

The Lure of the Mask

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)
CHAPTER XV.

THE ARIA FROM "IL TROVATORE."
"I SHALL we take a look into the Campo Formosa again tonight?" asked Merrilow, stepping into the gondola.
"It will be a waste of time. Bettina will have warned them. What's the Italian coming to, anyhow? She refused a hundred francs. But I can see that Mrs. Sandford had a hand in this latest event. She has probably written that we might look for them in the Campo."

"All right. We'll listen to the music," grumbled Merrilow. He wanted to find Kitty right away. Hilliard's indifference annoyed him.

"To the barges of the troupe!" said Hilliard to Achille.
In the great canal of San Marco the scene was like a water carnival. Hundreds of gondolas, with bobbing lights, swam slowly round the barges of the serenaders, who, for the most part, were fallen operatic stars or those who had failed to attain those dizzy heights.

What was that? Hilliard was no longer lethargic.

From a gondola on the far side of the barge, standing out of the press and just beyond the radiance of the lanterns, came a voice which had a soul in it, a voice which broke into song for the pure joy of it—clear, thrilling—a voice before which the world bows down. The prima donna in the barge was clever; she stopped. The tenor went on, however, recognizing that he was playing opposite, as they say, to a great singer. Hilliard's heart beat fast. That voice! There could not be another like it. And she was here in Venice!

"Quick, Achille!" for the far gondola was heading for the Grand canal. Merrilow understood now.

"Follow!" commanded Hilliard. "Ten lire if you can come up alongside that gondola. Can you see the number?"
"It is 152, signor—Pompeo. It will be a race."

At each stroke Merrilow swung forward his body. The end of the race came sooner than any one expected. A police barge nosed round an ell. By the time Pompeo was off again the ferrule of the pursuing gondola scraped past Pompeo's blade. Pompeo called, and Achille answered. There was a war of words, figure of a dog, name of a pig. Achille was in the wrong, but 10 lire were 10 lire.

Hilliard caught the gondola by the rail and clung. The race was over.
"Signorina," said Pompeo, boiling with rage, "shall I call the police?"
"No, Pompeo," said his solitary passenger.
"To the Campo, Pompeo. Mr. Hilliard, will you kindly follow? I would speak to you alone, since there is no escape."

The way to the Campo Formosa was made without further incident.

The gondolas became moored. Hilliard jumped out and went to assist La Signorina, but she ignored his outstretched hand.

"What is it you wish?" she asked.
"One look at your face," he answered simply.

She slowly removed the veil. Then, for the first time, he looked upon the face of this woman who had burdened his dreams. The face was not like any he had conjured. It seemed to him that Verchio's—Paola Vecchio's—Barbara had stepped down from her frame—beauty, tranquility, flawless beauty. A minute passed. He was incapable of speech; he could only look.

"Well?" she said in the same expressionless tone.
"Let us begin at the beginning," he replied.

"Since this is to be the end."
"Why did you permit me to dine with you that memorable night?"
"A regrettable impulse."

"And why, after all had come to an apparent end—why did you send me that mask?"
"It is unanswerable. Truthfully I do not know."

"Who is that man—the Italian with the scar?"
"I will not answer that."
"A lady? Grace of Mary, that is dull!"

"Why do you say that?"
"I am only quoting the man with the scar. Those were the words he used in regard to you."

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"Perhaps he is right. Perhaps I am not a lady according to his lights." But she laughed.

"Do not laugh like that. What you are or have been or might have been to him is nothing to me. Only one fact remains clear, and that is I love you."

"No, Mr. Hilliard, you are only excited. I may be a fugitive from the law."

"I do not believe it."
"There may be scars which do not show," she faltered—"in the heart, in the mind. I am sorry, terribly sorry. Heaven knows that I meant no harm. Forget me!"

"Forget you! Tell me what prevents friendship between us."

"You say you love me. Is that not answer enough? Give up all idea, all thought, of me. You will only waste your time. Come, is your love strong enough to offer a single sacrifice?"

"Not if it is to give you up. Oh, do not worry about persecution! I shall only seek to be near you."

"Good night," she said, "and good-by!" She wound the veil round her face, took half a dozen steps, halted and turned, then went on into the dark.

The Villa Ariadne rested upon a small knoll half a mile or more north of and above Fiesole, from which the panoramic beauty of Florence was to be seen at all times, glistening in the sun, glowing in the rain, sparkling in the night.

Life ran smoothly enough at the Villa Ariadne. La Signorina at the very last moment surrendered to the entreaties of Kitty. She agreed not to pass herself off as the princess. Among themselves each played the role originally assigned. La Signorina seemed to enjoy the farce as much as any one. It was a great temptation not to steal a look into the marvelous chests and sideboards, bulging as they knew with priceless glass and silver and linen and laces. But La Signorina each day inspected the seals and uttered solemn warnings.

They had now lived in the Villa Ariadne for two weeks, a careless, thoughtless, happy-go-lucky family.

Today was warm and mellow. On the stone bench by the porter's lodge hard by the gate sat the old Florentine and O'Mally. From some unknown source O'Mally had produced a conceiver's hat and coat, a little moth eaten, a little tarnished, but serviceable.

"Pietro," said O'Mally, "I've got an idea. If any tourists come today I propose to show them around the place."

Pietro's eyes flashed angrily. "No, no! Mine, all mine!"
"Oh, I am not going to rob you! I'll give you the tip. What I want is the fun of the thing."

Pietro understood. That was different. If his excellency would pay over

these two families contemporaneous?"

"They were," scornfully.
The quintet consulted their guide-books, but before they had located the paragraph referring to this work O'Mally was cunningly leading them away. He passed on to the antique marbles, explaining how this one was Nero's, that one Caligula's, that one Tiberius'. He lied so gracefully that the tomb of Ananias must have rocked.

"Do you know," said the woman who had not yet spoken, "you speak English with an accent I do not understand."
O'Mally shivered. Was she going to spring dagos on him? "I am an Italian," he said solemnly. "I was born, however, in County Clare. My father and mother were immigrants to Ireland."

"Ma," whispered the girl, "ask him for one of those buttons."
The stage whisper was overheard by O'Mally. "These buttons," he explained, "cost a lira each, but if the signorina really wishes one"—and thus another lira swelled the profits of the day.

At the gates O'Mally received his poubrore (tip) of 20 centesimi and returned to Pietro.

"Quando!" he cried.
O'Mally handed him the exact amount, minus the lira for the button.

"Santa Maria! All these? How? No more I take dem? You?"
O'Mally sat down on the bench and laughed. It was as good a part as he had ever had.

Early evening. La Signorina leaned over the terrace wall, her hand idly trailing over the soft cool roses. Stretched out on either hand, white and shadowy, lay the great road. She was dreaming. Presently upon the silence came the echo of galloping horses. Two horsemen came cantering toward the Villa Ariadne. She heard their voices.

"Jack, this has been the trip of my life. Verona, Padua, Bologna and now Florence! This is life. Nothing like it!"

"It has been enjoyable, Dan. I only hope our luggage will be at the hotel." La Signorina's hand closed convulsively over a rose and crushed it.

"A last center to Fiesole!"
The two went clattering down the road.

La Signorina walked slowly back to the villa. It was fatality that this man should again cross her path.

"The Borgias?" doubtfully. "Were

"How much?" asked one of the men. "Cinquante," said O'Mally, then correcting himself, "for each person."

"Ten cents? Two lire fifty? Why, this is downright extortion!" declared the woman.

O'Mally gave vent to a perfect Italian shrug and put a hand out suggestively toward the gates.

"Oh, come, dear," protested one of the men wearily, "you've dragged us up here from Fiesole, and I'm not going back without seeing what's to be seen!"

Solemnly Pietro watched them pass, wondering what the terms were. O'Mally led the party to the fountain.

"This," O'Mally began, with a careless wave of the hand, "is the famous fountain by Donatello. It was originally owned by Catherine d'Medissy. The Borgias stole it from her, and Italy and France nearly came to war over it."

"The Borgias?" doubtfully. "Were

GETS FRANCHISE FOR GAS PLANT

The Dalles city council, at its mid-monthly meeting last week, unanimously passed an ordinance granting to John D. Wilcox of Portland, his successors and assigns, the right to build, operate and maintain a gas plant for the purpose of transmitting gas, light and power, under and along the streets and alleys.

According to the ordinance, the construction work must all be done in a workmanlike manner and kept free and safe from danger. The rights and privileges are given to the Portland man for a period of 30 years. The franchise becomes null and void unless the grantee files his acceptance with the city recorder within 30 days and it is to be forfeited unless the erection and construction of the gas plant is begun within nine months from the time the ordinance was passed.

According to Mr. Wilcox, the work of erecting the plant and constructing the mains will begin within a very short time, as soon as the weather permits, and the people of The Dalles are now sure of having gas for cooking and lighting purposes.

W. C. F. U. Column

The late Major A. W. Edwards, then editor of the Fargo Forum, the leading Republican newspaper of the state, said: "The buildings made empty by the abolishment of the saloon have been turned into emporiums of trade, a credit to the city and to the people. Fargo—whatever may be her 'short'comings in other directions—is a homelike city to live in, and I attribute it largely to the fact that the prohibition law is enforced as nearly perfectly as it is possible for humanity to walk in a straight line. I am convinced that the prohibition law is stronger in this state today than ever before, and that it will grow in the hearts of our people as time rolls on."

When the prohibition question was raised, Major Edwards was opposed to it, but after seeing its working in the state, as a member of the legislature, he did all he could to keep the law upon our statute books and has been a consistent supporter of the same ever since.

MRS. W. J. KERR.
A Sprained Ankle.

As a man will feel well satisfied if he can hobble around on crutches in two or three weeks after spraining his ankle, and it is often two or three months before he is fully recovered. This is an unnecessary loss of time, as by applying Chamberlain's Liniment, as directed, a cure may be effected in less than one week's time, and in many cases within three days. Sold by all good dealers.

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TIME TABLE
Effective Sunday, Jan. 16, trains will arrive and depart at Hood River, Oregon, on the following schedule:

WEST BOUND
No. 9. Fast Mail (no passengers)..... 6:00 A. M.
No. 3. Soo-Spokane-Portland..... 6:45 "
No. 11. Portland Local..... 7:45 "
No. 5. Oregon & Washington Express 7:55 "
No. 1. Portland Local..... 8:40 P. M.
No. 7. Portland Limited..... 8:45 "

EAST BOUND
No. 2. Pendleton Local..... 10:25 A. M.
No. 8. Chicago Limited..... 11:55 "
No. 12. The Dalles Local..... 5:45 P. M.
No. 4. Soo-Spokane-Portland..... 9:00 "
No. 10. Fast Mail..... 9:10 "
No. 6. Oregon & Washington Express..... 9:25 "
No. 3, No. 5 and No. 7 make no stops between Hood River and Portland.

No. 1 and No. 11 stop at all stations.
No. 4, No. 8 and No. 10 stop at The Dalles, Arlington, Umatilla.
No. 6 stops at Mosier, The Dalles, Celilo, Deschutes, Biggs, Rufus, Arlington, Coyote, Irizson, Umatilla, Hermiston, Stanfield, Echo.

No. 2 stops at all stations between Portland and Pendleton.
No. 12 stops at all stations between Portland and The Dalles.

For further information inquire at the ticket office.
J. H. FREDRICK, Agent.

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