

# The Lure of the Mask

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

## CHAPTER IX.

### A TANGLED SKIN.

SANFORD knew how to order a dinner, and so by the time that Merribew had emptied his second glass of Burgundy and his first of champagne he was in the haze of golden confidence. He would find Kitty, and when he found her he would find her heart as well.

"Say, Jack," said Sanford, "what did you mean by that fool cable anyhow?"

Hillard had been patiently waiting for an opening of this sort. "And what did you mean by hoarding me?"

"Hoarding you?"

"That's the word. I was in your house that night. I was there as surely as I am here tonight."

"Well, am I crazy or is it Jack?"

"Sometimes," said Mrs. Sanford, "when you put the chauffeur in the tonneau I'm inclined to think that it is you."

Hillard looked straight into the placid gray eyes of his hostess. Very slowly one of the white lids drooped. His heart bounded.

"But really," continued Sanford seriously, "unless you bribed the caretaker you could not possibly have entered the house. You have been dreaming."

"Very well, then. It begins to look as if I had." It was apparent to Hillard that Sanford was not in his wife's confidence in all things. He also saw the wisdom of dropping the subject while at the table.

They took coffee and liqueur in the glass enclosed balcony. Hillard found a quiet nook not far from the lift. He saw that Mrs. Sanford's chair was placed so that she could get a good view of the superb night. He sat down himself, slipped his liqueur meditatively, drank his coffee and as she nodded lighted a cigarette.

"Well?" she said, smiling into his brown eyes. She was rather fond of Hillard, a gentleman always and one of excellent taste. There was never any wearisome innuendo in his wit nor suggestion in his stories.

"You deliberately winked at me," he began.

"I deliberately did."

"Sanford is in the dark. I suspected as much."

"Regarding the wink?"

"Regarding the mysterious woman who occupied your house by your express authority and who rode the hunter in the park."

"Was there ever a more beautiful picture?" sweeping her hands toward the city.

"The beauty of it will last several hours yet. Who and what was she?"

"I wish I could find you a wife. You would make a good husband."

"Thank you. I am even willing, with your assistance, to prove it. Who was she, and how came she in your house?"

"She wished that favor and that her presence in New York should not be known. Now describe to me exactly what happened. I am worrying about the plate and the silver."

He laughed. "And you will meet me halfway?"

"I promise to tell you all I dare."

"There is a mystery?"

"Yes. So begin with your side of it."

It was a capital story teller. He recounted the adventure in all its color—the voice under his window, the personals in the paper, the interchange of letters, the extraordinary dinner, the mask in the envelope. She followed him with breathless interest.

"Charming, charming!" She clapped her hands. "And how well you tell it! You have told it just as it happened."

"Just as it happened?" confounded for a moment.

"Exactly. I have had a letter—two, in fact. You did not see her face?"

"Only the chin and mouth. But if I ever meet her again I shall know her by her teeth."  
"Heavens! And how?"  
"Two lower ones are gone. Otherwise they would be beautiful."  
"Poor man! You have builded your house upon the sands. Her teeth are perfect. She has fooled you."  
"But I saw with these two eyes!"  
"There is a preparation which theatrical people use—a kind of gum. She mentioned the trick. Isn't she clever?"  
"Yet I shall know her hair," doggedly.  
She put her hands swiftly to her head. "Now, you have known me for



He recounted the adventure in all its color.

years. What is the color of my hair?"  
"Why, it is blond."  
"Nothing of the kind. It is auburn. If you cannot tell mine, how will you tell hers?"  
"I shall probably run after every red-headed woman in Europe till I find her," humorously.  
"Our ears never deceive half so often as our eyes."  
"Her face is not scarred, is it?"  
"Scarred!" indignantly. "She is as beautiful as a Raphael, as lovely as a Bouguereau. If I were a man I should gladly journey round the world for the sight of her."  
"I am willing, even anxious."  
"I should fall in love with her."  
"I believe I have."  
"Come, Mr. Hillard. I am just fooling. You are too sensible a man to fall in love with a shadow—a mask. One does not fall in love that way."  
"She is married?"  
"Certainly I have not said so."  
He flicked the ash from his cigarette.  
"Have you those letters?"  
"One of them I'll show you."  
"Why not the other?"  
"It would be wasting time. It merely relates to your adventure. She called the day after you dined with her."  
"That accounts for the shutters. The police and the caretaker were bribed."  
"I suspect they were."  
"If I were a vain man, and you know I am not, I might ask you if she spoke well of me in this letter. Understand I am not inquiring."  
"But you put the question as adroitly as a woman. We are sure of vanity always. Yes, she spoke of you. She found you to be an agreeable gentleman. But, with gentle malice, she did not say that she wished she had met you years ago under more favorable circumstances."  
"Come, give me the death stroke and have done with it. Tell me what you dare, and I'll be content with it."  
She opened her handkerchief purse and delved among the various articles therein.  
"I expected that you would be asking questions, so I am prepared. I did not tell my husband for that very reason. He would have insisted upon knowing everything. Here, read this. It is only a glimpse."  
He searched eagerly for the signature.  
"Don't bother," she said. "The name is only a nickname we gave her at school."  
"School? Do you mean to tell me that you went to school with her? Where?"  
"In Pennsylvania first, then in Milan. Read."

O Cara Mia—if only you knew how sorry I am to miss you! Why must you sail at once? Why not come to my beautiful Venice? I have so much to say that cannot be written. You ask about the adventure. Foot goes my little dream of greatness. It was a blank failure. The officials put unheard of obstacles in our path. The contracts were utterly disregarded. In the first place, we had not purchased our costumes and scenery in Italy.

"Costumes and scenery?" Hillard sought the signature again.

The base of all the trouble was a clerk in the consulate at Naples. He wrote us that there would be no duties on costumes and scenery. Alas, the manager and his backers are on the way to America, sad and wiser men! We surrendered our return tickets to the chorus and sent them home. The rest of us are stranded—

—is not that the word?—here in Venice, waiting for money from home. If I were alone, it would be highly amusing, but these poor people with me! There is only one way I can help them, but that—never! You recollect that my personal income is quarterly, and it will be two months before I shall have funds. There are persons moving heaven and earth to find me. My companions haven't the least idea who I am. So here we all are, wandering about the Piazza San Marco, calling at Cook's every day in hopes of money. I am staying with my maid in the Campo Santa Maria Formosa, near our beloved Santa Barbara. I have guaranteed the credit of my companions, and they believe that Venetians are generous people. Generous! Perhaps you will wonder how I dared appear on the stage in Italy. A black wig and a theatrical makeup—these were sufficient. A duke sent me an invitation to take supper with him, as if I were a ballerina! I sent one of the American chorus girls, a little miss for mischief. She ate his supper and then ran away. I understand that he was furious. Only a few months more, Nell, and then I may come and go as I please. Come to Venice.

CAPRICCIOSA.

Hillard did not stir. Another labyrinth to this mystery! Capricciosa—Kitty Killigrew's unknown prima donna, and all he had to do was to take the morning train for Venice, and twenty-four hours later he would be prowling through the Campo Santa Maria Formosa.

Mrs. Sanford observed him curiously, even sadly. Why couldn't his fancy have been charmed by an every-day, sensible girl and not by this whimsical, extraordinary woman who fooled diplomats, flouted dukes and kept a king at arm's length as a pastime? And yet—

"Capricciosa," he mused aloud. "That is not her name."  
"And I shall not tell it to you."  
"But her given name? Just a straw, something to hold on. I'm a drowning man."

"It is Hilda."  
"That is German."  
"She prefers it to Sonia."  
"Sonia Hilda. It begins well. May I keep this letter?"  
"Certainly not. With that cara mia! Give it to me."

He did so. "Shall I seek her?"  
"This is my advice—don't think of her after tonight. If you ever see or recognize her, avoid her. It may sound theatrical, but she is the innocent cause of two deaths. These men sought her openly too."  
"What has she done?"  
"She made a great though common mistake."

"Political?"  
"Don't be foolish. I am sorry I let you see the letter. I forgot that she told me her hiding place."  
"Her hiding place?"  
"Mr. Hillard, she is as far removed from your orbit as Mars' is from Jupiter's. Forget her."

"My orbit is not limited. I shall seek her. When I find her I shall marry her."

"I like you too much, Mr. Hillard, to stand by and see you break your heart against a stone wall."  
"Don't you see, the deeper the mystery is the more powerful the attraction becomes?"

The door to the lift opened and closed noisily, and Hillard turned negligently. A man sauntered through the room. The moment he came into the light Hillard's interest became lively enough. It was the handsome Italian with the scar.

"Who is that man?" he whispered. "Only a few weeks ago I bumped into him on coming out of the club."  
"Do not attract his attention," she answered.

"Who is he?" he repeated.  
"A Venetian officer and a profligate. I entertained him once, but I learned from him that I had been ill advised."

Hillard saw that this subject would admit of no further questions. The man with the scar had committed some inexcusable offense, and Mrs. Sanford had crossed him off the list.

It was after 10 when Hillard and his friend took their leave.

"We shall leave in the morning for Venice," said Hillard.

"Venice? How about Rome and Florence?"

"Which would you prefer, Rome and the antiquities or Venice and—Kitty Killigrew?"

"Kitty in Venice? Are you sure?"

"She is there with La Signorina Capricciosa. Oh, this is a fine word, after all, and I was wrong to speak ill of it this morning."

"If Kitty's in Venice I'm an ungrateful beggar too. But I do not see why Kitty's being in Venice excites you."

"No? Well, fate writes that Kitty's

CHAPTER X.

CARABINIERI.

"SIGNORI," began Hillard calmly, "before you act will you not do me the honor to explain this visit?"

"It is not he!" said one of the carabinieri. "It is the master, and not the servant. This is Signor Hillard, is it not?" he continued, addressing himself to Hillard. "The signor has a servant by the name of Giovanni?"

"Yes. And what has he done to warrant this visit?"

"It is a matter of seven years," answered the spokesman. "Your servant attempted to kill an officer in Rome. Luigi here, who was then interested in the case in Rome, thought he recognized Giovanni in the street today. Inquiries led us here."

"At any rate, it looks as though Giovanni had been forewarned of your visit," answered Hillard. "And may I ask what is the name of the officer Giovanni attempted to kill?"

"It is not necessary that you should know."

Hillard accepted the rebuke with becoming grace.

"And now, signor," with the utmost courtesy, "permit us to apologize for this intrusion. We shall wait in the hall, and if we find Giovanni we shall gladly notify you of the event."

"Hello! What's this?" exclaimed Hillard, going to the table when the officers had gone. It was a note addressed to him:

My Kind Master—The carabinieri are after me. But rest easy. I was not born to rot in a dungeon. I am going north. As for my clothes, send them to Giacomo, the baker, who lives on the road to El Deserta. He will understand. May the Holy Mother guard you should we never meet again!

Hillard passed the note to Merribew. "That's too bad. I've taken a great fancy to him. It seems that the peasant has no chance on this side of the water. His child a painted dancer in Paris and a price on his own head! It's hard luck. And the fellow who caused all this trouble goes free."

"He always goes free, Dan, here or elsewhere."  
"Why, we'd have lynched him in America."  
"That's possible. We are such an impulsive race," ironically. "Yes, no doubt we'd have lynched him, and these foreigners would have added another ounce of fact to their belief that we are still barbarians."  
"I hadn't thought of that," Merribew admitted.

Merribew became impatient. "Now out with it. Where and how did you learn that Kitty is in Venice?"

Hillard told him briefly.

"And so they are all in Venice, broke? By George, here's our chance—everlasting gratitude and all that! We'll bail 'em out and ship 'em home! How is that for a bright idea?"

"Let me see," said Hillard practically. "There are five of them—five hundred for tickets and doubtless five hundred more for unpaid hotel bills. It would never do, Dan, unless we wish to go home with them."

"But I haven't touched my letter of credit yet. I could get along on two thousand."

"Not with the brand of cigars you are smoking, 30 cents each."  
"No; we can't ball them out, but we can ease up their bills till money comes from home. Not one of them by this time will have a watch. O'Mally will remain sober from dire necessity. Poor Kitty Killigrew! All the wonderful shops and not a stiver in her pockets!"

Merribew paced the floor for some time, his head full of impossible schemes. He stopped in the middle of the room with an abruptness which portended something.

"I have it. Instead of going directly to Venice, we'll change the route and go to Monte Carlo. I'll risk my four hundred, and if I win—"

"Then the announcement cards, a house wedding and pictures in the New York papers. Dan, you are impossible. You have gambled enough to know that when you are careless of results you win, but never when you need the cash. But it is Monte Carlo if you say so. Two or three days there will cure you of your beautiful dream. After all, with a second thought, it's a good cause, and it might be just your luck to win. The masquerading lady! Monte Carlo it is."

Merribew danced a jig. Hillard stepped to the mirror and bowed profoundly. The jig ceased.

"Madame, permit me, a comparative stranger, to offer you passage money home. We won it at Monte Carlo. It is yours. Polite enough," mused Hillard, "but hanged if it sounds proper."

"To the deuce with propriety!" cried Merribew buoyantly. "We'll start tomorrow!"

From her window Kitty looked down on the Campo, which lay patched with black shadows and moonshine. How still at night was this fairy city in the sea! There were no hoarse clattering over the stone pavements, no trains, no omnibuses. The stillness which was of peace lay over all things. And some of this had entered Kitty's heart.

But for one thing the hour would have been perfect. Kitty, ordinarily brave and cheerful, was very lonesome and homesick. The dismal failure of it all! She had danced, sung, spoken her lines the very best she knew how, and none had noticed or encouraged her. It was a bitter cup after all the success at home. If only she could take it philosophically like La Signorina!

And there were so many things she could not understand. Why should La Signorina always go veiled? Where did she disappear so mysteriously in the daytime? And those sapphires and diamonds and emeralds? Why live here with such a fortune hanging round her neck?

"Kitty?" The voice came from the doorway. Kitty was startled for a

moment, but it was only La Signorina. Kitty furtively wiped her eyes.

"I am over here by the window. The moon was so bright I did not light the lamp."

La Signorina moved with light step to the window, bent and caught Kitty's face between her hands and turned it firmly toward the moon.

"You have been crying, cara!"  
"I am very lonely," said Kitty.  
"You poor little homeless bird!" La Signorina seized Kitty impulsively in her arms. "If I were not"—She hesitated.

"If you were not?"  
"If I were not poor, but rich instead, I'd take you to one of the fashionable hotels. You are out of place here in this rambling old ruin."  
"Not half so much as you are," Kitty replied.

"I am never out of place. I can live comfortably in the fields with the peasants, in cities in extravagant hotels. My mind is always at one height. Where the body is does not matter much."

There was a subtle hauteur in the voice. It subdued Kitty's inquisitiveness.

"Sometimes," said Kitty, drying the final tear—"sometimes I am afraid of you."

"And wisely. I am often afraid of myself. I always do the first thing that enters my head, and generally it

is the wrong thing. Never mind. The old woman here will trust us for some weeks yet." She leaned from the window and called, "Pompeo!"

From the canal the gondolier answered.

"Now then!" said the woman to the girl.

Kitty threw a heavy shawl over her head and shoulders, while the other would about her face the now familiar dark gray veil, and the two went down into the Campo to the landing.

Pompeo threw away his cigarette and doffed his hat. He offered his elbow to steady the women as they boarded, and once they were seated a good stroke sent the gondola up the canal. Under bridges they passed. They glided by little restaurants where Venetians in olden days talked liberty for themselves and death to the Austrians, and at length they came out upon the Grand canal where the Rialto curves its ancient blocks of marble.

"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 mole, Pompeo!"

At the mole, the great quay of Venice, they disembarked. The willow prima donna dropped 50 centesimi into

Pompeo's palm, and he bowed to the very guaiate 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—princessa. The gondolier 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 a 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

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, "till I 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. But 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, out in a gulse wholly unexpected.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## New Secretary

A new secretary of the Washington State Railway Commission has been appointed in the person of Francis N. Larned of Seattle. He is well known in newspaper circles, having been connected with the Post-Intelligencer for five years. His latest service was as Sunday editor. Mr. Larned is regarded as particularly well qualified for his new post.

## A FULL STOCKING



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