

From Household Words
A "Detective" Anecdote

The Pair of Gloves
by Charles Dickens

"It's a singular story, sir," said Inspector Wield of the detective police, who in company with Sergeants Dorton and Mith, paid me another twilight visit, one July evening; "and I've been thinking you might like to know it."

"It's concerning the murder of the young woman, Eliza Grimwood, some years ago, near the Waterloo road. She was commonly called the countess, because of her handsome appearance and her proud way of carrying herself; and when I saw the poor countess, (I had known her well to speak to,) lying dead, with her throat cut, on the floor of her bedroom, you'll believe me that a variety of reflections calculated to make a man rather low in his spirits came into my head.

"That's neither here nor there. I went the morning after the murder, and examined the body, and made a general observation of the bedroom where it was. Turning down the pillow of the bed with my hand, I found underneath it a pair of gloves. A pair of gentleman's dress gloves, very dirty; and inside the lining the letters TR, and a cross.

"Well, sir, I took them gloves away, and I showed 'em to the magistrate, over at Union Hall, before whom the case was. He says, 'Wield,' he says, 'there's no doubt this is a discovery that may lead to something very important; and what you have got to do, Wield, is to find out the owner of these gloves.'

"I was of the same opinion of course, and I went at it immediately. I looked at the gloves pretty narrowly, and it was my opinion that they had been cleaned. There was a smell of sulphur and rosin about 'em, you know, which cleaned gloves usually have, more or less. I took 'em over to a friend of mine at Kennington, who was in that line, and I put it to him—"What do you say now? Have these gloves been cleaned?" "These gloves have been cleaned," says he. "Have you any idea who cleaned them?" says I. "Not at all," says he; "I've a very distinct idea who didn't clean 'em, and that's myself. But I'll tell you what, Wield, there ain't above eight or nine reg'lar glove cleaners in London,"—there were not at that time, it seems—"and I think I can give you their addresses, and you may find out, by that means who did clean 'em." Accordingly, he gave me the directions, and I went here, and I went there, and I looked up this man, and I looked up that man; but though they all agreed that the gloves had been cleaned, I couldn't find the man, woman, or child that had cleaned that aforesaid pair of gloves.

"What with this person not being at home and that person being expected home in the afternoon, and so forth, the inquiry took me three days. On the evening of the third day, coming over Waterloo Bridge from the Surrey side of the river, quite beat, and very much vexed and disappointed, I thought I'd have a shilling's worth of entertainment at the Lyceum theater, to freshen myself up. So I went into the pit, at half-price, and I sat myself down next to a very quiet modest sort of a young man. Seeing I was a stranger, (which I thought it just as well to appear to

be,) he told me the names of the actors on the stage, and we got into conversation.—When the play was over we came out together, and I said, ‘We’ve been very companionable and agreeable and perhaps you would not object to a drain?’ ‘Well, you’re very good,’ says he; ‘I shouldn’t object to a drain.’ Accordingly we went into a public house, near the theater, sat ourselves down in a quiet room upstairs on the first floor, and called for a pint of half-and-half, a piece, and a pipe.

“Well, sir, we put our pipe aboard, and we drank our half-and-half, and sat talking very sociably, when the young man says, ‘You must excuse me stopping very long,’ he says, ‘because I am forced to go home in good time. I must be at work all night.’ ‘At work all night?’ says I. ‘You ain’t a baker?’ ‘No,’ he says, laughing, ‘I ain’t a baker.—‘I tho’t not,’ says I, ‘you haven’t the looks of a baker.’ ‘No,’ says he, ‘I’m a glove cleaner.’

“I never was more astonished in my life, than when I heard them words come out of his lips. ‘You’re a glove cleaner, are you?’ says I. ‘Yes,’ he says, ‘I am.’ ‘Then, perhaps,’ says I, taking the gloves out of my pocket, ‘you can tell me who cleaned this pair of gloves? It’s a rum story,’ I says. ‘I was dining over at Lambeth, the other day, at a free-and-easy—quite promiscuous—with a public company—when some gentleman left these gloves behind him? Another gentleman and me, you see, laid a wager of a sovereign, that I wouldn’t find out who they belonged to. I’ve spent as much as seven shillings already, in trying to discover; but if you could help me, I’d stand another seven and welcome. You see there’s TR and a cross, inside.’ ‘I see,’ he says. ‘Bless you, I know these gloves very well; I’ve some dozens of pairs belonging to the same party.’ ‘No?’ says I. ‘Yes,’ says he. ‘Then you know who cleaned ’em?’ says I. ‘Rather so,’ says he. ‘My father cleaned ’em.’

“‘Where does your father live?’ says I.—‘Just round the corner,’ says the young man, ‘near Exeter street, here. He’ll tell you who they belong to, directly.’ ‘Would you come round with me now?’ says I. ‘Certainly,’ says he, ‘but you needn’t tell my father that you found me at the play, you know; because he mightn’t like it.’ ‘All right!’—We went round the place, and there we found an old man in a white apron, with two or three daughters, all rubbing and cleaning away at lots of gloves, in a front parlor. ‘Oh, father!’ said the young man. ‘Here’s a person been and made a bet about the ownership of a pair of gloves, and I’ve told him you could settle it.’ ‘Good evening, sir,’ says I to the old gentleman. ‘Here’s the gloves your son speaks of. Letters TR, you see, and a cross.’ ‘Oh, yes,’ he says, ‘I know these gloves very well, I’ve cleaned dozens of pairs of ’em.—They belong to Mr. Trinkle, the great upholsterer in Cheapside.’ ‘Did you get ’em from Mr. Trinkle direct,’ says I, ‘if you’ll excuse me asking the question?’ ‘No,’ says he; ‘Mr. Trinkle always sends them to Mr. Phibbs’, the haberdasher’s, opposite his shop, and the haberdasher sends ’em to me.’ ‘Perhaps *you* wouldn’t object to a drain?’ says I. ‘Not in the least!’ says he. So I took the old gentleman out, and had a little more talk with him and his son over a glass, and we parted excellent friends.

“This was late Saturday night. First thing on the Monday morning, I went to the haberdasher’s shop, opposite Mr. Trinkle’s, the great upholsterer’s in Cheapside. ‘Mr. Phibbs in the way?’ ‘My name is Phibbs.’—‘Oh! I believe you sent this pair of gloves to be cleaned?’ ‘Yes, I did, for young Mr. Trinkle over the way. There he is in the shop!’ ‘O! That’s him in the shop, is it?—Him in the green coat?’ ‘The same individual.’ ‘Well, Mr. Phibbs, this is an unpleasant affair; but the fact is, I am Inspector Wiold of the detective police, and I found these gloves under the

pillow of the young woman that was murdered the other day, over in Waterloo road!’ ‘Good heaven!’ says he. ‘He is a most respectable young man, and if his father was to hear of it, it would be the ruin of him!’ ‘I’m very sorry for it,’ says I, ‘but I must take him into custody.’ ‘Good heaven!’ says Mr. Phibbs, again, ‘can nothing be done?’ ‘Nothing,’ says I. ‘Will you allow me to call him over here,’ says he, ‘that his father may not see it done?’ ‘I don’t object to that,’ says I; ‘but unfortunately, Mr. Phibbs, I can’t allow of any communication between you. If any was attempted, I should have to interfere directly. Perhaps you’ll beckon him over here?’ Mr. Phibbs went to the door and beckoned, and the young fellow came across the street directly; a smart, brisk young fellow.

“‘Good morning, sir,’ said I. ‘Good morning, sir,’ said he. ‘Would you allow me to inquire, sir,’ said I, ‘if you ever had any acquaintance with a party of the name of Grimwood?’ ‘Grimwood! Grimwood!’ says he, ‘No!’ ‘You know the Waterloo road!—Happen to have heard of a young woman being murdered there?’ ‘Yes, I read it in the paper, and very sorry I was to read it.’ ‘Here’s a pair of gloves belong to you, that I found under her pillow the morning afterwards!’

“‘He was in a dreadful state, sir; a dreadful state!’ ‘Mr. Wield,’ he says, ‘upon my solemn oath I never was there. I never so much as saw her, to my knowledge, in my life!’ ‘I am very sorry,’ says I. ‘To tell you the truth, I don’t think you are the murderer, but I must take you to Union Hall in a cab. However, I think it’s a case of that sort, at present at all events, the magistrate will hear it in private.’

“A private examination took place, and then it came out that this young man was acquainted with a cousin of this unfortunate Eliza Grimwood, and that, calling to see this cousin a day or two before the murder, he left those gloves on the table. Who should come in, shortly afterwards, but Eliza Grimwood? ‘Whose gloves are these!’ she says, taking ’em up. ‘Those are Mr. Trinkle’s gloves,’ says her cousin. ‘Oh!’ says she, ‘they are very dirty, and of no use to him, I am sure. I shall take ’em away for my girl to clean the stoves with.’ And she put ’em in her pocket. The girl had used ’em to clean the stoves, and, I have no doubt, had left ’em lying on the bedroom mantelpiece, or on the drawers, or somewhere; and her mistress, looking round to see that the room was tidy, had caught ’em up and put ’em under the pillow where I found ’em.

“That’s the story, sir.”

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