

H. S. LLOYD

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H. S. LLOYD, **Masonic Block**

THE CHRISTMAS BURGLAR MAN

"IS your father at home, kid?" He was not altogether an unpleasant looking man who addressed the question to a fair haired child alone on the veranda of a suburban villa late in the afternoon of the day before Christmas.

The little girl stopped playing, frowned prettily and answered:

"My name's Muriel, not kid, and my papa never gets home till long after I've gone to bed. What's your name?" The hulking fellow averted his eyes and answered her question by asking another.

"Who else lives with you?" "Oh, my little brother—you haven't seen him, have you?—my mamma and Mary, Mary's the servant, you know."

"Good day, young 'un," said the tramp as he ambled away. "Muriel I'm called!" she shouted after him. "Will you come again?"

"Thank'ee; I reckon I will," he answered.

"Oh, wait a minute, papa; I'm so sleepy!"

Muriel knelt up in her little bed, rubbed her eyes and shook her golden curls out. It was midnight. Having



"WHERE ARE YOU GOING NOW?" SHE ASKED.

completely recovered from dreamland, she looked at the tall figure beside her bed and gasped with delight when she realized that her long cherished desire was going to be carried out. Papa had often promised to play at burglars with her, and there he was, quite ready, with the black mask covering his eyes and a little lantern that gave only a wee light.

"Oh, papa," she cried, "you do look a funny burglar! We'll take ma's jewelry first. Won't she be surprised?"

The midnight intruder nodded. "Where does ma keep it, Muriel?" he asked. "Burglars don't know where things are, you know. That's half the fun of it, eh?"

"Oh, you are funny, papa! Let's whisper softer. It's on the dressing table in one of the little drawers. S-s-sh!"

Muriel felt herself lifted shoulder high.

"Now, then, ki—Muriel," he whispered, "when we pass your mamma's room, ki—Muriel, you just point to it and keep as quiet as a mouse. That's the proper way, isn't it?"

She nodded delightedly and did as he wished.

"Where are you going now?" she asked almost inaudibly as she was being carried downstairs.

"Why, somebody must keep watch. Don't you know that one burglar takes the things while another keeps watch?"

He carried her down into the cellar. It was very dark and cold, but Muriel said she wasn't afraid because they were only playing burglars.

"Now, then, ki—Muriel," he whispered, "you keep watch and don't make a noise." He slipped into her tiny hand one small bar of chocolate. "That's your share of the swag," he said and disappeared.

Muriel giggled when she thought of mamma's surprise. She listened a long time for return footsteps and wondered, after all, if papa had been caught. She was not at all comfortable, nor was she warm, and a few minutes later her pretty eyes closed, her head dropped, and she drifted into dreamland. Then she was awakened by her father. The mask was gone from the face, and he looked pale and troubled.

"Oh, you've come back!" she whispered, remembering the last caution she had received.

"Why are you here, dearie?" asked her father.

"You brought me, papa. Don't you remember—when we were playing burglars?"

Muriel's father telephoned to the police and reported the strange burglary. In the morning he spent an hour in convincing his little girl that he was not the man who wore the mask.

"Well, papa," she said in the end, "he was a very good Christmas burglar, wasn't he?"

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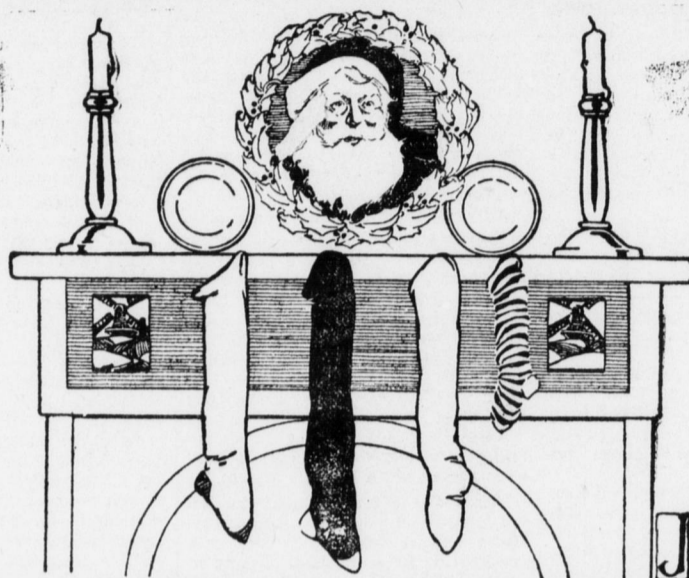
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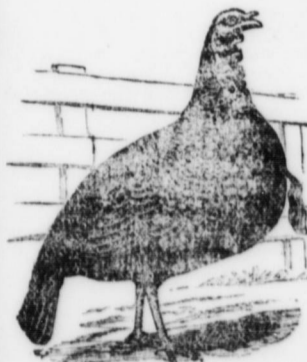
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