

The Murder on Mulberry Lane

by Adela C. Bjerknes

An elderly lady passed through town. Her long, pine green skirt made her appear as though she drifted above the misty cobblestones. She set her suitcase gingerly on the ground as she stood before the grand entrance of Mulberry Lane Inn. The aged woman drew in a deep breath of the crisp air that cloaked the town and twisted her mouth into a warm smile, which wrinkled at the edges like folded silk. She swept her auburn, silver-speckled hair off her old, soft face, and slowly started up the marble steps with a determined gait. The lady entered and politely asked the lobby man for a room.

“Name, please?”

“Mhm, of course. Ms. um, uh,” she frantically gazed around the room, “Ms. Chandler.” The man nodded and printed her name in fine cursive on the registry sheet. “A clever woman I am. Just... very forgetful,” she explained, then dragged her luggage up the stairs lined with rich red velvet. On the way up the ten flights, Ms. Chandler stopped frequently to admire the several paintings that lined the walls. She fancied one in particular. The paint was deliberately smudged in an eerie manner. The painting depicted a portrait of a cloaked young woman holding a broom. The canvas lay encased in a golden frame, with modest embellishments intricately carved into the corners.

She eventually tore her eyes from the portrait and continued up the many steps that towered before her.

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The next morning Ms. Chandler awoke to a ruckus below. She took a sip from her teacup and scurried down the stairs to find a bustling crowd gathered in the lounge, all childishly shouting over each other. “Excuse me...” Ms. Chandler started. She then stepped forward, making a grand entrance with her arms held high and cleared her throat loudly. The swarming herd stopped unnaturally and gathered around her.

“What is the meaning of all this?” she asked, grandly.

“There is a murderer, ma’am,” A young fellow spoke up sheepishly, “in this town... near here.” Ms. Chandler thanked the man for explaining and continued calmly with her breakfast. The bell on the large entrance door rang violently, and a disheveled man burst in, slightly bumping into Ms. Chandler as she began to start up the stairs to her room.

“Oh, I am sure sorry. Who are you?” Ms. Chandler wondered aloud.

“Meh, none o’ your business. Get out o’ me way!” He grunted.

The hotel owner barged in and scolded the man.

Ms. Chandler hastily continued on her way up attempting to avoid the conflict, once again gazing in awe at the paintings. She snatched her purse and made her way into town, purchasing a few fine fabrics at the general store. After her shopping was done, she decided she would wander around

the park she spotted on her way to the store. Ms. Chandler rested on an old, beautifully hand-carved bench. She tore small bits from a sweet roll from the downtown bakery and threw them to the songbirds. "Enjoy your meal, little friends." She said.

As evening dawned on Ms. Chandler, she walked back to the hotel and peacefully went to bed.

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Ms. Chandler awoke to a bloodcurdling scream. The lights in the hallway were already switched on. She could just make out a woman screech "The hotel owner, Mr. Smith! He was murdered!" Ms. Chandler hurried back to her room.

In the morning, Ms. Chandler awoke with a jolt. "What a terrible nightmare!" She shivered, then dressed warmly. As she ate breakfast, she heard gossip about the murder, then glumly realizing that the event was not a dream. She headed to her favorite spot in the park again, greeting the birds. Ms. Chandler saw a familiar man walk past, his head held low when he spotted her. "Young people these days," she continued, "so mysterious..."

That night she locked her door again. She opened her book, and flipped to a marked page.

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Ms. Chandler opened her eyes to an unsettling rattle just as the sun emerged from the mountains, dimly lighting her room. She lifted the book from her chest and set it on her nightstand. The rattling grew louder and her doorknob began to jerk. Ms. Chandler stood and tied her robe tightly around herself. The doorknob dropped loudly to the ground.

The door slowly creaked open, leaving Ms. Chandler believing that that moment was her last. A figure with a slight resemblance to the man in the park stepped in; bloodshot eyes glowing. He feverishly paced forward towards the helpless woman, grasping a knife so hard his knuckles grew white. He took a stab at Ms. Chandler, she ducked, tripping and bruising her cheek. She spun around to see the shadow still attacking.

Ms. Chandler raised her arms, palms facing out, and chanted. The figure stopped, struck with fright, but then continued. Ms. Chandler's face turned white as snow, she stood there, petrified. He attempted to throw the knife at her, but his try was vain, and the knife missed. As Ms. Chandler stood stiff as a statue, he pounced behind her, grabbing the knife, and stabbed her in the back. She wheezed

gruesomely, then fell to her knees. After a few seconds she collapsed, leaving all behind. The figure smirked and stood proudly.

Suddenly, the moon shone brilliantly, blinding the shadow and illuminating Ms. Chandler. She unexpectedly levitated from the ground, waking once again. She planted her feet strongly, lifted her arms as high as they would go and chanted wildly. Ms. Chandler could then see the man's face in the moonlight. The hotel owner! *He had pretended to be murdered so I wouldn't suspect him...* She thought. He squealed indignantly and shrank, morphing into a little, plump pig.

"I always thought you looked like a wee, fat pig." Ms. Chandler chuckled. She then transformed into an orange tabby, pouncing for the windowsill. She leaped onto a tree and disappeared into the moonlit night.