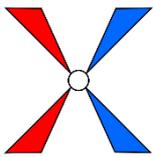


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bncdoc.id	H94
bncdoc.author	Wood, Sara
bncdoc.year	1993
bncdoc.title	Mask of deception.
bncdoc.info	Mask of deception. Sample containing about 58450 words from a book (domain: imaginative)
Text availability	Worldwide rights cleared
Publication date	1985-1993
Text type	Written books and periodicals
David Lee's classification	W_fict_prose

<p><386/c></p>  <p>Key: Footprint ConEn1 Footprint ConEn2 Footprint ConEn3</p>	<p>'Who the hell are you?' he demanded grimly. 'I told you. Meredith. I'm the person you've come to meet,' she said doggedly, puzzled by Lucenzo's tight fury. 'Ada Williams is my grandmother.' He looked stunned. 'I don't believe it,' Lucenzo muttered in an ominously quiet voice. 'A woman?' He swore long and soft beneath his breath. 'The vindictive...' He bit off whatever he was going to say and inhaled deeply, smoothing his face into a blank expression so that only the hot glitter in his eyes betrayed his anger. 'You have brothers?' he snapped out suddenly. Meredith tried to gather her confused thoughts together. She had no idea why Lucenzo should be remotely interested, or why he was waiting in such a fever of anticipation for her answer. 'I'm an only child. There's only me -' Gesù!' He muttered something and then his tensed muscles relaxed. 'You're bad enough,' he said contemptuously. Suddenly the penny dropped, and Meredith knew why he'd been prowling about the airport like an angry lion. It wasn't just the interminable waiting, the lateness of the hour, the cold boredom he must have suffered. It was worse than that. He knew all about the blackmail. She felt her eyes close, as if to block out everything: the embarrassment, the shock, the deep sense of shame. No wonder he looked as if he wanted to wring her neck. She groaned. neck. She groaned. All that bottled-up vitriol for the man he'd been waiting for had actually been for her. 'This is terrible,' she said, upset. 'You - you realise I'm here because of the - the blackmail?' she croaked, barely managing to say the word. A cynical eyebrow shot up. 'Well, you don't believe in hiding your intentions, do you?' he said tightly. She flushed at the implied insult. 'What do you mean?' she cried indignantly. 'Are you suggesting that I've come to -?' 'Continue the extortion your grandmother began?' finished Lucenzo, speaking each word slowly and clearly, to produce the maximum of contempt. 'Yes,' he drawled. 'I am suggesting that. Why else would you bother to come halfway across Europe during Arctic weather conditions?' 'Oh, how dare you?' she breathed, aghast. 'Your role is to meet me, not to pass judgement - which you're ill-qualified to make. This matter is between me and Corosini.' 'No. It's between you and me,' he said quietly, his eyes holding her startled gaze with a compelling force. 'I don't deal with middle-men.' She was aware that he'd rocked with the insult, but was too furious and shaken to care. 'I told you in my letter last week that I wanted you to arrange for me to meet him. Tomorrow. Until then, let me pass. I can make my own way to my digs,' she said with great dignity. Meredith was determined to show him that she could do without arrogant bankers who'd heard half a story and jumped to the wrong conclusions. Whirling like a miniature tornado past Lucenzo's menacing bulk, she persuaded her legs to stop wobbling by sheer force of will and strode angrily over the deep snow to the nearest bus stop. 'Come here!' he ordered. She ignored him. 'You're being stupid!' he barked irritably. Meredith bristled at his rudeness and whirled around, hot with temper. 'I am not! You are! People who make snap judgements based on hearsay and flimsy evidence are stupid!' she cried, her small figure quivering with outrage. 'You and Corosini are wrong all down the line. About Gran, about me, and even my sex.' She tossed her head. 'Fancy not even considering the idea that Meredith</p>
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might be **a woman**'s name!' 'It was **your** -' He cut off his own words abruptly and stared at **her** woodenly as if frustrated because **she** was right. 'Nothing in my letter suggested **I** was a man. That's one mistake you made. Why don't you admit you might have made others?' Turning **her** back defiantly on him, **she** peered at the timetable, wondering despairingly if **she**'d ever decipher it before **she** froze where **she** stood. There was the crunch of his feet rapidly moving away over the snow and **she** felt **her** tense muscles relax. Lucenzo was going. A few moments later, however, a taxi drew up to the kerb and he thrust his golden head out of the window. **She** groaned silently. 'Get in,' he ordered arrogantly. 'What are you, royalty?' **she** demanded. His nostrils flared dangerously but **she** stood **her** ground. '**I**'m not travelling with someone who thinks **I**'m here intent on **blackmail**. **I**'ll go it alone.' **She** drew herself up to **her** full height. 'But just you wait, Lucenzo Salvati! You'll wish you never -' The door flew open and Lucenzo exploded out of the cab like a flying demon, catching **her** arms in a fierce grip, his face distorted with anger. **Meredith** squealed in alarm as he jerked **her** roughly towards him. 'Don't **you** ever threaten me,' he whispered, his breath clouding the cold air between **them** and freezing on **her** parted lips. 'And, for **your** information, **I**'ve long wished that **I**'d never heard of **you** - or **your wretched grandmother**. But **you**'ll get in that darn cab and stop giving me any more hassle, even if I have to throw **you** in bodily like the little baggage **you** are. I mean it. So decide whether **you** get in under **your** own steam, or with my assistance.' His vehemence shook **her**. But **she** was in the right and so **she** held **her** body erect, **her** tiny, heart-shaped face raised to his in haughty indifference however close to angry tears **she** might be. 'You think **I**'m

the granddaughter of a criminal

- 'I don't think,' he said scornfully. 'I know **you** are. **You**'ve got ten seconds.' The hard eyes bored into **hers** mercilessly. **She** began to tremble, quite appalled by the situation. It was unbelievable that anyone could condemn **her** like this without good reason. 'You're wrong. **I**'ve **always been totally honest**,' **she** cried shakily. '**My** parents brought me up to -' '**Lie, cheat, steal**. Five ... four ...' 'Oh!' **She** wriggled fruitlessly in his ruthless grasp. 'Let me go,' **she** grated, 'or **I**'ll -' '**You**'ll what?' rasped Lucenzo, his fingers biting into **her** arms. 'Don't be ridiculous.' He looked at the stubborn set of **her** mouth and muttered something - obviously rude - in Italian. 'Don't **you** know that there isn't a bus till dawn?' he rasped. 'Dawn?' **she** cried in dismay, all the stuffing knocked out of **her**. He took advantage of **her** despair. Without another word, he picked up **her** bags and disdainfully threw them into the boot. Miserably **she** allowed him to settle **her** in the taxi. **She** stole an anxious look at him and withered from the frosty blast of his basilisk stare. 'Thank you,' **she** muttered with chilling politeness. 'Don't. I'd hate **you** to imagine that I'm doing this out of the goodness of my heart,' he said through clenched teeth. '**We** happen to be staying in the same place, and I'm damned if I'm keeping awake waiting for **you** to turn up. I've had precious little sleep over the last two days because of **your** delayed flight, and I'm exhausted. That's why **you**'re getting a lift and for no other reason. Understand?' 'Perfectly,' **she** said stiffly, hoping **she** sounded unaffected by his undisguised loathing. 'But **I** will keep my independence. **I** insist on paying half the fare.' He shot **her** a surprised look and shrugged. 'All right. Why should I beggar myself for **you**?' **She** blanched, hardly hearing his barked order at the driver. The cab drove slowly away through the bleak night while **Meredith** sat without moving, painfully remembering where **she**'d heard that phrase before: 'Beggar myself'. It had been nearly a year ago, when the postman had delivered a letter postmarked Venice to the little cottage in Wales **she** had shared with **her grandmother**. **Gran** had read the letter, given an anguished cry and