

The Million Dollar Mystery.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK—LOOK FOR NEXT ISSUE.)

upon two modest ones that were evenly matched in color and design. Florence ordered them to be sent home. Then the two of them sallied up to the Ritz-Carlton and had tea.

The man from the laundrette entered the costume's display and demanded that the proprietor show him the costumes selected by the two young people who had just left. The man obeyed wonderingly.

"I want a pair exactly like these," said the detective. "How much?"

"Two dollars each, rental; seven apiece if you wish to buy them."

"I'll buy them."

The detective paid the bill, nodded curtly, and returned to his taxicab.

"Now, I wonder," mused the costumer, "what the dickens those innocent-looking young people are up to?" He never found out.

On the night of the ball Norton dined with Florence for the first time; and for once in his life he experienced that petty disturbance of collective thought called embarrassment. To talk over war plans with Jones was one thing, but to have Jones serve soup was altogether another.

All through dinner Jones replied to questions with no more and no less than "Yes, sir," and "No, sir." Norton was beginning to learn that this strange man could put on a dozen kinds of armor and always retain his individuality. And tonight there seemed something vaguely familiar about the impassive face of the butler, as if he had seen it somewhere in the past, but could not tell when or where. As he and Florence were leaving for the automobile which was to take them to the princess', the truth came home to him with the shock of a douche of ice cold water. Under his breath he murmured: "You're a wonderful man, Jones; and I take my hat off to you with the deepest admiration. Hang me!"

halls, opposite the dressing rooms, she was suddenly thrust into a room and made prisoner. When the light was turned up she recognized with horror the woman who had helped to kidnap her and take her away on the George Washington weeks ago. She could not have cried out for help if she had tried.

Meantime Jim got up and began to wander about in search of Florence. Braine played a clever game that night. He and the Russian, still domineered like Norton and Florence, ordered the Hargreave auto, by number, entered it and were driven up to the porte cochere of the Hargreave house. The two alighted, the chauffeur sent the car toward the garage, and Braine and his companion ran lightly down the path to the street, where the cab which had followed picked them up.

It grew more and more evident to Jim that something untoward had taken place. He could not find Florence anywhere, in the alcoves, in the

sweetheart. Later, they took short rides in the runabout, and at length she became as lively as she had ever been.

But often she would catch Norton brooding.

"What makes you frown like that?" "Was I frowning?" innocently enough.

"I find you this way a dozen times in an afternoon. What is the matter? Are they after you again?"

"Heavens, no! I'm only a vague issue. They will not bother me so long as I do not bother them. It has dwindled into a game of truce."

"Do you think so?" eying him curiously.

"Why, yes."

"What's the use of trying to fool me, Jim? If they haven't been after you, you are sensing a presage of evil. I'm not a child any longer. Haven't I been through enough to make me a woman? Sometimes I feel very old."

"To me you are the most charming in all this wide world. No, you're not a child any longer. You are a woman, brave and patient; and I know that I could trust you with any secret I have or own. But sometimes a person may have a secret which is not his and which he hasn't any right to disclose."

She became silent for awhile. "I hate money," she said. "I hate it, hate it!"

"It's mighty comfortable to have it around sometimes," he countered.

"As in my case, for instance. If I were poor and had to work no one would bother me."

"I would!" he declared, laughing. "Come; let's throw off moods and go into town for tea at the Rose Garden; and if you feel strong enough we'll trip the light fantastic."

"They had been gone from the house less than an hour when a man ran up the steps of the veranda and rang the bell. Jones being busy at the rear of the house, the maid came to the door.

"Is Miss Hargreave in?" the stranger asked.

"No," abruptly. The door began to close ever so slowly.

"Do you know where I can find her?"

The maid eyed him with covert keenness; then, remembering that the reporter was with Florence, said: "I believe she is at the Rose Garden this afternoon."

"That is in town?"

"Yes."

"Thanks." The man turned abruptly and ran down the steps.

The maid ran back to Jones.

"Why didn't you call me?" he demanded impatiently.

"There wasn't time."

"Did you tell him where she was?"

"Yes. But I shouldn't have told him if Mr. Norton had not been with Miss Florence."

Jones ran to the front, dashed out, eyed the back of the man hastening down the street, smiled, and returned to his work, or, rather, to the maid. He took her by the shoulder, whisked her about, and shot a look into her eyes that qualified her.

"Always call me hereafter, no matter what I'm doing. That man has never laid eyes on Florence and has no idea what she looks like. Why did you drug my coffee the night of that ball?"

She stepped back.

"And how much did they pay you for letting that doctor send Florence to Atlantic City? I know everything. Hereafter, walk straight. If you play another trick I'll kill you with these

any particular objective point in view.

"Sh!" whispered Jim.

"What is it?"

"Olga Perigoff is yonder in a box."

"Very well; let us go and sit with her. Is she alone?"

"Apparently. But don't you think we'd better go elsewhere?"

"My dear young man," said Florence with mock loftiness, "Olga Perigoff has written me down as a simple young fool, and that is why, sooner or later, I'm going to put the shoe on the other foot. You and Jones have coddled me long enough. Inasmuch as I am the stake they are playing for, I intend to have something more than a speaking part in the play."

"All right; you're the admiral," he said with pretended lightness.

So the two of them joined their subtle enemy, conscious of a tingle of zest as they did so. On her part, the countess was always suspicious of this sleepy-eyed reporter. She never could tell how much he knew. But of Florence she was reasonably certain; and so long as she could fool the pretty infant the suspicions of the reporter were a negligible quantity.

hand of this strange door. Diligence rewarded her, and she soon found herself in a large, musty, earth-smelling cave. Loot was scattered about, and there were boxes and chairs and a large chest. Men evidently met here, possibly after some desperate adventure against society. She found nothing to reward her hardship, and as she was in the act of moving toward the cave's door she beheld with terror that it was moving!

She was near the chest at that moment. The cave was not a deep one. There was no tunnel, only a wall. Resolutely she raised the lid of the chest, stepped inside, and drew the lid down. She was just in time. The door opened and three men entered, talking, volubly. They felt perfectly secure in talking as loudly as they pleased. To Florence it seemed almost impossible that they did not hear the thunder of her heart! Strain her ears as she might, she could gather but little of what they said, except:

"If Hargreave had this paper, it might all be put on the defensive. But the boss will be able to read it. . . ."

The speaker moved away from the vicinity of the chest and she heard no more.

Very dextrously Florence raised the lid just enough to peep out. The man who had been talking was putting the note in his hip pocket. As he turned toward the chest he sat down on the soapbox immediately in front of the chest. An inspiration came to the girl, an exceedingly daring one. She took her liberty in her hands as she executed the deed. But the dimness of the cave aided her. When she crouched down again the magic paper was hers.

It seemed hours to her before the men left the cave. As she heard the hidden door jar in closing she raised the lid and stepped out, breathing deeply. The paper she had purloined was indeed blank, but Jones or Jim would know what to do with it. And wouldn't they be surprised when she told them what she had accomplished all alone? Her exultation was of short duration. She heard the whine of the door on its hinges. The men were returning. Why?

They were returning because they had discovered a woman's shoeprint outside. It pointed toward the cave, freshly, and there was none coming away. To reenter the chest would be foolhardy. It would be the first place the men would look. She glanced about desperately. She saw but one chance, the well. And even while the door was swinging inward, letting the brilliant sunshine enter, she summoned up the courage and let herself down into the well, which proved to be nothing more nor less than an underground river!

The men came in with a rush. They upset boxes, looked into the chest, and the man who was evidently in command gazed down the well, shaking his head. Their search was thorough, but they found no one. And at length they began to reason that perhaps a woman had got as far as the door and then turned away, walking on the turf.

Meantime Florence was borne along by the swift current of the river, which gained in swiftness every moment. From time to time she bumped along the rocky walls, but she clung to life valiantly. In ten minutes she was swept to the other side of the hill, invisible. At last! Hargreave was alive; this letter settled all doubt in her mind on this question. Alive! And not only that, but the girl and Jones were evidently in communication with him. She summoned a waiter, made a secret sign, and he bowed and approached. She slipped the letter into his hand and whispered: "Show that at the cave tomorrow. It is in invisible ink and meant for Hargreave."

"He's alive!"

"Positively."

"Very well." The waiter bowed and strolled away nonchalantly.

Braine was in Boston over night, otherwise the countess would have taken the mysterious note at once to him. She remained for perhaps a quarter of an hour longer and then left the garden. She would have taken the letter to her own apartment but for the fact that the chemicals needed were hidden in the cave.

Now it happened that Florence went out for her early ride the next morning, and crossing a field she saw a man with a bundle under his arm. The sun struck his profile and limned it plainly, and Florence uttered a low cry. The man had not observed her. So, very quietly, she slipped the horse, tethered it to a tree, and started after the man to learn what he was doing so far from the city. She would never forget that face. She had seen it that dreadful night when the note had lured her into the hands of her enemies. The face belonged to the man who had impersonated her father.

It occurred to her that she might just as well do a little detective work on her own hook. She had passed through so many terrifying episodes that she was beginning to crave for the excitement, strange as this may seem. Like a gambler who has once played for high stakes, she no longer found pleasure in thimbles and needles and pins. She followed the man with no little skill and at length saw him approach a knoll, stoop, apparently press a spring, and a hole suddenly yawned. The man vanished quickly, and the spot took on again its virginal appearance. A cave. Florence had the patience to wait. By and by the man appeared again and slunk away.

When she was sure that he was beyond range, she came out from the place of concealment, crept up the knoll, and searched about for the magic

struggling in the water, about three hundred yards away. The current leisurely brought the object into full view. It was a young woman with just power enough to keep herself afloat. The golden head roused something in him stronger than curiosity. It might be!

Braine proceeded to move the launch in the direction of the girl. It was this movement that turned the reporter's gaze. He, too, now saw the woman in the water and wondered how she had come there. When Braine reached the girl and pulled her into the launch Jim saw her face plainly.

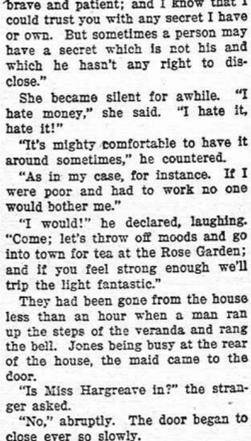
He flew from his vantage point, found a skiff, and started after Braine.

"By the Lord Harry!" murmured the rogue. "Well, they can talk of manna from heaven, but this is what I call luck. Florence Hargreave, out of nowhere, into my arms! The god of luck has cast another horseshoe and it's mine."

He had a flask in his pocket, and he forced some of the biting spirits



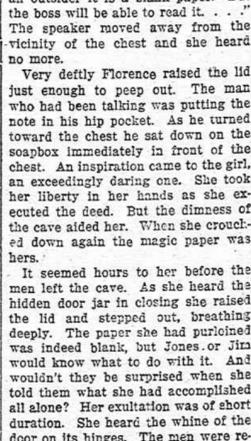
They Agreed Upon Two Modest Ones.



Florence Was Thrust Into a Room and Made Prisoner.



She Greeted them effusively and offered them chairs. For half an hour they sat there, chatting inanities, all the while each mind busy with deeper concerns.



Found Herself in a Large, Musty Cave.



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"What are you mumbling about?" asked the happy girl at his side.

"Was I mumbling? Perhaps I was going over my catechism. I haven't been out in society in so long that I've forgotten how to act."

"I believe that. We've been in here for five minutes and you haven't told me that you love me."

"Good heavens!" And his arms went around her so tightly that she begged for quarter.

"How strong you are!"

The splendor of the rooms, the dazzling array of jewels, the kaleidoscopic colors, the perfume of the banked flowers and the music all combined to put Florence into a pleasurable kind of trance. And it was only when the first waltz began that she became herself and surrendered to the arms of the man she loved.

And they were waiting over a volcano. She knew and he knew it. From what direction would the blow come? Well, they were prepared for all manner of tricks.

In an alcove off the hall room sat Braine and Olga, both dressed exactly like Norton and Florence. Another man and woman entered presently and Braine spoke to them for a moment, as if giving instructions, which was indeed the case.

The band crashed into another dance, and the masqueraders began swirling hither and thither and yon. A gay cavalier suddenly stopped in front of Florence.

"Enchantress, may I have the pleasure of this dance?"

Jim touched Florence's hand. But she turned laughingly toward the stranger. What difference did it make? The man would never know who she was nor would she know him. It was a lark, that was all; and despite Jim's warning touch she

side rooms, the supper or card room. Later, to his utter amazement, he was informed that the Hargreave auto had some time since been called and its owner taken home. Some one had taken his place!

His first sensation was impotent fury against Jones, who had permitted them to play with fire. He hung out of the mansion unceremoniously, commanded a cab, and flew out to Riverdale. And when Jones came to the door he was staggering with sleep.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Jim roughly. "Where's Florence?"

"Isn't she with you?" cried Jones, making an effort to dispel the drowsiness. "What time is it?" suddenly.

"Midnight! Where is she?"

"Midnight! I've been drugged!"

Without a word Jones staggered off to the kitchens, Jim at his heels.

There was always hot water, and within five minutes Jones had drunk two cups of raw strong coffee.

"Drugged!" he murmured. "Some one in the house! I'll attend to that later. Now, the chauffeur!"

But the chauffeur swore on his oath that he had left Jim and Florence on the steps of the porte cochere.

"Get it!" said Jones to Norton, now fully alive. He could not get it out of his head that some one in the house had drugged him.

The events which followed were to both Jones and Norton something like a series of nightmares. In the new home of the Princess Parlova a bomb exploded and fire followed the explosion. From pleasure to terror is only a step. The wildest confusion imaginable ensued. Most of the guests were of the opinion that some anarchist had attempted to blow up the house of the rich Fole. Jones and Norton arrived just as the smoke began to pour out from the windows. A crowd had already collected.

Then Jim overheard a woman masquerader say: "The fool made the bomb too strong. She is in the room on the second floor. The game is up if she suffocates—!" The voice trailed off and the woman became lost in the crowd. But it was enough for the reporter, who pushed his way roughly through the excited masqueraders and entered the house. The rescue was one of the most exciting to be found in the newspaper files of the day.

So Braine in his effort to scare everybody from the house had overreached himself once more.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Blank Sheet of Paper.

Florence was a fortnight in recovering from the shock of her experience at the masked ball of the Princess Parlova, who, by the way, disappeared from New York shortly after the fire, no doubt because of her fear of the Black Hundred. The fire did not destroy the house, but most of the furnishings were so thoroughly drenched by water that they were practically ruined. Her coming and going were a nine days' wonder, and then the public found something else to talk about.

Norton was a constant visitor at the Hargreave place. There was to him a new interest in that mysterious house, with its hidden panels, its false floors, its secret tunnels; but he treated Jones upon the same basis as hitherto. One thing, however: He felt a sense of security in regard to Florence such as he had not felt before. So, between assignments, he ran out to Riverdale and did what he could to amuse his

Princess Parlova Attired for the Ball.

two hands. And listen and tell this to your confederates: I always know every move they make; that is why no one is missing from this house. There is a traitor. Let them find him if they can. Will you walk straight, or will you leave?"

"I—I will walk straight," she faltered. "The money was too big a temptation."

"Did they give it to you?"

"Yes. And more to stay here. But this is the first bit of dishonest work I ever did."

"Well, remember what I have said. Another misstep and I'll make an end to you. Don't think I'm trying to scare you. You've witnessed enough to know that it's life and death in this house. Now run along."

At the garden Jim and Florence sauntered among the crowd, not hav-

world again. On, on she was carried. Even though she was half dead, she could hear the roar of a falls somewhere in advance.

Braine thought he really had a clue to the treasure, and with his usual promptness he set about to learn if it was worth anything. He procured a launch and began to prow about, using a pole as a feeler. All the while he was being closely watched by Norton, who had concluded to hang onto Braine's trail till he found something worthy of note. Braine was disgraced, but this time Jim was not to be fooled. But what was he looking for, wondered the reporter? Braine continued to pole along, sometimes pausing to look over the gunwale down into the water. In raising his head after the last investigation he discerned something,

down the girl's throat. She opened her eyes.

"Well, my beauty?"

Florence eyed him wildly, not quite understanding where he had come from.

"I don't know how you got here," he said; "and I don't care. But here we are together at last. Where is your father?"

"I—I don't know," dazedly.

"Better think quickly," he warned.

"I want lucid answers to my questions, or back you go into the water. I'm about at the end of my rope. I've been beaten too many times, my girl, to have any particular love for you. Now, where is your father?"

"I don't know; I have never seen him."

Braine laughed.

And Jim's boat ran afoul some rocks and into the water he went. He had not attracted Braine's attention, fortunately. He began to swim toward the drifting launch.

"Where have they hidden that money?"

"I don't know."

"Well, well; I've given you your chance. You'll have to try your luck with the water again."

Florence, weak as she was, set her lips.

"You don't ask for mercy!" he said banteringly.

"I should be wasting my breath to ask for mercy from such a monster as you are," she answered quickly.

"That damned Hargreave nerve!" he snarled.

He rolled up his sleeves and stepped toward her. She braced herself but did not turn her eyes from him. Suddenly, from nowhere at all, came a pair of hands. One clutched the gunwale and the other laid hold of Braine. A quick pull followed, and Braine began to topple. But even as he fell he managed to fling himself atop his assailant; and it was only when the struggle began in the water that he recognized the reporter. All the devil in him came to the surface and he fought with the fierceness of a tiger to kill, kill, kill, in nearly every instance this meddling reporter had checkmated him. This time one or the other of them should stay in the water.

Norton recognized that he had a large order before him to disable Braine. The recognition between them was now frank and absolute; there could never again be any diplomatic sidestepping.

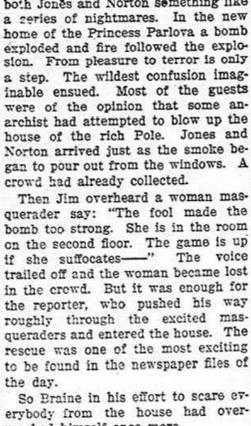
"You're a dead man, Norton!" panted Braine, as he reached for the reporter's throat.

Norton said nothing, but struck the hand aside. For a moment they both went under. They came up spluttering, each trying for a hold. It was a terribly enervating struggle.

Florence could do nothing. The boat in which she sat continued to drift away from the fighting men. Once she tried to reach Braine with the pole he had been using, but failed. From the shore came another boat. For a while she could not tell whether it contained friends or enemies. It was terrible to be forced to wait, absolutely helpless. When she heard the newcomers call encouragingly to Braine she knew then that the brave fight of her sweetheart was going to



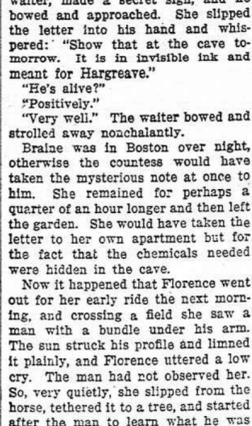
"Invite Them In; That is All You Have to Do."



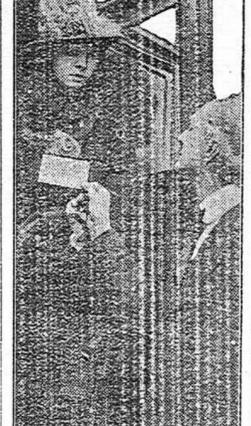
CHAPTER XIX.



Princess Parlova Attired for the Ball.



For a Moment the Countess Suspected a Trap.



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