

Beauchamp's Career — Volume 7 eBook

Beauchamp's Career — Volume 7 by George Meredith

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AT THE COTTAGE ON THE COMMON

Rain went with Lord Romfrey in a pursuing cloud all the way to Bevisham, and across the common to the long garden and plain little green-shuttered, neat white cottage of Dr. Shrapnel. Carriages were driving from the door; idle men with hands deep in their pockets hung near it, some women pointing their shoulders under wet shawls, and boys. The earl was on foot. With no sign of discomposure, he stood at the half-open door and sent in his card, bearing the request for permission to visit his nephew. The reply failing to come to him immediately, he began striding to and fro. That garden gate where he had flourished the righteous whip was wide. Foot-farers over the sodden common were attracted to the gateway, and lingered in it, looking at the long, green-extended windows, apparently listening, before they broke away to exchange undertone speech here and there. Boys had pushed up through the garden to the kitchen area. From time to time a woman in a dripping bonnet whimpered aloud.

An air of a country churchyard on a Sunday morning when the curate has commenced the service prevailed. The boys were subdued by the moisture, as they are when they sit in the church aisle or organ-loft, before their members have been much cramped.

The whole scene, and especially the behaviour of the boys, betokened to Lord Romfrey that an event had come to pass.

In the chronicle of a sickness the event is death.

He bethought him of various means of stopping the telegraph and smothering the tale, if matters should have touched the worst here. He calculated abstrusely the practicable shortness of the two routes from Bevisham to Romfrey, by post-horses on the straightest line of road, or by express train on the triangle of railway, in case of an extreme need requiring him to hasten back to his wife and renew his paternal-despotic system with her. She had but persuaded him of the policy of a liberal openness and confidence for the moment's occasion: she could not turn his nature, which ran to strokes of craft and blunt decision whenever the emergency smote him and he felt himself hailed to show generalship.

While thus occupied in thoughtfulness he became aware of the monotony of a tuneless chant, as if, it struck him, an insane young chorister or canon were galloping straight on end hippomaniacally through the Psalms. There was a creak at intervals, leading him to think it a machine that might have run away with the winder's arm.

The earl's humour proposed the notion to him that this perhaps was one of the forms of Radical lamentation, ululation, possibly practised by a veteran impietist like Dr. Shrapnel for the loss of his youngster, his political cub—poor lad!

Deriding any such paganry, and aught that could be set howling, Lord Romfrey was presently moved to ask of the small crowd at the gate what that sound was.

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'It's the poor commander, sir,' said a wet-shawled woman, shivering.

'He's been at it twenty hours already, sir,' said one of the boys.

'Twenty-four hour he 've been at it,' said another.

A short dispute grew over the exact number of hours. One boy declared that thirty hours had been reached. 'Father heerd'n yesterday morning as he was aff to 's work in the town afore six: that brings 't nigh thirty and he ha'n't stopped yet.'

The earl was invited to step inside the gate, a little way up to the house, and under the commander's window, that he might obtain a better hearing.

He swung round, walked away, walked back, and listened.

If it was indeed a voice, the voice, he would have said, was travelling high in air along the sky.

Yesterday he had described to his wife Nevil's chattering of hundreds to the minute. He had not realized the description, which had been only his manner of painting delirium: there had been no warrant for it. He heard the wild scudding voice imperfectly: it reminded him of a string of winter geese changeing waters. Shower gusts, and the wail and hiss of the rows of fir-trees bordering the garden, came between, and allowed him a moment's incredulity as to its being a human voice. Such a cry will often haunt the moors and wolds from above at nightfall. The voice hied on, sank, seemed swallowed; it rose, as if above water, in a hush of wind and trees. The trees bowed their heads rageing, the voice drowned; once more to rise, chattering thrice rapidly, in a high-pitched key, thin, shrill, weird, interminable, like winds through a crazy chamber-door at midnight.

The voice of a broomstick-witch in the clouds could not be thinner and stranger: Lord Romfrey had some such thought.

Dr. Gannet was the bearer of Miss Denham's excuses to Lord Romfrey for the delay in begging him to enter the house: in the confusion of the household his lordship's card had been laid on the table below, and she was in the sick-room.

'Is my nephew a dead man?' said the earl.

The doctor weighed his reply. 'He lives. Whether he will, after the exhaustion of this prolonged fit of raving, I don't dare to predict. In the course of my experience I have never known anything like it. He lives: there's the miracle, but he lives.'

'On brandy?'

'That would soon have sped him.'

'Ha. You have everything here that you want?'

'Everything.'

'He's in your hands, Gannet.'

The earl was conducted to a sitting-room, where Dr. Gannet left him for a while.

Mindful that he was under the roof of his enemy, he remained standing, observing nothing.

The voice overheard was off at a prodigious rate, like the far sound of a yell ringing on and on.

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The earl unconsciously sought a refuge from it by turning the leaves of a book upon the table, which was a complete edition of Harry Denham's Poems, with a preface by a man named Lydiard; and really, to read the preface one would suppose that these poets were the princes of the earth. Lord Romfrey closed the volume. It was exquisitely bound, and presented to Miss Denham by the Mr. Lydiard. 'The works of your illustrious father,' was written on the title-page. These writers deal queerly with their words of praise of one another. There is no law to restrain them. Perhaps it is the consolation they take for the poor devil's life they lead!

A lady addressing him familiarly, invited him to go upstairs.

He thanked her. At the foot of the stairs he turned; he had recognized Cecilia Halkett.

Seeing her there was more strange to him than being there himself; but he bowed to facts.

'What do you think?' he said.

She did not answer intelligibly.

He walked up.

The crazed gabbling tongue had entire possession of the house, and rang through it at an amazing pitch to sustain for a single minute.

A reflection to the effect that dogs die more decently than we men, saddened the earl. But, then, it is true, we shorten their pangs by shooting them.

A dismal figure loomed above him at the head of the stairs.

He distinguished it in the vast lean length he had once whipped and flung to earth.

Dr. Shrapnel was planted against the wall outside that raving chamber, at the salient angle of a common prop or buttress. The edge of a shoulder and a heel were the supports to him sideways in his distorted attitude. His wall arm hung dead beside his pendent frock-coat; the hair of his head had gone to wildness, like a field of barley whipped by tempest. One hand pressed his eyeballs: his unshaven jaw dropped.

Lord Romfrey passed him by.

The dumb consent of all present affirmed the creature lying on the bed to be Nevil Beauchamp.

Face, voice, lank arms, chicken neck: what a sepulchral sketch of him!

It was the revelry of a corpse.

Shudders of alarm for his wife seized Lord Romfrey at the sight. He thought the poor thing on the bed must be going, resolving to a cry, unwinding itself violently in its hurricane of speech, that was not speech nor exclamation, rather the tongue let loose to run to the death. It seemed to be out in mid-sea, up wave and down wave.

A nurse was at the pillow smoothing it. Miss Denham stood at the foot of the bed.

'Is that pain?' Lord Romfrey said low to Dr. Gannet.

'Unconscious,' was the reply.

Miss Denham glided about the room and disappeared.

Her business was to remove Dr. Shrapnel, that he might be out of the way when Lord Romfrey should pass him again: but Dr. Shrapnel heard one voice only, and moaned, 'My Beauchamp!' She could not get him to stir.



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Miss Denham saw him start slightly as the earl stepped forth and, bowing to him, said: 'I thank you, sir, for permitting me to visit my nephew.'

Dr. Shrapnel made a motion of the hand, to signify freedom of access to his house. He would have spoken the effort fetched a burst of terrible chuckles. He covered his face.

Lord Romfrey descended. The silly old wretch had disturbed his equanimity as a composer of fiction for the comfort and sustainment of his wife: and no sooner had he the front door in view than the calculation of the three strides requisite to carry him out of the house plucked at his legs, much as young people are affected by a dancing measure; for he had, without deigning to think of matters disagreeable to him in doing so, performed the duty imposed upon him by his wife, and now it behoved him to ward off the coming blow from that double life at Romfrey Castle.

He was arrested in his hasty passage by Cecilia Halkett.

She handed him a telegraphic message: Rosamund requested him to stay two days in Bevisham. She said additionally: 'Perfectly well. Shall fear to see you returning yet. Have sent to Tourdestelle. All his friends. Ni espoir, ni crainte, mais point de deceptions. Lumiere. Ce sont les tenebres qui tuent.'

Her nimble wits had spied him on the road he was choosing, and outrun him.

He resigned himself to wait a couple of days at Bevisham. Cecilia begged him to accept a bed at Mount Laurels. He declined, and asked her: 'How is it you are here?'

'I called here,' said she, compressing her eyelids in anguish at a wilder cry of the voice overhead, and forgetting to state why she had called at the house and what services she had undertaken. A heap of letters in her handwriting explained the nature of her task.

Lord Romfrey asked her where the colonel was.

'He drives me down in the morning and back at night, but they will give me a bed or a sofa here to-night—I can't . . .' Cecilia stretched her hand out, blinded, to the earl.

He squeezed her hand.

'These letters take away my strength: crying is quite useless, I know that,' said she, glancing at a pile of letters that she had partly replied to. 'Some are from people who can hardly write. There were people who distrusted him! Some are from people who abused him and maltreated him. See those poor creatures out in the rain!'

Lord Romfrey looked through the venetian blinds of the parlour window.

'It's as good as a play to them,' he remarked.

Cecilia lit a candle and applied a stick of black wax to the flame, saying: 'Envelopes have fallen short. These letters will frighten the receivers. I cannot help it.'

'I will bring letter paper and envelopes in the afternoon,' said Lord Romfrey. 'Don't use black wax, my dear.'

'I can find no other: I do not like to trouble Miss Denham. Letter paper has to be sealed. These letters must go by the afternoon post: I do not like to rob the poor anxious people of a little hope while he lives. Let me have note paper and envelopes quickly: not black-edged.'

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'Plain; that's right,' said Lord Romfrey.

Black appeared to him like the torch of death flying over the country.

'There may be hope,' he added.

She sighed: 'Oh! yes.'

'Gannet will do everything that man can do to save him.'

'He will, I am sure.'

'You don't keep watch in the room, my dear, do you?'

'Miss Denham allows me an hour there in the day: it is the only rest she takes. She gives me her bedroom.'

'Ha: well: women!' ejaculated the earl, and paused. 'That sounded like him!'

'At times,' murmured Cecilia. 'All yesterday! all through the night! and to-day!'

'He'll be missed.'

Any sudden light of happier expectation that might have animated him was extinguished by the flight of chatter following the cry which had sounded like Beauchamp.

He went out into the rain, thinking that Beauchamp would be missed. The fellow had bothered the world, but the world without him would be heavy matter.

The hour was mid-day, workmen's meal-time. A congregation of shipyard workmen and a multitude of children crowded near the door. In passing through them, Lord Romfrey was besought for the doctor's report of Commander Beauchamp, variously named Beesham, Bosham, Bitcham, Bewsham. The earl heard his own name pronounced as he particularly disliked to hear it—Rumfree. Two or three men scowled at him.

It had not occurred to him ever before in his meditations to separate his blood and race from the common English; and he was not of a character to dwell on fantastical and purposeless distinctions, but the mispronunciation of his name and his nephew's at an instant when he was thinking of Nevil's laying down his life for such men as these gross excessive breeders, of ill shape and wooden countenance, pushed him to reflections on the madness of Nevil in endeavouring to lift them up and brush them up; and a curious tenderness for Nevil's madness worked in his breast as he contrasted this much-abused nephew of his with our general English—the so-called nobles, who were sunk in the mud of the traders: the traders, who were sinking in the mud of the workmen: the

workmen, who were like harbour-flats at ebb tide round a stuck-fast fleet of vessels big and little.

Decidedly a fellow like Nevil would be missed by him!

These English, huddling more and more in flocks, turning to lumps, getting to be cut in a pattern and marked by a label—how they bark and snap to rend an obnoxious original! One may chafe at the botheration everlastingly raised by the fellow; but if our England is to keep her place she must have him, and many of him. Have him? He's gone!

Lord Romfrey reasoned himself into pathetic sentiment by degrees.

He purchased the note paper and envelopes in the town for Cecilia. Late in the afternoon he deposited them on the parlour table at Dr. Shrapnel's. Miss Denham received him. She was about to lie down for her hour of rest on the sofa. Cecilia was upstairs. He inquired if there was any change in his nephew's condition.

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'Not any,' said Miss Denham.

The voice was abroad for proof of that.

He stood with a swelling heart.

Jenny flung out a rug to its length beside the sofa, and; holding it by one end, said: 'I must have my rest, to be of service, my lord.'

He bowed. He was mute and surprised.

The young lady was like no person of her age and sex that he remembered ever to have met.

'I will close the door,' he said, retiring softly.

'Do not, my lord.'

The rug was over her, up to her throat, and her eyes were shut. He looked back through the doorway in going out. She was asleep.

'Some delirium. Gannet of good hope. All in the usual course'; he transmitted intelligence to his wife.

A strong desire for wine at his dinner-table warned him of something wrong with his iron nerves.

CHAPTER LI

IN THE NIGHT

The delirious voice haunted him. It came no longer accompanied by images and likenesses to this and that of animate nature, which were relieving and distracting; it came to him in its mortal nakedness—an afflicting incessant ringing peal, bare as death's ribs in telling of death. When would it stop? And when it stopped, what would succeed? What ghastly silence!

He walked to within view of the lights of Dr. Shrapnel's at night: then home to his hotel.

Miss Denham's power of commanding sleep, as he could not, though contrary to custom he tried it on the right side and the left, set him thinking of her. He owned she was pretty. But that, he contended, was not the word; and the word was undiscoverable. Not Cecilia Halkett herself had so high-bred an air, for Cecilia had not her fineness of feature and full quick eyes, of which the thin eyelids were part of the

expression. And Cecilia sobbed, snifed, was patched about the face, reddish, bluish. This girl was pliable only to service, not to grief: she did her work for three-and-twenty hours, and fell to her sleep of one hour like a soldier. Lord Romfrey could not recollect anything in a young woman that had taken him so much as the girl's tossing out of the rug and covering herself, lying down and going to sleep under his nose, absolutely independent of his presence.

She had not betrayed any woman's petulance with him for his conduct to her uncle or guardian. Nor had she hypocritically affected the reverse, as ductile women do, when they feel wanting in force to do the other. She was not unlike Nevil's marquise in face, he thought: less foreign of course; looking thrice as firm. Both were delicately featured.

He had a dream.

It was of an interminable procession of that odd lot called the People. All of them were quarrelling under a deluge. One party was for umbrellas, one was against them: and sounding the dispute with a question or two, Everard held it logical that there should be protection from the wet: just as logical on the other hand that so frail a shelter should be discarded, considering the tremendous downpour. But as he himself was dry, save for two or three drops, he deemed them all lunatics. He requested them to gag their empty chatter-boxes, and put the mother upon that child's cry.

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He was now a simple unit of the procession. Asking naturally whither they were going, he saw them point. 'St. Paul's,' he heard. In his own bosom it was, and striking like the cathedral big bell.

Several ladies addressed him sorrowfully. He stood alone. It had become notorious that he was to do battle, and no one thought well of his chances. Devil an enemy to be seen! he muttered. Yet they said the enemy was close upon him. His right arm was paralyzed. There was the enemy hard in front, mailed, vizored, gauntleted. He tried to lift his right hand, and found it grasping an iron ring at the bottom of the deep Steynham well, sunk one hundred feet through the chalk. But the unexampled cunning of his left arm was his little secret; and, acting upon this knowledge, he telegraphed to his first wife at Steynham that Dr. Gannet was of good hope, and thereupon he re-entered the ranks of the voluminous procession, already winding spirally round the dome of St. Paul's. And there, said he, is the tomb of Beauchamp. Everything occurred according to his predictions, and he was entirely devoid of astonishment. Yet he would fain have known the titles of the slain admiral's naval battles. He protested he had a right to know, for he was the hero's uncle, and loved him. He assured the stupid scowling people that he loved Nevil Beauchamp, always loved the boy, and was the staunchest friend the fellow had. And saying that, he certainly felt himself leaning up against the cathedral rails in the attitude of Dr. Shrapnel, and crying, 'Beauchamp! Beauchamp!' And then he walked firmly out of Romfrey oakwoods, and, at a mile's distance from her, related to his countess Rosamund that the burial was over without much silly ceremony, and that she needed to know nothing of it whatever.

Rosamund's face awoke him. It was the face of a chalk-quarry, featureless, hollowed, appalling.

The hour was no later than three in the morning. He quitted the detestable bed where a dream—one of some half-dozen in the course of his life—had befallen him. For the maxim of the healthy man is: up, and have it out in exercise when sleep is for foisting base coin of dreams upon you! And as the healthy only are fit to live, their maxims should be law. He dressed and directed his leisurely steps to the common, under a black sky, and stars of lively brilliancy. The lights of a carriage gleamed on Dr. Shrapnel's door. A footman informed Lord Romfrey that Colonel Halkett was in the house, and soon afterward the colonel appeared.

'Is it over? I don't hear him,' said Lord Romfrey.

Colonel Halkett grasped his hand. 'Not yet,' he said. 'Cissy can't be got away. It's killing her. No, he's alive. You may hear him now.'

Lord Romfrey bent his ear.

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'It's weaker,' the colonel resumed. 'By the way, Romfrey, step out with me. My dear friend, the circumstances will excuse me: you know I'm not a man to take liberties. I'm bound to tell you what your wife writes to me. She says she has it on her conscience, and can't rest for it. You know women. She wants you to speak to the man here—Shrapnel. She wants Nevil to hear that you and he were friendly before he dies; thinks it would console the poor dear fellow. That's only an idea; but it concerns her, you see. I'm shocked to have to talk to you about it.'

'My dear colonel, I have no feeling against the man,' Lord Romfrey replied. 'I spoke to him when I saw him yesterday. I bear no grudges. Where is he? You can send to her to say I have spoken to him twice.'

'Yes, yes,' the colonel assented.

He could not imagine that Lady Romfrey required more of her husband. 'Well, I must be off. I leave Blackburn Tuckham here, with a friend of his; a man who seems to be very sweet with Mrs. Wardour-Devereux.'

'Ha! Fetch him to me, colonel; I beg you to do that,' said Lord Romfrey.

The colonel brought out Lydiard to the earl.

'You have been at my nephew's bedside, Mr. Lydiard?'

'Within ten minutes, my lord.'

'What is your opinion of the case?'

'My opinion is, the chances are in his favour.'

'Lay me under obligation by communicating that to Romfrey Castle at the first opening of the telegraph office to-morrow morning.'

Lydiard promised.

'The raving has ended?'

'Hardly, sir, but the exhaustion is less than we feared it would be.'

'Gannet is there?'

'He is in an arm-chair in the room.'

'And Dr. Shrapnel?'

'He does not bear speaking to; he is quiet.'



'He is attached to my nephew?'

'As much as to life itself.'

Lord Romfrey thanked Lydiard courteously. 'Let us hope, sir, that some day I shall have the pleasure of entertaining you, as well as another friend of yours.'

'You are very kind, my lord.'

The earl stood at the door to see Colonel Halkett drive off: he declined to accompany him to Mount Laurels.

In the place of the carriage stood a man, who growled 'Where's your horsewhip, butcher?'

He dogged the earl some steps across the common. Everard returned to his hotel and slept soundly during the remainder of the dark hours.

CHAPTER LII

QUESTION OF A PILGRIMAGE AND AN ACT OF PENANCE

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Then came a glorious morning for sportsmen. One sniffed the dews, and could fancy fresh smells of stubble earth and dank woodland grass in the very streets of dirty Bevisham. Sound sleep, like hearty dining, endows men with a sense of rectitude, and sunlight following the former, as a pleasant spell of conversational ease or sweet music the latter, smiles a celestial approval of the performance: Lord Romfrey dismissed his anxieties. His lady slightly ruffled him at breakfast in a letter saying that she wished to join him. He was annoyed at noon by a message, wherein the wish was put as a request. And later arrived another message, bearing the character of an urgent petition. True, it might be laid to the account of telegraphic brevity.

He saw Dr. Shrapnel, and spoke to him, as before, to thank him for the permission to visit his nephew. Nevil he contemplated for the space of five minutes. He cordially saluted Miss Denham. He kissed Cecilia's hand.

'All here is going on so well that I am with you for a day or two to-morrow,' he despatched the message to his wife.

Her case was now the gravest. He could not understand why she desired to be in Bevisham. She must have had execrable dreams!—rank poison to mothers.

However, her constitutional strength was great, and his pride in the restoration of his House by her agency flourished anew, what with fair weather and a favourable report from Dr. Gannet: The weather was most propitious to the hopes of any soul bent on dispersing the shadows of death, and to sportsmen. From the windows of his railway carriage he beheld the happy sportsmen stalking afield. The birds whirled and dropped just where he counted on their dropping. The smoke of the guns threaded to dazzling silver in the sunshine. Say what poor old Nevil will, or did say, previous to the sobering of his blood, where is there a land like England? Everard rejoiced in his country temperately. Having Nevil as well,—of which fact the report he was framing in his mind to deliver to his wife assured him—he was rich. And you that put yourselves forward for republicans and democrats, do you deny the aristocracy of an oaklike man who is young upon the verge of eighty?

These were poetic flights, but he knew them not by name, and had not to be ashamed of them.

Rosamund met him in the hall of the castle. 'You have not deceived me, my dear lord,' she said, embracing him. 'You have done what you could for me. The rest is for me to do.'

He reciprocated her embrace warmly, in commendation of her fresher good looks.

She asked him, 'You have spoken to Dr. Shrapnel?'

He answered her, 'Twice.'

The word seemed quaint. She recollected that he was quaint.

He repeated, 'I spoke to him the first day I saw him, and the second.'

'We are so much indebted to him,' said Rosamund. 'His love of Nevil surpasses ours. Poor man! poor man! At least we may now hope the blow will be spared him which would have carried off his life with Nevil's. I have later news of Nevil than you.'

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'Good, of course?'

'Ah me! the pleasure of the absence of pain. He is not gone.'

Lord Romfrey liked her calm resignation.

'There's a Mr. Lydiard,' he said, 'a friend of Nevil's, and a friend of Louise Devereux's.'

'Yes; we hear from him every four hours,' Rosamund rejoined. 'Mention him to her before me.'

'That's exactly what I was going to tell you to do before me,' said her husband, smiling.

'Because, Everard, is it not so?—widows . . . and she loves this gentleman!'

'Certainly, my dear; I think with you about widows. The world asks them to practise its own hypocrisy. Louise Devereux was married to a pipe; she's the widow of tobacco ash. We'll make daylight round her.'

'How good, how kind you are, my lord! I did not think so shrewd! But benevolence is almost all-seeing: You said you spoke to Dr. Shrapnel twice. Was he . . . polite?'

'Thoroughly upset, you know.'

'What did he say?'

'What was it? "Beauchamp! Beauchamp!" the first time; and the second time he said he thought it had left off raining.'

'Ah!' Rosamund drooped her head.

She looked up. 'Here is Louise. My lord has had a long conversation with Mr. Lydiard.'

'I trust he will come here before you leave us,' added the earl.

Rosamund took her hand. 'My lord has been more acute than I, or else your friend is less guarded than you.'

'What have you seen?' said the blushing lady.

'Stay. I have an idea you are one of the women I promised to Cecil Baskett,' said the earl. 'Now may I tell him there's no chance?'

'Oh! do.'

They spent so very pleasant an evening that the earl settled down into a comfortable expectation of the renewal of his old habits in the September and October season. Nevil's frightful cry played on his ear-drum at whiles, but not too affectingly. He conducted Rosamund to her room, kissed her, hoped she would sleep well, and retired to his good hard bachelor's bed, where he confidently supposed he would sleep. The sleep of a dyspeptic, with a wilder than the monstrous Bevisham dream, befell him, causing him to rise at three in the morning and proceed to his lady's chamber, to assure himself that at least she slept well. She was awake.

'I thought you might come,' she said.

He reproached her gently for indulging foolish nervous fears.

She replied, 'No, I do not; I am easier about Nevil. I begin to think he will live. I have something at my heart that prevents me from sleeping. It concerns me. Whether he is to live or die, I should like him to know he has not striven in vain—not in everything: not where my conscience tells me he was right, and we, I, wrong—utterly wrong, wickedly wrong.'

'My dear girl, you are exciting yourself.'

'No; feel my pulse. The dead of night brings out Nevil to me like the Writing on the Wall. It shall not be said he failed in everything. Shame to us if it could be said! He tried to make me see what my duty was, and my honour.'

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'He was at every man Jack of us.'

'I speak of one thing. I thought I might not have to go. Now I feel I must. I remember him at Steynham, when Colonel Halkett and Cecilia were there. But for me, Cecilia would now be his wife. Of that there is no doubt; that is not the point; regrets are fruitless. I see how the struggle it cost him to break with his old love—that endearing Madame de Rouaillout, his Renee—broke his heart; and then his loss of Cecilia Halkett. But I do believe, true as that I am lying here, and you hold my hand, my dear husband, those losses were not so fatal to him as his sufferings he went through on account of his friend Dr. Shrapnel. I will not keep you here.

Go and have some rest. What I shall beg of you tomorrow will not injure my health in the slightest: the reverse: it will raise me from a bitter depression. It shall not be said that those who loved him were unmoved by him. Before he comes back to life, or is carried to his grave, he shall know that I was not false to my love of him.'

'My dear, your pulse is at ninety,' said the earl.

'Look lenient, be kind, be just, my husband. Oh! let us cleanse our hearts. This great wrong was my doing. I am not only quite strong enough to travel to Bevisham, I shall be happy in going: and when I have done it—said: "The wrong was all mine," I shall rejoice like the pure in spirit. Forgiveness does not matter, though I now believe that poor loving old man who waits outside his door weeping, is wrong-headed only in his political views. We women can read men by their power to love. Where love exists there is goodness. But it is not for the sake of the poor old man himself that I would go: it is for Nevil's; it is for ours, chiefly for me, for my child's, if ever . . . !' Rosamund turned her head on her pillow.

The earl patted her cheek. 'We 'll talk it over in the morning,' he said. 'Now go to sleep.'

He could not say more, for he did not dare to attempt cajolery with her. Shading his lamp he stepped softly away to wrestle with a worse nightmare than sleep's. Her meaning was clear: and she was a woman to insist on doing it. She was nevertheless a woman not impervious to reason, if only he could shape her understanding to perceive that the state of her nerves, incident to her delicate situation and the shock of that fellow Nevil's illness—poor lad!—was acting on her mind, rendering her a victim of exaggerated ideas of duty, and so forth.

Naturally, apart from allowing her to undertake the journey by rail, he could not sanction his lady's humbling of herself so egregiously and unnecessarily. Shrapnel had behaved unbecomingly, and had been punished for it. He had spoken to Shrapnel, and the affair was virtually at an end. With his assistance she would see that, when less excited. Her eternal brooding over Nevil was the cause of these mental vagaries.

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Lord Romfrey was for postponing the appointed discussion in the morning after breakfast. He pleaded business engagements.

'None so urgent as this of mine,' said Rosamund.

'But we have excellent news of Nevil: you have Gannet's word for it,' he argued. 'There's really nothing to distress you.'

'My heart: I must be worthy of good news, to know happiness,' she answered. 'I will say, let me go to Bevisham two, three, four days hence, if you like, but there is peace for me, and nowhere else.'

'My precious Rosamund! have you set your two eyes on it? What you are asking, is for permission to make an apology to Shrapnel!'

'That is the word.'

'That's Nevil's word.'

'It is a prescription to me.'

'An apology?'

The earl's gorge rose. Why, such an act was comparable to the circular mission of the dog!

'If I do not make the apology, the mother of your child is a coward,' said Rosamund.

'She's not.'

'I trust not.'

'You are a reasonable woman, my dear. Now listen the man insulted you. It's past: done with. He insulted you . . .'

'He did not.'

'What?'

'He was courteous to me, hospitable to me, kind to me. He did not insult me. I belied him.'

'My dear saint, you're dreaming. He spoke insultingly of you to Cecil.'

'Is my lord that man's dupe? I would stand against him before the throne of God, with what little I know of his interview with Dr. Shrapnel, to confront him and expose his lie.'



Do not speak of him. He stirs my evil passions, and makes me feel myself the creature I was when I returned to Steynham from my first visit to Bevisham, enraged with jealousy of Dr. Shrapnel's influence over Nevil, spiteful, malicious: Oh! such a nest of vileness as I pray to heaven I am not now, if it is granted me to give life to another. Nevil's misfortunes date from that,' she continued, in reply to the earl's efforts to soothe her. 'Not the loss of the Election: that was no misfortune, but a lesson. He would not have shone in Parliament: he runs too much from first principles to extremes. You see I am perfectly reasonable, Everard: 'I can form an exact estimate of character and things.' She smiled in his face. 'And I know my husband too: what he will grant; what he would not, and justly would not. I know to a certainty that vexatious as I must be to you now, you are conscious of my having reason for being so.'

'You carry it so far—fifty miles beyond the mark,' said he. 'The man roughed you, and I taught him manners.'

'No!' she half screamed her interposition. 'I repeat, he was in no way discourteous or disobliging to me. He offered me a seat at his table, and, heaven forgive me! I believe a bed in his house, that I might wait and be sure of seeing Nevil, because I was very anxious to see him.'

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'All the same, you can't go to the man.'

'I should have said so too, before my destiny touched me.'

'A certain dignity of position, my dear, demands a corresponding dignity of conduct: you can't go.'

'If I am walking in the very eye of heaven, and feeling it shining on me where I go, there is no question for me of human dignity.'

Such flighty talk offended Lord Romfrey.

'It comes to this: you're in want of a parson.'

Rosamund was too careful to hint that she would have expected succour and seconding from one or other of the better order of clergymen.

She shook her head. 'To this, my dear lord: I have a troubled mind; and it is not to listen nor to talk, that I am in need of, but to act.'

'Yes, my dear girl, but not to act insanely. I do love soundness of head. You have it, only just now you're a little astray. We'll leave this matter for another time.'

Rosamund held him by the arm. 'Not too long!'

Both of them applied privately to Mrs. Wardour-Devereux for her opinion and counsel on the subject of the proposal to apologize to Dr. Shrapnel. She was against it with the earl, and became Rosamund's echo when with her. When alone, she was divided into two almost equal halves: deeming that the countess should not insist, and the earl should not refuse: him she condemned for lack of sufficient spiritual insight to perceive the merits of his wife's request: her she accused of some vestige of something underbred in her nature, for putting such fervid stress upon the supplication: *i.e.* making too much of it—a trick of the vulgar: and not known to the languid.

She wrote to Lydiard for advice.

He condensed a paragraph into a line:

'It should be the earl. She is driving him to it, intentionally or not.'

Mrs. Devereux doubted that the countess could have so false an idea of her husband's character as to think it possible he would ever be bent to humble himself to the man he had castigated. She was right. It was by honestly presenting to his mind something more loathsome still, the humbling of herself, that Rosamund succeeded in awakening some remote thoughts of a compromise, in case of necessity. Better I than she!

But the necessity was inconceivable.

He had really done everything required of him, if anything was really required, by speaking to Shrapnel civilly. He had spoken to Shrapnel twice.

Besides, the castle was being gladdened by happier tidings of Beauchamp. Gannet now pledged his word to the poor fellow's recovery, and the earl's particular friends arrived, and the countess entertained them. October passed smoothly.

She said once: 'Ancestresses of yours, my lord, have undertaken pilgrimages as acts of penance for sin, to obtain heaven's intercession in their extremity.'

'I dare say they did,' he replied. 'The monks got round them.'

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'It is not to be laughed at, if it eased their hearts.'

Timidly she renewed her request for permission to perform the pilgrimage to Bevisham.

'Wait,' said he, 'till Nevil is on his legs.'

'Have you considered where I may then be, Everard?'

'My love, you sleep well, don't you?'

'You see me every night.'

'I see you sound asleep.'

'I see you watching me.'

'Let's reason,' said the earl; and again they went through the argument upon the apology to Dr. Shrapnel.

He was willing to indulge her in any amount of it: and she perceived why. Fox! she thought. Grand fox, but fox downright. For her time was shortening to days that would leave her no free-will.

On the other hand, the exercise of her free-will in a fast resolve, was growing all the more a privilege that he was bound to respect. As she became sacred and doubly precious to him, the less would he venture to thwart her, though he should think her mad. There would be an analogy between his manner of regarding her and the way that superstitious villagers look on their crazy innocents, she thought sadly. And she bled for him too: she grieved to hurt his pride. But she had come to imagine that there was no avoidance of this deed of personal humiliation.

Nevil had scrawled a note to her. She had it in her hand one forenoon in mid November, when she said to her husband: 'I have ordered the carriage for two o'clock to meet the quarter to three train to London, and I have sent Stanton on to get the house ready for us tonight.'

Lord Romfrey levelled a marksman's eye at her.

'Why London? You know my wish that it should be here at the castle.'

'I have decided to go to Bevisham. I have little time left.'

'None, to my thinking.'

'Oh I yes; my heart will be light. I shall gain. You come with me to London?'

'You can't go.'

'Don't attempt to reason with me, please, please!'

'I command, madam.'

'My lord, it is past the hour of commanding.'

He nodded his head, with the eyes up amid the puckered brows, and blowing one of his long nasal expirations, cried, 'Here we are, in for another bout of argument.'

'No; I can bear the journey, rejoice in confessing my fault, but more argument I cannot bear. I will reason with you when I can: submit to me in this.'

'Feminine reasoning!' he interjected.

'I have nothing better to offer. It will be prudent to attend to me. Take my conduct for the portion I bring you. Before I put myself in God's care I must be clean. I am unclean. Language like that offends you. I have no better. My reasoning has not touched you; I am helpless, except in this determination that my contrition shall be expressed to Dr. Shrapnel. If I am to have life, to be worthy of living and being a mother, it must be done. Now, my dear lord, see that, and submit. You're but one voice: I am two.'

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He jumped off his chair, frowning up his forehead, and staring awfully at the insulting prospect. 'An apology to the man? By you? Away with it.'

'Make allowances for me if you can, my dear lord that is what I am going to do.'

'My wife going there?' He strode along furiously. 'No!'

'You will not stop her.'

'There's a palsy in my arm if I don't.'

She plucked at her watch.

'Why, ma'am, I don't know you,' he said, coming close to her. 'Let's reason. Perhaps you overshot it; you were disgusted with Shrapnel. Perhaps I was hasty; I get fired by an insult to a woman. There was a rascal kissed a girl once against her will, and I heard her cry out; I laid him on his back for six months; just to tell you; I'd do the same to lord or beggar. Very well, my dear heart, we'll own I might have looked into the case when that dog Cecil . . . what's the matter?'

'Speak on, my dear husband,' said Rosamund, panting.

'But your making the journey to Bevisham is a foolish notion.'

'Yes? well?'

'Well, we'll wait.'

'Oh! have we to travel over it all again?' she exclaimed in despair at the dashing out of a light she had fancied. 'You see the wrong. You know the fever it is in my blood, and you bid me wait.'

'Drop a line to Nevil.'

'To trick my conscience! I might have done that, and done well, once. Do you think I dislike the task I propose to myself? It is for your sake that I would shun it. As for me, the thought of going there is an ecstasy. I shall be with Nevil, and be able to look in his face. And how can I be actually abasing you when I am so certain that I am worthier of you in what I do?'

Her exaltation swept her on. 'Hurry there, my lord, if you will. If you think it prudent that you should go in my place, go: you deprive me of a great joy, but I will not put myself in your way, and I consent. The chief sin was mine; remember that. I rank it viler than Cecil Baskellett's. And listen: when—can you reckon?—when will he confess his wickedness? We separate ourselves from a wretch like that.'

'Pooh,' quoth the earl.

'But you will go?' She fastened her arms round the arm nearest: 'You or I! Does it matter which? We are one. You speak for me; I should have been forced to speak for you. You spare me the journey. I do not in truth suppose it would have injured me; but I would not run one unnecessary risk.'

Lord Romfrey sighed profoundly. He could not shake her off. How could he refuse her?

How on earth had it come about that suddenly he was expected to be the person to go?

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She would not let him elude her; and her stained cheeks and her trembling on his arm pleaded most pressingly and masteringly. It might be that she spoke with a knowledge of her case. Positive it undoubtedly was that she meant to go if he did not. Perhaps the hopes of his House hung on it. Having admitted that a wrong had been done, he was not the man to leave it unamended; only he would have chosen his time, and the manner. Since Nevil's illness, too, he had once or twice been clouded with a little bit of regret at the recollection of poor innocent old Shrapnel posted like a figure of total inebriation beside the doorway of the dreadful sickroom.

There had been women of the earl's illustrious House who would have given their hands to the axe rather than conceal a stain and have to dread a scandal. His Rosamund, after all, was of their pattern; even though she blew that conscience she prattled of into trifles, and swelled them, as women of high birth in this country, out of the clutches of the priests, do not do.

She clung to him for his promise to go.

He said: 'Well, well.'

'That means, you will,' said she.

His not denying it passed for the affirmative.

Then indeed she bloomed with love of him.

'Yet do say yes,' she begged.

'I'll go, ma'am,' shouted the earl. 'I'll go, my love,' he said softly.

CHAPTER LIII

THE APOLOGY TO DR. SHRAPNEL

'You and Nevil are so alike,' Lady Romfrey said to her lord, at some secret resemblance she detected and dwelt on fondly, when the earl was on the point of starting a second time for Bevisham to perform what she had prompted him to conceive his honourable duty, without a single intimation that he loathed the task, neither shrug nor grimace.

'Two ends of a stick are pretty much alike: they're all that length apart,' said he, very little in the humour for compliments, however well braced for his work.

His wife's admiring love was pleasant enough. He preferred to have it unspoken. Few of us care to be eulogized in the act of taking a nauseous medical mixture.



For him the thing was as good as done, on his deciding to think it both adviseable and right: so he shouldered his load and marched off with it. He could have postponed the right proceeding, even after the partial recognition of his error:—one drops a word or two by hazard, one expresses an anxiety to afford reparation, one sends a message, and so forth, for the satisfaction of one's conventionally gentlemanly feeling: but the adviseable proceeding under stress of peculiar circumstances, his clearly-awakened recognition of that, impelled him unhesitatingly. His wife had said it was the portion she brought him. Tears would not have persuaded him so powerfully, that he might prove to her he was glad of her whatever the portion she brought. She was a good wife,

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a brave woman, likely to be an incomparable mother. At present her very virtues excited her to fancifulness nevertheless she was in his charge, and he was bound to break the neck of his will, to give her perfect peace of mind. The child suffers from the mother's mental agitation. It might be a question of a nervous or an idiot future Earl of Romfrey. Better death to the House than such a mockery of his line! These reflections reminded him of the heartiness of his whipping of that poor old tumbled signpost Shrapnel, in the name of outraged womankind. If there was no outrage?

Assuredly if there was no outrage, consideration for the state of his wife would urge him to speak the apology in the most natural manner possible. She vowed there was none.

He never thought of blaming her for formerly deceiving him, nor of blaming her for now expediting him.

In the presence of Colonel Halkett, Mr. Tuckham, and Mr. Lydiard, on a fine November afternoon, standing bareheaded in the fir-bordered garden of the cottage on the common, Lord Romfrey delivered his apology to Dr. Shrapnel, and he said:

'I call you to witness, gentlemen, I offer Dr. Shrapnel the fullest reparation he may think fit to demand of me for an unprovoked assault on him, that I find was quite unjustified, and for which I am here to ask his forgiveness.'

Speech of man could not have been more nobly uttered.

Dr. Shrapnel replied:

'To the half of that, sir—'tis over! What remains is done with the hand.'

He stretched his hand out.

Lord Romfrey closed his own on it.

The antagonists, between whom was no pretence of their being other after the performance of a creditable ceremony, bowed and exchanged civil remarks: and then Lord Romfrey was invited to go into the house and see Beauchamp, who happened to be sitting with Cecilia Halkett and Jenny Denham. Beauchamp was thin, pale, and quiet; but the sight of him standing and conversing after that scene of the skinny creature struggling with bareribbed obstruction on the bed, was an example of constitutional vigour and a compliment to the family very gratifying to Lord Romfrey. Excepting by Cecilia, the earl was coldly received. He had to leave early by special express for London to catch the last train to Romfrey. Beauchamp declined to fix a day for his visit to the castle with Lydiard, but proposed that Lydiard should accompany the

earl on his return. Lydiard was called in, and at once accepted the earl's invitation, and quitted the room to pack his portmanteau.

A faint sign of firm-shutting shadowed the corners of Jenny's lips.

'You have brought my nephew to life,' Lord Romfrey said to her.

'My share in it was very small, my lord.'

'Gannet says that your share in it was very great.'

'And I say so, with the authority of a witness,' added Cecilia.

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'And I, from my experience,' came from Beauchamp.

His voice had a hollow sound, unlike his natural voice.

The earl looked at him remembering the bright laughing lad he had once been, and said: 'Why not try a month of Madeira? You have only to step on board the boat.'

'I don't want to lose a month of my friend,' said Beauchamp.

'Take your friend with you. After these fevers our Winters are bad.'

'I've been idle too long.'

'But, Captain Beauchamp,' said Jenny, 'you proposed to do nothing but read for a couple of years.'

'Ay, there's the voyage!' sighed he, with a sailor-invalid's vision of sunny seas dancing in the far sky.

'You must persuade Dr. Shrapnel to come; and he will not come unless you come too, and you won't go anywhere but to the Alps!' She bent her eyes on the floor. Beauchamp remembered what had brought her home from the Alps. He cast a cold look on his uncle talking with Cecilia: granite, as he thought. And the reflux of that slight feeling of despair seemed to tear down with it in wreckage every effort he had made in life, and cry failure on him. Yet he was hoping that he had not been created for failure.

He touched his uncle's hand indifferently: 'My love to the countess: let me hear of her, sir, if you please.'

'You shall,' said the earl. 'But, off to Madeira, and up Teneriffe: sail the Azores. I'll hire you a good-sized schooner.'

'There is the Esperanza,' said Cecilia. 'And the vessel is lying idle, Nevil! Can you allow it?'

He consented to laugh at himself, and fell to coughing.

Jenny Denham saw a real human expression of anxiety cross the features of the earl at the sound of the cough.

Lord Romfrey said 'Adieu,' to her.

He offered her his hand, which she contrived to avoid taking by dropping a formal half-reverence.

'Think of the Esperanza; she will be coasting her nominal native land! and adieu for to-day,' Cecilia said to Beauchamp.

Jenny Denham and he stood at the window to watch the leave-taking in the garden, for a distraction. They interchanged no remark of surprise at seeing the earl and Dr. Shrapnel hand-locked: but Jenny's heart reproached her uncle for being actually servile, and Beauchamp accused the earl of aristocratic impudence.

Both were overcome with remorse when Colonel Halkett, putting his head into the room to say good-bye to Beauchamp and place the Esperanza at his disposal for a Winter cruise, chanced to mention in two or three half words the purpose of the earl's visit, and what had occurred. He took it for known already.

To Miss Denham he remarked: 'Lord Romfrey is very much concerned about your health; he fears you have overdone it in nursing Captain Beauchamp!

'I must be off after him,' said Beauchamp, and began trembling so that he could not stir.

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The colonel knew the pain and shame of that condition of weakness to a man who has been strong and swift, and said: 'Seven-league boots are not to be caught. You'll see him soon. Why, I thought some letter of yours had fetched him here! I gave you all the credit of it.'

'No, he deserves it all himself—all,' said Beauchamp and with a dubious eye on Jenny Denham: 'You see, we were unfair.'

The 'we' meant 'you' to her sensitiveness; and probably he did mean it for 'you': for as he would have felt, so he supposed that his uncle must have felt, Jenny's coldness was much the crueller. Her features, which in animation were summer light playing upon smooth water, could be exceedingly cold in repose: the icier to those who knew her, because they never expressed disdain. No expression of the baser sort belonged to them. Beauchamp was intimate with these delicately-cut features; he would have shuddered had they chilled on him. He had fallen in love with his uncle; he fancied she ought to have done so too; and from his excess of sympathy he found her deficient in it.

He sat himself down to write a hearty letter to his 'dear old uncle Everard.'

Jenny left him, to go to her chamber and cry.

CHAPTER LIV

THE FRUITS OF THE APOLOGY

This clear heart had cause for tears. Her just indignation with Lord Romfrey had sustained her artificially hitherto now that it was erased, she sank down to weep. Her sentiments toward Lydiard had been very like Cecilia Halkett's in favour of Mr. Austin; with something more to warm them on the part of the gentleman. He first had led her mind in the direction of balanced thought, when, despite her affection for Dr. Shrapnel, her timorous maiden wits, unable to contend with the copious exclamatory old politician, opposed him silently. Lydiard had helped her tongue to speak, as well as her mind to rational views; and there had been a bond of union in common for them in his admiration of her father's writings. She had known that he was miserably yoked, and had respected him when he seemed inclined for compassion without wooing her for tenderness. He had not trifled with her, hardly flattered; he had done no more than kindle a young girl's imaginative liking. The pale flower of imagination, fed by dews, not by sunshine, was born drooping, and hung secret in her bosom, shy as a bell of the frail wood-sorrel. Yet there was pain for her in the perishing of a thing so poor and lowly. She had not observed the change in Lydiard after Beauchamp came on the scene: and that may tell us how passionlessly pure the little maidenly sentiment was. For do but look on the dewy wood-sorrel flower; it is not violet or rose inviting hands to pluck it: still it is there, happy in the woods. And Jenny's feeling was that a foot had crushed it.

She wept, thinking confusedly of Lord Romfrey; trying to think he had made his amends tardily, and that Beauchamp prized him too highly for the act. She had no longer anything to resent: she was obliged to weep. In truth, as the earl had noticed, she was physically depressed by the strain of her protracted watch over Beauchamp, as well as rather heartsick.

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But she had been of aid and use in saving him! She was not quite a valueless person; sweet, too, was the thought that he consulted her, listened to her, weighed her ideas. He had evidently taken to study her, as if dispersing some wonderment that one of her sex should have ideas. He had repeated certain of her own which had been forgotten by her. His eyes were often on her with this that she thought humorous intentness. She smiled. She had assisted in raising him from his bed of sickness, whereof the memory affrighted her and melted her. The difficulty now was to keep him indoors, and why he would not go even temporarily to a large house like Mount Laurels, whither Colonel Halkett was daily requesting him to go, she was unable to comprehend. His love of Dr. Shrapnel might account for it.

'Own, Jenny,' said Beauchamp, springing up to meet her as she entered the room where he and Dr. Shrapnel sat discussing Lord Romfrey's bearing at his visit, 'own that my uncle Everard is a true nobleman. He has to make the round to the right mark, but he comes to it. I could not move him—and I like him the better for that. He worked round to it himself. I ought to have been sure he would. You're right: I break my head with impatience.'

'No; you sowed seed,' said Dr. Shrapnel. 'Heed not that girl, my Beauchamp. The old woman's in the Tory, and the Tory leads the young maid. Here's a fable I draw from a Naturalist's book, and we'll set it against the dicta of Jenny Do-nothing, Jenny Discretion, Jenny Wait-for-the-Gods: Once upon a time in a tropical island a man lay sick; so ill that he could not rise to trouble his neighbours for help; so weak that it was lifting a mountain to get up from his bed; so hopeless of succour that the last spark of distraught wisdom perching on his brains advised him to lie where he was and trouble not himself, since peace at least he could command, before he passed upon the black highroad men call our kingdom of peace: ay, he lay there. Now it chanced that this man had a mess to cook for his nourishment. And life said, Do it, and death said, To what end? He wrestled with the stark limbs of death, and cooked the mess; and that done he had no strength remaining to him to consume it, but crept to his bed like the toad into winter. Now, meanwhile a steam arose from the mess, and he lay stretched. So it befel that the birds of prey of the region scented the mess, and they descended and thronged at that man's windows. And the man's neighbours looked up at them, for it was the sign of one who is fit for the beaks of birds, lying unburied. Fail to spread the pall one hour where suns are decisive, and the pall comes down out of heaven! They said, The man is dead within. And they went to his room, and saw him and succoured him. They lifted him out of death by the last uncut thread.'

'Now, my Jenny Weigh-words, Jenny Halt-there! was it they who saved the man, or he that saved himself? The man taxed his expiring breath to sow seed of life. Lydiard shall put it into verse for a fable in song for our people. I say it is a good fable, and sung spiritedly may serve for nourishment, and faith in work, to many of our poor fainting fellows! Now you?'

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Jenny said: 'I think it is a good fable of self-help. Does it quite illustrate the case? I mean, the virtue of impatience. But I like the fable and the moral; and I think it would do good if it were made popular, though it would be hard to condense it to a song.'

'It would be hard! ay, then we do it forthwith. And you shall compose the music. As for the "case of impatience," my dear, you tether the soaring universal to your pet-lamb's post, the special. I spoke of seed sown. I spoke of the fruits of energy and resolution. Cared I for an apology? I took the blows as I take hail from the clouds—which apologize to you the moment you are in shelter, if you laugh at them. So, good night to that matter! Are we to have rain this evening? I must away into Bevisham to the Workmen's Hall, and pay the men.'

'There will not be rain; there will be frost, and you must be well wrapped if you must go,' said Jenny. 'And tell them not to think of deputations to Captain Beauchamp yet.'

'No, no deputations; let them send Killick, if they want to say anything,' said Beauchamp.

'Wrong!' the doctor cried; 'wrong! wrong! Six men won't hurt you more than one. And why check them when their feelings are up? They burn to be speaking some words to you. Trust me, Beauchamp, if we shun to encounter the good warm soul of numbers, our hearts are narrowed to them. The business of our modern world is to open heart and stretch out arms to numbers. In numbers we have our sinews; they are our iron and gold. Scatter them not; teach them the secret of cohesion. Practically, since they gave you not their entire confidence once, you should not rebuff them to suspicions of you as aristocrat, when they rise on the effort to believe a man of, as 'tis called, birth their undivided friend. Meet them!'

'Send them,' said Beauchamp.

Jenny Denham fastened a vast cloak and a comforter on the doctor's heedless shoulders and throat, enjoining on him to return in good time for dinner.

He put his finger to her cheek in reproof of such supererogatory counsel to a man famous for his punctuality.

The day had darkened.

Beauchamp begged Jenny to play to him on the piano.

'Do you indeed care to have music?' said she. 'I did not wish you to meet a deputation, because your strength is not yet equal to it. Dr. Shrapnel dwells on principles, forgetful of minor considerations.'

'I wish thousands did!' cried Beauchamp. 'When you play I seem to hear ideas. Your music makes me think.'

Jenny lit a pair of candles and set them on the piano. 'Waltzes?' she asked.

'Call in a puppet-show at once!'

She smiled, turned over some leaves, and struck the opening notes of the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, and made her selections.

At the finish he said: 'Now read me your father's poem, "The Hunt of the Fates."'

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She read it to him.

'Now read, "The Ascent from the Inferno."'

That she read: and also 'Soul and Brute,' another of his favourites.

He wanted more, and told her to read 'First Love—Last Love.'

'I fear I have not the tone of voice for love-poems,' Jenny said, returning the book to him.

'I'll read it,' said he.

He read with more impressiveness than effect. Lydiard's reading thrilled her: Beauchamp's insisted too much on particular lines. But it was worth while observing him. She saw him always as in a picture, remote from herself. His loftier social station and strange character precluded any of those keen suspicions by which women learn that a fire is beginning to glow near them.

'How I should like to have known your father!' he said. 'I don't wonder at Dr. Shrapnel's love of him. Yes, he was one of the great men of his day! and it's a higher honour to be of his blood than any that rank can give. You were ten years old when you lost him. Describe him to me.'

'He used to play with me like a boy,' said Jenny. She described her father from a child's recollection of him.

'Dr. Shrapnel declares he would have been one of the first surgeons in Europe: and he was one of the first of poets,' Beauchamp pursued with enthusiasm. 'So he was doubly great. I hold a good surgeon to be in the front rank of public benefactors—where they put rich brewers, bankers, and speculative manufacturers now. Well! the world is young. We shall alter that in time. Whom did your father marry?'

Jenny answered, 'My mother was the daughter of a London lawyer. She married without her father's approval of the match, and he left her nothing.'

Beauchamp interjected: 'Lawyer's money!'

'It would have been useful to my mother's household when I was an infant,' said Jenny.

'Poor soul! I suppose so. Yes; well,' Beauchamp sighed. 'Money! never mind how it comes. We're in such a primitive condition that we catch at anything to keep us out of the cold; dogs with a bone!—instead of living, as Dr. Shrapnel prophesies, for and, with one another. It's war now, and money's the weapon of war. And we're the worst nation in Europe for that. But if we fairly recognize it, we shall be the first to alter our ways.'

There's the point. Well, Jenny, I can look you in the face to-night. Thanks to my uncle Everard at last!

'Captain Beauchamp, you have never been blamed.'

'I am Captain Beauchamp by courtesy, in public. My friends call me Nevil. I think I have heard the name on your lips?'

'When you were very ill.'

He stood closer to her, very close.

'Which was the arm that bled for me? May I look at it? There was a bruise.'

'Have you not forgotten that trifle? There is the faintest possible mark of it left.'

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'I wish to see.'

She gently defended the arm, but he made it so much a matter of earnest to see the bruise of the old Election missile on her fair arm, that, with a pardonable soft blush, to avoid making much of it herself, she turned her sleeve a little above the wrist. He took her hand.

'It was for me!'

'It was quite an accident: no harm was intended.'

'But it was in my cause—for me!'

'Indeed, Captain Beauchamp . . .'

'Nevil, we say indoors.'

'Nevil—but is it not wiser to say what comes naturally to us?'

'Who told you to-day that you had brought me to life? I am here to prove it true. If I had paid attention to your advice, I should not have gone into the cottage of those poor creatures and taken away the fever. I did no good there. But the man's wife said her husband had been ruined by voting for me: and it was a point of honour to go in and sit with him. You are not to have your hand back: it is mine. Don't you remember, Jenny, how you gave me your arm on the road when I staggered; two days before the fever knocked me over? Shall I tell you what I thought then? I thought that he who could have you for a mate would have the bravest and helpfulest wife in all England. And not a mere beauty, for you have good looks: but you have the qualities I have been in search of. Why do your eyes look so mournfully at me? I am full of hope. We'll sail the Esperanza for the Winter: you and I, and our best friend with us. And you shall have a voice in the council, be sure.'

'If you are two to one?' Jenny said quickly, to keep from faltering.

Beauchamp pressed his mouth to the mark of the bruise on her arm. He held her fast.

'I mean it, if you will join me, that you and I should rejoice the heart of the dear old man—will you? He has been brooding over your loneliness here if you are unmarried, ever since his recovery. I owe my life to you, and every debt of gratitude to him. Now, Jenny!'

'Oh! Captain Beauchamp—Nevil, if you will . . . if I may have my hand. You exaggerate common kindness. He loves you. We both esteem you.'

'But you don't love me?'



'Indeed I have no fear that I shall be unable to support myself, if I am left alone.'

'But I want your help. I wake from illness with my eyes open. I must have your arm to lean on now and then.'

Jenny dropped a shivering sigh.

'Uncle is long absent!' she said.

Her hand was released. Beauchamp inspected his watch.

'He may have fallen! He may be lying on the common!'

'Oh!' cried Jenny, 'why did I let him go out without me?'

'Let me have his lantern; I'll go and search over the common.'

'You must not go out,' said she.

'I must. The old man may be perishing.'

'It will be death to you . . . Nevill!'



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'That 's foolish. I can stand the air for a few minutes.'

'I 'll go,' said Jenny.

'Unprotected? No.'

'Cook shall come with me.'

'Two women!'

'Nevil, if you care a little for me, be good, be kind, submit.'

'He is half an hour behind dinner-time, and he's never late. Something must have happened to him. Way for me, my dear girl.'

She stood firm between him and the door. It came to pass that she stretched her hands to arrest him, and he seized the hands.

'Rather than you should go out in this cold weather, anything!' she said, in the desperation of physical inability to hold him back.

'Ah!' Beauchamp crossed his arms round her. 'I'll wait for five minutes.'

One went by, with Jenny folded, broken and sobbing, senseless, against his breast.

They had not heard Dr. Shrapnel quietly opening the hall door and hanging up his hat. He looked in.

'Beauchamp!' he exclaimed.

'Come, doctor,' said Beauchamp, and loosened his clasp of Jenny considerably.

She disengaged herself.

'Beauchamp! now I die a glad man.'

'Witness, doctor, she 's mine by her own confession.'

'Uncle!' Jenny gasped. 'Oh! Captain Beauchamp, what an error! what delusion! . . . Forget it. I will. Here are more misunderstandings! You shall be excused. But be . . .'

'Be you the blessedest woman alive on this earth, my Jenny!' shouted Dr. Shrapnel. 'You have the choice man on all the earth for husband, sweetheart! Ay, of all the earth! I go with a message for my old friend Harry Denham, to quicken him in the grave; for the husband of his girl is Nevil Beauchamp! The one thing I dared not dream of thousands is established. Sunlight, my Jenny!'



Beauchamp kissed her hand.

She slipped away to her chamber, grovelling to find her diminished self somewhere in the mid-thunder of her amazement, as though it were to discover a pin on the floor by the flash of lightning. Where was she!

This ensued from the apology of Lord Romfrey to Dr. Shrapnel.

CHAPTER LV

WITHOUT LOVE

At the end of November, Jenny Denham wrote these lines to Mr. Lydiard, in reply to his request that she should furnish the latest particulars of Nevil Beauchamp, for the satisfaction of the Countess of Romfrey:

'There is everything to reassure Lady Romfrey in the state of Captain Beauchamp's health, and I have never seen him so placidly happy as he has been since the arrival, yesterday morning, of a lady from France, Madame la Marquise de Rouaillout, with her brother, M. le Comte de Croisnel. Her husband, I hear from M. de Croisnel, dreads our climate and coffee too much to attempt the voyage. I understand that she writes to Lady Romfrey to-day. Lady Romfrey's letter to her, informing her of Captain Beauchamp's alarming illness, went the round from Normandy to Touraine and Dauphiny, otherwise she would have come over earlier.

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'Her first inquiry of me was, "Il est mort?" You would have supposed her disappointed by my answer. A light went out in her eyes, like that of a *veilleuse* in the dawn. She looked at me without speaking, while her beautiful eyes regained their natural expression. She shut them and sighed. "Tell him that M. de Croisnel and his sister are here."

'This morning her wish to see Miss Halkett was gratified. You know my taste was formed in France; I agree with Captain Beauchamp in his more than admiration of Frenchwomen; ours, though more accomplished, are colder and less plastic. But Miss Halkett is surpassingly beautiful, very amiable, very generous, a perfect friend. She is our country at its best. Probably she is shy of speaking French; she frequently puts the Italian accent. Madame de Rouailout begged to speak with her alone: I do not know what passed. Miss Halkett did not return to us.

'Dr. Shrapnel and Captain Beauchamp have recently been speculating on our becoming a nation of artists, and authorities in science and philosophy, by the time our coalfields and material wealth are exhausted. That, and the cataclysm, are their themes.

'They say, will things end utterly?—all our gains be lost? The question seems to me to come of that love of earth which is recognition of God: for if they cannot reconcile themselves to believe in extinction, to what must they be looking? It is a confirmation of your saying, that love leads to God, through art or in acts.

'You will regret to hear that the project of Captain Beauchamp's voyage is in danger of being abandoned. A committee of a vacant Radical borough has offered to nominate him. My influence is weak; madame would have him go back with her and her brother to Normandy. My influence is weak, I suppose, because he finds me constantly leaning to expediency—I am your pupil. It may be quite correct that powder is intended for explosion we do not therefore apply a spark to the barrel. I ventured on that. He pitied me in the snares of simile and metaphor. He is the same, you perceive. How often have we not discussed what would have become of him, with that "rocket brain" of his, in less quiet times! Yet, when he was addressing a deputation of workmen the other day, he recommended patience to them as one of the virtues that count under wisdom. He is curiously impatient for knowledge. One of his reasons for not accepting Colonel Halkett's offer of his yacht is, that he will not be able to have books enough on board. Definite instead of vast and hazy duties are to be desired for him, I think. Most fervently I pray that he will obtain a ship and serve some years. At the risk of your accusing me of "sententious posing," I would say, that men who do not live in the present chiefly, but hamper themselves with giant tasks in excess of alarm for the future, however devoted and noble they may be—and he is an example

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of one that is—reduce themselves to the dimensions of pigmies; they have the cry of infants. You reply, Foresight is an element of love of country and mankind. But how often is not the foresight guess-work? 'He has not spoken of the *dawn* project. To-day he is repeating one of uncle's novelties—"Sultry Tories." The sultry Tory sits in the sun and prophecies woefully of storm, it appears. Your accusation that I am one at heart amuses me; I am not quite able to deny it. "Sultriness" I am not conscious of. But it would appear to be an epithet for the Conservatives of wealth. So that England, being very wealthy, we are to call it a sultry country? You are much wanted, for where there is no "middleman Liberal" to hold the scales for them, these two have it all their own way, which is not good for them.

Captain Beauchamp quotes you too. It seems that you once talked to him of a machine for measuring the force of blows delivered with the fist, and compared his efforts to those of one perpetually practising at it: and this you are said to have called "The case of the Constitutional Realm and the extreme Radical." Elsewhere the Radical smites at iron or rotten wood; in England it is a cushion on springs. Did you say it? He quotes it as yours, half acquiescingly, and ruefully.

'For visitors, we have had Captain Baskellett for two minutes, and Lord Palmet, who stayed longer, and seems to intend to come daily. He attempts French with Madame de R., and amuses her a little: a silver foot and a ball of worsted. Mr. and Mrs. Grancey Lespel have called, and Lord and Lady Croyston. Colonel Halkett, Miss Halkett, and Mr. Tuckham come frequently. Captain Beauchamp spoke to her yesterday of her marriage. 'Madame de R. leaves us to-morrow. Her brother is a delightful, gay-tempered, very handsome boyish Frenchman—not her equal, to my mind, for I do not think Frenchmen comparable to the women of France; but she is exceedingly grave, with hardly a smile, and his high spirits excite Nevil's, so it is pleasant to see them together.'

The letter was handed to Lady Romfrey. She read through it thoughtfully till she came to the name of Nevil, when she frowned. On the morrow she pronounced it a disingenuous letter. Renee had sent her these lines:

'I should come to you if my time were not restricted; my brother's leave of absence is short. I have done here what lay in my power, to show you I have learnt something in the school of self-immolation. I have seen *Mlle.* Halkett. She is a beautiful young woman, deficient only in words, doubtless. My labour, except that it may satisfy you, was the vainest of tasks. She marries a ruddy monsieur of a name that I forget, and of the bearing of a member of the *gardes du corps*, without the stature. Enfin, madame, I have done my duty, and do not regret it, since I may hope that it will win for me some approbation and a portion of the esteem of a lady to whom I am indebted for that which is now the best of life to me: and I do not undervalue it in saying I would gladly have it

stamped on brass and deposited beside my father's. I have my faith. I would it were Nevil's too—and yours, should you be in need of it.

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'He will marry *Mlle*. Denham. If I may foretell events, she will steady him. She is a young person who will not feel astray in society of his rank; she possesses the natural grace we do not expect to see out of our country—from sheer ignorance of what is beyond it. For the moment she affects to consider herself unworthy; and it is excuseable that she should be slightly alarmed at her prospect. But Nevil must have a wife. I presume to think that he could not have chosen better. Above all, make him leave England for the Winter. Adieu, dear countess. Nevil promises me a visit after his marriage. I shall not set foot on England again: but you, should you ever come to our land of France, will find my heart open to you at the gates of undying grateful recollection. I am not skilled in writing. You have looked into me once; look now; I am the same. Only I have succeeded in bringing myself to a greater likeness to the dead, as it becomes a creature to be who is coupled with one of their body. Meanwhile I shall have news of you. I trust that soon I may be warranted in forwarding congratulations to Lord Romfrey.'

Rosamund handed the letters to her husband. Not only did she think Miss Denham disingenuous, she saw that the girl was not in love with Beauchamp: and the idea of a loveless marriage for him threw the mournfullest of Hecate's beams along the course of a career that the passionate love of a bride, though she were not well-born and not wealthy, would have rosily coloured.

'Without love!' she exclaimed to herself. She asked the earl's opinion of the startling intelligence, and of the character of that Miss Denham, who could pen such a letter, after engaging to give her hand to Nevil.

Lord Romfrey laughed in his dumb way. 'If Nevil must have a wife—and the marquise tells you so, and she ought to know—he may as well marry a girl who won't go all the way down hill with him at his pace. He'll be cogged.'

'You do not object to such an alliance?'

'I 'm past objection. There's no law against a man's marrying his nurse.'

'But she is not even in love with him!'

'I dare say not. He wants a wife: she accepts a husband. The two women who were in love with him he wouldn't have.'

Lady Romfrey sighed deeply: 'He has lost Cecilia! She might still have been his: but he has taken to that girl. And Madame de Rouaillout praises the girl because—oh! I see it—she has less to be jealous of in Miss Denham: of whose birth and blood we know nothing. Let that pass! If only she loved him! I cannot endure the thought of his marrying a girl who is not in love with him.'



'Just as you like, my dear.'

'I used to suspect Mr. Lydiard.'

'Perhaps he's the man.'

'Oh, what an end of so brilliant a beginning!'

'It strikes me, my dear,' said the earl, 'it's the proper common sense beginning that may have a fairish end.'

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'No, but what I feel is that he—our Nevil!—has accomplished hardly anything, if anything!'

'He hasn't marched on London with a couple of hundred thousand men: no, he hasn't done that,' the earl said, glancing back in his mind through Beauchamp's career. 'And he escapes what Stukely calls his nation's scourge, in the shape of a statue turned out by an English chisel. No: we haven't had much public excitement out of him. But one thing he did do: he got me down on my knees!'

Lord Romfrey pronounced these words with a sober emphasis that struck the humour of it sharply into Rosamund's heart, through some contrast it presented between Nevil's aim at the world and hit of a man: the immense deal thought of it by the earl, and the very little that Nevil would think of it—the great domestic achievement to be boasted of by an enthusiastic devotee of politics!

She embraced her husband with peals of loving laughter: the last laughter heard in Romfrey Castle for many a day.

CHAPTER LVI

THE LAST OF NEVIL BEAUCHAMP

Not before Beauchamp was flying with the Winter gales to warmer climes could Rosamund reflect on his career unshadowed by her feminine mortification at the thought that he was unloved by the girl he had decided to marry. But when he was away and winds blew, the clouds which obscured an embracing imagination of him—such as, to be true and full and sufficient, should stretch like the dome of heaven over the humblest of lives under contemplation—broke, and revealed him to her as one who had other than failed: rather as one in mid career, in mid forest, who, by force of character, advancing in self-conquest, strikes his impress right and left around him, because of his aim at stars. He had faults, and she gloried to think he had; for the woman's heart rejoiced in his portion of our common humanity while she named their prince to men: but where was he to be matched in devotedness and in gallantry? and what man of blood fiery as Nevil's ever fought so to subject it? Rosamund followed him like a migratory bird, hovered over his vessel, perched on deck beside the helm, where her sailor was sure to be stationed, entered his breast, communed with him, and wound him round and round with her love. He has mine! she cried. Her craving that he should be blest in the reward, or flower-crown, of his wife's love of him lessened in proportion as her brooding spirit vividly realized his deeds. In fact it had been but an example of our very general craving for a climax, palpable and scenic. She was completely satisfied by her conviction that his wife would respect and must be subordinate to him. So it had been with her. As for love, let him come to his Rosamund for love, and appreciation, adoration!

Rosamund drew nigh to her hour of peril with this torch of her love of Beauchamp to illuminate her.

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There had been a difficulty in getting him to go. One day Cecilia walked down to Dr. Shrapnel's with Mr. Tuckham, to communicate that the *Esperanza* awaited Captain Beauchamp, manned and provisioned, off the pier. Now, he would not go without Dr. Shrapnel, nor the doctor without Jenny; and Jenny could not hold back, seeing that the wish of her heart was for Nevil to be at sea, untroubled by political questions and prowling Radical deputies. So her consent was the seal of the voyage. What she would not consent to, was the proposal to have her finger ringed previous to the voyage, altogether in the manner of a sailor's bride. She seemed to stipulate for a term of courtship. Nevil frankly told the doctor that he was not equal to it; anything that was kind he was quite ready to say; and anything that was pretty: but nothing particularly kind and pretty occurred to him: he was exactly like a juvenile correspondent facing a blank sheet of letter paper:—he really did not know what to say, further than the uncomplicated exposition of his case, that he wanted a wife and had found the very woman. How, then, fathom Jenny's mood for delaying? Dr. Shrapnel's exhortations were so worded as to induce her to comport herself like a Scriptural woman, humbly wakeful to the surpassing splendour of the high fortune which had befallen her in being so selected, and obedient at a sign. But she was, it appeared that she was, a maid of scaly vision, not perceptive of the blessedness of her lot. She could have been very little perceptive, for she did not understand his casual allusion to Beauchamp's readiness to overcome 'a natural repugnance,' for the purpose of making her his wife.

Up to the last moment, before Cecilia Halkett left the deck of the *Esperanza* to step on the pier, Jenny remained in vague but excited expectation of something intervening to bring Cecilia and Beauchamp together. It was not a hope; it was with pure suspense that she awaited the issue. Cecilia was pale. Beauchamp shook Mr. Tuckham by the hand, and said: 'I shall not hear the bells, but send me word of it, will you?' and he wished them both all happiness.

The sails of the schooner filled. On a fair frosty day, with a light wind ruffling from the North-west, she swept away, out of sight of Bevisham, and the island, into the Channel, to within view of the coast of France. England once below the water-line, alone with Beauchamp and Dr. Shrapnel, Jenny Denham knew her fate.

As soon as that grew distinctly visible in shape and colour, she ceased to be reluctant. All about her, in air and sea and unknown coast, was fresh and prompting. And if she looked on Beauchamp, the thought—my husband! palpitated, and destroyed and re-made her. Rapidly she underwent her transformation from doubtfully-minded woman to woman awakening clear-eyed, and with new sweet shivers in her temperate blood, like the tremulous light seen running to the morn upon a quiet sea. She fell under the charm of Beauchamp at sea.

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In view of the island of Madeira, Jenny noticed that some trouble had come upon Dr. Shrapnel and Beauchamp, both of whom had been hilarious during the gales; but sailing into Summer they began to wear that look which indicated one of their serious deliberations. She was not taken into their confidence, and after awhile they recovered partially.

The truth was, they had been forced back upon old English ground by a recognition of the absolute necessity, for her sake, of handing themselves over to a parson. In England, possibly, a civil marriage might have been proposed to the poor girl. In a foreign island, they would be driven not simply to accept the services of a parson, but to seek him and solicit him: otherwise the knot, faster than any sailor's in binding, could not be tied. Decidedly it could not; and how submit? Neither Dr. Shrapnel nor Beauchamp were of a temper to deceive the clerical gentleman; only they had to think of Jenny's feelings. Alas for us!—this our awful baggage in the rear of humanity, these women who have not moved on their own feet one step since the primal mother taught them to suckle, are perpetually pulling us backward on the march. Slaves of custom, forms, shows and superstitions, they are slaves of the priests. 'They are so in gratitude perchance, as the matter works,' Dr. Shrapnel admitted. For at one period the priests did cherish and protect the weak from animal man. But we have entered a broader daylight now, when the sun of high heaven has crowned our structure with the flower of brain, like him to scatter mists, and penetrate darkness, and shoot from end to end of earth; and must we still be grinning subserviently to ancient usages and stale forms, because of a baggage that it is, woe to us! too true, we cannot cut ourselves loose from? Lydiard might say we are compelling the priests to fight, and that they are compact foemen, not always passive. Battle, then!—The cry was valiant. Nevertheless, Jenny would certainly insist upon the presence of a parson, in spite of her bridegroom's 'natural repugnance.' Dr. Shrapnel offered to argue it with her, being of opinion that a British consul could satisfactorily perform the ceremony. Beauchamp knew her too well. Moreover, though tongue-tied as to love-making, he was in a hurry to be married. Jenny's eyes were lovely, her smiles were soft; the fair promise of her was in bloom on her face and figure. He could not wait; he must off to the parson.

Then came the question as to whether honesty and honour did not impose it on them to deal openly with that gentle, and on such occasions unobtrusive official, by means of a candid statement to him overnight, to the effect that they were the avowed antagonists of his Church, which would put him on his defence, and lead to an argument that would accomplish his overthrow. You parsons, whose cause is good, marshal out the poor of the land, that we may see the sort of army your stewardship has gained for you. What! no army? only women and hoary men? And in the rear rank, to support you as an institution, none but fanatics, cowards, white-eyeballed dogmatists, timeservers, money-changers, mockers in their sleeves? What is this?

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But the prospect of so completely confounding the unfortunate parson warned Beauchamp that he might have a shot in his locker: the parson heavily trodden on will turn. 'I suppose we must be hypocrites,' he said in dejection. Dr. Shrapnel was even more melancholy. He again offered to try his persuasiveness upon Jenny. Beauchamp declined to let her be disturbed.

She did not yield so very lightly to the invitation to go before a parson. She had to be wooed after all; a Harry Hotspur's wooing. Three clergymen of the Established Church were on the island: 'And where won't they be, where there's fine scenery and comforts abound?' Beauchamp said to the doctor ungratefully.

'Whether a celibate clergy ruins the Faith faster than a non-celibate, I won't dispute,' replied the doctor; 'but a non-celibate interwinds with us, and is likely to keep up a one-storied edifice longer.'

Jenny hesitated. She was a faltering unit against an ardent and imperative two in the council. And Beauchamp had shown her a letter of Lady Romfrey's very clearly signifying that she and her lord anticipated tidings of the union. Marrying Beauchamp was no simple adventure. She feared in her bosom, and resigned herself.

She had a taste of what it was to be, at the conclusion of the service. Beauchamp thanked the good-natured clergyman, and spoke approvingly of him to his bride, as an agreeable well-bred gentlemanly person. Then, fronting her and taking both her hands: 'Now, my darling,' he said: 'you must pledge me your word to this: I have stooped my head to the parson, and I am content to have done that to win you, though I don't think much of myself for doing it. I can't look so happy as I am. And this idle ceremony—however, I thank God I have you, and I thank you for taking me. But you won't expect me to give in to the parson again.'

'But, Nevil,' she said, fearing what was to come: 'they are gentlemen, good men.'

'Yes, yes.'

'They are educated men, Nevil.'

'Jenny! Jenny Beauchamp, they're not men, they're Churchmen. My experience of the priest in our country is, that he has abandoned—he's dead against the only cause that can justify and keep up a Church: the cause of the poor—the people. He is a creature of the moneyed class. I look on him as a pretender. I go through his forms, to save my wife from annoyance, but there's the end of it: and if ever I'm helpless, unable to resist him, I rely on your word not to let him intrude; he's to have nothing to do with the burial of me. He's against the cause of the people. Very well: I make my protest to the death against him. When he's a Christian instead of a Churchman, then may my example not be followed. It's little use looking for that.'

Jenny dropped some tears on her bridal day. She sighed her submission. 'So long as you do not change,' said she.

'Change!' cried Nevil. 'That's for the parson. Now it's over: we start fair. My darling! I have you. I don't mean to bother you. I'm sure you'll see that the enemies of Reason are the enemies of the human race; you will see that. I can wait.'

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'If we can be sure that we ourselves are using reason rightly, Nevil!— not prejudice.'

'Of course. But don't you see, my Jenny, we have no interest in opposing reason?'

'But have we not all grown up together? And is it just or wise to direct our efforts to overthrow a solid structure that is a part . . . ?'

He put his legal right in force to shut her mouth, telling her presently she might Lydiardize as much as she liked. While practising this mastery, he assured her he would always listen to her: yes, whether she Lydiardized, or what Dr. Shrapnel called Jenny-prated.

'That is to say, dear Nevil, that you have quite made up your mind to a toddling chattering little nursery wife?'

Very much the contrary to anything of the sort, he declared; and he proved his honesty by announcing an immediate reflection that had come to him: 'How oddly things are settled! Cecilia Halkett and Tuckham; you and I! Now, I know for certain that I have brought Cecilia Halkett out of her woman's Toryism, and given her at least liberal views, and she goes and marries an arrant Tory; while you, a bit of a Tory at heart, more than anything else, have married an ultra.'

'Perhaps we may hope that the conflict will be seasonable on both sides? —if you give me fair play, Nevil!'

As fair play as a woman's lord could give her, she was to have; with which, adieu to argumentation and controversy, and all the thanks in life to the parson! On a lovely island, free from the seductions of care, possessing a wife who, instead of starting out of romance and poetry with him to the supreme honeymoon, led him back to those forsaken valleys of his youth, and taught him the joys of colour and sweet companionship, simple delights, a sister mind, with a loveliness of person and nature unimagined by him, Beauchamp drank of a happiness that neither Renee nor Cecilia had promised. His wooing of Jenny Beauchamp was a flattery richer than any the maiden Jenny Denham could have deemed her due; and if his wonder in experiencing such strange gladness was quaintly ingenuous, it was delicious to her to see and know full surely that he who was at little pains to court, or please, independently of the agency of the truth in him, had come to be her lover through being her husband.

Here I would stop. It is Beauchamp's career that carries me on to its close, where the lanterns throw their beams off the mudbanks by the black riverside; when some few English men and women differed from the world in thinking that it had suffered a loss.

They sorrowed for the earl when tidings came to them of the loss of his child, alive one hour in his arms. Rosamund caused them to be deceived as to her condition. She

survived; she wrote to Jenny, bidding her keep her husband cruising. Lord Romfrey added a brief word: he told Nevil that he would see no one for the present; hoped he would be absent a year, not a day less. To render it the more easily practicable, in the next packet of letters Colonel Halkett and Cecilia begged them not to bring the Esperanza home for the yachting season: the colonel said his daughter was to be married in April, and that bridegroom and bride had consented to take an old man off with them to Italy; perhaps in the autumn all might meet in Venice.

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'And you've never seen Venice,' Beauchamp said to Jenny.

'Everything is new to me,' said she, penetrating and gladly joining the conspiracy to have him out of England.

Dr. Shrapnel was not so compliant as the young husband. Where he could land and botanize, as at Madeira, he let time fly and drum his wings on air, but the cities of priests along the coast of Portugal and Spain roused him to a burning sense of that flight of time and the vacuity it told of in his labours. Greatly to his astonishment, he found that it was no longer he and Beauchamp against Jenny, but Jenny and Beauchamp against him.

'What!' he cried, 'to draw breath day by day, and not to pay for it by striking daily at the rock Iniquity? Are you for that, Beauchamp? And in a land where these priests walk with hats curled like the water-lily's leaf without the flower? How far will you push indolent unreason to gain the delusion of happiness? There is no such thing: but there's trance. That talk of happiness is a carrion clamour of the creatures of prey. Take it—and you're helping tear some poor wretch to pieces, whom you might be constructing, saving perchance: some one? some thousands! You, Beauchamp, when I met you first, you were for England, England! for a breadth of the palm of my hand comparatively—the round of a copper penny, no wider! And from that you jumped at a bound to the round of this earth: you were for humanity. Ay, we sailed our planet among the icy spheres, and were at blood-heat for its destiny, you and I! And now you hover for a wind to catch you. So it is for a soul rejecting prayer. This wind and that has it: the well-springs within are shut down fast! I pardon my Jenny, my Harry Denham's girl. She is a woman, and has a brain like a bell that rings all round to the tongue. It is her kingdom, of the interdicted untraversed frontiers. But what cares she, or any woman, that this Age of ours should lie like a carcase against the Sun? What cares any woman to help to hold up Life to him? He breeds divinely upon life, filthy upon stagnation. Sail you away, if you will, in your trance. I go. I go home by land alone, and I await you. Here in this land of moles upright, I do naught but execrate; I am a pulpit of curses. Counter-anathema, you might call me.'

'Oh! I feel the comparison so, for England shining spiritually bright,' said Jenny, and cut her husband adrift with the exclamation, and saw him float away to Dr. Shrapnel.

'Spiritually bright!'

'By comparison, Nevil.'

'There's neither spiritual nor political brightness in England, but a common resolution to eat of good things and stick to them,' said the doctor: 'and we two out of England, there's barely a voice to cry scare to the feeders. I'm back! I'm home!'

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They lost him once in Cadiz, and discovered him on the quay, looking about for a vessel. In getting him to return to the *Esperanza*, they nearly all three fell into the hands of the police. Beauchamp gave him a great deal of his time, reading and discussing with him on deck and in the cabin, and projecting future enterprises, to pacify his restlessness. A translation of Plato had become Beauchamp's intellectual world. This philosopher singularly anticipated his ideas. Concerning himself he was beginning to think that he had many years ahead of him for work. He was with Dr. Shrapnel, as to the battle, and with Jenny as to the delay in recommencing it. Both the men laughed at the constant employment she gave them among the Greek islands in furnishing her severely accurate accounts of sea-fights and land-fights: and the scenes being before them they could neither of them protest that their task-work was an idle labour. Dr. Shrapnel assisted in fighting Marathon and Salamis over again cordially—to shield Great Britain from the rule of a satrapy.

Beauchamp often tried to conjure words to paint his wife. On grave subjects she had the manner of speaking of a shy scholar, and between grave and playful, between smiling and serious, her clear head, her nobly poised character, seemed to him to have never had a prototype and to elude the art of picturing it in expression, until he heard Lydiard call her whimsically, 'Portia disrobing'

Portia half in her doctor's gown, half out of it. They met Lydiard and his wife Louise, and Mr. and Mrs. Tuckham, in Venice, where, upon the first day of October, Jenny Beauchamp gave birth to a son. The thrilling mother did not perceive on this occasion the gloom she cast over the father of the child and Dr. Shrapnel. The youngster would insist on his right to be sprinkled by the parson, to get a legal name and please his mother. At all turns in the history of our healthy relations with women we are confronted by the parson! 'And, upon my word, I believe,' Beauchamp said to Lydiard, 'those parsons—not bad creatures in private life: there was one in Madeira I took a personal liking to—but they're utterly ignorant of what men feel to them—more ignorant than women!' Mr. Tuckham and Mrs. Lydiard would not listen to his foolish objections; nor were they ever mentioned to Jenny. Apparently the commission of the act of marriage was to force Beauchamp from all his positions one by one.

'The education of that child?' Mrs. Lydiard said to her husband.

He considered that the mother would prevail.

Cecilia feared she would not.

'Depend upon it, he'll make himself miserable if he can,' said Tuckham.

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That gentleman, however, was perpetually coming fuming from arguments with Beauchamp, and his opinion was a controversialist's. His common sense was much afflicted. 'I thought marriage would have stopped all those absurdities,' he said, glaring angrily, laughing, and then frowning. 'I've warned him I'll go out of my way to come across him if he carries on his headlong folly. A man should accept his country for what it is when he's born into it. Don't tell me he's a good fellow. I know he is, but there's an ass mounted on the good fellow. Talks of the parsons! Why, they're men of education.'

'They couldn't steer a ship in a gale, though.'

'Oh! he's a good sailor. And let him go to sea,' said Tuckham. 'His wife's a prize. He's hardly worthy of her. If she manages him she'll deserve a monument for doing a public service.'

How fortunate it is for us that here and there we do not succeed in wresting our temporary treasure from the grasp of the Fates!

This good old commonplace reflection came to Beauchamp while clasping his wife's hand on the deck of the *Esperanza*, and looking up at the mountains over the Gulf of Venice. The impression of that marvellous dawn when he and Renee looked up hand-in-hand was ineffaceable, and pity for the tender hand lost to him wrought in his blood, but Jenny was a peerless wife; and though not in the music of her tongue, or in subtlety of delicate meaning did she excel Renee, as a sober adviser she did, and as a firm speaker; and she had homelier deep eyes, thoughtfuller brows. The father could speculate with good hope of Jenny's child. Cecilia's wealth, too, had gone over to the Tory party, with her incomprehensible espousal of Tuckham. Let it go; let all go for dowerless Jenny!

It was (she dared to recollect it in her anguish) Jenny's choice to go home in the yacht that decided her husband not to make the journey by land in company with the Lydiards.

The voyage was favourable. Beauchamp had a passing wish to land on the Norman coast, and take Jenny for a day to Tourdestelle. He deferred to her desire to land baby speedily, now they were so near home. They ran past Otley river, having sight of Mount Laurels, and on to Bevisham, with swelling sails. There they parted. Beauchamp made it one of his 'points of honour' to deliver the vessel where he had taken her, at her moorings in the Otley. One of the piermen stood before Beauchamp, and saluting him, said he had been directed to inform him that the Earl of Romfrey was with Colonel Halkett, expecting him at Mount Laurels. Beauchamp wanted his wife to return in the yacht. She turned her eyes to Dr. Shrapnel. It was out of the question that the doctor should think of going. Husband and wife parted. She saw him no more.

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This is no time to tell of weeping. The dry chronicle is fittest. Hard on nine o'clock in the December darkness, the night being still and clear, Jenny's babe was at her breast, and her ears were awake for the return of her husband. A man rang at the door of the house, and asked to see Dr. Shrapnel. This man was Killick, the Radical Sam of politics. He said to the doctor: 'I 'm going to hit you sharp, sir; I've had it myself: please put on your hat and come out with me; and close the door. They mustn't hear inside. And here's a fly. I knew you'd be off for the finding of the body. Commander Beauchamp's drowned.'

Dr. Shrapnel drove round by the shore of the broad water past a great hospital and ruined abbey to Otley village. Killick had lifted him into the conveyance, and he lifted him out. Dr. Shrapnel had not spoken a word. Lights were flaring on the river, illuminating the small craft sombrely. Men, women, and children crowded the hard and landing-places, the marshy banks and the decks of colliers and trawlers. Neither Killick nor Dr. Shrapnel questioned them. The lights were torches and lanterns; the occupation of the boats moving in couples was the dragging for the dead.

'O God, let's find his body,' a woman called out.

'Just a word; is it Commander Beauchamp?' Killick said to her.

She was scarcely aware of a question. 'Here, this one,' she said, and plucked a little boy of eight by the hand close against her side, and shook him roughly and kissed him.

An old man volunteered information. 'That's the boy. That boy was in his father's boat out there, with two of his brothers, larking; and he and another older than him fell overboard; and just then Commander Beauchamp was rowing by, and I saw him from off here, where I stood, jump up and dive, and he swam to his boat with one of them, and got him in safe: that boy: and he dived again after the other, and was down a long time. Either he burst a vessel or he got cramp, for he'd been rowing himself from the schooner grounded down at the river-mouth, and must have been hot when he jumped in: either way, he fetched the second up, and sank with him. Down he went.'

A fisherman said to Killick: 'Do you hear that voice thundering? That's the great Lord Romfrey. He's been directing the dragging since five o' the evening, and will till he drops or drowns, or up comes the body.'

'O God, let's find the body!' the woman with the little boy called out.

A torch lit up Lord Romfrey's face as he stepped ashore. 'The flood has played us a trick,' he said. 'We want more drags, or with the next ebb the body may be lost for days in this infernal water.'

The mother of the rescued boy sobbed, 'Oh, my lord, my lord!'

The earl caught sight of Dr. Shrapnel, and went to him.

'My wife has gone down to Mrs. Beauchamp,' he said. 'She will bring her and the baby to Mount Laurels. The child will have to be hand-fed. I take you with me. You must not be alone.'

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He put his arm within the arm of the heavily-breathing man whom he had once flung to the ground, to support him.

'My lord! my lord!' sobbed the woman, and dropped on her knees.

'What 's this?' the earl said, drawing his hand away from the woman's clutch at it.

'She's the mother, my lord,' several explained to him.

'Mother of what?'

'My boy,' the woman cried, and dragged the urchin to Lord Romfrey's feet, cleaning her boy's face with her apron.

'It's the boy Commander Beauchamp drowned to save,' said a man.

All the lights of the ring were turned on the head of the boy. Dr. Shrapnel's eyes and Lord Romfrey's fell on the abashed little creature. The boy struck out both arms to get his fists against his eyelids.

This is what we have in exchange for Beauchamp!

It was not uttered, but it was visible in the blank stare at one another of the two men who loved Beauchamp, after they had examined the insignificant bit of mudbank life remaining in this world in the place of him.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

And life said, Do it, and death said, To what end?
As fair play as a woman's lord could give her
Beauchamp's career
Dogs die more decently than we men
Dreads our climate and coffee too much to attempt the voyage
Had come to be her lover through being her husband
He bowed to facts
He condensed a paragraph into a line
He runs too much from first principles to extremes
I do not think Frenchmen comparable to the women of France
It would be hard! ay, then we do it forthwith
Making too much of it—a trick of the vulgar
More argument I cannot bear
None but fanatics, cowards, white-eyeballed dogmatists
Push indolent unreason to gain the delusion of happiness
Reproof of such supererogatory counsel



She had no longer anything to resent: she was obliged to weep
Slaves of the priests
The healthy only are fit to live
The world without him would be heavy matter
This girl was pliable only to service, not to grief
Virtue of impatience
We women can read men by their power to love
When he's a Christian instead of a Churchman
Where love exists there is goodness
Without a single intimation that he loathed the task
Wonderment that one of her sex should have ideas