

* A DAUGHTER OF JUDAS. *

By the Author of "Sir Lionel's Wife," "The Great Moreland Tragedy," Etc.

CONTINUED.
CHAPTER XLII.
THE CLAIRVOYANTE.

"Vi, should you like to know your future?"

"Not if it wasn't going to be pleasant," said Vi, with alacrity. "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise, you know?"

"But shouldn't you like to have your future told you—just for fun? Everybody says that Madame Santanello is wonderfully clever. I should just love to consult her, Vi."

"I don't believe she could tell us a word about our future. You don't mean you believe in such nonsense, Kate?"

"Of course I don't. I'm not so foolish. But all the same, I should like to hear what she would say. I should think it would be great fun."

"Oh yes!" acquiesced Vi, with sparkling eyes.

"Well, then, will you go with me?"

"With you? Won't Mr. Morewood take you?"

"No; I asked him, and he refused; and that's one great reason why I want to go."

"He refused! I am surprised, Kate."

"He professes he dislikes these exhibitions, says I should hear a great deal of nonsense, and might possibly be too seriously impressed with it."

"As if that's likely!"

"The truth is, Lady Vere has been talking to him. I feel quite sure she's persuaded him not to take me."

"Lady Vere?"

"Yes, I was mentioning it the other day, when I was at the Court, and she urged me very earnestly, not to go."

"But why should she?"

"Oh, I can understand why! Lillian is a darling, and I love her dearly; but she has one of those dreamy, poetic natures which incline towards the metaphysical. If a clairvoyante predicted evil for her, she would believe in it implicitly, and brood over it all her days. It wouldn't effect me at all. I should simply be amused."

"And do you really mean to go, Kate?"

"Yes, if you'll go with me. I'll tell you what I thought Vi. Your father is going to take us into the town to do some shopping, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, he will leave us at Mornington's and won't come back with the carriage for ever so long. This madam Santanello has rooms only half-a-dozen doors away. We could easily make some excuse for leaving the shop, slip to the clairvoyante, consult her, and be back at Mornington's again before your father calls with the carriage."

"Yes, we could do that."

"Then, shall we, Vi?"

"Oh, yes; I'm willing!"

And so the two light-hearted girls, in a spirit of fun and mischief, planned the visit which was destined to yield, to one at least of them, such evil fruit.

Little did Kate Lisle dream of the woe in store for her.

A neat brass plate on the door of a house in the principal street of Basingstoke informed the public that Madame Santanello, clairvoyante, might be consulted from twelve to four daily.

Two charmingly-dressed young ladies, who had just emerged from Mornington's, the draper's, stopped at the clairvoyante's and rang the bell.

An elderly female, of foreign aspect, answered it—a superior servant, evidently.

"Is Madame Santanello within?" asked Kate Lisle.

"Yes, Madame," said the woman, speaking very politely, and with a distinctly foreign accent.

"Can we see her?"

"Certainly, madame. Will you step this way?"

She showed the two girls into an elegant furnished room, littered with foreign curios.

Here she left them, returning, in a few minutes, to say—

"Madame Santanello will see you. Which lady is it who wishes to consult her?"

"Both of us, if you please."

"Each one must go into the presence of madame alone. She never sees more than one person at a time. Which is it to go first?"

"I will," said Vi, springing up with alacrity.

Kate sat still.

Her gay spirits seemed to have deserted her.

She looked quite serious, as though a trying ordeal lay in front of her.

The servant conducted Vi along a narrow passage, then through a curtained doorway into a large room, whose windows were surrounded with thick blinds, the only light being that which was cast by a curiously-wrought copper lamp suspended from the ceiling.

This light was yellowish in colour, and lent an eerie aspect to the room.

"Madame Santanello will come to you," said the woman, and retired leaving Vi alone to contemplate the tiger-skins, with which the floor was strewn.

There was little else to look at, for the only objects of furniture the room contained were a table and a single chair.

On the table was a skull.

A thick black velvet curtain hung at the further end of the room, and, while Viv stood waiting—a little nervous and fluttered at all her courage—this curtain was drawn aside, and a woman advanced, with slow, majestic step.

A tall woman, gowned in black from head to foot, excepting that a crimson veil, bordered with gold sequins in a curious

Arabesque fashion, fell from her head to below her shoulders.

She was of a tawny complexion, rich and clear, but dark; her full lips were of a vivid scarlet, her teeth white as ivory, her hair—black as jet—fell smoothly over a high, smooth brow.

The eyes were concealed by a pair of blue glasses.

One could not but long to see the glasses removed, for the rest of the face seemed to give assurance that no common soul looked from out of those eyes.

On the middle finger of one strong, shapely hand she wore a barbaric-looking ring—a bloodstone set in massive and curiously-twisted gold.

She advanced to the table, then, bowing her head, with a cold haughtiness of gesture, said—

"You desire to consult me?"

"If you please, madame."

Vi could not keep her voice from trembling a little.

There was something truly awe-inspiring in the appearance of this tall, dark woman. She reminded the girl of an Egyptian priestess in the olden times—of a pythoness or of a sphynx—anything that was dark and enigmatical, and full of mystery.

"Sit down!" she commanded, pointing to the single chair the room contained.

Her voice was rich and full, with a slightly melancholy cadence.

Vi obeyed, almost mechanically, and the clairvoyante, bending over the table, took the girl's hand and examined it intently for a couple of minutes.

Then she poured some water into a saucer, added a few drops of liquid from a phial, and pored over it as though it had been the very Book of Fate.

And all this in perfect silence.

After that command to sit down she had not uttered a word.

She was, perhaps, three or four minutes examining the contents of the saucer, and when she raised her head she looked full at Vi, and said—

"You are engaged to be married."

Vi, thinking this was intended as a question, was about to answer, but the clairvoyante stopped her with an imperious wave of the hand.

"Do not interrupt me. You are engaged to be married. There have been obstacles in the way of your happiness, but they are now removed. Other obstacles will arise, but in the end you will be happy with the man you love. That is all I can tell you of your future—or your past."

"Thank you!" murmured Vi, rising as she spoke, and fumbling at her purse a little awkwardly.

For the life of her she didn't know how to offer a fee to this majestic woman; and yet, she supposed, it must be done.

But Madame Santanello stepped her with an imperious gesture.

"My servant will receive the fee," she said, speaking as a queen might have spoken of the tribute of a subject.

And then, with another cold haughty bow, she retired behind the curtain.

The foreign-looking domestic appeared the moment Vi walked towards the door.

"Madame Santanello said I was to pay you the fee," said Vi, as she walked back to the waiting room, along the narrow passages. "What is it please? I wish to pay for myself, and for my friend as well."

The millionaire's daughter was a generous little soul, and she knew Kate was not overwell supplied with pocket money.

"The terms are half-a-guinea for each interview," said the woman, promptly.

Vi took out her purse, and handed her a guinea, adding a half-crown for herself.

By the time this was done, they had reached the waiting-room.

"Will you come, if you please?" Madame Santanello was waiting for you," said

the woman to Kate, and bore off before she could exchange so much as one word with Vi.

Thus she was quite unprepared for the grim and sombre aspect of the room in which the clairvoyante exercised her art.

An involuntary shiver passed through her when she was left alone there.

The yellow light had something ghost-like about it.

The skull seemed to be grinning horribly.

The black velvet curtain looked like a pall.

Her heart palpitated violently when that curtain was drawn aside, and the majestic, black-robed figure appeared, the face looking more sphynx like than ever beneath the crimson veil.

Kate was received precisely as Vi had been; told to sit down, her hand examined the saucer of water with the few drops of liquid prepared, and all in total silence.

Very intently dip the clairvoyante look into the saucer.

For fully five minutes she never removed her eyes from it, and when she at length turned to Kate, her look was so serious as to be almost stern.

"Do you wish me to tell you the whole truth?" she demanded, abruptly.

"Certainly!" said Kate, bravely; though, if the truth must be told, she felt very far from brave at heart.

"You will not reproach me if what you hear does not answer to your wishes?"

"Of course not."

"Very well."

The clairvoyante approached a little nearer, and her dark eyes seemed to burn Kate, even through the blue glasses which screened them.

"I must ask you to have the goodness not to interrupt me," she said. "If you do, you disturb the images on my brain. In the first place, as to your past. You have had a fairly happy life, with very little of trouble and anxiety. You have recently met with a man you think you love, and are engaged to be married to him."

The clairvoyante's voice was singularly low and passionless.

She spoke almost like one in sleep.

A moment or two she paused, then resumed, in the same cold, level tone—

"You will not marry him. The fates have decreed against it. You will discover that he has deceived you, and you will turn from him in anger. The man to whom you will ultimately unite yourself is dark and slender, and he will come from foreign lands. At first you will feel a repulsion to him, but ultimately you will love him passionately, and will be willing to pass through fire and water to be his wife. The fates have said it!"

Again the clairvoyante paused, again she resumed in the same passionless voice—

"The man to whom you are now engaged has loved another—he loves her still. It was only when his suit with her was hopeless that he turned to you. The woman he loves is beautiful, with no common beauty. I see her image clearly. She is pure and radiant as a morning star. She is bound in the chains of wedlock, but those chains will be broken, whether by death or by some other means I cannot clearly see. But your lover will certainly turn to her again. She is pure and good, and, moreover, she is your friend; but nevertheless, she is fated to work you bitter woe. The end is dark. I can see no more."

Thus abruptly did the oracle break off her darkly enigmatical communications.

Kate was pale as death.

A sense of awe and mystery thrilled her inmost soul.

"I have nothing further to say," said the clairvoyante. "Yours is a singular fate. I have told you nothing but the truth. I have seen your future in a glass. It must come to pass, for the Fates cannot lie."

With this she retreated backwards, slowly and majestically, and disappeared behind the black velvet curtain, which seemed so like a pall.

CHAPTER XLIII. COMPLAINING NOTES.

When Mr. Muggleton drove up to Mornington's shop to fetch the two girls he found Kate looking very pale.

"My dear, what have you been doing to yourself?" he cried out. "You've lost all your pretty colour!"

"Yes, I've a headache," said Kate. "Perhaps the ride home will do it good."

"Are you already?"

"If you please," said Kate, in a strangely subdued and quiet voice, and Vi acquiesced, with a glance full of curiosity, at her friend.

The two girls had not had time to exchange more than a dozen sentences hitherto concerning their respective interviews with Madame Santanello, and during the homeward drive Mr. Muggleton's presence was, of course, a restraint.

But so soon as they arrived at The Towers, they went upstairs to Vi's room and there talked undisturbed.

"Kate, I do believe she frightened you," said Vi. "You looked so pale and solemn when you came back."

"There was such a disagreeable smell in the room, as if she had been burning incense. It was that that made my head ache," said Kate, evasively.

She had made up her mind she would not tell even Vi all that had been said by the clairvoyante, and she was wondering how much it would be wise to reveal.

"Well, shall I tell you what she said to me?" cried Vi, gaily. "She really is a wonderful woman, for she told me just what had happened between Harry and me. But she promised me happiness in the end, so I ought to be thankful to her."

And then she detailed, as nearly as she could remember, all that the clairvoyante had said to her.

"She showed an equal knowledge of my past," said Kate, thoughtfully; "for she told me my life had been a happy one, singularly free from care and trouble, and that I had recently become engaged."

"Kate, she must have known who we were. That accounts for her cleverness."

"Yes, I think she must have done so, though I don't know how, for she hasn't been in the town many days, and we so seldom go there," said Kate, more thoughtfully than ever.

The supposition suggested by Vi had occurred to her on the way home, but it did not tend to ease her mind of that painful fear which lurked within it.

Could it be that that mysterious woman knew that Morewood loved Lillian Vere?

For, it was to Lillian that Kate's thoughts had spoken of a woman beautiful with no common beauty, pure and radiant as a morning star.

Lillian's image could not but rise involuntarily to her mind as she listened to what was so faithful a description of her.

And the clairvoyante had said she was bound in the chains of wedlock, and was, moreover, Kate's friend.

Who could it be but Lillian Vere?

Kate was by no means a jealous girl—far from it; but, nevertheless, she felt unhappy as she remembered how persistently her lover had refused to reply to her queries as to whether she herself was his first and only love.

A hundred little circumstances, unnoted before, rose up in her memory, and made her fancy that Lady Vere had once possessed his heart.

And if so, and his passion for his friends wife was quite dead, why had he not owned it to her, frankly, when she questioned him?

Could it be—she asked herself the question, though the very thought was torture—could it be she still loved his friend's wife?

The clairvoyante had said he did, and that he would turn to her again.

She had declared the Fates had said it, and that they could not lie.

Two hours ago Kate would have laughed at the very idea of giving credence to such a woman's words.

But the spirit of superstition is, perhaps, not so far from any of us as we think, and, assuredly, it had cast its shadow over her mind.

"Well, but what did she say about your future?" questioned Vi.

"Oh, a lot of nonsense!" replied Kate, trying to speak lightly, and only half succeeding. "I am to have a more romantic fate than you. I am to break with Morewood, and to marry a dark, slender man, who is to come to me from foreign lands."

"Well, that you'll never do!" laughed Vi. "Madame was wrong there, at all events. I wonder what Morewood would say if he were to hear of it?"

Kate turned to her with great earnestness.

"Vi, I want you to promise me you'll never mention this to anybody—not unless I say you may. I wouldn't have John know we've been here for all the world. Some day I may tell him, but not now. Promise me you'll mention it to no one, Vi."

"Very well, I promise."

"To no one mind!" said Kate, with almost feverish eagerness.

"You may trust me, Kitty," answered Vi. "To tell the truth, I'm a little bit ashamed of our adventure now that it's really over. I'd rather no one knew of it. If Harry were ever to hear, he'd tease me to death. I know he would."

CHAPTER XLIII. KATE'S ILLNESS.

Kate had promised to dine at Vivian Court that evening, and to stay the night.

Sir Gerald had been called away from home on business, and would not return until the next day.

Lady Ruth was keeping her room with a slight cold, and Lillian had written a note to Kate, begging her to come over and keep her company.

Kate had promised willingly enough, but when evening came, she more than half regretted her promise.

Her head still ached—a strange depression weighed upon her spirits—she felt tired and languid.

However she resolved not to disappoint her friend.

So she dressed at the appointed time, and, stepping into the carriage which Lady Vere had sent for her, was quickly at the Court.

Little did she dream what suffering awaited her before she quitted that roof again!

Lady Vere received her with delight.

"It is so good of you to come to me, Kate," she said, as she came out into the hall to meet her.

And Kate flushed a little guiltily, remembering her interview with Madame Santanello in the morning.

All day since, she had been wondering whether Lillian knew that Moorwood had loved her—whether it was true he still loved her—whether she knew that, and whether she, in any way, returned or encouraged his love.

But, the moment she saw Lillian, any faint doubt she might have formed against her perfect faith and purity, died away, as the mists vanish at the shining of the morning sun.

That pure and radiant face, with its sweet lips and soulful eyes, was not the face—Kate decided—of a woman who, while herself bound by the holy ties of wedlock, would seek to win the lover of another girl.

The two dined together in Lady Vere's boudoir.

A dainty little dinner was served to them—suited to feminine tastes, as opposed to masculine—fruit and sweets being very much more largely partaken of than the coarser edibles of meat and game.

A daintily-cooked fowl was brought them, but it was sent away almost untouched.

Lillian drank nothing but water; Kate took a single glass of wine.

"Do you know, you look particularly charming to-night, Kate," said Lady Vere. "You have the most lovely color, and your eyes are as bright as stars."

Kate glanced at herself in a mirror.

She did, indeed, look charming, in a pretty dinner dress of black lace, relieved by notes of heliotrope-colored silk.

But her color was, perhaps, too delicately brilliant, and her eyes too lustrous, for perfect health.

"I believe I have taken cold, and am a little feverish," said Kate to herself.

Turning from the mirror with a half sigh, she looked at Lady Vere, and noticed with what simplicity she was dressed now that her husband was not at home.

Her gown was of white Indian silk, without ornament.

She wore not a single jewel.

The only touch of color about her was a band of turquoise velvet, which she wore round her hair.

Rarely, perhaps, she had looked more beautiful; but it was not so she dressed when Sir Gerald was at home to look upon her beauty, and Kate noticed the difference.

"What shall we do, all the evening?" asked Lady Vere, as Kate sat toying with a magnificent bunch of purple hothouse grapes.

"I know what I should like to do—if you don't mind."

"Oh, tell me!"

"I should like to lie on a couch, and be lazy, and listen to you play and sing."

"Then you shall, Kate. I should be very ungrateful if I didn't indulge you, after you've been so good in coming to me," said Lillian, smiling. "I must go upstairs first, just for a couple of minutes, to make sure auntie wants for nothing; then I'll sing to you to your heart's content!"

Ten minutes later she was seated at the piano-table, singing soft, sweet love-ballads, which, somehow, brought the tears to Kate's eyes, as she lay on the couch, with her face buried in the cushions.

She was feeling strangely weak and low to-night.

Her nervous system seemed all overwrought.

The tears would come, in spite of her efforts to restrain them.

An hour perhaps, had passed in this way, when, at the close of a song, Lillian, turned to look at her friend, and saw she had risen to a sitting position on the couch, her cheeks crimson, her hand pressed to her brow.

"My dear, what is the matter?"

"Lillian, should you mind if I went to bed? I don't feel well, I—I think I have taken cold. I am dizzy—and—and—"

The rest of the sentence died away in an inarticulate murmur.

She pressed her hand to her brow again and shivered from head to foot.

In a moment Lady Vere was by her side.

"Oh, my dearest, you are ill—really ill, and I never noticed it!" she cried, in keen self-reproach. "Is it your head that aches? Let me take you to my room, and bathe it for you."

"I—I don't know," murmured Kate, in a strangely incoherent fashion. "I—I feel strange all over. Don't leave me, Lillian—don't leave me. I am frightened. I feel as if I were going to die!"

Lady Vere seized the bell rope, and pulled it violently.

But, quickly as the summons was answered by the well-trained footman, before he made his appearance Kate's head had sunk, like a laden weight, upon her bosom, and she had swooned away in Lillian's arms.

"Send for a doctor, immediately!" commanded Lady Vere. "And let someone come to me here. Don't lose an instant!"

In a very few moments both the house-keeper and Lady Vere's maid were in attendance.

They brought restoratives, and used their best efforts to bring Kate back to consciousness; but all in vain.

She seemed to be not so much in a faint as in a death-like stupor.

Her breathing was heavy and laboured, and every now and again, a convulsion shook her from head to foot.

Lady Vere's composure was not easily disturbed, but Kate's illness seemed to agitate her fearfully.

She had got one of the girl's hands in her own, and was chafing it.

As she did that she fixed her eyes, with a strange look of terror in them, on a tiny scratch, or puncture, not larger than a head of a pin, on Kate's wrist.

"Who is going for the doctor?" she cried almost wildly, while the look of terror deepened in her eyes.

"Jarvis is going, my lady. They are saddling a horse for him now."

"Tell him to ride quick—quick!" said Lady Vere. "Don't let him lose a moment. Tell him it is a question of life or death."

"Oh, my lady, it is not so bad as that, I hope!" said the house-keeper, in a tone of respectful sympathy. "It is a very sudden seizure, and very distressing one, but the young lady will, probably, be better soon."

"Heaven grant it!" murmured Lady Vere. "Oh, if only the doctor would come! It is the suspense that is so hard to bear!"

And turning away from the unconscious Kate, she paced up and down the room uncontrollable agitation.

It was fully half an hour before the doctor arrived.

Lady Vere had bidden them fetch the one who lived nearest to the Court.

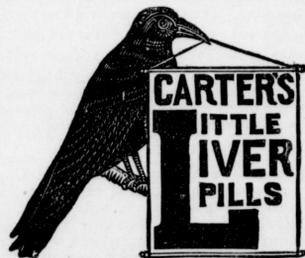
He was an elderly man, who had for years enjoyed the confidence of Sir Gerald.

A safe, old-fashioned practitioner.

But it so happened that this gentleman—Dr. Baker was his name—had gone away for a short holiday, only the day before and it was his locum tenens whom Jarvis brought back with him.

The locum tenens was a young man, tall and thin, and somewhat peculiar-looking. He was decidedly plain of feature, but had a massive brow and keen, deep-set eyes, which imparted a great deal of character to his plain-featured face.

Continued on Fifteenth Page.



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