

The Lure of the Mask

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

CHAPTER XI

A BOX OF CIGARS

ON the way up to Rome Hillard and his pupil had a second class compartment all to themselves. The train was a fast one, for the day of slow travel has passed in Italy, and the cry of speed is heard over the land.

There was a change of cars at Rome and a wait of two hours. After intermission Merrihew secretly bought two boxes of cigars to carry along. They were good cigars and cost him \$15. He covered them with some



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TIME TABLE
 Effective Sunday, Sept. 12, trains will arrive and depart at Hood River, Oregon, on the following schedule:

WEST BOUND
 No. 8 Oregon & Washington Limited 5:50 A. M.
 No. 9 Portland Express 8:00
 No. 3 Spo-Spokane-Portland 8:45
 No. 11 Pacific Express 8:50 P. M.
 No. 7 Portland Special 8:45
 Train No. 11 makes all stops between Hood River and Portland.

Train No. 8 will stop only at Wyeth, Cascade Locks, Bonneville, Bridal Veil, Troutdale, Fairview, Columbia Beach, Latourelle and Corbetta.
 Train No. 3, No. 5 and No. 7 will make no stop between Hood River and Portland.

EAST BOUND
 No. 12 Atlantic Express 10:25 A. M.
 No. 10 Chicago Special 11:55
 No. 4 Oregon & Washington Limited 3:35 P. M.
 No. 6 Spo-Spokane-Portland 9:00
 No. 10 Will Lake Express 10:25
 No. 12 stops at all stations east of Hood River.
 No. 10 stops at Mosier, The Dalles, Celilo, Deschutes, Rufus, Arlington, Umatilla, Hermiston, Reindoll, and other way stations.

No. 4 and No. 6 stop only at The Dalles, Umatilla, Pendleton, Gibbon, LaGrande and Baker City.
 No. 8 will only handle passengers for Nampa, Idaho, and points east thereof.
 Passengers for local points east of Hood River must take train No. 12 or train No. 10 to points at which they stop.

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newspapers and at the station succeeded by some legerdemain in slipping them into one of his cases. Hillard would have lectured him on his extravagance, and this was a good way to avoid it. But some hours later he was going to be very sorry that he had not made a confidant of his guide.

As they were boarding the train they noticed two gentlemen getting into the forward compartment of the carriage. "Humph! Our friend with the scar," said Hillard. "We do not seem able to shake him."

"I'd like to shake him. He goes against the grain somehow." Merrihew swung into the compartment. "I wonder why the Sandfords dropped him?"

"For some good reason. They are a liberal pair, and if our friend forward offended them it must have been something outside the pale of forgiveness. But I should like to know where old Giovanni is. I miss him."

"Poor devil!" said Merrihew, with careless sympathy.

The train started.

"Monte Carlo! Gold, gold, little round pieces of gold!" Merrihew rubbed his hands like a miser.

"Hard to get and heavy to hold!" quoted Hillard. "I suppose that you have a system already worked out."

"Of course. I shall win if I stick to it."

"Or if the money lasts. Bury your system, my boy. It will do you no good. Trust to luck only. Monte Carlo is the graveyard of systems."

"But maybe my system is the one. You can't tell till I have tried it."

Soon the train began to lift into the mountains, the beautiful Apennines. By the time they arrived in Genoa, late at night, both compared favorably with the coalers in the harbor of Naples.

Early the next morning the adventurers set out for Monte Carlo—more tunnels, a compartment filled with women and children. But the beauty of the Riviera was compensation.

Ventimiglia, or Vintimille, has a sinister sound in the ears of the traveler if perchance he be a man fond of his tobacco. The train drew in. A dozen steps more and one was virtually in France. But there is generally a slight hitch before one takes the aforesaid steps—the French customs. A porter

knipped his head into the window. "Eight minutes for examination of baggage," he cried.

"Come, Dan," cried Hillard; "lively if we want good seats when we come out. We change trains."

After a short skirmish they located their belongings. They would have to be patient.

Among the inspectors at Ventimiglia is a small, wizened Frenchman with a face as cold and impassive as the sand blown sphinx. He possesses, among other accomplishments, a nose peculiar less for its shape than for its smell. He can "smell out" tobacco as a witch doctor in Zululand smells out a "devil."

Fate directed this individual toward the Americans. Hillard knew him of old, and he never forgets a face, this wizened little man.

"Monsieur has nothing to declare?" he asked.

Hillard made a negative sign and opened his cases. With scarce a glance at their contents and waving aside the coupons the inspector applied the chalk and turned to Merrihew:

"Monsieur has nothing to declare?" he repeated.

Merrihew shook his head airily. "Niente, niente!" he said in his best Italian. He did not understand what the inspector said. He merely had suspicions.

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Hillard. Passing out of the door which led to liberty and to France, their luggage guaranteed by cabalistic chalk marks, were two women. One of them was veiled; the other was not.

"Kitty Killgrew, as I live!" shouted Merrihew, making a dash for the door. But the inspector blocked the way, beckoned to a gendarme, who came over, and calmly pointed to Merrihew's unopened cases.

"Open!" said the inspector.

"But—Merrihew struggled to pass.

"For heaven's sake," cried Hillard, "be patient and open the cases at once."

Merrihew handled his keys clumsily. It is ever thus when one is in a hurry. Finally he threw back the lids, feeling that in another moment he must have spouted Italian or French out of pure magic simply to tell this fool inspector what he thought of him.

"Oh, monsieur in a hurry!" mocked the inspector. "Nothing, nothing!" He took out two boxes of cigars.

"Why the devil didn't you tell me you had them?" Hillard demanded wrathfully. To find the women by this stroke of luck and then to lose them again for two boxes of cigars! It was maddening.

The inspector went through Merrihew's possessions with premeditated leisure. Everything had to come out. He even opened the shaving sets, the collar box, the pin cases and the tie bag.

"Will you hasten?" asked Hillard. "We do not wish to miss this train."

"Others follow," said the inspector laconically.

Hillard produced a five franc piece. The inspector laughed without noise and shook his head. This one inspector is impervious to money or smooth speeches. He is the law personified, inexorable.

Hillard strained his eyes, but saw neither Kitty nor the veiled lady again. Doubtless they were already on the train. Had Merrihew been an old traveler he would have left him to get to Monte Carlo the best way he could, but Merrihew was as helpless as a child, and he hadn't the heart to desert him, though he deserved to be deserted.

"Ding-ding!" went the bell. Whew! went the whistle. The train

for Monte Carlo was drawing out, and they were being left behind. Hillard swore and Merrihew went white with impotent anger. If only he could hit something! The inspector smiled and went on with his deadly work. When he was certain that they could not possibly catch the train he handed the cigars to their owner and pointed to a sign the other side of the barricade.

"What shall I do now, Jack?" Merrihew asked.

"I refuse to help you. Find out yourself."

So Merrihew, hopeless and subdued, went into the room designated, saw the cigars taken out and weighed, took the bill and presented it with a hundred lire note at the little window in the office.

Procuring his change, he found Hillard sitting disconsolately on the barricade.

"I hope you are perfectly satisfied," said Hillard, with an amiability which wouldn't have passed muster anywhere.

"Oh, I'm satisfied," answered Merrihew. He stuffed his pockets with cigars, slammed the boxes into the case and locked them up.

"I worked you about tobacco."

"I know it."

"You should have told me."

"I know that, too, but I didn't want you to lecture me."

"A lecture would have been better than waiting here in this barn for three hours."

"Three hours?" despondently.

"Oh, there's a restaurant, but it's not much better than this. It's bad—dies and greasy plates."

And by the time they had found the Ristorante Toruagli—miserable and uninviting—they were laughing.

"Only I wish I knew where they were going," was Hillard's regret.

"They?" said Merrihew.

"Yes. The woman with Kitty is the woman I'm going to find if I stay in Europe ten years. And when I find her I'm going to marry her."

"Sounds good," said Merrihew, pouring himself a third glass of very indifferent Beatine.

"And they may be going anywhere but to Monte Carlo—Paris, Cherbourg, Calais. In my opinion, Monte Carlo is the last place two such women are likely to go to alone."

So they sat in the dingy restaurant, smoking and laughing and grumbling till the next train was announced. At 4 that afternoon they arrived without further mishap at the most interesting station of its size in Europe, Monte Carlo.

And then into the omnibus adjoining came the man with the scar.

The Riviera, from San Remo on the Italian side to Cannes on the French, possesses a singular beauty.

Villefranche stands above Nice, between that white city and Monte Carlo. It is quiet and lovely. For this reason the great army of tourists pass it by. There is no casino, no band, no streets full of tantalizing shops. On the very western limit of Villefranche, on the winding white road which rises out of Nice, is a modest little villa, so modest that a ballerina would scorn it and a duchess ignore it.

In the balcony La Signorina reposed in a steamer chair, gazing seaward. The awning cast a warm glow as of gold upon her face and hair, a transparent shadow. She was at this moment the most precious thing upon which the eye may look, a wholly beautiful woman. Kitty Killgrew, standing in the casement window, stared at her silently, not without some envy, not without some awe. What was going on behind those dreamy eyes?

"Hide?" said Kitty.

"Yes, Kitty."

"Who and what are you?" Kitty asked bravely.

La Signorina's eyes wandered till they met Kitty's.

"And what good would it do you to know? Would it bring money from home any sooner? You already know that I am unhappy. The adventures are always in."

"Adventures?" Kitty laughed scornfully. "The proprietor pretends he



La Signorina turned again in a passion fierce and sudden.

does not know you, but I am certain he does. He forgets himself sometimes in the way he bows to you."

Kitty paused, then asked: "Won't you tell me what the secret is?"

"How beautiful that white sail looks!"

"You know all about me," went on Kitty stubbornly.

"Because you told me. I never asked you a single question."

"Is it love?"

"Love!" La Signorina shrugged. "Poor Kitty, you are trying in vain to make a romance out of my life. You should not read so much."

"It is not curiosity," declared Kitty. "It is because I love you and because it makes me sad when I hear you laugh, when I see you beat your hands against the chair as you did just now."

La Signorina turned again in a passion which was as fierce as it was sudden.

"There is a man," she hissed, her eyes dilating. "But I loathe him, I hate him, I abhor him! And were it not wicked to kill he would have been dead long ago. Enough! If you ever ask another question I will leave you."

"I am sorry," said Kitty. "He was false to you and broke your heart."

"No, Kitty, only my pride."

"It is a strange world," mused Kitty. "Let us turn to our affairs. I received a letter today."

"From home?" eagerly.

"I have no home, Kitty. The letter is from a friend in Naples. Mr. Hillard and Mr. Merrihew, friends of yours, are in Italy."

Kitty could scarcely believe her ears. "Where are they? Where are they stopping?"

"That I do not know. But listen. They have started out to find us. When I tell you that Mr. Hillard is the gentleman I dined with that night before we sailed you will understand my reasons for wishing to avoid him. From this time on we must never appear on the streets without our veils. If by chance we meet them we must give no sign. It will be only for a little while. Your letter will come soon, and you may renew your acquaintance with these two gentlemen when you return home. It may be hard for you, but if you wish to stay with me my will must be a law unto you."

"Not to speak to them if we meet them?" urged Kitty in dismay. "But that is cruel of you. They are both gentlemen."

"I do not know Mr. Merrihew, but I can say that Mr. Hillard is a gentleman. As for being cruel, I am not; only selfish."

"Are you not a queen who has run away from a kingdom?" asked Kitty bitterly. "One reads about them every day in the papers."

"My dear, you are free to choose one of two paths. I shall not urge you one way or the other, but you must choose now."

Several minutes passed. Kitty looked out to sea, and La Signorina closed her eyes. In her heart Kitty knew that she could no more leave this woman than she could fly. She was held by curiosity, by sentiment, by the romantic mystery.

"I have chosen," she said at length. "I shall stay with you."

"Thanks, Kitty. And now the affairs of the company. We have played three days and have lost steadily. Tonight will be the last chance. Win or lose, tomorrow we shall return to Venice. I do not like the idea of going to Monte Carlo at night. It is not exactly safe. But since beggars mustn't be choosers we must go. Again I warn you to speak to no one while I am playing and under no circumstances raise your veil. They have begun to notice us, but it will end tonight. I was mad to think that I could win. And, by the way, Kitty, we shall not go back to the Campo Formosa."

Kitty accepted this news brightly. If there was one place she hated it was the Campo.

"Now run and dress," advised La Signorina. "Let me dream a little more while the sun sets."

She knew them tolerably well. After thirty they cease to follow visions—they seek tangible things. No, they must never meet again. It would not be wise. Her heart, galled by disillusion, might not withstand much storming. And she had no wish to add this irretrievable folly to the original blunder. She was afraid.

No; they must go their separate ways till the end. With a sigh she rose and went into the room. Kitty was busy with the finishing touches of her toilet. The older woman kissed her fondly.

"And do you realize that you are the most beautiful woman in the world?" asked Kitty.

"Little gatterer!"

"And if I were a man"—Kitty paused— "I'd fall in love with you and marry you."

La Signorina looked into the mirror.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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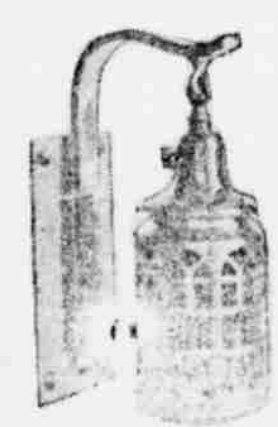
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