



HEARTS AND MASKS

By
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With Drawings by Harrison Fisher

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CHAPTER I.

It all depends upon the manner of your entrance to the Castle of Adventure. One does not have to scale its beetling parapets or assault its scarp and frowning bastions; neither is one obliged to force with clamor and blaring trumpets and glittering gorgets the drawbridge and portcullis. Rather the pathway lies through one of those many little doors, obscure, yet easily accessible, latchless and boltless, to which the average person gives no particular attention, and yet which invariably lead to the very heart of this Castle Delectable. The whimsical chatelaine of this enchanted keep is a shy goddess. Circumspection has no part in her affairs, nor caution, nor practicality; nor does her eye linger upon the dullard and the blunderer. Imagination solves the secret riddle, and wit is the guide that leads the seeker through the winding, bewildering labyrinths.

And there is something in being idle, too!

If I had not gone idly into Mouquin's cellar for dinner that night, I should have missed the most engaging adventure that ever fell to my lot. It is second nature for me to be guided by impulse rather than by reason; reason is always so square-toed and impulse is always so alluring. You will find that nearly all the great captains were and are creatures of impulse; nothing brilliant is ever achieved by calculation. All this is not to say that I am a great captain; it is offered only to inform you that I am often impulsive.

A Times, four days old; and if I hadn't fallen upon it to pass the twenty-odd minutes between my order and the service of it, I shouldn't have made the acquaintance of the police in that pretty little suburb over in New Jersey; nor should I have met the enchanting Blue Domino; nor would fate have written Kismet. The clairvoyant never has any fun in this cycle; he has no surprises.

I had been away from New York for several weeks, and had returned only that afternoon. Thus, the spirit of unrest acquired by travel was still upon me. It was nearly holiday week, and those congenial friends I might have called upon, to while away the evening, were either busily occupied with shopping or were out of town; and I determined not to go to the club and be bored by some indifferent billiard player. I would dine quietly, listen to some light music, and then go to the theater. I was searching the theatrical amusements, when the society column indifferently attacked my eye. I do not know why it is, but I have a wholesome contempt for the so-called society columns of the daily newspaper in New York. Mayhap, it is because I do not belong.

I read this paragraph with a shrug, and that one with a smirk. I was in no manner surprised at the announcement that Miss High-Culture was going to wed the Duke of Impecunio; I had always been certain this girl would do some such fool thing. That Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds was giving a farewell dinner at the Waldorf, prior to her departure to Europe, interested my curiosity not in the least degree. It would be all the same to me if she never came back. None of the wishy-washy tittle-tattle interested me, in fact. There was only one little six-line paragraph that really caught me. On Friday night (that is to say, the night of my adventures in Blankshire), the Hunt Club was to give a charity masquerade dance. This grasped my adventurous spirit by the throat and refused to let go.

The atmosphere surrounding the paragraph was spirituous with enchantment. There was a genuine novelty about this dance. Two packs of playing cards had been sent out as tickets; one pack to the ladies and one to the gentlemen. Charming idea, wasn't it? These cards were to be shown at the door, together with ten dollars, but were to be retained by the recipients till two o'clock (supper time), at which moment everybody was to unmask and take his partner, who held the corresponding card, in to supper. Its newness strongly appealed to me. I found myself reading the paragraph over and over.

By Jove, what an inspiration! I knew the Blankshire Hunt Club, with its colonial architecture, its great ball room, its quaint fireplaces, its stables and sheds, and the fame of its chef. It was one of those great country clubs that keep open house the year round. It stood back from the sea about four miles and was within five miles of the village. There was a fine course inland, a cross-country going of not less than twenty miles, a shooting-box, and excellent golf links. In the winter it was cozy; in the summer it was ideal.

I was intimately acquainted with the

club's M. F. H., Teddy Hamilton. We had done the Paris-Berlin run in my racing car the summer before. If I hadn't known him so well, I might still have been in durance vile, next door to jail, or securely inside. I had frequently dined with him at the club during the summer, and he had offered to put me up; but as I knew no one intimately but himself, I explained the futility of such action. Besides, my horse wasn't a hunter; and I was riding him less and less. It is no pleasure to go "parking" along the bridle-paths of Central Park. For myself, I want a hill country and something like forty miles, straight away; that's riding.

The fact that I knew no one but Teddy added zest to the inspiration which had seized me. For I determined to attend that dance, happen what might. It would be vastly more entertaining than a possibly dull theatrical performance. (It was!)

I called for a messenger and dispatched him to the nearest drug store for a pack of playing cards; and while I waited for his return I casually glanced at the other diners. At my table—one of those long marble-topped affairs by the wall—there was an old man reading a paper, and the handsomest girl I had set eyes upon in a month of moons. Sometimes the word handsome seems an inferior adjective. She was beautiful, and her half-hidden eyes told me that she was anywhere but at Mouquin's. What a head of hair! Fine as a spider's web, and the dazzling yellow of a wheat field in a sun shower! The irregularity of her features made them all the more interesting. I was an artist in an amateur way, and I mentally painted in that head against a Rubens



It Was the Ten-Spot of Hearts.

background. The return of the messenger brought me back to earth; for I confess that my imagination had already leaped far into the future, and this girl across the way was nebulously connected with it.

I took the pack of cards, ripped off the covering, tossed aside the joker (though, really, I ought to have retained it!) and began shuffling the shiny pasteboards. I dare say that those around me sat up and took notice. It was by no means a common sight to see a man gravely shuffling a pack of cards in a public restaurant. Nobody interfered, doubtless because nobody knew exactly what to do in the face of such an act, for which no adequate laws had been provided. A waiter stood solemnly at the end of the table, scratching his chin thoughtfully, wondering whether he should report this peculiarity of constitution and susceptibility occasioning certain peculiarities of effect from impress of extraneous influences (vide Webster), synonymous with idiocracy and known as Idiosyncrasy. It was quite possible that I was the first man to establish such a precedent in Monsieur Mouquin's restaurant. Thus, I aroused only passive curiosity.

From the corner of my eye I observed the old gentleman opposite. He was peering over the top of his paper, and I could see by the glitter in his eye that he was a confirmed player of solitaire. The girl, however, still appeared to be in a dreaming state. I have no doubt every one who saw me thought that anarchy was abroad again, or that Sherlock Holmes had entered into his third incarnation.

Finally I squared the park, took a long breath, and cut. I turned up the card. It was the ten-spot of hearts. I considered this most propitious, hearts being my long suit in everything but love,—love having not yet crossed my path. I put the card in my wallet, and was about to toss the rest of the pack under the table, when a woman's voice stayed my hand.

"Don't throw them away. Tell my fortune first."

I looked up, not a little surprised. It was the beautiful young girl who had spoken. She was leaning on her elbows, her chin propped in her palms, and the light in her gray chatoyant

eyes was wholly innocent and mischievous. In Monsieur Mouquin's cellar people are rather Bohemian, not to say friendly; for it is the rendezvous of artists, literary men and journalists,—a clan that holds formality in contempt.

"Tell your fortune?" I repeated, parrot-like.

"Yes."

"Your mirror can tell that more accurately than I can," I replied with a frank glance of admiration.

She drew her shoulders together and dropped them. "I spoke to you, sir, because I believed you wouldn't say anything so commonplace as that. When one sees a man soberly shuffling a pack of cards in a place like this, one naturally expects originality."

"Well, perhaps you caught me off my guard,"—humbly. "I am original. Did you ever before witness this performance in a public restaurant?"—making the cards purr.

"I can not say I have,"—amused.

"Well, no more have I!"

"Why, then do you do it?"—with renewed interest.

"Shall I tell your fortune?"

"Not now. I had much rather you would tell me the meaning of this play."

I leaned toward her and whispered mysteriously: "The truth is, I belong to a secret society, and I was cutting the cards to see whether or not I should blow up the postoffice to-night or the police station. You mustn't tell anybody."

"Oh!" She started back from the table. "You do not look it," she added suddenly.

"I know it; appearances are so deceptive," said I sadly.

Then the old man laughed, and the

girl laughed, and I laughed; and I wasn't quite sure that the grave waiter did not crack the ghost of a smile—in relief.

"And what, may I ask, was the fatal card?" inquired the old man, folding his paper.

"The ace of spades; we always choose that gloomy card in secret societies. There is something deadly and suggestive about it," I answered morbidly.

"Indeed."

"Yes. Ah, if only you knew the terrible life we lead, we who conspire! Every day brings forth some galling disappointment. We push a king off into the dark, and another rises immediately in his place. Futility, futility everywhere! If only there were some way of dynamiting habit and custom! I am a Russian; all my family are perishing in Siberian mines,"—dismally.

"Fudge!" said the girl.

"Tommy-rot!" said the amiable old gentleman.

"Uncle, his hair is too short for an anarchist."

"And his collar too immaculate," (So the old gentleman was this charming creature's uncle!)

"We are obliged to disguise ourselves at times," I explained. "The police are always meddling. It is discouraging."

"You have some purpose, humorous or serious," said the girl shrewdly. "A man does not bring a pack of cards—"

"I didn't bring them; I sent out for them."

"—bring a pack of cards here simply to attract attention," she continued tranquilly.

"Perhaps I am a prestidigitator in a popular dime museum," I suggested, willing to help her out, "and am doing a little advertising."

"Now, that has a plausible sound," she admitted, folding her hands under her chin. "It must be an interesting life. Presto—change! and all that."

"Oh, I find it rather monotonous in the winter; but in the summer it is fine. Then I wander about the summer resorts and give exhibitions."

To be Continued.

SHONTS OUT.

Resigns as Chairman of Canal Commission.

GETS BETTER JOB.

He Has Been Elected President of the Interborough Co., Gotham's Street Railway Combine.

Washington, D. C.—The resignation of Theodore P. Shonts, as chairman of the Isthmian canal commission, was announced at the White House Wednesday, having been tendered to the president and accepted by him Tuesday, according to correspondence made public. It will take effect not later than March 4. Mr. Shonts having been elected president of the Interborough-Metropolitan company, which controls the rapid transit and many surface lines in New York.

No announcement was made as to who will succeed Mr. Shonts as chairman of the commission, but it was learned authoritatively that headquarters will be removed from Washington to the Isthmus and that a high salaried chairman to serve in that capacity alone will not be named. This being admitted, it follows that John F. Stevens, the engineer in charge of the construction of the canal, would not be made subordinate to another official on the Isthmus. Without definite announcement, therefore, it is regarded as a certainty that Mr. Stevens will be named as chairman of the commission and will assume duties as such in connection with his post as chief engineer.

Mr. Shonts' retirement does not come wholly as a surprise. It has been rumored that as soon as action had been taken upon the proposition to build the canal by contract, that Mr. Shonts would sever his connection and resume a calling more congenial to his taste. Secretary Taft confirmed that rumor by saying that Mr. Shonts' resignation was voluntary.

THAW'S TRIAL BEGINS.

Two Jurors Are Secured During the First Day's Session.

New York.—The curtain was rung up Wednesday for another act in the tragedy of real life known as the Thaw-White case. The setting was not the gay all-night restaurants of the Tenderloin, where the principal actors in the tragedy once were familiar figures. It was not the roof garden crowded with summer revelers who on a fateful night clinked glasses in rhythm to the music of the orchestra and listened laughingly to merry singers, and then were hushed into a silence of horror as three pistol shots cracked and a noted architect lay dead at the table where he had been chatting with friends.

The story of the play was brought down to the grim court room scene where 12 men are to sit and render a judgment which may mean either the taking of another life, this time by the state, or a determination that Harry K. Thaw was justified in the claim that he had shot the man who had "ruined his wife." There may be a third decision, that Thaw was insane at the time he committed the crime—"emotional insanity," it is called—but there will be no opportunity to say that Thaw is now insane. The trial began shortly before 10:30 o'clock and when an adjournment for the day had been taken about 5 p. m., there were two jurors in the box. A third juror had been accepted and sworn, but he was excused in the closing moments of the day's session.

TWENTY MINERS KILLED.

A Terribly Fatal Explosion in a Mine Near Primero, Col.

Trinidad, Col.—Twenty miners, according to the most authoritative information available, lost their lives as a result of an explosion which occurred early Wednesday in the Colorado Fuel and Iron Co.'s mine near Primero, 20 miles west of this city.

Two of the dead are Frank Hobart, miner, and R. J. Lumley, fire boss. The names of the other men killed have not been learned, as the shift boss who checked up the men who went into the mine Tuesday night is missing. All the men except Lumley were foreigners, most of them being Italians. The explosion stopped the air fan, which was not repaired until late Wednesday and there is little chance that any of the men in the mine at the time of the explosion are still alive.

Congress.

Washington.—On the 23d the senate passed the bill increasing the salaries of congressmen to \$7,500 a year. Senator Beveridge began a long speech on the evils of child labor. The house began consideration of the pension appropriation bill.

Will Build Six Tunnels.

Welch, W. Va.—The Norfolk & Western Railroad Co. has let contracts for six tunnels at a cost of \$2,000,000. The tunnels, which are to be double tracked, will shorten the distance on the West Virginia division 15 miles. The six tunnels will aggregate 6,100 feet in length.

The River and Harbor Bill.

Washington, D. C.—The river and harbor bill which will be reported to the house to-day by the committee on rivers and harbors will carry an appropriation aggregating \$83,466,138.

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