

An Ex-Detective's Story

During the summer of 1852, I was called to work up a case that had perplexed and baffled the keenest men on our force.

The facts were simply these: Simon Glover, a wealthy merchant of S—, a town about five miles from New York, had missed from his safe, at various times, money, varying in amount from one to five thousand dollars.

Nothing at all remarkable—such things are occurring daily; the mystery centered in the fact that all the researches that had been made failed to discover the slightest trace of how, or by whom, it had been taken.

Mr. Glover had sent a peremptory despatch to the bureau for an officer to be sent him at once. I had been selected to go; and, after a private interview with our chief, I took the train for S—.

As I had sent no announcement of my coming, I expected no one to meet me at the station; but as I enquired of a bystander the way to Mr. Glover's, a pleasant looking, gentlemanly-appearing young man stepped forward, and who had been intently regarding me from the moment I first put my foot on the platform.

He introduced himself as Mr. Glover's son, and offered to go with me to his father's house, which was a short distance.

"The officer father sent for, I presume?" he said, in a low voice, as soon as we got clear of the crowd.

"The same, sir, John Jones, and quite at your service."

The young man bowed again, giving me another quiet, penetrating look.

And as I looked at him attentively, I perceived that there was an air of maturity about him, not at all in keeping with his smooth, boyish face.

"Our captain got the telegram just about an hour before I left. Has anything new occurred?"

"It can hardly be called anything new, sir; but five thousand dollars more disappeared last night, and in the same mysterious manner."

"And you haven't the slightest suspicion?"

"I am sorry to say that father suspects my cousin Clyde, who is his head book-keeper. But I am strongly in the hope that an investigation will prove his entire innocence."

There was a peculiar dropping of the eyelids at the close of these words that did not escape my notice.

“Do you believe in his guilt?” I said abruptly, turning my eyes full upon his face.

“No indeed, sir! why, Clyde and I were brought up like brothers! I can’t believe such a thing of him, and I won’t.

“Still,” added the young man, after a pause, with a sorrowful shake of the head, “it can’t be denied but what father has some cause for his suspicions. It is certainly evident that the robbery was committed by no outsider, as no one else had access to the room where the safe was kept, suspicion naturally tends that way.”

In this style young Mr. Glover continued to talk, until we reached the house, vehemently asserting his belief in his cousin’s innocence, and yet alluding to various circumstances which tended to prove his guilt.

I said little in reply, my mission and policy being to listen rather than talk.

I found old Mr. Glover considerably excited over his fresh loss. And no wonder; it now amounted in the aggregate, thirty thousand dollars. And the mystery that enveloped it made it doubly aggravating.

On conversing with the old gentleman, I saw that his suspicions were strongly fixed upon his nephew, and not without some show of reason.

In fact, his position, and the opportunities it gave him, naturally turned suspicion that way.

“The ungrateful scoundrel!” exclaimed the old gentleman, with indignant warmth; “if he be found guilty I will not spare him! I would not if he were my own son!”

At this energetic assertion, I glanced over at the only person who could be affected by it; but he had walked to the window, and stood looking out in the court below.

“He is engaged to and about to marry my niece, Emily,” resumed Mr. Glover. “But of course, all that will have to be broken up now. Poor girl! she is devotedly attached to him, and I fear it will break her heart!”

A singular expression flashed from the eyes that young Mr. Glover turned upon his father’s face, but it vanished too quickly for me to note its meaning.

“Yes, poor Emily is indeed to be pitied!” he said, in the low, soft tone that seemed to be natural to him.

I was obliged to caution them that there was no tangible proof, as yet, of the young man’s guilt, and that, if they wished me to get at the truth of the matter, they must keep it as quiet as possible.

Mr. Glover's family consisted of himself, his son, his nephew and niece.

The two latter I saw for the first time at the dinner-table.

Clyde evidently not only knew my errand, but was conscious of the suspicion that was attached to him.

He seemed ill at ease, and his manner towards me was haughty, almost defiant. But I did not take this to be a proof of guilt, as those less used to criminals and the workings of crime might.

He had a stout, strongly-developed form, dark hair and eyes, and a heavy beard. His features were rather irregular; but his face, under more favorable circumstances, would not have been displeasing, though it looked rather dark and lowering now.

The young lady who sat opposite Mr. Glover was his niece Emily.

Her face would have been noted anywhere, and not only on account of its beauty. The hair was of jetty blackness, the eyes of the same hue, and the complexion as fair and clear as a lily.

And yet the first glance struck me [unfavorably]; the black, heavy brows were too near together, and the upper lip closed so firmly over the under that they gave the face a cold, repelling look. But this vanished the moment she spoke or smiled.

What struck me as a little singular was that though she spoke to her betrothed and chatted gaily with her uncle, she did not address one word to her cousin James; neither did he speak to her, or even toward the place where she sat.

The niece either was, or seemed to be, quite unconscious of the object of my visit, or that anything unpleasant had occurred.

After dinner I went to Mr. Glover's place of business, where the robbery had occurred.

I examined the safe, the lock bore no marks of being tampered with. It was evident that it had been entered by means of a key.

Mr. Glover assured me that he always locked the safe himself, keeping the key in his own possession; though he owned that it would not be impossible for [anyone] to obtain a duplicate, who resided in the family. The combination used was intricate and puzzling, but not insurmountable by the same means.

On our return to the house, Mr. Glover went to his own room, while I proceeded to the back parlor, at the further end of the hall, my footsteps giving sound as they fell upon the thick, soft carpet.

The door was ajar, being lighted, and hearing the sound of whispering within, I paused on the threshold. "How can you be so imprudent, James?" said the soft, low voice of a woman.

"Give me one kiss, darling! only one!" pleaded an eager, passionate voice in reply.

Hearing the sound of a step upon the basement stairs, I beat a sudden retreat into an obscure corner of the hall.

It was a servant to light the gas; and as soon as it flashed up, I entered the parlor, as though I had just come in.

Its only occupants were Mr. James Glover and Miss Leland.

The former was standing by the window, with his back to the door; the latter was upon a sofa at the further end of the room.

She sat with her head leaning listlessly on her cheek, and a strange glitter to the eyes that not even the long, drooping lashes could conceal.

It was in pursuance of my own plans that I became domiciled at Mr. Glover's; the large reward offered, as well as my professional reputation being at stake, having stimulated my zeal to the utmost.

My room overlooked the garden, and one moonless night I saw the faint show of a man under a tree at the end of it. It was soon joined by another; evidently, from its sweeping outlines, a woman.

They approached, and melted into one.

They were undoubtedly lovers, but who? Surely not Clyde and Miss Leland—they would have no occasion to meet in that way.

The woman was the first to go; gliding across the garden, she entered a side door.

The other figure lingered a few minutes, then getting among the roots of the tree.

He then disappeared through the same entrance.

At early dawn the next day, I was out in the garden, going directly to the spot where I had seen the two figures the night before.

I looked narrowly around, but could discover neither shred nor footstep by which I could gain any clue to their identity.

Recalling the mysterious movements of the man at the base of the tree, I examined closely the ground around it.

I was about relinquishing my search when I chanced to displace a small pebble that lay half hidden in the long grass at the foot of the main root. Putting my hand, or rather two fingers of it, in the crevice it concealed, I discovered something hard; it was a key, and I needed only one glance at it to determine its character and design.

After breakfast I had a private interview with Mr. Glover and his son, telling them that I had discovered the thief; that I was going to New York to perfect my arrangements for his arrest, and that they must keep everything quiet until my return.

Addressing the father, I said: "Though it may be a matter of much private sorrow, remember that there need be no public exposure, unless you chose."

"I understand you sir," said the old man, straightening himself up, and looking me steadily in the eyes.

"Clyde is my dear sister's son, and I have reared him as tenderly as if he were my own; still he shall not escape the punishment he merits!"

I made no reply, and in five minutes was on my way to the station, James accompanying me.

His face was pale with repressed agitation.

"I am greatly shocked at what you have intimated," he said. "Had you not better warn my cousin, so that he can escape? Father is greatly incensed not to, but he will thank you for it when he has had time for reflection. I assure you that the reward offered will be paid all the same. Indeed, I cannot endure the thought of my cousin suffering the penalty of his guilt!"

"I have said nothing about your cousin's guilt," I replied, shortly.

"Not in so many words, perhaps, but what else *could* we understand? Surely there need be no concealment with *me*!"

"I can say no more at present than that your cousin is as innocent of the theft as I am. Still I agree with you in thinking that it would be well for the real criminal to escape, while escape is possible."

As I said this, the train came thundering to the station, and I sprang on board.

But as the train rushed by, I caught a glimpse of a pale, haggard face, with a look of terror in the eyes, that haunted me long after.

I got off at the next station, and having disguised myself by means of a large overcoat, and hat to correspond, I returned on the evening train to S— .

It was nearly dusk when I stepped on the platform, and turning the collar of my coat over my face, I took a roundabout course to Mr. Glover's. Entering the garden by the back way, I secreted myself behind some vines that overrun a trellis near by the tree where I had seen the two figures the night before.

I expected their re-appearance, and was not disappointed.

Half an hour later, having stationed two officers where they could be within call, I entered the house by the side door before mentioned. Being acquainted with the geography of the house, I went directly to Mr. Glover's study, where I saw a light was burning.

He looked startled at my unexpected appearance, and was still more so at my words.

"Mr. Glover, the man who robbed you is now preparing to leave the house with his plunder; but I have so arranged it that he cannot escape unless you desire it. He is one of your own blood, and I am inclined to think you will spare both yourself and him."

The old man's face grew hard and pitiless.

"That only makes his guilt worse. I will not spare him!"

I was used to hard things, but my heart was stirred with pity as I looked at that gray head, and thought of the crushing blow that awaited it.

In order that no link might be wanting in the chain, I provided myself with a dark lantern, and we both stationed ourselves in a closet that opened at the foot of the back stairs.

We had not long to wait; soon there came the sound of footsteps upon the stairs, together with the soft rustle of a woman's dress.

Opening the door, I flashed the light full into the face of James Glover and Emily Leland.

Mr. Glover staggered back as if he had been shot; James dropped his valise, and stood trembling in fear and dismay, while Emily, who was dressed in her bonnet and shawl, and had a bundle in her hand, sank down upon the stairs and covered her face with her hands.

It was a tableau, not soon to be forgotten by those who witnessed it.

I was the first to speak.

"You will find the stolen money in this valise," I said, touching it with my foot. "Shall I call in the men that are stationed without?"

"No, no!" was the eager and hurried reply, "not now!—I must have time to think it over first."

Then as he looked upon the bowed head of his niece, the wrath that he would not visit on his son, burst forth:

“Shameless girl! it is *you* that tempted him to this!”

I did not give James Glover credit for so much manliness.

“Stay father!” he cried, “the guilt is more mine than hers; I will accept of no mercy that is not extended to her!”

Perceiving how it would all end, I now said:

“ Mr. Glover, I am going to the P— House, where I shall remain until [tomorrow] noon. If you want me, you will know where to find me.”

The next morning a letter reached me, enclosing a check for five thousand dollars.

I never had occasion to see Mr. Glover again.

His son went abroad, but he went alone.

His niece Emily remained with him for several months, she then disappeared, if her uncle knew whither, he kept the knowledge to himself.

One day, nearly three years later, as I was passing through Germany I came across a young couple whose countenances were familiar to me, and who evidently were Americans. On looking on them more narrowly I saw that it was James Glover and his cousin Emily—now his wife.

They looked happy and contented, and doubtless were so.

Mr. Glover took his nephew into partnership with him, who, in return, brought home a fair, young wife to cheer his loneliness, in whom, and whose children, the old man finds consolation for those that so sorely disappointed him.

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