

The Stolen Laces

An Episode in the History of Chicago Crime

From the Diary of Detective Dennis Simmons of the Bank Detail of the Central Station

I

Early in the spring of 1872 the boarders at Mrs. Frelinghuysen's house, on West Adams street, felt themselves constrained to discuss and decide a very delicate question. For some time previous the conduct of Mrs. Alice Claypole had given them great concern. This lady was the wife of a middle aged lawyer of good standing, who seemed devotedly attached to her, and was blind to the many weaknesses of her character, and oblivious of the fact that her bearing in male society was a subject of unfavorable comment in the well conducted establishment of the estimable Mrs. Frelinghuysen.

Mrs. Claypole's flirtations were the talk of the neighborhood, and her bald headed, good natured husband came in for a goodly share of that pity and compassion which the world has ever in store for persons apparently unconscious of their own misfortunes.

"Poor old Claypole" was an oft repeated remark; "some one ought to open his eyes and let him know the full iniquity of his wife's misconduct."

But none undertook this delicate mission, and "poor old Claypole" continued to idolize his charming and fascinating spouse—charming and fascinating not only to him, but to some half dozen other gentlemen who were said to languish in the sunshine of her smiles.

Mrs. Claypole, to make matters more piquant and interesting to her fellow boarders, was not a beautiful woman, as the term goes. She was tall and shapely, however, dressed with becoming taste, and carried herself with a stately grace that never failed to elicit remarks of admiration.

Her features were somewhat irregular and heavy in repose, but when she became interested in conversation, or, better still, when she was aiming at a conquest, her face lighted up with the ardor of her thoughts, and her big blue eyes flashed dangerously from beneath half drooping lids fringed with long, dark eye lashes that tried in vain to screen the passionate fire of amorous glances.

No: Mrs. Claypole was not a beautiful woman, but she had that subtle power of charming which is more fascinating than beauty and plays the deuce with the virtuous instincts of mankind.

Mr. and Mrs. Claypole had lived at the Frelinghuysen establishment two months when the boarders thought it high time to arrive at some conclusion as to the alleged improprieties of her conduct.

Not content with the conquest of full grown and bearded men, the fair Alice, who was thirty if she was a year, had recently shown a liking for the society of young men in their teens. Three or

four of these susceptible young fellows danced in constant attendance upon her. They ran her errands, escorted her to the theatre, took her to supper after the play, and acted spooney generally in the manner peculiar to lovesick lads.

And what was most exasperating to the critics of mature age, Mrs. Claypole seemed to enjoy this hoydenish homage. She was soft and soothing, even motherly, in her demeanor toward her young admirers. She would stroke their cheeks and pat their heads lovingly, call them brave boys, and sometimes – so Miss Goggles, the ancient spinster, who occupied the first floor hall bedroom, and was ever on the alert to spy out the moral delinquencies of her neighbors, averred – kiss them tenderly and tell them to be good and true to their mother.

“She calls herself their mother, the artful wench,” reported Miss Goggles, with a look of horror in her watery eyes: “she ought to be horsewhipped.”

No wonder Mrs. Frelinghuysen’s boarders were stirred to the very depths of their honest hearts. Such vagaries on the part of a married woman were reprehensible in the highest degree. They called for an expression of virtuous indignation. Mr. Claypole ought to be informed of his wife’s moral obliquity. It was a burning, scandalous shame that such a nice, high indeed, honorable old gentleman should have the wool pulled over his eyes by this wicked woman, and he a lawyer, too, with a professional knowledge of the relief which could be speedily gained in the divorce court.

Then it was that the boarders came to the unanimous decision that Mrs. Claypole was a designing, heartless coquette; that her society should be tabooed, and that poor old Mr. Claypole should receive a broad hint of what was going on with a view to a prompt disruption of his marital ties.

The conveyal of this hint was deputed to James Hadley, clerk in a downtown lace store, who had worshipped at the shrine of the fascinating blonde when she first appeared at the boarding house, and whose attentions had been suppressed with a scornful derision which still rankled in his virtuous breast, and made him accept the mission with revengeful alacrity.

And when Mr. Hadley finished his recital of Mrs. Claypole’s shortcomings and suspected peccadilloes, which he delivered with many pious sighs and groans about the inconstancy of woman, he was almost petrified by “poor old Claypole’s” emphatic rejoinder:

“You confounded idiot!” cried the lawyer, shaking his fist in Hadley’s face: “you lace peddling dolt! If I hear another word of this I’ll break every bone in your asinine carcass.”

II

If Hadley had been a man of good common sense he would have thought twice before meddling with the conjugal affairs of Mr. and Mrs. Claypole. Students of social philosophy have long recognized the dangers of such interference. Husbands and wives may fight like cats and dogs, they may be guilty of the grossest kinds of infidelity, but woe betide the rash individual who essays to patch up their quarrels or smooth the wrinkles in their code of mutual morality.

Hadley, however, was young and impetuous, not accustomed to philosophical speculation, and he learned his first lesson of worldly wisdom from the bitter tongue of the irascible lawyer. It was not long ere he regretted the foolish step he took at the instigation of his fellow boarders.

Mr. Claypole, it can be readily imagined, had the fullest confidence in the honor and integrity of his wife.

“Ally,” said he, after venting his wrath on the callow dry goods clerk: “Ally, the fools are beginning to talk. It may be prudent to draw in a little. Give the boys a hint to be less demonstrative and let us work slower for the common good.”

“Why, what is the trouble, Henry?” asked Mrs. Claypole, as she got her husband’s slippers and drew his easy chair in front of the cheerful grate fire in their private sitting room.

“That idiot Hadley has been telling me of your flirtations. The boarders are shocked at your free and easy ways, and they induced the fellow to enlighten me on the subject. I had half a mind to break his head.”

“Oh! Is that all?” said Mrs. Claypole, with a peculiar smile. “So they think I am a wicked, reckless flirt? I admire their penetration. But, under all circumstances, Henry, it’s a special reputation. A flirt has no time for other business, and out affairs may flourish without suspicion while they think I’m engrossed in the pleasurable occupation of juggling with hearts. As for Mr. Hadley, you may leave his punishment to me. I will settle him in a way he will remember for the rest of his life.”

“He deserves something, the meddlesome fool,” responded Mr. Claypole, in a contemptuous tone. “But what is your plan?”

“Wait and see,” was the quiet rejoinder, while those big blue eyes flashed ominously; “it will be in the direct line of business.”

“Ah! I understand,” said the elderly lawyer. “Do you expect any one this evening?”

“Herman promised to be here about 9 o’clock.”

“Well, I will take a nap and afterward go to the club, so that you may work him alone. He is smart as a whip, that lad, and I expect great things of him,” and with this Mr. Claypole settled himself in his easy chair, closed his eyes and was soon snoring gently in front of the fire.

Mrs. Claypole, who was more annoyed by the incident of the evening than she was willing to admit, took up the evening paper and rapidly scanned its columns. She seemed to be looking for some particular item of news. Presently a paragraph struck her eye which she read with great interest.

“The scheme works well,” she muttered. “No clue? Of course not. Trust a woman’s wits for that. Six months more will give us all the money we need, and then for the sunny south. Bah! How I detest this horrid climate as well as the hurry-scurrying habits of the people. Everything is rush and bustle and money making. Well, let them pile up their wealth, let them repair the ravages of the fire and build costly temples of trade and commerce. Those who neither weave nor spin will be the gainers in the end. Honest industry is ever opening up avenues of idleness and luxury for those who have the courage and ability to follow the only royal road to ease and affluence.”

Mr. Claypole finished his nap in about an hour, and at once went out to spend the evening at his club, leaving his wife alone to entertain the expected visitor.

She added a few touches to her toilet after the departure of her husband, and then sat down to the piano and sang one or two love songs in a low contralto voice.

The music reached the ears of the boarders in the parlor, who by this time had word the sensational story of Hadley’s reception by Mr. Claypole threadbare, and were deliberating as to the next step to be taken in exposing the scandalous doings of the fascinating blond.

“The old fool has gone out as usual,” said one. “She’s expecting somebody. She always sings those sentimental ditties when one of those kids is coming.”

“Well,” remarked another, an elderly gentleman with a pair of twinkling brown eyes. “I think we had better allow things to take their natural course. The flirtations of married women bring their own punishment, and I guess old Claypole will finally come to his senses without any assistance on our part.”

“But it’s so abominably disgraceful,” snapped Miss Goggles. “I wouldn’t mind so much if she confined her attention to grown men, who ought to know better than to encourage her base designs; but to think of her inveigling those boys. Why, it’s an outrage against all the recognized maxims of good society.”

“Never mind that, Miss Goggles,” said the old gentleman, who seemed anxious to restore peace in the Frelinghuysen establishment. “We have done all we can for the present. Besides, we have no evidence that there is anything radically improper. All pretty women like to flirt.”

“Oh! Mr. Johnson,” ejaculated the spinster, blushing feverishly. “How can you say such a thing?”

“It’s true, Miss Goggles,” said Mr. Johnson, stoutly and with a touch of gallantry. “Coquetry is one of the prerogatives of the sex; the art is indispensable from female loveliness. Don’t attempt to deny it, Miss Goggles; you, of all women, ought to be the first to recognize this universal truth.”

The old fellow, who was suspected of matrimonial designs on the antiquated spinster, accompanied this speech with a glance which threw Miss Goggles into a flutter of excitement.

Several of the gentlemen tittered at her confusion, but she was too busy with the tender thoughts Mr. Johnson had suddenly inspired to notice their amusement.

“Well, what shall we do, Mr. Johnson?” asked Miss Goggles, as soon as she regained her composure.

“Nothing,” was the laconic response.

“Nothing?”

There was a tone of disappointment in this query which caused Mr. Johnson to elevate his eyebrows suspiciously. But he was firm in his resolution with which he sought to imbue his fellow boarders.

“That’s just it,” he rejoined, emphatically. “We’ll do nothing more, but wait and”—

“Watch,” chimed in Mr. Hadley.

“Yes, sir: wait and watch. You have hit it exactly. I thought you would realize the wisdom of this course.”

Hadley’s face flushed, but he had gained wisdom since his interview with “poor old Claypole,” and deemed it prudent to say nothing.

Something about the programme struck the boarders favorably. The first step of active interference had resulted disastrously. The old lawyer was apparently indifferent to the fate his wife so recklessly invited. “Waiting” and “watching” were words full of mystery and ominous import. The programme presaged keen excitement. Ten pairs of eyes scrutinizing every look and action of a frivolous woman, ten superheated brains wrestling with the motives that guided her conduct, and ten busy tongues ready to tear her reputation to tatters on the slightest provocation—why, the prospect was delightful to this modern school for scandal, and with one accord the borders lifted up their voices in approval.

“Agreed,” was the unanimous verdict. “We’ll wait and watch.”

Meanwhile 9 o’clock had arrived, and with it Mrs. Claypole’s expected visitor. From her cozy little sitting room upstairs came the rhythmic thumming of the piano and the soft contralto voice singing in delightful unison, “You’ll Remember Me.”

“One of them’s there,” said Miss Goggles in a stage whisper. “She always sings that song when that curly headed boy comes. But it’s getting late—I wish you all good evening.”

And Miss Goggles glided swiftly from the parlor and went upstairs.

“The game’s begun,” remarked Mr. Johnson, with a significant shrug.

“How so?” asked Hadley.

“Miss Goggles is first on watch.”

III

Mr. Johnson was right. Miss Goggles was first on watch.

The watery eyed spinster foresaw many personal advantages in the scheme of espionage agreed upon by the borders. In the first place, nature seemed to have endowed her with special gifts of poking and prying into the personal affairs of others.

Her eyes, expressionless though they were, were remarkably sharp both at short and long range. Her ears, which bulged out like miniature cornucopia, had very susceptible tympanums, which accurately received and registered the slightest undulation of sound. Her nose, long, sharp and pointed, seemed framed to scent out scandal, while her high, narrow forehead betokened intellectual qualities in keeping with those other tokens of inquisitiveness and cunning.

Then she had a footfall as soft and velvety as that of a cat. She glided noiselessly about the house, and was constantly turning up in the midst of interesting domestic incidents. The servants said she had a disagreeable habit of looking through keyholes. One night when young Mr. Jobson came home slightly under the weather, and Mrs. Jobson began to moan and cry and threaten to return to the aching bosom of her mother, Miss Goggles was caught peering through the transom of their room. She excused herself on the ground that she thought the wretch was murdering his unfortunate wife, and she wanted to be able to testify against him in the criminal court.

Mrs. Jobson came near tearing her eyes out the next morning, and Mr. Jobson, mortified and humiliated almost beyond endurance, consulted a scientific friend as to the practicability of securing the germs of some malignant disease with which to quietly inoculate the innocent, saintlike Miss Goggles.

This showed Mr. Johnson to be a bitter, spiteful man, quite capable of the awful crime which the spinster suspected him of contemplating; but a man cannot feel friendly toward a woman who has witnessed and gloated over his first connubial tiff.

Then, Miss Goggles was pleased with the new programme because it emanated from Mr. Johnson.

The old gentleman had been particularly attentive to the spinster of late. He had taken her to the theatre several times and grown terribly sentimental over the subsequent oyster stews. More than once he had waxed confidential over the parlor stove, and spoken of his financial affairs in a way which excited her to envy, if it did not warm her to love.

She felt herself blushing whenever those kindly, twinkling brown eyes looked into the literally liquid depths of her own passionless orbs. Affairs had reached such a pass now that Mr. Johnson

had only to whisper an affectionate word, and she was ready to flop into his arms and proclaim vows of undying devotion.

But Mr. Johnson did not whisper that word, contenting himself with an occasional sigh and a glance of respectful adoration. He sometimes called her “Henrietta”—that was her given name—but the word seemed to come from him unawares, and he lapsed into moody silence every time it escaped his lips.

Now was the opportunity of her life, she argued, as she glided up the stairs to her hall bedroom. If she were industrious in her espionage, if she discovered reckless abandon on the part of the fascinating Mrs. Claypole, if she were the first to procure proof of unlawful conduct, Mr. Johnson would be profuse in expressions of admiration and probably be impelled to make the longed for declaration.

When Miss Goggles reached her room she closed the door noiselessly. Inside there was another door which communicated with the sitting room of Mr. and Mrs. Claypole. This door, of course, was locked on the other side. The key hole was stuffed with paper, the chinks were covered with list, and the glass of the transom had a green baize covering to shut out the gaze of curious eyes and deaden the sounds within.

It was evident that the Claypoles knew of and were desirous of circumventing the inquisitive proclivities of their next door neighbor.

But the genius of Miss Goggles rose superior to trivial obstacles of this kind. Days ago she had seized a chance to enter the Claypole apartments and unfasten the button which held the transom closed. This maneuver had evidently not been noticed, since only that morning while Mrs. Claypole was down town shopping, she had tried the transom and found it worked responsively and noiselessly to her touch.

As to the key hole, a pair of tweezers had picked the paper almost entirely out, bit by bit, until only a thin layer remained, which could easily be removed when the exigencies of the case required such a step.

Consequently Miss Goggles was well situated to play the part of a spy and, if needs be, to surprise the blond in the very height of her amours.

And Miss Goggle chuckled to herself as she heard the lid of the piano close and the singing give way to sounds of earnest conversation.

Turning down the gas, the inquisitive spinster mounted on a chair, pushed the transom open a little, and was delighted to find that the angle of vision this obtained gave her a full view of Mrs. Claypole and her visitor, besides enabling her to hear every word that passed between them.

What was transpiring in the Claypole sitting room must have been profoundly entertaining, since for a full hour, at the risk of a cramp in her neck, Miss Goggles remained in this uncomfortable attitude with wide staring eyes and eager open ears taking in the scene below.

Suddenly the ancient spinster released her hold of the transom, sprang from the chair with a suppressed scream, hastily undressed herself, got into bed, and pulled the clothes over her head like a frightened child.

IV

What was the cause of Miss Goggles' agitation? The spinster had nerved herself to see and hear strange goings on in the Claypole sitting room. Something out of the ordinary run of scandalous proceedings must have occurred to make her dive deep under the bed clothes as if she wanted to shut out the remembrance of a horrible sight.

When the expected visitor was admitted, Mrs. Claypole was seated at the piano warbling plaintive love songs. She rose and received him cordially, called him "dear Herman," and allowed him to press his lips to her cheek.

The borders were right as to the age of this youthful admirer. He was about 17 years old. He had a bright, sunny face, with laughing blue eyes, and flaxen curly hair, brushed from a square, intelligent forehead, adorned by heavy, bushy eyebrows, which were arched like a bow at full tension.

He was dressed with great neatness. His black cutaway coat was of the newest pattern, the vest cut low, showing a wide expanse of shirt bosom. He wore a gold watch chain of excellent make, and on the little finger of his right hand was a solitaire diamond ring.

The boy looked like a well to do broker's clerk. He carried himself easily and gracefully, as though accustomed to society.

He was evidently a welcome guest, for Mrs. Claypole's eyes dwelt lovingly on his handsome face, and beamed with pleasure as he asked her to resume her seat at the piano.

"What shall I play, Herman?" she asked smilingly.

"You know my favorite song, Ally," he replied. "Sing, 'You'll Remember Me.'"

Mrs. Claypole complied, and the boy hung on the tones of her low, rich voice with rapt attention. His eyes followed her every movement; his face flushed with delight when she turned to him during the tender passages of the song and accented them by glances which sent a thrill through his frame.

There could be no doubt as to the feelings with which the lad regarded her; he was desperately in love with this fair enchantress.

And Mrs. Claypole? It would be difficult to probe her feelings. Practiced in all the arts of coquetry, she could play with hearts at will and yet remain serene and cold beneath the surface.

The conversation with her husband denoted that the lad was to be kept under the spell for a purpose. What was the purpose which could induce a woman of mature age to enthrall a boy and keep his heart jumping in response to her seductive wiles?

Just as Miss Goggle was gently opening the transom Mrs. Claypole again left the piano and seated herself by the side of the boy, who, with a trace of old time gallantry, raised her jeweled fingers to his lips and kissed them. The action sent a thrill through the bosom of the antique eavesdropper, which was intensified when the blonde ran her fingers lovingly through his flaxen curls and fondly patted his rosy cheeks.

“Now, that’s enough nonsense for the night,” she said, with a winning smile. “Tell me what you have been doing lately, Herman.”

“You ought to know, Ally,” he answered languidly: “or doesn’t the governor make daily reports?”

“I am afraid he does not tell me everything,” was the smiling reply, “and I always like to hear the exploits of the boys from the captain’s own lips.”

The lad was evidently pleased. He said frankly, “To tell you the truth, Ally, I have been a little suspicious of the governor of late. He doesn’t seem to be toting fair. He said he only got \$1,000 for that last bundle, while I have it on the best authority that the stuff brought \$1,700. The gang are mad about it, and you better give him a gentle hint that we will stand anything but swindling on his part. We run all the risk, and he might surely be satisfied with a square divvy.”

A shadow crossed the woman’s face, but it was gone in a moment.

“You are right, my boy,” she said in a caressing tone. “Henry should be more careful of your interests—indeed, all of our interests, since we are all in the same swim. But you know what he is.”

“Yes,” responded the boy, moodily, “I know what he is, and he better be a little more careful. Had it not been for you, Ally, we would have broken with him long ago and given him a push toward the pen. If you say the word now, I’ll risk everything to settle him, and we’ll go south together.”

“No, no! Herman,” cried the woman, in a tone of alarm: “that would never do, you foolish boy. I must still be your mother, and you must be kind and considerate to Henry.”

The boy pouted, but returned the kiss with which this declaration terminated.

“I am getting tired of this ‘mother’ business,” he said, testily. “A fellow don’t want two mothers.”

“But you need me, my dear, to keep you safe. You would have been in trouble a year ago had I not caught you in time. Now be patient, Herman, and don’t harbor harsh thoughts about the

governor. I want my boys to work pleasantly together, and we'll soon be able to enjoy the good time that's coming."

"All right, Ally," said the lad in a more cheerful spirit. "I'll not only wait but work, if you say so."

"That's my brave boy," said the woman, kissing him again warmly. "Now tell me what's in the wind."

"Well, we've done some fine night work lately," Herman responded, his eyes flashing enthusiastically at the recollection. "We've been cracking private cribs and the governor has several thousands in the vault, which will be worked off soon on the outside. The cops are all at sea. They are looking for eastern crooks, and have no idea that home talent is at the bottom of all the fine work in town. I pass members of the central detail every day, and they don't condescend to notice the peddler boy who is disposing of stolen goods under their very noses."

The lad laughed heartily at this evidence of the perspicuity of the police and continued:

"We are going to branch out in another direction. The private house racket is played out, for the people are getting alarmed and laying in stocks of firearms to give the cracksmen a warm reception. We will scoop in the business district next. There are lots of fine pickings in some of the wholesale houses, and we have two or three marked which are easy to crack. Oh! There'll be no end of fun and boodle during the next three months, and then it will be time to take that vacation you spoke of."

"I am glad you are working toward the business center," said the woman. "But how are you on blowing?"

"Curly has been practicing lately," answered the lad, "and promises well. A fellow from St. Louis, an old timer, has him in tow and says he'll be a daisy in a few months. But we don't depend on blowing for good hauls. We'll take all the loose stuff we can find – such stuff that can be easily peddled and has a quick sale in offices and private houses. The governor's vault is a safe hiding place."

"But isn't this peddling fake risky?" asked Mrs. Claypole, uneasily.

"Bless you, no," replied the lad, laughing. "The cops will never suspect poor peddler boys of being mixed up with high toned cracksmen. The very openness of our street fake is an insurance against suspicion, and I understand the scheme is being adopted by the big bugs in New York."

"Well, you must be cautious, Herman. I don't want any of my chicks nabbed."

"You needn't be afraid, All," said the boy. "We've got everything fixed in case of trouble. He'll be a fly cop indeed, who tumbles to our racket."

"Do you think, Herman," said the woman, "that you could do a little job on my account?"

“Why, of course I can,” promptly replied the lad. Anything you want will be attended to: the boys swear by their mother. Just give it a name and consider it done.”

Mrs. Claypole smiled at Herman’s confident tone. She was proud of her influence over the “gang,” who were always ready to obey her slightest behests, and she was particularly pleased with the ardent homage of the handsome captain. She drew her chair nearer to him, and caressed him in a motherly fashion.

“Two people have offended me grievously,” she said in a tone of mingled mournfulness and malignity; “they have tried to damage my reputation in this neighborhood, and want to set Henry against me because I am kind and affectionate toward you, Herman.”

“Who are the villains?” cried the boy melodramatically. “Give me their names and the gang will soon settle their hash.”

“Oh!” responded Mrs. Claypole, with a languishing sigh, which had the effect of stirring Herman to deep anger, “I don’t want any rash deed of vengeance. This is a matter which can be disposed of without bloodshed. I would like their punishment to be lingering—to be in the nature of mental agony, the loss of friends and the sacrifice of good name—in short, to make them objects of scorn, to make them suffer as they intended I should suffer.”

“They shall do all this and more, I swear,” exclaimed the lad, excited by the quiver in the woman’s voice, and the tear she had forced to glisten in her eye. “Who are they?”

“One is a woman,” said Mrs. Claypole, “who watches my movements and circulates evil reports about my character—a malicious, spiteful wretch, whose life has been one long chapter of deceit and wickedness, and whose sole excuse for living now is that she may sow the seeds of dissension and hatred broadcast in the hearts of loving husbands and trusting wives. You know her Herman; she lives in this house.”

The lad jumped to his feet and paced the floor excitedly.

“It’s that Goggles,” he cried. “Know her? Why, of course I know her, the prying, meddling hussy. And she had dared to talk of you—to backbite and slander you! Say, Ally”—and he spoke in a tragic whisper, every syllable reaching the ears of the eavesdropper—“we’ll kidnap her and bury her alive. If she makes an outcry, this will settle her.”

And the lad pulled a murderous looking dirk from his hip pocket, and brandished it fiercely like a stage villain.

It was at this juncture that the transom closed, and Miss Goggles hurried to bed, shivering and quaking with fear. If she had listened a little longer she would have heard the cruel blonde acquiesce in this boyish scheme of revenge and become acquainted with a scarcely less fiendish plan to get even with Mr. Hadley for his impertinent interference in Mr. Claypole’s personal affairs.

But Miss Goggles had heard too much. Her nervous system was severely shocked. She passed a dreadful night, and in the morning was found dangerously ill with brain fever.

V

Shortly after the incident above recorded Chicago was startled by a series of bold and successful burglaries in the business section of the city.

The perpetrators of these crimes were skillful workers. They picked out first class establishments and carried off large stocks of such merchandise as was readily saleable. As a rule the safes were left untouched, the burglars being satisfied with the portable goods in the store.

Among the victims were Williamson & Graves, the hardware merchants, on Lake street, who were relieved of a valuable assortment of firearms, knives and tools; Cobb's circulating library, which lost a number of expensive books and stationery, and Mendelssohn's lace store, on Washington, near State street.

The lace store was completely sacked of its finest goods. All the imported hand made laces were taken. The burglars left the common grades in a state of confusion on the counters, and must have spent considerable time in selecting their booty. Mr. Mendelssohn estimated his loss at about \$10,000.

The store had been entered by the windows which opened into an alley in the rear of the building. The goods were taken out by the front door, which was found open in the morning.

Of course those daring robberies caused a commotion at police headquarters. No noted cracksmen were in the city, and yet the detectives were convinced that the burglaries were the work of old hands. Several expert criminal hunters were put to work on the case, but they worked diligently for weeks without striking the faintest clue.

The newspapers and public became impatient over the delay in capturing the daring burglars, and the central detail came in for a liberal dose of censure.

To make matters more complicated, it was openly charged that there had been no burglary at the Mendelssohn store, but that the proprietor, who was known to be financially embarrassed, had robbed himself to gain the sympathy of the public and make easy terms with his creditors.

Mr. Mendelssohn was greatly annoyed by this accusation. He acknowledged that his financial affairs were in a desperate condition, but he pointed to this past record as incompatible with the infamous act of which he was charged.

His friends admitted everything in regard to previous probity, but shrugged their shoulders significantly when they were asked to accept it as an assurance of present integrity.

“The facts are against you,” they remarked. “Burglars do not generally possess the technical knowledge to enable them to pick out the finest laces in the excitement of a midnight raid. If your store was despoiled by robbers, where are the robbers?”

And Mr. Mendelssohn’s inability to produce those living proofs of his innocence was regarded as additional evidence of his guilt!

Then came the attempt to find Mendelssohn’s accomplices, for it was evident that he could not have carried out this gigantic scheme of deception alone and unaided.

A hint was received at police headquarters that a clerk named Hadley was implicated. The note conveying the hint was written in a female hand. It read:

To the Chief of Police:

Dear Sir—Watch James Hadley, clerk in Mendelssohn’s store, about those stolen laces. Perhaps some of his lady friends are sporting a portion of those goods. At any rate, you can take the hint for what it’s worth.

ONE WHO SUSPECTS

The detectives did take the hint. For a week or two Hadley was constantly shadowed, and his lady acquaintances were subjected to a rigorous espionage, which, had they been aware of it, would have thrown them into hysterics.

Hadley’s fiancée, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy lumberman, wore some handsome laces at church one Sunday. The following day her father received a visit from a stranger, who poured poison into his ear concerning his prospective son-in-law. The stranger was promptly kicked out of the office, but when the lumberman’s daughter admitted that evening that the laces were the gift of Hadley some months previous the old man waxed angry and told her to throw them in the fire.

“There’s something wrong about the fellow,” he cried, “clerks cannot afford to buy such expensive gewgaws. Perhaps he helped Mendelssohn to rob himself.”

And Hadley was beside himself with grief when the very next morning, a district messenger brought him a parcel containing the laces and other presents he had made to his sweetheart, together with a note, blotted with tears, stating in simple but excruciating terms that her heart was broken and that they must part for ever more.

It was several months before Hadley could clear himself in the eyes of the young lady, and during that time he had wasted away to a mere shadow and suffered the torments of a lost soul in purgatory.

There was one member of the city detective force who took no stock in the story that Mr. Mendelssohn was his own burglar. This was Dennis Simmons; one of the eldest and shrewdest of Chicago’s able officers, who for the last seven years had been detained on bank work.

“Mr. Mendelssohn,” said Dennis to the grief stricken merchant, “don’t worry yourself to death. I am convinced that the robbery was the work of professional thieves, and I’m a Dutchman if I don’t pinch them before I’m many weeks older.”

This was the strongest expression Dennis could use, for everyone knows he is not a Dutchman, and wouldn’t be one for any consideration.

Mr. Mendelssohn was consoled by this expression of confidence.

“I thank you Mr. Simmons,” he said with emotion. “I hope heaven will prosper you in this work. If the thieves are not captured soon I shall be ruined in body and soul, for even my old father in Germany thinks I am the thief.”

“Cheer up,” said Dennis, encouragingly; “we’ll bag the game, and then you can take a month’s vacation to receive the apologies of your suspicious friends.

VI

If this were a romance instead of a story based on facts, it would be easy to associate Mr. Simmons’ name with some wonderful experiences during his search for the lace robbers.

Real detective work, however, rarely possesses romantic features. Success in this arduous calling is attained as much by patient plodding as by a keen appreciation of the habit and methods of criminals and a shrewd knowledge of the world. Sometimes the most important revelations are the result of sheer accident. As straws show the drift of a current, so do trivial incidents often guide detective skill to the accomplishment of great and important ends.

When Dennis pledged himself to “bag the game,” he had not the slightest clue to work upon. Like several of his confreres, he believed the robberies were committed by New York experts, but he was as much puzzled as they were when it was proved beyond peradventure that no metropolitan thieves of prominence, men who were skilled at this class of work, had been in town for months.

Consequently, Dennis had to “go it blind” for a time, trusting to Providence to furnish him a clue. And Providence didn’t shirk this grave duty.

Two or three days after his conversation with Mr. Mendelssohn the detective was detailed on a petty larceny case in a fashionable boarding house on Michigan avenue. The job was an easy one, and as he was about to leave the house a lady asked him if he were a judge of laces.

“No, madam,” said the detective; “why do you ask?”

“Because I have just made a wonderful bargain,” replied the lady. “I have bought several yards of the finest French hand made lace for \$1 a yard. It’s worth at least \$10 a yard.”

“Indeed,” said Dennis, his heart giving a great bound as he thought of that troublesome robbery at Mendelssohn’s: “of whom did you buy it?”

“Of a peddler – a nice looking, curly haired young man, wearing a velvet coat.”

The detective examined the lace, and although he was not an expert, he had sufficient knowledge of such goods to warrant him in the conclusion that the peddler was practically giving the lace away. He made an excuse to take the “bargain” down town and showed it to Mr. Mendelssohn, who immediately recognized it as a portion of his stolen stock.

Dennis had struck a clue. The description of the peddler tallied with that of Herman Landgraff, a boy whom he had arrested for sneak work several years ago, and whom he thought was leading a correct life. Still the detective did not think Landgraff was skillful enough to commit the lace robbery; the boy was probably the tool of older thieves, who had set him to peddle some of the goods as the safest means of disposing of them.

About the same time, another detective had his attention called to a cheap pocketbook bought from a peddler by a broker’s clerk. This pocketbook proved part of the stock stolen from Cobb’s Circulating library. The peddler who sold it answered to the description of Charlie Mott, a partner of Landgraff’s, and the brother of Molly Mott, whose thieving propensities and profligacy were the talk of Chicago for years.

“It never rains but it pours,” remarked Dennis to his colleague. “We are on the eve of a great haul.”

Having got track of a portion of the stolen property, Simmons felt that the rest of the work was comparatively simple. He soon located Landgraff and Mott. They lived in an old frame house on West Thirteenth street with Mrs. Landgraff.

The detective made cautious inquiries as to the habits of the boys and ascertained that they were regular night hawks, as well as street peddlers by day. They rarely reached home before day light, and invariably drove up in a buggy, from which they carried bundles into the house.

Two other boys, known as “Curly” and Herman, often accompanied them, and stopped with Mrs. Landgraff for days at a stretch.

As these facts developed, Simmons changed his mind about the connection of New York men with the burglaries. He had struck an organized gang of smart young thieves, who were probably solely responsible for the crimes which had startled the business community and puzzled the police.

It was late at night when Dennis reported the result of his investigation to the chief. He was instructed to arrest the lads, but as by this time they were undoubtedly on one of their marauding expeditions, Simmons concluded to swoop down on the old frame house in the early morning and capture the whole gang.

Three officers were detailed to assist Simmons, and at 4 o'clock in the morning they drove out on West Thirteenth street. Dennis talked enthusiastically about the importance of this expedition and the praise they would receive for breaking up such a daring and dangerous gang of burglars.

"It will be one of the biggest things of the year," he said, "and a splendid feather in all our caps."

Dennis' enthusiasm was infectious. Long before they reached the old frame house his colleagues were swelled with the magnitude of their mission and anticipated the glowing accounts of their efficiency and prowess which would adorn the columns of the newspapers.

The carriage was not taken direct to the house for fear of alarming the inmates. The officers left it a block away and approached on foot.

Two went to the rear of the building to intercept any of the boy burglars who might attempt to escape that way.

Simmons and the other officer banged on the front door, and loudly demanded admittance.

Not a sound came from inside. The place was in total darkness, and the loud knocks echoed and re-echoed through the hallway without bringing a response.

"They're in there fast asleep," said Dennis, "and nothing short of Gabriel's trump will rouse them."

"Let's kick in the door," suggested his colleague, who was anxious to complete the job.

"All right," said Dennis, "here goes."

A few vigorous kicks made kindling wood of the door, and the two officers entered the house, pistol in hand, ready for any resistance on the part of the boy burglars.

The house had an empty ring, and Dennis turned on his bull's eye, to start back in astonishment.

Not a vestige of furniture was seen on the lower floor. The upstairs rooms were equally bare. The birds had flown.

"This is the biggest thing of the year," said Dennis' companion, sarcastically.

Simmons bit his lip and said nothing. The officers in the rear of the house were called in. They laughed immoderately when they grasped the situation.

And all the way back to the Central station Dennis was the target for ruthless jokes, which he received without a word, but continued biting his nether lip until the blood came.

He left his brother officers at the station and started out again in grim silence. Before nightfall he had the burglarious peddlers located again. Mrs. Landgraff, her son and Curly had moved to a

brick house on Archer avenue, near the railway station; Herman and Mott were traced to a place on Brown street.

At 10 o'clock the lads were under lock and key at the Central station, and a wagon load of plunder, comprising laces from Mendelssohn's, books from Cobb's library, and guns, revolvers and cutlery from the hardware store of Williamson & Graves, was deposited in a room above their cells.

There was no more laughing at Dennis Simmons, who had been on duty forty eight hours and fulfilled his promise of making one of the most important captures of the year.

VII

The lads seemed stupefied by their arrest. Young Landgraff, who was addressed as "captain" by the others, was particularly cast down. He sat on the cot for several hours after he was placed in the cell staring at the wall with vacant eyes.

Next morning the expression of unutterable misery was still on his face. He turned to Simmons, who entered the cell with a substantial breakfast for him, and said in a hollow voice:

"Mr. Simmons, will you do me a favor?"

"Yes," answered Dennis, promptly, "if it is anything in reason."

"Who was it gave us away?"

The touch of anxiety in this query struck Simmons as peculiar. He did not reply immediately, and Landgraff continued, still more anxiously.

"Tell me if it was a woman."

Simmons' mind reverted to the lady who furnished the clue about the lace. Thinking the lad had some strong motive in seeking this information, he answered that it was a woman.

"I thought so," said the boy gloomily, and, then brightening up suddenly. "Let Curly and the others come in: we may have something to tell you."

Curly, Mott, and Herman were brought into the cell. The captain looked at them sadly and said:

"Boys, she gave us away."

"No," exclaimed the lads: "she'd never do that."

"It's true; Mr. Simmons says so," said Landgraff, tears glistening in his eyes which he resolutely brushed away with his coat cuff.

“Landgraff is right,” said Dennis, bewildered by the turn of affairs, but surmising that an interesting disclosure was imminent: “she furnished the clue.”

The lads groaned and looked ineffably distressed.

“What do you propose, captain?” asked Curly.

“Revenge,” exclaimed Landgraff, fiercely.

“Yes, that’s right,” said the others in chorus. “Let’s make a clean breast of it, and let the traitoress take equal chances with us.

“This is getting decidedly interesting,” said Dennis to himself. “I wonder who she is, and what she has to do with these kids.”

“Mr. Simmons,” Landgraff said, with an air of dignity which was rather amusing, “if you will kindly furnish me with pens, ink and paper I will draw up a statement about those robberies and furnish you with the information which will be of great service to you.”

Dennis readily complied with this request, after removing the others to their respective cells.

In an hour the statement was prepared, and an astonishing document it proved. It was a full confession of the long series of burglaries which had given the police so much trouble. But the most remarkable passages related to the connection of Lawyer Claypole and Mrs. Claypole with the gang.

Landgraff told how himself and colleagues had been worked upon by this estimable couple. “she told us fairy tales,” he wrote, “and got us all in love with her. She promised to elope with me this summer, and I believe she was in earnest, for she said she didn’t have it very comfortable with the old man. Claypole engineered the burglaries, and we acted under his instructions. He put up this street peddling fake, and we kept piles of stuff in the vault in his office, in Dearborn street. He didn’t always do the square thing, but we were bamboozled by his wife, who promised everything to make matters run smooth and easy like. Now that she’s squealed, we think it nothing but fair that we should tell all about the snap, so that she may get the same deal as we got. The Mendelssohn job was done for Mrs. Claypole. She wanted to get square with a fellow named Hadley, who had been saying rough things about her, and she started the yarn that he helped the Dutchman to rob himself. She took me to the store one day and gave me points about the laces that were best to take. She had a trunk full of the stuff. We weren’t so bad before these Claypoles got a hold of us, only doing a little fake now and then while we were peddling. This is all a true story, and we give it away so that the fiend in female form may be pinched and go down where she belongs, for playing false with poor boys who loved and lost her.”

Simmons read this curious epistle without regard to the romance it contained. Claypole was known to him as a reputable lawyer, and he could scarcely believe the story of his connections with the gang.

But he lost no time, however, in going to the office on Dearborn street. The lawyer had not been there that day. An inspection of the vault revealed a lot of plate, jewelry, silks, velvets, laces, and other valuable property.

This was the startling evidence of the lawyer's close relations with the youthful gang of burglars. Simmons hurried to the boarding house on West Adams street to learn that Mr. and Mrs. Claypole had removed their trunks on the previous evening and left no address.

The most diligent inquiry failed to find traces of their whereabouts, and neither Mr. Claypole nor his fascinating wife have been seen from that day to this.

The boys had a speedy trial. Their spirits were broken by the perfidious conduct, as they supposed, of their "mother." Being under age they were sent to the Bridewell for eighteen months each.

This clever capture of Dennis Simmons broke up one of the most dangerous gangs that ever infested Chicago. It restored Mr. Mendelssohn's good name and reconciled him to his old father in Germany.

But trouble seems inseparable from some men. Mendelssohn's fortune was very precarious afterward, and two years ago he committed suicide in Milwaukee.

Landgraff is dead; Charlie Mott moved to Indiana with his people; Curly, taking the advice of Dennis Simmons when he served his term at the Bridewell, enlisted in the United States army, and Herman, who turned out a very hard case, is doing a ten years' term at Joliet.

VIII

And what of Miss Goggles?

The inquisitive spinster paid dearly for her vigil at the transom. For several weeks she hovered between life and death. During her spells of delirium she screamed out confusedly about daggers and pistols and new made graves, and she said she was going to be buried alive.

When she was convalescent the boarders noticed a change in her demeanor. She was quiet and subdued, and her shrill voice lost its sharp ring which added harshness to her bitter sentences. She did not interest herself as much in the affairs of her neighbors. Her spirit of prying inquisitiveness seemed to be broken, and more than one of her neighbors remarked:

"Miss Goggles has greatly improved since her sickness."

Mr. Johnson, it was noticed, kept silent on the subject, but his kindly brown eyes were forever fixed on the thin, pale face of the spinster as though he were trying to read the secret of her reformation.

Miss Goggles' sudden seizure and subsequent dangerous condition had withdrawn attention from the deplorable conduct of Mrs. Claypole, and that attractive lady was permitted to enjoy her flirtations in peace.

Interest was not revived in her again until the arrest of the boy burglars, and then there was a sensation in the Frelinghuysen boarding house.

Mr. Hadley, who for personal reasons kept pace with the movements of the police in the lace robbery, startled the boarders at dinner the day after the arrests by rushing in, excitedly shouting:

"I told you so!"

"Told us what?" asked Mr. Johnson, scowling at the agitated clerk.

"Why, that she was no good."

"Ah! that's very explicit," sarcastically remarked the old gentleman, causing a titter round the board, "and who may she be?"

"Mrs. Claypole," shrieked Hadley almost frantically, as he dropped into his seat and viciously attacked the soup.

This declaration had a curious effect. Every knife and fork dropped on the instant, and all eyes were fixed on Hadley, and ten voices, blended with intense curiosity, exclaimed:

"Why, what is the matter?"

This was one of the supreme moments in the clerk's life. He dropped his table spoon, mounted on a chair, and addressed the boarders in a half oratorical, half hysterical fashion, as follows:

"Ladies and Gentlemen—You all know me and how I have suffered. The thieves have been caught; a confession has been made: Mr. and Mrs. Claypole are implicated. She was not so much of a flirt as a thief. The nicely dressed, curly headed boy who called her mother was the captain of the gang. He was a peddler. She tried to spoil my character. The officers are looking for her. She will be hung if they catch her, and I shall marry my darling Ophelia. And"—

Here Hadley broke down, dropped into his seat again and buried his head in the soup plate, while his frame shook with convulsive sobs.

There was intense excitement in the dining room. Miss Goggles shrieked:

"I knew it!"

"Henrietta!" cried Mr. Johnson, in amazement, bending on her a look of earnest inquiry.

The spinster became confused, but repeated hysterically:

“I knew it!”

Then broke out a gabble of conversation, during which the spinster’s significant remark was forgotten, and the whole story was drawn out piecemeal from Hadley. Every one seemed delighted with the misfortune which had overtaken the audacious blonde and her bland like husband, the only regrets being that they had left the house before the officers arrived to arrest them.

In the parlor that evening Mr. Johnson and Miss Goggles sat in earnest conversation long after the rest of the boarders had retired.

“And that was the cause of your illness,” Mr. Johnson was saying, as he moved his chair a little nearer the spinster.

“Yes, I was frightened out of my wits by the young man’s ferocious threat,” she replied meekly.

“And you never intend to meddle with other people’s affairs again?” he asked tenderly.

“Never.”

“Henrietta!”

“Mr. Johnson!”

“You are the woman I’ve been looking for all my life. Curiosity, woman’s greatest failing, seems entirely crushed out of you. I am yours; will you be mine?”

Miss Goggles did not faint. She threw herself into Mr. Johnson’s arms, and they sealed the betrothal with a kiss.

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