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THE STOLEN LACES. An Episode in the History of Chicago Crime.

FROM THE DIARY OF DETECTIVE DENIS SIMMONS, OF THE BANK DETAIL OF THE CENTRAL STATION.

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 I want to set my foot 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."

"One is a woman," said Mrs. Claypole, "who violates 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 busybody. And she has dared to talk of you—to backbite and slander you! Say, ally—and he spoke in a tragic whisper, every syllable reaching the acute ears of the eavesdropper—"we'll kidnap her and bury her alive. If she makes any outcry we'll set her free."

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.

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 salable. As a rule the safes were left untouched, the burglars being satisfied with the portable goods in the store.

The detectives were convinced that the burglaries were the work of old hands. Several expert criminal painters 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 his past record as incompatible with the imputation of which he was charged.

His friends admitted everything in regard to previous profligacy, 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 laces?"

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

Then came an attempt to find Mendelssohn's accomplices, for it was evident that the laces had not been 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 delicate female hand. It read:

To the Chief of Police: Dean Sir—Watch James Hadley, clerk in Mendelssohn's store, about those stolen laces. Perceptions of his lady friends are sporting a portion of the goods. At any rate, you can take the hint for what it is worth.

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 on 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 work 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 gawwags. Perhaps he helped Mendelssohn 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, starting in simple but execrating terms that his heart was broken, and that they must part forever more.

It was several months before Hadley could get himself in the eyes of the young lady and her father, 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 Denis Simmons, one of the oldest and shrewdest of Chicago's able officers, who for the last seven years had been detailed on bank work.

"Mr. Mendelssohn," said Denis 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."

"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 Denis, 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 not an expert, he had sufficient knowledge of such goods to warrant him in the conclusion that the peddler was probably giving the lace away.

Denis had struck a clue. The description of the peddler tallied with that of Herman Landgraf, a boy whom he had arrested for smuggling cigars a year ago, and whom he thought was leading a correct life. Still, the detective did not think that Landgraf 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.

But this was a great discovery, and Simmons was elated over it.

About the same time another detective held his attention called to a cheap pocketbook from a peddler by a broker's clerk. This pocketbook proved to be 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 Landgraf's, and the brother of Mollie Mott, whose thieving propensities and profligacy were the talk of Chicago for years.

"It never rains but it pours," remarked Denis 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 easy. He soon located Landgraf and Mott. They lived in an old frame house on West Thirtieth street with Mrs. Landgraf.

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 daylight, 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. Landgraf for days at a stretch.

As these facts developed Simmons changed his mind about the connection of the 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 started the business community and puzzled the police.

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

Three men were detailed to assist Simmons, and at 4 o'clock in the morning they drove out on West Thirtieth street. Denis 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."

Denis' enthusiasm was infectious. Long before they reached the old frame house his colleagues were awed with the magnitude of their mission, and anticipating 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, but to a vacant lot. The officers left it a block away and approached on foot.

The lad had some strong motive in seeking this information, he answered that it was a woman.

"Thought so," said the boy gloomily, and then enlightening us 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 Landgraf, tears gathering in his eyes, which he resolutely brushed away with his coat cuff.

"Landgraf is right," said Denis, bewildered at the turn of affairs, but surmising that an interesting disclosure was imminent; "she furnished the clue."

The lads groaned and looked ineffably discontented.

"What do you propose, captain?" asked Curly.

"Revenge," exclaimed Landgraf, fiercely.

"Yes, that's right," said the others in chorus. "Let's make a clean breast of it, and let the traitress take equal chances with us."

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

"Mr. Simmons," Landgraf 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 information which will be of great service to you."

Denis 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.

Landgraf 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 long."

drawn 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 Fringing-board 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 wildly 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 a 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.

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