
THE GURSE

by Tim Kissman

a short short-story

LIMELIGHTCREATIONS
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FOREWORD

These short short-stories were written for a weekly Internet mystery contest, where authors are invited to submit a 500 word or less story about a photo the Web site puts on its site. This week's featured photo: three men dressed in black with white mime-like masks.

"This is all we have to go on? One lousy picture?" Detective Mack Mitchell slammed the photo on the table. His fist followed, emphasizing his frustration. The caper of the century just took place and his top officers stood around the room looking puzzled. "These jokers sneak in and steal these priceless Millville Death Masks and —"

"That's pronounced Malvello," Toby Haskey, the curator of the Detroit Museum of the Ancient World, gulped hard when he realized his interruption was a mistake. "But I know what you mean, sir."

"What do we have?" Mack ignored Toby and pointed to the photo of three men, dressed in black, standing in a boat. They were wearing the priceless masks like trophies.

"Apparently they came in through the museum's basement, drilled a hole underneath the mask display without setting off the alarm and snatched them," Officer Katie Zipinski read from her notes, then pointed at the picture. "We found this photo at the dock outside."

"Amazing ... freaking amazing," Mack was intense as ever. "And then they just row away. C'mon, I don't believe that. Do we have any witnesses?"

"No, but we're canvassing the area," Katie said.

"Sir, may I comment?" Toby's voice came out of nowhere. Everyone in the room stared at the small, fragile-looking man.

"You again?" Mack sneered.

"Those masks are cursed," Toby ignored Mack's facial expression, picked up the picture and studied it for a second. "These men are sure to die."

"Oh, well tell me something I don't know," Mack snatched the picture from Toby's hand. "I'm going to kill these guys myself for embarrassing the department."

Toby adjusted his glasses, "No, you don't understand, legend says whoever puts on a mask of death can't take it off until they're dead."

Mack growled, "You want me to believe this bull?"

"Believe it or not, detective," Toby's high-pitched voice turned into a whisper. "These men will die soon, I'm sure of it. No one has ever stolen the death masks."

Mack feigned a surprised look and waved to his officers. "Well, I guess our work is done here. La-dee-freaking-da!" he yelled. "Go home guys and get some rest. Mr. Haskey thinks this case will solve itself."

If Toby was embarrassed it didn't show. He took off his glasses and wiped them with his handkerchief. Mack looked at him and shouted, "Get him out of here."

Katie escorted Toby to the door, but stopped when another uniformed officer burst into the room and handed Mack a note. He studied it for a second then turned and looked at Toby.

"Let him go," Mack ordered. "It seems as though three men, matching the suspects' descriptions, were just found floating in Lake Erie. Our suspects apparently tried to remove the masks and pulled their faces off with it. All three bled to death."

"They were doomed," Toby said quietly. "No one has ever stolen the masks."
