

## *The Pigot Murder*

C. Davis

I HAD been eight years on the special detective force in Philadelphia when that trouble about Joe Myers turned up. Joe was an old chum of mine: the only red-headed fellow I ever did trust, by-the-way, but it was a matter of propinquity; my father's tavern and old Pete Myers' shop were close beside each other, on the L— turnpike; Joe and I were in the same classes in the district school; and after that, worked together on Squire Hall's farm, year in and year out, until I got the chance of an opening up in town. The fact is, whatever success I met with there is due to a succession of lucky chances – hits, as I may say, at discoveries in my line of business, rather than any astuteness of mine. That troubled me but little; it was enough that I did succeed; at the end of the eight years had a snug marble-slabbed brick house out on Green Hill, which my wife had as prettily fitted up as any of the old blooded nob's in town. She had a fanciful way of hanging plant baskets about, and matching colors in carpets and the other trumpery, that set off a room somehow; she got up prime little game suppers for our friends, in winter, too; we had the boys at good schools; and, altogether, bid fair to settle down early into a comfortable, easy middle age. Next to Pike (the chief) I had the best salary on the staff; and no man on the force was so often called on for fancy jobs; and they always pay well.

Things move slower in the country, you know. Joe, in the mean time, had only come to be a sort of steward for Hall – an agent for selling his trees; for the Squire had gone into the nursery business within the last three years.

I think he and Joe were both bitten by the *morus multicaulis* mania, too, which raged about that time, and tried it in partnership. I know Hall had silk-worm galleries put up back of his forcing houses.

Whenever Joe came up on business, and I saw his name among the arrivals, I'd go up to the hotel and have him down for an hour's talk. He seemed a dull, plodding fellow enough, with the vague, uncertain lout and shambling of the country clinging to his habit of thought as to his clothes; but doggedly in earnest in his work, or in his few likings and dislikings. He was a prime favorite with my wife, I remember. One night he happened up when her cousins from Boston were dining with us; and I confess I was conscious of his baggy clothes, and freckled face, and horse-laugh, and irritated by them; but I don't believe Jane once thought of them. She never weighs outward appearance enough, I think. It was on that night he told me about Susy Birt, I recollect. After the others were gone he and I sat over the dining-room fire sipping a glass of egg-nog, when I said:

“Myers, it's time you were taking a wife, and getting a snug little home of your own. There's a place in your head as bare as my palm: it will be too late to think of soon if you don't look sharp. Years tell on women, Joe, at your age and mine.”

Joe had emptied his glass and set it down, and now sat staring in the fire, chafing his red whiskers.

“I know it's late. It is six years now since we've been promised. It was not our fault.”

“Eh? What did you say, Joe?”

“I didn’t say. But it’s Susy Birt.”

“Oho! I know her,” I added, more gravely. “She is a true woman. I am glad to hear of it, Myers. Very glad.”

Joe nodded once or twice in his earnest fashion.

“Yes; that’s what she is – genuine stuff. If we had had our hands free we could have married five years ago. But I have been staving off that mortgage on the farm that father left, you know; it’s all there is for Bill and me. And Susan’s father and mother go with her when she marries. That’s providing for three, you see. We counted it up many a time, but could make nothing of it; so she has gone on teaching at Pilkstown, and I have dogged on with Hall. He’s close, the Squire is, Caldwell; I ought to have got on faster than I have,” pulling his beard, thoughtfully. “Sharp and close.”

“How about the mortgage, Myers?”

“It is a man named Pigot holds it, down in Waynesboro’. He threatens to foreclose this fall. But I have great hopes of doing a good stroke in wool this season. I’ve a venture of my own in that: if I do, I’ll pay Pigot off, and bring matters to a focus with Susy. I’ll risk our starting with the old folks. This is a miserable way of dragging along,” getting up and stretching himself – “living alone, Caldwell. And the girl is getting thin and wearing out. It’s hard we can’t live while we do live – as other people.”

Seeing how much he felt I turned the subject for him. But I took more interest in Joe after that night, and Jane and I used to look every week to see how wool was quoted. But wool went down at an unprecedented rate, and Myers came no more up to town that season.

“I suppose his man Pigot will foreclose the mortgage,” I said.

“Poor Susy!” said my wife, with a sigh.

It is incredible the compassion that little woman has for all of her sex who can not marry. I rather like it in her, though it does make her a bit of a match-maker.

It was two months before we heard anything of Myers; then intelligence came startling enough. One day I met Boyd Stroud (a hatter down in L—) on Chestnut Street, and asked him up for dinner.

“Any thing new down in the old place, Mr. Stroud?” I asked as the soup went off.

“News enough, I should say!” with the pride all country people have in their own gossip, when a chance morsel turns up. “Is it possible you haven’t heard about Pigot? And you in that line of business too!”

“Pigot?” I glanced at Jane. “There’s a Pigot in Waynesboro’; you don’t mean him?”

“That’s the man. But he was up in L— half his time.”

“Well?”

“Well, he was murdered up in our place. It was a foul deed, Sir – a bloody deed,” growing hot. “I am surprised you have not heard of it. Why, the papers are filled with it.”

“It is a bad business, no doubt. But your fish is growing cold, Mr. Stroud. This Pigot, my dear,” to Jane, “is the man who held Myers’s mortgage.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“The mortgage, hey?” said Stroud, sharply. “You knew about that? It’s the worse feature against Myers in the case.”

I dropped my fork.

“What do you mean? What has Myers to do with the case?”

“Oh, nothing,” coolly, pleased at having touched me at last. “Only he’s charged with the murder, and it is pretty certain he did it.”

I knew how to control my face, so only said “Tut! Tut!” and went on with my dinner before asking any questions; but Jane flamed out, and said she was as likely herself to commit a murder as Mr. Myers, and after a moment or two grew very pale, and asked to be excused from the table.

I picked the story out of Stroud by piecemeal. Myers, as I said, was a sort of agent for Squire Hall, and for several years had boarded with him and his wife. There was no other man in the house at the present time; nor, indeed, any women but an old deaf cook, the other servants having left after harvest. Pigot, it seems, had come up to L— on his way to Philadelphia, and stopped at Squire Hall’s. The one tavern in the town was only a wagon-stand, and the gentlemen of the place were in the habit of asking their friends home even more than is usual in country villages. Pigot had been in the house for a day or two. He and Myers did not meet on the friendliest footing the whole town knew, as part of Pigot’s errand in town was to foreclose the mortgage on Joe’s farm and put it under the hammer.

“Pigot was hard on him, there’s no disputing that,” Stroud said. “If it had not been for the fall in wool Joe could have paid him last month. As it was, Hall would likely have come to the rescue in January, when his payments came in – so we all thought, at least.”

“I thought Hall was a close man to deal with?”

“Well, yes. Still, him and Joe’s pulled in harness together a long time. It’s likely he’d have seen him through come New-Year’s”

Hall, however, had not offered to see him through now. The mortgage was to be closed on a Monday. On Saturday night hard words passed between the two men at the supper-table, Joe swearing that he knew a way to hold to his own. The next morning Pigot did not appear as usual. No one entered his room until the bells were ringing for church; then a boy who did odd chores about the kitchen and outhouses was sent in, and found him dead in his bed, his face, chest, and arms already discolored.”

“An effect only to be produced,” said Stroud, evidently quoting the country paper, “by the infusion of the most virulent poison into the blood. In fact, a vial of the blood,” laying down his fork, “and his stomach were sent here to a chemist for examination.”

“Then they arrested Myers?”

“Of course.”

“The blockheads! As if his murder of Pigot would have any effect on the mortgage business!”

Stroud looked rather damped. “There are other circumstances that tell against him,” he said.

But although I bluffed it off with Boyd Stroud, I was secretly disquieted. Joe was not the man to reason, pro or con. He was a pig-headed fool when his prejudices were concerned; the very temperament on which revenge would have a maddening impulse.

In the two months that elapsed before the trial (for it was brought before the next court) I studied the minutiae of the case with a more rigid scrutiny than I had often bestowed on my own heaviest strokes of business; but I had a strange feeling that made it impossible for me to talk about it, even to Jane. Nor did she speak of it to me. When the L— County *Times* was brought in we passed the yellow sleazy sheet from one to the other without a word. Two weeks before the trial, however, one evening, she laid it down, and sat resting her elbows on the table, and her head in her hands.

“You are very busy just now, Philip?” at last.

“Yes. I’m on the track at last of that Sleaman lay. It is just three years since I undertook that job.”

(I’ve heard men in my line warn each other never to trust a petticoat; but I will say that Jane’s clear head and ready wit have stood me in good place many’s the time in my tightest puzzles. So I keep her posted generally.)

“You will not be able to leave town, then, this month?”

(Bless your soul! I knew what that little woman was up to from her first word.)

“Yes; I am going out of town next week.”

“To L—?” quickly.

“Yes, Jane. I’ll see what I can do.”

“God bless you, Philip!” her blue eyes filling, and her pink cheek flushed. “Don’t scruple to sacrifice any money to go. I feel sure it will all be right if you are there. You don’t know how I have prayed for that poor Myers; such a simple-hearted, dogged soul as he is. And there’s nobody there with a grain of wit to help him through: I see that,” tapping the paper with her finger impatiently. It did not make our evening less warm and cozy that Jane overrated her great lumbering husband so much, as you may suppose.

Well, I went down to L— the next Monday: a half-day’s journey by railway, the rest by the old coaching – tiresome enough. I stopped a bit out of town at the Weirich Inn; for, although I had not visited my old home for nearly a dozen years, and, except by Stroud, Myers himself, and one or two others, stood no chance of recognition, I thought it best to keep quiet. It would do Joe no good with the thick-headed jury that he had a town “special” on his side. “Set a thief to catch a thief” is a motto with the country people.

The town of L—is one of those dead-alive villages in the low, rolling Pennsylvanian hills which wakens up on Sundays long enough for its inhabitants to pace slowly to Seceder church, and listen to sermons three hours long. It has its wooden market place, to which a dozen wagons repair leisurely twice a week from the neighboring farms; a squat brick tavern with a pump and trough before the door, where the coach stops once a day; the courthouse on the edge of the town, shut up except for two weeks in the year, its pavement overgrown with grass and star-wort; no other central objects of interest, unless, indeed, you count Jim Allen’s smithy and young Bob Fawcett’s smart drug-shop down at the corner. You may guess, therefore, the buzz and hurry of the town as the time drew near for the county court, when the dusty house would be open and a trial for murder going on in it – a case, too, belonging entirely to themselves. They were a good, amiable herd of people down in L—; but they did gloat over that murder, both men and women. It was market day when I arrived – a cool October day. I put on a farmer’s coat and felt hat, and walked from the Weirich house into town. How the smell of the hemlock woods and stubble brought back the old turnip-digging days to me, when Myers and I worked in Hall’s truck-patch! I meant to call on Hall as I went in, but seeing some carriages in the lane as I passed put it off until my return, and made straight for Garfield’s office. Garfield was prosecuting attorney; I had met him once or twice in the city, and found him to be a sharp, wide-awake fellow, with sufficient good-feeling at bottom to keep him honest. He was conducting the matter against Myers alone, and I knew could give me clearer insight into it than Joe’s own counsel, a mudd-headed old chap, who belonged to L— since he was born. I think his name was Woodsel. Garfield was a New Yorker.

He had a dingy little office, up two pairs of stairs, hung round with maps, and full of tobacco-smoke, for he had a pipe in his mouth and was smoking while he worked out a problem in chess. That's the way these fellows in country towns idle out their lives, and live meanwhile on the fat of the land.

“What the deuce! Caldwell!” he said, eyeing [eyeing] me from head to foot. “I took you for Sanderson off the Ridge Farm. Sit down, sit down! What have you been about the last year? Ferreting out state secrets, eh?”

“No, this is a private stroke of business.”

He stopped a minute. “I see,” gravely, “you've come down to look after Myers. I heard you were old chums. Well, I'm glad of it; but it's of little use, Caldwell, I'm afraid.”

“Is it so squally for Joe, then?”

“Yes.” He went on to outline the evidence as it stood then. Purely circumstantial, but just such as would tell on a jury like the one that would be apt to try Myers. After the men parted at supper (Joe sullen and cursing under his breath), Pigot had gone straight to his room to write letters, and had not left it that night. Myers sat moodily by the dining-room stove, his face buried in his hands, and on Bob Fawcett's coming in to chat an hour with the Squire, got up and went out without speaking; did not return until after ten that night, when Fawcett and Hall heard him go up to his own room, and laughed to themselves at Joe's ill-temper. Mrs. Hall and the cook had seen him meanwhile walking up and down the path to the stables.

“Now nobody in L— could comprehend a man's working off excited feeling by pacing about in the dark and cold,” said Garfield. “Only a murder could warrant such conduct to them. Fawcett left the house at half past ten. Hall reports that all was quiet in Pigot's and Myer's rooms when he went to bed, and further evidence there is none, except that of Dr. Hopper, who passed the house about one o'clock on his way to visit a patient. He says there was a bright light in two of the upper windows, caused apparently by someone carrying a candle from place to place. The windows are those of Pigot's room.”

“The chemist who analyzed the blood—?”

“Alleges the presence of poison, but curiously enough cannot define its nature. How malignant it was we can judge by the effects.”

“But there was no wound, Mr. Garfield?”

“Yes, there was,” drawing his chair closer. “Now to my mind that's the oddest part of the affair. The discoloration of the head and neck all appeared to proceed, radiate, I might say, from two minute punctures in the throat just below the ear, not larger than if made by a needle. The poison used must, therefore, have been of the subtlest nature.”

“Now, Garfield,” I exclaimed. “I leave it to your common sense to say if Joe Myers was apt to have any knowledge of such Borgia-like treachery? Bah! I always take a man’s groundwork of character into account. Myers would have given the fellow a wallop with the axe or kitchen shovel, perhaps, but for puncturing with needles – I’m glad I know this. It satisfies me. Let who will have done the deed. Myers is clear.”

“Well, well!” Garfield tapped thoughtfully on the table with his pencil, and said nothing. But I saw that he agreed with me. “Myers’ conduct after the arrest was against him,” he added, after a pause. “He was dogged and sullen. Just what you would have expected, eh? Perhaps, perhaps! But if Joe is cleared it will be by no plotting of his. He is running his mastiff-neck straight into the halter.”

“He has no friends to plot for him?”

Garfield looked at me sharply. “He has one. You know, I perceive? She’s a good girl, that daughter of Birt’s. It takes a thing like this to bring a woman out.”

“Clear-headed, eh?”

“Caldwell, I wish you’d call on her,” he said, earnestly. “If there’s any link dropped, or hint to be given, she is the one to help you. She had been with me once or twice to talk the matter over. Go this morning. It’s a thing of life and death to her, and so far she has been fighting alone.”

“Where is Hall? Has he made no exertion in the matter?”

“Well, yes. But you see Hall is a slow-brained fellow, not used to look out sharply for any thing but his own interest. Susan’s quick. All that Hall can urge is the point that Myers had no object to serve in the murder, as it would not actually alter his own position, and that Pigot had no money with him if he had wished to rob. Now nobody would suspect Joe of any motive but revenge.”

I was silent. An odd idea struck me. No money with him?

“Pigot had brothers in Waynesboro’? One is a wool-dealer, I believe—”

“And the other is suspected of carrying on an underhand lottery on a tolerably extensive scale.”

“Humph, yes! Well, I think I will take your advise and call on the girl.”

Before I called, however, I stopped in the book-store and scribbled a letter to John Pigot, of Waynesboro’. It went by that night’s mail.

The Birts lived in a little quiet lane, running down from the village street to the creek. They lived there when I was a boy, when Susy and I and a dozen others speared for frogs in the pond at the back of the garden. She was only a fat, giddy, freckled school-girl then, but had left a pleasant impression on me somehow. The house was unaltered. I stepped up on the shaky old wooden

porch, covered with the same coral honey-suckle, and caught a glimpse of Mrs. Birt's milk-pans airing by the pump just as they did twelve years ago. But it would have been hard to recognize the thin pale woman who opened the door for me. The freckles were there on the homely, grave face as on the chubby, dimpled one of long ago, and the same mass of nut-brown hair pushed behind the ears, but that was all of the likeness. There was nothing pretty in this woman's face. Something better than beauty, maybe; a rare intelligence in the mobility of the lips and inflation of the delicate nostril; and in the quiet eyes a sort of thoroughness, truth – a melancholy fidelity, such as you see in the eyes of some horses that have been kindly used. A man in my business soon learns whom to trust. In five minutes I was talking of every phase of this matter with this girl, almost as much in earnest as she, and thoroughly *en rapport* with her. We were alone in the little "keeping-room;" and even to me there was something oddly strange in the contrast of the quiet of the hazy noon without, the garden blooms of purple and crimson hollyhocks and dahlias, the sleepy hum of the bees on the sun, and within the pale, intent face of this woman, and the smothered feeling in her soul of which it but feebly hinted. Her little school had vacation now: "it happened well, for I could not have thought of anything else, and – *this*," she said, her hands clasped on the table before her, working together as if she were in a spasm. Otherwise she was perfectly still. She did not seem to doubt me from the first. "I know you will do what you can. But I have thought and thought, and nothing comes of it. And it matters to me," her voice growing low. "He is all I have." When I spoke cheerfully – "You don't know the people here," she said; in the same low, hopeless tone. "They are hounding him on to his death, because they always join in the same outcry. They don't know enough of life to judge fairly." But she was not bitter even then. "They all like Joe; they don't mean to be unjust. But it is a new thing – a murder; so they talk and argue day by day to keep up the excitement. They don't see the harm it does," with a sudden motion of the hand to her forehead, checked before made. I saw how thick and swollen the veins in her neck and head were. "A case of brain-fever in less than a week," I thought. "She must have something new to think of." I drew my chair sharply to the pine table.

"Please attend to me, Miss Birt," I said. "If Myers is saved, you and I must do it. For Woodsel, he is a mere log; I remember him of old. The trial comes off in two weeks; of this time I can spare four days from other business to devote to it."

"Four days!" She smiled, bitterly; her very lips were white and dry.

"You think that is a narrow plank to interpose between a man and death? It will be enough, God helping us. My belief is this: that Pigot, most probably, had money with him – that he was murdered by someone cognizant of the fact; there is a sharp gang, I know, in the outskirts of L— county. I am the more convinced of the truth of this guess by my knowledge of Hall's house; for, if you will remember, there is a slanting roof from the second story back by which an expert climber could easily have reached the chambers unheard. Let us but catch the slightest clew to such an attempt and we are safe. I leave you to watch; I can give but two days now, two at the time of the trial. Meanwhile I mean to prove that Pigot had money with him; the establishment of any other motive than revenge will be a strong premise in Joe's behalf."

I stopped short there, with half of my real thought untold; for the fact was, I wanted to occupy her mind by this harangue as much as any thing else. She had followed me, a curious change working out on her face, a sort of childish, breathless eagerness, her big dark eyes growing wet,



her thin cheeks red. When I had finished she drew a gasping breath. "I see! He's safe, Joe is! Joe—" put her hand on my arm, and then turned to the window with a nervous half-cry and half-laugh. She was so much more credulous and silly and loveable a woman than I expected to find when Garfield talked of her clear head. If ever this bout was over wouldn't Jane delight in coddling and making much of the girl up in the little parlor on Green Hill!

"It is growing late," I said, rising; "I will only see you once again, Miss Birt, most probably. I may have to run down to Waynesboro' tonight, and today I must sift the evidence. You will communicate with Myers?"

"I go there every evening," turning with the flush and trembling smile yet on her face.

The old Susy Birt was not dead yet; but I shook hands with her gravely, and turned down into the grassy lane leading to the village. It was past noon: the bees were droning lazily into the great purple iron-weeds along the fences: there was a heavy smell of harvest fields in the air: far off a faint, blue mist on the horizon hills shimmered like steam in the yellow August sunshine; little brown chippeys hopped right in my path as if we were the oldest sort of friends. Now I'm not a man that cares for these things, but I could not help walking slower, taking off my hat, and feeling what a pleasant, warm-hearted world it was, after all, and how it did a man's very bones good to be alive. Then came the thought of Joe yonder in that brick jail, of the girl I had just left — of the black death waiting for him in one of these early pleasant days; the two lives God made going out suddenly in darkness and loss; homely, common lives enough, maybe, but full of wholesome health — of an infinite tenderness — good for much in the world. Nobody could save them but me—! The thought came on me terribly there in that quiet lane and warm sunshine, I do not know why. I remember stopping suddenly, looking at my big muscles, feeling how weak they were, how dull my clogged brain — humbly; and if Phil Caldwell asked help to bring the truth to light that day you need not laugh at him. Some one was as near and quick to hear the detective in the sunny lane as if he had been the preacher yonder in the stone hill-chapel.

However, one does not often understand the fashion in which prayers are heard. When I started back to Philadelphia, two days after, I got into the yellow stage-coach thoroughly disheartened—in fact with a sense of utter defeat. If I thought at all of that little passage in the lane it was but to smile bitterly at it. I am not going into detail about those wasted days. I had discovered nothing in Waynesboro' to prove that Pigot had money about him; his brother, the lottery-dealer (of whose underhand remittances I supposed the murdered man to be the bearer), had gone West two days before Pigot's death. I was tired of dogging the meager evidence up and down the village streets, trying to foist some new bearing into it. Meager as it was, the facts were sharp and direct enough with these L— people, I saw, to carry poor Joe to the gallows, and I was powerless. The atmosphere of the town infected me, I believe; it was dull, ignorant, lethargic from the first. Myers' doom had appeared a thing as certain to them as the rising of the sun on the sultry day that was to see it. Insensibly I found myself swerving into that habit of thinking. I wanted to get out — to thrust the whole matter away from me. The very glare of the sun on the steep, narrow brick pavements choked and taunted me with the useless efforts I had made. The afternoon before I left Garfield called me up as I was passing his office window. A broad-shouldered, stumpy, boorish-looking man was sitting on the edge of a chair balancing a shiny low hat, such as sailors wear, between his knees. I knew the dead black eyes swaddled in fat, and the low

forehead well, though the face had sharpened, and the hair and whiskers turned gray since I saw them.

“Squire Hall”—holding out my hand—“I have called twice, but could not find you.”

“No, Philip, I have been up to town. I—”

The old man looked troubled; his voice was unsteady.

“The Squire,” said Garfield heartily, “can not rest about Joe. He has been up to engage other counsel. Glendenning is on the defense now with Woodsel.”

“What do you think of my choice, Caldwell?” said the old man, anxiously, pulling at his cravat, his hand nervous, as I remembered it long ago – a man always unsure of himself. “He was the highest-priced of those city chaps, so I thought must be the sharpest – eh?”

“Not a safe general rule, but it will serve in this case. Did you want me, Garfield?”

“Only to warn you of a new point against Myers,” gravely pulling something from his pocket.

“How? No! Eh?” The old man stooped eagerly over the table, so as to hide the object from me, his face turning pale as he looked up. “It is no point against Joe; it means nothing. Don’t let them turn you against the boy, Philip!”

“Squire!” said Garfield. He turned to me a little heated. “His feeling for Myers makes him unjust to me. I have barely done my duty in this case, and God knows how unwillingly that was done!”

“But this point against Myers?”

“Nott, the jailer, found this secreted in the coat Joe had on when arrested,” handing me a coarsely cut key, apparently that of a valise or large portfolio. “It opens the case in which Pigot kept his papers – a spring-lock, you see. The inference is, Myers had obtained the key, but was probably deterred by some noise from securing the mortgage.”

“What did Joe want with the mortgage?” said the Squire, starting up fiercely. “The boy is no fool! Would he have clenched the proof of the murder on himself?”

“He has done it, I’m afraid,” said Garfield.

Hall stood looking down into his hat, fumbling with the rim, the dark blood coming and going from his face. I was touched by his emotion: it was unexpected, I confess.

“I’m glad you take this case up as you do, Squire.”

He looked me full in the face.

“I did not at first. It stunned me. And I didn’t know what Joe was to me; come eleven years in February he’s worked on the place. It’s a hard blow, Philip!” running his hand uncertainly through his white hair, his face turning actually livid. “I’m not used to changes. I’d give my right arm out from the socket,” facing me suddenly, “to see Joe Myers a free man today!”

Garfield was standing thoughtfully by the table: the key touched it. Hall started at the noise, curiously.

“For that key it proves nothing!” he said, in a shrill voice. “*You* don’t think it weighs in the evidence, Caldwell?” coming up to me, patting my coat in an inane, pleading way.

“With the jury you will have – every thing.”

He turned away slowly; stood silent for a moment. “I’ll go, gentlemen,” he said in a low voice. “I’m not well.” As he went I noticed that he staggered.

“I did not think the old buffer had so much feeling,” muttered Garfield, shutting the door after him.

“It is genuine,” I said; “no sham.” Yet it impressed me strangely.

I did not see Hall again, leaving by daylight the next morning. I had not the heart to go to the Birts’ cottage; why should I? However, as I left Garfield’s office that evening I saw Susy coming out of the lane on the street, on her way to the jail. I noticed her step was quick and eager; a hopeful glow yet in her face. She had a bit of a pink bow in her brown dress (Jane would have liked that), and carried a bunch of clove pinks and tansy under her shawl. Well! Well! People looked after her with sad, grave faces; their voices had something tender in them as they gave her good-morning, too, I noticed. Steve Derrick’s little daughter ran out from the shop with something wrapped up in a napkin – a hard cheesecake, I think. “Take it to Uncle Joe; I made it for him—me, Miss Susy, mind!” Susan took it and hurried on, then turning back kissed the child passionately. “God bless you, Phoebe Derrick!” she said. I remembered that Myers was “Uncle Joe” for all the youngsters in L—.

When I came back to L— it was but two days before the trial. The case had excited much interest through the State, Glendenning having thrown the effect of his name on Joe’s side. Such things tell. I arrived after night. Court had met, it was easy to know by the state of the town: every shop and corner seethed with an excitement people in cities can not imagine; the very boy that blacked your boots was grave with importance. As I finished my steak and potatoes the landlord touched me.

“Mr. Glendenning is in his room,” in a mysterious whisper; “wishes to see you, Sir.”

Glendenning was a little blue-eyed man, thorough, acute, direct; giving himself utterly up, body and soul, to the business of each hour; consequently one of the most successful lawyers at the Philadelphia bar (I use fictitious names, of course).

“It’s a bad business, Caldwell,” when I was seated at the other side of the oil-lamp. “If I gain an acquittal the verdict would be, in verity, only ‘not proven;’ and the man lives under a stigma worse than death, to my mind. Make the best of three days. I must go back tonight. Here is something you can turn to account, perhaps,” watching me sharply as I glanced at a bit of paper he handed me. “I tore it from Pigot’s memorandum-book. You see? ‘To dep’t. Sept. 3. Phil. M. and F. Bank. \$40,000.’ That means,” his uneasy fingers playing on his lip, “just what I believed from the first: that Pigot had a sum of money to deposit, and for that money he was murdered.”

“Exactly. Now prove it, my fine fellow,” jumping up nimbly and going about the room like a sparrow. “One dollar of that money found would weigh more in Myers’ favor than all evidence for his character. Where is it? If Pigot had it in trust, where is the owner? His own books show no such sum in hand.”

“Well, do your best, Caldwell. For the girl’s sake, at least,” growing suddenly quiet. “You have seen her?”

“In the jail. Yes.”

“What an exquisite face she has!” half to himself. “It put me in mind of the Francesca di Rimini.”

I knew nothing of the Di Rimini woman, and I was a little surprised to hear of Susy’s beauty; so I thought best to keep quiet.

Glendenning set off that night. But in the two days I did nothing. I was like a man holding an endless skein of thread; one broken end, and the whole would have been unwound cleanly; but the end did not come into my fingers.

The day of the trial was gray and dull, a fine drizzling rain falling without cessation. The sky seemed to settle down heavily on the low hills, shutting in the dingy little village and the deed that was to be done in it today. Despite the lowering weather, however, a steady tide of people had set in from the neighboring counties, beginning the night before: a gala day with such a relish of horror L— had never known. I remember listening to the rumble of wheels all the night, and when the morning broke standing smoking at the tavern window, watching the muddy jostle of buggies, horsemen, Jersey wagons in the narrow street, and wondering how the sounds came to Myers, shut up in the brick jail down the street. His old companions these men were. The court-house bell began its cracked jangle at nine. Long before that, however, the crowd had been packed on the pavement without, waiting for the doors to open. I did not go down. I remember how I stood for an hour chewing the end of an unlighted cigar, sick in blood, like a nervous woman, with but the one thought: he might have been saved, and I had done nothing; now it was too late. I do not know that I should have gone down that day if Glendenning had not sent me a note requiring my attendance on some trifling point of business.

It was a little, square, plastered room, with green shutters, the court-room, the window sashes and doors picked off with red. The rain dashed against the panes. Even the sills were packed with the mass of people, their stolid, anxious faces all turned toward the one point where I dared not

look. Judge Gilmore was on the bench, fat, red, waggish even there (we had begun to elect our judges in this state then). I heard Glendenning's shrill, abrupt tones as I entered. All these points I took in before I gathered courage to glance at the dock. When I did Myers' back was toward me. I saw his broad shoulders in the old bulging coat, and the red head held stiffly erect; and somehow the old turnip-digging days flashed vividly before me, and Joe in the field beside me – how truthful and dogged he was! – free with his money, surly with his word.

“I never pleaded for a manlier client,” whispered little Glendenning after he had told me what he wanted.

“What chances?” I said.

“None. Look at that row of wooden faces in the jury-box, and—”

He stopped, chewing tobacco vehemently. As usual, he had thrown all his strength into the case. I drew back into the crowd. Jolliffe, my landlord, touched my elbow.

“D’ye see? There she is,” pointing to a dark corner near Myers, where I could catch sight of a small figure wrapped in a brown shawl. The face was hid. I knew she would be there; it would do Joe good to feel her beside him, strengthen him as religion would a less commonplace man. It belonged to her simple real nature to do this thing.

Well, the evidence summed itself up slowly. Garfield's slovenly looseness in summing could not keep back facts. The existence of the mortgage was proved; Joe's offers to pay in January; Pigot's refusal; after that threats from Myers in various places and at frequent times, so open and frequent as to show their slight weight. Squire Hall, the next witness called on the stand, saw this, and began to mutter about “a man's not being likely to take the whole village by the button when he was set on murder,” until he was called to order by the court. The old man was haggard and worn, holding himself erect by the pine railings of the witness-box, the stumpy fingers trembling. There was something so foreign to Hall's hard, sharp character in this real feeling that I drew involuntarily closer to inspect it. His testimony was dragged out of him piecemeal; additional facts about the mortgage; the history of Pigot's visit; the squabbling between the two men from day to day; finally the scene at the supper-table, when Joe declared his purpose to hold to his own by a sure way. Hall balked here; his voice grew thick and husky; he was silent when the next question was asked, the color going out of his face, leaving it mottled.

“It will be necessary for you to answer, Squire,” said Gillmore.

There was a moment's pause. The old man raised both hands to his neck as if he were choking.

“Judge, d’ye see, I'm swearing Joe's life away? I never meant that.”

His voice was sharp and piping. Gillmore said something about painful duty. Hall did not hear him.

“The rest don’t matter,” he said. “But Joe an’ me’s pulled together eleven years. I’ll not have his blood on my soul.”

To give him time they put his wife on the stand, a sharp, gray-eyed woman, older than her husband. It cost her nothing to tell the story. It came out clear and pointed enough, from Myers’ threat to the finding of the blackening corpse. Something—the foul air or the woman’s acrid tones—nauseated me. I turned off into the jury-room, where the witnesses were waiting to be called. As I went I caught Joe’s eye. He shook his head, with a half-smile, the most hopeless and quiet I ever saw on human face. It meant goodbye, I knew. He saw the truth – that his doom was sealed. I hurried out.

A few moments after I was standing by the window of the little jury room when a vague something startled me out of the stupid quiet into which I had fallen as needing attention. I believe in presentiments; I knew then, God knows how or why, that the broken end of the skein was in my hand. It was nothing but a faint perfume I perceived, peculiar and sickening. I glanced about me: Sam Tarr, the stable boy, who had discovered Pigot dead, and whose evidence came next in order, was standing nearest me; a loutish, good-natured-faced lad, with a good deal of trouble just now in his look. He was tossing a bit of glass up and down, unconsciously as it seemed. The odor hung about this thing.

“What is that?” holding out my hand. “Eh? Show?”

“A bottle stopper. That’s all. Queer cut, isn’t it? I kep’ it for the smell. D’ye know where I found it, now?”

“No.”

“On the floor of old Pigot’s room, that morning. I’m keepin’ it for a remembrancer, like. Lend it to you? Of course, Sir,” his eyes opening. “It’s nothing after all.”

It *was* nothing, and yet I turned out of the room quickly, with a strange certainty of having work to do. As I passed through the court-room some words stopped me. Dr. Hopper was on the stand; had testified to passing Hall’s house between one or two o’clock the night of the murder. “My attention was arrested,” he said, “by an unusual light in two of the front windows, the room occupied by the deceased. It was such a direct, sharp light as would be produced by a candle, not the steady glow of a night-lamp, and cause me to wonder if any of the Squire’s family were ill. The light was held near one of the windows, and for a moment, as I passed, was dimmed, and then grew bright again.”

“Ask him if it was entirely extinguished?” I said to Glendenning.

“No, only dimmed as though some large, solid object were momentarily interposed between me and it. I drove on, and can not therefore say how long the light continued in the room.”

“Nothing material there,” said Glendenning, aside. Was there not?

A detective abhors an inexplicable trifle as much as nature does a vacuum. *Why* was the light dimmed? I knew the construction of the room thoroughly. It had been open for examination; there was no means of dimming a light near that window; no apparent means at least.

“A means not apparent? Eh?”

I put on my felt hat.

“Keep the drag on the evidence for two hours,” I said to Glendenning, and beckoning to Jolliffe and another shrewd-looking fellow, left the court-room and struck across the fields to Hall’s house. The rain beat in our faces as we went; the smoke from a kiln swept in sullen folds along the wet stubble-fields; the house itself stood deserted and vacant, a howl from a chained dog being our only greeting.

“It looks as if the murder-curse had fallen on the place,” said Jolliffe, coming closer to me. But I had no time to study effects. “Come with me, gentlemen,” I said, thrusting aside the stupid servant-girl that stopped the entrance, and assuming an air of assurance I was far from feeling, I led the way to Pigot’s room. It was a square, plainly-furnished chamber, such as you find in any farm-house, with the usual red and green striped carpet, three wooden chairs, cherry bedstead, and wash-stand. With one exception a feature, however, common in many Pennsylvania houses, built fifty years ago. A paneling of pine wood, slightly beaded, ran half-way up to the ceiling, met there by the tawdry paper. I had a vague hope of some discovery to be made in this wood-work which would account for the dimming of the light close by the window. There was no time to spend in search of secret springs; lifting a heavy brass andiron from the open grate, I struck vigorously on the wall. The echo came; thank God! Came hollow and dull! “Break it open,” I said, handing the bar to Jolliffe. In another moment the thin, wooden door was crushed in and the cupboard left bare. Within was a small case of glass vials; one without a stopper and empty. “I make this vial complete, you perceive?” I said. “It would be better not to smell to it too strongly, friend Jolliffe,” trying to laugh. What a fool I was that I could not steady my hands nor my tongue!

“Your mistress’s room,” I said to the woman who met us at the door. She was new in the house, and led us to the chamber without hesitation. I must make my story brief. Enough to say that, secreted in Hall’s sleeping-room, we found the money of which the murdered man had been robbed; that, by a strange chance, as we returned through the main street to the court-room the long-looked-for letter from Pigot’s brother was placed in my hand, claiming this money, and furnishing means to identify it.

The dull afternoon was darkening into evening when we reentered the court-room. Glendenning was speaking – speaking weakly and vaguely, against time I saw at a glance, watching the door for our return. There was something damped and cheerless in every inflection of his voice. He had brought up Myers’ scanty defense, and knew it was of no avail. “I saw the verdict written on every one of those twelve stolid faces,” he said afterward. A chill like that of the coming shadow of death had fallen on the house; the murky, damp air was full of it. Two or three faces out of the mass stamped themselves sharply on my memory as I entered. Hall’s wife, pale, the light eyes, glowing like those of a tigress waiting to spring, fixed on the prisoner; her husband’s, purple,

bloated, frightened; Joe's, turned to the stretch of dull sky without, a solemn depth of meaning in it never seen there before, like that of a man who looked death in the face and asked what it had for him. There was something almost grand in the quiet bravery of the common face, with its shock of red hair, now that it drew close to eternity. But even in that instant of time I saw another look which I never forgot. Susy Birt had crept close to the dock, and drawn one of Joe's hands through the railings; a dull flicker of light fell on her head and half-closed eyes. I remember having an odd fancy that if the man were in hell the pain and love in that look could have purified and brought him back. But I had work to do. A few whispered words to the sheriff, and with a startled look he sauntered up to a group of constables, who speedily took their hands from their pockets and their melancholy regards from Joe, and quietly posted themselves behind Hall and his wife. Then I placed a scrap of paper before Glendenning; he glanced at it, suddenly wakened into energy, and abruptly asked that the rules be suspended to allow important witnesses to be placed upon the stand. How eagerly I mounted it I need not say. The dénouement did not arrive as I had planned it, however. At my first mention of the secret closet Hall started back with a muttered oath, dragging his wife with him. She shook him off and stood her ground, her lips only shutting a little tighter and turning blue. "Fool!" she hissed. I saw my time; drew out the roll of Pigot's money and laid it on the table. As I had hoped, the man's terror at this reached its climax, and clutching hold of the sheriff's coat, in a scene of the wildest confusion, he made a full confession, and begged and whined for mercy. In all the excitement that followed – the crashing of benches, shouts, exclamations, Joe's one gasping "Hurrah!" Susy's quiet dead fall on the floor – one little trait struck and touched me strangely. It was in Hall's wife. She faced Judge Gillmore, as they were dragging her off, pushing her rusty gray hair out of her eyes.

"I've this to say" – in a shrill voice that rose over all the clamor – "now that this old fool has leaked it all out, that you'd best let him go. One of us is enough, and it was me did it. I put him up to it, and found out the way, and it was me put the key in Joe Myers's pocket. The Squire was agin' blamin' Joe from the first." The last words I heard from her were: "One of us is enough, enough, God knows!"

Well, this all happened years ago. It's growing to be like a horrible ghost story to us all, even to Joe and Susy. Yet it laid the foundation of a healthy, cheerful friendship between us—the most enduring we know, perhaps. As Jane said last fall when we were coming back from our annual visit to Myers's farm, "It made one's life fresher and nearer to God somehow, to be with people so natural and true." Jane and Susan came together just as I fancied they would: they have a real respect for each other, and that's rare among women, you know. I'll never forget how, when our Ben died of varioloid, and my wife was ill, Mrs. Myers came up, and in her still, gentle way turned into the sick-room and kitchen like any hireling. We go down there every summer, as I said. They have a cheerful little farm on the Juniata hills; and a jolly, noisy farm-house it is growing to be, now that their boys are stretching up into men and making Joe a boy again. In winter Joe and Susy come up, especially in Opera season; for Susan has an odd love and comprehension for music, different from ours. They are at our house on Green Hill now, by-the-way. Mr. Glendenning did us the honor to come out to supper the other evening, to "see that rare womanly face again," he said. "A real Francesca; he never had forgotten it." I think he was a little disappointed, however. I saw him watching her after supper, where she sat apart playing with her baby. "A pity!" he said. "Such a clear-cut tragedy face it was! I see! It is Joe, and the cheery farm, and the baby that have softened it down into that common beauty."



Glendenning is a critic in high art, I know; but I could not agree with him, somehow. I had seen Ary Scheffer's picture; but there was a beauty deeper and holier to me in the pink flush on Susy's cheek when Joe came near her, and in the look in her soft brown eyes resting on her baby.

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