

Who Stole the Coughlin Baby



Mrs. George H. Coughlin,
Baby Blakely's Mother.

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Little
Blakely
Coughlin.

If kidnaping was the real purpose of his midnight errand he would have realized that his only booty was the child, and that the safety of the little one was of prime importance for the subsequent development of his scheme of ransom.

If it was as a kidnaper that the man entered the house and left the house with a live child in his hands he would have followed the plans he had already mapped out and gone to the place where he meant to keep the child in hiding. He would not have wandered aimlessly on a side road and then travelled on to the river bank and sat there until daylight, holding the dead body in his lap, as he claims.

Furthermore, the police declare that it is not credible that a kidnapper would have arrived on the scene with no blanket, bag or receptacle to conceal the child in. According to Pasquale's confession, it was by accident that he came across the old overcoat belonging to one of the workmen in the house nearby, where he found the ladder, and which he used to cover the little one. It is true that Pasquale had with him that night a yellow imitation leather grip, but it was only 24x9 inches, not large enough to hold the child. What has become of that yellow grip is a mystery which Pasquale refuses to explain.

That the man did have the overcoat and had a baby in it on the night of the kidnaping seems somewhat substantiated by the statement of a woman who lives near the city line, who declares that she saw a man who carried a baby wrapped in a coat pass her house. It was a beautiful moonlight night.

If the police theory is correct Pasquale crept into the Coughlin house bent upon burglary alone. Surprised and disconcerted by the cry of the little one he seized it and strangled it. Making his escape before the parents of the little one in the next room could intercept him, he took the infant along with him, perhaps not knowing at that instant whether the child was really dead or merely temporarily stifled into quietude. Having safely gotten away from the premises he found that the child was really dead. He had bungled the job. He had secured no valuables and the child was dead.

Pasquale sat down in the darkness and thought the situation over, and as a result approached concluded that perhaps he could salvage something out of the situation after all. He would dispose of the remains of the little one, destroy its clothes and try to write a ransom from the distracted parents, who would not know that the little one no longer lived. This is the theory of some of the detectives. They believe that Pasquale's circumstantial story about the step-ladder and the vision of mother and child and the plans to return and kidnap the little one and the accidental smothering of the boy, as given in his last confession, are all a fiction. They are convinced that little Blakely was strangled in his own crib to stifle his cries because he had alarmed the prowler intent on burglary only.

But Mrs. Coughlin does not accept this analysis. She thinks that her child was stolen in a deliberate and perhaps extremely well planned kidnaping plot. She agrees with the police that the story of the accidental strangling in the overcoat is highly unlikely and she refuses to believe it.

Is little Blakely alive after all? Perhaps Pasquale is a much more clever scoundrel than has been supposed. When he planned his second scheme for getting his hands on the ransom money without risking being caught he worked out the details very cleverly. Mr. Coughlin was instructed to get on a fast express train and ride along, keeping his eyes fixed on the countryside until he should see a figure waving a white sheet. At that moment and at that point Mr. Coughlin was to throw out of the window of the rushing train the package with the money. A well conceived plan and almost too intelligent for a crazy man. And he would have escaped again had not the Pennsylvania police sprung a surprise which he could

hardly have foreseen—on a special train following immediately behind the express were a squad of detectives who instantly stopped their train, surrounded the patch of woods and secured Pasquale.

It is possible that the man thought he could repeat these schemes to mislead Mr. Coughlin from time to time and that he held the baby in reserve, intending to ultimately use the child itself as the final trump card in his last hold-up of the distracted parents.

If this is so, then Mrs. Coughlin is right in her instinct that her baby still lives. Pasquale perhaps figures that there is no evidence which will convince a jury that he kidnaped the child or, indeed, ever entered the Coughlin residence.

An uncorroborated confession cannot alone be used to convict a self-confessed criminal, and Pasquale has already laid the foundation for a plea that, in any case, he is an irresponsible crazy man. If, in one way or another, the man escapes conviction he can begin negotiations all over again to return the child to its parents. If the child is alive it would do him no good to return it at this time. If he returned it voluntarily the police would have the corroboration which would convict him with certainty.

One significant thing tends to lend color to the possibility that the child is still alive. On the morning after the kidnaping footprints of a man AND A WOMAN were discovered in the soft earth at the foot of the ladder. Pasquale has denied that he had any accomplice. But if his errand on that June night was to kidnap the infant it would be quite natural to have a woman as his confederate. If anybody had seen them along the road the infant in the arms of a woman would disarm suspicion. A screaming baby in the hands of a man might have attracted attention.

How came those footprints of a woman beneath that ladder?

And another thing. Pasquale carefully secured the hot-water heater used to heat the baby's milk bottle and carried it down the ladder and set it on the ground. The heater was found at the foot of the ladder the next morning and Pasquale says he made a special trip out of the window and down the ladder to make sure of it. This would look very much like the first step in a well deliberated plan to steal the child and provide for its subsequent welfare.

Pasquale did another thing which seems strongly to indicate a kidnaping purpose. He slipped the baby's half-consumed bottle of milk into his pocket. A man with no intent to kidnap and preserve the child would scarcely have done this.

Furthermore, it is a highly significant fact that Pasquale at the very moment of the crime took time to do something then and there which could only have been done for the purpose of establishing something to identify him later on in negotiations which he must then have had in mind. In his first letter to Mr. Coughlin he said:

"If you don't think that I am the man who stole your child look at the window sill of the nursery and find three nicks cut by a penknife." And, sure enough, the three nicks were there.

And still again it was remarked that the bedclothes in the little crib were not tumbled, but were carefully folded back as a woman lays back the cover after she has taken an infant out of its bed. This would not indicate a hasty seizing and strangling of the little one to still its

I appeal to every mother and child in the United States to help me find my baby. x x x
Mrs. G. H. Coughlin

From
Mrs.
Coughlin's
Appeal to
Kidnappers
to Return
Her
Baby.

voice. Would Pasquale himself have been likely to have folded back those bed clothes in the way they were found? Is it possible that the same feet that made those woman's footprints at the foot of the ladder also were actually in little Blakely's room and their owner smoothed back gently the cover while Pasquale lifted the little sleeping form into his arms?

If little Blakely was deliberately kidnaped and a woman was on the scene to take care of the child, it is almost beyond belief that the little one was accidentally strangled. If the woman's footprints were made by an accomplice of Pasquale there is every reason to suppose that the baby was carefully cared for and removed to a place of safety in accordance with plans well matured. If this is so the man Pasquale has lied from beginning to end in every essential detail and Mrs. Coughlin may be justified in her hope that somewhere some woman still has little Blakely alive and well.

This she has always believed, and in her touching appeal for the return of the little one, she said:

"To the abductors of Blakely Coughlin: I want my baby. Some woman must be caring for it. Won't you let your mother's heart plead for me now and send him safely back to me?"

Pasquale will be put on trial in a few weeks charged with murder, kidnaping and burglary. The prosecuting attorney feels sure he has evidence enough to convict the man.

Pasquale is thirty-eight years old. He is an Italian, born near the French-Swiss border and has a wife and two children, but asserts that he does not know their whereabouts. He has a long police record. He has been arrested a number of times for robbery, has resided in New York City and then moved to Philadelphia. A few weeks before he kidnaped the Coughlin baby he was released from the county prison at Holmesburg, Pennsylvania, where he had served two years for larceny.

Nowhere along his criminal career, so far as the police can ascertain, is there anything to indicate an unsound mind. On the other hand, Pasquale is a man of more than average criminal intelligence and evidently has had considerable education. In his letters his grammar and diction is remarkably good and the following photograph of his signature shows a well rounded, easy handwriting:

August Pasquale

Whatever happens at the trial of Pasquale, it is not likely that the true facts and all the facts surrounding the disappearance of little Blakely Coughlin will be known for a long time to come—if ever.

If Pasquale should manage to secure his freedom and the child is still alive it is thought likely that he will find a way to try to return the little one to its parents for whatever ransom money he can get.



Section of the Coughlin Residence and Pasquale's Escape With the Kidnapped Child Wrapped in an Old Overcoat, According to His Confession.