

# The Heir of Redclyffe

By

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# Chapter 1

In such pursuits if wisdom lies,  
Who, Laura, can thy taste despise?--GAY

The drawing-room of Hollywell House was one of the favoured apartments, where a peculiar air of home seems to reside, whether seen in the middle of summer, all its large windows open to the garden, or, as when our story commences, its bright fire and stands of fragrant green-house plants contrasted with the wintry fog and leafless trees of November. There were two persons in the room--a young lady, who sat drawing at the round table, and a youth, lying on a couch near the fire, surrounded with books and newspapers, and a pair of crutches near him. Both looked up with a smile of welcome at the entrance of a tall, fine-looking young man, whom each greeted with 'Good morning, Philip.'

'Good morning, Laura. Good morning, Charles; I am glad you are downstairs again! How are you to-day?'

'No way remarkable, thank you,' was the answer, somewhat wearily given by Charles.

'You walked?' said Laura.

'Yes. Where's my uncle? I called at the post-office, and brought a letter for him. It has the Moorworth post-mark,' he added, producing it.

'Where's that?' said Charles.

'The post-town to Redclyffe; Sir Guy Morville's place.'

'That old Sir Guy! What can he have to do with my father?'

'Did you not know,' said Philip, 'that my uncle is to be guardian to the boy--his grandson?'

'Eh? No, I did not.'

'Yes,' said Philip; 'when old Sir Guy made it an especial point that my father should take the guardianship, he only consented on condition that my uncle should be joined with him; so now my uncle is alone in the trust, and I cannot help thinking something must have happened at Redclyffe. It is certainly not Sir Guy's writing.'

'It must wait, unless your curiosity will carry you out in search of papa,' said Charles; 'he is somewhere about, zealously supplying the place of Jenkins.'

'Really, Philip,' said Laura, 'there is no telling how much good you have done him by convincing him of Jenkins' dishonesty. To say nothing of the benefit of being no longer cheated, the pleasure of having to overlook the farming is untold.'

Philip smiled, and came to the table where she was drawing. 'Do you know this place?' said she, looking up in his face.

'Stylehurst itself! What is it taken from?'

'From this pencil sketch of your sister's, which I found in mamma's scrap book.'

'You are making it very like, only the spire is too slender, and that tree--can't you alter the foliage?--it is an ash.'

'Is it? I took it for an elm.'

'And surely those trees in the foreground should be greener, to throw back the middle distance. That is the peak of South Moor exactly, if it looked further off.'

She began the alterations, while Philip stood watching her progress, a shade of melancholy gathering on his face. Suddenly, a voice called 'Laura! Are you there? Open the door, and you will see.'

On Philip's opening it, in came a tall camellia; the laughing face, and light, shining curls of the bearer peeping through the dark green leaves.

'Thank you! Oh, is it you, Philip? Oh, don't take it. I must bring my own camellia to show Charlie.'

'You make the most of that one flower,' said Charles.

'Only see how many buds!' and she placed it by his sofa. Is it not a perfect blossom, so pure a white, and so regular! And I am so proud of having beaten mamma and all the gardeners, for not another will be out this fortnight; and this is to go to the horticultural show. Sam would hardly trust me to bring it in, though it was my nursing, not his.'

'Now, Amy,' said Philip, when the flower had been duly admired, 'you must let me put it into the window, for you. It is too heavy for you.'

'Oh, take care,' cried Amabel, but too late; for, as he took it from her, the solitary flower struck against Charles's little table, and was broken off.

'O Amy, I am very sorry. What a pity! How did it happen?'

'Never mind,' she answered; 'it will last a long time in water.'

'It was very unlucky--I am very sorry--especially because of the horticultural show.'

'Make all your apologies to Sam,' said Amy, 'his feelings will be more hurt than mine. I dare say my poor flower would have caught cold at the show, and never held up its head again.'

Her tone was gay; but Charles, who saw her face in the glass, betrayed her by saying, 'Winking away a tear, O Amy!'

'I never nursed a dear gazelle!' quoted Amy, with a merry laugh; and before any more could be said, there entered a middle-aged gentleman, short and slight, with a fresh, weather-beaten, good-natured face, gray whiskers, quick eyes, and a hasty, undecided air in look and movement. He greeted Philip heartily, and the letter was given to him.

'Ha! Eh? Let us look. Not old Sir Guy's hand. Eh? What can be the matter? What? Dead! This is a sudden thing.'

'Dead! Who? Sir Guy Morville?'

'Yes, quite suddenly--poor old man.' Then stepping to the door, he opened it, and called, 'Mamma; just step here a minute, will you, mamma?'

The summons was obeyed by a tall, handsome lady, and behind her crept, with doubtful steps, as if she knew not how far to venture, a little girl of eleven, her turned-up nose and shrewd face full of curiosity. She darted up to Amabel; who, though she shook her head, and held up her finger, smiled, and took the little girl's hand, listening meanwhile to the announcement, 'Do you hear this, mamma? Here's a shocking thing! Sir Guy Morville dead, quite suddenly.'

'Indeed! Well, poor man, I suppose no one ever repented or suffered more than he. Who writes?'

'His grandson--poor boy! I can hardly make out his letter.' Holding it half a yard from his eyes, so that all could see a few lines of hasty, irregular writing, in a forcible hand, bearing marks of having been penned under great distress and agitation, he read aloud:-

""DEAR MR. EDMONSTONE,--

My dear grandfather died at six this morning. He had an attack of apoplexy yesterday evening, and never spoke again, though for a short time he knew me. We hope he suffered little. Markham will make all arrangements. We propose that the funeral should take place on Tuesday; I hope you will be able to come. I would write to my cousin, Philip Morville, if I knew his address; but I depend on you for saying all that ought to be said. Excuse this illegible letter,--I hardly know what I write.

"Yours, very sincerely,  
"Guy Morville."

'Poor fellow!' said Philip, 'he writes with a great deal of proper feeling.'

'How very sad for him to be left alone there!' said Mrs. Edmonstone.

'Very sad--very,' said her husband. 'I must start off to him at once-- yes, at once. Should you not say so--eh, Philip?'

'Certainly. I think I had better go with you. It would be the correct thing, and I should not like to fail in any token of respect for poor old Sir Guy.'

'Of course--of course,' said Mr. Edmonstone; 'it would be the correct thing. I am sure he was always very civil to us, and you are next heir after this boy.'

Little Charlotte made a sort of jump, lifted her eyebrows, and stared at Amabel.

Philip answered. 'That is not worth a thought; but since he and I are now the only representatives of the two branches of the house of Morville, it shall not be my fault if the enmity is not forgotten.'

'Buried in oblivion would sound more magnanimous,' said Charles; at which Amabel laughed so uncontrollably, that she was forced to hide her head on her little sister's shoulder. Charlotte laughed too, an imprudent proceeding, as it attracted attention. Her father smiled, saying, half-reprovingly--'So you are there, inquisitive pussy-cat?' And at her mother's question,--'Charlotte, what business have you here?' She stole back to her lessons, looking very small, without the satisfaction of hearing her mother's compassionate words--'Poor child!'

'How old is he?' asked Mr. Edmonstone, returning to the former subject.

'He is of the same age as Laura--seventeen and a half,' answered Mrs. Edmonstone. 'Don't you remember my brother saying what a satisfaction it was to see such a noble baby as she was, after such a poor little miserable thing as the one at Redclyffe?'

'He is grown into a fine spirited fellow,' said Philip.

'I suppose we must have him here,' said Mr. Edmonstone. 'Should you not say so--eh, Philip?'

'Certainly; I should think it very good for him. Indeed, his grandfather's death has happened at a most favourable time for him. The poor old man had such a dread of his going wrong that he kept him--'

'I know--as tight as a drum.'

'With strictness that I should think very bad for a boy of his impatient temper. It would have been a very dangerous experiment to send him at once among the temptations of Oxford, after such discipline and solitude as he has been used to.'

'Don't talk of it,' interrupted Mr. Edmonstone, spreading out his hands in a deprecating manner. 'We must do the best we can with him, for I have got him on my hands till he is five-and-twenty--his grandfather has tied him up till then. If we can keep him out of mischief, well and good; if not, it can't be helped.'

'You have him all to yourself,' said Charles.

'Ay, to my sorrow. If your poor father was alive, Philip, I should be free of all care. I've a pretty deal on my hands,' he proceeded, looking more important than troubled. 'All that great Redclyffe estate is no sinecure, to say nothing of the youth himself. If all the world will come to me, I can't help it. I must go and speak to the men, if I am to be off to Redclyffe tomorrow. Will you come, Philip?'

'I must go back soon, thank you,' replied Philip. 'I must see about my leave; only we should first settle when to set off.'

This arranged, Mr. Edmonstone hurried away, and Charles began by saying, 'Isn't there a ghost at Redclyffe?'

'So it is said,' answered his cousin; 'though I don't think it is certain whose it is. There is a room called Sir Hugh's Chamber, over the gateway, but the honour of naming it is undecided between Hugo de Morville, who murdered Thomas a Becket, and his namesake, the first Baronet, who lived in the time of William of Orange, when the quarrel began with our branch of the family. Do you know the history of it, aunt?'

'It was about some property,' said Mrs Edmonstone, 'though I don't know the rights of it. But the Morvilles were always a fiery, violent race, and the enmity once begun between Sir Hugh and his brother, was kept up, generation after generation, in a most unjustifiable way. Even I can remember when the Morvilles of Redclyffe used to be spoken of in our family like a sort of ogres.'

'Not undeservedly, I should think,' said Philip. 'This poor old man, who is just dead, ran a strange career. Stories of his duels and mad freaks are still extant.'

'Poor man! I believe he went all lengths,' said Mrs. Edmonstone.

'What was the true version of that horrible story about his son?' said Philip. 'Did he strike him?'

'Oh, no! it was bad enough without that.'

'How?' asked Laura.

'He was an only child, and lost his mother early. He was very ill brought up, and was as impetuous and violent as Sir Guy himself, though with much kindness and generosity. He was only nineteen when he made a runaway marriage with a girl of sixteen, the sister of a violin player, who was at that time in fashion. His father was very much offended, and there was much dreadfully violent conduct on each side. At last, the young man was driven to seek a reconciliation. He brought his wife to Moorworth, and rode to Redclyffe, to have an interview with his father. Unhappily, Sir Guy was giving a dinner to the hunt, and had been drinking. He not only refused to see him, but I am afraid he used shocking language, and said something about bidding him go back to his fiddling brother-in-law. The son was waiting in the hall, heard everything, threw himself on his horse, and rushed away in the dark. His forehead struck against the branch of a tree, and he was killed on the spot.'

'The poor wife?' asked Amabel, shuddering.

'She died the next day, when this boy was born.'

'Frightful!' said Philip. 'It might well make a reformation in old Sir Guy.'

'I have heard that nothing could be more awful than the stillness that fell on that wretched party, even before they knew what had happened-- before Colonel Harewood, who had been called aside by the servants, could resolve to come and fetch away the father. No wonder Sir Guy was a changed man from that hour.'

'It was then that he sent for my father,' said Philip.

'But what made him think of doing so?'

'You know Colonel Harewood's house at Stylehurst? Many years ago, when the St. Mildred's races used to be so much more in fashion, Sir Guy and Colonel Harewood, and some men of that stamp, took that house amongst them, and used to spend some time there every year, to attend to something about the training of the horses. There were some malpractices of their servants, that did so much harm in the parish, that my brother was obliged to remonstrate. Sir Guy was very angry at first, but behaved better at last than any of the others. I suspect he was struck by my dear brother's bold, uncompromising ways, for he took to him to a certain degree--and my brother could not help being interested in him, there seemed to be so much goodness in his nature. I saw him once, and never did I meet any one who gave me so much the idea of a finished gentleman. When the poor son was about fourteen, he was with a tutor in the neighbourhood, and used to be a good deal at Stylehurst, and, after the unhappy marriage, my brother happened to meet him in London, heard his story, and tried to bring about a reconciliation.'

'Ha!' said Philip; 'did not they come to Stylehurst? I have a dim recollection of somebody very tall, and a lady who sung.'

'Yes; your father asked them to stay there, that he might judge of her, and wrote to Sir Guy that she was a little, gentle, childish thing, capable of being moulded to anything, and representing the mischief of leaving them to such society as that of her brother, who was actually maintaining them. That letter was never answered, but about ten days or a fortnight after this terrible accident, Colonel Harewood wrote to entreat my brother to come to Redclyffe, saying poor Sir Guy had eagerly caught at the mention of his name. Of course he went at once, and he told me that he never, in all his experience as a clergyman, saw any one so completely broken down with grief.'

I found a great many of his letters among my father's papers,' said Philip; 'and it was a very touching one that he wrote to me on my father's death. Those Redclyffe people certainly have great force of character.'

'And was it then he settled his property on my uncle?' said Charles.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Edmonstone. 'My brother did not like his doing so, but he would not be at rest till it was settled. It was in vain to put him in mind of his grandchild, for he would not believe it could live; and, indeed, its life hung on a thread. I remember my brother telling me how he went to Moorworth to see it--for it could not be brought home--in hopes of bringing, back a report that might cheer its grandfather, but how he found it so weak and delicate, that he did not dare to try to make him take interest in it. It was not till the child was two or three years old, that Sir Guy ventured to let himself grow fond of it.'

'Sir Guy was a very striking person,' said Philip; 'I shall not easily forget my visit to Redclyffe four years ago. It was more like a scene in a romance than anything real--the fine old red sandstone house crumbling away in the exposed parts, the arched gateway covered with ivy; the great quadrangle where the sun never shone, and full of echoes; the large hall and black wainscoted rooms, which the candles never would light up. It is a fit place to be haunted.'

'That poor boy alone there!' said Mrs. Edmonstone; 'I am glad you and your uncle are going to him.'

'Tell us about him,' said Laura.

'He was the most incongruous thing there,' said Philip. 'There was a calm, deep melancholy about the old man added to the grand courtesy which showed he had been what old books call a fine gentleman, that made him suit his house as a hermit does his cell, or a knight his castle; but breaking in on this "penseroso" scene, there was Guy--'

'In what way?' asked Laura.

'Always in wild spirits, rushing about, playing antics, provoking the solemn echoes with shouting, whooping, singing, whistling. There was something in that whistle of his that always made me angry.'

'How did this suit old Sir Guy?'

'It was curious to see how Guy could rattle on to him, pour out the whole history of his doings, laughing, rubbing his hands, springing about with animation--all with as little answer as if he had been talking to a statue.'

'Do you mean that Sir Guy did not like it?'

'He did in his own way. There was now and then a glance or a nod, to show that he was attending; but it was such slight encouragement, that any less buoyant spirits must have been checked.'

'Did you like him, on the whole?' asked Laura. 'I hope he has not this tremendous Morville temper? Oh, you don't say so. What a grievous thing.'

'He is a fine fellow,' said Philip; 'but I did not think Sir Guy managed him well. Poor old man, he was quite wrapped up in him, and only thought how to keep him out of harm's way. He would never let him be with other boys, and kept him so fettered by rules, so strictly watched, and so sternly called to account, that I cannot think how any boy could stand it.'

'Yet, you say, he told everything freely to his grandfather,' said Amy.

'Yes,' added her mother, 'I was going to say that, as long as that went on, I should think all safe.'

'As I said before,' resumed Philip, 'he has a great deal of frankness, much of the making of a fine character; but he is a thorough Morville. I remember something that will show you his best and worst sides. You know Redclyffe is a beautiful place, with magnificent cliffs overhanging the sea, and fine woods crowning them. On one of the most inaccessible of these crags there was a hawk's nest, about half-way down, so that looking from the top of the precipice, we could see the old birds fly in and out. Well, what does Master Guy do, but go down this headlong descent after the nest. How he escaped alive no one could guess; and his grandfather could not bear to look at the place afterwards--but climb it he did, and came back with two young hawks, buttoned up inside his jacket.'

'There's a regular brick for you!' cried Charles, delighted.

'His heart was set on training these birds. He turned the library upside down in search of books on falconry, and spent every spare moment on them. At last, a servant left some door open, and they escaped. I shall never forget Guy's passion; I am sure I don't exaggerate when I say he was perfectly beside himself with anger.'

'Poor boy!' said Mrs. Edmonstone.

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