

JUST IN TIME.

BY ADELINE SERGEANT. AUTHOR OF "JACOB'S WIFE," "UNDER FALSE PRETENCES," &c.

CHAPTER VII. (Continued.) MAGGIE LOGAN'S OATH.

Maggie Logan amazed her aunt that night by first turning sick and faint and then by going off into a long fit of hysterical crying. But she would not say what had happened between herself and the laird, and Mrs. Pirie was left to conjecture that it was simply the shock of Mr. Lockhart's death which had produced so unwonted an effect upon the girl.

The influence of Mr. Lockhart's looks and tone was still upon her. Maggie had some Highland blood in her, and was perhaps the more disposed to yield herself to superstitious emotions. She dared not open her lips when she thought of the oath that she had sworn and the threats that Mr. Lockhart had used. She firmly believed that if she pointed out the place where the tin box was hidden she would be haunted for the rest of her life by the laird's ghost, perhaps torn to pieces or strangled—(she had heard a story of the kind)—by avenging spirits at dead of night. No, she dared not tell.

The poor old laird's hour of madness had impressed itself with fearful vividness on Maggie's brain. Her nerves were thoroughly unstrung.

She was indeed so weak and nervous that, in spite of her years, a little judicious and kindly pressure might have induced her to tell the whole story. But a different turn was given to the affair after the funeral, and she was not required to say anything at all.

Naturally the girl did not know how important the loss of the box might be. She knew that it contained money and jewels, and she thought that Mrs. Douglas simply wished to possess herself of these. She did not like Mrs. Douglas. She hated and feared her aunt, Mrs. Pirie. Consequently she was not tempted to tell them the secret out of any desire for their welfare.

As for taking the box from its place and robbing it of its contents, she was afraid to go near the room in which it was hidden. The terrors of the unseen universe had got hold of her and would not be controlled. She knew nothing about wills, nothing about the contending claims of Mrs. Douglas and Anthony Lockhart. She only knew that Mrs. Douglas and Mrs. Pirie occupied themselves for many hours on the day after Mr. Lockhart's death in searching every nook and cranny of the rooms and corridors through which the laird had passed. But they found nothing, and Maggie remained mute.

Mrs. Douglas's excitement was so obvious that the very servants of the house remarked on it. She wept bitterly for her father; her eyes were feverishly bright and dry, she cheeks took on a specter of color which had an unnatural look. Not until the funeral was over did she grow calm.

The old family lawyer appeared with Mr. Lockhart's last will and testament in his pocket, and the document was read in the presence of Mrs. Douglas and her friends. It was dated six years previously, and it left everything that Mr. Lockhart possessed to his grandson, Bertie Douglas. The late Lord Morven had been made guardian, with his own consent; and in event of his death the guardianship was to pass to his son, if the son were of age and willing to accept the trust. Bertie was not to have full power over the property, or to marry without his guardian's consent until he had attained the age of twenty-five; in the event of his marriage against Lord Morven's will before that time, the estate was to pass at once to his cousin, Anthony Lockhart. This proviso had been inserted, as everybody knew, in order to prevent Bertie from making a rash marriage, such as Anthony Lockhart the elder and various others of the Lockhart family had done.

The lawyer, in answer to some questions put by Dr. Airlie, who attended (as Mrs. Douglas's request) as "a friend of the family," declared that he knew of no other will than the one which had just been read, and that if Mr. Lockhart had desired to make another, he had not entrusted the making of it to him, Mr. Brand. It was probable, thought Mr. Brand, that the laird had expressed this intention simply by way of rebuking Mrs. Douglas for some piece of presumptuous folly, and that he had never carried it into effect.

"You know of no such later will, did you, Mrs. Douglas?" asked Mr. Brand, carelessly.

"Oh, no. I am sure my dear father would not have made another without consulting you," faltered Mrs. Douglas,

whose black bordered handkerchief was pressed to her eyes. Little Bertie was standing beside her, with his hand in hers.

He looked wonderingly up into her face. "Mamma," he said, "you are hurting my fingers. Please let me go."

Many a long year passed away before the meaning of that close, hard grip of his mother's hand became clear to him. But he always remembered it.

The lawyer departed, and Mrs. Douglas was left to have a long private conference with Dr. Airlie. Before the interview was ended she sent for Maggie Logan.

The girl came unwillingly. Her appearance was strangely altered. Her face was white and her eyelids red with crying. Even the masses of hair which hung over her shoulders looked less bright than usual. She came in with a sullen, heavy look, and glanced oddly round the room as she entered.

"The doctor, Mistress Douglas was here," she said, seeing that the doctor was alone.

"No, I'm here," said the doctor, with a benevolent smile. "Now, my dear, I want to talk to you. Sit down. I want to ask you a question."

"I'll tell you my own, Maggie flashed out at once. "I've no said a word yet, and I never will. Auntie Bell may skelp me if I'm black and blue if she likes, but I winna tell."

"Your aunt has been skelping you, has she? Never mind; we will persuade her not to do it again," said the doctor mildly. "Don't be afraid. Nobody wants you to say anything."

Maggie looked at him with wide open eyes. "Yes, they do," she said slowly. "An' I've naething to tell them. I dinna ken onything."

"That's right," said Dr. Airlie in an approving tone. "Keep to that, my dear. Do you understand? Mrs. Douglas does not want you to say anything to anybody. If you know what Mr. Lockhart did with any of his possessions—a box, for instance, papers, letters, ornaments—you had better keep it to yourself. Do you see what I mean?"

"Mrs. Douglas dinna want to ken?" said Maggie in astonishment.

"Exactly. She wants to know nothing, and as long as you keep it to yourself she will be very good and kind to you. The laird told you not to say anything, did he not?"

Maggie nodded.

"Well, she wants you to do just what the laird told you—to say nothing to anybody. Unless, indeed, you like just to whisper it in my ear as a secret where this precious box went to—"

"I'll no dae't," said Maggie, stamping her foot. "He said he'd come back to punish me if I said so word to anybody, and I said I wadna dae't."

"Very well." The doctor was wise enough to make the best of a bad business. "If you tell anybody, you know, you had better tell Mrs. Douglas or me, and we will make you a handsome present—whatever you like best in the world. No! Well, then, see that you say nothing to anybody else. You understand?"

"Yes."

"And if you are a good girl, and keep your mouth shut, Mrs. Douglas will do something for you. Would you like to go to London and be apprenticed to a dressmaker? You would make quite a fortune there when you were grown up."

"I'll no gang to London; I'll stay in Glasgie," was Maggie's resolute answer, "I want to go to the schule."

It was after the separation of years that the cousins met in a foreign land. Doctor Airlie's question might have been answered now. Anthony Lockhart was not dead. He stood in a little tent under a tropical midnight sky, and confronted his cousin steadily and in silence. When Bertie Douglas said quietly that he had known of the relationship all along, the elder man drew back with a startled and rather an indignant look.

"Impossible!" he said.

"I have been morally certain of it since the first—or at least the second—day we met. Do you remember that you brought me some books for my amusement on the day after we came here? Amongst them was an old Horace with Anthony Lockhart, Glenbervie, written on it, and the Lockhart coat of arms on the first page. It must have come out of the Glenbervie library. That was the first link. Then it struck me that your relationship to us could almost be guaranteed by your extraordinary resemblance to the Lockhart family, especially to my grandfather. I considered that I had moral evidence enough, and that I would try you by telling my own story. My ruse succeeded. You acknowledged your name without my even asking it. And since you are my cousin, as you remarked a moment since, don't go on to say that you are sorry."

He held out his hand, and after a moment's hesitation Anthony Lockhart (as he must henceforth be called) took it and pressed it cordially.

"I ought perhaps to have told you earlier," said the elder man after a moment's silence. "But I thought that the knowledge would give you no pleasure, and—to tell the truth—I had meant to avoid you."

"What for?" said Bertie warmly.

"Has either of us so many friends and relations that he can afford to dispense with a cousin? I was delighted when the idea occurred to me. I have been trying to bring you to confession for a day or two."

"You were very keen-sighted," rejoined Anthony with a half-pleased, half-embarrassed smile.

"You have simply no notion how much you are like old John Lockhart, my grandfather. But you knew my name and history from the first?"

"I did."

"And you would not acknowledge the relationship? I did not know that I had done anything to make you ashamed of me," said Bertie mockingly.

"That is not for you to say. I expected to hear you disavow the relationship—as your grandfather did," said Anthony drily.

Bertie shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not bound to behave exactly as my grandfather did, am I?" he said. "Poor old boy! he's been dead this many a year; and why—, Oh, well, all that will keep for some future day," he broke off to say, divining with instinctive quickness that Anthony did not want to answer him; "and at any rate I can only say I am glad that we have run up against each other in this remote corner of the world."

"Yes," said Lockhart, recovering the wonted coolness of his demeanor, "so am I."

There was a silence. The two men eyed each other somewhat furtively; a little awkwardness might be expected to supervene after this recognition. An-

thony was the first to speak in his ordinary manner.

"Come," he said, "my relationship and my seniority give me an extra right of command now. I'm not going to let you talk any longer. You must be tired."

"Never was less so."

"Then you are feverish, and the doctor will call me over the coals to-morrow. We can't send that letter to-night, or to-morrow either, even if we write, so I think that matter may keep."

"All right! I'll submit—for once," said Bertie cheerfully. "You'll help me to devise a letter to Morven to-morrow?"

"Certainly."

Exciting subjects being thus laid aside, Bertie's man was called in, and preparations were made for the night. Anthony had ceased to sleep in Douglas's tent as he had done when the fever was at its height; but on this night he stopped short just as he was turning to go, and said abruptly—

"How do you feel to-night? Would you like me to stay?"

"No, thanks. Donald will do any thing I want."

"Good-night then."

For the second time their hands met for a moment. Bertie was particularly glad of this recognition of relationship, but he was perhaps a little ashamed of his gladness—or at least of any manifestation thereof. But that silent grasp of the hand was a sign of amity which neither of them would readily have foregone.

Then Bertie, locking up with his soft dark eyes into Anthony's face, said quietly—

"Wait; I want to ask you one question. When you turned back to me the other day and thought we should both be cut down—was it on account of our blood relationship that you came?"

"Not in the least. I turned back before I guessed who the stranger was."

"I'm glad of that," said Bertie, with a slightly humorous look. "I should think less of human nature if you had turned back for any reason but that of pure charity." Then he laughed and said good-night.

Anthony went out into the night with a sense of turbulence in his blood. He was half angry to find that Bertie's recognition had affected him so powerfully. His veins tingled with a rush of emotion which had almost caused him to lose his self command. If there was one thing on earth that he hated it was to feel that he had lost control of himself. Yet now and then it was a thing that happened, because he was a man of very strong passions, keen sensitiveness, and imperious temper. The impression of something he'd done, kept back, repressed, and that he produced upon people was due to the constant fight between his will and his emotion. There was a kind of charm in knowing that this struggle was carried on; but many persons might meet him, and meet him often, without guessing at what lay behind the reserve and self-restraint of his usual demeanor.

To him, the meeting with Bertie Douglas meant far more than it did to Bertie. Lockhart's life had been a hard one. It could not be said of him, as Bertie had said of himself, that if he had few relations he had, at any rate, many friends. The circumstances of his history had rendered him a trifle suspicious of other people's good faith; and it was almost against his will that he recognized the fact that Bertie's nature was what it seemed—frank, genial, sincere; that it really was a pleasure to young Douglas to acknowledge his cousin and to make friends with him. Besides the tie of relationship there was now a tie of real liking. Anthony knew that Bertie had been drawn to him by other causes than those of kinship. Gratitude? Yes, Bertie had felt some gratitude for Anthony's generous resolve to stand by him in the hour of danger; but Anthony had seen too often how slender a tie gratitude could prove to trust to that. No, there was real, honest, downright liking for him on Bertie's part, and the consciousness of it sent a curious thrill through the man's whole being. He himself had long brooded over the difference between Bertie's position and his own. If he had been asked, he would have said that he was prepared to hate the man—fortune's favorite—who had taken from him all that ought to have been his own. And yet he did not hate Bertie Douglas. On the contrary, he liked him better than any one he had met for many years.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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