

Vanity Fair - March 2010

The Suspects Wore Louboutins

The most audacious burglary gang in recent Hollywood history—accused of stealing more than \$3 million in clothing and jewelry from Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, and other stars—appears to be a bunch of club-hopping Valley kids, motivated by vanity and celebrity-worship.

By: Nancy Jo Sales

Alexis Neiers told cops that she and Nick Prugo had been drinking at Beso, a trendy bar-restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard, when Prugo got a call from Rachel Lee telling him to come and meet her. It was July 13, 2009. Neiers said she knew that Prugo and Lee—both 19 and former classmates at Indian Hills, an alternative high school in Agoura Hills, an affluent suburb of Los Angeles—had been burglarizing the homes of celebrities. This “included Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, Rachel Bilson, Audrina Patridge, and others she was not sure about,” according to the L.A.P.D.’s report.

Neiers, 18, said that she was drunk and “not sure what was going on” as Prugo parked his white Toyota on the road by a house in the Hollywood Hills. Later, she said, she would find out that it was the home of *Pirates of the Caribbean* star Orlando Bloom. Her friends knew that Bloom was in New York shooting a movie; they researched this kind of information on celebrity Web sites like TMZ. They discovered the locations of stars’ homes on Google Maps and celebrityaddressaerial.com.

Neiers said that Lee and another girl, Diana Tamayo, 19, got out of Lee’s white Audi A4, and the four kids walked uphill to Bloom’s residence, a stark, black mansion. Neiers didn’t want to go inside, she said, but still she followed. She told police that Prugo, Lee, and Tamayo seemed to be covering their faces with their hoodies, apparently in order to hide from security cameras. Lee cut a section out of the chain-link fence surrounding the property, Neiers said, and the kids crawled through it.

She said they went around the house, checking windows and doors, finally finding an unlocked door by Bloom’s pool area. They went inside and the other kids started to “ransack” Bloom’s home, according to Neiers. That night, they would allegedly steal close to \$500,000 in Rolex watches, Louis Vuitton luggage, clothing, and artwork. “What are you doing? Get me the fuck out of here,” Neiers said she screamed. Then she went outside and threw up and peed in the bushes.

The Fame Monster

On November 16, Neiers arrived at Los Angeles Superior Court for her arraignment with an E! reality crew in tow. Her show, originally intended to be about her life as a party girl on the Hollywood scene, had now become a chronicle of her effort to stay out of jail. She was being charged that day with one count of residential burglary of Orlando Bloom's home. In the media, she was being called a member of "the Burglar Bunch," "the Bling Ring," nicknames for the most successful and outrageous burglary gang in recent Hollywood memory: a gang of well-off kids from the Valley.

Camera crews from local news stations, *Good Morning America*, *Dateline NBC*, and TMZ were waiting outside Department 30 on the third floor of the courthouse. Producers from various shows murmured as Neiers—a former hip-hop- and pole-dancing instructor—sat calmly on a bench, allowing a makeup woman to touch her up.

A leggy girl with long, dark hair and shimmering blue-green eyes, Neiers was wearing a tweed miniskirt, a pink sweater, and six-inch Christian Louboutin heels. "I have a pretty cool shoe collection going on right now," she said.

The L.A.P.D.'s report on the Bling Ring states that Nick Prugo told cops that Rachel Lee—a Korean-American girl from Calabasas, a wealthy suburb in the Valley—was "the driving force of the burglary crew and that her motivation was based on her desire to own the designer wardrobes of the Hollywood celebrities she admired." Charged in the case are Neiers; Prugo; Lee; Tamayo; their friend Courtney Ames, 19; and Roy Lopez Jr., 27, a bouncer Ames knew from a waitressing job. (All have pleaded not guilty, except for Lee, whose arraignment was pending at press time.)

Between October of 2008 and August of 2009, the alleged members of the Bling Ring collectively stole more than \$3 million in jewelry and high-end designer goods from a number of Young Hollywood players: Hilton, Lohan, Patridge (a regular on the reality show *The Hills*), Bilson (former star of *The O.C.*), original *Beverly Hills 90210* cast member Brian Austin Green and his girlfriend, actress Megan Fox. They are said to have tried to rob *High School Musical's* Ashley Tisdale too, but fled when discovered by a female houseguest.

The thieves apparently had a taste for luxury brands: Chanel, Gucci, Tiffany, Cartier, Prada, Marc Jacobs, Dolce & Gabbana, Burberry, Yves Saint Laurent. They allegedly stole clothes, shoes, handbags, makeup, perfume, underwear. They also took Green's Sig Sauer .380 semi-automatic handgun.

At her lawyer's office, a week before her arraignment, Neiers denied any involvement in the burglaries. "I'm a firm believer in Karma," she said, "and I think this situation was attracted into my life because it was supposed to be a huge learning lesson for me to grow and expand as a spiritual human being. I see myself being like an Angelina Jolie," she said, "but even stronger, pushing even harder for the universe and for peace and for the health of our planet." She was

sounding almost like a real celebrity. “God didn’t give me these talents and looks to just sit around being a model or being famous. I want to lead a huge charity organization. I want to lead a country, for all I know.”

Moments before her arraignment began, a news producer approached, asking Neiers for an interview. “I’m going to make a statement on the courthouse steps,” the pretty defendant promised. She runway-walked into the courtroom as the cameras started rolling.

The Rat

Nick Prugo has a different take on the events of the night of the Bloom burglary. “We didn’t even go to Beso that night,” he said. A slender boy with an angular face and small brown eyes, he was sitting in front of the fire at the Encino home of his lawyer, Sean Erenstoft, on a rainy night in December.

Charged with seven counts of residential burglary, each bringing a possible sentence of two to six years, Prugo is potentially facing serious time. In October, he confessed to police without first getting a deal. For weeks after he was arrested, on September 17 (after being fingered by a tipster), he denied everything; but then, he says, he was finding it difficult to breathe, sleep, eat—“I was even losing my hair.”

“He confessed to crimes we didn’t even know he committed,” Officer Brett Goodkin, the lead investigator in the case, said on the phone. “Even though I was charged with more, you know, things,” Prugo said, “I still think it was the right thing to do.”

He said that on the night of the Bloom burglary “my parents were out of town. Alexis’s mom had kicked her out of the house. So Alexis moved in with me.” Neiers also told cops that her “mother kicked her out of her home.” Prugo, according to the L.A.P.D. report, said the reason was that Neiers had been smoking OxyContin. “Obviously it’s not true,” says Neiers. “Nick Prugo’s credibility is questionable at best,” says her lawyer, Jeffery Rubenstein.

“Miranda Kerr, a Victoria’s Secret model, was dating Orlando Bloom, and Rachel [Lee] wanted Victoria’s Secret model clothes,” said Prugo. Lee’s lawyer, Peter Korn, would say only, “I don’t want to participate in the media attention in this case.”

“We planned to meet” at Bloom’s, Prugo said. “Me and Alexis met Rachel and Diana. We went up to the house.” The surveillance video from Bloom’s residence on the night of the robbery shows four youthful-looking figures coming up a lamplit hill, all covering their heads with their arms and hoods while walking backward, apparently trying to hide their faces from security cameras. “How would a drunk person, so sick, throwing up,” as Neiers claimed she was, “be walking backwards up a hill?” Prugo asked.

Whenever they robbed celebrities’ homes, Prugo said, it went like this: “You grabbed a suitcase

and filled it up with whatever you wanted.” He said Lee called it “going shopping.” “In [Bloom’s] master bedroom, Rachel found a stash of Rolexes and, like, fifteen hundred dollars. Alexis grabbed a Louis Vuitton laptop-size bag and she was rocking it as a purse. Miranda Kerr had a dress there by Alex Perry—like, a one-of-a-kind runway dress. She took that.”

The Bloom surveillance video shows two of the four figures coming and going up and down the hill with large bags several times between three and four a.m. The bags are so unwieldy that one of the figures stumbles. Prugo said that he and Neiers left around five a.m., but Lee and Tamayo went back inside because, Lee said, “I want artwork ‘cause I’m moving to Vegas and I want stuff to decorate my house.”

Some time later, Prugo said, he sold most of Bloom’s Rolexes to Johnny Ajar—a.k.a. “Johnny Dangerous,” and, according to the police report, their “fence”—a thuggish ex-con and promoter at Les Deux who would allegedly get Prugo and his under-age friends into the club. When cops searched Ajar’s home, they found Brian Austin Green’s pistol. Ajar is now in Los Angeles’s Twin Tower Correctional Facility, charged with possession of narcotics and a firearm. “He gave us \$5,000 for, like, 10 Rolexes,” Prugo said, “which is I guess a ripoff now that I think of it.”

Ajar’s lawyer, Michael Goldstein, says, “I find it troubling that Prugo, who according to most of the players is the mastermind of these burglaries along with Lee, is now implicating everyone else while my client remains incarcerated.”

“I Loved Her”

It was left to the adults dealing with the aftermath of the Bling Ring—cops, lawyers, the victims—to ask “Why?” “Why did they do this?” asked Audrina Patridge, whose home was burglarized on February 22, 2009, Oscar night. “I watched the surveillance videos,” she said, “expecting it to be these big scary guys, and instead it was these two kids”—allegedly Lee and Prugo.

In the grainy video, a girl and boy who seem to resemble Prugo and Lee enter Patridge’s Hollywood Hills home (they got in through an unlocked door). They pick through her things. The girl looks composed; the boy looks jumpy.

“They took bags and bags of stuff,” Patridge said. “They took my great-grandma’s jewelry, my passport, my laptop, jeans made to fit my body to my perfect shape.” The estimated value of her stolen property was \$43,000. Patridge said she believes the thieves were motivated by her fame. “Rachel Lee was a big fan of me. I was her target,” she said she’d heard from cops. “She’s a little obsessed girl, I gotta tell you. She’s going to get what she deserves.”

“Were teenagers too enthralled by stars?” asked *The New York Times*. “They did it for the money. This was their job,” said Officer Goodkin, who took over the case from detectives when Prugo’s lawyer approached him with his client’s confession. But Goodkin said he was also struck

by the “stalkerish” aspect of the crimes. “It may be a stretch, but is wanting to wear somebody’s clothes that different from wanting to wrap yourself up in their skin, like that guy in *The Silence of the Lambs*?”

Meanwhile, Prugo said that he and his accomplices never discussed “why.” “We just did it. I know it sounds dumb, but Rachel just wanted the clothes. She wanted to look pretty.” As for himself, Prugo said, “I was just following Rachel ... I loved her almost like a sister.”

Nick and Rachel

Nick Prugo met Rachel Lee in 2006 at Indian Hills, where he had transferred after being kicked out of Calabasas High School for excessive absences. He was a troubled kid who had been diagnosed with A.D.H.D., for which he was prescribed Concerta, and “anxiety issues,” for which he was given Zoloft. He said that Lee was “the first person I felt was, like, my best friend.” They became “inseparable,” in constant contact, phoning, IMing, texting.

She was a fashionable girl whom Prugo and Neiers describe as “spoiled” and “haughty.” She had troubles of her own; apparently she didn’t get along with her mother, Vickie Kwon, a North Korean immigrant and owner of two centers of the tutoring company Kumon. Prugo claims, “Rachel hates her stepfather,” whom her mother married when Lee was in her early teens. (Neither Lee nor Kwon responded to requests for comment.)

Around this time, Prugo said, he was also becoming estranged from his parents, Melva-Lynn and Frank, a senior vice president at IM Global, a film-and-television sales-and-distribution company, and the foreign sales agent for the low-budget blockbuster *Paranormal Activity*. “Me and my parents had a falling-out,” Prugo said, not wishing to elaborate. “I can’t blame them. Whatever I’ve done, it’s my responsibility.”

He said that he and his new friend, Lee, “bonded over fashion. I like fashion, I like clothes. I like to think that I’m a stylish guy.” He dreamed of designing his own line, as did Lee, who talked about attending the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in L.A. “A lot of the *Hills* girls went there.”

Throughout the 10th grade, Prugo said, they were a couple of “carefree kids,” “smoking weed, hanging out at Zuma Beach, going to parties with a lot of under-age kids doing beer pong.” And then, that summer, things started to change, when Prugo said Lee proposed they rob the house of a boy in Woodland Hills whom Prugo knew to be out of town. “I’m like, O.K., whatever, just wanting to please her.”

“I’m in the house,” he said, “walking back and forth, freaking out. I mean, it’s weird to go through somebody’s things.” But Lee, he said, was always “very into it, focused”—so relaxed that when they burglarized the home of Rachel Bilson, on May 9, Lee took the time to go into the bathroom and have a bowel movement.

At that first burglary in the Valley, Prugo said, Lee found a box with \$8,000 in cash under a bed. Which calmed him down. “We each get four grand. Like, this isn’t so bad. We didn’t kill anybody.” The next day, they went shopping on Rodeo Drive.

Prugo said they fell into a nearly nightly ritual they called “checking cars”—taking credit cards and cash from unlocked Bentleys, Mercedeses, and other fancy rides parked in their neighborhood. The next day, they’d go shopping. “We’d go to, like, Kitson,” a Melrose boutique popular with starlets. “We’d walk in, stylized and beautiful. We’d use the cards—no one would question.”

Meanwhile, Prugo said, he was developing a cocaine habit, “so I was also stealing for drugs.” (Arrested for possession in 2009, he’s entered into a Deferred Entry of Judgment program, hoping to get the charge dismissed. He says he’s clean now.)

He says he doesn’t remember exactly why he and Lee decided to start burglarizing celebrities’ homes, except that “these were women with, like, fashion sense. Rachel watched *The Hills*, *Gossip Girl*—all those shows. She loved their clothes.” They started “checking up on celebrity Web sites. We’d be like a little research team.” They’d drive by celebrities’ homes to do surveillance, figuring out how to get in.

They picked Paris Hilton as their first victim, Prugo said, because they figured she was “dumb.” “Like, who would leave a door unlocked? Who would leave a lot of money lying around?”

One night in October of 2008, he says, he and Lee entered Hilton’s sprawling tile-roofed mansion in a gated community in the Hollywood Hills, opening the front door with a key they had found under the mat. “Stupid,” Prugo said, shrugging. He said he found the sensation of suddenly being in Hilton’s home “horrifying. There was that percentage of ‘Wow, this is Paris Hilton’s house,’ but as soon as I put my foot in the door I was just wanting to run out.”

He says he served as a lookout at the top of the stairs while Lee went into Hilton’s bedroom to search for valuables. “I was sweating unnaturally. Every five minutes, I was yelling, Let’s get the fuck out of here. She was like, It’s fine, it’s fine, let’s keep going.”

Lee took some expensive bras and a designer dress that night, he says (he can’t remember which; there would be so many). They took a bottle of Grey Goose vodka from Hilton’s “nightclub room.” They took “crumpled cash,” he claims, “fifties, hundreds,” from Hilton’s purses.

The idea was to take so little that the heiress wouldn’t notice—and so they could come back again. Hilton actually didn’t notice or at least didn’t report any of the Bling Ring burglaries until December 19, 2008, when Roy Lopez allegedly stole close to \$2 million worth of her jewelry, stuffing it into one of her Louis Vuitton tote bags. Lopez has been charged with one count of residential burglary. His lawyer, David Diamond, says his client “did not steal anything” from

Hilton.

“We found about, like, five grams of coke in Paris’s house” on another night, Prugo told police; he says they snorted it and left. Then they “drove around Mulholland, having the best time of our lives.”

“I don’t know why anyone would listen to allegations made by a self-confessed thief,” said Dawn Miller, a rep for Hilton.

My So-Called Real Life

At Alexis Neiers’s home in Westlake Village on the afternoon of her arraignment, the E! reality crew was filming a scene in which Neiers’s parents recount for their younger daughter, Gabrielle, what happened in court that day. Neiers’s mother, Andrea Arlington Dunn, and father, Mikel Neiers, stood in the living room, taking direction from E! supervising producer Gennifer Gardiner, who was feeding them lines: “Tell her, ‘Everything’s going to be O.K., Gabby.’”

“Everything’s going to be O.K., Gabby,” said Dunn, who was still dressed for court in a brown suit. A former Playboy Playmate, Dunn—now married to Jerry Dunn, a production designer for television—is a masseuse and holistic health-care practitioner. Their house, which sits on a rolling, manicured street, is decorated with religious talismans and floor-standing statues of Buddha which Dunn said she got at the closing of a Thai restaurant.

Mikel Neiers, Alexis’s father, a tall man in a blazer and jeans—a former director of photography on *Friends* who Alexis says “has been in the industry forever”—was looking rather shell-shocked. “He doesn’t really have a place right now,” Dunn said, explaining why her ex-husband sometimes lives with the family.

“I’ve had a lot of struggles with my dad falling off the face of this earth and not being a father,” Alexis had complained earlier. (Her father declined to comment on this.) Continuing on the theme of her difficulties, she said, “I had a boyfriend who was into drugs.”

Alexis’s “dysfunctional background” was the reason why, she said, she “related so well” to Tess Taylor, who sometimes also lives in the Neiers-Dunn household. Taylor, 20, a Playboy Cyber Girl, is still being investigated for her role in the Bling Ring burglaries, according to sources in the L.A.P.D. Taylor’s lawyer, Jeffery Rubenstein, had no comment.

Alexis met Taylor (a stage name; her real name is Adler), a dark-haired bombshell, in ballet class when they were toddlers. “We took her in” six years ago, Alexis said. “My mom kinda fell off the face of the planet,” Taylor said on the phone. She said she doesn’t know where her mother is. “I feel like she’s my other half,” said Alexis, “I love to go out and dance with my sister.” They can also be seen making out with each other in the straight-to-DVD teen flick *Frat Party*.

It was their ubiquity on the Hollywood club scene that got E! interested in the girls for their reality show, tentatively titled *Pretty Wild*, last year. The pilot—which airs in March; unfortunately, I may be in it, having been around while they were filming—includes a wild night in which Alexis and Taylor hit the club Wonderland in Hollywood with their friend rapper Mickey Avalon. “He’s such an awesome guy!” Alexis says.

The morning after, October 22, the L.A.P.D. showed up at Alexis’s door with a search warrant. In the house, cops found a Marc Jacobs handbag allegedly belonging to Rachel Bilson and a Chanel necklace allegedly belonging to Lindsay Lohan. Alexis denies stealing the items, saying, “I have receipts for everything.” The reality-crew cameras kept rolling as Alexis exited Van Nuys Jail that night after being bailed out on a \$50,000 bond. Taylor was released after questioning.

It was through Taylor that Alexis had come to know Nick Prugo—who knew Taylor via mutual friends in the “Valley party scene.” (Taylor went to Oak View High School, while Alexis was home-schooled.) “I didn’t care for Nick,” Alexis said, “because he took all of Tess’s attention. There was a lot of jealousy between me and Tess and him.”

“Tess wanted me to be her little best friend,” said Prugo. “Tess and Alexis got into a fight about me.” He also claims that Rachel Lee was “jealous” of his friendship with the girls.

Alexis said Prugo told her and Taylor that he was a “stylist” for his father’s film company, which was presumably why he had access to the expensive designer clothes he would let the girls “borrow.” And that is why, Taylor explained, she could be seen in a tryout for a commercial for Axe body spray wearing a vest that cops say belongs to Rachel Bilson—because “Nick dressed me for the commercial.” Prugo maintains that Alexis and Taylor were aware the clothes were stolen, and made up the story about his being a stylist as a cover for Alexis’s mother.

“Nick really liked the life we had,” Alexis said. “He wanted to live like us. He wanted to tag along with us to the clubs we went to, like Apple, Guys & Dolls, Teddy’s, Ecco. It was known that we were out hanging out with Emile Hirsch and Leonardo DiCaprio—just, like, typical Young Hollywood.” “They were the first people that brought me out to clubs,” Prugo allows.

Later in the afternoon, Gabby and Dunn were in the kitchen, filming a scene in which they were arguing about how to deal with Taylor and Alexis’s excessive partying. The producer, Gardiner, fed them lines: ““You need to be a stronger parent, Mom!’ ‘These girls are out of control!’”

Alexis went onto the porch to smoke a cigarette. She started discussing the Bling Ring. “Rachel’s a klepto freak,” she said. “She was so manipulating, so conniving. Nick always did what she said. Rachel was in charge. She started it all. Nick, he was a dude—why would he be knocking off chicks’ houses?”

“The Beautiful, Gorgeous Things”

By the beginning of 2009, the Bling Ring was in full escalation mode. “While this activity started as a twisted adventure for Prugo and his small group of friends fueled by celebrity worship,” says the L.A.P.D. report, “it quickly mushroomed into an organized criminal enterprise.”

Between October and December of 2008 there had been four more burglaries of Hilton’s house. By February there were allegedly more people involved: Diana Tamayo, president of the class of 2008 at Indian Hills, an illegal Mexican immigrant, according to cops, voted “Best Smile,” and Courtney Ames, an old friend of Lee’s who went to Calabasas High School and whose stepfather is famed welterweight Randy Shields. “Wanna smoke a bluuunt,” Ames wrote on her Facebook page in November.

“I didn’t want all these people coming in,” Prugo said. “I found it odd that Rachel would want to involve more people.”

Still, he participated in the planning of the December 19, \$2 million heist of Hilton’s jewelry, allegedly stolen by Roy Lopez, who cops say had been brought in by Ames. She and Lopez had worked together at Sagebrush Cantina, a bar-restaurant in Calabasas. (After Lopez was arrested, on October 22, he produced the majority of Hilton’s jewelry, which was returned to her. Lopez, cops say, had not had the criminal sophistication to fence it.)

I met Ames—a light-eyed girl with dyed black hair—at Art’s Deli on Ventura Boulevard one night in November. A friend of hers had told me she’d be there. “I didn’t do any of this,” she said flatly. “I’m not into that whole crowd that’s into fame.”

She has been charged with one count of residential burglary of Paris Hilton’s home. The L.A.P.D. has pictures of her at Les Deux—where she met her boyfriend, Johnny Ajar—wearing a Diane von Furstenberg leather jacket allegedly belonging to Hilton. Ames’s lawyer, Robert Schwartz, denies that she was involved in the burglaries.

The stuff, the designer goods—as Prugo said, “the beautiful, gorgeous things, like Marc Jacobs, Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent”—was accumulating, and, according to Prugo, the kids were wearing it around the Valley and to Hollywood clubs. “Diana’s, like, entire personal wardrobe was made up of clothing she stole,” he said. “Patently false,” said her lawyer, Howard Levy. Tamayo has been charged with two counts of residential burglary of Lohan’s home and the attempted burglary of Ashley Tisdale’s.

The kids seemed to be insatiable—and fearless. They allegedly kept on robbing even after Audrina Patridge posted the surveillance video, believed to be of Lee and Prugo, on her Web site in February. Patridge had hoped that someone would come forward to identify the thieves, but, miraculously, no one did, even though the video was picked up by TMZ and ran on L.A.’s local news stations.

“I was watching KTLA and I saw us and I just broke down,” Prugo said. “Rachel made it seem like it was O.K.”

According to the L.A.P.D.’s report, the Bling Ring collectively burglarized Rachel Bilson a full six times in April and May, taking nearly \$130,000 in property—so much stuff (clothing, jewelry, makeup, handbags), Prugo said, that they tried to unload some of it on the boardwalk at Venice Beach, scoring a few thousand dollars. In August, they allegedly robbed Brian Austin Green, but their real target was his live-in girlfriend, Megan Fox; Prugo said Lee liked her wardrobe.

Prugo also said that some of the kids continued to conduct surveillance on additional targets, including the homes of Disney stars Miley Cyrus, Zac Efron, Hilary Duff, and Vanessa Hudgens. Meanwhile, he said, he was becoming increasingly nervous about their activities—“worried, scared, just uneasy all the time, anxious, anxious.”

Lee may also have been growing concerned. In late July she moved to Las Vegas to live with her father, David Lee, an independent businessman from South Korea. Prugo helped her move, driving through the desert with her car filled up with bags of stolen property.

The Sting

But Rachel Lee couldn’t resist pulling off one last heist, Prugo said: “Rachel’s, like, biggest conquest was Lindsay Lohan. It was her ultimate fashion icon.”

Lee returned to L.A. from Vegas and, on the night of August 23, Prugo, Lee, and Tamayo allegedly burglarized Lohan’s Spanish-style home in the Hollywood Hills of close to \$130,000 in clothes and jewelry. Lee and Tamayo were, “like, freaking out over Lindsay’s stuff,” Prugo said. “I didn’t even want to go to Lindsay’s, because I had a feeling if anything was taken,” in the way of surveillance videos, “it would be released.”

It was. On August 26, the L.A.P.D.—with Lohan’s permission—released her surveillance video to TMZ. Now there were two videos circulating (Lohan’s and Patridge’s), making it all but plain to see that they had captured images of the same people, and that there was a connection between the Hollywood Hills burglaries. Tips started pouring in as to the thieves’ identities. But police were already moving on information they had received from someone who said she overheard Lee and Prugo bragging of their exploits at a party. Cops used Facebook to ascertain that Lee and Prugo were “friends” with each other.

On October 22, two weeks after Prugo confessed, the L.A.P.D. was issued search warrants for Ajar, Tamayo, Ames, Neiers, Lopez, and Lee. They found Lee at her father’s Las Vegas home. “During the warrant service,” says the L.A.P.D. report, “Lee asked several officers if they would release her if she told them where ‘everything is.’”

“Hypothetically,” Lee allegedly said, “let’s say I might know where this property is located and who has it, how could that help me?”

“It is clear that Lee felt that she successfully removed all items of stolen property from the residence,” the report goes on. “However, when Lee saw” that cops had found a coat allegedly belonging to Lindsay Lohan and some topless pictures of Paris Hilton (stolen from Hilton’s unlocked safe) on the premises, “her mood instantly changed from being calm and collected to instantly becoming nearly hysterical, physically ill, and gagging as though she were about to vomit.

“Lee asked Detective [Leanne] Hoffman,” of the L.A.P.D., “if she had spoken to the victims. Hoffman replied that she had spoken to all of the victims. Lee became excited and asked, ‘What did Lindsay say?’”

Lee has been charged with three counts of residential burglary of the homes of Lindsay Lohan, Paris Hilton, and Audrina Patridge.

Postscript

It isn’t clear yet whether there will be a trial in the case of the Bling Ring. If there is, all the celebrity victims may be called to appear, and it’s possible that Nick Prugo will be the prosecution’s star witness. It isn’t a role he relishes—he’s been called “a rat,” although many other members of the Bling Ring told police of each other’s involvement as well—but, he said, “I’m just trying to help the police in any way I can.”

Awaiting the resolution of the case, Prugo is living at home, attending the University of Phoenix online, and seeing a therapist weekly. Since Lee was arrested, he says, he has not had any contact with her. “It was a real friendship, and this whole thing’s been really hard,” he said. “I still love her.”

He said he believes that confessing was “the turning point in my life. I want to make it clear that everything I had in my possession I gave back. It was really hard for me to do that, but the stuff wasn’t mine anyway, so I’m a piece of shit for taking it.

“I’m just really trying to make whatever amends I can, especially to these celebrities that I victimized,” he said. “I really want them to know that I’m sorry. I’m not really sure how I’m going to do that yet. But I really plan on making some formal apology to them. I don’t know how they’ll react. I mean, to have someone in your house, where it’s your most personal of sanctuaries ...” He seemed at a loss for words.

He was wearing a pair of good-looking shoes, shiny black sneakers. I asked him where he got them. “A thrift store,” he said ruefully. “Thirteen bucks