

A Lost Glove

I AM a younger brother of Robert Barstan, Chief of the Union Detective Force, whose headquarters, in the year 1863, were in Washington. At that time I was employed in my brother's office, and had the working up of that case of Mrs. G—, vague reports of which have been floating in an unformed state in general conversation ever since.

Mrs. G— is now dead. In the silence of her grave are entombed some parts of my story—some missing details which no lips but hers could supply. But her death breaks the seal of my silence. It is better for me to tell the narrative even as brokenly as I must, than to have these false versions in circulation. A crude truth is better than a polished lie.

I stood at my desk, sorting some papers, when the chief sent for me. He waited till I stood at his side before he noticed me. He had a habit of commencing a sentence, then pausing and falling into a brown study, and finally saying something which apparently bore no resemblance to his first intended speech.

“Cecil, I want you to—”

He had not lifted his eyes from the letter he had in his hand. Still pondering over the manuscript, he subsided into silence. It was a small-sized, thick, cream-laid sheet, destitute of monogram or initial. From its general air of daintiness, I felt sure it was from a lady.

The silence was of so long a duration that I had time to note accessories about us—the pile of unopened letters, the dust that lay thick upon everything, even upon the coat of the Superintendent.

I was smiling at his crumpled collar and disheveled hair, when he spoke again.

“Here's a letter from Mrs. General G—” he said, musingly, “asking me to call or send around, as she has met with a loss, and needs my services, I think I will turn the business over to you. Yes,” he added, more decisively, “you can go. After you have heard what she has to say, you will know what to do as well as any one.”

So, I went.

It was a hot July morning. The dust lay thick in the streets, or whirled in phantom shapes after vehicles. The blinding sunlight poured down upon the scorching pavements. The very earth seemed to pulsate with heat, as if liquid fire ran in her subterranean arteries.

General G— lived on a retired street. As I neared the house, a man came hastily out of the gate, unfastened his waiting horse, and rode quickly away. I caught but a momentary glimpse of him, yet so keen does the faculty of observation become by cultivation, that in that brief interval I obtained a mental photograph of his countenance, and had noted his jaunty zouave cap, his gray suit, and the scarf-pin, which, out of consonance with his quiet, business-like attire, flashed a

diamond-like gleam in the sunlight. Mrs. G— received me in the library. As I entered, she rose, and laid aside her book.

“I expected Mr. Barstan,” she said, glancing at my card.

“My name is Barstan, and I am sent to you by the Chief of the Union Detective Force, of which I am a member.”

“You are a relative of the chief?”

“A brother.”

“Please to be seated.”

As she said these last words, our eyes met for the first time. I had heard of Mrs. G— as one of the beauties of the capital, and in that moment I confessed to myself that she deserved the reputation. Her complexion was pale, with only a delicate rose bloom upon the lips, and with that bluish tint in the shadows peculiar to blondes. Her hair was soft and abundant, with bright, golden light and bronze-hued shadows, and it curled in little rings and tendrils all around her forehead. To have been in consonance with the general character of her face, her eyes should have been blue or gray. As she lifted them to mine I saw, with a thrill of surprise, that they were the regular hazel eyes—a brown, warmed and vivified by an amber tint.

“Mr. Barstan,” she began, “I have sent to your office for help in reference to a loss which has befallen me. Last Sunday evening, at service in the Episcopal Church, I dropped a glove. It may seem a very small matter you, who are engaged upon cases so much more important; but the gloves were the gift of a dead friend, and as such, I value them highly.

“Have you made any search for it at all, madame?”

“Yes. I inquired of the sexton, who denies all knowledge of it.”

“Do you remember the occupants of the pew in front of you.”

“Yes. Two young men occupied it.”

“You may have dropped it in the aisle, and they coming after you, may have found it.”

“The crowd was too great. They would not have seen it on the floor.”

“When did you first miss it?”

She hesitated, and then said, confusedly, that she discovered her loss as she stepped down the aisle.

“There were two young men in the pew in front of me. They sat near each other at the door of the pew. I sat at the extreme end of the pew I occupied. As we rose to leave the church, I must have dropped my glove in the seat in front, and when the young man nearest me in that pew turned to get his hat, which was beside him, he probably saw the glove, and retained it.”

“Did you ever see that young man before that night, or have you seen him since?”

“Yes; once since—never before that night. He was in the Consolidation Bank yesterday, getting a check cashed, and I had to wait for him.”

“That probably makes it easy to find him; and the other young man—do you know him?”

“I never saw him before or since.”

“One more question, if you please. Who occupied the seat with you?”

“Only my husband.”

“Evidently,” I thought, as I bowed myself out, “madame has formed her own opinion in regard to the finder of the glove, and she is determined that I shall adopt that opinion.”

This, then, was the summing up:

Mrs. G— dropped her glove in church, knowing exactly where it fell, and being convinced in her own mind of the probable finder. She admits to have missed it as she walked down the aisle; but, although she was with her husband, she made no mention of her loss till four days had elapsed. Of the two men who sat in front of her, she remembers but one, and he the supposed finder of the glove. It would appear, therefore, that it was dropped with the intent that he should find it; but that, for some subsequent unexplained reason, Mrs. G— desired the return of the glove, and so communicated with the police.

Plainly, my first step should be to find the young man who had occupied the seat in front of Mrs. G— on that eventful Sunday. Accordingly, I made my way to the Consolidation Bank. The paying teller and I were old acquaintances.

“Well, Barstan, what’s up?” he asked, his hands pausing in their rapid work.

“I want to know who presented the check which was cashed just before that of Mrs. G— yesterday morning.”

He turned over a book on his desk with the light, quick touch engendered by his vocation, and ran his eye quickly over the day’s entries.

“Ah, yes. Here it is. Philip Sherwin—sixty dollars. Check issued by Turner & Co. He works there. Nothing wrong, I hope?”

“The check was all right, so far as I know.”

“Well, that’s a relief. I declare, I dread to see your face since I cashed that forged check for a thousand, and you discovered the forger.”

He turned a little pale at the very recollection, and gave a short, uneasy laugh.

“You know this Sherwin, you said.”

“Yes, I know him. He is bookkeeper at Turner & Co.’s, stationers.”

“Where does he board?”

“Well, that I don’t know, but the Directory will show.”

I found it in a moment.

“Sherwin, Philip, bkpr Turner & Co., bds 208 —St.”

I made a memorandum of the address, and went out again into the hot, blinding street. It was too early to seek Mr. Sherwin. If it were true that he had found the glove, it was probably at his boarding-place. I determined, therefore, to wait, and time my visit between his dinner-hour and the time for evening amusements.

I wiled away the long, hot afternoon in a desultory style, and then started for my call on Mr. Sherwin.

Either I was a fast walker, or he a slow eater, for he was still at table when I arrived. The servant showed me into a parlor, dingily furnished with horsehair and mahogany. A few cheap and gaudy chromo-lithographs hung on the walls, and a hideous bust of Douglas surmounted the mantel. Across the hall I heard the clatter of dishes, and the rattle of knives and forks.

Presently the door opened, and a young man came in, accompanied by a young lady. She sat down to a discordant piano, and they began to practice a new song. They arrived at the middle of the first strain, broke down, and commenced an argument as to the length of the various notes in a certain crescendo passage. In the midst of the dispute the door opened for the second time, and admitted another young man. He bowed, holding my card in his hand, and introduced himself as Mr. Sherwin.

He was young, not more than twenty-one, and so shy that the red blood flew to his face as he spoke.

The musicians were now launched upon the chorus, and I was at liberty to present my business. Such a silly parade over a woman’s lost glove! How I wished she had dropped it in the fire!

“If your business is private,” he said, noticing my hesitation, “you’d better come up to my room.”

“Oh, no! I merely called to inquire if you found a glove at church last Sunday evening.”

“You have come about that,” he said, in a low voice. His fair face crimsoned and paled. “Indeed, I think you had better come up to my room. This way, if you please!”

The room into which he led me was a second floor front chamber. A bed was pushed back into a recess; there were some bookshelves on the wall, and over the head of the bed hung a violin and bow.

He offered me the only easy chair the room afforded, and seated himself opposite on the edge of the bed.

“Now,” said he, “I’ll tell you all I know about that confounded glove business. I rent a seat in the Episcopal Church. I went there last Sunday night. After a while the sexton showed a stranger into the pew with me. Just before services I heard a rustle of silk, and perceived a waft of Lubin’s bouquet de something or other, and I knew that the pew just back of me was occupied. I thought no more of that until an impression began to form in my mind that I must turn my head, and look at some one back of me. This feeling grew momentarily stronger. At last, under pretense of looking at the choir, I ‘gave one longing, lingering look behind,’ and my eyes met those of the lady in the pew behind me. It was Mrs. G—, wife of the general. Her husband sat next the door of the pew. I knew them both by sight.

“I was convinced that for some reason Mrs. G— wished to impress me with a sense of her presence. I never ceased to think of her through church-time. As we rose to leave, I turned to get my hat on the seat beside me, and I met Mrs. G—’s eyes. She looked at me steadily, and then glanced downward. My glance followed hers. Her hand rested on the back of my seat. As I looked, she unclinchd it, and a little dark roll fell from it directly into my hat. When I arrived home, I found the ball to be a crumpled, dark-green kid glove. So I stuffed it into my vest-pocket, where it was forgotten and lost.”

“Lost!”

“Yes. What matter? It was good for nothing.”

“But the sentiment! Consider, when a lady gives you a glove—”

But I could not laugh naturally.

“Oh, well!” he said, blushing, “I wasn’t such a fool as to suppose that a lady in Mrs. G—’s station, rich and handsome, wished to open a flirtation with me.”

“What did you think?”

“Well, I didn’t know what to suppose in the matter.”

“How do you think it was lost?”

“I don’t know. I don’t wear the vest every day. I put the glove there Sunday, and last night I went to show it, and when I looked for it, it was gone. That’s the whole story.”

“I am very sorry not to recover the glove. I was sent by Mrs. G—”

“Well, the glove is gone. What more can I do—or you either? You cannot hang or transport a man for not returning an old kid glove to its owner. I never heard such a row over a trifle!”

“The gloves were a present from a friend now dead.”

“Oh, bosh!” he cried, impatiently. “What did she give it to me for?”

“You are laboring under a mistake, I think. She dropped it by accident.”

I had risen, bowed, and was making my way toward the door. My companion was highly irate at my last remark, which seemed to cast a suspicion of coxcombry and egotism over his story.

“I tell you, Mr.—Mr. Whatever-your-name-may-be, I don’t know your game, nor that of Mrs. G—. But, mind this: I don’t want to hear anymore about that rubbishy glove. She as good as gave it to me, and I lost it. That’s the whole story. You may do as you like about it.”

I left him, carrying with me, as I descended the stairs, the consciousness that I had made a fool of myself, and that Mr. Sherwin had the last unanswerable word.

The next morning I was summoned to an interview with the chief, in his private room. He had my report in his hand when I entered, and other reports from different members of the force were scattered over his table. The dust lay thick over everything, and over even the Superintendent himself. He had always had a habit of rumpling his hair with his hands when anything occurred to bewilder or perplex him, and I judged now from the state of his locks that his distress of mind had been great.

“Well, Frank,” he said, “I have come to the conclusion —” A pause. “Sit down.”

He pondered over my report for a while.

“What do you think of this case of Mrs. G—’s?”

“I think it a great fuss about nothing. I should like to throw it up, and take something else in hand.”

“On the contrary, I should desire you to make every effort to find the glove. If Mrs. G—chose to give it to a young man whom she had never before seen, and yet could recognize on second

sight, and then three days after make such strenuous efforts to regain her property, it proves to me that she mistook the young man for one whom she expected to meet, and the glove was a signal. From her anxiety to regain the glove, I believe it contains something which would be a revelation even to the uninitiated. If it was a mere glove, she would allow the loss to pass as an accident.”

I held silently to the opinion that it was only some love-intrigue of Mrs. G—’s; but my business was to obey, and not to argue.

I was sent out, therefore, again, on my undesirable quest. I hardly knew where to turn. Philip Sherwin was the only one who would have helped me, but it was plain I must go my way without his aid. Whatever his suspicions might be, I should have no opportunity to profit by them. He had, however, given me one hint, when he acknowledged that the vest in which the glove had been placed was not worn every day, had not been worn between the eventful Sunday when the glove came into his possession and the no less eventful Wednesday when it was lost. It seemed clear to me that the theft must have been committed by some inmate of the house. Theft! What a term to apply to the purloining of an old glove, with at best a supposititious inclosure!

The inmates of the house consisted of the landlady, three commission merchants, a handsome clerk, Mr. Sherwin, the landlady’s inevitable young lady daughter, and the landlady’s equally inevitable juvenile son.

The connecting link between the kitchen and the parlor was a poor relation of the landlady, a young unmarried seamstress, who made the house her home. There were but two servants, a cook and a “second girl.”

Knowing the innate propensity of women to examine pockets, and the many opportunities afforded them to gratify that desire, I resolved to pass over the gentlemen boarders, and devote my investigations to the feminine portion of the household.

I called at the house ostensibly to engage board, in reality to see the landlady. She was tall and thin, I may say scraggy, with bony hands, and big knuckles. Into Mrs. G—’s glove the landlady could hardly have insinuated the tips of her fingers. The landlady’s daughter I had seen. She was the young lady who favored me with some music, when I called on Mr. Sherwin. She had inherited her mother’s hands. The next day I called at the kitchen, to exchange china for old clothes. The cook was a great fat negress, and the second girl was a late importation from Sweden. No possible object could either of them have for purloining that little dainty glove.

I had repudiated the idea that the glove had been taken from Mr. Sherwin on account of any concealed contents. Had the inclosure been of any size or weight, it could not have escaped Mr. Sherwin’s sense of touch.

There now remained as the supposed thief only the seamstress. Whether she took it because of the discovery of an inclosure, or retained it as a mate to one already in her possession, in either case it was necessary that at her hand should be small enough to fit the glove. It being necessary

to determine this point, I stationed myself in the street, and watched her one morning as she started for her daily toil.

As she turned to shut the gate, I sauntered toward her unnoticed. She wore black lace mitts, and her hands were small and white. I followed her, though without any particular motive. At the corner, she was joined by a young man. He looked like a carpenter, and he held in his hand a measuring square.

From their manner it was evident they were, as their class call it, “keeping company.” They walked along, chatting and laughing. As they parted, he said, in a raised voice:

“Well, I’ll be round at eight.”

“I’ll be ready,” she answered, with a smile, and a bird-like toss of the head.

I, too, resolved to be ready.

In the meantime, I had another interview with Superintendent Berstan. He had been making some researches into Mrs. G—’s past history. She was Southern born and bred, but had married a Northerner, who afterward rose to the rank of brigadier-general in the Union Volunteer service. Thus, she was suspected of inclinations and opportunities unfavorable to the cause in which her husband was engaged.

But, so far, she had been only suspected—never convicted.

“I have been to see Mr. Sherwin myself,” said the chief, with an egotistical stress on the personal pronouns.

“Well?” said I, for he paused as if waiting to give me time to fortify myself.

He put his hands in his pockets, and threw himself back in his chair.

“I asked Mr. Sherwin to show me his dress he wore that evening. I felt sure it was a case of mistaken identity, and that Sherwin had unconsciously used some signal agreed upon between Mrs. G— and some other party, and it misled her. I talked the matter over with Sherwin. He was very courteous and obliging, and anxious to assist me.”

This was a hit at my mismanagement with Mr. Sherwin, but I merely bowed in silence.

“You see that pin?” said the chief, taking one hand out of his pocket, and pushing a small box toward me.

I opened it, and saw lying upon the pink cotton inside, a gentleman’s scarfpin.

It represented a rattlesnake, coiled for attack. The body of the serpent was enameled, to imitate the natural skin of the reptile, and the eyes were small but brilliant diamonds.

“I am convinced that it was that pin which misled Mrs. G—. All the more convinced because I hunted up the jeweler who sold the pin to Mr. Sherwin, and ascertained that he himself manufactured it after the pattern of a pin which was left at his shop to be mended. Now, if I could only find the man who owned that broken pin, I should have found the man for whom Mrs. G— mistook Mr. Sherwin. That serpent-pin was, I am certain, the sign agreed upon as a means of identification by Mrs. G—.”

“The man I met coming out of Mrs. G—’s the morning I called had diamonds in his cravat pin. Otherwise, he was very plainly dressed.”

“Ah! Well, there are two questions to be solved—for whom was the glove meant? and who has it? I will answer the first, and leave you to unriddle the second.”

And so the interview terminated.

Although no one was expecting me, as the seamstress was expecting the young carpenter, still, I was as punctual to the appointment as he. I had been in doubt as to what disguise I should adopt, in case it should be necessary to introduce myself to their notice. I finally decided to appear in the character of an honest mechanic, dressed in his best.

A new shiny black suit, worn with an unaccustomed air; heavy, clumsy, but brilliantly-polished boots; an expanse of white shirt-bosom, surmounted by a magenta necktie, and a black felt hat, was, I flattered myself, an irreproachable outfit for that character. I stained my hands, whitened by a long servitude to gloves, and softened by long exemption from labor.

There was a livery-carriage before the door. Evidently the pretty seamstress had been invited to take a ride. I called a hack, and waited around a corner. When they drove off, I followed at a safe distance. It was a long ride, out into the country to a dance-garden.

I found no difficulty in entering. I waited patiently for my time, and watched the young sewing-girl as she was whirled round the room by various admirers.

She looked very pretty. Exercise and pleasure brought to cheeks and lips a delicate flush, which usurped the place of the wonted paleness. Her soft dark eyes flashed, and brought forth a hundred coquettish wiles, and her smooth black hair shimmered in the light like satin. Her dress, of some green gauzy material, floated gracefully about her as she circled along, and the full sleeves flew back, and showed an arm which, if not fully rounded, was yet beautifully and naturally white.

At a suitable opportunity, I obtained an introduction to the carpenter’s lady-love through one of the floor-managers, and proposed a promenade in the grounds.

In the moonlight Miss Warren was prettier even than when beneath lamplight. I would have given a good round sum to have been able to have finished my complimentary speeches, and left her as happy and gay as when I watched her in the dance.

But then, the gloves! I saw them when I first entered the hall. They were green, to match her dress. Very well, if such was her taste. But, then, there was a difference in the make; the right, which rested on my arm, being fine French work, while the left-hand one was some inferior specimen of manufacture. Again, there was a slight variation of tint perceptible to so close and interesting an observer as myself. There was no doubt in my mind that she had taken the glove to match one already in her possession. Ah, she was so poor! It was so difficult, almost impossible, to dress daintily on her slender earnings.

I hesitated how to begin upon the subject most interesting to me. The moments flew by. Finding that I could invent no plausible lie, I decided to mildly administer truth.

“Miss Warren,” I began, “I came here especially to see you, and ask you one question.”

She shot one quick glance at me, and then dropped her eyes. Hopeless of any further sign of encouragement, I stammered on:

“It is a very simple question, and yet I dread to ask it.”

Still no answer.

“Well,” said I, in desperation, “I know where you found the glove upon my arm. Tell me now what was in it?”

It was out. She drew her hand from my arm, stared at me for one moment, and then burst into tears.

“Oh, don’t!” I entreated. “Pray don’t There is nothing to make you cry.”

“You think me a thief,” she sobbed.

“Indeed I do not. You found it—the glove, I mean—and kept it. I should have done the same.”

“No. I *am* thief. The glove was in Mr. Sherwin’s vest. I used to mend his clothes. I was looking at the vest, and found the glove in the pocket. Oh, what will they do to me?”

“Don’t be silly. There is no harm done. Mr. Sherwin found the glove first. He kept it, too; but the lady who lost the glove wishes it back.” I had got her hands from her face, and wiped her tears away with my own handkerchief. “What was in the glove?”

“Nothing but a tiny strip of tissue paper.”

“What was written on it?”

“Nothing.”

“What else was in the glove?”

“Only a little downy feather.”

“What did you do with the paper and the feather?”

“I burned them.”

Which was the deathblow of my hopes. “Well, you will return the glove —will you not?”

She began to tear it hastily from her hand.

“Everybody—Mr. Sherwin, the lady, you—all will think I *steal*.”

And with fierce pulls at the glove, she began to sob afresh.

“Nobody but myself knows, or will know, the story. Even Mr. Sherwin does not suspect.”

And so I took her hand in mine, simply to assist in the unglowing.

“Do not worry or grieve,” I said, pocketing the glove. “No one shall know, and you shall have a new pair in place of this old one.

I still had her hand in mine. Her eyes were lifted to my own, and teardrops glittered on the long eyelashes. She looked so very pretty, that, as I said those last words, I stooped and kissed her.

“You villain!” cried a voice just behind us, hoarse with passion and liquor.

I turned. The young carpenter was close upon us. For the moment I was tempted to knock him down, but there were a dozen stout fellows back of him, and it would not do for me to be arrested in a brawl at a dance-house. I turned and fled, and the young carpenter after me. His hand clutched my carriage-door just as the wheels made evolution, and, stupid with drink, he lurched heavily back into the ditch, whence I saw him picked out by his friends, and stand shaking his fist after my retreating carriage.

Some hours later I told my story to the Superintendent, omitting certain unimportant little details—the reader can imagine which.

“The tissue slip had probably a message written upon it in invisible ink,” said he, contemptuous of the stratagem, “and the gift of a feather is the Oriental style of commanding one to fly. But now for my story,” he added, swelling with egotism. “Do you see that picture?”

“Yes; it is that of the man I met coming out of Mrs. G—’s.”

“Exactly,” increasing in self-importance. “Do you see that pin?”

“I suppose it is the duplicate of Mr. Sherwin’s.”

“A very shrewd guess,” with a grand air. “Well, sir, while you were poking around, I just went to the bottom of the matter. I telegraphed to the lines, and received the news of the capture and execution of a spy. That is his picture, and that was his scarf-pin. Which finishes Mrs. G—’s little plot very nicely. You’d better take her the glove.”

And the chief, endeavoring to hide his self-exultation under an air of indifference, returned to his morning letters, while I went out to return the glove.

Mrs. G— received me amid the same surroundings as before.

“Madame,” said I, “your glove is found. I have the pleasure of returning it.”

“My husband will call at your office today,” she said, taking the glove from me, but evincing no anxiety in regard to any inclosure.

She waited for me to take my leave, for we had both remained standing.

“Madame, I regret to add that the young lady—a poor sewing-girl—who found your glove, destroyed the little strip of tissue-paper and the feather, which were inclosed.”

Her face paled, and then flushed. She rang the bell, and a servant entered, to whom she gave a command. The girl disappeared and returned with a sliver *portemonnie*. Mrs. G— opened it and extended to me two fifty-dollar bills.

“I am indebted to the young lady,” she said. “Please give her these, with my thanks.”

The next day I bought the prettiest lilac-tinted number six French gloves I could find, lined each one with a fifty-dollar greenback, and sent them to Miss Warren.

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