The Chase of the Golden Plate

Jacques Futrelle

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graph of George Francis Hayden a
of an apartment.

"Mr. Herbert and I searched the
growing idea, based on the established
George Francis Hayden, that he was th
in the college incident, was proven whe
this ring there—the ring that was stole
him—with the initials of the owner in it.

The Thinking Machine produced the r
showed it to Detective Mallory, who had
the earth to slip away from him slowly but
and he examined it with a new and absorb
eyes.

"Mr. Herbert and I learned of the insur
trial's another matter—that is, when we kn
that George Francis Hayden was not dead.
have since had been a fraud. Mr. Hayden ha
has been lately as Chester Goodrich. He ha
been missing since Mr. Herbert, in his absence, re
posed the plate and the jewels in his apartments.
long will that, up to the day of the masked ball,
is so protected from casual recognition by a full
head. He is now clean-shaven."

The Thinking Machine glanced at Mr. Mal

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1st Prize at Whist held
at Miss C.C. Gales house
and won by F.J. Deane

11-23-06.

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"'You really do not love him, anyway,' he ventured"

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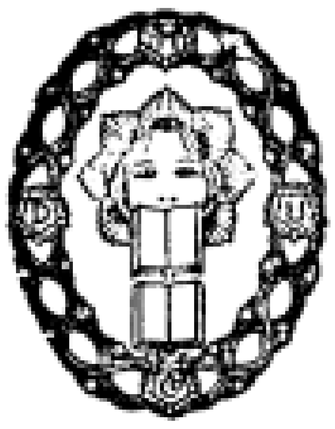
By

Jacques Futrelle

With Illustrations by Will Grefé
and Decorations by E. A. Poucher



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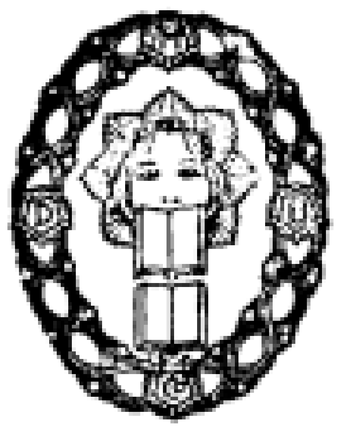

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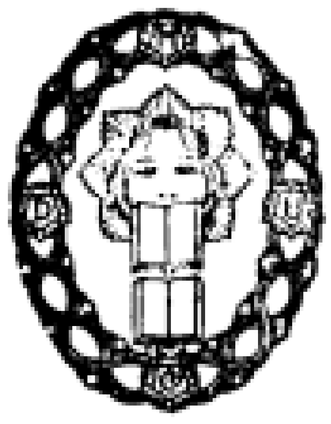

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To

Three Women I Love:

FAMA,

and

MAYZIE,

and

BERTA

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PART I

THE BURGLAR AND THE GIRL

CHAPTER I

CARDINAL RICHELIEU and the Mikado stepped out on a narrow balcony overlooking the entrance to Seven Oaks, lighted their cigarettes and stood idly watching the throng as it poured up the wide marble steps. Here was an over-corpulent Dowager Empress of China, there an Indian warrior in full paint and toggery, and mincing along behind him two giggling Geisha girls. Next, in splendid robes of rank, came the Czar of Russia. The Mikado smiled.

"An old enemy of mine," he remarked to the Cardinal.

A Watteau Shepherdess was assisted out of an

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automobile by Christopher Columbus and they came up the walk arm-in-arm, while a Pierrette ran beside them laughing up into their faces. D'Artagnan, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos swaggered along with insolent, clanking swords.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Cardinal. "There are four gentlemen whom I know well."

Mary Queen of Scots, Pocahontas, the Sultan of Turkey, and Mr. Micawber chatted amicably together in one language. Behind them came a figure which immediately arrested attention. It was a Burglar, with dark lantern in one hand and revolver in the other. A black mask was drawn down to his lips, a slouch hat shaded his eyes, and a kit of the tools of his profession swung from one shoulder.

"By George!" commented the Cardinal. "Now, that's clever."

"Looks like the real thing," the Mikado added.

The Burglar stood aside a moment, allowing a diamond-burdened Queen Elizabeth to pass, then came on up the steps. The Cardinal and the Mikado passed through an open window into the reception-room to witness his arrival.

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"A figure which immediately arrested attention"

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"Her Royal Highness, Queen Elizabeth!" the graven-faced servant announced.

The Burglar handed a card to the liveried Voice and noted, with obvious amusement, a fleeting expression of astonishment on the stolid face. Perhaps it was there because the card had been offered in that hand which held the revolver. The Voice glanced at the name on the card and took a deep breath of relief.

"Bill, the Burglar!" he announced.

There was a murmur of astonishment and interest in the reception-hall and the ballroom beyond.

Thus it was that the Burglar found himself the centre of attention for a moment, while a ripple of laughter ran around. The entrance of a Clown, bounding in behind him, drew all eyes away, however, and the Burglar was absorbed in the crowd.

It was only a few minutes later that Cardinal Richelieu and the Mikado, seeking diversion, isolated the Burglar and dragged him off to the smoking-room. There the Czar of Russia, who was on

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such terms of intimacy with the Mikado that he called him Mike, joined them, and they smoked together.

"How did you ever come to hit on a costume like that?" asked the Cardinal of the Burglar.

The Burglar laughed, disclosing two rows of strong, white teeth. A cleft in the square-cut, clean-shaven chin, visible below the mask, became more pronounced. A woman would have called it a dimple.

"I wanted something different," he explained. "I couldn't imagine anything more extraordinary than a real burglar here ready to do business, so I came."

"It's lucky the police didn't see you," remarked the Czar.

Again the Burglar laughed. He was evidently a good-natured craftsman, despite his sinister garb.

"That was my one fear—that I would be pinched before I arrived," he replied. "'Pinched,' I may explain, is a technical term in my profession meaning jugged, nabbed, collared, run in. It seemed that my fears had some foundation, too, for when I drove up in my auto and stepped out a

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couple of plain-clothes men stared at me pretty hard."

He laid aside the dark lantern and revolver to light a fresh cigarette. The Mikado picked up

the lantern and flashed the light on and off several times, while the Czar sighted the revolver at the floor.

"Better not do that," suggested the Burglar casually. "It's loaded."

"Loaded?" repeated the Czar. He laid down the revolver gingerly.

"Surest thing, you know," and the Burglar laughed quizzically. "I'm the real thing, you see, so naturally my revolver is loaded. I think I ought to be able to make quite a good haul, as we say, before unmasking-time."

"If you're as clever as your appearance would indicate," said the Cardinal admiringly, "I see no reason why it shouldn't be worth while. You might, for instance, make a collection of Eliza-

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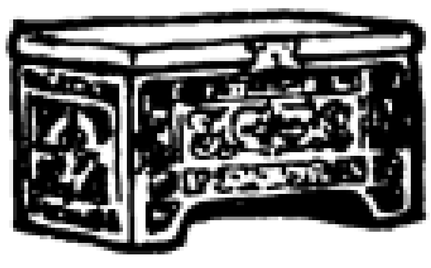
bethan jewels. I have noticed four Elizabeths so far, and it's early yet."

"Oh, I'll make it pay," the Burglar assured him lightly. "I'm pretty clever; practised a good deal, you know. Just to show you that I am an expert, here is a watch and pin I took from my friend, the Czar, five minutes ago."

He extended a well-gloved hand in which lay the watch and diamond pin. The Czar stared at



them a moment in frank astonishment; patted himself all over in sudden trepidation; then laughed sheepishly. The Mikado tilted his cigar up to a level with the slant eyes of his mask, and laughed.

"In the language of diplomacy, Nick," he told the Czar, "you are what is known as 'easy.' I thought I had convinced you of that."

"Gad, you are clever," remarked the Cardinal. "I might have used you along with D'Artagnan and the others."

The Burglar laughed again and stood up lazily.

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"Come on, this is stupid," he suggested. "Let's go out and see what's doing."

"Say, just between ourselves tell us who you are," urged the Czar. "Your voice seems familiar, but I can't place you."

"Wait till unmasking-time," retorted the Burglar good-naturedly. "Then you'll know. Or if you think you could bribe that stone image who took my card at the door you might try. He'll remember me. I never saw a man so startled in all my life as he was when I appeared."

The quartet sauntered out into the ballroom just as the signal for the grand march was given. A few minutes later the kaleidoscopic picture began to move. Stuyvesant Randolph, the host, as Sir Walter Raleigh, and his superb wife, as Cleopatra, looked upon the mass of colour, and gleaming

shoulders, and jewels, and brilliant uniforms, and found it good—extremely good.

Mr. Randolph smiled behind his mask at the striking incongruities on every hand: Queen Eliza-

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beth and Mr. Micawber; Cardinal Richelieu and a Pierrette; a Clown dancing attendance on Marie Antoinette. The Czar of Russia paid deep and devoted attention to a light-footed Geisha girl, while the Mikado and Folly, a jingling thing in bells and abbreviated skirts, romped together.

The grotesque figure of the march was the Burglar. His revolver was thrust carelessly into a pocket and the dark lantern hung at his belt. He was pouring a stream of pleasing nonsense into the august ear of Lady Macbeth, nimbly seeking at the same time to evade the pompous train of the Dowager Empress. The grand march came to an end and the chattering throng broke up into little groups.

Cardinal Richelieu strolled along with a Pierrette on his arm.

"Business good?" he inquired of the Burglar.

"Expect it to be," was the reply.

The Pierrette came and, standing on her tiptoes—silly, impractical sort of toes they were—made a *moue* at the Burglar.

"Oooh!" she exclaimed. "You are perfectly horrid."

"Thank you," retorted the Burglar.

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He bowed gravely, and the Cardinal, with his companion, passed on. The Burglar stood gazing after them a moment, then glanced around the room, curiously, two or three times. He might have been looking for someone. Finally he wandered away aimlessly through the crowd.

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CHAPTER II

HALF an hour later the Burglar stood alone, thoughtfully watching the dancers as they whirled by. A light hand fell on his arm—he started a little—and in his ear sounded a voice soft with the tone of a caress.

"Excellent, Dick, excellent!"

The Burglar turned quickly to face a girl—a Girl of the Golden West, with deliciously rounded chin, slightly parted rose-red lips, and sparkling, eager eyes as blue as—as blue as—well, they were blue eyes. An envious mask hid cheeks and brow, but above a sombrero was perched arrogantly on crisp, ruddy-gold hair, flaunting a tricoloured ribbon. A revolver swung at her hip—the wrong hip—and a Bowie knife, singularly inoffensive in appearance, was thrust through her girdle. The Burglar looked curiously a moment, then smiled.

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"How did you know me?" he asked.

"By your chin," she replied. "You can never hide yourself behind a mask that doesn't cover that."

The Burglar touched his chin with one gloved hand.

"I forgot that," he remarked ruefully.

"Hadn't you seen me?"

"No."

The Girl drew nearer and laid one hand lightly on his arm; her voice dropped mysteriously.

"Is everything ready?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he assured her quickly. His voice, too, was lowered cautiously.

"Did you come in the auto?"

"Yes."

'And the casket?"

For an instant the Burglar hesitated.

"The casket?" he repeated.

"Certainly, the casket. Did you get it all right?"

The Burglar looked at her with a new, business-

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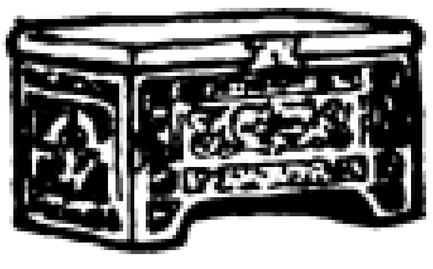

like expression on his lips. The Girl returned his steady gaze for an instant, then her eyes dropped. A faint colour glowed in her white chin. The Burglar suddenly laughed admiringly.

"Yes, I got it," he said.

She took a deep breath quickly, and her white hands fluttered a little.

"We will have to go in a few minutes, won't we?" she asked uneasily.

"I suppose so," he replied.

"Certainly before unmasking-time," she said, "because—because I think there is someone here who knows, or suspects, that——"

"Suspects what?" demanded the Burglar.

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned the Girl, and she laid a finger on her lips. "Not so loud. Someone might hear. Here are some people coming now that I'm afraid of. They know me. Meet me in the conservatory in five minutes. I don't want them to see me talking to you."

She moved away quickly and the Burglar looked

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after her with admiration and some impalpable quality other than that in his eyes. He was turning away toward the conservatory when he ran into the arms of an oversized man lumpily clad in the dress of a courtier. The lumpy individual stood back and sized him up.

"Say, young fellow, that's a swell rig you got there," he remarked.

The Burglar glanced at him in polite astonishment—perhaps it was the tone of the remark.

"Glad you like it," he said coldly, and passed on.

As he waited in the conservatory the amusement died out of his eyes and his lips were drawn into a straight, sharp line. He had seen the lumpy individual speak to another man, indicating generally the direction of the conservatory as he did so. After a moment the Girl returned in deep agitation.

"We must go now—at once," she whispered

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hurriedly. "They suspect us. I know it, I know it!"

"I'm afraid so," said the Burglar grimly. "That's why that detective spoke to me."

"Detective?" gasped the Girl.

"Yes, a detective disguised as a gentleman."

"Oh, if they are watching us what shall we do?"

The Burglar glanced out, and seeing the man to whom the lumpy individual had spoken coming toward the conservatory, turned suddenly to the Girl.

"Do you really want to go with me?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied eagerly.

"You are making no mistake?"

"No, Dick, no!" she said again. "But if we are caught——"

"Do as I say and we won't be caught," declared the Burglar. His tone now was sharp, commanding. "You go on alone toward the front door. Pass out as if to get a breath of fresh air. I'll

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follow in a minute. Watch for me. This detective is getting too curious for comfort. Outside we'll take the first auto and run for it."

He thoughtfully whirled the barrel of his revolver in his fingers as he stared out into the ballroom. The Girl clung to him helplessly a moment; her hand trembled on his arm.

"I'm frightened," she confessed. "Oh, Dick, if——"

"Don't lose your nerve," he commanded. "If you do we'll both be caught. Go on now, and do as I say. I'll come—but I may come in a hurry. Watch for me."

For just a moment more the Girl clung to his arm.

"Oh, Dick, you darling!" she whispered. Then, turning, she left him there.

From the door of the conservatory the Burglar watched her splendid, lithe figure as she threaded her way through the crowd. Finally she passed beyond his view and he sauntered carelessly toward the door. Once he glanced back. The lumpy individual was following slowly. Then he saw a liveried servant approach the host and whisper to him excitedly.

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"This is my cue to move," the Burglar told himself grimly.

Still watching, he saw the servant point directly at him. The host, with a sudden gesture, tore off his mask and the Burglar accelerated his pace.

"Stop that man!" called the host.

For one brief instant there was the dead silence which follows general astonishment—and the Burglar ran for the door. Several pairs of hands reached out from the crowd toward him.

"There he goes, there!" exclaimed the Burglar excitedly. "That man ahead! I'll catch him!"

The ruse opened the way and he went through. The Girl was waiting at the foot of the steps.

"They're coming!" he panted as he dragged her along. "Climb in that last car on the end there!"

Without a word the Girl ran to the auto and clambered into the front seat. Several men dashed out of the house. Wonderingly her eyes followed the vague figure of the Burglar as he sped along in the shadow of a wall. He paused beneath a window, picked up something and raced for the car.

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"Stop him!" came a cry.

The Burglar flung his burden, which fell at the Girl's feet with a clatter, and leaped. The auto swayed as he landed beside her. With a quick twist of the wheel he headed out.

"Hurry, Dick, they're coming!" gasped the Girl.

The motor beneath them whirred and panted and the car began to move.

"Halt, or I'll fire," came another cry.

"Down!" commanded the Burglar.

His hand fell on the Girl's shoulder heavily and he dragged her below the level of the seat. Then, bending low over the wheel, he gave the car half power. It leaped out into the road in the path of its own light, just as there came a pistol-shot from behind, followed instantly by another.

The car sped on.

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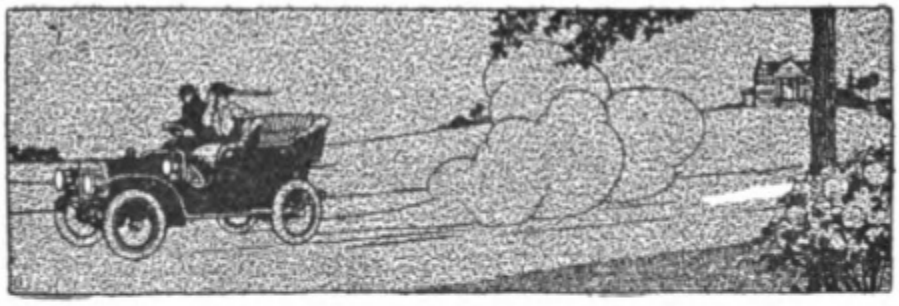

CHAPTER III

STUYVESANT RANDOLPH, millionaire, owner of Seven Oaks and host of the masked ball, was able to tell the police only what happened, and not the manner of its happening. Briefly, this was that a thief, cunningly disguised as a Burglar with dark lantern and revolver in hand, had surreptitiously attended the masked ball by entering at the front door and presenting an invitation card. And when Mr. Randolph got this far in his story even *he* couldn't keep his face straight.

The sum total of everyone's knowledge, therefore, was this:

Soon after the grand march a servant entered the smoking-room and found the Burglar there alone, standing beside an open window, looking out. This smoking-room connected, by a corridor, with a small dining-room where the Randolph

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