

# The Victim

By Anonymous

Some years ago, myself and a fellow-student went to Dawlish for the summer months. An accident, which I need not narrate, and which was followed by a severe attack of pleurisy, chained me a prisoner to my room for several weeks. My companion, whose name was St Clare, was a young man of high spirits and lively temper; and though naturally kind and affectionate, escaped, as often as he could, from the restraint of a sick room. In one of his walks, he chanced to encounter a young lady, whom he fell in love with, as the phrase is, at first sight, and whose beauty he dwelt upon with a warmth of enthusiasm not a little tantalizing to one, like myself, who could not even behold it. The lady, however, quitted Dawlish very suddenly, and left my friend in ignorance of every other particular concerning her than that her name was Smith, and her residence in London. So vague a direction he, however, resolved to follow up. We returned to town sooner than we otherwise should have done, in order that the lover might commence his inquiries. My friend was worthy of the romantic name that he bore, Melville St Clare—a name that was the delight of all his boarding-school cousins, and the jest of all his acquaintance in the schools.

He was the sole son of Thomas St Clare, of Clare Hall, in the county of , No. —, in Hanover-square, and Banker, No. —, Lombard-street. An eccentric man did the world account him. ‘Very odd,’ remarked the heads of houses for wholesale brides, ‘that the old man should insist upon his son studying medicine and surgery, when every one knows he will inherit at least ten thousand a-year.’ — ‘Nothing to do with it,’ was the argument of the father; ‘who can tell what is to happen to funded, or even landed property, in England? The empire of disease takes in the world; and in all its quarters, medical knowledge may be made the key to competency and wealth.’

While quietly discussing in my own mind the various relative merits between two modes of operation for poplitical aneurism, at my lodgings in town, some three weeks after our return from the country of hills and rain, (some ungallantly add, of thick andes also,) my studies were broken in upon by a messenger, who demanded my immediate compliance with the terms of a note he held in his hand. It ran thus:—

‘Let me pray you to set off instantly with the bearer in my carriage to your distressed friend—

‘M. ST CLARE.’

On reaching the house, the blinds were down and the shutters closed; while the knocker muffled, bespoke a note of ominous preparation. ‘How are you?’ I inquired, somewhat relieved by seeing my friend up; and though looking wan, bearing no marks of severe illness. ‘I hope nothing has happened?’

‘Yes, the deadliest arrow in Fortune’s quiver has been shot—and found its mark. At three, this morning, my father’s valet called me up, to say his master was in convulsions. Suspecting it to be a return of apoplexy, I despatched him off for Abercrombie, and on reaching his room, I found my fears verified. Abercrombie arrived; he opened the temporal artery, and sense returned, when my unfortunate parent insisted on informing me what arrangements he had made in my favour respecting the property; and on my suggesting that his books might previously require to be looked over, he interrupted me by saying it was useless. “You are the son of a ruined man.” I

started. "Yes, such have I been for the last twenty years! I have secured to you a *thousand pounds*, to finish your education—and that is all that calamity has left it in my power to bestow." For some moments I was led to doubt his sanity.

' "What, then, can be contained within those two massive chests, so carefully secured?"—"Old parchment copies of my mortgages. Your fortune has only changed in aspect; before you were in existence, the author of your being was a *beggar!* My credit alone has supported me. I have with difficulty been able to invest in the funds for your wants the paltry sum I mentioned. May you prosper better than your father, and the brightness of your day make up for the darkness of his closing scene. God's blessing " His head sank on the pillow, and falling into a comatose state he slept for four or five hours, when his transition from time to eternity was as gentle as it was unnoticed.

'For my part, I merely remain here till the last offices are performed. All his affairs will be committed to his solicitors, when the fortune and residence which I looked forward to enjoying as my own must be left to others.'

'Courage, my dear fellow,' said I, 'there is no space too great to allow of the sun's rays enlivening it—neither is that heart in existence which hope may not inhabit.'

The funeral was over, the mansions of his father relinquished, and St Clare himself duly forgotten by his *friends*. The profession, which he before looked on as optional in its pursuit, was now to become his means of existence; and in order to pursue it with greater comfort to ourselves, we took spacious rooms, which enabled us to live together, in – street, Borough, in the neighbourhood of our hospital. One morning, it so happened that I had something to detain me at home, and St Clare proceeded by himself to his studies. From the brilliant complexion and handsome countenance of a former day, his appearance had degenerated into the pale and consumptive look of one about to follow the friend for whom his 'sable livery of woe was worn'.

'Give me joy, Dudley! Joy, I say, for life is bright once more!' exclaimed St Clare, returning late in the evening, while his face was beaming with gladness.

'I rejoice to hear it,' said I. 'What has happened?' I inquired. St Clare explained. He had met his unforgotten mistress of Dawlish; she had introduced him to her father, with whom she was walking, and whom he recognized as a Mr Smith, an eccentric and wealthy acquaintance of his deceased parents. Mr Smith invited him to dinner the next day. To cut short my story, St Clare soon received permission to pay his addresses to the lady he had so long secretly loved; and Mr Smith, who had originally been in trade, and was at once saving and generous, promised 16,000*l.* to the young couple, on the condition that St Glare should follow up his profession. The marriage was to be concluded immediately after St Glare had passed the College of Surgeons, which he expected to do in six months.

'Dudley, I have an engagement to-day, and shall not be at home till the evening,' said St Glare, returning from the Hospital one morning; 'but as we must dissect the arteries of the neck somewhat more minutely before we go up for examination, I wish you would get a subject. I am told you can have one within two days, by applying to this man,' giving me the card of an exhumator in the Borough.

'Very well,' I returned, setting off.

'Which will you have, Sir?' asked the trafficker in human clay, whose lineaments bespoke the total absence of every human feeling from his heart:—'a lady or a jemman?'

'Whichever you can procure with least trouble,' I replied. 'When can you bring it to my lodgings?'

'The day after to-morrow, Sir.'

‘Good! What is your price?’

‘Why, Sir, the market’s very high just now, as there’s a terrible rout about those things; so I must have twelve guineas.’

‘Well, then, at eleven, the evening after to-morrow, I shall expect you.’

The night passed, no St Glare appeared;—the next, still he came not—and eleven on the following evening found him yet absent. Surrounded with books, bones, skulls, and other requisites for surgical study, midnight surprised me, when a gentle tap at the door put my reveries to flight.

‘Two men in the street, Sir, wish to see you there.’

‘Very well,’ said I; and recollecting the appointment, I descended, and found the exhumator and another.

‘We called you down, Sir, to get the woman out of the way; because, you know, these things don’t do to gossip about. Shall we take it up-stairs?’

‘Yes, and I will follow behind. Make as little noise as possible.’

‘No, no, Sir, trust us for that—we’re pretty well used to this sort of work. Jem, give the signal’: when the party addressed, stepping into the street, gave a low whistle on his fingers, and something advanced with a dull, rustling noise, which proved to be a wheelbarrow containing a sack. They had filled the gutter with straw, and over this driven the barrow. In an instant two of them seized the sack, and without making any more disturbance than if they had been simply walking up-stairs, they carried it into my apartment, and the vehicle it was brought in was rapidly wheeled off.

It is usual for students to carry on their dissections solely in the theatre to which they belong, but as there are many annoyances from the low and coarse set too often mixed up in these places, St Glare and myself had determined to choose a lodging where we could pursue this necessary, but revolting, part of the profession in private. Within my bedroom was a dressing-closet, which, as it was well lighted, we devoted to this purpose. Having carried in their burden and laid it down, they returned to the sitting-room, through which was the only communication with the other.

‘Couldn’t get ye a jemman, Sir; so we brought ye a lady this time,’ said the man.

‘Very well. I hope the subject is a recent one, because I may not be able to make use of the body for a day or two.’

‘As to the time she has been buried, Sir, that’s *none* to speak of’; while a grin of dark expression gathered round his mouth; and though ignorant of its meaning it made me recoil, from the air of additional horror it flung over features already so revolting in expression. I went into the closet to take a glance at the subject, fearing they might attempt to deceive me. They had lain it on the table, and a linen cloth swathed round was the only covering. I drew aside the corner which concealed the face, and started, for never till that instant had I seen aught that came so near to my most ideal picture of female loveliness; even though the last touches had been painted by the hand of Death. As the light of the candle fell on the shrouded figure before me, it composed the very scene that Rembrandt would have loved to paint, and you, my reader, to have looked on. Her hair was loose and motionless, while its whole length, which had strayed over her neck and shoulders, nestled in a bosom white as snow, whose pure, warm tides were now at rest for ever! One thing struck me as singular—her rich, dark tresses still held within them a thin, slight comb. An oath of impatience from the men I had left in the next room drew me from my survey.

‘Where did you get the subject, my men?’ I inquired, as I put the money into the man’s hand.

‘Oh, we hadn’t it from a town churchyard, Sir. It came up from the country, didn’t it, Jem?’

‘Yes,’ replied the man addressed, and both moved quickly to depart; while I returned to gaze on the beauteous object I had left, and which afforded me a pleasure, so mixed up with all that was horrid, that I sincerely hope it will never fall to my lot to have a second experience of the same feeling.

To me she was as nothing, less than nothing; and though, from long habit, I had almost brought myself to meet with indifference the objects which are found on the dissecting-table, I could not gaze on one so young, so very fair, without feeling the springs of pity dissolve within me; and tears, fast and many, fell on those lips; I refrained not from kissing, notwithstanding Mortality had set its seal upon them; as yet—

‘Before Decay’s effacing fingers  
Had swept the lines where beauty lingers.’

Her eyes were closed beneath the long lashes. I lifted one lid; the orb beneath was large and blue—but ‘soul was wanting there.’ So great was the impression her beauty made upon me, that, stepping into the next room, I took my materials, and made a drawing of the placid and unconscious form so hushed and still. I look upon it at this moment, and fancy recalls the deep and unaccountable emotions that shook me as I made it. It must have been an instinctive—But, to proceed, I saw but one figure in my sleep—the lovely, but unburied dead. I awoke—what could it be that felt so moist and cold against my face?—where was I?—what light was glimmering through the windows?—it was the break of day. Worn with fatigue, I had fallen asleep over my drawing, while the candle had burnt out in the socket, and my head was resting on the inanimate breast, which had been deprived too soon of existence to know the pure joy of pillowing a fellow-heart it loved. I arose, and retired to a sleepless couch. In the evening, while over my modicum of coffee, in came St Glare. He appeared haggard and wild, whilst every now and then his eye would gaze on vacancy, and closing, seem to shut out some unpleasant thought, that haunted him in ideal reality.

‘Well, St Glare, what has detained you?’

‘Death!’ said he, solemnly. ‘The sole remaining relative to whom Nature has given any claim on my affections, is no more. A sudden despatch called me down to soothe the expiring hours of my mother’s sister, and not a soul is left me now on earth to love, save Emily and my friend. I feel most unaccountably oppressed—a dread sense of ill pervades me; but let me hope that ill is past.’

‘Well, think of it no more,’ I replied, and changed the conversation. ‘I have procured a subject—female, beautiful and young; but I feel more inclined to let it rest and rot amidst its fellow-clods of clay, than bare so fair a bosom to the knife. It is well that the living hold a pre-occupancy of my heart, or such a beauteous form of death—’

‘This note has just been left for you, Sir, from Mr Smith, who requests an immediate answer,’ said my servant, entering. I read aloud its contents:—

‘Though unknown to you, save by name and the mention of another, I call upon you, as the friend of one who was my friend, to assist me in unravelling this horrid mystery. On Tuesday, at two, my dearest Emily went out, with the intention of returning at four. Since that hour, I have been unable to obtain the slightest information respecting her. I have called in your absence for St Glare twice; he was unexpectedly out. Surely I have not mistaken *him!* *He* cannot have filled

up the measure of mankind's deceit, and abused the trust reposed in him! Let me pray you, for the love of Heaven! to give me the least clue you are possessed of that may lead to her discovery.

'I know not what I have written, but you can understand its meaning.

'Your's, &c.  
'JOHN SMITH.'

Starting from his seat with an air of a maniac, St Glare abstractedly gazed on empty air, as if to wait conviction. Too soon it came, and seizing a light, he dashed towards the closet where he knew the body was to be. For the first time a dark suspicion flashed upon me, and taking the other candle I followed. The face had been again covered, and St Glare, setting the light upon the table, stood transfixed,—just as we feel the pressure of some night-mare-dream,—without the power of drawing his eyes away, or by dashing aside the veil, to end this suspense of agony, in the certainty of despair.

Every muscle of his body shook, while his pale lips could only mutter—'It must be so! it must be so!' and his finger pointing to the shrouded corpse, silently bade me to disclose the truth: mute, motionless horror pervaded me throughout; when, springing from his trance, he tore away the linen from the features it concealed. One glance sufficed;—true, the last twenty-four hours had robbed them of much that was lovely, but they were cast in a mould of such sweet expression that *once seen*, was to be *remembered for ever*.

With indescribable wildness he flung himself upon the body, and embracing the pallid clay, seemed vainly trying to kiss it back to life. I watched his countenance till it became so pale, there was only one shade of difference between the two. In an instant, from the strained glare of his fixed glance, his eyes relaxed, and a lifeless, inanimate expression of nonentity succeeded their former tension, while with his hand still retaining the hair of the deceased in his grasp, he sunk upon the ground.

Assistance was called, and from a state of insensibility he passed into one of depression.

All our efforts to disentangle the locks he had so warmly loved from his fingers were in vain; the locks were, therefore, cut off from the head. Through all the anguish of his soul he never spoke; the last words to which his lips gave utterance, were these—'It must be so, it must be so.' For hours he would stare at one object, and his look was to me so full of horror and reproach, I could not meet it. Suddenly he would turn to the hair, and fastening his lips upon it, murmur some inarticulate sounds, and weep with all the bitterness of infantine sorrow.

The reader will remember it so chanced, that I never was introduced to the heroine of my tale; but all doubt was now removed as to the identity of the subject for dissection with the unfortunate Emily Smith. How she came by her death was a mystery that nothing seemed likely to unravel.

Not the slightest marks of violence could be found about her person; the arms were certainly in an unnatural position, being bent with the palms upward, as if to support a weight; and seemed to have been somewhat pressed, but this might be accounted for by the packing of the body. All beside wore the appearance of quiescent death.

She was opened, and not the slightest trace of poison presented itself. Immediate search had been made for the men; they had absconded, and all apparent means of inquiry seemed hushed with the victim of science in its grave.

Some years passed—St Glare was dead—the father of the unfortunate Emily was no more. Fortune had thriven with me, and being independent of practice, I had settled in the West-end of

London, and married the object of my choice. I was soon occupied with the employments of my profession, and amongst the rest, that of surgeon to the — dispensary.

Seven years after my first commencement, I had to attend a poor man who was attacked with inflammation of the brain. The violence of the disease had been subdued, but some strange wanderings of delirium still haunted him. In a paroxysm of this sort he one day exclaimed to me, as I was feeling his pulse, ‘Gut it off! Cut it off! it says so: off with it!’ Paying no attention to this, I replaced his arm within the cover-lid, but dashing it out, he seized mine and demanded, ‘does it not say if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off?’ ‘Yes, my man, but yours is a useful member; take my advice and keep it on.

‘I will not; it has offended me, ay, damned me to eternity. It is a murderous right hand!’ But I will not drag the reader through the incoherent ravings of guilty delirium; it suffices to say, that after some considerable pains I elicited the following story from him.

‘It’s just ten years to-morrow (that’s Tuesday) since I was discharged from four months imprisonment in the House of Correction. I was then just twenty. In the same place I met a gang of resurrection men, and they said what a jolly life they led, plenty of money, and all that, when one of ’em told the rest he knew a better way to get the rhino<sup>1</sup> quickly than what they did, and if so be as they wouldn’t split, he’d tell ’em. Well, after making me take an oath (I trembles now to think of it) that I wouldn’t tell, they let me into it. This was to kidnap all the greenhorns, that didn’t know their way about town, and carry them to a house the gang had in — alley, near Blackfriars, where they were to be suffocated, and sold to you doctors for cutting up. Well, it took a long time to bring my mind to such a thing, but they persuaded me we were *all destined to go to heaven or hell*, before we were born, and that *our actions had nothing to do with it*. So I agreed, when the time came round, to enter the gang.

‘On the day we were *let loose*, there were four of us loitering near the coach stand in — street. A gentleman was walking up and down before an inn, looking at his watch every now and then, and casting his eyes round to see if a coach was coming which he seemed to expect. Presently he met some one who knowed ’un, and I saw him take a letter and read it, and then say to the other “I can’t come this instant, because I expect a friend in half an hour, and must wait for her; but stay, I can write a note, and put her off,” when he stepped inside the inn, and came out in ten minutes, with a note in his hand. One of us had been servant in a cutting-up house in the Borough, and knowed him afore: stepping up, he asked if he could carry the note for him? The other was in a hurry, and said “yes,” giving him half-a-crown to take it into the Borough, then got into the coach and drove off. Instead of going with it, he had larnt to read, and breaking the note open, found some lady was coming to meet the gentleman by half-past two. “I tell ye what, my boys,” says he, “here’s a fish come to our net without looking for it, so we’ll have her first.” Shortly after, up comes the coach with a lady in it; meanwhile one of our gang had got another coach belonging to us *for the purpose*, which was in waiting; so the villain tells her that the gentleman had been obliged to go somewhere else, but he was an old servant, and if she would get into his coach, he would drive her to the house where the gemman was waiting to receive her. She, never suspecting, got in, and was driven off to the *slaughter house*, as we called it. She entered by a back yard, and frightened by the dark, dirty way, and lonely-looking rooms, and not seeing him she expected, she attempted to run off, but that was of no use, and taking her to a room for the purpose, in the middle of the house, where no one could hear her screaming, she was locked up for the night. Well, I was uncommon struck with her beautiful looks, and begged very hard to let her go: they said it would not do, because as how they would all be found out. *So*

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<sup>1</sup> Money.

*die she must, the next order they had for a corpse.* That very night came an order, and they swore I should have the killing of her, for being spooney enough to beg her life. I swore I would not do it; but they said if I didn't they would send me instead, and, frightened at their threats, I agreed.

'In the room where she slept was a bed, with a sliding top to let down and smother the person who was lying beneath, while the chain which let it down was fastened in the room above. They had given her a small lamp in order to look at her through a hole, that they might see what she was about. After locking the door inside, (for they left the key there to keep 'em *easy*, while it was bolted on the out,) and looking to see there was no one in the room, nor any other door, she knelt by the bed-side, said her prayers, and then laid down in her clothes. This was at ten—they watched her till twelve; she was sleeping soundly, but crying too, they said, when they took me up into the room above, and with a drawn knife at my throat, insisted on my letting go the chain which was to smother her beneath—I did it! Oh, I did it!—hark!' starting up, 'don't you hear that rustling of the clothes? a stifled cry? no, all is quiet! She is done for—take her and sell her!' and from that he fell into his old raving manner once more.

The next day he was again lucid, and pulling from his bosom an old purse, he said, 'I managed to get these things without their knowledge.' It contained a ring with a locket engraven 'E. S.' and the silver plate of a dog's collar with the name of 'Emily' on it; 'that,' he remarked, 'came from a little spaniel which we sold.'

I made a finished miniature from the rough drawing taken on the first evening of my seeing Emily Smith. This had been set in the lid of a snuff-box, and anxious to see if he would recognise it, I brought it in my pocket. After looking an instant at the contents of the purse, I silently placed the snuff-box in his hand. His mind but barely took time to comprehend and know the face, when flinging it from him with a loud cry, his spirit took its flight to final judgment—and I vowed from that day a renunciation of the scalpel for ever.