

A Hard Lesson

[Written Exclusively for the Plain Dealer]

SADIE Arnold was in an unenviable frame of mind on the evening of the 4th of September. She leaned her head against the back of the chair on which she was sitting and cried. It was not often that Sadie gave way to tears—she was by no means a pessimist; but on this particular occasion she considered her grievance worthy of tears. No less a thing had happened than a quarrel between her and her lover, Carl Reed. Lover's quarrels are not, as a general rule, of absorbing interest to outsiders; but this was a trifle out of the usual line.

Young Carl Reed was by nature a jealous man, and when the green-eyed monster laid its hand on Carl's shoulder, he often said and did things for which he was sincerely sorry when he recovered his mental equilibrium. The worst part of it all was that Sadie was very pretty. Now a pretty girl will naturally receive more or less attention until she gets married or betakes herself to a nunnery. This is one of the things we all concede; we all love beauty, and quite right we are in doing so.

"But the devil of it is," said Carl to himself, "that cousin of hers is getting too familiar. When I called last night Sadie had gone to the theater with him. Things are coming to a pretty pass!"

The cousin referred to was James Arnold; he was visiting his uncle, and Sadie could hardly refuse to make his visit pleasant. But a man in love, say those who ought to know, [is] not accountable for vagaries, and surely Carl Reed deserved considerable latitude. Nevertheless, on the evening of the 4th of September, Carl had behaved badly. He had insisted that Sadie was a heartless flirt and had intimated a desire to expunge the identity of Mr. James Arnold with any weapon the latter might select. This ferocious sentiment was the climax which brought the tears to poor Sadie's eyes, and the lovers parted in anger.

For the first time in his life Carl indulged too freely in liquor on this night. He happened to meet several jolly fellows who invited him to join them in a lark. Carl did so, and many were the glasses of liquor that he drank. When he awoke on the morning of the 5th he remembered trying to sing a sentimental song the night before; remembered his ignominious failure; remembered a quarrel with someone—some young man—and after that all was a blank. With unsettled stomach and throbbing temples Carl dressed himself and walked out onto the street. The newsboys were crying, "Mysterious disappearance of James Arnold;" "All about the s'posed murder." Carl bought a paper and hastily looked the article up. The gist of it was that Mr. James Arnold had mysteriously disappeared on the evening of the 4th and all efforts to obtain a clue to his whereabouts were fruitless. The unfortunate young man's uncle had set the police at work, saying that while his nephew's absence might be perfectly natural, he felt a little anxious and preferred to have a search made as soon as possible. About 9 o'clock in the morning a silk hat had been found in an alley, crushed and spotted with blood. This led to a belief of foul play and a vigorous search was being made.

Carl Reed read the article with blanched face, and hastily wended his way to a restaurant for breakfast. His meal was scarcely touched, and the waiter remarked:

“You have a poor appetite this morning, Mr. Reed.”

“Yes,” said Carl, “I am not feeling well.”

“Have you heard about the murder?” asked the waiter.

“What are you talking about?” said Carl; “there has been no murder. People are always ready to make a sensation out of nothing. I tell you there was no murder about it. You are a fool.”

And with these words Carl left the place. He boarded a street car and rode to his employer’s establishment, where he said he was sick and obtained leave of absence for the day. Then he returned to his apartments and remained there until night.

Meanwhile a detective visited Mr. Arnold and learned all that was to be told of the nephew’s cash.

“Now, then,” said the detective, who, by the way, looked much more like an ordinary business man than an unraveler of dark secrets, “do you know anyone who had a grudge against your nephew?”

“Not a soul in the city, I am positive; he had only been visiting us two weeks.”

“Make many acquaintances?”

“Well,” replied Mr. Arnold, “I really don’t know. My daughter has been taking him around, I believe.”

“May I question her?”

“Certainly,” answered Mr. Arnold, stepping to a door and calling Sadie.

“Miss Arnold,” began the detective, “did your cousin make many acquaintances here?”

“A good many, considering the short time,” said Sadie.

“You know of no quarrel between him and some other young man?”

“No.”

“Umph! well,” said the detective rising to go, “have to look around more. Strange business.”

As he placed his hand on the doorknob he paused, looked around and asked, quite mechanically, as if his thoughts were preoccupied:

“No one jealous of him over a young lady or anything of that kind?”

“Not that I know—” Sadie began, and broke off quickly, pale as death.

“What is it?” asked the detective, turning suddenly to her, his whole manner changed to nervous attention. “You know of some jealousy which existed?”

“Oh, it is really nothing of importance,” replied Sadie; “absolutely nothing to do with the case.”

“But I assure you,” said the officer, “it is of much importance. Please tell it immediately.”

Sadie refused.

“I suppose it is something to do with young Reed,” interposed Mr. Arnold. “He generally is jealous of somebody. But he is thoroughly honorable, and of course had nothing to do with the affair. You will have to look further, Mr. Officer.”

“One moment,” said the detective. “Miss Arnold, was Mr. Reed jealous of your cousin?”

“No,” replied Sadie, much agitated, “he was not. It is absurd to think of such a thing. Oh, why did I say anything about it!” she cried, bursting into tears.

The detective walked rapidly down the street in deep thought.

“The girl lies,” he muttered to himself, as he entered the dingy police station.

A week passed and James Arnold’s disappearance was as mysterious as ever. Telegrams had been sent out profusely, and it seemed natural to suppose that if the young man was alive he would make the fact known.

Carl Reed did not call on Sadie during the week. She wrote him a note, deploring their quarrel, and imploring him to come to her immediately. Friday night Carl started for the Arnold residence. An observer located under a street lamp could have seen, as Reed passed, that he was haggard and unwell. When he neared the house he stopped abruptly, as if struck with a sudden alarm, raised a hand to his forehead and seemed greatly agitated. He turned away, and walked briskly toward his lodgings. A man on the opposite side of the street followed him warily.

The next morning the detective called on Mr. Arnold before the latter was out of bed.

“Tell him to get up immediately,” said the detective to the servant. “I must see him without delay on a matter of vital importance.”

In a few minutes the two men were together.

“Now, sir,” said the officer, rubbing his hands together complacently, “we are getting on, getting on. The papers have said a good deal at one time and another about the detective force of this

city, but I wish to say, sir, that no city of its size was ever better provided in that line. No, sir, the papers notwithstanding.”

“Then you have some information of importance?” eagerly questioned Mr. Arnold.

“Ha!” said the detective, curling his brown moustache with a self-satisfied air, “I believe you.”

“Then out with it man—out with it,” said Mr. Arnold.

“Well, sir, I am sorry to inform you that your nephew was undoubtedly murdered and I am positive I can put my finger on the murderer.”

“Well?”

“Well, sir, you must prepare yourself for a shock; I bring unpleasant news—most unpleasant news. But you are not the man to let a little sentiment keep you from doing justice.”

“Never,” replied Mr. Arnold. “If my own son were guilty I myself would deliver him up to justice. But you alarm me. Proceed at once to the point.”

“The fact is,” replied the detective, “I have accumulated evidence enough to warrant me in arresting Carl Reed for the murder of your nephew.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Mr. Arnold. “Why, good God, man, he is engaged to my daughter!”

“It is a bad business,” said the detective; “but we must do our duty.”

“But you must be mistaken. Pshaw! You are all wrong; I tell you I never knew Carl Reed to do a dishonorable deed in his life.”

“Consider, my dear sir, the thousands of parallel cases—where jealousy prompts the most moral to acts of violence.”

“What evidence have you against him?”

“I will let you know before the day is out. In the meantime say nothing to anybody. I am on the home run and I am positive of success.”

“My poor girl!” cried Mr. Arnold when he was left alone. “If this should prove true it would kill her.”

This Saturday morning Carl Reed lay in bed long after his usual hour. About 11 o’clock he got up, dressed and went out to a neighboring drug store, where he purchased a vial of laudanum. The clerk eyed him narrowly, but sold him the drug. What hours of agony young Reed passed later on no one knows, but as subsequent events will show he must have suffered more than death. About 2 o’clock in the afternoon two men stole noiselessly up the stairway leading to

Reed's room and cautiously turned the doorknob. There sat Reed on the edge of his bed, his coat off, hair disordered and a wild expression in his eyes. His right hand clutched a wineglass.

The two men rushed in and seized Reed's arms before he realized the fact. A bottle marked "laudanum—poison," was on the table half full. The contents of the wineglass were found to be the same deadly drug.

"Just in time," said the detective to his companion. "I need no further proof."

They hastily dressed Reed, called a cab and the three drove away together. Carl sat like one stupefied, and seemed not to hear the questions asked him. The cab pulled up before Mr. Arnold's house and the occupants dismounted and entered. Mr. Arnold received them at the door and ushered them into his study and locked the door after him.

"Now, sir," said the detective, "I don't know but it is my duty to take my prisoner before a magistrate immediately, but for your sake I will stretch a point and convince you we have the right man. I will begin by telling you that your daughter gave me the first clue. When she denied that there was any jealousy between the prisoner and your nephew, I believed there was bad feeling—your daughter's embarrassment convinced me of it. Well, I had the prisoner watched, and his actions were those of a guilty man. Last Tuesday I accidentally discovered overwhelming proof of this man's guilt. While watching the house in which the prisoner resides, my assistant saw a dog dragging something from under the stoop. At first he took no notice of it, but all at once he saw it was a human arm. He rushed up and drove the dog away. It was a man's arm, cut off just above the elbow, and on the hand was a scar. That scar answers to the one you told me your nephew had on his left hand."

Mr. Arnold groaned.

"A tough business, sir," continued the detective, "but we must do our duty. I am positive you can identify that arm. It is that of a young man who has not been accustomed to hard work, and the scar—why, that settles the thing conclusively."

"But two men might have scars on their left hands," interposed Mr. Arnold.

"True," said the detective, "but take all the facts together, sir, and no jury under the sun would fail to convict. You are not convinced, I see. Well, sir, I have more evidence. I can bring witnesses to prove that on the night of this murder Reed went around with some young bucks and drank freely."

"Stop," said Mr. Arnold. "You are—you must be—mistaken. Consider that I have known young Reed all his life and never knew of him drinking to excess."

"Nevertheless, his companions will swear that he did drink freely, and they are reluctant witnesses, too—the strongest kind of evidence. Besides, they admit that about midnight they met your nephew on the street; that Reed stopped him and began to quarrel with him, using some very hard names and accusing him of trying to get your daughter's affections away from Reed.

They with difficulty restrained Reed from assaulting your nephew then and there. Your nephew was very indignant, accusing Reed of being drunk and called him a jealous fool, winding up by saying that he disgraced himself and your daughter by such conduct. Reed replied hotly, and your nephew told him that he pitied the girl that married him, saying that she would never have an hour's happiness with a drunkard and a jealous lunatic. At this, Reed struck at your nephew, but was held back by his companions, and young Mr. Arnold walked off, muttering that he had a mind to teach Reed a lesson. Well, sir, when the crowd got to the corner near Reed's house, they left him and supposed he went home. But what will a jury say; what will any intelligent man say? Why, my dear sir, there is only one thing you can say, and that is that Reed followed your nephew, murdered him in a fit of drunken jealousy and cut the body up for the purpose of hiding it more readily."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the distracted Mr. Arnold. "Your proof is overwhelming."

During this conversation Reed and the other detective had remained in an adjoining room. Mr. Arnold now urged that Reed be charged with the crime and his deportment observed. The detective called in his companion and the prisoner and said:

"Carl Reed, I arrest you for the murder of James Arnold on the night of the 4th of September. You are not expected to deny or acknowledge the truth of the charge. I warn you that you need say nothing to criminate yourself."

"If you are a man," said Mr. Arnold, "you will answer it nevertheless. Are you guilty?"

Carl Reed roused himself with apparent effort and replied:

"I do not know!"

"The man's crazy!" cried Mr. Arnold.

"I am not," answered Reed. "I am perfectly sane. On the night of the 4th of September I—"

"I am in honor bound to tell you, Reed," interrupted the detective, "that whatever you say will be used as evidence against you. You need say nothing."

"On the night of the 4th of September," continued Reed, "I was under the influence of liquor for the first time in my life. Early in the evening I quarreled with Miss Arnold because she went to the theater with her cousin. I left her feeling very jealous and drank because I wanted to forget my trouble. I remember meeting someone and quarreling with him. I think it was James Arnold, but am not positive. My companions held me and we went on up the street. I remember walking up the street a short distance, and I remember nothing more until I found myself half undressed and in bed in my room the next morning. This is true. I have asked myself a thousand times if I followed Arnold and killed him, but can remember nothing. I was unaccustomed to drink and it affected me powerfully."

“Oh, my poor girl!” moaned Mr. Arnold. Reed sank into a chair and seemed to relapse into a partial stupor. His appearance was frightful and even the hardened detectives felt great pity for the miserable man. For a moment they sat there, crushed by the weight of their emotion. Suddenly a loud knocking was heard at the door. Mr. Arnold cautiously opened it an inch and said they were not to be disturbed.

“Let me in,” said a man’s voice and with a push James Arnold himself forced the door open and rushed into the room.

“I had no idea this had gone so far,” he cried. “Reed, forgive me, I never dreamed you would be suspected and I only wanted to cause you a little remorse by making you think I had been killed on the same night you accused me of trying to win Sadie from you. I thought it might cure you of jealousy. I have read the papers and knew I was supposed to be dead, but never, upon my honor, imagined you would be accused so horribly. I heard that you were suspected—one of your companions of that night told me as I met him on the street ten minutes since. I have been in a small town not twenty miles away, stopping at a hotel under an assumed name and disguised.”

Carl Reed rose to his feet, staggered and fell heavily to the floor. It was a full hour before he recovered enough to sit up.

“Can you forgive me?” asked young Arnold.

“Not now,” answered Reed. “Go away for a while.”

“You rascal,” said the detective to James Arnold, “I have a mind to arrest you.”

“And I to horsewhip you,” exclaimed the indignant uncle.

“Stop!” said the detective, a gleam of mystery still cheering him. “What about that arm we found under the steps! Ha! I’ll look into that.”

He did, and two weeks later discovered that it was placed there by a young medical student who lodged in the same house as Carl Reed. The prospective doctor said he brought it from the college to study in his room, but that he thought it would be safer in the daytime under the stoop.

James Arnold’s visit came to an abrupt termination. His uncle could not bear the sight of him, and it was ten years before Carl Reed, happily married to Sadie, could heartily forgive him. Sadie never knew the story which so nearly ended in a tragedy; it was carefully guarded from her, and, strange to say, the public generally are in ignorance of the truth of the affair to this day.

One day, however, Carl Reed grasped James Arnold’s hand and said:

“Your lesson was hard, but I never forgot it. Sadie can thank you for a husband who is never jealous, and for one who has never drunk to excess since that night.” C.A.P.

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The original was accompanied by four in-text illustrations.