

## *A Detective's Story*

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One winter morning, away back in the sixties, I left the Providence train at a village about thirty miles away to look for a man for whom I had a warrant for grand larceny. In walking from the depot to the hotel I came across a group of women at the gate of a fine old mansion which stood back several rods from the street. They were nervous and fearful. The house was the residence of a Mrs. Brush and her son, she a widow 60 years of age, and he a young man of 22. The hour was 11 o'clock, and they were alarmed because there was no stir about the house. It was known that the son, James, had gone to Providence the evening before, but the mother was an early riser, and the house should have been open by 7 o'clock. The milkman had been there, as also the butcher boy and a laborer, but their knocks had been unanswered. The neighbors had at last come to have a dreadful suspicion, and a constable had already been sent for to make an investigation.

It was in my line to be interested and to remain. When the constable came we found that we had met before, and he asked me as a favor to assist him. He was nervous and excited, and we both had the same feeling before the house was entered. I would have bet my life that the old woman was dead, and he was just as sure. We knocked at the kitchen door until any living person would have been aroused, and then we broke it open and entered. Everything in the kitchen was in order, and the same was true of the sitting room and parlor. Mother and son occupied the rooms up stairs. One of the women piloted us directly to her room. She lay on the floor in her night clothes in a pool of blood, stabbed in five places. Foul murder had been done. The first thing was to send for the coroner, the next to turn everybody out of doors. The murdered woman had relatives in the town, and as soon as they got the news and reached the spot I was engaged to take charge of the case. I telegraphed to my chief at Providence and was told to go ahead, and half an hour later I was at work. Before any persons were admitted I took the coroner and constable through the house to look for clues, and here is what I found:

1. The key of the back door was missing. There was a heavy bolt on the inside, but the bolt was not spring. Therefore some one had passed out by this door and locked it from the outside.
2. There was a stand in the kitchen, and on this stand a pitcher of water and a washbowl, while a roller towel hung near by. There were damp spots on this towel. The pitcher was on the floor, half its contents gone, while a gill of blood-stained water remained in the bowl. Conclusion: the murderer had washed his hands here.
3. A hall ran through the house upstairs. At the rear end of this hall was a window, and beginning two feet below the sill was the long sloping roof of the kitchen and woodshed. The lower sash was raised. The sash had been fastened with nails. These nails had been pulled out. I found one of them on the floor close to the baseboard. They could only have been pulled from the inside. The sash bore no marks of violence. There was snow on the roof and it showed no tracks. Conclusion: the murderer had raised this window as a blind, but had blundered.
4. The bureau in the old lady's room had been overhauled, as if in search of plunder. Here and there an article showed a blood stain. The articles had been flung out in such a way that even a novice could see the idea as not plunder. A watch, several rings, a dozen gold pieces, and a roll

of bank bills were in the heap. A robber would have taken them. Plunder would have been his motive and object. Conclusion: it was another blind.

There were several other things, trifling to an outsider, but having a bearing to me, and as soon as the Coroner's jury had been admitted to view the body I began to make inquiries about the son. He soon appeared to answer for himself, having returned from Providence on the 3 o'clock train. There wasn't a man, woman, or child in the village who had the least suspicion of him. He seemed stunned and overcome by the news, but while his demeanor satisfied all others it looked to me as if he were playing a part. His lamentations were overdone. I sat down with him after a while and told him it would be necessary for him to account for his own time the previous night. He appeared quite willing to do this, and stated as follows:

"I left the house at 8 o'clock last night. Exactly at 9 I took the train for Providence. I reached there at 10:15. I went to the —— Hotel. I was assigned to room 82. After registering I went to 240 Blank street to see a girl named Mattie Davis. She was not at home. I went upstairs with John Carew, a Boston drummer. I slept until 9 in the morning. Had breakfast, strolled about, had dinner, and left for home at 1:45."

All this seemed straight and reasonable, and I took care to hide my suspicions. I went to Providence and verified his statements up to a certain point. He did call at 240 Blank street and ask to see Mattie Davis, but when told that she was out and would return within ten minutes he would not wait. Why? That was his object in going to Providence, as he admitted, and he had plenty of time. He did go upstairs with John Carew, but ten minutes after entering his room he came out again. A chambermaid saw him. She saw that he wore a different hat, or, rather, he exchanged his hat for a cap. When he went down stairs he went out by the ladies' door. In every corridor of every large hotel the help are sentinels. It is a part of their duties to watch the guests. A woman suspected and remembered young Brush. When the night watch came on, he was told to look out and see what hour the young man returned.

A train left Providence at midnight. I hunted up the conductor who had the run that night, and he remembered taking up the ticket of a young man who wore a cap and sat in the smoker. The passenger had his nose in a newspaper and seemed deeply interested, although the light was very poor and it was a strange hour to be reading the news of the day. He was sure this passenger got off at the town [where] the murder was committed. A train left here again for Providence at 3 o'clock in the morning. I found the conductor of that, and he remembered taking cash fare of a young man wearing a cap, who got on at that place; remembered it more distinctly because the young man was curled up in his seat as if asleep, or as if anxious to beat his way. I returned to Providence and interviewed the night watch at the hotel and he said that the young man assigned to room No. 82 came softly in at about 3:30 and staggered along as if drunk. He figured it out that the young fellow had come into the city for a lark, and had had it.

It took me ten days to study all this out, and, meanwhile, the murdered woman had been buried, the Coroner's jury had returned a verdict, and public opinion had settled down to the conviction that the crime was the work of a tramp, who had gotten safely away. I must be sure of my case before moving against young Brush, as I would stand entirely alone. When I had the evidence as above given, I began a hunt for the back door key. In a search of half an hour I found it in the

garden, where it had been thrown after locking the door. It had fallen in the snow but the snow had melted. Then I got the chambermaid and night watch down for a quick look at James, and both identified him. As the train from Providence entered the depot it stopped for a moment at a street crossing. This street crossing was a quarter of a mile nearer the Brush house than the depot. I concluded that Brush got on and off here. The nearest building was the office of a coal yard, which had a man on watch all night. When I came to interview him he remembered seeing a man alight from the train and walk rapidly up the street. The night and the hour coincided with my figuring.

The Brush house had been practically shut up since the murder, though James had visited it several times in the company of relatives. I was allowed to go and come at will, and on the next day, after interviewing the watchman at the coal yard, I went to the house about the middle of the forenoon to take a last look before bringing my accusation. While I was inside I heard someone enter. Off the upstairs hall was a closet into which I stepped and held the door slightly ajar. My idea was that it was young Brush, and that he had come alone for a purpose. He could not have known of my presence, but he came in very quietly, and as he got to the head of the stairs, where I could see him, I saw that he was pale and nervous. He acted like one who had dreaded to come, but had still been forced to. I had overhauled the clothing in his room, and had searched high and low in hopes to find the knife with which the stabbing had been done. I was certain that he could not have escaped blood stains, and that he had changed at least a portion of his clothing after committing the murder. I was there for a last search, and it wasn't five minutes before I had the proofs that I had been blind.

Young Brush dared not enter his mother's room. He started to, but backed out. He walked up and down the hall two or three times, evidently trying to get his courage up, and then entered his own room. I gave him a couple of minutes to work, and then left my place of concealment and tiptoed to his door. A chimney ran up through his room and was fitted for a stovepipe, but the hole was stopped up by an ordinary stopper. He had removed this, and was standing on a chair and had his arm in the hole as I entered the room. For half a minute he looked down into my eyes with a frightened, despairing expression. Then he made a spring for me, and as we both crashed to the floor he grabbed for my throat. He was desperate, and desperation gave him false strength, but after a struggle of three or four minutes I had him handcuffed and helpless. Then I investigated the chimney. There was a fireplace down stairs, but it had been stopped up. I opened it and found the entire suit he had on when he committed the murder. Every garment was splashed and spotted with the blood of his mother. Not only the clothes but the bloody knife was there. It was a farmer's jack knife, with a blade large enough to prune trees. Not a word was spoken between us until I had all this evidence. Then the young man asked:

“Did you suspect me from the first?”

“I did.”

“I thought so. I was a fool to come here in the day time. I suppose the jig is up?”

“I have all the proofs to convict you.”

Sitting on a chair in his own room; with the blood evidences before us, he confessed everything and related all the details. While he expressed no contrition, he said he should plead guilty and humbly accept his fate. An hour later, when I had him in jail, he had decided to fight to the bitter end. He had rich and influential relatives to back him in this decision, and when the case came to trial he was actually acquitted in spite of proofs enough to convict him ten times over. The defense set up that I, as the detective in the case, could not find the real criminal, and therefore made my plans to convict young Brush. They even charged me with preparing and hiding the clothes and with buying and fixing the knife. I was denounced as a monster and a dangerous man, and many people shunned me. Six months after the verdict young Brush drowned himself in a pond. It was deliberate suicide, and he left a note behind him, reading: "I cannot longer endure this burden. I was cleared by the law, but I am the murderer of my mother." – *New York Sun*.

*Barnstable [MA] Patriot*, May 7, 1889

*The Indiana Progress*, May 8, 1889

This is a shorter version of "A Red Chapter" (*Sumner Gazette* [IA], September 26, 1889), which credits the *Cincinnati Enquirer* as its source. The longer version includes an introductory paragraph and four additional sentences prefacing paragraph 2.