

**SCYLLA OR
CHARYBDIS?
A NOVEL**

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Scylla or Charybdis? A novel by Rhoda Broughton

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BY

RHODA BROUGHTON

AUTHOR OF NANCY, SECOND THOUGHTS, A BEGINNER, ETC.



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SCYLLA OR CHARYBDIS?

CHAPTER I.

“**THIS** must be the house, William! This must be the house!”

Until it had pulled up at her door, the occupant of a bow window, projecting over the street, had not suspected that a landau, which has been making its way with horses kept to a walk and footman uncertainly consulting the faces of succeeding domiciles, had any visiting intention toward herself. No sooner has she realized this fact and the other one, that a voice and a parasol are waving and shouting directions from inside, than she slips noiselessly off the cushioned window-seat running round the embrasure, into the interior of the summer-darkened room. Mrs. Clarence is a shy woman, and she has not recognized either the voice, the parasol, or the liveries. She is a shy woman,—a good deal retired from the world,—and she awaits with some slight trepidation the outcome of the incident.

“It is probably the wrong house,” she says to herself.

But this explanation is disproved by the fact that the footman’s resounding rap is followed shortly by

an undoubted admittance, by a strange step on the stairs, and by the parlor maid's announcement of a splendid rustling, châtelaine-clattering "Lady Brams-hill." To the modest mouse-color-clad lady upon whom it is sprung, the title is as unfamiliar as the rest of the vision.

"Why do not you have your number on your door?" asks the intruder, in a loudish but not disagreeable voice. "How is one to find you out?"

"I am very sorry, but they are renumbering the street—changing the numbers. I do not quite know why."

"I asked which was No. 22 at the White Hart, and the secretary said she did not know, but the hall-porter would. I asked the hall porter, and he said he did not know, but the policeman would. I asked the policeman, and he said he did not know, but that the milkman would. I asked the milkman—or, at least, I made William, my footman, ask him—and he said he did not know, but that the postman would. I asked the postman—and, *enfin*, I am here!"

Mrs. Clarence has thought her visitor's opening speech as tiresome as her appearance at all is unaccounted for.

"It is evident that I am not much known to fame in St. Gratian," she replies, with a shy smile and an inward hope that her face does not betray her total ignorance of her visitor's identity. But that hope is not long left to her.

"You have not the foggiest idea who I am," says that visitor good-humoredly, but not even attempting to give her remark an interrogatory shape.

"Well, I cannot return the left-handed compliment, for I certainly should have known you anywhere."

"Should you?" with a distressed and timid glance at the portly and prosperous expanse before her, as if to evoke thereby some helpful memory; but none such comes, and she can only murmur: "*Lady Bramshill.*"

The other laughs.

"That will not help you. My name is as new as my gloves, which I put on to do you honor—and much too small they are! I cannot imagine why the shops have altered all the sizes! It is not three months since my judge was given a peerage."

My judge! The visitor is, then, the wife of a dignitary of the law. But Mrs. Clarence scans the horizon of her narrow acquaintance in vain. No judge rises, beneficent and rescuing, upon it.

"I think he appeared on the scene after you had left Green Leigh."

At the mention of this name—that of a place which she had quitted a quarter of a century ago, and where she had spent the five years of her wifehood—a place even more infinitely remote in the spirit's calendar than in that of the body—Mrs. Clarence gives a slight start.

"Life is a system of compensations," continues Lady Bramshill cheerfully; "he rose on my horizon as you disappeared over it. As soon as I was married I went to India. We did not come back, except to put the children to school, until last year. Have you any glimmering of a notion as to who I am *now*?"

A pleased confidence in an immediate joyous recog-

dition following upon these indications is legibly written across her features, and upon Mrs. Clarence's memory there rises the cloudy figure of a big-framed, thin young woman, the bustling eldest of the Vicarage brood at her gates—a young woman of her own age, who, in that immeasurable distance, had served her as friend. But the outline is still so nebulous that her visitor has time for a look of disappointment and a rather crestfallen "I know that I have expanded a good deal," before the person to whom she seems to herself to have disclosed so unmistakably her personality proffers hesitatingly, in a faint and dubious key:

"Not Marion Baynes?"

"You make me doubt my own identity when you question it in that voice!" cries Lady Bramshill, with a touch of good-humored mortification. "Am I, then, so absolutely unrecognizable? Why, I should have known you to be Lucy Clarence anywhere."

"Ah, but you must remember what an advantage you had over me!" replies the other, in distressed apology. "You were expecting to see me, while I— No doubt if I had been prepared for our meeting, I, too, should—"

But the fib dies on her lips. Under no circumstances of preparation could she have extracted from the plethoric and diamond-eared area before her the scraggy form of the comrade of her early matronhood.

"I dare say you will find that my *inside* is not as much changed as my *outside*," says the area, with a philosophic laugh at her quondam friend's vain attempt. "It was by the merest chance that I learned