



The Lure of the Mask

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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(Continued.) SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Jack Hilliard, a wealthy New York clubman, hears a mysterious voice singing in the night under his window.

II—He inserts an advertisement in a personal column to find the singer. He receives a reply.

III, IV, V, and VI—He visits the mysterious singer, but she wears a mask. He falls desperately in love with her, but he has not seen her face. The unknown woman gives her name as Mme. Angot, which is assumed. They have dinner. She refuses to see him again.

CHAPTER VIII. WHAT MERRIHEW FOUND.

THE great ship had passed the Isle of Ischia, and now the bay of Naples unfolded all its variant beauties. Both he and Merrihew were foremost in the press against the forward rail. To the latter's impressionable mind it was like a dream—yonder, the temples and baths of Nero of the golden house; thither, the palaces of the grim Tiberius; beyond, Pompeii, with Glaucus, Jone and Nydia, the blind girl. The dream picture faded, and the reality was no less fascinating—the white sails of the fishermen winging across the sapphire waters, leaving ribboned pathways behind; proud white pleasure yachts, great vessels from all ports in the world, and an occasional battleship, drab and stealthy, and the hundred pink and white villages, the jade and amethyst of the islands, the ruined temples, the grim giant ash heap of Vesuvius.

"See that village on the cliffs toward the south?" asked Hilliard. "That's Sorrento, where I was born. Sh! Look at Giovanni!"

Merrihew looked at the old Roman. Tears were running down his cheeks, and his gaze strove to pierce the distance to the faroff Sabine hills. Italy! Hilliard leaned over and touched him on the arm, and he started.

"Take care, Giovanni!" "Pardon! I am weak this day, but tomorrow I shall be strong. Seven years! Have you not longed for it yourself? Has not your heart gone out many times across the seas to those cliffs?" pointing to Sorrento.

"Many times, Giovanni. But remember and control yourself. Presently the carabinieri will come on board. You will see that all our luggage goes promptly to the Bristol once we are through the customs."

"Trust me, signor." They landed at the custom house at 2 in the afternoon and passed without any difficulty.

Hilliard obtained rooms pleasantly situated looking out upon the sparkling bay. Giovanni began at once to unpack the trunks, happy enough to have something to occupy him till after dark, when he determined to venture forth. The dreaded carabinieri had paid him not the slightest attention. So far he was as safe as though he were in New York.

It was yet so early in the day that the two young men sallied forth in quest of light adventure. Besides, Merrihew was very eager to find some Roman and Florence newspapers. The American Comic Opera company was somewhere north. They found stationed outside the hotel a rosy cheeked caddy who answered to the name of Tomasso, or Tomass, as the Neapolitans generally drop the final. He carried a bright red lap robe and blanket, spoke a little English and was very proud of the accomplishment. He was rather disappointed, however, when Hilliard bargained with him in his own tongue. Tomass shook his fingers under Hilliard's nose, and Hilliard returned the compliment. Finally Tomass compromised on 1 lira 50 centesimi (30 cents) per hour, with 50 centesimi (10 cents) as a pourboire (tip). Crack, crack! Down the hill they went, as if a thousand devils

were after them. "By George," gasped Merrihew, clutching his seat, "the fool will break our necks!"

Tomass grinned and cracked his whip. He did not understand the word slowly in his own tongue or in any other, at least not till he reached the shops. A dozen times on the Via Roma Merrihew yelled that they would lose a wheel. Bu. Tomass knew the game.

Merrihew had never seen such shops. Coral, coral wherever the eye roamed—where did they get it all, and to whom did they sell it? Necklaces, tiaras, rings, brooches, carved and uncarved—were there women enough in the world to buy these things?

"If I had a wife"—he began. "Well?"

"I'd feel devilish sorry for her husband at this moment."

"But isn't the color great?" said Hilliard. It was good to be in Naples again.

"I never saw so many kids," Merrihew finally observed, "so many dirty ones," he added. "Herod would have had his work cut out for him here. Now where can we get some newspapers? I must know where she is."

At the bookshop in the piazza they found the Rome and Florence papers. Hilliard went through them thoroughly, but nowhere did he see anything relative to the doings of the American Comic Opera company.

"Not a line, Dan."

"But there must be something in the Florence paper. They should be playing there yet."

"Nothing. These papers are two weeks old."

Merrihew stared blankly at the sheet. "I should like to know what it means."

"We will write to the consulate in Rome. If there has been any trouble he will certainly notify us. I'll write tonight. Now, here's Cook's next door. We'll ask if there is any mail for Kitty Killigrew."

But there wasn't, nor had there been, and the name was not on the forwarding books.

"Looks as if your Kitty were the needle in the haystack."

"Cut it!" savagely. Pictures and churches and museums were all well enough, but Merrihew wanted Kitty Killigrew above all the treasures of earth.

When they turned down to the Via Caracciolo, with the full sweep of the magnificent bay at their feet, Merrihew's disappointment softened somewhat. It was the fashionable hour. The band was playing near by in the Villa Nazionale. Americans were everywhere. Occasionally a stray princess or countess flashed by in inert and listless against the cushions and invariably overdressed. And when men accompanied them the men (if they were husbands) lolled back, even more listless. And beggars of all sorts and descriptions besieged the "very great grand rich Americans."

They were nearly a week in Naples. They saw the galleries, the museums and churches; they saw underground Naples; they made the weary and useful ascent of Vesuvius, and Merrihew added a new smell to his collection every hour. Pompell by moonlight, however, was worth a thousand ordinary dreams, and Merrihew, who had abundant imagination, but no art with which to express it, happily or unhappily, saw Lytton's story unfold in all its romantic splendor.

They lingered at Amalfi three days and dreamed away the hours under the white pergola. Merrihew was loath to leave, but Hilliard was for going on to Sorrento, for which his heart was always longing. A spring rain fell as they took the incline, and it followed them over the mountains and down into Sorrento. They finally drew up in the courtyard of the Hotel de la Sirena, and the long ride was at an end. The little garden was white and pink with roses and camellias, and the tubed mandarins were heavy with fruit.

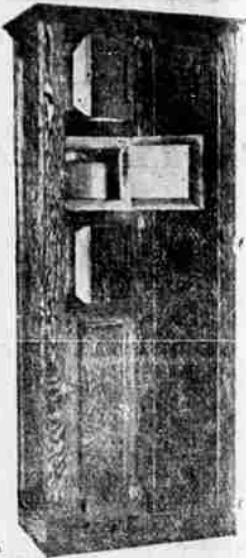
"And this is March," said Merrihew, his thought traveling back to his own bleak country, where winter is so long

and summer is so short. Their rooms were on the northeast corner, on the first floor, and from the windows they could look down upon the marina piccola and the tideless sea, a sheer 150 feet below. Everybody welcomed the Signor Hilliard. The hotel was his and everything and everybody in it. Later, when they were alone, Hilliard began to explain. "They remember my father. He used to live like a prince in Sorrento. Every time I come here I do the best I can to keep the luster to his name. Tomorrow I shall point out to you the

place in which I was born. A Russian princess owns it now." "A real live princess?" said Merrihew. "Is she beautiful?" "Once upon a time," returned Hilliard, laughing. Giovanni did not return till late that night, and on the morrow Hilliard questioned him. "I have been to see a cousin," said Giovanni, "who lives on the way to El Deserta." "Ah! So you have a cousin here?" "Yes, signor."

(To be continued.)

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