

The Case of Jennie Brice

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"I had been asleep when my wife awakened me. She asked for a medicine she used in these attacks. I got up and found the bottle, but it was empty. As she was nervous and frightened, I agreed to try to get some at a drug store. I went downstairs, took Mrs. Pitman's boat and went to several stores before I could awaken a pharmacist."

"You cut the boat loose?"

"Yes. It was tied in a woman's knot or series of knots. I could not untie it, and I was in a hurry."

"How did you cut it?"

"With my pocketknife."

"You did not use Mrs. Pitman's bread knife?"

"I did not."

"And in cutting it you cut your wrist, did you?"

"Yes. The knife slipped. I have the scar still."

"What did you do then?"

"I went back to the room and stanch-ed the blood with a towel."

"From whom did you get the medicine?"

"From Alexander's pharmacy."

"At what time?"

"I am not certain. About 3 o'clock, probably."

"You went directly back home?"

Mr. Ladley hesitated. "No," he said finally. "My wife had had these attacks, but they were not serious. I was curious to see how the river front looked and rowed out too far. I was caught in the current and nearly carried away."

"You came home after that?"

"Yes, at once. Mrs. Ladley was better and had dropped asleep. She awakened as I came in. She was disagreeable about the length of time I had been gone and would not let me explain. We quarreled, and she said she was going to leave me. I said that as she had threatened this before and had never done it I would see that she really started. At daylight I rowed her to Federal street."

"What had she with her?"

"A small brown valise."

"How was she dressed?"

"In a black and white dress and hat, with a long, black coat."

"What was the last you saw of her?"

"She was going across the Sixth street bridge."

"Alone?"

"No. She went with a young man we knew."

There was a stir in the courtroom at this.

"Who was the young man?"

"A Mr. Howell, a reporter on a newspaper here."

"Have you seen Mr. Howell since your arrest?"

"No, sir. He has been out of the city."

I was so excited by this time that I could hardly hear. I missed some of the cross examination. The district attorney pulled Mr. Ladley's testimony to pieces.

"You cut the boat's painter with your pocketknife?"

"I did."

"Then how do you account for Mrs. Pitman's broken knife, with the blade in your room?"

"I have no theory about it. She may have broken it herself. She had used it the day before to lift tacks out of a carpet."

"That was true; I had."

"That early Monday morning was cold, was it not?"

"Yes; very."

"Why did your wife leave without her fur coat?"

"I did not know she had until we had left the house. Then I did not ask her. She would not speak to me."

"I see. But is it not true that, upon a wet fur coat being shown you as your wife's, you said it could not be hers, as she had taken hers with her?"

"I do not recall such a statement."

"You recall a coat being shown you?"

"Yes. Mrs. Pitman brought a coat to my door, but I was working on a play I am writing, and I do not remember what I said. The coat was ruined. I did not want it. I probably said the first thing I thought of to get rid of the woman."

I got up at that. I'd held my peace about the breadknife, but this was too much. However, the moment I started to speak somebody pushed me back into my chair and told me to be quiet.

"Now, you say you were in such a hurry to get this medicine for your wife that you cut the rope, thus cutting your wrist."

"Yes. I have the scar still."

"You could not wait to untie the boat, and yet you went along the river front to see how high the water was?"

"Her alarm had excited me. But when I got out and remembered that the doctors had told us she would never die in an attack, I grew more composed."

"You got the medicine first, you say?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Alexander has testified that you got the medicine at 3:30. It has been shown that you left the house at 2 and got back about 4. Does not this show that with all your alarm you went to the river front first?"

"I was gone from 2 to 4," he replied calmly. "Mr. Alexander must be wrong about the time I awakened him. I got the medicine first."

"When your wife left you at the bridge, did she say where she was going?"

"No."

"You claim that this woman at Horner was your wife?"

"I think it likely."

"Was there an onyx clock in the second story room when you moved into it?"

"I do not recall the clock."

"Your wife did not take an onyx clock away with her?"

Mr. Ladley smiled. "No."

The defense called Mr. Howell next. He looked rested and the happier for having seen Lida, but he was still pale and showed the strain of some hidden anxiety. What that anxiety was the next two days were to tell us all.

"Mr. Howell," Mr. Llewellyn asked "you know the prisoner?"

"Slightly."

"State when you met him."

"On Sunday morning, March 4. I went to see him."

"Will you tell us the nature of that visit?"

"My paper had heard he was writing a play for himself. I was to get an interview, with photographs, if possible."

"You saw his wife at that time?"

"Yes."

"When did you see her again?"

"The following morning at 6 o'clock or a little later. I walked across the Sixth street bridge with her and put her on a train for Horner, Pa."

"You are positive it was Jennie Brice?"

"Yes. I watched her get out of the boat while her husband steadied it."

"If you knew this, why did you not come forward sooner?"

"I have been out of the city."

"But you knew the prisoner had been arrested and that this testimony of yours would be invaluable to him."

"Yes. But I thought it necessary to produce Jennie Brice herself. My unsupported word."

"You have been searching for Jennie Brice?"

"Yes. Since March 8."

"How was she dressed when you saw her last?"

"She wore a red and black hat and a black coat. She carried a small brown valise."

"Thank you."

The cross examination did not shake his testimony. But it brought out some curious things. Mr. Howell refused to say how he happened to be at the end of the Sixth street bridge at that hour or why he had thought it necessary on meeting a woman he claimed to have known only twenty-four hours to go with her to the railway station and put her on a train.

The jury was visibly impressed and much shaken, for Mr. Howell carried

conviction in every word he said. He looked the district attorney in the eye, and once when our glances crossed he even smiled at me faintly. But I saw why he had tried to find Jennie Brice and had dreaded testifying. Not a woman in that courtroom and hardly a man but believed when he left the stand that he was or had been Jennie

To be continued.

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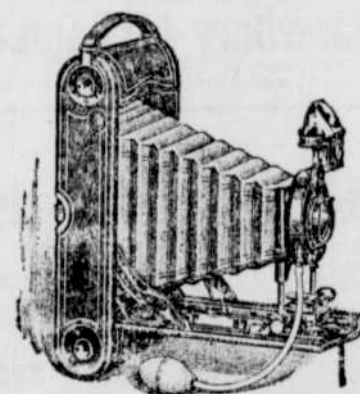
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