

PRIZE STORY
No. 20.

The Crimson Clue

by Lizzie Campbell

I.

Toward the close of the summer of 1840 an extraordinary event occurred in the village of Acton.

Belle Lincoln, the only child of a widow lady, who had lived in the village for many years, and was generally esteemed and respected, suddenly and inexplicably disappeared.

Belle was seventeen years old, and a lovely blonde.

Of course she had many suitors, but above all she favored Clarence Osgood, a wealthy young barrister, settled in the neighborhood.

As days grew into weeks and weeks into months, and still no news was heard of the missing girl, the belief of her constrained abduction, at first dimly conceived by the villagers, became matter of positive conviction; and her lover, distracted with grief, swore an oath of vengeance against the spoiler of his peace. Years passed, and nothing transpired to lighten the darkness which shrouded the disappearance of Belle Lincoln, and, except in the mourning hearts of her mother and her lover, the young girl was almost forgotten.

At first, young Osgood, controlled by deep grief, had abandoned his profession and all ordinary pursuits. But after five or six years he resumed his wonted occupations, re-entered the practice of the law, and gave up his whole energies to the stern business of life.

In this mood it was that he soon afterward engaged in a criminal case which was agitating the whole country roundabout. His ability and tireless zeal had already made him formidable at the bar, and the excitement of the people knew no bounds when it was said that Clarence Osgood would appear for the prisoner.

The charge was murder.

A young man had been arrested on suspicion of having murdered and then made away with the body of a chambermaid in his mother's house.

The name of the accused was Henry Sloan.

During the time of the trial, which occupied several days, Clarence, remaining at the county town, accepted the hospitality of the prisoner's aunt, Mrs. Laitone, who had asked him to make her house his home.

The trial was long and hard, and sometimes it seemed impossible that Mr. Harry Sloan's neck could escape the halter, which same he indeed little deserved to escape if all was true that was alleged against him.

But Clarence Osgood felt that his reputation as an advocate depended on the issue of this case, and he worked at it with dogged perseverance and devoted energy. Very early he had persuaded himself of the innocence of his client; and it soon became evident that with such extraordinary argumentative powers and vast personal magnetism he would be able to convince others also that the prisoner was guiltless.

In the end he was successful. He won the case, and Harry Sloan was acquitted.

It was a proud triumph for Clarence Osgood. He felt it to be so, as he straightway acknowledged in a letter to Mrs. Lincoln, whom he always called "mother." He spoke also of the brilliant career his present success had opened before him, and concluded, with almost bitter mournfulness, that nothing was wanting to his joy but the presence and appreciation of the dear little girl lost forever.

His letter finished, he bowed his face between his hands, and his lithe sinewy form shook with an inward tempest. By-and-by he raised his face. It was very still and white, and on either cheek a tear seemed to have frozen.

Belle had been a sweet, gentle, true girl, as well as most beautiful, and Clarence Osgood had loved her very dearly. A single sob, one great, gurgling, gasping sob, that seemed to rend his chest, came up his throat and broke through his lips; then he took up his letter to Mrs. Lincoln, folded it and put it in the envelope.

This letter was written at the law office, which he temporarily occupied. He had not yet sealed it when Mr. Harry Sloan came in, equipped for the two miles' ride that lay between them and his aunt's house. Mr. Osgood had promised to pass several days more at Mrs. Laitone's; and Harry and himself had engaged to go down together.

Harry Sloan was a handsome, elegant young man, with just a dash of rakishness that well became him. He entered quite carelessly and easily, and taking the chair beside Clarence, said:

"Don't allow me to hurry you, Mr. Osgood; though I confess to a little impatience for the moment when I shall leave this inhospitable town. But of course my time is entirely at your disposal."

Clarence bowed without looking up, and then having sealed his letter, threw it down on the table. Inadvertently Henry Sloan glanced at the superscription, seemingly unconscious that he read—

"Mrs. Harriet Lincoln, Acton," on the back of the envelope. Then suddenly he struck his spurred boot with his riding-whip, and looked up at Clarence.

Clarence was just then looking at him.

"I'm very glad, indeed, to see you here, Mr. Sloan," he said, when their eyes met.

"And I—many thanks to you—am very glad to be here," young Sloan heartily replied.

"Don't thank me," said Clarence. "I was your lawyer. It was only my business to gain the case. If I saved you in doing so, I don't know that I merit anybody's eternal gratitude for doing my duty. But come, we will be gone. You look as if a brisk canter and fresh air might do you good. You are pale, paler than you were in court. I hope you are not going to be ill now, at the end of it all?"

"Not I, indeed," and the young man rose cheerily, with a light, boyish laugh. "It's being kept in prison, and on prison fare, no doubt. Bah! How I hate the thought of the whole disgusting affair. To the winds with it all; and may I have another week in the old jail if I ever think of it again!"

He waved his hand, and seemed to throw something from it, as though he thus cast away from him forever all memory of this painful episode in his life.

"Come, Mr. Osgood, since you are ready. Aunt Kate will be waiting us impatiently."

He went first, clattering downstairs with his heavy riding-boots, striking his spurs against the steps as he descended.

Then they mounted and set off. It was not easy to be on terms at all approaching intimacy with Mr. Clarence Osgood; but before they had ridden half the distance to Mrs. Laitone's, Harry Sloan had so far progressed in his acquaintance with his companion, that it seemed as if they had been chosen friends for years. Even Osgood, stern as he was, found it difficult to resist the fascination of Sloan's manner, it was so frank, open, buoyant.

Although he was in reality the same age as Clarence, anyone unacquainted with the fact would have pronounced him at least ten years younger, and his musical, ringing voice, his merry, boyish laugh seemed the fit index to a nature as innocent, as happy and as simple.

No two men could have been more unlike than these; yet for some reason they found themselves mysteriously attracted toward each other.

Clarence was a dark, pale man; his face one that might have been hewn from marble; lighted by dark eyes, of no settled color, but gleaming like diamonds, and like them giving forth light in the dark. The blackest feather in the wing of a crow could not be blacker than his hair, which curled slightly, and was dressed with some care, always displaying his massive brow and fine temples. And as I have said, his figure was lithe and sinewy—the sort of figure that goes with intellect and mental nervousness.

Now there's much more to be said of Henry Sloan's figure. It was an embodiment of grace and elegance; he might have stood for a statue of the young Adonis. His head was small, set on his white neck with light, airy, girlish grace, and the fair, brown, curling hair, negligently falling over brow and throat, served to heighten that expression.

His face was beautiful. The brow broad, moderately high, and white as ivory; a faint color in the cheeks and a rich crimson, like the heart of a blood-rose, filling the beautiful lips, and contrasting almost too vividly with the white teeth. Clarence didn't know why it was that he scarcely cared to look long at the mouth, though ever as he looked away from it he turned again and again to look at it. It was, in truth, too tantalizing to look at long. The lips never stopping their ceaseless play provoked anyone who wished for one minute to see the mouth in repose. Whenever it seemed for an instant about to lapse into quiet, Clarence asked himself was that a hard cruel line on the upper lip of which he had caught just the faintest suggestion?

Hardness and cruelty in that nature! Impossible!

Then those eyes of Henry Sloan's! What wondrous eyes they were! They said a great deal if one could only read it all. But, like the bewildering mouth, they couldn't rest. Their glance darted hither, thither, away to that side and back to this, ever glancing, gleaming, sparkling, laughing and throwing such an added beauty and brightness all over his handsome face, that Clarence, looking at him unconsciously, thought aloud,

“Good God! And it was this man—this boy—who sat before me in a criminal court, charged with murder! True, the evidence was strong, very strong, almost too strong for me to cope with; and that is the only excuse for arraigning that boy for such a crime.”

Shortly afterward they arrived at Mrs. Laitone's.

Glad his words had not been overheard, Clarence dismounted, and drawing Harry's arm through his own, as he would have done that of a younger brother, they walked up to the front door.

An inexplicable feeling took possession of Clarence. If he had drawn a bar of red hot iron through his arm it could scarcely have hurt him more than did the light touch of Harry Sloan. He was inexpressively relieved when the latter, disengaging himself, ran up the steps, burst into the hall a little boisterously, and catching his aunt in his arms, exclaimed:

“Rejoice with me, dear aunt. I am free again—free, free, and therefore innocent! Good aunt, congratulate me! Forgive me, too! I'm a little wild with joy—but it is so sweet to be free again—free as the birds. Thank Mr. Osgood, aunt Kate. But for him, I should be—. Bah! I daren't think it.”

Mrs. Laitone kissed her nephew on both cheeks, and drew her arm round his neck, caressingly. Then, extending her other hand to Clarence, she thanked him warmly; and all went into the parlor together.

II.

In the course of conversation chance mention was made that Clarence occupied the room at Mrs. Laitone's, hitherto sacred to her nephew Harry.

Clarence at once declared that Mr. Sloan should have his own room; and asked Mrs. Laitone to give him another. She at last consented.

He retired at an earlier hour than usual—for the day, though triumphant, had been fatiguing. Mrs. Laitone herself conducted him to an apartment in the second story, and wished him good night.

Clarence set his lamp down on the centre-table, and looked around the room. It was a handsome one; large and lofty, and furnished in an old, quaint style. The chairs, table, bedstead, etc., were of polished mahogany. There was no carpet on the floor, which was made of some pale, glistening wood; the walls were tapestried; and curtains of purple damask, heavily trimmed with gold and embroidery, draped the windows.

A large, deep armchair stood near the table, and in it Clarence seated himself that he might the more leisurely look around his quarters for the night.

From a habit contracted in childhood he always examined his sleeping room in a strange house. Once seated, however, he seemed to find a difficulty on this occasion in putting the old custom in force. Yet his desire was strong to explore the room. He was soon conscious of some magnetic influence which held him almost spellbound to his seat, while a cold, shivering feeling took possession of him and ran along all his nerves like some dim, undefined horror.

Surmounting this feeling he rose, and, taking his lamp, walked closely around the room, examining it as he did so. A large clothes-closet he opened, peered into, and saw a quantity of rich, old-fashioned dresses—silk, satin, brocade and velvet. He touched one and another, shaking them slightly, and they gave out a ghostly rustling as they brushed against each other. He then moved on to the windows, opened the curtains, and, after gazing an instant at the darkness without, let them fall together again.

In crossing toward the bed his feet grew rooted to a certain spot on the floor, about midway in the room.

Scarcely knowing why, he stooped down, placed the lamp on the floor, and curiously examined the place. A cold pain smote his heart. He almost ceased breathing. On the very spot where his foot had stood was a large, dark crimson stain, perfectly round, and over an inch in circumference.

For more than a minute he remained mutely, fixedly gazing on it; then starting up with a groan, and clutching the lamp in his hand, staggered back, and almost fell into the armchair.

He had placed the lamp on the table, but still kept his gaze turned toward that crimson stain on the floor, although gradually his thoughts had wandered away from it, and busied themselves in other ways.

It might have been an hour afterward that he found himself becoming very drowsy, and making no effort to resist the feeling, quietly gave way to it. What took place within the next five minutes he never could determine—whether he slept and dreamed, or whether he was awake and saw.

He suddenly became aware of some Presence in the room besides himself. It floated chillily through the whole place, and struck against his face cold as ice. Very soon he felt that this mysterious essence was concentrating itself somewhere, and with his gaze still dreamily turned toward the crimson stain on the floor, he saw it there slowly rise up, take form, and shape itself before him.

Heavens be gracious!

Was it, then, indeed so?

His hair stood on end. The blood no longer flowed through his veins, but, as if frozen, stood still, for recognized in the shape before him Belle Lincoln!

She was dressed in her favorite dress, white—the very dress she had worn on the evening she so mysteriously disappeared. Clarence recognized it on the instant. A simple white muslin, the ample skirt flowing cloudily around her, and confined at the waist by a zone composed of minute links of gold, and which he had himself given her. Her face was turned toward him. She was very pale, and her lustrous hair all unbound floated like sunlight over her shoulders, and rippled in golden waves halfway to her feet. There were no apparent marks of violence on her, but an expression of anguish filled her white face, her dry, wild blue eyes and delicate mouth; her lips, once so rosy red, were livid with pain.

She slowly raised her hand. It was thin and shadowy, but still fair and lovely, and on the third finger sparkled her betrothal ring.

Mutely she pointed downward to the spot on the floor; waved her hand in a wide, sweeping circle to the west, and then, hastily raising it to her lips, passionately kissed the glittering ring.

Up to that moment Clarence had watched, silent, moveless, breathless, but at the last act he started to his feet, and with outstretched arms sprang toward her.

“Belle—Belle! My darling—my own!”

But only the vacant air met his passionate embrace.

She was gone.

“Lost again! Belle, love, mistress, wife! Are you indeed lost to me? Gone—and left me nothing! No word, no token!”

Looking downward he saw the crimson stain.

His eyes gleamed with fierce pleasure.

“Yes,” he muttered. “I have this to guide me. And it shall guide me! Here, Belle, do I again record my solemn vow to discover your murderer, and avenge you. By this I swear it!”

He knelt and kissed the blood mark!

It was near daybreak when Clarence was at length sufficiently composed to sleep. He slept soundly, till the morning was far advanced.

In reviewing the strange visitation of the night, the appearance of Belle seemed to him a dream; he could with difficulty persuade himself that he had not been in bed and soundly sleeping at the time he fancied himself seated in the armchair, looking at her.

But dream or reality, the effect was the same. He felt certain that she had died in that house, nay, in that very room; and he remembered his vow. How to accomplish it he knew not, but resolved to leave, in part at least, to circumstances the solution of the mystery. He examined the crimson spot carefully by the bright daylight, and felt convinced that it was a stain of blood. He had not forgotten that the apparition waved its arm to the west; and, after many conjectures as to the meaning of that movement, he decided at last that her body had been concealed in that direction. If so, was there no means of discovering her grave? There must be, and he determined to find it.

He proceeded in all his steps toward this end with his usual caution.

That morning at breakfast he met the family of Mrs. Laitone with his customary friendly ease; and to the inquiries of his hostess he answered that he never had slept more soundly.

Regarding his companions—Mrs. Laitone, her daughter Helen, a handsome, sprightly girl of fifteen, and Harry Sloan, he was not long in coming to the conclusion that none of them were in any way connected with Belle’s disappearance.

Mrs. Laitone must have recently come there to live, he thought, and that same day he inquired of Harry, “Who had lived in the house before his aunt, why had they left it, and where had they gone?” But to his astonishment he learned that it was hereditary property, that Mrs. Laitone owned the estate, and had lived there nearly forty years. Amazed as he was at this intelligence, Clarence didn’t give up his conviction that his poor lost Belle had breathed away her life in that house.

Mrs. Laitone must have had guests—yes, surely; friends, perhaps relatives, who, without exciting her suspicions, might have committed and concealed dark crimes in her house. Murders had been committed within earshot of others, many a time before, and the victims concealed

without suspicion, under less advantages for concealment of crime than Mrs. Laitone's house afforded.

He still waited and watched.

Days passed, and the charm of Harry's manner and conversation seemed to increase. Clarence and he were soon intimate; though, whenever he approached him closely, he felt that same magnetic repulsion he had received when he first took his arm.

One day the two young men had strolled around the Laitone estate, Harry showing the beauties and improvements which his aunt had been adding to her place, when suddenly the whining bark of a dog, prolonged into a howl, attracted their attention. It was a pet dog of Harry's that had followed them which was creating the disturbance.

"Come, Busy! Busy, old fellow, what's the matter?" called out his master.

The dog paid no heed to his voice, but pawing the ground and sniffing it with his nose, continued to bark vociferously, to whine, and then to howl in a dreary, piteous manner.

In vain Harry called him, threatened, coaxed him. He wouldn't stir from the spot.

"What can he have found?" said Clarence, at length going over to him. Harry followed, and striking the dog several times with a riding-whip he always carried out with him, ordered him off.

The poor brute, reluctantly and whining, limped away.

"Poor little Busy! It was too bad to strike him, Hal," and as he spoke Clarence laid his hand on his companion's shoulder.

It fell off, as though it had been violently thrown aside, so strong was the magnetism that repelled him from actual contact with Harry. In the same instant a terrible truth swept startlingly to his heart.

The feeling he experienced in touching Sloan was precisely the same as that which had stayed his steps when his foot rested on the crimson stain of blood. The suspicion this discovery engendered in his mind was too horrible. He dashed it from him as unworthy to be harbored for one moment against his young friend.

"Come, Harry," he spoke hurriedly, "let us return to the house."

III.

Notwithstanding his abrupt dismissal of the suspicion which had so shocked him, it returned again and again to the mind of Clarence as he and Harry proceeded homeward.

“At least it can do no harm to test the truth of this horrid fancy.”

So thinking, Clarence confided to his companion the sad story of his love and loss. Never before had he made anyone his confidant on that subject, and he did so now with pain.

There was a perceptible tremor in his voice and visible agitation in his whole manner.

Harry listened with extreme attention.

When Clarence had ceased he replied with emotion; there were tears, too, in the handsome eyes:

“My dear Clarence, from my soul I sympathise with you. Yours was, indeed, a severe affliction. I never was so in love with a woman, but, on my honor, I know how to feel for you, and I do from my inmost heart.”

Warm tears were now coursing down his cheeks.

He drew out his handkerchief and tried to wipe them away without exciting the attention of Clarence.

As he drew forth his handkerchief something fell on the ground and sparkled up at Osgood. He stooped with lightening swiftness and picked it up. Sloan did not observe the movement, and presently replaced the handkerchief in his pocket.

“Why, Osgood—my friend, my dear Clarence—this painful reminiscence has been too much for you. I am sorry, proud as I am of your confidence, that you told me of it. How pale you are! Heaven! You are ghastly! Here, lean on me—you are ill.”

“No, no, it will be over soon. I’ll think no more of it just now.”

One minute he looked into the fair, handsome pitying face, regarding him so earnestly, with such kind sympathy and ingenuous tenderness.

“Can it be? My God!” he muttered in a hollow tone.

“You are worse!” exclaimed Harry, anxiously. “Nay, dear Clarence, do lean on me. I am strong—you don’t know how strong I am.”

“It’s over now. I’m quite well.”

He quickened his steps, and they were soon at home.

Arrived there, Clarence excused himself on the plea of urgent business, and departed for the country town.

That evening Mr. Harry Sloan was a second time arrested on a charge of murder.

Mr. Osgood made the charge, accusing him of the forcible abduction and subsequent murder of one Belle Lincoln, who had, years before, mysteriously disappeared from her home in the village of Acton.

Harry bore this second grave charge with the same composure and apparent consciousness of innocence that had characterized his bearing on a previous occasion. Only when Clarence visited him in prison did he exhibit any signs of emotion.

“Osgood—Clarence! You—my friend, that I loved as a brother—you to turn against me—you to accuse me of such a crime! But I forgive you, my friend, for it is evident to me that a settled grief for the loss of your betrothed, combined with severe intellectual labor, has affected your mind. Yes, Clarence, I forgive you.”

“You are very kind, I’m sure. Do you recognize this ring, Mr. Harry Sloan?”

As he spoke Osgood held up a diamond ring. His face was terrible to look upon.

Before his gaze Harry had neither paled nor trembled, but at the sight of the ring he started to his feet, his chains clanking about his ankles, and tried wildly to clutch at the ring with his manacled hands.

Livid passion and pallid terror struggled together in his beautiful face, making it the likeness of a very fiend.

Failing in his effort, he sank down on his pallet and glared wildly at Clarence.

“Well; and what of that ring?” he asked, at last.

“It is the one I put on Belle Lincoln’s hand when she promised to marry me. On the inside is engraved, ‘To my Wife,’ and then ‘C.O.’—the initials of my name. That ring you took from her hand after having murdered her.”

“How do you prove that?”

“Yesterday I witnessed the disinterment of the dead body from the grave where your unholy hands laid it. Busy led us to the grave again. He has a most keen scent—your dog! Only by the remains of her clothing, and the zone she had worn about her waist was I able to recognize my darling; those, and the purer gold of her glorious unblemished hair.”

“I am lost—lost! Oh, Satan! Thou hast forsaken thine own!”

For a moment this fair young criminal seemed overcome—but a moment.

A laugh that might have scared the very demons startled the silence of the cell; and returning the gaze of Clarence with a smile demonically cruel and cold, Harry Sloan said:

“It’s all up, then, Mr. Osgood. I wouldn’t say so, if there was a chance of getting another such clever lawyer as yourself—but there isn’t. So far you have only circumstantial evidence, but with you against me, and no one to equal you for me, I should fail. So, here goes. I’ll tell you the whole story. It will amuse me, I know, and may entertain you.”

No glancing of the eyes now. They looked straight at Clarence with all the terrible depravity of the soul within looking through them. No treacherous, sweet smile, twitching the cherry red lips now. All their native devilish cruelty sat triumphant on the perfect rosy curve of the mouth, as, lips a little apart, he seemed looking back into the past for the facts of his story.

“Ah, yes! I remember. I saw her first—your lovely Belle, in the beginning of that summer. I was down in Acton on business. I met her as I was returning to the village inn one afternoon. I was quite struck with her appearance. She was really a most charming little creature. And beautiful! I never saw anything more exquisite. I resolved that she should be mine.

“Pooh, pooh, man! Control the muscles of that right arm of yours. Yes, I know you were thoughtful enough to come without weapons. It was a wise precaution, my dear Clarence, a very wise precaution.

“I made some inquiries about her—learned her engagement to you, and at once concluded it was useless to go into competition. You see, I’m not so vain as such a handsome dog might be. Besides, I understand that kind of woman. I saw stratagem was my only chance, and I delayed the matter to a more convenient season. My business at Acton concluded, I returned home.

“Toward the close of summer, as luck would have it, aunt Laitone, at whose house I was on a visit, was called away suddenly on imperative business. She laughingly invited me to remain and keep house for her. I jumped at the proposal. Could anything be more deliciously fortunate? Helen was away at boarding-school—Aunt Kate’s business likely to detain her several months at a town fifty miles distant—and I, Harry Sloan, master of a lone country house, with only two old servants in it? Well, everything progressed precisely as I could have wished. I possessed the keys of all the rooms, with entire control of them. I selected one for my purpose. It was the tapestried one, on the second story. That’s a secure room, Clarence; the door once locked even a shriek can’t be heard from within, and the oaken shutters closed it might as well be without windows.

“About a week after my aunt left I ran down to Acton, explaining to the servants that I would be back in a few days. I laugh when I think how easily everything went. The very first evening I spent in Acton I met Belle. It was not twenty yards from her own house, and just in the gloaming. I judged from her wistful air that she was looking for you, and I was right. Trusting to luck, I had left a close carriage a little way off, and now that I saw her my resolve was taken—on the instant my plan was made and put in execution. I flatter myself that my address is not likely to alarm, nor my manner repulsive. I hastened up to Belle and spoke—my tone was hurried and anxious, tender and solicitous, respectful and gentle, too, as I know how to address a lady. ‘Miss

Lincoln?’ I said. ‘Yes, I know it must be. One you love—Clarence Osgood—is lying at the point of death. He spends his last breath in calling for you.’ ”

“Heaven be merciful! Oh, sir, take me to him.”

She almost fainted and fell staggering against me. I clasped my arm about her, and spoke encouragingly. ‘Nerve yourself, then, and come with me.’ She clung to my arm, and walked so fast that I was almost breathless in the effort to keep up with her. The ruse was a dreadfully old and threadbare one, it is true; but I trusted to its very simplicity, and the result complimented my judgment. In a few minutes we had reached the carriage, and without meeting a single being. It was a lonely place—at the outskirts of the village—and the dusk favored me. I was wise enough to act as my own coachman too. When she saw the carriage she showed the first faint glimmering of suspicion.

“ ‘Where are you taking me?’ ” she demanded.

“ ‘To one who loves you. Quick! enter—we never will reach him in time at this slow rate.’ ”

“Almost before the words were spoken, I had her in the carriage. To gag her and bind her fast was the work of a minute, and even before she had recovered from the shock of surprise. The next instant I was on the box, my hat well slouched over my face, and driving off at a swift rate. It was quite midnight when I reached aunt Kate’s. I let myself in with a latchkey, and thought how careless the old servants were, and aunt Kate too, to leave all the Laitone plate so poorly guarded. Belle, I found, had fainted; so I carried her light form up the stairs and into the tapestried room. I removed the gag from her mouth, and used what restoratives I could lay hands on to recover her from her swoon. When she began to revive I whispered in her ear, ‘Don’t be alarmed, my darling, I wouldn’t hurt you for the world.’ I laid her on the bed, not yet sufficiently recovered to comprehend anything, and hurried out, locking the door after me. I returned after I had seen the horses stabled and the house all quiet again. She addressed me with great dignity when I entered.

“ ‘Well, sir, what is the meaning of this?’

“ ‘My dearest girl, you see before you one who worships you, and determined to possess you at any risk.’

“ ‘I see before me a liar and a thief—a kidnapper of helpless women.’

“Her scorn was magnificent; Venus in anger must have looked like her. I was enraged. I caught up a long, sharp dagger I had placed on the center table close by. ‘I’ll kill you!’ I hissed out. ‘Do, I beseech you!’ She came toward me, looking, with her disordered hair, flashing eyes and crimson cheeks, more beautiful than ever. I went toward her, my arms open to embrace her, but she stepped aside and fell on the dagger, which entered her heart. She never uttered a word, but withdrawing the reeking weapon, held it, point downward for a few moments. Her crimson blood dropped to the floor in a tiny, round pool, and she fell dead at my feet.”

Mr. Sloan was right in thinking that Clarence took a wise precaution to bring no weapon with him. Fifty times was the listener tempted during this heartless recital to strike the murderer dead before him, and rob the hangman of his due. But he did not do it. The hope restrained him that this smiling fiend would expiate his crime by an ignominious death on the gallows. But when Sloan had concluded his horrible confession, Clarence felt that he could bear no more. Every finger ached to clutch that fair young throat, and fearing to trust himself any longer, he hurried from the cell. But the gallows was not destined to be graced by Harry. Visiting his cell next morning, the turnkey found him dead—horribly strangled with his own chains. He was a shocking object—stiff, bent, his eyes starting from their sockets, and his beautiful face swollen and livid. So he went his way, whither, who knows?

“Facilis descensus Averni.”

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