

The Gentleman and the Thief

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Gentility wears a burglar's mask in *The Gentleman and the Thief*, a proper romance set in the criminal underworld of Victorian London.

Hollis coasts on his good name while supporting himself as a penny dreadful author. Ana, a disgraced music teacher, steals back heirlooms from the wealthier folks who acquired them during her family's fall from grace. During a citywide crime spree, Ana and Hollis are drawn together by a shared caper and the pursuit of another thief, Four Finger Mike. Their romantic tension comes from the double masks they both wear.

On a drive through Hyde Park, Ana realizes that Hollis's ignorance of her past is comforting: "He offered her a measure of peace that she desperately needed. If he hadn't pieced together her secret life as a thief, she couldn't afford for him to." Her decisions about what to reveal, and when, result in a playful, will-they-won't-they dynamic. In the absence of explicit sex scenes, the couple's decisions about when to disclose their aliases are fraught and satisfying.

Although they're intent on chasing down Four Finger Mike, Ana and Hollis have more to discover in one another. For two people who subsist on deceit, they are both naïve; their senses of propriety and good breeding keep them from seeing the seedier elements of humanity, which blossom like hideous flowers from London's sidewalks. Supporting characters are arresting; most stand in contrast to Ana and Hollis's anachronistic wholesomeness. As Ana and Hollis lose their fears of being known, they discover the answer to the mystery and find a meaningful romance with one another.

Charming, suggestive, and featuring rich historical details, *The Gentleman and the Thief* has the elements of a gritty, juicy penny dreadful.

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