

# The Tribune

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## HEARTS AND MASKS

By HAROLD MacGRATH

Author of "The Man on the Box," etc.

With Drawings by Harrison Fisher

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### CHAPTER V.—Continued.

Here was a burglar with the sense of humor.

"What can I do for you?" I asked blandly.

"Firstly, as they say, you might tell me what you and this lady are doing in this lonesome cellar."

"Say 'sir,' when you address me."

"Yes, sir."

"The lady and I were playing hide-and-seek."

"Nice game, sir,"—grinning. "Were you trying to hide under the coal?"

"Oh, no; I was merely exploring it."

"Say 'sir,' when you address me."

"Sir."

"You're a cool hand, sir."

"I am gratified to learn that our admiration is mutual. But what are you doing here?"

"I was ascertaining if the law was properly observed, sir," shaking with silent laughter.

"But what puzzles me," I went on, "is the fact that you could gather the gems in that garb." For I was positive that this was the Galloping Dick every one was looking for.

"I don't understand a word you say, sir. I'm an inspector of cellars, sir, not a jeweler. So you and the lady was playing hide-and-seek? Come, now, what is your graft? Is all the push here to-night?"

"That depends,"—cursing under my breath that I wore a gown which hampered my movements. For, truth to tell, I was watching him as a cat watches a mouse.

"Well, sir, we of the profession never interferes with gentlemanly jobs, sir. All I want of you is to help me out of here."

"I am not a burglar."

"Oh, I understand, sir; I understand completely. A gentleman is always a gentleman, sir. Now, you can return to that coal bin. I was just about to make for it when you lit that candle."

"Why not leave by the cellar doors?"

"I have my reasons, sir; most satisfactory reasons, sir. I prefer the window. Get along!"—his tones suddenly hardening.

I got along.

"The lady may sit down, sir," he said courteously.

"Thank you, I will," replied the girl, plumping down on an empty winecase. (She afterward confessed that if she had not sat down on the box, she would have sat down on the cellar floor, as a sort of paralysis had seized her knees.)

I stepped into the coal bin and rested the candle on the little shelf for that purpose. I was downright anxious to see the fellow safely away. There wasn't room in that cellar for the three of us. His presence doubly endangered us and multiplied the complications. I was in no position to force the gems from him. A man who has ten thousand dollars' worth of jewels on his person doesn't stop at shooting; and I possessed a healthy regard for my skin. I opened the window and caught it to the ceiling by a hook I found there.

"There is a stout screen, my man."

"Take this, sir, and cut it out,"—handing me a pair of wire clippers, holding his lantern under his arm meanwhile. The muzzle of the revolver, during all this time, never wavered in its aim at my head.

I went to work at the screen and presently it fell inward.

"Is that satisfactory?"—with impulsive irony.

"You are the most perfect gentleman that I ever see, sir!"

The girl laughed hysterically.

"Now what?" The fun was beginning to pall on me.

"Step out of the bin and stand aside. Sit down by the lady. Maybe she's a bit frightened."

I obeyed him to the letter.

"Thanks!" With the agility of a cat he leaped up and wriggled through the window. He turned. "Good night, sir. Sometime maybe I'll do the same for you, sir."

"Go to the devil!" I snarled.

"My, my! What a temper, sir! I wouldn't have thought it of you, and a nice lady in speaking distance!"

He disappeared.

The girl laid a hand on my arm.

"You have acted very sensibly, Mr. Comstall. If you had not, it is quite certain he would have shot you."

"It would have been a good thing for me if he had. He has gone, and the jewels have gone with him. I hadn't the least chance; the wretch! He probably came disguised as a plumber, and nobody suspected him."

"But if he possessed the ten of hearts, why should he have left this way?"

"Possibly my idea was only an imitation of his. There must have been at least a dozen tens of hearts. My dear young lady, I would give a good

deal if you were well out of this. I believed my plan was for the best, and instead I have simply blackened the case against us. I have been too adventurous. The situation looks very serious just now. Of course, in the long run, we shall clear ourselves; but it will take some fine arguing to do it, and possibly half a dozen lawyers."

"It is a terribly embarrassing predicament; but since we started out together, we'll hang together." She held out her hand to me. "It will be fun to extricate ourselves with full honors."

"You're a brick!" And I pressed her hand tightly.

"Now, I wonder why the burglar didn't try those cellar doors?" she murmured.

"By Jove, I'll soon find out! Come on! There's hope yet."

This time we reached the stone steps without interference. I gave the candle to the girl, cautiously put a shoulder against one of the doors, and gave a gentle heave. It was not locked. Through the thin crack I looked out upon the bright world of moonshine and crystal. Instantly I permitted the door to settle into its accustomed place. I readily understood the burglar's reasons. Seated upon a box, less than a dozen feet away, and blissfully smoking one of the club's cigars, sat a burly policeman. So they had arrived upon the scene!

"What is it?" asked the girl, as I motioned her to retreat.

"The worst has come; the police!"—dramatically.

"Gracious heavens, this is frightful! We shall never get out now. Oh dear!

Instantly the door opened and a policeman poked his head in. Before I had time to move, he grabbed me by the arm and yanked me into the ballroom! The girl and I had made a complete circuit of the cellars, and had stumbled into the ball-room again by the flight opposite to that by which we left it. Cheerful prospect, wasn't it? The adventure had ceased to have any droll side to it.

"Aha!" cried the base minion of the law. "Here you are, then! Hello, everybody! Hello!" he bawled.

Caught! Here we were, the Blue Domino and myself, the Grey Capuchin, both of us in a fine fix. Discovery and ejection I could have stood with fortitude and equanimity; but there was bad business afoot. There wasn't any doubt in my mind what was going to happen. As the girl said,

stairs, leading somewhere into the club. It was our last chance, or we should be obliged to stay all night in some bin; for it would not be long before they searched the cellars. If this flight led into the kitchen, we were saved, for I could bluff the servants. We paused. Presently we ascended, side by side, with light but firm step. We reached the landing in front of the door without mishap. From somewhere came a puff of air which blew out the candle. I struck a match viciously against the wall—and blundered into a string of cooking-pans! It was all over, the agony of suspense!

Blang! Rumpity-bumpity-blang-blang!

I have heard many stage thunderstorms in my time, but that racket beat anything and everything this side of siegenguns.

George, dear." Mrs. Sweetley's voice was soft and persuasive. "What is it, Helen?" said Mr. Sweetley.

"I have had a lot of samples of wall paper sent up this afternoon and here they are. I want you to help me select one for the parlors. You have such excellent taste. Here they are, nice large samples that show the full pattern. The trouble is that several of them are so pretty it is hard to select. They do have such lovely wall paper nowadays. Now please put down your book and lay aside your cigar and give your undivided attention to this wall paper. I want to be quite sure that the paper pleases you. I should take no pleasure in it if it did not. What do you think of this pattern?"

"I don't see but that it is all right."

"Why George! You honestly and truly wouldn't want that on our parlor walls! I think it is horrid! Such a stiff, conventional pattern!"

"O, I don't know. It seems graceful to me."

"Graceful? Those great, stiff figures all of the same size graceful? I would not have that paper on the walls if they would put it on for nothing. How do you like this pattern?"

"Well, it seems rather characterless to me."

"Characterless! My goodness me! I think it has ten times the character of that other pattern. Still, it is too dark. The parlors are not as well lighted as I wish they were, and this paper would make them still darker. I was sure that I wouldn't want that paper when they gave me the sample. What do you think of this pattern?"

"I like that first rate."

"You do? Well, now it seems like a very commonplace pattern to me. Just such a paper as you would be apt to find on any one's walls. I want something—well, unique and yet not conspicuously so. Something that—you know what I mean. My idea is that wall paper, like furniture, should in a certain way, reflect the character of the people in the house. It should have a certain indefinable—how do you like this pattern?"

"I don't like striped wall paper."

"You don't? Why it is very fashionable, and it gives height to a room. I don't like a distinct and positive stripe, but you see that this is not that kind. It is more of a suggestion of a stripe. Still, if you do not want a stripe—"

"I do not insist on the paper not having a stripe in it."

"But I want the paper to please you, dear, and if you hate a stripe—I—"

"I didn't say that I hated a stripe."

"Well, I do not want anything that you even dislike. I rather like a stripe and—now they told me at the store that this paper is being used a great deal. Do you like it?"

"Well, yes; I think I like it better than any piece you have shown me."

"Why George! Do you? It seems perfectly horrid to me. It looks loud—bold—braven! And it would simply kill any picture hung on it! That is something we want to consider—the pictures. Then this paper would be all out of harmony with the rugs in the parlors. It would be a screaming note of discord all through."

"Then why did you have a sample of it sent?"

"Well, I thought it would give us a variety from which to select. Now I like this pattern immensely. Don't you?"

"Well, I do not fancy it."

"You don't? Well, now, I like it better than anything I have found yet, and I think that you would grow to like it. The clerk at the store said that it was so much in demand that they could hardly supply it fast enough. He said that they put it on the parlor walls of a perfectly elegant new house only last week. It is something entirely new and I think that it has a great deal of character and a certain tone of refinement in it—that, if you do not like it—"

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