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 Company it has been made possible not only to run the story in this paper but also 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 chapter 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 corresponding 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 fall into the hands of the police.

Later, Florence is lured from home by the band, but succeeds in freeing herself from their clutches. The next day Jones removes a box from its hiding place and, pursued by Braine's men, rushes to the water front. A race in motor boats ensues. Jones drops the box into the sea and with his automatic sets fire to the pursuing boat.

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 after Norton has exploded a fire on the fast approaching museline with a bullet.

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

Countess Olga, scheming to break the engagement now existing between Florence Hargreave and Norton, invites them both to her apartment and pretends to faint in the reporter's arms. Florence appears in the doorway just at the planned moment, and as a result gives Norton back his ring.

Accomplices of Braine succeed in kidnaping Florence while she is alone and hurry her off to sea. Norton receives a wireless later informing him that the girl had leaped into the sea and been drowned.

Florence is picked up in a dazed condition by a party of fishermen. The Black Hundred locate her and Braine, disguised as her father, succeeds in taking her back to sea with him. Florence sets fire to the boat and is rescued by a ship on which Norton has been shanghaied.

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CHAPTER XI.

When bones received the telegram that Florence was safe, the iron nerve of the man broke down. The suspense had been so keenly terrible that the sudden reaction left him almost hysterically weak. Three weeks of waiting, waiting. Not even the scoundrel and his wife who had been the principal actors in the abduction had been found. From a great ship in mid-ocean they had disappeared. Doubtless they had hidden among the immigrants who, for a little money, would have fooled all the officers on board. There was no doubt in Jones' mind that the pair had landed safely at Madrid.

As for Susan, she did have hysterics. She went about the room, wailing and laughing and wringing her hands. You would have thought by her actions that Florence had just died. The sight of her stirred the satirine lips of the butler into a smile. But he did not remonstrated with her. In fact, he rather envied her freedom in emotion. Man cannot let go in that fashion; it is a sign of weakness; and he dared not let even Susan see any sign of weakness in him.

So the reporter had found her, and she was safe and sound and on her way to New York? Knowing by this time something of the reporter's courage, he was eager to learn how the event had come about. When he had not heard a telephone message from Norton in forty-eight hours, he had decided that the Black Hundred had finally succeeded in getting hold of him. It had been something of a blow; for while he looked with disfavor upon the reporter's frank regard for his charge, he appreciated the fact that Norton was a staff to lean on, and had behind him all the power of the press, which included the privilege of going everywhere even if one could not always get back.

As he folded the telegram and put it into his pocket, he observed the man with the opera glasses over the way. He shrugged. Well, let him watch till his eyes dropped out of his head; he would see only that which was intended for his eyes. Still, it was irksome to feel that no matter when or where you moved, watching eyes observed and chronicled these movements.

Suddenly, not being devoid of a sense of dry humor, Jones stepped over to the telephone and called up her highness the Princess Perigoff.

"Who is it?"

He was forced to adfit, however reluctantly, that the woman had a marvelously fine speaking voice.

"It is Jones, madam."

"Jones?"

"Mr. Hargreave's butler, madam."

"O! You have news of Florence,"

"Yes." It will be an embarrassing day for humanity when some one invents a photographic apparatus by which two persons at the two ends of the telephone may observe the facial expressions of each other.

"What is it? Tell me quickly."

"Florence has been found, and she is on her way back to New York. She was found by Mr. Norton, the reporter."

"I am so glad! Shall I come up at once and have you tell me the whole amazing story?"

"It would be useless, madam, for I know nothing except what I learned from a telegram I have just reeived. But no doubt some time this evening you might risk a call."

"Ring up the instant she returns. Did she say what train?"

"No, madam," lied Jones, smiling.

He hung up the receiver and stared at the telephone as if he would force his gaze in and through it to the woman at the other end. Flesh and blood! Well, greed was stronger than that. Treacherous cat! Let her play; let her weave her nets, dig her pits. The day would come, and it was not far distant, when she would find that the mi . eyed mongoose was just as deadly as the cobra, and far more cunning.

The heads of the Black Hundred must be destroyed. Those were the orders. What good to denounce them, to send them to a prison from which, with the aid of money and a tremendous secret political pull, they might readily find their way out? They must be exterminated, as one kills off the poisonous plague rats of the orient. A woman? In the law of reprisal there was no sex.

Shortly after the telephone episode (which rather puzzler the princess) she received a wire from Braine, which announced the fact that Florence and five had escaped and were coming to New York on train No. 15, and advising her to meet the train en route. She had to fly about to do it.

When Capt. Bannock released Braine, he had been in no enviable frame of mind. Tricked, fooled by the girl, whose mind was as unclouded as his own! She had succeeded in bribing a coal stoker, and had taken him aways. The man had donned the disguise he had laid out for shore approach, and the blockhead Bannock did not recognize Norton at all. It was only when Bannock explained the history of the shanghaied stoker that he realized his real danger. Norton! He must be pushed off the board. After this episode he could no longer keep up the pretense of being friendly. Norton, by a rare stroke of luck, had forced him out into the open. So be it. Self-preservation is in no wise looked upon as criminal. The law may have its uses about it, but the individual recognizes no law but its own. It was Braine whom he loved and admired, of Norton whom he hated as a dog with rabies hates water. With Norton free, he would never again dare return to New York openly. This meddling reporter aimed at his ease and elegance.

"BE SILENT YOU SCUM."

AND HE FELL INTO AN AMBUSH WITHIN A HUNDRED YARDS OF HIS GOAL

He left the freighter as soon as a boat could carry him ashore. The fugitives would make directly for the railroad, and thither he went at top speed, to arrive ten minutes too late.

"Free!" said Florence, as the train began to increase its speed.

Norton reached over and patted her hand. Then he sat back with a sudden shock of dismay. He dived a hand into a pocket, into another and another. The price of the telegram he had sent to Jones was all he had had in the world; and he had borrowed that from a friendly stoker. In the excitement he had forgotten all about such a contingency as the absolute need of money.

"Florence, I'm afraid we're going to have trouble with the conductor when he comes."

"Why?"

He pulled out his pockets suggestively. "Not a postage stamp. They'll put us off at the next station. And," with a glance in the little mirror between the two windows, "I shouldn't blame them a bit." He was unshaven, he was wearing the suit substituted for his own; and Florence, cartorially, was not much better off.

She smiled, blushed, stood up, and turned her back to him. Then she sat down again. In her hand she held a small dissipated roll of banknotes.

"I had them with me when they abducted me," she said. "Besides, this ring is worth something."

"Thank the Lord!" he exclaimed, relievedly.

So there was nothing more to do but be happy; and happy they were. They were quite oblivious to the peculiar interest they aroused among the other passengers. This unshaven young man, in his ragged coat and soiled jersey; this beautiful young girl, in a wrinkled kimesqua, her glorious blonde hair awry; and the way they looked at each other during those lapses in conversation peculiar to lovers the world over, inspired in the other passengers with the idea that something very unusual had happened to these two.

The Pullman conductor was not especially polite; but money was money, and the stockholders, waiting for their dividends, made it imperative for him to select it. The regular conductor had them no more attention than to grumble over changing a $20 bill.

So, while these two were hurrying on to New York, the plotters were hurrying east to meet them. The two trains met and stopped at the same station about eighty miles from New York. The princess, accompanied by Vroon, who kept well in the background, entered the car occupied by the two castaways.

In the mirror at the rear of the car Norton happened to cast an idle glance, and he saw the princess. Vroon, however, escaped his eye.

"Be careful, Florence," he said. "The princess is in the car. They game begins again. Pretend that you suspect nothing. Pretty quick work on their part. And that's all the more reason why we should play the comedy well. Here she comes. She will recognize you, throw her arms around you, and show all manner of effusiveness. Just keep your head and play the game."

"She lied about you to me."

"No matter."

"O!" cried the princess. She seized Florence in a wild embrace. She was an inimitable actress, and Norton could not help admiring her. "Your butler telephoned me! I ran to the first train out. And here you are, back safe and sound. It is wonderful. Tell me all about it. What an adventure! And, good heavens, Mr. Norton, where did you get those clothes? Did you find her and rescue her? What a newspaper story you'll be able to make out of it all! Now, tell me just [illegible] happened. She sat down on the arm of Florence's chair. The girl had steeled her nerves against the touch of her. And yet she was beautiful! How could any one so beautiful be wicked?

"Well, it began like this," said Florence; and she described her adventures, omitting, to be sure, Braine's part in it.

She had reached that part where they had been rescued by Capt. Bannock when a thundering, grinding crash struck the words from her lips. The three of them were flung violently to the side of the car amid splintering wood, tinkling glass, and the shriek of steel against steel. A low wail of horror rose and died away as the car careened over on its side. The three were rendered unconscious and were huddled together on the floor, under the upreared chairs.

Vroon had escaped with only a slight cut on the hand from flying glass. He climbed over the chairs and passengers with a single object in view. He saw that [illegible] he was interested in were insensible. He hurriedly examined them and saw that they had not received serious injuries. He had but little time. The princess and Norton would have to take their chance with the other passengers. Resolutely he stooped and lifted Florence in his arms and crawled out of the car with her. It was a difficult task, but he managed it. Outside, in the confusion, no one paid any attention to him. So he threw the unconscious girl over his shoulder and staggered on toward the road.

It was fortunate that the accident had occurred where it did. Five miles beyond was the station marked for the arrest of Norton as an abductor and the taking in charge of Florence as a rebellious girl who had run away from her parents. If he could reach the Swede's hut, where his confederates were in waiting, the game was his.

After struggling along for half an hour a carriage was spied by Vroon, and he hailed it when it reached his side.

"What's the trouble, mister?" asked the farmer.

"A wreck on the railroad. My daughter is badly hurt and I must take her to the nearest village. How far is it?"

"About three miles."

"I'll give you twenty dollars for the use of that rig of yours."

"Can't do it, mister."

"But it's a case of humanity, sir!" indignantly. "You are refusing to aid the unfortunate."

The farmer thought it over for a moment. "All right. You can have the buggy for twenty dollars. When you get to the village take the nag to Doc Sanders' livery. He'll know what to do."

"Thank you. Help me in with her."

Vroon drove away without the least intention of going toward the village. As a result, when Florence came to her senses she found herself surrounded by strange and ominous faces. At first she thought that they had taken her from the wreck out of kindness; but when she saw the cold, impassive face of the man Vroon she closed her eyes and lay back in the chair. Well, ill and weak as she was, they should find that she was not without a certain strength.

In the meantime Norton revived and looked about in vain for Florence. He searched among the crowd of terrified passengers, the hurt and the maimed, but she was not to be found. He ran back to the princess and helped her out of the broken car.

"Where is Florence?" she asked dazedly.

"God knows. Here, come over and sit down by the fence till I see if there is a field telegraph."

They had already erected one, and his message went off with a batch of others. This time he was determined not to trust to chance. The shock may have brought back Florence's recent mental disorder, and she may have wandered off without knowing what she was doing. On the other hand, she may have been carried off. And against such a contingency he must be fortified. Money! The curse of God was upon it; it was the trail of the serpent, spreading poison in its wake.

By and by the princess was able to walk, and, supporting her, he led her to the road, along which they walked slowly for at least an hour. They might very well have waited for the relief train. But he could not stand the thought of inactivity. The princess had her choice of staying behind or going with him. He hated the woman but he could not refuse her aid. She had a cut on the side of her head, and she limped besides.

They stopped at the first farm house, explained what had happened and the mistress urged them to enter. She, she had seen no one, and certainly not a young woman. She must have wandered off in another direction. She ran into the kitchen for a basin and towel and proceeded to patch the princess' hurts.

She was extremely uneasy. She should be under obligation to [illegible] galled her. There was a spark of conscience left in her soul. She had tried to destroy him, and he had been kind to her. Was he a fool or was he deep, playing a game as shrewd as her own? She could not tell. Where was Vroon? Had he carried Florence off?

An hour later a man came in.

"Hullo! More folks from the wreck?"

"Where's the horse and buggy, Jake?" his wife asked.

"Rented it to a man whose daughter was hurt. He went to the village."

"Will you describe the daughter?" asked Norton.

The princess twisted her fingers.

The farmer rudely described Florence.

"Have you another horse and a saddle?"

"What's your hurry?"

"I'll tell you later. What I want now is the horse."

"What is to become of me?" asked the princess.

"You will be in good hands," he answered briefly. "I am going to find out what has become of Florence. Is there a deserted farmhouse hereabouts?" he asked of the farmer.

"Not that I recollect."

"Why, yes, there is, Jake. There's that old hut about two miles up the fork," volunteered the wife. "Where the Swede died last winter."

"By jingo! I'm going into the village and see if that man brought in the rig."

"But get my horse first. My name is James Norton, and I am on the Star in New York. Which way do I go?"

"First turn to the left. Come on; I'll get the horse for you."

Once the horse was saddled, Norton set off at a run. He was unnerved; he forgot all about this fact. His one thought was to find the woman he loved. He was not afraid of meeting a dozen men, not while his present fury lasted.

And he fell into an ambush within a hundred yards of his goal. They dragged him off the horse and buffeted and mishandled him into the hut.

"Both of them!" said Vroon, rubbing his hands.

"I know you, you Russian rat," cried Norton. "And if I ever get out of this I'll kill you out of hand! Damn you!"

"O, you will talk; but it never hurts any one," jeered Vroon. "You'll never have the chance to kill me out of hand, as you say. Besides, do you know my face?"

"I do. The mask doesn't matter. You're the man who had me shanghaied. The voice is enough."

"Very good. That's what I wished to know. That's your death warrant. We'll do what they used to do it at the old Academy; tie you to the railroad track. We shall not hurt you at all. If some engine runs over you heaven is witness we did not guide the engine. Remember the story of the boy and the cat? wasn't putting the cat's tail, he was only holding it the cat did the pulling. Bring him along men. Time is precious, and we have a good deal to do before night settles down. Come on with him. The track is only a short distance."

"Jim, Jim!" cried Florence in anguish.

"Never you mind, girl; they're only bluffing. They won't dare."

"You think so?" said Vroon. "Wait and see." He turned upon Florence. "He is your lover. Do you wish him to die?"

"No, no!"

"We promise to give him his freedom twelve hours from now on condition that you tell where that money is."

"Florence," warned Norton.

Vroon struck him on the mouth. "Be silent, you scum!"

"It is in the chest Jones, the butler, threw into the sound," she said bravely. And to [illegible] for all the new.

Vroon laughed. "We know about where that is."

"Florence, say nothing on my account. They are not the kind of men to keep their word."

"Eh?" snarled Vroon. "We'll see about that." He glanced at his watch. In half an hour the freight comes along. It may become stalled at the wreck. But it will serve."

Norton knew very well that if need said must they would not hesitate to execute a melodramatic plan of this character. It was the way of the Black Hundred. They had to make crime abnormal in order to enjoy it. They could very well have knocked him on the head then and there and have done with him. But the time used in conveying him to the railroad might prove his salvation. Nearly four hours had passed since the sending of the telegram to Jones.

They bound Florence and left her seated in the chair. As soon as they were gone she rolled to the floor. She was able to right herself to her knees, and after a torturous five minutes reached the fireplace. She burnt her hands and wrists, but the blaze was the only knife obtainable. She was free.

Jones arrived with half a dozen policemen. Vroom alone escaped.

The butler caught Florence in his arms and nearly crushed the breath out of her. And she was so glad to see him that she kissed him half a dozen times. What if he was her father's butler? He was brave and loyal and kind.

"They tied him to the track," she cried. "Look at my wrists!" The butler did so, and kissed them tenderly. And I saved him"

Jones stretched out a hand over Florence's shoulder. "When the time comes," he said; "When the right time comes and my master's enemies are confounded. But always the rooks, over the hawks, we catch. God bless you, Norton. I don't know what should have done without you."

"When a chap's in love," began Norton, embarrassedly.

"I know, I know," interrupted Jones. "The second relief train is waiting. Let us hurry back, I shan't feel secure till we are once more in the house."

So, arm in arm, the three of them went down the tracks to the hand car which had brought the police.

And now for the iron bound chest at the bottom of the sea.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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