

SQUIRE ARDEN.

VOL. III.

BY
MRS. OLIPHANT

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SQUIRE ARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

“How is Miss Pimpernel?” Arthur asked as he entered the house. He went in with a great appearance of anxiety and haste, and he repeated his question to a maid who was just preparing to ascend the stairs. The footman had given him no answer—a fact which he did not even observe; and the maid made him a little curtsy, and cast down her eyes, and looked confused and uncomfortable. “My mistress is coming, sir,” she said; and Arthur, looking up, saw that Mrs. Pimpernel herself was advancing to meet him. He saw at the first glance that there was to be war, and war to the knife, and that conciliation was impossible. “How is Miss Pimpernel?” he asked, taking the first word. “I was so glad to see she was able to move at once; but I fear she must have been much shaken, at least.”

Mrs. Pimpernel came downstairs upon him before she made any answer. She bore down like a conquering ship or a charge of cavalry. Her face was crimson; her eyes bright with anger; her head was agitated by a little nervous tremble. “Mr. Arden,” she said, rushing, as it were, into the fray, “I don’t think Miss Pimpernel would have been much the better for you, whatever had happened. I don’t think from what I have heard, that your kind service would have been much good to her. To tell the truth, when I heard some one asking, I never thought it could be you.”

“Miss Pimpernel fortunately, had no need of my services,” said Arthur firmly, standing his ground. “I cannot tell you what a relief it was to me to find her unhurt.”

“Unhurt, indeed!” said Mrs. Pimpernel. “Who says she is unhurt? A delicate young creature thrown from a high phaeton like that, and all but trampled under the horses’ feet! And whose fault was it, Mr. Arden? I hope I shall have patience to speak. Whose *fault* was it, I say? And then to find herself deserted by those that ought to have taken care of her! All for the sake of a designing girl—an artful little cheat and hussy—a—a——”

“I am not the girl’s defender,” said Arthur Arden. “She may be all you say, and it is quite unimportant to me; but I thought she was killed, and Mr. Pimpernel and my cousin Edgar Arden were with your daughter.”

“Ah, Mr. Arden!” said Mrs. Pimpernel, “he is a gentleman—he is a true gentleman, notwithstanding all the nonsense you have been putting in Mr. Pimpernel’s head. And I tell you I don’t believe a word of it—not a word! Mr. Arden is what he always was, and you are a poor, mean, shabby adventurer, poking into people’s houses, and making yourself agreeable, and all that. Yes! I’ll make you hear me! that I shall! I tell you you are no better than a——”

“Is it necessary that John and Mary should assist at this explanation?” said Arthur. He smiled, but he was very pale. He said to himself that to attach any importance to the words of such a woman would be folly indeed; but yet shame and rage tore him asunder. A lady would not have condescended to abuse him. She would have treated him with deadly civility, and given him to understand that his room was wanted for another guest. But Mrs.

Pimpernel had not been trained to habits of conventional decorum. Her face was red, her head trembled with rage and excitement. She had suffered a great deal in silence nursing her wrath—and now there was no longer any need to restrain herself. Now, Mr. Pimpernel himself was convinced, and Alice was indignant. He had been making use of them, trifling with them, taking advantage of the shelter of their house to carry on first one “affair” and then another. Had it been Clare Arden who had at this last crowning moment led him away from Alice, the affront would have been bitter, but not so unpardonable. But a girl out of the village, a nobody, an artful—— Words forsook Mrs. Pimpernel’s burning lips. She felt herself no longer able to stand and pour forth her wrath. She made a dash at the door of Mr. Pimpernel’s library, and sat down, calling the culprit before her, with a wave of her hand. Arthur went in; but he shut the door, which was not what she had wanted. A certain moral support was in the fact that she stood, as it were, in the open centre of her own house, speaking loud enough to be heard by her husband and daughter above, and by the servants below stairs. But Mrs. Pimpernel, notwithstanding her courage, did not feel so comfortable when she found herself shut into the silence of a separate room, with Arthur Arden, pale and composed, and overwhelmingly gentlemanly, before her, and not even the presence of John or Mary to give her strength. It was a strategical mistake.

“I am glad to say it does not matter to me who hears me,” she said. “Let those be ashamed that have acted shabby, and shown themselves what they are. For my part, I couldn’t have believed it. To creep into a house, and live on the best of everything, and carriages and horses and all at your command—I should have been

ashamed to do it. No man would have done it that was better than an adventurer—a mean, miserable——”

“Mrs. Pimpernel,” said Arthur, “you have been very civil and friendly, asking me to your house, and I have done my best to repay it in the way that was expected. Pray don’t suppose I am ignorant it was an affair of barter—the best of everything, as you say, and the carriages, &c., on one side; but on my side a very just equivalent. Let us understand each other. What am I supposed to have done amiss? Of course, our mutual accommodation is over, after this scene—but I should be glad to know, before I accept my dismissal, what I am supposed to have done amiss——”

“Equivalent! Accommodation! Oh you!—— Without a penny to bless yourself with—and living on the fat of the land—— Champagne like water, and everything you could set your face to. And now you brazen it out to me. Oh you poor creature! Oh you beggarly, penniless——”

“Pray let us come to particulars,” said Arthur; “these reproaches are sadly vague. Come, things are not so bad after all. You expected me to be your attendant, a sort of upper footman, and I have been such. You expected me to lend the name of an Arden to all your junketings, and I have done it. You expected me, perhaps—— But I don’t want to bring in the name of Miss Pimpernel——”

“No, don’t—if you dare!” cried the mother. “Mention my child, if you dare. As if she was not, and hadn’t always been, a deal too good for you. Thirty thousand pounds of her own, and as pretty a girl and as good a girl—— Oh, don’t you suppose she cares! She would not look at you out of her window, if there was not another

man; she would never bemean herself, wouldn't my Alice. You think yourself a great man with the ladies, but you may find out your mistake. Your cousin won't see you, nor look at you—you know that. Oh, you may start! She has seen through you long ago, has Miss Arden—and if you thought for a moment that my Alice—
— Good gracious!—to think a man should venture to look me in the face, after leaving my child to be killed, and going after a—
Don't speak to me! Yes, I know you. I always saw through you. If it hadn't been for Mr. Pimpernel, and that sweet angel upstairs—
”

And here Mrs. Pimpernel paused, and sobbed, and shed tears—giving her adversary the advantage over her. She was all the more angry that she felt she had wasted her words, and had not transfixed and made an end of him, as she had hoped—as she had meant to do. To see him standing there unsubdued, with a smile on his face, was gall and wormwood to her. She choked with impotent rage and passion. She could have flown at him, tooth and claw, if she had not put force on herself. Arthur felt the height of exasperation to which he was driving her, and, perhaps, enjoyed it; but nothing was to be made by continuing such a struggle.

“I am sorry to have to take my leave of you in such a way,” he said, in his most courteous tone. “I shall explain to Mr. Pimpernel how grieved I am to quit his house so abruptly; but after this unfortunate colloquy, of course there is no more to be said. It is a pity to speak when one is so excited—one says more always than one means. Many thanks to you for a pleasant visit, such as it has been. You have done your best to amuse me with croquet and that sort of thing. Society, of course, one cannot always command. My man will bring over my things to—Arden in the course of the day. I trust that if we meet in the county, as we may perhaps do, that we

shall both be able to forget this little passage of arms. Good-bye, and many thanks, Mrs. Pimpernel.”

Mrs. Pimpernel gave a little stammering cry of passion and annoyance. She had never calculated upon her prey escaping so easily. She had not even meant to dismiss him entirely, but only to subdue him, and bring him under discipline. After all, he was an Arden, and going to Arden—as he said—and might procure invitations to Arden, probably, notwithstanding her affirmation about Clare. But Arthur left her no time for repentance. He withdrew at once when he had discharged this parting shot, closing the door after him, and leaving the panting, enraged woman shut up in that cool and silent place to come to herself as she best might. He was a little pleased with his victory, and satisfied to think that he had had the best of it. The maid was still standing outside, listening near the door, when he opened it suddenly. “Your mistress is a little put out, Mary,” he said to her, with a smile. “Perhaps it would be better to leave her to herself for a few minutes. I hope Miss Pimpernel is not really hurt. Tell her I am grieved to have to go away without saying good-bye.” And then he stopped to give John directions about his things, and distributed his few remaining sovereigns among them with fine liberality. The servants had grinned at his discomfiture before, but they grinned still more now at the thought of their mistress weeping with rage in the library, and her visitor escaped from her. “He was always quite the gentleman,” Mary said to John, as he left the house; and they laid their heads together over the discomfiture that would follow his departure. Thus Arthur Arden shook the dust of the Red House from his feet, and went out upon the world again, not knowing where he was to go.

And his thoughts were far from cheerful, as he made his way among the shrubberies, which sometimes had looked to him like prison walls. Poor Alice and her thirty thousand pounds had always been something to fall back upon. If Clare did not relent, and would not explain herself, a man must do something—and though it was letting himself go very cheap, still thirty thousand pounds was not contemptible. And now that was over—the hope which after all had been his surest hope—all (once more) from thinking of other people's rather than of his own interests. What was Jeanie to him? She had never given him a kind word or smile. She was a child—a bloodless being—out of whom it was impossible to get even a little amusement. Yet for her sake here was thirty thousand pounds lost to him. And probably she would go and die, now that she had done him as much harm as possible, leaving it altogether out of his power to do her any harm, or compensate himself in the smallest degree. And in the meantime where was he to go? Arthur's funds were at a very low ebb. All this time which he had been wasting in the country he had been out of the way of putting a penny in his pocket; and for the moment he did not know what he was to do? He had said he was going to Arden, partly to impose on Mrs. Pimpernel, partly with a sudden sense that to throw himself upon Edgar's hospitality was about the best thing on the cards for him. Might he venture to go there at once, and risk welcome or rejection? At the very worst they could not refuse to take him in till Monday. But then it would be better to secure himself for longer than Monday—and Clare was very uncompromising, and Edgar firm, notwithstanding his good nature. Altogether the position was difficult. He had been making great way with the Pimpernels since Clare had shut her doors upon him. There had been nothing to disturb him, nothing to divide his allegiance, and therefore he had been utterly unprepared for this

sudden derangement of plans. The Pimpernels, too, were utterly unprepared. His hostess had meant to “set him down,” as she said, “to show him his proper place,” to “bring him to his senses,” but she had never intended the matter to be concluded so promptly. The discomfiture on both sides was equally great. He took a little pleasure in the thought of this, but yet it did not enlighten him as to where he was to go.

The conclusion of the matter was that for that night he went to the Arden Arms. Edgar had disappeared when he returned to the village, and all was quiet and silent. Arthur met Dr. Somers going down to the cottage in which Jeanie still was. The Doctor shook his head, but would not say much. “She is young, and she may pull through, if the place is kept quiet,” was all the information he would give. But he asked Arthur to dinner, which was a momentary relief to him, and Arthur recounted to him, with many amusing details, the history of his dismissal by the Pimpernels. The Doctor chuckled, partly because it was a good story, and made the Pimpernels ridiculous, and partly because Arthur Arden, though he put the best possible face upon it, must have been himself discomfited. “Serve him right,” the Doctor said within himself; but he asked him to dinner, and saved him from the horrors of a chop at the Arden Arms and a solitary evening in its little sanded parlour, which was a work of true benevolence—for Dr. Somers’ dinner and his claret would have been worthy of notice anywhere—much more when contrasted with the greasy attractions of a chop at the Arden Arms.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE Arthur went to the Red House, Edgar had been exerting himself to still all the roads and deaden every sound about Sally Timms' cottage. Sally's boys considered the operation as a personal compliment. They tumbled in the straw, and threw it about, and buried each other with cries of delight which had to be suppressed in the most forcible and emphatic way—until at last Edgar, driven to interfere, had to order the removal of Johnny and Tommy. "They can go to the West Lodge for the night," he said, with a hospitable liberality, at which the West Lodge keeper, who was helping in the work, groaned aloud. Sally herself, however, was very indignant at this exercise of despotic authority. She rushed to the front, and demanded to know why her cottage should be taken possession of, and the children carried off for the benefit of a stranger. "A lass as nobody knows, nor don't care to know," said Sally, "as has a deal too many gentlefolks alooking after her to be an honest lass." "Take her away too," said Edgar with benevolent tyranny. And Sally, with a scream of despair, snatched the old petticoat which stuffed her broken window, and fled from the bystanders, who did not attempt to carry out the Squire's command. "I'll go and I'll see what Miss Clare says to it," she cried. Edgar was a great deal too busy to pay any attention. He saw the work completed, and urged the necessity of care upon John Hesketh and his wife without considering that even they were but partial sympathisers. "I don't hold with no such a fuss," the women were saying among themselves. "If it had been the mother of a family she'd have had to take her chance; but a bit of a wench with a pretty face——" Thus he got no credit for his exertions,

notwithstanding the injunctions of Dr. Somers. If Jeanie had been altogether unfriended, the village people would have shown her all manner of care and sympathy; but the Squire's kindness put an end to theirs. They sympathised with Sally in her banishment. "You'll see as Miss Clare won't like it a bit," cried one. "I don't think nothing of Sally, but she has a right to her own place." "She'll be well paid for it all," said another. Sally, and the fuss that was being made, and Miss Clare's supposed sentiments bulked much more largely with the villagers than the thought that Jeanie lay between life and death, although many of them liked Jeanie, and had grown used to see her, so small and so fair, wandering about the street. Only old Sarah stood with her apron to her eyes. "I'm as fond of her as if she was my own. She's the sweetest, patientest, good-temperedest lamb—none of you wenches can hold a candle to her," sobbed the old woman. "She stitches beautiful, though I'm not one as holds with your pretty faces," said Sally, the sexton's daughter; but these were the only voices raised in poor Jeanie's favour throughout the village crowd.

Edgar lingered last of all at the cottage door. John Hesketh's wife, partly moved by pity for the grandmother left thus alone, partly by curiosity to investigate the amount of dirt and discomfort in Sally Timms' cottage—had taken her place in the outer room, to remain with Mrs. Murray until Sally returned or some other assistant came. And Edgar lingered to hear the last news of the patient before going away. The twilight by this time was falling, faint little stars were appearing in the sky, the dew and the peacefulness of approaching night were in the atmosphere. While he stood waiting at the door, Mrs. Murray herself came out upon him all at once. She had an air of suppressed excitement about her which struck him strangely—not so much anxiety, as agitation,

highly excited feeling. He put out his hand to her as she approached, feeling, he could not tell how, that she wanted his aid and consolation. She took his hand between both hers, and held it tight and pressed it close; and then surely the strangest words came from her lips that were ever spoken in such circumstances. "He carried her here in his arms—he left the other to save her. You'll no forget it to him—you'll no forget it to him. That is the charge I lay on you."

Edgar half drew away his hand in his surprise; but she held it fast, not seeming even to feel his attempt at withdrawal. "What do you mean?" he said. "I came to ask for Jeanie. Is it of Arthur Arden you are speaking—my cousin? But it is about Jeanie I want to know."

"Ay, your cousin," she said anxiously. "It's strange that I never kent you had a cousin. Nobody ever told me that—— But mind, mind what I say. Whatever happens, you'll no forget this. He carried her here in his arms. He forgot all the rest, all the rest. And you'll no forget it to him. That's my injunction upon you, whatever anybody may say."

"This is very strange," Edgar said, in spite of himself. Who was she, that she should lay injunctions upon him—should bid him do this or that? And then he thought to himself that her head too must be a little turned. So startling an event probably had confused her, as Jeanie had been confused by a sudden shock. He looked at her very sympathetically, and pressed the hands that held his. "Tell me first how Jeanie is—poor little Jeanie; that is by far the most important now."

“It’s no the most important,” said the old woman almost obstinately. “I ken both sides, and you ken but little—very, very little. But whatever you do or say, you’ll no forget him for this—promise me that you’ll never forget.”

“That is easy enough to promise,” said Edgar; “but he was to blame, for it was he who put her in the carriage. I think he was to blame. And what am I to reward him for?—for carrying the poor child home?”

“Yes, for carrying her home,” said Mrs. Murray, “in his arms, when the other was waiting that was more to him than Jeanie. You’ll no please me, nor do your duty, if you do not mind this good deed. They say he’s no a good man; but the poor have many a temptation that never comes near the rich; and if he had been in your place at Arden and you in his—or even——”

“My dear, kind woman,” said Edgar, trying with a pressure of her hands to recall her to herself, “don’t trouble yourself about Arthur or me. You are excited with all that has happened. Think of Jeanie. Don’t take any trouble about us——”

“Eh, if I could help troubling!” she said, loosing her hands from his. And then the look of excitement slowly faded out of her face. “I am bidding you bear my burdens,” she said, with a deep sigh; “as if the innocent could bear the load of the guilty, or make amends—— You must not mind what I say. I’ve been a solitary woman, and whiles I put things into words that are meant for nobody’s ear. You were asking about Jeanie. She is real ill—in a kind of faint—but if she is kept quiet, the doctor says she may come round. I think she will come round, for my part. She is delicate, but there is *life* in her: me and mine have all so much

life." When she said these words Mrs. Murray fixed her eyes upon Edgar keenly and surveyed him, as if trying to fathom his constitution and powers. "I cannot tell for you," she said, with a sudden pause. He smiled, but he was grieved, thinking sadly that her brain was affected, as Jeanie's had been. What was to become of the hapless pair if the mother's brain was gone as well as the child's. The thought filled him with infinite pity, so great as almost to bring tears to his eyes.

"You must try and compose yourself," he said. "I will send Perfitt to see that you have everything you want, and perhaps when she is a little better she may be removed to your own rooms. This is not a comfortable cottage, I fear. But you must compose yourself, and not allow yourself to be worried one way or another. You may be quite sure I will stand by you, and take care of you as much as I can—you who have been so kind to everybody, so good——"

"Oh no, no, no good!" she cried, "not good. I think night and day, but I cannot see what to do; and when a wronged man heaps coals of fire on your head—— Oh, you're kind, kind; and I'm no ungrateful, though I may look it. And it is not excitement, as you say, that makes me speak. There's many a thing of which a young lad like you is ignorant. You'll mind this to his credit if ever you can do him a good turn——"

"Yes, yes," said Edgar impatiently; and then he added, "Think of Jeanie. Arthur Arden is very well qualified to take care of himself."

And so he turned away, chafed and disquieted. Arthur Arden had been the cause of his leaving home, and here as soon as he returned Arthur Arden again was in his way, and a trouble to him.

He walked through the village street very uneasy about poor Mrs. Murray, and Jeanie, who would be in her sole charge. If the grandmother's mind was unsettled, how could she look after the child, and what would become of two creatures so helpless in a strange place? No doubt it must be in the family, as people say. Jeanie's monomania was about her brother, and Mrs. Murray's was about Arthur Arden. What had he to do with Arthur Arden? He was not his brother's keeper, that he should step in and make of himself a providence for Arthur's benefit. Altogether it was odd and disagreeable and discomposing. As his mind was thus occupied he walked along the village street, pre-occupied and absorbed. When he had nearly reached the Arden Arms he met Dr. Somers, and immediately seized the opportunity to make inquiries. The Doctor held up his hand as if warding him off.

"Not a word, Mr. Edgar, not another word. I have said if she's kept quiet and not excited she'll do. I don't like fuss any more than the villagers. You don't put straw down when a comfortable matron adds to the number of society, and why should you for this girl? You are all mad about Jeanie. She is a pretty girl, I allow; but there is as pretty to be seen elsewhere. You should hear your cousin on that subject. He and his misfortunes are as good as a play."

"What are his misfortunes?" said Edgar, and in spite of himself a certain coldness crept into his voice.

"You don't like him?" said Dr. Somers; "neither do I. I hate a man who lives on his wits. Generally neither the wits nor the man are worth much. But as I say, this time Arthur Arden's as good as a play. He has been turned out of the Red House—the Pimpernels will have no more of him. It is a capital story. He has been

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