

Coleridge Christabel Rose

Amethyst: The Story of a Beauty



Christabel Coleridge

Amethyst: The Story of a Beauty

«Public Domain»

Coleridge C.

Amethyst: The Story of a Beauty / C. Coleridge — «Public
Domain»,

Содержание

Chapter One	5
Chapter Two	8
Chapter Three	11
Chapter Four	14
Chapter Five	17
Chapter Six	21
Chapter Seven	25
Chapter Eight	29
Chapter Nine	33
Chapter Ten	37
Chapter Eleven	40
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	41

Coleridge Christabel R. Christabel Rose

Amethyst: The Story of a Beauty

Chapter One

A Champagne Luncheon

“Well, my dear Annabel, very glad to see you. You don’t often give me a chance of entertaining you. Come and have some luncheon; one can’t talk business on an empty stomach.”

“You’re very good, Haredale. I wish my errand was a pleasanter one; but – ”

“Well, we’ll hear all about it directly. Champagne? Ladies always like champagne, so I provided some for you. – It’s very good, it won’t disagree with you.”

Miss Annabel Haredale did not like champagne in the middle of the day, and thought that it was sure to disagree with her; but she smiled at her brother and took it like a martyr.

The scene was a rather shabbily appointed set of rooms in Duke Street, Saint James’s; in one of which an elegant little luncheon was laid for two. The actors were a lady and gentleman, both some years past fifty, both tall, with large well-marked features, and reddish hair touched with grey. Both were unmistakably people of family and position, and to this air of his breeding the lady added that of personal worth. She looked like a good though not a clever woman; her brother, Lord Haredale, unfortunately, did not look like a good man. Their eyes, however, met with kindness, hers openly anxious, and his furtively so.

“And so you have given up the Twickenham villa and settled at Cleverley?” she said, after some surface conversation.

“Well, yes, – must economise, you know, and the old Admiral’s lease of the Hall being out, it seemed convenient. My lady doesn’t like it much; but she can leave the little girls down there, if she comes up to meet you and take out Amethyst. Of course she wants to present her; but it’s confoundedly inconvenient this year.”

“It is about Amethyst that I wish to speak to you,” said Miss Haredale, strenuously refusing more champagne, and showing unmistakably her desire to proceed to business.

“What! you haven’t found a chance already of settling her?”

“Oh no, no! she has seen no one. She has never been away from school. But, Haredale, a great misfortune has befallen me; so that I can no longer do by her as I could wish. I am a poor woman now, and it is for you to decide what you think right about her.”

“Why! Deuce take it, have *you* been making ducks and drakes with your money?”

“No, but Farrant has done it for me. His brothers’ bank has failed, the investments he advised have proved worthless. I shall hardly have 150 pounds a year left – I have turned it over in my mind in every possible way – ”

Lord Haredale had always felt that, however unlucky he might be himself, it was his sister’s duty to the family to keep her few thousands safe; they had held a satisfactory place in his mind. He swore at the family lawyer for giving her bad advice, and confounded her folly in not looking more closely after her own affairs.

“I’m infernally sorry for you, Annabel,” he said, when he had cooled down a little. “As you know, what with Charles’s cursed extravagance, to say nothing of my lady’s, I have nothing at command.”

“I never supposed, for one moment, that you would have, Haredale,” said his sister, emphatically. “Nor am I reduced to beggary. I can lessen my expenses. But if I do so, what can I do for Amethyst? Her life would be cut down to the narrowest limits. I could not possibly introduce her

in London, which seems to me essential, in her position – all I had saved for the purpose is gone. I cannot tell you what it would cost me to resign the charge which I undertook. But of course you must decide for her as you think best.”

“It’s deuced bad luck,” said Lord Haredale. “You see, I got my lady down to Cleverley, on the plea that she could come up for two or three weeks when you had Amethyst in town. But as to a London house, and bringing the girl out ourselves, it’s impossible.”

“In that case, she might wait another year; we might manage to keep her at school a year longer?” said Miss Haredale, anxiously.

“Ay, but you see,” said Lord Haredale, “her mother tells me she’s going to be a beauty.”

“Yes, she is,” said Miss Haredale, dejectedly.

“That alters the question. She might make a good match. You know my lady won’t be jealous of her, and keep her back. That never was her way. She treated Blanche like a sister – dressed her up to the nines on every occasion – though she wasn’t her own child.”

“If I thought that Blanche’s story – ” began Miss Haredale, vehemently.

“Blanche was a fool,” said Lord Haredale, “she was born so. Perhaps Amethyst ain’t.”

“Amethyst is a good, high-minded girl, with plenty of sense. But she’s as innocent as a child, and how do I know how she may turn out? Oh, Haredale, I came to tell you my trouble, and to offer her back, because I had promised that she should be brought out this year, and I felt that it was due to the family. I do care for the old name, Haredale, but I believe I am a worldly-minded woman. Let her grow a bit older, and then we shall see. Down with me, she’ll be as fresh as a rose at twenty.”

“Una will be coming on by that time; her mother wanted to bring her out now, the girls are getting too big to be about as children. No, if we’re to have Amethyst on our hands, which of course is uncommon bad luck, we’d better take her at her best. Cleverley’s not a bad neighbourhood – we could bring her out first in the country. I know her mother means to have her with her somehow this year. It won’t do to let her be permanently on our hands, now you haven’t the same prospect for her. You must see that, though how the deuce my lady will manage to get her frocks – ”

“I’ll keep her, Haredale,” cried Miss Haredale, starting up. “I’ll keep her, somehow. A London season and a fashionable marriage is not the end of existence. She shall not have to go through the misery of difficulties about dress and other things, which I knew only too well I did not know what I was doing in coming here. Don’t expose her to all those shifts and contrivances?”

“You’re upset, Anna,” said Lord Haredale, “and no wonder! – By Jove! there’s nothing so upsetting as losing money, especially when you’ve had nothing to show for it!”

“Can you wonder,” said Miss Haredale, struggling with her feelings, “can you wonder that I shrink from exposing the child to – to so many temptations?”

“There’s nothing to hurt her,” said Lord Haredale easily. “She’ll never come in Blanche’s way; and Charles, curse him, never comes home at all. She’ll be with people quite of your own sort at Cleverley. Of course we’re quite aware of all you’ve done for her, I shouldn’t think of taking her away from you, in any other case. But come down and talk the matter over with my lady. Capital train at 4:30. Come for a couple of nights and see for yourself. You’ll find it all right enough for her. Come and see.”

“Well, I shall at least hear what her mother thinks,” said Miss Haredale, doubtfully; for in truth the mother was the chief subject of anxiety in her anxious mind. When eleven years before she had taken her niece to live with her, her object had been to make Amethyst’s girlhood as unlike as possible to her own.

Thirty years or so ago, Annabel Haredale had been a fine distinguished-looking girl, popular in the fast and reckless set which frequented the family place, Haredale, in the last days of her father’s life. Lord Haredale and his sons were racing men, and not at all particular as to which of their acquaintances they introduced to the family circle. All the men Annabel knew were fast and dissipated, and all the ladies of her set tolerated, and even liked, fastness and dissipation. She had

very little education, and all her religion consisted of an occasional attendance at Haredale church in a gallery with arm-chairs and a fire; where she and her visitors laughed and talked at intervals, and quizzed the natives. She was, however, a kind and warm-hearted girl, affectionate to her unworthy relatives, and she did her best, according to her lights, to keep matters straight at Haredale, and to preserve her own self-respect. She had many admirers, but no chance of marriage offered itself which she felt herself able to accept. The family circumstances did not improve when the old Lord Haredale died. His eldest son was equally deep in debt, and had less strength of character and constitution to carry off his vices. Annabel withdrew herself and her fortune, and, freed from the family surroundings, she came across people of a different stamp; another education began for her, she fell under religious influences, made good friends, and settled down happily into a pleasant and useful life at Silverfold, a pretty village not far from London.

She did what she could to keep up a kindly intercourse with her brother, and made much of his son and daughter, being indeed very fond of the somewhat unpromising boy whom she would fain have regarded as the hope of the family, and, when his mother died, she did all she could to show him kindness. Lord Haredale, however, married again almost immediately, a young beauty, who proved very uncongenial to her husband's sister.

When four little girls were added to the family, Miss Haredale had not much difficulty in getting the eldest put into her hands for education, and since then she had given Amethyst every advantage that she had missed herself.

The son and daughter of the first marriage had soon put themselves out of her reach, and were causes of increased difficulty and trouble. She had no reason to believe home-life desirable for Amethyst, or to regret having removed her from its influence. The younger sisters were not so brought up as to make her think the mother – whose right over her child must needs be recognised – a wise guide for a beautiful girl. A kindly woman, without much strength of purpose, she had, spite of later influences, never quite outgrown the code of her youth, and it had never occurred to her as possible that her brother's daughter should not be "introduced" at eighteen in London, as she herself had been. She had felt it a duty, now that she could not herself give the girl this advantage, to let her have what opportunities her parents could give her.

And, though this interview showed her how much her standard had changed from that of her family, though she felt many misgivings as to the future, though she could not respect or trust her brother, even while she had never ceased to feel a fondness for him, she had not courage to fight the battle out; and when she finally consented to go with him to Cleverley to consult "my lady," she knew quite well that she had put the decision out of her own hands, and that Amethyst would enter on grown-up life under her mother's auspices.

Chapter Two

In the Shade

Two days later, Miss Haredale came back from her visit to Cleverley, and reached her pretty cottage at Silverfold with a sad heart and many misgivings.

How gay the garden was, with its spring flowers, how successful her hyacinths and tulips, how comfortable her little drawing-room as she sat down by the fire! There would be no more little floral triumphs for her now, the cheerful home would be beyond her means, and her peaceful, useful life in it must be given up.

And Amethyst, who had been at her school during her aunt's absence, had still to be told of what had happened, of the new life in store for her. How could the fond aunt bring herself to tell her darling that their life together must end?

A rapid footfall came along the garden and across the hall, and Amethyst burst into the room.

"Auntie, auntie! The list has come from Cambridge. – And what do you think?"

As she dropped on her knees on the rug at her aunt's feet, waving a pamphlet before her eyes, Miss Haredale looked at her, but in a preoccupied, inattentive way.

"What list, my dear?"

"What list, auntie! Why, the Cambridge Examination list, of course. And I'm in it! And I have a class – a second class; and, auntie – I'm 'distinguished in literature.' There! Oh the relief to one's mind! Did you ever know anything so delightful?"

"It won't make any difference, my dear, I'm afraid, to the trouble that has come upon us," said Miss Haredale, too deeply disturbed even to think of how she was dashing a pleasure, which seemed to her to bear little more relation to the realities of life than if Amethyst had shown her a new doll.

"What is the matter?" said the girl, startled. "Is anything wrong? Father – or mother?"

"No, my dear. But – but I have fallen into great misfortune; I would not tell you while there seemed a chance of its being a mistake. I hope I shall be enabled to bear it, – but it is more than I can face now."

"What – what, auntie?" cried Amethyst, pressing close to her aunt's knees and seizing the trembling hands clasped on them.

It took some talking and explaining before Amethyst could be made to comprehend the situation; but when she did understand how entirely the circumstances of their two lives were altered, her young soft face assumed a resolute expression. She stood up by the fireplace, and once more took the examination list in her hand.

"Auntie," she said, "it is very sad, of course, but it would have been much worse yesterday. *Now*, I don't think you need be anxious about me, at any rate. I am worth something now. I shall go to Miss Halliday; I think she will let me have Miss Hayne's situation at Saint Etheldred's. At least, I know that a girl, with so good a certificate as *this*, can always get employment. So, dear auntie, *I* can do for myself, and help you perhaps a little too."

"Be a school-teacher?" exclaimed Miss Haredale, in horror. "You, at your age! with your family, and your appearance! – Perfectly impossible."

"I could begin as a student-teacher, if I'm too young," said Amethyst coolly. "And it would be no disgrace to a princess to earn her living, if she was poor. And, as for looks, – it's a great advantage, auntie, to be rather nice-looking. It makes the girls like one."

"My dear, don't talk of it," said her aunt. "You have a right to the advantages and opportunities of other girls, and you *must* have them. Besides, it is settled otherwise."

"Of course," said Amethyst, "I should have liked the balls and everything very much. But I hope you don't think, dear auntie, that I'm such a selfish girl as to think of that when you are in trouble."

Besides, if we can't afford them, it would be wrong of course to go in for them. I like teaching, I shouldn't be dull. There would be garden-parties in the holidays. My cream muslin will do all this summer. And as for opportunities – if you mean about marrying – I'm sure, auntie, I've heard you say, over and over again, that if they are to come, they will come, wherever one may be. And if not – why, I can be quite happy as I am.”

As the girl spoke, in her fresh cool young voice, Miss Haredale felt that her line of education had been very successful since Amethyst could think thus, and also that it was incumbent on Amethyst's guardians to think otherwise.

She did not much enjoy, nor greatly value beauty. She had deep reasons for distrusting the kind of beauty which Amethyst inherited. But she was perfectly aware that her young niece was beautiful, and that, whatever Amethyst might think at eighteen, the matter would look very different to her at eight and twenty.

“My dear,” she said, “it can't be. Your parents would never consent, and you don't know what you are talking of. There's only one right thing to do. As I can no longer do my duty by you, or give you proper advantages, I – I – must give you up, and let you go home. Indeed, I have agreed to do so.”

Miss Haredale turned her face away in the struggle to control her tears, so that she did not see the look that was not sorrow on Amethyst's face. But in another moment the girl's arms were round her neck.

“No – no, auntie,” she said, “that would not be right at all. You often say how poor my father is for his position, and how he let me go because there were so many girls to provide for. It wouldn't be at all right for me to go back on his hands now, and to leave you in your trouble. I won't do it, auntie.”

“My dear,” said Miss Haredale, “you will be a great deal more on his hands if you don't get a chance of settling yourself. If only I knew better – if only I thought that all was as it should be! You are a dear good affectionate child, and I've kept you too innocent and ignorant. But you will be a good girl, Amethyst, wherever you may be. I am sure I could trust you.”

“Oh yes, auntie, I think you could,” said Amethyst, simply. “But I should be helped to be good if I went on at Saint Etheldred's.”

“I will talk to you presently,” said Miss Haredale, after a tearful pause. “Run away, my darling, and leave me to compose myself.”

Amethyst, with the despised list in her hand, went away into her own bedroom, and sat down by the window to think on her own account. She had been taken from her home at seven years old, and since then, her intercourse with it had been confined to short visits on either side, and even these had ceased of late years, as Lord and Lady Haredale had lived much on the continent. She knew that her father's affairs were involved, that the heir, her half-brother, was in debt, and, as Miss Haredale put it, “not satisfactory, poor dear boy.” She knew also that her half-sister, Lady Clyste, lived abroad apart from her husband, and that her own younger sisters had travelled about and lived very unsettled lives. But what all these things implied, she did not know at all. She thought her little-known mother the loveliest and sweetest person she had ever seen, and when she heard that her family were going to settle down for a time at a smaller place belonging to them not far from London, she had been full of hope of closer intercourse.

And now, the thought of going into society with her mother was full of dazzle and charm. She had had a very happy life. Her home with her aunt had been made bright by many little pleasures, and varied by all the interests of her education. The Saint Etheldred's of which she had spoken was a girls' school in the neighbourhood of Silverfold, founded and carried on with a view to uniting the best modern education with strict religious principles. Amethyst and a few other girls attended as day scholars. She had been thoroughly well taught; her nature was susceptible to the best influences of the place, and she was popular and influential with her school-fellows.

By far the prettiest girl in the school, among the cleverest, and the only one with any prestige of rank, she had grown up with a considerable amount of self-confidence. She did not feel herself

ignorant of life, nor was she of the exclusive high-toned life in which she had been reared. She had helped to manage younger girls, she had been a very important person at Saint Etheldred's, and she honestly believed herself capable of taking her aunt's burden on her shoulders and of carrying it successfully. She also thought herself capable of cheerfully sacrificing the gaieties of the great world for this dear aunt's sake. She felt quite convinced that work was a nobler thing than pleasure, and that a Saint Etheldred's teacher would be happier than an idle young lady. She did not give in to her aunt's arguments. She was not so young and foolish as auntie supposed. She felt quite grown-up, surely she looked so. She turned to the looking-glass to settle the point.

She saw a tall girl, slender and graceful, holding her long neck and small head with an air of dignity and distinction; which, nevertheless, harmonised perfectly with the simplicity and modesty of her expression. "Grown-up," in her own sense she might be, but she had the innocent look of a creature on whom the world's breath had never blown; and though there was power in the smooth white brow, and spiritual capacity in the dark grey eyes, there was not a line of experience on the delicate face; the full red lips lay in a peaceful curve, and over the whole face there was a bloom and softness that had never known the wear and tear of ill-health, or ill feelings.

"I don't look like a child," she said to herself, "and I know so much more of the world than the girls who are always shut up in school, and never see a newspaper or read a novel. I should be fit for a teacher, I might go home for one season and be presented, if mother likes, and then come back and help auntie. I should like to know my sisters. It strikes me I do know very little about them all. Yes, I *should* like to go home."

Amethyst's eyes filled with tears, as a sudden yearning for the home circle from which she had been shut out possessed her. The affections of a child taken out of its natural place cannot flow in one smooth unbroken stream, and Amethyst felt that there was a contention within her. Her heart went out to the unknown home, and though she went down-stairs again, prepared to urge her scheme of self-help upon her aunt, it was already with a conscious sense of self-conquest that she did so.

Miss Haredale stopped the girl's arguments at once.

"No, my child, my mind is made up, and your parents' too. What you propose is perfectly out of the question. But, remember, you may always come back to me, I will always make some sort of home for you if you really need it, and you will try to be a good girl; for – for I don't like all I hear of fashionable life. There will be great deal of gaiety and frivolity."

"But mother will tell me what is right," said Amethyst. "I can always ask her, and I'll always do what she thinks best."

"Oh, my dear child," cried Miss Haredale, with agitation inexplicable to Amethyst, "no earthly guide is always enough."

"Of course I know that," said Amethyst, simply, and with surprise. "But I can't go away from that other guidance, you know, auntie. That is the same everywhere. If one really wishes to know what is right, there is never any doubt about it. There is always a way out of a puzzle at school; and of course things there *are* sometimes puzzling."

The words were spoken in the most matter-of-course way, as by one who believed herself to have found by experience the truth of what she had been constantly taught, and who did not suppose that any one else could doubt it.

Miss Haredale said nothing; but whether rightly or wrongly, she never gave Amethyst a clearer warning, or more definite advice than this.

Chapter Three

Neighbours

Market Cleverley was a dull little town, within easy reach of London, but on another line from Silverfold. The great feature of its respectable old-fashioned street was the high-built wall and handsome iron gates of Cleverley Hall, a substantial house of dark brick of the style prevalent in the earlier part of the last century. Nearly opposite the Hall was the Rectory, smaller in size, but similar in age and colour; and, beyond the large, long, square-towered church which stood at the end of the street, were the fields and gardens of Ashfield Mount, a large white modern villa built on a rising ground, which commanded a view of flat, fertile country, and of long, white roads, stretching away between neatly trimmed hedges.

The exchange of the dull but innocuous Admiral and Mrs Parry, at Cleverley Hall, for a large family of undoubted rank and position, who were supposed to be equally handsome and ill-behaved, and to belong to the extreme of fashion, could not fail to be exciting to the mother of two growing girls, and of a grown-up son, whose good looks and fair fortune were not to be despised. Mrs Leigh rented Ashfield from the guardian uncle of the owner, Miss Carisbrooke, a girl still under age, and had lived there for many years. Her son's place, Toppings, in a northern county, had been let during his long minority.

She was a handsome woman, still in early middle life, and, having been long the leader of Cleverley society, naturally regarded so formidable a rival as Lady Haredale with anxiety. She was indeed so full of the subject, that when Miss Margaret Riddell, the rector's maiden sister, came to see her for the first time, after a three months' absence abroad, she had no thoughts to spare for the climate of Rome, or the beauty of Florence; but began at once on the subject of the sudden arrival of the owners of Cleverley Hall, and the change from the dear good Parrys.

"Have you called there yet?" said Miss Riddell, as the two ladies sat at tea in the pleasant, well-furnished drawing-room at Ashfield Mount.

"Yes," said Mrs Leigh, "but Lady Haredale was out. Three great tall girls came late into church on Sunday, handsome creatures, but not good style. Gertie and Kate are very eager about them, of course, but I shall be cautious how I let them get intimate."

"But what is the state of the case about the Haredales? What has become of the first family?"

"Well, my cousin in London, Mrs Saint George, tells me that Lord Haredale is supposed to be very hard up; ill luck on the turf I fancy, and the eldest son's debts. He, the son, is a shocking character, drinks I believe. But my cousin thinks his father very hard on him. Then Lady Clyste, the first wife's daughter, does not show at all – lives on the continent. Sir Edward is in India; but everybody knows that there was a great scandal, and a separation."

"Well, they both seem pretty well out of the way, at any rate."

"Yes, but it is this Lady Haredale herself. There's nothing definite against her, Louisa says, but she belongs to the very fastest set! And these children have knocked about on the continent; and at Twickenham, where they have had a villa, they were always to be seen with the men Lady Haredale had about, and, in fact, chaperoning their mother. – A nice training for girls!"

"Poor little things?" said Miss Riddell. "Perhaps this is their first chance in life."

"I dislike that style of thing so very much," said Mrs Leigh; "with my girls I cannot be too particular."

Miss Riddell knew very well that this sentence might have been read, "with my boy I cannot be too particular;" and she was herself concerned at the report of the new-comers, though, being a woman of a kindly heart, she thought with interest and pity of the handsome girls, with their bad style – the result evidently of a bad training.

“I must go and call – of course,” she said.

“Oh, of course – and I hope you and the Rector will come to meet them, we must have a dinner-party for them as soon as possible. Besides, it is time that Lucian came forward a little, if he is so shy when he goes back to Lancashire, he will make no way at all in his own county.”

Miss Riddell’s reply was forestalled by the entrance of the subject of this remark, who came up and shook hands with her cordially, but with something of the stiff politeness of a well-bred school-boy.

“Ah, you hear what I say, Lucian,” said his mother, “there are several things in store for you, which I do not mean to let you shirk in your usual fashion.”

“But I don’t want to shirk, if you are asking the Rector and Miss Riddell to dinner,” said the young man. “I’m very glad to see you back again, Miss Riddell; and if I must take in this formidable Lady Haredale, you’ll sit on the other side – won’t you? – and help me to talk to her?”

“I fancy from what I hear that you won’t find that difficult,” said Miss Riddell, “or disagreeable; but, if you like, I will report on her after my first visit.”

“Ah, thanks – give me the map of the country beforehand. Syl coming down this Easter?”

“I think so, for a week or two,” said Miss Riddell, as she took her leave. “Come some day soon, and see my Italian photographs; you know you are always welcome.”

“I will,” said Lucian; “the mother can’t say I shirk coming to see you.”

“No, Lucian, I have no fault to find with you. You know I always take your part. Good-bye for the present.”

Miss Riddell watched him as he walked away down the garden whistling to his dog – a tall fair youth, handsome as a young Greek, possessing indeed a kind of ideal beauty, that seemed almost out of character in the simple good-hearted boy who loved nothing so well as dogs and horses, liked to spend all his days in the roughest of shooting-coats, was too shy to enjoy balls and garden-parties (since he had never found out that he might have been the most popular of partners), and except on the simplest topics, in the home circle, or with his old friend Sylvester Riddell, never seemed to have anything to say. He was not clever, and cared little for intellectual interests, but he had managed to get himself decently through the Schools, and never seemed to have found it difficult to behave well.

His mother often declared herself disappointed that he did not make more of himself; but Miss Riddell wondered if there was much more to make.

She was interested in him, however, for ever since she had come to live with her widowed brother, the young people of the neighbourhood had formed one of the great interests of her life; and it was with every intention of giving a kindly welcome to the new-comers, that she set out on the next day to call on Lady Haredale. Within the wrought-iron gates of Cleverley Hall, a short straight drive led up to the house, defended by high cypress hedges, cut at intervals into turrets and pinnacles, troublesome to keep in order, and sombre and peculiar in effect. Miss Riddell wondered what the fashionable family would think of them. She was shown into a long drawing-room, where a tall slim figure rose to receive her, and three tall children started up from various parts of the room.

Lady Haredale was girlishly slight and graceful. She seemed to have given her daughters their delicate outlines and pale soft colouring, neither dark nor fair; but as Miss Riddell watched the manner and expression of the four, it seemed to her that the mother’s was much the simpler, and less affected; while she looked almost as youthful, and much more capable of enjoyment than her daughters. She was dressed in a shabby but becoming velvet gown, which told no tale of extravagance or of undue fashion.

“You know, Miss Riddell,” she said presently, in a sweet cheerful voice, “we are supposed to come here to be economical. This is our retreat. These children are getting too big to be dragged about on the continent. Aren’t they great girls? I have had them always with me. Now we ought to shut them up in the school-room.”

“Have they a governess?” asked Miss Riddell.

“Why – not at present. You see there wasn’t money enough both for education and frocks – and I’m afraid I chose frocks,” said Lady Haredale, with a voice and smile that almost made Miss Riddell feel that frocks were preferable to education.

“They have some time before them,” she said.

“Poor little penniless things,” said Lady Haredale, with a light laugh. “They haven’t any time to waste. This creature – come here, Una – is really fifteen.”

“I hope we shall soon be good friends,” said Miss Riddell, kindly.

“Oh, thanks, you’re very good, I’m sure,” said Una, with a cool level stare out of her big eyes and an indifferent drawl in her voice.

“They want some friends,” said Lady Haredale. “But this is not my eldest. There’s Amethyst. Her aunt has brought her up, and kept her always at school. But now we’re going to have her back. She’s a very pretty child it seems to me.”

“Is she coming to you soon?” asked Miss Riddell.

“After Easter. At her school they don’t like going out in Lent,” said Lady Haredale, opening her eyes, and speaking as if keeping Lent was a Japanese custom recently introduced. “She’s been *so* well brought up by good Miss Haredale. But now she is eighteen, and it’s time to take her out. The fact is, her aunt has had money losses – the last person among us who deserved them – but none of us ever have any money! She has been down here, poor woman, with Lord Haredale, to settle about it all.”

“She feels parting with her niece, no doubt.”

“Oh yes, dreadfully. But of course we shall let Amethyst go to her constantly. I’m so grateful to her for bringing her up. I hope the child will rub along with us comfortably. We shall have a few people staying with us soon; and while we are down here we must get these children taught something – they can do nothing but gabble a little French and German. Amethyst is finished, she has passed one of these new examinations. I hardly know what they are – but we left all that to her aunt, of course,” concluded Lady Haredale, with a slight tone of apology. “And I think she’s too pretty to be a blue.”

“I hope she will find Cleverley pleasant,” said Miss Riddell as she rose to take leave.

“I’m sure she will,” said Lady Haredale sweetly and cordially, as she shook hands with her guest. “Of course we shall do our best to enjoy ourselves while we are in retreat. Though I don’t mind confessing to you that I detest the country.”

“She looks innocent enough,” thought Miss Riddell as she walked away. “Silly I should say – but a real beauty.”

“That woman’s more frumpish than Aunt Annabel,” said one of the girls as the door closed behind the visitor.

“Just her style, dear good creature,” said Lady Haredale. “But they’re the *Cheshire* Riddells, you know, my dear – quite people to be civil to.”

Chapter Four

The Home Circle

Lady Haredale was naturally gifted with peculiarly even, cheerful spirits. She had a great capacity for enjoyment, though she had troubles enough to break down a better woman. She had married at seventeen a man much older than herself, already in embarrassed circumstances. Her step-children both disliked her, and had given her very good cause to dislike them.

She had four nearly portionless girls of her own to marry, and she herself had endless personal anxieties and worries, springing alike from want of money and from want of principle. Truly she had often not the wherewithal to pay for her own and her daughters' dress. She did not mind being in debt because it was wrong, but she found it very disagreeable. She belonged to a circle of ladies who played cards, and for very high stakes. That led to complications. She was a beauty and had many admirers, with whom she liked to maintain sentimental relations, and she was just really sentimental enough not always to stop at the safe point. Very uncomfortable trains of circumstances had arisen from the indulgence of this taste; and, if she had had no regrets or difficulties of her own, Lord Haredale's character and pursuits would have given her plenty. Nor had she outer interests or resources in herself. She never realised, she seemed scarcely to have heard of all the various forms of philanthropy which are furthered by so many ladies of position. She did not care for politics, literature, or art. She was probably conscious of being much more charming than most of the women who occupied themselves with these interests; but on the whole it was rather that she did not know anything about them, than that she set herself against them. As for religion, she was really hardly conscious of its claims upon her beyond an occasional attendance at church, and due consideration for the social rank of a bishop. In such unconsciousness rather than opposition Lady Haredale was behind and unlike her age; but the state of mind may still be found, where dense perceptions and exclusive habits co-exist.

Yet she was always ready for a fresh amusement; she enjoyed gossip of a piquant and scandalous nature; she greatly enjoyed admiration, and treading on social white ice. When none of these excitements were at hand, she liked realistic novels, and comfortable chairs, and good things to eat and drink. She also liked her little girls, though she took very little trouble about them; and, though it cannot be denied that Satan did find some mischief for her idle heart and brain, if not for her idle hands to do, he did not often manage to lower her spirits or ruffle her temper. She not only did what she liked – what is less common, she liked what she did.

But her young daughters did not inherit this cheery serenity. They had no intelligent teaching, no growing enthusiasms to occupy their minds, and they were inconceivably ignorant and *bornées*. They were entirely unprincipled, using the word in a negative sense, and they had not their mother's steady health. They had knocked about, abroad and at home, with careless servants, and foreign teachers. They had been to children's balls, and had been produced in picturesque costumes at grown-up entertainments; till, lacking their mother's spirit, they were apt to look on cynically, while she devised fresh schemes of amusement.

"Lady Haredale is so fresh!" Una had once remarked, to the intense amusement of her partner, at one of those "children's parties," which are given that grown-up people may admire the children, and amuse themselves.

These three children, in the afternoon in Easter week on which Amethyst was expected, had grouped themselves into the bow-window of the drawing-room, looking with their long hair, black legs, and fashionable frocks, like a contemporary picture in Punch.

"Dismal place this!" said Una, yawning and looking out at the garden.

"Oh," said Kattern, as the next girl, Katherine, was usually called, "my lady will have all the old set here soon."

They often called their mother “my lady,” after the manner of their half-brother and sister.

“Yes,” said Victoria, the youngest, in a slow, high-toned drawl. “It’s quite six weeks since we’ve seen Tony. He’ll be coming soon, and Frank Chichester, I dare say. Frank’ll give you a chance, Una.”

“Frank Chichester! I don’t value boys; they have no conversation. You and Kattern may pull caps for him.”

“Tory’s too rude,” said Kattern. “He never forgave her for saying, when he asked her to dance, that she must watch him to see how he moved.”

“I thought that was *chic*,” said Tory; “some men like it, and coax you.”

“He’s too young for it,” said the experienced Una; “not *my* style at all.”

“Ah, we know *your* style – dear Tony.”

“Be quiet,” interposed Una, angrily, and with scarlet cheeks; “what’s my style to such little chits as you?”

“Little chits indeed!” said Tory. “*You* might be glad to be a little chit. You’re getting to the awkward age, and you won’t have a little girl’s privileges much longer. You’d better look out. And besides, we shall none of us wear as well as my lady.”

“There’ll be Amethyst,” said Kattern. “If she’s so awfully pretty, we shall be out of the running.”

“She’s sure to be bread-and-butterish and goody; that won’t pay,” said Tory. “Now be quiet, I want to finish my book before she comes.”

“What’s it about?” asked Kattern.

“She married the wrong man, and the hero wants her to run away with him, but I suppose the husband will die, so it will all come right!” said Tory, drawing up her black legs into a comfortable attitude, and burying herself in her book.

On that morning Amethyst had been taken to London by her aunt; and, by no means so miserable as she thought she ought to have been, was delivered over to her father’s care.

Matters had settled themselves fairly pleasantly for Miss Haredale. Her house was let, and an old friend had asked her to go abroad with her for the summer, so that she was not left to solitude – a greater consolation just now to Amethyst than to herself. The girl felt the parting; but eager interest in the new old house, longing for her mother and sisters, and shy pleasure in her father’s notice, overwhelmed the feeling and pushed it aside for the time. She was delighted when her father took her to lunch at Verey’s, and enjoyed the strawberry ice which he gave her. She tried to adapt her conversation to what she supposed might be Lord Haredale’s tastes, and asked him if the hunting near Cleverley was good.

“Fond of riding, eh?” he said. “I haven’t been out for years, – never was much in my line. But your aunt, she was the best horse-woman in the county. Fellows used to lay bets on what ugly places Annabel Haredale would go in for next. But she was up to the game, and when she was expected to show off would ride as if she were following a funeral – make them open all the gates for her, and then go ahead like a bird and distance everybody. – You’ll do, if you have her hand at a horse’s mouth, and her seat on the saddle.”

Amethyst found some difficulty in picturing her aunt flying over the country like a bird, and answered humbly —

“I never rode anything but Dobbin, the Rectory pony, papa; but he could take a flat ditch, if it wasn’t too wide. I should like hunting.”

“Well, we’ll see about it next winter. I’ll manage to mount you, perhaps, somehow.”

“Oh, papa, I don’t want anything that’s any trouble. I like everything that comes handy.” She smiled gaily as she spoke, and her sweet light-hearted look struck her father.

“You take after my lady,” he said aloud, and then under his moustaches, “and, by Jove! you’ll cut her out too.”

Amethyst's gaiety subsided as they came to the little country station, and were driving through the lanes to Cleverley Hall. Her heart beat very fast – it was the intensest moment her young life had known.

“Shy, eh?” said her father good-naturedly, as they reached the Hall. “Never mind – we take things easy. Visitors in the drawing-room, do you say?” – to the servant. “Generally are, I think. My lady would have made a circle of mermen and savages if she had been shipwrecked with Robinson Crusoe.” Amethyst hardly heard; she followed her father into the long low room, full of misty afternoon sunlight. She did not heed that several figures rose hurriedly as they entered; she heard a clear sweet voice say —

“Why here she is! Here's my big girl!” and, full in the dazzle of that confusing sunlight, she saw her mothers slender figure and smiling face.

As the welcoming arms clasped her, and the smiling lips kissed her, Amethyst felt as if she had never known what happiness meant before.

Chapter Five

Sisters

The visitors, who were introduced by Lady Haredale as, “Our neighbours at Ashfield, Mr Leigh, and Mrs Leigh,” speedily took their leave. Amethyst had hardly seen them; for the whole evening was dazzling and dreamy to her, full of emotion and excitement.

It was hours before she could sleep, though a wakeful night was a new experience to her. But when she woke the next morning rather late, she was sensible of the light of common day, and came down fresh and cheerful to find herself the first at breakfast, and nobody there to receive her apologies for having overslept herself.

Breakfast was in the “library” – a pleasant room, but with no books in it to account for its appellation; and Lady Haredale soon appeared, while the three girls straggled in by degrees.

“Now, you bad children,” said Lady Haredale gaily, as the meal concluded, “you know you have all got to make up your minds that Amethyst will go out with me, and that you are all still in the school-room.”

“Where is it?” asked Tory, with her lazy drawl.

“There isn’t much to go out for, that I see – down here,” said Una.

“Oh, you are all spoiled,” said Lady Haredale. “Amethyst never saw such a set of ignorant creatures. I shall leave her to tell you what good little girls should be like.”

There was a sweet lightsome tone in Lady Haredale’s voice, that seemed to Amethyst to indicate the most delightful relations between herself and her daughters, though the three girls did not look responsive.

“Have you any pretty frocks, my dear?” said Lady Haredale, as she rose to go away. “I mean to have some parties, and there will be people here. If his lordship won’t let us go to London, we must amuse ourselves here, mustn’t we? Though I don’t despair of London yet.”

“I don’t know – I’m afraid you wouldn’t think my best dress very pretty, mamma.”

“Mamma’ – how pretty the old name is on her tongue!”

Amethyst blushed.

“I’m afraid it’s old-fashioned,” she said, “but the Rectory girls at Silverfold say ‘mamma.’ Do we call you ‘mother’?”

“Do you know,” said Lady Haredale, “‘mamma’ is *so* old-fashioned that I think it’s quite *chic*. And very pretty of you; go on – I like it. And never mind the frocks. Of course it’s my place to dress you up and show you off – and I will. I’m glad you’re such a pretty creature.”

She kissed Amethyst lightly as she passed her, and went away, leaving the girl embarrassed by the outspoken praise. But Amethyst knew, or thought she knew, all about her own beauty, and accepted it as one of the facts of life; so she roused herself in a moment, clapped her hands together, and sprang at her sisters – seizing Una round the waist.

“Come! come! let us look at each other, let us find each other out! – How big you all are! Come and tell me what work you are doing, and what you each go in for; let’s have a splendid talk together.”

She pulled Una down beside her on the sofa, and looked smiling into her face. She had not been grown-up so long as not to be quite ready for companionship with these younger girls, and girls came natural to her.

Una looked back wistfully into the laughing eyes. She was as tall as Amethyst, and her still childish dress accentuated the lanky slenderness of her figure, which seemed weighed down by the enormous quantities of reddish brown hair that fell over her shoulders and about her face. Indeed she looked out of health; all the colour in her face was concentrated in her full red lips, and her wide-open eyes were set in very dark circles. She looked, spite of her short frock and her long hair,

older than her real age, and as unlike a natural healthy school-girl as the most “intense” and aesthetic taste could desire. Kattern was prettier, and, as Amethyst expressed it to herself, more comfortable-looking, but she had a stupid face; and by far the shrewdest, keenest glances came from Tory’s darker eyes, which had an elfish malice in them, that caused Amethyst mentally to comment on her as “a handful for any teacher.”

“We don’t do any work – we’re neglected,” she said, perching herself on the arm of the sofa, and looking at her sisters as they sat upon it, with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. “I expect we shall have some lessons now, though, we’re ‘in the school-room,’ now we are in the country – like the Miss Leighs.”

“You could not do regular lessons when you were travelling,” said Amethyst, “but I dare say you’re all good at French and German. We might have some readings together anyhow. I don’t mean to be idle, Una – you’ll help me to stick to work of some kind, won’t you?”

“You’d better ask me, Amethyst,” said Tory. “I think education might be amusing. Una never does anything she can help of any sort, she’s always tired or something.”

“There’s never anything worth doing,” said Una languidly, “it’s so dull.”

“It won’t be so dull next week,” said Kattern, with meaning, while Una coloured and shot a savage glance at her.

“Dear me!” said Amethyst. “We shan’t be dull. There are always such heaps of things to do and to think of. But tell me about the people who are coming next week, and about the neighbours round here.”

“There are Miss Riddell and her brother,” said Una. “He’s the parson, but it seems they’re in society here. They’ll be a bore most likely.”

“And there are the Leighs,” said Kattern. “There’s a young Leigh, who looks rather promising.”

“And next week,” said Tory, “the Lorrimores, and Damers, and Tony.”

“Who is Tony?”

“Oh, Tony’s quite a tame cat here,” said Tory, manifestly mimicking some one. “He’s always round. My lady has him about a great deal, and he’s useful, he’s got a little money. His wife ran away from him – his fault I dare say; and now they’re di – ”

“Tory!” interposed Una, starting up from her lounging attitude, “be quiet directly, you don’t know what you’re talking about. I won’t have it!”

“You can’t help Amethyst getting to know things,” said Tory in her slowest drawl; but she gave in, and swung herself off the end of the sofa, calling Kattern to come out in the garden.

Una let herself drop back on the sofa, it was characteristic of her that she never sat upright a moment longer than she could help it, and looked furtively round under her hair at her sister. Amethyst, however, had encountered children before, possessed of a desire to shock their betters, and took Tory’s measure according to her lights; which were to take no notice of improper remarks, especially as Una had shut the little one up so effectually.

“Well, I must go and write to auntie,” she said; “and then shall we go out too, Una?”

“Yes, if you like,” said Una, and with a sudden impulse she put up her face to Amethyst’s, and kissed her.

During the next week or ten days Amethyst was so much taken up with her own family that the various introductions in the neighbourhood made very little impression on her. The result on her mind of these first days of intercourse was curious. She did not by any means think her home perfection. She had indeed been vaguely prepared for much that was imperfect; and she had far too clear and definite a standard not to know that her sisters really were “neglected,” and was too much accustomed to good sense not to be aware that Lady Haredale talked nonsense. But there was a glamour over her which, perhaps happily, softened all the rough edges. Amethyst fell in love with her new “mamma,” and Una conceived a sudden and vehement devotion for the pretty, cheerful, chattering elder sister, who was so unlike any one in her previous experience. Amethyst forgot to criticise what her mother

said or did, when the way of saying it or doing it was so congenial to one who shared the same soft gaiety of nature; and Una, suffering, poor child, in many ways, from the “neglect” of which Tory had too truly spoken, followed all Amethyst’s suggestions, and clung to her with ever-increasing affection.

A lady was recommended by Miss Riddell to come every morning and teach the three girls, and though Amethyst did not exactly share in the lessons, she talked about them, and helped in the preparation of them, and made them the fashion, and Tory at least began, as she had said, to find education interesting. This home-life went on as a background during all the ensuing weeks, when outer interests began to assert themselves, and the flood of life for Amethyst rolled on fast and full.

But all along, and at first especially, there were many intervals filled up with teaching her sisters the delights of country walks and primrose-pickings; with reading her favourite books to them, stirring them up about their lessons, and, all unintentionally, in giving them something else to think of than the vagaries of their elders’ life.

A “school-room” had really been provided for them, high up in one of the corners of the house, with a window in its angle which caught the sun all day, and looked over the pretty, rough open country in which Cleverley lay. Here, with flowers and books and girlish rummage, was the most home-like spot the Haredale girls had ever known; and here late one sunny afternoon lounged Una, curled up in the corner of an old sofa – doing, as was still too often the case, absolutely nothing.

Suddenly a light step came flying up the stairs, and Amethyst ran into the room, and stood before her in the full glory of the early evening sunlight, saying in her fresh girlish voice —

“Look, Una – look!”

Amethyst was already in her white dinner-dress, and round her neck was clasped a broad band of glowing purple jewels. Stars of deep lustrous colour gleamed in her hair and on her bosom, her eyes shone in the sunshine, which poured its full glory on her innocent eager face, which in that clear and searching light seemed to share with the jewels a sort of heavenly radiance, a splendour of light and colour from a fairer and purer world.

“Amethyst,” exclaimed Una, starting up, “you look like an angel.”

Amethyst laughed, and stepping out of the sunlight, came and knelt down by Una’s side; no longer a heavenly vision of light and colour, but a happy-faced girl, decorated with quaint and splendid ornaments of amethysts set with small diamonds.

“Mamma says that she has given me my own jewels. She says she was so fond of these beautiful stones that she made up her mind to call me after them, and I am to wear them whenever I can. Aren’t they lovely?”

“Yes,” said Una; “I didn’t know my lady had them still. They’re just fit for you.”

Amethyst took off the splendid necklet, and held it in her hands.

“They’re too beautiful to be vain of,” she said, dreamily. “It’s rather nice to have a stone and colour of one’s own. I used to think amethysts and purple rather dull when we chose favourites at school. Amethyst means temperance, you know. It’s a dull meaning, but I expect it’s a very useful one for me now.”

“Why, what do you mean?” said Una.

“Well!” said Amethyst, “I do enjoy everything so very much. I feel as if music, and dancing, and going out with mother, and having pretty things to wear, would be so very delightful. So if the most delightful things of all remind me that I mustn’t let myself go, but be temperate in all things, it ought to be getting some good out of the beauty, oughtn’t it?”

Amethyst spoke quite simply, as one to whom various little methods of self-discipline were as natural a subject of discussion as various methods of study.

“I hope you’ll never look different from what you did just now,” said Una, in a curious strained voice, and laying her head on her sister’s shoulder; “but it’s all going to begin.”

“Why, Una, what is it?” as the words ended in a stifled sob. “Headache again? You naughty child, I’m sure you want tonics, or sea air, or something. And I wish you would let me plait all this hair into a tail, it is much too hot and heavy for you.”

“Oh no, no! not now,” said Una, now fairly crying, “not just now – let it alone. I don’t want to be grown-up!”

“A tail doesn’t look grown-up,” said Amethyst in a matter-of-fact voice. “Any way there’s nothing to cry about. If you want to come down and see the people after dinner, you must lie still now and rest. But you ought to go to bed early, and get a good-night. When people cry for nothing, it shows they’re ill.”

“I dare say it does, but I’m not ill,” said Una.

“Then you’re silly,” said Amethyst, with cheerful briskness; but Una did not resent the tone. She gave Amethyst a long clinging kiss, and then lay back on the sofa; while her sister went off to arrange the jewels to her satisfaction, in preparation for the first state dinner-party at which she was to make her appearance.

Chapter Six

Historical Types

“Well, father – how goes the world in Cleverley? How are you getting on with the charming but undesirable family at the Hall, of whom Aunt Meg writes to me?”

Sylvester Riddell and his father were walking up and down the centre path of the Rectory kitchen-garden, smoking an after-breakfast pipe together, between borders filled with tulips, daffodils, polyanthuses, and other spring flowers, behind which espaliers were coming into blossom, and early cabbages and young peas sprouting up in fresh and orderly rows. The red tower of the church looked over a tall hedge of lilac trees, and beyond was the little street, soon leading into fields and open, prettily-wooded country, rising into low hills in the distance.

Sylvester had just arrived for a few days' visit from Oxbridge, where he had recently obtained a first-class, a fellowship, and an appointment as tutor of his college. His father and grandfather had both been scholars, and such honours seemed to them almost the hereditary right of their family.

Sylvester inherited from his father long angular limbs, rugged but well-formed features, and brown skin. But the dreamy look, latent in the father's fine grey eyes, was habitual in the son's; while a certain humorous twinkle in their corners had had less time to develop itself, and was much less apparent in the younger man's face.

The old Rector had shaggy grey hair, eyebrows, and whiskers; he had grown stout, and his everyday clothes were somewhat loose and shabby. Sylvester had brown hair, cut short, and was close shaved, and his dress was neat, and did his tailor credit. Still, the father's youth was closely recalled by this son of his old age, and the two found each other congenial spirits.

The fox-terrier that barked in front of them, and the old collie that paced soberly behind, turned eyes of kindness alike on both, the great grey cat rubbed against both pairs of trousers, and the old gardener lay in wait to show Sylvester his side of a dispute with “master” as to the clipping of the lilac hedges.

Fifty years or so ago the Rector of Cleverley had been a young undergraduate, remarkable for the fine scholarship and elegant verse-making of his day, but with a touch of genius that made him differ from his fellows; careless, simple, and untidy, yet fond of society and good fellowship, full of the romance and sentiment of his day, – a man who admired pretty women, but had only one lasting love, from whom circumstances had divided him till he married her late in life, and lost her soon after Sylvester's birth.

When, on his marriage, he took the living of Cleverley, he became an excellent parish priest, the personal friend of all his flock, and deeply beloved by them; a little shy of modern organisation, and more hard on his curates for mispronouncing Greek names than on many worse offenders. He was a gentleman, and a man of the world who had other experiences than those of parochial life, and belonged to a race of clergy more common in the last generation than in this one.

Sylvester was meant to be much the same sort of person as his father; but he was born in a grave and more self-conscious age. He had all the Rector's cordial kindness, and much of his keen insight; but the romantic, dreamy side of the character was both more carefully hidden and stronger in the younger man. The sentiment of the eighth decade of the nineteenth century was less cheerful and light-hearted than that of the third or fourth. The Rector had been among those who still laughed and sighed with Moore, and smiled with Praed (he had not been the sort of man to give himself over to Byron). He had fallen in love with the miller's and the gardener's fair daughters in the early days of Tennyson. Sylvester dived into Browning, and dreamed with Rossetti. He was haunted by ideals which he did not hope to realise; and, moreover, felt himself compelled frequently to pretend that he had no ideals at all.

And although he had worked hard to attain his university distinctions, he took the duties they involved somewhat lightly, and hardly found in his profession a sufficient interest and aim in life, fulfilling its claims in fact in a somewhat formal fashion.

He was, however, a very affectionate son, and was delighted to find himself at home again, and full of curiosity as to the new-comers at Cleverley Hall.

“Are they as charming as they appeared at first sight?” he asked.

“My dear boy,” said the Rector in a confidential tone, “they are very charming. But I’m sorry for the little girl. There’s something ideal about her. But it’s a bad stock, Syl, a bad stock!”

“So I’ve always heard,” said Sylvester, slightly amused at his father’s tone of reluctant admiration. “But what’s amiss with them? We’re to dine there to-night, I believe?”

“Yes,” said the Rector, “and we shall have a very pleasant evening. You see, my dear boy, the ladies here are rather pleased with Lady Haredale. They were prejudiced – very much prejudiced against her. Now they say she is much nicer and quieter than they expected, and they believe that the reports about her are exaggerated. But they don’t see that she is so handsome. The fact is, you know, Syl,” and here Mr Riddell paused in his walk and spoke in confidential accents, “that she belongs to another order of women altogether – to the fascinating women of history, and her beauty is a fact quite beyond discussion. But she’s not a good woman, Sylvester, and never will be.”

“The fascinating women of history,” said Sylvester – “Cleopatra, and others, were perhaps a little deficient in moral backbone. But I’m sure, father, Lady Haredale must be a charming hostess. I quite look forward to the party to-night. So she outshines her daughter, I suppose.”

“My dear boy,” said Mr Riddell, “there’s something about that little girl that goes to one’s heart. What is to become of her?”

“But what is it that is so dangerous about Lady Haredale?” said Sylvester. “She doesn’t appear to offend the proprieties.”

“She has no principle, Syl – not a stiver,” said the Rector, “and I like the look of none of their friends. So, my dear boy, I wouldn’t advise you to get drawn into the set too much. They’re very sociable and hospitable. Young Leigh seems a good deal attracted.”

“Old Lucy? Really? Has he succumbed to the historical type of fascination? The young lady must be charming indeed. But, father, I am immensely interested. I must study these historical ladies – at a distance, of course. But there’s Aunt Meg. I must go and ask her how the parish is getting on.”

Miss Riddell, who represented the practical element in the household and family, honestly said that she liked gossip. Sylvester called it studying life. In both, it was really kindly interest in old friends and neighbours.

But to-day, she was so much taken up with the new-comers, and evidently admired them so much, that Sylvester prepared for the dinner-party with much curiosity. As he followed his father and aunt into the long low drawing-room, he was struck at once by its more tasteful and cheerful appearance than when he had last seen it, and by the lively murmur of conversation that filled it, and, as he advanced to receive Lady Haredale’s greeting, he did not think that she was splendidly dressed, or startlingly fashionable, but he perceived at once that she was a great beauty. She introduced “my eldest daughter,” and Sylvester saw, standing by her side, a tall girl, in the simplest of white gowns, but with splendid jewels clasping her slender throat, and shining in her hair. She smiled, and looked at him with the most cordial friendliness, and she struck him as quite unlike the general run of young ladies, with her lithe graceful figure, her full soft lips, and her clear spiritual eyes.

“I know what it is,” thought Sylvester, “she is Rossetti’s ideal; but he never reached her. She is the maiden that Chiaro saw. But she is also a happy girl. By Jove! no wonder the dad was so impressive!”

Presently Mrs Leigh and her son arrived to complete the party, and were greeted by Amethyst as well-established acquaintances.

Sylvester knew Lucian Leigh well, had been at school with him, and believed him to be, in all points, a good fellow. But as he watched him making small talk with greater ease than usual to the young lady, it struck Sylvester as a new idea that it was a pity that Lucian's appearance was so deceptive; he had not at all the sort of character suggested by the first sight of his face. But that the two faces harmonised well as they sat side by side at the table, was indisputable.

Presently, he saw Amethyst turn to the Rector, who sat on her left hand, and begin to talk to him with pretty respectful courtesy. Evidently she did not think it well-behaved to be absorbed in her younger companion, and Mr Riddell succeeded in amusing her, for she laughed and looked interested, and he evidently put forward his best powers of pleasing.

Sylvester looked with curiosity at the rest of the company. Some, of course, were well-known neighbours; others, strangers staying in the house, who did not greatly take his fancy. The most prominent of these was a middle-aged, military-looking man, who was introduced as Major Fowler, and who struck Sylvester as a specimen of the 'bad style' which had been sought for in vain in Lady Haredale and her daughter. Lady Haredale called him Tony, and he seemed on intimate terms in the house, especially with the younger girls, who were found in the drawing-room after dinner – Una with a bright colour in her usually pale cheeks, and a sudden flow of childish chatter. Presently Victoria, with an air of infantine confidence, came up to Sylvester and said —

"Please, are there any primroses growing here?"

"Primroses! why yes; haven't you seen them?"

"We have never gathered any primroses, we want to go and get some. Will you show us the way?" said Tory, looking up in his face.

"Oh, Tory," said Amethyst, who, passing near, heard this request; "there are plenty of primroses which we can find quite easily."

"But I should be delighted to show you the best places for them," said Sylvester, with alacrity.

"Mr Leigh will come too," said Tory, turning to Lucian. "We're Cockneys, we want to be taught to enjoy the country, mother says so."

"We'll have a grand primrose picnic," said Lucian. "My sisters will come too. Miss Haredale, do let us show you your first primrose."

"Oh, I have gathered plenty of primroses," said Amethyst, smiling, but with a blush and a puzzled look, as if she did not quite know what it behoved her to say. "But one cannot have too many," she added after a moment.

The primrose gathering was arranged for the next day, ostensibly between the Miss Haredales, and the girls from Ashfield, escorted by their governess.

"But," said Tory afterwards with a knowing look, "we shan't have to gather them by ourselves, you'll see."

"Tory!" exclaimed Amethyst, "you should not have asked Mr Riddell and Mr Leigh to come and gather primroses with us! And how could you say that you did not know where they grew, when we got some yesterday?"

"Oh, they'll like to come," said Tory, "and I'm quite little enough to ask them."

She made an indescribable face at Amethyst, and walked away as she spoke.

"Did you like your first party, my pretty girl?" said Lady Haredale, putting a caressing hand on Amethyst's shoulder.

"Oh yes, mamma, it was delightful."

"I am going to be the old mother now, you know, Tony. It is this child's turn now."

"You will have a great deal of satisfaction in teaching her," said Tony, with an intonation which Amethyst did not understand, and a look she did not like.

But, as she shut herself into her own room, the images in her mind were full of colour and brightness. She felt that she had begun to live. The manifold relations of family life, the new

acquaintances, even the new dresses and jewels, filled her with interest and pleasure so great that it brought a pang of remorse.

“Poor auntie!” she thought, “and now she is dull, without me!”

And, being too much excited to sleep, she sat down to write some of her first eager impressions to Miss Haredale; till, at what seemed to her a wickedly late hour, she heard a light soft foot in the passage.

She opened the door softly, and there was Una, still in her white evening frock, with shining eyes and burning cheeks, starting nervously at sight of her sister.

“Una! Do you know how late it is? Where have you been? How your head will ache to-morrow!”

“I’ve been in the smoking-room and I’ve smoked a cigarette, and tasted a brandy-and-soda!” said Una, with a touch of Tory’s wicked defiance.

“Would mother let you?” said Amethyst slowly.

“Oh yes!” said Una, shrugging her shoulders, “but *I* shan’t let *you*!”

She flung her arms round Amethyst and kissed her with burning lips, then scuttled away into her own room.

Chapter Seven

No Cunning to be Strange

“When do you suppose Amethyst will find my lady out?” said Kattern and Tory, as they started for the primrose-picking the next day, and Amethyst ran back again to beg her mother to drive round to the wood and join them.

“Not yet,” said Tory, “my lady is making up to her, as much as ever she did to any man she ever went in for, and Amethyst would believe black was white just at present.”

“I’d like to see her face, if we told her what my lady is really like.”

“You are not to tell her,” said Una, suddenly turning round upon them, “I won’t have it. Let her be happy while she can; *I* shall tell her, when I think it proper.”

Una looked languid and dull to-day. She did not care for gathering primroses, and she was not strong enough to enjoy long out-door expeditions. She watched Amethyst, with a look on her face, and thoughts in her heart, which would much have astonished the elder girl if she had noticed the one, or guessed at the other.

Amethyst good-naturedly patronised Kate and Gertie Leigh, girls matching in age with Kattern and Tory; she made friends with their governess, who had recently been the head girl at a rival school to Saint Etheldred’s, and was discussing the honours respectively gained by the two institutions at all the recent examinations, with the heartiest interest, when the party was enlarged by the arrival of Miss Riddell and her nephew, and Mrs Leigh and her son. Lady Haredale, Major Fowler, and some of the other guests at Cleverley also turned up. It was a day of rare spring loveliness, blue sky, young green leaves, and springing flowers.

“A day of beginnings,” Sylvester Riddell said, as he noted the budding oak trees, the unfolding blossoms, the opening intercourse that was still in its first spring.

“You like the woods?” he said to Amethyst.

“Oh yes,” she said, “I like everything here; you can’t think how pleasant beginning to be at home is.”

“I suppose you are making several beginnings,” he said.

“Yes,” she answered, “I am beginning to know my sisters – and every one here – and next week I am going to my first ball.”

“Beginnings are very charming when they do not imply endings,” said Sylvester tritely; but he was thinking so much of the lovely slender girl before him that he spoke half mechanically.

“That can never be,” said Amethyst, with sudden gravity. “My school-days are ended, and my living with my aunt. Beginnings must come out of endings – but then they *are* beginnings,” she added; and stooping, she picked a primrose, round which still lingered the large faded leaves of last year, and showed it to him, with a grave smile on her soft young lips.

Sylvester never forgot her as she stood there, dressed all in mossy green that harmonised with the woods. He had a dim sense that a beginning was coming to him, as he took the fresh primrose and the faded leaf out of her hand.

“One ought to be able to spin a poem out of this,” he said; but just then Lucian Leigh came springing down the bank, a picturesque figure in his brown suit, and looking, as the little girls climbed and scrambled after him, as like a young wood god, as Amethyst was like a wood nymph.

“They matched exactly,” Sylvester thought, as they drew by instinct together, and through all the merry afternoon, seemed the motive of the picture, the centre of the piece.

“It is quite charming to be so rustic,” said Lady Haredale; while Tory and Kattern forgot about being charming as they scrambled about with their contemporaries, and Amethyst drank in happiness with the sun and the air. To-day was indeed a delightful beginning.

It began a great deal. Lady Haredale was a person who liked something to be always going on, and hardly a day passed without some little scheme of pleasure, some opportunity for meetings something that gave colour and brightness to the days. Distant neighbours seemed to come nearer, and Cleverley had never been so gay within the memory of man.

Yet it all seemed quite simple. Lady Haredale, the Cleverley ladies said, liked simple pleasures, and freely owned that she must have inexpensive ones. There was the county ball for a climax, and various set entertainments given at the country houses round for salient points; but Lady Haredale did little but keep open house in a sort of free and easy way. Lord Haredale was a good deal absent in London, and Major Fowler, so old a family friend, acted as a sort of deputy master of the house, showed the young men the way to the sideboard, set games of billiards on foot, took a hand at whist in the evenings. Sometimes, when there were young people, they all played round games, and put three penny bits into the pool. It could not be true, that whisper of Lady Haredale playing for high stakes and losing money, or she could not have laughed so merrily over the threepenny “vingt-un with variations.”

Then, when the wind was cold after playing tennis, for which the season was still early, she made such pretty fun over producing champagne and claret cup at afternoon tea, that, though such was not the Cleverley custom except at large garden-parties, there seemed nothing to wonder at; – though it was a pity that so young a girl as Una Haredale should be allowed to drink it.

Lady Haredale did not dress too youthfully, or try to keep her beautiful daughter in the background; on the contrary, everything was arranged to make a good time for Amethyst; Lady Haredale chose her dresses with the utmost care, and taught her how to arrange them becomingly, with so outspoken a delight in the girl’s beauty as almost rendered her flattery harmless. Those were happy weeks. Now and then came little shocks and startling incidents; but they fell on unheeding ears.

A very few words are enough to tell Amethyst’s story. She and Lucian Leigh fell in love with each other; suddenly, rapturously, without delay or misgiving, almost at the first sight of each other’s fair faces, almost with the first sense of an answering stir in each other’s souls, Lucian courted her in a quiet but most unmistakable fashion; and soon, life for Amethyst meant his presence, his words and looks. She was carried off her feet, caught out of herself. Even as she knew “what made the assembly shine” for her, she was well assured that she “made the ball fine” for him. She did not remain unconscious or ignorant of what had befallen her. Love did not come to her with slow, cautious, and imperceptible footsteps, he caught her in a sweet frenzy, which left no space for misgivings; while her quickly answering warmth probably hastened and intensified the passion, which might have seemed alien to Lucian’s slower and shyer nature.

A few social meetings and games of tennis together – one or two encounters “by chance,” which yet were so important that it seemed as if the whole course of life must have been arranged to bring them about – a sunny Sunday or two, in the same church, singing the same hymns – a belief in each other’s goodness, so that no misgivings troubled their joy in each other’s charms, scraps of talk – wonderful glances – the county ball, where Amethyst’s success woke Lucian to the sudden fear of rivalry, and where the world began to say that she was a great beauty – a dance the next night at a neighbour’s house – a long, long waltz together, then, dim lights, heavy-scented flowers, a wonderful sense of being alone, after the crowd of dancers; then feelings found words, words hardly needed, his arms were round her, his kiss on her lips, and, after scarcely a doubt or a fear, in three short weeks, in a dozen meetings, Amethyst’s heart was won, her promise given, and all her story, as she believed, told.

But, with the actual promise given, with the spoken words, Lucian, at any rate, woke up to a sense of real life, and of what it behoved him to do.

“To-morrow I must come to Lord Haredale. I hope he won’t kick me down-stairs.”

“Why should he be angry? We are not doing wrong. – That is – ought I to have told mother first? – Was it too quick?” faltered Amethyst, crimson and trembling with sudden misgiving.

“Too quick! It has seemed a life-time since last night, before I could speak to you! I am my own master. But you, who might have all London at your feet, they will say I ought to have let you have a season in town first.”

“But that wouldn’t have made any difference.”

“No? I don’t suppose it would. Nothing could make any difference to me. We’ll go and live at Toppings. You like the country. I meant to see if I could not go to Norway, and get some seal fishing; but I shan’t care for that now, we’ll settle down at once.”

But this was going too fast for Amethyst.

“Oh don’t,” she said, “don’t; I – I cannot think. – It is too much. – I want to stop – to wait – not to have any more now!”

She turned white as she spoke, overwhelmed with the rush of emotion; while Lucian, though only half-comprehending, held himself back, drew her on to a seat, and said, “I’ve done something clumsy, and frightened you. I always do.”

“Oh no – no – no! But oh! It is so wonderful – it is – it is like death!” cried Amethyst. She did not in the least know what she meant, and in a moment the strange rapture passed, the colour came back in natural blushes, her eyes fell, and she rose from her seat.

“Some one will come. Let us go back. Let us find mother.”

Lucian laughed a little curious laugh, and as the music ceased, and footsteps sounded, he offered her his arm formally, and led her back into the lighted ball-room; where, at the entrance to the conservatory, her partner claimed her, and he began to remember that there was a young lady somewhere to whom he had been introduced.

A boyish shyness seized on him, he turned his back on Amethyst, and went off hastily to the other end of the room. And she, away from him, suddenly found out that she was utterly, wonderfully happy, and laughed and danced with joyous glee. She did not want to speak to him or to come near him again just yet, she only wanted to feel happy, in the whirl of the music and the dancing, and the sparkle of the lights. While he stood in a corner, and thought how lovely she looked.

There were other people in the carriage with Amethyst and her mother as they drove home; but as soon as they arrived there, and the “Good-nights” had passed, she pursued Lady Haredale to the cosy dressing-room, where she sat up late sometimes with a novel, or dawdled over one in the morning, when disinclined to come down-stairs. She had taken off her evening dress, and was sitting by the fire in a pretty blue dressing-gown, which gave her an unusually youthful look, when Amethyst, still in her white ball dress, came in and stood by her side.

“Well, little girl, what is it?”

“Oh, mamma,” said Amethyst, “mamma; I thought I ought to come.” She stammered a little, then lifted up her stately head, and said simply, “Lucian Leigh has asked me to marry him.”

“Already?” exclaimed Lady Haredale. “Why I shall never make a match-making mother. I saw that he was *épris*, but I never thought of its happening at once!”

“I – I am afraid it seems quick – but, mother – I hope you won’t be angry, nor my father – but I said yes.”

“You did? and suppose my lord says no?”

“Oh, mamma, he will not?”

“Suppose he does?”

“I should wait till he consented, I couldn’t change. But indeed, mamma, he has *quite* enough money.”

“The little mercenary thing! She has thought of that!”

“No – no – but I thought there could be nothing else, he is so good.”

“Now look here, Amethyst,” said Lady Haredale, standing up, and laying her hand on the girl’s shoulder, “this is your first fancy?”

“Mother!”

“Well, yes, I supposed so. Now listen, and no one shall say I don’t tell you all the truth. You are a beauty. That is a very different thing from being a pretty girl. You would have – I could ensure your having – a great success, and you might make a very great marriage. I don’t think many mothers would let you marry in the country at eighteen. But, on the other hand, we’re as poor as rats, as you know; if you marry young Leigh you are provided for, and if you think you love him – I believe she *is* in love with him – all my children are susceptible! No, I won’t talk you out of it.”

“Talking could not make any difference,” said Amethyst; then suddenly – “Oh, mamma, I don’t want to be wilful, I will try to be good, but please – please don’t say I must not!”

There was a passion in her tone, which Lady Haredale felt.

“No,” she said. “You *shall* have him! How like you are to poor pretty Blanche; you shan’t be talked out of your lover as she was. I’ll not have it on my conscience. But does the child think she knows her own mind?”

Amethyst felt indescribably jarred and hurt by her mother’s manner. Her cheeks burnt and her eyes were bright, as she answered with equal straightforwardness, and with unexpected passion —

“I should have liked to be a beauty, and have a success; I know I should like it. But that’s all nothing, compared – compared to *him*,” as the tears came in floods, and she hid her face.

“Ah!” said Lady Haredale. – “Poor little girl, it’s a shame to tease her! You are a good child, my pretty Amethyst, and you shall stay good, if you can. Come, kiss me and forgive me, and you shall have your way.” Amethyst threw herself into her mother’s arms, and, in clinging kisses, soon forgot her vexation. “Mother was right to make sure;” and she only felt that she had the kindest and tenderest mother ever known, and the most sympathetic. For Lady Haredale, with a sudden change of tone, began to question her, and listened to the little idyll with as fresh and eager an interest as if she had been Amethyst’s sister or school friend.

“My darling, it’s lovely. It’s the sweetest thing I ever knew, and I won’t let anything interfere with it.”

Chapter Eight

The Earthly Paradise

Lucian Leigh's side of the story did not meet with so favourable a reception. Like Lady Haredale, Mrs Leigh had not taken warning in time, and, while she was thinking of cautioning her son against the penniless beauty, he stood before her with the tale of his successful wooing, quite unprepared for the displeasure with which she received it.

He was entirely independent of her, and she had no power to prevent him from marrying whom he would; and when she comprehended that the offer had been made and accepted, her consternation was great.

"Lucian! In three weeks! One of those Haredales! Nothing could have grieved me more."

"I don't think you can mean that, mother," said Lucian.

"You don't know what you are doing."

Lucian said nothing. The fewness of his words always made it difficult to argue with him. He made no protestations of passionate love, but he did not yield an inch, and only said at last —

"But I'm booked now, mother. I *have* proposed to her."

"Will you not at least give in to a delay? Have you no regard to my wishes?"

"Yes," said Lucian, "I wish you liked it. But I think I ought to settle it for myself. Anyway I *have* settled it."

"And have you no misgivings?"

"No," said Lucian, with a light in his handsome face never seen there before.

Mrs Leigh felt as if she might as well argue with a statue. She went to bed in distress and uncertainty, and, early the next morning sent over a message to the Rectory, begging Mr Riddell to come and see her at once. He was an old friend, and his office made her feel it right to consult him besides; and she was a woman who liked sympathy, and always talked freely of her troubles and anxieties.

He came before breakfast was over at Ashfield, and Mrs Leigh, rising, with an eager squeeze of his hand, dismissed her little girls and their governess, and said tearfully —

"My dear Rector, you know everything I would say. I shall leave you with this foolish boy to persuade him, if possible —"

"I can go, mother, if you want to tell the Rector all your objections," said Lucian. "Anyway I don't see why you should go away. I *have* proposed to Miss Haredale, and she has accepted me. The thing is done."

Lucian turned scarlet as he spoke, and embarrassment gave a certain coldness to his tone. Mr Riddell recognised that he would be hard to move.

"My dear boy," he said, as Mrs Leigh, in spite of her son's words, left them alone together, "I think I am sorry that you have been so hasty. Three weeks is a very short time."

"It's quite long enough," said Lucian.

"Yes, she is a beautiful girl, Lucian, and as guileless — as — as Psyche herself; and brought up by a good woman. But she is only eighteen, and no man can say what she will grow up to. There will be a very great deal of her, Lucian. She is a great prize. She is rarely beautiful, and she has brains, and is highly strung. She will expect a great deal of life. She does not know at all, yet, what she will need. She has all her growing and her living to do in the future."

"So have I," said Lucian. "But one knows very well what one will come to."

"Yes, my dear Lucian, that is the very thing. But no one can know what Amethyst Haredale will come to. It's a very serious thing to marry a girl who comes of so doubtful a stock. And, my dear boy, I am certain that her mother is not a good woman."

“Of course,” said Lucian, “I know all about her people. I shall take her right away from them. She has never been with Lady Haredale.”

“Your mind is quite made up?”

“Of course,” said Lucian. “It’s quite easy for me to marry early, and I don’t see why I should not. My mother will get used to it.”

Lucian still uttered no expressions of enthusiastic love. He hardly attempted to defend Amethyst. His fair, beautifully formed face was quite still and impassive. He had made up his mind and so had Amethyst, and, with her by his side, he meant to begin at once to lead the life to which he believed himself called; to live on his estate, look after his tenants, keep up his shooting, attend to public business, and set a good example in his own neighbourhood. As he said himself, he knew exactly what he was going to grow to, and he never doubted that his wife would grow in the same direction as himself.

He was a thoroughly good fellow; but Mr Riddell wondered whether he was quite the mate for the lovely child, in whose face a thousand possibilities were written, and whose nature was all in bud. The Rector was, however, a man who could recognise the inevitable. He saw that the engagement must be, and could only hope that the quick-springing love between the pair was warm enough to fuse these two natures into one. At least, they were still in a soft and malleable stage of existence. He set himself, therefore, not to talk over the young man, but to endeavour to reconcile Mrs Leigh to her son’s choice; and, what was perhaps equally hard, to the fact of his early marriage, and separation from her family circle.

Lucian set off for Cleverley Hall, looking and feeling much as if he had been about to walk up to a cannon’s mouth. He was an odd mixture of self-confidence and unreadiness, and, though he felt perfectly sure that he was a right choice for Amethyst, he had no words in which to convey as much to her father.

All the trouble, however, was saved him, for he was shown into the morning-room to Lady Haredale.

“Ah, Mr Leigh,” she said, “what am I to say to you? What have you been doing with my little girl? I don’t think I ought to consent till she has seen a little of the world. I meant her to have such a success in London.”

“But that wouldn’t be much good after we were engaged,” said Lucian. “And I don’t think she would like it.”

“Don’t you?” said Lady Haredale, with a thought in her mind not very unlike her Rector’s, “Ah, you think she is a little nun. Well now, I am going to be quite frank with you. You know we are as poor as rats!”

“I – I – I have understood that – that Lord Haredale was – not wealthy,” stammered Lucian, losing his self-possession entirely.

“As rats – as church mice! Of course *now* I have no reserves with you. We can’t afford to take her out as we should like. Her grandfather’s will gives her 3,000 pounds on her wedding-day. We can’t give her a farthing more!”

“I know that – I don’t care. I can settle – ”

“Ah yes; you will tell Lord Haredale about that. Because we are going to say yes. We think we ought to have our girl settled. And, my dear Mr Leigh – my dear Lucian, I want her to be happy. Oh, yes, you know about her poor sister. – That came of ambition – and I mean my Amethyst to have her way.”

“I shall take care of her. I’ll make her happy – ” said Lucian, touched, and with fervour.

As he spoke, Lord Haredale came in, shook hands with him, heard his carefully prepared speech as to his money matters, and answered it. “Yes, my lady thinks we had better let her get settled at once. It will please her aunt, who brought her up. She is a good little thing, and I’m glad she should do well for herself.”

“Well then,” said Lady Haredale, “we don’t like all these formalities, do we? You will much prefer coming to Amethyst. But your mother? I suppose she doesn’t like it?”

“She does think we are rather young,” said Lucian meekly.

“I shall talk to her. Now wait here, and I will find the child.”

Lady Haredale went off to the school-room, where Amethyst was restlessly trying to look as if nothing was happening, and the younger girls, well aware of a crisis, were secretly watching her.

“Well!” said Lady Haredale. “Now you can go and enjoy yourself. I quite mean to enjoy it all myself. Little girls, Amethyst has set you an excellent example. She has fallen in love, quite in an eligible direction, without any delay, in the most irreproachable manner. Mind you all go and do likewise!”

“Oh, *I* knew all about it,” said Tory. “But he’s much too well off and too eligible to be so handsome. It isn’t fair!”

“It’s an awful joke!” said Kattern.

Una stood silent for a moment, then flung herself on Amethyst’s neck.

“Oh, how lucky you are!” she whispered, kissing her sister with hot quivering lips.

“So I am,” whispered Amethyst in reply.

She was blushing and confused; but there was a dreamy blissful air about her, as if she hardly heard these characteristic comments on her choice. She freed herself gently from Una, and went up to her mother, who, laughing, but with something of real tenderness, kissed her, and took her away. Tory gave a skip.

“What a jolly lark,” she said.

“It’s no such thing,” cried Una with passionate vehemence, as she rushed out of the room. “It’s losing the only thing that made life tolerable, and I’d like to go and hang myself at once.”

“I’ll tell you what it is, Kat,” said Tory. “Una’s too great a fool for anything, and some day I shall tell Amethyst all about Tony.”

“Una will half kill you if you do,” said Tory. “Never mind about that now. Let’s go into the garden, then we can peep in at the windows and see Amethyst and her young man!”

There ensued a time which seemed to Amethyst afterwards like a piece out of an age of gold, each day more full than the one before it of absorbing, intoxicating bliss. There was the day when Lucian brought the ring, set with her namesake jewel, and put it on the pink girlish finger that had never worn a ring before, then spread out her soft delicate hand on his brown palm, and looked at it proudly, saying, “That shall stay there always. That means you belong to me.” And the two hands closed tight upon each other, as if they never would unclasp again.

The first Sunday, too, when they went to church together, and gave thanks from the bottom of their young honest hearts for their great happiness, and when the hymn of the Heavenly City rang in Amethyst’s ears with vague and mystic rapture. Heaven was near and earth was good, and she did not quite know the one from the other. All was joy.

As they came out, Lucian, with his shy, boyish smile, showed her a line in his hymn-book with a deep under-score.

“Thine ageless walls are bonded
With *amethysts unpriced*...”

“Oh, Lucian,” she said, half shocked, “but you shouldn’t think about me in church!”

“Yes, I should,” said Lucian. “I shall think about you everywhere. Besides, we shall go to church together all our lives, you know, at Toppings. Then we’ll remember to-day.”

“As if we could ever forget it!” said Amethyst dreamily, while her heart beat, and her eyes shone.

“I never shall, as long as I live,” said Lucian. “Look there, look at those long-tailed tits swinging in the hedge. Do you know they grow those long tails quite smooth and straight in a little round nest? How do they manage it?”

Lucian made his profession of life-long remembrance, and called her attention to the tits, much in the same tone of voice. He was not an emotional person, and his talk was mostly of what passed before his observant eyes.

But fate did not intend that either of them should forget that summer Sunday when “all in the blue unclouded weather” they looked forward to the life that they were beginning together, in a world that seemed to them both very good, with the Heavenly City in a rainbow-tinted mist, far – far ahead of them.

Chapter Nine

Tony

The wedding was fixed for the middle of July, and, in the middle of June, Lucian went to Toppings to arrange for having it prepared for the reception of his bride. His long minority had left him with plenty of ready money; but neither he nor Amethyst had grown-up sufficiently to have much desire for house-decoration of an aesthetic kind. They were much more full of the long foreign tour, which was to follow their marriage, than of the details of their future house-keeping. He was also obliged to pay a visit to some elderly relations in his own county, so that he was absent from Cleverley for nearly a fortnight.

Amethyst meanwhile was free to give her mind to her wedding garments, which delighted Lady Haredale even more than the bride herself. Money or credit had been found for the trousseau, and Amethyst was too inexperienced to know that it was both very costly, and rather inadequate.

A visit, in the course of the wedding tour, was to be paid to Miss Haredale at Lausanne, where she was spending the summer, and Amethyst had few anticipations more delightful than that of showing her Lucian to “auntie,” whose congratulations had been full of incredulous pleasure.

In the meantime, Lady Haredale had been as sympathetic as a girl, promoting the love-idyll in every possible way, and devising the loveliest and most original costumes for her daughter. Amethyst set her own girlish fancy on an “amethyst” velvet, which she considered suitable to a young married lady, and felt would be becoming to herself; but she cared most to have her riding habit exactly what Lucian thought correct, and to choose hats of the shapes and colours which he admired.

She went to London with Lady Haredale for a few days during his absence, to complete these arrangements, and there, in the brief intervals when her mind was not taken up with her lover’s letters, or with the engrossing business of the trousseau, she fancied that Lady Haredale was less cheery and light-hearted than usual. Her father, who was very little at Cleverley, met them in London, and disappointed her by his want of interest in her prospects, and by the captious, irritable annoyance with which he turned off any mention of the wedding. She returned to Cleverley with her mother, while Lucian was still absent, and found there Major Fowler, who had, he said, “been backwards and forwards” during Lady Haredale’s absence. Amethyst’s first view of the great “Tony” had been that he was a middle-aged gentleman, an uninteresting but worthy family friend.

Therefore it appeared to her quite natural that the girls should be “very fond of him,” as Tony, with a wicked twinkle in her eye, declared herself to be. Amethyst herself behaved to him graciously, as a person that she expected to know and like, but rather respectfully, as belonging to her elders.

She thought so little about him, that it was not until Lucian expressed a dislike to him, that she realised that there was something about him that she did not like herself. She was not shy; but he had a way sometimes of staring at her that made her uncomfortable, and, almost unconsciously, she held him at a distance and did not fall into the free intercourse with him practised by her sisters. Her mother called him “poor Tony,” and had explained him in the following manner some time before.

“You see, my dear, the poor fellow has been very unlucky. Of course I don’t enter into the questions between him and Mrs Fowler; she wasn’t a pleasant woman, and she is dead now. I’m sure he had his excuses. Besides, that is all over and done with, and I hate picking holes in people, one should take them as one finds them. This is his refuge; he is very domestic. Men are quite lost without a woman to turn to.”

“I suppose he is a very old friend,” said Amethyst, quite simply.

“Oh yes, darling; six or seven years I’ve known him. He was at Nice once with us, and he used to run down to Twickenham. But you know, as my lord is so much away, I always make a point of

having the children about. That is why they have been so much in the drawing-room, and lost their schooling, poor dears!”

Amethyst blushed with a confused sense of misgiving, as her mother fixed her sweet, shallow eyes upon her. The apologetic tone seemed out of place.

Her time had been, however, too much taken up by Lucian for Major Fowler to come much in her way, though she was glad when now, on their return from London, after an hour’s chat with Lady Haredale, he went off by the train, without any definite promise of an immediate return.

Lady Haredale drew a long sigh as she watched him go.

“Things come to an end!” she said sentimentally. “Who would have thought it of poor Tony?”

“Thought what, mother?” said Amethyst.

“Ah, that’s a secret! Well, it’s all for the best. Nothing can go on for ever. But I don’t know. — Well! I never look forward. There’s a way out of everything. I never knew a bother, that I didn’t see round the corner of it soon!”

Lady Haredale laughed, and Amethyst looked at her, admiring her cheery sweetness; but presently the mother’s brows drew together, and she bit her lip sharply, then smiled suddenly, and, with the confidential air, which yet bestowed no confidence, said, —

“Men never believe that one has any tact at all!” and walked away.

Amethyst was puzzled; sometimes she felt as if, in addition to all other blessings, her marriage would be a refuge from a home that might have many perplexities. Her mother was occasionally mysterious. Tory threw out hints, which Amethyst did not choose to follow up. Una was ill and miserable, giving way to unexplained fits of crying, and angry when Amethyst tried to laugh her out of them.

The time of Lucian’s absence seemed endless, and, on the afternoon of his return, Amethyst’s spirits rose to rapturous pitch.

It was a lovely summer day, tea was laid out on the terrace. Over the grave, old-fashioned garden was a blaze of joyous sunlight, giving it a cheerfulness that it sometimes lacked. For the high, broad cypress hedges in front of the house were continued behind it, and enclosed the garden in a square of sombre green. These living walls were as firm and regular as if they had been built of brick.

Here and there recesses were cut in them, in which benches were placed, and at intervals, and at the corners, the cypresses grew to a great height, and were cut into all sorts of fantastic shapes — pyramids, peacocks, and lyres, the pride of the old gardener, who regarded himself as their owner in a much more real sense than either tenants or landlord.

They were certainly very striking and uncommon, and formed an effective setting to the elaborate pattern of bright flower-beds into which the turf between them was cut up. Here and there, against the dark hedges, and along the terrace, were placed really graceful statues, and in the centre was a fountain of marble Tritons and dolphins, very suitable to the formal stateliness of the whole scene. Amethyst, in her prettiest dress and hat, her beauty heightened by joyous expectation, was flitting about among the flowers, picking one here and there, and chattering to Tory and Kattern. She was longing for Lucian, but in the security of her young unbroken peace it was longing, unmixed with doubt or fear. She was happy because he was coming, not fearful that he might not come.

Una was sitting on the terrace steps. Like her little sisters she wore a bright red frock striped with white, and a fantastically-shaped hat with a red bow in it. The costume, which was becoming to the children, had an odd bizarre effect on the tall thin girl, with her masses of hair, and her melancholy eyes. Lady Haredale sat just above her, the tea-table by her side, and a French novel on her lap. She looked the picture of lazy comfort, and a very pretty picture too, with her uncovered head, as fearless as her girls of air and light, openly reading a book which most mothers, if they studied it at all, would have blushed to let their daughters see in their hands.

Presently a telegram was brought to her, and Amethyst came running up.

“Not from Lucian, mamma?”

“Oh no, my dear child. I should like to weep a little over this bit of news. Dear old Tony has been so *convenient*, and I like to have a man about the house; but, as he says, it wouldn’t be right to let such a chance slip. So he’s going to marry this heiress. Ah, well, it’s a great sacrifice in some ways. – What’s that?”

A sudden piercing shriek interrupted the sweet melancholy flow of Lady Haredale’s tones. Una sprang up from the steps, threw up her arms, made a movement as if to rush away, but either fell, or flung herself down headlong, across a bed of scarlet geraniums. Tory, who had come running up to hear the news, with a watering-pot in her hand, deliberately turned, and emptied its contents on Una’s head, with the result of causing her to start up, choking with sobs, half of rage, half of misery.

“Don’t be such a fool, Una,” said Tory, sharply. “You’ve known it was coming, you’ve always known it was no use.”

Una rushed away into the house, her sobs and half-choked screams echoing as she went.

“What does it mean?” said Amethyst, appalled. “It means,” said Tory, “that Tony was always fond of kissing us and spooning us, when he was hanging about my lady. But Una has been over head and ears in love with him ever since I can remember, and he liked it and called her his little wife, and she’d sit all day in the window watching for him, or hide in the passage waiting for a kiss.”

“Oh, my dear child,” said Lady Haredale, “of course Tony was only in play.”

“Yes, but Una wasn’t. And lately he has been trying to get her out of it. That’s why she has been so miserable; only she didn’t want Amethyst to know.”

“It’s quite absurd,” said Lady Haredale, “those things should never go too far. It’s quite Una’s fault. I shall have to bring her out, when you are married, Amethyst, to put it out of her head. As if Tony cared for a chit like her!”

Victoria made an indescribable grimace, while Amethyst was speechless. Tory’s cynical plain-speaking, and her mother’s light response, turned her quite cold with horror.

“Mother, you will never let that man come here again?” she exclaimed, at length. “If he could behave so – ”

“Oh, my dear child,” said Lady Haredale, “it was only play. – Poor little Una will soon forget it again. It’s just a little sentiment, that’s all.”

Amethyst turned with a start, as Lucian, for once taking her by surprise, came out of the house all eager and joyous.

“Oh, dear Lucian,” said Lady Haredale, “we are quite upset! Such a sudden piece of news.”

“There is something the matter!” said Lucian, with an anxious look at Amethyst, whose face was still scared and startled, even in the midst of his greeting.

“Oh no!” said Lady Haredale. “But our dear old friend Major Fowler is going to be married. The girls are all in tears, he is *such* a loss, we can’t imagine ourselves without him. I think we’ve all had a share in him, we don’t like to give him up to an heiress. I don’t know what we shall do.”

Amethyst made no contradiction, but she looked at her mother with tragical eyes, hardly controlling tears of she knew not what strange distress.

“What does it mean?” said Lucian, as Lady Haredale turned away. “I don’t understand.”

“Don’t ask,” said Amethyst. “Oh, Lucian, it’s like heaven to see you, and know that I belong to you, – but – but – ”

“You don’t belong to any one else; keep yourself quite separate. You’re mine, mine only,” said Lucian in the short, masterful tone peculiar to him.

“I hate that fellow,” he continued, as he drew her away into the cypress walk; “he’s a bad sort.”

“But now he is going to be married, we shall not see anything more of him,” said Amethyst.

“Have nothing to do with him. You haven’t seen very much of him, have you?”

“Why, I have *seen* a good deal of him. He has been here so much; but – Lucian, I don’t think I notice any one now-a-days. I’m always thinking of you.”

Lucian looked down at her with eyes which, light in colour and steadfast in expression, had a peculiar unfaltering clearness, pure as crystal, but a little hard. He was rarely tender in word or look, he showed his love for Amethyst by taking possession of her.

“No one else has any right to you,” he said firmly; and, as he took her in his arms, she forgot everything that troubled her, in his kiss.

Chapter Ten

Eden's Gate

When Lucian left her, Amethyst stood leaning over the stile, which, at the end of the long cypress walk, led through a little wood into the fields. She watched his brisk active movements, his tall slight figure, with a proud sense of possession. In the morning he would come back again, through the shade and sunlight of the woodland path, and if, as might be, she were watching for him, would wave a greeting where now he waved a farewell. She turned as he passed out of sight, and started to see her graceful, charming mother coming down the long walk towards her.

"My darling child," said Lady Haredale, with a little anxious frown on her sweet face, "I made the best of it just now; but I'm in mortal trouble. Will you help me?"

"Oh, mother dear, what is it?" said Amethyst, as Lady Haredale put her arm round her waist, and walked on by her side.

"Well, dear, the truth is that I owe some money. When people are in such a dreadful state of *hard-upishness* as your poor papa and I, one can do nothing like other people. You see how careful I am about my clothes, I'm not a bit extravagant; but just a little game of cards is a most innocent diversion – when one can afford it. I know it's just the one pleasure I can't resist – my poor old daddy couldn't either – which was why your dear father only got about three farthings with me – a thing Charles has never forgiven."

"Oh, mother," said Amethyst, breathlessly, "then don't buy the velvet dress. And I would just have a plain white to be married in."

"Oh, darling, that's nothing to do with it. But I'm going to confide in my girl, and she'll keep my secret, won't she?"

"Oh, yes – yes!"

"Well, I lost some money to Lady Saint George, and the awkward thing is, that she is a distant cousin of Mrs Leigh's; as rich as Croesus the Saint Georges are really. But she hates me – always did – and lately she has made friends with Charles. I wouldn't know Charles, I think a line should be drawn, but she chose to take him up, and actually 'confided' to him my little delay. That was mean, and I hate meanness. Well, Charles and his father had one of their pleasant interviews; Charles wanted money as usual, and when my lord couldn't give it him, and complained of his constant drains upon him, he had the audacity to say that he was not the only culprit!"

"Oh, mother, can't you pay it?"

"I must, my dear child; you see poor, good old Tony has managed hundreds of little affairs for me; but now it will be different, as he has told me."

"Did *he* lend you money?"

"My dear, he was good-nature itself. Besides, one can't go oneself and sell one's poor little things. One would be cheated, and it is so much nicer, isn't it, to leave those matters to a man to manage?"

"Won't you – ask father?"

"My dear child, no! He can't give me any money. It is you, my darling, who must help your poor mother. Will you give up your amethysts at least for a time? They are really of value."

"I would give up everything on earth," said Amethyst.

"Well then, you will make it all quite easy. I am writing a note to Tony, and you shall just direct it for me, and take it down to the post."

"Why should I direct it?"

"Why, he is staying at Loseby. Miss Verrequers, his heiress, is a connection of the Riddells, you know, our Riddells' cousins. They are there together. I don't want to appear in the matter at all,

but you might be writing to him about your wedding presents. I must be most careful not to make any trouble for him, poor fellow! Miss Verrequers wouldn't understand our friendship." Amethyst felt an instinctive shrinking from directing the letter, though she could hardly tell why. She was confused and puzzled. The whole story was so out of her experience, her mother fascinated her so much, that she could not judge the case on its own merits.

"We are going to. Loseby on Thursday," she said, "to a tennis party."

"Yes, I know, that will be the opportunity for giving him the amethysts. Come, dearest, and let me give you the note. And, Amethyst, Lucian, of course, mustn't guess at this little *contretemps*. You promise?"

Amethyst shrank again. She could not have told Lucian of her mother's – what? – shame seemed too strong a word – discredit? Yet to promise secrecy towards him went against her, but at her mother's desire, it never struck her that it was wrong.

"Yes, mamma," she said confusedly, and followed Lady Haredale into the house, directed the envelope in the modern, upright, school-girl hand, which certainly bore no resemblance to Lady Haredale's sloping penmanship, and prepared to take it to the post-office. As she came down-stairs she saw Tory standing in the hall, her legs apart and her hands behind her back.

"Amethyst," she said, "Kat and I mean you to know. It's quite true what I said just now. Una's gone nearly off her head over Tony getting married. She's a perfect fool about him. But it's his fault, he's an awful spoon is Tony. So is she; you'd better go and talk to her."

"But – she's a child," said Amethyst; so much taken aback, that she forgot that the precocious Tory was more of a child still.

"Oh – little girls are amusing. He thought it didn't matter. Una ought to have known it was nonsense."

"But mother said it was nonsense, just now – of Una's."

"Very likely. That's what she would think."

Amethyst turned and fled. She felt as if she could neither speak nor look. A horror seized her of "kind good Tony," and she ran across the park, in haste to get the note addressed to him out of her hand.

As she was about to put it into the box, Sylvester Riddell came up with a handful of letters.

"Good afternoon, Miss Haredale," he said, "I hope this lovely weather will last for my cousin's party at Loseby."

The sense of unaccustomed secrecy made Amethyst give a guilty start; she dropped the letter, Sylvester picked it up, and the address in the clear-marked writing caught his eye. He noticed it, of course, by no word or look, but her crimson blush startled him.

Why should she write to a man whom, in common with Lucian Leigh, he detested; and why, if she did so, should she look so frightened and ashamed?

She dropped the letter into the box, and with a murmured excuse of being in a hurry, went back with winged footsteps, but a heavy heart.

She took herself to task for her folly in being so much startled and upset, but the shadow of half-understood evil is very frightful to a young soul; and she turned, with almost a sense of relief, from her mother's revelations, to what she believed to be more within her comprehension, Una's "silliness" about Major Fowler.

She had, of course, seen many girls who were "silly," and meaning to scold and coax Una out of such folly, went straight up to her room in search of her, opening the door without waiting for an answer to her knock.

The girl was crouched up in a chair all in a heap, and glared at Amethyst under her hair, as if she would have liked to spring at her.

"What is the matter, Una?" said Amethyst. "Won't you tell me all about it? Why are you so miserable, you poor little dear?"

“I mean to tell you. I hate to see you think the world is all sugar, when I know it is so wicked. I’ll teach you knowledge of the world.”

“Well?” said Amethyst composedly, and sitting down on the side of the bed. She was too much of a modern school-girl to be easily impressed by heroics.

“My lady made a great deal of him,” began Una abruptly, “because he lent her money. After he’d told *her* all about Mrs Fowler’s ill-temper he used to catch *me* in the passage and kiss me, and say he wished *I* was his little wife. He took me out long days, and people said I was so little it didn’t matter. And I used to put little notes in his great-coat pocket, and he’d stick his in little corners for me. And when he sat up smoking, I’d slip out when I’d been sent to bed, and run down and have such good times. He told *me* a great deal more of his sorrows than he ever told my lady! And he’d plan how we’d be married when I was seventeen, and go in a yacht to a lovely island in the south. I was happy then; I didn’t care about being married. It was just enough to love him, love him, love him! And *now*, he’s been cooling off ever since we came here, and I’ve just been dying for him. And it’s over, it’s over! I won’t live! I won’t exist without him! I’d like to kill him. Last time he was here, he laughed and made jokes. It wasn’t a joke once. He was just a fool about me then. He has sucked out my life like a vampire!”

Amethyst clenched her fingers together.

“I wish *I* could punish him!” she said. “He is a wicked man – a villain.”

“Oh no, no, no!” screamed Una. “He can’t help it. He’s an angel, and I’d die for him this minute!” and she flung herself down on her bed, sobbing pitifully.

It came slowly over Amethyst how dreadful a story Una had been telling her, how unfortunate a fate had fallen on the poor child. Una might be naughty; but Amethyst saw dimly that no amount of “naughtiness” could bear any relation to the great injury that had been done to her by the thoughtless mother, who had never taken care of her, and by the selfish man who, for his own pleasure, had excited her childish passion.

An instinct of pity greater than she could understand came over her; she could not speak a word of blame, but knelt down, and laid her face close to Una’s, herself crying bitterly. Una nestled up to her, and sobbed more quietly, and at length Amethyst looked up.

“Now,” she said, “however bad it is, we have got to leave off crying. You must go to bed, Una, and I shall see about some supper for you; *I’ll* take care of you, now I know, and he shall never have anything more to do with you.”

A look, which Amethyst did not follow, came into Una’s eyes; but she gave a long sigh, as of relief to her feelings, submitted to Amethyst’s care, and finally settled herself down to sleep, not perhaps more miserable than usual. Amethyst went away from her, and stood by the passage window in the soft evening light, looking over the grave old garden, the peaceful spot which she had rejoiced in calling “home.”

Affection, emotion, the ignorance of innocent girlhood as to the proportion of one evil to another, confused her; but her brain was clear and strong, and, through all the glamour of her mother’s charm, she saw the face of evil, and never, try as she would, could shut her eyes to it again.

Chapter Eleven

As it Looked

“Oh yes, I always knew that she was Lucian’s property. They were marked out for each other from the first. But no man can keep such loveliness all to himself; it is the inheritance of humanity, like the great beauties of nature. I am convinced that Amethyst Haredale is the embodiment of the ideal of our generation. Rossetti – Burne Jones – they aim at her, they cannot reach her. It does not matter whom she belongs to, she is – ”

“It strikes me, Sylvester, that you are talking nonsense.”

“No, Aunt Meg, not to the initiated,” said Sylvester, pulling the collie’s ears, and looking dreamily out at the sunny Rectory garden, one day shortly after his return home at midsummer. “There is Beauty, you know, and sometimes it takes shape. Dante had his Beatrice; Faust, or Goethe himself, sought, but never found – ”

“I have always understood that Goethe was interested in several young women,” interrupted Miss Riddell.

“Yes, but you see the ideal always escaped him; he never quite believed in it. But when one has once seen it, you know, life must be the richer and the fairer. – Eh, dad? Have you been listening?” as he suddenly met his father’s eyes fixed on him over the top of the county paper.

“Yes, my dear boy, I have. But young men’s ideals have been in the habit of taking shape ever since Adam woke up and saw Eve.”

“Oh, a man’s own ideal,” said Sylvester impatiently, and colouring a little; “but I meant the ideal of the race. That is impersonal, and exists for all.”

“H’m!” said the Rector. “The two ideals had a way in my day of seeming identical. I strongly suspect they ran together, as far back as Plato, and will be found, in the same person, however many philosophies may succeed his.”

“And I don’t think,” said Miss Riddell, “that that cheerful, healthy-looking girl is at all like those melancholy pictures that I see in the Grosvenor Gallery.”

“Oh,” said Sylvester, starting up and laughing, “there is no use in talking about the ideal to either of you.”

Perhaps he had been impelled to do so, by the consciousness that his feelings concerning the engagement were watched.

He had known, as he said, from the first, that Amethyst was Lucian’s property; but she had so filled his imagination, that he could not help thinking of her, and fancied he had found a way of doing so, compatible with the turn events had taken. Of course he was not quite in earnest, or rather, he hid the earnestness of which he was conscious, under a veil of fine talking.

He thought of little except of Amethyst and Lucian, but by talking of her he could prove to himself that the thinking was not painful. No, rather it was sweet to compare her to all the fair impersonations of poetry and art.

This peculiar feeling for her was surely quite compatible with his own happiness, when she was Lucian’s wife. Then came the encounter at the post-office, perplexing him extremely; so that he thought of little else, until the day arrived for the garden-party at his cousin’s at Loseby Hall, to which he repaired with his father and aunt, thinking only that he should there see Amethyst. The weather was fine, the gardens beautiful, and half the neighbourhood were gathered on the wide smooth lawn, or scattered about in the paths and shrubberies.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.