

The Lure of the Mask

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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(Continued.)

"I have something to say to you," he said, "upon which your future welfare largely depends."

"I am listening." She showed surprise.

"There has been a tremendous wonder, as I understand, about this ball in regard to the strange manner in which the invitations were issued."

"Have you found out who did it?" she demanded.

"Yes. The light in his eyes was feverish."

"Who was it?" she asked.

"I issued those invitations."

"You?" Her lips parted.

"Yes. I am the guilty man. The hat was the main obstacle. I represented myself as secretary to her highness."

"And you have the effrontery to come your crime to me?" her fury blazed forth.

"Call it what you please."

"What purpose had you in mind when you did this cowardly thing?"

"I had a definite purpose. An imposture like yours is a prison offense. You have seen that I love you, yet allow me to ignore me. You must marry me."

"You are hiding a threat."

"I shall hide it no longer. Marry me or I shall disclose the imposture to the police."

"Oh!" Then she laughed the laughter of one in deadly anger. "Mr. Worth, do you suppose, even had I entertained some sentiment toward you, that it would survive a circumstance like this?"

"I am waiting for your answer. Yes or no?"

"No."

"Take care!" He advanced.

"I am perfectly capable of taking care. And, Mr. Worth, you will leave this villa at once. And if you do not go quietly I shall order the servants to put you forth."

"You speak as though you were the prince," he snarled.

"Till Thursday morning I am!" La Signorina replied proudly.

A man who loses his last throw is generally desperate. He seized her roughly in his arms. She struck him across the eyes with full strength. He gasped and released her.

"If I were a man," she said quietly, "but with lightning in her eyes, 'you should die for that!'" She left him.

Worth burst into tears. He went to his room, got together his things and drove secretly into Florence.

On the night of the ball there was a brilliant moon. Rosy Chinese lanterns stretched from tree to tree. The orchestra was playing Strauss, the dreamy waltzes from "The Queen's Lace Handkerchief." Bright uniforms and handsome gowns flashed by the opened windows.

Lenning against the door which gave entrance to the ballroom from the hall were two officers negligently interested in the moving picture.

"Shall we go?"

"No, no! The prince himself will be here at 11. He was, singularly enough, not invited, and, knowing the story as I do, I am curious to witness the scene."

Hillard, peering gloomily over their shoulders, overheard. The prince! Oh, this must not be! There could be only one prince in a matter of this kind. He pushed by the Italians without apology for his rudeness, edged around

the ballroom till he reached La Signorina's side. He must save her at all hazards.

"The prince himself will be here at 11," he whispered.

"What prince?"

"Di Monte Bianca. Come; there is no time to lose. I have been holding my carriage ready."

"Thank you, but it is too late." She smiled, but it was a tired and lonely little smile. She had long since armed her nerves against this moment.

He stepped back, discouraged. He would wait, and woe to any who touched her!

At precisely 11 the music ceased for intermission. There was a lull. Two carabinieri pushed their way into the ballroom. Tableau!

"Which among you is called the Principessa di Monte Bianca?" was asked authoritatively.

"I am she," said La Signorina, stepping forth. "What do you wish?"

"You are under arrest for imposture. You are not the Principessa di Monte Bianca."

Hillard, wild with despair, started to intervene.

As the carabinieri were about to lay hands upon La Signorina a loud voice from the hall stopped them.

"One moment!" An officer in riding breeches and dusty boots entered and approached the dramatic group. Hillard and Merrithew recognized him instantly. It was the man with the scar.

"This woman," explained one of the carabinieri, saluting respectfully, "is posing as your wife, highness. We are here to arrest her."

"Do not touch her!" said the prince. "She is the Principessa di Monte Bianca, my wife!"

CHAPTER XXVII. MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

SILENCE invested the Villa Ardanne, yet a warm and mellow light illumined many a window or marked short pathways on the blackness of the lawn. A solitary saddle horse rattled his bit, pawed restively and tossed his head worriedly from side to side, as if penitence had touched him with foretelling.

On the other side of the wall, lurking in the dark niches, was a tall, lean, gray haired old man, who watched and listened and waited. He was watching and listening and waiting for the horse. Seven years! It was a long time. He had not hunted for this man. He was breaking no promise. Their paths had recrossed. It was destiny.

The leaving of the guests had been hurried and noisy. In truth, it resembled a disorderly retreat more than anything else. The denouement was evidently sufficient. They had no desire to witness the anticlimax, however interesting and instructive it might be. His highness, the Principessa di Monte Bianca, Enrico by name, strode up and down the floor, his spurs tinkling and his saber rattling harshly. Occasionally he glanced at the group on the opposite side of the room. He laughed silently. Oh, he would enjoy himself tonight. He would extract every drop of pleasure from this unexpected moment. Had she been mad, he wondered, to give him this longed for opportunity? A month longer and this scene would have been impossible. At last he came to a stand in front of La Signorina, who was white and weary.

"So," he said, "after five years I find you, my beautiful wife! What a devil of a time you have given me—across oceans and continents! A hundred times I have passed you without knowing it till too late. And here, at

the very moment when I believed it was all over, you fling yourself into the loving arms of your adoring husband! I do not understand."

"Be brief," she replied, the chill of snows in her voice. Her hate for this man had no empty corners. "Say what you will and be gone."

"I shall telegraph the attorneys in Rome to partition the estates, my heart!" he mocked her. "The king will not add to his private purse the riches of Colonel Grosvenor and the Principessa di Monte Bianca, your father and mine—old fools! To tell the truth, I am badly in need of money, and, head of Bacchus, your appearance here is life to me, my dear Soula. Life! I am a rich man. But," with a sudden scowl, "what position in my household does this gentleman occupy?" indicating Hillard and smiling evilly.

"So it is all true, then?" Hillard exclaimed. "You are his wife?"

"Well!" cried the prince impatiently. "I inquire again, what position does he hold?"

"This villa"

was not a villa, but to the vicar, burning in her heart. "However the estates may be partitioned, this will be mine. I command you to leave it at once. I love her!"

The prince laughed. She was smiling a sick of gold. But this was his hour of triumph, and he proposed to make the most of it.

"I could have let the carabinieri take you to prison," he said urbane. "A night in a damp cell would have hastened your spirit."

"Is it possible?" returned Hillard. "Your highness has but to say the word and I will undertake the pleasure of relieving you of this man's presence."

"Be still," she said. "Will you go?" to the prince.

"Presently. First I wish to add that your dear friend is both thick skulled and cowardly. I offered to slap his face a few nights ago, but he discreetly declined."

"I am calm," replied Hillard, gently releasing his arm from her grasp. He approached the prince, smiling, but there were murder and despair in his heart. "Had I known you that night one of us would not be here now."

"It is not too late," suggested the prince. "Come, are you in love with my wife?"

"Yes."

The bluntness of this assertion rather staggered the prince. "You admit it, then?" his throat swelling with rage.

"There is no reason to deny it."

"She is your—"

But the word died with a cough. Hillard, a wild joy in his heart, caught the prince by the throat and jammed him back against the rose panel. Hillard seized his sword arm and pinned it to the panel above his head. Again and again the prince made desperate attempts to free himself. He was soon falling in a bad way. He gasped, his lips grew blue and the whites of his eyes bloodshot. This man was killing him! And so he was, for Hillard, realizing that he had lost everything in the world worth living for, was mad for killing.

La Signorina was first to recover. She sprang toward the combatants and grasped Hillard's hand, the one buried in the prince's throat, and pulled. She was not strong enough.

"Merrithew! O'Mally! Quick! He is killing him!" she cried wildly.

The two finally succeeded in separating the men, and none too soon. A moment more and the prince had been a dead man.

La Signorina turned upon Hillard. "And you would have done this thing before my very eyes?"

"I was mad," he panted, shamed. "I love you better than anything else in God's world, and this man means that I shall lose you."

The prince lurched toward Hillard, but fortunately Merrithew heard the silencing sound of the saber as it left its scabbard. Merrithew with a desperate lunge stopped the blow. He flung the saber at O'Mally's feet.

"You speak English," said Merrithew in an ugly temper. "You may send your orderly to the Hotel Italie tomorrow morning, and your saber will be given to him. We can get along without you nicely."

The prince tore at his mustaches. Meddler! To return to Florence without his saber was dishonor. He cursed them all roundly and turned to La Signorina.

"I am in the way here," he cried. "But listen. You shall remain my wife so long as both of us live. I had intended arranging your freedom once the estate and moneys were divided, but not now. You shall read my wife till the end of the book, for unless I meet you halfway the marriage contract cannot be broken. In the old days it was your conscience. The still small voice seems no longer to trouble you," turning suggestively to Hillard.

"You are stopping at the Hotel Italie?"

"I am. You will find me there," returned Hillard, with good understanding.

"Good! Your highness, tomorrow night I shall have the extreme pleasure of running your lover through the throat!" He picked up his cap and took his princely presence out of their immediate vicinity.

"It will do my soul good to stand before that scoundrel," said Hillard, stretching out his hands and closing them with crushing force.

La Signorina laid a protesting hand on his arm.

"I love you," he murmured as he bent to kiss her hand. "And it is not dishonorable for you to hear me say so."

"I forbid you to say that!" But the longing of the world was in her eyes as she looked down at his head.

"This is what comes of American girls marrying these blighted foreigners," growled the tender hearted O'Mally. "Why did you do it?"

"I am almost Italian, Mr. O'Mally. I had no choice in the matter. The affair was prearranged by our parents, after the continental fashion."

When Hillard and La Signorina were at length alone he asked, "When shall I see you again?"

"Who knows? Some day, perhaps, when time has softened the sharp edges of this moment. Tomorrow I shall write, or very soon."

"You will send for me?" with eagerness and hope.

"Why not? There is nothing wrong in our friendship, and I prize it. Promise."

"I promise. Goodbye! For a little while I have lived in paradise. Wherever I may be, at the world's end, you have but to call me. In a month, in a year, a decade, I shall come. Goodbye!" Without looking at her again he rushed away.

She remained standing there as motionless as a statue. He had not asked her if she loved him, and that was well. But there was not at that mo-

ment in all the length and breadth of Italy a lonelier woman than her highness the Principessa di Monte Bianca. Meanwhile the prince, rapt, mounted his horse. Eh, well! This time tomorrow night the American should pay dearly for it all.

And the woman—she could never understand her. But for her fool's conscience he would not have been riding the beggar's horse today. She was now too self reliant, too intelligent. She was her father over again, soldier and diplomat.

He was riding past the confines of the villa when a man darted out suddenly from the shadows and seized the bridle.

"At last, my prince!"

"Giovanni?"

Instinctively the prince reached for his saber, knowing that he had need of it, but the scabbard was empty. He cursed the folly which had made him lose it. Oddly enough, his thought ran swiftly back to the little case in the Sabine hills. Bah! Full of courage, knowing that one or the other would not leave this spot alive, he struck his horse, with purpose this time, to run his man down. But Giovanni did not lose his hold. Hate and the nearness of revenge made him strong.

"No, no!" he laughed. "She is dead, my prince. And I—I was not going to seek you. I was going to let hell claim you in its own time. But you rode by me tonight. This is the end."

(To be continued.)

NOTICE.

There will be a special meeting of the stockholders of the Siskiyou Copper & Gold Development company Friday, November 12, at 7:30 p. m. at their office in the Medford hotel, to consider the purchase of additional claims.

M. J. LOVE, President.

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 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 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 said 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 to 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 892.56 feet and described Vol. 66, page 313, county recorder's records of Jackson county, Oregon; 752.56 feet; rate 80 1/2 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 400.76 feet, and described Vol. 28, page 265, county recorder's records of Jackson county, Oregon; 700.76 feet; rate per foot 80 1/2 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 34 feet distance south from north

line of said lot to southerly line of said road, crossing north west 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 6 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 1/2 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 24 day of November, 1909, by the following vote: Merrick aye, Welch aye, Eifert aye, Emerick aye, Wortman aye, Demmer absent.

Approved November 3, 1909.

W. H. CANON, Mayor.

Attest: ROBT. W. TELFER, Recorder.

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She struck him across the eyes.