

The Accusing Picture

by Judge Clark

The tragic event which left violet Malvern an orphan, occurred some three years before the time at which our story opens.

In the hour of her bereavement, a kind old uncle had come and taken her to his home; where it was, while yet in deep affliction, that she was first seen by Arthur Wolcott.

No charm appeals more warmly to a generous, youthful fancy, than that which grief lends to beauty. At the first glance of Violet's sweet, pensive face, Arthur Wolcott's heart was filled with sympathy and admiration.

Once or twice only did they meet in the brief period before his return to college to begin his last year. But short as the time had been, it had sufficed for the growth of feelings which the ardent young student would not have departed without declaring, had he not felt that so to do would be to profane a sacred sorrow.

When he came again, it was to find that Violet's uncle had taken her to spend some years abroad. In time, Arthur, too, was seized with the desire to see foreign lands. So it chanced that in Paris, three years after their first meeting, he and Violet met again.

But now, when he would have felt free to tell her of the sentiment which time had only served to strengthen, he found another so constantly at her side, that it was difficult to gain an opportunity to speak, even had not rumor whispered that Lucien Durand, in monopolizing Violet's society, was but asserting an accepted suitor's right.

Not a pleasant impression did this Lucien make on Arthur Walcott when the two encountered. Jealousy seldom finds perfection in a rival; and strikingly handsome as were the young foreigner's dark features, to Arthur's view they seemed a mask which but imperfectly concealed the workings of a malign and dangerous spirit. Nor had he been able, when, at times, he saw Violet's look fixed intently on Lucien's somber, faultless face, to settle whether the spell that bound her was the effect of fear or admiration.

Thus much Arthur learned of the intimacy between the Malverns and Lucien Durand, and how it had come about. While travelling in Italy, Violet and her uncle had been stopped on the highway by a band of robbers. Opportunely Lucien had appeared upon the scene, put the brigands to flight by a word, tendered assistance to the frightened stranger, and ever since had stood upon the footing of a friend who had well earned the title.

"If ever the truth comes out," growled Arthur to himself, "I wager 'twill be found that the valiant knight who made the rescue, was himself no other than the bandit captain! Such fellows have a dash of gallantry in them often."

In such an unreasonable state was Arthur Walcott's mind; but some allowance must be made for disappointed lovers.

As it is common to imagine that any other ill would be preferable to the present one, so the jealous man is prone to fancy he could better bear the success of any other than his actual rival.

"I could endure to see her," would Arthur keep insisting to himself, "the wife of some noble, generous man. But *his* wife!" the thought made him shudder.

Still, he had no ground for interference, even had he possessed the right. It was for Violet and her uncle, the one to choose, the other to approve.

One day Arthur was sauntering through an art gallery, when his attention was drawn to a crowd collected before a large painting recently brought in, the work of an unknown artist.

"How horrible!" "How ghastly!" were the exclamations which greeted Arthur's ears as he pushed his way through the press.

One glance at the canvas, and he recoiled with horror.

On it was portrayed a night scene amid some ancient ruins. A human form lay prostrate on the ground, a stream of blood flowing from a gaping wound. The upturned face, that of a man past middle age, whose silvery hairs glistened in the moonlight, was convulsed with the death agony. With what fearful fidelity the artist had traced in the contracted features the last expiring throes! Another figure stood partly stooping over that of the victim. It was that of a man in the vigor of youth, well-knit, muscular, symmetrical. In one hand he grasped a dagger from whose blade still dripped great drops of blood. The countenance, perfect in outline, but in expression relentless and cruel, was partially in shadow, yet painfully distinct in every lineament. From behind a broken column peered a pale, terrified face, evidently that of a concealed and frightened witness of the tragedy.

Arthur was startled by a wild shriek.

"My poor murdered father!" was wailed out in tones which thrilled every fiber of his being.

Turning quickly, his eyes fell upon the pale, terror-stricken face of Violet Malvern. Her gaze was fixed, as if beyond the power of withdrawal, on the prostrate, bleeding form.

"And behold the murderer!" exclaimed Arthur Wolcott, glancing rapidly from the face of the assassin in the picture to that of Lucien Durand.

No portrait was ever more faithful.

As the likeness flashed upon her, Violet staggered back from her companion, and but for Arthur's timely aid, would have sunk helpless to the floor.

“Stop that man!” cried Arthur, as Duran turned to flee.

“Who accuses him?” demanded an official; at the same time staying the fugitive.

“I do,” said Arthur.

“On what proof?”

“Whoever painted that picture can furnish it.”

The Paris police stand little on ceremony. Durand was taken into custody. The artist was found. His story was brief, but to the point. He was a poor Italian painter, who, strolling out one night near Rome, witnessed, from a concealed spot, the commission of a robbery and murder. He recognized in the assassin a famous bandit chief, and fearing for his own life, if he betrayed his presence or divulged his knowledge, he had carefully kept the secret till finding himself in another country, he had ventured to make the terrible scene so vividly impressed upon his memory, the subject of a picture. In Lucien Durand he fully identified the murderer.

The criminal was surrendered to answer to the government whose laws he had violated, and, in due time, received his just reward.

Violet, in truth, had never loved Lucien Durand, and the rumor of their betrothal was merely gossip. His society had been accepted by reason of the service with which he was accredited, and people had drawn their own conclusions.

All this Arthur Walcott soon found out, and matters were speedily cleared up between him and Violet.

New York Ledger, May 26, 1877