

Fenn George Manville

# One Maid's Mischief



**George Fenn**  
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# Fenn George Manville

## One Maid's Mischief

### Volume One – Chapter One.

#### One of her Victims

Seven o'clock in the morning, and *chee-op – chee-op – chee-op – chirrup – pee-yew*— a splendid thrush waking the echoes with his loud notes; the blackbirds down in the copse whistling a soft love-song to their silent mates, waiting in their cup-like nests for the first chip of the blotched eggs; Coelebs, the chaffinch, pouring down tinkling strains from the pink-blossomed apple-trees; while the larks high above the young corn and clover, twittered their joyous hymn in rivalling accord to the May-morning sun. The dew lay heavy and cold upon the tawny, sweet-scented wallflowers, and the freshness of feeling in the shade whispered that the silvery whiteness of their hues was not far removed from frost.

So thought the Reverend Arthur Rosebury, as he stood contemplating the flower-beds in front of the quaint old Rectory, whose windows were framed in the opening blossoms of a huge snaky-stemmed wistaria, one of which windows – his own – was wide open, and had been for an hour, while its fellow over the

little drawing-room was delicately draped in snowy dimity.

Geraniums formed the subject of the Reverend Arthur's contemplation as he stood upon the closely-shaven, dewy lawn; and he had just come to the conclusion that he had better wait another week before filling his beds with the scarlet trusses, when there was the sharp sound of brass rings upon a rod. The dimity curtains were drawn aside, the casement window was opened and carefully hooked back, and the kit-cat living portrait of a pleasant plump little woman of about forty appeared in the frame.

"Arthur, I'm sure you are getting your feet wet," she chirped.

The tall, very thin curate of Little Magnus looked dreamily up at the window, and then down at his feet, stooping a good deal to obtain a nearer view. Slowly rising, he looked up at the window again, took off his soft felt hat, smoothed his thin grey hair, and said slowly:

"No, my dear, I think not."

"But I'm sure you must be, Arthur; it's a very heavy dew?" cried the little lady, emphatically.

"Yes, my dear Mary," he replied, in a slow, deprecating way, "it is a very heavy dew, but I have got on my goloshes."

"Ho!" exclaimed the little lady, and she disappeared.

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury began to make a peculiar humming noise, somewhat suggestive of a large bumble-bee trying to practise a chant, which was his idea of singing, and was walking slowly off towards a laurel-shaded walk when the little lady once more appeared at the window.

“Arthur!”

“Yes, my dear Mary?”

“Don’t you go far away; breakfast won’t be long.”

“No, my dear Mary.”

“Where shall you be?”

“Down by the bees.”

“You’ll come when I whistle?”

“Yes, my dear Mary.”

The lady disappeared once more, and the curate of Little Magnus went slowly and deliberately down the garden of the Rectory, where he had been for many years resident; the wealthy rector, who was a canon of Dunchester, finding a sermon or two a year nearly all he could give to the little parish.

The bees were visited, both those dwelling in the round-topped, old-fashioned straw hives and the occupants of the modern square boxes, cunningly contrived to enable the proprietor to commit honied burglaries without adding bee-murder to the offence.

The bees were as busy as those immortalised by Dr Watts, and coming and going in the bright sunshine, making a glorious hum in a snowy cherry-tree close at hand, and suggesting to the curate’s mind ample supplies of the cloying sweet, about five hundredweights of which he hoped to sell at a shilling a pound.

The Reverend Arthur went slowly away, smiling in his heart – he rarely smiled visibly – happy and thankful for his lot; opened the white gate in the tall green hedge, and after closing

it carefully, began to walk across the drenched grass, a couple of soft-eyed, mousy-skinned Alderney cows slowly raising their heads to stare at him, munching the grass the while, and then coming to meet him, lowing softly.

“Ah, Dewnose! Ah, Bessy,” he said, pulling the great flapping ears of each in turn, and inhaling the puffs of warm, sweet-scented breath as he passed, the cows watching him for a few moments, and then, evidently thinking fresh dewy grass preferable to the best of curates, they resumed their quiet “crop crop” of the verdant meal.

The meadow crossed, another gate led back into the garden, where a long glass-house stood with open door inviting the Reverend Arthur to enter and breathe the warm, deliciously-scented air. The sun was shining brightly and came in a shower of rays upon the red-bricked floor, broken up as it were by the silvery shoots of the vines whose leaves were fringed with drops of pearly dew.

A glance at the leafy roof displayed so much attention needed that the Reverend Arthur, after a little contemplation and a few moral comparisons between the wild growth of the vine and that of the young and old of the parish, slowly took off his coat, lifted a heavy plank and placed it across two of the iron rafter-ties of the building; and after satisfying himself of its safety, mounting a pair of steps, climbing on to the plank, and seating himself in a very unclerical attitude, he began to snap off the redundant branches of the vine.

“Chirrup!” went a shrill whistle as the first branch was snapped, but the Reverend Arthur heard it not, and in a rapt, dreamy manner went on snapping off at their joints branch after branch just beyond where the young bunches of grapes were beginning to show.

“Chirrup!” went the whistle again, but still unheard, for the Reverend Arthur had just placed one of the succulent branches he had broken off between his lips, and, as if imitating the ways of Dewnose and Bessy, he was sedately munching away at the pleasant acid growth.

“Chirrup!” again, but this time in another direction, and, perfectly unconscious of the summons, the Reverend Arthur went on with his pruning, breakfasting the while off the tender acid shoots.

Chirrup after chirrup mingled with the songs of the birds, and at last the bustling little figure of the lady lately seen at the Rectory window appeared at the door.

“Why, here you are Arthur!” she exclaimed. “What a shame it is! You said you’d be down by the bees.”

“I’m – I’m very sorry, my dear Mary,” said the guilty truant, with a look of appeal in his face.

“That’s what you always say, sir, and here is the ham getting cold, the eggs will be quite hard, and I’ve got my feet soaking wet running all over the place.”

“I really am very sorry, my dear Mary,” said the Reverend Arthur, slowly descending from his perch.

“I never did see such a man,” cried the little lady, with her pleasant face a droll mixture of vexation and good-humour.

As she spoke she took up the curate’s long coat, and held it ready for him to put on, tip-toeing to enable him to thrust his long thin arms into the sleeves, and then tip-toeing a little more to reach up and give him a hearty kiss.

“There, I won’t be very cross,” she cried, “only there never was such a thoughtless, tiresome man before. Just look at your hands!”

“It’s only vine-juice, my dear Mary,” he said, looking at his long thin fingers in turn.

“Well, come along. You will have time to go and wash them while I change my shoes and stockings. Just look there.”

Miss Mary Rosebury made no hesitation about drawing her grey cloth dress aside to display a very prettily-shaped pair of feet and ankles, soaked with dew and muddied by the garden paths, before taking her brother, as it were, into custody and leading him up to the house.

Five minutes later they were in the prettily-furnished dining-room, before a most temptingly spread breakfast-table, where everything was clean and neat as the home of an old bachelor, tended by a maiden sister, might be expected to be. There were flowers and hand-painted screens; the linen was snowy white, and the eggs, and butter, and cream were as delicious as the coffee.

The morning prayers were read in presence of Cook and Jane;

then the coffee was poured out in a dark amber stream, and for the first time the Reverend Arthur smiled.

“Really, my dear Mary,” he said, “I don’t think any two people could be happier than we are.”

“Than we should be if you would not do such foolish things, Arthur,” said the little lady, sharply.

“Foolish things, my dear?” he replied, rather blankly.

“Yes, foolish things. I don’t mind your being so fond of your garden and natural history, but it doesn’t look becoming for you to come back as you did yesterday, with a bunch of weeds in one hand, a bundle of mosses in the other, and your hat pinned all over with butterflies. The people think you half mad.”

“But I had no pill-boxes, my dear Mary, and Thompson, of the Entomological, asked me to get him some of the large sulphurs.”

“Then I wish Thompson, of the Entomological, would come down and catch his butterflies himself. Give me a bit more fat.”

“For my part I should never wish to change.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said the elderly lady, slowly, as she made a very hearty breakfast. “Little Magnus is very nice and the garden very pretty, but there seems to be a something wanting. Tilt the dish and give me a little more of that gravy, Arthur. Why don’t you pass your cup?”

“And yet we have an abundance of the good things of this life, Mary, that we could not enjoy in a town.”

“Ye-es,” said the little lady, dubiously; “but still there seems to be a something wanting.”

“I think we shall have plenty of honey this year, my dear Mary.”

“So we did last year, Arthur.”

“The mushrooms are coming on very fast in the pit. By the way, what did you do with those Saint George’s agarics I brought home yesterday?”

“Threw them away.”

“My dear Mary!”

“And the best thing too, Arthur. Now, once for all, mushrooms are mushrooms; but I’m not going to have you poison yourself nor me neither with all kinds of toadstools, to gratify your love of experiment.”

The curate sighed, and there came a pause, broken by Miss Mary Rosebury saying:

“Yes, I suppose we ought to be perfectly contented, and I think I am; but sometimes it seems a pity that we should always go on like this without any change. Oh, here’s Brown.”

# **Volume One – Chapter Two.**

## **A Dangerous Visitor**

Miss Mary Rosebury left her chair at the breakfast-table and hurried out to the rose-covered porch as a heavy step was heard upon the gravel; and directly after a sturdy-looking man, with half-a-dozen leather bags slung from his shoulder, appeared at the door.

“Fine morning, miss. Two letters – three letters – four letters. ‘Stan’ard,’ ‘Gar’ner’s Chronkle,’ ‘Beekeep’s Junnel;’ that’s all, miss;” and before the little lady had had time to speak, the heavy step was receding over the gravel. “Four letters for you, Arthur. Shall I open them?”

“Please, my dear Mary,” said the Reverend Arthur, without evincing the slightest interest in the arrival of the post, for he was carefully filling up the holes in some well-made dry toast with the freshest of fresh butter.

Miss Mary Rosebury laid the letters upon the table while she fished a spectacle-case from her pocket, balanced her glasses upon her rather decided-looking nose, gave the two little bunches of curls on either side of her white forehead a shake, and opened the first letter, reading aloud:

“‘Messrs Spindle and Twist beg to call your attention to a very curious sherry, and’ – um – um – um – um – Ah! you don’t want

to lay down sherry, do you, Arthur?"

"No, my dear Mary," said her brother; and letter number two was opened.

"Mr Hazelton is now prepared to make advances upon personal security to the clergy, gentry – 'Bah! money-lenders!" exclaimed Miss Mary Rosebury, throwing aside the second letter. "I wish these people wouldn't bore us with their applications. What's this?"

As she spoke she took up a large blue official-looking envelope.

"Looks important, my dear Mary," said the Rev. Arthur, displaying a little more interest.

"Yes," said his sister, turning the letter over. "Oh! Arthur, suppose it means preferment at last – a vicarage somewhere."

"I don't think I should be very much pleased, my dear Mary. I am very happy here."

"Oh, yes, of course we are, Arthur; but as I have often said, there does seem to be a something wanting, and – 'The directors of the New Polwheedle and Verity Friendship Tin Mining' – Oh, dear, dear, just as if we had money to throw down Cornish mines. What's this? I don't know this hand. There's a crest upon the envelope, and 'H.B.' in the corner. Oh! it's from Doctor Bolter."

"Postmark Penang?" said the Reverend Arthur. "Wondered I had not heard from him."

"No, it's from London. Let me see. All about specimens, I suppose."

My Dear Rosebury, —

I'm in England for a month or two, and am coming down to see you and chat over old times. Don't make any fuss, old fellow! Bed on a sofa will do for an old campaigner like me. I've got business your way — to see some young ladies at Mayleyfield — daughters of two people out in the Peninsula. Been educated at home, and I am going to be their escort back. Nuisance, but must do it; expect me to-morrow.

*Yours very truly, —*

*Harry Bolter.*

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury.

“Why, Arthur, he's coming here!”

“Yes, my dear. I'm very glad!”

“But to-day, Arthur! What shall I do?”

“Do, my dear Mary? Nothing! Bolter never wants anything done for him, unless he's very much altered, and I don't think he will be.”

“But the young ladies at Mayleyfield? Why that must be at Miss Twettenham's establishment!”

“Very probably, my dear!” said the Reverend Arthur, getting up to walk up and down the room. “I shall be very, very glad to see Harry Bolter. I wonder whether he has brought any specimens?”

“To be sure, I've heard that the Misses Twettenham have several young ladies there whose parents are in India.”

“Not India, my dear. Henry Bolter has been in the Malay

Peninsula. He was at Singapore and then at Penang.”

“And the house in such a terrible muddle!” exclaimed Miss Mary. “Whatever shall I do?”

“What a little world this is,” said the Reverend Arthur. “How strange that Henry Bolter should, so to speak, have friends as near as Mayleyfield!”

“Oh, Arthur, Arthur, you really have no thought whatever! To-day is baking day!”

“I am very glad, my dear Mary! Henry Bolter was always, I remember, fond of new bread. We used to call him Hot-roll Bolter at college.”

“Arthur!”

“Yes, my dear Mary.”

“I really am thankful that you never married! You would have worried any reasonable woman into her grave!”

“I am very sorry. I hope not, my dear Mary! I think if I had ever seen any lady I should have liked to call my wife, my whole study would have been to make her happy!”

“Yes, yes, my dear Arthur!” said the little petulant lady, placing her hands upon her tall, thin brother’s shoulders once more to pull him down to be kissed, “I know you would; but you are so tiresome.”

“I’m – I’m afraid I am, my dear Mary. I think sometimes that I must be very stupid.”

“Nonsense, Arthur; you are not. You are one of the best and cleverest of men; but you do get so lost in your studies that you

forget all ordinary troubles of life. Why, there, actually you have come down this morning without any shirt-collar.”

“Have I? Have I, Mary?” said the Reverend Arthur, looking hastily in a glass. “How very foolish of me! I was anxious to get down, I suppose.”

“What we are to do for dinner I don’t know!” exclaimed Miss Mary. “The butcher won’t kill till the day after to-morrow.”

“Chickens,” suggested her brother.

“You can’t feed men always on chickens, Arthur.”

“No, no, my dear; but Henry Bolter has been a great deal in the East; and you might do a deal with chickens.”

“Oh, I know, Arthur,” said the little lady, pettishly. “Roast and boiled.”

“And curried! Bolter is sure to like curry.”

“And then grumble at it, and say it is not as good as he gets abroad. You never have anything in the garden either!”

“I have some very fine asparagus, my dear Mary.”

“Ah, well, that’s something.”

“And some forced rhubarb.”

“I could use that too. But really it is too bad to take one so by surprise. Men are so unreasonable!”

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury took a turn or two up and down the room, with a troubled look in his face, ending by stopping short before his sister.

“I – I am very sorry, my dear Mary,” he said. “Can I help you a little?”

“What by getting in the way, Arthur?” said the little lady, pettishly. “Nonsense! stuff!”

He smoothed his long, thin, closely-shaven face with one hand, gazing pensively at his sister.

“I – I used to be very fond of Henry Bolter,” he said, in a hesitating way.

“Why?” she said sharply. “I don’t believe in these very warm friendships between men!”

“It was when our father died, Mary, more than twenty years ago; and for want of a hundred pounds I thought I should have to leave college.”

“Yes?” said the little lady, sharply.

“Henry Bolter found it out, and he forced the money into my hand.”

“He did?”

“Yes, my dear Mary, and he never would let me pay it back again.”

“But didn’t you try, Arthur?”

“Four times over, my dear Mary; but he always sent the money back to me in a letter with only one word in it.”

“And what was that?”

There was a dry, half-pitiful smile in the Reverend Arthur’s face as he replied, gazing fixedly the while at his sister:

“Beast!”

“What, Arthur?”

“He said ‘beast.’ He met me afterwards, and vowed he would

never speak to me again if I alluded to the money, which he said was a gift; and it has never been repaid to this day.”

“Beast!” ejaculated Miss Mary, thoughtfully.

“Yes, my dear Mary, but I have that sum put away, ready for him to take when he will.”

“Of course,” said Miss Rosebury thoughtfully.

“And I should like to give Harry Bolter a warm welcome when he comes, Mary; not a welcome of corn and wine, oil, olive and honey, Mary – but a welcome from the heart, such as would please him more.”

“My dear Arthur,” cried the little lady, throwing her arms round her brother’s lank, spare form, “you mustn’t notice my crotchety ways, I’m getting an old woman – a fidgety old maid. Dr Bolter shall have as warm a welcome as I can give.”

“I knew it sister,” he said tenderly embracing her; and it was very foolish, but the eyes of both were wet with tears as the little lady snatched herself away.

“There, Arthur, now go, and don’t you come near me again except to bring me the asparagus and rhubarb, for I shall be as busy as a bee. There’s the doctor’s room to prepare.”

“No; let him have mine.”

“What, with all that litter of dried plants and flies?”

“Just what he would like.”

“There, go away.”

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury was about to say something more, but his sister checked him, and in a thoughtful dreamy

way, he went slowly out into the garden, where at the end of ten minutes he had forgotten rhubarb, asparagus, even the coming of Dr Bolter, for the sun had shone out very hot, and the bees in the fourth hive beginning from the top were threatening to swarm.

# **Volume One – Chapter Three.**

## **The Young Ladies**

“The Firlawns, Mayleyfield, educational establishment for the daughters of officers and gentlemen in the Indian civil service, conducted by the Misses Twettenham,” as it said in the old circulars, for none were ever issued now. Thirty years of the care of young people, committed to their charge by parents compelled to reside in the East, had placed the Misses Twettenham beyond the need of circular or other advertising advocate. For it was considered a stroke of good fortune by Indian and other officials if vacancies could be found at the Firlawns for their daughters; in fact the Misses Twettenham might have doubled their numbers and their prices too, but they were content to keep on in their old conservative way, enjoying the confidence of their patrons, and really acting the parts of mothers to the young ladies committed to their charge.

It was a difficult task as well as an onerous one, this care of girls from the ages of ten or twelve up to even twenty and one-and-twenty, especially when it is taken into consideration that, whatever the emergency, the parents would be in India, China, or the Eastern islands – one or two months’ distance by letter, sometimes more.

It was not often that there were troubles, though, at the

Firlawns, for the Misses Twettenham's was a kindly as well as rigid rule. Sickness of course there was from time to time. Sadder still, they had had deaths; but there were times when some young lady of more than ordinary volatility would try to assert herself and resent the bonds that the elderly sisters insisted upon tying round her and keeping her back.

There were occasionally handsome curates at Mayleyfield. There was a particularly good-looking young doctor's assistant once in the town; and at times Squire Morden's soldier and sailor sons would return home for a short stay, when a misguided pupil would form a most hopeless attachment, and even go so far as to receive a smuggled note.

Woe be to her if she did! It was sure to be discovered; and if such a course was persisted in the doom was certain. Transportation was the sentence. Word was sent to mamma and papa in India, China, or wherever they might be, and Miss Rebellious had to leave the school.

These were very, very rare cases, for there was scarcely a girl who did not look upon the elderly sisters as their best of friends; but such accidents had occurred, and there was trouble at the Firlawns now.

"Never," said Miss Twettenham to her sisters twain – "never, my dear Julia – never, my dear Maria, in the whole course of my experience, have I met with so determined, so obstinate a girl!"

"She is very beautiful," said Miss Julia.

"And it promises to be a fatal gift," said Miss Maria.

“Yes,” said the eldest Miss Twettenham; “and if it were not for the letter we have received saying that Dr Bolter was coming to fetch her away, I should certainly have been compelled to insist upon her being recalled.”

“I don’t think she means harm, dear Hannah,” said Miss Maria.

“No young lady brought up here could mean harm, Maria,” said Miss Twettenham, severely; “but to witness in her such a terrible display of – of – of – I really cannot find a word.”

“Coquetry,” suggested Miss Julia.

“Well, coquetry,” said Miss Twettenham, taking the word unwillingly, as if it were too bad to touch. “It is a terrible love of admiration!”

“What did she say, Hannah, when you spoke to her?”

“Laughed, my dear, in the most barefaced way, and said that it was all nonsense.”

“But that dreadful half-haughty, half-shy way in which she looked at him!” said Miss Maria.

“And she almost smiled,” said Miss Julia.

“Quite smiled!” said Miss Twettenham, severely. “I saw her smile at him; and then, when he lifted his hat, she raised her eyes and stared at him in a haughty, astonished way, as if she had never given him the slightest encouragement.”

“It is very shocking,” murmured Miss Maria.

“But I think she blushed a little,” remonstrated Miss Julia, as if to try and find some slight extenuating circumstance for the

benefit of the most handsome pupil at the Firlawns.

“That I deny!” exclaimed Miss Twettenham. “It was only the reflection from the lining of her sunshade! I repeat it, sisters; I am very – very glad she is going away!”

“So am I,” said Miss Julia; “and yet I am sorry, for she is a very beautiful girl, and I am sure she is affectionate.”

“What is beauty without ballast, my dear Julia? or affection that goes floating about like a gossamer without a stay?” said Miss Twettenham severely, and her sisters sighed.

“I consider it most reprehensible. And now I think we will have her down.”

The three grey, elderly ladies seated themselves in three stiff-backed, uneasy chairs, wool-worked by former pupils; and as soon as they had settled themselves in severe attitudes, Miss Twettenham gave a long wool-worked bell-pull a decided tug.

The bell was answered by a quiet, elderly manservant in a neat livery.

“Send word to Fräulein Webling’s room that we wish to see Miss Perowne and Miss Stuart,” said Miss Twettenham; and after sitting in frigid silence for a few minutes, the two young ladies were ushered into the presence of the principals.

There was a marked contrast between the girls, one being tall, with a finely-shaped oval face, dark hair, and peculiarly lustrous eyes, fringed by long black lashes; the other decidedly *petite*, with the clear skin, blue-grey eyes, and fair hair suggestive of the North.

The dark girl was perfectly composed, and walked over the well-worn carpet with an easy, graceful carriage, and a look of languid indifference, far from being shared by her companion, whose cheeks were flushed as she darted an uneasy look at the three sisters in turn.

The young ladies evidently expected to be asked to take chairs, but the words were not forthcoming; and after advancing a few paces, they stopped short in the midst of a chilling silence, the three sisters sitting very upright with mittened hands crossed in a peculiar way about the region of the waist of their old-fashioned dresses.

The dark girl, after a languid glance round, gave her shapely shoulders a slight shrug before half closing her eyes, and gazing through the tall, blank window at a scaly araucaria upon the lawn.

At last Miss Twettenham spoke:

“Miss Stuart,” she began, in chilling tones and with great deliberation, “speaking for myself and sisters, I must say that I sadly regret that we are under the necessity of drawing you into the discussion that is about to take place.”

“But, at the same time, my dear,” continued Miss Julia, in precisely the same formal tone, “we wish to tell you that we exonerate you from all blame in the matter.”

“And,” concluded Miss Maria, “we are glad to say that your conduct since you have been under our care has been all that could be desired.”

The fair girl made a half step forward, her eyes filling with

tears, and one hand was involuntarily raised, as if she would have liked to place it in that of the last speaker; but the three sisters drew themselves up a little more rigidly, and, as if in concert, drew in a long breath.

The dark girl smiled faintly and looked bored.

“It is an unpleasant thing for you to do, Miss Stuart, to have to bear witness against your schoolfellow and companion,” resumed Miss Twettenham, her sisters tightening their lips as if to rigidly keep in the indignation they felt, and to subdue their desire to interrupt their elder, who, by right of seniority, was the principal spokeswoman upon such occasions.

The dark girl raised her eyebrows slightly, and the corners of her well-shaped mouth twitched, and were drawn down in a provokingly attractive manner.

“Will you kindly inform me, Miss Twettenham,” she said, in a low, sweet voice, full of *hauteur*, “why I am to be subjected to this examination? Of what am I accused?”

“Why, you know!” exclaimed Miss Maria, excitedly. “Of smiling at a man, miss!” and she seemed to shudder with indignant protest.

“My dear Maria,” exclaimed Miss Twettenham, severely, “you forget.”

“I beg your pardon, my dear Hannah!” exclaimed the younger sister, and she drew herself up and tightened her lips more and more.

“I had intended to have approached the subject with more

de – I mean caution,” continued Miss Twettenham; “but since my sister has spoken out so plainly, I will only say that your conduct yesterday, Miss Perowne, places me under the necessity of confining your future walks to the garden.”

“My conduct?” said the girl, turning her dark eyes full upon the speaker.

“Your conduct, Miss Helen Perowne,” said the elder lady austerely. “It has for months past been far from in accordance with that we expect from the young ladies placed by their parents in our charge; but yesterday it culminated in the smile and look of intelligence we saw pass between you and that tall, fair gentleman who has of late haunted the outskirts of this place. I think I have your approval in what I say?” she added, turning to her sisters, who both bowed stiffly, and became more rigid than before.

“Such conduct is worse than unbecoming. It is unladylike to a degree, and what is more, displays so great a want of womanly dignity and self-respect that I am reluctantly compelled to say that we feel our endeavours to instil a right moral tone and thoroughly decorous idea of a young lady’s duties to have been thrown away.”

There was a slight twitching of the corners of the mouth and an involuntary shrugging of the shoulders here.

“You are aware, Miss Perowne, that your papa has requested us to resign you to the care of his friend, Dr Bolter, and that in a short time you will cease to be our pupil; but still, while you stay at the Firlawns, we must exact a rigid obedience to our rules,

and, as I have said, your liberty must be sadly curtailed while you are in our charge.”

“As you please,” said the girl, indifferently.

“You do not deny your fault, then?”

“No,” said the girl, without turning her eyes from the window.

“Who was this gentleman – I should say, who is this gentleman?”

“I really do not know,” said the girl, turning from the window now with a careless look in her eyes, as if of wonder that she should be asked such a question.

“Have you had any epistolary communication?” said Miss Twettenham, sternly.

“Not the slightest,” said the girl, coldly; and then she added, after a pause, “If I had I should not have told you!”

“Miss Perowne!” exclaimed the eldest Miss Twettenham, indignantly.

“Miss Twettenham,” exclaimed the girl, drawing herself up, and with a flash from her dark eyes full of defiance, “you forget that I am no longer a child. It has suited my father’s purpose to have me detained here among school-children until he found a suitable escort for my return to the East; but I am a woman. As to that absurd episode, it is beneath my notice.”

“Beneath your notice!” exclaimed Miss Twettenham, while her sisters looked astounded.

The fair girl laid her hand upon her companion’s arm, but Helen Perowne snatched hers away.

“I say beneath my notice. A foolish young man thinks proper to stare at me and raises his hat probably at the whole school.”

“At you, Miss Helen Perowne – at you!” exclaimed Miss Twettenham.

“Possibly,” said the girl, carelessly, as the flash died out of her eyes, her lids drooped, and she let her gaze wander to the window.

“I can scarcely tell you how grieved – how hurt we feel,” continued Miss Twettenham, “to find that a young lady who has for so many years enjoyed the – the care, the instruction, the direction of our establishment, should have set so terrible an example to her fellow-pupils.”

The girl shrugged her shoulders again slightly, and her face assumed a more indifferent air.

“The time that you have to stay here, Miss Perowne, is very short,” continued the speaker; “but while you do stay it will be under rigid supervision. You may now retire to your room.”

The girl turned away, and was walking straight out of the room, but years of lessons in deportment asserted themselves, and from sheer habit she turned by the door to make a stately courtesy, frowning and biting her lip directly after as if from annoyance, and passing out with the grace and proud carriage of an Eastern queen.

“Stop, Miss Stuart,” said Miss Twettenham, as Helen Perowne’s companion was about to follow. “I wish to say a few words to you before you go – not words of anger, my dear child, for the only pain we have suffered through you is in hearing the

news that you are so soon to go.”

“Oh, Miss Twettenham,” exclaimed the girl, hurrying to take the extended hands of the schoolmistress, but to find herself pressed to the old lady’s heart, an embrace which she received in turn from Miss Julia and Miss Maria.

“We have long felt that it must soon come, my dear,” chirped Miss Maria.

“Yes, dear,” said Miss Julia, in a prattling way. “You’ve done scolding now, sister, have you not?”

“Yes,” said Miss Twettenham; “but I wish to speak seriously for a minute or two, and the present seems a favourable opportunity for Grey Stuart to hear.”

The younger sisters placed the fair young girl in a chair between them, and each held a hand, while Miss Twettenham drew herself up stiffly, hemmed twice, and began:

“My dear Miss Stuart – I – I – Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!”

The poor old lady burst into a violent fit of sobbing as she rose from her seat, for nature was stronger than the stiff varnish of art with which she was encrusted; and holding her handkerchief to her eyes, she crossed the little space between them, and sank down upon her knees before Grey Stuart, passing her arms round her and drawing her to her breast.

For a few minutes nothing was heard in the stiff old-fashioned drawing-room but suppressed sobs, for the younger sisters wept in concert, and the moist contagion extended to Grey Stuart, whose tears fell fast.

There was no buckram stiffness in Miss Twettenham's words when she spoke again, but a very tender, affectionate shake in her voice.

"It is very weak and foolish, my dear," she said, "but we were all very much upset; for there is something so shocking in seeing one so young and beautiful as Helen Perowne deliberately defy the best of advice, and persist in going on in her own wilful way. We are schoolmistresses, my dear Grey, and I know we are very formal and stiff; but though we have never been married ladies to have little children of our own, I am sure we have grown to love those placed in our care, so that often and often, when some pupil has been taken away to go to those far-off burning lands, it has been to us like losing a child."

"Yes – yes," sobbed the younger sisters in concert.

"And now, my dear Grey, I think I can speak a little more firmly. You are a woman grown now, my dear, and I hope feel with us in our trouble."

"Indeed – indeed I do!" exclaimed Grey, eagerly.

"I know you do, my darling, so now listen. You know how sweet a jewel is a woman's modesty, and how great a safeguard is her innocency? I need say little to you of yourself, now that you are going far across the sea; but we, my sisters and I, pray earnestly for your help in trying to exercise some influence over Helen's future. You will be together, and I know what your example will be; but still I shudder as I think of what her future is to be, out there at some station where ladies are so few that

they all get married as soon as they go out.”

This was rather an incongruous ending to Miss Twettenham’s speech, but the old lady’s eyes bespoke her trouble, and she went on:

“It seems to me, my dear, that, with her love of admiration, she will be like a firebrand in the camp, and I shudder when I think of what Mr Perowne will say, when I’m sure, sisters, we have striven our very best.”

“Indeed, indeed we have.”

“Then we can do no more,” sighed Miss Twettenham, who now smiled in a very pleasant, motherly way. “There, Grey, my dear, I am not going to cross-examine you about this naughty child, and we will say no more now. Some tender young plants grow as they are trained, and some persist in growing wild. I tremble for our handsome pupil, and shall often wonder in the future how she fares, but promise me that you will be to her the best of friends.”

“Indeed I will,” said Grey earnestly.

“It will be a thankless office,” said Miss Julia.

“And cause you many a heartache, Grey Stuart,” said Miss Maria.

“Yes, but Grey Stuart will not pay heed to that when she knows it is her duty,” said Miss Twettenham, smiling. “Leave us now, my dear; we must have a quiet talk about Helen, and our arrangements while she stays. Good-bye, my child.”

The *good-bye* on the old lady’s lips was a genuine God be with

you, and an affectionate kiss touched Grey Stuart's cheek, as she left the room, fluttered and in trouble about her schoolfellow, as the prophetic words of her teachers kept repeating themselves in her ears.

# **Volume One – Chapter Four.**

## **Dr Bolter's Question**

“Dr Bolter, ma'am,” said the elderly manservant, seeking Miss Twettenham the next afternoon, as she was sunning herself in a favourite corner of the garden, where a large heavily-backed rustic seat stood against the red-brick wall.

The pupils were out walking with her two sisters – all save Helen Perowne and Grey Stuart, who were prisoners; and Miss Twettenham was just wondering how it was that a little tuft of green, velvety moss should have fallen from the wall upon her cap, when the old serving-man came up.

“Dr Bolter! Dear me! So soon!” exclaimed the old lady, glancing at Helen Perowne, book in hand, walking up and down the lawn, while Grey Stuart was at some little distance, tying up the blossoms of a flower.

Miss Twettenham entered the drawing-room, and then stood gazing in wonder at the little plump, brisk-looking man, with a rosy face, in spite of the deep bronze to which it was burned by exposure to the sun and air.

He was evidently about seven or eight and forty, but full of life and energy; a couple of clear grey eyes looking out from beneath a pair of rather shaggy eyebrows – for his face was better supplied with hirsute appendages than his head – a large portion of which

was very white and smooth, seeming to be polished to the highest pitch, and contrasting strangely with his sunbrowned face.

As Miss Twettenham entered, the little doctor was going on tiptoe, with open hands, towards the window, where he dexterously caught a large fly, and after placing it conveniently between the finger and thumb of his left hand, he drew a lens from his waistcoat pocket, and began examining his prize.

“Hum! Yes,” he said, in a low, thoughtful tone, “decided similarity in the trunk. Eyes rather larger. Intersection of – I beg your pardon! Miss Twettenham?”

The lady bowed, and looked rather dignified. Catching flies and examining them in her drawing-room by means of a lens was an unusual proceeding, especially when there were so many much worthier objects for examination in the shape of pupils’ drawings and needlework about the place.

Miss Twettenham softened though directly, for the manners of Dr Bolter were, she owned, perfect. Nothing could have been more gentlemanly than the way in which he waited for her to be seated, and then, after a chatty introduction, came to the object of his visit.

“You see, my dear madam, it happens so opportunely my being in England. Perowne and Stuart are both old friends and patients, and of course they did not like the idea of their daughters being entrusted to comparative strangers.”

“So you will be friend, guardian, and medical attendant all in one?” said Miss Twettenham, smiling.

“Exactly,” said the little doctor. “I have never seen them; they are quite schoolgirls – children, I suppose?”

“Ye-es,” said Miss Twettenham, who had a habit of measuring a young lady’s age by its distance from her own, “they are very young.”

“No joke of a task, my dear madam, undertaking the charge of two young ladies – and I hope from my heart they are too young and plain to be attractive – make it difficult for me.”

There was a bright red spot on each of Miss Twettenham’s cheeks, and she replied with a little hesitation:

“They are both young, and you will find in Miss Stuart a young lady of great sweetness and promise.”

“Glad to hear it, my dear madam. Her father is a very dry Scot, very quaint and parsimonious, but a good fellow at heart.”

“Most punctual in his payments,” said Miss Twettenham, with dignity.

“Oh, of course, of course!” said Dr Bolter. “More so, I’ll be bound, than Perowne.”

“Mr Perowne is not so observant of dates as Mr Stuart, I must own, Dr Bolter,” said Miss Twettenham.

“No, my dear madam; but he is as rich as a Jew. Very good fellow, Perowne?”

Miss Twettenham bowed rather stiffly.

“Well, my dear madam, I am not going to rob you of your pupils for several weeks yet, but I should like to make their acquaintance and get them a little used to me before we start on

our long voyage.”

“They are in the garden, Dr Bolter,” said Miss Twettenham, rising. “I will have them sent for – or would you – ”

“Like to join them in the garden? Most happy!”

Miss Twettenham led the way towards a handsome conservatory, through which there was a flight of steps descending to the lawn.

“Dear me! ah, yes!” exclaimed the doctor. “Very nice display of flowers! Would you allow me? My own collections in the jungle – passiflora – convolvulaciae – acacia.”

He drew some dry seeds from his pocket, and placed them in the old lady’s hand, she taking them with a smile and a bow; after which they descended to the soft, velvety, well-kept lawn.

“Most charming garden!” said the doctor – “quite a little paradise! but no Eves – no young ladies!”

“They are all taking their afternoon walk except Miss Stuart and Miss Perowne,” replied the old lady. “Oh!”

She uttered a sharp ejaculation as a stone struck her upon the collarbone and then fell at the doctor’s feet, that gentleman picking it up with one hand as he adjusted his double eyeglass with the other.

“Hum! ha!” he said drily. “We get our post very irregularly out in the East; but they don’t throw the letters at us over the wall.”

Miss Twettenham’s hands trembled as she hastily snatched the stone, to which a closely-folded note was attached by an india-rubber band, from the Doctor’s hands.

“What will he think of our establishment?” mentally exclaimed the poor little old lady, as she glanced at the superscription, and saw that it was for Helen Perowne. “I have never had such a thing occur since Miss Bainbridge was sent away.”

“So Miss Perowne receives notes thrown to her over the garden wall, eh?” said the little doctor severely.

“Indeed, Dr Bolter – I assure you – I am shocked – I hardly know – the young ladies have been kept in – I only discovered –”

“Hum!” ejaculated the doctor, frowning. “I am rather surprised. Let me see,” he continued. “I suppose that fair-haired girl stooping over the flower-bed yonder is Miss Perowne, eh?”

“My sight is failing,” stammered Miss Twettenham, who was terribly agitated at the untoward incident; “but your description answers to Miss Stuart.”

“And that’s Miss Stuart is it? Hum! Too far off to see what she is like. Then I suppose that tall dark girl on the seat is Miss Perowne?”

“Tall and dark – yes,” said Miss Twettenham, in an agitated way. “Is she sitting down? You said tall?”

“Hum! no,” said the doctor, balancing his glasses; “she is standing right on the top of the back of a seat, and seems to be looking over the garden wall.”

“Oh!”

“Bless my heart! Hum! Sham or real?” muttered the doctor.

Real enough, for the agitation had been too much for the poor

old lady, so proud of the reputation of her school. A note over the garden wall – a young lady looking over into the lane, perhaps in conversation with a man, and just when a stranger had arrived to act as escort for two finished pupils. It was too much.

For the first time for many years Miss Twettenham had fainted away.

# **Volume One – Chapter Five.**

## **A Very Nice Little Woman**

“Fainted dead away, Arthur; fainted dead away, Miss Rosebury; and until I shouted aloud there was my fair pussy peeping out of paradise over the wall to see if a young Adam was coming. Ha! ha! ha!”

“I am very much surprised, Dr Bolter,” said Miss Rosebury, severely; “I always thought the Miss Twettenham’s was a most strictly-conducted establishment?”

“So it is, my dear madam – so it is; but they’ve got one little black ewe lamb in the flock, and the old ladies told me that if my young lady had not been about to leave they’d have sent her away.”

“And very properly,” said Miss Rosebury, tightening her lips and slightly agitating her curls.

“And did the lady soon come to, Harry?” said the Reverend Arthur Rosebury, for he seemed to be much interested in his friend’s discourse over the dessert.

“Oh, yes, very soon. When I shouted, the dark nymph hopped off the garden-seat, and the fair one came running from the flowers, and we soon brought her to. Then I had a good look at the girls.”

Miss Rosebury’s rather pleasantly-shaped mouth was fast

beginning to assume the form of a thin red line, so tightly were her lips compressed.

“By George, sir! what a girl! A graceful Juno, sir; the handsomest woman I ever saw. I was staggered. Bless my soul, Miss Rosebury, here’s Perowne and here’s Stuart; they say to me, ‘You may as well take charge of my girl and see her safe back here,’ and being a good-natured sort of fellow – ”

“As you always were, Harry,” said the Reverend Arthur, beaming mildly upon his friend, while Miss Rosebury’s lips relaxed a little.

“All rubbish! Stuff, man! Well, I said *yes*, of course, and I imagined a couple of strips of schoolgirls that I could chat to, and tell them about the sea, and tie on their pinafores before breakfast and dinner, and give them a dose of medicine once a week; while here I am dropped in for being guardian to a couple of beautiful women – girls who will set our jungles on fire with their eyes, sir. By George, it’s a startler, sir, and no mistake.”

“Dr Bolter seems to be an admirer of female beauty,” said Miss Rosebury, rather drily.

“Not a bit of it, madam. By George, no! Ladies? Why, they have always seemed to be studies to me – objects of natural history. Very beautiful from their construction, and I shouldn’t have noticed these two only that, by George! I’ve got to take charge of them – deliver them safe and sound to their papas – with care – this side up; and the first thing I find is that they’ve got eyes that will drive our young fellows wild, and one of them

– the peep out of paradise one – knows it too. Nice job for a quiet old bachelor, eh?”

“You don’t tell us anything about yourself, Harry,” said the Reverend Arthur; and Miss Rosebury seemed a little more at her ease.

“Nothing to tell you, my boy. Claret? Yes, thanks. Have you such a thing as a lemon, Miss Rosebury?”

Miss Rosebury had, and as she rang she smiled with satisfaction at being able to supply the wants of the bright little man who had been so true a friend to her brother in the days gone by.

“Thank you, Miss Rosebury. Tumbler – water. Thanks. The lemon is, I think, the king of fruits, and invaluable to man. Deliciously acid, a marvellous quencher of thirst, a corrective, highly aromatic, a perfect boon. I would leave all the finest wines in the world for a lemon.”

“Then you believe all intoxicating drinks to be bad, doctor?” said Miss Rosebury, eagerly.

“Except whiskey, my dear madam,” said the doctor, with a twinkle of the eye.

“Ah!” said Miss Rosebury, and the eager smile upon her lips faded; but as she saw the zest with which the doctor rolled the lemon soft, and after cutting it in half, squeezed the juice and pulp into his glass, she relaxed a little, and directly afterwards began to beam, as the doctor suddenly exclaimed:

“There, madam, smell my hands! There’s scent! Talk of eau-

de-cologne, and millefleurs, and jockey club! Nothing to it! But come, Arthur, you don't tell me about yourself."

"About myself," said the Reverend Arthur, smiling blandly; "I have nothing to tell. You have seen my village; you have looked at my church; you have been through my garden; and you have had a rummage in my study. There is my life."

"A blessed one – a happy one, my dear Arthur. A perfect little home, presided over by a lady whose presence shows itself at every turn. Miss Rosebury," said the doctor, rising, "when I think of my own vagabond life, journeying here and there with my regiment through heat and cold, in civilisation and out, and after many wanderings, come back to this peaceful spot, this little haven of rest, I see what a happy man my old friend must be, and I envy him with all my heart."

He reseated himself, and Miss Rosebury's lips ceased to be compressed into a tight line; and as she smiled and nodded pleasantly, she glanced across at her brother, to see if he would speak, before replying that, pleasant as their home was, they had their troubles in the parish.

"And I have no end of trouble with Arthur," she continued. "He is so terribly forgetful!"

"He always was, my dear madam," said the little doctor. "If you wanted him to keep an appointment in the old college days you had to write it down upon eight pieces of paper, and place one in each of his pockets, and pin the eighth in his hat. Then you might, perhaps, see him at the appointed time."

“Oh, no, no, Harry! too bad – too bad!” murmured the Reverend Arthur, smiling and shaking his head.

“Well, really, Arthur,” said his sister, “I don’t think there is much exaggeration in what Dr Bolter says.”

“I am very sorry,” said the Reverend Arthur, meekly. “I suppose I am far from perfect.”

“My dear old boy, you are perfect enough. You are just right; and though your dear sister here gives you a good scolding sometimes, I’ll be bound to say she thinks you are the finest brother under the sun!”

Miss Rosebury left her chair with a very pleasant smile upon her lips, and a twinkling in the eyes that had the effect of making her look ten years younger.

“I am going into the drawing-room,” she said, in a quick little decided way. “Arthur, dear, I daresay Dr Bolter would like to smoke.”

“But, my dear madam, it would be profanity here.”

“Then you shall be profane, doctor,” said the little lady, nodding and smiling, “but don’t let Arthur smoke. He tried once before when he had a friend to dinner, and it made him feel very, very sick.”

The Reverend Arthur raised his eyebrows in a deprecating way, and then shook his head sadly.

“Then I will not lure him on to indulgence in such a bad habit, Miss Rosebury,” said the little doctor. “In fact, I feel that I ought not to indulge myself.”

“Well, I really think it is very shocking, doctor!” said Miss Rosebury, merrily. “You, a medical man, and you have confessed to a love for whiskey, and now for tobacco.”

“No, no; no, no!” he cried holding up his hands. “They are nauseous medicines that I take to do me good.”

“Indeed!” said the little lady, lingering in the room, and hanging about her brother’s chair as if loth to go; and there was a very sarcastic ring in her voice.

“Oh, be merciful, Miss Rosebury!” said the doctor, laughing. “I am only a weak man – a solitary wanderer upon the face of the earth! I have no pleasant home. I have no sister to keep house.”

“And keep you in order,” said the Reverend Arthur, smiling pleasantly.

“And to keep me in order!” cried the doctor. “Mine’s a hard life, Miss Rosebury, and with all a man’s vanity – a little man’s vanity, for we little men have a great deal of conceit to make up for our want of stature – I think I do deserve a few creature comforts.”

“Which you shall have while you stay, doctor; so now light your cigar, for I’ll be bound to say you have a store of the little black rolls somewhere about you.”

“I confess,” he said, smiling, “I carry them in the same case with a few surgical instruments.”

“But I think we’ll go into the little greenhouse, Mary,” said the Reverend Arthur. “I feel sure Harry Bolter would not mind.”

“Mind? My dear Miss Rosebury, I’ll go and sit outside on a

gate and smoke if you like.”

“No, no,” said the Reverend Arthur, mildly; “the green fly are rather gaining ground amongst my flowers, and I thought it would kill a few.”

“Dr Bolter is going to smoke his cigar here, where I am about to send in the coffee,” said Miss Rosebury, very decidedly, and the Reverend Arthur directed an apologetic look at his old friend.

“Hah!” ejaculated the little doctor, taking out his case, and selecting a cigar, “that’s just the kind of social tyranny I like. A man, sir, is stronger than a woman in physical development, but weaker in the matter of making up his mind. I never am able to make up mine, and I am quite sure, Arthur, old fellow, that you are very weak in the matter of making up yours: thus, in steps the presiding genius of your house, and bids you do this, and you do it. Yes, Miss Rosebury, I am going to sit here and smoke and –”

“I am ready with a light, Dr Bolter,” said the little lady, standing close by with a box and a wax-match in her hands.

“No, no, really, my dear madam, I could not think of beginning while you are here.”

*Scratch!* went the match; there was a flash from the composition, and then Miss Rosebury’s plump taper little fingers held out the tiny wax-light, which was taken; there were a few puffs of bluish smoke, and Dr Bolter sank back in his chair, gazing at the door through which Miss Rosebury had passed.

“Hah!” he ejaculated. “I shall have to be off to-morrow.”

“Oh, nonsense!” cried the Reverend Arthur. “I thought you

would come and stay a month.”

“Stay a month!” cried the doctor. “Why, my dear boy, what should I be fit for afterwards if I did?”

“Fit for, Harry?”

“Yes, fit for. I should be totally spoiled. I should become a complete domestic sybarite, and no more fit to go back to my tasks in the Malay jungle than to fly. No, Arthur, old fellow, it would never do.”

“We shall keep you as long as you can stay,” said the Reverend Arthur, smiling. “But seriously, did you not exaggerate about those young ladies?”

“Not in the least, my dear boy, as far as regards one of them. The other – old Stuart’s little lassie – seems to be all that is pretty and demure. But I don’t suppose there is any harm in Helen Perowne. She is a very handsome girl of about twenty or one-and-twenty, and I suppose she has been kept shut up there by the old ladies, and probably, with the best intentions, treated like a child.”

“That must be rather a mistake,” murmured the Reverend Arthur, dreamily.

“A mistake, sir, decidedly. If you have sons or daughters never forget that they grow up to maturity; and if you wish to keep them caged up, let it be in a cage whose bars are composed of good training, confidence and belief in the principles you have sought to instil.”

“Yes, I quite agree with you, Harry.”

“Why, my dear boy, what can be more absurd than to take a handsome young girl and tell her that men are a kind of wild beast that must never be looked at, much more spoken to – suppressing all the young aspirations of her heart?”

“I suppose it would be wrong, Harry.”

“Wrong and absurd, sir. There is the vigorous young growth that will have play, and you tighten it up in a pair of moral stays, so to speak, with the result that the growth pushes forth in an abnormal way to the detriment of the subject; and in the future you have a moral distortion instead of a healthy young plant. Ha – ha! – ha – ha!”

“Why do you laugh?” said the Reverend Arthur. “I think what you have said quite right, only that ladies like the Misses Twettenham are, as it were, forced to a very rigid course.”

“Yes, yes, exactly. I was laughing because it seems so absurd for a pair of old fogies of bachelors like us to be laying down the law as to the management and training of young girls. But look here, Arthur, old fellow, as I am in for this job of guardian to these girls, I should like to have something intermediate.”

“Something intermediate? I don’t understand you. Thank you; set the coffee down, Betsey.”

“Hah! Yes; capital cup of coffee, Arthur,” said the doctor, after a pause. “Best cup I’ve tasted for years.”

“Yes, it is nice,” said the Reverend Arthur, smiling, as if gratified at his friend’s satisfaction. “My sister always makes it herself.”

“That woman’s a treasure, sir. Might I ask for another cup?”

“Of course, my dear Harry. Pray consider that you are at home.”

The coffee was rung for and brought, after a whispered conversation between Betsey the maid and Miss Mary the mistress.

“What did they ring for, Betsey?” asked Miss Mary.

“The little gentleman wants some more coffee, ma’am.”

“Then he likes it,” said Miss Mary, who somehow seemed unduly excited. “But hush, Betsey; you must not say ‘the little gentleman,’ but ‘Dr Bolter.’ He is your master’s dearest friend.”

A minute or two later the maid came out from the little dining-room, with scarlet cheeks and wide-open eyes, to where Miss Mary was lying in wait.

“Is anything the matter, Betsey?” she asked, anxiously.

“No, ma’am, only the little Dr Bolter, ma’am, he took up the cup and smelt it, just as if it was a smelling-bottle or one of master’s roses, ma’am.”

“Yes – yes,” whispered Miss Mary, impatiently.

“And then he put about ten lumps of sugar in it, ma’am.”

“How many Betsey?”

“Ten big lumps, mum, and tasted; and while I was clearing away he said, ‘Hambrosher!’ I don’t know what he meant, but that’s what he said, mum.”

“That will do, Betsey,” whispered Miss Mary. “Mind that the heater is very hot. I’ll come and cut the bread and butter myself.”

Betsey went her way, and Miss Mary returned to the little drawing-room, uttering a sigh of satisfaction; and it is worthy of record, that before closing the door she sniffed twice, and thought that at a distance the smell of cigars was after all not so very bad.

Meanwhile the conversation had been continued in the dining-room.

“What do I mean by intermediate, Arthur? Well, I don’t want to take those girls at one jump from the conventual seclusion of their school to what would seem to them like the wild gaiety of one of the great steamers of the *Messageries Maritimes*. I should like to give them a little society first.”

“Exactly; very wisely,” assented the Reverend Arthur.

“So I thought if your sister would call on the Misses Twettenham with you, and you would have them here two or three times to spend the day, and a little of that sort of thing, do you see?”

“Certainly. We will talk to Mary about it when we go in to tea. I am sure she would be very pleased.”

“That’s right; and now what do you say to a trot in the garden?”

“I shall be delighted!” was the reply; and they went out of the French window into the warm glow of the soft spring evening, the doctor throwing away the stump of his cigar as they came in sight of Miss Mary with a handkerchief tied lightly over her head, busy at work with scissors and basket cutting some flowers; and for the next hour they were walking up and down listening to the doctor’s account of Malaya – its heat, its thunder-storms,

and tropic rains; the beauties of the vegetation; the glories of its nights when the fire-flies were scintillating amidst the trees and shrubs that overhung the river, and so on, for the doctor never seemed to tire.

“How anxious you must be to return, doctor!” said little Miss Rosebury at last.

“No,” he said, frankly. “No, I am not. I am very happy here in this charming little home; but when I go back, I hope to be as happy there, for I shall be busy, and work has its pleasures.”

Brother and sister assented, and soon after they went in to tea, over which the visiting question was broached, and after looking rather severe, little Miss Rosebury readily assented to call and invite the young ladies to spend a day.

The evening glided away like magic; and before the doctor could credit that it was so late, he had to say “good-night,” and was ushered into his bedroom.

“Hah!” ejaculated the little man as he sank into a soft easy-chair, covered with snow-white dimity, and gazed at the white hangings, the pretty paper, the spotless furniture, and breathed in the pleasant scent of fresh flowers, of which there was a large bunch upon his dressing table. “Hah!” he ejaculated again, and rising softly, he went to the table and looked at the blossoms.

“Why, those are the flowers she was cutting when we went down the garden,” he said to himself; and he went back to his chair and became very thoughtful.

At the end of a quarter of an hour he wound up his watch and

placed it beneath his pillow, and then stood thinking for a few minutes before slowly pulling off his boots.

As he took off one, he took it up meditatively, gazed at the sole, and then at the interior, saying softly:

“She is really a very nice little woman!”

Then he took off the other boot, and whispered the same sentiment in that, and all in the most serious manner; while just before dropping off into a pleasant, restful sleep, he said, quite aloud this time:

“A very nice little woman indeed!”

## **Volume One – Chapter Six.**

### **Visitors at the Rectory**

The fact of its being the wish of the appointed guardian of the young ladies was sufficient to make the Misses Twettenham readily acquiesce to an invitation being accepted; and before many days had passed little Miss Rosebury drove over in the pony-carriage, into the front seat of which Helen Perowne, in the richest dress she possessed, glided with a grace and dignity that seemed to say she was conferring a favour.

“I wish you could drive, my dear,” said little Miss Rosebury, smiling in Grey Stuart’s face, for there was something in the fair young countenance which attracted her.

“May I ask why?” replied Grey.

“Because it seems so rude to make you take the back seat.”

For answer Grey nimbly took her place behind; while, as Helen Perowne settled herself in a graceful, reclining attitude, Miss Rosebury took her seat, the round fat pony tossed its head, hands were waved, and away the little carriage spun along the ten miles’ drive between Mayleyfield and the Rectory.

Helen was languid and quiet, leaning back with her eyes half closed, while Grey bent forward between them and chatted with Miss Rosebury, the little lady seeming to be at home with her at once.

Before they had gone a mile, though, the observant charioteer noticed that Grey started and coloured vividly at the sight of a tall, thin youth with a downy moustache, who eagerly raised his hat, as if to show his fair curly hair as they passed.

“Then she has a lover too,” said Miss Rosebury to herself; for Helen Perowne sat unmoved, and did not appear to see the tall youth as they drove by him, but kept her eyes half closed, the long lashes drooping almost to her cheeks.

Little Miss Rosebury darted a keen glance at both the girls in turn, to see Grey Stuart colour more deeply still beneath her scrutiny; while Helen Perowne raised her eyes on finding Miss Rosebury looking at her, and smiled, her face wearing an enquiring look the while.

Dr Bolter had gone to town on business, so it had been decided that the visitors should stay for a couple of nights at the Rectory, where the Reverend Arthur, trowel in one hand, basket in the other, was busy at work filling the beds with geraniums when the pony-carriage drew up.

He slowly placed basket and trowel upon the grass as the carriage stopped, and forgetful of the state of his hands, helped the ladies to alight, leaving the imprint of his earthy fingers upon Helen’s delicate gloves.

Grey saw what took place, and expected an angry show of impatience on her companion’s part; but on the contrary, Helen held up her hands and laughed in quite a merry way.

“Oh, Arthur,” exclaimed Miss Rosebury, “how thoughtless

you are!”

The Reverend Arthur looked in dismay at the mischief he had done, and taking out his pocket-handkerchief – one that had evidently been used for wiping earthy fingers before – he deliberately took first one and then the other of Helen Perowne’s hands to try and remove the marks he had made upon her gloves.

“I am very sorry, Miss Perowne,” he said, in his quiet, deliberate way. “It was very thoughtless of me; I have been planting geraniums.”

To the amazement of Grey Stuart, Helen gazed full in the curate’s face, smilingly surrendering her hands to the tender dusting they received.

Miss Rosebury was evidently annoyed, for she turned from surrendering the reins to the gardener, who was waiting to lead away the pony, and exclaimed:

“Oh, Arthur, you foolish man, what are you doing? Miss Perowne’s hands are not the leaves of plants.”

“No, my dear Mary,” said the Reverend Arthur, in the most serious manner; “and I am afraid I have made the mischief worse.”

“It does not matter, Mr Rosebury. It is only a pair of gloves – I have plenty more,” said Helen, hastily stripping them off regardless of buttons, and tearing them in the effort. They were of the thinnest and finest French kid, and as she hastily rolled them up she looked laughingly round for a place to throw them, ending by dropping them into the large garden basket half full

of little geranium pots, while the Reverend Arthur's eyes rested gravely upon the delicate blue-veined hands with their taper fingers and rosy nails.

"Come, my dears," exclaimed Miss Rosebury, in her quick, chirpy way, "I'm sure you would like to come and take off your things after your hot, dusty drive. This way; and pray do go and wash your hands, Arthur."

"Certainly, my dear Mary," he replied, slowly. "If I had thought of it I would have done so before. I am very glad to see you at the Rectory, Miss Perowne. May I –"

He held out his earth-soiled hand to shake that of his visitor, but recollecting himself, he let it fall again, as he did the words he was about to speak.

"I do not mind," said Helen, quickly, as she extended her own hand, which the curate had no other course than to take, and he did so with a slight colour mounting to his pale cheeks.

Grey Stuart offered her hand in turn, her darker glove showing no trace of the contact.

"I don't like her," said little Miss Rosebury to herself, and her lips tightened a little as she looked sidewise at Helen. "She's a dreadfully handsome, wicked girl, I'm sure; and she tries to make every man fall in love with her that she sees. She'll be trying Dr Bolter next."

It was as if the sudden breath of a furnace had touched her cheeks as this thought crossed her mind, and she quite started as she took Grey Stuart's arm, saying once more, as in an effort to

change the current of her thoughts:

“Come, my dears; and do pray, Arthur, go and take off that dreadful coat!”

“Yes, my dear Mary, certainly,” he said; and smiling benignly at all in turn, he was moving towards the door, when Helen exclaimed quickly:

“I am not at all tired. I was going to ask Mr Rosebury to show me round his garden.”

There was a dead silence, only broken by the dull noise of the wheels of the pony-carriage rasping the gravel drive; there was the chirp of a sparrow too on the mossy roof-tiles, and then a fowl in the stable-yard clapped its wings loudly and uttered a triumphant crow, as, with old-fashioned chivalrous politeness, the Reverend Arthur took off his soft felt hat and offered his arm.

For it was like a revelation to him – an awakening from a quiet, dreamy, happy state of existence, into one full of excitement and life, as he saw that beautiful young creature standing before him with a sweet, appealing look in her eyes, and one of those soft white hands held appealingly forth, asking of him a favour.

And what a favour! She asked him to show her his garden – his pride – the place where he spent all his spare moments. His pale cheeks really did flush slightly now, and his soft, dull eyes brightened as if the reflection of Helen’s youth and beauty irradiated the thin face, the white forehead, and sparse grey hairs bared to the soft breeze.

Miss Mary Rosebury felt a bitter pang shoot through her

tender little breast; and once more, as she saw Helen's hand rest upon her brother's shabby alpaca coat-sleeve, she compressed her lips, and felt that she hated this girl.

"She's a temptress – a wicked coquette," she thought.

It was a matter of moments only, and then she recollected herself.

Her first idea was to go round the garden with Helen; but she shrank from the act as being inquisitorial, and turning to Grey, she took her arm.

"Let them go and see the garden, my dear. You and I will go and get rid of the dust. There," she continued, as she led her visitor into the little flower-bedecked drawing-room, "does it not strike nice and cool? Our rooms look very small after yours."

"Oh! but so bright and cheerful," said Grey, quietly.

"Now I'll show you your bedroom," said Miss Rosebury, whose feeling of annoyance was gone. "I'm obliged to put you both in the same room, and you must arrange between you who is to have the little bed. Now, welcome to the Rectory, my dear, and I hope you will enjoy your visit. Let me help you."

For Grey had smiled her thanks, and was taking off her bonnet, the wire of which had somehow become entangled with her soft, fair, wavy hair.

Miss Rosebury's clever, plump little fingers deftly disentangled the bonnet, and then, not satisfied, began to smooth the slightly dishevelled hair, as if finding pleasure in playing with the fair, sunny strands that only seemed to ask for a dexterous

turn or twist to naturally hang in clusters of curls.

Miss Rosebury's other hand must have been jealous, for it too rose to Grey's head and joined in the gentle caress; while far from looking tight, and forming a thin red line, the little middle-aged lady's lips were in smiling curves, and her eyes beamed very pleasantly at her young visitor, who seemed to be half pleased, half pained at the other's tender way.

"I am sure I shall be sorry to go away again," said Grey, softly. "It is very kind of you to fetch us here."

"Not at all, my dear," said Miss Rosebury, starting from her reverie; "but – but I'm afraid I must be very strict with you," she continued, in a half-merry, half-reproving tone. "The Misses Twettenham have confided you to my care, and I said – I said –"

"You said, Miss Rosebury?" exclaimed Grey, in wondering tones, and her large, soft eyes looked their surprise.

"Yes, I said, as we came away, I'm a very peculiar, particular old lady, my dear; and I can't have tall gentlemen making bows to you when you are in my charge."

"Oh, Miss Rosebury!" cried Grey, catching her hand and blushing scarlet, "please – pray don't think that! It was not to me!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the little lady, softly. "Hum! I see;" and she looked searchingly in the fair young face so near to hers. "It was my mistake, my dear; I beg your pardon."

Grey's face was all smiles, though her eyes were full of tears, and the next moment she was clasped tightly to Miss Rosebury's

breast, responding to her motherly kisses, and saying eagerly:

“I could not bear for you to think that.”

“And I ought never to have thought it, my dear,” said the little lady, softly patting and smoothing Grey’s hair. “Why, I ought to have known you a long time ago; and now I do know you, I hear you are going away?”

“Yes,” said Grey, “and so very soon. My father wishes me to join him at the station.”

“Yes, I know, my dear. It is quite right, for he is alone.”

“And he says it is dull without me; but he wished me to thoroughly finish my education first.”

“You don’t recollect mamma, my dear, the doctor tells me?”

“No,” said Grey, shaking her head. “She died when I was a very little child – the same year as Mrs Perowne.”

“A sad position for two young girls,” said Miss Rosebury.

“But the Misses Twettenham have always been so kind,” said Grey, eagerly. “I shall be very, very sorry to go away?”

“And will Helen Perowne be very, very sorry to go away?”

Grey Stuart’s face assumed a troubled expression, and she looked appealingly in her questioner’s face, which immediately became all smiles.

“There, there, I fetched you both over to enjoy yourselves, and I’m pestering you with questions. Come into my room, my dear, while I wash my hands, and then we’ll go and join the truants in the garden. I want you to like my brother very much, and I am sure he will like you.”

“I know I shall,” said Grey, quietly, but with a good deal of bright girlish ingenuousness in her tones. “Dr Bolter told me a great deal about him; how clever he is as a naturalist. I do like Dr Bolter.”

Miss Rosebury glanced at her sharply. It was an involuntary glance, which changed directly into a beaming look of satisfaction, as they crossed the landing into Miss Rosebury’s own room, where their conversation lengthened so that the “truants,” as the little lady called them, were forgotten.

# **Volume One – Chapter Seven.**

## **A Lesson in Botany**

Meanwhile the Reverend Arthur, with growing solicitude, was walking his garden as in a dream, explaining to his companion the progress of his flowers, his vegetables, and his fruit.

The beds were searched for strawberries that were not ready; the wall trees were looked at reproachfully for not bearing ripe fruit months before their time; and the roses, that should have been in perfection, were grieved over for their fall during the week-past storm.

It was wonderful to him what sweet and earnest interest this fair young creature took in his pursuits, and how eagerly she listened to his discourse when, down by the beehives, he explained the habits of his bees, and removed screens to let her see the working insects within.

Miss Mary Rosebury took an interest in his garden and in his botanical pursuits, but nothing like this. She did not keep picking weeds and wild flowers from beneath the hedge, and listen with rapt attention while he pointed out the class, the qualities, and peculiarities of the plant.

Helen Perowne did, and it was quite a privilege to a weed to be picked, as was that stitchwort that had run its long trailing growth right up in the hedge, so as to give its pale green leaves

and regular white cut-edged blossoms a good long bathe in the sunshine where the insects played.

“I have often seen these little white flowers in the hedges,” she said softly. “I suppose they are too insignificant to have a name?”

She stooped and picked the flower as she spoke, looking in her companion’s eyes for an answer.

“Insignificant? No!” he cried, warming to his task. “No flower is insignificant. The very smallest have beauties that perhaps we cannot see.”

“Indeed,” she said; and he looked at the blue veins beneath the transparent skin, as Helen held up the flower. “Then has this a name?”

“Yes,” he said, rousing himself from a strange reverie, “a very simple, homely name – the stitchwort. Later on in the season you will find myriads of its smaller relative, the lesser stitchwort. They belong to the chickweed tribe.”

“Not the chickweed with which I used to feed my dear little bird that died?”

“The very same,” he replied, smiling. “Next time you pluck a bunch you will see that, though tiny, the flowers strangely resemble these.”

“And the lesser stitchwort?”

“Yes?” he said, inquiringly. “Is it like this?”

“Nearly the same, only the flowers are half the size.”

“And it grows where?”

“In similar places – by hedges and ditches.”

“But you said something about time.”

“Yes,” replied the Reverend Arthur, who was thinking how wondrous pleasant it would be to go on teaching botany to such a pupil for evermore. “Yes, it is a couple of months, say, later than the great stitchwort.”

“Ah!” said Helen, with a sigh. “By that time I shall be far away.”

The stitchwort fell to the ground, and they walked on together, with Helen, Circe-like, transforming the meek, studious, elderly man by her side, so that he was ready to obey her slightest whim, eagerly trying the while to explain each object upon which her eye seemed to rest; while she, glorying in her new power, led him on and on, with soft word, and glance, and sigh.

They had been at least an hour in the garden when they reached the vinery, through whose open door came the sweet, inviting scent of the luxuriant tender growth.

“What place is this?” she cried.

“My vinery. May I show you in?”

“It would give you so much trouble.”

“Trouble?” he said; and taking off his hat he drew back for her to enter.

“And will all those running things bear grapes?” she asked, as, throwing back her head and displaying the soft contour of her beautifully moulded throat, she gazed up at the tendril-handed vines.

“Yes,” he said, dreamily, “these are the young bunches with

berries scarcely set. You see they grow too fast. I have to break off large pieces to keep them back, and tie them to those wires overhead.”

“Oh, do show me, Mr Rosebury?” she cried, with childlike eagerness.

“Yes,” he said, smiling; “but I must climb up there.”

“What, on to that board?”

“Yes, and tie them with this strong foreign grass.”

“Oh, how interesting! How beautiful!” she cried, her red lips parted, and showing the little regular white teeth within. “I never thought that grapes would grow like this. Please show me more.”

He climbed and sprawled awkwardly on to the great plank that reached from tie to tie, seating himself astride with the consequence that his trousers were dragged half way up his long, thin legs, revealing his clumsily-made garden shoes. In his eagerness to show his visitor the growing of his vines he heeded it not; but after snapping off a luxuriant shoot, he was about to tie the residue to a stout wire, when a cry of fear from Helen arrested him.

“Oh, Mr Rosebury, pray, pray get down!” she cried. “It is not safe. I’m sure you’ll fall!”

“It is quite safe,” he said, mildly; and he looked down with a bland smile at the anxious face below him.

“Oh, no,” she cried; “it cannot be.”

“I have tested it so many times,” he said. “Pray do not be alarmed.”

“But I am alarmed,” she cried, looking up at him with an agitated air that made him hasten to descend, going through a series of evolutions that did not tend to set off his ungainly figure to advantage, and ended in landing him at her feet minus the bottom button of his vest.

“Thank you,” she cried. “I am afraid I am very timid, but I could not bear to see you there.”

“Then I must leave my vines for the present,” he said, smiling.

“Oh, if you please,” she cried; and then, as they left the vinery, she relapsed into so staid and dignified a mood, that the Reverend Arthur felt troubled and as if he had been guilty of some grave want of courtesy to his sister’s guest, a state of inquietude that was ended by the coming of Miss Rosebury and Grey.

# **Volume One – Chapter Eight.**

## **Helen's Discovery**

The nearness of the date for the long voyage to the East came like a surprise to the occupants of the Rectory and the Misses Twettenham's establishment. Dr Bolter had come down to stay at the Rectory for a few days, and somehow – no one could tell the manner of its happening – the few days, with occasional lapses for business matters, had grown into a few weeks, and still there seemed no likelihood of his leaving.

What was more, no one seemed to wish him to leave. He and the Reverend Arthur went out on botanical rambles, and came back loaded with specimens about which they discoursed all the evenings, while Miss Rosebury sat and worked.

Upon sundry occasions the young ladies from Miss Twettenham's came over to spend the day, when Grey would be treated by Miss Rosebury with affectionate solicitude, and Helen with a grave courtesy that never seemed to alter unless for the parties concerned to grow more distant.

With the Reverend Arthur, though, it was different. Upon the days of these visits he was changed. His outward appearance was the same, but there was a rapt, dreaminess pervading his actions and speech, and for the greater portion of the time he would be silent.

Not that this was observed, for the doctor chatted and said enough for all – telling stories, relating the experiences of himself and the curate in the woods, while Helen sat back in her chair proud and listless, her eyes half closed, and a languid look of *hauteur* in her handsome face. When addressed she would rouse herself for the moment, but sank back into her proud listlessness directly, looking bored, and as if she tolerated, because she could not help it, the jokes and sallies of the doctor.

The incident of the tall, fair young man was dead and buried. Whatever encouraging looks he may have had before, however his young love may have begun to sprout, it had been cut off by the untimely frost of Helen Perowne's indifference; for no matter how often he might waylay the school during walks, he never now received a glance from the dark beauty's eyes.

The unfortunate youth, after these meetings, would console himself with the thought that he could place himself opposite in church, and there dart appeal into her eyes; but the very first Sunday he went it was to find that Helen had changed her seat, so that it was her back and not her face at which he gazed.

A half-crown bestowed upon the pew-opener – young men at such times are generous – remedied this difficulty, and in the afternoon he had secured a seat opposite to Helen once again; but the next Sunday she had again changed her place, and no matter how he tried, Helen always avoided his gaze.

A month killed the tender passion, and the young gentleman disappeared from Mayleyfield for good – at least so it is to be

hoped, for no ill was heard of the hapless youth, the first smitten down by Helen Perowne's dark eyes.

"And I am very glad we never see him now," said Helen one day when they were staying at the Rectory, and incidentally the troubles at Miss Twettenham's were named.

"So am I," said Grey, quietly. "It was such a pity that you should have noticed him at all."

"Nonsense! He was only a silly overgrown boy; but oh, Grey, child," cried Helen, in a burst of confidence, "isn't the Reverend Arthur delicious?"

"Delicious?" replied Grey, gazing at her wonderingly. "I don't understand you."

"Oh, nonsense! He is so droll-looking, so tall and thin, and so attentive. I declare I feel sometimes as if I could make everyone my slave."

"Oh! Helen, pray don't talk like that!" cried Grey, in alarm.

"Why not? Is a woman to be always wearing a pinafore and eating bread and butter? I'm not a child now. Look, there comes Dr Bolter along the lane. Stand back from the window, or he'll be blowing kisses at us, or some nonsense. I declare I hate that man!"

"I like Dr Bolter," said Grey, quietly.

"Yes, you like everyone who is weak and stupid. Dr Bolter always treats me as if I were a child. A silly, fat, dumpy little stupid; feeling my pulse and making me put out my tongue. He makes my fingers tingle to box his ears."

"I think Dr Bolter takes great interest in us," said Grey, slowly, and she stood gazing through the open window of their bedroom at the figure of the little doctor, as he came slowly down the lane, his eyes intent upon the weeds, and every now and then making a dart at some plant beneath the hedge, and evidently quite forgetful of his proximity to the Rectory gate.

"Interest, yes!" cried Helen, who, in the retirement of their bedroom threw off her languid ways, and seemed full of eagerness and animation. "A nice prospect for us, cooped up on board ship with a man like that! I declare I feel quite ashamed of him. I wonder what sort of people we shall have as cabin passengers."

"They are sure to be nice," said Grey.

"There will be some officers," continued Helen; "and some of them are sure to be young. I've heard of girls going out to India being engaged to be married directly. I say, Miss Demure, what fun it would be if we were to be engaged directly."

Grey Stuart looked at her old schoolfellow, half wondering at her flippancy, half in pain, but Helen went on, as if getting rid of so much vitality before having to resume her stiff, distant ways.

"Did you notice how silly the Reverend Arthur was last night?"

"No," replied Grey. "I thought he was very kind."

"I thought he was going down upon his knees to kiss my feet!" cried Helen, with a mocking laugh; and her eyes sparkled and the colour came brightly in her cheeks. "Oh, Grey, you little fair, soft, weak kitten of a thing, why don't you wake up and try to

show your power.”

“Nelly, you surprise me!” cried Grey. “How can you talk so giddily, so foolishly about such things.”

“Because I am no longer a child,” cried the girl, proudly, and she drew herself up and walked backwards and forwards across the room. “Do you suppose I do not know how handsome I am, and how people admire me? Well, I’m not going to be always kept down. Look at the long, weary years of misery we have had at that wretched school.”

“Helen, you hurt me,” said Grey. “Your words are cruel. No one could have been kinder to us than the Miss Twettenhams.”

“Kinder – nonsense! Treated us like infants; but it is over now, and I mean to be free. Who is that on the gravel path? Oh! it’s poor Miss Rosebury. What a funny, sharp little body she is!”

“Always so kind and genial to us,” said Grey.

“To you. She likes you as much as she detests me.”

“Oh, Nelly!”

“She does; but not more than I detest her. She would not have me here at all if she could help it.”

“Oh! why do you say such things as that, Helen?”

“Because they are true. She does not like me because her brother is so attentive; and she seemed quite annoyed yesterday when the doctor spent so long feeling my pulse and talking his physic jargon to me. And – oh, Grey, hush! Come gently – here, beside this curtain! Don’t let them see you! What a discovery! Let’s go and fetch the Reverend Arthur to see as well.”

“Oh, Helen, how wild you are! What do you mean?”

“That!” whispered Helen, catching her schoolfellow tightly by the arm as she wrenched her into position, so that she could look out of the little flower-decked window. “What do I mean? Why that! See there!”

## Volume One – Chapter Nine.

### “I am Forty-Four.”

There was very little to see; and if Grey Stuart had accidentally seen what passed with unbiased eyes, she would merely have noted that, as Dr Bolter encountered Miss Rosebury at the gate, he shook hands warmly, paused for a moment, and then raised one of the lady's soft, plump little hands to his lips.

Grey would not have felt surprised. Why should she? The Reverend Arthur Rosebury was Dr Bolter's oldest and dearest friend, to whom the Rosebury's were under great obligations; and there was nothing to Grey Stuart's eyes strange in this warm display of friendship.

Helen gave the bias to her thoughts as she laughingly exclaimed:

“Then the silly little woman was jealous of him yesterday. Oh, do look, Grey! Did you ever see anything so absurd! They are just like a pair of little round elderly doves. You see if the doctor does not propose.”

“What nonsense, Helen!” cried Grey, reproachfully. “You are always talking and thinking of such things as that. Miss Rosebury and Dr Bolter are very old friends.”

“That they are not. They never met till a few weeks ago; and perhaps, madam, the time may come when you will talk and

think about such things as much as I.”

Certainly there was little more to justify Helen Perowne’s remark as the doctor and Miss Rosebury came along the garden path, unless the unusual flush in the lady’s cheek was the effect of the heat of the sun.

But Helen Perowne was right, nevertheless, for a strange tumult was going on in little Miss Rosebury’s breast.

She knew that Dr Bolter, although he had not said a word, was day by day becoming more and more impressive and almost tender in his way towards her.

He lowered his voice when he spoke, and was always so deeply concerned about her health, that more than once her heart had been guilty of so peculiar a flutter that she had been quite angry with herself; going to her own room, taking herself roundly to task, and asking whether, after living to beyond forty, she ought ever for a moment to dream of becoming different from what she was.

That very day, after feeling very much agitated by Dr Bolter’s gravely-tender salute at the gate, she was completely taken by surprise.

For towards evening, when the Reverend Arthur had asked Helen if she would take a turn round the garden, and that young lady had risen with graceful dignity, and asked Grey to be their companion, Miss Rosebury and the doctor were left in the drawing-room alone.

The little lady’s soul had risen in opposition to her brother’s

request to Helen, and she had been about to rise and say that she too would go, when she was quite disarmed by Helen herself asking Grey to accompany them, and she sank back in her seat with a satisfied sigh.

“I declare the wicked thing is trying to lead poor Arthur on, and he is so weak and foolish that he might be brought to make himself uncomfortable about her.”

She sat thinking for a few moments as the girls left the room, and then settled herself in her chair with a sigh.

“It is all nonsense,” she said to herself; “Arthur is like me – too old now ever to let such folly trouble his breast.”

A loud snap made her start as Dr Bolter closed his cigar-case after spending some time in selecting a cigar, one which he had made up his mind to smoke in the garden.

Just then their eyes met, and the little lady rose, walked to her writing-table, took a brass box from a drawer, struck a match, and advanced with it in her fingers towards the doctor.

He replaced his cigar-case, and held out one hand for the match, took it, and blew it out before throwing it from the open window.

“Was it not a good one?” said Miss Rosebury, beginning to tremble.

“No,” he said, quickly, as he thrust the cigar into his waistcoat pocket; “and I could not smoke here.”

As he spoke he took the little lady’s hand in his left and looked pleadingly in her face.

“Dr Bolter!” she exclaimed; and there was anger in her tone.

“Don’t – don’t,” he exclaimed, huskily, and as if involuntarily his forefinger was pressed upon her wrist – “don’t be agitated Miss Rosebury. Greatly accelerated pulse – almost feverish. Will you sit down?”

Trembling, and with her face scarlet, he led the little lady to the couch, where, snatching her hand away, she sank down, caught her handkerchief from her pocket, covered her face with it, and burst into tears.

“What have I done?” he cried. “Miss Rosebury – Miss Rosebury – I meant to say – I wished to speak – everything gone from me – half dumb – my dear Mary Rosebury – Mary – I love you with all my heart!”

As he spoke he plumped down upon his knees before her and tried to remove her hands from her face.

For a few moments she resisted, but at last she let them rest in his, and he seemed to gain courage and went on:

“It seemed so easy to tell you this; but I, who have seen death in every form, and been under fire a dozen times, feel now as weak as a girl. Mary, dear Mary, will you be my wife?”

“Oh, Dr Bolter, pray get up, it is impossible. You must be mad,” she sobbed. “I must be mad to let you say it.”

“No, no – no, no!” he cried. “If I am mad, though, let me stay so, for I never was so happy in my life.”

“Pray – pray get up!” she cried, still sobbing bitterly; “it would look so foolish if you were seen kneeling to an old woman like

me.”

“Foolish! to be kneeling and imploring the most amiable, the dearest woman – the best sister in the world? Let them see me; let the whole world see me. I am proud to be here begging you – praying you to be my wife.”

“Oh! no, no, no! It is all nonsense. Oh, Dr Bolter, I – I am forty-four!”

“Brave – courageous little woman,” he cried, ecstatically, “to tell me out like that! Forty-four!”

“Turned,” sobbed the little lady; “and I never thought now that anybody would talk to me like this.”

“I don’t care if you are fifty-four or sixty-four!” cried the little doctor excitedly. “I am not a youth, Mary. I’m fifty, my dear girl; and I’ve been so busy all my life, that, like our dear old Arthur, I have never even thought of such a thing as marriage. But since I have been over here – seen this quiet little home, made so happy by your clever hands – I have learned that, after all, I had a heart, and that if my dear old friend’s sweet sister would look over my faults, my age, my uncouth ways, I should be the happiest of men.”

“Pray – pray get up, doctor,” said Miss Rosebury sadly.

“Call me Harry, and I will,” he cried, gallantly.

“No, no!” she said, softly, and there was something so firm and gentle in her words that he rose at once, took the seat she pointed to by her side, and would have passed his arm round her shapely little waist, but she laid one hand upon his wrist and

stayed him.

“No, Henry Bolter,” she said, firmly; “we are not boy and girl. Let us act like sensible, mature, and thoughtful folk.”

“My dear,” he said, and the tears stood in his eyes, “I respect and love you more and more. What is there that I would not do?”

She beamed upon him sweetly, and laid her hand upon his as they sat there side by side in silence, enjoying a few brief moments of the greatest happiness that had ever been their lot, and then the little lady spoke:

“Henry,” she said, softly, “my dear brother’s dearest friend – my dearest friend – do not think me wanting in appreciation of what you have said.”

“I could never think your words other than the best,” he said, tenderly; and the little lady bowed her head before resuming.

“I will not be so foolish as to deny that in the past,” she went on, “there have been weak times when I may have thought that it would be a happy thing for a man whom a woman could reverence and respect as well as love to come and ask me to be his wife.”

“As I would always strive to make you respect me, Mary,” he said, softly; and he kissed her hand.

“I know you would,” she said, “but it cannot be.”

“Mary,” he cried, pleadingly, “I have waited and weighed all this, and asked myself whether it was vanity that made me think your dear eyes lighted up and that you were glad to see me when I came.”

“You did not deceive yourself,” she said, softly. “I was glad to see my dear brother’s friend when he first came, and that gladness has gone on increasing until, I confess to you freely, it will come upon me like some great sadness when the time is here for you to go away.”

“Say that again,” he cried, eagerly.

“Why should I?” she said, sadly.

“Then – then you do love me, Mary?”

“I – I think so,” she said, softly; and the little lady’s voice was very grave; “but love in this world has often to give way to duty.”

“Ye-es,” he said, dubiously; “but where two people have been waiting such a precious long time before they found out what love really is, it seems rather hard to be told that duty must stand first.”

“It is hard, but it is fact,” she said.

“I don’t know so much about that,” said the little doctor. “Just now I feel as if it was my bounden duty to make you my happy little wife.”

“And how can I think it my duty to accept you?” she said, smiling.

“Well, I do ask a great deal,” he replied. “It means going to the other side of the world; but, my dear Mary, you should never repent it.”

“I know I never should,” she replied. “We have only lately seen one another face to face, but I have known you and your kindness these many years.”

“Then why refuse me?”

“For one thing, I am too old,” she said, sadly.

“Your dear little heart is too young, and good, and tender, you mean.”

She shook her head.

“That’s no argument against it,” he said. “And now what else?”

“There is my brother,” she replied, speaking very firmly now.

“Your brother?”

“You know what dear Arthur is.”

“The simplest, and best, and truest of men.”

“Yes,” she cried, with animation.

“And a clever naturalist, whose worth has never yet been thoroughly known.”

“He is unworldly to a degree,” continued the little lady; “and as you justly say, the simplest of men.”

“I would not have him in the slightest degree different,” cried the doctor.

“I scold him a good deal sometimes,” said the little lady, smiling; “but I don’t think I would have him different in the least.”

“No; why should we?” said the doctor.

That *we* was a cunning stroke of diplomacy, and it made Miss Rosebury start. She shook her head though directly.

“No, Henry Bolter,” she said, firmly, “it cannot be.”

“Cannot be?” he said, despondently.

“No; I could not leave my brother. Let us join them in the garden!”

"I am not to take that for an answer?" cried the doctor.

"Yes," she replied; "it would be cruel to leave him."

"But Mary, dear Mary, you do not dislike me!" cried the little doctor. "I'm not much to look at I know; not a very gallant youth, my dear!"

"I think you are one of the best of men! You make me very proud to think that – that you could – could – "

"And you have owned to liking me, my dear?" he whispered. "Say *yea*. Arthur would soon get used to your absence; and of course, before long we should come back."

"No," she said firmly, "it could not be!"

"Not be!" he said in a tone of so much misery that little Miss Rosebury added:

"Not for me to go out there. We must wait."

"Wait!"

"Yes; a few years soon pass away, and you will return."

"But we – I mean – I am getting so precious old," said the doctor dismally.

"Yes, we should be much older, Henry," said the little lady sweetly, as she held out her hand; "but surely our esteem would never fade."

"Never!" he cried, kissing her hand again; and then he laid that hand upon his arm, and they went out into the garden, where the little lady's eyes soon made out the Reverend Arthur bending over his choicest flowers, to pick the finest blossoms for a bouquet ready for Helen Perowne to carelessly throw aside.

Satisfied that her brother was in no imminent danger with Grey Stuart present, little Miss Rosebury made no opposition to a walk round; the doctor thinking that perhaps, now the ice was broken, he might manage to prevail.

“How beautiful the garden is!” said the little lady, to turn the conversation.

“Beautiful, yes! but, my dear madam,” exclaimed the doctor, in didactic tones, “a garden in Malaya, where I ask you to go – the jungle gorgeous with flowers – the silver river sparkling in the eternal sunshine – the green of the ever-verdant woods – the mountains lifting – ”

“Thank you, doctor,” said the little lady, “that is very pretty; but when I was a young girl they took me to see the ‘Lady of Lyons,’ and I remember that a certain mock prince describes his home to the lady something in that way – a palace lifting to eternal summer – and lo! as they say in the old classic stories, it was only a gardener’s cottage after all!”

The matter-of-fact little body had got over her emotion, and this remark completely extinguished the doctor for the time.

# **Volume One – Chapter Ten.**

## **Miss Rosebury Speaks Seriously**

The next day, when the visitors had been driven back by the Reverend Arthur, his sister met him upon the step, and taking his arm, led him down the garden to the vine-house.

“Let us go in here, Arthur,” she said. “It is such a good place to talk in; there is no fear of being overheard.”

“Yes, it is a quiet retired place,” he said thoughtfully.

“I hope you were careful in driving, and had no accident, Arthur?”

“N-no; I had no accident, only I drove one wheel a little up the bank in Sandrock Lane.”

“How was that? You surely did not try to pass another carriage in that narrow part?”

“N-no,” hesitated the Reverend Arthur. “Let me see, how was it? Oh, I remember. Miss Perowne had made some remark to me, and I was thinking of my answer.”

“And nearly upset them,” cried Miss Rosebury. “Oh! Arthur – Arthur, you grow more rapt and dreamy every day; What is coming to you I want to know?”

The Reverend Arthur started guiltily, and gazed at his sister.

“Oh! Arthur,” she cried, shaking a warning finger at him, “you are neglecting your garden and your natural history pursuits to try

and make yourself a cavalier of dames, and it will not do. There – there, I won't scold you; but I am beginning to think that it will be a very good thing when our visitors have gone for good."

The Reverend Arthur sighed, and half turned away to snip off two or three tendrils from a vine-shoot above his head.

"I want to talk to you very seriously, Arthur," said the little lady, whose cheeks began to flush slightly with excitement; and she felt relieved as she saw her brother turn a little more away.

"I want to talk to you very seriously indeed," said Miss Rosebury.

"I am listening," he said hoarsely; but she did not notice it in her excitement.

There was a minute's pause, during which the Rev. Arthur broke off the young vine-shoot by accident, and then stood trying to replace it again.

At last Miss Rosebury spoke.

"Arthur," she said – and her brother started and seemed to shiver, though she saw it not – "Arthur, Henry Bolter has asked me to be his wife!"

The Reverend Arthur turned round now in his astonishment, with his face deadly white and the tiny beads of perspiration upon his forehead. "Asked you to be his wife?" he said. "Yes, dear."

"I am astonished," cried the Reverend Arthur. "No, I am not," he added thoughtfully. "He seemed to like you very much, Mary."

"And I like him very much, Arthur, for I think him a truly

good, amiable, earnest man.”

“He is my dear Mary – he is indeed; but – but – ”

“But what, Arthur? Were you going to say that you could not spare me?”

“I – I hardly know what I was about to say, Mary, you took me so by surprise. It would be very strange, though, to be here without you.”

“And you will not be, Arthur. I felt that I must tell you. I have nothing that I keep from you; but I have refused him.”

“You have refused him,” he said thoughtfully. “Yes, I felt that it would not be right to let a comparative stranger come in here and break up at once our happy little home. No, Arthur, this must all be like some dream. You and I, dear brother, are fast growing into elderly people; and love such as that is the luxury of the young.”

“Love such as that,” said the Reverend Arthur, softly, “is the luxury of the young!”

“Yes, dear brother, it would be folly in me to give way to such feelings!”

“Do you like Harry?” he exclaimed, suddenly.

“Yes,” she said, quietly. “I have felt day by day, Arthur, that I liked him more and more. It was and is a wonder to me at my age; but I should not be honest if I did not own that I liked him.”

“It is very strange, Mary,” said the curate, softly.

“Yes, it is very strange,” she said; “and as I think of it all, I am obliged to own to myself, that after all I should have liked to be

married. It is such a revival of the past.”

The curate nodded his head several times as he let himself sink down upon the greenhouse steps, resting his hands upon his knees.

“But it is all past now, Arthur,” said the lady, quickly, and the tears were in her eyes, “we are both too old, my dear brother; and as soon as these visitors are gone, we will forget all disturbing influences, and go back to our happy old humdrum life.”

She could not trust herself to say more, but hurried off to her room, leaving the Reverend Arthur gazing fixedly at the red-brick floor.

“We are too old,” he muttered softly, from time to time; and as he said those words there seemed to stand before him the tall, well-developed figure of a dark-eyed, beauteous woman, who was gazing at him softly from between her half-closed, heavily-fringed lids.

“We are too old,” he said again; and then he went on dreaming of that day’s drive, and Helen’s gentle farewell – of the walks they had had in his garden – the flowers she had taken from his hand. Lastly, of his sister’s words respecting disturbing influences, and then settling down to their own happy humdrum life once again.

“It is fate!” he said, at last – “fate. Can we bring back the past?”

He felt that he could not, even as his sister felt just then, as she knelt beside one of the chairs in her own sweet-scented room, and asked for strength, as she termed it, to fight against this temptation.

“No,” she cried, at last; “I cannot – I will not! For Arthur’s sake I will be firm.”

# **Volume One – Chapter Eleven.**

## **A Difficulty Solved**

A week passed, during which all had been very quiet at the Rectory, brother and sister meeting each other hour by hour in a kind of saddened calm. The Reverend Arthur was paler than usual, almost cadaverous, while there was a troubled, anxious look in little Miss Rosebury's eyes, and a sharpness in her voice that was not there on the day when Dr Bolter proposed.

No news had been heard of the young ladies at Miss Twettenham's; and Dr Bolter, to Miss Rosebury's sorrow, had not written to her brother.

But she bravely fought down her suffering, busying herself with more than usual zeal in home and parish; while the Reverend Arthur came back evening after evening faint, weary, and haggard, from some long botanical ramble.

The eighth day had arrived, and towards noon little Miss Rosebury was quietly seated by the open window with her work, fallen upon her knee, and a sad expression in her eyes as she gazed wistfully along the road, thinking, truth to tell, that Dr Bolter might perhaps come in to their early dinner.

Doctors were so seldom ill, or perhaps he might be lying suffering at some hotel.

The thought sent a pang through the little body, making her

start, and seizing her needle, begin to work, when a warm flush came into her cheeks as she heard at one and the same time the noise of wheels, and a slow, heavy step upon the gravel.

The step she well knew, and for a few moments she did not look up; but when she did she uttered an exclamation.

“Tut – tut – tut!” she said. “If anyone saw poor Arthur now they would think him mad.”

Certainly the long, gaunt figure of the Reverend Arthur Rosebury, in his soft, shapeless felt hat, and long, clinging, shabby black alpaca coat, was very suggestive of his being a kind of male Ophelia gone slightly distraught as the consequence of a disappointment in love.

For in the heat of a long walk the tie of his white cravat had gone round towards the nape of his neck, while his felt hat was decorated to the crown with butterflies secured to it by pins. The band had wild flowers and herbs tucked in here and there. His umbrella – a very shabby, baggy gingham – was closed and stuffed with botanical treasures; and his vasculum, slung beneath one arm, was so gorged with herbs and flowers of the field that it would not close.

He was coming slowly down the path as wheels stopped at the gate just out of sight from the window, where little Miss Rosebury sat with her head once more bent down over her work; but she could hear a quick, well-known voice speaking to the driver of the station fly; then there was the click of the latch as the gate swung to, and the little lady’s heart began to go pat, pat –

pat, pat – much faster than the quick, decided step that she heard coming down the long gravel path.

Her hearing seemed to be abnormally quickened, and she listened to the wheels as the fly drove off, and then heard every word as the doctor's quick, decided voice saluted his old friend.

“Been horribly busy, Arthur,” he cried; “but I'm down at last. Where's Mary?”

Hiding behind the curtain, for she had drawn back to place her hand upon her side to try and control the agitated beating of her foolish little heart.

“Oh, it is dreadful! How can I be so weak?” she cried angrily, as she made a brave effort to be calm – a calmness swept away by the entrance of the doctor, who rushed in boisterously to seize her hands, and before she could repel him, he had kissed her heartily.

“Eureka! my dear Mary! Eureka!” he cried. “I have it – I have it!”

“Henry – Dr Bolter!” she cried, with a decidedly dignified look in her pleasant face.

“Don't be angry with me, my dear,” he cried; “the news is so good. You couldn't leave poor Arthur, could you?”

“No!” she cried, with an angry little stamp, as she mentally upbraided him for tearing open the throbbing wound she was striving to heal. “You know I will not leave him.”

“I love and honour you for it more and more, my dear,” he cried. “But what do you think of this? Suppose we take him with us?”

“Take him with us?” said the little lady, slowly.

“Yes,” cried the doctor, excitedly; “take him with us, Mary – my darling wife that is to be. The chaplaincy of our settlement is vacant. Did you ever hear the like?”

Little Miss Rosebury could only stare at the excited doctor in a troubled way, for she understood him now, though her lips refused to speak.

“Yes, and I am one of the first to learn the news. I can work it, I feel sure, if he’ll come. Then only think; lovely climate, glorious botanical collecting trips for him! The land, too, whence Solomon’s ships brought gold, and apes, and peacocks. Ophir, Mary, Ophir! Arthur will be delighted.”

“Indeed!” said that lady wonderingly.

“Not a doubt about it, my dear. My own discovery. All live together! Happiness itself.”

“But Arthur is delicate,” she faltered. “The station is unhealthy.”

“Am not I there? Do I not understand your brother thoroughly? Oh! my dear Mary, do not raise obstacles in the way. It is fate. I know it is, in the shape of our Political Resident Harley. He came over with me, and goes back in the same boat. He has had telegrams from the station.”

“You – you take away my breath, doctor,” panted the little lady. “I must have time to think. Oh! no, no, no; it is impossible. Arthur would never consent to go.”

“If you will promise to be my wife, Mary, I’ll make him go!”

cried the doctor, excitedly.

“No, no; he never would. He could not give up his position here, and I should not allow him. It would be too cruelly selfish on my part. It is impossible; it can never be.”

The next moment the doctor was alone, for Miss Rosebury had hurried out to go and sob passionately as a girl in her own room, waking up more and more, as she did, to the fact that she had taken the love distemper late in life; but it was none the weaker for being long delayed.

“It isn’t impossible, my dear,” chuckled the doctor, as he rubbed his hands; “and if I know anything of womankind, the darling little body’s mine. I hope she won’t think I want her bit of money, because I don’t.”

He took a turn up and down the room, rubbing his hands and smiling in a very satisfied way.

“I think I can work Master Arthur,” he said. “He’ll be delighted at the picture I shall paint him of our flora and fauna. It will be a treat for him, and we shall be as jolly as can be. We’ll see about duty and that sort of thing. Why, it will be a better post for him ever so much, and he’s a splendid old fellow.”

There was another promenade of the room, greatly to the endangerment of Miss Rosebury’s ornaments. Then the doctor slapped one of his legs loudly.

“Capital!” he cried. “What a grand thought. What a card to play! That will carry her by storm. I’ll play that card at our next interview; but gently, Bolter, my boy, don’t be in too great a

hurry! She's a splendid specimen, and you must not lose her by being precipitate; but, by Jove! what a capital thought – tell her it will be quite an act of duty to come with me and act a mother's part to those two girls.”

“She'll do it – she'll do it,” he cried, after a pause, “for she quite loves little Grey, and a very nice little girl too. Then it will keep that dark beauty out of mischief, for hang me if I think I could get her over to her father disengaged, and so I told Harley yesterday.”

The doctor did knock off an ornament from a stand at his next turn up and down the room, breaking it right in two; and this brought him to his senses, as, full of repentance, he sought the Reverend Arthur Rosebury in his study to act as medium and confess his sin.

# Volume One – Chapter Twelve.

## Playing the Card

The Reverend Arthur had removed the butterflies and wild flowers from his hat by the time Dr Bolter reached him, and was walking slowly up and down the study with his hands clasped behind him.

There was a wrinkled look of trouble in his face.

As the doctor entered he smilingly placed a chair for his friend, and seemed to make an effort to get rid of the feeling of oppression that weighed him down.

Then they sat and talked of butterflies and birds for a time, fencing as it were, for somehow Dr Bolter felt nervous and ill at ease, shrinking from the task which he had set himself, while the Reverend Arthur, though burning to ask several questions upon a subject nearest his heart, shrank from so doing lest he should expose his wound to his friend's inquisitorial eyes.

"I declare I'm as weak as a child," said the doctor to himself, after making several vain attempts at beginning. "It's dreadfully difficult work!" and he asked his friend if the lesser copper butterfly was plentiful in that district.

"No," said the Reverend Arthur, "we have not chalk enough near the surface."

Then there was a pause – a painful pause – during which the

two old friends seemed to be fighting hard to break the ice that kept forming between them.

“I declare I’m much weaker than a child,” said the doctor to himself; and the subject was the next moment introduced by the Reverend Arthur, who, with a guilty aspect and look askant, both misinterpreted by the doctor, said, hesitatingly:

“Do you know for certain when you go away, Harry?”

“In three weeks, my boy, or a month at most, and there is no time to lose in foolish hesitation, is there?”

“No, of course not. You mean about the subject Mary named?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” cried the doctor, who was now very hot and excited. “You wouldn’t raise any objection, Arthur?”

“No, I think not, Harry. It would be a terrible loss to me.”

“It would – it would.”

“And I should feel it bitterly at first.”

“Of course – of course,” said the doctor, trying to speak; but his friend went on excitedly.

“Time back I could not have understood it; but I am not surprised now!”

“That’s right, my dear Arthur, that’s right; and I will try and make her a good husband.”

“She is a very, very good woman, Harry!”

“The best of women, Arthur, the very best of women; and it will be so nice for those two girls to have her for guide.”

“Do – do they go – both go – with you – so soon?” said the

Reverend Arthur, wiping his wet forehead and averting his head.

“Yes, of course,” said the doctor, eagerly.

“And – and does Mary say she will accept you, Harry?”

“No,” said a quick, decided voice. “I told him I could not leave you, Arthur;” and the two gentlemen started guiltily from their chairs.

“My dear Mary,” said the curate, “how you startled me.”

“I have not had time to tell him yet,” said the doctor, recovering himself; and taking the little lady’s hand, he led her to the chair he had vacated, closed the door, and then stood between brother and sister. “I have not had time to tell him yet, my dear Miss Rosebury, but I have been saying to him that it would be so satisfactory for you to help me in my charge of those two young ladies.”

Miss Rosebury started in turn, and coloured slightly.

“And now, my dear old friend,” said the doctor, “let me ask you, treating you as Mary’s nearest relative, will you give your consent to our marriage?”

“No, Arthur, you cannot,” said the little lady, firmly. “I could not leave you.”

“But I have an offer to make you, my dear old friend,” said the doctor; “the chaplaincy at our station is vacant; will you come out with us and take it? There will be no separation then, and –”

He stopped short, for at his words the Reverend Arthur seemed to be galvanised into a new life. He started from his seat, the listless, saddened aspect dropped away, his eyes flashed, and

the blood mounted to his cheeks.

“Come with you?” he cried. “Chaplaincy? Out there?”

It seemed as if he had been blinded by the prospect, for the next moment he covered his face with his hands, and sank back in his seat without a word.

“I knew it!” cried little Miss Rosebury, in reproachful tones; and, leaving her chair, she clung to her brother’s arm. “I told you he could not break up his old home here. No, no, Arthur, dear Arthur, it is all a foolish dream! I do not wish to leave you – I could not leave you. Henry Bolter, pray – pray go,” she said, piteously, as she turned to the doctor. “We both love you dearly as our truest friend; but you place upon us burdens that we cannot bear. Oh, why – why did you come to thus disturb our peace? Arthur, dear brother, I will not go away!”

“Hush! hush, Mary!” the curate said, from behind his hands. “Let me think. You do not know. I cannot bear it yet!”

“My dear old Arthur,” began the doctor.

“Let me think, Harry, let me think,” he said, softly.

“No, no, don’t think!” cried the little lady, almost angrily. “You shall not sacrifice yourself for my sake! I will not be the means of dragging you from your peaceful happy home – the home you love – and from the people who love you for your gentle ways! Henry Bolter, am I to think you cruel and selfish instead of our kind old friend?”

“No, no, my dear Mary!” cried the doctor, excitedly. “Selfish? Well, perhaps I am, but – ”

“Hush!” said the curate softly; and again, “let me think.”

A silence fell upon the little group, and the chirping of the birds in the pleasant country garden was all that broke that silence for many minutes to come.

Then the Reverend Arthur rose from his seat and moved towards the door, motioning to them not to follow him as he went out into the garden, and they saw him from the window go up and down the walks, as if communing with all his familiar friends, asking, as it were, their counsel in his time of trial.

At last he came slowly back into the room, where the elderly lovers had been seated in silence, neither daring to break the spell that was upon them, feeling as they did how their future depended upon the brother's words.

They looked at him wonderingly as he came into the room pale and agitated, as if suffering from the reaction of a mental struggle; but there was a smile of great sweetness upon his lips as he said, softly:

“Harry, old friend, I never had a brother. You will be really brother to me now.”

“No, no!” cried his sister, excitedly. “You shall not sacrifice yourself like this!”

“Hush, dear Mary,” he replied calmly; “let me disabuse your mind. You confessed to me your love for Harry Bolter here. Why should I stand in the way of your happiness?”

“Because it would half kill you to be left alone.”

“But I shall not be left alone,” he cried, excitedly. “I shall

bitterly regret parting from this dear old home; but I am not so old that I could not make another in a foreign land.”

“Oh! Henry Bolter,” protested the little lady, “it must not be!”

“But it must,” said her brother, taking her in his arms, and kissing her tenderly. “There are other reasons, Mary, why I should like to go. I need not explain what those reasons are; but I tell you honestly that I should like to see this distant land.”

“Where natural history runs mad, Arthur,” cried the doctor, excitedly. “Hurrah!”

“Oh, Arthur!” cried his sister, “you cannot mean it. It is to please me.”

“And myself,” he said, quietly. “There; I am in sober earnest, and I tell you that no greater pleasure could be mine than to see you two one.”

“At the cost of your misery, Arthur.”

“To the giving of endless pleasure to your husband and my brother,” said the Reverend Arthur, smiling; and before she could thoroughly realise the fact, little quiet Miss Mary Rosebury was sobbing on the doctor’s breast.

# Volume One – Chapter Thirteen.

## On the Voyage

In these busy days of rail and steam, supplemented by their quick young brother electricity, time seems to go so fast that before the parties to this story had thoroughly realised the fact, another month had slipped by, another week had been added to that month, the Channel had been crossed, then France by train, and at Marseilles the travellers had stepped on board one of the steamers of the French company, the *Messageries Maritimes*, bound for Alexandria, Aden, Colombo, Penang, and then, on her onward voyage to Singapore and Hong Kong, to drop a certain group of her passengers at the mouth of the Darak river, up which they would be conveyed by Government steamer to Sindang, the settlement where Mr Harley, her Britannic Majesty's Resident at the barbaric court of the petty Malay Rajah-Sultan Murad had the guidance of affairs.

It was one of those delicious, calm evenings of the South, with the purple waters of the tideless Mediterranean being rapidly turned into orange and gold. Away on the left could be seen, faintly pencilled against the sky, the distant outlines of the mountains that shelter the Riviera from the northern winds. To the right all was gold, and purple, and orange sea; and the group seated about the deck enjoying the comparative coolness of the

evening knew that long before daybreak the next morning they would be out of sight of land.

There were a large number of passengers; for the most part English officials and their families returning from leave of absence to the various stations in the far East; and as they were grouped about the spacious quarter-deck of the sumptuously-fitted steamer rapidly ploughing its way through the sun-dyed waters, the scene was as bright and animated as painter could depict.

Gentlemen were lounging, smoking, or making attempts to catch the fish that played about the vessel's sides without the slightest success; ladies were seated here and there, or promenading the deck, while other groups were conversing in low tones as they drank in the soft, sensuous air, and wondered how people could be satisfied to exist in dull and foggy, sunless England, when nature offered such climes as this.

“In another half-hour, Miss Perowne, I think I shall be able to show you a gorgeous sunset, if you will stay on deck.”

The speaker was a tall, fair man by rights, but long residence in the East had burned his skin almost to the complexion of that of a Red Indian. He was apparently about forty, with high forehead, clear-cut aquiline features, and the quick, firm, searching look of one accustomed to command and master men.

He took off his puggree-covered straw hat as he spoke, to let the cool breeze play through his hair, which was crisp and short, but growing so thin and sparse upon the top that partings were

already made by time, and he would have been looked upon by every West-end hair-dresser as a suitable object to be supplied with nostrums and capillary regenerators galore.

“Are the sunsets here very fine?” said Helen, languidly, as she lay back in a cane chair listlessly gazing through her half-closed eyes at the glittering water that foamed astern, ever widening away from the churning of the huge propeller of the ship.

“Very grand some of them, but nothing to those we shall show you in the water-charged atmosphere close to the equator. Ah, Miss Stuart, come here and stop to see the sunset. You grieve me, my child,” he added, smiling, and showing his white teeth.

“Grieve you, Mr Harley, why?” said Grey, smiling.

“Because I feel as if I were partner in the crime of taking you out to Sindang to turn that fair complexion of yours brown.”

“Grey Stuart is very careless about such things,” said Helen, with languid pettishness. “How insufferably hot it is!”

“Well,” said Mr Harley, laughing, “you are almost queen here already, Miss Perowne; everyone seems to constitute himself your slave. Shall we arm ourselves with punkahs, and waft sweet southern gales to your fair cheeks?”

“Here! Hi, Harley!” cried the brisk voice of Dr Bolter from the forward part of the vessel.

“Tis the voice of the male turtle-dove,” said Mr Harley, laughing. “He is separated from his mate. Have I your permission to go, fair queen?”

Helen’s eyes opened widely for a moment, and she darted an

angry look at the speaker before turning away with an imperious gesture, when, with a meaning smile upon his lip, Neil Harley, Her Britannic Majesty's Political Resident at Sindang, walked forward.

"That man irritates me," said Helen, in a low, angry voice. "I began by disliking him; I declare I hate him now!"

"Is it not because you both try to say sharp-edged words to each other, Helen?" said Grey Stuart, seating herself by her schoolfellow's side, and beginning to work. "Mr Harley is always very kind and nice to me."

"Pah! He treats you like a child!" said Helen, contemptuously.

"Well," said Grey, smiling in her companion's face, "I suppose I am a child to him. Here comes Mr Rosebury."

"I wish Mr Rosebury were back in England," said Helen, petulantly. "He wearies me with his constant talk about the beauties of nature. I wish this dreadful voyage were over!"

"And we have hardly begun it, Helen," said Grey, quietly; but noticing that her companion's face was flushed, she said, anxiously, "Are you unwell, dear?"

"Unwell? No."

There was something strange in Helen's behaviour, but she had the skill to conceal it, as the newly-appointed chaplain of Sindang came slowly up and began to talk to Helen in his dry, measured way, trying to draw her attention to the beauty of the evening, but without avail, for she seemed *distracte*, and her answers were sometimes far from pertinent to the subject in

question.

Just then Mrs Doctor Bolter came bustling up, looking bright, eager, and full of animation.

She darted an uneasy look at her brother, and another at Helen, which was returned by one full of indifference, almost defiance, as if resenting the little lady's way, and Mrs Bolter turned to Grey Stuart.

"Where is my husband, my dear?" she said. "I declare this ship is so big that people are all getting lost! Oh! here he comes! Now there – just as if there were no sailors to do it – he must be carrying pails of water!"

For the little doctor came panting along with a bucket of water in each hand, the Resident walking by his side till the two vessels were plumped down in front of Helen's chair.

"Now, my dear Harry, what are you doing?" began the little lady, in tones of remonstrance.

"All right, my dear. Two pails full of freshly-dipped sea water. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you will close round, I will show you some of the marvels of creation."

As quite a little crowd began to collect, many being ladies, at whom the little doctor's wife – only a few days back elderly Miss Rosebury – directed very sharp, searching glances, especially when they spoke to her husband, Helen rose with a look of annoyance from her chair and began to walk forward.

She was hesitating about going farther alone, when a low voice by her ear said, softly:

“Thank you, Miss Perowne. Suppose you take my arm? We will walk forward into the bows.”

“Mr Harley!” said the lady, drawing back, with her eyes full of indignation.

“I think I was to show you the beauty of the sunset,” he said. “We can see it so much better from the bows, and,” he added, meaningly, “I shall have so much better an opportunity to say that which I wish to say.”

“What you wish to say, Mr Harley?”

“Yes,” he replied, taking her hand, drawing it quickly through his arm, and leading her down the steps.

“I wish to return, Mr Harley,” she said, imperiously.

“You shall return, my dear young lady, when I have said that which I wish to say.”

“What can you wish to say to me?” she said, haughtily.

“That which your eyes have been asking me if I could say, ever since we met a fortnight ago, Helen, and that which I have determined to say while there is time.”

Helen Perowne shrank away, but there was a power of will in her companion that seemed to subdue her, and in spite of herself she was led to the forward part of the vessel, just as the sun had dipped below the horizon; the heavens were lit up like the sea with a gorgeous blaze of orange, purple, green, and gold; and little Mrs Doctor Bolter exclaimed:

“That wicked, coquettish girl away again! Grey Stuart, my dear, where has your schoolfellow gone?”

# Volume One – Chapter Fourteen.

## A Troublesome Charge

Neil Harley, in spite of his strong power of will, had said but very few words to Helen Perowne before little Mrs Doctor Bolter bustled up.

“Oh, Mr Harley!” she exclaimed, “you have carried off my charge.”

“Yes,” he replied, smiling pleasantly; “we came forward to have a good view of the sunset.”

“Because you could see it so much better at the other end?” said Mrs Bolter, drily.

“No; but because we could see it uninterruptedly,” replied the Resident, coolly.

“Oh no, you could not, Mr Harley,” continued the little lady, “because you see I have come to interrupt your *tête-à-tête*. Helen, my dear, will you come back and join us on the other deck?”

“To be sure she will, my dear Mrs Bolter, and I shall come too. There, mind those ropes. That’s better. What a glorious evening! I hope I am to have the pleasure of showing you ladies many that are far more beautiful on the Darak river.”

Little Mrs Bolter looked up at him meaningly; but the Resident’s eyes did not flinch; he only gave her a quiet nod in reply, and they climbed once more to the quarter-deck, where,

in preparation for the coming darkness, the sailors were busily hanging lamps.

They had no sooner reached the group of people around Dr Bolter, than, as if to revenge herself for the annoyance to which she had been subjected, Helen disengaged her hand, walked quickly up to the Reverend Arthur, and began to talk to him in a low earnest voice.

“If she would only keep away from poor Arthur,” muttered the little lady, “I would not care – she is making him infatuated. And now there’s Henry talking to that thin dark lady again. I wish he would not talk so much to her.”

“Married late in life,” said the Resident, quietly, as he lit a cigar; “but she seems to have her share of jealousy. She’s a dear, good little woman, though, all the same.”

He walked to the side watching Helen where she stood beneath one of the newly lit lamps, looking very attractive in the faint reflected rays of the sunset mingled with those shed down from above upon her glossy hair.

“Why does she go so much to gossip with that chaplain? If it is to pique me it is labour in vain, for I have not a *soupeçon* of jealousy in my composition. She is very beautiful and she knows it too. What a head and neck, and what speaking eyes!”

He stood smoking for a few minutes and then went on:

“Speaking eyes? Yes, they are indeed. It is no fancy, but it seems to have been to lead me on; and as I judge her, perhaps wrongfully, she loves to drag every man she sees in her train.

Well, she has made a mistake this time if she thinks she is going to play with me. I feel ashamed of myself sometimes when I think of how easily I let her noose me, but it is done.”

He lit a fresh cigar, and still stood watching Helen.

“Sometimes,” he continued, “I have called myself idiot for this sudden awakening of a passion that I thought dead; but no, the man who receives encouragement from a woman like that is no idiot. It is the natural consequence that he should love her.”

Just then three or four of the passengers, officers and civil officials, sauntered up to Helen, and after the first few words she joined with animation in the conversation; but not without darting a quick glance once or twice in the Resident’s direction.

“No,” he said, softly; “the man who, receiving encouragement, becomes deeply in love with you, fair Helen, is no idiot, but very appreciative, for you are a beautiful girl and very fond of admiration.”

He did not move, but still watched the girl, who began to stand out clearly against the lamp-light now, more attractive than he had ever seen her.

“Yes,” he said; “you may flirt and coquet to your heart’s content, but it will have no effect upon me, my child. I don’t think I am a conceited man, but I know I am strong, and have a will. Let me see, I have known you since I went down, at Bolter’s request, to be his best man at the wedding, and I had you, my fair bridesmaid, under my charge, with the result that you tried to drag me at your car. Well, I am caught, but take care, my child,

prisoners are dangerous sometimes, and rise and take the captor captive.”

“Yes,” he continued, “some day I may hold you struggling against my prisoning hands – hands that grasp you tenderly, so that your soft plumage may not be ruffled, for it is too beautiful to spoil.”

Just then there was a sally made by a French officer of the vessel, and Helen’s silvery laugh rang out.

“Yes, your laugh is sweet and thrilling,” he continued softly. “No doubt it was a brilliant compliment our French friend paid. I don’t think I am vain, if I say to myself even that laugh was uttered to pique me. It is an arrow that has failed, for I am in a prophetic mood. I have seen the maidens of every land almost beneath the sun, and allowing for savagery, I find them very much the same when they turn coquettes. You could not understand my meaning this evening, eh? Well, we shall see. Go on, coquette, and laugh and dance in the sun till you are tired. I’ll wait till then. The effervescence and froth of the cup will have passed away, and there will be but the sweet, clear wine of your woman’s nature left for me to drink. I’ll wait till then.”

Again Helen’s laugh rang out, but the Resident remained unmoved.

“Am I a coxcomb – a conceited idiot?” he said; then softly, “I hope not. Time will prove.”

“I don’t care, Harry; I will not have it!”

“But it is only girlish nonsense, my dear.”

“Then the young ladies in our charge shall not indulge in girlish nonsense. It is not becoming. Grey Stuart never gets a cluster of young men round her like a queen in a court.”

“More fools the young men, my dear,” said the doctor; “for Grey is really as sweet a maiden as – ”

“Henry!”

“Well, really, my dear, I mean it. Hang it, my dear Mary! don’t think I mean anything but fatherly feeling towards the child. Hallo, Harley! you there? Why are you not paying your court yonder?”

“Because, my dear Bolter, your good lady here has given me one severe castigation to-day for the very sin.”

“There I think you are wrong, Mary,” said the doctor, quickly; “and I will say that I wish you, a stable, middle-aged man, and an old friend of her father’s, would go and spend more time by her side; it would keep off these buzzing young gnats.”

“If I said anything unkind, Mr Harley,” said the little lady, holding out her hand, “please forgive me. I only wish to help my husband to do his duty towards the young lady who is in our charge.”

“My dear Mrs Bolter,” said the Resident, taking the extended hand, “I only esteem my dear old friend’s wife the more for the brave way in which she behaved. I am sure we shall be the firmest of friends!”

“I hope we shall, I am sure,” said the little lady, warmly.

“What do you say, Bolter?”

“I know you will,” cried the doctor. “You won’t be able to help it, Harley. She is just the brave, true lady we want at the station to take the lead and rule the roost. She’ll keep all the ladies in order.”

“Now, Henry!”

“But you will, my dear; and I tell you at once that Neil Harley here will help you all he can.”

Five minutes later the doctor and his wife were alone, the former being called to account for his very warm advocacy of Mr Harley.

“Well, my dear, he deserves it all,” said the doctor.

“But I don’t quite like his behaviour towards Helen Perowne,” said the little lady; “and now we are upon the subject, Harry, I must say that I don’t quite like your conduct towards that girl.”

The doctor turned, took her hands, held them, and laughed.

“Why, what a droll little body you are, Mary!”

“And why, sir, pray?” said the lady, rather sharply.

“Four or five months ago, my dear, I don’t believe you knew the real meaning of the word *love*, and now I honestly believe you are finding out the meaning of the word *jealousy* as well; but seriously, my dear, that girl makes me shiver!”

“Shiver, sir! Why?”

“She’s a regular firebrand coming amongst our young men. She’ll do no end of mischief. I see it as plain as can be, and I shall have to set to as soon as I get home to compound a fresh medicine – pills at night, draught in the morning – for the cure

of love-sickness. She'll give the lot the complaint. But, you dear, silly little old woman, you don't think that I – oh! – oh! come, Mary, Mary, my dear!"

"Well, there, I don't think so, Harry," said the little lady, apologetically, "but she is so horribly handsome, and makes such use of those dreadful eyes of hers, that it makes me cross when I see the gentlemen obeying her lightest beck and call."

"Well, she does lead them about pretty well," chuckled the doctor. "She's a handsome girl!"

"Henry!"

"Well, my dear, I'll think she's as ugly as sin if you like."

"And in spite of all you say of Mr Harley, I don't think he is behaving well. She gave him a few of those looks of hers when he came down to our wedding, and he has been following her ever since. I've watched him!"

"What a wicked wretch!" chuckled the little doctor. "Has he taken a fancy to a pretty girl, then, and made up his mind to win? Why, he's as bad as that scoundrel Harry Bolter, who wouldn't take *no* for an answer, and did not."

"Now, don't talk nonsense, Henry. This is too serious a subject for joking."

"I am as serious as a judge, Polly."

"What!"

"Is there anything the matter, my dear?" said the little doctor, who was startled by the lady's energy.

"What did you call me, sir?"

“Polly, my dear; tender pet name for Mary.”

“Never again please, dear Henry,” said the little lady. “I don’t wish to be too particular, and don’t mind tenderness – I – I – rather like it, dear. But do I look like a lady who could be called Polly?”

“Then it shall always be Mary, my dear,” said the doctor; “and I won’t joke about serious matters. As to Neil Harley and Helen Perowne, you’re quite right; but ’pon my word, I don’t see why we should interfere as long as matters don’t go too far.”

“I do not agree with you, Henry.”

“You have not heard my argument, my dear,” he said taking her hand, drawing it through his arm, and walking her up and down the deck. “Now look here, my dear Mary, six months ago you were a miserable unbeliever.”

“A what?” cried the lady, indignantly.

“A miserable unbeliever. You had no faith in its being the duty of all ladies to get married; and I came to your barbarous little village and converted you.”

“Oh, yes, I had great belief,” said the little lady, quietly.

“Well, then, you were waiting for the missionary to come and lead your belief the right way. Now then, my dear, don’t you see this? Suppose a place where there are a dozen ladies and only one gentleman. How many can be married?”

“Why, only one lady, of course,” said Mrs Doctor.

“Exactly, my dear,” said the doctor; “but it is a moral certainty that the gentleman will be married.”

“Well, yes, I suppose so,” replied Mrs Doctor.

“Suppose so? Why, they’d combine and kill him for an unnatural monster if he did not marry one of them,” said the doctor, laughing. “Well, then, my dear, suppose we reverse the case, and take a young and very handsome lady to a station in an out-of-the-way part of the world, where the proportions are as one to twenty – one lady to twenty gentlemen – what is the moral result?”

“I suppose she would be sure to be married?”

“Exactly, my dear. Well, as our handsome young charge evidently thinks a very great deal about love-making – ”

“A very great deal too much,” said Mrs Doctor, tartly.

“Exactly so, my dear. Well, she is going to such a place. What ought we to do?”

“See of course that she does not make a foolish match.”

“Ex – actly!” cried the doctor. “Well, Harley seems to have taken a fancy to her at once. Good man – good position – not too old.”

“I don’t know,” said the lady, dubiously, “I don’t quite think they would match.”

“I do,” said the doctor, sharply. “The very man. Plenty of firmness. He’s as genial and warm-hearted as a man can be; but he has a will like iron. He’d break in my young madam there; and, by Jove! ma’am, if I am a judge of woman’s nature – ”

“Which you are not, sir,” said the lady, sharply. “Well, perhaps not; but I do say this – if ever there was a Petruchio cut out for our

handsome, dark-eyed Katherine, then Neil Harley is the man!”

“Here, doctor, where are you? Come along!” cried the gentleman in question. “Music – music! Miss Perowne has promised to sing!”

“Have you been persuading her, Mr Harley?” said the little lady.

“I? My dear madam, no! She refused me; but has been listening to the blandishments of Captain Lindley; and – there – she is beginning. By Jove! what a voice!”

# **Volume One – Chapter Fifteen.**

## **Lieutenant Chumbley**

A rapid and pleasant voyage, with a touch here and there at the various ports, giving the two girls, just fresh from their life of seclusion, a glance at the strange mixture of nationalities collected together in these pauses of commercial transit.

It was one continuous scene of interest to Grey Stuart, who was never weary of gazing at the hurrying crowds and the strange customs of these far-off towns; while Helen, if persuaded to land, found the heat too oppressive, and preferred a cane lounge in the shade of an awning, with four or five gentlemen in attendance with fans, iced water, or fruit.

The Resident was constant in his attentions to her, and tried, whenever the steamer put into port, to get her to join some excursion, the most notable of which was at Ceylon; but she invariably refused, when he would laughingly turn to Grey and ask her to be his companion.

Mrs Doctor looked serious at first; but, particular as she was, she gave way, for the Resident's behaviour to the bright English girl was beyond reproach.

"You'll understand Harley better by-and-by," said the doctor. "He's a very old friend of her father, and he might be the girl's uncle from his way."

“But do you think it will be proper to let her go?” said the little lady.

“I’ll answer for Harley’s conduct, my dear. If ever there was a gentleman it is he. Let her go.”

So Grey often became Neil Harley’s companion in these excursions, returning delighted with the wonders of each place; while the Resident was loud in his praises of her quiet, sensible appreciation of all they saw.

“She’s a very amiable, sweet, intelligent girl, Mrs Bolter,” he said one evening, as he sat with the doctor and his wife.

“Do you think so, Mr Harley?” said the lady drily.

“Indeed I do, ma’am,” he replied, “and I am very proud to know her.”

“Better hook her, Harley,” said the doctor, with a twinkle of the eye, as he saw his wife’s serious, suspicious glances. “She’ll be caught up like a shot.”

“Then I hope you and Mrs Bolter will help and see that she makes no foolish match. I beg her pardon, though,” he added, hastily; “she is not a girl who would do that.”

“You are first in the field,” said the doctor, in spite of an admonitory shake of the head from his lady. “Why not make your hay while the sun shines?”

The Resident sat gazing very seriously out at sea, and his voice was very low and tender as he replied:

“No; Miss Stuart is a young lady for whom I feel just such sentiments as I should presume a man would feel for his bright,

intelligent child. That is all, Mrs Bolter,” he said, turning quickly. “I ought to congratulate you upon the warm hold you have upon Miss Grey’s affections.”

He rose then and walked away, with the little doctor’s wife watching him intently.

“Henry,” she said suddenly, “that man is either a very fine fellow or else he is an arch-hypocrite.”

“Well, I’ll vouch he isn’t the last,” said the doctor, warmly, “for I’ve known him ten years, and I’ve had him down twice with very severe attacks of fever. I know him by heart. I’ve sounded him all over, heart, lungs, liver: he hasn’t a failing spot in his whole body.”

“Bless the man!” said Mrs Doctor, “just as if that had anything to do with his character for honesty and truth. Now look there, Henry, really I cannot bear it much longer. That girl’s conduct is scandalous?”

“What, Grey Stuart’s?”

“No; absurd! Helen Perowne’s. Why the young men all seem to be mad.”

“Moths round a candle,” said the doctor. “There, don’t worry yourself, my dear, it’s only her way. She loves admiration, and young fellows admire her, so it suits both sides.”

“But I don’t like a young lady who is under our charge to be so fond of admiration.”

“Oh, there’s no harm in her. She is one of those ladies who seem to have been born to exact attention; and as there are plenty

ready to pay toll, why, what does it matter?"

"It matters a great deal," said the little lady, indignantly; "and no good will come of it. One day she is trying to lead Mr Harley at her heels like a lapdog; the next day it is Captain Lindley; the next, Mr Adjutant Morris; then Lieutenant Barlow. Why, she was making eyes at Captain Pennelle yesterday at dinner. I declare the girl seems quite to infatuate the men, and you see if trouble does not come of it."

"Oh, tut! tut! Nonsense, my dear, what trouble should come?"

"Quarrels, and duels, and that sort of thing."

"Men don't fight duels now, my dear. Oh, no, don't you be uneasy. We shall soon be at Sindang now, and then we can hand your incubus over to papa Perowne, and be free of it all."

"I shall be very glad, I'm sure," said the lady. "There look at her. I suppose that's the last conquest!"

"Whom do you mean?" said the doctor, drowsily, for he had just settled himself for a nap in the yielding cane chair.

"That great, tall young officer, who came on board at Colombo."

"Oh, Chumbley," said the doctor, looking up and following his wife's eyes to where a great broad-shouldered fellow was bending down talking to Helen Perowne, who seemed to be listening eagerly to his words, as if on purpose to annoy the half-dozen gentlemen forming her court.

He was a fine, well-set-up young fellow, looking like a lifeguardsman picked from among a selection of fair, curly-

haired Saxons, and, evidently flattered by the lady's notice, he was doing his best to make himself agreeable.

"You may call it what you like," said Mrs Doctor. "I call it scandalous! Here's the very last arrival in the ship."

"Regularly subjugated," laughed the doctor.

"It is nothing to laugh at," said the lady, indignantly. "I declare I have a good mind to go and interfere."

"No, no, don't," said the doctor earnestly. "She means no harm, and you may only make a breach between you."

"I don't care, Henry; it is for the girl's sake that I should interfere; and as to the breach, she utterly detests me as it is for what I have said. I think she hates me as much as I do her."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense, Mary, you could not hate anyone; and as to Helen Perowne's foolish coquetry, it will all settle down into the love of some stout brave fellow."

"Such as that of Lieutenant Chumbley."

"Perhaps so."

"Well I hope so, I'm sure. One ought to have a big strong man to keep all the others away, for if ever there was a heartless coquette it is she; and the sooner we can place her in her father's hands the happier I shall be."

"Would you mind whisking a fly off now and then with your handkerchief, Mary," said the little doctor, drowsily, as he settled himself for his nap.

"I know there'll be some mischief come out of it all," said the little lady, as she drove a couple of flies from her husband's nose.

“Only – few days – old Perowne – sure to meet us, and – ”

The handkerchief was kept busily whisking about, for the flies were tiresome, and the doctor was fast asleep, only turning restlessly now and then, when in her eagerness to watch Helen Perowne and Lieutenant Chumbley – the young officer coming out to join the regiment into which he had exchanged with the hope of getting variety and sport – Mrs Doctor forgot to act as guardian against the flies.

# **Volume One – Chapter Sixteen.**

## **A Dangerous Creature**

At last Mrs Bolter's troubles were, as she said, at an end, for the great steamer had transferred a portion of her passengers to the station gunboat at the mouth of the Darak river. There had been a quick run up between the low shores dense with their growth of mangrove and nipah palm. The station had been reached, and the ladies transferred to the arms of their fathers, both waiting anxiously for the coming boat upon the Resident's island, where in close connection with the fort Mr Harley's handsome bungalow had been built.

For the first few days all was excitement at Sindang, for the report of the beauty of "Old Stuart's" daughter, and above all that of the child of the principal merchant in the place, created quite a furore among the officers of the two companies of foot stationed at the fort, and the young merchants and civil officers of the place.

"It is really a very, very great relief, Henry," said Mrs Doctor. "I can sleep as easily again now those girls are off my hands. I mean that girl; but really I don't feel so satisfied as I should like, for though I know Helen Perowne to be safe in her father's charge, I am not at all sure that my responsibility has ceased."

"Ah, you must do what you can for the motherless girls, my

dear. Eh, Arthur? what do you say?"

"I quite agree with you, Harry," said the new chaplain, quietly; "but the change to here is – is rather confusing at first."

"Oh, you'll soon settle down, old fellow; and I say, Mary, my dear, it is a beautiful place, is it not?"

"Very, very beautiful indeed," replied the little lady; "but it is very hot."

"Well, say warmish," said the doctor, chuckling; "but I did not deceive you about that. You'll soon get used to it, and you won't be so ready to bustle about; you must take it coolly."

"As you do?" said Mrs Doctor, smiling.

"As I do? Oh, I'm the doctor, and here is every one getting his or her liver out of order during my absence! My hands are terribly full just now; but we shall soon settle down. How is the church getting on, Arthur?"

"Slowly, my dear Harry," said the Reverend Arthur, in his quiet way. "They are making the improvements I suggested. Mr Perowne subscribed handsomely, and Mr Harley is supplying more labour; but I'm afraid I was rather negligent this morning, for I strolled away towards the woods."

"Jungle, my dear fellow, jungle! but don't go again without me; I'm more at home here than you."

"But the woods – I mean jungle – looked so beautiful; surely there is nothing to fear."

"Not much – with care," replied the doctor, "but still there are dangers – fever, sunstroke, tigers, crocodiles, poisonous serpents,

venomous insects and leeches.”

“Goodness gracious!” ejaculated Mrs Doctor. “Arthur, you are on no account to go again!”

“But, my dear Mary – ” said the chaplain, meekly.

“Now, don’t argue, Arthur. I say you are on no account to go again!”

“But really, my dear Mary – ”

“I will listen to no excuse, Arthur. Unless Henry, who understands the place, accompanies you, I forbid your going again. I hope you have not been into any other dangerous place.”

“Oh, no, my dear Mary; I only went and called upon Mr Perowne.” Mrs Bolter started, and the doctor burst into a roar of laughter.

“Ha, ha, ha!” he cried. “Why, my dear boy, that’s a far more dangerous place than the jungle.”

“I – I do not understand you, Henry,” said the chaplain, with a faint flush in his cheek.

“Not understand me, my dear fellow! Why, Perowne keeps a most ferocious creature there, and it’s loose too.”

“Loose?” cried Mrs Doctor, excitedly.

“Oh, yes: I’ve seen it about the grounds, parading up and down on the lawn by the river, and in the house as well.”

“Gracious me, Henry, the man must be mad! What is it?” cried Mrs Bolter.

“Regular tigress – man-eater,” said the doctor.

“And you allowed your brother-in-law to go there without

warning, Henry? Really, I am surprised at you!”

“Oh! pooh, pooh!” ejaculated the doctor. “Arthur can take care of himself.”

“And here have I accepted an invitation for all of us to go there the week after next to dinner! I won’t go. I certainly will not go.”

“Nonsense, my dear Mary – nonsense!” said the doctor, with his eyes twinkling. “We must go. Perowne would be horribly put out if we did not.”

“Now look here, Henry, when I was a maiden lady I never even kept a cat or a dog, because I said to myself that live animals about a house might be unpleasant to one’s friends. So how do you suppose that when I have become a married lady I am going to sanction the presence of dangerous monsters in a house?”

“Oh, but it won’t hurt you,” said the doctor. “I tell you it’s a man-eater. We must go, Mary.”

“I certainly must beg of you not to ask me,” said the little lady. “My dear Harry, it gives me great pain to go against your wishes, but I could not – I really could not go.”

“Not if I assured you it was perfectly safe?”

“If you gave me that assurance, Henry, I – I think I would go; for I believe you would not deceive me.”

“Never,” said the doctor, emphatically. “Well, I assure you that you need not be under the slightest apprehension.”

“But is it chained up, Harry?”

“Well, no, my dear,” replied the little doctor; “they could not very well chain her up. But I was there yesterday though, and I

saw that Perowne had given her a very handsome chain.”

“Then why doesn’t he chain her up? I shall certainly tell Mr Perowne that he ought. This comes of the poor man having no wife and living out in these savage parts. Really, Henry, I don’t think we ought to go.”

“Oh! pooh, pooh – nonsense, my dear! You’ve nothing to mind. I’m not afraid of her. I’ll take care of you.”

“I know you are very good, and brave, and strong, Harry,” said the little lady, smiling, “and if you say it is safe I will go, for I do trust in your knowledge, and – there, now, I declare I am quite angry! You are laughing, sir! I’m sure there is some trick!”

“Trick? What trick?” cried the doctor, chuckling.

“Do you mean to tell me, sir, that Mr Perowne has a wild tigress running about his place?”

“Oh, no; I never said a wild tigress – did I, Arthur?”

“I – I did not quite hear what you said, Henry,” replied the chaplain.

“You said a dangerous creature – a sort of tigress, sir.”

“Right, so I did; and so he has.”

“What is it then?” said Mrs Doctor, very sharply.

“A handsome young woman,” chuckled the doctor – “his daughter Helen.”

“Now, Henry, I do declare that you are insufferable!” cried Mrs Doctor, angrily, as her brother rose softly, walked to the window of the pretty palm-thatched bungalow, and stood gazing out at the bright flowers with which the doctor had surrounded

his place.

“Well, it’s true enough,” chuckled the doctor. “I never saw such a girl in my life. She has had that great fellow Chumbley hanging after her for weeks, and now – ”

“And now what, sir?”

Perhaps it was the wind, but certainly just then there was a sound as of a faint sigh from somewhere by the window, and it seemed as if the chaplain was recalling the past days of repose at his little home near Mayleyfield, and wondering whether he had done right to come; but no one heeded him, and the doctor went on:

“Now she seems to have lassoed young Hilton.”

“What, Captain Hilton?”

“Yes, my dear, with a silken lasso; and he is all devotion.”

“Henry, you astound me!” cried Mrs Doctor. “Why, I thought that Mr Harley meant something there.”

“So did I,” said the doctor, “but it seems all off. Harley and Chumbley cashiered, *vice* Hilton – the reigning hero of the day.”

“Of the day indeed!” exclaimed Mrs Doctor. “I never did see such a girl. It is dreadful.”

“And yet you scolded me for calling her a dangerous creature.”

“Well, I must own that she is, Henry,” said Mrs Doctor; and once more there was a faint sigh by the window.

“She’s a regular man-trap, my dear, and practises with her eyes upon everyone she sees. I don’t think even her great-grandfather would be safe. She actually smiled at me yesterday.”

“What?” cried the little lady.

“Perowne sent for me, you know.”

“Yes, of course, I remember. Go on, Henry.”

“They’d been out together – she wanted to see the Residency island – and then nothing would do but she must have a walk in the jungle; and then, I don’t know whether she began making eyes at the leeches, but half a dozen fastened upon her, of course.”

“Why, of course, sir?”

“Because she went out walking in ridiculous high-heeled low shoes, with fancy stockings.”

“Well, Henry, how tiresomely prolix you are!”

“Well, that’s all, my dear, only that the leeches fastened on her feet and ankles.”

“And did Mr Perowne send for you to take them off?”

“Well, not exactly, my dear, they pulled them off themselves; but one bite would not stop bleeding, and I had to apply a little pad on the instep – wonderfully pretty little ankles and insteps, my dear, when the stockings are off.”

“Doctor Bolter!” exclaimed the little lady in so severe a tone of voice that the subject of Helen Perowne was dismissed, and the culprit allowed to go to his little surgery to see to the compounding of some medicines necessary for his sick.

# **Volume One – Chapter Seventeen.**

## **Doctor Bolter's Theory**

In a little Eastern settlement, in spite of feelings of caste, the Europeans are so few that rules of society are to a certain extent set aside, so that people mix to a greater degree than in larger towns. In spite of her rather particular, and, to be truthful, rather sharp, old-maidish ways, Mrs Bolter soon found herself heartily welcomed by all, and readily accorded, as the doctor's wife, almost a leading position in the place.

This position would by rights have been given to the lady of the principal merchant, but Mr Perowne had lost his wife when Helen was very young; and Isaac Stuart – “Old Stuart,” as he was generally called – was no better off, his daughter Grey having been left motherless at a very early age.

The idea of Mr Perowne was that upon his daughter joining him she should take the lead and give receptions; and to this end the first party was arranged, to which Mr and Mrs Doctor Bolter and the chaplain had been invited, the time rapidly coming round, and the guests assembling at Mr Perowne's handsome house, where the luxurious dinner, served in the most admirable manner by the soft-footed, quiet Chinese servants, passed off without a hitch; and at last, with a smile that seemed to have the effect of being directed at every gentleman at table, Helen

Perowne rose, and the ladies left the room.

The conversation soon became general, and then the doctor's voice rose in opposition to a laugh raised against something he had said.

"Oh, yes," he cried, "laugh and turn everything I say into ridicule: I can bear it. I have not been out all these years in the jungle for nothing."

"Does Mrs Bolter approve of your theory, doctor?" said the Resident.

"I have not mentioned it to her, sir," replied the doctor, glancing at the curtains looped over the open doorway; "and if you have no objection, I will make the communication myself. My journey home and my marriage have put it a good deal out of my head. But what I want to tell all here is, that the thing is as plain as the nose on your face."

Mr Harley, to whom this was principally addressed, gently stroked the bridge of his aquiline nose, half closed his eyes, and smiled in a good-humoured way.

"That's right," said the doctor. "Go on unbelieving. Some day I'll give you the most convincing proofs that what I say is right."

"But will Mrs Bolter approve of your running wild in the jungle now you are married?" said the Resident, quietly.

"Pooh, sir – pooh, sir! My wife is a very sensible little woman, isn't she, Arthur?" he cried; and the chaplain smiled and bowed before lapsing into a dreamy state, and sitting back in his chair, gazing at the curtains hanging softly across the open door.

“Oh, we’re ready enough to believe, doctor,” said the Resident; “don’t be offended.”

“Pooh! I’m not offended,” exclaimed the doctor. “All discoveries get laughed at till the people are forced to believe. Here, young man, you’ve had enough fruit,” he cried sharply, as one of the party stretched forth his hand to help himself to the luscious tropic fruits with which the table was spread.

“What a tyrant you are, doctor,” said the young officer.

“Here, boy,” cried the doctor, to one of the silent Chinese servants gliding about the table, “more ice. – You’re as unbelieving as John Chinaman here.”

“We’ll believe fast enough, doctor,” said the last speaker; “but it is only fair that we should ask for facts.”

“Facts, Captain Hilton,” said the doctor, turning sharply upon the sun-tanned young officer, who, like the rest of the party, was attired in white, for the heat of the large, lightly-furnished room was very great, “facts, sir? What do you want? Haven’t you your Bible, and does it not tell you that Solomon’s ships went to Ophir, and brought back gold, and apes, and peacocks?”

“Yes,” said Captain Hilton, “certainly;” and the Reverend Arthur bowed his head.

“Oh, you’ll grant that,” said the little doctor, with a smile of triumph and a glance round the table.

“Of course,” said the young officer, taking a cigarette.

“I say, Doctor,” said the Resident – “or no; I’ll ask your brother-in-law. Mr Rosebury, did the doctor ventilate his

astounding theory over in England?”

“No,” replied the chaplain, smiling, “I have never heard him propound any theory.”

“I thought not,” said the Resident. “Go on, doctor.”

“I don’t mind your banter,” said the little doctor, good-humouredly. “Now look here, Captain Hilton, I want to know what more you wish for. There’s Malacca due south of where you are sitting, and there lies Mount Ophir to the east.”

“But there is a Mount Ophir in Sumatra,” said Lieutenant Chumbley, the big, heavy dragoon-looking fellow, who had not yet spoken.

“In Sumatra?” cried the doctor. “Bah, sir, bah! That isn’t Solomon’s place at all. I tell you I’ve investigated the whole thing. Here’s Ophir east of Malacca, with its old gold workings all about the foot of the mountain; there are the apes in the trees – Boy, more ice.”

“And where are the peacocks?” drawled Chumbley.

“Hark at him!” cried the doctor; “he says where are the peacocks? Look here, Mr Chumbley, if you would take a gun, or a geologist’s hammer, and exercise your limbs and your understanding, instead of dangling about after young ladies – ”

“Shouldn’t have brought them out, doctor,” drawled the young fellow, coolly.

“Or say a collecting-box and a cyanide bottle,” continued the doctor, “instead of getting your liver into a torpid state by sitting and lying under trees and verandas smoking and learning to chew

betel like the degraded natives, you would not ask me where are the peacocks?”

“I don’t know where they are, doctor,” said the young man, slowly.

“In the jungle, sir, in the jungle, which swarms with the lovely creatures, and with pheasants too. Pff! ’tis hot – Boy, more ice.”

“Don’t be so hard on a fellow, doctor,” drawled the lieutenant. “I’m new to the country, and I’ve twice as much body to carry about as you have. You’re seasoned and tough; I’m young and tender. So the jungle swarms with peacocks, does it?”

“Yes, sir, swarms,” said the doctor, with asperity. “Well,” said Chumbley, languidly, “let it swarm! I knew it swarmed with mosquitoes.”

“Sir,” said the doctor, contemptuously, as he glanced at the great frame of the young officer, “you never exert yourself, and I don’t believe, sir, that you know what is going on within a mile of the Residency.”

“I really don’t believe I do,” said the young man, with a sleepy yawn. “I say, Mr Perowne, can’t you give us a little more air?”

“My dear Mr Chumbley,” said the host, a thin, slightly grey, rather *distingué* man, “every door and window is wide open. Take a little more iced cup.”

“It makes a fellow wish he were a frog,” drawled the lieutenant. “I should like to go and lie right in the water with only my nose in the air.”

As he spoke he gazed sleepily through his half-closed eyes

at the broad, moonlit river gliding on like so much molten silver, while on the farther bank the palms stood up in columns, spreading their great fronds like lace against the spangled purple sky.

Below them, playing amidst the bushes and undergrowth that fringed the river, it seemed as if nature had sent the surplus of her starry millions from sky to earth, for the leaves were dotted with fire-flies scintillating and flashing in every direction. A dense patch of darkness would suddenly blaze out with hundreds of soft, lambent sparks, then darken again for another patch to be illumined, as the wondrous insects played about like magnified productions of the points of light that run through well-burned tinder.

From time to time there would be a faint splash rise from the river, and the water rippled in the moonbeams, sounds then well understood by the occupants of Mr Perowne's dining-room, for as the languid lieutenant made another allusion to the pleasure of being a frog, the doctor said, laughing: "Try it Chumbley; you are young and tolerably plump, and it would make a vacancy for another sub. The crocodiles would bless you."

"Two natives were carried off last week while bathing on the bank," said a sharp, harsh voice, and a little, thin, dry man who had been lying back in an easy-chair with a handkerchief over his head raised himself and passed his glass to be filled with claret and iced water. "Hah! Harley," he continued, with a broad Scotch accent, "you ought to put down crocodiles. What's the use of our

having a Resident if he is not to suppress every nuisance in the place?"

"Put down crocodiles, Mr Stuart, eh? Rather a task!"

"Make these idle young officers shoot them then, instead of dangling after our daughters. Set Chumbley to work."

"The crocodiles never hurt me," drawled the young man. "Rather ugly, certainly, but they've a nice open style of countenance. I like hunting and shooting, but I don't see any fun in making yourself a nuisance to everything that runs or flies, as the doctor there does, shooting, and skinning and sticking pins through 'em, and putting them in glass cases with camphor. I hope you don't do much of that sort of thing, Mr Rosebury?"

"I? Oh, no," said the Reverend Arthur, raising his eyes from a dreamy contemplation of the doorway, through which a pleasant murmur of female voices came. "I – I am afraid I am guilty as to insects."

"But you draw the line at crocodiles, I suppose? Poor brutes! They never had any education, and if you put temptation in their way, of course they'll tumble in."

"And then repent and shed crocodile's tears," said Captain Hilton, smiling.

"A vulgar error, sir!" said the doctor, sharply. "Crocodiles have no tear-secreting glands."

"They could not wipe their eyes in the water if they had, doctor," said Captain Hilton, merrily.

"Of course not, sir," said the doctor; "but as I was saying,

gentlemen, when Solomon's ships – ”

“I say, Perowne,” interrupted the little Scotch merchant, in his harsh voice, “hadn't we better join the ladies? If Bolter is going to ventilate his theory I shall go to sleep.”

“I've done,” said the doctor, leaning back and thrusting his hands into his pockets; “but I must say, Stuart, that as an old resident in these parts I think you might give a little attention to a fact of great historical interest, and one that might lead to a valuable discovery of gold. What do you say, Perowne?”

“I leave such matters to you scientific gentlemen,” said the host, carefully flicking a scrap of cigar-ash from his shirt-front.

“You can't tempt Perowne,” laughed the little Scot. “He is a regular Mount Ophir in himself, and,” he added to himself, “has a flaunting peacock – I mean peahen – of his own.”

“Nay, nay, Stuart,” said the host, smiling meaningly; “I am not a rich man.”

“Oh, no,” chuckled his brother merchant; “he's as poor as a Jew.”

Mr Perowne shook his head at his harsh-voiced guest, glanced round suavely, as if asking permission of his guests, and then rose from the handsomely-furnished table.

“Then we will join the ladies,” he said, blandly; and the Chinese servants drew aside the light muslin curtains which hung in graceful folds over the arched door.

It was but a few steps across a conservatory, the bright tints of whose rich tropical flowers and lustrous sheen of whose leaves

were softened and subdued by the light of some half-dozen large Chinese lanterns, cleverly arranged so as to give the finest effect to the gorgeous plants.

Here several of the party paused for a few moments to gaze through another muslin-draped portal into the drawing-room, whose shaded lamps with their heavy silken fringes cast a subdued light upon a group, the sight of which had a strange effect upon several of the men.

There, in the darker part of the beautifully-furnished room, where the taste of Paris was mingled with the highest and airiest ornamentation of the East, sat little Mrs Doctor very far back in a cane chair – wide awake, as she would have declared had anyone spoken, but with her mouth open, and a general vacancy of expression upon her countenance suggestive of some wonder visible in the land of dreams.

Close by her, upon a low seat, was Grey Stuart, looking very simple and innocent in her diaphanous white dress; but there was trouble in her gentle eyes, and her lips seemed pinched as if with pain, as now and then one of her hands left the work upon which she was engaged to push back a wave of her thick soft hair.

She too was partly in shadow, but as she pushed back the thick fair hair, it was possible to see that there were faint lines of care in her white forehead, for she too was gazing at the group that had taken the attention of the gentlemen leaving their dessert.

For in the centre of the room, just where the soft glow of one of the shaded lamps formed quite a halo round her glistening

dark hair, and seemed to add lustre to her large, well-shaped eyes, reclined Helen Perowne. Her attitude was graceful, and evidently studied for effect. One hand rested on the back of the well-stuffed ottoman, so as to display the rounded softness of her shapely arm; while her head was thrown back to place at the same advantage her creamy-hued well-formed throat, and at the same time to allow its owner to turn her gaze from time to time upon the companion standing beside her, grave, statuesque, and calm, but with all the fire of his Eastern nature glowing in his large dark eyes, which needed no interpreter to tell the tale they told.

“A nigger now!” said Lieutenant Chumbley to himself, with a look of contempt at the handsome young hostess. “Well, there’s no knowing what that girl would do.”

“The rajah – the sultan!” muttered Captain Hilton, with a furiously-jealous look. “How dare he! The insolent, dark-skinned cad!”

“Flying at a seat upon an ivory throne in a palm-tree palace, eh, Helen?” mused the Resident, with a quiet smile. “Well, you will exhaust them all in time?”

These thoughts ran through the brains of each of the spectators of the little scene within the drawing-room in turn, but only one of the dinner-party spoke aloud, and that was in a low voice in another’s ear.

It was the little Scotchman, Grey Stuart’s father, who spoke, as he laid his hand upon his host’s shoulder.

“Perowne, mahn,” he whispered, “ye’ll have a care there, and

“speak to your lass, for there’ll be the deil’s own mischief, and murder too, if she leads that fellow on.”

# **Volume One – Chapter Eighteen.**

## **Helen Perowne at Home**

Sultan Murad, who, from the aspect of affairs in Mr Perowne's drawing-room, seemed to be the last captive to the bow of Helen's lips and the arrows of her eyes, was one of the rajahs of the Malay peninsula, living upon friendly terms with the English, paying allegiance to the government, and accepting the friendly services of a Political Resident, in the shape of Mr Harley, whose duties were to advise him in his rule, to help him in any plans for civilising and opening out his country; and in exchange for his alliance and friendly offices with neighbouring chiefs, who viewed the coming of the English with jealous eyes, the rajah was promised the help of the English arms in time of need. As an earnest of this promise, a couple of companies of an English foot regiment were permanently stationed upon a little island in the river, just opposite to Sindang, the principal native town of Jullah, over which territory Sultan Murad reigned.

But the Prince only adopted such of the English customs as suited his tastes. He had no objection, though a follower of Mahomet, to the wines that were introduced, showing a great preference for champagne. Our dress he took to at once, making a point of always appearing in indigo-blue silk stockings and patent-leather shoes. The widest-fronted shirts were spread over

his broad breast, and the tail-coat found so much favour that he had to exercise a good deal of self-denial to keep himself from appearing all day long in full evening-dress.

But he had good advisers to help his natural shrewdness, and finding that his adoption of our costume found favour with his English allies, he adhered to it rigorously, as far as his position as sultan or rajah would allow. For there was and is one part of the native dress that no Malay will set aside, and that is the sarong, a tartan scarf sewn together at the ends and worn in folds around the body, so as to form a kilt.

This article of dress, always a check or plaid of some showy-coloured pattern, is worn by every Malay, in silk or cotton, according to his station, and in the sash-like folds he always carries his kris, a dangerous-looking dagger, that falsely bears the reputation of being smeared along its wavy blade with poison.

A silken kilt and a dagger are rather *outré* objects for an English drawing-room, and looked barbaric and strange as worn by the young rajah, whose evening-dress was otherwise in faultless English style, being in fact the production of a certain tailor, of Savile Row, an artist who had been largely patronised by Murad for shooting and morning gear, and also for his especial pride, a couple of gorgeous uniforms, something between that of a hussar and a field-marshal bound to a review.

The bad name given to a dog dies hard, and in spite of steam and electricity, the idea still lingers in our midst that the Malay is as evil as his kris, and that he is a brutal savage, accustomed

to put forth from his campong in a long row-boat, or prahu, to make a piratical attack upon some becalmed vessel. After this it is supposed to be his custom to put the crew to death, plunder the ship, and set it on fire as a finish to his task.

Such deeds have been done, for there are rougths amongst the Malays, even as there are in civilised England. In bygone days, too, such acts were doubtless as common as among our border chieftains; but, as a rule, the Malays are an educated body of eastern people, professing the Mahommedan religion, with an excellent code of laws, punctilious in etiquette, and though exceedingly simple in their habits, far from wanting in refinement.

Sultan Murad was unmistakably a prince, handsome in person, and naturally of a grave and dignified mien, while since his alliance with the English he had become so thoroughly imbued with our habits and the ordinary ways of a gentleman as to make him a visitor well worthy of Helen's attention for the time.

There was something delightful to her vanity in the eastern term "sultan," a title associated in her mind with barbaric splendour, showers of diamonds and pearls, cloth of gold, elephants with silver howdahs, attended by troops of slaves bearing peacock fans, chowries, and palm-leaf punkahs. She saw herself in imagination mounted upon some monstrous beast, with a veil of gossamer texture covering her face; a troop of beautiful slaves in attendance, and guards with flashing weapons jealously

watching on every side the approach of those who would dare to sun themselves in her beauty.

Her thoughts were so pleasant, that in place of the languid air of repose in her dark, shaded eyes, they would flash out as she listened with a gratified smile to Murad's eastern compliments and the soft deference in his voice.

He was a real sultan, who, when with the English, adopted their customs; while with his people no doubt he would assume his barbaric splendour; and to Helen, fresh as it were from school, and, revelling in the joys of her new-born power, there was something delicious in finding that she had a real eastern potentate among her slaves.

The Rajah had been talking to her in his soft, pleasant English for some time before the gentlemen left the dining-room. Now Neil Harley separated himself from the rest, sauntered across, nodded to the Rajah, who drew back, and made a flash dart from the young Malay's eyes as he saw the Resident seat himself in a careless, quite-at-home fashion beside the young hostess.

"Well, Mad'moiselle Helen," he whispered in a half-contemptuous tone, "how many more conquests this week?"

"I do not understand you, Mr Harley," she said, coldly; but he noticed that she could hardly manage to contain the annoyance she felt at his cavalier manner.

"Don't you?" he said, smiling and half closing his eyes. "As you please, most chilling and proud of beauties. What lucky men those are who find themselves allowed to bask in the sunshine of

your smiles! There, that is the proper, youthful way of expressing it poetically, is it not?"

"If you wish to insult me, pray say so, Mr Harley, and I will at once leave the room," said Helen, in a low voice, as if wishful that the Rajah should not hear her words, but making the Malay's countenance lower as he saw the familiar way in which she was addressed.

"Insult you? All the saints and good people past and to come forbid! It is you who, after making me your slave, turn from me, the elderly beau, to listen to the voice of our dusky charmer. I don't mind. I am going to chat and listen to little Grey Stuart. I shall be patient, because I know that some day you will return to me cloyed with conquests, and say, 'Neil Harley, I am yours!'"

"I do not understand you," she cried, quickly.

"Let me be explicit then," he said, mockingly. "Some day the fair Helen will come to me and say, with her pretty hands joined together, 'Neil Harley, I am tired of slaying men. I have been very wicked, and cruel, and coquettish. I have wounded our chaplain; I have slain red-coated officers; I have trampled a Malayan sultan beneath my feet; but I know that you have loved me through it all. Forgive me and take me; I am humble now – I am yours!'"

"Mr Harley!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "How dare you speak to me like this in my father's house."

As she spoke her eyes seemed to flash with anger, and he ought to have quailed before her; but he met her gaze with a calm, mastering look, and said slowly:

“Yes, you are very beautiful, and I do not wonder at your triumph in your power; but it is not love, Helen, and some day you will, as I tell you, be weary of all this adulation, and think of what I have said. I am in no hurry; and of course all this will be when you have had your reign as the most beautiful coquette in the East.”

“Mr Harley, if you were not my father’s old friend – ”

“Exactly, my dear child; old friend, who has your father’s wishes for my success with his daughter – old friend, who has known you by report since a child. I have been waiting for you, my dear, and you see I behave with all the familiarity accorded to a man of middle age.”

“Mr Harley, your words are insufferable!” said Helen, still in a low voice.

“You think so now, my dear child. But there: I have done. Don’t look so cross and indignant, or our friend the Rajah will be using his kris upon me as I go home. I can see his hand playing with it now, although he has it enveloped in the folds of his silken sarong in token of peace.”

“I beg you will go,” said Helen, contemptuously; “you are keeping the Rajah away.”

“Which would be a pity,” said the Resident, smiling. “He is a very handsome fellow, our friend Murad.”

“I have hardly heeded his looks,” said Helen, weakly; and then she flushed crimson as she saw Mr Harley’s mocking smile.

“Doosid strange, those fellows can’t come into a gentleman’s

drawing-room without their skewers,” said Chumbley, coming up and overhearing the last words. “I say, Miss Perowne, you ought to have stayed and heard the doctor give us a lecture on Ophir and Solomon’s ships. Capital, wasn’t it, Hilton?”

“Really I hardly heard it,” replied the young officer, approaching Helen with a smile; and the Resident met the lady’s eye, and gave her a mocking look, as he rose and made place for the new-comer, who was welcomed warmly. “I was thinking about our hostess, and wondering how long it would be before we were to be emancipated from old customs and allowed to enter the drawing-room.”

“Yes, it is strange how we English cling to our customs, and bring them out even to such places as this,” said the lady, letting her eyes rest softly upon those of the young officer, and there allowing them to stop; but giving a quick glance the next moment at the Rajah, who, with a fixed smile upon his face, was sending lowering looks from one to the other of those who seemed to have ousted him and monopolised the lady’s attention.

“I never felt our customs so tedious as they were to-night,” said Captain Hilton, earnestly; and bending down, he began to talk in a subdued voice, while the gentlemen proceeded to discuss mercantile matters, the probability of the neighbouring Malay princess – the Inche Maida – taking to herself a lord; the latest move made by the governor; and other matters more or less interesting to the younger men.

At last Chumbley, seeing that Harley was chatting with Grey

Stuart, crossed over to the doctor's little lady, who had rather a troubled, uneasy look in her pleasant face as she watched her brother, the chaplain, hanging about as if to catch a word let drop by Helen now and then.

# **Volume One – Chapter Nineteen.**

## **Signs of the Times**

“Well, Mrs Bolter,” drawled Chumbley, “who’s going to carry off the prize?”

“What prize?” cried the little lady, sharply.

“The fair Helen,” said the young man, with a smile.

“You, I should say,” said Mrs Bolter, with more asperity in her tone.

“Chaff!” said Chumbley; and he went on, slowly, “Won’t do, Mrs Doctor; I’m too slow for her. She had me in silken strings for a week like a pet poodle; but I soon got tired and jealous of seeing her pet other puppies instead of me, and I was not allowed to bite them, so – ”

“Well?” said the doctor’s wife, for he had stopped.

“I snapped the string and ran away, and she has never forgiven me.”

“Harry Chumbley,” said the doctor’s wife, shaking her finger at him, “don’t you ever try to make me believe again that you are stupid, because, sir, it will not do.”

“I never pretend to be,” said the young man, with a sluggish laugh, “I’m just as I was made – good, bad and indifferent. I don’t think I’m more stupid than most men. I’m awfully lazy though – too lazy to play the idiot or the lover, or to put up with a flirting

young lady's whims; but I say, Mrs Doctor."

"Well?" said the lady.

"I don't want to be meddlesome, but really if I were you, being the regular methodical lady of the station, I should speak seriously to Helen Perowne about flirting with that nigger."

"Has she been flirting with him to-night?" said the lady eagerly.

"Awfully," said Chumbley – "hot and strong. We fellows can stand it, you know, and if we get led on and then snubbed, why it makes us a bit sore, and we growl and try to lick the place, and – there's an end of it."

"Yes – yes – exactly," said the lady, thoughtfully.

"But it's my belief," continued Chumbley, spreading his words out so as to cover a good deal of space, while he made himself comfortable by stretching out his long legs, lowering himself back, and placing his hands under his head – a very ungraceful position, which displayed a gap between his vest and the top of his trousers – "it's my belief, I say, that if Beauty there goes on playing with the Beast in his plaid sarong, and making his opal eyeballs roll into the idea that she cares for him, which she doesn't a single pip –"

"Go on, I'm listening," said the doctor's lady.

"All right – give me time, Mrs Bolter; but that's about all I was going to say, only that I think if she leads him on as she is doing now there will not be an end of it. That's all."

"Well, busy little Grey," said the Resident, merrily, as he

seated himself beside the earnest-eyed Scottish maiden, “what is the new piece of needlework now?”

“Only a bit of embroidery, Mr Harley,” she replied, giving him a quick, animated glance, and the look of trouble upon her face passing away.

“Ha!” he said, taking up the piece of work and examining it intently, “what a strange thing it is that out in these hot places, while we men grow lazier, you ladies become more industrious. Look at Chumbley for instance, he’s growing fatter and slower every day.”

“Oh, but he’s very nice, and frank, and natural,” said Grey with animation.

“Yes,” said the Resident, “he’s a good fellow. I like Chumbley. But look at the work in that embroidery now – thousands and thousands of stitches. Why what idiots our young fellows are!”

“Why, Mr Harley?” said the girl, wonderingly.

“Why, my child? Because one or the other of them does not make a swoop down and persuade you to let him carry you off.”

“Are you all so tired of me already?” said Grey, smiling.

“Tired of you? Oh, no, little one, but it seems to me that you are such a quiet little mouse that they all forget your very existence.”

“I am happy enough with my father, and very glad to join him once more, Mr Harley.”

“Happy? Of course you are; that seems to be your nature. I never saw a girl so sweet, and happy, and contented.”

“Indeed!” said Grey, blushing. “How can I help being happy when everyone is so kind?”

“Kind? Why, of course. Why, let me see,” said the Resident, “how time goes; what a number of years it seems since I took you to England and played papa to you?”

“Yes, it does seem a long time ago,” said Grey, musingly.

“I never thought that the little girl I petted would ever grow into such a beautiful young lady. Perhaps that is why papa Stuart did not ask me to bring you back.”

“Mr Harley!” exclaimed Grey, and a look of pain crossed her face.

“Why, what have I done?” he said.

“Hurt me,” she said, simply. “I like so to talk to you that it troubles me when you adopt that complimentary style.”

“Then I won’t do it again,” he said, earnestly. “We won’t spoil our old friendship with folly.”

“How well you remember, Mr Harley,” said the girl, smiling again.

“Remember? Of course I do, my dear. Don’t you recollect what jolly feeds of preserved ginger and mango you and I used to have? Ah, it was too bad of you to grow up into a little woman!”

“I don’t think we are any the less good friends, Mr Harley,” said the girl, looking trustingly up in his face.

“Not a bit,” he said. “Do you know, my dear, I think more and more every day that I am going to grow into a staid old bachelor; and if I do I shall have to adopt you as daughter or niece.”

“Indeed, Mr Harley.”

“Yes, indeed, my dear. Nineteen, eh? and I am forty-four. Heigho! how time goes!”

“I had begun to think, Mr Harley – ” said Grey, softly. “May I go on?”

“Go on? Of course, my dear. What had you begun to think?”

“That you would marry Helen.”

“Ye-es, several people thought so on shipboard,” he said, dreamily. “Nineteen – twenty-one – forty-four. I’m getting quite an old man now, my dear. Hah!” he said, starting, “I daresay Mademoiselle Helen will have plenty of offers.”

“Yes,” said Grey; “but she should meet with someone firm and strong as well as kind.”

“Like your humble servant?” he said, smiling.

“Yes,” said Grey, looking ingenuously in his face. “Helen is very sweet and affectionate at heart, only she is so fond of being admired.”

“A weakness she will outgrow,” said the Resident, calmly. “I like to hear you talk like that, Grey. You are not jealous, then, of the court that is paid to her?”

“I, jealous?” said Grey, smiling. “Do I look so?”

“Not at all,” said the Resident; “not at all. Beauty and fortune, they are great attractions for men, my dear, and Helen has both. But, my clever little woman, you ought to teach papa to make a fortune.”

Grey shook her head.

“That’s the thing to do nowadays, like our host has done. Perowne is very rich, and if papa Stuart had done as well, we should be having plenty of offers for that busy little hand. Yes, a score at your feet.”

“Where they would not be wanted,” said the girl, quietly.

“Eh? Not wanted?” said the Resident. “What, would you not like to be worshipped, and hold a court like our fair Helen yonder?”

The girl’s eyes flashed as she glanced in the direction of the ottoman, where Captain Hilton was talking in a low, earnest voice to Helen Perowne; and then, with a slightly-heightened colour, she went on with her work, shaking her head the while.

“I don’t think I shall believe that,” said the Resident, banteringly; but as he spoke she looked up at him so searchingly that even he, the middle-aged man of the world, felt disconcerted, and rather welcomed the coming of the little rosy-faced doctor, who advanced on tiptoe, and with a look of mock horror in his face, as he said, softly:

“Let me come here, my dear. Spread one of your dove-wings over me to ensure peace. Madam is wroth with her slave, and I dare not go near her.”

“Why, what have you been doing now, doctor?” said Grey, with mock severity.

“Heaven knows, my dear. My name is Nor – I mean Henry – but it ought to have been Benjamin, for I have always got a mess on hand, lots of times as big as anyone else’s mess. I’m a

miserable man.”

Meanwhile the conversation had been continued between the doctor's lady and Chumbley, till the former began to fidget about, to the great amusement of the latter, who, knowing the lady's weakness, lay back with half-closed eyes, watching her uneasy glances as they followed the doctor, till after a chat here and a chat there, he made his way to the couch by Grey Stuart, and began to speak to her, evidently in a most earnest way.

“She's as jealous as a Turk,” said Chumbley to himself; and he tightened his lips to keep from indulging in a smile.

“I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr Chumbley,” said Mrs Bolter at last.

“No trouble, Mrs Bolter,” he replied, slowly, though his tone indicated that it would be a trouble for him to move.

“Thank you. I'll bear in mind what you said about Helen Perowne.”

“And that nigger fellow? Ah, do!” said Chumbley, suppressing a yawn.

“Would you mind telling Dr Bolter I want to speak to him for a moment – just a moment?”

“Certainly not,” said Chumbley; and he rose slowly, as if a good deal of caution was required in getting his big body perpendicular; after which he crossed to where the doctor was chatting to Grey Stuart.

“Here, doctor, get up,” he said. “Your colonel says you are to go to her directly. There's such a row brewing!”

“No, no! Gammon!” said the little man, uneasily. “Mrs Bolter didn’t send you, did she?”

“Yes. Honour bright! and if I were you I’d go at once and throw myself on her mercy. You’ll get off more easily.”

“No, but Chumbley, what is it? ’Pon my word I don’t think I’ve done anything to upset her to-day.”

“I don’t know. There; she’s looking this way! ’Pon my honour, doctor, you’d better go!”

Dr Bolter rose with a sigh, and crossed to his lady, while Chumbley took his place, and threw himself back, laughing softly the while.

“If that was a trick, Mr Chumbley,” said Grey, gazing at him keenly, “it is very cruel of you!”

“But it wasn’t a trick, Miss Stuart. She sent me to fetch him. The poor little woman was getting miserable because the doctor was so attentive to you.”

“Oh, Mr Chumbley, what nonsense,” said Grey, colouring. “It is too absurd!”

“So it is,” he replied; “but that isn’t.” She followed the direction of his eyes as he fixed them on Captain Hilton and Helen Perowne, and then, with the flush dying out of her cheeks, she looked at him inquiringly.

“I say, Miss Stuart,” he drawled, “don’t call me a mischief-maker, please.”

“Certainly not. Why should I?”

“Because I get chattering to people about Miss Perowne. I

wish she'd marry somebody. I say, hasn't she hooked Bertie Hilton?"

There was no reply, and Chumbley went on: "I mean to tell him he's an idiot when he gets back to quarters to-night. I don't believe Helen Perowne cares a *sou* for him. She keeps leading him on till the poor fellow doesn't know whether he stands on his head or his heels, and by-and-by she'll pitch him over."

Grey bent her head a little lower, for there seemed to be a knot in the work upon which she was engaged, but she did not speak.

"I say, Miss Stuart, look at our coffee-coloured friend. Just you watch his eyes. I'll be hanged if I don't think there'll be a row between him and Hilton. He looks quite dangerous!"

"Oh, Mr Chumbley!" cried Grey, gazing at him as if horrified at his words.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," he continued. "Helen Perowne has been leading him on, and now he has been cut to make room for Hilton. These Malay chaps don't understand this sort of thing, especially as they all seem born with the idea that we are a set of common white people, and that one Malay is worth a dozen of us."

"Do – do you think there is danger?" said Grey hoarsely.

"Well, no, perhaps not danger," replied Chumbley, coolly; "but things might turn ugly if they went on. And it's my belief that, if my lady there does not take care, she'll find herself in a mess."

A more general mingling of the occupants of the drawing-

room put an end to the various *tête-à-têtes*, and Grey Stuart's present anxiety was somewhat abated; but she did not feel any the more at rest upon seeing that the young rajah had softly approached Hilton, and was smiling at him in an innocently bland way, bending towards him as he spoke, and keeping very close to his side for the rest of the evening.

At last "good-byes" were said, and the party separated, the two young officers walking slowly down towards the landing-stage, to enter a native boat and be rowed to their quarters on the Residency island.

The heat was very great, and but little was said for some minutes, during which Hilton was rapturously thinking of the beauty of Helen's eyes.

"I say, Chum," he said suddenly. "Murad has invited me to go on a hunting-trip with him in the interior. Would you go?"

"Certainly – if – " drawled Chumbley, yawning.

"If? If what!"

"I wanted a kris in my back, and to supply food to the crocodiles."

# Volume One – Chapter Twenty.

## A Proposal

Mr Perowne's home at Sindang was kept up in almost princely style, and he was regarded as the principal inhabitant of the place. Both English and Chinese merchants consulted him, and the native dealers and rajahs made him the first offers of tin slabs, rice, gambier, gutta-percha, and other products of the country, while a large proportion of the English and French imports that found favour with the Malays were consigned to the house of Perowne and Company.

People said that he must be immensely rich, and he never denied the impeachment, but went on in a quiet, bland way, accepting their hints, polite to all, whether trading or non-trading, while his table was magnificently kept up, and to it the occupants of the station were always made welcome.

When fate places people in the tropics, they make a point of rising early. Helen Perowne was up with the sun, and dressed in a charming French muslin costume, had a delightful drive, which she called upon Grey Stuart to share, before she met her father at breakfast – a meal discussed almost in silence, for Mr Perowne would give a good deal of his attention to business matters over his meals, a habit against which Dr Bolter warned him, but without avail.

The repast was nearly finished, when a servant entered and announced that the Sultan Murad was coming down the river in his dragon-boat, and evidently meant to land at the stage at the bottom of the garden.

“What does he want?” said the merchant, absently. “Been collecting tribute, I suppose, and wants to sell. Go and see if he lands,” he said aloud, “and then come back.”

“This is the way we have to make our money, my dear,” said Perowne, smiling, but without seeing the increased colour in his child’s face.

“The Sultan is here, sir,” said the man, returning.

“Where?” asked Mr Perowne.

“In the drawing-room, sir. Shall I bring in fresh breakfast?”

“I don’t know. I’ll ring. I’ve done, Helen. I say, young lady, what a colour you have got! You stopped out too long in the sun this morning.”

“Oh, no, papa, I think not,” she replied; “but it is hot.”

“You’ll soon get used to that, my dear. I don’t mind the heat at all. Party went off very well last night, I think.”

The merchant was by this time at the door, wondering what proposal the Rajah had to make to him, for all these petty princes stoop to doing a little trading upon their own account, raising rice in large quantities by means of their slaves; but, man of the world as the merchant was, he did not find himself prepared for the proposition that ensued.

In this case Helen was more prepared than her father, though

even she was taken by surprise. She had had her suspicions that the Rajah might take her soft glances and gently-spoken words as sufficient permission for him to speak to her father; and though she trembled at the possible result, there was something so deliciously gratifying to her vanity that she could not help enjoying the position.

To be asked in marriage by a real sultan! What would the Miss Twettenhams say? and if she accepted him she would be sultana. The idea was dazzling at a distance, but even to her romance-loving brain there was something theatrical when it was looked at with the eyes of common sense.

She could not accept him. It was absurd; and after all, perhaps he had no such idea as that in coming. It was, as her father thought, some matter of business, such as he had been in the habit of visiting her father about over and over again, and such as had resulted in the intimacy which made him a welcome guest at the house.

She thought differently, however; and though she assumed surprise, she was in nowise startled when her father returned.

“I say, Nelly!” he exclaimed, looking annoyed, and completely off his balance, “what the dickens have you been about?”

“About, papa?” said the girl, raising her eyebrows, “I don’t understand you!”

“Then the sooner you do the better! I’ve quite enough to worry me without your foolery! Here’s the Rajah come to see me on business.”

“Very well, papa, I don’t understand business,” she said, quietly.

“But you’ll have to understand it!” he cried, angrily. “Here, he says that you have been giving him permission to speak to me; and as far as I can understand him, he proposes for your hand!”

“The Rajah, papa! Oh! absurd!”

“Oh, yes, it’s absurd enough, confound his copper-coloured insolence! But it puts me in a fix with him. If I offend him, I shall offend his people, or he’ll make them offended, and I shall be a heavy loser. Did you tell him to speak to me?”

“Certainly not, papa!”

“Perhaps I misunderstood him, for he speaks horrible English. But whether or no, he proposes that you shall be his wife.”

“His wife, papa! Why, he has a dozen!”

“Yes, my dear, of course; but then these fellows don’t take that into consideration. What the deuce am I to do?”

“Tell him it is an insult to an English lady to propose such a thing!” said Helen, haughtily.

“Yes, that’s easily said; but you must have been leading the fellow on.”

“He was your guest, papa, and I was civil to him,” said Helen, coldly.

“A deal too civil, I’ll be bound! I’m sick of your civilities, Nell, and their consequences! Why can’t you get engaged like any other girl? I wish to goodness you were married and settled!”

“Thank you, papa,” she replied in the same cold, indifferent

manner.

“Yes, but this fellow’s waiting to see you. What am I to say.”

“What are you to say, papa? Really you ought to know!”

“But it’s impossible for you to accept him, though he is very rich.”

“Quite impossible, papa!”

“Then he’ll be offended.”

“Well, papa, that is not of much consequence.”

“But it is of consequence – of great consequence! Don’t I tell you it will cause me serious loss; and besides that, it is dangerous to affront a fellow like this. He is only a nigger, of course, but he is a reigning prince, and has great power. He’s as proud as Lucifer; and if he considers that he is affronted, there’s no knowing what may be the consequences.”

“He may carry me off perhaps, papa,” said Helen, showing her white teeth.

“Well, I wouldn’t say that he might not attempt it!”

“Like a baron of old,” said the girl scornfully. “Papa, I am not a child! How can you be so absurd?”

“You can call it what you like,” he said angrily; “but your folly has got us into a pretty mess. Well, you must go in and see him.”

“I? Go in and see him?” cried Helen, flushing. “Impossible, papa!”

“But it is not impossible. I told him I didn’t know what to say till I had seen you, and, what was the perfect truth, that I was quite taken by surprise. Now the best thing will be for you to go

in and see him and temporise with him. Don't refuse him out and out, but try and ease him off, as one may say. Gain time, and the fellow will forget all about it in a month or two."

"Papa!"

"Ah, you may say —*papa*; but you have got me into a terrible muddle, and now you must help to get me out of it. I must not have this fellow offended. Confound the insolent scoundrel! Just like the savage. He learns to wear English clothes, and then thinks he is a gentleman, and insults us with this proposal."

"Yes; insults us *papa*: that is the word!" cried Helen, with spirit.

"Well, time's flying, and he is waiting, so go and see him at once, and get it over."

"But I tell you, *papa*, I cannot. It is impossible!"

"Why, you were talking to him for long enough last night in the drawing-room. Now, come, Helen, don't be ridiculous, but go and do as I tell you; and the sooner it is done the better."

Helen Perowne pressed her lips tightly together, and a look came into her face that betokened obstinate determination of the straightest kind.

"Papa, you make matters worse," she cried, "by proposing such a degrading task to me. This man is, as you say, little better than a savage. His proposal is an insult, and yet you wish me to go and see him. It is impossible!"

"Don't I tell you that I have business arrangements with the fellow, and that I can't afford to lose his custom? And don't I tell

you that, situated as we are here amongst these people, it is not wise to make them our enemies. I don't want you to snub him. It is only for prudential reasons. Now, come; get it over."

"I cannot see him! I will not see him!" cried Helen, passionately; and she turned pale now at the idea of encountering the passionate young Malay. For the moment she bitterly regretted her folly, though the chances are that if circumstances tended in that direction she would have behaved again in precisely the same way.

"Now look here, Nelly," said Mr Perowne, "you must see him!"

For answer she paused for a moment, and then walked straight to the door.

"That's right," he said. "Temporise with him a bit, my dear, and let him down gently."

Helen stood with the door in her hand, and darted at him an imperious look; then she passed through, and the door swung to behind her.

"Confound him! What insolence!" muttered Mr Perowne, as he stood listening. "Eh? No; she wouldn't dare! Why, confound the girl, she has gone up to her room and locked herself in! What a temper she has got to be sure!"

He gave his head a vicious rub, and then, evidently under the impression that it was in vain to appeal again to his child, he snapped his teeth together sharply, and walked firmly into the drawing-room, where the Rajah stood impatiently waiting his

return.

The young eastern prince was most carefully dressed; his morning coat and trousers being from a West-end tailor, and his hands were covered with the tightest of lemon-coloured gloves. In one hand was a grey tall hat, in the other the thinnest of umbrellas. Altogether his appearance was unexceptionable, if he had dispensed with the gaudy silken sarong ablaze with a plaid of green, yellow, and scarlet.

His thick lips were wreathed in a pleasant smile, and his dark, full eyes were half closed; but they opened widely for an instant, and seemed to emit anger in one flash, as he saw that Mr Perowne came back alone.

“Where – is – miss?” he said, in a slow, thick tone.

“Well, the fact is, Rajah,” said Mr Perowne, giving a laugh to clear his throat, “I have seen my daughter, and she asked me to tell you that she is suffering from a bad headache. You understand me?”

The young Rajah nodded, his eyes seeming to contract the while.

“She is of course very much flattered by your proposal – one which she says she will think over most carefully; but she is so surprised, that she can only ask you to give her time. I see you understand me?”

The Rajah nodded again in a quick, eager way.

“English girls do not say *yea* all at once to a proposal like yours; and if you will wait a few months – of course being good

friends all the time – we shall be able to speak more about the subject.”

Mr Perowne, merchant, and man of the world, meant to say all this in a quick, matter-of-fact, frank way, but he stumbled, and spoke in a halting, lame fashion, growing more and more unsatisfactory as the young Malay prince came closer to him.

“I – I think you understand me,” he said, feeling called upon to say something, as the Malay glared at him as if about to spring.

“Yes – yes!” hissed the Malay. “Lies – all lies! I came for friend. You mock – you laugh in my face – but you do not know. I say I came for friend – I go away – enemy!”

He went on speaking rapidly in the Malay tongue, his rage seeming to be the more concentrated from the cold, cutting tone he adopted. Then, nearly closing his eyes, and giving his peculiar type of features a crafty, cat-like aspect, he gazed furiously at the merchant for a few minutes, and then turned, and seemed to creep from the house in a way that was as feline as his looks.

# Volume One – Chapter Twenty One.

## Taking Alarm

Mr Perowne drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped the dew from his forehead.

“Good Heavens!” he ejaculated, “they assassinated poor Rodrick, and here is that girl only home for a few weeks, and a shock like this to come upon me! Surely I’ve troubles enough on hand without a worry like this!”

He walked to the window and saw the Malay prince entering his boat by the landing-place, where it was pushed off and pulled into mid-stream by a dozen stout rowers.

“The man’s mad with passion,” muttered Mr Perowne. “I would not have had it happen for all I possess. Women always were at the bottom of every bit of mischief, but I did not expect Helen would begin so soon.”

He had another look at the Rajah’s handsome boat, which took the place of a carriage in that roadless place, and saw that the Malay prince had turned and was gazing back.

“I don’t know what’s to be the end of all this, and – Oh, Harley! is that you? Come in.”

The Resident, looking rather troubled and anxious, came in through the veranda, gazing sharply at Mr Perowne.

“What has the Rajah been here for this morning?”

“What has he been here for?” cried Mr Perowne, angrily, and glad of someone upon whom he could let off a little of his rage. “Why, to do what you ought to have done in a downright way. I gave you leave, and you have done nothing but play with her.”

“He has not been to propose for Helen’s hand?”

“Indeed, but he has.”

“How unfortunate! I did not know that matters had gone so far as that?”

“Nor I neither. I knew she was flirting a bit, confound her. Did you meet him?”

“Yes, and he would not speak. I saw something was wrong from his savage manner.”

“Perhaps he thought you had come up to propose, eh? Had you?”

“Not exactly,” said the Resident, looking very serious.

“Because if you had, you ought to have come before,” said Mr Perowne, biting his nails.

“I came to remonstrate with Helen, after seeing Mrs Bolter this morning.”

“Hang Mrs Bolter for a meddling little fool,” cried the merchant.

“She drew my attention to the serious dangers that might ensue if Helen led this man on. I ought to have foreseen it, but I did not, and that’s the most troublous part of it. I ought to have known better,” cried the Resident, biting his lips.

“Oh, it’s very easy to talk,” said Mr Perowne, whose previous

night's blandness seemed to be quite gone, to leave a weak, querulous childishness in its place.

"Knowing what I do of the Malay character, Perowne, I ought to have watched her, but I confess I was so wrapped up in my own feelings that I did not think."

"I thought you wanted to marry her, I gave you my consent at once. I told you nothing would please me better," continued the father, querulously; "but ever since you both landed you seem to have done nothing but shilly-shally."

"Don't talk like that, Perowne," said the Resident, impatiently. "A man does not take a wife like you make a bargain. I want to win her love as well as have her hand."

"And you hang back – I've seen you – and let these other fellows cut you out. Hilton and Chumbley, and then this Rajah. I say – I must say, Harley, it is much too bad."

"Yes, yes, I have done as you say; but I had a reason for it, Perowne, I had indeed; but I find I can manage natives better than a beautiful girl. If I had foreseen –"

"If I had foreseen it," cried Perowne, interrupting, "I'd have had her kept in England. Confound the girl!"

"It never occurred to me," said the Resident, "though it ought, that danger might arise from her flirtations."

"Danger! Why I shall lose thousands!" cried Perowne. "The fellow will never forgive me, and throw endless obstacles in my way with his people."

"Helen refused him, of course?" said the Resident.

“Of course – of course,” said the merchant, pettishly.

“I blame myself deeply for not being more observant,” said the Resident. “Others have seen what I failed to see, and it was always so. Lookers-on see most of the game; but I am awake to the danger now.”

“Danger? danger?” said Perowne, looking up now in a startled way. “Do you think there is danger? I hope not; but we ought to be prepared. What do you think it will be best to do?”

“See Hilton, and tell him to double all guards; fill your revolver with cartridges; and be always on the alert. We must make no show of begin in danger, but go on as usual, while reinforcements are quietly sent for from Singapore.”

“Do – do you think it will be as bad as that?”

“Worse, for aught I know,” said the Resident, bitterly. “That fellow, with all his smoothness and French polish, may turn out, now he is thwarted, a perfect demon. Perowne, we have contrived to make him our bitterest foe.”

“But – but it couldn’t be helped, Harley,” said Perowne, in an apologetic tone. “Helen could not – ”

“Suppose you leave Miss Perowne’s name out of the question, Mr Perowne,” said the Resident, sternly. “I’ll go on and see Hilton now, and we must do the best we can.”

# Volume One – Chapter Twenty Two.

## Mrs Bolter at Home

It cannot be denied that Mrs Bolter's mature little heart had developed, with an intense love and admiration of her lord, a good deal of acidity, such as made her jealous, exacting, and tyrannical to a degree.

Let it not be supposed, however, that the doctor was unhappy. Quite the contrary; he seemed to enjoy his tyrant's rule, and to go on peaceably enough, letting her dictate, order, and check him at her own sweet will.

“There's no doubt about it,” chuckled the little doctor to himself, “she's as jealous as Othello, and watches me like an – an – an – well – say eagle,” he said, quite at a loss for a simile. “I don't mind, bless her! Shows how fond she has grown; and I suppose it must be worrying to the dear little woman to have first one and then another lady sending for me. I don't wonder at her asking me what they wanted. I shouldn't like it if gentlemen were always sending for her.”

Dr Bolter had been indulging in a similar strain to this, when, after making up a few quinine powders in his tiny surgery, he went into the room where his little wife was in conversation with her brother.

“Ah, Arthur!” said the doctor, “how are you getting on with

folks?”

“Very pleasantly,” said the chaplain, smiling. “I find everybody kind and genial.”

“That’s right,” said the doctor, rubbing his hands and smiling at his wife, who frowned at him severely, and then let her pleasant face break up in dimples. “I want you both to enjoy the place. Don’t be afraid of visiting. They like it. Stir them up well, and make yourself quite at home with everybody. This isn’t England.”

“No,” said the Reverend Arthur, smiling; “I find the difference.”

“I say, old boy,” continued the doctor, “I was in the fort yesterday, talking to some of the men. They say they like your preaching.”

“I am very glad, Harry,” said the chaplain, simply. “I was afraid that I was rather wandering sometimes in my discourse.”

“No, no; just what they like, old fellow! Simple and matter of fact. What they can understand. Going?”

“Yes; I am going across to see Mr Harley.”

“Ah! do. Good fellow, Harley! Don’t make any mistakes though, and step into the river instead of the sampan.”

“Is there any danger, Henry?” exclaimed Mrs Doctor, sharply.

“Not the least, my dear; only Arthur here is a little dreamy sometimes.”

“I’d go with him,” said Mrs Bolter decidedly, “only I want to talk to you, Henry.”

“Phee-ew!” whistled the doctor, softly, “here’s a breeze

coming;” and he looked furtively at his wife to see what she meant.

She walked with her brother to the door, bade him be careful, and then returned.

“Now look here, Dr Bolter,” she said severely, “I am the last woman in the world to find fault, but I am your wife.”

“You are, my dear Mary, and the very, very best of wives!”

“That’s base flattery, sir,” said the little lady, who, however, looked pleased.

“Flattery? No! One never flatters one’s wife.”

“How do you know, sir?” cried Mrs Bolter, sharply.

“From what one reads, Mary. I never had a wife before; and I never flatter you.”

“No, sir, but you try something else; and I tell you I will not submit to be imposed upon!”

“I’m sure, my dear, I never impose upon you.”

“Indeed, sir; then what is this you propose doing? Why do you want to go away for three days?”

“Collecting, my dear.”

“Without Arthur? Now look here, Bolter, the very fact of your wanting to go collecting without Arthur, whom you always talk about as being a brother naturalist, looks suspicious.”

“Indeed, my dear, I do want to go collecting.”

“Collecting? Rubbish!”

“No, my dear, it is not. I’m afraid you will never realise the value of my specimens.”

“You are going collecting, then?” said Mrs Doctor.

“Yes, my dear.”

“Without Arthur?”

“Yes; he does not get on very well in the jungle; and he is rather awkward in a boat.”

“Then I shall go with you myself,” said the little lady, decidedly.

“You – you go with me, Mary,” he said, staring.

“Yes, certainly.”

“But the thorns, and mud, and heat, and mosquitoes, my dear?”

“If they will not hurt you, Henry, they will not hurt me,” said the little lady.

“But they would hurt you, my dear. Of course I should like to have you, but it would be impossible! I shall only be away three days.”

“But the place is full of old stones and skins that smell atrociously, and wretched flies and beetles with pins stuck through their bodies, and I’m sure I can’t think why you want more.”

“For the learned societies in London, my dear. You forget that I am a corresponding member to several.”

“Oh, no, I don’t,” said Mrs Bolter. “I don’t forget that you make it an excuse for sitting up all night smoking and drinking cold whiskey and water, sir, because you have writing to do instead of coming to bed.”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

“My dear,” he said, “you would be a perfect woman if you only cared for science.”

“You never said a word to me, sir, about caring for science when I consented to come out with you to this dreadful, hot, damp place, where everything that does not turn mouldy is eaten by ants.”

“The damp and the ants are great nuisances, my dear,” said the doctor. “They have destroyed numbers of my best specimens.”

“They have destroyed my beautiful piano that I was foolish enough to bring out,” said Mrs Bolter. “Grey Stuart opened it yesterday, and the damp has melted the glue, and the ants have eaten up all the leather of the hammers. The wires are rusty, and the instrument is totally spoiled.”

“Never mind, my dear, so long as the climate does not affect your constitution,” said the doctor, cheerfully.

“Oh, by the way,” said Mrs Bolter, “that reminds me of two things. First of all, Bolter, I will not have you so fond of talking to the young ladies at the dinner parties to which we go. You remember what I said to you about your conduct with Miss Morrison?”

“Yes, my dear, perfectly,” said the doctor, with a sigh.

“Secondly, about medicine. Now, it is of no use for you to deny it, for I feel as sure as can be that you have been giving me some medicine on the sly these last few days.”

“Why, my darling!” cried the doctor.

“It is of no use for you to put on that injured expression, Henry, because I know; and mind this, I don’t accuse you of trying to poison me, but of trying experiments with new-fangled drugs, and I tell you I won’t have it.”

The doctor protested his innocence, but the lady was not convinced; and apparently under the impression that it would be as well to submit, he allowed her to go on till she reached the top of her bent, when she suddenly changed the topic.

“Ah, there was something else I wanted to say to you,” she said sharply. “How about Helen Perowne?”

This was too much for the doctor’s equanimity, and he gave the table a bang with his fist.

“I declare it’s too bad,” he exclaimed, wrathfully now. He had submitted to all that had been said before with a few protestations and shrugs of the shoulders, but now he fired up. “I have never hardly said a civil word to the girl in my life, for I protest that I utterly detest the handsome, heartless, coquettish creature. Of all the unjust women I ever met, Mary, you are about the worst.”

A casual observer would have set Mrs Doctor Bolter down as an extremely prejudiced, suspicious woman of a highly-jealous temperament; but then a casual observer would not have known her real nature.

If he had seen her now, as she sank back in her chair, and the pleasant dimples and puckers came into her face, he would have understood much better how it was that the doctor had persuaded her to leave her maiden state to come and share his lot.

For as the doctor turned redder in the face and then purple, she smiled and shook a little round white finger at him.

“A guilty conscience needs no accuser,” she said. “I never accused you, sir, of flirting with Helen Perowne; but as soon as I mentioned her name you began to defend yourself.”

“I don’t care,” cried the doctor, “I confess I have said complimentary and pleasant things to all the ladies of the station, both old and young; not that they think anything of it, for I’m only the doctor; while as to Helen Perowne, last time her father asked me to see and prescribe for her, and she began to make eyes at me, and put forth her blandishments – ”

“Oh, you confess that, sir?”

“Confess it?” cried the doctor, stoutly. “Why she does that to every man she sees! I believe if her father took her to Madame Tussaud’s – You remember my taking you to Madame Tussaud’s, my dear?”

“Oh, yes, I remember,” said Mrs Bolter.

“Well, I honestly believe that if she were taken there she’d begin making eyes at the wax figures.”

“Indeed!” said Mrs Bolter, stiffly. “And so she began to make eyes at you!”

“That she did, the jade,” said the doctor, chuckling, “and – and – ha, ha, ha – ho, ho, ho! don’t – ha, ha, ha! – say a word about it, my dear – there was nothing the matter with her but young girl’s whimsical fancies; and she made me so cross with her fads and languishing airs, and then by making such a dead

set at me, that I – ha, ha, ha – ho, ho, ho – ”

“Bolter,” exclaimed Mrs B, “if you confess to me that you kissed her I’ll have a divorce – I’ll go straight back to England?”

“Kiss her? Not I! – ho, ho, ho! – I gave her such a dose; and I kept her extremely poorly for about a week. She – she hates me like she does physic. Oh, dear me!”

The doctor wiped his eyes, burst into another fit of laughing, and then, after another wipe at his eyes, his face smoothed down and he grew composed.

“Then it’s a pity you don’t give her another dose of medicine,” said his lady, “and prevent her doing so much mischief as she is doing here.”

“But really, my dear, you have no right to accuse me of being extra polite to Helen Perowne.”

“I did not, and I was not about to accuse you of being extra polite to Helen Perowne —*extra polite*, as you call it, sir; but I was about to connect her name with that of other gentlemen, and not with that of my husband.”

“Oh! come, that’s a comfort,” said the doctor. “What is it then about Helen Perowne?”

“I don’t like the way in which she is going on,” said Mrs Doctor, “and I am quite sure that no good will come of it. I don’t think there is any real harm in the girl.”

“Harm? No, I don’t think there is,” said Dr Bolter. “She’s very handsome, and she has been spoiled by flattery.”

“Administered by foolish men like someone we know,” said

the lady.

“H’m! yes – well, perhaps so; but really she is too bad. The fellows seem to run mad after her.”

“Did you see her talking to the Rajah last night?”

“Yes, I saw her; and then poor Hilton began to singe his wings in the candle, and next week she will have somebody else. I know what I’d do if I had to prescribe for her.”

“And what might that be, sir?”

“I’d prescribe a husband, such a one as Harley – a firm, strong-minded, middle-aged man, who would keep a tight hand at the rein and bring her to her senses. I daresay she’d make a man a good wife, after all.”

“Perhaps so,” said Mrs Doctor, pursing up her lips; “but meantime, as you are not called upon to prescribe, what is to be done?”

“To be done? Why, nothing.”

“Oh! but something must be done, Bolter. You ought to speak to Mr Perowne.”

“And be called an idiot for my pains. No, thank you, my dear. In all such delicate matters as these a lady’s hand – I should say, tongue – is the instrument to set matters right. Now, I should say the proper thing would be for a quiet, sensible, clever, middle-aged lady – may I speak of you as a middle-aged lady, my dear –”

“Don’t be stupid, Henry. I’m forty-four, as you well know, and I never pretended to be younger.”

“No, of course not. You fired forty years at me in a platoon

when I proposed, like the dear, sensible old darling you are.”

“Tut! Hush! Silence, sir! No more of that, please.”

“All right, my dear. Well, as I was saying, suppose you have a quiet talk to the girl yourself.”

Mrs Bolter knitted her brows and looked very thoughtful.

“I don’t know,” she said. “It might do good, or it might not. I will think about it.”

“And about my going away for three days, my dear.”

“Oh, one moment, Henry,” said Mrs Doctor. “There was something else I wished to ascertain.”

“What, another something else?” groaned the doctor.

“Yes, another something else, sir. You promised me, that if you could not quite check that terrible habit of yours of talking about Ophir and King Solomon, that you would modify it.”

“Yes, my dear,” said the doctor, giving his ear a rub, and accompanying it by a submissive look.

“I heard you last night exciting the ridicule of all the gentlemen by your pertinacious declarations regarding that mythical idea.”

“Don’t say ridicule, my dear.”

“But I do say ridicule, Henry, and I object to having my husband laughed at by ignorant people – he being a very clever man. So be careful in the future. Now you may go.”

“For three days, my dear?”

“Yes; and pray take care of yourself.”

“I will, my darling,” he cried, in delight; and he was about to embrace the lady warmly, when a step was heard in the veranda,

and a voice exclaiming:

“May I come in?”

# **Volume One – Chapter Twenty Three.**

## **A Little Cloud**

“Yes; come in Mr Harley,” and the tall, stern-looking Resident entered the room with the free at-home-ness of people living out at a station where circumstances force the Europeans into the closet intimacy.

“Is anything the matter?” exclaimed the doctor’s wife, as she saw his anxious face.

“Well, not yet,” he said; “but I must confess to being a little nervous about something that has happened. Don’t go away, Bolter.”

“Only going to make a few preparations for a run out. Back directly.”

“No, no,” said the Resident; “you would oblige me by staying. I think, Bolter, you will have to give up all thought of going out at present.”

“Then something is the matter!” said the doctor.

“Oh, it isn’t doctor’s work – at present,” said the Resident, smiling. “The fact is, the Rajah has been hanging about Perowne’s place a good deal lately.”

“Yes, we had observed it,” said Mrs Bolter, severely.

“And the foolish fellow seems to think he has had a little encouragement from Miss Perowne.”

Mrs Doctor nodded and tightened her lips as the Resident went on:

“The result is, that he has been to Perowne’s this morning and proposed in due form for her hand.”

“Why, the scoundrel has got about a dozen wives,” cried the doctor.

“Yes, and of course Perowne tried to smooth him down and to soften the disappointment; but he has gone away furious. I have just come from Perowne’s, and I called to put you on your guard.”

“Think there’s any danger?” said the doctor, sharply.

“Can’t say. You know what these people are if they do not have their own way.”

“Yes,” said the doctor, thoughtfully. “They can be crafty and cruel enough I know; and they don’t love us any better than they did ten years ago, when I was all through the old troubles.”

“Of course,” said the Resident, “if there should be any threatening of trouble you will come across to the island till it is over. I would not show that we are at all uneasy, doctor; only be upon one’s guard.”

“Yes,” said Mrs Doctor, who had been listening attentively, “that will be best. There may be no trouble over the matter, Mr Harley, and I think we should, as you say, be doing wrong by seeming to be alarmed.”

“Then my expedition is quashed for the present,” said the doctor, dolefully.

“It can wait, I am sure,” said his lady, quietly; and her lord

resigned himself to his fate as the Resident repeated his advice about not spreading the alarm and exciting the natives by whom they were surrounded, and then left them to go to the fort on the Residency island – a picturesque little clump of rocky earth that divided the river into two parts. On mounting upon the bamboo landing-stage the first person he encountered was Captain Hilton.

Knowing as he did that the young officer had been very attentive to Helen Perowne of late, he hesitated for a few moments, naturally feeling a repugnance to speak upon such matters to one whom other men would have considered a rival; but after a little thought he laughed to himself.

“I am a fatalist,” he muttered, “and I am not afraid. Here, Hilton,” he said, aloud, “I want to speak to you. Ah, there’s Chumbley, too. Don’t take any particular notice,” he continued, as he noted that several of the natives were about. “Have a cigar?”

He drew out his case as he spoke, and Lieutenant Chumbley coming sauntering up in his cool, idle way, the case was offered to him, and the three gentlemen went slowly along the well-kept military path towards the little mess-room.

“Anything wrong?” said Captain Hilton, eagerly; and as he spoke the Resident saw his eyes turn in the direction of Mr Perowne’s house on the east bank of the river.

“Not at present; but the fact is, I am afraid Mr Perowne has seriously affronted the Rajah this morning, and I think it would be as well to be upon our guard.”

“Got any more of these cigars, Harley?” said Chumbley, quietly. “I like ’em.”

“For Heaven’s sake do hold your tongue, Chumbley!” cried the captain. “I never did see a fellow so cool and indifferent.”

“Why not?” replied Chumbley, in his slow drawl. “There’s nothing wrong, only that the Rajah has been to Perowne’s this morning to propose for the fair Helen, and he has come away with a flea in his ear.”

“What?” cried Captain Hilton.

“How did you know?” exclaimed the Resident, turning upon Chumbley, sharply.

“Guessed it – knew it would come from what I saw last night. That’s it, isn’t it?”

“Yes, that is it,” replied the Resident, frowning slightly.

“The insolence – the consummate ignorant audacity!” cried the captain, his face flushing with anger. “The dog! I’ll horsewhip him till he begs for mercy!”

“You will do nothing of the kind, Hilton,” said the Resident quietly.

“But it is insufferable,” cried Hilton. “An ignorant, brown-skinned savage to pretend to place himself on a level with gentlemen, and then to dare to propose for an English lady’s hand!”

“Don’t be excited, Hilton,” said the Resident, looking fixedly in the young officer’s handsome, angry countenance. “You forget that the Rajah may look down upon us as his inferiors. He is

a prince in his own right, and rules over a very large extent of country here.”

“Oh, yes, I know all that,” cried Hilton, angrily; “but of course Perowne sent him about his business?”

“Yes, and that is why I have come to you. There may be nothing more heard of the matter; but I think it is quite possible that the Rajah may have taken such dire offence that he will force all his people to join in his quarrel, and the result be a serious trouble.”

“I hope not,” drawled Chumbley. “I hate fighting.”

“Pooh!” ejaculated Hilton. “If the scoundrel gives us any of his insolence, we’ll send him handcuffed to Singapore!”

“I should be greatly obliged, Hilton,” said the Resident stiffly, “if you would modify your tone a little. For my part, I am not surprised at the Rajah’s conduct, and I think that it would be better to let our behaviour towards him be conciliating.”

“What! to a fellow like that?” cried the captain.

“To a man like that,” said the Resident, gravely. “If he behaves badly we are strong enough to resent it; but if, on the other hand, he cools down and acts as a gentleman would under the circumstances, it is our duty to meet him in the most friendly spirit we can.”

“I don’t think so,” cried Hilton, hotly, “and if the scoundrel comes to me I shall treat him as he deserves.”

“Captain Hilton,” said the Resident, and his voice was now very grave and stern, “I must ask you to bear in mind that

we occupy a very delicate position here – I as her Majesty’s representative; and you, with your handful of troops, as my supporters. We are few, living in the midst of many, and we hold our own here, please to recollect, by *prestige*.”

“Of course – yes, I know that,” said Hilton.

“That *prestige* we shall lose if we let our judgment be biased by personal feeling. Kindly set self on one side, as I am striving to do, and help me to the best of your ability by your manly, unselfish advice.”

Hilton frowned as the Resident went on; but the next instant he had held out his hand, which the other grasped.

“I am afraid I am very hot-headed, Mr Harley,” he exclaimed. “There, it is all over, and I’ll help you to the best of my power. Now then, what’s to be done?”

“First accept my thanks,” cried the Resident. “I knew that I could count upon you, Hilton.”

“I’ll do my best, Harley.”

“Then stroll quietly back to the barracks, and in a matter-of-fact way see that all is in such order that you could bring up your men at a moment’s notice.”

“Reinforcements?” suggested Captain Hilton.

“I did think of asking for them,” said the Resident, “but on second thoughts it seems hardly necessary. I would do everything without exciting suspicion, and as if you were only inspecting the fort. Now go.”

“Right,” said the captain; and he walked away, saying to

himself:

“He’s a good fellow, Harley, that he is, and he does not bear a bit of malice against me for cutting him out. Poor fellow! he must have felt it bitterly. Hang it all! I could not have borne it. The very fact of this fellow proposing for Helen nearly drove me wild. I think if I were to lose her I should die.”

Chumbley was about to follow Hilton, but the Resident laid a hand upon his shoulder.

“Of course I can count upon your discretion, Chumbley?” he said.

“Oh, yes, I suppose so,” said the young man, “so long as you don’t want anything done in a hurry. Nature seems to forbid a man to be scurried in this climate; but I say, Mr Harley, don’t let’s have a row if you can help it, I’m a soldier, but if there is anything I do abhor, it is fighting. I hate blood. The very idea of having to make our lads use their bayonets gives me a cold chill all down the back.”

“Depend upon it we will not have a quarrel with the natives if we can help it, Chumbley. If diplomacy can keep it off, there shall be none;” and nodding his head in a friendly manner to the young officer, he strolled away.

“But diplomacy won’t keep it off, my dear sir,” said Chumbley. “If Mother Nature turns loose such a girl as Helen Perowne, to play fast and loose with men like Murad, a row must come.

“Let me see,” he said, after a pause, “what shall I do with

myself to-day? Best way to avoid scrapes is to keep up friendly relations with the natives.

“Oh, what a worry this love-making is! We all go in for it at some time or another, but hang me if I think it pays.

“Little Helen quite hates me now, since I’ve broken the string and will not be cajoled into coming back. By Jove! what a wise little girl little Stuart is. One might get up a flirtation there without any heart-breaking. No: won’t do, she’s too sweet, and wise, and sensible. Hang it all, can’t a fellow talk sensibly to a pretty girl without thinking he’s flirting! I like little Stuart. You can talk to her about anything, and she never giggles and blushes, and looks silly. She’s an uncommonly nice young girl, and twenty years hence, when beautiful Helen has grown old, and yellow, and scraggy, Stuart will be a pleasant, soft, amiable little woman, like Mrs Bolter. There’s a woman for you! ’Pon my word I believe she likes me; she talks to me just as if I were a big son.

“Well, now, what’s to be done? I’ll go and see if Hilton wants me, and if he doesn’t I shall have a few hours ashore.

“By the way, I wonder who’ll marry little Stuart?” he said, as he went slowly on with his hands behind him, his broad chest thrown out, and a bluff, manly bearing about him that would have made an onlooker think that he would not make a bad match for the lady himself.

“I shan’t,” he added, after a pause. “Hilton’s a precious idiot not to go for her himself, instead of wasting his time upon a woman who will throw him over. As for me, I’m beginning to

think I am not a lady's man. I'm too big, and clumsy, and stupid. They tolerate me when they don't laugh at me. Bah! what does it matter? Sport's my line – and dogs.”

# **Volume One – Chapter Twenty Four.**

## **The Pains of a Princess**

Captain Hilton saw no reason for detaining his subaltern, only bade him be ready to return to the island at the slightest sign of danger, which Chumbley promised to do; and he was about to walk down to the landing-stage, when, happening to gaze across the swift river towards Mr Perowne's beautiful garden, which sloped down to the water's edge, with as good a semblance of a lawn as could be obtained in that part of the world, he caught sight of a couple of figures in white, walking slowly up and down in the shade of the trees.

He was too far distant to make out their faces, but he had no doubt that the two were Helen and Grey Stuart.

"Now, I would not mind laying a whole shilling that Master Hilton has his binocular focussed exactly upon one of your faces, and is watching every turn of expression. If you smile he thinks it is with thoughts of him; and take it altogether, the poor fellow imagines you are always dreaming of him, when you are wondering what is worn now in Paris or London, and whether any of the new fashions will reach you by the next steamer.

"Yes, that's Helen – fair Helen," he said, leaning upon a rail, and gazing across the water. "Chumbley, old fellow, I'm beginning to think you are not such a fool as I used to imagine

you to be. It was a good brave stroke to get away from the toils of that syren; for there's no mistake about it, old man, you were just like a big fly in the pretty spider's web.

“By George! she is a very lovely girl though! She seems to fascinate everyone she comes near. Thank goodness, she only got me by one leg, and I broke out, I hope, without much damaging the net. Certainly she soon seemed to repair it. I wish I were a good prophet,” he went on, lighting a cigarette. “I should like to be able to say what is to take place here, who'll marry whom, and who'll remain single. Hullo! what's coming now?”

The splash of oars roused him from his reverie, and turning towards the landing-stage, he made out a dragon-boat, or naga, as the larger row-galleys used by the Malay nobles are called, rapidly approaching the little isle.

It was propelled by a dozen rowers, all dressed uniformly in yellow silk bajus or jackets, their coarse black hair being topped by a natty little cap similar to that worn by a cavalry soldier in undress, and they kept stroke with wonderful accuracy as they forced the boat along.

A large shed-like awning of bamboo and palm leaves covered the latter part of the vessel; and Chumbley forgot his customary inertia, and scanned the boat eagerly, to see if it contained armed men. To his surprise, however, he saw that the whole space beneath the broad awning was filled with women, whose brightly-coloured silken sarongs were hung from their heads after the manner of veils; and though the rowers each wore his kris,

the hilt was covered, and it was evidently a friendly visit.

“I don’t know though,” thought Chumbley. “Perhaps it is a ruse, and instead of women, those are smart youths, well armed, ready to give our fellows a dig with the kris, and take the place by surprise.

“No,” he said, after a few moments’ pause, for there was no mistaking the object of the visit, the Malays being a particularly religious people, and great sticklers for form and ceremony, to which they adhere with scrupulous exactness, so that any one pretty well versed in their customs would know at a glance at their dress whether their object was friendly or the reverse.

“Why, it must be the Inche Maida,” muttered Chumbley, giving the native name to a princess residing some distance higher up the stream. “I ought to have been in full fig. I suppose I must go and receive her as I am.”

He threw away his cigarette, turned out the guard, sent a messenger up to the Residency with the news of the Princess’s arrival, bidding the man leave word at the officers’ quarters as he passed, and then walked down to the landing-stage, just as the dragon-boat, with its carved and gilded prow, was run abreast.

Chumbley courteously raised his muslin-covered pith helmet, tucked it beneath his arm, and helped the Princess to step ashore.

She was a remarkably handsome woman of about thirty, with features of the Malay type, but softened into a nearer approach to beauty than is common amongst the women of this nation, whose prominent lips and dilated nostrils are not compensated

by the rich long black hair, and large lustrous dark eyes.

In the case of the Princess there was almost a European cast of feature, and she possessed an imposing yet graceful carriage, which with her picturesque costume and flower-decked hair, made her far from unattractive, in spite of her warm brown skin.

She accepted Chumbley's assistance with a smile that checked the thought in his mind that she was a fine-looking woman; for that smile revealed a set of remarkably even teeth, but they were filed to a particular pattern and stained black.

Chumbley removed his eyes at once from this disfigurement, and let them rest on the magnificent knot of jetty hair, in which were stuck, in company with large gold pins, clusters of a white and odorous jasmine.

He could not help noting, too, the gracefully-worn scarf of gossamer texture, passing from her right shoulder beneath her left arm, and secured by a richly-chased gold brooch of native workmanship. This she removed to set the scarf at liberty, so as to throw over her head to screen it from the sun.

Accustomed to command, she made no scruple in exposing her face to the gaze of men; but as the women who formed her train alighted, each raised her hands to a level with her temples, and spread the silken sarong she wore over her head, so that it formed an elongated slit, covering every portion of the face but the eyes, and following the Princess in this uncomfortable guise, they took their places ashore.

"I have come to see the Resident," said the Princess, looking

very fixedly at Chumbley, and speaking in excellent English. "Will you take me to his presence?"

Chumbley bowed, and he forgot his slow drawl as he said that he would be happy to lead her to the Residency; but felt rather disconcerted as the visitor exclaimed, in a very pointed way:

"I have not seen you before. Are you the lieutenant?"

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting you either," he replied, rather liking the visitor's dignified way as he recovered himself; "but I have heard Mr and Miss Perowne talk of the Inche Maida."

"What did they say about me?" she said, sharply.

"That you were a noble lady, and quite a princess."

"Ah!" she replied, looking at him fixedly. "How big and strong you are."

Chumbley stared and tried to find something suitable to reply, but nothing came, and the situation seemed to him so comical that he smiled, and then, as the Princess smiled too, he laughed outright.

"Forgive my laughing," he said, good-humouredly. "I can't help being big; and I suppose I am strong."

"There is the Resident!" said the lady then; and she drew her hand from Chumbley's arm. "Ah! and the captain."

For just then Harley stepped out from the Residency veranda to meet his visitors; and Hilton, who had found time to put on the regimental scarlet and buckle on his sword, came up to make the reception more imposing.

The Princess shook hands in the European fashion, and

accepted the Resident's arm, smiling and bowing as if excusing herself to Hilton. Then, declining to enter the house, she took a seat in the broad veranda amongst the Resident's flowers, while her women grouped themselves behind her, letting fall the sarongs they held over their faces now that, with the exception of a single sentry, none of the common soldiers were about to gaze upon their charms.

But for her costume, the Inche Maida would have passed very well for a dark Englishwoman, and she chatted on for a time about the Resident's flowers and her own; about her visits to the English ladies at the station; and the various European luxuries that she kept adding to her home some twenty miles up the river, where she had quite a palm-tree palace and a goodly retinue of slaves.

Both Mr Harley and Hilton knew that there was some special object in the lady's visit; but that was scrupulously kept in the background, while coffee and liqueurs were handed round, the visitors partaking freely of these and the sweetmeats and cakes kept by the Resident for the gratification of his native friends.

"It is nearly a year since you have been to see me Mr Harley," said the lady at last. "When will you come again?"

"I shall be only too glad to come and see you," said the Resident, "I have not forgotten the pleasure of my last journey to your home."

"And you will come too?" said the Princess quickly; and she turned her great dark eyes upon Hilton, gazing at him fixedly the

while.

“I – er – really I hardly think I can leave.”

“You will not come?” she cried, with an impetuous jerk of the head. “You think I am a savage, and you despise my ways. Mr Harley will tell you I have tried for years to learn your English customs and to speak your language. It is not fair.”

“Indeed,” cried Hilton, eager to make up for what the visitor evidently considered a slight, “I only hesitated on the score of duty.”

“You would not care to come,” she said, with the injured look of a spoiled child.

“Indeed I should,” exclaimed Hilton, “and I will come.”

“You will come?” she cried, with her dark eyes flashing.

“Yes, indeed I will.”

She leaned towards him, speaking eagerly:

“I am glad. I like you English. You shall hunt and shoot. There are tigers, and I have elephants. My slaves shall find game, and you shall have my boat to fetch you.”

Dark as her skin was, the Resident noticed the red blood mantling beneath it in her cheeks as she spoke eagerly, fixing her eyes upon Hilton as she spoke, and then lowering the lids in a dreamy, thoughtful way.

“Then you will both come?” she said.

“Yes, I promise for both; but we cannot leave the station together,” said Mr Harley.

“It is well,” she said, smiling; “and you too, lieutenant – you

will come and see me? You like to shoot. All Englishmen like to shoot.”

“Oh, yes, I’ll come,” said Chumbley, with his slow, heavy drawl. “I think it would be rather jolly. Yes, I’ll come.”

She nodded and smiled at him once more, as if he amused her; and Harley noticed that she glanced at Chumbley again and again as the conversation went on, looking at him as if he were some fine kind of animal she thought it would be well to buy at the first opportunity.

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