

The Torn Newspaper;
or
Circumstantial Evidence

by Oliver Sinclair

Chapter I

“I will never consent to your marriage with William Appleton, Ida,” said Charles Redington, with a flushed look and angry eyes.

“If I love William more than I love you, Charles, why should you be angry. This is not the way to make me love you better than William. If I cannot be your wife, I can be your friend! You have paid me a compliment I shall always be grateful for, in offering me your hand. I feel deeply your preference of me over other and fairer maidens of your acquaintance, and who I know would be made happy by such an offer. Nay, do not look displeased! Because I refuse to be your wife is no reason that I cannot esteem you as a friend!”

Thus calmly and gently and sensibly spoke Ida Boyd, a sweet, beautiful girl of eighteen, the daughter of a poor widow, to a rich young man of uncontrollable passions, who had loved her long and would have made her his wife; for though poor she was socially his equal, her father having been a gentleman of fortune who became bankrupt before his death through the failure of a bank in which he had invested all he was worth.

They were standing at the garden gate, to which he had asked her to accompany him after having called to see her, saying that he wished to say a few words to her alone. These few words were the offer of his hand and fortune. Her reply was, that she had been a month engaged to William Appleton. His angry exclamations of disappointment called from her the words of remonstrance and kindness which she addressed him at the beginning of our tale.

“Love or hatred!” he replied, almost fiercely. “I must either love or hate you, Ida Boyd! There is no medium with me. As for William Appleton, may the day—”

“Charles—Charles! Stop where you are! This conduct is unworthy of you and painful to me!” she cried, laying her hand upon his arm, which he pettishly withdrew from her touch. “If I cannot love you, why will you hate me? Does not this show your love for me was not such as would stand the tests of life?”

“Ida—talk not of this! My love for you would have made me *die* for you! *Yesterday*, if you had bidden me do any deed involving the risk of my life, I would have marched, with a smile upon my lips, to death, so that I felt that *you* approved!”

She looked in his face. The moonlight, sifted through a lattice of leaves above their heads, fell in soft splendor upon his forehead; for his forehead was uncovered as he spoke to the fair object of his worship. There was a momentary silence. She broke it by saying:

“Charles, I am very, *very* sorry for you! I—”

“Pity me not! Your pity adds poison to the barb you have so completely fastened in my heart! A heart that so loved you that if, like chamomile, you had trodden it under your feet, it would have given out from its bruised leaves sweet fragrance to regale you. *Hate* me, Ida, hate me! This will be the most grateful return you can make me, for robbing me of yourself!”

“Charles,” said the lovely girl, as she took his reluctant hand in hers; “*dear* Charles, my friend, how can you blame me! How can you feel so! Love is a mystery! I do not know why I chose William rather than you!”

“He has known you but ten months, while *I* have known you from a child!”

“I know it, Charles! I have *always* liked you! Do you not remember how I have *so* often given you flowers; and how we have blackberried together; and how you used to love to carry my heavy satchel of books home for me; and how you gave me birds and rabbits for pets, and I named them after you; and how you used to do my hard sums for me, and what good friends we used to be!”

“Yes, I remember it all, Ida; and we were very happy; and when I grew up, and you grew up and became so beautiful, I resolved you should be my wife; but then came this stranger and—and—”

Here the emotion, if not a gush of tears, of the young man choked his utterance, and he turned away without finishing the sentence.

“As I said, Charles, love is a mystery. I loved him as soon as I saw him. I don’t know how it was, but our eyes no sooner met than our hearts seemed to fly together and embrace like long-absent friends!”

The disappointed lover made no immediate reply. He walked for a few moments to and fro before the garden gate. There was a cloud visible upon his brow, and a stern fixedness of the lips which alarmed her. She approached him gently, and said:

“Charles!”

“Well, Miss Boyd.”

“Do not speak to me so unkindly.”

“What matters it? Are you anything to me? Am I anything to thee? Are you not *his!* body soul, and spirit? Are you not his in all that made you dear—oh, *how* dear to me? I do well to speak unkindly! But, forgive me, Ida! I see no moonlight reflected, as for diamonds, in tears upon your cheeks. I am not angry with you! Poets say love cannot be helped! But as for *him*, who knowing how I loved you, and who has come between me and happiness—”

“Say no word in anger, Charles! For *my* sake, do not be angry with William!”

“For *thy* sake!”

“Yes, may I not ask this?”

“Ida, what do I owe you—that for thy sake I should not hate him?”

“Nothing—but—oh—forgive me! I knew not you loved me so dearly. You never told me till tonight!”

“Because I did not deem it necessary to tell thee,” he observed, bitterly. “Do birds tell one another they love before they mate? Does the night-blooming cereus tell the moon it loves before it opens its bosom to her embrace? Does the river tell the sea before it flings itself murmuring into his arms? Does the glowworm tell its mate that it loves ere he lights the lamp which is to guide him to her bower in the grass? True love is *instinct*, and is voiceless! I did not believe, Ida, I had need to tell you how dearly, how fondly, how passionately I loved you! I thought you understood the look of my eyes, the touch of my hand, the tone of my voice! To tell you that I love you would have seemed to me like painting the rainbow, or lending torches to the light of the stars! But, alas, I see I have been mistaken! The love of this world to secure itself must gabble and speak itself out, or the loudest goose will be the victor!”

“You are very bitter, Charles!”

“Pardon me, but I feel bitterly. Good night, Ida!”

“Let us part friends!”

“Friends! Eh! Friends! What does that mean? *Not* enemies?”

“More than that, Charles! Let us part friends!”

“*Not* Enemies” answered the young man, as he coldly received in his own her soft hand, with which she warmly clasped his. “I can never hate *thee*! When I die, Ida, your image will be found engraven upon my inmost heart! Good night! If I never more speak to thee, do not imagine I hate thee! But I can never look again upon the form which is possessed by my rival! Good night!”

He left the gate and walked rapidly onward. She impulsively followed him half a dozen steps, but seeing he paid no attention to her pursuing feet, though he must have heard them upon the pavement, she stopped, clasped her hands together upon her bosom, sighed heavily and said:

“Oh, that I had known *how* Charles loved me! Yet he never told his love! He was so diffident and distant, while William pressed his suit with such fervor! Poor Charles! I wish he could understand that I love him (as a *friend*) though William is to be my husband!”

“Wi-po-will! Wi-po-will!” cried in plaintive notes a whippoorwill in the top of a neighboring tree.

“What a doleful cry! This bird’s note sounds ominously and makes me feel fear!” she said, as she returned slowly to the gate. “They say it sings thus only when some evil is to happen to the hearer. Shall I go in or wait for William,” she soliloquized, as she lingered by the gate, held half-open in her hand. “He was to be here at nine o’clock, and the bell for nine will soon ring.”¹

The young girl, with a torn heart—for she loved *both* lovers (but William most and tenderest, having also pledged him her hand, heart, and troth), lingered long after the nine o’clock bell had rung, for William had promised her he would come at nine. With every note of the bell she expected to hear blended the sound of his footstep. Half past nine came, and her mother came out to her, and said—

“Ida, you ought to be in, dear. Where is William?”

“Not come yet, Mother. I wonder has detained him.”

“Perhaps some engagement. You know he is but a bookkeeper, and hasn’t his time to himself, poor young man, as Mr. Redington has, who is rich. I must confess, Ida, I am surprised you should have selected the poor one.”

“He selected me, mother.”

“But you know on the least encouragement the richer would have asked you.”

“I did not encourage him because he was rich. I could not trust myself. I feared I might be thinking of his fortune. So I let the one who offered first have my hand.”

“Well, William is a good young man, and will make you happy. But you know my opinion. *I* would rather you would have married Mr. Redington. That fine house his mother lives in would have been yours at her death, with a carriage, and all that.”

¹ The reader, by the allusion to the nine o’clock bell, will understand that the scenes of our tale are laid in the New England.

The origin of the “nine o’clock bell,” which regulates and measures the length of a social evening in New England States, dates back to the “curfew bell” of Old England. All my readers will recall the line in Gray’s *Elegy*: “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.”

William the Conqueror, in order to prevent night conspiracies, ordered all fires (and lights) to be put out an hour after sundown throughout the realm of England. This order was called the *couvre feu* order, from the French words, signifying *cover fire!* The church bells in all the towns gave the curfew or *cover fire* signal. This custom of ringing a bell for people to go to bed continued for centuries afterwards in England, when the law enforcing it had become a dead letter. The Puritans brought over the custom to Plymouth, and to this day the curfew bell (alias nine o’clock bell) is heard filling with melody the starlit valleys of New England, and is a signal for staid and quiet folk to be at home and think of bed! This custom has exercised a positive effect upon the morality of New Englanders; and, to be out after nine, is considered encroaching on the verge of dissipation. The curfew is an admirable regulator of hours, and we wish it were instituted all over the Union. It fixes a standard for honest bedtime!

“Don’t talk of such things, Mother. They do not come into my thoughts. I shall be perfectly happy with William. And since I have seen the exhibition of anger and feeling shown by Charles this evening, I see he has a fearful temper, which might have made me wretched as his wife.”

“Well, come in, dear child. It is full a quarter to ten. Honest people ought to be in bed by half an hour after bell ringing.”

“I will come in soon, dear Ma. I think William will be here by ten. I will just meet him at the gate here, and say good night to him. He was to bring me a wedding ring.”

“Well, at ten you must come in. Tie your handkerchief over your head, Ida, for I feel there is a dew.”

Ten o’clock was struck by the old clock in the house, but Ida’s lover had not come. She waited till ten minutes past, when slowly and wonderingly she returned to the house.

“He has never failed me before,” she said. “But perhaps something has detained him. It cannot be that, now that I am engaged to him, he loves me less, and thinks he need not be so punctual to his engagements as he was when he was not sure of me, and was trying to win my consent.”

How sensitive, how jealous, how exacting is true love!

Ida re-entered the house and by-and-by retired, but not until all hope of seeing William that night had expired.

In the morning she dreamed a dream. She believed that she was walking arm in arm with William by the side of a river, when a mermaid rose before them out of the water, and said in a harsh voice—

“Come—I have waited for you! You must go with me! My home in the depth of the river is ready!”

She thought the mermaid so fascinated William that he left her side, and went, as by a resistless spell, to the siren, who was about to entwine her arms about him, when someone cried, as if from the air—

“Fire and slay her, or she will destroy him!”

She heard at the moment a report, as if from behind her, and she saw William, with a wound in his forehead, fall into the arms of the siren, who plunged with him into the river and disappeared. There was a mocking laugh behind her, and she thought the voice sounded like that of Charles Redington. She turned to see if her fears were true, when the loud voice of her mother awoke her:

“Awake, child! Up, Ida! There is fearful news!”

“What is it, Mother?” she cried, starting from her vivid dream.

“William—”

“William is *dead!*” she shrieked, catching the words from the pallid lips of her mother. “I saw him shot! Is it not so? Oh, do not be silent!”

“News has just come in that he was found in—”

“In the river, with a bullet wound in his forehead!” she cried.

“How wonderful and true!” cried two or three neighbors, who were at her bedroom door, while a third said—

“How could you know this?”

“I saw it all in a dream. Oh, tell me—is William dead?”

“Yes,” answered the minister, who lived near, and having heard the news had hastened to the house of mourning, as became his office. “He was found dead an hour ago by the shore, half in the water. He had been shot in the forehead. His body is taken to his mother’s, where an inquest will be held.”

“Oh! William, William—who could have done this! Dead! William dead!” she shrieked, and fell insensible into the arms of her mother.

CHAPTER II.

The death of William Appleton by violence, in so mysterious a manner, created the most profound excitement throughout the peaceful village. He was beloved and popular, and was not known to have an enemy. He had been found by the shore, his body half in the water; but as his clothing and hair were thoroughly wetted, it was believed he had been thrown in, and floated ashore. The place where he was found was about halfway between the village and the residence of Ida Boyd, by the road that led along the winding and shady banks.

“He must have been going to see her, or else coming from there,” said a woman, who was present as they were holding the inquest. “He was ’gaged to her, and went to see her every night.”

This opinion prevailed. The question now came up, *who* could have done this? And what could have been the motive?

There was no suspicion of person or motive, and the jury gave in their verdict—“Shot dead, with a pistol or gun, by person or persons unknown, and then thrown in the river.”

What more could a coroner's jury, not omniscient nor omnipresent, decide. The funeral took place on the third day, and was attended by a vast concourse of people; for a murder invests death with a fearful mystery, which arouses the deepest sympathies of the human heart, as well as awakens the liveliest curiosities of our nature.

But there were agencies of Providence at work for the discovery of the murderer. The surgeon who had been called to examine and pronounce upon the nature of the wound, had drawn from the orifice made by the bullet a mass of paper saturated with blood and with river water. He saw that it was newspaper wadding which had been driven into the wound behind the ball. He stated to the coroner, from this circumstance, that the assassin must have stood close to his victim for the wadding also to have entered the wound. This assertion threw no light upon the author of the crime, and had little weight with the coroner and his rustic jury. The surgeon, who was a shrewd man of the world, and who let nothing escape him, took the wadding home, and, having removed the stains of blood and dried it, closely examined it. He discovered that it was part of a newspaper called the "Evening Star."

Dr. Thomas, upon looking carefully at this fragment, compressed his lips and was for a few moments silent, fixing his keen, gray eyes upon his office floor.

"The Evening Star!" he at length exclaimed, or rather muttered. "I wonder who takes that paper in this village! This I must quietly ascertain. I saw before the coroner that this piece of paper might be probably a clue to the murderer, and I did not wish to make any noise about it, lest the murderer himself might be present at the inquest and take alarm. I think I have shown my usual sagacity. Now, with the aid of Providence, I may find who murdered William Appleton. Poor Ida Boyd! They say it has broken her heart, as they were soon to be married! The Evening Star! Stay there, bit of paper," he added, until I look further."

As he spoke he locked the wadding in his money drawer, and putting the key in his pocket walked out. He took the direction of the post office, which he entered with a loitering step, as if he had no purpose. The postmaster was seated in his great armchair (being a bent-up, rheumatic man, with iron spectacles), actually reading a copy of "The Evening Star."

Doctor Thomas was a friend and his physician. After a question or two as to the present state of his rheumatism, the medical man said:

"A New York paper, eh?"

"Yes, the Star; Noah's paper. They say he is a Jew; but he is a great wit, and a capital, fine writer."

"So I've heard. Do you take it?"

"No. He is on the other side of my politics. It comes here to Mrs. Redington, whose husband, you know, was a great politician. You see her name on it."

"Yes, I see. It is such an interesting paper, I suppose many copies of it are taken in the village."

“No. This is the only one taken here at this office. It is usually taken out by her son Charles, but he has not been here for several days; so I thought I would peep into it.”

“A privilege,” replied the smiling doctor, “which you postmasters take not only with papers but with letters, eh?”

“Ah, doctor, that is a serious joke,” responded the man of privileges, as he folded up the paper, for at that moment Charles Redington entered and asked for his papers and letters.

“So you keep up the old ‘Star’ subscription, sir, like your father?” said the doctor.

The young man answered with a curl of the lip—

“I suppose one can subscribe to what paper he pleases”; and thus saying, he pocketed his newspaper and went out of the office, which was kept in an open room, common to all comers; indeed the people generally helped themselves to their own letters (and their neighbors’, too, if they chose) to save the bent and rheumatic postmaster getting up out of his chair.

Doctor Thomas wended his way to his own office slowly and thoughtfully. Charles Redington was above suspicion, wealthy, son of a member of Congress, born in the village, and of good name and fame. Yet he was the only one who took the “Star,” and it was a torn portion of the “Star” which formed the wad of the bullet!

“Is it possible another may have found or torn the paper. Perhaps he does not file them, and throws them away. If so, anyone might pick them up. I must be cautious. I will call on his mother, and ask her for the loan of a volume of the folio Encyclopedia, which belonged to her husband. It will enable me to look about and perhaps learn something. Yet, do I suspect her son of the deed? Heaven forbid! But this wadding must be traced.”

Thus he mused as he walked on. That day he called on the widow, and was shown into the library for the book by Charles himself, who looked pale and ill at ease, so much so that the doctor said—

“Mr. Redington, you do not look well. You must look after yourself.”

The young man laughed and turned away his head. Upon a chair the doctor saw piled in a heap a great number of the “Star.” He took one up and said—

“This is a singularly American journal, Mr. Redington, to be edited by a Jew.”

“I seldom read it. I am not a politician. I keep it as waste paper.”

“Ah, indeed. Permit me to look over some of them.”

“Yes; but you will excuse me, as I have an engagement. You can borrow any other books you please, sir, besides the Encyclopedia.”

After the young man had gone out the doctor proceeded to examine the newspapers upon the chair, but found them all whole; but seeing one wrapped around a parcel upon the table, he approached it, and saw that it contained melon seed. A portion of this paper was torn off. A glance showed him that he had the missing part in his money drawer in his office!

Instantly and adroitly he poured out the seeds and secured the paper. He was overwhelmed with surprise and pain. As he was leaving, Mrs. Redington met him in the hall and said, after a few remarks about books—

“Have they discovered the murderer, doctor?”

“Not yet, I believe.”

“Poor Ida! Charles thought worlds of her, and has not been himself since he heard how she is almost beside herself. I think he loved her; but I always told him she was too poor a match for him. I am very sorry for her, and the poor young man. How pitiful!”

The doctor left and proceeded to his office, took the wad, and went to the residence of the justice of the peace. The two gentlemen remained closeted together for an hour. That night Charles Redington was arrested, while at the tea table, by two officers of the law, and conveyed to prison.

He denied all knowledge of the murder, and assumed the front and bearing of injured innocence. He was, in due time, brought into court for trial. The only ground of evidence against him was the fragment of newspaper. But the defense ably argued that the assassin, whoever he was, might have stolen the paper, as no such paper was to be found on the prisoner’s premises, or brought it with him from another town.

“The ‘Star’ mails four thousand copies weekly,” he added; “and there are four thousand chances that my client is innocent.”

When everybody in court looked for an acquittal, the torn newspaper which the doctor had taken from the library, with “Mrs. Eleanor Redington’s” name upon it, was produced, and the fragment fitted to it before all eyes.

When Charles Redington saw this produced he uttered a cry of despair, and sprang from the prisoner’s box so unexpectedly, that he had reached and leaped from an open window before he could be arrested. Mounted men followed his wild flight, and he was overtaken and caught at the very spot where the body of William had been discovered. The result was that he confessed in prison the deed of murder, so clearly established by circumstantial evidence. He said he had gone home after leaving Ida Boyd, loaded his pistol, tearing off a portion of the “Star” for the wadding, resolved to meet Appleton on his return from his visit to Ida Boyd, and compel him to relinquish her to himself. That he met him on his way, and upon his refusal to comply with his demand, he shot him in a moment of uncontrollable jealousy.

Three months afterwards Charles Redington expiated his crime on the gallows; and the evening of the same fatal day the body of the fair Ida Boyd was laid by weeping mourners in her last home.

Oh, love, oh war—which has slain most victims!

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