

## *The Mystery Solved*

The more I studied over it, the more it puzzled me. It was a brief document, covering but one side of a leaf of paper, and the signature, beyond question, was John Merivale's crabbed sign manual, leaving everything to his "beloved third cousin, Bozrah Beggs."

The affection which inspired such an act must have been of sudden growth, for two more uncongenial spirits than John Merivale and Bozrah Beggs could hardly be imagined.

John Merivale had taken to his home and heart the orphan child of an old friend. So young was little Katie at the time, that she never remembered any other father, and a kind, loving father she had found in old John Merivale; and how proud of her he was when she grew up a beauty, with scores of suitors at her feet, the number not diminished by the open secret of Mr. Merivale's intent to make her the heiress of his fortune.

When the news came of one of those terrible railroad accidents which periodically cast a gloom over the land, and John Merivale's name appeared in the list of the killed, it was a great shock to the community in which he had long dwelt in honor and esteem; and not less was the surprise when the will, leaving everything to Katie, which Mr. Merivale had made less than a month before his death, was offered for probate, to find Bozrah Beggs producing another, later testament, whose purpose we have already given.

Like other lawyers, I had met with many knotty questions in my time, but none knottier than that presented by the turning up of this unwelcome will, concerning which it was my lot to be consulted.

The document in question, it was conceded, had been drawn by Job Jottrell, a rather slippery lawyer, by whom, and a tricky clerk of his, it was duly witnessed.

Not many days before the appointed final hearing, I was sitting in my office in no pleasant mood. The more I thought the matter over, the more I was convinced there was foul play somewhere.

The entrance of Tom Jarvis, an old tenant of Mr. Merivale's, broke in on my reflections.

Tom wanted advice about a lease, a renewal of which, it seemed, had been agreed upon between himself and Mr. Merivale, just before the latter's death. But here I must observe the professional rule of secrecy touching matters of private communication between attorney and client. Suffice it to say, the consultation was much longer than it might have seemed requisite for the simple matter Tom had come to seek advice about.

It was an edifying sight, on the day of the trial, when Bozrah Beggs arrayed in solemn black, leaning on the arm of his counsel, and struggling with indifferent success to force upon his flinty features a look of counterfeited sorrow, walked into court and took his seat with a somber air of conscious rectitude.

Job Jottrell and his clerk filed in next, giving me a look as they passed which seemed to say, "You call yourself a shrewd cross-examiner, Mr. Badger, but catch *us* if you can!"

Near me sat Katie, and by her side Herbert Price, both looking happy and contented, for Herbert had told Katie something which made amends for her loss of fortune.

Whatever plans I had I kept to myself.

Job Jottrell was called first. He kissed the book with a hypocritical smack, and went through his story with a glibness betokening perfect preparation. Mr. Merivale had come to witness's office in great haste; wanted his will written; dictated its contents; witness put them in form; Mr. Merivale read the paper over; signed it; requested witness and his clerk to attest the execution, which they did; testator was of full age, sound mind and under no restraint, &c., &c.

Having finished his recital, Mr. Jottrell braced himself for cross-examination.

"Stand down," I said.

Bozrah Beggs and his counsel smiled the smile of triumph.

The clerk's story was a stereotyped copy of the other.

"Stand down," again was all I said, and the smile of triumph deepened.

"We rest," said Mr. Beggs's counsel, rubbing his hands contentedly.

"Have you any witnesses, Mr. Badger?" inquired his Honor.

"But one," I replied, and proceeded to call.

"Thomas Jarvis!"

A respectable looking tradesman stepped forward and was sworn. After a few preliminary questions—

"You were a tenant of the late Mr. Merivale's?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"When did your lease expire?"

The date was given.

"What, if anything, occurred between you and Mr. Merivale touching its renewal?"

"Really," my adversary interrupted, "I must object to this as quite irrelevant."

“I confess I don’t see its bearing at present,” remarked his Honor, “but it may lead to something. Proceed, witness.”

“Well,” resumed the latter, “it was agreed between Mr. Merivale and myself that I was to have the place another year. On the morning he started his journey he was passing my shop.

“‘Jarvis,’ said he, stepping in, ‘I’ve had no time to attend to making that lease. Have you a leaf of paper handy?’

“‘I can tear one from my shop-book,’ I answered, and did so. He wrote his name at the foot.

“‘Take that to my agent,’ he added, and tell him to fill you up a new lease on the old terms.’

“Mr. Merivale went away. I folded up the paper and put it in my pocket, from which I lost it the same day.”

“Have you the book from which the leaf was torn?” was my next question.

“I have.”

“Produce it.”

As the witness complied, a marked change came over the face of Borzah Beggs. All confidence faded out of it; the smile of triumph vanished, and the look of conscious rectitude gave place to one of fear.

Jottrell and his clerk made a move as if to leave.

“I must insist on these persons remaining for the present,” I said, addressing the bench.

“See that they do so, Mr. Sheriff,” directed the judge.

“Find the place from which the leaf was torn,” I resumed, turning to the witness.

He did so, and handed me the book.

Taking up the disputed will, I adjusted it to a strip of the missing leaf still remaining in its place. *The two exactly fitted!* It was plain that the will had been forged on the paper lost by Tom Jarvis.

Bozrah Beggs and his accomplices left the court as prisoners, and spent the next five years in the public service.

Herbert Price and Katie had to give up their dreams of frugal bliss in a cottage and make themselves as happy as they could in a brown-stone mansion, on ever so many thousands a year.

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