

**CAST OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS**

**1849**

HELENA, LADY MIDHURST, 50  
Her daughter, AMICIA, LADY WARISTON, 33  
Amicia's husband, LORD WARISTON, 37  
Their son, REDGIE SEYTON, 13  
Their daughter, AMY SEYTON, 14  
Redgie's tutor, DENHAM, 30  
JOHN CHEYNE, 53, brother of Midhurst and Lord Cheyne  
His son, FRANK CHEYNE, 10  
His daughter, CLARA CHEYNE, 14  
EDMUND CHEYNE, 14, son and heir to Lord Cheyne

**1861**

HELENA, LADY MIDHURST, 62  
AMICIA, LADY WARISTON, 44  
LORD WARISTON, 49  
REDGIE SEYTON, 24  
AMY, LADY CHEYNE, 26  
Amy's husband, EDMUND, LORD CHEYNE, 26  
CLARA CHEYNE RADWORTH, 26  
Clara's husband, ERNEST RADWORTH, 41  
FRANK CHEYNE, 22  
ARMANDE DE ROCHELAURIER, 55  
Her daughter, PHILOMENE DE ROCHELAURIER, 17



DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LIDCOMBE – NIGHT

The song continues. We dimly see, through falling snow, the façade of the grand Cheyne family seat.

TITLE:

Lidcombe

TITLE:

Eleven years, four months later.

TITLE:

1861

INT. LONG GALLERY AT LIDCOMBE – NIGHT

The song continues, Amy, Lady Cheyne (25 and married to Edmund, 25, who is now Lord Cheyne) playing and singing in her own drawing room. She, Edmund, Clara (25), Radworth (41, now Clara's husband), Redgie (24), Frank (21) and Midhurst (61) sit in the same relative positions as in the previous scene. Redgie has grown up vivid and poetic-looking, a male version of Amy, who is a willowy Pre-Raphaelite beauty. Frank is big, handsome and dark, much like Clara, except that she is blonde; her beauty hints of matronliness. Edmund and Radworth are homely and ungainly, Radworth entirely gray.

–THE MIDHURST LASHES–

Midhurst's white hair marks the sole change in her appearance. Redgie and Radworth watch Clara. Frank and Edmund watch Amy. Midhurst watches everyone.

Song ends.

MIDHURST

Thank you, child.

EDMUND

Very pretty, my dear.

RADWORTH

Charming, Lady Cheyne,  
charming!

REDGIE

Amy, what on earth possessed  
you to play *that*?

Redgie begins to walk up and down. Frank plays a four-handed waltz with Amy beneath the dialogue. Radworth and Edmund (carrying a riding crop) stroll up and down together. Midhurst is the center around which everyone orbits.

RADWORTH

So accomplished a wife  
ornaments your leisure, Lord  
Cheyne.

EDMUND

As Clara does yours, Radworth—  
save that leisure I have none. My

–THE MIDHURST LASHES–

time is given over to  
emancipation, the right of voting,  
the adulteration of food,  
morality, sewerage—

Redgie passes Midhurst and Clara.

CLARA

Redgie! Your grandmother's  
telling me about an old novel  
called— *Vingt-et-Un*?

MIDHURST

Some such name—I know there  
are cards in it. I am the Lady  
Manhurst of that book. I break  
the heart of a rising poet. I make  
two brothers fight a duel. I run  
off with Lord Avery. I poison my  
husband. I hope I finally enter the  
convent, but I forget.

(Clara laughs.)

My friend Lady Wells wrote it. I  
had to give her up in the long  
run.

You may take her as soon as I beg  
a favor of her, Redgie.

Redgie resumes walking.

CLARA

Any service I might do, Aunt  
Helena.

MIDHURST

I want to see the family on comfortable terms – especially to see you and Amy friends.

CLARA

We *are* friends.

MIDHURST

There has been a coolness of late. You and Edmund were so intimate before he succeeded to the title that he must regret this change, and Amy wants a companion. Men have their uses, but you cannot live on them.

CLARA

Of course I will be what I can to her.

MIDHURST

I rely on your head. Nothing but a good clear head can get us through in quiet.

CLARA

Aunt, you mystify me.

MIDHURST

Your brother. You must have heard the absurd rumors about Frank's last stay. People talk of his devotion to poor Amy. There

–THE MIDHURST LASHES–

can be nothing to it: He's hardly of age, and besides, Edmund and Amy are devoted to each other.

CLARA

Then what causes concern?

MIDHURST

Occupation suffices for him, but emotion is wanting to her.

CLARA

Should you not speak to Frank yourself?

MIDHURST

A screeching old aunt, running round with ruffled feathers? I have no intention of helping people laugh at my white hair.

CLARA

It turned suddenly, didn't it?

MIDHURST

Your father's death was a shock. Both my brothers are dead and my thoughts turn to the young people. Your husband must be such a support.

She nods to Radworth, strolling past with Edmund.

CLARA

Ernest has taken to bones.

MIDHURST

You would not have been happy  
with Edmund.

CLARA

Perhaps a word to *him* about  
Frank — ?

MIDHURST

*La bonne farce!* Edmund playing  
Othello? No, a sister older and  
wiser is the best help a boy can  
have to avoid scandal and the  
light — rather, the twilight — of  
publicity.

CLARA

I expect hardly to see Frank, with  
Redgie here. They are always  
together.

MIDHURST

Oh, Redgie. Be nice to him, my  
dear. He is just now much "sat  
upon," as he puts it.

CLARA

His disgrace at Oxford —

MIDHURST

Lord Wariston behaves as if  
everyone else's son saves up his  
allowance. No, it is time for him



–THE MIDHURST LASHES–

to begin life. I don't mean joining  
the bar or the Church.

Midhurst and Edmund exchange nods as he and  
Radworth pass. Amy and Frank begin to walk up and  
down.

EDMUND

– the equilibrium of society, the  
reformation of criminals and  
above all –

RADWORTH

Yes? Yes?

EDMUND

– the destiny of women.

MIDHURST

Poor man. Amy, my darling,  
come to me.

Amy and Frank come up.

CLARA

Amy, your music is ravishing.

MIDHURST

(to Clara, dismissively)  
Thank you, dear.

Amy sits down. Clara goes off on Frank's arm.

CLARA

One always heard about her wit  
and insight and power of reading

character. Her satire's vicious, but stupid and pointless. Like looking at that old face and remembering she was thought a beauty.

FRANK

What was she saying?

CLARA

Lady Midhurst thinks the household harmony suffers from your presence.

FRANK

I don't understand.

CLARA

She tells me you think of falling in love with limp little Amy.

FRANK

There should be a penal colony for old women! It comes of the infamous reading which the Midhurst must indulge in.

CLARA

There is a true side to that way of looking at things.

FRANK

I never can believe that she helped bring up Amy. She left nothing of her mark on her.

Passing Midhurst and Amy, they smile and nod.

CLARA

Do you like her brother?

FRANK

His admiration of *you* is immense. You see, mention Amy and I shall retort with the desirable Redgie.

Edmund and Radworth pass.

EDMUND

The appetite for doing good gains in vigor with advancing years – unlike baser appetites, which time effaces and enjoyment allays.

RADWORTH

A cheering truth.

They nod to Midhurst.

MIDHURST

(to Amy)

We lived apart the last ten years of his life. Odd he should take it to heart. When I saw him last he was grayer than Ernest Radworth. That wife of his: enough to turn any man gray – Ernest's, I mean. She'll be the

ruin of poor Redgie if we don't  
keep him out of her way.

AMY

*You* suggested we have him here  
with them.

MIDHURST

I did, thinking you would do the  
reverse of what an old woman  
told you. Here is my advice.  
Construe it by contraries: Keep  
Frank beside you, encourage  
Clara and be the fool with your  
husband.

AMY

Edmund and Clara—?

MIDHURST

*There* is your game.

AMY

When I remember how she  
courted him, I am uneasy.

MIDHURST

She cares more just now for the  
younger bird. (I declare, the  
woman makes me talk her style.)  
If you hold her off Redgie, I  
warrant your husband against  
her.

—THE MIDHURST LASHES—

AMY

I thought you had me ask them  
because you knew I wanted  
Frank here —

MIDHURST

— and Clara makes a firescreen  
for you? I am not so liberal as  
that. But Frank is a nice boy. Go  
tell him I say so.

AMY

Yes, *grand-mère*.

Amy joins Clara and Frank as they pass. Midhurst  
signals Redgie, who joins her though his eyes follow  
Clara.

MIDHURST

Redgie, Redgie: I should like to  
flog you. It is the only way to  
manage a dunce. The stinging of  
birch rods is nothing to the viper  
bites you run the risk of.

REDGIE

You cannot know the risk —

MIDHURST

I have been stung, and I have  
been talked of.

REDGIE

If you feel my presence a threat  
to Clara —

MIDHURST

You are no threat to Clara. Clara is the cleverest *stupid* woman I know, but nothing more. She can't be better than her style, but she won't be worse. The upshot is she's the safest woman alive. Not safe for her husband, mind – or for you. But as safe for herself as I am, or the Queen.

REDGIE

You don't think Ernest would rub his spectacles if – ?

MIDHURST

Ernest! She never was in love but once – with Edmund. You were at school. She fought for the title with delicious dexterity, but his father wouldn't hear of cousins marrying. Her defeat steadied her for life, and she married Ernest in six months. When my brother died, I married Edmund to our little Amy. Don't worry, you goose: Amy knows all about it. No, the risk is to you.

Radworth (excited) and Edmund (bored) pass.

RADWORTH

– bones proving the range of motion was not –

(flaps his arms)  
but rather —  
(flaps arms wider)  
The implication! To those who  
doubt me, I say come to  
Blocksham and see my bones!

REDGIE

How do you mean, steadied her?

MIDHURST

Cooled her down—made her  
sensible. At your age you cannot  
understand how anybody can be  
at once excitable and cold. She  
can enjoy herself, her excitability  
secures that. But she will never  
pay too high a price for anything.  
If she were more clever, she  
would be good training for you.

REDGIE

If she knew you spoke of her  
thus.

MIDHURST

(rising)  
Tell her. I don't want my nice old  
Redgie sacrificed on a tinsel side-  
altar. I must be good to waste my  
time on girls and boys even  
younger than their ages. You  
should stick to dolls and cricket.

–THE MIDHURST LASHES–

Good night, Redgie. Good night,  
everybody, good night.

EDMUND

Good night, Lady Midhurst.  
Welcome to Lidcombe.

Midhurst goes out. Frank, Clara and Amy come up to  
Redgie. He looks glumly up at Clara.

FRANK

You look as though the Pope had  
stolen a march on Garibaldi.

CLARA

(to Redgie)  
Your grandmother says I'm to be  
nice to you.

AMY

(to Frank)  
*Grand-mère* warns me to be  
careful of you.

FRANK

And Clara warns me of you. Do  
let's keep watch on each other.  
Only then can we be safe.

Amy and Frank sink onto a settee. Clara sits down  
beside Redgie. Edmund and Radworth pass.

EDMUND

– public baths, reading rooms,  
and my father's special concern:  
fallen women. My father assisted



—THE MIDHURST LASHES—

I should think *hundreds* of fallen  
women to make their living.

RADWORTH  
Truly a gentleman.

*The Midhurst Lashes*

*A screenplay adapted from A.C. Swinburne's novels*

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