

JUST IN TIME.

BY ADELINE SERGEANT. AUTHOR OF "JACOB'S WIFE," "UNDER FAIR PARLIANCE," &c.

CHAPTER I. (Continued.)

The amusement in Bertie's eyes did not lessen, but there was also a softness of expression which denoted a great deal of liking for his impracticable friend.

"All right," he understood, he said. "I won't burden you more than I can help. But just read Morven's letter first. Then you'll see for yourself."

Scott took up the letter with the tips of his fingers, as if he disliked touching it. Lord Morven's communication was not made on this foreign paper; he used a particularly fine sort, hand-woven, with his crest neatly stamped in black upon sheets and envelopes. There was a look of fastidious refinement of taste about it all. Even the handwriting had its own scrupulous particularity. Each letter was beautifully formed, in a somewhat quaint fashion; it was like the handwriting of a manuscript belonging to the sixteenth century. Scott looked at it critically before he began to read.

"Lord Morven's handwriting is peculiar," he said.

"It's not to my taste," rejoined Bertie, very briefly.

The letter contained nothing interesting. It first alluded to a report made by the factor, from which it seemed that the Douglas estates were not in a particularly flourishing condition; then adverted to a communication which Bertie must have previously made to another member of Lord Morven's family.

"I hear that you have mentioned to Lillias that your intention is to leave the army very shortly and settle down in your own house. As your guardian I cannot too strongly reprobate the idea. You are young—too young to spend the best years of your life in a Scottish country town without career; your estate is not sufficiently large to give you employment, unless you wish to act as your own factor; in short, I cannot conceive any inducement for a young man of spirit or intellect to leave an honorable service for a life of useless idleness. I could not give my sanction to such a step; and I trust that you are not determined to act in a manner which (though I have no means of legally preventing it) would impose me to the maintenance of those cordial feelings which have hitherto been undisturbed between us. In short, my dear Bertie, if you persist in this resolution and take up your abode at Glenberrie I shall be forced to mark my disapproval of the step by asking you to discontinue your visits to the Towers."

"Would that be a great deprivation?" said Scott, lifting his eyes to Bertie's face with a momentary smile, for at Bertie's request he was reading the letter aloud.

"Douglas gave an answering smile. 'Read on,' he said.

"I hope however, that we shall hear no more of this wild scheme," Scott proceeded to read. "Mr. Beaud tells me that he has found a tenant for Glenberrie, and I have authorized him to let the house at least for the summer months. I trust that you will offer no objection to a plan which will increase the rental of your property, and enable us in time to pay off the mortgage with interest. I need hardly say that had it everything goes well we shall be pleased to see you again in the Towers when you come home on leave. Bertie and Lillias send their kind remembrance. Gerald is, as usual, away from us—I think in Edinburgh. And here, with a few curt words of farewell, the letter came to an end.

Scott laid his hand, with the letter in it, on his crossed knees, and looked at Bertie.

"It's a hard letter," he said; "but not perhaps an unjust one."

"On the contrary, I maintain that it is unjust," returned Bertie. "Is your son unheard; it judges me from a misrepresentation of facts."

"Indeed? You did not mean to leave the army, then?"

"Not for some years at any rate. Lady Lillias must have misunderstood me."

"Lady Lillias," repeated Scott deliberately. "She is the Earl's daughter?"

"Sister."

"Let me see. What age is Lord Morven?"

"Thirty-three. Lillias is eighteen. I don't mind telling you, Scott, that I want to marry Lady Lillias."

"I anticipated as much," said Scott. "That makes the matter more serious."

"Exactly. Lady Lillias is rather more than Morven's thumb than even I am."

Scott laid the letter on the table beside him, folded his arms again, and regarded Bertie steadfastly. "If you want any opinion of advice from me—"

"Which I do," said the young man quickly.

"You had better let me ask a few straight-forward questions."

"All right," Bertie answered, with a laugh. "I will consider myself in the witness-box. You ought to have been a lawyer."

Without paying any attention to this remark, Scott put his first question. "What is the reason," he said, "for your being fled up in this extraordinary way, your actions controlled, and your property administered for you until you attain the age of twenty-five?"

"The reason is a short one, and not hard to find," said Bertie easily. "Because my grandfather—that is to say, my grandfather's family—have hitherto had a practice of contracting marriages that my grandfather thought undesirable."

Scott moved slightly; for some reason another, his face flushed. Perhaps he also belonged to a family that had a knack of contracting undesirable marriages.

"It began some time back," said Bertie. "My great-grandfather ran away with a duke's daughter. You may not think that an undesirable thing to do; but it proved so in the end. The duke's daughter was not a pleasant woman to deal with. My grandfather was irreproachable in his marriage as in all his other doings; but his brother, the Admiral, was not thought to have done equally well for himself; and his sister, my Aunt Elsie, the grand-aunt whom I mentioned to you, eloped from a boarding school with a cavalry officer. Poor soul! I believe she really ran away from her mother; the duke's daughter, Lady Margaretta was not the kind of person one cared to spend much of one's life with, I imagine."

"I'd take the marriages of the family on trust," said Scott quickly; he was looking down, with a sudden fire in his dark eyes. "Don't trouble to tell me the others; go on with your own case."

"No hurry," said Bertie, in a languid way. "One likes to do a thing thoroughly, if one does it at all. My grandfather had only two children, a son and daughter. My impression is that he mismanaged them, both as he mismanaged me for the few years during which he had anything to do with me. My mother married fairly well, but my father was a poor man, and died soon after my birth. My grandfather did not like the Douglas, and never treated either my mother or myself with much favor."

"He left you his estate, did he not?"

"Yes, he did—against all my mother's expectations."

"And the son?" said Scott, in an oddly muffled sort of voice. He was sitting with one hand shading his eyes so that the expression of his face could not well be seen. "The son—he married beneath him too, I suppose."

"That's as you take it," said Bertie, with a laugh. "I would rather have married a gipsy girl, as he did, than that patrician mercenary, Lady Margaretta. I believe that my grandfather was angry with him than with any other offending member of the family. He died soon, however, and what became of his widow and child I do not exactly know. I believe she is dead."

"But the child did not die?"

"I suppose not. I suppose he was brought up by his mother's people, but how I cannot tell you—whether in ignorance, vice, misery."

Scott suddenly rose to his feet. He drew himself up until his tall figure looked almost gigantic in the little tent in which he stood.

"Say no more," he interrupted. "I ought to have told you before. My name is not Scott at all! I assumed it some years ago when I enlisted in the Dragons. I am the gipsy woman's son of whom you spoke—your cousin, the grandson of the man who brought you up. My name is Anthony Lockhart."

"My dear fellow," said Bertie quickly, "I have known it all along."

It had been the first meeting of these kinsmen when they stood on the burning Indian plane and looked death in the face together; and it had been the beginning of a friendship which was fated to last through all the vicissitudes of a strongly-sequenced life. But before we strongly the progress of that friendship it were well to glance back at the years that had come and gone since Anthony Lockhart was a poor desolate lad, without a penny in the world, while Bertie Douglas was the cherished idol of an indigent mother, and the central figure of a luxurious and loving home.

The contrast had been great; the history of the two might point to a difference of heart and character that was greater still.

CHAPTER II. THE GIPSY LAD.

Twelve years before Bertie Douglas and Anthony Lockhart met in Northern India, their grandfather, John Lockhart of Glenberrie, took occasion to pay a visit to Glasgow, and when he reached Glasgow he found that he had inlander, lately shown a Fast-day for the time of his visit.

Fast-day in Glasgow fifteen or twenty years ago. Can you remember it, reader?"

The month was October; the weather was of the dulled and the dreariest, and an air of sullen gloom had settled down upon St. Mungo's city. Rain had fallen throughout the night; rain was still falling—a steady, drizzling rain, not heavy but persistent. The sky was as lead,

the streets were deep in mud; the faces of the foot-passengers were for the most part as air of hopeless discontent. Through the grey stillness of the atmosphere the sound of church bells made its way with unusual distinctness. The partial cessation of the ordinary noises of traffic in the streets gave the voice of the bells a peculiarly ostentatious effect; it smote upon the ear with a preeminent clearness and decision which left no room for hesitation about the claims of duty and religion. "Come to church to church!" was never said more plainly. And it was easy to see that a large number of Glasgow citizens responded to the call. Respectable families hastened along the mazy pavements, the women of the party resplendent in silks and satins, only half-concealed by heavy water-proof cloaks, the men, grave and sober, and seldom in broad-cloth and white linen, the children, self-conscious as only children can be, in their Sunday frocks and hats. With umbrellas and Bibles in hand the devout worshippers picked their steps across the wet pavements, and along the muddy roads, regardless of the hoarse and sudden feet or rattled skirts, intent only upon the performance of a pious act, which seems on modern Fast-days to have fallen somewhat into desuetude.

But after all these well-dressed multitudes were in the minority. When the church-goers were safely ensconced in their comfortable pews there still remained an ever-shifting concourse of men and women who dreamed no little of going to church as to paradise. At every street corner groups of pale-faced men in fustian and corduroy smoked black pipes and exchanged surly jests with the passers-by; women of a kindred type laughed and joked together or stood in stolid silence, while their male friends and relations drank and smoked at the neighboring public house. There were dozens of factory girls, with shawls drawn closely round their head and shoulders; they walked about with arms interlaced, always ready for a quip or a crack, a laugh or a jest at their friends' expense. Then there was a certain proportion of more respectable folk, free for the day from the toil of workshop or counter; but to these people the bad weather was a misfortune which they did not deserve, and their faces were mostly darkened by a look of gloom and disappointment.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning that a gentleman came out of an old-fashioned, old-established hotel in Buchanan Street and made his way slowly and, as it were, with difficulty towards Gordon Street. The well-dressed passers-by, with their intent faces and shining umbrellas, seemed somewhat to disturb his mind; he had passed now and then in order to get out of the way of some more than usually hurried pedestrian, and narrowly escaped being blindsided once or twice by the protruding ferule of an umbrella.

There was just a hint of feebleness in the manner in which he moved along the street—just a touch of the querulousness of old age in his step as he murmured to himself—

"If that minded that it was the Fast-day, I would have waited. A day would have made no difference—no difference at all."

He paused before crossing Gordon Street, and looked up and down with a slightly uncertain air. Nearly all the shops were closed, and the long lines of buildings on either hand, sloping down towards the river, had a sombre, almost a desolate look. The church bells had stopped, and the worshippers were safely seated in their respective churches. Far away down Union Street a solitary omnibus drawn by its two patient horses, came slowly along the road. The old man stood and watched it as if interested in its approach. He looked at it so earnestly indeed that the driver, as it drew near, thought him a possible passenger and stopped the bus. But when the gentleman saw what had happened he only shook his head and turned impatiently away. He had been thinking of other things; his mind was far away from the streets of Glasgow Town.

"The lad has waited for three years and more," he said to himself, striking the ground with his stick as he crossed the road. "I'll not keep him another day. Who knows what may happen? I will be seventy-nine to-morrow. I don't want to die with the matter unsettled. I'll not turn back."

And he went vigorously forward—down Union Street and Jamaica Street—until he stood upon Glasgow Bridge, and there again he paused and looked about him.

He was a man who had evidently once possessed great muscular strength, and although he was bowed and bent by age, had perhaps by illness, his gait and massive frame showed the remains of a magnificent physique. His hair was nearly white, but his eyebrows and shaggy short-cropped beard were iron grey. His countenance was wrinkled and somewhat weather-beaten. There was a certain sternness and grimness of expression, caused perhaps by the well-marked fold between the eyebrows, and some deep lines about the eyes and mouth, which was not altogether attractive. The big, high nose, something like

an eagle's beak, the large chin and well-cut lips—sternly compressed when in repose—as well as the fiery penetrating eye, all manifested the same type of character. One could well imagine that a man possessed of such features would be hot-tempered, obstinate, hard to move, and to please; one would not expect him willingly to humiliate himself, or to own himself in the wrong. And yet this was what old John Lockhart of Glenberrie had come to do in Glasgow.

He did not live many miles from the great city, but he had not trod its streets for years. He did not like it. He loved his own home better; the quaint, castellated building with turrets and pepper-pots like those of a French chateau, from the windows of which he could see Ben Ledi in the distance, and the great green trees and stretches of velvet sward belonging to his own park near at hand. He was fond of his home and proud of it—fond also of the little town, outside his gates, with the brown brawling river running through its midst, the pointed stone bridge, and the picturesque old castle on the neighboring heights, where the Earls of Morven had held high revel and ruled their vassals with an iron hand from times immemorial.

John Lockhart was as proud of his lineage and his ancestral home as any bolted earl of old Scotland, or England either; and it had been a bitter grief to him when his only son Anthony, instead of upholding the traditions of his race, had thrown off the restraints of education, of habit, and of family, in order to marry a beautiful gipsy girl and lead the wandering life of the gipsy tribe.

It was a young man a freak, of which he would possibly have repented in a year or two and returned to the ordinary duties of his station, but he had no time for repentance. In a few months he was stricken with fever, and died before there was time for any reconciliation with his father to take place. He left a child—a baby boy of three weeks old—who was called Anthony after himself.

A dispute arose very soon as to the future and the guardianship of this child. Old Mr. Lockhart wanted to bring him up, and to separate mother and child once and for all. Anthony's widow passionately refused to surrender her rights, Mr. Lockhart uttered his ultimatum with the harsh and obstinate injustice which characterized all his dealings with the woman to whom, as he thought, his son's life had been sacrificed.

"I'll take the child and bring him up as my own," he said; "or I'll have nothing to do with him. Let him come to me now, and you shall see that you never see him or speak to him again, and I'll make him master of Glenberrie. But if you bring him up amongst a pack of horse stealers and fortune-tellers, I'll have none of him. I want no gipsy vagabonds about my house."

Poor Zillah—Zillah was the name by which Mrs. Anthony Lockhart was known amongst her friends—answered this proposal with a storm of indignation which took her father-in-law by surprise. She vowed that she would never give up her child for any land or fortune in the world. He was her own, and she would take care of him. A scree on the man who wanted to sever mother and child. Her boy should belong to her tribe and to herself, but never to the hard-hearted Scottish race from which her husband had, for her sake, come out.

Then they parted, never to meet again.

Mr. Lockhart managed to keep himself pretty well informed of her movements. He heard of her subsequent marriage with one of her own tribe, of her wanderings from place to place; finally, of her death when young Anthony was ten years old.

The knowledge of Anthony's desolate state might have softened the grandfather's heart towards him, but it did not, for there was a strong influence at work against the boy.

Mr. Lockhart's one daughter had married, been widowed, and returned with a child, also a boy, to her father's house, and she was naturally anxious that her son, Bertie Douglas, should be provided for. She was a scheming, unscrupulous woman, who lost no opportunity of mourning over her dead brother's folly and wickedness; or of insinuating that Zillah was no better than she should be, and that the boy, Anthony, was growing up a thief amongst thieves of the worst description. And Mr. Lockhart listened and—almost—agreed, with her.

On one unlucky day it chanced that a boy, who seemed to be about eleven or twelve years old, presented himself at Glenberrie and gave his name as Anthony Lockhart. He was a slouching, ruffianly-looking lad, with matted hair, and a sullen, suspicious expression. His clothes were in rags, his feet were bare and bleeding. For some reason best known to himself, old Mr. Lockhart chose to consider him an impostor, and chased him angrily from the house. Mrs. Douglas, his daughter, encouraged him in the act. She stood at one of the doors, approving and well-pleased, (her own little boy clutching at her gown, meanwhile, and crying, with distress at seeing a beggar treated with such harshness, while the old laird threatened to set the dogs on the lad who dared to call himself by his son's name. The boy ran

down the avenue, thoroughly frightened, and was never seen at Glenberrie again.

But when Mr. Lockhart of Glenberrie—or, as he liked to hear himself called, Glenberrie, pure and simple—when Glenberrie came to his senses after that pampered fit of rage he was sorry for what he had done. In private he made inquiries, which insured him that the boy whom he had driven away from his door was indeed young Anthony Lockhart, his grandson, whom he would have given all the world to take to his arms and acknowledge as his rightful heir. But he was afraid of his daughter. Janet's tongue was a deadly weapon, and many a sly thrust did she give him with a serene and smiling countenance. He knew that she would never forgive him if he brought Anthony's boy to the house and set him over the head of her darling Bertie, and he shrank from the notion of her anger and disgust. He shrank also in spite of the yearning of his heart, from the thought of this rough, untutored lad, wild as a hawk, insubordinate as a savage, whom, if he brought home, he must treat as the future master of Glenberrie. Glenberrie in the hands of a gipsy woman's son! It was a hard saying. No! let the lad go with his own kind, mix with those of his own blood and breeding. He should be no Lockhart of Glenberrie.

And yet, as the years went on and the old man felt his strength falling, his conscience troubled him sorely. If Anthony Lockhart went wrong, would not his grandfather, who had driven him from the house which the boy had sought, be morally responsible? What would poor Tony have said if he could know that his child had been abandoned to ignorance and destitution, without one friendly hand stretched out to save him? These thoughts so worked upon Mr. Lockhart's mind that at last he resolved to go to

Glasgow, where he knew that the living, to seek him out and to give fresh start in life. If the lad was honest and trustful the old laird felt that might even yet make him his heir; not—he might at any rate set him above the temptation to dishonesty. It was late in the day to do anything perhaps—the lad must be fourteen years of age—but better late than never the laird said to himself as he set off on his Glasgow expedition, and thought of Janet's indignant scorns.

He was a little ashamed of the means that he had been using. He had set a detective to work on Anthony's track; the lad had never changed his name and was easy to identify. Mr. Lockhart had an address in his pocket-book, and at this place he had been told that he would find his grandson. He passed upon the bridge, and fumbled in his pocket for the book, in order to verify his remembrance of the address.

It did not make him very much wiser. He did not know the street in which the house stood which he was bidden to seek. He knew that it was tolerably near the river, somewhere between the Saltmarket and the Trongate, but he had felt a dislike to asking his way thither at the hotel, and had started off with the slightest possible notion concerning his destination. He now retraced his steps and made an inquiry in the Trongate for "Gibson's Cloak."

TO BE CONTINUED.

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