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The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

Illustrated from Scenes in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Thanhouser Film Company

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Susan received a long night letter in the morning. And the doctor arrived at about the same time. And called promptly upon his patient.

"Fine!" he said. "The sea air was just the thing. A doctor always likes to find his advice turning out well."

He glanced quizzically at Florence, who was the picture of glowing health. Suddenly he frowned anxiously.

"You need not look at me," she laughed. "I never felt better in all my life."

"Are you sure?" he asked gravely. "Why, what in the world do you mean?"

He did not speak, but stepped forward and took her by the wrist, holding his watch in his other hand. He shook his head. He looked very solemn, indeed.

"What is it?" demanded Susan, with growing terror.

"Go to your own room immediately and remain there for the present," he ordered. "I must see Miss Hargreave alone."

He opened the door and Susan passed out bewilderedly. He returned to Florence, who was even more bewildered than her companion. The doctor began to ask her questions; how she slept, if she was thirsty, felt pains in her back. She answered all these questions vaguely. Not the slightest suspicion entered her head that she was being hoodwinked. Why should she entertain any suspicion? This doctor, who seemed kindly and benevolent, who had prescribed for Susan and benefited her, why should she doubt him?

"In heaven's name, tell me what is the matter?" she pleaded.

"Stay here for a little while and I'll be back. Under no circumstances leave your room till I return."

He paced out into the hall, to meet the frantic Susan.

"We must see the manager at once," he replied to her queries. "And we must be extremely quiet about it. There must be no excitement. You had better go to your room. You must not go into Miss Hargreave's. Tell me, where have you been? Have you been trying to do any charitable work among the poorer classes?"

"Only once," admitted Susan, now on the verge of tears.

"Only once is sufficient. Come; we'll go and see the manager together."

They arrived at the desk, and the manager was summoned.

"I take it," began the doctor lowly, "that a contagious disease, if it oc-

son and make a commonplace end of him. He would disappear, this reporter, that would be all; and when they found him he might or might not be recognizable.

So Braine called a conference and he and his fellow rogues went over a number of expedients and finally agreed that the best thing to do would be to send a man to the newspaper, ostensibly as a reporter looking for a situation. With this excuse he would be able to hang around the city room for three or four days. The idea back of this was to waylay Norton on his way to some assignment which took him to the suburbs.

All this was arranged down to the smallest detail; and a man whom they were quite certain Norton had not yet seen was selected to play the part. He had been a reporter once, more's the pity; so there was no doubt of his being able to handle his end of the game.

"I want Norton, I want him badly," declared Braine, "and woe to you if you let booze play in between you and the object of this move."

The man selected to act the reporter hung his head. Whisky had been the origin of his fall from honest living, and he was not so caloused as not to feel the sting of remorse at times.

"More," went on Braine, "I want Norton brought to 49. It's a little off the beat, and we can handle Norton as we please. When we get rid of this newspaper ferret there'll be another to eliminate. But he's a fox, and a fox must be set to trail him."

"And who is that?"

"Jones, Jones, Jones!" thundered Braine. "He's the live wire. But the reporter first. Jones depends a lot on him. Take away this prop and Jones will not be so sure of himself. There's a man outside all this circle, and all these weeks of warfare have not served to bring him into the circle."

"Hargreave is dead," said Vroom stolidly.

"As dead as I am," snarled Braine. "Two men went away in that balloon; and I'll wager my head that one man came back. I am beginning to put a few things together that I have not thought of before. Who knows? That balloon may have been carried out to sea purposely. The captain of

strictest orders from the manager, refused to let them into Florence's room.

"Never mind, Susan. Come along." Out of earshot of the porter he said: "My room is directly above Florence's. We'll see what can be done. This smells of the Black Hundred a mile off. Smallpox! Only yesterday she wrote me that she never felt better. Have you wired Jones?"

"I never thought to!"

"Then I shall. Our old friends are at work again."

"But it's the same doctor who sent me down here."

Norton frowned.

What followed all appeared in the reporter's story, as written three months later. He and Susan went up to his room, raised the flooring, cut through the ceiling, and with the fire escape rope dropped below.

One glance at Florence's tear-stained face was enough for him. Norton's subsequent battle with the doctor and his accomplices made very interesting reading. Their escape from the hotel, their flight, their encounter with one of the gang in the road, and Florence's blunder into the bed of quicksand, gave a succession of thrills to the readers of the Blade.

And all this while the million accumulated dust, layer by layer. Perhaps an occasional hardy roach scrambled over the packets, no doubt attracted by the peculiar odor of the ink.

CHAPTER XVII.

Setting Traps for Norton.

The Black Hundred possessed three separate council chambers, always in preparation. Hence, when the one in use was burned down they transferred their conferences to the second council chamber appointed identically the same as the first. As inferred, the organization owned considerable wealth, and they leased the buildings in which they had their council chambers.

They leased them for a number of years and refurbished them secretly with trap floors, doors and panels and all that apparatus so necessary to men who are sometimes compelled to make a quick getaway.

When the Atlantic City attempt was turned into a fiasco by Norton's timely arrival Braine determined once more to rid himself of this meddling reporter. He knew too much, in the first place, and in the second place Braine wanted to learn whether the reporter bore a charmed life or was just ordinarily lucky. He would attempt nothing delicate, requiring guess. He would simply waylay Nor-



Had No Suspicion That She Was Being Hoodwinked.

came known among your guests, would create a good deal of disturbance?"

"Disturbance! Good heavens, man, it would ruin my business for the whole season!" exclaimed the astounded manager.

"I am sorry, but this young lady's companion has been stricken with smallpox--"

The manager fell back against his desk, his jaw fallen. Susan turned as white as the marble top.

"The only way to avoid trouble is to have her conveyed immediately to some place where she can be treated properly. Not a word to any one now; absolute secrecy or a panic."

The manager was glad enough to agree.

"She is not dangerous at present, but it is only a matter of a few hours when the disease will become virulent. If you will place a porter before Miss Hargreave's door till I make arrangements to take her away, that will simplify matters."

Smallpox! Susan wandered aimlessly about, half out of her mind with terror. There was no help against such a dread disease. Her Florence, her pretty rosy cheeked Florence, disappeared for life . . .

"Miss Susan, where is Florence?"

"O. Mr. Norton!" she gasped.

"What's the trouble?" instantly alert.

"Florence has the smallpox!"

"Impossible! Come with me."

But the porter, having had the

(Continued on page 5)

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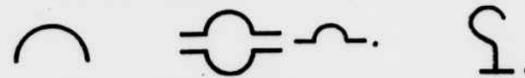
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