

# A STRANGE, TRUE TALE

### Romance and Tragedy of General Sickles' Daughter's Life.

#### HOW HER BEAUTY FADED AWAY.

Ruined by Dissipation and Excesses, the Once Brilliant Young Woman Dies Practically Friendless and Alone—Social Triumphs Years Ago.



A FILE in the surrogate's office of Brooklyn, says the New York World, is a will which tells a story of love, romance and tragedy such as fiction seldom equals. It brings to memory events of half a century ago that stirred society and the nation.

Woman's frailty, woman's faithlessness, man's treachery and man's revenge—all are revealed in its two brief pages. It tells of broken homes, wrecked lives, and still above it all, like a halo, shines the glory of distinction attained, of brave deeds done.

Laura B. Sickles at one time could have claimed the hand of the bravest and best in America or Europe. Daughter of a man of distinction, wealth and power, there was nothing the future might not have brought to her.

While still in her teens she reigned with a queenly sway at the court of Madrid. Cavaliers with the bluest blood of old Castile bowed before her. The horizon of her life was rosy tinted, but somewhere afar off was a dark speck, a menacing blot upon her heritage.

Laura Sickles was not a girl one would call beautiful, though her mother was gifted with radiant charms of feature and person. Her father, too, the famous General Daniel E. Sickles, was and still is a splendid specimen of physical manhood.

His seventy years are carried with a dignity, a majesty even, from which his crutches cannot detract.

It was away back in 1853 that Daniel E. Sickles, then in his thirty-first year and corporation attorney for New York city, was married to Teresa Baglioli. She was only seventeen and the daughter of A. Baglioli, an Italian music teacher of New York.

Beautiful as a dream of an Italian morning was the bride of the rising young lawyer politician. She was accomplished as well, a brilliant conversationalist in several languages and in every way fitted to grace the home her talented husband gave her.

The young lawyer met her when he was studying Italian under Lorenzo Daponte, the librettist of Verdi's most celebrated opera. The elder Sickles, one of the richest men of New York in those days, had carefully educated his son, but the youth was self-willed and there had been a quarrel.

The son could get along without his father, and the old gentleman was pleased at his rapid advancement. The beautiful Teresa was self-willed also. Her busy father could not devote much time to her moral education, and left to herself she grew to womanhood full of the choicest of feminine physical charms, but deficient in those beauties of soul which elevate woman above the sphere of ordinary humanity.

James Buchanan, already a power in the politics of New York, was sent to London as minister for the United States. His political acumen and knowledge of men led him to accept young Sickles as secretary of legation. In London Mrs. Sickles was the rage. She was presented to the queen, and at many of the great social functions in the English capital and at the country houses of the aristocracy she was the observed of all observers.

It was while her father was in London in 1854 that Laura was born at the old Sickles homestead in Bloomingdale. Laura Baglioli Sickles she was christened. The next year the handsome secretary of legation returned to this country to help elect James Buchanan president of the United States. At the same election he was chosen as a state senator, and the next year he was sent to congress from New York.

He made his home on Lafayette square, then one of the most fashionable sections of the capital. Husband and wife were petted members of Washington's best society.

of New York and had raised the Excelsior brigade. How he gained distinction at Williamsburg, Fair Oaks, Malvern Hill and finally Gettysburg, how he rose in rank and was retired as a major general are matters of history.

Little Laura had been growing apace, and when the general was appointed minister to Spain by President Grant she was fifteen years old. She went with him to Madrid, and there learned what it was to receive the homage of nobles and princes.

In her train at Madrid was a handsome young cavalier who, though not wealthy, could trace his ancestry to the bluest blooded hidalgos of Castile and Aragon. She loved him. The courtship went on until the general concluded that the young Spaniard was after his daughter's money and broke off the engagement.

About the same time he took to himself a young Spanish wife. Laura refused to submit. Imperious as her father, and scornful the mediation of her stepmother, she came back to the United States. The quarrel that took place in the American minister's house at Madrid was never healed. Father and daughter never saw each other again.

Laura came to New York and went to live with her grandmother, Mmie. Baglioli, in Fifty-second street. At her grandfather's death she became possessed of about \$60,000, well invested in real estate.

The general resigned his post in Madrid and returned to this country in 1873. Laura's heritage of stubbornness began to manifest itself. She left her grandmother's roof to plunge into the sea of dissipation and self-indulgence.

Her name was linked with that of John Bloodgood, then with that of a Mr. Hughes and then with others by the score. Untrammelled by social connections, reckless of her own and her family's name, she became the extravagant queen of the wildest set in New York.

At one time she was known as Mrs. Carlton and lived at Morella's. Her favors were dispensed with a generous hand, but she exacted a devotion and a subservience to her will that resulted in frequent ruptures.

There was nothing mercenary about this butterfly of the gilded parades. Of a hardy race, strong and supple limbed, she bade fair to withstand the immense task she put upon her endurance. But the pace was too rapid even for her.

The attractions which brought to her feet the accomplished youths and wealthy bankers and merchants began to disappear. The splendid figure of which a Hebe or a Juno would have been proud began to take on flesh.

The lines of beauty disappeared first into embonpoint and at the last were totally obliterated in gross obesity. From champagne and the costliest wines that private and public cellars could afford she turned to gin and whisky.

The girl who had graced the receptions at the court of Spain, whom princes and princesses had caressed, was now the Circe of back rooms in New York and Brooklyn groceries. She still had her followers, though. Her income purchased what grace and charm had once commanded.

She moved over to Brooklyn four years ago, spending her time in recuperating from the effects of debauches, in which her intervals of strength would permit her to indulge.

Her grandmother, to whom she returned for awhile, was then living at Croton Falls. But Laura could not remain in such a secluded, lifeless spot. She took up her home in Brooklyn at 11 Debevoise place, the house of George W. Cook. Mr. Cook is a clerk in the New York postoffice and is a brother of Mmie. Baglioli, Laura Sickles' grandmother. Laura rented a suite of rooms from the Cooks and furnished them herself.

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