

Fenn George Manville

Sawn Off: A Tale of a Family Tree



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Sawn Off: A Tale of a Family Tree

Volume One – Chapter One.

Naboth and his Vineyard

“Well, I’m – ”

“Papa!”

“Hi! don’t, Very. Let me breathe,” cried Doctor Salado, removing a very pretty little hand from over his mouth, and kissing the owner, as pretty a little girl as ever stepped; though just then her pretty creamy face was puckered into the most lovable of dimples, and there was trouble in her great dark eyes, over which were lashes and brows as black as the great clusters and waves of luxuriant hair.

“You shall not.”

“I was only going to say ‘blessed.’”

“You were not, papa. You were going to use that dreadful word again.”

“So I was, Very, and enough to make me,” said the Doctor, passing his hand over his high bold forehead and crown. “Why, it completely cuts off our view of the park and the manor-house at the end of the beautiful vista of oaks.”

“Never mind, dear; we’ll take to the drawing-room, and look out at the back at the grand old pines.”

“Well, upon my soul,” said the Doctor again. “Of all the malicious bits of impudence! They must have been at it all night.”

“Yes, papa; I heard them knocking, and I could not sleep.”

“Hang me if I don’t take an axe and cut the old thing down,” cried the Doctor again, as he stood gazing out of his breakfast-room window at where – just across the road, and exactly opposite his delightful little cottage – half a dozen carpenters and labourers were rapidly completing a great range of hoarding fifty feet long and full twenty high.

“You mustn’t, papa. We are not in South America now.”

“No. I wish it was. But – Well, that beats all! Well, I *am*– Very, my pet, let me swear once. I shall feel so much better then.”

“You shall not, papa. But what a shame!”

“Worse than that, my darling. It’s all a confounded planned insult, got up by my lord and that sneaking scoundrel of an agent,” he continued, as he watched a bill-sticker busy at work pasting placards on the new raw deal boards just nailed on the rough pine poles. “Selling off, etc. To be sold by auction,” read the Doctor, “Guy Bunting’s boots.”

“Oh! is this a land of liberty, where one is to be insulted like this, and not even allowed the British prerogative of a good honest – ”

Veronica’s lips were pressed upon the speaker’s lips, as near as they could get for the crisp, grey, shaggy hair of an enormous moustache, and said, —

“You shall not say it, papa; and you are too proud and dignified to notice such contemptible treatment. Now come and have your breakfast. The cutlets are getting cold.”

“Then Teddington Weir him!” said the Doctor.

“What do you mean, dear?”

“Never mind. Hah! I am hungry. But look here, Pussy – more sugar, please – and milk. It’s all your fault.”

“It is not, papa,” said Veronica, colouring a little. “It was through your buying this cottage.”

“Well, how was I to know he wanted it? Suppose the grounds do run like a wedge into the estate. Hang the blackguardly Ahab! Can’t a poor miserable Naboth like myself have his own vineyard without his wanting it for a garden of herbs? Bitter herbs I’ll make them for him!”

“No, you will not, papa.”

“Yes, I will, tyrant. The next thing will be his confounded Jezebel of a wife setting him to – ”

“Papa! I cannot sit here and listen to you,” cried Veronica, flushing deeply now. “Lady Pinemount is a sweet, lovable woman.”

“How do you know?”

“Everybody says so.”

“Including her son?”

“Papa dear!” cried the girl, with her eyes filling with tears.

“There, my dear, I don’t want to hurt your feelings; but the old man will never consent to it, and I’m going to forbid Mr Rolleston the house.”

Veronica was silent, but such a look of hopeless misery came into her face that the Doctor got up from his chair and went and knelt on one knee by his child’s chair, drawing her beautiful head down on his shoulder and softly stroking her cheek.

“And you – after turning up this pretty little nose at all the gallant young Spanish dons and settlers about the Pampas – to come and strike your colours like this, Very! I say, are you so very fond of him?”

“I – I think so, papa; I can’t help it.”

“Humph! But he’s an Englishman born and bred, and you’re half a Spaniard, Very.”

“But you are an Englishman, papa.”

“I suppose so. But thirty years in South America seem to have altered me. Yah! hammer away. What a blackguardly trick of his father!”

“Don’t talk about it, papa. Mr Rolleston said Lord Pinemount was furious with his steward for not bidding higher and buying this estate.”

“More fool he! I’d have bid his head off. He’d never have got it.”

“And he was very angry, too, because you refused his offer afterwards to take it off your hands.”

“I don’t care for his anger. I came over to England to end my days in peace. I bought the Sandleighs, and I mean to keep it.”

“Papa!”

“There, then – there, don’t cry, and I will not make use of bad language about that hoarding; but if this is the behaviour of an English nobleman, I’m glad I’m plain Doctor Salado. Now breakfast; and my coffee’s cold.”

Volume One – Chapter Two.

His Lordship is Angry

“I say it’s a shame, father, and a disgrace to you.”

“And I say you are a confounded insolent young puppy; and if you dare to speak to me again like that – ”

“Oh, hush, Edward dear! Denis, my boy, pray don’t!”

“But I shall be ashamed to go about the place, mamma. It is so mean and petty.”

“How dare you, sir! how dare you!” cried Lord Pinemount. “Don’t dictate to me. I’ve put up with too much, and I mean to end it all. How dare he – a confounded Yankee!”

“Doctor Salado is an English gentleman, father.”

“Nothing of the sort, sir. Look at his name. Comes here from nobody knows where.”

“Yes, they do, sir. He comes here from Iquique, and he is one of the most famous naturalists of the day.”

“I don’t care what he is. Comes here, I say; and just as at last that wretched old woman dies, and the Sandleighs is in the market – a place that ought by rights to belong to the manor – he must bid over that idiot Markby’s head, and secure the place. I told Markby distinctly that I wanted that cottage and grounds. Went at such a price, he said. Fool! And then, when I offered this miserable foreign adventurer five hundred pounds to give it up, he must send me an insulting message.”

“It was only a quiet letter, my dear,” said Lady Pinemount, “to say that he had taken a fancy to the place, and preferred to keep it.”

“You mind your own business,” said his lordship, his florid face growing slightly apoplectic of aspect. “I’m not blind. But I won’t have it. You write and ask the Elsgraves here; and you, Denis, recollect that I expect you to be civil to Hilda Elsgrave. The Earl and I quite understand each other about that.”

“If you expect me to begin paying attentions to a girl whom I dislike, and who dislikes me, sir,” said the young man firmly, “I’m afraid you will be disappointed.”

“No, sir: look here – ”

“Edward, my love – ”

“Hold – your – tongue. I’m master while I live, and I’ll have my way. You, Denis, you’ve got to marry Hilda; and if I hear of your hanging about the Sandleighs again, and talking to that half-bred Spanish hussy – ”

“Look here, father: when you insult Miss Salado, you insult me.”

“Silence, sir!” roared his lordship. “Listen to what I say. Insult you! Puppy! How dare you! The father’s an adventurer, and you’re mad after a big-eyed adventuress.”

“She is a lady, sir.”

“Silence! And as for you, Lady Pinemount, you must have been mad to call upon them. That was the beginning of the mischief.”

“Miss Salado is a very sweet, refined girl, Edward,” said her ladyship quietly, “and it was a social duty to call.”

“Then you’ve done your duty, and there’s an end of it. I won’t have it, and I won’t have the fellow staring over into my park. Coming and sticking himself there! Won’t sell the place again, won’t he? Never another inch of timber or head of beasts does that auctioneer sell for me.”

The Honourable Denis Rolleston was about to speak, but a meaning look from handsome, dignified Lady Pinemount silenced him, and the angry head of the family rose from his half finished lunch and paced the room.

“Taken a fancy to the place, has he? I’ll make him take a fancy to go. The sooner he’s out of Lescombe the better. Like to buy the manor, perhaps? But I’ll make it too hot for him. And you, Denis, understand me at once. I can’t interfere about the title; but look here, sir, you marry as I wish you to, – keep up the dignity of our family tree. You are the head, sir, but if you don’t do as I tell you, sir, not a penny do you have to support the title, for I’ll disinherit you. Yes, sir, you think you’re a devilish fine branch, no doubt, but damme, I’ll saw you off!”

As his lordship spoke, he bounced out of the dining-room, banged the door, and directly after mother and son saw him going straight across the fields to inspect the hoarding he had ordered to be put up.

“I am very sorry, Denis, my dear,” said Lady Pinemount.

“Can’t be helped, mother dear,” said the young man, passing his arm round her and walking up towards the window, where they stood watching his lordship’s diminishing figure. “I want to be a good son, and I never kick against the dad’s eccentricities, except when they are too bad. That is such a petty, ungentlemanly trick – an insult to as fine a fellow as ever breathed, and – ”

“You do love Veronica, my boy?” said Lady Pinemount, gazing wistfully at her son.

“Love her?” said the young man, with his frank, handsome English face lighting. “Mother dear, could I pick out a sweeter wife?”

Lady Pinemount sighed, and kissed her son.

Volume One – Chapter Three.

How the Doctor Hit

“Down again, Very!” cried the Doctor, a week later, as he came in from a botanical ramble to breakfast. “Why, eh? – yes – no: it has been burned.”

“Yes, papa: didn’t you see the flames?”

“Not I. Slept like a top, and I went out through the sandpits and among the fir trees this morning.”

He hurried out of the French window, and out into the road, and looked over the hedge into the park and then returned.

“Seems to have been splashed with petroleum or paraffin. Twice cut down, and once burned. Well, somebody else does not like the hoarding.”

“But, papa, you gave orders for it to be destroyed!”

“I? Hang it all, Very, am I the sort of man to do such a shabby thing?”

“No, papa: I beg your pardon.”

“Granted, pet. Some one in the village thinks it’s a paltry thing to do, and has constituted himself our champion. Confound his insolence! What did he say in his letter?”

“That if you dared to destroy his property, he would prosecute you, papa,” said Veronica.

“Yes, and he has sent me a summons.”

“Oh, papa!”

“Fact, my dear; and I shall be puzzled as to how to defend myself and prove my innocence. I say, Very, my dear, this looks bad for you.”

The girl sighed, and bent over her cup.

“Wouldn’t be a pleasant alliance, my dear, even if it could come off,” continued the Doctor, watching his child furtively. “Ah, dear me! how strangely things do work! Who’d have thought, when we landed in England, that there was the heir to a baron bold waiting to go down on bended knee to my little tyrant, and make her an offer of his heart and hand?”

“Oh, papa, how you do delight in teasing me!”

“Teasing you? Well, isn’t it a fact? You shot him through and through first time we were at church, and your victim has been our humble servant ever since.”

“But, papa, do you think Thomas could have destroyed the hoarding?”

“Well, I don’t know, my dear. He was very indignant about it, and said if this was his place he would soon down with the obstruction.”

“Then it must have been he. You ought to scold him well.”

“What, for getting rid of a nuisance?”

“No: for getting you into such trouble with Lord Pinemount.”

“Hah!” said the Doctor dreamily; “it’s a strange world, Very. Perhaps we had better go back to Iquique.”

“Oh, papa!” cried the girl in dismay.

“Don’t you want to go?”

“What, leave this lovely place, where it is always green, and the flowers are everywhere, for that dreadful dry desert place where one is parched to death? Ah, no, no, no!”

“Humph!” said the Doctor – “always green. Don’t seem so, Very: something, to my mind, is getting ripe at a tremendous rate.”

“I don’t know what you mean, dear,” said the girl consciously.

“Don’t you? Ah well, never mind. But you need not be uneasy, – I do not mean to go back: this place will just suit me to write my book, and I’m not going to stir for all the Lord Pinemounts in England.”

“I wonder how you could ever leave so beautiful a country as England, papa,” said Veronica, as the breakfast went on.

“You wouldn’t wonder, if you knew all,” said the Doctor thoughtfully.

“All, papa? – all what?”

The Doctor was silent, and his child respected his silence. The breakfast was ended, and the paper was thrown down.

“I don’t see why you should not know, my dear. You are a woman now, and thinking about such things.”

Veronica looked across at him wonderingly.

“You asked me why I left England, or some such question. It was because of the woman I loved, my dear.”

“Mamma? To join her at Iquique?”

“No,” said the Doctor thoughtfully; “it was before I knew of her existence.”

“Ah, papa!”

“Yes, my dear. I was desperately in love with a lady before I knew your dear mother.”

Veronica rose with wondering eyes, and knelt down beside her father, resting her elbows on his knees and gazing up in his face.

“Do people – ? You loved mamma very dearly, papa?” she whispered.

“Very, my child; and we were very happy till it pleased Heaven to take her away. She taught a poor, weak, foolish man what a good woman really is.”

There was a long pause, and then Veronica said, —

“Do people love more than once, papa?”

“I don’t know, dear,” he said, smiling. “I loved here in England very desperately, and when the lady I worshipped threw me over for another, I swore I would never look a woman in the face again with the idea of wedding; and in utter disgust left England, and all I knew, to roam for a time in the Malay Archipelago; and from thence I went to South America, following out my natural history tasks. Then I found out I had been a fool.”

“I do not understand you, papa.”

“I found, my darling, that I had wasted the strength of a young man’s first love upon a miserable handsome coquette.”

“How did you find that out, papa?”

“By meeting your dear mother, who was everything a true woman should be; and instead of my life proving to be a miserable state of exile, it was all that joy could give till the day of the great pain.”

There was another long pause, and then the Doctor said cheerfully, —

“And that’s why Doctor Salado went away from England. By the way, Very, I’m not a regular doctor, though I studied medicine after I left England very hard.”

“How can you say so, dear, when you know how all the poor people cried at your going away? They said no one would ever cure them of the fever again as you did. Why, they always called you the great doctor.”

“Yes, my dear: but people here would call me the great quack. There, I’m going for my walk round. But – hullo! here’s his lordship to see the burnt hoarding.”

For just at that moment Lord Pinemount’s loud, harsh voice floated in at the window.

“Disgraceful!” he cried.

Then there was a murmur of another voice, and again of another, as if two men were respectfully addressing his lordship.

“An old scoundrel!” came in at the window again.

“He means me!” cried the Doctor excitedly, rising.

“No, no, papa – please, please!” whispered Veronica, clinging to him.

“But I’m sure he does, Very.”

“I mean, don’t go out, papa dear: you would be so angry.”

“Would be? I am! – furiously angry. How dare he call me an old scoundrel!”

“Pray, pray don’t quarrel with him, dear.”

“I’m not going to, pet; but I’ll knock his head off for him.”

“No, no; you shall not go out, dear. I will not have my dear father disgrace himself like that.”

“I declare, Very, you are worse than your poor mother used to be. I must go and hit him, or I shall explode.”

“Then please explode here, papa dear, at me.”

“You’re a strange girl, Very, ’pon my soul,” cried the Doctor.

“Yes, papa dear,” she said quietly, but clinging tightly to his arm.

“How dare he come and damage my property!” floated in through the window.

“Buzz-buzz-buzz,” from another voice.

“But I will, sir. How dare he? I’ll lay the horsewhip across the scoundrel’s back!”

“Buzz-buzz – buzz-buzz.”

“Law or no law, he shall have the horsewhip first and the fine or imprisonment afterwards. These foreign rowdy ways shall not be tolerated here.”

“Let go, Very. I can’t stand it, I tell you,” said the Doctor. But Veronica threw her arms now about his neck, and laid her head close to his cheek, and clung there.

“Will you let go?”

“No, papa.”

“Do you want me to hit you?”

“Yes, papa dear.”

“Hang it, Very, it’s too bad! You’re a coward. You know I can’t.”

“Yes, papa dear; I know you’d sooner cut off your hand.”

“A blackguardly old scoundrel!” floated through the window.

“Yes? my lord.”

“Ah! I am, am I?” cried the Doctor. “Let go, Very.”

“No, papa dear: never.”

“Out, I suppose?” came, as if shouted for the inmates of the cottage to hear.

“I will be directly, you pompous, titled bully,” muttered the Doctor.

“Buzz-buzz – buzz-buzz,” in two different keys.

“Yes, I suppose so,” cried his lordship; “but if he thinks he is going to defeat me he is sadly mistaken.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Very! will you untie those wretched little arms of yours from about my neck?”

“No, papa dear; and I’m not afraid of your hitting me.”

“Then, if you don’t let go, I’ll hit myself.”

Veronica raised her head a little, and kissed him.

“No: at home, and dare not show his face!” roared Lord Pinemount.

“There!” cried the Doctor. “Every word is a stinging blow in the face, Very.”

“Yes, papa; but I’m kissing the places to make them well,” said Veronica, suiting the action to the word.

“But I’ll let him see.”

“Buzz-buzz-buzz, – boozz-boozz-boozz,” and the sound of horse’s hoofs slowly dying away.

“Gone!” cried the Doctor passionately. “Very, you’ve made me seem like a miserable cowards that man will despise me, and insult us more than ever.”

“You are angry, papa dear; but when you grow calm you will tell me I’ve done quite right.”

“Humph! I’ll tell you so now, my darling,” said the Doctor, kissing her affectionately; “but my fingers itched to knock him down.”

“And when you had done so, you would have been very sorry, papa dear; for you would have hurt yourself.”

“What, my knuckles?”

“No, papa – your dignity as a gentleman; and you would have hurt me, too, very much.”

“You’re a witch, Very,” said the Doctor, drawing a long sigh. “What an overbearing brute it is! and I’ll be bound to say that son of his will develop into just such another animal.”

“Papa!”

“Hallo! what have I said?” cried the Doctor, with his eyes winking.

“Hit me after all,” said Very to herself, as she ran sobbing out of the room, but only to be caught upon the stairs and tenderly kissed and petted till her eyes grew dry, and the hysterical sobs which would rise to her lips had cleared.

Volume One – Chapter Four.

Stop!

About a couple of hours later the Doctor was down in his garden with a large note-book in his hand, a pen behind his ear, and an exciseman's ink-bottle suspended by a piece of silk ribbon to his button-hole. Every now and then, as he walked up and down the gravel walk, he stopped to gaze away south at the lovely prospect, his eyes resting longest on a magnificent clump of fir trees which grew just beyond the bottom of the grounds, and hid from sight some very, shabby sand pits, which had something to do with the place being called "Sandleighs."

They were splendid old trees, every one having grown straight and clean, for the sandy soil suited them, and a timber merchant would have looked at them longingly, and thought what fine sticks of timber they were, and what fine broad planks they would make if borne to a saw-mill.

Veronica was busy too, but not too busy to run to her father from time to time, as she saw that he took his pen from behind his ear, dipped it, and carefully wrote some note for his work. This note he would read aloud to her, and ask her opinion; after which Veronica hurried back to her work, pricking her fingers in spite of her thick gloves, as she carefully went over her rose trees to free them from the enemies with which they swarmed.

Close at hand, upon his knees, which were protected by an old mat, was Thomas, the old gardener, who was diligently extracting little tufts of weed from the gravel walk, and making observations to his young mistress as he went on.

"Make a deal o' fuss at the Manor 'bout her ladyship's roses; but they ain't nowt to yourn."

"Indeed!"

"Nowt, miss. You see that this guaney jooce as I waters 'em with is reg'lar hessence, and I saves it up. Seven gard'ners, 'cloodin' a boy, they keeps there; but they can't touch us in roses, miss."

Chod!

"What's that?" said Veronica, looking up as a peculiar sound struck her ear.

Chud! Then *chad!* and directly after, *chod!*

Thomas was kneeling bolt upright now, and took off his very shabby cap, and began from habit to scratch his head with the blunt point of the old weed knife.

"Don't you hear, Thomas?" cried Veronica, keeping a rose grub in suspense between her finger and thumb; and as she spoke the sounds came at regular intervals.

"Ay, miss: sounds like some 'un a choppin' 'ard."

"Ah!" ejaculated Veronica, as she caught sight of a couple of men through an opening in the shrubbery at the bottom of the lawn, and she ran to where her father was busily writing down a note, speaking aloud as he went on.

"In the half-ruined capsule – "

"Papa!"

"One moment, my dear. "The sun causes the outer covering to contract, and assume the form of a shiny and – "

"Papa, they're cutting down those beautiful old trees."

"What!" cried the Doctor, turning in the direction of the clump. "Oh no; it must be a mistake."

Chod! A tremendous chop.

"By Gladstone!" he roared; and, thrusting his book into his pocket, he ran down the lawn, and, leaping the hedge, passed through to the open, furzy piece of land, where, full in view now, two men were plying their woodmen's axes rapidly, and making the white chips fly as a ghastly notch began to appear in the side of one of the outer trees.

“Hi! what are you doing?” roared the Doctor, just as Veronica reached the bottom and looked over.

The two men stopped, and rested the heads of their axes on the ground as they grinned.

“Cuttin’ down the trees, sir,” said one of the men.

“What! By whose orders?”

“Lordship’s, sir. Sent us up, and he’s comin’ hisself soon.”

“Do you mean to say that his lordship gave orders for this beautiful clump of trees to be cut down?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But it will disfigure the estate horribly.”

“Well, sir, my mate and the head gardener said as it were a pity.”

“Oh, it’s a mistake, man. You are cutting down the wrong trees.”

“Nay, sir; these here’s right. Lordship said bottom o’ the Sandleighs garden. Can’t be no mistake about that.”

“Then it’s an insult to me,” said the Doctor furiously; “and it shall not be done. Here, come away directly.”

The men looked at one another, and smiled uneasily.

“Do you hear? I say it shall not be done.”

“But his lordship said – ”

“Something his lordship!” roared the Doctor. “You strike a blow, either of you, again on one of those trees, and I’ll strike you. There!”

“Papa!” cried Veronica from the garden; but the Doctor was too angry to hear that or anything else.

“Beg pardon, sir, here is his lordship,” whispered one of the men; and Lord Pinemount came cantering up over the short turf and furze.

“Here, what’s the meaning of this?” he cried. “Why are you not going on with your work? Two of these trees ought to be down by now. Who is this man?”

He had so far ignored the Doctor; and as Veronica saw the impending collision she tried to get through the hedge, but stuck fast.

The Doctor flushed, but spoke very quietly, as he raised his hat.

“Lord Pinemount, I believe?” he said.

“Yes,” said Lord Pinemount. “Who the devil are you? How dare you trespass on my grounds and delay my workpeople?”

The Doctor’s lips worked under his stiff beard, and he could not speak for a moment.

“Do you hear me, sir? Be off!” cried his lordship, who was pale with rage. “You men get on with your job.”

The men touched their hats, spat in their hands, and swung up their axes; and Veronica saw things through a mist, but started as much as Lord Pinemount did, for the Doctor roared, in a voice of thunder, —

“Stop!”

And the men stopped.

“How dare you!” cried his lordship, white now with fury. “What the devil do you mean? Of all the insolence! Go on, men, at once; and as for you, sir, I have already instructed the police for your destruction of my property. Now I shall proceed against you for trespass.”

“Stop!” roared the Doctor again, as the men swung up their axes; and Veronica turned cold, and felt as if her delightful love-dream was at an end.

Lord Pinemount dragged his horse’s head round, and rode closer to the Doctor.

“What do you mean, fellow?” he roared.

“Have the goodness to recollect that you are addressing a gentleman. Stop those men. I will not have my property disfigured by these trees being cut down.”

“Oh, papa, papa!” sighed Veronica.

“What, you dare!” cried his lordship. “Your property – disfigured!”

“Then I will not have the Manor disfigured by that timber being taken down.”

“Are you mad?” yelled his lordship.

“No, sir; but from your display of temper, and your insulting language, I presume that you are,” said the Doctor, who grew more cool and dignified as his lordship became incoherent with passion. “Have the goodness to remember that you hold this estate upon certain conditions, and that you have no right to impoverish or destroy. I say that your action now would injure this property as well as mine beyond that hedge. Cut down a single tree more, and I’ll make you smart for it in a way in which you little expect. Now order your workpeople off home, and – No: cut down that disfigured tree now, and grub up the stump. But if you touch another, Lord Pinemount, you will have to reckon with me. Go on, my lads, and be quick and get your hateful job done.”

For a few minutes his lordship could not speak. Then, growing more incoherent minute by minute, —

“Where is Mr Rolleston?” he cried.

“Went round with the head-keeper, my lord,” said one of the men.

“Blue cap spinney, I think, my lord,” ventured the second man.

“Are we to cut down one tree, my lord?” said the first man, touching his hat.

Lord Pinemount said something decidedly strong, drove his spurs into his horse’s side, and went off at a furious gallop; while the two men grinned, and, as if moved by one spirit, wiped their noses on their bare arms.

“This here’s a rum game,” whispered one to the other.

“Come, my lads,” cried the Doctor, “down with that tree, get the stump cut down and the chips cleared away by to-night, and I’ll give you five shillings for beer.”

“Thankye, sir,” they cried in duet, and then set to work vigorously; while the Doctor, who looked very knowing and severe, went slowly back to where Veronica stood, pale and troubled.

“Oh, papa dear!” she whispered, “what have you done?”

“Given Lord Pinemount a lesson that he has needed for a long time, my dear. I thought I could cow him.”

“Yes, papa; but how can you ever be friends at the Manor now?”

“Eh? Denis? Humph! I never thought of that,” said the Doctor, passing his arm round his child, and walking with her slowly up the lawn, passing Thomas, who, as soon as the encounter was over, slipped back from where he had been watching it, and was now extracting weeds at a furious rate, chuckling to himself, and with his opinion of his master wonderfully heightened, while he thought of how he would tell them at the “Half-Moon” at night about the way in which the Doctor had taken his lordship down.

“Humph!” muttered the Doctor, “how can we be friends at the Manor now? Very, my dear, have I made a mistake? No. I must bring him to his senses. This has been too much to bear.”

Veronica looked wonderingly at the stern, commanding face before her; but she could not help her own trouble, and the countenance of Denis Rolleston creeping in like a dissolving view, which grew plainer and plainer, and then died out again, her vision being blurred by tears.

Volume One – Chapter Five.

Denis Apologises

“Eh, Miss 'Ronica, but the master ought to ha' been a lord!” said old Thomas some days later, as he was nailing up some loose strands of clematis against the house; and he stopped for a moment to take a couple of garden nails from his mouth, for they hindered his speech, though he had removed a third from his lips when he began.

He was up on the ladder, ten feet from the ground, and kept looking down at Veronica for instructions.

“Nonsense, Thomas!” she said, rather pettishly; “and raise that long spray higher; I want it to go close up by my window.”

“You shall have him just where you like, miss; and I'll give him some jooce at the roots to make him run faster. Hallo! what, have I got you, my fine fellow?” he continued, as he pounced upon a great snail which was having its day sleep after a heavy night's feed, close up under the window-sill.

He descended the ladder slowly with his prize, and was about to crush it under his heel on the gravel path, when Veronica interposed.

“No, no!” she cried; “don't do that. It is so horrid. I hate to see things killed.”

“But sneels do so much mischief, miss.”

“Never mind; throw it out into the field.”

“To be sure,” said the Doctor, coming along. “Do you know what Uncle Toby said, Thomas, to the fly?”

“Your Uncle Toby, sir? Nay.”

“Everybody's Uncle Toby. He told the fly there was room enough for both of them in the world.”

“Mebbe, sir,” said Thomas, scratching his head with the claws of his wall-hammer; “and I doan't say nowt again flies; but if Uncle Toby had grown lettershes and storrbrys he wouldn't ha' said as there was room for sneels and slugs in his garden.”

The Doctor laughed, and went on down his favourite path, while, after jerking the snail over the hedge, Thomas returned to the ladder.

“Let him eat his lordship's stuff,” he said, with a chuckle. “An' the master ought to ha' been a lord, miss. The way he put down his lordship's amazen. They do nowt but talk about it every night at the 'Half-Moon.’”

“Now, nail up that long loose strand, Thomas,” said Veronica hastily.

“Ay, miss, I'll nail him,” said the man, climbing the ladder once more; “but would you mind asking the master, miss, to give me something for my back?”

“Why don't you ask him yourself?”

“I did, miss, four times over; and he always says the same. ‘Go to the properly qualified doctor,’ he says, – just as if there was any one in these parts o' such guid quality as he is. Nay, miss, you might speak to him for me: he did me a wonderful lot o' guid once. Mint iles is nothing to that tincture as he gives me. I say it, and I'll say it again – Wo ho!”

(This to the ladder, which shifted a little, and had to be rearranged against the wall.)

“– Agen anybody,” continued Thomas, with a shred in his lips. “The master's a wonderful doctor, and he ought to ha' been a lord.”

Just then the Doctor called his child.

“Coming, papa.”

“Here's young Master Rolleston coming along the road, miss,” continued Thomas, hammering away at his bines. “Not much like his father, he ain't. Wouldn't ha' ketched him sticking shutter-boards up in the very front o' people's houses, and wanting to cut down the trees. Nice young gent, he

is, as ever stepped, miss. Very different to my lord, and – Hullo, when did she go?” said the gardener, looking round to find that his young mistress had gone.

“Ah! I see. Gone into the house ’cause Mr Rolleston’s coming. Tck! Shouldn’t be a bit surprised to hear them two asked in church some day; and a very pretty pair they’d make. Mum! here’s the master.”

Thomas went on hammering away; for the Doctor, who had been to the gate to meet his visitor, had received him coldly, and slowly led him into the room where Veronica was seated.

“Well, Mr Rolleston, may I ask the meaning of this visit?” he said, after a conscious greeting between the young people.

“Doctor Salado, pray, pray don’t take that tone with me!” cried Denis appealingly.

“What other tone can you expect, after the treatment I have received?”

“I know, sir. It has been most painful; but I have come to apologise.” As he spoke he glanced at Veronica, who was seated, looking pale and troubled, with her eyes cast down.

“Oho! An apology? That alters the case. Then his lordship is apologetic, and acknowledges that he is in the wrong?”

The young man flushed.

“I – I regret to say, sir, that my father does not know of my visit.”

“Then you have come to apologise for him without his leave?”

“No, sir; I have come to apologise for myself, and to ask you not to think ill of my father.”

“Humph! Very right of you to defend your father, young man.”

“He is a little hasty and irritable, sir. He has been put out ever since you took this place, for he had set his mind upon it for years. It was a disappointment to him, sir.”

“I had set my mind upon having the place, and it would have been a bitter disappointment to me to have missed it. Let me see, Mr Rolleston: with the paddock, garden, and orchard there are about six acres.”

“So I have heard, sir.”

“And your father has thousands of acres?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And he grudges me my little bit. Hardly fair, eh?”

“I can make no defence, sir. I only throw myself upon your mercy. My father is too unwell and irritable to see the matter in the light I do.”

“Ah! you are a prejudiced observer,” said the Doctor drily.

“I hope not, sir: I wish to be just; and I ask you not to think ill of us for this affair.”

“Humph! And are you apologising for Lady Pinemount too?”

“For my mother, sir? There is no need.”

“Oh! Why, I thought when Ahab coveted Naboth’s vineyard, the queen – ”

“Doctor Salado!” cried Denis, springing from his seat with flashing eyes, “how dare you. It is an insult to my dear mother, who is as pained and grieved as I am.”

“I beg her ladyship’s pardon humbly,” said the Doctor, as he saw Denis glance again at Veronica, and that she made him an imploring sign.

“I – I beg yours, sir,” faltered Denis.

“What for, my lad? Defending your mother? It was quite right. Shake hands.”

Denis caught the Doctor’s hand, and Veronica uttered a sigh of relief.

“There now, sit down, and let’s talk sensibly; and next time a man insults Lady Pinemount like that, knock him down. So you have come to apologise, eh?”

“Yes, sir. It is most painful to me. I have no authority, but I know you to be a straightforward English gentleman who sees my position, and I ask you to be lenient with my father and forbearing towards him.”

“But you see this is all selfishness, Denis Rolleston.”

“Yes, sir; but you don’t know all.”

“All what? That you have a silly, boyish liking for my child.”

“Silly! boyish!” cried the young man, flushing. “Don’t you be hard upon me too.”

“It’s the simple truth,” said the Doctor drily; “and very simple too. Here are you, son of the nobleman who holds this handsome estate, with a right to look very high in a matrimonial alliance, and yet you come hanging about here after a young lady, daughter of such a nobody as an eccentric old naturalist who has spent the past thirty years abroad. You must be very weak-minded, young man.”

“Words, sir,” cried Denis eagerly. “You know in your heart you think I am as wise as I know I am.”

His eyes met Veronica’s again, and there was a proud look of happiness in his glance.

“Bah – bah – bah! Heroics, sentiment. Rubbish!” cried the Doctor. “Come, be frank. Your father knows of your inclinations?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And he flew into a rage when he found it out?”

Denis was silent.

“Of course he did, and threatened to disown you, eh? There, you need not answer: I know it all by heart. Quite natural. You expect to be Lord Pinemount some day, and must choose a suitable wife.”

“You told me not to indulge in heroics, sir, so I will remain silent.”

“Quite right. It will not do. Your father threatened to disown you, disinherit you, and all that sort of thing, eh?” Denis made no answer.

“There, you see, Veronica, my child. You have done wrong in encouraging this young man so far. You don’t want to blight his prospects?”

“Ah, no, papa,” cried Veronica, with the tears slowly welling over from her eyes.

“Then you are quite ready to forget what has passed?” Veronica slowly covered her eyes with her hands, and was silent, while Denis stepped to her side and took her hand.

“Let me answer for her, sir,” he said firmly. “I have never spoken out plainly to her in the happy days I have known your daughter. It has seemed enough to be near her, and to feel that I might hope; but I do speak out now, and say – ‘Veronica, I love you dearly: let me tell your father that you care for me, and will never change.’”

“Very pretty and sentimental,” said the Doctor coldly, “but I cannot let this go on. I believe your father would disinherit you if you persisted in this – this – this *mésalliance*.”

“On your child’s part, sir?” said Denis, smiling, and then giving her a loving look.

“No, the other way, sir. I’m not going to let my child stoop to enter a family where they look down upon her; and I’m not going to let a young fellow in your position ruin himself with his father for her sake. No, no: no more – that will do. Lord and Lady Pinemount must come and ask for the alliance; so now you had better go.”

“Yes, sir, I’ll go,” said the young man quietly, as he raised Veronica’s hands to his lips, – “I’ll go, for I don’t feel downhearted. I tell you this, though, that I will never give her up. I’m going to wait.”

“Humph!”

“And now, before I go, sir, I want to apologise again for the annoyance I have given you.”

“You? none at all. Always were civil enough.”

“You don’t know, sir, so I will confess. It was I who destroyed those hoardings.”

“You!” cried the Doctor; and Veronica started.

“I was so annoyed, sir, that I came twice over and sawed the supports, and let them down; and as they were put up again, I came last night, deluged the hateful boards with spirits, and set fire to them.”

“And a pretty mess you have got me in, sir,” cried the Doctor angrily. “Do you know I am summoned to appear before the magistrates?”

“That’s all over, sir, for I shall tell my father it was my doing. Good-bye, Veronica: I shall wait. You will shake hands, sir?”

“Humph! oughtn’t to, after such a scampish trick. Well, there, good-bye, my lad. Don’t come here again till you are asked.”

There was a sad and long pressure of two hands directly after; and Denis went off back towards the Manor, while Veronica, after kissing her father, stole up to her room for the maiden’s consolation – salt and water, warm, shed copiously into a piece of cambric.

“Can’t help liking the young dog,” said the Doctor. “Humph!” he added, laughing: “nice son to destroy his father’s ungodly works! So it was he?”

Volume One – Chapter Six.

Sawn Off

Lord Pinemount was seated in his library, biting his nails mentally, as he lay back in his easy chair glaring at his steward, who stood before him wishing he could get another post, where his master would not be a tyrant, and thinking that, if it had not been for the fact that he had a large wife and a small family at home, he would resign at once.

“And you are sure?”

“Oh yes, my lord – quite.”

“Went straight there?”

“Yes, my lord; and I hope your lordship considers I have done my duty in telling you according to your orders.”

“I consider, sir, that you have behaved like a miserable, contemptible sneak.”

“But your lordship told me to – ”

“Don’t talk to me, sir. Leave the room.”

The steward left the room, and as he closed the door he turned round, showing his teeth, and shook his fist.

“Old beast!” he said aloud: “I’ll serve you out for this some day.”

Then his countenance changed, his jaw dropped, and he drew to one side to allow Lady Pinemount to pass, fully conscious that she must have heard his words and seen the expression on his face.

“It’s all over,” he groaned, as her ladyship passed into the library. “I’m a ruined man. She’ll tell him, and – oh dear, oh dear! The workhouse stares us all in the face.”

But Lady Pinemount did not tell her husband, for she knew that the unfortunate steward must have been smarting from one of the injuries his lordship knew so well how to inflict. In fact, if she had felt so disposed she would not have had the opportunity, for the moment she had closed the door she was addressed.

“Ah, here you are!” cried her lord. “I hope you are satisfied.”

“Satisfied, dear?”

“Dear? Bah! You’ve encouraged and sided with that scoundrel of a boy, till he is in open rebellion against me; and then you call me dear.”

“I have not encouraged him,” said Lady Pinemount. “I have always tried to set you two at one. What is the matter now?”

“Why, I’ve found out this morning that Denis himself cut down and burned that hoarding.”

“Over whose destruction you insulted Doctor Salado.”

“I made a mistake,” said his lordship. “I daresay even angels make mistakes sometimes.”

“I don’t know,” said her ladyship quietly. “Of course you will apologise to the Doctor?”

“The Doctor? The quack! No, madam, I am not going to stoop to that.”

Lady Pinemount sighed.

“And that’s not the worst of it. I forbade the young scoundrel to go near those people again. Did I, or did I not?”

“You did, dear, emphatically. But if Denis really cares for Miss Salado – ”

“He sha’n’t have her – there! I forbade him to go there; and, not content with insulting me by grubbing down and burning the hoarding I erected to keep off obnoxious people, he has gone there again and again, encouraged by the adventurer of a father.”

“I am very sorry, dear.”

“Sorry? What good does that do? And he’s there now.”

“No, my dear,” said Lady Pinemount; “he is just coming across the park.”

“Ah! is he?” cried Lord Pinemount, leaping up and running to the window. “Here, – hi! Denis! Come here!”

The young man came calmly enough up to the window.

“Ah, mamma!” he said. “You want me, sir?”

“Yes. Where the devil have you been?”

“Over to Sandleighs, sir. And have the goodness to remember, in addressing me, that I am not one of the grooms.”

“Denis!”

“All right, mamma. I am not a child now, and if his lordship addresses me in that tone I shall resent it.”

“Ah, indeed!” said the father sarcastically. “May I respectfully inquire, then, why you have been over to Sandleighs?”

“To apologise to Doctor Salado for causing him so much annoyance.”

“Say Don Salado, my dear son,” cried his lordship: “and may I ask how you have annoyed him? By making eyes at the adventurer’s daughter – bah! wench!”

The young man’s eyes flashed, but he spoke quite calmly.

“I apologised for causing him to be suspected of destroying that hoarding which I cut down and burned.”

“Yes, I know you did, sir.”

“I am not surprised, father. I thought one of your spies would be watching me.”

“Oh, Denis, Denis!” cried Lady Pinemount appealingly. “Right, mother dear. I’ll speak and act quite calmly; but I will not be treated as a schoolboy.”

“Then you have apologised to Doctor Salado, the Spanish-American adventurer, and you are going to espouse his daughter, I presume?”

“Yes, father. I love her very dearly, and – ”

“That will do, thank you,” said his lordship quietly, though he was pale with suppressed fury. “I have no time to listen to silly sentiment. Good morning: there is the door.”

Lady Pinemount ran to her son’s side.

“Don’t quarrel, Denis, for my sake,” she whispered; and he pressed her hand.

“Did you hear me, Mr Rolleston? Have the goodness to go. Of course you will get the title when I die, and the estate. But not a penny do you have from me beside; and the estate will nearly ruin you, without money to keep it up. You say you are a man: act like one, and go.”

“You wish me to leave your house finally, sir?”

“Wish? I order you to go; and until you come over humbly and ask leave to pay your addresses to the Lady Jenny, never darken my doors again.”

“Very well, sir. I will see you again, mother, before I go.”

“Denis! Husband, pray, pray do not let this trouble come upon us.”

“Mr Rolleston, being angry makes me ill. I wish to behave politely and calmly to you. Please to go.”

Denis caught his mother to his breast, and then hurried out of the room, to go and order the valet to pack up his portmanteau and send it across to the station; and then he went off across the park, to see the Salados and say good-bye.

Volume One – Chapter Seven.

Good-Bye

“Back again so soon, Mr Rolleston?” said the Doctor, as Denis presented himself before the father and daughter; Veronica having risen from her seat and laid her hand upon her father’s shoulder, reading at once in their visitor’s eyes that something serious was the cause of his visit.

“Yes, sir: I have come to say good-bye to you both.”

“For good?” said the Doctor, taking his child’s hand and pressing it warmly.

“I hope for good,” said Denis, smiling encouragingly at Veronica. “I am going abroad.”

“What for?”

“The same reason that others go for, sir. To make my fortune.”

“You! I thought you were Lord Pinemount’s heir.”

“So I am, sir; but my father may live twenty or thirty years, – I hope he may, – and I have nothing now except what I earn.”

“Humph! then you have come to an open rupture with him?”

“No, sir; he has come to an open rupture with me.”

“Because you come here?”

“Because I refuse to obey him and make matrimonial overtures to a lady I dislike.”

“Overture to a very bad opera, eh?”

“I could not do it, sir. It would be base, contemptible, and – There – you know.”

“Humph! Then you have beggared yourself because you think you care for Veronica?”

“No, sir; I am ordered away till I go and beg pardon and promise to marry as my father orders; so there is a breach that will never be healed.”

“Better go and heal it. This is all very fresh. Very will soon forget you, and you’ll forget her.”

“Doctor Salado!”

“Well, I know the world, sir. Sad thing for a young man like you to sacrifice his prospects.”

“I don’t agree with you, sir. It is the best thing that could have happened, and will make a man of me. I shall go to Canada or Vancouver, I think; and in justice to Miss Salado I have come to say that I bind her by no promise, – I only trust in her faith. Some day I shall return to ask her to be my wife. Till then – ”

He could not finish, but stood with his lips compressed.

“Humph! Well, I think you are quite right, sir. Come, Very, be a woman. How much capital have you to take with you?”

“None, sir.”

“Then you’ll want some five hundred or a thousand. I have the latter amount, and no particular use for it. I’ll lend it to you at five per cent.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Denis warmly, “but I must decline. I’ll go and fight the battle for myself, and prove to my father that I am not the weak boy he thinks.”

“Quite right. Go and fight the battle for yourself.”

“Papa!” whispered Veronica, with a look of agony in her eyes.

“Yes, my dear; it’s the best thing he can do. You both feel a bit sore, but you will soon forget the trouble. Good-bye, Denis Rolleston. You’re more of a man than I thought you. Write to me now and then, and let me hear how you are getting on. We shall both be very pleased to hear of your welfare. It’s a pity your father is so severe; but there – all fathers are. I am. Good-bye, my lad. I’d select a good ship, and I wouldn’t go steerage.”

“Why not?” said Denis, through his set teeth. “Better begin at the bottom, sir.”

“Well, yes, my lad, perhaps you had. Now, Very, my dear, say good-bye to him like a woman, and wish him well. Some day in the future you two will meet at dinner and laugh at this rosy-posy boy-and-girl love business. And by the way, Rolleston, my lad, keep your eyes open, and send me any little natural history specimen you find.”

“Good-bye, Veronica,” said Denis, who did not seem to hear the Doctor’s words.

“Good-bye,” she said, giving him a wistful look; and her voice was almost inaudible, while her eyes looked dull and her cheeks ashy pale.

He took her cold limp hand, held it for a few moments in his, then turned and rushed out of the house.

“Papa! Father!”

Only two words; but their tone was enough for the Doctor, who caught her to his heart, then placed her in a chair and turned to the window.

“Hi! Denis!” he roared; and the young man turned, coming back in obedience to the signals the Doctor made, and standing once more in the room.

“Look here, sir, you had better have that money: you’ll want it over yonder.”

“Did you call me back for that, sir?” said the young man bitterly – “to go through this agony again? No: I will make the money I want myself.”

“Bravo!” cried the Doctor, seizing his hand. “But you sha’n’t go!”

Denis stared.

“Do you think I am going to have my little pet here die of a broken heart, for the sake of you, you ugly young scoundrel? No! you sha’n’t go. Here: you stop and comfort Very, and I’ll go over to the Manor and bring my Lord Pinemount to his knees.”

“Doctor Salado!” cried Denis excitedly. “No, no: it is impossible. You must not go. You would be insulted.”

“Then I’ll insult him. Here, Very, my pretty: I’m not to let this boy go, am I?”

For answer the girl flung herself upon Denis’ breast, and clung there sobbing.

“This – this is too hard, sir!” cried Denis passionately.

“I am only man, after all.”

“Well, what do you want to be, boy? There, I don’t like you, and I don’t like your father; but I’m not going to let that stand in the way. I’m going over to the Manor to bring my lord to his knees.”

“You don’t know what you are saying,” cried Denis. “Veronica, he must not go.”

“I do know what I’m saying. Am I not Doctor Salado – a moral magician in my way? Did I not make him give up cutting down the trees?”

“Yes, sir; but you cannot make him retract from driving me off the family tree for a time,” said Denis, with a sad smile. “I am only a beggar now, and I must go.”

“Indeed you will not. And as for being a beggar, Very here will have plenty for you both.”

“Which I could not take.”

“Then, confound you, sir!” cried the Doctor, with mock fury, “I’ll bring an action against you for breach of promise of marriage. There, pet, don’t cry: you shall have your pretty boy.”

“Doctor Salado, you must not go. You don’t know my father.”

“Thoroughly, my lad. There – take heart, both of you. Denis, my lad, you sha’n’t be a pensioner on my bounty. Come, I’ll bet you five pounds that your father and mother dine here with us to-night, and talk to my Very here as if she were their child, as she has to be.”

“Doctor Salado, are you mad?”

“Yes, my lad. I have been all my life, but I’m not at all dangerous. God bless you, my lad! I believe in you, and when I come back you’ll believe in me.”

Volume One – Chapter Eight.

Doctor Salado's Magic

"Take the good the gods provide you," seemed to be Denis Rolleston's motto, for he was very happy with Veronica, while the Doctor made off across the park, gave the bell at the open door a tremendous tug, and then waited till a serious-looking butler came to the front.

"Tell his lordship I want to see him directly."

"Not at home, sir," said the man stolidly.

"Tell his lordship I want to see him directly," cried the Doctor sternly. "He's in the library: I heard his laugh as I came up to the house."

"But – "

"Stand aside, fellow!" cried the Doctor; and he marched in, flung open the library door, and shut it sharply, as Lord Pinemount rose from his chair pale with rage.

"Morning," said the Doctor. "Sit down. I want a chat with you."

He took a seat coolly, and looked critically at the angry man before him, who was breathless with passion.

"How dare you!" he said at last – "how dare you force your presence here! Go, sir, before I send for the police."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, sir: sit down. You must know that the business is important, or I should not act like this."

"You are a madman, sir!"

"Yes, perhaps: sit down."

There was such a tone of authority in the Doctor's words that his lordship dropped back in his chair wondering at his own action.

"That's better. Now then, Pinemount, let's look the state of affairs in the face. Your boy loves my child."

"I have no son, sir. I have cut him off."

"Humph! All talk, sir. Can't be done. He loves my girl, and she loves him. He is up at my house now; and after I have talked to you I want you to bring her ladyship over to the young people, and make things comfortable."

"Yes, you are mad," said his lordship, reassuring himself. "How dare you presume like this! Leave my house, sir!"

"Don't raise your voice, man, and let all the servants know you are in a passion."

"The insolence – the presumption! Look here, sir: if you are not mad, who and what are you, that you dare to come and make such a proposition to me?"

"Ah!" said the Doctor, as Lady Pinemount entered, looking anxiously from one to the other, while the visitor advanced to meet her, took her hand, kissed it with courtly grace, and led her to a chair.

"I repeat, sir, who and what are you, that you presume to come and sow dissension in my peaceful village – heartburnings in my home? Who are you?"

"Your cousin Richard, who died abroad."

"What!" roared his lordship. "Impostor, you lie!"

"No, sir: you are the impostor, or rather usurper. I grieve to say, madam – Mrs Rolleston – that I am Lord Pinemount, and that your husband has no right whatever here."

"I – "

"Silence, sir!" said Lord Pinemount, with dignity. "Accept the position, and hear what I have to say."

“Is this true, sir?” faltered the lady.

“You will know if you listen, madam. Nay, you both must know, by the inquiries that were made before your husband succeeded to the title and estates. I saw all the papers with the advertisements; but I was happy, was rich, and detested England for an old association, and I preferred to remain dead to all who had known me. When at last I did return to England, for my child’s sake – a widower – I came down here. The Sandleighs was for sale, and I bought it.”

There was something like a groan here, and the lady gazed wildly at her husband.

“Of course I thought of claiming the title; but I met you and your son, and I said to myself, ‘Why should I make his family wretched?’ Then, as you know, while I was in doubt, Love came and cleared away the difficulty and decided me. If I had claimed the title it would have been for Veronica’s sake. Well, Denis loves her; and in due time – a long time hence, if your husband will study his health and not cut his life short by passion and apoplexy – Denis will be My Lord, – my child My Lady. That is enough for me. I am contented to be the Doctor and go on as the naturalist still.”

“But – but – ” faltered the lady. “My husband – Mr Rolleston, if what you say is true – ”

“He knows it is true. But not Mr Rolleston, – Lord Pinemount still. Madam, I tell you I am very rich, and my wants are very few. The title is nothing to me. Yes, it is – it is my one secret. There, Pinemount, am I an impostor now?”

“I am stunned,” faltered the bearer of the title.

“Bah! that will soon go off. Lady Pinemount, our esteem, I am sure, is mutual, and I believe you like your son’s choice.”

“Indeed, indeed I do!” cried Lady Pinemount eagerly.

“You would not be a woman if you did not,” said the Doctor warmly. “There, Pinemount, you may take my word – the more easily that you see I want nothing from you but your cousinship. Still the family lawyers can see papers that would convince the greatest sceptic living. Let bygones be forgotten. Give me your hand.”

The said hand was raised doubtfully, but it was seized and warmly grasped.

“Now then,” said the Doctor, “I promised your son to bring you up to ask my child to be your son’s wife.”

“Is this some dream?” said Lord Pinemount, in a subdued voice.

“No, sir – the broad sunlight of fact. There, my dear cousin, Lady Pinemount, is eager to take my darling in her arms, and you are as eager to grasp the hand of as true and brave a young fellow as ever stepped. Will you order the carriage, Lady Pinemount?”

“But – but,” faltered Lord Pinemount, “do I understand that you will not ask me to give up the title – the estate?”

“Only when the great end comes, and your son reigns in your stead – and ours, sir. God bless him! for I love him as if he was my son. Lady Pinemount – cousin, sister – you will come on at once?”

She could not speak, but pressed the hand he gave her and held it to her lips.

“But what magic is this?” whispered Denis two hours later, when he had felt the warm grasp of his father’s hand, and seen him kiss and bless Veronica, who was now seated on a couch with Lady Pinemount’s arm round her waist “Doctor Salado’s magic, my dear boy. Some day I will give you the recipe. There – never mind now. You will represent the family tree, and its finest limb is not sawn off.”

Volume Two – Chapter One.

The Gilded Pill – A Homely Comedy.

Dove and Daws

“Richard Shingle, Shoemaker. Repairs neatly executed.”

This legend was written in yellow letters, shaded with blue, upon an oval red board. Red, blue, and yellow form a pleasing combination to some eyes; but when the yellow is drab, the blue dirty, and the scarlet of a brick-dusty tint, the harmony is not pleasing. Moreover, the literary artist could not be complimented upon his skill in writing in pigment with a camel-hair brush; for, not content to be staid and steadfast in Roman characters, he had indulged in wild flourishes, which gave the signboard the appearance of a battle-field, upon which certain ordinary letters were staggering about, while three or four tyrannical capitals were catching them with lassoes, which twined wildly, round their heads and legs.

For instance, the first “d” was in difficulties, the “g” was pulled out of place, the “h” and “o” tied tightly together, while just below, the “repairs” seemed to be neatly executed indeed, for the “r” had a yellow rope round its neck, having been hung by “Richard,” beneath which word it was suspended, with the rest of the letters kicking frantically because that initial was at its last gasp.

But this idea, probably, did not present itself to the inhabitants of Crowder’s Buildings, a pleasant *cul de sac* in the neighbourhood of the Angel at Islington. Crowder, once upon a time, bought two houses in a front street, between and under which there was an entrance like a tunnel, leading to the back gardens and back doors of the said houses; and Crowder – now dead and numbered with the just – being a man of frugal mind, gazed at the gardens of his freehold messuage and tenements, and saw that they were useful as cat walks, to make beds growing oyster and other shells, and vegetables of the most melancholy kind. He let the fact dawn upon his understanding that the vegetables grown might be bought better for sixpence per annum, and resolved that he would utilise the space.

To do this, he built up two rows of staring-eyed, four-roomed tenements, sixteen in all, separated by twelve feet of pavement, whitewashed them as they stood staring at one another, and turned the two garden deserts into a busy, thrifty hive, where some twenty or thirty families flourished and grew dirty.

The occupants of the two houses in the street complained, and left; but Crowder let the houses at a higher rent without the gardens – let the little tenements each at ten shillings a week, and turned out those who did not pay; and for the rest of his life collected his own dues, did his own painting and whitewashing – even plastered upon occasion; and at last, while repairing a chimney-stack and putting on a new pot, at the age of seventy-five, like a thrifty soul as he was, he slipped from the ladder, rolled off the roof of Number 10, fell into the open paved space, with his head in the centre gutter, where the soapsuds ran down, and his heels on a scraper – every house had a scraper, to make it complete – and was so much injured that Nature gave him notice to quit his earthly habitation, evicted him, and, save in name, the buildings knew him no more.

For they passed into the hands of Maximilian Shingle, “broker and setrer,” as his brother said – a most worthy member of society: a sticky-fingered man, who, through this last quality, was enabled to lay up honey in store. In fact, he was so well off that, when Crowder’s Buildings were brought to the hammer by Crowder’s heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, the hammer that knocked them down knocked them into Max Shingle’s possession, and they were paid for with Mrs Fraser’s money – a certain amount in thousands which she bestowed, with her two sons Fred and Tom – upon the man who re-won her heart six months after Fred Fraser senior’s death.

It was a retired spot after passing through the tunnel, and hence it became the popular playground of the children of the neighbourhood, who chalked the pavement, broke their knees and

heads upon its harsher corners, and made it the scene of the festive dance when a dark-visaged organ-man came down to grind the last new airs of the day.

By a great act of benevolence, Maximilian Shingle, who was a lowly, good man, a shining light at his chapel, where he was deacon, had, though inundated with applications for Number 4 when it became empty, let it to his unlucky brother Richard, who flourished under the sign that heads this chapter, made boots and shoes, and neatly executed the repairs in the dilapidated Oxonians and strong working-men's bluchers that came to his lot.

It was first-floor front-room cleaning-up day at Richard Shingle's; and Mrs Shingle – familiarly spoken to as “mother” – was in her glory, having what she called “a good rummage.” Had her home possessed a back yard or a front garden, every article of furniture would have been turned out; but as there was not an inch of back yard, and the front garden was very small, being limited to six flowerpots behind a small green fence on the upstairs window-sill, Mrs Shingle was debarred from that general clearance.

But she did the best she could to get at the floor for a busy scrub while her husband and daughter were away; and the consequence was that the side-table had its petticoats tucked up round its waist, thereby revealing the fact that its legs were not mahogany, but deal; the hearthrug was rolled up, and sitting in the big-armed Windsor chair; the fender had gone to bed in the back room; and the chairs seemed to be playing at being acrobats, and were standing one upon the other; while the chimney ornaments – shepherds and shepherdesses for the most part – were placed as spectators on the top of the little cupboard to look on.

Mrs Shingle finished her task of cleaning up before descending, carrying a pail which had to be emptied and rinsed out before her hands were dried.

Mrs Shingle was a pleasant, plump woman, who had run a good deal to dimple; in fact, the backs of her hands were full of coy little pits, where the water hid when she washed, and her wedding ring lay in a kind of furrow, from not having grown with her hands.

She gave a few touches with a duster to the lower room, which was half sitting, one-fourth kitchen, and one-fourth workshop, inasmuch as there was a low shoemaker's bench, with its tools, under the window, beneath which, and secured to the wall by a strap, were lasts, knives, awls, pincers, and various other implements of the shoemaker's art. On a stand close by stood a sewing machine, and on the table were patches of kid and patent leather, evidently awaiting the needle.

Mrs Shingle had finished her hurried cleaning, and the furniture was put back; had been to the glass and arranged her hair, and finished off by taking out three pins, which she stuck in her mouth, as if it were a cushion, giving herself a shake, which caused her dress, that had been round her waist, to fall into its customary folds; and then, sitting down she was busy at work binding boot-tops, when the open door was darkened, and a fashionably dressed young man, of five-and-twenty, tapped on the panel with the end of his stick, entered with a languid walk, said, “How do, aunt?” and seated himself on the edge of the table.

The visitor's clothes were very good, but they had a slangy cut, and might have been made for some Leviathan of a music-hall, who intended to delineate what he termed “a swell.” For the cuffs of the excessively short coat nearly hid the young fellow's hands, even as the ends of his trousers almost concealed his feet; his shirt front was ornamented with large crimson zigzag patterns, and his hat was so arranged on the back of his head that it pressed down over his forehead a series of unhappy, greasy-looking little curls, which came down to his eyebrows.

Mrs Shingle nodded, and stabbed a boot-top very viciously as the young man saluted her.

“Old man out?” he said.

“You know he is,” retorted Mrs Shingle, “else you wouldn't have come.”

“Don't be hard on a fellow, aunt. You know I can't help coming. Where's Jessie?”

“Out,” said Mrs Shingle, sharply.

“She always is out when I come,” drawled the young man, tapping his teeth with his cane. “I believe she is upstairs now.”

“Then you’d better go up and see,” exclaimed Mrs Shingle. “Look here, Fred, I’m sure your father don’t approve of your coming here.”

“I can’t help what the governor likes,” was the reply.

“I’m not going to ask him where I’m to go. Is Jessie out?”

“I told you she was, sir.”

“Don’t be so jolly cross, aunt. It’s all right, you know. The old man will kick a bit, but he’ll soon come round. Don’t you be rusty about it. You ought to be pleased, you know; because she ain’t likely to have a chance to do half so well. I shall go and meet her.”

As he spoke, the young man – to wit, Frederick Fraser, step-son of Maximilian Shingle, Esq, of Oblong Square, Pentonville – slowly descended from the table, glanced at himself in the glass, and made for the door.

“She’s gone down the Goswell Road, I know,” said the young man, turning to show his teeth in a grin.

“No, no,” exclaimed Mrs Shingle hastily.

“Thank ye, I know,” said the young fellow, with a wink, and he passed out.

“Bother the boy!” exclaimed Mrs Shingle petulantly. “Now he’ll meet her, and she’ll be upset, and Dick will be cross, and Tom look hurt. Oh, dear, dear, dear, I wish she’d been as ugly as sin!”

There was an interval of angry stitching, as if the needle was at enmity with the soft leather, and determined to do it to death, and then Mrs Shingle cried, “Here she is!”

“Ah, my precious!” she added, as a trim, neat little figure came hurrying in snatched off her hat and hung it behind the door.

She was only in a dark brown stuff dress, but it was the very pattern of neatness, as it hung in the most graceful of folds; while over all shone as sweet a face as could be seen from east to west, with the bright innocence looking out of dark grey eyes.

“Back again, mother,” accompanied by a hasty kiss, was the reply to Mrs Shingle’s salute.

Then, brushing the crisp fair hair back from her white temples, the girl popped herself into a chair, opened a packet, drew close to the sewing machine, and in response to the pressure of a couple of little feet, that would have made anything but cold crystallised iron thrill, the wheel revolved, and with a clinking rattle the needle darted up and down.

“Have I been long?”

“No, my dear – quick as quick!” said Mrs Shingle, watching her child curiously.

“I wanted to get back and finish this, so as to take it in,” said the girl, making the machine rattle like distant firing.

“Did you meet Mr Fred?”

“Fred? No, mother,” was the reply, as the girl started, coloured, and the consequence was a tangle of the threads and a halt. “Has he been here?” she continued, as with busy fingers she tried to set the work free once more.

“Yes, just now, and set out to meet you. I wonder how you could have missed him.”

There was a busy pause for a few minutes, during which some work was hastily finished; and while Mrs Shingle kept watching her child from time to time uneasily, the latter rose from the machine, and began to double up the jacket upon which she had been at work, and to place it with a couple more lying close by on a black cloth.

“I hope you don’t encourage him, Jessie,” said Mrs Shingle at last.

“Mother!” exclaimed the girl, and her face became like crimson – “how can you?”

“Well, there, there, I’ll say no more,” exclaimed Mrs Shingle – “only it worries me. Now, make haste, there’s a dear, or you’ll be late. Don’t stop about, Jessie; and, whatever you do, don’t come back without the money. Your uncle’d sure to come or send to-day, and it’s so unpleasant not being ready.”

“I’ll be as quick as I can, mother,” said Jessie briskly.

“And you won’t stop, dear?”

“I don’t know what you mean, mother,” said the girl, with a tell-tale blush on her cheek.

“How innocent we are, to be sure!” exclaimed Mrs Shingle, tartly. Then, smiling, she continued, “There, I’m not cross, but I don’t quite like it. Of course, Tom don’t know when you go to the warehouse, and won’t be waiting. There, I suppose young folks will be young folks.”

“I can’t help it, mother, if Mr Fraser meets me by accident,” said Jessie, blushing very rosily, and pouting her lips.

“But he mustn’t meet you by accident; and it oughtn’t to be. Uncle Max would be furious if he knew of it, and those two boys will be playing at Cain and Abel about you, and you mustn’t think anything about either of them.”

“Mother!” exclaimed Jessie.

“I can’t help it, my dear; I must speak, and put a stop to it. Your father would be very angry if he knew.”

“Oh, don’t say so, mother!” pleaded Jessie, with a troubled look.

“But I must say it, my dear, before matters get serious; and I’ve been thinking about it all, and I’ve come to the conclusion that it must all be stopped. There! what impudence, to be sure! I believe that’s him come again.”

“May I come in?” said a voice, after a light tap at the door. And a frank, bearded face appeared in the opening.

“Yes, you can come in,” said Mrs Shingle sharply. But, in spite of her knitted brows, she could not keep back a smile of welcome as the owner of the frank face entered the room, kissed her, and then turned and caught Jessie’s hands in his, with the result that the parcel she was making up slipped off the table to the ground.

“There, how clumsy I am!” he exclaimed, picking up the fallen package, and nearly striking his head against Jessie’s, as, flushed and agitated, she stooped too. “Well, aunt dear, how are you?”

“Oh, I’m well enough,” said Mrs Shingle tartly, as she stretched a piece of silk between her fingers and her teeth, and made it twang like a guitar string. “What do you want here?”

“What do I want, aunt? All right, Jessie – I’ll tie the string. Thought I’d come in and carry Jessie’s parcel.”

“Oh, there!” exclaimed the girl.

“Now, look here, Mr Tom Fraser,” said Mrs Shingle, holding up her needle as if it were a weapon of offence: “you two have been planning this.”

“Mother!” cried Jessie.

“Oh no, we did not, aunt,” cried the young man; “it was all my doing. No, no, Jessie – I’ll carry the parcel.”

“No, no, Tom; indeed you must not.”

“I should think not, indeed!” cried Mrs Shingle, who, as she glanced from one to the other, and thought of her own early days, plainly read the love that was growing up between the young people; but could not see that her first visitor, Fred, had come back, and was standing gazing, with a sallow, vicious look upon his face, at what was going on inside, before going off with his teeth set and an ugly glare in his eyes.

“Tom Fraser,” continued the lady of the house, “I mean Mr Tom – Mr Thomas Fraser – you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to behave in this way. You quite the gentleman, and under Government, and coming to poor peopled houses, and wanting to carry parcels, and all like a poor errand-boy!”

“Stuff and nonsense, aunt! – I’m not a gentleman, and I’m only your nephew; and whilst I’m here I’m not going to see Jessie go through the street carrying a parcel, when I can do it for her.”

“But you must not, indeed, Tom – I mean Mr Fraser,” said Jessie, half-tearful, half-laughing. “I’m going to the warehouse, and I must carry it myself.”

“I know you are going to the warehouse,” said Tom, laughing; “but you must not carry the parcel yourself.”

“But, my dear boy,” said Mrs Shingle, who was evidently softening, “think of what your father would say.”

“I can’t help what he would say, aunt,” said the young man, earnestly; “I only know I can’t help coming here, and I don’t think you want to be cruel and drive me away.”

“No – no – no,” said Mrs Shingle, “but – ”

“Do you, Jessie?”

“No, Tom – Mr Fraser,” faltered Jessie. “But – ”

“But – but!” exclaimed the young man impatiently. “Bother Mr Fraser! My dear Jessie, why are you turning so cold here before your mother? Are you ashamed of me?”

“No – no, Tom,” she cried eagerly.

“And you know how dearly I love you?”

“Yes, Tom,” faltered Jessie sadly; “but it must be only as cousins.”

“And why?” said the young man sternly.

“Because,” said Jessie, laying her hand upon his arm, “I’m only a very poor girl, Tom, and half educated.”

“What a wicked story, Jessie!” cried Mrs Shingle, who had her apron to her eyes, but now spoke up indignantly – “why, you write beautiful!”

“And,” continued Jessie, “your father – my father would never consent to it; for I’m not a suitable choice for you to make.”

“Why, Jessie,” cried the young man, “you talk like a persecuted young lady in a book. What nonsense! Uncle Richard, if he felt sure that I should make you a good husband, would consent. And, as to my step-father – ”

“Now, look here, you two,” said Mrs Shingle, “it’s important that Jessie should get to the warehouse with those things, and you’re stopping idling. It’s late as it is.”

“Come along, then,” cried Tom, seizing the parcel.

“No, no,” cried Jessie, who looked pale, and trembled.

“No, indeed; he must not go with you,” said Mrs Shingle.

“Don’t be cruel, aunt,” said Tom appealingly. “I don’t like Jessie to go by herself.”

“There, then, she’s not going by herself; I’m going with her,” exclaimed Mrs Shingle.

“Then let me go instead.”

“No, no,” cried Jessie, getting agitated; “you must not.”

“You have some reason, Jessie,” said Tom, looking at her suspiciously.

“No, no, Tom. Don’t look at me like that,” she cried.

“Then tell me why,” he said, sternly.

“The man at the warehouse made remarks last time you came,” said Jessie, hesitating.

“I’ll make marks and remarks on him, if he does,” cried Tom. “Aunt,” he continued angrily, “I can’t bear it. It’s not right for Jessie to go alone; and I don’t believe you were going. It makes me half mad to think that she may be insulted by some puppy or another, and I not be there to knock him down.”

“But no one will insult her, my boy,” said Mrs Shingle, looking at him admiringly.

“But people do, and have,” cried Tom, grinding his teeth. “She has told me so. Because she goes with a parcel through the streets, every unmanly rascal seems to consider she is fair game for him; and – hang it, aunt, I can’t help it! – if any scoundrel does it again, I’ll half kill him!”

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