

JUST IN TIME

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

CHAPTER XXIX.

MORVEN had slowly slipped when Beatrice spoke. He leaned against a heavy piece of furniture, as though for support, and contemplated her with blank yet anguish-stricken eyes.

"He has gone—he has escaped. That is what has happened. The doors were all unlocked, though I myself locked them as usual last night. The devil is in it!"

For it was not at all disconcerted at finding Lillas present. He entered in the wake of Maggie Drummond, whose beauty was never more brilliant than in this moment of trial and possible defeat, and as he saw Lillas an illumination of pleasure kindled in his face.

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"No," said her brother, quietly. "No, as I have said, he did not deny it. He told me of his marriage—a spasm of pain passed over Lord Morven's face at the recollection of Gerald's confession."

"More than one of us may say that, my lord. But you have special occasion, perhaps. For it is owing to this great and terrible mistake that you have tried to hide the fact that Gerald—poor Gerald Ruthven—is still alive."

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Dr. Airtie speaking? "But before he could even try to answer her another interruption occurred. The door was opened—timidly this time, as if the new-comer hardly liked to show herself, and both Morven and Beatrice uttered a quick exclamation of surprise."

"It comes to the same thing in the end," he muttered to himself. "Nothing can matter now." Lillas had left the door open; and Beatrice perceived that the old butler was making signs to her from the hall.

"I never hated you, Ralph," said Beatrice, drawing nearer to him. "I wish you had. Hate would have been nearer love than indifference. Oh, Beatrice, is it too late? Can I not win you back?"

"Dear Ralph," she said, "I am so sorry. I have wronged you more than I knew. I thought that you would not care—that you would be willing enough to give me up when you found that I did not love you as I should—as a woman ought. Forgive me, and—forgive me—Anthony too; it was my fault."

Beatrice was puzzled. She would have spoken but for an interruption—one which Morven had perhaps anticipated. The inner door of the room suddenly opened, and Dr. Airtie appeared. Was it his footsteps which Lord Morven had distinguished? His usually neat attire was disordered, his face was pale, his voice agitated and unsteady. For the first time in her life Beatrice saw the doctor in a state of extreme nervous excitement. He was not even sufficiently on his guard to observe her; he advanced to the Earl, and almost wrung his own hands as he addressed him.

"My lord—my lord," he said, "it is you who have done this!" Morven lifted his face from his hands; he did not seem to understand. "What is it?" he asked. "What is it? You do not know what has happened," gabbled the little doctor.

"I do not know why you have come," he said. His voice was low and broken, like the voice of an old man, and it startled Beatrice into grave attention.

"You need not tell me that!" he said, standing up, with an aspect of such stern dignity that all except Beatrice fell back. "I do not need to be reminded of my duty in that respect. This matter has come upon me so suddenly that my silence is surely excusable. I do not know this—this lady. But I did know—I heard it from his own lips—that he had married a young woman named Margaret Logan; and that the marriage, though somewhat irregularly performed, was a legal one."

"Lord Morven looked at her sternly. 'I have said that my brother was married,' he remarked, 'but I have not added that I had every reason to believe that my brother's wife and child were dead.'"

"I am sorry that you trusted Dr. Airtie so much," said Beatrice. He frowned Lord Morven as he spoke, and did not notice that the library door was opened just then, and that Anthony Lockhart stepped into the room. But Beatrice saw. She drew herself out of the little circle, and met him with her finger on her lip. He looked at her in some surprise, not knowing what was the meaning of the sudden summons, and of his introduction into the midst of an apparently excited group of persons.

"Can you remember, Morven?" Beatrice whispered anxiously in his ear. "Did Gerald speak of anyone? Her name is Margaret—Maggie; did he speak of her?" "Oh, my lord," said Maggie, suddenly throwing a tone of vehement passion into her voice, "it's no for my sake that I would ask you listen to me; it's for the bairn's. Look at him, my lord, and see whether he isna like Gerald. It's Gerald's ain laddie, an' Gerald lo'd's heir deary—an' me too, although the doctor says that he denied me on his dying bed! He must have been wrong in his heid when he said soe, I'm think-

"But he did not deny it, Morven!" It was Lillas who spoke.

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