

JUST IN TIME.

BY ADELINE SERGEANT.

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

CHAPTER XVIII. (Continued.)

MAGGIE LOGAN.

"If I tell ye," she said at last, "ye'll no breathe a word? Ye'll promise?"

"Ay."

"I'd better tell ye, maybe," said Maggie, as if still arguing the matter with herself, "and then ye'll understand. Granny, ye mind the time when Auntie Bell an' me went to Glenbervie. Auntie Bell was a nurse then, ye'll mind, an' she was sent frae the hospital to tend an auld gentleman that lived down Strimlin' way?"

"I mind."

"He'd been looking for his grandson in Glasgow, an' the grandson was in jail. The auld man got a stroke when he heard o't. He was ill in the hotel for a day or twa, an' when he was t'en awa' to his ain house, Auntie Bell gae'd wi' m'."

"What's a' this to do wi' t'?" inquired old Mrs. Logan.

"Wait a bit an' ye'll hear. Auntie Bell had been there ower lang when she sent for me to gae an' help her. She wanted a lassie to rin errands, she said. I went the next day, but she had queer errands for me to do."

"I mind, I mind. I thoct there was somehing wrang. I speered at her moony a time what gae'd on at Glenbervie, but she wadna say. She cam' awa' at the auld laird's death no a penny the richer."

"She an' the laird's dochter, Mrs. Douglas," said Maggie, "wanted me to spy on the auld man's doings—me, a wee bit lassie o' twal year auld. It wadna sit work for me, as I hae telt ye Auntie Bell. No but what I did it weel enoch. The laird never suspectit a wee cratur wi' hair like gowd an' cheeks like roses, as he used to say. An' an' cam' to this, that he hid a box fu' o' gowd an' jewels an' notes in a place whar neither Mr. Douglas nor Auntie Bell coold find it, an' I telt o't at the time."

"An' ye never telt yer Auntie Bell?" said the old woman.

"No me."

"Nor Mrs. Douglas?"

"No."

"Then—ye'll hae the box beside ye?" said Mrs. Logan, in a voice of suppressed excitement.

"No, I've no the box," Maggie paused for a few moments, as if she were reluctant to go on with the tale. "I daurna say a word. Th' auld laird, cursed me if I said anything to ony leavin' soul, an' I keep my word—until—until—"

"Until what?"

"Until Gerald garred me telt him," murmured Maggie, with an irrespressible sob. "An' how coold I say him nay?"

"Ye mean that ye kept the secret 'thae twal year an' mair'?" said the old woman. "A secret that wad hae made yer fortune? Ye fule!"

The contempt of her tone could not be put into words.

"I wish I had kept it langer," said Maggie passionately. "He said he wouid punish me if I taid; an' see what has happened! Gerald is deid—deid, an' a' through me. He taid me to telt him everything, an' I thoct it nae harm. What for should he no hear o' the laird's hiding-place—he might as weel hae the box as for it to lie by unknown an' unthocht o'—but haim has come o't, the worst haim o' a' wae's me fer't."

Maggie burst into tears and hid her face in her hands.

"Was it a' gowd an' jewels, Maggie?" asked her grandmother hungrily. "A boxfu'?"

"There was papers," said Maggie, wearily. "An' I think—though I never thoct sicca an' like thing at the time—that it was the papers mair nor the gowd an' jewels that Mistress Douglas wanted to get a grip o'; an' Gerald thoct nae o't. He kenned the family an' a' the ings an' oots o't, an' he wad hae likit weel to see Glenbervie gae to the auld laird's eldest grandson, an' Anthony Lockhart, instead o' the young Mr. Douglas that has it the noo."

He said something that I coold not richtly understand about a wrang that he had done to Anthony when she was a liddle, an' he wad be fine an' pleased if he coold gie Anthony back his sin. He telt me mair than that, an' he grew sair thoctfu' an' troubled like; then at last he borrowed David Baird's class an' set off without teltin' me. But I kenned—though I willna say a' that I ken, He went aff wi' a lauch an' a jest as his way was. 'Goodbye, Maggie,' says he, 'maybe I'll come back a rich man and maybe no, but rich or poor I'll be ye till I deo—ye an' the haimie.' An' that was the last I'll ever see or hear o' Gerald."

There was a long silence, broken at last by Mrs. Logan's quivering voice.

"I'll len' ye the twal pun, Maggie," she said in an unusually amiable tone. "An' ye shall hae mair gin ye require it. Yer Auntie Bell's noo leavin' at Glenbervie town, an' she'll be glad to help ye. Ance at Glenbervie, ye'll hae a guid chance

tas ma' terms for yourself an' yer bonny bairn wi' Lord Morven—ferby the bairn! which ye'll maybe find whar Gerald Ruthven left it. There's nae teltin'! But the chance is worth a guid pun' noo or twa."

CHAPTER XIX.

A WARNING.

Bertie was convalescent. He was able to sit up for a portion of each day—to lie on a broad, old-fashioned sofa in his bedroom and look out at the view of red-jenning woods and purpling heather in the distance—even to be moved into his sitting-room on the same floor and to see his factor and his lawyer on business matters. But there was a great weakness and languor about him still. It seemed to Anthony sometimes as if a slight weakening of mental energy and will had followed upon the loss of physical strength; he could not tell how or why it was, but he thought himself conscious of some want of resolution and steady purpose in the character of his cousin—a want which he had never observed before. Bertie was as lovable as ever, but Anthony could not help thinking that at times he was a little weak.

Perhaps, however, Anthony judged him harshly. In Bertie's place he would certainly not have been as easily depressed and disheartened as Bertie had been by Lord Morven's dismissal of his suit; but then Anthony was made of sterner stuff than his cousin, and had been moulded by adverse circumstances into a very different character. He grew into the habit of treating Bertie in a protecting, elderly-brotherly kind of way, which had its charm for the young man, although he did not quite understand it. Anthony took to himself, almost unconsciously, a certain amount of authority, and, as if to counterbalance it, a certain amount of responsibility. He made it his business to see that Bertie did the right and the sensible thing on every occasion. And, while this treatment was a novelty at first, Bertie bore it with great good humor.

It came perhaps from the possession of the paper which Beatrice had placed in Anthony's hands. Old John Lockhart's will gave to his elder grandson the whole of the Glenbervie estate; leaving to Bertie only a small income, of which Anthony himself, in conjunction with Lord Morven, was to be trustee. It was an extraordinary will, considering the little that Mr. Lockhart knew of Anthony, and Anthony himself was fully alive to its strangeness. He tried to learn everything possible concerning the old laird, and heard some queer stories about his oddities, his freaks of obstinacy and wilfulness.

"It looks to me sometimes as if there were a streak of something more than eccentricity in the old man," said Anthony to himself. "As if his mind had been disordered by some shock, or weakened by grief and anxiety. But I don't hear anybody giving this explanation. By the by, Mrs. Pirie, our landlady, said that she knew him. I'll have a talk with her some day."

The opportunity soon occurred. Anthony met her as he was walking through the lower passage of the house on his way to the door, and she stopped him with a question about some of Bertie's requirements. It was easy for him to follow her into her own little sitting-room, and to say with an excellent assumption of carelessness:

"You nursed my grandfather through his last illness, did you not, Mrs. Pirie?"

"Yes, jair." Mrs. Pirie lifted her eyes to his face and then dropped them demurely to the ground. Her features were remarkably expressionless; Anthony said to himself that they looked as if they were carved in wood.

"Was it a long illness?"

"A matter o' three months, sir, or thereabout. I canna exactly mind."

"Was he conscious—and sensible—the whole time?" said Anthony.

Mrs. Pirie looked at him again. "Whiles," she said significantly, and she held her tongue.

"Whiles," repeated Anthony. "He varied from time to time then?"

"Ay, sir."

"He could not walk from room to room, I suppose, during the last few weeks of his illness?" Anthony was wondering where that tin box with which the will had dropped out could have been concealed so long. He had examined the room in which it had been found, but the fire had worked its way as well amongst the bookshelves and the disjointed masonry that no trace of the opening in the paneled wall was discoverable. And he knew that Mr. Lockhart's bedroom was situated on the other side of the house.

"Did he never get into his study after his first attack, for instance?"

Mrs. Pirie deliberated. She saw—or fancied she saw—that Anthony had got some inkling of the way in which the old man's mind has worked during the last days of his life, and she wondered how much or how little she had better let him know. Would he pay her anything for the story of Mr. Lockhart's vain repentance? Probably not. And the missing box must have been destroyed in the fire? It was natural that she should

think so. For the box, with its contents of money and jewels, which Anthony had committed to the police officer's charge, had been placed lock and key at the local Bank, and had passed without particular notice as one of the few valuable possessions which had fortunately escaped the flames. Mrs. Pirie, in common with the general public, knew nothing of it, and dared not count on the chance of its preservation.

"I was scarcely like to say, sir," she answered at last, with caution. "I have nursed a moony folk that I dions mind. Mrs. Douglas, she wad be deid, pur body, an' I telt ye, but she died, pur body, an' Mr. Bertie was ower young to telt o' t' things."

"Of course," said Anthony. "Ah, well, it doesn't signify. Thank you, Mrs. Pirie." And then he dismissed the subject from his mind as an utterly unimportant one.

Mrs. Pirie looked after him with a puzzled expression as he strode away. "He's a deep ane," was her conclusion. "He's got his ain plans an' his ain devices. An' he'll never come to wae."

Mr. Bertie for money, wi' his bonny eyes an' body, see like he lather fore he married at Miss James an' used to come about our place when I was a lassie. Ay, Mr. Bertie's use an' life his mother had a cousin's like a book. I'd gae through a muckle pain an' sorrow to keep Mr. Bertie in his ain. I wish Dr. Airlie wad happen this day; I'm just awa' right to hae a cock wi' him about a' these things. An' he telt me that he thoct he had heard o' Maggie."

Meanwhile Anthony had gone out for a walk, and was making his way through a wood which extended for some distance on each bank of the river outside the town. In this wood he suddenly caught sight of a woman's figure amongst the trees. He stopped short, and regarded it intently. For a moment he could hardly believe the testimony of his eyes. A little trembling hand raised through the arch of the branches his feet; and there, just beyond it, stood Beatrice Eastmont. She did not see him; she was leaning against a tree, holding a book in her hand, but her eyes were fixed on a bit of blue sky visible between the overhanging branches of the trees. She was dressed in black—mourning for poor Gerald Ruthven—but the black that she had thrown round her graceful shoulders was for her favorite crimson, and even in that moment of silent observation Anthony could not help noticing how brightly the diamonds flashed upon her slender, ungloved hand. He paused, spellbound, neither liking to advance nor to retreat. It seemed to him that her face was paler, thinner than it had been when he saw her last; but then he had not often seen her bearing that expression of thought, almost of sadness, which now distinguished it, and which used to be strange indeed to Beatrice's animated features. A great shadow was crouching at her side. Something—perhaps the dog's howl when Anthony moved his hand—caused her to turn at last. Then she saw him. She changed her posture, let the hand with the book in it fall to her side, and smiled with a frank friendliness which made his heart leap—he knew not why.

"Good morning, Mr. Lockhart," she said. "You have found out my favorite retreat. Is it not a pretty place? Take care—the brook is between us."

"May I come over?"

"Certainly. Then you will get my point of view."

"Which things are an allegory," said Anthony, with a smile as he strode over the brook. He did not know whether she understood him; probably she did not understand all that was in his mind at that moment, for by the brook he was symbolizing to himself the line of separation which society drew between them. She offered him her hand with a look which told of some gladness at his coming; and then they both stood silent—a silence which was full of a strange double consciousness a silence charged with suggestion, which neither of them cared to break. Was it merely the knowledge that they shared the secret of Mr. Lockhart's will which gave them that feeling of standing alone and separate from all the world? Surely so trivial a cause would not produce that result?

It was Beatrice who—woman-like—broke the silence, growing restless under its thrall sooner than the more massive nature of the man was apt to do. She turned a little towards him as she spoke.

"How is Bertie?" she asked.

"He is growing stronger. But his illness has been serious."

"Do you think that his health is generally delicate?" said Beatrice, with a resolute plunge into prosaic detail, which yet she felt herself unaccountably anxious to set aside.

"Not usually. He has had a great deal to try it—his wound in India, his illness afterwards, then the excitement of coming home, the burning of his house, and Lord Morven's rejection of his proposal—it has all tended to pull him down."

"You speak of his house," said Beatrice, after a moment's reflection.

"Yes. Why not?"

"It is not his."

"Possession is nine points of law," Miss Eastmont.

"And it is always to remain in Bertie's possession?"

Anthony was silent for a moment. He looked down, and crushed the fern under his foot with some impatience.

"Before I answer you," he said, "let me ask you one question. Would the ownership or non-ownership of Glenbervie effect Lord Morven's decision with respect to Lady Lillias Ruthven's marriage?"

"I do not know. I suppose that it would—to some extent. Morven would not be any the more likely to give his consent to the marriage if poor Bertie was not even the laird of Glenbervie. But that consideration ought not to weigh with you."

"It does weigh with me—to some extent, as you say," rejoined Anthony with a smile. "But I have another reason for delaying my decision. After all, I have known Bertie for a very short time."

He stopped suddenly and looked away, as if considering what to say next. Beatrice listened and watched him eagerly.

"Yes," she said at last.

"I know I may trust you," said Anthony, with deliberation. "I know that I may tell you what I would not tell anybody else. You will not betray me. Well, I had what are called odd views about property. I think no man has a right to it who cannot use it rightly. I should take away without a grain of compunction every acre of land from the man who sees in it nothing but a means of amusement. He should use it for the good of his tenants, the good of the country at large, or he should not have it at all. Now I am willing to wait. I don't believe in turning my cousin out for the sake of my own rights. I don't care to own landed property, and I have no fancy to settle down in the country; but if Bertie were to prove himself a bad steward, a bad landlord—or if he merely used his wealth for his own pleasure and profit, as so many men do now-a-days—why, then, I think I should tell him to make room for me. I am not going to stand by and see my money, my property wasted, when here are the thousands of starving men and sick children and trampled down women in the country whom I could have helped if I had had the land."

"But you are not a Socialist, are you?" said Beatrice in rather a grave voice.

Anthony laughed. "I love the people," he said. "I don't want them to be poor. I think for yourself whether or not I am a Socialist or not. I call it Christianity."

She was silent—impressed, almost in spite of herself, with a view of life and conduct which differed strangely from that which had been presented to her before.

"So, you see," he continued cheerfully, "I mean to wait a few weeks or months before I decide. Even if I were to take my own rights I should not leave him penniless, you know, Miss Eastmont. He has an income."

"Bertie is kind hearted and generous," said Beatrice in a low voice. "I don't think he will do anything to injure the people in his charge."

"So much the better. That will relieve me of a great responsibility."

"Mr. Lockhart," said Beatrice, "I really don't know whether to think you very generous or—"

"Or a great hypocrite?" said Anthony with one of his rare laughs. "I don't think I am either one or the other. I am only trying to be just."

"And that is a harder matter than to be either," rejoined Beatrice with an answering smile.

She began to walk slowly through the wood, and Anthony walked at her side. Presently she spoke again.

"I must tell you what our movements are likely to be during the next week or two. We are going abroad."

"Indeed? Bertie will be sorry."

"Lillias is sorry too. It is Morven's wish—not ours. You see I have not the influence you attributed to me."

"I am sure of your good will—your good wishes at any rate."

"Yes, you may be sure of that. You will tell Bertie what I say. We are going to Switzerland for change of air and scene. My cousin Lillias has not been well; she has grieved over this separation and over Gerald's death—and the doctor has ordered her away."

"Dr. Airlie?"

"Yes."

"Ah. I thought as much."

"Do you not like Dr. Airlie, Mr. Lockhart?" said Beatrice, struck by the tone of his voice.

"I do not trust him. I have reason to dislike and distrust. I thought at one time, Miss Eastmont, that I could tell you the whole story, but my lips are sealed now. There is no reason why I could tell you a story that would give Dr. Airlie. He is a man that would hesitate at nothing to further his own ends."

"I have sometimes thought so," said Beatrice, rather reluctantly, "but I have never found him personally anything but kind and agreeable. He has great influence over Lord Morven. It seems especially great just now."

"Yes. And he had great influence over Gerald Ruthven. Miss Eastmont, I would not for the world say anything to disturb your confidence unnecessarily, but believe me, Dr. Airlie's influence is not always an influence for good. I have known a case—Anthony's voice became a little agitated as he spoke—"a case—in which that influence was founded upon a crime."

"Mr. Lockhart? It could not at any rate be founded upon wrong-doing in this instance," said Beatrice, with some haughtiness.

"I did not mean to say so," replied Anthony more humbly than usual; "but I wanted you to understand that Dr. Airlie would use any means that fell within his power—good, bad, or indifferent."

"Morven trusts him implicitly," said Beatrice in a doubtful tone. But Anthony returned no answer. His eyes were fixed upon the path-way he was treading. There was a frown of perplexity upon his brow. How much or how little ought he to tell Beatrice Eastmont of the story that would show Dr. Airlie in his true colors?

And while he hesitated the opportunity was lost. A turn in the pathway brought them face to face with the very man of whom they had been speaking; Dr. Airlie was also taking his walk abroad, and had come—by accident or design—to the spot which Miss Eastmont loved to frequent. He glanced quickly from one to the other; his face wore a keen and even a suspicious expression as he did so; but in one moment the sharp look was gone, and nothing but innocent and benevolent interest beamed from his soft blue eyes.

(CONTINUED)

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