



HEARTS AND MASKS

By HAROLD MacGRATH
Author of "The Man on the Box," etc.

With Drawings by Harrison Fisher

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"What do you know about the ten of hearts?" I began with directness.

"I am a shade; all things are known to me."

"You may be a lamp-shade, for all I care. What do you know about the ten of hearts?"

"Beware of it,"—hollowly. From under his toga he produced a ten of hearts!

My knees wobbled, and there was a sense of looseness about my collar. The fellow knew I was an impostor. Why didn't he denounce me?

"Is the back of your card anything like this one?"—ironically. "I dare say it isn't. But have your good time, grave monk; doubtless you are willing that the fiddlers shall be paid." And wrapping his toga about him majestically, he stalked away, leaving me staring dumfoundedly after his receding form.

Discovered!

The dance! Had I been attired like you Romeo, I certainly should have taken to my heels; but a fellow can not run in a Capuchin's gown, and retain any dignity. I would much rather be arrested than laughed at. I stood irresolute. What was to be done? How much did he know? Did he know who I was? And what was his object in letting me run my course? I was all at sea. . . . Hang the grisly old Roman! I shut my teeth! I would see the comedy to its end, no matter what befell. If worst came to worst, there was always Teddy Hamilton to fall back on.

I made off toward the smoking room, ruminating imprecations against the gods for having given me the idea of attending this masquerade, when it would have been cheaper and far more comfortable to go to the theater.

But as soon as I entered the smoking room, I laughed. It was a dreil scene. Here we were, all of us, trying savagely to smoke a cigar or cigarette through the flabby aperture designated in a mask as the mouth. It was a hopeless job; for myself, I gave it up in disgust.

Nobody dared talk naturally for fear of being identified. When a man did open his mouth it was only to commit some banal idiosyncrasy, for which, during office hours, he would have been hailed to the nearest insane asylum and labeled incurable. Added to this was that matching Sahara's and the oppressive odor of weltering paint.

By Jove! Only one man knew that the back of my card was unlike the others; the man who had picked it up in old Friard's curio-shop, the man who had come to Blankshire with me; I knew now. He had been there buying a costume like myself. He had seen me on the train, and had guessed the secret. I elbowed my way out of the smoking room. It wouldn't do me a bit of harm to ask a few polite questions of Mr. Caesar's and the sardonic laugh.

But I had lost the golden opportunity. Caesar had gone to join the shades of other noble Romans; in vain I searched high and low for him. Once I ran into Hamilton. His face was pale and disturbed and anxious.

"What's the trouble, Hamilton?" I asked, with forced gaiety.

He favored me with a penetrating glance.

"The very devil is the trouble," he growled. "Several of the ladies have begun to miss valuable jewels. Anne of Austria has lost her necklace and Queen Elizabeth is without a priceless comb; altogether, about ten thousand dollars."

"Robbery?" I looked at him aghast.

"That's the word. Curse the luck! There is always something of this sort happening to spoil the fun. But whoever has the jewels will not get away with them."

"What are you going to do?"

"I have already sent for the village police. Now I shall lock all the doors and make every man and woman produce cards for identification,"—abruptly leaving me.

Thunderbolts out of heavens! My knees and collar bothered me again; the first attack was trifling compared to this second seizure. How the devil was I to get out?

"Are you searching for me?" inquired a soft voice at my elbow.

I turned instantly. The Blue Domino had come back to me.

"I have been searching for you everywhere," I said gallantly.

"Oh! but that is a black one. Never mind; the fib was well meant."

I led her over to a secluded nook, within a few feet of the door which gave entrance to the club cellars. This door I had been bearing in mind for some time. It is well to know your topography. The door was at the left of the band platform. There was a twin door on the other side. We sat down.

"Have you heard the news?" I asked.

"No. Has some one been discovered making love to his own wife by mistake?"

"It's serious. Anne of Austria and Queen Elizabeth have been robbed of some jewels."

"A thief among us?"

"A regular Galloping Dick. I'm a thief, myself, for that matter."

"You?" she drew away from me a bit.

"Yes. My name is Procrastination."

"Ah, my grave Capuchin, we do not steal time; we merely waste it. But is what you tell me true?"

"I am very sorry to say it is. The jewels were worth something like ten thousand dollars."

"Merciful heavens!"

"It is true, infernally true,"—looking around to see if by chance Caesar had reappeared on the scene. (How was I to manage my escape? It is true I might hie me to the cellars; but how to get out of the cellars!) "Have you seen Julius Caesar?" I asked.

"Caesar?"

"Yes, Miss Hawthorne—"

The Blue Domino swung about and leaned toward me, her hands tense upon the sides of her chair.

"What name did you say?"—a strained note in her voice.

"Hawthorne," I answered, taking out the slip of pasteboard. "See! it says that one blue domino was rented of Monsieur Friard at five-thirty this afternoon."

"How did you come by that ticket?" she demanded.

"It was a miracle. I purchased a mask there, and this ticket was wrapped up in my bundle by mistake."

and I beheld the girl I had met in Mouquin's!

"You?"

"Silence! So this is the meaning of your shuffling those cards? Oh, it is certainly droll!" She laughed.

"And are you Miss Hawthorne?"

"I am still in the mask, sir; I shall answer none of your questions."

"This is the finest romance in the world!" I cried.

"You were talking about getting out," she said. "Shall I lend you my domino? But that would be useless. Such a prestidigitator as Signor Fantocini has only to say—Presto! and disappear at once."

"I assure you, it is no laughing matter."

"I see it from a different angle."

An artist's model, and yet a guest at this exclusive function?

A commotion around the stage distracted us. Presently we saw Teddy Hamilton mount the stage and hold up his hands.

"Attention, ladies and gentlemen!" he called.

Silence gradually fell upon the motley groups of masqueraders.

"A thief is among us. I have had all the exits closed. Everybody will be so kind as to present cards at the main entrance. Three ten-spots of hearts have been tallied on the comparing lists. We have been imposed upon. The police are on the way. Very sorry to cause you this annoyance. The identity of the holders of the cards will be known only to those of us on the committee."

Silence and then a murmur which soon became a buzzing like that of many bees.



The Blue Domino Swung About.

"It is a curious coincidence,"—her voice normal and unagitated.

I was confused. "Then I am mistaken?"—my chagrin evident. (All this while, mind you, I was wondering if that cellar-door was unlocked, and how long it would take me to reach it before the denouement!)

"One way or the other, it does not matter," said she.

"Yet, if I could reach the cellars,"—absently. Then I bit my tongue.

"Cellars? Who said anything about cellars? I meant that this is not the hour for unmasking or disclosing one's identity,"—coldly.

"And yet, when Caesar whispered 'Beware the ten of hearts,' you turned and shuddered. What have you to offer in defense?"

"It was the horrid mask he wore."

"Well, it wasn't handsome of him."

"What did you mean by cellars?"—suddenly becoming the inquisitor in her turn.

"Oh, I was thinking what I should do in case of fire,"—nimbly.

"That is not the truth."

"Well, no, it isn't. Can you keep a secret?" I whispered.

"If it isn't a terrible one."

"Well, I have no earthly business here. I am an impostor."

"An impostor!"

"Yes. And for the past few minutes, since I heard of the robbery, I've been thinking how I could get out of here upon the slightest notice." While the reckless spirit was upon me, I produced the fatal card and showed the back to her. "You will find that yours is of a different color. But I am not the Galloping Dick; it was only a hare-brained lark on my part, and I had no idea it would turn out serious like this. I was going to disappear before they unmasked. What would you advise me to do?"

She took the card, studied it, and finally returned it. There followed an interval of silence.

"I have known the imposition from the first," she said.

"What!"

She touched the signet-ring on my little finger. "I have seen that once before to-night. No," she mused, "you will not blow up the postoffice to-night nor the police station."

She lit the corner of her mask,

INTO A DITCH

A B. & O. Passenger Train was Thrown.

ENGINEER KILLED.

He was Pinned Under the Engine and Roasted to Death—Fire Destroyed Entire Train.

Connellsville, Pa. — Baltimore & Ohio train No. 49, westbound, running 18 minutes late and 40 miles an hour, was wrecked last night near Indian Creek, seven miles east of here. The entire train, consisting of a combination smoking and baggage car, two day coaches and the private car of Robert J. Finney, superintendent of the Pittsburg division of the Baltimore & Ohio railroad, left the rails and after running 200 feet along the ties was thrown into a ditch at the foot of the mountains, where the wreckage was completely burned. The engineer was killed, the fireman fatally injured, the baggagemaster, express messenger, conductor and six passengers were seriously hurt. About 30 passengers were more or less cut and bruised.

There were 41 passengers on the train, including a party of Baltimore & Ohio railroad officials who were on a tour of inspection. When the train was three miles east of Indian Creek the engineer began to speed in an endeavor to make up 18 minutes lost early in the trip. Suddenly the whole train swayed and with much jarring and cracking left the rails. Fortunately the train took a course northwest from the track and after running over 200 feet along the ties plunged into a heap almost directly over the engine.

The passengers were thrown and tossed about like packages. Screaming and fighting desperately they managed to break the windows of the cars and gain places of safety just as all the cars became ignited from the engine and commenced to burn fiercely. Within a few moments all had gotten out. While they stood about in a dazed condition they were attracted by the cries of Engineer Irwin. Several of the passengers, accompanied by Superintendent Finney and the other railroad officials ran to the engineer's rescue.

Their efforts were accelerated by Irwin's pathetic pleading and every possible attempt was made to liberate the engineer, who was tightly wedged under the wrecked engine, but without success. The flames quickly burned their way toward the doomed man and soon it was apparent that he would be cremated. Within a short time the flames reached the engineer. There were a few piercing screams and all was over.

ANTI-SUICIDE BUREAUS.

They Will be Established by the Salvation Army in the Large Cities of the United States.

New York. — Commander Miss Booth, the head of the Salvation Army in the United States, will to-day inaugurate anti-suicide bureaus in all the large cities of the country.

The plan follows one which has been in operation in London under the direction of Gen. William Booth.

The bureaus are designed to assist and advise any person contemplating suicide.

An announcement issued last night says: "The Salvation Army extends an invitation to all distressed persons who are tempted to commit suicide to call at headquarters, or if unable to do so, write to the officers."

The plan in London, according to the local army officers, proved immediately successful, resulting in the forming of bureaus in various continental cities. In London there were numerous requests "for advice from people who contemplated taking their own lives. These included all classes of society."

"The results have been astonishing. Within the first 11 days no fewer than 300 applicants were personally interviewed and a large number of others reached by correspondence with advice and assistance. It was soon discovered necessary to classify the applicants. This was done as follows: "The sick and incurable, especially those suffering from nervous diseases, and those unable to see."

"Drunkards or persons addicted to the use of narcotics and who while suffering from excesses were subject to overpowering mental depressions."

"The unemployed and those financially embarrassed, which proved to be the most numerous class."

Congress.

Washington.—On the 28th the senate passed the bill extending government aid to the exposition to be held at Seattle in 1909 and spent the rest of the day in debate of the denatured alcohol bill. The house devoted its session to debate of the ship subsidy bill.

Bomb Exploded in a Cathedral.

Madrid, Spain.—A bomb exploded in the cathedral here Thursday while a service was being held. There was a great panic among the congregation and ten persons sustained serious injuries in the crush to get out of the building.

Shot and Killed Four People.

Bloomington, Ill.—Thomas Baldwin, a rich farmer and former merchant of Colfax, Ill., on Thursday shot and killed Charles Kennedy and wife and Mrs. Sim Elsmann and daughter Cora. Baldwin was arrested.

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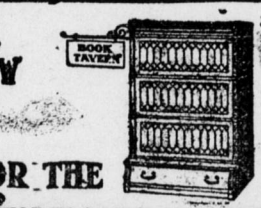
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