

# A Detective Story

## Tracking a Burglar

by an English Detective

### CHAPTER I

Burglary and attempted murder! That was the charge. The burglar had escaped and the task of capturing him was given to me. It did not prove such a hard task as I expected it to be when I had heard only the first report, but it was enough to try a man's nerve before all was over.

"There's not much to go upon, Crinly," said the chief of our department when he was putting me on the case. "You must go out there, and I have no doubt you'll make something of the matter."

That was a compliment, and it was very pleasant to hear it from the chief, and I immediately went out there.

The house was in a very retired road at Highgate. When the door was opened to me, I asked to see Mr. Bowles, and that gentleman made his appearance in a very time.

I had only to introduce myself as Mr. Crinley, detective, called to make inquiries concerning the robbery and the murderous assault, to insure a very cordial reception.

"The rascal has not left even a footmark behind to trace him by!" exclaimed the injured Mr. Bowles soon after he had conducted me onto the parlor.

"Men who follow such lines of business seldom do," I said. "But perhaps I shall be able to trace come of the stolen property. If I do that I dare say I can run down the thief. Let me see the place where you were attacked, please."

I was conducted up the stairs and into a passage or lobby which ran from the back of the house to a door leading into a front bed room. There was a door on each side of this passage, each giving admittance to another bed room. Two smaller doors belonged to closets, in which a variety of things not in immediate use, were deposited from time to time.

"This is where I caught the villain," said Mr. Bowles, planting his foot firmly on the carpet near one of the bedroom doors. "This is my bedroom, you see," he continued. "I retired for the night about eleven o'clock, but I had not gone to bed. I put on a dressing gown and sat down to write a couple of letters. I thought I would come home and smoke a pipe with Mr. Ainger if he should come home before I had laid down. Well, I wrote my letters, and was sitting near the fire thinking of friends in Australia, and one thing and another, when I heard a sound out here that drew my attention. I listened intently a few seconds, when, I distinctly heard a low, rustling noise that appeared to come from the closet, in which my boxes were laid.

“I got up then, and going to the door lightly I suddenly threw it open, and saw a big fellow on his knees, with a small dark lantern on a box beside him, busily turning out the contents of a leather trunk in which I had a large sum of money and several gold and silver knickknacks of some value.”

“Did you not seize him while you had such an opportunity?” I asked.

“I seized him, sir, but I missed the opportunity while he was kneeling,” he replied, as if recollection made him angry with himself. “The moment I threw the door open the villain sprang to his feet like a flash. I gave a shout and attempted to grapple with him, when he actually threw himself in to my arms. But I soon found that I could not keep him there without a struggle. He was a big, powerful fellow. He tried to throw me, but I have learned enough of rough wrestling to be able to hold my ground pretty well. Our struggling made enough noise to awaken everybody in the house. I heard the front door bang loudly. Mrs. Ainger, my sister, sir, ran from her room screaming, and met her husband at the top of the stairs. Then the fellow loosed his hold of me, and, as quick as thought, a great sheath knife, like a dagger flashed before my eyes. The robber stabbed at my face, but I was quick enough to avoid the blow and the point of the weapon sank deep into the frame of the door behind me. There is the hole it made.”

As he spoke the last words, he pointed to a deep, broad gash in the wood, which only a blow of great force could make.

“Did not the assistance of Mr. Ainger enable you to overpower the man?” I asked.

“No, sir. If we had overpowered him, I should not want your assistance in finding him. I was much more overpowered. The fellow wrenched himself away before Ainger could reach us. He sprang along the passage and down the stairs in about two strides, and was out, through the window of the back kitchen, and lost to sight in less time than I require to tell you so. Mr. Ainger found a policeman and told him; then he went off to the station, which is a pretty long step from this place, and when he came back I was busy examining my trunk and finding out what I had lost. I had a lantern, a screw driver and a locket left in place of more than a hundred pound in coverings and notes, and a black leather case that contained a watch, two diamond rings, and some gold ornaments for a watch chain. A few other things of less value were taken too.”

“Are all who were in the house last night at home now?” I asked, when Mr. Bowles had concluded the story of his adventure.

“I suppose all are in the house except one, and you know I wish I had him here just now,” he replied, accompanying the latter words with a grim smile.

I told him I desired to see only the servants who slept in the house. I did not wish that any alarm be excited among them, as if they were suspected. They might be called together or separately while he showed me the way by which the robber had escaped. Mr. Bowles at first protested that neither of the girls in the house could know much about the affair as he did, but consented to speak to Mrs. Ainger on the point, who settled the matter as I desired.

My walk through the house, from the bedroom floor to the kitchen, produced no addition to my knowledge. I looked over the little kitchen garden, on which the window opened, but without making any useful discovery.

The wall at the end of the garden was nearly eight feet in height. There was a door in it which opened on a narrow lane formed by noting but garden walls on both sides through the entire length.

“Did the burglar escape by that door?” I asked.

“No, sir. The door was bolted when we came to it. He must have scaled the wall.”

“But the wall is high for a big, heavy-bodied man to scale so quickly,” I said.

“Yes, he was big, and he must have been supple as a monkey. But that is the only way by which he could have gone,” replied Mr. Bowles, confidently.

“It is odd, and hardly to be credited,” I said, “but we must accept the fact, it seems.”

While in the garden, and speaking of the burglar, I had secretly, but very closely, scanned the face of the housemaid who was with us. She was tall and decidedly pretty, while in her form and face there was an air of intelligence and refinement greater than is to be found in all girls of her class.

But there was also a pained and troubled expression on her features, That might be set down to a number of causes wholly foreign to the business I was then engaged in, but it excited my curiosity none the less.

When Mr. Bowles mentioned the size and agility of the robber who had escaped on the preceding night I noticed that the troubled expression of her face deepened. Why was this? Detectives are accused of hastily arriving at conclusions, and I at once suspected very strongly that there was some kind of connection between the robber and the thoughts then current in her mind.

Our inspection of the garden being finished, I intimated to Mr. Bowles that I wished to press my inquiries further with the housemaid and her fellow servant.

“I suppose you must do what you think necessary to forward the ends of justice,” he said; “but I must ask you to be careful in your questioning. The young lady you call housemaid is really the friend and companion of my sister, though she fills a servant’s place. She stands even higher in my opinion than in my sister’s, and I would rather my money should be lost and the thief go free than that her feelings should be hurt in connection with the matter.”

I satisfied Mr. Bowles that I knew the proper deference that should be shown to a young lady, whereupon he left me to use my discretion.

The young lady in question didn't try to avoid the interview I desired. A few leading questions elicited the information she could give, but her story was so interesting and so important to me in its bearing on the case that I must give the substance of it here as briefly as I can.

"I did look troubled when I heard the robber was a big and powerful man, and I will tell you why," she said. "Two days ago a man called here to see me. He is a big, powerful man. I don't know what he may be doing now, but about three years ago he had a very bad character. Mr. Bowles' description of the robber brought him strongly to my mind, and I thought he might probably be the man.

"Are you acquainted with this man? Do you know him intimately?" I asked.

"Oh, no," she replied shrinkingly. "Before he called here I had not seen him for more than three years. Then he was a bad man. My brother kept his company, and they committed some crime together, for which my brother is still in prison. This man was the principal offender, I am sure, but he escaped punishment.

"Why did he call upon you?"

"I don't know why; and that has made me most uneasy since the robbery last night. He actually mentioned the rich Australian gentleman who was staying in the house. When I saw him I could not stand in the door speaking to such a man as I had known him to be. But I did not send him away directly—I did not like to make him angry because he might cause a disturbance. When he said he wanted a few words in private with me, I thought he had some news of my brother, and I turned into the little spare kitchen with him."

"I only called to see how you were getting on, Mary," he said. "Somehow I'd been thinking of you as poor Tom Drew's sister, and I thought I'd come. There's no offense, I hope. I see you've grown a lady. I don't suppose I'll ever make a gentleman, you know, Mary, but I've turned over a new leaf, and I'll to get money till I grow as rich as that Australian gent that's living in the house now. It's prime to work where they dig gold by the shovelful. A little of that precious stuff would be useful to poor folks here—wouldn't it, Mary? And they'd still have plenty more than they could spend if they did share a bit."

"The man touched me on the arm, and I shrank from him. He then began to praise the house—so many floors, so many rooms, and actually two sets of stairs. He left soon to my great relief, but he had gained some information about the house and the people by his seemingly careless remarks and indirect questions.

"What you have told me may be of great service to me," I said, "I must ask you to give me this strange fellow's name."

"I am sorry I cannot do that. I don't know his name," she replied.

"Well, that is unfortunate. But you say it is about three years since he was implicated in some crime for which your brother suffered? What is your brother's name?"

“James Drew,” she replied in a low voice, which made me think she did not like to speak the tainted name aloud.

I thanked her, and immediately went to Mr. Bowles, from whom I obtained a more particular description of the several articles he had lost, in addition to the money.

## CHAPTER II

On referring to a file of papers published three years before the robbery at Highgate, I learned that James Drew and Matthew Brown had been charged with complicity in an extensive robbery fraud. James Drew had been sentenced to five years penal servitude, but Matthew Brown had been acquitted because the evidence was not sufficiently clear against him.

I did not doubt that this Matt Brown was the man who visited Mary Drew. He was known to many members of the force, and I was one of the number. But I had no reason to believe he knew me simply because my professional duties had not caused me to appear very often in the localities where he was best known. He was a sporting man in his own way.

A certain public house near Drury Lane was recognized as Matt’s headquarters between the hours of twelve in the morning and four in the afternoon. When he was not seen at the corner outside, or at the public bar within, he was certain to be found in the plain and sparsely furnished little smoking room regaling himself with a pipe and a glass of toddy.

I dressed for the occasion one day, and went to the public house in question. I asked at the bar whether I could see Mr. Brown, and the potman stared at me very searchingly a moment or two before he spoke. My sedate appearance, with silk hat and umbrella appeared to puzzle him, but he slowly answered:

“I dare say he’s in the smoking room. Did you say bitters, sir?” seizing one of the upright pump handles and holding a glass in readiness.

“Not just now,” I said, turning to a door on which the word “Smoking” was painted.

Matt Brown was the only person in the room when I entered. Advancing, I took off my hat, and bending a little, said:

“You must be Mr. Brown the bookmaker, I believe.”

“I am Matt Brown, guv’nor, right enough, but I don’t see as how my business matters much to a stranger.”

“But it does to me, Mr. Brown. The fact is I want a little business in your line. I’m not a betting man, as a rule, but I want to back Ribbon for November Handicap. What odds can you give against two pounds?”

“I can’t give no odds, gov’nor. You’d better go to the races and bet your money in the ring. You are too mighty respectable lookin’, with that stuffed umbrel’ an’ all, to catch an old bird with a chaff,” and, leaning forward he laughed in a way which told me very plainly my plan had fallen.

Of course I protested that Mr. Brown misunderstood me. He only laughed the more, and I left expressing a hope that we should arrive at a better understanding the next time I wanted to do business with him.

After leaving the public house I made my way to High Holborn, and through Russell Square and Guilford street to Gray’s Inn road. Near the latter thoroughfare there lived a friend of mine in whose house I deposited my umbrella, my overcoat and silk hat, as I left other disguises on former occasions.

During the evening I learned a great deal about Matt Brown.

The next day I devoted to touring among the dealers in second hand goods, who are rather numerous in that locality.

In one place which I entered I found quite a collection of pipes, cigar holders, cigar-cases, tobacco boxes, and other articles that are considered necessary in a smoker’s complete outfit. There was some sameness among the cigar cases only, and as I was especially interested in the cigar cases I asked the grimy looking proprietor of the shop if he could show me anything a little more off the common. After some haggling he said he had a few more, and he brought them to me from an inner room. One was a rough-looking affair, indeed. It was made of untanned skin, from which the hair had not been removed. A rudely formed silver medallion was on the front, and the clasp was of silver. I liked it as a curiosity, and bought it at high price, feeling satisfied that I had secured a bargain in the very inelegant looking thing. In reply to my inquiry as to when he had bought the article, the dealer replied he could not remember exactly, but it had been in his possession a long time.

The following day I called at the public house near Drury lane once more, and entered the smoking room, in which I found Matt Brown in his glory.

“Well, Mr. Brown,” I said, “will you do business with me today?”

“Hello gov’nor! Is it you?” he exclaimed. “I’d hardly know you now. You look more like a business man I must say, without your long coat and top hat an’ old woman’s umbrella. But I don’t think we can do that kind of business together, all the same.”

“Well, I must say you’re a strange man,” I said. “Can’t you make a bet with me just as far as a sovereign?”

“No, dear boy, it won’t do,” he said, raising his hand as if to repel my proposal, while he leaned back in his chair and laughed aloud. “I’m off bis’ness just now, gov’nor,” he continued, “and I can’t bet a shillin’.”

“Well, will you take a glass with me?” I asked.

“No; thank you all the same. I’ve got enough here,” he explained.

“Well, a smoke? I’ve got a nice cigar.”

“You’re such a pressin’ fellow, I don’t mind if I do. I like my pipe, but I can always take a cigar from a friend.”

I drew from my pocket the rough looking cigar case I had purchased two days earlier, and put it in his hand.

Soon as his glance rested on the article, all the hilarity vanished out of his face as if by magic. He looked at it a few moments intently, turning it over nonchalantly and then looked up at me with an attempt to resume his habitual smile, but with the keenest questioning in his eyes.

“This is a curious thing,” he said.

“Yes, you don’t see many like that,” I replied. “It has had some wear, but you see it’s good for service yet.”

“Well, it’s not very pretty, but it’s useful,” he remarked, handing it back to me.

“But will you not try a cigar?” I asked.

“No, thanks; I’ll stick to my pipe still.”

I left the room almost immediately afterward; but I contrived to see Matt Brown a little more at his ease.

I was now satisfied that the burglar at Highgate and Matt Brown were one. The cigar case was one of the articles which had been stolen from Mr. Bowles’ trunk, and the effect its appearance produced on Mr. Brown fully established his guilt in my mind.

I procured from Bow street two men to secure the man, and in less than a quarter of an hour he was arrested.

Brown’s lodgings were searched, and nearly all the stolen property was found there. The big, powerful Matt Brown was tried at the ensuing assizes and is now expiating his crime by serving ten years in penal servitude.

I learned afterward that Mr. Bowles proposed to Mary Drew, who shrank from his advances at first, but subsequently consented to become his wife. They were married, and went to Australia together, where one can only hope they are still living happily. *Philadelphia Transcript*

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