"WITH AN AMETHYST."

SUGGESTED BY A PERSIAN FABLE.

While its the February shows,
By waning sunbeams softly kissed,
And at thy white breast, lady, glows
My amethyst.

The magic hues that lurk beneath
The surface of the purple wine,
Fall on the snowdrift's rippling breath,
And upon thine.

Then as an emblem wear my gift,
As sun to snow, dear, let it be;
So may this radiant mystery lift
Thine heart to me.

Not into the parable, fair child;
'Twas whispered to the air along
The age, in the music wild
Of Persian song.

Of all the months whose jeweled round
The circling year doth diadem,
Each one, the poet fabled, found
Its special gem.

The wealth of shifting hues that lies
In eastern earth's unfathomed heart,
For every season's change supplies
A counterpart.

The red heat of the torrid zone—
The frozen Arctic's iron cold,
In strange symbolic meaning known
These gems unfold.

Read by this light, our birthdays tell
A lesson of his own to each;
And autumn's wane, or summer's spell,
Their moral teach.

To thee, the February days,
That lengthen out to herald spring,
The amethyst's imprisoned rays
For token bring.

Then let spring's diamond light thine hair
And summer's pearl entwine thy wrist;
But on thy snow-white bosom wear
My amethyst.

Laura Desmond's Choice.

BY AGNES M. STEWART.

PART II.

CHAPTER XVI.—[CONTINUED.]

Four o'clock struck, five, six. Now her heart had been full of fear as to the revelations which might await her in London, now of hope; and as the last-named hour struck she heard the footsteps of the servants, and ringing her chamber bell she ordered the housemaid who answered the summons to bring her some chocolate and a cup of tea for Ella, whose voice, assuring her 'she was ever so much better,' filled her heart with joy.

Now, the more Laura thought over the disjointed words, coupled with the name and address on that scrap of a torn note, and together with the nocturnal visits of her maid to her chamber, the more gladly did she lend a willing ear to the newly-born hope; for, granted that there was a solid foundation for it, then she could imagine no lengths too terrible, no crime too great, for an unscrupulous woman to stay the revelation she must be sure would be the inevitable result of Ella's return to the East end of London.

'Darling, I wonder if Dr. Rickards will let you travel to London to-morrow; if so, we will go together,' she said, taking her place by the bedside.

'I should like it much, and we shall take papa by surprise,' you know, replied Ella, all unconscious, in her great fear lest she should fall seriously ill, that Mrs. Ainslie had written to inform the Lesters that she should come to London with their daughter as soon as Ella's health allowed her to undertake the journey.

Dr. Rickards came early in the morning; his visit was a long one, and his conversation with Mrs. Ainslie was of such a nature that he deemed it prudent to advise that lady to take the butler into her confidence, and to request her to require the attendance of a police constable in private clothes, who should be admitted at a late hour of the night, and keep watch and ward, not in Ella's room, but in Mrs. Ainslie's, who on some pretext was to change apartments for that one night with her guest.

Ella had recovered enough to rise, though as weak and languid as if she had recovered from a long illness, and in Martha's presence Laura purposely discussed the advisability of her speedy return to London.

Over and over again the revelation of what she had seen in the little slip of paper hung on Laura's lips; but prudence restrained her, and she resolved not to say one word on the matter till she was safe with her old friends, for if the artist *was* in very truth the son of the woman Martha, then the sooner Ella forgot him the better for herself and all concerned.

And then the shades of a third night of anxiety and dread for poor Laura fell on Riversdale Manor and its surroundings; and urging the larger size of her own chamber, and consequently its being airy, the change of apartments, though strenuously opposed by the young lady, was effected, and Martha was dismissed at eleven o'clock, leaving Ella in her mistress' bed, and the latter in the inner chamber.

A little after midnight the butler ushered into the room a powerful, well-built man, whom Dr. Rickards had sent for from Exeter, and who, passing as a friend of the former, that worthy man, Benson, long in the service of the late Squire, had spent the evening within his own room.

After Martha had ostensibly gone to her own chamber to pass the night, Mrs. Ainslie rose and dressed herself, keeping watch in the inner chamber with an anxious, beating heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

TAKEN RED-HANDED.

One, two, three, and the silence as of death itself reigned around the mansion. It was oppressive to Laura, less so to the genuine specimen of the John Bull type who sat in the adjoining room, shaded by a screen placed just behind a small table by Ella's bedside, on which was a glass of lemonade for her use when she wakened in the night.

Suddenly Tom Jenkins, the detective, bent his body forwards, for his sharp ear had detected a low sound—so low, so slight, that it might have been lost on any but a practical ear. Yes, he was right; and now the anxious watcher in the adjoining apartment is herself aware that the door of the next room is gently opened, and that a stealthy step has passed by Ella's bedside.

One moment, aye, but it seemed like an age in its duration, a rustling as of paper first, then a smothered exclamation of alarm, a cry from the terrified Ella, and, above both, the loud voice of the constable in hand:

'Martha Hazleton, I arrest you on the charge of seeking to poison Miss Lester.'

In a moment Mrs. Ainslie, fully dressed, was by Ella's side, to re-assure her, and to tell her all danger was at an end; and his firm grasp on the perfidious woman's shoulder, Jenkins with his disengaged hand outstretched, was just in time to prevent her from dashing over the glass of lemonade.

'Now don't, my beauty, get into a rage,' said he; 'we must get to know, which the analysts will tell us, what sort of stuff is in that powder that you have come into this here lady's room in the dead of the night to mix with her drink.'

Baffled in her cunning and her wickedness there stood the discomfited Martha for a moment vainly contending with her captor, in whose herculean grasp she was as a baby; then appealing to her mistress, she put on an air of injured innocence, and insisted on being allowed to return to her own room.

'A reasonable request which it is,' said the detective; 'but, my dear, I must see first the height of the window from the garden beneath, which, if it be near the ground, I can by no means allow you to remain there, and so the better way by far will be for me to stay with you till daylight, and then we will go to Exeter together.'

But cool and daring as Martha had shown herself, her firmness had now forsaken her; she shrieked and stormed, and protested her innocence, and then turning on Mrs. Ainslie bid her beware of prosecuting her, adding that it would be a bad day's work should she avow herself her enemy. It needed not this last remark, made as the detective firmly grasped her by the shoulder as he stood at the open door, and uttering a low whistle made his companion, still in the butler's room, understand that his presence was needed, to convince Laura more than ever that she was on the point of the discovery of a plot which had blighted her whole life, yet, even now a touch of pity moved her towards the miserable woman who had been so relentless to herself.

False sentimentality, in which society at large plays its own part; for there in that very room was the young girl whom Martha was prepared to kill without the slightest atom of compunction and who would certainly have met death at her hands but for the suspicions excited in the mind of Laura herself; there was the slip of paper with those disjointed sentences, which pointed to some fearful conspiracy in her regard. And yet she pitied the fiendish woman when she saw the officer make a sign to his comrade, and then hand to him what he significantly termed 'a pair of bracelets,' with which, notwithstanding all her efforts, Martha's wrists were speedily manacled.

Pity! Yes, society pities with all its false sentiment the callous murderer, or the cold-blooded deliberate poisoner, forgetting the poor victim ruthlessly hurried out of life at their behest or mercilessly tortured first. It too often forgets all this in its sympathy for the murderer.

'Pray, madame, do not speak to this woman,' said Jenkins, when Martha's fresh outburst of fury had somewhat cooled down, and she strove to work on Laura's feelings of pity in her behalf. 'Please, ma'am, remember I and my mate are but doing our duty, which it is certain is the right thing; we'll treat this person well if she'll be quiet and sociable like; but I can not allow her to stay here.'

Convinced that the man was advising her for the best, Laura turned away and strove to comfort Ella, who, pale and excited as well as really ill, had crept to the inner chamber, where Mrs Ainslie discovered her on her knees, fervently thanking the Almighty God for His watchful care of herself.

In truth, some time had elapsed after Ella was fully awake before she could clearly understand how it had all happened; and when she heard of the awful charge laid upon Martha, she was still more astonished, for in what way, or how could she have provoked her friend's maid, she argued, so as to lead her to attempt to poison her?

Mrs. Ainslie fancied, though still somewhat dimly, that she could have helped her to solve the reason, but the time had not come as yet.

There was an impediment, however, to Laura's intention of proceeding to London that day. Instead of going thither, she had to appear at the court-house with Ella to bear her company. Nor did that day end the unwelcome duty she had to perform. The case before the magistrate occupied the whole of the following day also, when she was bound over to appear as the prosecutrix, the case being sent for trial.

A strange expression flitted over Martha's face when, before her removal to the cell, bail having been refused, she looked significantly at Mrs. Ainslie, exclaiming.

'If you knew a secret which is in my safe keeping, you would give worlds to be able to extort it from me. I will take it with me to my grave.'

Laura shuddered as she met her angry glance, and listened to her words truly surmising that they bore a hidden reference to her lost child. However, she had a clue in her hand, and trusted ere long to unravel the mystery which had wrecked her life from her youth upwards.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ARTIST.

It is the evening hour, and the *Ave Maria* rings out melodiously from campanella and belfry; no fleecy clouds hover about the vivid blue of the glorious Italian sky, and as a lonely watcher leaned forth from his open casement noting the brilliancy of the stars, which now appear hanging like lamps from the clear azure blue of the firmament, his mind carries him far, far away to other scenes, even from Rome, in which he was a sojourner, to the smoky metropolis of England, and a vision of a beauteous English maiden with eyes of as deep a blue as the sky he dreamily gazed upon, and as brilliant as the stars, and a complexion like the delicate tint of a blush rose, passes before his mental vision.

'Pshaw! She is fickle as the rest of her sex,' he murmured. 'Not a line from her all these three months to cheer me in my toil, and yet I wrote to her, when at the Palazzo Altieri, that I was steadily making way. Poor mother, poor, dear mother, what a mistake she has made,' he continued, looking at a note which had that morning reached him. 'She evidently has taken it into her head that the Lesters wish me back, but do not like to say so.'

Then he arose and paced moodily up and down his studio; his clear olive complexion had become very pale of late, and his eyebrows contracted over his large, dark brown eyes as he reflected on the past.

Signor Buzzell had anticipated the idea of William Lester, and by striking out one of the consonants from his vulgar English cognomen, and adding a vowel at the end of it, had given it a fair sound. He neither wanted friends nor commissions, and, of course, the money had followed rapidly on the latter. A certain air of haughtiness had always marked the features of this early struggler in London life, and there was a somewhat contemptuous curl on his well-formed mouth as he impatiently dashed aside his dark hair from his pale and lofty brow, when he paused suddenly in his walk before a painting which had for some time been carefully covered, and at last in a fit of jealous spleen contemptuously turned it with its face to the wall.

Only that day it had been restored to its former place of honor, for Il Countess Partizi, who honored him with her commissions, had paid a visit to his studio, and smitten with the curiosity of her sex, had deliberately turned the portrait with her own fair hands, and clapping them together, uttered an exclamation of unfeigned delight, with eager inquiries as to whom the portrait represented. Was it the creature of the artist's fancy? or was it really the representation of some beautiful English Signora?

The poor artist replied in the affirmative; 'Ah, Carissima Mia,' thought he, relenting a little as he looked on the sweet face with its arch expression, and its small, regular features, 'is it possible that I am mistaken in my doubts of your constancy?'

And long after the Countess had left his studio he sat at his easel musing before his unfinished painting of the Madonna. He had made great strides in art since he had pursued his studies in Italy. He was now a member of the celebrated academy of St. Luke's, and by this means had become acquainted with the leading painters and sculptors of the day, and Signor Buseli lacked not friends, and warm ones, in the southern clime in which he had for some time past located himself.

'Ah, Carissima Mia,' said he again, now apostrophizing the picture. 'She writes me you are ill, and are coming back to your home, but if you really *are* faithless, and those sweet innocent features are *not* the index of a faithful heart, then I will remain in this beautiful clime and return to England no more.'

And as he thus soliloquized, he went to the open window and looked out on the calm delicious night; the sun had careered through a cloudless sky, and had sunk in the west in a bed of molten gold.

All who had time and money in their hands had left Rome for the country, for the month of October in the fair land of Italy is a most lovely season; but though his purse was now well filled, the artist could not resolve on tearing himself from the capital. He had not grown avaricious; far from it. He felt too great a pleasure in giving to those in need, as he had once been himself, even to become covetous. Still he *was* covetous in a manner of speaking, and had decided on repairing to a watering place near for a short stay of only two weeks, making even for that short space of time pleasure subservient to business, by sketching nearly every day during his holiday. The calm azure bay extended from the most beautiful of shores, its blue waters bearing on its bosom yachts and pleasure boats and fishing skiffs.

The short two weeks he had allotted to himself having passed quickly away, he abstained from lingering near autumn vineyards, or purling brooks, and returned to the shady portiques and noisy streets of the capital; but bethink you what the imperial city yet was to one who had passed his life in East London. He loved the beautiful Champagna, and reveled in the enjoyment of Rome, its walks, its paintings, its galleries and magnificence. But to return—it was all very well to say to himself he would love Ella no longer; he could not tear her image from his mind's eye; it was for *her* he toiled so hard and lived so simply; it was for *her* he gloried in the power he saw that he possessed—and why? Because fame and popularity meant wealth. And wealth, though it will not bring *of itself* happiness, is a powerful agent, and gives us the unspeakable pleasure of making others happy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

'It is more than strange, it is perfectly annoying,' said Laura to her young friend, the fourth morning after the confinement of Martha Hazleton, on the charge of attempting to poison Miss Lester; 'I have written twice to Mr. Ainslie, telling him of this atrocious affair and he neither comes home nor does he write.'

She was right, it *was* more than strange, but Squire Ainslie had reasons of his own for not breaking silence, above all for not showing his face at Riversdale.

The local papers were full of the attempt made on the life of the young friend of Mr. Ainslie, and the arrest and committal for trial of Mrs. Ainslie's maid, and from these it had been copied into the London papers, and the Squire in a quiet lodging in a street at Knightsbridge poured over these accounts, and wondered how it would all end.

For the life of him he dared not return to Riversdale, he must keep quiet in an obscure lodging and watch which way the wind blew.

He felt sure that Laura would take Ella to London, and knew as well as if he had been at Riversdale when it all happened as to how Martha had employed herself in his absence.

How he cursed the day that had brought Ella on that ill-omened journey to Exeter.

Come what would he must reside where he was till he saw the issue of Martha's coming trial; but he was sore in want of money, and eventually conquered his fears, and resolved on running a desperate risk; in fact he determined on the almost certain chance that Laura would take Ella to London as soon as Martha had been committed to prison, pending her trial at the next assizes.

And he put his plan into execution and reached Riversdale the day after Laura had left home.

Toward the butler he assumed an admirable amount of well-stimulated surprise; he had been rambling about the Continent, so he said and knew nothing of all that had occured till he reached his own home.

From the Butler he ascertained that Laura had turned her steps as he supposed she would to the home of Miss Lester.

One day only did he abide at Riversdale, but he took good care to replenish his purse, and in case anything should leak out at Stepney in which his name might be brought up, he was not yet penniless, for he had still the yearly income which the good old Squire had apportioned to him as Gilbert's youngest brother. He retired to rest apparently as usual, but no sleep visited his eyes that night; after the servants had gone to their rooms he arose, stealthily went to the library and secreted several private documents, took away with him many valuables belonging to his late uncle, which might at some later date be converted into cash, and returning to his own room packed a small valise with various articles belonging to himself, then he laid him down to rest but not to sleep.

In the morning he entered the breakfast room at the usual hour, and seeking for the old servant told him that it was his intention to to return to the Continent, from whence he would write to Mrs. Ainslie. He, however, went back the same day to his obscure lodgings, which he had engaged under the name of Maitland, and here he resolved to await the issue of Martha's trial.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE TRACK.

'Dear me, ma'am, and have poor Miss Ella really been so ill; I am downright sorry, that's what I am,'

And here worthy Mrs. Buzzle put the corner of her apron to her eyes and wiped away her tears.

Mrs. Lester had called on the good woman, full of the astounding intelligence which her old friend Laura had imparted to herself and her husband.

As yet Ella was left in total ignorance of an assumption which the whole trio had arrived at; for, if Edward turned out to be Martha's son, then by no possibility could she be allowed to marry him.

'Have you heard from your good clever son lately?' quoth Mrs. Lester.

'No ma'am, not for some time past; but he have made lots of money which it is not surprising, for he is so very clever, ma'am.'

'Yes, indeed, he is extremely gifted, Mrs. Buzzle; you must be very proud of him.'

'Ah! that's true enough, Mrs. Lester,' was the reply; he be a wonderful young man, handsome and clever, and now he'll be rich; and yet, ma'am, he writes me that he'll not come back to London again, and I am sure you'll know why?'

'Indeed I do not, my good soul,' said Mrs. Lester, feeling convinced that she was now on the right track, and that she should be able, as people say, to draw Mrs. Buzzle out.

And yet she might have found it a more difficult matter but for the coming up of her old friend, the priest of St. Mary's, whose well known knock at that moment was heard at the door. Showing Father Sherbourne into the little parlor in which Mrs. Lester was already seated, the lady and the priest shook hands, whilst Mrs. Buzzle twisted the easy chair for his reverence when the conversation at once turned on Ella, and the attempt which had been made on the young lady's life.

Poor Mrs. Buzzle did not read newspapers, but she listened very attentively whilst the lady and the priest talked together, and her eyes falling once on the good woman's face, she felt convinced, by the flush that covered it, that the mines had been sprung which would once and forever settle the parentage of Edward Buzzle.

But she could not maintain her composure; white and red she was by turns, her large coarse hand trembled as she laid it on the table, and she said;

'Please pardon me, Mrs. Lester, for asking questions, but my heart be *so* heavy. Now, it is not possible, is it, that my stepdaughter Martha can be the woman who have tried to poison Miss Lester, there be so many women named Martha? What part of Devonshire have Miss Ella been stopping at, ma'am, if I may be so bold as to ask?'

'At Riversdale, near Exeter, Mrs. Buzzle.'

But the words were no sooner uttered than a change came over the countenance of the poor woman. She turned ghastly pale and fell forward in a deep swoon.

'Ella can never marry that poor young artist, Father Sherbourne,' exclaimed Mrs. Lester.

Then the lady hastened to the kitchen, returning in a few minutes with a cruet full of vinegar and a glass of water; and at length, after having laid her on the sofa with the help of the priest, and bathed her temples with the cooling liquid, Mrs. Buzzle slowly recovered.

'Oh, my husband, said she, wringing her hands, whilst the tears rolled down her cheeks, 'to think that she should have so disgraced us; she be my poor man's own daughter, and belike he'll never hold up his head again.'

And Mrs. Lester's heart ached for Ella; for this was worse and worse, she mentally argued, if Edward be this woman's son, for so had Mrs. Buzzle written on the slip of paper in Mrs. Ainslie's possession.

'Now, Mrs. Buzzle, my good soul,' said the priest, 'you must make a clean breast of it before Mrs. Lester leaves this house. You have owned to me, you know, that Edward is no son of yours and your husband.

'No more he be, Father; but no one can say as how we did not do the right thing, sure, by the poor lad, God bless him, and he be as good a lad as ever breathed, whatever folks may say or think about the matter.'

'Do not mistake me, my worthy soul,' said the priest soothingly, 'but there has been a sort of love affair, you know, between Edward and Miss Ella; now you *must* make a clean breast of it whilst I am here. Do you mean to say—for mind, a letter from you to this good-for-nothing Marth has been read by the lady whose maid she was, and in whose house she so very nearly sent Miss Lester to the next world, in which you speak of poor Edward as *her boy, Martha's boy*, you know. Now, of course, those words lead one to believe you had adopted your stepdaughter's child.'

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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I am, yours truly,
DAMASE PAGEAT,
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