

The Lure of the Mask

By
**HAROLD
MAC GRATH**

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(Continued.)

CHAPTER XVII. MORE TANGLES.

HILLARD passed the card to Merrihew, who presented it to Kitty. Smith had already seen it. He waved it aside moodily. La Signorina's eyes roved as in an effort to find some way out.

"It's a pretty kettle of fish," said O'Mally, rather pleased secretly in having created so dramatic a moment. "There's nothing for us to do but to clear out, bag and baggage."

Then La Signorina rose to her feet. She took the card from Kitty's fingers, tore it into many pieces and flung them over the wall.

"We have been betrayed!" she cried, a storm in her eyes. "Betrayed? In what manner?" asked Hillard.

"Her highness has had no hand in this. I know. Some one with malice has done this."

La Signorina, her arms folded, her lips compressed into a thin line of scarlet, the anger in her eyes unabated, began to walk back and forth. O'Mally gripped Smith by the arm and pointed to the gates.

Two carabinieri and an inspector of seals, dusty, but stern of countenance, came up the path. The inspector came on. Without touching his cap—a bad sign—he laid upon the tea table a card and a newspaper, familiar now to them all.

"Signora," he said politely, but coldly, to the whilom prima donna, "will you do me the honor to explain this? We have some doubts as to the authority upon which this invitation was issued."

She spoke evenly, almost insolently. "The invitation is perfectly regular."

Everybody experienced a chill. This time the inspector bowed. "Then her highness will occupy her villa?"

"She is already in possession. I am the Principessa di Monte Bianca," calmly.

Had an earthquake shattered the surrounding hills and gulfs opened at their feet it could not have spread terror more quickly among the transient guests at the Villa Ariadne than this declaration. They knew that she was not the princess, and here, calmly and negligently, she was jeopardizing their liberty as well as her own. She was mad.

The keen eyed inspector took mental note of these variant expressions.

"Your highness," he said, his cap setting the dust on the stones flying, "a thousand pardons for this disagreeable intrusion. It was not officially known that your highness was here."

"It is nothing," replied the pseudo princess. "Only I desired to remain incognito for the present."

"And the seals?" purred the official.

"We shall go through that formality the morning after the ball. At present I do not wish to be disturbed with the turning of the villa upside down, as would be the case were the seals removed."

"That will require the permission of the crown, your highness."

"Then you will set about at once to secure this permission."

The air with which she delivered this command was noble enough for any one.

"You will telegraph to Cranford and Baring, in the Corso Umberto Primo, Rome. They will supply you with the necessary details and information."

The inspector spoke to the carabinieri, and the trio marched to the gates.

Loud were the exclamations of dismay from the unfortunate Americans, and only Hillard and Merrihew showed faith in La Signorina and her protestation that she would straighten out the tangle without any additional misfortune coming to her former associates in the opera troupe.

Kitty, O'Mally and Smith, however, were convinced that a dirty Italian person would be their ultimate resting place.

"Suppose we go and break the news to Wanda," remarked Smith.

O'Mally assented, stopping a moment in front of La Signorina.

"We have all been together for many weeks," he said. "Yet who you are none of us knows."

The shadow of a smile lay upon her lips and vanished. "My name is Sonia Hilda Grosvenor." And her voice was music.

"Tomorrow," said Merrihew. "I'm going to look up the jail and engage rooms ahead. It might be crowded."

Both he and Hillard rode back to their quarters for the night, but they found that sleep was practically out of the question.

The morning sun poured over the hills, throwing huge shadows in the gorge below. O'Mally sniffed. As the wind veered intermittently there came to him the perfume of the locust trees, now in full bloom. Pietro rocked, his legs crossed, his face blurred in the drifting tobacco smoke.

"No more tourists, Pietro?"

"No," Pietro sighed.

"Did you ever see La Signorina before? Do you know anything about her?"

"Never! No!" answered Pietro, with the perfect candor of an accomplished liar.

"Have you ever seen"—

"Zitto! She come!" Pietro got up with alacrity.

La Signorina was as daintily fresh in her pink frock as a spring tulip. Her eyes were shining, but her color was thin.

"I have been looking for you, Mr. O'Mally," she said. "I have just received a telegram from her highness."

O'Mally accepted the yellow sheet. "I can make out a word or two," he said. "It's in Italian."

"I forgot," apologetically.

Briefly, La Principessa di Monte Bianca gave Sonia Hilda Grosvenor full authority to act as her proxy in giving the ball. As for the invitation, she knew absolutely nothing about it.

This last statement rather staggered the erstwhile concierge. If the princess hadn't issued the invitation, who the deuce had?

The dreamy, pleasurable days at the Villa Ariadne were no more. The spirit of suspicion now stalked abroad. And there were a-coming and going of the many needed extra servants, a to and froing of extra gardeners and carpenters and the sound of many hammers. The ballroom and the dining room were opened and aired and the beautiful floors polished.

In Florence there was a deal of excitement over the coming affair, for the Villa Ariadne had once been the scene of many a splendid entertainment. There had always been a mystery regarding the Principessa di Monte Bianca. Many doubted her actual existence. But the prince was known all over Europe as a handsome spendthrift. And the fact that at this precise moment he was quartered with the Eighth corps in Florence added largely to the zest of speculation.

As for Hillard, well indeed he understood now why Mrs. Sandford had warned him. He understood now what the great mistake was.

He was always at her heels now, but speaking no more of his love. She understood and was grateful. Once she plucked a young rose and gave it to him, and he was sure that her hand touched his with pity, though she would not meet his eyes.

At 4 o'clock on the afternoon of the day before the ball, now that the noise had subsided and the servants were in their quarters, La Signorina went into the gardens alone. An hour earlier she had seen Hillard mount and ride away, the last time but once. There seemed to bear down upon her that oppression which one experiences in a nightmare of being able to fly so high, to run madly and yet to move slowly, always pursued by terror. Even now there was a single avenue of escape, but she knew that she could not profit by it and leave these unfortunate derelicts to shift for themselves. Love! She laughed brokenly and struck her hands in suppressed fury. A fitting climax this! All the world was mad, and she was the maddest in it.

Some one was coming along the path. She wheeled impatiently. She wanted to be alone. And of all men Worth was not the one she cared to see. But the sight of his pale face and set jaws stayed her words. She waited restlessly.

(To be continued.)

CITY NOTICES.

ORDINANCE NO. 251.

An ordinance declaring the assessment on the property benefited for the cost of laying a water main on outer section of Clark street, West and corporation boundary line south to Jackson street, West, and directing the recorder to enter a statement thereof in the water main lien docket.

The city of Medford doth ordain as follows:

Section 1. Whereas, the city council did heretofore by resolution declare its intention to lay a 6-inch water main on outer section of Clark street, West, and corporation boundary line south to Jackson street, West, and to assess the cost thereof on the property fronting on said portion of said street in proportion to the frontage of said property, and did fix a time and place for hearing protests against the laying of said water main on said portion of said street and the assessment of the cost thereof as aforesaid.

Whereas, said resolution was duly posted and published as required by section 116 of the charter of said city; and,

Whereas, a meeting of the council was held at the time and place fixed in said resolution for the purpose of considering any such protests, but no protests were at such time or at any time made or received by the council to the laying of said water main or the assessing of the cost thereof as aforesaid, and said council having considered the matter, and deeming that said water main was and is of material benefit to said city and that all property to be assessed therefor would be benefited thereby to the extent of the probable amount of the respective assessments to be levied against said property, did order said water main laid; and,

Whereas, the cost of said water main has been and hereby is determined to be the sum of \$1236.50;

Now, therefore, it is hereby further determined that the proportionate share of the cost of laying said water main of each parcel of the property fronting on said portion of said street is the amount set opposite the description of each piece or parcel of land below and that each such piece or parcel of land is benefited by the laying of said water main to the full extent of the amount so set opposite the description of such piece or parcel, and that the respective amounts represent the proportional benefits of said water main to said respective parcels of property and also the proportional frontage thereof on said portion of said street, and the council does hereby declare each of the parcels of property described below to be assessed and each of the same is hereby assessed the amount set opposite each respective description for the cost of laying said water main.

ASSESSMENT FOR A 6-INCH WATER MAIN FROM INTERSECTION OF CLARK STREET, WEST, AND CORPORATION BOUNDARY SOUTH TO JACKSON STREET, WEST:

Assessment No. 1—Elfred and Jennie Barzee, block 3, Mings subdivision in the city of Medford, Oregon, frontage 802.56 feet and described Vol. 66, page 313, county recorder's records of Jackson county, Oregon; 752.56 feet; rate 80 1/4 cents per foot; amount due \$605.80.

Assessment No. 2—F. W. Hutchason, the west half of lot 7, block 2, Mings subdivision, in section 24, township 37 south, range 2 west of the Willamette meridian, in Medford, Jackson county, Oregon; frontage 409.76 feet, and described Vol. 28, page 265, county recorder's records of Jackson county, Oregon; 700.76 feet; rate per foot 80 1/4 cents; amount due \$322.60.

Assessment No. 3—Mathias Demmer, commencing at the southwest corner of lot 6, block 2, Mings' subdivision, in section 24, township 37 south, range 2 west of the Willamette meridian, in Jackson county, Oregon, and running thence east on south line of said lot 9 chains 41 links, thence north at right angles to said south line to within 30 feet of north line of said lot, thence west parallel with and 30 feet distance south from north line of said lot to southerly line of said road, crossing northwest corner of said lot, thence south 42.15 degrees west to said southerly line of said county road, to west line of said lot, thence south on said west line of said lot to place of beginning, containing 4 acres; frontage 420.75 feet on east side street, described Vol. 31, page 569, county recorder's records of Jackson county, Oregon; 382.75 feet; rate per foot 80 1/4 cents; amount due \$308.10.

Section 2. The recorder of the city of Medford is hereby directed to enter a statement of said several assessments in the water main lien docket of said city as required by the city charter.

The foregoing ordinance was passed by the city council of the city of Medford on the 23 day of November, 1907, by the following vote: Merrick aye, Welch aye, Eifert aye, Emerick aye, Wortman aye, Demmer absent.

Approved November 3, 1907.

W. H. CANON, Mayor.

Attest: ROBT. W. TELFER, Recorder.

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