

# 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.

VII—Hilliard and Dan Merryhew decide to go to Italy. Merryhew loves Kitty Killigrew, a comic opera singer, who has gone to Italy. Hilliard receives a black mask in an envelope.

VIII and IX—Hilliard and Merryhew arrive in Italy and later dine with Mrs. Stanford, an American Society woman, who tells Hilliard considerable about the mysterious woman with whom he is in love. She is now posing as an opera singer in Kitty Killigrew's opera company.

"There! This is better."  
"It is always better when you are with me," said Kitty.

For years Kitty had fought her battles alone, independent and resourceful, and yet here she was leaning upon the strong will of this remarkable woman, and gratefully too.

"Now, my dear Kitty, we'll just enjoy ourselves tonight, and on our return I shall lay a plan before you, and tomorrow you may submit it to the men."

"I accept it at once without knowing what it is."

"What a beautiful palace!" Kitty cried presently, pointing to a house not far from the house of Petrarch. The moon poured broadly upon it. The gondola posts stood like sleeping sentinels, and the tide murmured over the steps.

Pompeo, seeing Kitty's gesture, swung the gondola diagonally across the canal.

"No, no, Pompeo!" La Signorina spoke in Italian. "I have told you never to go near that house without express orders. Straight ahead."

"Who lives there?" asked Kitty.

"Nobody," answered La Signorina, "though once it was the palace of a great warrior. How picturesque the gondolas look, with their dancing double lights!"

"The old palace interests me more than the gondolas," declared Kitty. But La Signorina was not to be trapped.

From the Grand canal they came out into the great canal of San Marco, the beginning of the lagoon.

"La Signorina"—began Kitty.

"There! I have warned you twice. The third time I shall be angry."

"Hilda, then. But I am afraid whenever I call you that. You do not belong to my world."

"And what makes you think that?" There was a smile behind the veil.

"I do not know unless it is that you are at home everywhere, in the Campo, in the hotels, in the theater or the palace. Now, I am at home only in the theater, in places which are unreal and artificial. You are a great actress, a great singer, and yet, as O'Mally would say, you don't belong." Kitty had forgotten what she had started out to say.

La Signorina laughed. "Pouf! You have been reading too many novels. To the molo, Pompeo."

At the molo, the great quay of Venice, they disembarked. The whilom prima donna dropped 50 centesimi into Pompeo's palm, and he bowed to the very gunwale of the boat.

"Grazie, nobilita."

"What does he say?" asked Kitty.

"He says 'Thanks, nobility.' If I had given him a penny it would have been thanks only. For a lira he would

have added principessa—princess. The gondoller will give you any title you desire if you are willing enough to pay for it."

The Piazza San Marco, or St. Mark, is the mecca of those in search of beauty. Here they may lay the sacred carpet, kneel and worship. There is none other to compare with this mighty square, with its enchanting splendor, its haunting romance, its brilliant if pathetic history.

There were several thousand people in the square tonight, mostly travelers. The band was playing selections from Audran's whimsical "La Mascotte." The tables of the many cafes were filled, and hundreds walked to and fro under the bright arcades or stopped to gaze into the shop windows.

The two women saw no vacant tables at Florian's, but presently they espied the other derelicts—O'Mally, Smith and Worth—who managed to find two extra chairs.

Through her veil their former prima donna studied them carefully, with a purpose in mind. The only one she doubted was Worth. Somehow he annoyed her. She could not explain, yet still the sense of annoyance was always there.

"Gentlemen," she said during a lull. "I have a plan to propose to you all."

"If it will get us back to old Broadway let us have it at once," said O'Mally.

"Well, then, I propose to wait no longer for letters from home. My plan



A glorious green emerald lay in the palm of her hand.

is simple. They say that a gambler always wins the first time he plays. I propose that each of you will spare me what money you can, and Kitty and I will go to Monte Carlo and take one plunge at the tables."

"Monte Carlo!" O'Mally brought down his fist resoundingly. "That's a good idea. If you should break the bank think of the advertisement when you go back to New York."

"Be still," said Worth.

"Dash it, business is business, and without publicity there isn't any business," O'Mally was hurt.

"Mr. O'Mally is right," said La Signorina. "It would be a good advertisement. But your combined opinion is what I want."

The three men looked at one another thoughtfully, then drew out their wallets, thin and worn. They made up a purse of exactly \$150, not at all a propitious sum. But, such as it was, O'Mally passed it across the table. This utter confidence in her touched La Signorina's heart. She turned aside for a moment and fumbled with the hidden chain about her neck. She placed her hand on the table and opened it. O'Mally gasped. An emerald—a glorious green emerald—lay in the palm of her hand.

"I shall give this to you, Mr. O'Mally," said the owner. "I'll return. It is very dear to me, but that must not stand in the way."

"Ye gods!" cried O'Mally in dismay. "Put it away. I shouldn't sleep o' nights with that on my person. Keep it. We'll trust you anywhere this side

of jail. If you're a brick, all the same." And that was as near familiarity as O'Mally ever came.

She turned to Smith, but he put out a hand in violent protest; then to Worth, but he smiled and shook his head.

She put the ring away. It was her mother's. She never would smile scornfully in secret at these men again.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "If I lose your money we will all go to Florence. I have another plan, but that will keep till this one under hand proves a failure."

O'Mally beckoned to a waiter.

"Tom!" warned Smith.

"You let me alone," replied O'Mally.

"A quart of Asti won't hurt anybody." Early the next morning she and Kitty departed for Monte Carlo in quest of fortune. Fortune was there, waiting, but in a guise wholly unexpected.

(To be continued.)

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