

# GEORGE MEREDITH

BEAUCHAMP'S  
CAREER.  
VOLUME 2

George Meredith  
**Beauchamp's Career. Volume 2**

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# **George Meredith**

## **Beauchamp's Career – Volume 2**

### **CHAPTER XI**

### **CAPTAIN BASKELETT**

Our England, meanwhile, was bustling over the extinguished war, counting the cost of it, with a rather rueful eye on Manchester, and soothing the taxed by an exhibition of heroes at brilliant feasts. Of course, the first to come home had the cream of the praises. She hugged them in a manner somewhat suffocating to modest men, but heroism must be brought to bear upon these excesses of maternal admiration; modesty, too, when it accepts the place of honour at a public banquet, should not protest overmuch. To be just, the earliest arrivals, which were such as reached the shores of Albion before her war was at an end, did cordially reciprocate the hug. They were taught, and they believed most naturally, that it was quite as well to repose upon her bosom as to have stuck to their posts. Surely there was a conscious weakness in the Spartans, who were always at pains to discipline their men in heroical conduct, and rewarded none save the stand-fasts. A system of that sort seems to betray the sense of poverty in the article. Our England does nothing like it. All are welcome home to her so long as she is in want of them. Besides, she has to please the taxpayer. You may track a shadowy line or crazy zigzag of policy in almost every stroke of her domestic history: either it is the forethought finding it necessary to stir up an impulse, or else dashing impulse gives a lively pull to the afterthought: policy becomes evident somehow, clumsily very possibly. How can she manage an enormous middle-class, to keep it happy, other than a little clumsily? The managing of it at all is the wonder. And not only has she to stupefy the taxpayer by a timely display of feasting and fireworks, she has to stop all that nonsense (to quote a satiated man lightened in his purse) at the right moment, about the hour when the old standfasts, who have simply been doing duty, return, poor jog-trot fellows, and a complimentary motto or two is the utmost she can present to them. On the other hand, it is true she gives her first loves, those early birds, fully to understand that a change has come in their island mother's mind. If there is a balance to be righted, she leaves that business to society, and if it be the season for the gathering of society, it will be righted more or less; and if no righting is done at all, perhaps the Press will incidentally toss a leaf of laurel on a name or two: thus in the exercise of grumbling doing good.

With few exceptions, Nevil Beauchamp's heroes received the motto instead of the sweetmeat. England expected them to do their duty; they did it, and she was not dissatisfied, nor should they be. Beauchamp, at a distance from the scene, chafed with customary vehemence, concerning the unjust measure dealt to his favourites: Captain Hardist, of the Diomed, twenty years a captain, still a captain! Young Michell denied the cross! Colonel Evans Cuff, on the heights from first to last, and not advanced a step! But Prancer, and Plunger, and Lammakin were thoroughly well taken care of, this critic of the war wrote savagely, reviving an echo of a queer small circumstance occurring in the midst of the high dolour and anxiety of the whole nation, and which a politic country preferred to forget, as we will do, for it was but an instance of strong family feeling in high quarters; and is not the unity of the country founded on the integrity of the family sentiment? Is it not certain, which the master tells us, that a line is but a continuation of a number of dots? Nevil Beauchamp was for insisting that great Government officers had paid more attention to a dot or two than to the line. He appeared to be at war with his country after the peace. So far he had a lively ally in his uncle Everard; but these remarks of his were a portion of a letter, whose chief burden was the request that Everard Romfrey would back him in proposing for the hand of a young French lady, she being,

Beauchamp smoothly acknowledged, engaged to a wealthy French marquis, under the approbation of her family. Could mortal folly outstrip a petition of that sort? And apparently, according to the wording and emphasis of the letter, it was the mature age of the marquis which made Mr. Beauchamp so particularly desirous to stop the projected marriage and take the girl himself. He appealed to his uncle on the subject in a 'really—really' remonstrative tone, quite overwhelming to read. 'It ought not to be permitted: by all the laws of chivalry, I should write to the girl's father to interdict it: I really am particeps criminis in a sin against nature if I don't!' Mr. Romfrey interjected in burlesque of his ridiculous nephew, with collapsing laughter. But he expressed an indignant surprise at Nevil for allowing Rosamund to travel alone.

'I can take very good care of myself,' Rosamund protested.

'You can do hundreds of things you should never be obliged to do while he's at hand, or I, ma'am,' said Mr. Romfrey. 'The fellow's insane. He forgets a gentleman's duty. Here's his "humanity" dogging a French frock, and pooh!—the age of the marquis! Fifty? A man's beginning his prime at fifty, or there never was much man in him. It's the mark of a fool to take everybody for a bigger fool than himself—or he wouldn't have written this letter to me. He can't come home yet, not yet, and he doesn't know when he can! Has he thrown up the service? I am to preserve the alliance between England and France by getting this French girl for him in the teeth of her marquis, at my peril if I refuse!'

Rosamund asked, 'Will you let me see where Nevil says that, sir?'

Mr. Romfrey tore the letter to strips. 'He's one of your fellows who cock their eyes when they mean to be cunning. He sends you to do the wheedling, that's plain. I don't say he has hit on a bad advocate; but tell him I back him in no mortal marriage till he shows a pair of epaulettes on his shoulders. Tell him lieutenants are fledglings—he's not marriageable at present. It's a very pretty sacrifice of himself he intends for the sake of the alliance, tell him that, but a lieutenant's not quite big enough to establish it. You will know what to tell him, ma'am. And say, it's the fellow's best friend that advises him to be out of it and home quick. If he makes one of a French trio, he's dished. He's too late for his luck in England. Have him out of that mire, we can't hope for more now.'

Rosamund postponed her mission to plead. Her heart was with Nevil; her understanding was easily led to side against him, and for better reasons than Mr. Romfrey could be aware of: so she was assured by her experience of the character of Mademoiselle de Croisnel. A certain belief in her personal arts of persuasion had stopped her from writing on her homeward journey to inform him that Nevil was not accompanying her, and when she drove over Steynham Common, triumphal arches and the odour of a roasting ox richly browning to celebrate the hero's return afflicted her mind with all the solid arguments of a common-sense country in contravention of a wild lover's vaporous extravagances. Why had he not come with her? The disappointed ox put the question in a wavering drop of the cheers of the villagers at the sight of the carriage without their bleeding hero. Mr. Romfrey, at his hall-doors, merely screwed his eyebrows; for it was the quality of this gentleman to foresee most human events, and his capacity to stifle astonishment when they trifled with his prognostics. Rosamund had left Nevil fast bound in the meshes of the young French sorceress, no longer leading, but submissively following, expecting blindly, seeing strange new virtues in the lurid indication of what appeared to border on the reverse. How could she plead for her infatuated darling to one who was common sense in person?

Everard's pointed interrogations reduced her to speak defensively, instead of attacking and claiming his aid for the poor enamoured young man. She dared not say that Nevil continued to be absent because he was now encouraged by the girl to remain in attendance on her, and was more than half inspired to hope, and too artfully assisted to deceive the count and the marquis under the guise of simple friendship. Letters passed between them in books given into one another's hands with an audacious openness of the saddest augury for the future of the pair, and Nevil could be so lost to reason as to glory in Renee's intrepidity, which he justified by their mutual situation, and cherished



for a proof that she was getting courage. In fine, Rosamund abandoned her task of pleading. Nevil's communications gave the case a worse and worse aspect: Renee was prepared to speak to her father; she delayed it; then the two were to part; they were unable to perform the terrible sacrifice and slay their last hope; and then Nevil wrote of destiny—language hitherto unknown to him, evidently the tongue of Renee. He slipped on from Italy to France. His uncle was besieged by a series of letters, and his cousin, Cecil Baskett, a captain in England's grand reserve force—her Horse Guards, of the Blue division—helped Everard Romfrey to laugh over them.

It was not difficult, alack! Letters of a lover in an extremity of love, crying for help, are as curious to cool strong men as the contortions of the proved heterodox tied to a stake must have been to their chastening ecclesiastical judges. Why go to the fire when a recantation will save you from it? Why not break the excruciating faggot-bands, and escape, when you have only to decide to do it? We naturally ask why. Those martyrs of love or religion are madmen. Altogether, Nevil's adjurations and supplications, his threats of wrath and appeals to reason, were an odd mixture. 'He won't lose a chance while there's breath in his body,' Everard said, quite good-humouredly, though he deplored that the chance for the fellow to make his hero-parade in society, and haply catch an heiress, was waning. There was an heiress at Steynham, on her way with her father to Italy, very anxious to see her old friend Nevil—Cecilia Halkett—and very inquisitive this young lady of sixteen was to know the cause of his absence. She heard of it from Cecil.

'And one morning last week mademoiselle was running away with him, and the next morning she was married to her marquis!'

Cecil was able to tell her that.

'I used to be so fond of him,' said the ingenuous young lady. She had to thank Nevil for a Circassian dress and pearls, which he had sent to her by the hands of Mrs. Culling—a pretty present to a girl in the nursery, she thought, and in fact she chose to be a little wounded by the cause of his absence.

'He's a good creature-really,' Cecil spoke on his cousin's behalf.

'Mad; he always will be mad. A dear old savage; always amuses me.

He does! I get half my entertainment from him.'

Captain Baskett was gifted with the art, which is a fine and a precious one, of priceless value in society, and not wanting a benediction upon it in our elegant literature, namely, the art of stripping his fellow-man and so posturing him as to make every movement of the comical wretch puppet-like, constrained, stiff, and foolish. He could present you heroic actions in that fashion; for example:

'A long-shanked trooper, bearing the name of John Thomas Drew, was crawling along under fire of the batteries. Out pops old Nevil, tries to get the man on his back. It won't do. Nevil insists that it's exactly one of the cases that ought to be, and they remain arguing about it like a pair of nine-pins while the Muscovites are at work with the bowls. Very well. Let me tell you my story. It's perfectly true, I give you my word. So Nevil tries to horse Drew, and Drew proposes to horse Nevil, as at school. Then Drew offers a compromise. He would much rather have crawled on, you know, and allowed the shot to pass over his head; but he's a Briton, old Nevil the same; but old Nevil's peculiarity is that, as you are aware, he hates a compromise—won't have it—retro Sathanas! and Drew's proposal to take his arm instead of being carried pickaback disgusts old Nevil. Still it won't do to stop where they are, like the cocoa-nut and the pincushion of our friends, the gipsies, on the downs: so they take arms and commence the journey home, resembling the best of friends on the evening of a holiday in our native clime—two steps to the right, half-a-dozen to the left, etcaetera.'

Thus, with scarce a variation from the facts, with but a flowery chaplet cast on a truthful narrative, as it were, Captain Baskett could render ludicrous that which in other quarters had obtained honourable mention. Nevil and Drew being knocked down by the wind of a ball near the battery, 'Confound it!' cries Nevil, jumping on his feet, 'it's because I consented to a compromise!'—a transparent piece of fiction this, but so in harmony with the character stripped naked for us that

it is accepted. Imagine Nevil's love-affair in such hands! Recovering from a fever, Nevil sees a pretty French girl in a gondola, and immediately thinks, 'By jingo, I'm marriageable.' He hears she is engaged. 'By jingo, she's marriageable too.' He goes through a sum in addition, and the total is a couple; so he determines on a marriage. 'You can't get it out of his head; he must be married instantly, and to her, because she is going to marry somebody else. Sticks to her, follows her, will have her, in spite of her father, her marquis, her brother, aunts, cousins, religion, country, and the young woman herself. I assure you, a perfect model of male fidelity! She is married. He is on her track. He knows his time will come; he has only to be handy. You see, old Nevil believes in Providence, is perfectly sure he will one day hear it cry out, "Where's Beauchamp?"—"Here I am!"—"And here's your marquis!"—"I knew I should have her at last," says Nevil, calm as Mont Blanc on a reduced scale.'

The secret of Captain Baskett's art would seem to be to show the automatic human creature at loggerheads with a necessity that winks at remarkable pretensions, while condemning it perpetually to doll-like action. You look on men from your own elevation as upon a quantity of our little wooden images, unto whom you affix puny characteristics, under restrictions from which they shall not escape, though they attempt it with the enterprising vigour of an extended leg, or a pair of raised arms, or a head awry, or a trick of jumping; and some of them are extraordinarily addicted to these feats; but for all they do the end is the same, for necessity rules, that exactly so, under stress of activity must the doll Nevil, the doll Everard, or the dolliest of dolls, fair woman, behave. The automatic creature is subject to the laws of its construction, you perceive. It can this, it can that, but it cannot leap out of its mechanism. One definition of the art is, humour made easy, and that may be why Cecil Baskett indulged in it, and why it is popular with those whose humour consists of a readiness to laugh.

The fun between Cecil Baskett and Mr. Romfrey over the doll Nevil threatened an intimacy and community of sentiment that alarmed Rosamund on behalf of her darling's material prospects. She wrote to him, entreating him to come to Steynham. Nevil Beauchamp replied to her both frankly and shrewdly: 'I shall not pretend that I forgive my uncle Everard, and therefore it is best for me to keep away. Have no fear. The baron likes a man of his own tastes: they may laugh together, if it suits them; he never could be guilty of treachery, and to disinherit me would be that. If I were to become his open enemy to-morrow, I should look on the estates as mine—unless I did anything to make him disrespect me. You will not suppose it likely. I foresee I shall want money. As for Cecil, I give him as much rope as he cares to have. I know very well Everard Romfrey will see where the point of likeness between them stops. I apply for a ship the moment I land.'

To test Nevil's judgement of his uncle, Rosamund ventured on showing this letter to Mr. Romfrey. He read it, and said nothing, but subsequently asked, from time to time, 'Has he got his ship yet?' It assured her that Nevil was not wrong, and dispelled her notion of the vulgar imbroglio of a rich uncle and two thirsty nephews. She was hardly less relieved in reflecting that he could read men so soberly and accurately. The desperation of the youth in love had rendered her one little bit doubtful of the orderliness of his wits. After this she smiled on Cecil's assiduities. Nevil obtained his appointment to a ship bound for the coast of Africa to spy for slavers. He called on his uncle in London, and spent the greater part of the hour's visit with Rosamund; seemed cured of his passion, devoid of rancour, glad of the prospect of a run among the slaving hulls. He and his uncle shook hands manfully, at the full outstretch of their arms, in a way so like them, to Rosamund's thinking—that is, in a way so unlike any other possible couple of men so situated—that the humour of the sight eclipsed all the pleasantries of Captain Baskett. 'Good-bye, sir,' Nevil said heartily; and Everard Romfrey was not behind-hand with the cordial ring of his 'Good-bye, Nevil'; and upon that they separated. Rosamund would have been willing to speak to her beloved of his false Renee—the Frenchwoman, she termed her, i.e. generically false, needless to name; and one question quivered on her tongue's tip: 'How, when she had promised to fly with you, how could she the very next day step to the altar with him now her husband?' And, if she had spoken it, she would have added, 'Your uncle could not



have set his face against you, had you brought her to England.' She felt strongly the mastery Nevil Beauchamp could exercise even over his uncle Everard. But when he was gone, unquestioned, merely caressed, it came to her mind that he had all through insisted on his possession of this particular power, and she accused herself of having wantonly helped to ruin his hope—a matter to be rejoiced at in the abstract; but what suffering she had inflicted on him! To quiet her heart, she persuaded herself that for the future she would never fail to believe in him and second him blindly, as true love should; and contemplating one so brave, far-sighted, and self-assured, her determination seemed to impose the lightest of tasks.

Practically humane though he was, and especially toward cattle and all kinds of beasts, Mr. Romfrey entertained no profound fellow-feeling for the negro, and, except as the representative of a certain amount of working power commonly requiring the whip to wind it up, he inclined to despise that black spot in the creation, with which our civilization should never have had anything to do. So he pronounced his mind, and the long habit of listening to oracles might grow us ears to hear and discover a meaning in it. Nevil's captures and releases of the grinning freights amused him for awhile. He compared them to strings of bananas, and presently put the vision of the whole business aside by talking of Nevil's banana-wreath. He desired to have Nevil out of it. He and Cecil handed Nevil in his banana-wreath about to their friends. Nevil, in his banana-wreath, was set preaching 'humanity.' At any rate, they contrived to keep the remembrance of Nevil Beauchamp alive during the period of his disappearance from the world, and in so doing they did him a service.

There is a pause between the descent of a diver and his return to the surface, when those who would not have him forgotten by the better world above him do rightly to relate anecdotes of him, if they can, and to provoke laughter at him. The encouragement of the humane sense of superiority over an object of interest, which laughter gives, is good for the object; and besides, if you begin to tell sly stories of one in the deeps who is holding his breath to fetch a pearl or two for you all, you divert a particular sympathetic oppression of the chest, that the extremely sensitive are apt to suffer from, and you dispose the larger number to keep in mind a person they no longer see. Otherwise it is likely that he will, very shortly after he has made his plunge, fatigue the contemplative brains above, and be shuffled off them, even as great ocean smooths away the dear vanished man's immediate circle of foam, and rapidly confounds the rippling memory of him with its other agitations. And in such a case the apparition of his head upon our common level once more will almost certainly cause a disagreeable shock; nor is it improbable that his first natural snorts in his native element, though they be simply to obtain his share of the breath of life, will draw down on him condemnation for eccentric behaviour and unmannerly; and this in spite of the jewel he brings, unless it be an exceedingly splendid one. The reason is, that our brave world cannot pardon a breach of continuity for any petty bribe.

Thus it chanced, owing to the prolonged efforts of Mr. Romfrey and Cecil Baskett to get fun out of him, at the cost of considerable inventiveness, that the electoral Address of the candidate, signing himself 'R. C. S. Nevil Beauchamp,' to the borough of Bevisham, did not issue from an altogether unremembered man.

He had been cruising in the Mediterranean, commanding the *Ariadne*, the smartest corvette in the service. He had, it was widely made known, met his marquise in Palermo. It was presumed that he was dancing the round with her still, when this amazing Address appeared on Bevisham's walls, in anticipation of the general Election. The Address, moreover, was ultra-Radical: museums to be opened on Sundays; ominous references to the Land question, etc.; no smooth passing mention of Reform, such as the Liberal, become stately, adopts in speaking of that property of his, but swinging blows on the heads of many a denounced iniquity.

Cecil forwarded the Address to Everard Romfrey without comment.

Next day the following letter, dated from Itchincope, the house of Mr.

Grancey Lespel, on the borders of Bevisham, arrived at Steynham:

'I have despatched you the proclamation, folded neatly. The electors of Bevisham are summoned, like a town at the sword's point, to yield him their votes. Proclamation is the word. I am your born representative! I have completed my political education on salt water, and I tackle you on the Land question. I am the heir of your votes, gentlemen!—I forgot, and I apologize; he calls them fellow-men. Fraternal, and not so risky. Here at Lespel's we read the thing with shouts. It hangs in the smoking-room. We throw open the curacoa to the intelligence and industry of the assembled guests; we carry the right of the multitude to our host's cigars by a majority. C'est un farceur que notre bon petit cousin. Lespel says it is sailorlike to do something of this sort after a cruise. Nevil's Radicalism would have been clever anywhere out of Bevisham. Of all boroughs! Grancey Lespel knows it. He and his family were Bevisham's Whig M.P.'s before the day of Manchester. In Bevisham an election is an arrangement made by Providence to square the accounts of the voters, and settle arrears. They reckon up the health of their two members and the chances of an appeal to the country when they fix the rents and leases. You have them pointed out to you in the street, with their figures attached to them like titles. Mr. Tomkins, the twenty-pound man; an elector of uncommon purity. I saw the ruffian yesterday. He has an extra breadth to his hat. He has never been known to listen to a member under L20, and is respected enormously—like the lady of the Mythology, who was an intolerable Tartar of virtue, because her price was nothing less than a god, and money down. Nevil will have to come down on Bevisham in the Jupiter style. Bevisham is downright the dearest of boroughs—"vaulting-boards," as Stukely Culbrett calls them—in the kingdom. I assume we still say "kingdom."

'He dashed into the Radical trap exactly two hours after landing. I believe he was on his way to the Halketts at Mount Laurels. A notorious old rascal revolutionist retired from his licenced business of slaughterer—one of your gratis doctors—met him on the high-road, and told him he was the man. Up went Nevil's enthusiasm like a bottle rid of the cork. You will see a great deal about faith in the proclamation; "faith in the future," and "my faith in you." When you become a Radical you have faith in any quantity, just as an alderman gets turtle soup. It is your badge, like a livery-servant's cockade or a corporal's sleeve stripes—your badge and your bellyful. Calculations were gone through at the Liberal newspaper-office, old Nevil adding up hard, and he was informed that he was elected by something like a topping eight or nine hundred and some fractions. I am sure that a fellow who can let himself be gulled by a pile of figures trumped up in a Radical newspaper-office must have great faith in the fractions. Out came Nevil's proclamation.

'I have not met him, and I would rather not. I shall not pretend to offer you advice, for I have the habit of thinking your judgement can stand by itself. We shall all find this affair a nuisance. Nevil will pay through the nose. We shall have the ridicule spattered on the family. It would be a safer thing for him to invest his money on the Turf, and I shall advise his doing it if I come across him.

'Perhaps the best course would be to telegraph for the marquise!'

This was from Cecil Baskellett. He added a postscript:

'Seriously, the "mad commander" has not an ace of a chance. Grancey and I saw some Working Men (you have to write them in capitals, king and queen small); they were reading the Address on a board carried by a red-nosed man, and shrugging. They are not such fools.

'By the way, I am informed Shrapnel has a young female relative living with him, said to be a sparkler. I bet you, sir, she is not a Radical. Do you take me?'

Rosamund Culling drove to the railway station on her way to Bevisham within an hour after Mr. Romfrey's eyebrows had made acute play over this communication.

## CHAPTER XII

### AN INTERVIEW WITH THE INFAMOUS DR. SHRAPNEL

In the High street of the ancient and famous town and port of Bevisham, Rosamund met the military governor of a neighbouring fortress, General Sherwin, once colonel of her husband's regiment in India; and by him, as it happened, she was assisted in finding the whereabouts of the young Liberal candidate, without the degrading recourse of an application at the newspaper-office of his party. The General was leisurely walking to a place of appointment to fetch his daughter home from a visit to an old school-friend, a Miss Jenny Denham, no other than a ward, or a niece, or an adoption of Dr. Shrapnel's: 'A nice girl; a great favourite of mine,' the General said. Shrapnel he knew by reputation only as a wrong-headed politician; but he spoke of Miss Denham pleasantly two or three times, praising her accomplishments and her winning manners. His hearer suspected that it might be done to dissociate the idea of her from the ruffling agitator. 'Is she pretty?' was a question that sprang from Rosamund's intimate reflections. The answer was, 'Yes.'

'Very pretty?'

'I think very pretty,' said the General.

'Captivatingly?'

'Clara thinks she is perfect; she is tall and slim, and dresses well. The girls were with a French Madam in Paris. But, if you are interested about her, you can come on with me, and we shall meet them somewhere near the head of the street. I don't,' the General hesitated and hummed— 'I don't call at Shrapnel's.'

'I have never heard her name before to-day,' said Rosamund.

'Exactly,' said the General, crowing at the aimlessness of a woman's curiosity.

The young ladies were seen approaching, and Rosamund had to ask herself whether the first sight of a person like Miss Denham would be of a kind to exercise a lively influence over the political and other sentiments of a dreamy sailor just released from ship-service. In an ordinary case she would have said no, for Nevil enjoyed a range of society where faces charming as Miss Denham's were plentiful as roses in the rose-garden. But, supposing him free of his bondage to the foreign woman, there was, she thought and feared, a possibility that a girl of this description might capture a young man's vacant heart sighing for a new mistress. And if so, further observation assured her Miss Denham was likely to be dangerous far more than professedly attractive persons, enchantresses and the rest. Rosamund watchfully gathered all the superficial indications which incite women to judge of character profoundly. This new object of alarm was, as the General had said of her, tall and slim, a friend of neatness, plainly dressed, but exquisitely fitted, in the manner of Frenchwomen. She spoke very readily, not too much, and had the rare gift of being able to speak fluently with a smile on the mouth. Vulgar archness imitates it. She won and retained the eyes of her hearer sympathetically, it seemed. Rosamund thought her as little conscious as a woman could be. She coloured at times quickly, but without confusion. When that name, the key of Rosamund's meditations, chanced to be mentioned, a flush swept over Miss Denham's face. The candour of it was unchanged as she gazed at Rosamund, with a look that asked, 'Do you know him?'

Rosamund said, 'I am an old friend of his.'

'He is here now, in this town.'

'I wish to see him very much.'

General Sherwin interposed: 'We won't talk about political characters just for the present.'

'I wish you knew him, papa, and would advise him,' his daughter said.

The General nodded hastily. 'By-and-by, by-and-by.'

They had in fact taken seats at a table of mutton pies in a pastrycook's shop, where dashing military men were restrained solely by their presence from a too noisy display of fascinations before the fashionable waiting- women.

Rosamund looked at Miss Denham. As soon as they were in the street the latter said, 'If you will be good enough to come with me, madam . . .?' Rosamund bowed, thankful to have been comprehended. The two young ladies kissed cheeks and parted. General Sherwin raised his hat, and was astonished to see Mrs. Culling join Miss Denham in accepting the salute, for they had not been introduced, and what could they have in common? It was another of the oddities of female nature.

'My name is Mrs. Culling, and I will tell you how it is that I am interested in Captain Beauchamp,' Rosamund addressed her companion. 'I am his uncle's housekeeper. I have known him and loved him since he was a boy. I am in great fear that he is acting rashly.'

'You honour me, madam, by speaking to me so frankly,' Miss Denham answered.

'He is quite bent upon this Election?'

'Yes, madam. I am not, as you can suppose, in his confidence, but I hear of him from Dr. Shrapnel.'

'Your uncle?'

'I call him uncle: he is my guardian, madam.'

It is perhaps excuseable that this communication did not cause the doctor to shine with added lustre in Rosamund's thoughts, or ennoble the young lady.

'You are not relatives, then?' she said.

'No, unless love can make us so.'

'Not blood-relatives?'

'No.'

'Is he not very . . . extreme?'

'He is very sincere.'

'I presume you are a politician?'

Miss Denham smiled. 'Could you pardon me, madam, if I said that I was?'

The counter-question was a fair retort enfolding a gentler irony.

Rosamund felt that she had to do with wits as well as with vivid feminine intuitions in the person of this Miss Denham.

She said, 'I really am of opinion that our sex might abstain from politics.'

'We find it difficult to do justice to both parties,' Miss Denham followed. 'It seems to be a kind of clanship with women; hardly even that.'

Rosamund was inattentive to the conversational slipshod, and launched one of the heavy affirmatives which are in dialogue full stops. She could not have said why she was sensible of anger, but the sentiment of anger, or spite (if that be a lesser degree of the same affliction), became stirred in her bosom when she listened to the ward of Dr. Shrapnel. A silly pretty puss of a girl would not have excited it, nor an avowed blood- relative of the demagogue.

Nevil's hotel was pointed out to Rosamund, and she left her card there. He had been absent since eight in the morning. There was the probability that he might be at Dr. Shrapnel's, so Rosamund walked on.

'Captain Beauchamp gives himself no rest,' Miss Denham said.

'Oh! I know him, when once his mind is set on anything,' said Rosamund.

'Is it not too early to begin to—canvass, I think, is the word?'

'He is studying whatever the town can teach him of its wants; that is, how he may serve it.'

'Indeed! But if the town will not have him to serve it?'

'He imagines that he cannot do better, until that has been decided, than to fit himself for the post.'

'Acting upon your advice? I mean, of course, your uncle's; that is, Dr.'

Shrapnel's.'

'Dr. Shrapnel thinks it will not be loss of time for Captain Beauchamp to grow familiar with the place, and observe as well as read.'

'It sounds almost as if Captain Beauchamp had submitted to be Dr.

Shrapnel's pupil.'

'It is natural, madam, that Dr. Shrapnel should know more of political ways at present than Captain Beauchamp.'

'To Captain Beauchamp's friends and relatives it appears very strange that he should have decided to contest this election so suddenly. May I inquire whether he and Dr. Shrapnel are old acquaintances?'

'No, madam, they are not. They had never met before Captain Beauchamp landed, the other day.'

'I am surprised, I confess. I cannot understand the nature of an influence that induces him to abandon a profession he loves and shines in, for politics, at a moment's notice.'

Miss Denham was silent, and then said:

'I will tell you, madam, how it occurred, as far as circumstances explain it. Dr. Shrapnel is accustomed to give a little country feast to the children I teach, and their parents if they choose to come, and they generally do. They are driven to Northeden Heath, where we set up a booth for them, and try with cakes and tea and games to make them spend one of their happy afternoons and evenings. We succeed, I know, for the little creatures talk of it and look forward to the day. When they are at their last romp, Dr. Shrapnel speaks to the parents.'

'Can he obtain a hearing?' Rosamund asked.

'He has not so very large a crowd to address, madam, and he is much beloved by those that come.'

'He speaks to them of politics on those occasions?'

'Adouci a leur intention. It is not a political speech, but Dr. Shrapnel thinks, that in a so-called free country seeking to be really free, men of the lowest class should be educated in forming a political judgement.'

'And women too?'

'And women, yes. Indeed, madam, we notice that the women listen very creditably.'

'They can put on the air.'

'I am afraid, not more than the men do. To get them to listen is something. They suffer like the men, and must depend on their intelligence to win their way out of it.'

Rosamund's meditation was exclamatory: What can be the age of this pretentious girl?

An afterthought turned her more conciliatorily toward the person, but less to the subject. She was sure that she was lending ear to the echo of the dangerous doctor, and rather pitied Miss Denham for awhile, reflecting that a young woman stuffed with such ideas would find it hard to get a husband. Mention of Nevil revived her feeling of hostility.

We had seen a gentleman standing near and listening attentively,' Miss Denham resumed, 'and when Dr. Shrapnel concluded a card was handed to him. He read it and gave it to me, and said, "You know that name." It was a name we had often talked about during the war.

He went to Captain Beauchamp and shook his hand. He does not pay many compliments, and he does not like to receive them, but it was impossible for him not to be moved by Captain Beauchamp's warmth in thanking him for the words he had spoken. I saw that Dr. Shrapnel became interested in Captain Beauchamp the longer they conversed. We walked home together. Captain Beauchamp supped with us. I left them at half-past eleven at night, and in the morning I found them walking in the garden. They had not gone to bed at all. Captain Beauchamp has remained in Bevisham ever since. He soon came to the decision to be a candidate for the borough.'

Rosamund checked her lips from uttering: To be a puppet of

Dr. Shrapnel's!

She remarked, 'He is very eloquent—Dr. Shrapnel?'

Miss Denham held some debate with herself upon the term.

'Perhaps it is not eloquence; he often . . . no, he is not an orator.'

Rosamund suggested that he was persuasive, possibly.

Again the young lady deliberately weighed the word, as though the nicest measure of her uncle or adoptor's quality in this or that direction were in requisition and of importance—an instance of a want of delicacy of perception Rosamund was not sorry to detect. For good-looking, refined-looking, quick-witted girls can be grown; but the nimble sense of fitness, ineffable lightning-footed tact, comes of race and breeding, and she was sure Nevil was a man soon to feel the absence of that.

'Dr. Shrapnel is persuasive to those who go partly with him, or whose condition of mind calls on him for great patience,' Miss Denham said at last.

'I am only trying to comprehend how it was that he should so rapidly have won Captain Beauchamp to his views,' Rosamund explained; and the young lady did not reply.

Dr. Shrapnel's house was about a mile beyond the town, on a common of thorn and gorse, through which the fir-bordered highway ran. A fence waist-high enclosed its plot of meadow and garden, so that the doctor, while protecting his own, might see and be seen of the world, as was the case when Rosamund approached. He was pacing at long slow strides along the gravel walk, with his head bent and bare, and his hands behind his back, accompanied by a gentleman who could be no other than Nevil, Rosamund presumed to think; but drawing nearer she found she was mistaken.

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