The MILLION DOLLAR MYSTERY

By Harold MacGrath

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"The Million Dollar Mystery" will run for twenty-two consecutive weeks in this paper. By an arrangement with the Thanhouser Film Campany it has been made possible not only to read the story in this paper but also to see it each week in the various moving picture theatres. For the solution of this mystery story $10,000 will be given.

Conditions Governing the Contest

The prize of $10,000 will be won by the man, woman or child who writes the most acceptable solution of the mystery, from which the last two reels of the motion picture drama will be made and the last two chapters of the story written by Harold MacGrath.

Solutions may be sent to the Thanhouser Film corporation, either at Chicago or New York, any time up to midnight, Dec. 14. They must bear postoffice marks not later than that date. This allows four weeks after the first appearance of the last film releases and three weeks after the last episode is published in the paper in which to submit the solutions.

A board of three judges will determine which of the many solutions received is the most acceptable. The judgment of this board will be absolute and final. Nothing of a literary nature will be considered in the decision, nor given any preference in the selection of the winner of the $10,000 prize. The last two reels, which will give the most acceptable solution to the mystery, will be presented in the theatres having this feature as soon as it is possible to produce the same. The story coresponding to these motion pictures will appear in the newspapers coincidentally, or as soon after the appearance of the pictures as practicable. With the last two reels will be shown the picture of the winner, his or her home, and other interesting features. It is understood that the newspapers, so far as practicable, in printing the last two chapters of the story by Harold MacGrath, will also show a picture of the successful contestant.

Solutions to the mystery must not be more than 100 words long. Here are some questions to be kept in mind in connection with the mystery as an aid to a solution:

No. 1—What becomes of the millionaire?

No. 2—What becomes of the $1,000,000?

No. 3—Whom does Florence marry?

No. 4—What does becomes of the Russian countess?

Nobody connected either directly or indirectly with "The Million Dollar Mystery" will be considered as a contestant.

Synopsis of Previous Chapters.

Stanley Hargreave, millionaire, after a miraculous escape from the den of the gang of brilliant thieves known as the Black Hundred, lives the life of a recluse for eighteen years. Hargreave one night enters a Broadway restaurant and there comes face to face with the gang's leader, Braine.

After the meeting, during which neither man apparently recognizes the other, Hargreave hurries to his magnificent Riverdale home and lays plans for making his escape from the country. He writes a letter to the girls' school in New Jersey where 18 years before he had mysteriously left on the doorstep his baby daughter, Florence Gray. He also pays a visit to the hangar of a daredevil aviator.

Braine and members of his band surround Hargreave's home at night, but as they enter the house the watchers outside see a balloon leave the roof. The safe is found empty—the million which Hargreave was known to have drawn that day was gone. Then some one announced the balloon had been punctured and dropped into the sea.

Florence arrives from the girls' school. Princess Olga, Braine's companion, visits her and claims to be a relative. Two bogus detectives call, but their plot is foiled by Norton, a newspaper man.

By bribing the captain of the Orient Norton lays a trap for Braine and his gang. Princess Olga also visits the Orient's captain and she easily falls into the reporter's snare. The plan proves abortive through Braine's good luck and only hirelings fell into the hands of the police.

Later, Florence is lured from home by the band, but succeeds in freeing herself from their clinches. The next day men recover a box from its hiding place and pursued by Braine's men, rather than the water found it rife in motor boats ensues. Jones drops the box into the sea and with it's automatic gets fire to the pursuing boat.

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After failing in their first attempt, the Black Hundred trap Florence. They ask her for money, but she escapes again foiling them.

Florence goes horseback riding and is captured by one of Braine's men along the roadside. Norton rescues her. They are pursued, however, and the pair make their complete escape only alive. Norton has exploded a tire on the fast approaching machine with a bullet.

CHAPTER VIII

The Wiles of a Woman.

After the affair of the auto bandits (three of whom were killed—a full followed. If you're a sailor you know what kind of a gull I mean; blue black clouds down the southwest horizon, the wires crinkly, the booms wab. Quiling. Suddenly a series of "accidents" began to happen to Norton. At first he did not give the matter much thought. The safe which fell almost at his feet and crashed through the sidewalk merely induced him to believe he was lucky. At another time an automobile came furiously around a corner while he was crossing the street, and only amazing agility saved him from bodily hurt. The car was out of sight when he thought to recall the number.

Then came the jolt in the subway. Only a desperate grab by one of the guards saved him from being crushed to death. Even then he thought nothing. But when a new box of cigarets arrived and he tried one and found it strangely perfumed, and, upon further analysis, found it to contain a Javanese narcotic, a slow but sure death, he became wide awake enough. They were after him. He began to walk carefully, to keep in public places as often as he possibly could.

He was not really afraid of death, but he did abhor the thought of its coming up from behind. Except for the cigarets they were all "accidents"; he could not have proved anything before a jury of his intimate friends.

He never entered an elevator without scrupulous care. He never passed under coverings over the sidewalk where construction was going on. Still careful as he was, death confronted him once more. It was his habit to have his coffee and rolls—he rarely ate anything more for his breakfast—set down outside his door every morning. The coffee, being in a silver thermos bottle, kept its heat for hours. When he took the stopper out and poured forth a cup it looked oddly black, discolored. It is quite probable that had there been no series of "accidents" he would have drunk a cup—and died in mortal agony. It contained bichloride of mercury.

Very quietly he set about to make inquiries. This was really becoming serious. In the kitchens downstairs nothing could be learned. The maid had set the thermos bottle before the door at 10:30. Norton had opened the door at 1:30—three hours after. The outlook was not the cheerfulest. He knew perfectly well why all these things "happened"; he had interfered with the plans of the scoundrels who were making every possible move to kidnap Florence Hargreave.

One afternoon he paid Florence a visit. Of course he told her nothing. They had become secretly engaged the day he had rescued her from the auto bandits. They were secretly engaged because Florence wanted it so. For once Jones suspected nothing. Why should he? He had troubles enough. As a matter of fact, Norton was afraid of Jones. He was afraid of him in the same sense as a boy is afraid of a policeman.

But on this day, when the time came, he accosted the butler and drew him into the pantry.

"Jones, they are after me now."

"You? Explain."

Norton briefly recounted the deliberate attempts against his life.

"You see, I'm not liar enough to say that I'm not worried. I am, devilishly worried. I'm not worth any ransom. I'm in the way, and they seem determined to put me out of it."

"To any other man I would say travel. But to you I say when you leave your rooms don't go where you first thought you would—that is, some usual haunt. They'll be everywhere, near your restaurant, your clubs, your office. You're a methodical young man; become erratic. Keep away from here at least three days, but always call me up by telephone some time during the day. Never under any circumstances, unless I send for you, come here at night. Only one man now watches the house during the day, but five are prowling around after dark. They might have instructions to shoot you on sight. I can't spare you just at present, Mr. Norton. You've been a godsend; and if it seems that sometimes I did not trust you fully it was because I did not care to drag you in too deep."

Deep? Norton thought of Florence and smiled inwardly. Could anybody be in deeper than he was? Once it was on the tip of his tongue to confess his love for Florence, but the gravity of Jones' countenance was an obstacle to such move; it did not invite it.

To be sure, Jones had no real authority to say what Florence should or should not do with her heart. Still, from all points of view, it was better to keep the affair under the rose till there came a more propitious [illegible]

Love, in the midst of all these alarms! Sharp, desperate rogues on one side, millions on the other, and yet love could enter the scene [illegible] like an actor who had missed his cue and came on too soon.

Oddly enough, there was no real lovemaking such as you often read about. A pressure of the hand, a glance from the eye, there was seldom anything more. Only once that memorable day on the river road—had he kissed her. No word of love had been spoken on either side. In that wild moment all conventionalities had disappeared, like smoke in the wind. There had been neither past nor future, only the present in which they knew that they loved. With her he was happy, for he had no time to plan over the future. Away from her he saw the inevitable barriers providing against the marriage between a poor young man and a very rich young woman. A man who had any respect wants always to be equal terms with his wife, financially more than in any other things. It's the way this peculiar organization called society has written down it rules. Doubtless, as a rule of the stone age, when Ab went out with his club to seek a wife and drag her by the hair to his den, and there to care for her and to guard her with his life's blood. It is one of the few primitive sensations that remain to us, this wanting the female dependent upon the male. Perhaps this accounts for man's lack of interest on the suffrage question.

Only Susan suspected the true state of affairs, being a woman. Having had no real romance herself, she delighted in having a second hand one, as you might say. She intercepted many a glance and pretended not to see the stolen hand pressures. The wedding was already full drawn in her mind's eye. These two young people should be married at Susan Farlow's when the roses were climbing up the sides of the house and the young robins were boldly trying their fuzzy wings. It struck her as rather strange, but she could not conjure up (at this wedding) more than two men besides the minister, the bridegroom, and the butler.

By forsaking his accustomed haunts, under the advice of Jones, the hidden warfare ceased temporarily. You can't very well kill a man when you don't know where to find him. He ate his breakfast haphazardly, now here, now there. He received most of his assignments by telephone and wrote his stories and articles in his club, in the writing rooms of hotels, and invariably dispatched them to the office by messenger. The managing editor wanted to know what all this meant; but Norton declined to tell him.

It irked him to be forced to rearrange his daily life—his habits. It was a revolution against his ease, for he loved ease when he was not at work. He had the sensation of having been suddenly robbed of his home, of having been cast out into streets. And on top of all this he had to go and fall in love!

There was no longer a shadow opposite the apartments of the Princess Perigoff. Braine came and went nightly without discovering any one. This rather worried him. It gave him the impression that the shadow had found out what he had been seeking and no longer needed to watch the coming and going of either himself or the Countess Perigoff.

"Olga, it looks as if we were at the end of our rope," he said discouragedly. "We have failed in all attempts so far. The devil watches over that girl."

"Or God," replied the countess gloomily. "In nearly every instance their success has been due to chance. Somehow I'm convinced that we began wrong. We should have let Hargreave escape quietly, followed him, and made him fast when the right opportunity came. After a month or so his vigilance would have relaxed; he would have arrived at the belief that he had eluded us."

"Indeed!" ironically. "He wasn't vigilant all these years in which he did elude us. How about the end, he never sought, but guarded? Vigilance! He never was anything else all these seventeen years. The truth is success has developed a coarseness in our methods. And now it is too late for fineness. We have tried every device we can think of; and there they are—the girl free, Norton unharmed, and the father as secure in his retreat as though he wore an invisible cloak. My head aches. I have ceased to be inventive."

"The two are in love with each other."

"I have my eyes. But I begin to wonder."

"About what?"

"Whether or not Jones suspects me and is giving me rope to hang myself with. Not once have the police been called in and told what has recently happened. They are totally at sea. And what has become of the man over the way?"

"By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Braine, clapping his hands. "I believe I've solved that. We shot a man coming out of Hargreave's. Since then there's been no one across the way. One and the same hand."

"But that knowledge doesn't get us anywhere."

"No. You say they are in love?"

"Secretly. I don't believe the butler has an inkling of it. It is possible, however, that Susan has caught the trend of affairs. But, being rather romantic, she will in no wise interfere."

Brain smoked in silence. Presently a smile twisted his lips.

"You have thought of something?" she asked.

"You might try it," he said. "They [illegible] your relationship, and their with ulterior purposes remains to be learned. She has been to your apartments two or three times to tea and always got home safely."

"No," she said determinedly. "Nothing shall happen here. I will not take the risk."

"Wait till I'm through. Break up the romance in such a way that the girl will bar Norton from the house. That's what we've been aiming at; to get rid of that meddling reporter. We've tried poisons. Try your kind."

"What do you mean?"

"Lies."

"Ah! I understand. You want me to understand. You want me to win him away from her. It cannot be done."

"Pshaw! You have a bag full of tricks. You can easily manage to put him into an equivocal position out of which he cannot possibly squirm so far as the girl is concerned. A little melodrama, arranged for the benefit of Florence. Fall into Norton's arms at the right moment, do something like that."

"I suppose I could. But if I failed—"

"You're too damnably clever to fail. [illegible] thing has got to be done to keep those two apart. I've often thought of raiding the house boldly and carrying off the whole family, Susan and all. But a wholesale affair like that would be too noisy. Think it over, Olga; we have gone too far to back down now. There's always Russia; and while I'm the boss over here they never cease to watch me. They'll make me answer for a failure like this."

She eyed him speculatively. "You have money."

"O, the money doesn't matter. It's the game. It's the game of playing fast and loose with Society, of pilfering it with one hand and making it kow-tow with the other. It's the sport of the thing. What was your thought?"

"We could go away together, to South America."

"And tire of each other within a month," he retorted shrewdly. "No; we are in the same boat. We could not live but for this never ending excitement. And, more than that, we never could get far enough away from the long arm of the First Ten. We'll have to stick it out here. Can't you see?"

"Yes, I can see."

But in her heart she knew that she could have lived in a hut with this man till the end of her days. She abhorred the life, though she never, by the slightest word, let him become aware of it. There was always that abiding fear that at the first sign of weakness he would resert her. And she was wise in her deductions. Braine was loyal to her because she held his interest. Once that rattled, he would be off and away.

The next afternoon the countess, having nurtured her plans against the happiness of the young girl who trusted her, drew up before the Hargreave place and alighted. Her welcome was the same as ever, and this strengthened her confidence.

The countess was always gesticulating. Her hands fluttered to emphasize her words. And the beautiful diamond solitaire caught the girl's eye. She seized the hand. Having an affair of her own, it was natural that she should be interested in that of her friend.

"I never saw that ring before."

"A gift of yesterday." The countess assumed a shy air which would have deceived St. Anthony. She twisted the ring on her finger.

"Tell me!" cried Florence. "You are engaged?"

"Mercy, no!"

"Is he rich?"

"No. Money should not matter when your heart is involved."

As this thought was in accord with her own, Florence nodded her head sagely.

"It is nothing serious. Just a fancy. I shall never marry again. Men are gay deceivers; they always have been always will be. Perhaps I'm a bit wicked; but I rather like to prove my theory that all men are weak. If I had a daughter I'd rather give her be an old man's darling than a young man's drudge. I distrust every man I know. I came to ask you and Susan to go to the opera with me tonight. You will come to my apartments first. You will come?"

"To be sure we will!"

"Simple little fool!" thought the Russian on the way home. "She shall see."

"I believe the countess is engaged to be married," said Florence to Jones.

"Indeed, miss?"

"Yes. I couldn't get anything definite out of her, but she had a beautiful ring on her finger. She wants Susan and me to go to the opera with her tonight. Will that be all right?"

Jones gazed abstractedly at the rug. Whenever a problem bothered him he seemed to find the solution in the delicate patterns of the Persian rugs. Finally he nodded. "I see no reason why you should not go. Jones, watch out."

"Jones, there is one thing that will make me brave and happy. Will you tell me if you are in direct communication with my father?"

"Yes, Miss Florence," he answered promptly. "But do not breathe this to a single soul, neither Susan nor Norton."

"I promise that. But, ah! hasten the day when he can come to me without fear."

"That is my wish also."

"You need not call me miss. Why should you?"

"It might not be wise to have any one hear me call you plain Florence," he objected gravely.

"Please yourself about that. Now I must telephone Jim."

"Jim?" the butler murmured.

He caught the word which was not intended for his ears. For an instant Jones had been startled out of himself.

"Is it wrong for me to call Mr. Norton Jim?" she asked with a bit of banter.

"It is not considered quite the proper thing, Miss Florence, to call a young man by his first name unless you are engaged to marry him, or grew up with him from childhood."

"Well, supposing I were engaged to him?" haughtily.

"That would be a very grave affair. What have you to prove that he may not wish to marry you for your money?"

"Why, Jones, you know that I haven't a penny in the world I can call my own! There is nothing to prove, except your word, that I am Stanley Hargreave's daughter."

"No, there is nothing to prove that you are his daughter. But hasn't it ever occurred to you that there might be a purpose back of this? Might it not be of incalculable value that your father's enemies should be left in doubt? Might it not be a means of holding them on the leash? There is proof, ample proof, my child; and when the time comes those will be shown you. But meantime put all thought of marrying Mr. Norton out of your head."

"That I refuse to do," quietly. "I am at least mistress of my own heart, and no one shall dictate to me whom I shall or shall not marry. I love Mr. Norton and he loves me, knowing that I may be an heiress after all. And some day I shall marry him."

Jones bowed. This seemed to appear final to him, and nothing more was to be said.

Norton did not return to his rooms till 7. He found a telephone call and also a note in a handwriting unfamiliar. He tore off the envelope and read the contents to no from the Countess Perigoff.

"Call at 8 tonight," he read. "I have an important news story for you. Tell no one, as I cannot be involved in the case. Cordially, Olga, Countess Perigoff."

Humph! Norton twiddled the note in his fingers and at length rolled it into a ball and threw it into the waste basket. He, too, made a mistake; he should have kept that note. He dressed, dined, and hurled off to the apartments of the countess.

He arrived ten minutes before Florence and Susan.

And Jones did some rapid telephoning.

"How long, now long," the butler murmured. "How long would this strange combat last? The strain was terrible. He slept but little during the nights, for his ears were always listening for sounds. He had cast the chest into the sea, and it would take a dozen expert divers to tackle it. And now, atop of all these worries, the child must fall in love with the first comer! It was heartbreaking. Norton, so far as he had learned, was cool and brave, honest and reliable in a pinch; but as the husband of Stanley Hargreave's daughter, that was altogether a different matter. And he must devise some means of putting a stop to it, but—

But he was saved that trouble.

Mongoose and cobra, this was the game being played; the cunning of the one against the deadly venom of the other. If he forced matters he would only lay himself open to the strike of the snake. He must have patience. Gradually they were breaking the organization, lopping off a branch here depended upon getting a grip on the spine of the cobra himself.

The trick was simple. The countess had news; trust her for that. She

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