

# MASKS

With

JIM'S BEAST, TIDES, AMONG THE LIONS,  
THE REASON, THE HOUSE

*One-Act Plays of Contemporary Life*

BY

*GEORGE MIDDLETON*

**MASKS**  
**with**  
**Jim's Beast, Tides, Among the Lions, The Reason, The House**  
***One-Act Plays of Contemporary Life***  
**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

Especial notice should be taken that the possession of this book without a valid contract for production first having been obtained from the publisher, confers no right or license to professionals or amateurs to produce the play publicly or in private for gain or charity.

In their present form these plays are dedicated to the reading public only, and no performance, representation, production, recitation, or public reading, or radio broadcasting may be given except by special arrangement with Samuel French, 25 West 45th Street, New York.

These plays may be presented by amateurs upon payment of a royalty of Ten Dollars per performance, payable to Samuel French, 25 West 45th Street, New York, one week before the date when the play is given.

Professional royalty quoted on application to Samuel French, 25 West 45th Street, New York, N. Y.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: "Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French of New York."

Attention is called to the penalty provided by law for any infringement of the author's rights, as follows:

"SECTION 4966:—Any person publicly performing or representing any dramatic or musical composition for which copyright has been

obtained, without the consent of the proprietor of said dramatic or musical composition, or his heirs and assigns, shall be liable for damages thereof, such damages, in all cases to be assessed at such sum, not less than one hundred dollars for the first and fifty dollars for every subsequent performance, as to the court shall appear to be just. If the unlawful performance and representation be wilful and for profit, such person or persons shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction shall be imprisoned for a period not exceeding one year.”—U. S. Revised Statutes: Title 60, Chap. 3.

To  
GARDNER and MARICE  
SOUVENIR OF HAPPY DAYS IN THE FOREST  
WHERE MUCH OF THIS WAS WRITTEN

In the prefaces to my five previous volumes I have sufficiently explained my reason for play publication—not as a substitute for production but as an alternative sometimes compelled by the exigencies of a highly commercialized theater. Further, I have stated in other places why I have so frequently turned to the one-act form.

The present volume is dedicated to no thesis, though perhaps the title may offer some hint of the underlying motive which has prompted this series.

G. M.

*December 23, 1919.*

# MASKS

## THE PEOPLE

GRANT WILLIAMS, *A*  
*DRAMATIST.*

*JERRY, his wife.*

*TOM ROBINSON, a*  
*great painter.*

*MARIE CASE, formerly*  
*Tom's wife.*

*Characters*

*in his*

*unproduced*

*drama "The*

*Lonely Way."*

## SCENE

*In the WILLIAMS' flat, New York City, after the second performance of GRANT WILLIAMS' first great success, THE SAND BAR, produced at the National Theater.*

## MASKS <sup>[A]</sup>

*The doorway from the public stairs opens immediately upon the living-room without the intervening privacy of a small hallway. The room was, no doubt, more formally pretentious in the early days of the WILLIAMS' marriage; but the relics of that time—some rigid mahogany chairs and stray pieces of staid furniture—have been ruthlessly pushed against the walls, so that one perceives a “parlor” transformed into a miscellaneous room upon which the flat's overflow has gradually crept. And with this has come GRANT WILLIAMS' plain wooden work-table, bearing now a writer's accessories, a desk lamp, and a mass of manuscripts; one of which is his unproduced drama, THE LONELY WAY, bound in the conventional blue linen cover. His well-worn typewriter is perched on the end of the table, in easy reach of his work-chair with its sofa cushions crushed and shaped to his form. Another chair is near by, so that it also may catch the flood of light which comes from the conventional electric bunch-light above. There is a small black kerosene heater to be used in those emergencies of temperature which landlords create. Not far from it, a child's collapsible go-cart is propped. On the walls, above some over-flowing bookshelves, are several tastefully selected etchings. A window in back, which hides an airshaft, is partly concealed by heavy curtains that hang tired and limp. There is another doorway, directly opposite the entrance, which leads to the other rooms of a characteristically compressed city flat.*

*Yet the room is not forbidding: it merely suggests forced economies that have not quite fringed poverty: continual*

*adaptation, as it were, to the financial contingencies of a marriage that has just managed to make both ends meet.*

*When the curtain rises JERRY WILLIAMS is seated in the cozy chair reading a number of newspaper clippings.*

*JERRY is an attractive woman in her thirties. Externally, there is nothing particularly striking about her: if there be such a thing as an average wife JERRY personifies it. She has loved her husband and kept house for him without a spoken protest; for she has had no advanced ideas or theories. Yet she has had her fears and little concealments and dreams—like any married woman. She has been sustained through the ten years of hard sledding by the belief in her husband's ultimate financial success. And as she reads the criticisms of his play, *THE SAND BAR*, produced the night before, she realizes it has come at last. She is now completely happy and calm in the thought of her rewards.*

*She looks at the cheap watch lying on the desk and indicates it is late. She closes the window, walks over to the doorway and looks in, apparently to see if the child is still asleep. Then she closes the door and stands there, with just a suspicion of impatience.*

*Several minutes pass. Then she gives a little cry of joy as she hears the key turn in the lock and she sees the hall door open slowly—admitting her husband.*

*GRANT WILLIAMS is a more striking personality than his wife; about forty, with a tinge of iron gray on his temples, he has a strong virile face not without traces of idealism. His whole appearance is normal and devoid of any conscious affectation of dress. But a very close inspection might reveal that his suit, though carefully pressed, is well worn—as is the overcoat which covers it. GRANT happens to be a man of cultivation and breeding, with a spark of genius, who has strayed into strange pastures. At present there lurks an*

*unexpected depression back of his mood; perhaps it is only the normal reaction which comes to every artist when success is won and the critical sense within mocks the achievement so beneath the dream. Perhaps with GRANT WILLIAMS it is something else.*

JERRY

Oh, Grant, I thought you'd never come home.

GRANT

Best, the house manager, detained me.

JERRY

*(Detecting his mood)*

There's nothing the matter with the play?

GRANT

Nothing; except it's an enormous success. *(She smiles again, and he wants to keep her smiling.)* We were sold out to-night. The second night! Think of that! I had to stand myself.

JERRY

Well, I don't see why you should be blue about it. There were always plenty of empty seats at your other plays. I knew THE SAND BAR couldn't fail.

GRANT

*(Throwing coat carelessly over chair)*

You felt the same about the others.

JERRY

*(Trying to cheer him)*

They didn't fail—artistically.

GRANT

You mean nobody came to see them—except on passes. But THE SAND BAR! That’s different! (*With a tinge of sarcasm throughout.*) You ought to have seen the way the mob at the National ate it up.

JERRY

I wanted to go but I couldn’t ask Mrs. Hale to take care of the baby again. Besides, I was anxious to read all the notices over quietly by myself and....

GRANT

(*Picking them up and glancing through them*)

Great, aren’t they? Not a “roast” among them.

JERRY

Not one. I couldn’t find Arthur Black’s review: he was always so kind to your other plays, too.

GRANT

(*Evasively*)

I forgot to bring in the *Gazette*. Best says he never saw such “money” notices. (*Glances at one.*) Doran outdid himself. (*Reading the critic’s notice with a touch of theatrical exaggeration.*) “The perception of human nature evinced by Grant Williams in his profoundly moving drama THE SAND BAR places him in the front rank of American dramatists!”

JERRY

Just where you belong.

GRANT

(*Skipping*)

“His hero, Tom Robinson, the artist, who deliberately deserts his highest ideals because his wife’s happiness is of more value than his own egoistic self-expression, is a new angle on the much abused artistic temperament.” (*With a wise smile.*) That “twist”



seems to have got them. (*Reading*) “Marie, his wife, who is willing to risk her honor to test his love and thus awaken him to a sense of his human responsibility, is a character which will appeal to every married woman.”

JERRY

(*She nods in approval, without his seeing her*)

But read the last paragraph, dear.

GRANT

“In fact, all the characters are true to themselves, never once being bent by the playwright for dramatic effect out of the inevitable and resistless momentum of their individual psychologies.” And Doran used to report prizefights!

JERRY

I hope he doesn't go back to it. He writes beautifully.

GRANT

By the way, I haven't told you the crowning achievement of my ten years of writing. Trebaro—the great Trebaro who would never even read my plays before—asked me in the lobby to-night to write him a curtain raiser!

JERRY

(*Happily*)

That's splendid!

GRANT

I've promised to get it done in ten days. His new play is going to run short. He's got to have something to lengthen the evening.

JERRY

Have you an idea?

GRANT

No; not yet. But he doesn't like anything with ideas in it.

JERRY

*(As she sees him go to his typewriter to remove cover)*

But, dear, you're not going to begin it to-night! *(Significantly stopping him.)* To-night belongs to me—not to your work. *(Nestling close beside him.)* Dearest....

GRANT

All right, Jerry. I've only got a few paragraphs of personal stuff to bang off. Then I'll be with you. *The Times* wants it for a Sunday story—with my photo. *(As her face brightens again.)* You see, Mrs. Grant Williams, your husband is now in the limelight.

JERRY

I'm so glad success has come to you at last.

GRANT

Better at last than at first. I'm told it's bad for your character to be too successful when you're young. So providence nearly starved us a bit, eh?

JERRY

You thought it was going to be so easy when we were first married. It's been hard for you, dear. I know. Writing and writing and seeing other fellows make money. But now you've won out. You ought to be very happy, as I am.

GRANT

You are happy, aren't you? *(He takes her hands affectionately, then looks at them, turning them over.)* The only hard thing, Jerry, was to see these hands of yours grow red and rough with the work here.

JERRY

Maybe that's the only way they could help you.

GRANT  
(*Enigmatically*)

It's because of them and only because of them that I've done it.

JERRY

Done what?

GRANT

Oh, nothing. (*He puts paper in the machine.*) How about a glass of milk?

JERRY

I'll get it while the great man reveals himself to an anxious public.

GRANT

And some crackers. (*Sitting at machine.*) They want something on: "How I Make My Characters Live." (*She laughs suddenly: he starts.*) Oh; it's you?

JERRY

Yes. I was thinking how funny it was to celebrate a success in milk.

GRANT

Yes. But the greatest joke of all is that THE SAND BAR *is* a success—a real financial success.

JERRY

It's a very good joke.

(*She goes out happily. Then a cynical look creeps into his face. He reads as he types.*)

GRANT

"How I Made My Characters in THE SAND BAR Live."

(*He pauses a second, smiling cynically. Then, as he apparently hears something, he rises and goes over to the hall door which he opens quickly. He looks out and apparently sees a neighbor*

*entering the apartment opposite. A bibulous “good night” is heard. He closes the door, turns the key, tests the door and sees it is locked. As he stands there puzzled, JERRY enters, with a bottle of milk, some crackers, and an apple on a small tray.)*

You’ll have to get over this habit of waiting on me now.

JERRY

Don’t ask the impossible.

GRANT

But we shall have servants now; plenty of them.

JERRY

Plenty of them? Why how much money are you going to make out of THE SAND BAR?

GRANT

Nearly a thousand dollars a week.

JERRY

*(Almost inaudibly as she nearly drops the tray)*

My God!

GRANT

*(As he puts tray on table)*

It will run forty weeks at the National. Then three road companies next year: “stock” and the “movies” after that. I’m going to make as much money in two weeks now as I ever made before in one year—turning out hack stuff and book reviews. And all I’ve got to do is to sit back and let it work for me!

JERRY

It doesn’t seem honest.

GRANT

Maybe it isn't, Jerry. (*As he eats.*) But when the public is pleased it pays to be pleased.

JERRY  
(*Venturing*)

The first thing I want is some new clothes.

GRANT  
(*Grandiloquently*)

My first week's royalty is yours.

JERRY

Really?

GRANT

Throw away everything that's darned and patched. I'm sick of seeing them.

JERRY

I was always so ashamed, too. Just think what people would have said if I'd been run over or killed in an accident.

GRANT

Now you'll do the running over—in our new car.

JERRY  
(*Hardly believing her ears*)

A car!

GRANT

Every successful playwright has a car.

JERRY  
(*Joyfully*)

Then we'll have to move from here to live up to the car?

GRANT

We've got to move. It's more important to look like a success than to be one. (*Glancing about flat.*) And the Lord knows this doesn't look like success.

JERRY

I'm so glad. I've grown to hate these five stuffy rooms without sunlight.

GRANT

Nothing to light them up these ten years but the glow of my genius, eh? Now I'll have a big house to shine in.

JERRY

I've always dreamed of you having a room off by yourself.

GRANT

Where you could really dream without the sound of my typewriter waking you and the baby?

JERRY

But it will be splendid for you, too. I don't see how you ever wrote here with me always fussing in and out.

GRANT

Washing the eternal dish and cooking the eternal chop.

JERRY

I don't ever want to look another gas stove in the face.

GRANT

You've cooked your last chop.

JERRY

Oh, Grant; my dreams have come true.

GRANT

(*Enigmatically again*)

Yes. Success or failure: it's all a matter of how you dream. (*She looks up puzzled: he is silent a moment and then goes to machine again.*) But I'll never get this done.

JERRY

I'll put on my old wrapper, for the last time, and wait up for you. I'm going to get a real *négligée* to-morrow. Your favorite color.

GRANT

I won't be long. This is an awful bore and I'm tired.

*(He begins to pound out something on his machine. JERRY goes over to hang up his coat, and as she does so, a newspaper clipping falls out of his pocket, on the floor. She picks it up unnoticed by GRANT. She glances at it; starts angrily to speak to GRANT about it; but seeing he is absorbed, hesitates and then conceals it. She hangs up the coat, comes around back of him as though to speak—but changes her mind. She kisses him. As she passes the table, she knocks off the manuscript of a play. She picks it up.)*

GRANT

What's that?

JERRY

The manuscript of *THE LONELY WAY*. (*He looks over at it, with a cynical smile.*) You've learned a lot about playwrighting since you wrote that, haven't you, dear?

GRANT

Yes—a lot.

JERRY

*(Tentatively)*

You used to say it was the best thing you ever did.

GRANT

How did you happen to come across it?

JERRY

I found it behind the chest when I was cleaning.

GRANT

Oh, yes; I remember. I threw it there the day of my great decision: The day I made up my mind to rewrite it and call it THE SAND BAR.

JERRY

*(As she glances over the pages)*

Grant. I'm not going to lose you now that you're a success?

GRANT

What ever put such a foolish idea in your head?

JERRY

You remember the Tom Robinson you drew in this play? All you made him think of was his art; he even threw away his wife to make a success of it.

GRANT

That was because his wife didn't understand. Besides, dear, you know how much I altered my original conception of their characters and completely changed the plot. Look how different it all is in THE SAND BAR.

JERRY

And you think your changes made the play truer to life? In real life a Tom Robinson wouldn't have got rid of her?

GRANT

I don't think anything's ever going to come between us, if that's what you mean.

JERRY



Of course not. (*Putting the manuscript on table, relieved, as she sees him resume his typing.*) But I felt so sure of you when we were poor. Perhaps it was because you couldn't afford to be wild.

*(She turns off the switch and goes out. The room is lighted only by the desk lamp, casting its shadows into the corners of the room. He takes a cigarette from the box on the table, and as he smokes he reads half to himself what he has written.)*

GRANT

“An author's characters grow into life out of his observation and experience. Once they are conceived by these two parents their first heart beats are the taps of the author's typewriter.” Good. “Gradually they grow into living men and women. They live with him, yet with a life of their own. In writing THE SAND BAR I ... I...”

*(This makes him hesitate to continue. He glances toward the manuscript of THE LONELY WAY. He rises slowly and picks it up cynically. Then, as though fascinated, he gradually settles in the cozy chair by his table. He begins to become absorbed as he reads his earlier play. He puts his hand over his eyes, he lowers the manuscript, gives a sigh as though lost in the thoughts it calls up. The door, which he has locked, opens noiselessly, and closes as GRANT looks up in surprise and sees a man enter.*

*GRANT immediately discovers there is something extraordinary about his unexpected visitor. As he directs the light upon him, GRANT perceives the man's power which lies both in his frame and impressive personality. His eyes have a relentless coldness when they narrow. His mouth is firm but cruel, with a sarcastic droop pulling down the corners. In spite of an occasional uncouth manner of spasmodically blurting out his words, GRANT soon realizes how keen is the intruder's penetration when it is*

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

