

## Mask by Mask

**Tyler Kyle**

Balboa Press (Feb 24, 2017)

Softcover \$16.99 (232pp)

978-1-5043-7132-2

*Mask by Mask is a beautiful book—a smart, sexy, and complex novel.*

Tyler Kyle's *Mask by Mask* is a wondrous novel with spirit, depth, and sensuality. At once a love letter to Barcelona, a character study of a woman dealing with her demons, and an examination of identity, meaning, and pleasure, this book is layered thick with thought and packaged in captivating prose.

At eighteen, Ada was a free spirit, having the time of her life indulging in the pleasures and freedom of Europe with her friends. But a horrific night in Barcelona left her marred and traumatized. An enigmatic Catalan man, Nathan, saved her but then rejected her.

Ten years later, she leaves her seemingly perfect San Francisco life—a successful wedding photography business; an engagement to a handsome man who loves her—to face her old ghosts. She fears what Barcelona will bring out in her, yet she cannot turn away.

Ada's world is endlessly entertaining to live in. She is shown to be strong, self-assured yet vulnerable, and intelligent; she likes fine wine and good sex and is unapologetic about her impulsiveness and hedonism. She notices more subtle beauties in the world, even if Barcelona's particular beauty brings her pain.

One of the most pure and enduring scenes is when Ada fantasizes about herself with Nathan, dancing to his impassioned and pained guitar: "The language Nathan sang was still a mystery to her. But she was a goddess in a woman's body, knowing everything and nothing." Ada clearly sees the woman she is becoming, and yet she is still so naive. In their lyricism, such scenes are engrossing to read.

Conversations with Nathan are particularly stimulating and remarkable. They discuss the memories evoked by colors of tiles in one of Gaudí's most iconic works, the Python, in passages that are demonstrative of what makes the book so gripping. Kyle weaves characters, images, philosophy, emotions, and a strong sense of place and history together.

Travel themes will speak to a restless generation. The trauma and disillusionment that Ada experiences as a result of her travels seem to critique the idea that travel is always the answer, but her unmistakable love for Barcelona and for what she learned there also speaks to the truth of its value. This complicated relationship proves worth exploring.

Prose is simultaneously raw, visceral, and engaging. Superfluous minor characters, especially Ada's fleeting lovers and lost friends, tend to blur together. A subplot about a mentor, Jordan, only prolongs the reveal of Ada's tragedy and her infatuation with Nathan. Some scene breaks and timelines are unclear.

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PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (May 24, 2017)

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