

The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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

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CHAPTER III.

The Safe in the Lonely Warehouse.

The princess did not remain long after the departure of the police with the bogus detectives. It had been a very difficult corner to wriggle out of, all because Braine had added to his plans after she had left the apartment. But for the advent of the meddling reporter the coup would have succeeded, herself apparently perfectly innocent of complicity. That must be the keynote of all her plans; to appear quite innocent and leave no trail behind her. She had gained the confidence of Florence and her companion. And she was rather certain that she had impressed this lazy-eyed reporter and the stolid butler. She had told nothing but the truth regarding her relationship. They would find that out. She was Katrina Pushkin's cousin. But blood with her counted as naught. She had room in her heart but for two things, Braine and money to spend on her caprices.

How long has your highness known Mr. Braine?" asked the reporter idly, as he smoothed away all signs of his recent conflict.

"O, the better part of a year. Mr. Hargrave did not recognize me the other night. That was quite excusable, for when he last saw me I was not more than twelve. My child," she said to Florence, "build no hopes regarding your mother. She is doubtless dead. Upon some trivial matter I do not know what it was—she was confined to the fortress. That was seventeen years ago. When you enter the fortress at St. Petersburg, you cease to be."

"That is true enough." "I did not recall myself to your father. I did not care at that moment to shock him with the remembrance of the past. Is not Mr. Braine a remarkable man?" All this in her charming broken English.

"He is, indeed," affirmed Norton. "He's a superb linguist, knows everybody and has traveled everywhere. No matter what subject you bring up he seems well informed."

"Come often," urged Florence. "I shall, my child. And any time you need me, call for me. After all, I am nearly your aunt. You will find life in the city far different from that which you have been accustomed to." She slipped down to her limousine. In tripping up Norton he had stepped upon her foot heavily.

"She is lovely!" cried Florence. "Well, I must be on my way, also," said Norton. "I am a worldly-wise man, Mrs. Florence. So is Jones here. Never go any place without letting him know; not even to the corner drug store. I am going to find your father. Some one was rescued. I'm going to find out whether it was the aviator or Mr. Hargrave." "Jones drew in a deep breath and his eyes closed for a moment. At the door he spoke to the reporter.

"What do you think of that woman?"

"I believe that she told the truth. She is charming." "She is. But for all her charm and truth I cannot help distrusting her. I have an idea. I shall call up your office at the end of each day. If a day comes without a call, you will know that something is wrong."

"A very good idea." Norton shook hands with everyone and departed.

"What a brave, pleasant young man!" murmured Susan. "I like him, too; and I'd like him for a friend," said the guileless girl. "It is very good to have a friend like Mr. Norton," added Jones; and passed out into the kitchen. All the help had been discharged and upon his shoulders lay the burden of the cooking till such time when he could reinstated the cook.

There was a stormy scene between Braine and the princess that night. "Are you in your dotage?" she asked vehemently.

"There, there; bring your voice down a bit. Where's the girl?" "In her home. Where did you suppose she would be, after that botchwork of letting me go to do one thing while you had in mind another? And an ordinary pair of cutthroats, at that!"

"The thought came to me after you left. I knew you'd recognize the men and understand. I see no reason why it didn't work."

"It would have been all right if you had considered a clairvoyant."

"What the deuce do you mean by that?" Braine demanded roughly.

"I mean that when you would have learned your friend the reporter was to arrive upon the scene at its most vital moment."

"What, Norton?" "Yes. The trouble is with you, you have been so successful all these years that you have grown overconfident. I tell you that there is a desperately shrewd man somewhere back of all this. Mark me, I do not believe Hargrave is dead. He is in hiding. It may be near by. He may have dropped from the balloon before it left and the men they picked up may be Oris,

the aeronaut. The five thousand might have been his fee for rescuing Hargrave. Here is the greatest thing we've ever been up against; and you start in with every day methods!"

"Little woman, don't let your tongue run away with you too far." "I'm not the least bit afraid of you, I go. You need me, and it has never been more apparent than at this moment."

"All right. I fell by the wayside this trip. Truthfully, I realized it five minutes after the men were gone. The only clever thing I did was to keep the mask on my face. They can't come back at me. But the thing looked so easy; and it would have worked but for Norton's appearance."

"You all but compromised me. That butler worries me a little." Her expression lost its anger and grew thoughtful. "He's always about, somewhere. Do you think Hargrave took him into his confidence?"

"Can't tell. He's been watched straight for 48 hours. He hasn't mailed a letter or telephoned to any place but the grocery. There have been no telegrams. Some one in that house knows where the money is, and it's ten to one that it will be the girl."

"She looks enough like Katrina to be her ghost." Braine went over to the window and stared up at the stars.

"You have made a good impression on the girl?" with his back still toward her.

"I had her in my arms." "Olga, my hat is off to you," turning, now that his face was again in repose. "Your very frankness regarding your relationship will pull the wool over their eyes. Of course they'll make inquiries and they'll find out that you haven't lied. It's perfect. Not even that newspaper wessel will see anything wrong. Toward you they will eventually ease up and you can act without their even dreaming your part in the business. We must not be seen in public any more. This butler may know where I stand even though he cannot prove it. Now, I'm going to tell you something. Perhaps you've long since guessed it. Katrina was mine till Hargrave—never mind what his name was then—till Hargrave came into the fold. So sure of her was I that I used her as a lure to bring him to us. She fell in love with him, but too late to warn him. I had the satisfaction of seeing him cast her aside, curse her, and leave her. In one thing she fooled us all. I never knew of the child till you told me."

He paused to light a cigarette. "Hargrave was madly in love with her. He cursed her, but he came back to the house to forgive her, to find that she had been seized by the secret police and entombed in the fortress. I had my revenge. It was I who sent in the information, practically bogus, but in Russia they never question; they act and forget. So he had a daughter!"

He began pacing the floor, his hands behind his back; and the woman watched him, oscillating between love and fear. He came to a halt abruptly and looked down at her. "Don't worry. You have no rival. I'll leave the daughter to your tender mercies." "The butler," she said, "has full powers of attorney to act for Hargrave while absent, up to the day the girl becomes of legal age."

"I'll keep an eye on our friend Jones. From now on, day and night, there will be a cat at the knothole, and 'ware mouse! Could you make up anything like this girl?" suddenly. "A fair likeness." "Do it. Go to the ship which picked up the man at sea and quiz the captain. Either the aviator or Hargrave is alive. It is important to learn which at once. Be very careful; play the game only as you know how to play it. And if Hargrave is alive, we win. Tomorrow morning, early. Tears of anguish, and all that. Sailors are easy when a woman weeps. No color, remember; just the yellow skin and the salt features. Now, by-by!"

"Aren't you going to kiss me, Leo?" He caught her hands. "There is a species of Delilah about you, Olga. A kiss tonight from your lips would snip my locks; and I need a clear head. Whether we fall or win, what this game is played you shall be my wife." He kissed her hands and strode out into the hall.

The woman gazed down at her small white hands and smiled tenderly. (The tigers has her tender moments!) "No more!"

She went into her dressing room and for an hour or more worked over her face and hair, till she was certain that if the captain of the ship described her to anyone else he could not fail to give a fair description of Florence Hargrave.

But Norton reached the captain first. Other reporters had besieged him, but they had succeeded in extracting the request kind of information. They had no description of Hargrave, while Norton had. Before going down to the boat, however, he had delved into the

part of the Princess Olga Perigoff. If cost him a pocketful of money, but the end justified the means. The princess had no past worth mentioning. By means of this and that together he became sure of that she had told the simple truth regarding the relationship to Florence's mother. A cablegram had given him all the facts in her history; there were no gaps or discrepancies. It read clear and frank. Trust a Russian secret agent to know what he was talking about.

So Norton's suspicions—and he had entertained some—were completely lulled to sleep. And he wouldn't have doubted her at all except for the fact that Braine had been with her when he had introduced Hargrave. Hargrave had feared Braine; that much the reporter had elicited from the butler. But there wasn't the slightest evidence. Braine had been in New York for nearly six years. The princess had arrived in the city but a year gone. And Braine was a member of several fashionable clubs, never touched cards, and seldom drank. He was an expert chess player and a wonderful amateur billiardist. Perhaps Jones, the tactician and inscrutable, had not told him all he knew regarding his master's past. Well, well; he had in his time unthought worse misdeeds. The office had turned him loose, a free lance, to handle the case as he saw fit, to turn in the story when it was complete.

But what a story it was going to be when he cleared it up! The more mysterious it was, the greater the zest and sport for him. Norton was like a



"I Am Not Afraid of You, Leo."

gambler who played for big stakes, and only big stakes stirred his cravings.

The captain of the tramp steamer Orient told him the same tale he had told the other reporters; he had picked up a man at sea. The man had been brought aboard totally exhausted.

"Was there another body any where?"

"No." "What became of him?" "I sent a wireless and that seemed to bother him. It looked so that he did not want anybody to learn that he had been rescued. The moment the boat touched the pier he lost himself in the crowd. Fifty reporters came aboard, but he was gone. And I can't tell you just what I'm telling you."

"He had money." "About five thousand." "Please describe him."

The captain did so. It was the same description he had given to all the reporters. Norton looked over the rail at the big warehouse.

"Was it an ordinary balloon?" "There, you've got me. My Marconi man says the balloon part was like any other balloon; but the passenger car was a new business to him. It could be driven against the wind."

"Driven against the wind. Did you tell this to the other chap?" "Don't think I did. Just remembered it. Probably some new invention; and now it's at the bottom of the sea. Two men, as I understand it, went off in this contraption. One is gone for good."

"For good," echoed the reporter gravely. "Gone for good, indeed, poor devil! Norton took out a roll of bills. "There's two hundred in this roll."

"Well," said the captain, vastly astonished. "It's yours if you will do me a small favor."

"If it doesn't get me mixed up with the police. I'm only captain of a tramp; and some of the harbor police have taken a dislike to me. What do you want me to do?"

"The police won't bother you. This man Hargrave had some enemies; they want either his life or his money; maybe both. It is a peculiar case, with Russia in the background. He might have laid the whole business before the police, but he chose to fight it out himself. And to tell the truth, I don't believe the police would have done any good."

"Leave her over; what do you want me to do for that handsome roll of money?"

"If any man or woman who is at a restaurant comes to you and tells

the man went ashore with a packet under his arm."

"Tie a knot in that." "Say that the man was gray haired, clean shaven, straight, with a year high up on his forehead, generally covered up by his hair."

"What? Battened down, my lad. Go on."

"Say that you saw him enter yonder warehouse, and later depart without his packet."

"Easy as dropping my mudhook." "That's all." Norton gave the captain the money. "Good-by and many thanks."

"Don't mention it." Norton left the slip and proceeded to the office of the warehouse. He approached the manager's desk.

"Hello, Grannis, old top!" "The man looked up from his work surlily. Then his face brightened.

"Norton? What's brought you here? O, yes; that balloon business. Sit down."

"What kind of a man is the captain of that old hooker in the slip?" "Shifty in gun running, but otherwise as square as a die. Looks funny to see an old tub like that fixed up with wireless; but that has saved his neck a dozen times when he was running it into a hock."

"Not going to interview me, are you?" "No. I'm going to ask you to do me a little favor."

"They always say that. But spin her out. If it doesn't cost me my job, it's yours."

"Well, there will be a person making inquiries about the mysterious aeronaut. All I want you to say is, that he left a packet with you, that you've put it in that safe till he calls to claim it."

Grannis nibbled the end of his pen. "Suppose some one should come and demand that I open the safe and deliver?"

"All you've got to do is to tell them to show the receipt signed by you." The warehouse manager laughed. "Got a lot of sense in that ivory dome of yours. All right. But if anything happens you've got to come around and back me up. What's it about?"

"That I dare not tell you. This much, I'm laying a trap and I want some one I don't know to fall into it."

"On your way, James. But if you don't send me some prize fight tickets next week for this, I'll never do you another favor."

In reply Norton took from his pocket two bits of pasteboard and laid them on the desk. "I know you'd be wanting something like this."

"Ringside!" cried Grannis. "You reporters are lucky devils!"

"I'd go myself if there was any earthly chance of a real scrap. You make me laugh, Gran. You're always going, always hoping the next one will be a real one. But it's all bunk. The pigs are the biggest fakers on top the rod. They've got us newspaper men done to a frazzle."

"I guess you're right. Well, count on me regarding that mysterious bundle in the safe."

"At three o'clock this afternoon I want you to call me up. If no one has called, why the game is up. But if some one does come around and make inquiries, don't fall to let me know."

"I'll be here till five. I'd better call you up then."

Then Norton returned home and fiddled about till afternoon. He went out to Riverside. Five times he walked up and down the front of the Hargrave place, finally plucked up his courage and walked to the door. After all, he was a lucky wretch. He had a good excuse to visit this house every day in the week. And there was something tantalizing in the risk he took. Besides, he wanted to prove to himself whether it was a passing fancy or something deeper. That's the way with humans; we never see a sign of "Fresh Paint" that we don't have to prove it.

He chatted with Florence for a while and found that, for all she might be guileless to the world, she was a good linguist, a good musician, and talked with remarkable keenness about books and arts. But unless he roused her, the sadness of her position always lay written in her face. It was not difficult for him to conjure up her dreams in coming to the city and the blow which, like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky, had shattered them ruthlessly.

"You must come every day and tell me how you have progressed," she said.

"I'll obey that order gladly, whenever I can possibly do it. My visits will always be short."

"That is not necessary." "No," said Norton in his heart, "but it is wise."

Always he found Jones waiting for him at the door, always in the shadow. "Well!" the barber whispered.

"I have laid a neat trap. Whether this balloon was the one that left the top of this house I don't know. But if there were two men in it, one of them lies at the bottom of the sea."

"And the man found?" The butler's voice was tense.

"It was not Hargrave. I met O. G. but once, and as he wore a beard then, the captain's description did not tally with your recollection."

"Thank God! But what is this trap?" "I propose to find out by it who is back of all this, who Hargrave's real enemies are."

Norton returned to his room, then to await the call from Grannis. He was sorry, but if Jones would not let him into his fullest confidence, he must hold himself to blame for any murder he (Norton) made. Of course, he could readily understand Jones' angle of vision. He knew nothing of the general run of reporters; he had heard of them by rumor and distrust

them. He was not aware of the fact that the average reporter carries more secrets in his head than a prima minister. It was, then, up to him to set about to ally this distrust and the man's complete confidence.

Meanwhile that same morning a pretty young woman boarded the Orient and asked to be led to the captain. Her eyes were red; she had evidently been weeping. When the captain, susceptible like all sailors, saw her his promise to Norton took wings.

"This is Captain Hagan?" she asked, balling the handkerchief she held in her hand.

"Yes, miss. What can I do for you?" He put his hands embarrassedly into his pockets—and felt the crisp bill. But for that magic touch he would have forgotten his lines. He squared his shoulders.

"I have every assurance that the man you picked up at sea is my father. I am Florence Hargrave. Tell me everything."

The captain's very blundering deceived her. "And then he hustled down the gang-plank and headed for that warehouse. He had a package which he was as tender of as if it had been dynamite."

"Thank you!" impulsively. "A man has to do his duty, miss. A sailor's always glad to rescue a man at sea," awkwardly.

"They finally went down the gangplank the night the captain heaved was almost as loud as the exhaust from the donkey engines which were working out the crates of lemons from the hold."

"Maybe she is his daughter; but two hundred is two hundred, and I'm a poor sailor man."

Then Grannis came in for his troubles. What was a chap to do when a pretty girl appealed to him?

"I am sorry, miss, but I can't give you that package. I gave the man a receipt and till it is presented to me the package must remain in yonder safe. You understand enough about the business to realize that. I did not solicit the job. It was thrust upon me. I'd give a hundred dollars if the blame thing was out of my wife. You say it is your fortune. That hasn't been proved. It may be gunpowder, dynamite. I'm sorry, but you will have to find your father and bring the receipt."

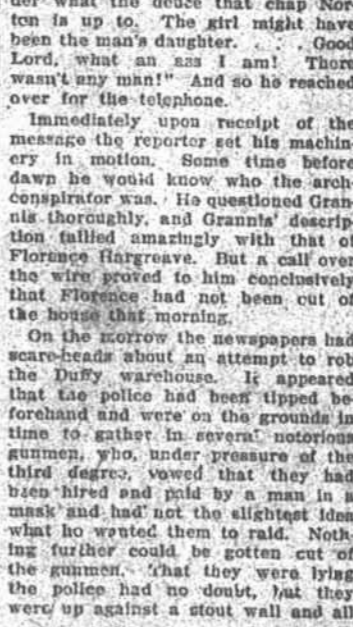
The young woman left the warehouse, dabbling her eyes with the sodden handkerchief.

"I wonder," mused Grannis, as he watched her from the window, "I wonder what the deuce that chap Norton is up to. The girl might have been the man's daughter."

Good Lord, what an ass I am! There wasn't any man! And so he reached over for the telephone.

Immediately upon receipt of the message the reporter set his machinery in motion. Some time before dawn he would know who the arch-conspirator was. He questioned Grannis thoroughly, and Grannis' description tallied amazingly with that of Florence Hargrave. But a call over the wire proved to him conclusively that Florence had not been cut out of the house that morning.

On the morning the newspapers had scarce heads about an attempt to rob the Duffy warehouse. It appeared that the police had been tipped beforehand and were on the grounds in time to gather in several notorious gunmen, who, under pressure of the third degree, swore that they had been hired and paid by a man in a mask and had not the slightest idea what he wanted them to raid. Nothing further could be gotten out of the gunmen. That they were lying the police had no doubt, but they were up against a stout wall and all



"You Must Come Every Day and Tell Me How You Have Progressed."

They could do was to hold the men for the grand jury.

Norton was in a fine temper. After all his careful planning he had gained nothing—absolutely nothing. But wait; he had gained something—the bitter enemy of a cunning and desperate man, who had been forced to remain hidden under the pier till almost dawn.

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