

*The Torn Glove*  
by William Russell

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 18--, a startling rumor prevailed in the city of New York that Mr. Stephen Meredith, a respectable merchant and citizen, had been found assassinated in his bed. His house, which was situated in Canal Street, was immediately surrounded by a curious crowd, and upon inquiry it was found that the news was only too true. The utmost consternation prevailed, and a hundred rumors were afloat, but nothing definite could be learned.

At this period I was engaged as a regular detective officer, and Mr. Meredith's partner called on me the same afternoon to investigate the matter, as the inquiries of the authorities up to that time had led to no result.

My first proceeding was to make inquiries with respect to Mr. Meredith's past history, and the information I gathered amounted to substantially as follows:

The unfortunate gentleman was English by birth, who, at twenty years of age, emigrated to this country. He immediately obtained a situation as a clerk in a commission house, and soon rendered himself so useful that his employers took him into partnership, and finally he became the head of the firm. His integrity was unimpeachable, and he was universally respected by all who knew him. He had never married, but entertained a good deal of company at his house. His partner, Mr. Johnson (for it was from him I obtained this information), further informed me that he was not aware Mr. Meredith had an enemy in the world.

I next proceeded to visit the scene of the tragedy, and on inquiring at the residence of the deceased in Canal Street, I was immediately admitted.

I found that everything remained in exactly the same state as when the murder was first discovered in the morning. I entered the fatal chamber, and found the deceased lying on the bed. A cursory examination of the body was sufficient to decide how the unfortunate gentleman had come by his death, for on one of his temples was a blue mark, showing where a bullet had penetrated to his brain.

The room in which the deed had been committed was on the third floor, fronting the street, and the door opened into a corridor, which was common to several apartments. The second floor was used as a drawing room and breakfast parlor, and the ground floor was used as a drugstore.

On the very onset of my investigations I was surrounded by a mystery, for the two servant girls, the only inmates of the house besides Mr. Meredith, informed me that the front door was fastened on the inside in the morning when they went downstairs, thus showing to a certainty that no one had entered the house by that means.

They further informed me that the fact of Mr. Meredith not rising at his usual hour had first aroused suspicion that something was wrong. One of them went to his chamber door, and knocked several times without receiving any answer. Very much alarmed, she tried the door, and to her surprise, found it fastened on the inside.

She immediately went down to her fellow servant, and calling in some neighbors, they proceeded to break open the door. They found Mr. Meredith dead in his bed. The unfortunate gentleman appeared to have died without a struggle, for the bedclothes were not in the least deranged, and he lay there as calmly as if asleep.

The difficulty with which I had to contend in the first instance, was not who had committed the murder, but how it was possible for anyone to have done the deed at all.

From the above statement it will be seen that no one had broken into the house, as the doors were all fastened, and even the victim's chamber door was found to be bolted on the inside.

When I first obtained the above particulars, I proceeded to examine narrowly Mr. Meredith's chamber. It was a lofty room at the top of the house, as I have before stated. On walking up to the windows, I found they were surrounded by a balcony common to that house and the one adjoining. Here then was a mode of entrance into the chamber; but the windows to the apartment were both fastened, and I learned that they were thus found when the room was first entered. It is true there was a pane of glass broken, but that had evidently been occasioned by the concussion of the gun or pistol with which the deed had been committed, for the pieces of broken glass were strewn on the balcony.

My next proceeding was to visit the adjoining house, which I found was occupied by Mr. Rignal, the proprietor of the drugstore, a young, unmarried man, against whom there could be no suspicion, as he bore an unimpeachable character for honor and integrity.

In answer to my inquiry, he stated that although his bedroom was only separated from that of the deceased by a thin wall, he had heard no report of a pistol shot during the night. Nor could I learn that anybody in the house or the neighborhood had heard any report.

Here was a new mystery, which served to complicate matters considerably, indeed.

In the midst of my inquiries the coroner arrived, and the jury proceeded to investigate. I need not dwell on this matter, as they discovered no more than I have stated above, and after an hour or two they brought in a verdict that "Mr. Stephen Meredith had come to his death from the effects of a pistol shot from the hands of some person or persons to the jury unknown."

Having thus settled the matter, they all adjourned to a neighboring tavern, to talk the matter over their cups. They invited me to accompany them, but I felt in no mood to do so.

I returned home a good deal crestfallen. This had been the only case where I had been so completely nonplussed as not to have discovered some clue; but in the present case I was utterly in the dark. That evening, while smoking a cigar, I thought over the matter in every possible light, until at last, weary of fruitless endeavor, I retired to bed.

It was quite morning before I fell asleep, for this tragedy still continued to occupy my thoughts. My professional reputation was at stake in the matter, and once or twice I upbraided myself for

not having made a more thorough examination of the premises, and almost felt tempted to get up and go to the house again, late as it was; but then when I attempted to individualize where I had been remiss, I could not do it.

I did not awake until late the next morning, and perhaps should even have slept later, had not my wife informed me that Mr. Johnson, the late Mr. Meredith's partner, wished to see me. I got up, and hurriedly putting on my clothes, went downstairs to the parlor, where I found the gentleman who had first introduced the matter to me, pacing up and down the room.

"Well, Barker," said he to me, "the murderer is taken."

"The murderer is taken," I repeated. "Impossible!"

"It is a fact."

"Who is it?"

"Rignal, the proprietor of the store."

"That cannot be; I saw Mr. Rignal yesterday, and am persuaded that he could not have committed the deed."

"Your acumen is at fault for once in your life," he returned; "the evidence is overwhelming."

"What is the nature of it?"

"Why, you know he occupies the next house. The balcony outside the windows runs along both houses. It appears that in the night he entered Mr. Meredith's room by the balcony, and shot the poor old gentleman with a revolver."

"And who has discovered the mare's nest?" I asked.

"Sullivan and O'Kief, who have been investigating the matter all night," he said.

These were the names of two rival detective officers, and should it prove true that they had been successful when I had failed, I knew that my prestige was lost, and that I should have to seek for some other means of livelihood.

"Mr. Johnson, they must be mistaken; the windows were all fastened down when the body was discovered."

"Yes, but there was a pane of glass broken next to the fastening. Besides, they have discovered the pistol with which the fatal shot was fired in Rignal's possession; his hand, too, is badly cut with the broken glass."

"But what was the motive?"

“Revenge, it seems; Mr. Meredith and the druggist had a violent quarrel the evening before.”

I must confess that I was staggered; — but still I felt this man Rignal could not have committed the deed. When I conversed with him the day before, the impression he made on my mind was so favorable that I had not entertained the slightest suspicion that he could be the guilty party.

“It is strange, Barker,” said Mr. Johnson, “that you did not notice one of the panes of glass broken?”

“I did notice it, but my impression was that it was broken by the concussion of the pistol shot; and even now I cannot understand how it could have broken on the outside, for all the fractured glass was strewn on the balcony; in the other case it ought to have been in the room.”

“I am surprised, Barker, that it should not have struck a man of your acuteness and penetration that it was very easy for the assassin to throw all the glass out of the window after the deed was committed, for the very purpose of blinding people, as it seems to have done you,” he remarked.

“Why, you ought to have been a detective officer yourself, Mr. Johnson; but we shall see. It is my opinion that Rignal did not commit the deed.”

“Well, all I can say is the evidence is most conclusive; but I must go and dress for the funeral: it takes place today. Do you mean to investigate the matter any further?”

“Well, yes. I shall at all events convince myself with respect to this druggist’s guilt or innocence.”

Mr. Johnson then left me.

I determined the moment that I had taken my breakfast to call and see the accused, and hurried through my meal for that purpose.

I had already opened the front door, when I saw a young lady in the act of ringing the bell. Supposing it was some visitor to my wife, I was about passing on, when she accosted me.

“Can you inform me if Mr. Barker is within?” she asked.

“That is my name, madam,” I replied. “Did you wish to speak with me?”

“If you please — on very important business.”

I led the way back again into the parlor, and asked my visitor to be seated. — I now had an opportunity of scrutinizing the young lady more closely, and was compelled to acknowledge that she was one of the most beautiful girls I ever beheld. She could not be more than eighteen years of age, and possessed of a purely American face, that type of womanly beauty which claims the notice of all strangers who visit our country. Her face was oval, her eyes black, and shielded by

long dark eyelashes; her nose was purely Grecian, and her red, pouting lips, slightly separated, revealed a magnificent set of teeth, white as ivory. Her complexion was very fair, and her cheeks tinged with the hue of health. She was above the middle height, and her form was most gracefully rounded.

“Mr. Barker,” she commenced, as soon as she was seated, “I have come to see you on a most painful business. My name is Mary Murdock, and I am cousin to Mr. Rignal who is arrested for the murder of Mr. Meredith. I have just learned from him that you saw him yesterday, and I at once concluded to apply to you in my trouble.”

“My dear young lady,” I replied, “you may command my services in any way I can be useful.”

“In the first place, let me ask you, sir, if you believe my cousin guilty of the foul crime laid to his charge? From what he told me about you, I cannot believe this to be the case; should I, however, be deceived in the matter, my visit will be fruitless.”

“I will be candid with you, Miss Murdock. I do not think Mr. Rignal is guilty of the murder. I am a pretty good judge of character, and my interview with Mr. Rignal impressed me so favorably yesterday, that I cannot think my judgment has deceived me.”

“God bless you for saying that,” replied the poor girl, clasping her hands together. “You are right, sir — indeed you are. James Rignal is as innocent as I am. Forgive my emotion, sir, but if you knew how heavily my heart is oppressed, you would make some allowance for me. I will disguise nothing from you — Mr. Rignal and myself have been engaged to each other for more than two years, and we were to have been married next week. And now this terrible charge has wrecked all our hopes.”

The poor young lady could not go on, but burying her face in her hands, the pearly tears trickled slowly through her fingers.

“Cheer up, my dear young lady,” I replied, trying to comfort her. “I will use every endeavor to prove his innocence, and I have but little doubt I shall be successful. I was about visiting him when you came here. After I have had an interview with him, I shall see my way clearer before me. Call on me tomorrow, and I hope to be able to give you some good news.”

She dried her eyes, and pouring out a flood of heartfelt thanks, bade me good morning.

I immediately directed my steps to the Tombs, and had no difficulty in obtaining an interview with the prisoner. I found him in a bare cell, with nothing but a couch on which to sit. He was a fine young man, about twenty-five years of age, his face decidedly intellectual, and its clear, open expression was certainly strong moral evidence against him having committed the deed with which he was now charged.

His eyes lighten up when he saw me, and he pressed my hand with much emotion.

“I little thought, Mr. Barker,” said he, “that when I saw you yesterday, I should stand charged with this horrible crime.”

“Be of good cheer, Mr. Rignal. I am persuaded of your innocence, and have but little doubt I shall discover something in a day or two which will prove it to the world. I want to ask you a few questions.”

“I am ready to answer anything you may ask me.”

“It appears that, on examining your rooms, a revolver was found with one of the barrels discharged?”

“That is true; the revolver belongs to me, and I fired off a barrel at a cat in the yard a day or two since,” he answered.

“It is also said that your hand is cut with glass?”

“That is also true. Just before closing my store yesterday, I broke a gallon bottle, and cut my hand severely,” was his reply.

“Did anyone see your hand cut before retiring to bed last night?” I again asked.

“No, it was late; and I tied my handkerchief round my hand, and went to bed immediately.”

“That’s unfortunate; but never mind. I believe all you have told me, Mr. Rignal, and have but little doubt I shall be able to ferret out the real criminal. By-the-by, a young lady called to see me this morning.”

“It was Mary Murdock, I am certain,” said he, his eyes lighting up with joy; “dear, dear girl. I assure you, Mr. Barker, I feel the humiliation of my present situation more on her account than my own, and yet I know her heart too well to think for a moment that she believes me guilty.”

“Have no fear on that head; she is as thoroughly convinced of your innocence as I am.”

We continued to converse for some time longer. I did all I could to soothe the poor young man, and really made lighter of the charge than circumstances warranted; for the fact is, the evidence was fearfully strong against Rignal. The broken pane of glass, the cut hand, the discharged pistol, were all important links in the chain.

“By-the-by, Mr. Rignal,” I said, taking up my hat to leave, “it is reported that you had a violent quarrel with the deceased the evening before the murder — is it true?”

“It was not a violent quarrel; it is true we had some words. The fact is, Mr. Meredith was a very exacting man. He came into my store and complained about the hydrant in the yard being out of repair, and contended that as I occupied the ground floor, it was my duty to repair it. I contended

that the expense ought to be shared between us, especially as he used the hydrant more than I did. One thing led to another, and some sharp — but not violent — words passed between us.”

“The difficulty has been a good deal magnified. Did anyone hear this quarrel?”

“There were two or three people in the store.”

“That’s rather unfortunate; but I must leave you now, for I have a good deal to do. Good-by. You shall hear from me in a day.”

Shaking him cordially by the hand, I left the prison. When I arrived in the street I paused for a moment to collect my thoughts, and to decide on the best step for me to take.

While plunged in a brown study, I felt someone tap me on the shoulder. I turned hastily round, and found it to be no other than Mr. Sullivan, my rival detective friend.

A smile of joy illuminated his features, and he could scarcely conceal his satisfaction at having, as he thought, outgeneraled me.

“How are you Barker?” said he. “You don’t appear to feel this cold weather, if I may judge from the quiet way in which you stand on the corner of the street. One would suppose that some weighty matter occupied your mind.”

“You are right,” I returned. “A very weighty matter does occupy my mind — nothing less, in fact, than the way to prove that Rignal is innocent.”

“I guess you’ll have a difficult matter to do that,” he replied with a chuckle. “We’ve got you in a tight place, I reckon, Barker.”

“Let those laugh who win,” I returned. “Rignal isn’t committed yet. Don’t crow too soon.”

“Well, Barker, don’t get out of temper — good-by. Just sleep two or three nights on it, and then, perhaps, you may come to some satisfactory conclusion.”

I bade him good morning, and he went away, his whole face lighted up with a real joy. I confess I felt annoyed at the fellow’s triumph, and what was the worst of it, I saw no way of proving the innocence of the accused; but still I was perfectly convinced that he was innocent, and I determined that I would not rest day or night until I had found out the truth. I returned home in an irritable state of mind, and my poor wife was soon made aware of the fact, for all the questions she asked me were either not answered at all, or responded to in no very gentle manner.

My wife, who is a sensible woman, saw there was something wrong, and left me to my own reflections.

A week elapsed without my being able to advance a single step in the task I had set for myself. I have generally plenty of hope in my nature, but I began to grow discouraged. My health, too, began to suffer, for I could not sleep much at night.

One day I was walking down Broadway, and by chance cast my eyes into a store window near Barclay Street. On a card, hanging over what appeared to be a large walking-stick, were printed the words "Air Gun."

I do not know what it was that caused me to stop and examine it. The fact is, I had never heard of such a weapon, and I suppose it was simply curiosity which actuated me.

At last I entered the store, and found a gentlemanly-looking young man behind the counter.

"You've got something new in the window," said I.

"Yes; we received them only a week ago from Europe. They are called air guns; they don't seem to sell very well, though."

"What do they propose to do?" I inquired.

"Well, they fire a ball by means of air compressed, thus doing away with the necessity of loading with gunpowder," he replied.

"A very strange kind of weapon," I ejaculated.

"Yes, and a dangerous one in the hands of bad men."

"How so?"

"When they are discharged, they make no report."

These last words struck me forcibly — for it will be remembered by the reader that not a soul had heard any report of a pistol on the night of the murder of Mr. Meredith. The idea entered my mind that this was the weapon used to effect his death.

"You say they don't sell well?" I carelessly asked.

"No, indeed: we've had them over one week, and have only sold one," he replied.

"I suppose they are very expensive — are they not?"

"Yes, that's the difficulty, very few persons can afford to buy them. Even the gentleman who bought the one we sold got tired of his bargain and wanted us to take it back again the other day — but," he continued, "we never take articles back."

"I suppose he'd be willing to sell it cheap now?"



“I reckon he would take half the price for it. But why do you ask? Do you want to buy one?”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind possessing one as a curiosity if I could get it cheap. Do you know the name of the gentleman who bought it?”

“I do not — but he lives somewhere uptown.”

“I know a great many persons uptown — can you describe him? Perhaps I may know him.”

“He’s a tall man with gray whiskers, dressed in black.”

“Thank you, sir. I will see if I can find him.”

I left the store with a hundred strange thoughts in my brain. I had a presentiment that the man who purchased that air gun was Mr. Meredith’s murderer.

The next thing for me to do was to find out who had purchased the gun. The clerk’s description, “a tall man with gray whiskers, dressed in black,” was altogether too vague to be reliable. I determined first, however, I would again visit the premises; for even after I had found the purchaser, I must prove how he used the weapon.

I immediately turned up Broadway again, and directed my steps to the late Mr. Meredith’s residence in Canal Street. Things remained in much the same position as when I first visited the dwelling. I again visited the bed chamber of the deceased and made even a more searching scrutiny than at first.

I really thought it was to be attended with the same result, when happening to cast my eyes up to the ceiling, I noticed for the first time that instead of its being a level surface, without any indentation or inequality, there was something that appeared like a trapdoor on one side of it, but it fitted so closely, that had not the sun at that moment been shining upon it, I am certain I should not have seen it. I called one of the servants into the apartment.

“Where does that opening lead to?” I asked, pointing to the trapdoor in the ceiling.

“Sure, an’ it leads to the top of the house, sir,” replied Bridget, evidently a recent importation.

“Is it ever used?”

“Niver to my knowledge; but I heard the poor dead gentleman say one day that it was a good place to see the stars up there.”

I procured a ladder and found that the trapdoor was easily moved. It opened into a small space between the roof and the ceiling, from which space a short flight of stairs led out to the roof. While searching here very closely, I found a piece of woolen material adhering to a nail which projected from the steps, owing to a piece of wood having been broken away. I immediately

recognized this piece of stuff to be a portion of a glove. It was evident that someone while descending the ladder had caught his glove in the nail, and on withdrawing his hand, a piece of the glove had remained behind. The circumstances convinced me that the place had been recently visited.

I also discovered another important fact — the opening made by the removal of the trapdoor, gave a person a perfect command over the bed, and nothing was more easy than to shoot a person reclining there from that situation. I had no doubt in my mind but it was from this spot that the murder had been committed.

I had now decided two facts — the weapon and the place — another followed from this — whoever had committed the deed, must have known the premises thoroughly. But there was still another important point to be settled. How did the murderer reach the trapdoor? It was evident it could not have been through the deceased's chamber.

It seemed to me that the most feasible way of discovering this was to endeavor to find an outlet by means of the roof. I had no difficulty in walking along it, as it was flat, and connected with several other houses which were all built exactly alike. I walked along the roof of four houses without finding any outlet; but when I came to the fifth I found a trapdoor which fastened on the inside. This I knew was the top of a tavern or second-rate hotel called "The Retreat," which I had often patronized with my friends, as it was a noted place for good oysters.

I retraced my way back to the point from which I started, and again descending into the chamber of the deceased, I hurriedly left the house for the purpose of visiting the tavern.

I found the proprietor of the place in the barroom. He knew me well, and advanced and shook hands.

After some desultory conversation, I said to him, "Jones, do you remember the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of this month?"

"Certainly I do — the night Mr. Meredith was murdered."

"Had you any stranger staying with you that night?"

"Yes, to be sure; there was a gentleman staying with us that night. I remember him very well because he carried a curious-looking cane with him, and he insisted in sleeping in one particular room, and that, too, at the top of the house."

"Would you be kind enough to let me see that chamber?"

"Certainly; come this way."

He led me to the room occupied by the stranger. It was as I expected; in the ceiling was the same species of trapdoor as that in Mr. Meredith's room.

I now felt certain that I was on the right clue.

“What kind of looking man is he?” I asked.

“He was quite a gentlemanly-looking man, tall, well-dressed, and if I remember right, had gray whiskers. But why do you ask all these questions? — You don’t imagine he had anything to do with the murder, do you? If you fancy so, I can tell you, you are on the wrong scent. I can swear that he never left the house during the night.”

“I am much obliged to you for your information. I may turn it to use or not, according to circumstances. Good morning.”

I shook the worthy host by the hand and returned home in high glee. — Nothing inspires a detective officer more than finding a clue; the first link of the chain found, he is generally able to follow it up very rapidly.

The same evening Mary Murdock paid me a visit, and it gave me great pleasure to be able to whisper words of encouragement in her ear, for the poor girl was becoming discouraged and more anxious every day. It gave me intense satisfaction to see her go away with a load of anxiety removed from her heart. The same night I caused the following advertisement to be put into the morning *Herald*:

“Anyone possessing a second-hand air gun, and may wish to dispose of it, may hear of a purchaser by addressing X.Y.Z., Broadway P.O.”

I received no answer for two days. The third morning, however, I got one, and smiled with self-satisfaction when I placed it in my pocket after perusing it. The next afternoon I visited Mr. Johnson, and found him at his office.

“How are you Barker?” said he, as soon as he saw me, “anything new stirring?”

“Nothing particular,” I replied; “I thought I would come over to see you, and let you know how I am getting along.”

“Well, how do you get along? I suppose you are now convinced that Rignal is the guilty party?”

“By no means,” I returned. “I am more satisfied than ever that he did not commit the deed.”

“Well, I don’t blame you for sticking to your opinion, especially as Sullivan and O’Kief have stolen such a march on you. But I can tell you it will be a very hard matter to persuade a jury to be of your opinion.”

“Perhaps not as hard as you imagine,” I replied. “The fact is, I have discovered the real murderer.”

“Discovered the real murderer, and not Rignal!” he exclaimed. “You are surely joking.”

“I was never more serious in my life,” I replied.

“And who may he be?” asked Mr. Johnson, in a careless air.

“*You, sir!*” said I, laying my hand on his shoulder, and giving a whistle that was responded to by the entrance of two police officers who had been waiting outside. “Mr. Johnson,” I continued, “I arrest you for the murder of your late partner, Mr. Meredith!”

The effect of this speech on Mr. Johnson was terrible to behold. He turned white and red by turns, he trembled in every limb, and gasped for breath.

I thought at first he would have fainted, but after a fearful struggle he recovered himself.

“This is a joke of yours, Barker,” said he. “You must either be a madman or a fool.”

“Neither one nor the other,” I returned. “I assure you I never was more in my senses in my life.”

“But where is your proof?”

“Well, I don’t see any harm in telling you. I have discovered that on the second of January you purchased an air gun at a store on Broadway. On the night of the third, you stayed at a tavern in Canal Street called ‘The Retreat.’ In the middle of the night you made your way through a trapdoor in the ceiling to the roof of the house. You then pursued your way across the roof until you reached Mr. Meredith’s house, you then removed the trapdoor which opened into his room, and shot the poor gentleman while he was asleep in his bed. This done, you returned by the same way that you had come, closing both trapdoors carefully after you.”

“How do you know all this — there is no truth in it.”

“I know it all by this,” I replied, taking from my pocket the piece of torn glove I found hanging to the nail, “and this,” I continued, going to his desk and taking up a pair of gloves I saw lying on the top of it, “and this is the pair of gloves to which the piece belongs.”

So saying, I opened them, and sure enough there was a piece torn out of one of them, which the portion that I had brought with me exactly fitted.

Johnson, when he saw the proofs accumulate against him, hung his head and was silent for a moment or two. At last a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and he exclaimed:

“You cannot prove I ever possessed an air gun.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Johnson,” I returned, in the politest manner possible; “you sold it yesterday, and I bought it, and have it now in my possession. Here is your letter,” I continued, taking the note I had received from the Broadway post office — “Making the offer to sell to X.Y.Z. I am

X.Y.Z., and, disguised as a countryman, received it from your hands. And what is more, the bullet found lodged in the brain of the unfortunate deceased, exactly fitted the barrel of the gun.”

“Gentlemen, I am your prisoner,” were the only words he uttered.

He was removed to the Tombs; the evidence against him was overwhelming; he was convicted of willful murder three weeks afterwards.

On examination it was discovered that he had used the means of the firm to a large amount in private speculations of his own, which had all failed. He could not have delayed exposure many days longer, and saw no other means of escape but by taking his partner’s life.

I cannot express the joy of Mary Murdock and Rignal on his release. I had the satisfaction of seeing them married a few weeks afterwards. Sullivan and O’Kief were so chagrined at my success in this case, that they at once took up their abode in a Southern city; I have never heard or seen anything of them since.

From Russell, William. *Strange Stories of a Detective; or, Curiosities of Crime, by a retired member of the Detective Police*. New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1863.