

The MILLION DOLLAR MYSTERY

By HAROLD MAC GRATH



\$10,000 FOR 100 WORDS.

"The Million Dollar Mystery" story will run for twenty-two consecutive weeks in this paper. By an arrangement with the Thanhouser Film company it has been made possible not only to read the story in this paper but also to see it each week in the various moving picture theaters. For the solution of this mystery story \$10,000 will be given by the Thanhouser Film corporation.

CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CONTEST.

The prize of \$10,000 will be won by the man, woman, or child who writes the most acceptable solution of the mystery, from which the last two reels of motion picture drama will be made and the last two chapters of the story written by Harold MacGrath.

Solutions may be sent to the Thanhouser Film corporation, either at Chicago or New York, any time up to midnight, Jan. 14. This allows several weeks after the last chapter has been published.

A board of three judges will determine which of the many solutions received is the most acceptable. The judges are to be Harold MacGrath, Lloyd Lonergan, and Miss Mae Tines. The judgment of this board will be absolute and final. Nothing of a literary nature will be considered in the decision, nor given any preference in the selection of the winner of the \$10,000 prize. The last two reels, which will give the most acceptable solution to the mystery, will be presented in the theaters having this feature as soon as it is possible to produce the same. The story corresponding to these motion pictures will appear in the newspapers coincidentally, or as soon after the appearance of the pictures as practicable. With the last two reels will be shown the picture of the winner, his or her home, and other interesting features. It is understood that the newspapers, so far as practicable, in printing the last two chapters of the story by Harold MacGrath, will also show a picture of the successful contestant.

Solutions to the mystery must not be more than 100 words long. Here are some questions to be kept in mind in connection with the mystery as an aid to a solution:

No. 1.—What becomes of the millionaire?

No. 2.—What becomes of the \$1,000,000?

No. 3.—Whom does Florence marry?

No. 4.—What becomes of the Russian countess?

Nobody connected either directly or indirectly with "The Million Dollar Mystery" will be considered as a contestant.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Stanley Hargreave, millionaire, after a miraculous escape from the den of the gang of brilliant thieves known as the Black Hundred, lives the life of a recluse for eighteen years. Hargreave accidentally meets Braine, leader of the Black Hundred. Knowing Braine will try to get him, he escapes from his own home by a balloon. Before escaping he writes a letter to the girls' school where eighteen years before he mysteriously left on the doorstep his baby daughter, Florence Gray. That day Hargreave also draws \$1,000,000 from the bank, but it is reported that this dropped into the sea when the balloon he escaped in was punctured.

Florence arrives from the girls' school. Countess Olga, Braine's companion, visits her and claims to be a relative. Two bogus detectives call, but their plot is foiled by Norton, a newspaper man.

By bribing the captain of the Orient Norton lays a trap for Braine and his gang. Countess Olga also visits the Orient's captain, and she easily falls into the reporter's snare. The plan proves abortive through Braine's good luck and only hirelings fall into the hands of the police.

After failing in their first attempt the Black Hundred trap Florence. They ask her for money, but she escapes, again foiling them.

Norton and the countess call on Florence the next day, once more safe at home. The visitors having gone, Jones removes a section of flooring and from a cavity takes a box. Pursued by members of the Black Hundred, he rushes to the water front and succeeds in dropping the box into the sea.

Countess Olga succeeds in breaking the engagement existing between Florence Hargreave and Norton.

Accomplices of Braine succeed in kidnapping Florence while she is shopping and hurry her off to sea. She leaps into the sea and is picked up in a dazed condition by a party of fishermen. The Black Hundred locate her, and Braine, disguised as her father, succeeds in taking her back to sea with him. Florence acts fire to the boat and is rescued by a ship on which Norton has been shanghaied.

Norton and Florence, safely ashore and with no longer any misunderstanding between them, take the train for home. The train is wrecked and waiting members of the Black Hundred carry the injured Florence to a deserted hut. Norton, who tries to rescue her, is tied to the railroad tracks. Florence saves him and finally Jones comes to the rescue of both.

The Black Hundred recover the box Jones dropped in the ocean. By a clever ruse Norton and Jones regain it.

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CHAPTER XIII.

AN AGENT FROM RUSSIA.

The Black Hundred, not as individuals but as an organization, began to worry. Powerful, and often reckless and daring because it was powerful, it began to look about for some basic cause for all these failures against Hargreave's daughter and Hargreave's ghost. They had tried to put the inquisitive reporter out of the way; they had laid every trap they could think of to catch the mysterious visitor at the Hargreave home; they had thrown out a hundred lures to bring Hargreave out of his lair, and failed; and they had lost a dozen valuable men and several thousand dollars. This must end somewhere, and quickly.



NORTON WANTED TO KISS HER, BUT THE ETERNAL JONES MIGHT BE WATCHING



COUNT PAROFF PRESENTS HIS CREDENTIALS

The one ray of hope for the conspirators lay in the fact that Florence had never seen her father and knew not in the least what he looked like. They determined to try again in this direction.

"Give it all up," said the countess to Braine. "I tell you, whatever is back of all this is stronger than we are. He knows the organization, and for all we know he may be a ghost."

"I never go back," smiled Braine. "There's something more than the million. There's the sport of the thing. We've been bested in a dozen bouts, and nearly always by a fluke. They have the breaks, as they say out at the Polo grounds."

"But the time and expense when we might be getting results elsewhere! I tell you, Leo, I'm afraid. It's like always hearing some one behind you and never finding anybody when you turn. I have told you my doubts. I have also asked you to trap that butler, but you've always laughed."

"You are seeing ghosts, Olga. A new man from holy Russia," shrugging, "is coming tonight. Evidently the head over there thinks our contributions of late have not been up to the mark, and they are going to stir us up. I am willing to wager my soul, however, that that box is simply a hoax to befuddle us. Either that or it holds the key. But the rest of them insist that the box must be recovered. When I leave this room tonight I am going over to Riverdale and stalk all by myself. I'm going to get a glimpse of that mysterious stranger. He carries a scar of mine somewhere, for I hit him that night."

The door opened, and the executive chamber became silent.

"Count Paroff," boomed the voice of Vroom. "He will present his credentials."

This formality was executed as prescribed by the rules; and Count Paroff was given his chair. He spoke for a while, rather pompously.

"The head organization is not satisfied with its offspring in this Hargreave affair," he said in conclusion. "You are slow."

"Then you have come with some suggestions for the betterment of our business?" asked Braine ironically.

"Sir, this is not the hour for flippancy," said the agent coldly.

Braine made a sign with his hand, a sign not observed by every one. Instantly Paroff bent low. He recognized that the speaker was the actual, not the nominal, head of the American branch.

"What are your suggestions?" inquired the nominal head from his chair, anxious to avoid a clash between the newcomer and the truculent master of them all.

"I have been informed that Hargreave's daughter has never seen her father, not even a photograph of him," said Paroff, more amiably.

"We are absolutely certain that this is the case," said the nominal head, who was known as the president. "But we tried one play in that direction, and it failed miserably."

"I have the story," replied Paroff. "It was clumsily done. The ruse was an old one."

Braine was frank enough to admit the truth of this statement, however much he disliked the admission. He nodded.

"I have authority to take a hand in this affair. We cannot waste all summer. Those government plans of the fortifications of the Panama are waiting. There's your millions. But the fact remains that it is the law of the Black Hundred never to step down till absolutely defeated. The hidden million is but



"MY CHILDI" WHISPERED THE MAN.

half; we must find and break this renegade Hargreave."

"If he lives," said Braine.

"Who can say one way or the other?" brusquely asked Paroff. "The fact that all your plans and schemes have come to naught should prove to you that you are not fighting a ghost. There is but one way to bring out the truth."

"And that is to make a captive of his daughter," supplemented Braine. "And we have worked toward that end ceaselessly. We are quite ready to listen to your suggestions, count."

"And so am I," thought the man with his ear to the little hole in the ceiling above.

"And some day, my energetic friend, I'm going to pay you back for that bullet."

Count Paroff cleared his voice and laid his plans before his audience.

"To act frankly and in the open, to go boldly to the Hargreave home and proclaim myself Hargreave. I can disguise myself in a manner that will at least temporarily fool the butler."

"Who has been with his master for fourteen years, knows every move, habit, gesture, inflection," interposed Braine. "But proceed, count, proceed. You will remember the old adage: too many cooks."

"Ah," flashed back the count, "but a new cook?"

Olga touched Braine's arm warningly.

"You mean, then, that there has been talk in St. Petersburg of disposing of some one?"

"A good deal of talk, sir," haughtily, forgetting that he had bent humbly enough but a few moments gone.

"Very well; go on."

Thought the man at the peephole above: "There's another adage. When thieves fall out, then honest men get their dues. Yes, yes; proceed, proceed!"

of information! So Florence Hargreave was going to have a new father in a day or so? There were some clever rogues among this band of theirs; but their cleverness was well offset by an equal number of fools.

Yes, there were some clever rogues, and to prove this assertion Braine secured a taxicab and drove furiously away, his destination the home of his ancient enemy. He dropped the cab a block or two away and presently stowed himself away in the summer house at the left of the lawn. It would have been a capital idea—that is, if the other man had not thought of and anticipated this very thing. So he used a public pay station telephone; and Braine waited in vain, waited till the lights in the Hargreave house went out one by one and it became wrapped in darkness within and moonshine without.

Braine was a philosopher. He returned to his waiting taxicab, drove home, paid the bill, smiling grimly, and went to bed. It was going to be a wonderful game of blind man's buff, and it was going to be sport to watch this fool Paroff blunder into a pit.

The next afternoon Florence and Norton sat in the summer house talking of the future. Lovers are prone to talk of that. As if anything else in the world ever equals the present! They talked of nice little apartments and vacations in the summer and how much they would save out of his salary, and a thousand and one other things which would not interest you at all if I recounted them in detail. But they did love each other, and they were going to be married; you may be certain of that. They did not care a snap of the finger what Jones thought. They were going to be married, and that was all there was to it. Of course, Florence couldn't touch a penny of her father's money. If he, Norton, couldn't take care of her without help, why, he wouldn't be worth the powder to blow him up with.

"But, my dear, you must be very careful," he said. "Jones and I will always be about somewhere. If they really get hold of you once, God alone knows what will happen. It is not you, it is your poor father they want to bring out into the open. If they knew where he was they would not bother you in the least."

"Have I really a father? Sometimes I doubt. Why couldn't he steal into the house and see me, just once?"

"Perhaps he dares not. This house is always watched, night and day, though you'll look in vain to discover any one. Your father knows best what he is doing, my dear girl. You see, I met him years ago in China; and when he started out to do a certain thing he generally did it. He never botched any of his plans. So we all must wait. Only I'm going to marry you all the same, whether he likes it or not. The rogues will try to impose upon you again; but do not pay any attention to notes or personals in the papers. You've been through enough. And it was a lucky thing that I was on that freighter that picked you up at sea. I shall always wonder how that yacht took fire."

"So shall I," replied Florence, her brows drawing together in puzzlement. "Sometimes I think I must have done it. You know, people out of their heads do strange things. I seem to see myself as in a dream. And this man Braine is a scoundrel!"

"Yes; and more than that, he is the dear friend of the countess. But understand, you must never let her dream or suspect that you know. By lulling her into overconfidence some day she will naturally grow careless, and then we'll have them all. I think I understand what your father's idea is: not to have them arrested for blackmail, but practically to exterminate them, put them in prison for such terms of years that they'll die there. When you see a snake, a poisonous one, don't let it get away. Kill it. Well, I must be off to work."

"And you be careful, too. You are in more danger than I am."

Vroom stationed his men at the several exits and Braine went upstairs. The man who had sneezed, however, had vanished as completely as if he had worn that invisible cloak one reads about in the Persian tales. As a matter of fact, after the second sneeze he had gone up to the roof, got out by the trap, and jumped—rather risky business, too—to the next roof and had clambered down the fire escape of the second building. He was swearing inaudibly. After all these days of care and planning, after all his cleverness in locating the rendezvous of the Black Hundred, and now to lose his advantage because of an uncontrollable sneeze! He would never dare go back, and just when he was beginning to pick up fine bits

"But I'm a man and can dodge quick," he laughed," picking up his hat.

"What a horrid thing money is! If I hadn't any money, nobody would bother me."

"I would," he smiled. He wanted to kiss her, but the eternal Jones might be watching from the windows; and so he patted her hand instead and walked down the gravelled path to the street.

It was difficult work for Florence to play at friendship. She was like her father; she did not bestow it on every one. She had given her friendship to the Russian, the first real big friendship in her life, and she had been roughly disillusioned. But if the countess could act, so could she; and of the two her acting was the most consummate. She could smile and laugh and jest, all the while her heart was burning with wrath.

One day, a week or so after her meeting with Norton in the summer house, Olga arrived, beautifully gowned, handsome as ever. There was not the least touch of the adventuress in her makeup. Florence had just received some mail, and she had dropped the letters on the library table to greet the countess. She had opened them, but had not yet looked at their contents.

They were chatting pleasantly about inconsequent things, when the maid came in and asked Florence to come to Miss Susan's room for a moment. Florence excused herself, wondering what Susan could want. She forgot the mail.

As soon as she was gone the countess, certain that Jones was not lurking about, picked up the letters and calmly examined their contents; and among them she found this remarkable document: "Dear daughter I have never seen: I must turn the treasure over to you. Meet me at 8 in the summer house. Tell no one as my life is in danger. Your loving father."

The countess could have laughed aloud. She saw this man Paroff's hand; and here was the chance to befool and humiliate him and send him off packing to his cold and miserable country. She had made up once as Florence, and she could easily do so again. The only thing that troubled her was the fact that she did not know whether Florence had read the letter or not. Thus, she did not dare destroy it. She first thought of opening the clock; then she concluded to drop the letter exactly where she had found it and trust to luck.

When Florence returned she explained that her absence had been due to some trifling household affair.

Said the Russian: "I come primarily to ask you to tea tomorrow, where they dance. If you like, you may ask Mr. Norton to go along. I begin to observe that you two are rather fond of one another."

"O, Mr. Norton is just a valuable friend," returned Florence with a smile that quite deceived the other woman. "I shall be glad to go to the tea. But I shall not promise to dance."

"Not with Mr. Norton?" archly.

"Reporters never dance themselves; they make others dance instead."

"I shall have to tell that," declared the countess; and she laughed quite honestly.

"Then I have said something witty?"

"Indeed you have; and it is not only witty but truthful. I'm afraid you're deeper than the rest of us have any idea of."

"Perhaps I am," thought Florence; "at least, deeper than you believe."

When the countess fluttered down to her limousine—Florence hated the sight of it—and drove away Florence remembered her letters. And when she came to the one purporting to be from her father, she read it carefully, bent her head in thought, and finally destroyed the missive, absolutely confident that it was only a trap, and not very well conceived at that. Norton had given her plenty of reasons for believing all such letters to be forgeries. Her father, if he really wished to see her, would enter the house; he would not write. Ah, when would she see that father of hers, so mysterious, always hovering near, always unseen?

It must have been an amusing adventure for the countess. To steal into the summer house and wait there, not knowing if Florence had advised Jones or the reporter. If caught, she had her excuses. Paroff, the confident, however, appeared shortly after.

"My child!" whispered the man.

And Olga stifled a laugh; but to him it sounded like a sob.

"I am worn out," he said. "I am tired of the game of hide and seek."

"You will not have to play the game long," thought Olga.

"The money is hidden in my office downtown. And we must go there at once. When we return we will pack up and leave for Europe. I've longed to see you so!"

"You poor fool! And they sent you to supersede Leo!" she mused.

She played out the farce to the very end. She permitted herself to be pinioned and jugged; and for what unnecessary roughness she suffered at the hands of Paroff he would presently pay. He took her straight to the executive chamber of the Black Hundred and pushed her into the room, exclaiming triumphantly:

"Here is Hargreave's daughter!"

"Indeed!" said Olga, throwing back her veil and standing revealed in her mask.

"Olga!" cried Braine, laughing.

And that was the inglorious end of the secret agent from Russia.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]