

The Story of a Ring
How the Perpetrator of a Bank
Robbery Was Detected

In looking over a collection of finger-rings in the possession of a friend who has a great fondness for such ornaments I came across a most unique character.

It was a heavy band of gold, set with a cameo cut to represent snake that lay coiled with head erect. Its eyes of emerald seemed to snap at a tiny bird, also cut in stone.

“There is a singular incident connected with that ring, which,” my friend remarked, as I picked it up and carefully examined it, “perhaps you would like to hear.”

“I should,” was my reply; and he narrated a story which I will tell as nearly as I can in his own words.

“Three years ago I went to pass a few days in Clifton—as you may know, a noted summer residence, but a better resting place than most ‘resorts.’

“I had been there only a few hours when I saw on the hand of a lady who lodged at the same hotel a ring which greatly excited my curiosity, for reasons that will appear later in my story.

“I easily secured an introduction to her, and in the course of our first conversation referred to this ring, no longer on her hand, as having attracted my especial attention.

“‘It is very curious,’ she said.

“‘Does it belong to you?’ I inquired.

“‘It does not, but was lent me by a friend.’

“‘May I inquire the name of the owner?’

“‘She requested me not to mention her in connection with the ring; so you will please excuse me from telling you her name.’

“‘I should like to purchase it, if she would dispose of it for a reasonable sum,’ I remarked, interrogatively.

“‘I will learn whether she is willing to sell it, and let you know soon.’

“Before my arrival in Clifton there had been many cases of pocket-picking and petty theft in the place, and on the fifth night after I came the village bank was burglarized.

“Though the minor offenses had caused no particular excitement, the burglary did, for the temporary as well as the permanent residents of Clifton would lose considerable sums if the stolen funds were not recovered.

“Every possible effort was made to ferret the crime to its source, but so shrewdly had it been planned and executed that no clew to its perpetrators seemed likely to be discovered.

“The detective—of wide renown—employed upon the case after a thorough investigation said:

“‘It baffles my skill as noting in my previous experience.’

“He had labored indefatigably but in vain for several days, when I requested him one morning to accompany me to my room. After I had locked the door and we were seated I observed:

“‘Straws show which way the wind blows, and I may be able to tell you something that will aid you in your present work.’

“‘I shall be pleased to receive assistance,’ he replied.

“‘Two years ago the 15th of last April,’ I began, ‘I was on my way from Elkart to Chicago, when, at South Bend, a lady entered the closely-packed car in which I was seated and asked me: “Is this seat occupied?”’

“‘“It is not,” I answered, rising that she might pass to the place next the window.

“‘“If you please,” she said, “I will take the outer seat, as I shall only go to the next station, if my brother meets me there.”’

“‘She was dressed in deep mourning and wore a heavy veil, which she kept drawn over her face, rendering it impossible for me to get a glimpse at her face,

“‘I endeavored, without success, to engage her in conversation. She appeared willing to talk, but her sentences were interrupted quite frequently by sobs, and she would raise her handkerchief to her face, evidently to wipe the tears from her eyes.

“‘I was very tired, and fell asleep soon after the train pulled out of Carlisle. The stranger had not left the car.

“‘When I awoke, just before reaching Otis, she was gone, as were my gold watch and chain and my pocketbook, containing several hundred dollars and numerous valuable papers,

“I learned that she got off the train at Laporte, and had no doubt she was the one who had picked my pockets.

“I was unable to recover my watch and chain and money, but the papers of no value to anyone except myself, were several days later returned to me from New York city by mail.

“On her left hand I noticed a curious ring and the day on which I came to Clifton I saw its exact counterpart on the hand of a lady who is at this hotel.

“Confident that two such rings do not exist, I made inquiries of this lady relative, to the one I had seen on her hand. I could only learn that it belonged to a friend, who did not wish her name mentioned in connection with it.

“The person with whom this lady is more intimate than with anyone else in Clifton is Mrs. Mary Ashleigh, whom I suspect to be the owner of the ring, which I have not seen since the time specified.”

“You do not suspect that Mrs. Ashleigh was connected with the burglary, do you?” the detective asked, in a tone of surprise mingled with horror.

“And it is not strange that he was astonished and horrified at the idea of her guilt, as Mrs. Ashleigh seemed to be one of the wealthiest as she was one of the handsomest and most attractive women in Clifton.

“I suspect only what I have told you,” I replied; “and if you base your future investigation upon what I have said, I do not wish to publicly figure in the affair.”

“You shall not. And I will prosecute my investigations in such a way that Mrs. Ashleigh, if innocent, shall not know that the faintest suspicion ever attached to her.”

“To make the story as short as possible: In the cottage occupied by Mrs. Ashleigh were found nearly all the spoils of the pocket-picking, the larceny and the burglary, besides burglar's tools and innumerable articles for effecting disguise. Confronted with these evidences of her guilt, she calmly said:

“The daughter of poor but estimable parents, more than fifteen years ago I left my home in disgrace, to get my living by my wits.

“Eventually, I attached myself to a gang of miscreants, and met with wonderful success as a pickpocket and confidence woman.

“My face and manners easily won me the attention of gentlemen who implicitly trusted me, and whom in various ways I victimized without arousing their suspicions.

“For instance, the impressible teller of the bank in this place was fascinated by my charms,’ smiling as the words left her lips, ‘and more than once has explained to me all that an inexperienced cracksman need know in order to appropriate the contents of the vault without leaving any clew to his identity.

“I have a wonderful faculty of remembering the names and faces of those whom I have victimized, and wherever I go I am on the lookout for them. Learning that you,’ addressing me, ‘were in Clifton, I felt certain that you, seeing it, would recognize the ring which I carelessly exposed to your view on the occasion when I relieved you of your valuables. I at once obtained it from her to whom I had lent it, but you had seen it, and I have no doubt that it was the immediate cause of a revelation of my misdeeds.’

“She was arrested, tried, found guilty on various counts, and sentenced to imprisonment for fifteen years persistently refusing to divulge her real name.

“Her two ‘servants’ were, found to be her accomplices, and each was imprisoned for five years.

“The impressible teller of the Clifton national bank was discharged from his position

“The ring in your hand ‘Mrs. Ashleigh’ gave me ‘as a partial compensation for the loss you sustained at my hands two years and more ago.’”— Fred F. Foster, in Chicago News.

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