

JUST IN TIME

BY ADELINE SERGEANT, AUTHOR OF "JACOB'S WIFE" "UNDER PALE PRINCIPLES," ETC.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN THE AVENUE.

It was nine o'clock in the evening. There was no moon, only a glimmer of starlight which scarcely penetrated the thick branches of the trees in the park land round the Towers.

But at last a man's figure appeared in a side walk, and advanced toward her. She waited for a moment, then met him and allowed him to put his arm around her and kiss her upturned face.

Their eyes and ears were well occupied, or surely they would have seen and heard what startled the wild birds in the brake and sent the hares flying through the underwood on either hand.

A wild white face looked out at them; stealthy footsteps dogged them as they walked along the road. Their voices were so low that the man who followed could scarcely hear what they were saying; but fragments of their conversation floated to his ears from time to time upon the wind and lashed his pulses 'up to fever height.

What were they saying? It was she who broke the silence first.

"So you got my note?"

"My dearest, yes. You are in trouble?"

"Yes, Anthony."

"And I can help you?"

"I am afraid not."

"Not help you?" said Anthony, in astonishment.

"Surely I can do something for you. Tell me—"

"Yes, you can do something for me," said Beatrice, turning toward him with almost passionate tenderness.

"You can comfort me, you can comfort me—and you can let me go."

"Go where?"

"Away from you—for ever. I am not fit to be your wife. I have come to say good by. Now, do you understand?"

"No," said Anthony. He stopped short, and holding her by the hand, looked steadily into her face.

"What has happened, Beatrice?"

"I cannot tell you."

"He passed, still looking at her."

"I hear that Lord Morven came home this afternoon. Is it he who has made you change?"

"I have not changed," she cried out, almost wildly, but he only repeated his question in a different form.

"Has he persuaded you to give me up?"

"No, no, Anthony, how can you think so! I have not even seen him since my return."

"Whom have you seen then?" he asked.

"I parted from you yesterday morning with your promise in my ears—and in my heart. Have you seen Beatrice?"

He spoke doubtfully. She shook her head, and turned away her face. He waited for a moment, and then continued quietly.

"I know what it is. You have been talking to Dr. Airle. And he has been telling you what a scoundrel he thinks me."

"Oh, no, Anthony, no. He never spoke of you—in that way, at least!"

"I have laid a trap for you, my darling, and you have fallen into it most convincingly," said Anthony, with a half-triumphant, half-tender laugh, as he walked on at her side, with her hand still clasped in his.

"So it is Dr. Airle! That is what I wanted to be sure of. Now, what has he been saying to you?"

"He told me to go."

"But if I can guess?"

"You cannot guess, Anthony. It is impossible."

"Listen to me," said Lockhart, drawing her toward him. "I know something of Airle's methods. I know his nature. I should not be surprised to hear that he has been working on your feelings by telling you something that you thought—terrible, something that seemed

to you a family disgrace, a—what, I have his blot, have I? Beatrice, my darling, why should you leave me for that? Why should you leave me for that? Why should you leave me for that? For she was sobbing against his shoulder as he had never seen her sob before.

Presently she calmed herself and lifted up her head. "Anthony, what is it you mean? What do you know?"

But Anthony was cautious. He had thought of Gerald's misdemeanors, but he knew that there might be other secrets than those of poor weak Gerald Ruthven. He would commit himself to as little as possible till Beatrice told him more.

"I know," he said, "that nothing but death shall come between you and me."

"But—disgrace?" she murmured.

"It is not your disgrace," he said. "You belong to Lord Morven's family, that is true; but you neither inherit their weakness nor shall bear their punishment. What does it matter to you and me what they have done? Will it lessen your love for me or mine for you? Are my own ancestors so immaculate that I should dare to cast a stone at your relations? Beatrice, I protest against the morbid folly that makes a woman refuse to marry a man who loves her because a member of her family has sinned in some way against society. It is worse than folly; it would be wickedness for you to leave me because your—your cousin did a thing which brought him within danger of the law. I'll hear no more of it; I should never have thought that you would be bound by such antiquated rags of conventionality."

Beatrice's heart gave a throb of delight in spite of herself. What woman does not like to be thoroughly mastered by the man she loves? Beatrice did not at all resent the momentary harshness of his tone. But she tried to remonstrate.

"It is not mere conventionality. It is not only for what the world would say. You would not like it—yourself."

"Of course I should not like it; neither would you. It concerns you more than me; and am I to desert you because you have got something to bear? Beatrice, would you abandon me if I were in trouble?"

"Never."

"Then don't you see how illogical you are? Do you think worse of me than of yourself?"

"It would be harder for you to bear than for me, perhaps," she suggested, doubtfully.

"Nonsense!—Now, look here, Beatrice. Put the case in its worst aspect—suppose it were murder or anything you would like to suggest (why do you start in that way?) suppose it were the most frightful crime in the world, what difference would it make to you and me if we love one another? We should bear the pain and disgrace of it together; that is all."

She was silent for a few moments; then she said in a low tone.

"What is it that you know?"

Anthony hesitated, then spoke boldly. "I will tell you all I know some other time. I don't think I know everything, Beatrice. But that makes no difference."

"Oh, but it does—it does. For a moment I thought you knew—"

"And you cannot tell me? No, I won't ask you to tell me. But whatever happens, Beatrice, you are my own—my very own—and nothing shall come between us. Least of all, anybody else's misdoings, whatever they may be—theft, or treachery, or murder, or anything else that the world calls crime, but which may be the fault of circumstance—or disease. I will try to blame no man harshly now; I have done so too often, and given you the right to call me hard and cruel; but you must not punish me by utter distrust of my love, Beatrice."

She felt that she could say no more. The tears were flowing from her eyes, but they were happy tears after all. Anthony kissed them away. And then she admitted (in answer to his demands) that she did not know him, and thus the two made peace.

But before she went back to the house she told him more—more than perhaps she meant to tell. She said how she had stood in Dr. Airle's room and seen the dog writhing, and heard the terrible cry for help—a cry about which even the doctor's explanation did not make her easy. It was a bird, no doubt, as he had said so—but why should he keep birds and animals in that part of the house, except for purposes of torture? Beatrice, with her love for all "dumb" animals, felt a throbbing of indignation and pity at the thought. And she told all this to Anthony.

"You must be mine very soon, said he, at the last, 'and then you will see and hear no more of Dr. Airle. How soon can it be, Beatrice?"

"Oh, not yet," she answered.

"And why not yet? Why should we wait? You can stay no longer in Lord Morven's house; it is not right that you should be there now. Make up your mind to come with me as soon as possible."

"As soon as possible?" she said with

a slight smile. "But it is not possible yet, is it? I must see Morven first. Mrs. Elton comes back tomorrow and I will see what she says."

"But you will not be guided by them," said Anthony with some anxiety of manner. "Oh, my love, my love, think how long a time I have spent without you! Think how nearly I had lost you altogether, and pity me a little. Promise me to follow the instincts of your own heart, and not to be influenced by other people's advice."

"Do you not trust me?" she said; and with this question Anthony had to be content.

He accompanied her to the end of the avenue, where they took leave of one another. He watched her until she reached the side entrance, then turned back and walked slowly through the Park to the gate by which he had come. And as he walked he was watched and followed by the unseen witness of his interview with Beatrice—watched with an enmity which he had never excited in all his life before, follow with a deadly purpose by the one man who conceived himself to be wronged by Anthony Lockhart in a way which in his eyes death only could atone.

The last turn in the avenue was reached. It was a dark corner, from which a distant view of the lighted windows of the house could be obtained. Anthony turned to look at it. For what reason did certain words uttered by his mother upon her dying bed recur at that moment to his mind? "The house is all lighted up; there are two in the avenue," she had murmured. "You were never in such danger of your life as you were just then." The words came back with such startling distinctness that he almost fancied he heard a voice repeating them. And surely there was a strange rustling among the trees!

Anthony was not exactly a superstitious man, but something like a thrill of fear shot through his nerves. He drew himself up, turned round and faced the quarter from which the rustling came. He saw nothing; but, although he knew it not, he was looking straight into the eyes of the man who, with pistol in hand and murder in his thoughts, crouched among the shrubs and took aim at his rival's heart.

But that long, steady gaze disconcerted the would-be murderer. His hand trembled and fell; a mist came over his eyes. When he recovered himself, Anthony was out of sight and out of reach, although the sound of his footsteps could still be heard. And then the miserable man staggered to his feet, and thanked God that, after all, his victim had escaped.

Beatrice's story had made Anthony uneasy. He came next morning, almost before the sun was up, to reconnoitre the Towers, in order to see whether any trace of Dr. Airle's sinister occupations could be found. He had some curiosity about the rooms which the doctor inhabited. It seemed to him monstrous that there should be a portion of the house which nobody might enter but Stephen Airle and the friends to whom he gave admittance. He could only account for it by the supposition that Dr. Airle had some pool hold on the Earl as he had on poor Gerald Ruthven—some knowledge, or of past indiscretions, possibly of crimes which Lord Morven was anxious to shield from the light of day. Where was this wing of the Towers in which he conducted his "experiments"? Anthony had a keen eye for architectural measurements, and had already acquainted himself pretty well with the plan of the Towers; he knew also where Dr. Airle's apartments were situated, but he did not see how there could be a continued suite of rooms such as Beatrice described, on that side of the house. "They must go right down into the rock," he said to himself reflectively.

"People talk of secret passages and underground rooms; probably Airle has found some convenient cellars for the subjects of his scientific experiments. If so, they must be on the river side of the house. Can one get round that way, I wonder?"

It was only six o'clock in the morning, and he made his way by a circuitous route to the riverside below the cliff on which the house was built, without encountering a soul. He had to pick his steps carefully; for there was no pathway at the steep bank, and the river was somewhat swollen. Anthony was, however, a very good mountaineer, and found no difficulty in keeping his footing on the wet moss and slippery stones. He found himself finally just below the house, and, on looking up, he saw, at some distance above his head, the patch of darkness which told of the traditional entrance to the subterranean passages beneath the house.

Anthony measured the distance between himself and the mouth of the cave—for such it seemed to be—with a care of eye. There was no path, of course, and the side of the rock was nearly perpendicular; and yet it seemed to him that to scale it would not be so difficult as at first appeared. There were strongly growing trees and creepers nearly all the way; indeed, he fancied that there were some convenient resting places for the feet which did not owe their existence, apparently, to nature. It seemed to

Anthony that some less agile climber than himself had been there before him. Difficult as it looked, the way had been rendered really easy by these artfully contrived niches and trained branches. He swung himself up by his hands and feet, using care indeed, but making his way with contemptuous ease. Was this the cliff that people had called inaccessible?

The dark hole in the side of the rock was reached at last. The creepers that partially veiled it were easily thrust aside. For a few feet there was nothing but darkness and damp, mouldy smelling walls on either side; and then to his great surprise, his course was intercepted by some hard substance against which his hand struck. He felt again: it was a wooden door.

He pushed, and felt it give way; it was a crazy structure, half off its hinges already. Then he heard himself in another passage, dimly lighted from the top—he could not tell how exactly—and by and bye he came to another door, much stronger than the first. Anthony laughed to himself as he tried it. It is like a bit of melodrama," he said. "Subterranean passages, secret rooms, and all. Am I in the Castle of Otranto I wonder? This is a modern door; I suppose it leads into the house itself. I shall be met by the servants and taken for a burglar if I don't care." His fingers were busy at the door as he spoke; they must have come into contact with some hidden spring, for at that moment it flew open as though by magic. He saw before him a small empty room; beyond it, there was another—was that empty too? Anthony heard a mean. A remembrance of all that Beatrice had said, of all that she had implied—flushed across his mind. He carefully propped the door open with a stone, so that he should not find himself entrapped without the power of escaping if he chose, and then went forward to the second room.

It was a bare enough place, sparsely furnished, but not uncomfortable. The light was so dim that at first Anthony could not see more than the outlines of a few articles of furniture—a bed, a table, a chair or two. But the thing that moaned—where was it? Something turned itself uneasily upon the bed—turned and moaned and moaned again.

Anthony made a step for the bed, and stopped. The creature—was it a man, woman, child?—saw it and cried aloud from fear. "I am alive," he said, "I am alive! I am not mad! They are going to kill me—I know they are; Beatrice, where are you? Help me, Beatrice, Beatrice! I am not mad!"

"I have come from Beatrice," said Anthony calmly, although his face was white to the very lips; "and I will take you to her. Who are you? What is your name?"

But before the answer came, he knew.

Meanwhile, Beatrice had returned to the Towers and passed a wakeful night. She had not yet seen Morven; and his arrival had greatly disturbed her. It was certainly not right, according to the conventional point of view, that she should be staying in the house after the recent rupture of their engagement, especially as Mrs. Elton was away; and she made up her mind to pack her boxes next morning as soon as possible and go elsewhere. The minister's wife would perhaps take her in at the Manse, and Anthony—Anthony would be glad. She smiled a little at the thought. Morven's probable anger and mortification affected her but little. She knew that he would be vexed; but honestly she did not believe in his love for her.

She rose early and began to make her arrangements. She breakfasted in her own room, having a great wish to avoid Morven for the present—until, at least, she had heard from him some expression of opinion about her conduct. She was surprised that he had not written to herself; and, when she had breakfasted, she expected momentarily to receive a message from him requesting an interview. But, as none came and the day wore on to the afternoon, she resolved to seek him out. She wanted to tell him about Anthony; and also to clear herself from the imputation of having thrown him over for Anthony's sake. That, at least, she said to herself with a burning blush, she had not done. When she broke off her engagement to Lord Morven she had not acknowledged to herself that Anthony was anything to her; certainly she had never dreamt of being anything to him!

Lord Morven, she was told, was in the library—alone. Beatrice knocked at the door without hesitation. What had to be done was better done quickly; and she knew that her interview would be a painful one—not only from the sense of her broken troth, but from an ever-present remembrance of the terrible story which Dr. Airle had poured into her ear. And yet she must have believed it when she could resolve (as she had resolved before she met her lover in the avenue) to give up Anthony on his account.

She received no answer to her knock. After repeating it, and waiting a reasonable time, she walked straight into the room. Then she almost wished that she had not come. Morven was lying on a sofa, face downwards, in an attitude of

the deepest dejection. How could he speak to him? How rouse him from that trance of sorrow? She waited, with her hand upon the door, and, as feeling that she were there, he suddenly raised his head and looked her in the face.

She was not prepared for what followed. He rose from the sofa, drew himself to his full height, and looked at her for a moment with haggard, despairing eyes. Then he dragged himself toward her, and fell at her feet. She heard him sob. He covered her face as though asking forgiveness, and yet he did not speak.

This degradation of his manliness shocked Beatrice inexpressibly, but it did not soften her. She was indignant with him for giving way. Dr. Airle had told her that she had heard the story of Gerald's death—and now—now, she felt with a cold chill at her heart, now she knew that the story must be true. Morven would never lay down his pride before her if he were innocent.

But it was terrible to see him there—at her feet, with wild sobs shaking him from head to foot. She could not bear it. She bent over him and put her hand upon his head. "Morven," she said, "dear Morven; be calm."

He caught at her hand and kissed it, but the force of his emotion would not be controlled. For once the storm would not be controlled. For once the storm would have its way. She knelt down beside him presently, and let him hold her hands and press them to his lips as he wished to do. Her brain was in a whirl. Why was Morven so unlike himself? Was it possible that he had loved her, after all?

After a long, long time (or so it seemed to her) he found voice.

"You may forgive me," he said in a broken tone which she could never have recognized as his; "you may forgive me some day—but not now."

"Forgive you?" she ejaculated. What did he mean?

"Because," he went on, "I am innocent, after all. I did not fire. I was almost mad—but not quite. Although you loved him—and I—I loved you, Beatrice—I did not kill him, and you will be happy yet."

"I do not know what you mean," said Beatrice, recoiling.

"Did Lockhart not see me?" said Morven passionately. "His eyes looked straight into mine—though he saw; I thought he knew. I was in the avenue last night; I watched you both—good God! I could have killed you both—but I would not have done that. Then I raised my hand to fire; but Lockhart turned and looked—looked at me as if he knew—and my hand fell. He's safe enough now; you may forgive me, Beatrice, for I loved you."

She had risen from her kneeling posture, and stood like a statue with her eyes fixed upon his still prostrate form. There was something hard and rigid in the fixity of her features, the sternness of her eye.

"Is that any claim to forgiveness?" she said quietly. He started and held his breath. Beatrice could be inflexible, when she liked—and yet he had trusted, more than he knew, to her warm-heartedness. He listened again.

"For Anthony, I forgive you," she went on. "He is safe, you tell me, and I trust your word. But what is that—an intention compared with what an actual crime? You ask my forgiveness for what you did not do; but have you nothing else to say? If you must needs show your repentance in this—this unmanly way—at least let me know that you are sorrowing also for the wrong you did to Gerald."

"To Gerald!" he repeated with a groan, and yet with an accent of so much wonderment that it startled her into a doubt of Dr. Airle's story.

"Yes, to Gerald. Ah, Morven," she cried, breaking down into tears as she met the miserable eyes which at last he raised to hers. "I did not mean to speak harshly—I am sorry for all that I have said and done that gives you pain—but how can I forgive you if it is true that you—that you killed Gerald—that you were Gerald's murderer? Oh, Morven, tell me that it is not true!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

9 THE REV. GEO. H. THAYER, of Bourbon, Ind., says: "Both myself and wife owe our lives to SHILOH'S CONSUMPTION CURE." For sale by J. Wilson, Druggist.

In the history of medicines no preparation has received such universal commendation for the alleviation it affords and the permanent cure it effects in kidney diseases as Dr. Van Buren's Kidney Cure. Its action in these distressing complaints is simply wonderful. Sold by J. Wilson.

3 Sleepless Nights, made miserable by that terrible cough. Shiloh's Cure is the remedy for you. For sale by J. Wilson, Druggist.

June 19, 1885. For two years my wife suffered from lung and heart disease through rheumatism. She was greatly emaciated and too weak to do anything for herself; she was given up by five doctors; they all passed their opinion that she could not live. She commenced using Dr. J. C. Ayer's Sarsaparilla in December, and after taking six bottles she was so much improved that she could look after her household duties.

J. M. BONDICK, Engineer, U. P. R., East Toronto. For sale by F. Jordan.

SCROFULA

I do not believe that Ayer's Sarsaparilla has an equal as a remedy for Scrofulous Humors. It is pleasant to take, gives strength and vigor to the body, and produces a more permanent, lasting, result than any medicine I ever used.—E. Haines, No. 14, Laidlaw, O.

I have used Ayer's Sarsaparilla, in my family, for Scrofula, and know, if it is taken faithfully, it will thoroughly eradicate this terrible disease.—W. F. Fowler, M. D., Greenville, Tenn.

For forty years I have suffered with Erysipelas. I have tried all sorts of remedies for my complaint, but found no relief until I commenced using Ayer's Sarsaparilla. After taking ten bottles of this medicine I am completely cured. Mary C. Amesbury, Rockport, Me.

I have suffered, for years, from Catarrh, which was so severe that it destroyed my appetite and weakened my system. After trying other remedies, and getting no relief, I began to take Ayer's Sarsaparilla, and in a few months, was cured.—Susan L. Cook, 909 Albany St., Boston Highlands, Mass.

Ayer's Sarsaparilla is superior to any blood purifier that I have ever tried. I have taken it for Scrofula, Canker, and Salt-Rheum, and received much benefit from it. It is good, also, for a weak stomach. Miss Jane Peirce, South Bradford, Mass.

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Common Cold  
gaining of serious affection, Bronchial Tubes, therefore, the importance of its treatment cannot be over-estimated. Ayer's Cherry Pectoral called upon for the speedy cure.

I was attacked with a cold, by neglect and cold, became worse, finally lungs. A terrible cough accompanied by pain in which I suffered intensely. Various remedies, without success, were tried. I commenced taking Ayer's Cherry Pectoral, and was speedily cured.

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