

# The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MACGRATH

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

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## 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 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.

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James L. Lombard, President  
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Scientific horse-shoeing, all lameness of the foot treated by scientific horse-shoeing.

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**R. A. HARP**

Southeast Corner Square.

### U. S. Soldier Shot on Border.

El Paso, Jan. 30.—W. D. Warrick, a soldier in Company G, Sixteenth Infantry, was shot and killed this afternoon while on border duty. He was lying in a cot in his tent when a stray bullet from the Mexican side passed his heart. His home was at Columbusville, N. C.

ing 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 tinge 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.

"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, whirled her about, and shot a look into her eyes that quailed 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

city. 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.

When the man in search of Florence eventually arrived and asked the manager of the garden if he knew Miss Hargreave by sight the manager pointed toward the box. The man wound his way in and out of the idlers and by the time he reached the box Jim and Florence had made their departure. The man bowed, approached, and asked if she was Miss Hargreave.

For a moment the countess suspected a trap. Then it appealed to her mind that if there was no trap it might be well to pose as Florence, if only to learn what the outcome might be.

"Yes. What is wanted?" she asked.

The man took a letter from his pocket and handed it to Olga, saying: "Give this to your father. He knows how to read it."

Before she could reply the man had turned and was hurrying away.

Olga opened the note, her heart beating furiously. It was utterly blank. At first she thought it was a hoax. Then she happened to remember that there was such a thing as invisible ink. 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 from 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 original appearance. A cave. Florence had the patience to wait. By and by the man appeared again and crouched down.

When she was sure that he was beyond observation she slipped from the knoll, crossed the field, and followed the man to the cave.

At the Garden Jim and Florence

measured against the crowd, but her

hand of this strange door. Diligence

rewarded her, and she soon found

herself in a large, musty, earth-smell-

ing 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 hardihood, and

as she was in the act of moving to-

ward the cave's door she beheld with

terror that it was moving!

She was near the chest at that mo-

ment. 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 al-

most 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 we

might all be put on the defensive. To

an outsider it is a blank paper. 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 deftly 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 exe-

cuted the deed. But the dimness of

the cave aided her. When she crouch-

ed 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 re-

turning. 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 sum-

moned up the courage and let herself

down into the well, which proved to

be nothing more nor less than an un-

derground river!

The men came in with a rush. They

upset boxes, looked into the chest, and

the man who was evidently in com-

mand 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, in-

to the rapids; but the blue sky was

overhead, she was out in the familiar

world again. On, on she was carried.

Even though she was half dead, she

could hear the roar of a falls some-

where 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

lantern and began to probe about, us-

ing a pole as a feeler. All the while

he was being closely watched by Nor-

ton, who had concluded to hang onto

Braine's trail till he found something

worth his own. Braine was discom-

forted by the time Jim was not to be

found. But what was he looking for?

He had been told that the treasure

was hidden in the cave. He had

been told that the cave was in the

vicinity of the chest and she heard

no more.

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