

THE PERFECT GLOVE

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The private investigator opens a door, then closes it behind him. Everything in the room takes shape very quickly, because there are no mirrors, no closets, no curtains, nothing not in plain sight. Inside, in the blink of an eye, all objects are there. The private investigator can see well in the dark. Outside, it is always raining. He wonders why. He takes off his hat. He is a bachelor—though he wasn't always. (He sighs, thinking about that.) In the corner, the police radio is on: "...double suicide, romantically motivated..." *But that doesn't explain anything, does it?*

Which is what the private investigator is thinking, too. He sits down at his desk. He turns on the tape recorder. His voice is like silver fog over asphalt at midnight. His thoughts are dark and diffusing rapidly. From his trench coat (beige), out comes the evidence, of which there are two. The little bag of shimmery white powder is an unidentified substance that the police have been finding everywhere, recently: bedrooms, bars, casinos, greenhouses. Speculations are many; conclusions are few. It might be a drug, a poison, or invisible ink. It might be purely decorative—he puts it aside. He turns to: a pair of long, black gloves, lying in the lamp-light like shadows of themselves. Gloves are worn for many reasons, he muses, and sometimes more than one at the same time. His right hand twirls a pen. His left hand swills a clear drink on ice. The most compelling reason to wear a glove, for the private investigator, would be in order to prevent personal information—fingerprints, fluids, etc.—from contaminating an object. But these particular gloves would be ill-suited to such a function: sparkly particles have flaked off the fabric and onto his desk, leaving a silhouette, like a chalk drawing around a corpse. When he compares this crystalline drop-shadow trace with the snowy white powder, they are a perfect match. But anything, he knows, might *look like* anything else, but *be* quite different...He sighs. He has not touched the powder directly. He can see tomorrow's headlines already: *Star-Crossed Lovers*, maybe *Crimes of the Heart*... His thoughts run out. He turns off the recorder. There is the murmur of the Pacific Ocean, coming in and out, like a bad signal—he turns off the light.

1. THE INVISIBLE HAND

A luxury department store always has the same kind of lighting—doesn't it? Soft and warm? But tonight Leo, who has stopped by right before closing, seems to be nightmarishly hallucinating the flickering of fluorescent overheads, the kinds they have in those public non-luxury spaces he's never visited, like courtrooms. The mirrors on the display cases warp into a funhouse maze of weird reflectives, suggesting one-way windows; boxes with unusually many sides; magic tricks involving saws; the riddle of the locked room and the pool of water—things like that, occurring just around the corner, behind a card tower of monogrammed leather wallets.

Although a whole day has passed since opening, **THE PLUSHY CARPET SHOWS NO FOOTPRINTS.**

This must be the oft-reported death of retail, which reminds Leo of the death of movies, which reminds him of his own death. Then again—he cheers up—dead or no, neither—stores nor movies—ever seem to really go away. By the accessories counter, another undead: a limply angular black hoodie, floating as though unoccupied. On the counter, beaming back up into the void of the hood, is a face-up, lit-up phone. A trap song Leo hasn't heard in forever comes out of it: *I can't feel / tryna figure out if this shit re-e-al...* whining animatronically around the mirrored rectangular columns, like a fly shut in a metal tin.

And who should be producing this mood of zombie carnival, who should be wearing the hoodie tonight...but Alexis, yes, you can tell it's her because the tips of her slender tattooed fingers peep out from one of the sleeves. They twitch mechanically over the phone screen. Leo remembers her mainly as the girlfriend of her boyfriend, a rapper who made it; Alexis, it seems, didn't. They'd seemed cute together, always in matching Rick Owens, her draped around him like something equally untailed. Did someone cheat, in the end? Leo can't remember. Now, Alexis's hoodie is way oversize on her. She's gotten way thin. Leo himself, blond hair, is scarily rosy, like someone who has just eaten babies. His long wool coat cuts him a villainous silhouette. He appears as the devil. And Alexis, hoodie-d head being pulled up now as if by invisible string, like a female grim reaper.

The hood falls back; its oval shadow is replaced by her oval face; surprising lavender effects surface around her eyesockets—cool makeup—but—*Alexis's eyes*—Leo's heart skips a beat—seem to be half-way missing!?! Something keeps glimmering in there before going flat, or filling and emptying, or appearing and disappearing: something, at any rate, that eyes don't normally do.

“...Cool makeup,” he says.

“Not wearing any.”

Leo smiles. A lie? But he's just here to buy a Christmas present for his new girlfriend.

The music sounds farther away now, vibrational and vinylic, like a record player locked in the department store's basement. Alexis nods. For sale in the case between them are many pairs of multi-thousand-dollar gloves, posed mid-gesture and arranged in awful little tableaux. Leo spies not only peace signs, hearts, middle fingers, finger-guns, fingers simulating sex, baroque letter formations that Leo guesses must relate to gang membership, a Dolce & Gabbana lace mamma mia, a deconstructed riding glove bearing a stigmata-like cigarette burn—but also much more enigmatic, indecipherable digital configurations, such that the display appears to teem with disembodied hands permanently pursuing many unintelligible but shockingly emotional conversations, like animals in a zoo, or, rather, animated taxidermy.

Leo doesn't speak sign language, but he interprets their message like this: that a gift is often a stand-in for some thing less tangible. This December, Sarah, icier and more inconstant than that month's weather, will be getting the present of *Object Permanence*. Like the mirror stage, or language, object permanence is a phase of development that many girls never quite graduate from, a problem to which presents—being a kind of evidence or note, an antidote to “out of sight, out of mind”—are the solution. Because when people are gone, they are usually still there, just somewhere else. Sometimes, baby has to go away on a business trip. And when he comes back? He does not like to have been forgotten. Leo looks up from the sign language diorama. He meets Alexis's eyes, so weirdly metallic.

“*I'm in Love*,” as the expression goes. “So it's got to be nice.”

The question of whether or not Leo is in fact in love is a regular subject of interpretation for the papers, but the word inspires no such suspicions in Alexis who, unlike the private investigator, cherishes a literal understanding of everything.

On closer inspection, it seems there's something silver hung strategically over Alexis's pupils: a crescent moon?

“*Love?*” she whispers. “In that case, I have just the thing for you.”

...and now, as her sleeve unfurls, hovering several inches above the vitrine, Leo realizes that Alexis is just wearing novelty contact lenses. And her nail art flashes terribly in the fluorescent light.

2. SUNGLASSES AT NIGHT

Sarah's been acting brand new. And sources close to her say it's not even acting: for, since Christmas, the impermanent presence

of Leo and the indeterminate relation Sarah bears to him have mysteriously hardened into real live *Love!* It took shape less like a carbon-based flowering and more like a sudden salt crystal from a hyper-saturated solution; easier than expected: just add salt. It feels a little like sepia-tinted sunglasses, a little bit like silky gloves, and it's made her, as the perfect accessory ought, into a whole new girl.

Now, at a party in Tribeca, she blinks around the room. She's slightly on drugs that make pinpricks of light collect over and around her irises, not unpleasantly but a bit distractingly, so her cat-eye sunglasses are pulled down over her face. Sarah was born under a lucky star. Tonight she wears a hot pink crushed-velvet dress, **BOOTS THAT EDGE TO A KNIFELIKE POINT,** and gloves that go all the way up her arm. Leo's talking to someone behind the potted palm. Although she can't see him, she knows he's there.

She's made her rounds at the party; these people are her friends, kind of. No, Sarah doesn't want to go home. Sarah's never one to go home—not to her apartment, not really to Leo's apartment, and certainly not to her parents' house in NJ. So Sarah must want to be here—she looks up—right *here*, under the crystal chandelier: each dangling pendant ends in a sharp yellowed point; each points right down at Sarah, like in the maps at the mall; hundreds of arrows indexing that *You are Here*. “You” is in this case Sarah and “here” is a penthouse. But “are”...

A wintry draft blasts through the door as it opens and closes, another guest enters, and the crystal droplets quiver and chime. The room is cold, but Sarah's hands are warm. It's her first time out in her new black gloves, which, her boyfriend had explained, are made of a hyper-thin baby-lamb-leather treated to a trademarked liquid-vinyl-acid-denim texture. From minute to minute, depending (on light, temperature, mood, etc.), her arms might appear as though skinned in any one of a dozen different materials, textures best described by the kind of linguistic follies invented to name shades of nail polish: not only *Black Leather* but *Fog Over Asphalt at Midnight*, say, or *Who-Dun-It!?* or *Molecular Mystery* or *Color Her Cadillac*. Downing her drink, Sarah notices that the perspiration pearling down the stem of the martini glass doesn't seem to soak through the liquid-vinyl-acid-denim leather. And that the gloves make a murmuring sound when they move, like background voices? When she steadies herself on a shiny white couch, it seems to respond: *Oh My God, Your Skin is So Soft!*

...? Sarah is on drugs, but not that much—she blinks downward. A french-manicured hand is touching her own. And it's moving, stroking what is actually not, technically, her hand at all, but the outside skin, the liquid-vinyl-acid-denim leather...And

Sarah literally can't feel the touch at all!

If paid, the private investigator might observe that gloves are a rather unpredictable medium for grasping object permanence. This is because the wearer of a gifted glove can't even touch her present: the inside of *it* is touching *her*. The glove is the one touching, using her hand. And Sarah has, recently, the annoying feeling that her hand is empty.

“I'm wearing a glove,” she says to the girl on the couch, “and it's expensive.” And withdraws her hand. It's a bit much. *These girls can't get next to her*, she reminds herself. But, in a physical sense, they, unfortunately, can. She needs air. She turns to the window. Outside, it's snowing. Inside, for no reason really, as though inhabited by an invisible hand, Sarah draws the window curtain around herself with a swoosh. She disappears from the scene. The noise of the party mutes. Time stands still. Sarah spreads the five fingers of her right-hand glove on the glass. NYC blasts back at her from the other side. Maybe it's just a good moment, at 11:59 PM on New Year's Eve, for Sarah to take a step behind a black velvet curtain and reflect, for the first time ever, on the nature of love!

Sarah is indeed feeling brand new, though the exact brand of these feelings will, for now, remain a mystery. She's hot and she's cool. She wants to leave; she wants to stay. It is less that Sarah is an unfeeling person and more that emotions run through her head like overpopulated deer through the woods: there and then gone and therefore not worth much thought. So, *Love?*...

Sarah self-reflects, though not for long.

...Yes, she figures, she must be feeling so much love for Leo that she can't even be in his presence. She has heard of this, how love sometimes causes you to do things that are the opposite, flipping over into a kind of mirror image. She listens: fireworks go off. 00:00. The new year is here. And Sarah's here, too—isn't she? She need only draw back the curtain...

But when she tries to move her fingers, still splayed on the glass, they're stuck, frozen to the windowpane. And her arms—what the fuck?—have gone totally numb! Poor blood circulation? The gloves had fit perfectly at Christmas, but maybe Sarah has gotten fatter. And who knows what paralysis-inducing chemicals might have gone into that trademarked textile?

Because the gloves are indistinguishable from the black velvet of the curtain, it's like her arms break off right under her shoulders. A marble Venus statue. The window, also black, goes floor to ceiling: in it, snowflakes fall, so detailed, like a movie. Sarah looks further west, to New Jersey and beyond. She closes her eyes.

As her lids shut, a teardrop pearls off her extra-long eyelashes and splats down, unnoticed, onto the glove of her right hand, where it pools into a shiny shape: a perfect heart? A gun or skull?

A pretty star? Impossible to tell, on the optically-illusionistic liquid-acid-vinyl-denim-leather background. Meanwhile, Sarah is passing through the screen and falling out the other side, tumbling through the air, flipping head over knife-shaped heels, down down down, past other screens, big billboards and lit-up apartments, the snowflakes thickening around her into a silver-white movie screen light....

3. CRIMES OF THE HEART

Sarah wakes to the sound of a scream that might have been her own, or not. A coyote?

—But the first thing she notices is that she’s wearing: a tightly-tailored double-breasted Ticonderoga-yellow-and-sunset-pink tweed jacket with a matching pencil skirt, a pill-box hat perched dangerously on her hair, rhinestone-sprinkled bow-shaped earrings—and the gloves, current shade: *Topanga Twilight*. Her hands are un-frozen. The air is warm. When she opens her eyes, everything is black! Then she remembers her sunglasses; she pulls them away. A swiss-dot-net-lace pattern appears, but that’s just the cute veil swooping down from her hat. Behind it, a scene comes into focus: a road at night, into which her nylon-stockinged feet extend, and a stucco wall, against which she is slumped. A cactus with a pink flower glows up ahead. A sign reads *Private Residences*; another: *Topanga Canyon*, with an arrow pointed enigmatically askance. The scenery is under-dimensional, all flat façades and stark shadows concealing nothing behind, like a set. Sarah has the weird feeling of experiencing a side effect of something she doesn’t remember taking. She knows she’s in L.A. From her outfit, she knows she’s in the 1940s...*But that doesn’t really explain anything, does it?*

Headlights come around a corner. A cool white Cadillac pulls up. No one gets out. A window rolls down: “Need a ride?”

Sarah always plays the cards she is dealt. She knows when to talk to strangers. She feels a call she knows she will obey because she always does. She gets up, gets in, and shuts the door behind her. The inside is made out in a handsome ochre leather. The smell: teakwood and tobacco. The man next to her wears a hat pulled down low and a big trench coat.

“That was easy.” His mouth curls. “Nice accessories.”

“Do you have a...‘smoke’?” Sarah improvises, already used to the way things are going here, getting lost and then found, picked up and transported away. He produces a cigarette, straight from thin air, and off they go. In the rear-view, instead of a face, there is only the sunset-orange glow of the cigarette in his mouth. The

snaking road disappears at a steady rate into the background.

And Sarah smiles at **HOW EASY THINGS ARE
WHEN YOU PLAY
THE ROLES YOU ARE GIVEN.**

...But the stranger has other ideas for where they’re headed. “It’s time for you to go home,” he is saying, in a voice like fog over asphalt at midnight. “Your husband’s been calling nonstop, I’ve been chasing you all the way up and down the coast since Christmas, and my fee doesn’t cover new tires—got it?”

The plot has thickened quickly, as it always, in Sarah’s experience, does. She sighs. It was better when it was just the outfit etc.. Holding up her hand, she suggests that he might have the wrong girl? “See? No wedding ring.” Just a glove.

Unfazed, one hand on the wheel, he flashes some kind of identification. “Private investigator.”

“I see.” Sarah considers her situation, arrives at no conclusion, sits back, and folds her hands in her lap. “Well then...Who *am* I?”

Unfortunately, the name he says will turn out to be a dead end for both of them. “I don’t think I am,” although, being unsure of the exact shape of the two letters monogrammed on the silk handkerchief in her jacket, or whether they’re even supposed to correspond to her initials at all—

But he is already producing a manila envelope and tossing it into her lap. Out falls a black-and-white photograph: of arched glass doors forming an alcove, inside of which is posed a figure. She wears a powder-white wedding gown and a swiss-dot-mesh veil to match. Though the veil drops down from her head like a snowy floor-length shadow, obscuring her face, it unfortunately does little to conceal the outfit’s other accessories: cat-eye sunglasses and gloves, both black, visible through the veil like ink on the flipside of a page. And is that a swoop of curtain there, in the upper-right corner? In the side mirror, Sarah catches a glimpse of a profile wearing sunglasses. *Objects Are Closer Than They Appear*, she knows...though it doesn’t have that printed there, as it’s before safety rules. She looks to the road, imagining disembodied features, slinking hands and cat-eyes, jumping, like deer, out of the night and into the headlights. And just like roadkill, another piece of paper flutters out the envelope, thin and shiny, like receipt paper. It’s a note in a woman’s loopy handwriting, unsigned and unaddressed, dated from a couple weeks ago:

I’m leaving home and never coming back. I’ll drown myself after what you’ve done, probably. I hope you’re happy now please have a great life and please don’t ever look for me!!!

Melodramatic. Sarah wouldn’t be caught dead writing that. Unfortunately, her feminine intuition regarding this matter of the heart in relation to her prose style won’t prove anything to

anyone. “I don’t write in cursive,” is all she can manage. If only she had a fountain pen to prove it! But writing tools don’t seem to come with this outfit.

The private investigator only laughs—“Time to give baby a call?”—and a brightly-shining telephone booth lurches up out of nowhere.

He pulls over. The ignition turns off. He opens the door; she puts her gloved fingers in his. She steps out; he disappears into the phone booth. Sarah watches his mysterious silhouette as he dials a number by rotating the vintage telephone ring of digits. The walls of the booth are four glass panels framed by wood. From the ceiling drops a flickering bulb. There’s some limp curtains for privacy, which the private investigator does not pull around him. Time stands still once again. He dials what seems to be the same number as before. Salty droplets spray up to land on Sarah’s cheek, for the booth, it turns out, is standing at the very edge of a cliff, below which waves are crashing, higher and higher...And though the man takes off his hat when he steps back out, Sarah still can’t read his face. He fishes a final piece of paper from his trench and hands over the number.

When she enters the booth, the outside sound mutes. In every glass panel, extending in an infinite multiple of four, is a reflection of Sarah. Though it is warm and cozy inside, she has a creepy feeling that’s the opposite of brand-new: *Déjà-Vu*. As she stares at the swoop of black curtain framing her features, a moving picture begins to well up on the inside of her dark designer sunglasses: of the party on the other side of that curtain back in Tribeca, and of Leo, just beginning to raise his glass in a toast!

Though she is happy to see him, he doesn’t see her at all. Being, she figures, a kind of ghost, Sarah slides closer. As in a card game in which each player’s hand is given a final meaning only in relation to those already on the table, Sarah finds it difficult to act out her feelings without a bit more context as to Leo’s own. But they can now “be as one,” as she’s heard love called, like a hand into a glove—a position from which, Sarah hopes, she might resolve a certain question all lovers love to ask. *Does Leo love Sarah?* From inside his pinstripe suit, she looks down at herself. *Sarah always looks great in menswear.* But is that a thought that Leo would have about himself, or Sarah about herself, or Leo about her, or Sarah about him? It’s all too much like her whole problem tonight, the mystery of a glove! And as she peers out from behind his blue-green eyes, at the champagne being made to flow in a waterfall down a pyramid of delicate glasses, out at the tuxedos and the...flappers?—it occurs to her that what she’s seeing is less a wrinkle-in-time-space-fabric caused by true love, and actually just a scene from *Great Gatsby*, the movie.

Sarah blinks away the image. Instead she sees the number.

Alone again, fingers trembling, she moves her liquid-vinyl acid-denim right hand clockwise and counterclockwise over the dial. A single ring hangs in the pocket of air curled under Sarah’s blonde hair. Then a click, like the start of a recording, and a voice:

Hello. I couldn’t feel anything, I was so unsure what’s real...so I took a walk round the canyon and to the beach just now. There I found her body. At least I think it was her; it was hard to tell. If you’re hearing this, I’m sorry to say: it’s too late. You’ll find me in my private residence. There will be a glass of water on my nightstand, under the lamp and next to the book. Please don’t drink from it; it is poisoned. Good night now.

A breath; another click; the recording ends; Sarah has a stinging salty feeling around what she’s pretty sure is her heart. The phone has dropped in slow-motion to dangle from its cord. For one second, it swings freely. When it hits the booth’s wooden edges, hard, the bulb overhead goes out with a pop, and the reflections of Sarah vanish too.

AND NOW
THE LIGHT THAT
HAS BEEN POOLING
ALL NIGHT
AT THE RIMS
AND INSIDE
CORNERS
OF HER EYES
BEGINS TO
SPILL OUT
AND DOWN
HER FACE.

4. CASE CLOSED

From outside the booth, the private investigator watches Sarah's mysterious silhouette begin to cry, and he wonders at the strangeness of sympathy, of symmetry. Can it be—real tears!? Sarah's "been through it"; by now, she's "iced out" in more ways than one. Yes, Sarah "came up on her own," and no, Sarah never cries. But now a cold glaze, like nail polish, streaks her cheeks from eyes to chin. Inside the upper-left pocket of her technicolor-tweed blazer, she feels a receipt paper crinkle. She pulls it out, unfolds the suicide note. Inside, writing has appeared that she didn't notice before, silvery-white lines, like invisible ink.

I met death in that one specific disguise he will never take off again long before I realized that was his name. Nor did I know I had loved him already in various forms! Because I was so innocent, I lied to everyone and pretended I did not know what I wanted when he took me in his [redacted car model / redacted graveyard; temporal signifiers too embarrassing i.e. too revealing to write here]. He told me he loved me because I looked just like him. I wish I could look exactly like a mirror; we all know what mirrors look like: they are silver. I will know many people who die, but I will only know death once. When I meet him again I know things will last. For now he has indeed shown me a mirror to myself: the one image that will never change!

Melodramatic, and yet...The private investigator has opened the door, is holding out a hand. Sarah steps straight into a puddle. Saltwater seeps through her stockings. She reaches out to give him the note: not that it explains anything really, it's Sarah who wants to explain something now, how she feels maybe—but as she looks down at the writing, she realizes that it's gone: all that is printed there is an itemized receipt, from a luxury department store, for a series of accessories, at an exorbitant cost.

"I guess that's that," he shrugs. "I got the wrong girl."

"Seems that way." Sarah feels at a loss, unsure where things could possibly go from here. She turns her face upwards to his. "Are we going to kiss?"

"No," he laughs—sadly, Sarah thinks, but maybe she's flattering herself. Then it starts to rain. Even the weather-proof liquid-vinyl-acid-denim-leather gloves don't stand a chance. She feels tears in the rain, then the rain on her skin: this must be the end. So Sarah decides to take matters into her own hands. She peels off the gloves, soaking wet. Turns out there's a manicure on her bare fingers: vintage-style, little crescents rising above the nail bed. **THE GLOVES HANG DOWN FROM HER FINGERS IN BLACK SILHOUETTES**, fluttering like shadows come unsewn from her skin. Sarah manages to toss them to the private investigator—"Case Closed!" she winks, and he catches them deftly—just before she lands on her feet, right where she should be: it's New Year's Eve, and if Sarah's in love, at least she's alive.

Evenings are slow in a luxury department store. The goods for sale here are highly contemporary, which, this Fall-Winter season, means: pillbox hats; gloves; retro sunglasses. Each twinkles in a coffin-shaped case. Some of the vitrines are arranged vertically around a shiny black mannequin to form a kind of modernist grotto; these repeat, in regular groves, across the carpeted glades of Floor 1. The mirrors in the cases are old and warped, so the objects inside appear closer or farther than they actually are.

At least, that's how it seems to Alexis, from the shadow in which she stands, between a skyscraper of hats and behind a low counter of Louis Vuitton. Alexis's fashion contact lenses, the private investigator might note, are partially responsible for the more otherworldly mise-en-scenes of form and content that play out around her station as her shift draws to a close, her manager leaves her to lock up, and the traffic goes to rush hour outside.

Though her eyes are often sources of diptychal illusion, Alexis's motivations are simple. She has worked for years at the department store in the hopes of encountering her ex-boyfriend, who has always had a taste for designer: already swag back in high school—then, mostly wearing imitation—he has, now, the funds to shop in sprees, and in-store. He'll be back from LA one day, on a business trip, maybe, and when he sees Alexis, it'll be here, just like this: and beauty and love will extend forever in every direction. There's only one moon over 5th Avenue tonight; on Alexis's nail art, there are ten. She looks at the bags and wallets on which certain intertwined initials are stamped, embossed, embroidered, and made to repeat infinitely. The gloves in her case repeat, in perfect pairs, real and fake, all across the globe: in factories, on street corners, and in cases just like this one, deep in a foreign mega-mall, LA or Dubai or Shanghai. Her ex, this very moment, might be touching any one of them.

In the meantime, Alexis has been playing a movie on her phone. Now, as it comes to a close, an emotion begins. Trapped between her iris and the film of her contacts, it comes into her vision like a blot of ink on a wet paper napkin: a dark color spreading every which way but growing, simultaneously, fainter and fainter, moving not towards a form (as all things should), but away from one. A feeling like this happens to Alexis at most once a day, usually at twilight, so it is precious and unpredictable. Having no cause, it might have no end. She must direct this feeling somewhere, anywhere; must force it into a crest that breaks, or a shape with edges, or a door that opens. She sharpens her focus

on what's in front of her. Sunglasses, hats, and gloves: in those enchanted minutes before closing, they seem to twitch and distend, leech-like, growing saturated and animate, full of something life-like-but-not-quite: *Love?*

“Prada...” she whispers, like a magic spell. “...Balenciaga.”

And as she blinks away her tears and flicks off the lights over Floor 1, Alexis notices, not for the first time, that some of the accessories have taken on a renewed sheen, as though glazed in crystals; dipped in brine, and then hung up and dried.