

Mrs. Armytage, who was watching over the heart disease, was put to bed and a doctor sent for.

Well, daylight came, the Coroner, and we soon had a jury impaneled. The evidence from the very first went dead again the Squire.

And he did believe the greatest; not like himself at all.

I could see that Jack was most crazy about his father, and between you and me I didn't wonder at it a particle. There Jack was, all his prospects in life just turned completely upside-down and spoiled in a good deal less time than it takes me to tell it.

He tried to speak to Anise, but Mrs. Barton put a stop to that in a minute. She told 'em both right then and there, that there was an end to all their hopes, and she never wanted the subject of their marryin' mentioned between 'em agin. Blast my eyes, if that wasn't a hard one though! There these two had been brought up from their cradles thinking that sometime or other they would make a match of it, and now to be heartlessly told that their fine plans was all ended and done with was pretty hard to bear.

But then, that's neither here nor there. Anise vowed right before us that she'd stand by Jack till she died, and she said she didn't believe the Squire killed her father, any more than she did herself.

Well, with daylight, as I said before, the Coroner arrived and held the inquest. The Squire listened to the evidence of his neighbors and friends, with an apathy that everybody wondered at. He acted that curm more like a man in a dream, than anything else.

But the mystery only grew deeper with closer investigation.

The Squire was at last put on the stand to testify in his own behalf.

"Now, for God's sake," says Jack, as he helped his father to rise up, "remember that your life is at stake as well as the family honor."

The old man was awful touchy on the score of family honor. If he had a hobby—that was it.

"Yes," says he, in a voice that made me think of the November wind a whistlin' through a pine-tree, "yes, the family honor, I'll be sure to think of that."

And then he shot a queer glance at the sheet which was spread out over the body of the dead doctor, and sighed and dropped his head. I tell you, in that one night he had changed awfully.

As he leaned on his son's arm, pale and old, and a tremblin' in every limb, he looked like he'd got a shock he could never get over.

"Mr. Armytage," says the magistrate, "you'll now proceed to give your testimony. I warn you against self-incrimination. You are upon your oath."

Well, sir, it's the first time since the tragedy, the old man raised his head with something like his accustomed spirit. His eyes flashed.

"Remember to whom you are speaking, and govern yourself accordingly," says the Squire.

"That's the talk," says Jack, givin' him an encouraging pressure. "Only be yourself and you'll come out of this all right, yet."

"I'm not here to bandy words with you, Mr. Armytage," retorts the magistrate, "my business is to listen to your evidence, and the best thing for you, is to say at once what you have to say."

Then the Squire kind of tottered, and all at once sunk down helplessly into his seat.

"I have nothing to tell," says he, in a tremblin' voice, and again looking in the direction of the corpse.

"Father," cried Jack, "father, what under heaven do you mean?"

"I think I can understand all too plainly what he means," says the magistrate, severely, "but as I said before, he need not excommunicate himself. Now, see here, Mr. Armytage, I want to ask you one question."

The Squire looked up slyly.

"One question?" repeats he, breaking out into a boisterous laugh. "Why, ask a thousand questions if you like; I'll answer them all."

A shudder seemed to go over everybody in the room. You see this was a phase of the old Squire's character, that was new even to his best friends, and he had some even yet, in the face of the horrid evidence that was accumulating against him. The magistrate began to look at him pretty sharp.

Mr. Armytage had suddenly stopped laughing, and now, apparently indifferent to the people about him, sat twirling his thumbs carefully over and over, a strange and inexplicable expression on his pale and careworn features.

"Now, then, give me your attention, Squire," says the officer in a coaxing voice, "Did you and Dr. Barton ever have any difficulty or hard feelings between you in your lives?"

"No," says the Squire, shortly.

"When you went into the study, was Dr. Barton there, or did he come a little later?"

The Squire stopped twirling his thumbs.

"He was already there," says he.

"Very well. Now, Mr. Armytage, as nearly as I can find out, Dr. Barton wanted to see you privately. He wanted to tell you something. State to this jury whether the secret of your own affairs or his, or both."

The Squire looked up furiously from under his eyebrows.

Jack sat beside him, white as a dead man, doubt, fear and confirmation all struggling for the mastery in his breast.

"Dr. Barton had something to tell me," said the prisoner, for the first time evincing anything like real emotion.

"Was it about yourself or your affairs?"

"It concerned my family honor," cries the Squire, beating the floor with his feet.

"Now, then," said the officer, cautiously, "what did Dr. Barton tell you?"

A look of fury swept over the face of the prisoner. He assumed an erect position, his eyes glared with anger. All the weakness and singular vacillation of manner that had characterized him since the tragedy seemed momentarily to forsake him.

"He told me," roared he, striking the table with his clenched fist, "that I was harboring a great villain in my bosom. He told me that, and offered to show me the proof."

Then he suddenly stopped, faltered, and sank down again, beginning once more to twirl his thumbs over and over, now faster, now slower, seeming to forget everybody in this occupation.

Well, Jack was positively ghastly, you see he felt rather than saw, the contemptuous glances that was leveled at him by the crowd, and he sat there perplexed and worried by his father's strange testimony.

"When Dr. Barton told you that, what did you do?"

"Do?" says the Squire, a-leaving his head on his son's shoulder, as if he was

the world come to an end. "Why, I went to tell the coroner and coroner's inquest with it, of course."

Then Jack took hold on his father's hand, it was burning hot. It was plain enough to see that the Squire was a good deal off his mental base.

"And when you went back," continues the magistrate, "you was mad with rage and excitement, and suddenly struck the Doctor with your knife; was that the way?"

Armytage never said a word, and the officer began to get vexed.

"Mr. Armytage," says he, a-slowly waving a lean forefinger, which the Squire watched with a sort of fascination as it moved before his eyes; "old man, you kill Dr. Barton?"

"A long, shuddering sigh escaped the prisoner. Again his eyes traveled over to the dark corner of the study where the corpse lay. He shot a furtive glance at the cloth that covered it from sight, and began muttering to himself.

In a perfect fever of surprise, everybody in the room bent forward to hear what he said.

"Gas was out; it was sticky and wet. Fall down—and my knife, Yes—pulled my knife from him—he ceased suddenly—but burst into a long, low shivering laugh."

The officer raised his hand, warningly. "Hush," says he, "let him alone for the present, but watch him."

Well, that closed the examination. The jury retired, and after being gone a short time, brought in their verdict according to the evidence. And we took the Squire in charge for the murder, in spite of Jack's remonstrances. The law, you know, don't take much stock in such a thing as sentimentalism.

A week passed—a terrible, never-to-be-forgotten week—in the annals of those who took part in the tragedy at Barrington. The body of the late Dr. Barton was laid away in the cemetery with great pomp and ceremony, followed by the biggest funeral procession ever known in this part of the country. While the old Squire, raring and tearing with brain fever, occupied one of the cells at the county jail, charged with the awful crime of murder. As you may see, as the young people grew older, they proved the wisdom of their respective parents, by falling desperately in love, and on the day that Jack attained his 21st year, the announcement of the betrothal was to be made public. The 21st birthday arrived, and the old Squire—Armytage was his name—fixed up in fine style to celebrate his event.

The Squire lived in great state at Barrington. His family consisted of himself, wife, his son Jack, and an adopted son, Mathew by name. Armytage served both boys alike, at least so far as appearances went. If Jack had a fine home bought for him, why a mate was got for Mathew too, and vice versa. Armytage was a rich man, and spent his money like water when the fit was on, and he made great preparations for the birthday fete. It was to be a stunning thing. All the gentry for miles around were to be invited, and they responded to the invitations to a man and woman too, for that matter. Banners flew in air, pennants fluttered, and a big band from the city was brought down to furnish the music. Along with the rest several policemen were stationed in the house and grounds to see that nobody insulted the guests or made off with the valuables. That's the way I happened to have a hand in it the first place.

Now Mathew, for some time previous to the birth-night ball, had not been in his usual health, and the Squire was a good deal worried about him. He had hurt his arm in some way, breaking the bone, in falling from a wall, and that, with various other causes, conspired to keep him indoors more than the Squire thought best for him.

But Mathew told the Squire not to worry, to his account; but to go on with the party, he would do what he could to make everything pass off in good shape.

Well, the night came, and so did the people. Everything promised a successful termination of the evening's enjoyment, when I saw Dr. Barton whisper something to the Squire, and the Squire suddenly got as pale as a dead man.

I heard Barton tell Armytage to go into the little study that opened on the terrace, that he had something to show him. The Squire promised he would, and got up to go, but some one then called his attention for a moment, and Barton passed into the study alone.

Well, from my post in the dining-room—I wore plain clothes that night, and passed for one of the guests—I could see everybody who went into that study or came out.

After a bit the Squire went in, and came out again, and called Mathew, but Mathew, just a moment before had stepped into the conservatory. It didn't seem more'n half a minute before somebody threw open the study door, and cried out, "Murder! murder!" at the top of their voice.

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"So I will," says her mother. And with that, as there was really no time to spare, they got themselves ready and took the train for the city, with the doctor's broken cuff-buttons.

Mrs. Barton and her daughter both went straight to Ball & Black's, and showed the diamonds, explaining what they wanted. It was while showing the broken link that the clerk looked a little surprised, and finally says he:

"Madam, how long have you owned those buttons?"

"My husband had them made to order here years ago," says she, surprised in her turn.

"Well, look here, then," says he, a-turning round and totching out a tray, "perhaps this will interest you."

And right there, a-winkin' in the sunlight right before their astonished eyes, was the lost half of the missing button. Armytage gave a screech.

"Where did you get this?" says Miss, a-snatchin' at the diamond. "This is my papa's. I fastened it in his cuff myself that very night of the—"

And then she stopped. "See here; it is a perfect fit," matching the two broken links of the chain together. "And here is his initial, the letter 'B,' scratched on this tiny bar. Where did you get it?"

"Not so fast, Miss," said the clerk, politely, taking the diamond from her hand. "This valuable was left in the care of Ball & Black until it should be identified and called for."

Then all of a sudden Anise stood up there before him, and told him, all excited as she was, the story of the murderer of her father, and how an old man, his friend, was in prison charged with

the same crime. The clerk had been given over since the night of the murder.

Well, the clerk was mighty interested, and he went back and called Mr. Black himself, and the gentleman, after listening to the story, just started out and went for a doctor, and that detective happened to be me, if you'll believe it.

Well, I tell you I shifted gams the minute I saw the missing half of that diamond set.

"Now, then," says I to Mr. Black, "the question is, how did that thing get here in your possession?"

"Well, sir," says Mr. Black, politely, "that piece of jewelry was left here by no less a person than the Surgeon General of the United States."

"Holy smoke! For a minute I was struck all of a heap." At that instant the old Squire's innocence of the murder of Dr. Barton was just as plain to my mind as if I had seen the deed committed. Not that I suspected the Surgeon General. Oh, no, bless you no!

My theory was that whoever killed the doctor had carried away the cuff-buttons unconsciously, and, having got hurt in the process, had consulted the Surgeon General, leaving behind him, in the shape of the diamond, the damning evidence of his guilt. The murderer had slipped into the street, and, while the old Squire had been out calling Mathew, the deed was committed and the villain had been obliged to make his escape before he had completed the work of robbery. Well,

there was only one thing now that I couldn't reconcile with this new theory of mine, and that was the fact that I had been watching the study-door all the evening of the murder, and, to my certain knowledge, nobody but the Squire and the doctor had entered the room at all.

Whoever killed Dr. Barton must either have already been in the study before I took up my station at the supper-table, or have entered it by the window. The window of the study, however, had been found to be fastened down, and there were no marks on the sill or the sod under it.

Obviously, my present move was to interview the Surgeon General and find out how he happened to have Dr. Barton's diamond in his possession.

Cautioning Mrs. Barton and her daughter not to mention a syllable of what had occurred at Ball & Black's until they heard from me, I telephoned the Surgeon General and, after a good deal of difficulty, found him at the St. Nicholas Hotel, in Philadelphia.

As you can imagine, he was mighty surprised when I broached the subject of the diamond, but, readily enough, told me all about how he came by it, and what he told me just completely floored me, I'll own.

Well, he said that he had been called to a consultation at Little Barrington, Little Barrington, you know, being about five miles distant from Barrington proper. That the consultation, which in this case had lasted longer than usual, had made it impossible for him to catch the early evening train for the city, and that he had thus been obliged to wait until the 4 o'clock train in the morning.

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