

HEARTS and MASKS

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CHAPTER V.

There was a clicking sound, and the glare of a dark-lantern struck my blinking eyes.

"Pick up the candle, sir," said the tranquil voice from behind the light.

I obeyed readily enough. Fate was downright cruel to us. Not a dozen feet away was liberty; and now we were back at the beginning again, with the end nowhere in sight.

"Shall I light it, sir?" I asked, not to be outdone in the matter of formal politeness.

"Yes, sir, doubtless you will need it." I struck a match and touched the candlestick.

"Burglar?" said I. (For all my apparent coolness, my heartbeats were away up in the eighties.)

The girl snuggled close to my side. I could feel her heart beating even faster than mine.

"Burglar?" I repeated.

"Indeed, no, sir,"—reproachfully. "Mine is a political job."

"A political job?" thunderstruck.

"Yes, sir; I am an inspector of cellars,—grimly. "I couldn't get around to this here cellar earlier in the day, sir, and a fellow's work must be done."

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 interfere 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 impressive irony.

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

There was wisdom in this. So, once again I took the candle, and we marched back. There wasn't a single jest left in my whole system, and it didn't look as if there was ever going to be another supply. We took the other side of the furnace, and at length came to a flight of wooden 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



Instantly the Door Opened, and a Policeman Popped His Head—

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 thunders in my time, but that racket beat anything and everything this side of sieg-guns.

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 ball-room! 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.

"Ah!" 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, there would be flaring head-lines and horrid pictures. We were like to be the newspaper sensation of the day. Aggrieved and lodged in jail! What would my rich, dotting old uncle say to that, who had threatened to disinherit me for lesser things! I felt terribly sorry for the girl, but it was now utterly impossible to help her, for I couldn't help myself.

And behold! The mysterious stranger I had met in the curiosity-shop, the fellow who had virtually haunted me for six hours, the fellow who had masqueraded as Caesar, suddenly loomed up before me, still wearing his sardonic smile. At his side were two more policemen. He had thrown aside his toga and was in evening dress. His keen glance rested on me.

"Here he is, Mr. Haggerty!" cried the policeman cheerfully, swinging me around.

A detective! And Heaven help me, he believed me to be the thief! Oh, for Aladdin's lamp!

CHAPTER VI.

I stood with folded arms, awaiting his approach. Nonchalance is always respected by the police. I must have presented a likely picture, however—my face blackened with coal-dust, cobwebs stringing down over my eyes, my Capuchin gown soiled and rent. The girl quietly took her place beside me.

"So you took a chance at the cellars, eh?" inquired the detective urbanely. "Well you look it. Will you go with us quietly, or shall we have to use force?"

"In the first place, what do you and your police want of me?" I returned coolly.

He exhibited his star of authority. "I am Haggerty of the Central Office. I want you for several things."

Several things? I stared at him stupidly. Several things? Then it came to me, with a jar like an earthquake. The story in the newspaper returned to my vision. Oh, this was too much, altogether too much! He took me to be the fashionable thief for whom half the New York police force were hunting. My sight swam for a moment in a blur.

"What is it you think I have done?" I demanded.

"You have, or have had, several thousand dollars' worth of gems on your person to-night!"

I shrugged. The accusation was so impossible that my confidence returned.

"Mr. Haggerty, you are making a stupid mistake. You are losing time, besides. I am not the man for whom you are hunting. My name is Richard Comstalk."

"One name or another, it does not matter."

"Plenty of gall," murmured one of the minions of the law, whom I afterward learned was the chief of the village police.

The card by which you gained admittance here," demanded the great Haggerty truculently.

I surrendered it. A crowd had by this time collected curiously about us. I could see the musicians on the stage peering over the plants.

"The thief you are looking for has gone," said I. "He escaped by the coal window." By this statement my feet sank deeper still.

"What did I tell you?" cried Haggerty, turning to his men. "They had an accomplice hidden in the cellars."

"I beg to inform you that you are making a mistake that will presently cost you dear,"—thinking of the political pull my uncle had in New York. "I am the nephew of Daniel Witherspoon."

"Worse and worse!" said the chief of police.

"We shall discuss the mistake later and at length. Of course you can easily explain how you came to impose upon these people,"—ironically. "Bah! the game is up. When you dropped that card in Friard's and said you were going to a masquerade, I knew your game in a minute, and laid eyes upon you for the first time since I began the chase. I've been after you for weeks. Your society dodge has worked out, and I'll land you behind the bars for some time to come, my gay boy. Come,"—roughly.

"I request Mr. Hamilton to be called. He will prove to you that you are greatly mistaken." Everything looked pretty black, I can tell you.

"You will see whom you please, but only after you are safely landed in the lockup. Now, Madame,"—turning swiftly upon the Blue Domino, "what is your part in this fine business?"

"It certainly has no part in yours,"—lolly.

Haggerty smiled. "My skin is very thick. Do you know this fellow?"

She shook her head. He stood undecided for a space.

"Let me see your card,"—haughtily.

Haggerty seemed staggered for a moment. "I am sorry to annoy you, but you must be identified at once."

"And why?"—proudly. "Was it forbidden to go into the club cellars for such harmless things as apples?"

Apples! I looked at her admiringly. "Apples?" repeated Haggerty. "Couldn't you have sent a servant for them?"

She did not reply.

"You were with this clever gentleman in the cellars. You may or may not be acquainted with him. I do not wish to do anything hasty in regard to yourself, but your position is rather equivocal. Produce your card and be identified—if you really can."

"I refuse!"

"Then I shall ask you to accompany us to the boom up stairs till the police patrol arrives."

"I will go,"—quietly.

"Nonsense!" I objected. "On my word of honor, I do not know this lady. Our presence in the cellar was perfectly harmless. There is no valid reason for detaining her. It is an outrage!"

"I am not going to stand here arguing with you," said Haggerty. "Let the lady produce her card; let her disclose her identity. That is simple enough."

"I have already given you my determination on that subject," replied the girl. "I can very well explain my presence here, but I naturally decline to explain it to the police."

"I didn't quite land her at all. She had said that she possessed an alibi. Why didn't she produce it?"

So the two of us left the gorgeous ball-room. Every one moved aside for us, and quickly, too, as if we had had the plague. I looked in vain for Hamilton. He was a friend in need. We were taken into the steward's office and the door was shut and locked. The band in the ball-room went galloping through a two-step, and the galeys was in full swing again. The thief had been rounded up! How the deuce was it going to end?

"I can not tell you how sorry I am to have mixed you up in this," I said to the girl.

"You are in no manner to blame. Think of what might have happened had you blown up the post-office!"

She certainly was the least embarrassed of the two of us. I addressed my next remark to the great Haggerty.

"Did you find a suitable pistol in Friard's?"

"A man in my business," said Haggerty mildly, "is often found in such places. There are various things to be recovered in pawnshops. The gentleman of this club sent me the original ten of hearts, my presence being necessary at such big entertainments. And when I saw that card of yours, I was so happy that I nearly put you on your guard. Lord, how long I've been looking for you! I give you credit for being a clever rascal. You have fooled us all nicely. Not a soul among us knew your name, nor what you looked like. And but for that card, you might still be at large. Until the lady submits to the simple process of identification, I shall be compelled to look upon her as a traitor as an accomplice. She has refused the offer I have made her, and she can not blame me if I am suspicious, when to be suspicious is a part of my business." He was reasonable enough in regard to the girl.

He turned to the chief of the village police, who was sitting at the desk ordinarily used by the club steward.

"No reporters, mind you."

"Yes, sir. Well, you see that no reporter gets wind of the capture."

The telephone bell rang. One of the police answered it.

"For you, Mr. Haggerty," he said. Haggerty sprang to the telephone and placed the receiver to his ear.

"What?" we heard him exclaim. "You have got the other fellow? A horse and carriage at once!"

"Take mine," said the chief excitedly. "What is it?"

"My subordinate at the railway station has just landed the fellow with the jewels. Mighty quick work. I must hustle in to town at once. There'll be plenty of time to attend to these persons. Bring them to town the moment the patrol arrives. The gems are the most important things just now."

"Yes, sir. You can rely upon us, Mr. Haggerty. Billy, go down with Mr. Haggerty and show him my rig."

"Good!" said Haggerty. "It's been a fine night's work, my lads, a fine night's work. I'll see that all get some credit. Permit no one to approach the prisoners without proper authority."

"Your orders shall be obeyed to the letter," said the chief importantly. He already saw his name figuring in the New York papers as having assisted in the capture of a great thief.

I cursed under my breath. If it hadn't been for the girl, I am ashamed to confess, I should have cut out loud. She sat rigid and motionless. It must have been a cruel ordeal for her. But what was puzzling me was the fact that she made not the slightest effort to spring her alibi. If I had had one! Where was Hamilton? I scarcely inclined to the idea of sleeping in jail in a dress-suit.

Haggerty departed. A silence settled gloomily down on us. Quarter of an hour passed. The grim-visaged police watched us vigilantly. Half an hour, three-quarters, an hour. Far away we heard the whistle of an outgoing train. Would I had been on it! From time to time we heard faint music. At length there was a noise outside the door, and a moment later Hamilton and two others came in. When he saw me, he stopped, his eyes bulging and his mouth agape.

"Dicky Comstalk?" he cried helplessly. "What the devil does this mean?"—turning to the police.

"Do you know this fellow, Mr. Hamilton?" asked the chief.

"Know him? Of course I know him," answered Teddy; "and I'll stake my last dollar on his honesty."

"You have, of course, the general invitation?" said Hamilton.

"Here is it,"—and she passed the engraved card to him.

"I beg a thousand pardons!" said Hamilton humbly. "Everything seems to have gone wrong."

"Will you guarantee this man?" asked the chief of Hamilton, nodding toward me.

"I have said so. Mr. Comstalk is very well known to me. He is a retired army officer, and to my knowledge a man with an income sufficient to put him far beyond want."

"What is your name?" asked the chief of the girl, scowling. It was quite evident he couldn't understand her actions any better than I.

"Alice Hawthorne," with an oblique glance at me.

"I had been right!"

"What is your occupation? I am obliged to ask these questions, Miss." "I am a miniature painter,"—briefly. Hamilton came forward. "Alice Hawthorne? Pardon me, but are you the artist who recently completed the miniature of the Emperor of Germany, the Princess of Hesse, and Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds?"

"I am. I believe there is no further reason for detaining me."

"Emperor of Germany?" echoed the now bewildered chief. "Why didn't you tell all this to Mr. Haggerty?"

"I had my reasons."

Once again the door opened. A burly man in a dark business-suit entered. His face was ruddy and his little grey eyes sparkled with suppressed ire. He reminded me of Vautrin, the only difference being that Vautrin was French while this man was distinctly Irish. His massive shoulders betrayed tremendous strength. He was vastly angry about something. He went to the chief's desk and rested his hands upon it.

"You are a nice specimen for a chief of police, you are!" he began.

"And who the devil are you?" bawled the chief, his choler rising.

"I'll tell you who I am presently."

We all eyed him in wonder. What was going to happen now?

"Which of you gentlemen is Mr. Hamilton?" asked the new-comer gruffly.

Hamilton signified that he was the gentleman by that name.

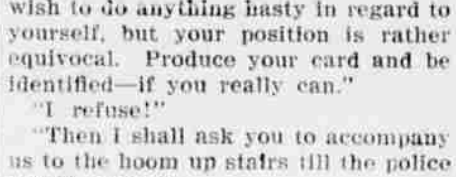
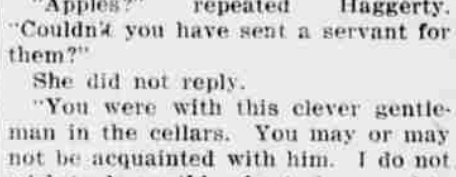
"Some ladies at your ball have been robbed of their diamonds I understand?"

"About ten thousands dollars' worth."

"Look here, sir," cried the chief, standing up and bailing his fist. "I want you to explain yourself, and mighty quick. You can't come into my presence in this manner."

"Bah! you have just permitted the cleverest rascal in the state to slip through your butter-fingers. I am Haggerty."

The chief of police sat down suddenly.



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SAILOR'S MARRIAGE YARN.

Tells Party in Ice Cream Parlor of Customs Which Are Peculiar to Andaman Islands.

The day was warm for March. The sailor sat in the ice cream saloon eating ice cream and lady cake.

"The queerest marriage I ever seen, miss," he said, "was in the Andaman islands. But maybe you ain't interested in marriages?"

He laughed as men always laugh over this joke, and the pretty waitress permitted herself to smile.

"The islanders in them islands," he said, "is dwarfs. Four feet, on the average. Very fierce and ugly."

"If a young islander wants a girl for his wife he asks her parents for her. They never refuse. They take the girl and hide her in the forest. There the lad must find her before morning. If he finds her she's his. If he don't she ain't."

"Of course I don't need to tell you that if the girl wants the young feller she sees to it that he finds her all right."

"And vice versa."

"Here is how the marriage ceremony is performed. The lad climbs up a slim young tree and the girl climbs up another close to him. Her clothes don't bother her in climbing—clothes never bother an Andaman islander. Well, up they go, and as they near the top their weight bends the slim trees over toward each other prettily. The trees bow and bend and courtesy, and finally the lad's head touches the girl's and from below a shout goes up, for the head touching has done the business. The ceremony is finished. The young folks' troubles have begun."

Egg-Swallowing Record.

A singular story of egg-swallowing comes from Maritzburg, the capital of Natal. A well-known citizen made a bet with a local auctioneer that he would swallow 42 raw eggs in ten minutes. He performed the task in eight minutes, and then offered to swallow 60 raw eggs in 15 minutes.

DEMAND FOR STEEL CARS.

Use of Them in the Postal Railway Service in Generally Favored.

Since 1900 70 postal clerks, substitutes and weighers have been killed in railroad wrecks while on duty, 444 have been injured seriously and 1,683 have been hurt slightly. The clerks in the railway post office service are among the most expert employees of the government and the department is seeking continually to improve the conditions under which they work, lessen the dangers that surround them and protect their lives and the valuable property in their care.

In 1893 the government adopted specifications for the construction of mail cars requiring them to be heavier and more substantial than those then in use. In May, 1904, these specifications were revised and further strengthening of the cars was required. The railroad companies have also been experimenting with improved rolling stock, the Erie building an all-steel car and the New York, New Haven & Hartford two; the Pennsylvania road is drafting plans for an all-steel car and the Santa Fe company has contracted for 39 steel-sheathed cars, with underframes and flooring of steel, the floors to be finished with cement, felt and wood.

All these cars are much heavier than those previously in use. Under the department specifications of 1904 a full 60-foot car weighs 100,000 pounds, or 20,000 pounds more than one built on the plans adopted in 1893. The clerks prefer the larger, heavier cars, which they believe to be safer in accidents than the others. Yet in a wreck on a Texas railway a 50-foot car telescoped a 60-foot car of later build and much greater weight and was itself practically undamaged.

One of the steel cars now in use has been in an accident. The postal clerks have great faith in them, feeling that they are practically indestructible and almost sure to preserve the lives of all who are in them. It is likely that steel mail cars will some day be required by the government, and when they are it is not improbable that the public will demand a substitution of metal cars or cars so heavily reinforced with steel as to be practically the same thing for all wooden passenger coaches.

ENGINE SUPERSTITIONS.

New Locomotive Rarely Taken Out on Initial Trip on Friday.

You never see a ship launched on a Friday, and similarly a new locomotive hardly ever makes a trial trip on that day or on the thirteenth of the month. Even though the superintendent may jeer at this superstition, yet he knows too well to set it at naught, for just as sailors consider that some ships are unlucky, so do train hands credit certain locomotives with a sort of demonical possession.

It is certainly very strange the difference that may be observed between two locomotives built from the same plans, at the same time, of similar material. One goes on her way quietly and smoothly, never breaks down, costs little or nothing for repairs; the other causes trouble from the very first, runs off the line, kills the drivers, gets into accidents of all kinds, and generally acts as though possessed by some evil spirit.

There was a famous instance some years ago on the South Florida railway. A locomotive killed so many people that she gained the name of "The Engine Drivers," and no fewer than three engine drivers actually left the employ of the company rather than continue driving her. The odd thing was that she never seemed to injure herself. Eventually her owners were forced to break her up, although she was by no means worn out.

Of actual ghosts in trains or railway engines one very seldom hears.

Neckties as Railway Signals.

"Red neckties are always worn by foreign brakemen and conductors. Ever notice it?" said a railroader.

"No. Why is it?"

"As a safety device," was the reply. "These red neckties that flash upon your gaze on the railroads of Italy, France, Germany and England are not a sign that the people have a gay taste, but that they are cautious and prudent."

"The neckties are supplied free by the railroad companies for use as danger signals in emergency. Thus, no matter when or where an accident may happen, there is no need to search or scramble for a red flag, but the brakeman whips off his red necktie and weighs it frantically aloft."

To Thwart Train Robbers.

The engines on the Denver & Rio Grande railway have an apparatus for preventing train robbers from climbing over the tender. This consists of a pipe extending along the roof of the cab and connected with the boiler. Through this pipe, without making a perceptible motion, either the engineer or fireman can send a jet of steam and boiling water that would effectually kill or injure anything living that happened to be on the tender or the front of the luggage-van.

To Bridge Royal Gorge.

The highest railroad bridge in the world will be built across the top of the famous Royal gorge near Canon City, Col. It will be 2,800 feet above the hanging bridge of the Denver & Rio Grande railroad—so high in the air that the roaring of the Arkansas river below will not be heard, and the powerful stream will look like a thread of silver running between the frowning cliffs.