

From the Hands of Her Enemy.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

CHAPTER I.

I'd have given anything he wasn't coming just now, but I suppose it can't be helped.

Lady Emma sighed a little, and straight way poured herself out another cup of tea. The room was dainty and pretty enough to delight the heart of any reasonable woman, or man either, for the matter of that.

The scented logs burnt and crackled in the wide, low fireplace, and the dancing flames played hide and seek amongst the shadows of the carved oak wainscoting, and lighted up now and again the faces of Lady Emma and her guest, who was also her cousin—Vere Tempest.

He looked thoughtful at his pretty cousin of whom he was very fond and proud, but did not at all times quite approve.

Emma was in the habit of doing such rash things; she took such unaccountable fancies to such—in his eyes—unaccountable people.

He often wondered she hadn't let herself in for all sorts of disagreeables.

She was too good-natured—too impulsive.

By Jove! he was glad he wasn't Trelawney, her husband.

Why, the poor fellow must live upon a kind of moral rack! Not that there was the least possible bit of harm in the sweet, charming little woman; she was all that was dear and good. Still—

'Vere, you aren't listening to me, I can see. It's too bad of you.'

Vere turned guiltily.

'Oh, yes, I am, dear! You were mentioning someone you designated as 'he.' Who is 'he,' and why 'just now'?' This query, put with a humorous twinkle in the handsome blue eyes brought his cousin—whose delicately arched brows were knitted in thought—up to the point at once.

'You are always so practical, dear Vere,' she replied, with the charming smile which was one of her chief attractions; 'so I suppose I shall have to give the why and wherefore. He is Mr. Adrian Crawford, who has written to fix his visit to us for Monday next, and Magdalen Durer is coming tomorrow. Now you have it all in a nutshell.'

With this she looked triumphantly at her vis-a-vis.

The slight start Vere Tempest had given at the mention of Magdalen Durer's name did not escape the sharp eyes of Lady Emma, and she watched him closely, as instead of answering her directly, he put another question—

'Who is this Mr. Adrian Crawford that you should not wish him to come on Monday, and what has he in connection with Miss Durer?'

'Nothing whatever; only I would rather they did not meet. I must say it's very provoking.'

And Vere could see that she was really more put out than she chose to say.

'But why? he asked. 'I don't see—' 'You don't know, and I can hardly explain,' Lady Emma broke in thoughtfully. 'I'm afraid I've been rather foolish, Vere; but when we were in Paris three months ago—you remember that delightful trip I wrote and told you about?—Vere nodded—we met this Mr. Crawford. He was in quite a good set, it is not the very best, and George and I took a great fancy to him; at least—correcting herself—'I did, at first.'

'He's awfully good-looking, and good form, and—all that, but there's something strange about him. . . . To tell you the truth, Vere, I can hardly describe it. Perhaps 'uncanny' is the term to use. He has a way of fixing his great melancholy dark eyes upon one, and it makes me just—creep! I never know at the moment whether I haven't a positive aversion to him. . . . But there, it's hardly fair to discuss him thus, when you will be house fellows so soon. I dare say you'll get on with each other awfully well.' But this was not uttered in very hopeful tones.

'My dear little cousin, I have a conviction that I shall detest him,' said Vere coolly; 'but have no fear—I will keep the peace for your sake, and if necessary, give him a wide berth. But now you haven't told me what Mag—Miss Durer has to do with this weird being who makes you 'creep,' and his visit.'

Lady Emma looked aggrieved.

'Now you're laughing at me,' she pouted.

Captain Tempest instantly disclaimed any such idea.

'About Miss Durer?' he reminded her.

'Well, you see, Magdalen is not like most girls—'

Indeed, she is no,' put in her cousin, who was now listening most intently.

Emma Trelawney took no notice of this interruption.

'She has a strange, dreamy temperament. This man may influence her, and I should blame myself. He affected me—commonplace me—in no ordinary manner; and you must own dear Magda is peculiar—magnetic, and when two strange, magnetic people come together—don't you see Vere?'

'No I don't see, Emma,' replied Vere, rising abruptly, 'and I don't want to say anything harsh, but really you should be more careful whom you pick up—abroad especially—and invite to your home. I wonder what Trelawney's thinking of.'

'But George liked him so much, and backed up my invitation so cordially,' interrupted Lady Emma almost tearfully.

'The George is a—but there, little woman, don't be so upset about it! I'm sure the fellow—even if he turns out to be as good as gold—isn't worth it. Any way he isn't worth you and I failing out. Why! tears, Emma! This will never do.'

And Vere set himself to work with such good will to bring back the smiles to his pretty cousin's face, that they were on the best of terms when the entrance of Sir George Trelawney and another man broke up the tete-a-tete, and at least one of the two forgot for the time being all about Adrian Crawford and his coming.

But that night, when Trelawney Court was wrapped in darkness and silence Vere Tempest sat smoking far into the small hours, thinking, and his thoughts were all the time on the same object—Magdalen—beautiful Magdalen Durer, whom he now knew to be the love of his life—the one and only woman in the world for him—and whom he hoped one day to win for his wife.

How he had looked forward to his visit to the Court, when he should have her practically to himself to woo and, maybe, win!

And all was to be spoiled by the presence of this foreigner!

Stay! was he a foreigner?

He couldn't exactly remember what Emma had said—anyway, he was a charlatan, imposing upon simple women with what he called 'magnetism.'

Well, he would prove that a good honest love was worth all this latter-day nonsense.

Weighed in the balance it would be found wanting.

And so comforting himself, he finally got bed.

CHAPTER II.

'And now, Emmie, dear, whom have you staying in the house? Who are my fellow guests, and am I likely to have a good time? You know I'm not like some of your smart friends—you always say I'm 'odd,' and I suppose I am.'

Magdalen Durer made this remark with a smile, rather sad than bright.

Here was a lovely face—lovely in the highest sense of the word; delicate in feature as in coloring, add with an expression of innocence in the clear, violet hued eyes but rarely seen.

And in those same starry eyes was something which stirred the heart of the gaze—a look as though the spirit of Magda Durer was not of this world.

Magdalen's young life had been a strangely lonely one.

Bereft of her mother at an early age, she had been, although so young, almost entirely thrown on her own resources, her father, a student entirely immersed in his books and scientific researches, knowing and caring little about a girl's requirements.

Were he to have been told that the solitary life in the heart of the country was ill-suited to a girl, and particularly to one of his daughter's sensitive, dreamy temperament, he would have opened his eyes wide in wonder.

His old and privileged friend, Lady Helen D'Arcy, who was the widow of a deceased squire in his neighborhood, had in deed ventured to put all this before him.

'Magdalen is too young and romantically inclined to lead so isolated a life,' she told him when the girl was sixteen years of age. 'Send her to school, my friend; let her be amongst others of her own age and class. Neither you nor I, and most certainly not old Martha, are suitable companions for the child. Alas! my entertaining days are over; whilst, as for you, you never cared for such things.'

There was a certain wistfulness in the old lady's face as she said this—almost pathetic. Perhaps she was thinking of the days of her own youth, when she was the toast of the county, and the man before her had been one of her most ardent admirers.

Mr. Durer smiled his far-away smile.

'What can she want more than she has?' he inquired placidly, with his eyes furtively fixed on the M.S. before him. 'I thought I had given her all she requires. She can have more—'

'She ought to be amongst girls of her age,' repeated Lady Helen vehemently, angered for the moment by the utter selfishness of the old man. 'I will take the trouble off your hands if you will only give me permission. I will find a suitable school—indeed, I know of one—where she would have exceptional advantages, and the companionship of the sweetest of girls—Emma Fairfax, the daughter of a very dear friend of mine. Only agree, and I will make all arrangements at once. You can well afford it.'

'Yes, oh, yes, money is no object,' replied Mr. Durer absently. 'I have, I am thankful to say, enough and to spare of this world's goods; only, it never struck me that Magdalen required more than she has,' he added, harping on the same old string. Lady Helen could have boxed his ears. As it was, she stamped her small and neat ly shod foot, and said briskly—

'Then I have your consent? That's settled. I will forthwith write and prepare Madame Dupont for her new pupil. By the way, the school is in Paris. You have no objection, I suppose?'

'Oh, none—none whatever!' answered

Magda's father. 'If she acquires the language perfectly, she may be of use to me in my literary work. See here,' and he opened a musty volume, from which Lady Helen fled in dismay and disgust.

So energetic was she, and so determined on getting her own way, that she did get it, and the upshot of it was that in a month's time Magdalen Durer crossed the Channel and became a boarder at Madame Dupont's very select establishment for the education of the daughters of the nobility and gentry.

Here she remained two years, and during that time made a life-long friend in the person of bright, vivacious Emma Fairfax, and when some time later, Emma became Lady Trelawney the friendship only ripened.

Magda was always heartily welcomed to Trelawney Court by her old friend and her husband. Today she had arrived at the hospitable mansion on one of her visits, and was at the present moment comfortably ensconced in a deep arm chair, invitingly drawn up before a blazing fire in the bed room allotted to her.

Her friend Emma half knelt, half rested against her, on the white fur rug.

'Let me see, dear,' she said, in answer to Magda's question. 'There's Mrs. Lionel Martin and her husband, poor little man! You can hardly see him behind her petticoats, she grows so huge! You know them I think—and there's that dear, sweet, muscular Christian, the Rev. Arthur Herbert, who bikes to church, and golfs during the week, and doesn't think a game of cricket on Sunday an unpardonable sin.'

'You'll hear him preach tomorrow. Such a wholesome sermon, and only ten minutes in length! I always feel as though I'd had a moral shower bath after hearing him. Then Captain Leslie is here, and Sir Wilfrid Stone, your old admirer, and that pretty smart little widow, Mrs. Norton whom we met at Scarborough, and—oh! of course, Vere—Vere Tempest,' with a sly glance at the delicate profile, the color of which, to her intense satisfaction, deepened somewhat at the mention of this last name.

'And on Monday,' she resumed half hesitatingly, 'Adrian Crawford will be here. I wonder what you will think of him Magda. Now, don't lose your heart to him, dear—I believe he could make anyone do anything if he chose—and I should be so sorry—' Emma wound up, somewhat vaguely.

Equally vaguely she wondered why her beautiful friend had suddenly grown so white.

'Isn't it time for tea, Emmie? Let us go down and see—I am longing for a cup,' said Magdalen, rising abruptly.

And thinking matters over long afterwards, Lady Emma thought it strange that the girl had made no mention of answer to her remarks concerning Adrian Crawford.

It has been already intimated that Vere Tempest was anxiously looking forward to this meeting with Magda.

He had met her some few months ago, and had been strangely fascinated by the lovely visionary girl who was his favorite cousin's chief friend.

He had anticipated this visit to Trelawney Court with much eagerness, for he was now assured that upon the answer to one question he fully intended to put, his life's happiness depended.

But then, there was that man Crawford! Why did his name haunt him?

Pshaw! What had he or she to do with a half-foreign adventurer—a charlatan!

Talking thus, he finished dressing for dinner, and went down to meet Magdalen.

Rarely had Magdalen Durer looked more lovely than she did this evening.

The clinging folds of the soft yellow gown she wore throw up the wonderful tints of her reddish hued hair.

A flush was upon her fair, delicate face, a subdued light in the dark purple eyes.

Yes, she was glad to see him; both lips and eyes told him so.

The evening passed all too quickly to these two.

A glimpse of paradise was opened, as fleeting as it was fair.

That night they found themselves alone in the conservatory; the soft warmth, the scent of the exotics, the shadows cast by the still palm trees, appealed to their senses.

Magda knew, with a mysterious intuition, that she was beloved.

An intense longing for rest, for safety, possessed her.

She feared—she knew not what. Tempest's hand touched hers.

That touch changed his life for ever.

In a moment she was in his arms, and words of tenderest love were poured into her willing ears.

'I love you! Darling! how I love you!' he whispered, straining her to his breast in a passion of ecstasy. 'I do not think you realize in the least what you are to me! Tell me, my sweetest, you love me.'

'Yes, I love you, Vere.'

The trembling shyness with which she uttered his name was irresistible.

He kissed her eyes, her lips, the ripples of her glorious hair.

He was intoxicated with his happiness.

'And you will be true to me, Magda?' he said, in a voice broken with the intensity of his emotions. 'You will not let anyone or anything come between you and me? I could not lose you now, my life, my darling!'

Even as he uttered the words a cold thrill—a presentiment for which he could not then account—took hold upon him.

A shudder ran through the girl.

She closed her eyes, and for the moment her lover feared she was about to faint.

'You are ill, dearest,' he cried anxiously, putting her in one of the wicker lounges which were invitingly placed here and there amongst the tropical plants. 'Let me bring you a glass of water—wine—why, you are white to the lips! What is it? What have I said, or done, to cause this?'

The weird sensation had passed from him; only anxiety for his beautiful Magda remained.

'No, no!' she said, catching his hand, and detaining him. 'I am better now. It is nothing; the scent of the flowers is so strong. Please say nothing about it; I only thought—I fancied—that—that—'

Her voice died away.

A look of fear was in her eyes.

'What, my darling, what?' inquired her lover, now seriously alarmed.

'That I saw a face there—over there—among the orange trees.'

Vere sprang in the direction in which she pointed.

He dashed aside the branches of the trees but not a trace of anyone could be found.

He returned to Magda.

'Darling,' he said, 'it is but your fancy. We are alone.'

The color came back to her face.

'Yes; I suppose it is only my fancy. I—I am nervous to-night; but you are with me Vere. I do love you.'

She put her hand in his, and laid her beautiful head against his shoulder, and sitting thus, and whispering to each other words too sacred for other ears, the golden moments flitted by.

'We must return to the drawing-room,' said Magda at last, rising from the low seat. 'Emmie will wonder what has become of us,' with a divine blush.

'I do not think so,' said Vere, smiling. 'I fancy she will guess.'

CHAPTER III.

On re-entering the drawing room many interested and furtive glances were bestowed upon the handsome young couple.

Emmie saw at once how matters stood, and was unfeignedly glad.

It was what she had long wished for, and secretly schemed to bring about.

She swelled with pride taking all the credit to herself.

Her first attempt at match-making was a success.

It realized all her expectations, and so she kissed and congratulated both, and the following day the whole house party was informed, and healths were drunk, and a speedy wedding prophesied.

'We will all walk over to church to-day,' said the pretty hostess at breakfast. 'It is only a mile through the park; we shall then pass the lake and judge for ourselves of the skating prospects for tomorrow. Pringle tells me it will hold well by then.'

They were all delighted at the welcome news, particularly the pretty little widow, Mrs. Norton, who being a Canadian, freely confessed that she adored skating.

She was in the midst of an animated flirtation with Captain Leslie, and Lady Emma told herself complacently that she should very likely have another engagement to announce before her party broke up.

They all started in the best of spirits, giving themselves plenty of time to enjoy the walk, and yet not be late for eleven o'clock service at the picturesque little church which nestled in a cosy hollow at the extreme end of the village.

Captain Tempest managed by skilful strategy to get his beautiful betrothed all to himself.

It must, however, be owned that he had in this innocent plot a warm ally in his cousin.

'Leave it to me, dear boy, I'll manage it. I remember how it was when George and I were engaged,' with a tender little sentimental sigh. 'Only, we never had chances such as I intend to arrange for you and darling Magda. Aunt Mary was a perfect dragon! Quite the old school; though, the most natural things in the world horribly improper, and wouldn't let us go the length of the avenue without a chaperon! But we used to give her the slip sometimes. I don't know but what it was more fun after all,' she wound up her blue eyes dancing.

'You shall be our chaperon, you dear little woman!' said Vere, kissing her affectionately. 'We want no other—and you are glad?'

'Glad?' she echoed, 'why, it has been my dearest wish—the dream of my life. You silly boy! don't you realize that it is I who have managed the whole affair?'

Vere Tempest smiled.

He thought otherwise, but he was too happy and grateful to contradict her. What did it matter to him how it had been brought about?

When he went down into the big hall, with its cheerily blazing fires, and Eastern rugs of varied hues flung here and there upon the polished oak floor, and decorated on all sides by trophies of the chase, he found Magdalen awaiting him, alone.

Vere thought, with a lover's partiality, that Magda looked, it possible, more beautiful in her furs than she had done the night before.

The soft richness of the costly sables, with which her violet velvet jacket was bordered, was indeed eminently becoming to the delicate purity of her complexion.

She turned upon her lover.

He caught her to him with a cry of rapture.

'You are mine—you are mine!' he said again and again. 'Nothing shall come between us my life.'

He kissed her on the lips, and noticed that they were cold beneath his passionate

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'Say it, darling; say that nothing shall part us.'

'I cannot say it,' Magda replied quietly and sadly. 'There are forces of which we know but little—forces stronger than our love—against which our feeble will is as nothing.'

'What can you mean, Magda?' asked Vere, deeply impressed against his will at the solemnity of her tones. 'Nothing can now part us save death, and that, of course is not in our own hands; but you are well—you are strong—and, my dearest, you have given yourself to me! I will hold you against the world. You are fanciful, darling.'

She smiled, and suffered him to place her hand upon his arm, and they passed out together into the crisp brightness of the wintry morning.

As they neared the lake, which was at best a gloomy spot, overshadowed by rees, and bordered by reeds, they noticed that the ice was smooth.

A bitter wind swept across the leaden-hued surface, and Magda shivered beneath her furs.

Vere passed his arm round the fragile shoulders.

'You are cold, sweetheart. Let us hurry on; it is a weird, eerie kind of spot. One could easily imagine any deed of darkness done here.'

He laughed a cheery laugh, as though defying all the ill-luck in the world.

But Magdalen looked grave, and her lover saw that all the brilliant color had died out of the sweet face.

'Yes,' she said, as they turned into the path through the woods; 'it is a depressing place. Have you ever heard the legend attaching to the lake?'

'No, dearest; and you are not going to tell it to me now. It is something tragic, and this is no time for such things. Are we not happy? See, there is the church, and good, faithful Emmie is waiting in the porch to give us the protection of her presence.'

Long afterwards did the memory of that peaceful happy Sunday come back to Vere Tempest with a bitter pang and a heart-ache from which there was no escaping.

'You cannot think, darling, how happy this makes me,' whispered Emma to her friend, with a little squeeze of the hand. 'The wedding must be soon; there is nothing to wait for.'

'Nothing at all!' put in Vere eagerly, delighted to have such a champion at his side.

They three had detached themselves from the rest and were walking home together.

Somehow, as though by mutual consent, they avoided the gloomy lake.

'Magda, when will you give me my happiness?'

He bent towards her, and Emma instantly became desirous of possessing a particular bunch of scarlet berries.

'I cannot tell—I cannot say—I dare not—I mean—'

Magda's face was deathly in hue.

Vere looked at her in astonishment.

Maidenly shyness was all very well, but this was something more than that.

It seemed as though a great horror was upon her, and, although deeply hurt, he forbore to press the question.

CHAPTER IV.

Magdalen Durer stood in her room, ready dressed for dinner.

It was still early.

She had but this moment heard Emma come upstairs.

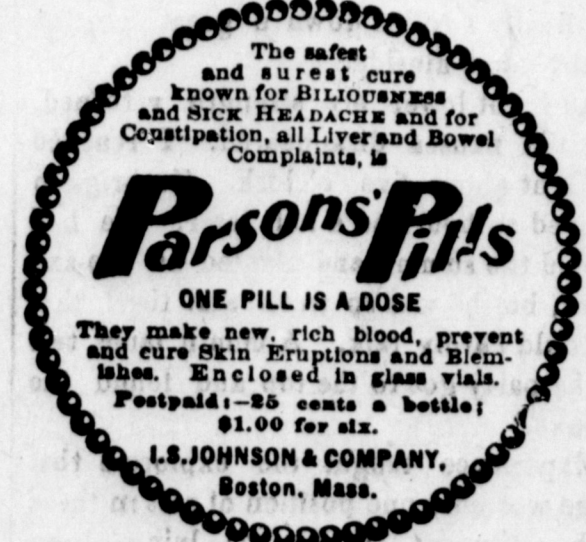
She had dismissed her maid, and was alone.

She was trembling from head to foot, and her beautiful face was almost grey in its pallor.

Moreover she was saying to herself softly below her breath—

'I must go down, I feel—I know he is in the house, although I did not hear him arrive. I feel, too, that he is waiting for me, and expects me. Oh! if it were only any place but the conservatory. God knows how thankfully, how gladly, I would break this bond—this cruel bond that binds me body and soul; and Vere poor Vere—'

(CONTINUED ON FIFTEENTH PAGE.)



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