

The Mysterious Murder

Leaves From the Diary of a Detective

About the middle of January, in the year 1856, I was startled from a very sound sleep, just as the town clock was striking three, by a very loud rapping at my office door. I arose and dressed myself as hastily as I could; and on answering the summons, found a young man, very excited, who handed me a note from the captain of police, with a request that I would attend to it at once.

I opened the note and read as follows:

“DEAR K.— Old Logan has been murdered—it must have been done after 12 o’clock, as his body is warm. Come at once. Yours, etc.,
C.”
“2:20 A.M.”

I quickly put my revolver in my belt, and after leaving word with my brother, who slept in the adjoining room, with reference to my trip, I hastened down to Mr. Logan’s store.

Mr. L. was the sole owner and proprietor of a large jewelry store on Bank street, and was looked upon as one of the wealthiest inhabitants of the city of P—g.

On my way down, I was busy thinking as to what might have been the reason for this murder, and concluded, before I got there, that the only incentive could have been his money, as I knew that he always kept a considerable amount about him, for he kept, in conjunction with his store, a kind of very fashionable loan office.

I was not very long in reaching Mr. L.’s place of business, and owing to the time and the state of the weather, which forbade anyone not compelled to go out, I found no one around at all. The store was darkened, no lights visible, and I was beginning to think that I was the victim of some well-laid hoax, when I heard the familiar sound of Captain Bob’s voice, very low.

He called me over to him, and said that he was waiting in hopes that the murderer might return, and hence had not changed anything at all. I assured him that there could be no possibility of the assassin returning that night at least, and the best thing we could do was to search through the store and try and find some clue.

The snow had been falling for the last forty-eight hours, so that the ground was very well covered, and the atmosphere was not the most inviting in the world; hence I was rather anxious to get out of the cold.

My first question on getting inside was as to how the murder was discovered.

The Captain told me that about twelve or half-past, in passing by, he thought he noticed the door facing on Bank street opened a very little, and on trying he found it was a little open; but he was not at all surprised at this, as Mr. L. was in the habit of sitting up quite late, looking over the business affairs of the day, or quietly enjoying a satisfactory smoke, as he reckoned the gains of

the day's work. So he gave it a little slam for the purpose of warning him that the door was not locked, and went on to attend to some other business, which occupied his attention for nearly an hour.

On returning, he again tried the door, and found it still unlocked. Then, fearing that Mr. L. had possibly fallen asleep, he determined to go in and awaken him, and enjoy a smoke too. Still he was surprised to find no light at all in either the store or office; so he had to use his own lantern, and as soon as he reached the door of the office, he saw Mr. L.'s body lying across the floor, with a gash in his throat, which severed the carotid artery, thereby causing death. He did not make any farther examinations, but sent for me, and kept watch himself upon the store.

This was all that I could learn from the captain, so I lit up the room, and began my survey.

I first examined the body, and found a wound on the back of the head, which I know must have been given by some blunt instrument, and which must have stunned him at once. It seemed as if it had bled very profusely; and as the blood seemed more clotted than that on his neck, I concluded it was given first; but I could find nothing about the room which bore marks of having been used for such.

Close by the side of the murdered man lay a knife, which I recognized as his own, and which bore unmistakable marks of having been the one used for severing his carotid artery.

Here was the first clue; it must have been some one who knew something of the habits and manners of Mr. L.

That was a very indifferent clue though, for Mr. L. had lived in that one store for thirty years back, and was known by every man, woman, and child in the city. Still I marked it well.

I noticed then that his shirt bosom showed signs of some struggling, for two of the buttons were completely torn off, and there was an imprint of *three fingers* upon it in one place, and of *four fingers* in another place. I easily found out, from the relative position of the hands, that both of these marks were made by the same hand, but at different times, I felt sure, as the bloody signs seemed unlike.

This discovery somewhat puzzled me, but I said nothing to the captain about it, determined to find out all myself.

I then examined to see what property had been stolen, and was convinced that the work was done by someone who knew something of Mr. L.'s habits.

I noticed here again on the safe the bloody prints of *four fingers*, and the same marks were on some papers which were lying on the floor near by.

It was impossible of course to find out exactly what articles had been stolen until the clerk arrived. So I again began to examine the dead body.

The marks on the back of the head were undoubtedly the result of a severe blow, or possibly two, given by a strong arm, and must have been given while Mr. L. was sitting, because the scalp was cut from the top more slightly than from nearer the base. So the blow was given by someone standing when Mr. L. was asleep in his chair, and it must have stunned him during the time that the murderer was examining the contents of the safe. There was not much satisfaction in that, but it was one of the links in the chain which I had determined must be discovered.

As I was meditating over this for a few moments, the clerk came, and began to examine the safe to find out what had been stolen.

He seemed terrified beyond endurance when brought into the store, and almost fainted at the sight of the old gentleman with his throat gashed through almost. His right hand was tied up; and on our questioning him, he said that he had cut off his *little finger* at about 10 or 11 o'clock that night, while feeding a meat cutter, and remarked jocularly that "the sausage would be savory."

We both expressed our regret at the occurrence, and the captain assisted Mr. Butler, the clerk, in looking over the stock.

I continued my investigations, and began to look at the gash in the neck.

It was an awkward looking wound, apparently done either in a great hurry, or under some undue excitement. The tip of the right ear was clipped, and the shirt collar cut nearly through, which led me at once to believe that the blow was made in a hurry, and by some other instrument than the knife above-mentioned, as the blade of the knife was hardly keen enough to make the cut; it was more the mark of a razor.

The wound in the throat extended from behind the ear on the right side, to and across what is familiarly called the Adam's apple, severing the carotid artery, and also the esophagus, and leaving the lips of the wound wide enough apart to allow the inside to be well examined. Nothing could be gained, I thought, by looking at this. We must await the result of the coroner's inquest, when all the Latinized-American words of innumerable syllables will be given, telling all *plainly*; but as I was about to leave the body, and see what the Captain and Butler were doing, I noticed something which did not look exactly like any part of his throat, at the mouth of the wound in the esophagus. I put my finger in and distinctly felt a *fangernail*. I took the knife lying by his side, and with its assistance soon succeeded in removing from his throat the *little finger* of some one's hand.

My God! thought I; can this clerk have been the murderer? Can he go on now and look over these things, with a guilty conscience pricking him? Can it be?

Being a good master over my own feelings on account of my experience, I did not lose control of them at this moment, although I felt astounded.

I determined that night to sleep with Butler, and try and find out anything else that I could; and at five o'clock, after a full inventory had been taken, I suggested the propriety of Butler and myself going to take a little nap, while the Captain might watch if he chose, or leave some of his men.

The Captain preferred watching himself, and as my own office was some distance away, I *accepted* Butler's invitation to sleep with him.

When I entered his room, the first thing that struck my sight was a *bloody razor* lying carelessly thrown on his bureau. I asked him how it got bloody, and he told me that he had trimmed off some jagged pieces that were left on the stump of his *little finger*. I asked him then to make me a present of the razor, and I would keep it as a memento of the mysterious murder, and also of course of his savory sausage.

He readily gave me the razor, and then hunted up for me the case, which had the mark of *three fingers* on it. Of course I could not sleep, thinking as I did that I was in bed with a murderer, and I was at a loss how to act.

I had sufficient circumstantial evidence to warrant me arresting him. It was a perfect chain, not one link wanting; but then I had known him for some four or five years and never knew him guilty of a dishonorable act. What could, what must I do?

I was glad when it became late enough for me to go to my own office, and on my way thither I called by L.'s store, and mildly hinted to the Captain [that] Butler was of course the best witness the jury wanted.

On my arriving at my office I was somewhat surprised at finding a note from my brother, stating that he had been called out—he was a doctor, and held in very high repute in the neighborhood—and possibly would not return for several days.

This was Sunday morning, and the inquest was to be held on the following morning.

I was in trouble. Everything pointed to my friend—as he really was—Butler as the murderer, and I was loath to admit the fact; but circumstances stared me in the face so strongly that I could not refuse. Of course I was examined, but at my own request my examination was strictly private, no one being present but the coroner and the jury.

I gave my testimony in accordance with the facts above related, but requested the jury not to return a verdict for a day or two, as I was unwilling to believe that Butler was guilty.

They agreed to do as I requested, although there was no doubt in the minds of any but that the clerk was the guilty person.

I carried with me the knife that was apparently used in the murder, and after getting in my room I compared the spots on both very carefully, and I thought I detected a slight difference in color.

This pleased me very much, and so anxious was I to find out if any difference did exist, that I procured a sleigh and started immediately for my brother, who was, as his note told me, some two miles in the country.

My brother was an excellent chemist, and I could rely well upon his analysis.

I found him after but little trouble at breakfast with an old friend of my father's who had sent for him to amputate the third joint of the *little finger* of the *left* hand of his nephew, who had been seriously bitten by a dog the previous night. I did not think much of this at first, for I had known the old gentleman from my boyhood, and no one around held a better or more enviable reputation.

I then told my brother the whole case, and showed him the two knives—that is, Mr. L.'s knife and Butler's razor. He quickly detected the difference, and explained to me very satisfactorily that they were not the same. I was so much delighted at this that I was about to return immediately and relieve my friend of any and all suspicion, when he asked me if I had the finger with me.

I did have it with me in a small vial of alcohol, and on showing it to him he started back as if stunned, but quickly recovering himself said:

“Well, Bob, you have given yourself great uneasiness for nothing. Did you not say that it was Butler's *right-hand finger*? and don't you see that the convex part of that second joint is towards the *left* when you place it in front of you? That is a little finger of the *left-hand*, and of course not Butler's; *but I know whose it is.*”

I was too much surprised to make any reply, but my brother, taking the finger out of the bottle, showed me the marks of a felon in the second joint of the finger, which had injured the bone, and to remedy which the finger was lanced down to the metacarpal bone, and then said:

“*Young Raymond is the murderer.*”

Nothing of course was said at the house about it, but I hastily returned to the city, and getting the Captain, we both hastened back, and after a little search, which we carried on as quietly as possible, succeeded in finding unmistakable evidence of his guilt.

He was immediately arrested, carried to the city, and placed in the room with the butchered body. His whole frame trembled like an aspen leaf, and he confessed the crime.

It was as I thought. Passing by the store he saw Mr. L. asleep in his chair, and he immediately determined to rob him. He first struck him back of the head, and stunned him sufficiently to be allowed time to complete the robbery, and as he was about to leave, Mr. L. recovered and grappled with him. A struggle ensued, when he picked up a razor lying on the counter, and grasping his jaws so as to stifle any sound, cut his throat; but in catching his jaws, by some means his little finger got in Mr. L.'s mouth, and was bitten off. This happened as the door was slammed, and being frightened he escaped as soon as possible.

His trial came on soon, and after a delay of only three minutes he was convicted of murder in the first degree, and hanged.

I don't know whether Butler's sausages were so savory or not, but I have since enjoyed many savory dishes with them, as we talked over how the mistake of a hand might have hanged him.

W.S.K.

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