



Masks and Faces

Janet Muir

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Everyone on deck! All hands on deck! Fire! Fire! Bring the hose quick! As the steamship lurched in the heavy seas, Harry Braham grabbed what clothes he could and struggled with the other terrified passengers to climb the ladders. On deck, with the rain lashing down and the wind howling, he gripped the rails of the ship tightly, trying to stay upright. With horror he saw the flames leaping high in the hold and he thought his time had come.

It was June 1891. A music-hall star famous for his comic songs and his ability to 'pull mugs', Harry - a seasoned traveler - was on his way from New York to his home in London, after a busy season appearing in a play by W H Crane. As the crew prepared the lifeboats, Harry looked back at his life - his apprenticeship with the Royal Christy Minstrels, his acclaimed tours of Australia and the USA, and his marriage to the vivacious but temperamental singer Lizzie Watson. Was this to be the end?

In this well-researched and lively biography, full of fascinating social background, Janet Muir (Harry Braham's great-great-niece) brings to life the world of the Victorian music-hall and traces Harry's career from minstrelsy through to 'legitimate' theatre and finally to moving pictures, where he landed a part in D W Griffith's Birth of a Nation.

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