

Charged for Wearing Medical Masks

by Kevin Gooden

In Canada, there is an old law prohibiting a person from wearing a mask while committing a crime. For example, prosecutors charge bank robbers who wear masks with two crimes.

This archaic legislation originated from the old train robbery era. When an old crook like Billy Miner fastened a clean handkerchief over his nose and mouth and robbed the train, no one could figure out who the perpetrator was. Even if a legendary Mountie like Sam Steele was questioning the witnesses, they'd respond, "Well, gosh, I don't really know *who* t'was. The crook kinda *looked* like ol' Billy Miner, but it couldn't a been him, on account of that handkerchief—it was *clean*, you know, not like Billy's hanky, all fulla huck-to and dat der yucky stuff. *You* know."

And yeah, the Mountie knew. So that tricky bugger Billy Miner got away with it until Parliament passed a new law, then given royal assent by the Queen. Sorry, forget that last part, that's a complicated story about how the Queen gets dragged into all this kinda stuff... better save that one for a different story.

On a chilly night in Hamilton, Ontario, local Johnny Gallant and his pal from Nova Scotia, Irving McCain (no relation to the French-fry tycoons... or the gas station tycoons) were sipping a tasty craft beer in their favourite pub, and having one of those important life talks that frequently go hand-in-hand with that environment.

From court transcripts:

"There's no hidin' from it, Johnny. If we don't get some money, we're gonna have to cut back, maybe start drinkin' that crappy canned beer again."

"Ew, don't *say that* Irv, that's gross. Anyway, I gotta plan."

Johnny planned to rob a bank. He thought he'd hit the Bank of Montreal, because he didn't like Quebecers much, but was confused as that name no longer existed. When the Canadian banks expanded into the U.S., they all hid their Canadian identities behind abbreviations, fearing no right-minded Americans would patronize a Canadian business. Irv and Johnny scratched their heads, perplexed. They scratched the abbreviations on a napkin, trying to decipher them: CIBC, TD, BMO, RBC.

"Hell Johnny, I dunno. Maybe RBC?"

"How you figger?"

"Regu-lare Bank de Cwebec, I think."

"Jeez Irv, everyone knows Quebec's with a 'Q', not a 'C'". Johnny sighed.

“Yeah but, remember, those French speakers switch everything around... so the last letter ‘C’ goes first.”

“Oh, yeah... good one, Irv. Okay, we’re doing RBC. Now we gotta decide about masks.”

“What’s to decide?” Irv asked.

Johnny explained the old mask law, then added in the complicated part: with the COVID epidemic, if they *didn’t* wear a mask, they might get charged with something *else*, putting people at risk maybe.

After plenty more discussion, and oodles more beer, they had a solution. And the next morning they were in the downtown RBC, medical masks on, guns in hand.

Johnny told the teller, “This is a stickup.”

Johnny’s muffled voice was tough to understand through his mask. The teller *heard* “Misses Nicka?”, and replied, “No, I’m Mrs. Nichols. Why do you have a gun, sir?”

Johnny said, “Money. Where’s the money?”

“Sir, I don’t know where your Mommy is. You’re a tad old to be asking that. Anyway, lower that gun.” While she was answering, the teller surreptitiously pushed the silent alarm button.

Irv was covering the elderly rent-a-guard, and tried to help, shouted to Johnny, “Tell her: put it in the bag.”

Johnny thought that was a weird thing to say, but Irv had robbed banks before, so maybe he knew their internal code words.

“Pudding in the bag,” Johnny said.

Amazed when the teller understood him and started putting money from the drawer in the bag, Johnny muffle-shouted to Irv, “Pudding did the trick!”

Irv looked confused, didn’t know what ‘put him in the brig’ meant, but guessed and took the guard to the vault and locked him in.

The confusion caused too many delays, and an enormous crowd of police, military, and biohazard-suited contagion specialists converged outside the bank, and apprehended our beer-devoted anti-heroes, who got charged with bank robbery and wearing masks during a robbery, then whisked into court.

The judge convicted them, asked if they had anything to say prior to sentencing.

Irv said through his mask, “We thought we were doing the right thing.”

The judge *thought* he said, “We saw you were doing Mrs. Wing.”

Johnny and Irv got released with a conditional discharge—no jail. They’ve returned to the pub and are planning their next adventure.

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