

## *The Golden-Haired Wig*

by a Retired Member of the Detective Police [William Russell]

You remember that very long cold winter of 18—, when the frost continued from October to the end of April?

We got so accustomed to it that we never expected it would change. A good many curious adventures happened to me while that cold weather lasted, some of which I have already related to you. I shall now tell you my adventure with the GOLDEN HAired WIG.

It was about the middle of December; the night was dark and stormy, and the cold intense. A dismal storm of sleet and snow was driving on the wind like spiteful mischief; but, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, I was braving it out in a horse and chaise on a very long journey. I had been up to Newburg to inspect the traces left by some villains in a daring burglary committed at a rich brewer's mansion, and having completed my task, was hastening back to the city, where my presence was urgently needed on another affair no less important.

You know that every noted burglar has his own peculiar style of carrying on his operations. By an inspection of the premises it is easy for a detective to tell whether Bandy Bill or Bosky Bob be the artist. In the case I had been inspecting, I was sure that Bandy Bill had been at work.

The burglars had been disturbed while engaged at their work, and made a precipitate retreat, not without carrying off considerable plunder, however. The coachman had fired a large pistol, loaded with swan-shot and slugs, at the retreating burglars; and it was supposed that the charge had taken effect, for traces of blood were distinctly visible on the gravel walk, along which the robbers had hastily retreated.

Bandy Bill was pretty well known to me. He had often been in trouble, and I had frequently been his guardian. You never would have taken him for a desperate burglar. He was a little, active fellow, slightly made, with hair of a peculiar golden brown color, smooth visaged, with no beard, nor a particle of hair on his face, although he must have been at least seven-and-twenty years of age. I believe he was an Englishman; but that's neither here nor there. I only know that he was a daring, desperate fellow, who stood at nothing in accomplishing his designs.

Why was he called Bandy? Well, he *was* rather queer about the legs, it is true; but as he usually wore loose, sailors' trousers, this defect of nature was not so very conspicuous. Had he been a woman, why, of course, nobody would ever have known of his peculiarity.

But to return to the road. About nine o'clock I found myself approaching the neighborhood of—. My fast mare seemed quite exhilarated by the storm, and dashed along "light and swift," imparting some of her own dash to my drooping spirits; and the prospect of a good supper and a roaring fire soon rose as a bright vision to my mind's eye.

The village—or town I think they call it—was about a couple of miles in the rear, and we were bowling along at full speed, when suddenly my mare shied—so suddenly, in fact, as nearly to jerk me out of the chaise. Looking out into the darkness to ascertain the cause of this very

unusual conduct on the part of the faithful animal, I discerned a dark object in the snow, lying a little on one side of the road, which I imagined to be a human being.

I well knew that no man or woman could survive exposure to the cold on such a night as that, so I jumped out of the vehicle to see if it really were some poor creature whom it was my duty to save from perishing.

I found my surmise realized. The form was that of a woman, but of what age or condition the darkness prevented my discerning. I could feel the bonnet and woolen shawl, and that decided me. My duty was clear, for the person, whoever it might be, was apparently benumbed with cold, and fast sinking into that torpor from which there is no awaking.

I raised her—she was rather heavy—and lifted her into the vehicle, intending to convey her to the nearest inn, where she could receive proper aid and shelter. I wrapped her in a large horseman's cloak upon which I had been sitting, and propping her up as well as I could, drove on, musing on the pleasing theme of my own philanthropy.

Before long, however, this comfortable feeling of self-complacency gave way, and was succeeded by a less satisfactory feeling. I remembered that footpads frequently disguised themselves as women, and being treated to “a lift” by generous and unsuspecting travelers, turned suddenly on their benefactors and robbed them of their money, sometimes making a pretty good haul, when the victim happened to be a country farmer returning from market with his pockets filled with the proceeds of his sales of produce or stock.

This suspicious feeling gained upon me every moment, and was in no respect diminished by my companion pressing very heavily upon me. All things considered, my situation was far from enviable. Here I might be sitting cheek by jowl with one of the greatest villains in the state. I would gladly have got rid of my anonymous companion, but as yet there was no excuse for dropping her in the road. I resolved to stop at the first inn we came to, and leave her there. Soon one came in view, and I attempted to rein in the mare; but when I endeavored to do so, found, to my amazement and horror, that the reins were no longer between my fingers: the cold had so benumbed them that the reins had slipped down. I was afraid to stoop to feel for the reins, lest my companion might take advantage of my position; so, after a moment's reflection, I resolved to rouse my equivocal travelling companion, and at once commenced the operation. I took off my glove, and put my hand to her cheek—it was *warm*. I then felt her hands—they were warm too. I had a flask of brandy in my breast coat pocket. I put it to her lips, and she sucked down the cordial with remarkable avidity. I had hopes now of a speedy and complete revival. I spoke a few words of inquiry, but gained no response except a groan, followed by a deep sigh.

It *must* be a woman after all!

Meanwhile the mare continued to dash along at her own free will with unabated speed. I had no control over her, but every confidence in her sagacity. At this rate, I thought, we shall soon reach a turnpike, and then we *must* stop. And in a few moments, in fact, the mare came to a standstill.

“Gate! gate!” I shouted.

The tollkeeper came out with a lantern. Now then, I thought, I shall see what sort of a companion I have got.

I turned to look at her. The head was drooping, but I could see that it was covered with a profusion of curly hair—long ringlets of a very peculiar color. Some envious people might have called it *red*; but I, who have some taste in hair, especially woman's hair, pronounced the color to be golden brown.

I nudged my companion gently.

“Wake up, if you please, ma'am. Wouldn't you like to get out and warm yourself by the tollkeeper's fire?”

No answer—only a groan and a sigh, as before.

“Better drive on to town, Mr. Barker,” said the tollkeeper; “the road's not very safe at this time o' night. Got your pistols, sir, I suppose?”

At hearing this my companion slowly raised her head, and, with widely opened eyes (I could see no more of her face), took a keen survey of *mine*, but said nothing. I picked up the reins, and started afresh, in the hope that another half-hour would put an end to my very uncomfortable state of suspense.

But I did not feel myself at all reassured in thinking over matters, so I made up my mind to prepare for the worst. I turned to drop my whip into the rest, spoke a few words to my mare, and began to whistle to keep up my courage.

“Steady, Polly, steady, old gal.”

I wore on this occasion an overcoat made of thick box-cloth, not over-long in the skirts, but long enough to reach to my knees: there were pockets in front, in one of which I carried a pair of bracelets, and in the other a pistol.

As I slightly turned to deposit the whip into its receptacle, my companion suddenly struck my left hand, by which I held the reins, and with his other hand gave me a blow on the head, sending my hat spinning into the road.

The sudden jerk on the reins caused the mare to stop and rear, and I very nigh lost my balance. This, together with the blow on my head, had nearly sent me tumbling into the road; but I am rather solid in the flesh, and therefore quickly regained my seat.

At the same moment my companion leaped from the gig, and, on reaching the ground struck my mare a blow on the haunch. The mare started, and doubtless would have made off, had I not fortunately retained a firm hold of the reins.

Whatever doubt I might have previously entertained as to the character or sex of my companion, it was now pretty evident that she or he “was no good.” The thought flashed into my mind that it was Bandy Bill, and the color of the hair strengthened my suspicion.

There was a reward of five hundred dollars offered for the apprehension of this rascal, and I felt that I must use every effort to capture him.

But I was in an awkward fix. Upon leaping from the chaise, the rascal scrambled over a gate into a field, where, of course, I could not follow him with the mare.

Generally speaking, the intelligent creature was as obedient as a dog; but as she had been somewhat flurried by the unusual treatment she had received, I could hardly make up my mind to leave her alone in the high road at that hour. But there was Bandy Bill almost within my grasp. I felt that I must run all risks to secure *him*.

I drew the chaise as close to the side of the road as possible, and fastened the reins to the wheel, patted the mare on the neck, and spoke a few soothing words to her.

“Steady, Polly; steady, old gal.”

She showed her impatience by pawing the ground furiously and champing her bit. As I turned to cross into the field, she looked after me and neighed.

“Steady, old gal, steady.”

All this was but the work of a moment. I had no time to look for my hat, so I bounded over the gate in double-quick time. I could see the dark figure of Bandy Bill relieved against the white snow about a hundred yards ahead. Supposing him to be encumbered with petticoats, I reckoned that I should soon overtake him. But he began to throw away his incumbrances; first came the bonnet and wig, next the woolen shawl, then a skirt that served, I suppose, for gown and petticoats in the disguise he had assumed. Of course I did not stop to pick up those articles *then*.

Bandy Bill was an active little fellow, as I have told you, and he made his way across the field with wonderful agility. I can skim the ground myself at a very good pace; but I soon found that I should have hard work to overtake Bill. He seemed to know the ground thoroughly, for he struck diagonally across to a gate, bounded over it, and before I reached it was half way across the next field. My blood was up. I gave hot chase. He reached another gate, cleared that, and was out of sight. When I reached that gate I found that it opened, not into another field, but into a narrow lane.

I could see nothing of Bill; he might have turned to the right, or he might have turned to the left. I was completely at fault. I paused to listen, but I could hear no sound except the whistling of the wind through the trees. He might be within a few feet of where I was standing: I should have been none the wiser. If he were armed, I was completely at his mercy; for, sheltered as he was by the darkness of the lane, I should have proved an easy mark for him, while I was powerless to act either on the offensive or defensive.

I was anxious about my mare, which I had left standing in the road. Bill might double and make off with her. I at once attempted to retrace my steps—a task of no little difficulty, on account of the blinding storm of snow and sleet. Besides, I had no Bill now to guide me to the gates.

I blundered along, trusting to “fate and metaphysical aid,” and soon reached the first fence. I looked for the gate as well as the darkness permitted; but not finding it, I forced a passage through the hedge, and in this way I managed at length to regain the turnpike road.

But there was no mare and gig in sight. As I had not returned by exactly the same path as I first crossed the fields, it was probable that I had emerged somewhere above or below the spot where I had fastened the mare; so I wended my way along the road, hoping soon to come upon her.

I plodded on for, I should say, at least half a mile without seeing any thing of my mare. I was then forced to conclude that I had started from a point in advance of where I had left her; so I retraced my steps in no very amiable mood, I can assure you.

I had not proceeded far before I became aware of the approach of a vehicle. I could hear, but not see it. As it came nearer I drew on one side of the road. Presently it dashed past me at a furious rate. The glance I had of it was but momentary, yet I made no doubt of its being my own mare and chaise; nor was I less sure that they were driven by Bandy Bill.

I had heard him lashing the whip—my whip—as he approached and passed by. He had goaded the mare up to a pace of at least fourteen miles an hour. For a moment I was confounded with rage and indignation. To be done in that manner by such a rascal! I felt my character was gone. I should be the laughingstock of my brother officers. The thought was unendurable.

I had my hands in my pockets while I was walking along the road, retracing my steps, and at the instant the chaise and mare passed me, driven as I had no doubt by Bandy Bill, I drew out my pistol and fired in the direction he had gone. It was too dark to take aim, and there was little probability that the bullet would take effect; but I did not consider my ammunition wasted, as the report, I hoped, might bring me assistance if any happened to be near.

A minute or two after I had fired my pistol I heard the report of another shot in the direction the chaise had gone. I did not know what to make of this, but I immediately hastened along the road, and in a few minutes came upon a saddle horse standing in the middle of the road, but without his rider, who was lying on the ground at the animal's feet, with the reins tightly gripped in his hand.

I stooped down, and addressing the prostrate man, inquired of him what was the matter.

“Oh, that villain has shot me! I am badly wounded. I'm very faint, but never mind me. Take my horse, and pursue the villain.”

I gently removed the wounded man on to the pathway skirting the road, and following his advice, mounted his horse and started in pursuit.

Giving the animal the rein, I soon urged it into a fast gallop. Its pace was splendid. My mare, harnessed to the gig, could but trot. At the pace I was now hurrying along, I had no doubt that I should soon overtake her. I hoped that at least a wheel would come off, or some other accident enable me to come up with the object of my pursuit.

I knew that there was another tollgate within a mile or so, and I had every hope that it might be the occasion of either impeding or altogether stopping Bill's progress.

Soon I observed a moving light at some distance in advance. This I had no doubt was the toll gate. In a few seconds I was there. I found my mare and chaise in the custody of the tollkeeper, but Bandy Bill was missing.

A few words of explanation informed me that the tollkeeper had been roused by the cry of "Gate." Upon coming out he found the mare with the chaise at the gate, but no driver.

I concluded that Bandy Bill, hearing the sound of the horse's feet, knew that he was pursued, and had thought it was wise to make off.

I informed the tollkeeper of the wounded man I had left on the road, and having seen him and his son set off on horseback to the poor fellow's aid, I proceeded to the nearest inn, whence I dispatched a messenger to town with information of what had occurred, and requesting that assistance might be immediately sent to me. I concluded that Bandy Bill would conceal himself in the neighborhood somewhere, and not dare to venture into New York.

As soon as day broke, I repaired to the scene of the previous night's encounter. My hat I found lying in a ditch; and in the field where Bandy Bill first entered, I found his shawl, bonnet, wig, and the skirt that served him for gown and petticoats. These I brought away with me, as a matter of course.

We examined the ground around the tollgate, to discover, if possible, the traces of Bill's footsteps after he got out of the gig. The snow had ceased falling about the time of his arrival at the gate, and we could not only trace footsteps into a field upon the snow, but there were also drops of blood on the track. My random shot at Bill had hit him, although the wound did not appear to be very serious, for he seemed in no way disabled. Seeing these spots of blood in the snow prompted me to examine my chaise: there I found some little blood on the seat and bottom. I therefore concluded Bill had been hit in the arm.

We followed the traces of the footsteps and blood for a considerable distance across several fields, until we came upon a byroad or lane, where we encountered some difficulty, for the snow had been trodden down by passengers. Still, with diligence we were enabled to follow up the traces for nearly three miles, till they stopped at a cattle shed in a field some little distance from the road.

Beyond this all traces of blood were lost; the marks of the footsteps we had first seen at the tollgate were no longer visible, having been trodden out by wayfarers. We continued along the

road, however, passing several humble cottages, at which we made inquiries, but with no result. At last we reached a little ale house, and there we concluded to halt, and hold a council of war as to the next move to be taken.

We called for refreshment, and inquired of the landlord "What news?" He had none to tell. We then told *him* some, and informed him of the object of our pursuit.

"Bandy Bill, you said, I think? If so be he is wanted, I suppose there's a reward offered for him?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"Paid when?"

"On his conviction."

"And no mistake?"

"And no mistake. I'll give you my word for it."

"Well, I dare say it's all right, but you're strangers to me, gentlemen. Now, suppose I show you where Bandy Bill is, what security will you give me that I shall get the reward?"

"I'll give you a writing, to the effect that it is upon your information we are enabled to discover and arrest Bandy Bill, *alias* Joe Lee, *alias* William Barlow, and a dozen other *aliases*."

"Agreed, give me the writing."

I wrote out the agreement, with which the landlord expressed himself satisfied.

"What's Bandy wanted for this time, I should like to know?"

"Oh! for a burglary, and an attempt to murder."

"Well, gentlemen, that individual is in my house. You will find him in bed upstairs."

"Then show us the way, if you please."

Opening a door at the end of a passage, he pointed with his hand up a narrow, crooked staircase. We understood.

"Second door on the left. You won't want me, I suppose?"

"We can do without you."

As quickly and as cautiously as possible I ascended the stairs, and, having reached the landing, awaited the ascent of a brother officer. I did not think it necessary to knock at the door; so put-

ting my shoulder to it, and seizing the latch at the same time, I was soon in the presence of Mr. Bandy Bill.

He had evidently been awoke out of a sound sleep. He slowly raised himself in bed, displaying a blood-stained shirt.

“Good morning, sir,” said I. “Sorry to disturb you, but—”

“What the — do you want?”

“Want you, Mr. Lee; so rouse up, quick.”

“I’ll see you— first!”

And he threw himself back in the bed again. We had much difficulty in rousing him to a proper consciousness of his situation. Loss of blood had probably weakened his intellect a little.

The sight of the ruffles, however, convinced him of the real state of things; but he obstinately refused to get up, and as he seemed much exhausted, we humored him, and let him have a good sleep.

About noon we prepared to start. A butcher’s cart was hired, and in the course of that evening Bandy Bill made his fortieth entrance through a prison gate.

Of course he was tried and found guilty. Sentence of death was commuted to imprisonment for life.

The wig? Oh! I had forgotten that. Of course it was produced at the trial, and caused much amusement and curiosity. It was certainly a very remarkable head of hair, and no little curiosity was excited to know how Bill came possessed of it.

After the trial, a fashionable hairdresser in Broadway called upon me about that wig. He believed it was one that had been stolen from him in a very mysterious manner. It was so peculiar in color that the hairdresser set great store by it; he regarded it as something quite unique, and said he would not have taken two hundred dollars for it.

When I showed him the wig, he identified it instantly. His joy knew no bounds. I was quite loath to part with it; but he made me a very handsome present.

I asked him if he knew the owner, and he told me the following story:—

“Some two years ago I was sent for to the Astor house, to dress the hair of a young lady who was going to the opera. I was particularly struck with the color and fine texture of her hair. Both qualities were very remarkable; so much so, that never in the course of my long practice as a hairdresser had I seen so beautiful a head of hair, either in color, quality or profusion.



“I was called several times to attend professionally upon this young lady, who appeared to be about twenty years of age, exceedingly beautiful and accomplished. From what dropped from her maid I gathered that the lady was a Hungarian of noble family; she was accompanied by her mother. There was some mystery connected with them, which of course I took no trouble to penetrate. My attendance upon the lady continued several months, and suddenly terminated without any notice being given to me.

“About two years afterward I was surprised one day by a visit from the young lady. She was accompanied by her mother. My professional services were put into requisition, during which she asked me what such a head of hair as hers was worth.

“The question surprised me, and I had an inkling of the probable motive of her asking it.

“I replied that upon a head of hair of such singular beauty it would be difficult to fix a proper value. I would be glad to obtain it for twenty-five dollars.

“She exchanged some words in a foreign tongue with her mother; then addressing me, she said,—

“‘Doubtless twenty-five dollars is as much as it is worth. I would part with it for fifty.’

“When I had named twenty-five dollars, it was at a mere venture, for I did not suppose money would buy it. Now I saw it could be obtained, I would have bid a hundred, and willingly have given it.

“‘If it can be had for fifty dollars, mademoiselle,’ I replied, ‘I will give that sum for it.’

“‘Then take it,’ she replied.

“I hesitated; it seemed desecration, almost sacrilege, to rob that fair head of its beautiful ornament.

“‘You hesitate,’ she said; ‘but you need not. Circumstances of a very painful nature compel me to make the sacrifice. We are strangers in a foreign country, and cannot make our necessities known even to those who would gladly relieve them.’

“This was spoken in very good English, although with a foreign accent. I could sympathize with the ladies in their distress, and was upon the eve of offering to lend her the sum she required; but, upon reflection, I did not.

“She seated herself again in the chair, saying, ‘Why do you not take it?’

“I could see but one solution to the question; so I took my scissors and commenced, I must say reluctantly, to perform my profane task.

“I gave her the money. She seemed exceedingly gratified, and took her departure.

“I had the hair made into a wig, and in due season it was placed under a glass shade in my shop window.

“It had not been exhibited there many weeks, when one day a tall, military-looking gentleman came in, and eagerly inquired where I had obtained that wig.

“‘I know of but one person to whom it could have belonged,’ he observed, taking out a pocketbook, and removing from it a piece of folded paper. Opening this, a lock of hair of exactly the same color as that of the wig was displayed.

“‘You see it matches exactly.’

“‘It does indeed.’

“‘Can you tell me how you came possessed of this hair? Was it from the owner?’

“‘It was. I cut it from her head with my own hands!’

“‘Then you can tell me where I may find her?’

“‘I regret to say I cannot. Two years ago she was staying at the Astor House; but I do not suppose she is there now.’

“A few weeks afterward I was one morning passing Grace Church, while a grand wedding was going on. I was prompted to pass under the portico just at the moment when the newly married couple were proceeding to their carriage.

“Judge of my astonishment when in the lady I recognized the original proprietor of the golden-haired wig: the gentleman was the same who called upon me with the lock of hair that so exactly matched the wig.”

That was the hairdresser’s story. You see even a wig may experience many vicissitudes in its career.

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