

# *The Murder of the Miser*

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## CHAPTER I THE MURDER

The news spread like wildfire—Jacob, the miser, had been murdered.

No one in the village knew anything of his antecedents. The oldest inhabitants, when questioned about him, gave the following stereotyped answer: “He had come to the village about nine months after it had been founded by us, bringing with him an only child, a girl about three years old. He never spoke to anybody except to answer a cheery good morning or good day, and even then he sometimes would not answer a person. He was reputed to be very wealthy, but nobody knew the extent of his wealth, not even his daughter. He had lived (and now had died) in his cabin, which stood on the outskirts of the village. In the cabin there was no bed, but a pile of straw answered the purpose. But one chair was in the room (if room it could be called), and that had but three legs. No clock, no table, or any other article of furniture was to be seen, except a broken-down stove and a tallow candle, which, when lighted, made the room look more dismal than ever. On the straw lay the miser, in a pool of blood, stretched out at full length; beside him sat his daughter, now eighteen years of age, moaning and crying bitterly.

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“Say, William, did you hear the news?”

The man thus addressed was a fine, young, handsome looking man, apparently about twenty-two years of age, but in reality he was nearer thirty.—There was but one disfigurement about him, and that was, that he had but four fingers on one hand. The man addressing him was almost opposite in stature. He was a small, stout man, with a face that once must have been handsome, but was now very repulsive. There was a peculiar red spot on the tip of his nose. He was very shabbily dressed, and taken altogether he would not be the man one would like to encounter on a dark night, in a lonely place.

“Why,” asked the one addressed as William, “what’s going on?”

“You know old Jacob, the miser, that lives up on the sandbanks in that old log cabin?”

“Yes,” answered William.

“Well, he was murdered last night.”

A low cry attracted the attention of a crowd of loungers who had gathered around the speakers, and looking around it was noticed that William had fainted.

“Get some water quick,” cried one: and immediately a dozen men ran to the tavern opposite.

“Jack, give me some water, quick, for Will Drayton has fainted.”

The man addressed as Jack immediately sprang behind the counter and handed to one of the men a basin full of water. William was brought in, and soon recovered his senses, and hardly anybody thought any more of the occurrence, it being a very hot day, and supposing he was overcome by the heat.

But there was one person who had observed this particularly. He was a stranger in the village, having arrived three days before.

He was a tall, heavy-built man, with a smooth, clean-shaven face, and if any one had examined his hands they would have noticed that his thumb on his right hand was missing.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE DETECTIVE

The scene is again in the miser's cabin. Twelve men with stolid, solemn countenances were in the room, besides the coroner and his assistant, and the miser's daughter. No stranger was allowed to be present. The twelve men were the jury who were impaneled by the coroner to hold an inquest on the dead.

The miser's daughter was called and testified as follows: That the night of the murder she bade him good night, and nothing unusual occurred until she awoke, when she found her father murdered.

Nobody else knew anything about the murder, and the jury brought in a verdict of “Death caused by some person or persons unknown to the jury.”

The miser was buried next day, and the property went to his daughter, no one appearing to contest her right to the same.

As soon as she became possessed of her father's property she set about to find the murderer.

Nothing had been disturbed in the cabin, for she thought it might be necessary to employ a detective, and, as will be seen, her surmises were correct.

All means had been employed in the village by the people to discover the miser's murderer, but all to no avail.

As a last resort, Clara (this was the name of the miser's daughter) went to the city to consult with a skilled detective, who had lately effected a great many captures. She stated the case in a few words; she said “On the night of the murder I bade my father good night and lay down on the

straw, which was all father had for a bed, and I don't know as anything unusual occurred during the night, but the next morning on awakening, I found my poor father had been murdered."

The Detective questioned her closely in regard to the position of the body and the furniture, of which she gave him exact account, as she had noticed it. She left, but not before she had promised to leave everything as it was in the cabin.

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### CHAPTER III ON THE TRAIL

The next day he called at the cabin, and noticed everything that was in and around it.

"Was everything as it now is?" he asked Clara, as soon as he came into the cabin.

"Yes, sir," she answered, "except that the body of my father was lying on the straw there," and she pointed to the pile of straw which the miser had called his bed.

"How was the body lying when you first saw it?" he asked.

"With the head towards the window there that looks out on these sandbanks."

Having scrutinized everything in the room as closely as possible, he strode to the window she had pointed at when she referred to the position of the body.

As he drew near the window he particularly noticed the floor of the cabin, and detected small drops of blood leading to the window, and on examining the window sill he observed the imprints of four bloody fingers!

He now sprang out through the window and closely examined the sandbank upon which the cabin stood. Within a foot of the window he noticed the indents of four feet which were very large, and following these up he soon discovered the fact that they led to the rear of the tavern already referred to.

Turning back, he entered the same way as he came out.

"Well," asked Clara as he came in, "what discoveries have you made?"

"I found," answered the detective, "that the murderer must have been a man with but four fingers on one hand, and also must have been a tall, heavy man," and he then took his departure.

On leaving the cabin he took a roundabout way toward the tavern, and reaching it, he called for a drink. He was immediately served with one, and after drinking it he moved to one of the tables in the room, and taking up a paper he apparently began to read it; but his attention was attracted

toward two men at the table behind him, and after waiting patiently for a short time he was rewarded by hearing the following:

“Bill, what do you think about that murder of old Jacob?”

“Oh, don’t speak to me about that murder,” said the other, and the detective saw that he trembled violently.

“Why, Bill, what has come over you lately,” asked the other; “you ain’t as jolly and gay as you used to be.”

Bill did not notice this last remark, but got up and walked out of the tavern.

The detective got up and asked the man who had been talking to Bill,

“Say, stranger, who is that young fellow who just went out?”

“Why?” answered he, “don’t you know him? Oh, no, I see now, you are a stranger here—that’s Bill Drayton.”

With a “thank you,” the detective walked out of the tavern, and seeing Bill followed him to his own door, and there he tapped him on the shoulder, saying “Bill Drayton, I believe.”

“At your service,” answered Bill.

“I want you to step over to the squire’s office for a few minutes.”

“What for?” asked Bill.

“That’s all right; you just come along,” answered the detective.

“I will not,” said Bill.

“Then,” said the detective, “I arrest you for the murder of old Jacob, the miser.”

Bill could not help but go with the detective to the squire’s office.

The squire, after hearing all the facts as told by the detective, committed Bill to the jail to await his trial for the murder of old Jacob.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE TRIAL

We will skip over the next three weeks, and then we come down to the day of Bill Drayton's trial for the murder of old Jacob. The scene was in the court house, which was in a town about two miles from the scene of the murder.

The judge had not yet arrived, but the court room is densely packed with spectators from far and near, who had left their home and business to hear the trial.

The judge now arrives, and immediately the crowd of people are all attention. After the disposition of a few minor cases, the prosecuting officer announces the case of "The People vs. Drayton for murder." The prosecuting officer, in a few words, stated the case. He said: "On the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, 187-, Jacob Demorest, an old miser, bade his daughter Clara good night, and lay down on some straw, which answered the purpose of a bed. In the morning, when Clara awoke, she found him murdered. No clue was obtained of the murderer by the people, until Clara hired a detective, whom we will put upon the stand"—and he went on and told the story of the detective as narrated in our last chapter. He ended by exhorting the jury, if they, from the evidence that would be offered, believed he was the murderer of old Jacob, to find him guilty.

He then called Clara, who gave the same evidence as she did before the coroner's jury.

He next called William Sharp, the detective.

There was some excitement when he took the stand, which the Judge immediately suppressed.

He told the same story we have already narrated; and when asked how he had known that Bill was the murderer, he answered that Bill had but four fingers, and the four fingers on the window-sill corresponded with his own; and that he had obtained one of the prisoner's boots and had fitted it in the sand-bank, and that it fitted exactly.

The prosecuting officer then had no more evidence to offer, and the defence then called:

"John Cockles, detective."

He testified as follows: that he had observed all the marks, etc., about the house and on the window-sill, but that the missing thumb on the window-sill must have been on the right hand.

On this single point rested the case. After satisfying himself on that point, the judge instructed the jury to bring in a verdict of "Not guilty," which they did, and the prisoner was discharged.

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Five years have passed. Mr. Sharp, the detective, was sitting in an easy chair when a tap at the door aroused him. On going there he found a boy with a message in his hand, which he received. It read, simply:

"Call immediately. I am dying. I have a confession to make. The bearer will conduct you to me."

The detective locked his office and went with the boy, and soon arrived at a fine hotel in the eastern part of the city.

He was immediately conducted to a room on the second floor, and there he saw a stranger.

“Mr. Sharp, I believe?” began the man.

“At your service,” answered Sharp.

“I suppose you do not know me.”

“I confess I do not,” answered Sharp.

“Do you remember the murder of old Jacob, the miser, about five years ago?” asked the man.

“Yes, I remember it distinctly, because I made a failure there.”

“Why, how was that?”

“I captured an innocent man who was afterward acquitted.”

“Oh, yes, I remember that.”

“But the murderer was never caught.”

“He lies before you.” This was spoken in a trembling voice, and it was evident to the detective that he was dying fast.

“And this is the confession you wished to make?” asked Sharp.

“Yes,” answered the man, and he would not speak another word.

He died about an hour after this without any apparent struggle.

Thus was cleared the mystery in regard to the murder of old Jacob, the miser, and giving another illustration of that old adage, “Murder will out.” It was afterward ascertained that the self-confessed murderer was the stranger who had noticed the fainting of William Drayton so particularly.

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