

The Lure of the Mask

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

CHAPTER XII GRAY VEILS

THE fascination of Monte Carlo is not to be described—it must be seen. Vice shall be attractive, says the mother of Satan. At Monte Carlo it is more than attractive; it is compelling. A subtle hypnotism prevails, the lure of gold. Fool and rogue, saint and sinner, here they meet and mingle and change. To those who give Monte Carlo but a trifling glance, toss a coin or two on the tables and leave by the morrow's train it has no real significance. It is simply one of the sights of Europe. To this latter class belonged the two young men. They had no fortunes to retrieve, no dishonesty to hide, no restrictions to make, no dancers to clothe and house. It was but a mild flirtation. They had searched Nice and Monaco and Mentone, but the women they sought were not to be found. They decided, therefore, that the women had gone on to Paris. "My system needs a tonic," said Merrihew. "We'll hold the funeral after tonight's play. Of all the damned games it's roulette." "And I can prove it," Merrihew replied. "I have just \$50 left." He took out the gold and toyed with it. "Can't you hear it?" he asked. "Hear what?" "The swan song of these tender napeleons." Merrihew had played the numbers, the dozens, the columns, the colors, odd and even. Sometimes he would win a little, but a moment later the relentless rake would drag it back to the bank.

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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. 4. Oregon & Washington Limited	5:50 A. M.
No. 9. Portland Express	6:50 "
No. 3. Soo-Spokane-Portland	6:45 "
No. 11. Pacific Express	8:20 P. M.
No. 7. Portland Special	8:45 "
Train No. 11 makes all stops between Hood River and Portland.	
Train No. 9 will stop only at Wyeth, Cascade Locks, Bonneville, Bridal Veil, Troutdale, Fairview, Columbia Beach, Latourelle and Corbett.	
Trains No. 3, No. 5 and No. 7 will make no stops between Hood River and Portland.	
EAST BOUND	
No. 12. Atlantic Express	10:25 A. M.
No. 6. Chicago Special	11:55 "
No. 8. Oregon & Washington Limited	3:35 P. M.
No. 4. Soo-Spokane-Portland	9:00 "
No. 10. Salt Lake Express	10:25 "
No. 12 stops at all stations east of Hood River.	
No. 10 stops at Mosier, The Dalles, Celina, Deschutes, Rufus, Arlington, Umatilla, Hermiston, Stanfield, Echo and other way stations.	
No. 6 and No. 8 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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"Nature has done this very prettily. Quite clever with her colors, don't you know," he drawled, plucking the down on his upper lip, for he was trying to raise a mustache, convinced that two waxed points of hair at each corner of his mouth would impress the hotel waiters and other facehins—baseborn. "Don't be a jackass!" Hillard was out of sorts. "You agreed with me that I was one. Why not let me make a finished product?" good humoredly. "Well," Merrihew finally said, "you might as well let me have my letter of credit now."



A picture, beautiful, but false.

friend. He's a bad loser. I have seen him lose his temper too. It's my opinion that he's a desperate man." "They usually are when they come to Monte Carlo."

So they walked round to the entrance to the gaming halls, where the lights, the gowns, the jewels, the sparkling eyes, the natural beauty and the beauty of enamel, the vague perfumes, the low murmur of voices, the soft rustle of silks, the music of ringing gold, all combine to produce a picture as beautiful as a mirage and as false. They joined the never ending procession which passes in and out of the swinging doors day after day, year after year.

"There's the chap with the scar. He is a handsome beggar," Hillard admitted. "I wonder what sort of blackleg he is. He's no ordinary one, I'm certain. I begin to recognize the face of the man with him. He's a distinguished diplomat."

The Italian played like an old hand, a number once in a while, but making it a point to stake on the colors. Red began to repeat itself. He doubled and doubled. On the sixth consecutive turn he played the maximum of 12,000 francs and won. The diplomat touched him on the arm significantly, but the player shook his head. Ten minutes later he had won 40,000 francs. Again he refused to leave his chair.

"If he stays now," said Hillard, "he will lose it all. His friend is right." "Forty thousand francs, \$8,000!" murmured Merrihew sadly. Why couldn't he have luck like this?

Hillard was a true prophet. There came a change in the smile of fortune. The game jumped from color to color, seldom repeating, with zero making itself conspicuous. The man with the scar played on, but he began to lose—small sums at first, then larger till finally he was down to his original stake. The scar grew livid. He waited five turns of the wheel, then placed his stake on the second dozen. He lost. He rose from his chair scowling. His eye chanced to meet Hillard's, and their glances held for a moment.

"Fool!" said Merrihew in an undertone as the man strolled leisurely past them. "Eight thousand and not content to quit!"

Meanwhile the trolleys from Nice and Mentone had poured into Monte Carlo their usual burdens of pleasure seekers. On one of the cars from Nice there had arrived two women, both veiled and simply gowned. They seldom addressed each other and never spoke to any one else. Doubtless they were some sober married women out for a lark. Upon leaving the car they did not at once go into the casino, but directed their steps toward the terraces, for the band was playing. They sat in the shadow of the statue of Masetet, and near by the rasp of a cricket broke in upon the music. When the music stopped they hunked arms and sauntered up and down the wide sweep of stone, mutually interested in the crowds. Once as they passed behind a bench the better to view the palaces of the prince they heard the voices of two men.

As they went on the women heard something about "those bad cigars." The men were Americans evidently. It was only an inconsequent incident, and a moment later both had forgotten it.

"At which table shall I make the stake, Kitty?" "The center. There is always a crush there, and we shall not be noticed."

"I do not agree with you there. However, it shall be the center's table. What would you do, Kitty, if I should break the bank?"

"Die of excitement!" truthfully. "You will live through this event then." With a light, careless laugh La Signorina pressed her way to the table.

She lost steadily from the start. She gave no sign, however, that her forces were in full retreat from the enemy. She played on, and the hand which placed the bets was steady. And when the gold was all gone she opened her empty hands expressively and shrugged. She was beaten.

Behind the chair of the banker, opposite, stood the Italian. The scowl still marred his forehead. When the woman in the veil spread out her hands he started. There was something familiar in that gesture. And then the woman saw him. For the briefest moment her form stiffened.

"Kitty," La Signorina whispered, "let us go out to the atrium. I am tired." They left the hall leisurely and found a vacant settle in the atrium.

"How cold your hands are!" exclaimed Kitty. "Kitty, I am a fool, a fool! I have unwittingly put my head in the lion's mouth. If I had not reached this seat in time I should have fallen. I would willingly give all my rings if at this moment I could run across the hall and out into the open!"

"Merciful heaven! Why, what is the matter? What has happened?" "I cannot explain to you."

"Was it some one you saw in there?" "Silence, and sit perfectly still!" A man in evening dress came out into the atrium, lighting a cigarette. At the sight of him both women were startled.

"It is Mr. Hillard, Mr. Merrihew's friend!" Kitty would have risen, but the other's strong hand restrained her. "Kitty, remember your promise."

"Is he the man?" "No, no! Only I have said that we must not meet him. It might do him incalculable harm. Harm!" La Signorina repeated. "Do you understand?"

Hillard blew outward a few pale rings of smoke and circled the atrium with an indolent glance which stopped as it rested upon the two veiled women. A certain curiosity impelled him toward them, and he sank on the settle with perhaps half a dozen spans of the hand between. He observed the women frankly. Not a single whisp of hair escaped the veils, not a line of any feature could be traced, and yet the tint of flesh shone dimly behind the silken bands of crape. He nodded. The veils did not move.

"Fortune favors the brave, but rarely the foolish." There was no response, but the small shoe of the woman nearest began to beat the floor ever so lightly. Hillard was chagrined.

Thereupon he bowed and sought another seat. The women hurried to the lobby. He would have given them no further thought had not the Italian with the scar appeared, eyed the retreating figures doubtfully and then started after them. That he did not know them Hillard was reasonably certain. He assumed that the Italian saw a possible flirtation. He rose quickly and followed.

The four departed from the casino and crossed toward the Hotel de Paris, the women in the lead. As yet they had not observed that they were being followed. The car stops at this turn. As the women came to a stand one of them saw the approaching men. Instantly she fled up the street. The other hesitated, then pursued her companion. Whatever doubts the Italian



"A lady? Grace of Mary, that is droll!"

might have entertained, this flight dispelled them. He knew now—he knew! With a sharp cry of exclamation he broke into a run. So did Hillard. People turned and stared, but none sought to intercept any of the runners. In Monte Carlo there are many strange scenes, and the knight errant often finds that his bump of caution has suddenly developed. And there were no police about; they were on the casino terraces or strolling through the gardens.

Past the park the quartet ran. Then came a stretch of darkness between one electric lamp and another. And then, as if whisked away by magic, the foremost woman disappeared. The other halted, breathless. She started again, but too late. The Italian caught her roughly and quickly tore aside the veil.

"Kitty Killgrew!" Hillard cried. He sprang forward and grasped the Italian by the shoulders. The Italian struck out savagely, but Hillard seized

his arm. Each man could hear the breathing of the other, quick and deep. "You meddling dog!" gasped Hillard. "Take care lest the dog bite, signor. Release my arm and stand aside!" "Presently. Now, that way is yours," said Hillard, pointing. "Are you certain?" the Italian hissed. "So certain that if you do not obey me I shall call the police." "I should like nothing better," replied the Italian, with a coolness which dumfounded Hillard. "Do you know these ladies?" "Do you?" insolently. "My knowing them does not matter. But it is any gentleman's concern when a man gives pursuit to a lady who does not wish to meet him."

"A lady? Grace of Mary, that is droll!" Hillard released the imprisoned arm. There was a patent rallyer, a quizzical insolence which convinced Hillard that the Italian had not given chase out of an idle purpose.

"We shall meet again," the Italian said softly. "I hope not," replied Hillard frankly. "However, you may find me at the Hotel de Londres."

The Italian laughed again. "You understand the language well," debatingly. "And the people too." Hillard had no desire to pass the time of day with his opponent.

"Well, I have said that we shall meet again, and it must be so." "And your hat, as well as mine, is still in the casino. The night is cold."

The Italian permitted his glance to wander over Hillard critically. He swung round on his heel and walked rapidly down the street. Hillard turned to reassure Kitty. Kitty had vanished!

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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