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MY LADY'S GLOVE

BY JUDITH SPENCER.

It was on the Montreal express. I had more than once cast looks of fervent admiration toward the lovely woman whose chair in the drawing-room car was opposite my own. But, absorbed in my reverie, she was unaware of my existence, until shortly past midday, when, having ordered a cup of tea from the porter, and looking for her *portemonnaie* to pay for it, she found that her pocket-book was gone.

It was an embarrassing situation, and I immediately went to the rescue with all the deference and tact that I could summon to my aid. She accepted my proffered assistance gratefully, assuring me that the loan would be repaid soon after she reached Montreal, and for that purpose she asked me for my card.

As her eyes fell upon my name, she looked up and regarded me curiously.

"Edward Poindexter," she repeated, slowly. "By any chance are you connected with Ethel Poindexter, the dear friend of my school-days?"

"She was my sister," I hastened to reply, "though—you apparently have not heard—Ethel died two years ago."

"Your sister! Dead!" she repeated in shocked surprise, while sudden tears welled up in her lovely eyes. "I had not heard; but then, I had lost sight of her. I had heard nothing of her for years."

At this point, the man sitting next to her across the aisle, offered to change seats with me, and this being apparently agreeable to all parties the exchange was immediately effected, and I settled down to talk with her more at my ease.

"I knew so many of my sister's friends," I said, "I wonder how it could have happened that we never met?"

"We were together at boarding school for several years," she said, "and once I went home with her for the holidays. But you were in Europe at the time—the reward of your high standing during your college career. Your father, I remember, was with a fleeting smile, 'was very proud of his clever son.'"

"And your name?" I suggested.

"Was Marion Denton, the same as now," she said, the far-away look returning to her lovely eyes.

I could hardly take my eyes from her beautiful face. She was neither blonde nor brunette, but a wonderful blending of the two, with a clear, warm color, deep violet eyes, and sunny hair of a rich golden brown.

She was tastefully dressed in a suit of some light, smooth finished cloth of a grayish green, trimmed with velvet of a darker shade, and a jaunty little hat of the same soft coloring most becomingly crowned the wavy masses of her hair.

Her hands, beautiful enough to serve as models for a sculptor, lay quietly folded in her lap—one bare, with its half-closed palm showing pink as a baby's hand. The other, the left, was gloved.

It was a most peculiar glove, of kid, of the same delicate grayish-green tint as her gown, with a long gauntlet, and curious, fanciful stitchings of black and gray.

It attracted my attention, perhaps, from the perfection with which it fitted her perfect hand, perhaps because of its uncommon style, or else it might have been the fact that she was wearing but the one. Seeing my eyes rest on it, she said, with an evanescent smile: "You are wondering at my ungloved hand? This has been a day of small misfortunes, up to my meeting with you. My starting for Montreal was sudden, unforeseen. I had not thought of taking the journey until last night. My preparations were hurried, and when I was about to start I found one

glove was missing or mislaid. I may find it in my trunk at the journey's end. Then losing my *portemonnaie*. I had it of course, when I bought my ticket, and must have dropped it, or had it stolen as I was hurrying to get on the train. I had not a minute to spare, and thinking of something else, I did not notice the loss until I wanted it again, and you so courteously came to my assistance."

I made light of my kindness to her, and we fell to talking of other things.

We were to stop at the same hotel, I found; but while I was making a hurried business trip, she was evidently intending to remain there for some time.

Did she expect to join friends there? I inquired.

Yes—or, rather, they would probably join her a little later on.

So the hours passed in pleasant desultory chat, as between old friends, until we parted in the corridor of the hotel. It was late, and she had ordered a light supper to be brought to her in her room.

I had already insisted upon her taking a sum of money more than sufficient for all possible present needs, though she had assured me that in a day or two at the latest she should be in a position to repay her debt—as far as such indebtedness could be repaid, she added, kindly.

I watched her with a strange blending of incomprehensible feelings as the elevator slowly rose and carried her from my sight. In fact, I wondered at myself. I had never been considered an impressionable man; but that was perhaps because my hour had not yet come.

She was gone now, and I turned quickly, with a half-amused smile at myself, to stumble over a hall-boy who was waiting at my elbow. Upon his silver tray a yellow envelope bearing my name, "Edward Poindexter."

"How business pursues a man?" I thought, as I carelessly tore it open. Then suddenly the great office with its myriad lights seemed whirling to one side. I caught at a support and the room righted itself again.

These were the words I had read: "Ambrose Willis dead. Message sent your rooms missed you. Come back at once."

Willis dead! My partner whom I had parted from at five o'clock on the previous night in the most perfect health! There must be some mistake! But no, our head clerk had sent the message. Could he have met death in an accident? The brief message gave me no clue to the terrible mystery.

After hasty inquiries I found that I had just time to catch the south bound train. So, having scribbled on my card that I had received a despatch recalling me at once, I sent it with my adieux to the room of my late companion and took my hurried departure.

It was a strange, confused, uncomfortable journey. For hours I could not sleep, but kept brooding over the mystery of Willis's sudden death. It must have been caused by an accident, or by apoplexy, I decided at last.

Next morning I fell into an uneasy doze. Willis's bright-hued smiling face rose before me, and I heard his jovial voice proclaiming as I had heard it so many times before: "Ned, my boy, you'll succeed more brilliantly than I have done; there's nothing soft about you! Now, I can't resist any good-natured appeal from my fellow man. There are a dozen fellows living on me, and I'm too weak to shake them off. I'd be a rich man but for those confounded blood-suckers—they keep me drawn down low."

And then, as his ruddy, good-humored countenance faded away, I saw my late travelling companion before me, straight and tall, but now, with a white anxious face, and she said, as she held out her rosy ungloved hand: "I am in trouble, I have lost my glove. When you find it, help me, if you can!"

The seemingly endless journey came to an end, at last, and I was greeted on my arrival by news for which I was totally unprepared.

My late partner had been murdered in his room on the night before I had left the city. He had been found the next morning in evening dress—disarranged by a furious struggle with his unknown assailant.

Two unused wineglasses were standing upon the side table near by, and he had come to his death by a blow on the head from one of his own heavy cut-glass decanters. The bottle had been broken by the force of the blow, and there were traces of blood everywhere, and fumes of the spilled wine.

A detective had been employed to trace the murderer, whom no one had seen enter or leave the apartment. The delinquent junior had been away from the door on that particular evening for some twenty minutes, and during that interval

the murderous visitor had come and gone.

At six o'clock that night I had my first interview with Rolfe, the detective. I asked him if he had no clue yet to the murderer.

"One," he replied, laconically; at the same time drawing a woman's glove from an inner pocket. He watched me narrowly, the while.

I could feel my color changing, and I was conscious that I had started violently as my eyes first fell upon it.

"You have seen this glove before?" he said, quietly.

"Never!" I affirmed, hastily.

"Never? Oh, of course not; but you have seen its mate! Well, now, I want to hear all that you know about its owner?"

"You—you do not suspect a woman?" I stammered, in horror, as the lovely, anxious face of Marion Denton suddenly rose before me, as I had seen it in my dream, when she had said to me, "I am in trouble; I have lost my glove. When you find it, help me, if you can!"

He smiled grimly. "No woman committed the murder, if that is what you mean. No woman entered Mr. Willis's rooms that night. But this glove was found there, and the man who did the deed is in some way connected with her. I don't even say she is seriously implicated, you understand. But to find her is to get nearer to finding him."

I was now on guard, but after all I had not much to hide, or to reveal. I was surprised to find how little I knew about her. Indeed, my interlocutor knew all that I knew, and more.

When our interview had ended, Rolfe told me with grim amusement that he had already traced her to Montreal, in company with a man, who, upon receiving a waiting telegram, had acted in a suspicious manner, and had immediately taken his departure. He, for some hours had been regarded as the guilty party—until further investigations had proved him to be myself! But, now, she too, had suddenly left the city, he added, and no one knew whither she had gone.

When I wonderingly inquired how he had so quickly traced the glove to its owner, he smiled.

"My dear sir, that was the simplest thing imaginable!" he replied. The very A B C of my profession! Perhaps you know enough about ladies' gloves to have noticed that this is decidedly out of the common, with its gauntlet, its unusual color, and its fancy stitchings?"

As I assented, he turned back the gauntlet and showed me the name of the importer stamped thereon.

"I learned there that these gloves had been specially imported with a costume, and were, in fact, probably the only pair of the kind on this side of the water as yet. Having found out the purchaser's name and address, the rest of it was, as you can now see, neither mysterious nor difficult."

I walked back slowly to my rooms, my mind full of uneasy suspicions and distrust. What connection could that beautiful woman, my dead sister's early friend, have with the man who was my partner's murderer? How much of that sombre history did she know? And had that in any way, been connected with her unexpected and hasty flight to, and also away from, Montreal?

The next morning I received a letter addressed in a feminine hand, and post-marked Montreal the noon before. I tore it open in breathless haste. The amount of my loan to her was inclosed, with these few words: "With thanks for a kindness I never shall forget." There was no signature.

Three months had passed, and it was the autumn of the year. In spite of all Rolfe's cleverness the murderer had not been found.

I was somewhat broken in health after the shock of Willis's death, and the strain attendant upon settling up the firm's affairs. My physician had urged me to take a holiday before taking up business cares again, and I had decided to spend the winter abroad.

It was at the season when the great human tide of travel was setting the other way, and the big steamer looked almost deserted on that first day, with its sparse groups clustered here and there upon the deck.

On the next morning it looked more deserted still. A high wind was blowing, and the sea was rolling heavily. Under such circumstances the majority of the passengers were sure to be detained below.

Being a good sailor, however, and fond of exercise, I was endeavoring to keep my footing and take my usual morning walk in spite of the attendant difficulties, when a sudden lurch of the vessel sent another passenger in my direction. It was a woman,

an, who seemed to be endeavoring to reach her chair.

I caught her in my arms, and steadied her until the vessel had righted somewhat; and then, with a smiling apology was proceeding to assist her to her chair, when she turned her face toward me, and I saw it was the lovely woman whose face still haunted me by night and day.

"You!" I breathed, while I felt the hot blood pulsing rapidly through my veins. She smiled, but ever so faintly.

"This is the second time you have come so opportunely to my assistance, and again I thank you," she said, quietly.

"But—you do not seem surprised at this meeting?" I stammered.

"No. I knew it must come sooner or later. I saw your name on the passenger list."

"But—yours is not there?"

"It is slightly misprinted—that is all. They have put me down as Mrs. Dunton, I see."

"And you are—with friends?" I ventured.

"No; I am travelling alone," she said in a way that forbade further questioning.

I sat beside her in a sheltered corner for an hour or more. What was this mystery that surrounded her? I felt it, I could not penetrate it, and yet I trusted her. She was beautiful and good—I was convinced of it. And more than ever I felt and knew that she was the one woman in all the world for me.

I assisted her down the companionway, at length, and then turned my footsteps toward the smoking-room. I was thinking deep and serious thoughts. I lighted a cigar and began to puff without noticing the other occupant of the room, until he arose and laid his hand upon my arm.

I looked up then and saw that it was Rolfe, the detective! A cold chill of horror took possession of me. Whom was he shadowing and what did it all mean?

He smiled at my evident confusion.

"I have seen you together," he said.

"and I want you to introduce me to her."

"That I will not do!" I cried, hotly.

"I will have nothing to do with your schemes. Why do you try to ensnare her in your horrible net? She is innocent—I could swear it!"

He smiled coolly at my heat.

"Very well, then. Your help is not absolutely necessary. Go your way and I will go mine."

I did not see her again until toward evening. A man sat beside her then and the two were in earnest conversation. My first indignation—that was that it must be Rolfe, but the next moment, though the man's back was toward me, I saw that it was not he. I felt strangely depressed and uncomfortable.

At length he arose with a violent, threatening gesture. It was so sudden, so unexpected that I stood utterly aghast. Then I sprang forward to her assistance, but before I had reached her side he was gone, and without having seen me.

I would have pursued him and have called him to a strict account, but she grasped my hand, and firmly drew me down into the unoccupied chair beside her.

"Contemptible villain!" I muttered, "to threaten you, even by so much as a gesture! Let me follow him and he never again—"

"Hush, hush," she said, quietly. "You do not know what you are saying! Don't attempt to interfere—he is—my husband."

"Good God!" I cried brokenly. "And I did not know—you said your name was—still the same—"

"And it is," she answered quietly, "though I had no thought of deceiving you. I married a man of the same name as my own."

My eyes fell upon her beautiful hands. For the first time I now saw the left ungloved, and on the third finger was the heavy plain gold marriage ring which plunged my budding hopes from brightness to black despair.

After awhile I said, sharply, "Did you not tell me that you were travelling alone?"

"I told you the truth," she answered, gravely. "Until an hour ago I did not know that—my husband—was on board the ship."

A new horror now came over me. This, then, was the man whom the detective was following. Her husband was under suspicion as my partner's murderer! What would the outcome be? What shame and misery in store for his innocent—wife! for the woman who, though forever lost to me, I trusted, respected, loved!

When next I saw the detective he was in conversation with the man whom I

now knew to be her husband. Rolfe called me to join them in a hand of poker.

I declined, but paused at the table long enough to scan the face of the man I held in a double horror and dislike. He was of that handsome, reckless type which, at a certain age, has such a power of fascination over women. But he had an air of dissipation now that would make any self-respecting woman draw from him with a shudder.

All my tenderest love and pity went out anew to the beautiful woman whose fate was bound so irrevocably with his.

I was plunged into the uttermost depths of misery. I avoided Rolfe; I avoided him; I avoided her. I could not bear the sight of those two together; and yet I knew that whenever she was on deck he was at her side like her shadow. The days seemed ages long.

It was just before sunset on the fourth day out, and I, with my load of misery for myself and my fears for her, had gone up for a solitary walk upon the almost deserted deck, when I came suddenly upon a group of three, the sight of which made my heart sink with a fearful yet unnamed dread.

Husband and wife sat side by side, and Rolfe was with them! He had accomplished his purpose, yet without help from me.

I was passing by with a grave salutation to the lady when Rolfe called out to me.

I paused, angry with him, and doubly angry with myself that I could be thus drawn into the man's now tightening net.

I answered his question coldly and was about to pass on, when Denton himself spoke.

"You are acquainted with my wife, I believe?" he said, civilly enough; and I forced myself to reply that I had been happy in being of some slight assistance to her on the first rough morning of our voyage. I did not think it necessary to mention our former meeting.

There had been a heavy storm for the past two days, and though the wind had now died down and it was clearing, it was hard to keep one's footing on the heavily rolling and pitching ship.

"Don't stand there like a king-pin ready to be bowled down. Here's a chair; come and join us. Rolfe has been telling some good stories," Denton went on, in his rough, companionable way.

Rolfe signed me to assent, and something forced me to obey him.

I dropped into the chair upon her left. Her husband sat on her right, Rolfe facing him.

"There is another story," Rolfe began.

"But no—it is unpleasant; and, though very curious, Mrs. Denton might not like to hear it."

"Oh, go on; she won't mind," Denton said, easily.

"Well, then it's the story of—a murder," Rolfe said, slowly, his eyes intently fixed upon Denton's face.

There was an instant's pause. The man he was watching seem to have suddenly stopped breathing; I almost stifled myself. What trap had Rolfe suddenly sprung upon us?

"Yes, my brother was almost unfortunately murdered," Rolfe went on quietly; and Denton began breathing again. "It was a shocking affair, but curious—very curious! You see he was an easy man, and a group of parasites fairly lived upon him, but he began to grow tired of it at last."

"Was the—guilty party—found?" Denton inquired, carelessly; but I could see that the man was hardly at his ease.

"Oh, yes, indeed," replied Rolfe; "caught, condemned, and—executed! It was a clear case at last, though the evidence was purely circumstantial. That is the story. My brother was living alone at the time. One morning he was found brained, and with one of his own wine bottles! The theory advanced was that he had received a call the evening before from one of the aforesaid parasites, had refused a demand for money, and had been assaulted in consequence. But the real clue to the murder was the broken wine bottle and—a woman's glove!"

In quick despair I spoke, diverting her attention at that moment to the setting sun, which was sinking, a huge globe of fiery color, in the storm-spent sky of the west; and she did not hear those two last words, which I had dreaded and foreseen.

On Denton, however, they had no unmistakable effect. He shook his oppressive off, and said, with ill-concealed relief: "So the parasite was a woman, as usual—and the hardest kind to shake off! But Jove! she must have had nerve!"

"Not so, my friend," rejoined Rolfe. "It was man's work, unmistakable; but, nevertheless, that was a needful clue.

By finding its owner"—he was human enough to spare me the repetition of the dreaded words—"and the owner was quickly found, strange as it may appear—sooner or later the guilty man was detected in her company. And his identity as the murderer was proved by the curious circular scar upon his palm, where the broken neck of the wine bottle had cruelly cut into the soft flesh! By the way," he went on rapidly, "that is a curious scar upon your hand, Mr. Denton. May I ask when and in what way it was received?"

Rolfe's sly face was bold and determined now; Denton's was flushed and furious. Her face, only very patient in its weariness, was proof beyond question that she had no share in that terrible secret.

"Come, let us go look at the sunset," I said, hurriedly, bending toward her in that moment's dreadful pause. She gratefully took my arm, and I staid her until we reached the rail, where she stood looking at the blood-red west.

Denton and Rolfe had also risen and stood fronting each other in threatening silence. I strained my ears for the first angry breaking of the storm. To my surprise the silence continued, and, glancing over my shoulder, I saw that the two had withdrawn and were standing alone together at some distance from us.

My companion was still gazing silently at the sunset sky, and I turned my fascinated gaze again upon the two men. Denton appeared to be speaking rapidly.

Was he trying to bribe his opponent? I saw Rolfe's lips open and close as if a curt monosyllable. Then Denton sprang forward. What weapon had he in his upraised hand? Had not Rolfe moved quickly to one side, he, too, would have met the fate of Ambrose Willis! He plunged his hand into his breast, but before it could be withdrawn something had happened.

Was it caused by a sudden intentional spring, or by that great wave which struck the ship and came sweeping down the deck with an almost irresistible force?

I caught my companion and held her firm until the shuddering vessel steadied itself. But at that instant I had seen Rolfe standing there alone, and had heard the cry, "Man overboard!"

The ship plunged on through the foaming sea, and the divided waves bore past us a human face, wide-eyed and distorted with an agony of baffled fury and despair.

A cry from my companion pierced my very heart, "My husband! Oh, my God, my God!"

The vessel was stopped, a life-boat lowered, and every effort was made to recover the drowning man. But it was of no avail; and after a half-hour's delay the ship again took up its course across the pathless sea.

When I next encountered Rolfe he wore a most crestfallen face.

"I had calculated upon every chance—but that," he said, "However, the guilty man has gone to receive his sentence from a higher tribunal than ours. I don't know after all, but this was the best way out of it, for you, as well as her!"

I looked darkly at him. "Are you not yet convinced of her innocence?"

"She is as innocent as a babe unborn," he answered, tranquilly. "And now she need never know."

I grasped his hand at this.

"Moreover," he continued, "I can set your mind at rest, for I see you are full of doubts. She married that wretch five years ago. He was what I call him, a parasite, and she soon found it out. She tried to raise him up, but he fell lower and lower. On the night of the murder—an hour before it occurred, she separated from him, against his wish, forever. She was fleeing from him when you met her on the Montreal train. She left there, fearing that he might follow her. She never connected him with Ambrose Willis's murder."

"For a time he kept himself in close hiding. Then, as the excitement died away, he attempted to seek her out. He pursued her with letters, and by means of one of these, which curiously came into my possession, I finally traced him."

"She engaged passage on this steamer, hoping thus to escape him; and he at the last moment followed her, as I was sure he would, thinking that in the long *telegraph cables* which she could not avoid he might win her back to living with him again, by gentle means, or threats—it mattered little to him which led to his success. You see, she is an orphan, with sufficient means to make her extremely desirable to such a man."

"The wretch!" I muttered, striking the rail with my clenched fist. "But why did you allow him to follow her? Why did you not arrest him ere he departed, and let her go free?"

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