

FINAL EPISODE

The Million Dollar Mystery

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Secret of the Million.

It will be remembered that Countess Olga had darted up the stairs during the struggle between Braine and his captors. The police who had followed her were recalled to pursue one of the lesser rogues. This left Olga free for a moment. She stole out and down as far as the landing.

Servan, the Russian agent, stood waiting for the taxicab to roll up to the porte cochere for himself, Braine, and Vroon. Norton had taken Florence by the hand, ostensibly to conduct her to the million. Suddenly Braine made a dash for liberty. Norton rushed after him. Just as he reached Braine a shot was heard. Braine whirled upon his heels and crashed to the floor.

Olga, intent upon giving injury to Norton, whom she regarded equally with Hargreave as having brought about the downfall, had hit her lover instead. With a cry of despair she dashed back into Florence's room, quite ready to end it all. She raised the revolver to her temple, shuddered, and lowered the weapon; so tentatively do we cling to life.

Below they were all stunned by the suddenness of the shot. Instantly they sought the fallen man's side and a hasty examination gave them the opinion that the man was dead. Happily a doctor was on the way, Servan having given a call, as one of the Black Hundred had been badly wounded.

But what to do with that mad woman upstairs? Hargreave advised them to wait. The house was surrounded; she could not possibly escape save by one method, and perhaps that would be the best for her. Hargreave looked gravely at Norton as he offered this suggestion. The reporter understood; the millionaire was willing to give the woman a chance.

"And you are my father?" said Florence, still bewildered by the amazing events. "But I don't understand!" her gaze roving from the real Jones to her father.

"I don't doubt it, child," replied Hargreave. "I'll explain. When I hired Jones here, who is really Jeddson of Scotland Yard, I did so because we looked alike when shaven. It was Jeddson here who escaped by the balcony; it was Jeddson who returned the five thousand to Norton; it was Jeddson who was wounded in the arm; it was he who watched the doings of the Black Hundred and kept me reasonably well informed. I myself guarded you, my child. Last night, unbeknown to you, I left, and the real Jones—for it is easier to call him that—took my place."

"And I never saw the difference!" exclaimed Florence.

"That is natural," smiled the father. "You were thinking of Norton here instead of me. Eh?"

Florence blushed.

"Well, why not? Here, Norton!"

The millionaire took Florence's hand and placed it in the reporter's. "It seems that I've got to lose her after all. Kiss her, man; in heaven's name, kiss her!"

And Norton threw his arms around the girl and kissed her soundly, careless of the fact that he was observed by both enemies and friends.

Suddenly the policeman who had been standing by the side of Braine ran into the living room.

"He's alive! Braine is alive! He just stirred!"

"What!" exclaimed Norton and Hargreave, in a single breath.

"Yes, sir! I saw his hands move. It's a good thing we sent for a doctor. He ought to be along here about now."

Even as he spoke the bell rang, and they all surged into the hall, forgetting for the moment all about the million. Olga hadn't killed the man, then? The doctor knelt beside the stricken man and examined him. He shrugged.

"Will he live?"

"Certainly. A scalp wound that laid him out for a few moments. He'll be all right in a few days. He was lucky. A quarter of an inch lower and he'd have passed in his checks."

"Good!" murmured Servan. "So our friend will accompany me back to good Russia? Oh, we'll be kind to him during the journey. Have him taken to the hospital ward at the Tombs. Now for the little lady upstairs."

A moment later Braine opened his eyes and the policeman assisted him to his feet. Servan with a nod ordered the police to help the wounded man to the taxicab which had just arrived. Braine, now wholly unconscious, slung back one look of hatred toward Hargreave; and that was the last either Florence or her father ever saw of Braine of the Black Hundred—a fine specimen of a man gone wrong through greed and an insatiable lust for revenge.

The policeman returned to Hargreave.

"It's pretty quiet upstairs," he suggested. "Don't you think, sir, that I'd better try that bedroom door again?"

"Well, if you must," assented Hargreave reluctantly. "But don't be rough with her if you can help it."

For Braine he had no sympathy. For eighteen years to have ridden and driven and sailed up and down the world, always confident that sooner or later that demon would find him! He had lost the childhood of his daughter, and now he was to lose her in her womanhood. And because of this implacable hatred the child's mother had died in the Petrograd prison fortress. But what an enemy the man had been! He, Hargreave, had needed all his wits constantly; he had never dared go to sleep except with one eye open. But in employing ordinary crooks Braine had at length overreached himself, and now he must pay the penalty. The way of the transgressor is hard, and though this ancient saying looks dingy with the wear and tear of centuries, it still holds good.

But he felt sorry for the woman up above. She had loved not wisely but too well. Far better for her if she put an end to life. She would not live a year in the God-forsaken snows of Siberia.

"My kind father!" said Florence, as if she could read his thoughts.

"I had a hard time of it, my child. It was difficult to play the butler with you about. The times that I fought down the desire to sweep you up in my arms! But I kept an iron grip on that impulse. It would have imperiled you. In some manner it would have leaked out, and your life and mine wouldn't have been worth a button."

Florence threw her arms around him and held him tightly.

"That poor weak woman upstairs!" she murmured. "Can't they let her go?"

"No, dear. She has lost, and losers pay the stakes. That's life. Norton, you knew who I was all the time, didn't you?"

"I did, Mr. Hargreave. There was a scar on the lobe of your ear; and secretly I had often wondered at the likeness between you and the real Jones. When I caught a glimpse of that ear then I knew what the game was. And I'll add you played it amazingly well. The one flaw in Braine's campaign was his hurry. He started the ball rolling before getting all the phases clearly established in his mind. He was a brave man anyhow."

"And do you think that you can lead Florence to the million?" asked Hargreave, smiling.

"For one thing, it is in her room and has always been there. It never was in the chest."

"Not had, not had," mused the father.

"But perhaps after all it will be best if you show it to her yourself."

"Just a little uncertain," jibed the millionaire.

"Absolutely certain. I will whisper in your ear where it is hidden." Norton leaned forward as Hargreave bent attentively.

"You've hit it," said the millionaire. "But how in the world did you guess it?"

"Because it was the last place anyone would look for it. I judged at the start that you'd hide it in just such a spot, in some place where you could always guard it and lay your hands on it quickly if needs said must."

"I'm mighty glad you were on my side," said Hargreave. "In a few minutes we'll go up and take a look at those packets of bills. There's a very unhappy young woman there at present."

"Is it in my room?" cried Florence. Hargreave nodded.

Meantime Countess Olga hovered between two courses; a brave attempt to escape by the window or to turn the revolver against her heart. In either case there was nothing left in life for her. The man she loved was dead below, killed by her hand. She felt as though she was treading air in some fantastic nightmare. She could not go forward or backward, and her heels were always within reach of her pursuers.

So this was the end of things? The dreams she had had of going away with Braine to other climes, the happiness she had pictured, all mere chimeras! A sudden rage swept over her. She would escape, she would continue to play the game to the end. She would show them that she had been the man's mate, not his pliant tool! She raised the window and in slipped the policeman who had patiently been waiting for her. Instantly she placed the revolver at her temple. A quick clutch and the policeman had her by the wrist. She made one tigerish effort to free herself, shrugged and signified that she surrendered.

"I don't want to hurt you, miss," said the policeman, "but if you make any attempt to escape I'll have to put the handcuffs on you."

"I'll go quietly. What are you going to do with me?"

"Turn you over to the Russian agent. He has extradition papers, and I guess it's Siberia."

"For me?" She laughed scornfully.

"Do I look like a woman who would go to Siberia?"

"Be careful, miss. As I said, I don't want to use the cuffs unless I have to."

She laughed again. It did not have a pleasant sound in the officer's ears. He had heard women, on suicide bent, laugh like that.

"I'll ask you for that ring on your finger."

"Do you think there is poison in it?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," he admitted.

She slipped the ring from her finger and gave it to him.

"There is poison in it, so be careful how you handle it," she said.

The policeman accepted it gingerly and dropped it into his capacious pocket. It tinkled as it fell against the handcuffs.

"Before you take me away I want you to let me see . . . my man."

"I can do that."

At that moment the other policeman broke in the door.

"All right, Doan; she's given up the game."

"She didn't kill the man after all," said Officer Dolan.

"He's alive!" she screamed.

"Yes; and they've taken him off to the Tombs. Just a scalp wound. He'll be all right in a day or two."

"Alive!" murmured Olga. She had not killed the man she loved, then? And if they were indeed taken to Siberia she would be with him until the end of things.

With her handsome head proudly erect she walked toward the door. She paused for a moment to look at the portrait of Hargreave. Somehow it seemed to smile at her ironically. Then on down the stairs, between the two officers, she went. Her glance traveled coolly from face to face and stopped at Florence's. There she saw pity.

"You are sorry for me?" she asked, skeptically.

"O, yes! I forgive you," said the generous Florence.

"Thanks, Officers, I am ready."

So Countess Olga passed through the hall door forever. How many times had she entered it, with guile and treachery in her heart? It was the game. She had played it and lost, and she must pay her debts to Fate, the fiddler. Siberia! The tin or lead mines, the ankle chains, the knout, and many things that were far worse to a beautiful woman. Well, so long as Braine was at her side she would suffer all these things without a murmur. And always there would be a chance, a chance!

When they heard the taxicab rattle down the driveway to the street Hargreave turned to Florence.

"Come along, now, and we'll have the bad taste taken off our tongues. To win out is the true principle of life. It takes off some of the tinsel and glamour, but the end is worth while."

They all trooped up the stairs to Florence's room. So wonderful is the power and attraction of money that they forgot the humiliation of their late enemies.

Hargreave approached the portrait of himself, took it from the wall, pressed a button on the back, which fell outward. Behold! There, in neat packages of a hundred thousand each, lay the mystic million! The spectators were awed into silence for a moment. Perhaps the thought of each was identical—the long struggle, the terrible hazards, the deaths that had taken place because of this enormous sum of money.

A million, sometimes called cool, why nobody knows! There it lay, without feeling, without emotion; yellow notes payable to bearer on demand. Presently Florence gasped, Norton sighed, and Hargreave smiled. The face of Jones (or Jeddson) alone remained impassive.

A million dollars is a marvelous sight. Few people have ever seen it, not even millionaires themselves. I dare say you never saw it, and I'm tolerably certain I never have, or will! A million, ready for eager, careless fingers to spend or thrifty fingers to multiply! What Correggio, what Rubens, what Titian could stand beside it? None that I wot of.

"Florence, that is all yours, to do with as you please, to spend when and how you will. Share it with your husband to be. He is a brave and gallant young man and is fortunate in finding a young woman equally brave and gallant. For the rest of my days I expect peace. Perhaps sometimes Jones here and I will talk over the strange things that have happened; but we'll do that only when we haven't your young folks to talk to. After your wedding journey you will return here. While I live this shall be your home. I demand that much. Free! No more looking over my shoulder when I walk the streets, no more testing windows and doors. I am myself again. I take up the thread I laid down eighteen years ago. Have no fear. Neither Braine nor Olga will ever return. Russia has a grip of steel."

Three weeks later Servan, the Russian agent, left for Russia with his three charges—Olga, Braine and Vroon. It was a long journey they went upon, something like ten weeks, always watched, always under the strictest guard, compelled to eat with wooden forks and knives and spoons. Waking or sleeping they knew no rest from espionage. From Paris to Berlin, from Berlin to Petrograd, then known as St. Petersburg; and then began the cruel journey over the mighty steppes of that barbaric wilderness to the Siberian mines. The way of the transgressor is hard.

On the same day that Olga, Braine and Vroon made their first descent into the deadly mines Florence and Norton were married. After the storm the sunshine; and who shall deny them happiness?

Immediately after the ceremony the two sailed for Europe on their honeymoon; and it is needless to say that some of the million went with them, but there was no mystery about it!

[THE END.]

PROCEEDINGS

Continued from page 5

now ordered and directed that said amount be and is hereby appropriated to the said East St. Louis Bridge Co. to pay for same.

It appearing that there is in the hands of the County Treasurer of Breckinridge County, due the Railroad Tax District, the sum of \$3,600.00, on motion duly made, seconded and carried it is ordered and directed that Paul Compton, treasurer of Breckinridge County, pay the interest coupons due July 1st, 1915, and that he call for payment two Bonds for the sum of \$1,000.00 each, and pay with accrued interest.

It is appearing that there is in the hands of County Treasurer of Breckinridge County, the sum of \$5,000.19, due the Sinking Fund, and it further appearing that there is four outstanding Sinking Fund or Commissioner's Bonds amounting to \$2,500.00. It is now ordered and directed that Paul Compton, Treasurer, call in and pay the aforesaid bonds with accrued interest, and he is further ordered and directed to pay the interest on all the outstanding bonded indebtedness (except the Railroad Tax District) out of the Sinking Fund, on motion duly made, seconded and carried, and the same is made by the order of this court.

It is ordered by the court that the following claims be allowed:

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| W. J. Hall, pothouse keeper, claim itemized..... | \$ 243 25 |
| Mrs. W. J. Hall, sewing for paupers..... | 6 95 |
| John Weisenberger, claim itemized..... | 7 75 |
| H. Wilson & Co., books for indigent children and coffin..... | 6 98 |
| J. J. Keenan, fees, claim itemized..... | 2 30 |
| W. W. Baxter, holding inquest Homer Wilson..... | 7 50 |
| The Bradley & Gilbert Co., claim itemized..... | 43 00 |
| Lloyd Cox, coroner's fees..... | 7 50 |
| J. T. Hoben, coffin and robe for pauper..... | 9 00 |
| Dr. C. B. Witt, Med. attention pauper..... | 20 00 |
| T. J. Adkisson, furnishings for pauper..... | 10 00 |
| Dr. S. P. Parks, Med. attention paupers..... | 2 00 |
| Dr. E. A. Lex, inquest and Med paupers..... | 11 70 |
| D. C. Heron, inquest Staples and Henry Board's child..... | 15 00 |

On motion duly made, seconded and carried, it is ordered that the salary of the County School Superintendent of Common Schools of Breckinridge County, he and the same be, \$1,250.00 per year, same to be paid as other County Officials' salaries are paid.

In Re Grain Weigher, Inspector and Registrar.

On motion duly made, seconded and carried, it is ordered that Esquire W. W. Baxter, Esquire D. C. Heron and Esquire C. E. Robbins be appointed a Committee with full power to appoint a Grain Weigher, Inspector and Registrar for the McQuady Grain Warehouse Co., located at McQuady, Ky., said Committee shall fix his bond to be approved by the court and his compensation to be paid by the sellers of grain as required by law.

In Re 1915 Levy.

On motion duly made, seconded and carried, it is ordered that the Levy in Breckinridge County, for the year 1915, be 18 cents on the \$100.00 in value of taxable property, divided into three funds, to-wit: General Expense Fund, which shall include the salary of all Officers and all current expenses, 9 cents; Sinking Fund, 4 cents; Pauper Fund, 5 cents, and each tax so levied shall not be directed to another purpose than that for which it was levied except as prescribed by law, and further that there be levied a per capita, or poll tax, on each male citizen 21 years of age, or over, resident in the county aforesaid, \$1.50 for said year of 1915, and said poll tax so levied shall be apportioned to the following purposes to-wit: For Road purposes 50 cents and for General Expense Fund \$1.00, and said tax of 50 cents shall be devoted to work upon, and expense of working the public highways in the districts in which it was collected, and further for Road and Bridge purposes be and remain at the same heretofore levied, to-wit: 25 cents on the \$100.00 in value of taxable property but divided as follows, to-wit: 15 cents for Roads and 10 cents for Bridges, and further that taxes collected for Road purposes situated in each Magisterial District in the county, shall be allotted to each District in which it is collected and the same shall be applied to roads and culverts in each District, but the tax collected for Bridge purposes shall be expended when necessary in the discretion of the authorities expend-same, and further that all hands required to work on public highways by law, that they work four days in said year of 1915, but no more than two days in each week, except in cases of emergency, which said hands may be required to work any number of days in the week or year to meet such emergency, and that all overseers require the road hands in the District to comply with this order as required by law.

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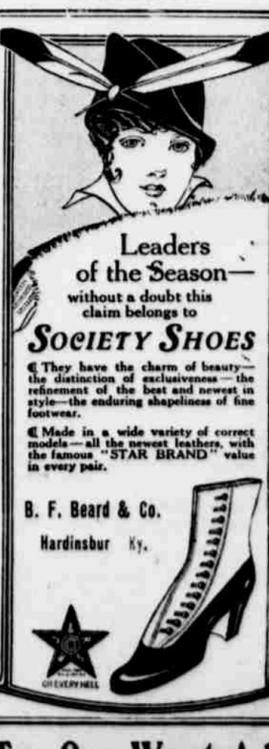
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