

With Serpent Guile.

IN TWO INSTALLMENTS.

CHAPTER I.

What orders have you for Phemie today, aunt?

Instead of replying at once, Mrs. Douglas went to the window, and for some moments stood looking discontentedly over the wide stretch of purple moorland front.

Then she said in a peevish voice—
‘It is not much good asking. Of course she must mince the remains of the beef for lunch. She had better make a gooseberry tart as well. As to the dinner—with an impatient shrug—‘I hardly know what to say. I do wish there were some decent shops within reach, one might have some change then.’

‘A plain little thing,’ Mrs. Douglas always called her niece, and certainly Osla’s face, with its want of color would have merited the description had it not been for a pair of magnificent dark eyes, shaded by long, curved lashes.

She was evidently quite used to her aunt’s petulance, for she ignored it entirely, and cheerfully replied—

‘We can have a variety today, aunt. Donald, the river keeper brought some trout this morning.’

‘That is some improvement,’ admitted Mrs. Douglas, but half grudgingly. ‘They can be broiled, and the fowl can be boiled. I am absolutely tired of poultry, but there is nothing else in the house. I wish I could live in a civilised place instead of in this desert, where the butcher calls only twice a week!’

The Red House, in spite of the picturesque of its situation, and the exquisite beauty of the surrounding country, was certainly by no means a convenient residence for one who craved all the luxuries of life as Mrs. Douglas did.

Mrs. Douglas, however, was poor and had she had to depend on her own small income, would have to put up with a very humble residence indeed.

She owed her possession of the Red House entirely to the generosity of her nephew, Sir Gavin Douglas.

She was not at all grateful for this; rather, she regarded it as an injury that she had not been installed mistress of Invergreen castle, as Sir Gavin never resided there himself.

Mrs. Douglas’s early life had been spent in luxury, and it was not till she was nearly twenty that she had the faintest idea of what poverty meant.

Her father, a physician of some note, had been thought to be very rich, and, indeed, his mode of life fully justified that supposition.

But at his death—which was a sudden one—his affairs were found to be in the wildest disorder, and, when everything was settled, Miriam Delatour discovered that instead of being a rich woman, she had barely enough to live on even in the most modest style, so that she was glad to accept the invitation of her step sister to reside with her for a time.

The two had not previously seen much of each other, for while Miriam was quite a child, her sister—now Mrs. Graham—Lad, to Dr. Delatour’s disgust, fallen in love with and married, a poor curate, after which she saw but little of either him or her sister.

For a time Miriam put up with the dullness and rigid economy of her sister’s household; but each day it grew more insupportable, and she longed for the constant round of amusement to which she had been accustomed.

But how was she ever to obtain that again?

She considered her future from all points and could see but one way of regaining her lost position—she must marry a wealthy man.

She said nothing of this till the time came when she could throw off her mourning; then, one day, she explained her intentions to her sister and brother-in-law, and announced that she intended to reside with a distant relative of her mother’s in London, till she had attained her object.

Both Mrs. Graham and her husband were shocked at such a scheme; but Miriam would not heed their expostulations, and, as soon as the season began, turned her back on the quiet home she had so heartily.

She was not, strictly speaking, a handsome girl, but she could be very fascinating when she chose and she knew quite well how to make the most of the fine eyes, abundant raven hair, and rich olive complexion which she had inherited—together with an intensely selfish and indolent disposition—from her West Indian mother.

Naturally, with these qualifications, she attracted a fair amount of attention in society, and it was not long before she received an offer of marriage from Francis Douglas, which she accepted at once, though she had not an atom of affection for him, and his character was notoriously bad.

But it was nothing to her if he was the black sheep of his family, and that his elder brother, Sir William, refused to receive him.

She believed he could give her wealth and position, and those were all she sought.

But she had not been married many months when she was forced to own to herself that she had made a serious mistake.

She found, when too late, that her husband, instead of being the wealthy man she had thought him, was really overwhelmed with debt, and that her whole life must be spent in eluding creditors, and scheming to keep up appearances before the world.

And, at last, when, after years of discord, her husband died, leaving her with a nearly grown up son and daughter depending on her, she would have been in a pitiable plight if her nephew had not come to her aid.

People thought, when, on the death of her sister, some two years later, she offered her orphan niece a home, that she was doing a most generous thing; but, as usual, she was thinking only of herself.

She knew Osla had been well drilled in all branches of domestic economy, and, therefore, would be very useful to her; and, before the girl had been six weeks in the house, she had shifted the whole burden of housekeeping on to her shoulders.

Osla was about to remove the breakfast things from the table, when a knock was heard at the door, and Phemie—somewhat grimy of face and hands—made her appearance with some letters.

‘There are three. You are in luck today, aunt,’ Osla said, as she handed them to Mrs. Douglas.

‘I don’t suppose there is much luck in them,’ that lady answered, irritably, as she turned them over. ‘There is one for you, Isabel,’ she said, tossing it over to her daughter, who was seated on a lounge, buried in a new novel. ‘It has the Grey’s crest. I do hope they have not written to put you off now you have got all those new things. And this is from Frank,’ she went on, in a gentler tone. ‘I suppose the poor boy wants money, though when I am to get it before next quarter I don’t know.’

Frank was the one person Mrs. Douglas really loved.

From his babyhood she had idolized him, and believed him faultless, though outsiders unhesitatingly pronounced him an incorrigible scamp.

‘Then he must do without it. I think it is shameful that, when he has the money his godmother left him, he does not make it do,’ observed Isabel, sharply.

‘Now, pray don’t take that tone,’ replied Mrs. Douglas, resentfully. ‘I think he is very good to make it go so far as he does. Why, ninety pounds a year is nothing. A young man has so many more expenses than a girl.’

‘Yes—unnecessary ones,’ retorted Isabel, scornfully. ‘But never mind all that now, Mamma; what is your other letter?’

‘Why, it is from Gavin! What can he have to write about?’ exclaimed Mrs. Douglas. Then, as she glanced over its contents, she added, indignantly, ‘I declare I never heard of such an inconsistent thing! He positively says he is coming to-morrow to stay for a week or two! The idea of giving no more notice! We might have had people here for all he knew.’

‘He knows we are too poor to have many, mamma,’ remarked Isabel, sarcastically; ‘and, of course, he thinks us bound to keep a room for him.’

Sir Gavin had made it a condition, when he placed the Red House at his aunt’s command, that she should act as his hostess when he came for a few weeks’ shooting or fishing; but, as he always acknowledged her hospitality by a handsome cheque on his departure, she had no cause to complain.

‘It is outrageous to be treated like this! I would not have believed it of him!’ turned Mrs. Douglas.

‘It is just what you might expect, mamma. When you are under an obligation to anyone they are sure to take advantage of it,’ Isabel said, ungratefully. ‘If I am fortunate, we shall have a home of our own soon, I hope. You don’t think I need put off going to the Greys; do you? Amy wants me to go on the twenty-fifth instead of the thirtieth.’

‘Then you must go. There is no reason you should not; and I am sure Gavin will not care. He has no taste for ladies’ society, and I believe he would be quite as well satisfied if there was only Phemie in the house.’

Mrs. Douglas spoke spitefully. It had been the darling wish of her heart to bring about a marriage between Sir Gavin and her daughter, and her failure was a very sore point.

‘You must tell Phemie to get his room ready, I suppose, Osla,’ she added to her niece.

‘Yes, auntie.’

And Osla quickly left the room, lest her aunt should suspect how much pleasure the prospect of Sir Gavin’s visit gave her.

The previous winter, the baronet had been laid up at the Red House with a severe attack of pneumonia, and Mrs. Douglas, with her usual carelessness, had left the task of nursing him to Osla; the latter had performed her duty well, but she had lost her heart to the patient.

CHAPTER II.

Sir Gavin had been at the Red House nearly a fortnight, when, one afternoon, on Osla’s returning from a call she had been paying, she found her aunt alone in the dining-room, evidently in one of her worst tempers.

As she had promised to be home much sooner, she thought that her prolonged absence was the cause, and she said, apologetically—

‘I am sorry to be so late, aunt, but Mrs. Hamlyn and Maisie would keep me to lunch.’

‘And what then? You do not flatter yourself that your absence would spoil my appetite, I hope,’ Mrs. Douglas replied, ironically.

Her answer, ungracious though it was, convinced Osla that, at any rate, she was not the delinquent.

She wondered what could have happened to ruffle her aunt’s temper so much; but she was too wise to ask questions.

‘I met the rector as I was coming home,’ she remarked, quietly, ‘and he gave me a message for Gavin. He says the schools are terribly in want of repair, and he would like to consult him about them. Has he gone out?’

‘Yes, he has. He has gone fishing, and I hope he may be drowned—it would be no more than he deserves. Such ingratitude as he has shown me to day, I never experienced in my whole life before!’

Osla could scarcely repress a smile at the absurdity of this charge.

How could he, who owed his aunt nothing, and gave so much, be ungrateful to her?

But she restrained herself, and asked, with an air of concern—

‘What has he done, aunt?’

‘He has insulted me most shamefully,’ replied Mrs. Douglas. ‘To think that he should refuse me such a trifle! It is undurable! I will never forgive him!’

‘But what did you ask him, aunt?’ inquired Osla.

She felt certain that the request must have been a very unusual one.

‘Only for a few pounds to help Frank—you know what difficulties the poor boy is in. But, instead of complying with my request, as anyone with any proper feeling would have done, he refused, and had the insolence to tell me that I ought not to encourage Frank in what he was pleased to term his evil habits.’

‘But, aunt, it is hardly fair to expect Gavin to pay Frank’s debts,’ remonstrated Osla.

‘Hardly fair! Why not, I should like to know?’ returned Mrs. Douglas, wrathfully. ‘Frank is his heir, and must have everything when Gavin dies, so why should he not enjoy a little of it now?’

‘But perhaps Gavin may marry and have a son of his own.’

‘Nonsense! He hates women. No, he will never marry,’ asserted Mrs. Douglas, positively.

Osla did not reply.

‘I only had known what I had to expect, things should have been very different—Frank should have been master of Invergreen before now,’ continued her aunt, spitefully. ‘I could easily have got rid of that wretch when he was ill here, and no one would have been a bit the wiser; his death would have been put down to natural causes. But it is not too late, even now.’

‘Aunt! What are you saying?’ exclaimed Osla.

The horror in the girl’s voice showed Mrs. Douglas the danger of the admission she had made, and forcing herself to be calm, she said with a little laugh—

‘For goodness sake don’t look at me like that, child! You might know I was not serious; but I feel so angry, I scarcely know what I am saying.’

‘You frightened me, aunt,’ murmured Osla.

Mrs. Douglas looked at her curiously; then she said, speaking as if her fit of passion had quite passed away—

‘I think I will go and lie down for a bit; all this worry has made my head ache.’

When her aunt had gone, Osla took up a piece of light needlework, and to fix her attention on it.

But the awful threats uttered by Mrs. Douglas against Gavin still rang in her ears, and try as she would, she could not convince herself that they were quite idle ones.

Better stop that cough now with a few doses of Dr. Wood’s Norway Pine Syrup than let it run on to end perhaps in Bronchitis, Pneumonia or Consumption. It’s a wonderful lung healing remedy that cures the worst kinds of coughs and colds when others fail.

Price 25c. & 50c. All dealers.

LAXA- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

LIVER PILLS- Cure constipation, biliousness, sick headache and dyspepsia. Every pill guaranteed perfect and to act without any gripping, weakening or sickening effects. 50c. at all drug-gists.

SINGER SEWING MACHINES

Are so simple that the youngest can understand them.

So easy that the oldest can work them.



106 years old.

(Taken from Life.)

5 years old.

Such easy terms that anybody can purchase one.

THE SINGER MANUFACTURING CO.

CANADIAN FACTORY: MONTREAL, P. Q.

All at once she remembered a certain case containing drugs, which stood in Mrs. Douglas’s room.

Many of these were rare and subtle foreign poisons, collected by her father, who had had a passion for studying their properties.

What if her aunt should now use any of them?

What if she were already preparing some deadly draught?

At last, Osla could bear the torture of this fear no longer, and throwing aside her work, she hastened from the room, framing an excuse for disturbing her aunt as she went.

She tapped at her door, but received no answer, and all was so silent within that she began to think she must be asleep.

Chiding herself for having been so silly as to attach any importance to words uttered in the heat of passion, she was about to turn away, when a clinking as of two glass bottles striking together, fell on her ear, and with all her fears once more aroused, she entered the room.

What she saw told her that her suspicion were not groundless; on the table stood several phials, and Mrs. Douglas herself was quite absorbed in the study of a book she held in her hand.

Osla, as she stood behind her, could read its title—it was work on Indian poisons!

As soon as Mrs. Douglas became aware of her niece’s presence she made a hasty movement as if to hide the tell-tale bottles; but recovering her self-possession, she withdrew her hand, and, turning round, said, pettishly—

‘How you frighten me, Osla! What in the world made you creep in like that? My head is quite bad enough without being startled; indeed I was just going to mix some of that lotion which did me so much good before. But I suppose you want something. What is it?’

‘I forgot to ask you what time tea is to be ready, aunt.’

‘Six. Tell Phemie to put everything on the table so that she is not fussing in and out when I come down. I shall not be long, for it is useless to try and sleep while my head is like this.’

Osla withdrew, hardly knowing what to believe.

Was it really a lotion her aunt was mixing?

She knew she had a mania for concocting such things.

Then she recalled the vindictive way in which she had spoken of Gavin’s death, and all her fears returned.

It her aunt really intended to harm him, perhaps she would put some deadly poison in his food! And the girl determined that she would watch her when she descended to the dining room.

Feeling as if she were the victim of some awful dream, she summoned Phemie, and directed her how to place the things on the table; that done, she slipped on to the verandah, and took her stand behind some tall plants, which, while they completely hid her, permitted her to see all that went on within the room.

In a very few minutes Mrs. Douglas came in and, after one glance round and at the open glass doors, she advanced swiftly to the table, and, drawing from her pocket one of the phials Osla had seen, emptied its contents into the cream—the one thing on the table which neither she nor Osla ever touched.

‘There, my dear Gavin, I really do not think you will ever refuse request of mine again,’ she muttered with a low, evil laugh, as she replaced the bottle. ‘What a sensation the sudden death of Sir Gavin Douglas will make! Heart disease the doctors will say it is. There will be every symptom of it, too,’ and, taking a book from the case, she seated herself on the couch, and began to read as coolly as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER III.

‘What sport have you had, Gavin?’ she asked, calmly, when her nephew came in, about half an hour later.

‘Very good. I have had quite a hard afternoon’s work, and feel almost ravenous,’ he replied.

Then Osla came in, and took her usual seat. She had formed a plan by which she hoped to save Gavin without exposing her aunt’s wickedness.

She poured out the tea, and was about

to add the cream to Sir Gavin’s cup, when apparently quite by accident, the jug slipped from her hold, the fragile china being smashed to pieces, while the cream soaked into the cloth.

‘How could you be so careless?’ cried Mrs. Douglas sharply. ‘You have quite spoiled the set, and it is real Sevres, too! And all the cream gone as well! You must have been asleep.’

‘No I think I was wide awake; but I am sorry I broke the jug,’ Osla answered, and Sir Gavin wondered why she laid such special stress on the first sentence.

Mrs. Douglas said no more, and the meal was finished almost in silence.

Afterwards Sir Gavin went out into the grounds, and seating himself in one of the garden chairs, lit a cigar.

Presently Osla came out, and sauntered slowly past him, saying, as she did so—

‘Will you come to me at the end of the rose-walk, Gavin? I have something to say to you.’

He nodded, and, soon after, rose and followed her.

‘I have a great favor to ask you, Gavin,’ she said, nervously, as he joined her.

‘It must be something tremendous to judge by your face,’ he replied, laughing. ‘What is it; do you want me to try to match that jug? I’m afraid it can’t be done, but I think there is a somewhat similar set at the castle, and she can have that, if she likes?’ Then, noticing her agitation, he asked, with some concern—‘he was very fond of the girl, far fonder than she could have believed: ‘But what is the matter, little one? Has our esteemed relative been railing at you?’

‘Aunt is very angry, but I do not mind that. Gavin, I—I want you to go away at once,’ Osla said, breathlessly.

‘To go away?’ he replied, in surprise.

‘Yes; to leave this place as soon as you can—to-night.’

‘What an extraordinary request! What on earth do you mean by it? Have I done anything to offend you, or why do you want to be rid of me?’

‘I can’t tell you—Osla had resolved not to betray her aunt if she could by any other means induce Sir Gavin to go away—‘only, do go, please do. I shall not have a moment’s peace till you do,’ she pleaded.

‘Oh! I see. You think my aunt will not forget this terrible accident, as long as I am here to remind her of it,’ said Sir Gavin, thinking this the cause of her evident alarm. ‘You silly child, leave it all to me. I will see you are not scolded. I will take care of you.’

‘No, no; I don’t want anyone to take care of me,’ interrupted Osla, little guessing that he was about to ask her to become his wife. ‘I only want you to go away. Could you not go to the castle?’

Her persistence wounded him greatly.

He had hoped she cared for him, and now she wanted him to go away like this! His absence was evidently all she thought of, he reflected bitterly.

‘No; I shall not go there,’ he replied coldly. ‘I think there must be madness in the air, to-day. First your aunt coolly asks me for seven pounds to pay her vagabond son’s debts, and now you want me to leave the house at a moment’s notice for no reason at all, as far as I can see. I shall go at the end of another fortnight, as I had decided; but, if my presence annoys you, I will take care you do not see much of me, so let that content you.’

In another fortnight! and perhaps, if he remained he might not be alive in another twenty-four hours!

What should she do?

How could she persuade him to go?

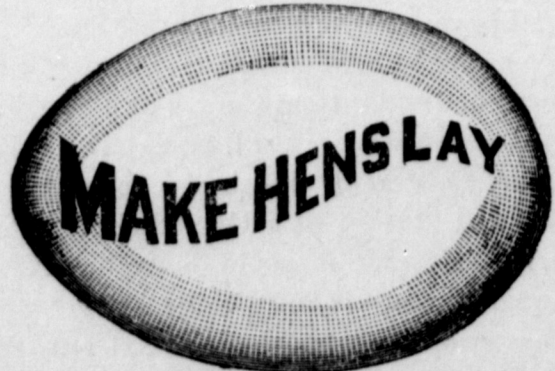
Suddenly a happy thought struck her.

‘Gavin, don’t you remember, when you wanted to give me that bracelet after you had been so ill, and I refused, that you said, if ever you could do anything to please me, you would do it? Will you keep that promise?’ she asked tearfully.

‘I am not in the habit of breaking a promise,’ he answered, sternly, as he divined her intention.

‘Then do what I ask you, leave this’

(CONTINUED ON FIFTEENTH PAGE.)



Nothing on Earth will do it like Sheridan’s Powder.

Thousands of successful Poultry-Keepers all over the country owe no small portion of their success to the practice of mixing with the mash food given to their poultry every day, a small quantity of Sheridan’s Cornstarch Powder. It has been used and endorsed by Poultry-Raisers over thirty years, and for all kinds of poultry. If you can’t get the Powder send to us. One pack, 25 cts.; five, \$1. Large two-lb. can, \$1.20. Six cans, exp. paid, \$5. Sample copy best Poultry paper free. L. S. JOHNSON & CO., Boston, Mass.

CANCER And Tumors cured to stay cured, at home; no knife, plaster or pain. For Canadian testimonials & 130-page book—free, write Dept. 11, MASON MEDICINE CO., 577 Sherbourne Street, Toronto, Ontario.