THE $1,000,000.00 MYSTERY

(By Harold McGrath)

13TH EPISODE

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"Spider" Beggs gasped, it was so unexpected; but at the same time almost instinctively he plunged headlong through the window, and the bullet which followed snipped a lock of his hair. He threw himself off the veranda and scurried across the lawn, zigzag fashion. But no more bullets followed.

Jones turned on the lights and investigated the room, but he could not find anything disturbed, and naturally came to the conclusion that the intruder had been interrupted before he had begun his work. He turned off the lights and sat up the major part of the nght. Nothing more happened. Florence came down, but he sent her back to bed, explaining that some one had attempted to enter the house and he had taken a shot at him.

"Spider" Beggs had a letter to write. He was in high feather. He had tackled a difficult job and had come away without a scratch. But he had the misfortune to write his letter to the secret service officials in a hotel often frequented by Norton. And so Jim, on finishing his own letter, blotted it and casually glanced at the blotter. A single word caught his eye. Being an alert newspaper man, always on the hunt for stories, he examined the blotter with care. It was an easy matter for him to read writing backward, having fooled away many an hour in the composing rooms. The word which had awakened the reportorial sense in him was "counterfeit." He held the blotter toward the mirror and read enough to satisfy himself that the Black Hundred had become active once more. And this was one of the best ideas they had yet conceived.

Hargreave had always been something of a mystery to his neighbors. Where he had lived in other days was unknown; neither had any one the remotest idea from what source his riches had been obtained. And nothing was known of Jones or the daughter. It was a very shrewd method of clearing every one out of the house and leaving it to be examined at leisure. And he had fallen upon this thing; he, Norton, all because his tailor had written him a sharp note about his bill and he had been provoked to reply in kind! Counterfeit money. There was quite a flurry these days over certain issues of spurious paper. It was so good that only experts could detect it. There were two plates, one for a ten and another for a twenty. For a while he was pulled between duty and love. Well, it would only add another interesting chapter to the general story when he published it. He started out to Riverdale to acquaint Jones with the discovery.

"Humph!" said Jones; "not a bad idea this. So that's what the sneak was doing here last night. I've been wondering and wondering. Let's have a look."

He went through the books and at length came across the three volumes. These held a thousand in excellent counterfeit.

"Mighty good work that. What are you going to do?" asked the reporter.

Jones rubbed his chin reflectively. "How long may a counterfeiter be sent up?"

"Anywhere from ten to twenty years."

"That will serve. My boy, this time we'll go and take Mr. Black Hundred right in his cubby hole.

"You know where it is?"

"Every nook and corner of it. Now you go at once to the chief of the local branch of the secret service and put the matter to him frankly. I, Florence, Susan, and the rest of us must be arrested. The wretches must believe that the house is empty. They'll rove about fruitlessly and will return to their den to report the success of the coup. All the while you and some detectives will be in hiding upstairs, dictagraph and all that. When the time comes you will follow. This will not reach the heads, perhaps, but it will demoralize the organization in such a way as to make it helpless for several months to come. There is a tunnel from the stables to this house."

"What, a tunnel?"

"Yes, Mr. Hargreave had it built several years ago. I don't know what his idea was; possibly he anticipated an event like this. You and your men will find entrance by this method. It can be done without exciting the suspicions of the watchers."

"Looks as if my yarn wasn't going to be delayed so long after all. Jones, you ought to have been in the secret service yourself," admiringly.

Jones smiled and shrugged. "I am perfectly satisfied with my lot—or would be if the Black Hundred could be wiped out of existence."

"I'll see the secret service people at once. I stand in well with them all."

"And good luck to you. We'll need good luck."

Norton was welcomed cordially by the chief. The secret service men trusted him and told him lots of tales that never saw light on the printed page. The reporter went directly to the point of his story, without elaboration, and the chief smiled and handed him the original letter.

"Norton, I've been after this gang of counterfeiters for months and they are clever beyond words. I've never been able to get anywhere near their presses. And for a moment I thought this note was from a squealer. I've a dozen men scouring the country. They find the bogus notes, but never the men who pass them. You see, it's new stuff. I know what all the old timers are at; but none of them has had a hand in this issue. Some foreigners, I take it, under the leadership of a man I'd very much like to know. Now, what's your scheme?"

Jim outlined it briefly.

"It all depends," said the chief, "upon the fact that they will be impatient. If they have the ability to wait, we lose. But we can afford to risk the chance. The man who wrote this letter is not a counterfeiter. He's an old yeggman. We haven't heard anything of him lately. We tried to corner him on a post office job, but he slipped by. He may be a stool. Anyhow, I'll draw him in somehow."

"There'll be some excitement."

"We're used to that; you too. All we've got to do is to locate this man Beggs. There are signs of spite in this letter. Very well played, if you want my opinion. What's this Black Hundred?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell just yet. It's a strange game; half political, half blackmail. It's a pretty strong organization. But if they're back of this counterfeiting, there's a fine chance of landing them all."

Here the chief's assistant came in. "Got Beggs on the wire. Says he'll conduct you to the home if you'll

"Stop!" Said Jones Quietly.

promise him immunity for some other offenses."

"Tell him he shall have immunity on the word of the chief. But also say that he must come to see me in person."

"All right, sir."

"I don't believe it would be wise for Beggs to see me here. I gave him a good send-off—Sing Sing—five years ago. He may recollect," said Norton.

"Suit yourself about that. Only, keep in communication with me by telephone and I'll tip you off as to when the raid shall take place. Lucky you came in. I should have honestly gone there and arrested innocent people, and they would have had a devil of a time explaining. It would have taken them at least a week to clear themselves. That would leave the house empty all that time."

Norton did not reply, but he put the blotter away carefully. There was no getting away from the fact, but the god of luck was with him.

"Do you know what's back of it all?"

"I can't tell you any more than I have," said Norton.

"Then I pass. I know you well enough. If you've made up your mind not to talk a man couldn't get anything out of you with a can-opener. And that's why we trust you, my boy. Don't forget the telephone."

"I shan't. So long."

That same night Braine paid the Russian woman a brief visit.

"I think that here's where we go forward. The secret service will raid the house tomorrow and then for a few days we'll roam about as we bally please. I'm hanged if I don't have every plank torn up and all the walls pulled down. More and more I'm convinced that the money is in that house."

"Don't be too confident," warned Olga. "So many times have we been tripped up when everything seemed in our hands. The house should be guarded but not entered for a day or two; at least not till after the raid is cold. I'm beginning to see traps everywhere."

"Nonsense! Leave it to me. We shan't stick our heads inside the Hargreave house till we are dead certain that it is absolutely empty. Olga, you're a gem. I don't think Russia will bother us for awhile. Eh? Paroff will not dare tell how he was flimflammed. The least he can do to save his own skin is to say that we are fully capable of taking care of ourselves."

Olga laughed. "To think of his writing a note like that! Florence would have recognized—and no doubt did—a palpable attempt to play an old game twice."

"How does she act towards you?"

"Cordial as ever; and yet . . ."

"Yet what?"

"I thought her an ordinary school girl, and yet every once in a while she makes what you billiard players call a professional shot. What matter? So long as they do not shut the door in my face, I ask nothing more. But do you want my opinion? I feel in my bones that something will go wrong tomorrow."

"Good lord, are you losing your nerve?" cried Braine impatiently. "The secret service has the warning; they find the green stuff, and Jones & Co. will mog off to the police station. And there'll be a week of red tape before they are turned loose again. They'll dig into Hargreave's finances and all that. We'll have all the security in the world to find out if the money is in the house or not. Why worry?"

"It's only the way I feel. There is something uncanny in the regularity of that girl's good luck."

"Ah, but we're not after her this time; it's the whole family."

"The servants too?"

"Everybody in the house will be under suspicion."

"And can you trust Beggs?"

"His life is in the hollow of my hand. You can always trust a man when you hold the rope that's around his neck."

Still the frown did not leave Olga's brow. With all her soul she longed to be out of this tangle. It had all looked so easy at the start; yet here they were, weeks later, no further forward than at the beginning, and added to this they had paid much in

The Dictagraph Registered Every Word.

lives and money. Well, if she would be fool enough to love this man she must abide with the consequences. She wanted him all by herself, out of danger, in a far country. He might tire, but she knew in her heart that she never would. This was her one great passion, and while her mode of living was not as honest as might be, her love was honest enough and unswerving, though it was not gilded by the pleasant fancies of youth.

"Of what are you thinking?" he asked when he concluded that the pause had been long enough.

"You."

"H'm. Complimentary?"

"No; just ordinary everyday love."

"Ah, Olga, why the deuce must you go and fall in love with a bundle of ashes like myself? Ashes and bitter ashes, too. Sometimes I regret. But the regretting only seems to make me all the more savage. What opium and dope are to other men, danger and excitement are to me. It is not written that I shall die in bed. I have told you that already. There is no other woman—now. And I do love you after a fashion, as a man loves a comrade. Wait till this dancing bout is over and I may talk otherwise. And now I am going to shake hands and hobnob with the elite—beautiful word! And while I bow and smirk and crack witticisms, I and the devil will be chuckling in our sleeves. But this I'll tell you, while there's a drop of blood in my veins, a breath in my body, I'll stick to this fight if only to prove that I'm not a quitter."

He caught her suddenly in his arms, kissed her, ran lightly to the door, and was gone before she could recover from her astonishment.

The affair went smoothly, without a hitch. Norton and his men gained the house through the tunnel without attracting the least attention. The Black Hundred, watching the front and rear of the house, never dreamed that there existed another mode of entrance or that there was a secret cabinet room.

Half an hour later the head of the secret service, accompanied by his men, together with "Spider" Beggs, who was in high feather over his success, arrived, demanded admittance, and went at the front of the business at once.

"Your name is Jones," began the chief.

The butler nodded, though his face evinced no little bewilderment at the appearance of these men.

"What is it you wish, sir?"

"I am from the secret service and I have it from a pretty good source that there is counterfeit money hidden in this house. More than that, I can put my hand on the very place it is hidden."

"That is impossible, sir," declared Jones indignantly.

"I'm an old hand, Mr. Jones. It will not do you a bit of good to put on that bold front."

Beggs smiled. How was he to know that this was a comedy set especially for his benefit?

"I should like to see that money," said Jones, not quite so bravely.

"Come with me," said the secret service man. "Where's the library?"

"Beyond that door, sir."

The chief beckoning to his men, entered the library, went directly to a certain shelf, extracted three volumes, and there lay the money in three neat packages.

"Good heavens!" gasped Jones.

"I shall have to request you and the family to accompany me to the station."

"But it is all utterly impossible, sir! I know nothing of that money, nor how it got there. It's a plot. I declare on my oath, sir, that I am innocent, that Miss Florence and her companion know nothing about it."

"You will have to tell that to the federal judge, sir. My duty is to take you all to the station. It would be just as well not to say anything more, sir."

"Very well; but some one shall smart for this outrage."

"That remains to be seen," was the terse comment of the secret service man.

He led his prisoners away directly.

Norton and his men had to wait far into the night. The Black Hundred did not intend to make any mistake this time by a hasty move. At quarter after ten they descended. Braine was not with them. This was due to the urgent request of Olga, who still had her doubts. The men rioted about the house, searching nooks and corners, examining floors and walls, opening books, pulling out drawers, but they found nothing. They talked freely, however, and the dictagraph registered every word. The printing plant, which had so long defied discovery, was in the cellar of the house occupied by the Black Hundred. Norton and his men determined to follow and raid the building. And the reporter promised himself a good front page story without in any way conflicting with his promises to Jones.

Events came to pass as they expected. The trailing was not the easiest thing. Norton knew about where the building was, but he could not go to it directly. He was quite confident that its entrance was identical with that which had the trap door through which he had been flung that memorable day when he had been shanghaied.

When they reached the building he warned the men to hug the wall to the stairs. The trap yawned, but no one was hurt. They scampered up the stairs like a lot of eager boys; broke the door in—to find the weird executive chamber dark and empty and an acrid smoke in their nostrils. This latter grew stifling as they blundered about in the dark. By luck Norton found the exit and called to the men to follow. They saw Beggs at the top of the stairway and called out to him to surrender. He held up his hands and the stairs collapsed. Real fire burst out and Norton and his companion had a desperate battle with flame and smoke to gain the street.

The fire was put out finally, but there was nothing in the ruins to prove that there had been a counterfeiting den there. There was, however, at least one consoling feature: in the future the Black Hundred would have to hold their star-chamber elsewhere.

It was checkmate; or, rather, it was a draw.

CHAPTER XV.

Another Trap Set.

If the truth is to be told, Jones was as deeply chagrined over the outcome

"I Shall Have to Request You and the Family to Accompany Me to the Station."

of the counterfeit deal as was Braine. They had both failed signally to reach the goal sought. But this time the organization had broken even with Jones, and this fact disturbed the butler. It might signify that the turning point had been reached, and that in the future the good luck might swing over to the side of the Black Hundred. Jones redoubled his cautions, reiterated his warnings, and slept less than ever. Indeed, as he went over the ground he conceded a point to the Black Hundred. He would no longer be able to keep tab on the organization. They had deserted their former quarters absolutely. The agent of whom they had leased the building knew nothing except that he would have to repair the place. The rent had been paid a year in advance, as it had been these last eight years. He had dealt through an attorney who knew no more of his clients than the agent. So it will be seen that Jones had in reality received a check.

More than all this, it would give his enemies renewed confidence; and this was a deeper menace than he cared to face. But he went about his affairs as usual, giving no hint to any one of the mental turmoil which had possession of him.

It is needless to state Norton did not scoop his rivals on the counterfeit story. But he set to work exploring the cellar of the gutted building, and in one corner he found a battered die. He turned this over to the secret service men. There was one man he wanted to find—Vroon. This man, could he find him, should be made to lead him, Norton, to the new stronghold. He saw the futility of trying to trap Braine by shadowing him. He desired Braine to believe that his escape from the freighter had been a bit of wild luck and not a preconceived plan. Braine was out of reach for the present, so he began the search for the man Vroon. He haunted the water front saloons for a week without success.

He did not know that it was the policy of the Black Hundred to lay low for a month after a raid of such a serious character. So the Hargreave menage had thirty days of peace; always watched, however. For Braine never relaxed his viligance in that part of the game. He did not care to lose sight of Jones, who he was positive was ready for flight if the slightest opportunity offered itself.

Norton went back to the primrose paths of love; and sometimes he would forget all about such a thing as the Black Hundred. So the summer days went by, with the lilacs and the roses embowering the Hargreave home. But Norton took note of the fact that Florence was no longer the light-hearted schoolgirl he had first met. Her trials had made a serious woman of her, and perhaps this phase was all the more enchanting to him, who had his serious side also. Her young mind was like an Italian garden, always opening new vistas for his admiring gaze.

He went about his work the same as of old, interviewing, playing detective, fattening his pay envelope by specials to the Sunday edition and some of the lighter magazines. Sometimes he had vague dreams of writing a play, a novel, and making a tremendous fortune like that chap Manders, who only a few years ago had been his desk mate. He really began the first chapter of a novel; but that has nothing to do with this history.

All ready, then. The chess are once more on the board, and it is the move of the Black Hundred.

The day was rather cloudy. Jones viewed the sky wearily. He could hear Florence playing rather a cheerless nocturne by Chopin. Fourteen weeks ago this warfare had begun, and all he had accomplished, he and those with him, was the death or incarceration of a few inconsequent members of the Black Hundred. Always they struck and always he had to ward off. He had always been on the defensive; and a defensive fighter may last a long while, but he seldom wins; and the butler knew that they must win or go down in bitter defeat. There was no half way route to the end; there could be no draw. It all reminded him of thunderbolts; one man knew where they were going to strike.

The telephone rang; at the same moment Florence left the piano. She stopped at the threshold.

"Hello! You? Where have you been? What has happened?"

"Who is it?" asked Florence, stepping forward.

Jones held up a warning hand, and Florence paused.

"Yes, yes; I hear perfectly. O! You've been working out their new quarters? Good, good! But be very careful, sir. One never knows what may happen. They have been quiet for some time now. . . . Ah! You can't work the ceiling this time? . . . Window over the way. Very good, sir. But be careful."

The word "sir" caught Florence's attention. She ran to Jones and seized him by the arm.

"Who was that?" she cried, as he turned away from the telephone.

"Why?"

"You said 'sir.'"

Jone's eyes widened. "I did?"

"Yes, and it's the first time I ever heard you use it over the telephone. Jones, you were talking to my father!"

"Please, Miss Florence, do not ask me any questions. I cannot answer any. I dare not."

"But if I should command, upon the pain of dismissal?" coldly.

"Ah, Miss Florence," and Jones tapped his pocket, "you forget that you cannot dismiss me by word. I am legally in control here. I am sorry that you have made me recall this fact to you."

Florence began to cry softly.

"I am sorry, very sorry," said the butler, torn between the desire to comfort her and the law that he had laid down for himself. "It is very gloomy today, and perhaps we are a little depressed by it. I am sorry."

"O, I realize, Jones, that all this unending mystery annd secrecy have a set purpose at back. Only, it does just seem as if I should go mad sometimes with waiting and wondering."

"And if the truth must be told, it is the same with me. We have to wait for them to strike. Shall I get you something new to read? I am going down to the drug store and they have a circulating library."

"Get me anything you please. But I'd feel better with a little sunshine."

"That's universal," replied Jones, gong into the hall for his hat.

Had the telephone rung again at that moment it is quite probable that the day would have come to a close as the day before had, monotonously. But the ring came five minutes after Jones had left the house.

"Is this the Hargreave place?"

"Yes," said Florence. "Who is it?"

"This is Miss Hargreave talking?"

"Yes."

"This is Doctor Morse. I am at the Queen hotel. Mr. Norton has been badly hurt, and he wants you and Mr. Jones to come at once. We cannot tell just how serious the injury is. He is just conscious. Shall I tell him you will come immediately?"

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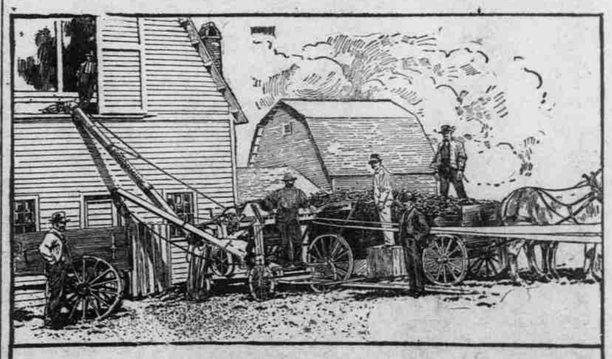

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