

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 V.

The Problem of the Sealed Box.

"Gone!" Jones kept saying to himself that he must strive to be calm, to think, think. Despite all his warnings, the warnings of Norton, she had tricked them and run away. It was maddening. He wanted to rave, tear his hair, break things. He tramped the hall. It would be wasting time to send for the police. They would only putter about fruitlessly. The Black Hundred knew how to arrange these abductions.

How had they succeeded in doing it? No one had entered the house that day without his being present. There had been no telephone call he had not heard the gist of, nor any letters he had not first glanced over. How had they done it? Suddenly into his mind flashed the remembrance of the candle-light under Florence's door the night before. In a dozen bounds he was in her room, searching drawers, paper boxes, baskets. He found nothing. He returned in despair to Susan, who, during all this turmoil, had sat as if frozen in her chair.

"Speak!" he cried. "For God's sake, say something, think something! Those devils are likely to torture her, hurt her!" He leaned against the wall, his head on his arm.

When he turned again he was calm. He walked with bent head toward the door, opened it and stood upon the threshold for a space. Across the street a shadow stirred, but Jones did not see it. His gaze was attracted by something which shone dimly white on the walk just beyond the steps. He ran to it. A crumpled letter, unaddressed. He carried it back to the house, smoothed it out and read its contents. Florence in her haste had dropped the letter.

He clutched at his hat, put it on and ran to Susan.

"Here!" he cried, holding out an automatic. "If anyone comes in that you don't know, shoot! Don't ask questions, shoot!"

"The dead!" She breathed with difficulty.

"Afrald!" he roared at her. He put the weapon in her hand. It slipped and thudded to the floor. He stooped for it and slammed it into her lap. "You love your life and honor. You'll know how to shoot when the time comes. Now, attend to me. If I'm not back here by ten o'clock, turn this note over to the police. If you can't do that, then God help us all!" And with that he ran from the house.

Susan eyed the revolver with growing terror. For what had she left the peace and quiet of Miss Farrow's; assassination, robbery, thieves and kidnapers? She wanted to shriek, but her throat was as dry as paper. Gingerly she touched the pistol. The cold steel sent a thrill of fear over her. He hadn't told her how to shoot it!

Two blocks down the street, up an alley, was the garage wherein Hargreave had been wont to keep his car. Toward this Jones ran with the speed of a track athlete. There might be half a dozen taxicabs about, but he would not run the risk of engaging any one of them. The Black Hundred was capable of anticipating his every movement.

The shadow across the street stood undecided. At length he concluded to give Jones ten minutes in which to return. If he did not return within that time, the watcher would go up to the drug store and telephone for instructions.

But Jones did not come back. "Where's Howard?" he demanded. "Hello, Jones; what's up?"

"Howard, get that car out at once." "Out she comes. Wait till I give her a slat or a buck of water. Gee!" whispered Howard, whom Hargreave often used as his chauffeur, "get on top his ribs! First time I ever saw him awake. I wonder what's done? You never know what a back of those mummy-faced headwaters. . . . All right, Jones!"

The chauffeur jumped into the car and Jones took the seat beside him. "Where to?"

"Number 73 . . ." and the rest of it trailed away, smothered in the violent thunder of the big six's engine. During the car's slight several policemen hailed it without success. Down this street, up that, round this corner, 50 miles an hour; and all the while Jones shouted: "Faster, faster!"

Within twelve minutes from the time it left the garage, the car stopped opposite No. 73 Grove street, and Jones got out.

"Wait here, Howard. If several men come rushing out, or if I don't appear within ten minutes, get your gun a couple of times for the police. I don't want them if I can manage without! They'd only bang!"

"All right, Mr. Jones," said the chauffeur. He had, in the past quarter of an hour, acquired a deep and lasting respect for the better class. His was a regular job, for all his senseless bawls.

As Jones reached the 73, the taxicab came forth as if by magic, with Jones' trunk in it. He had not time to get into the car before the taxicab had driven off. Jones was alone.

With his hands with a strength he had not dreamed existed in her slim body. "Florence, I am Jones!" She stopped, recognized him, and without a word ran across the street to the automobile and climbed into the tonneau. Jones followed immediately. "Home!"

The car shot up the dimly lighted street, shone palely for a second under the corner lamp, and vanished. "Ah, child, child!" groaned the man at her side, all the tenderness gone from his body. He was Jones again.

Still she did not speak but stared ahead with unseeing eyes. "No further reproach fell from the butler's lips. It was enough that God had guided him to her at the appointed moment. He felt assured that never again would she be drawn into any trap. Poor child! What had they said to her, done to her? How, in God's name, had she escaped from them who never let anybody escape? Presently she would become normal, and then she would tell him.

"I found the lying note. You dropped it."

"Horrible, horrible!" she said almost inaudibly.

"What did they do to you?" "He said he was my father. . . . He put his arms around me. . . . And I knew!"

"Knew what?" "That he lied. I can't explain."

"Don't try!" Suddenly she laid her head against the butler's shoulder and cried. It was terrible to hear youth weep in this fashion. Jones put his arm about her, and tried to console her.

"Horrible!" she murmured between the violent hicoughs. "I was wrong, wrong! Forgive me!"

Unconsciously the arm sustaining her drew her closer.

"Never mind," he consoled. "Tell me what has happened. Go about as usual. Don't let even Susan know. Whatever your poor father did was for your sake. He wanted you to be happy, without a care in the world."

"I promise." And gradually the sobs ceased. "But I feel so old, Jones, so very old. I threw over the lamp. I threw a chair through the window. They thought that it was I who had jumped out. That gave me the necessary time. I don't understand how I did it. I wasn't frightened at all till I gained the street."

They found Susan still seated in the chair, the automatic in her lap. She had not moved in all this time!

Braine paced the apartment of the Princess Perloff. From the living room to the boudoir and back, fully twenty times. From the divan Olga watched him nervously. He was like a tiger, fresh in captivity. All at once he paused in front of her.

"Do you realize what that mere child did?"

"I do." "Planned to the minute. We had her; seven of us; doors locked, and all that. No weeping, no wailing; I could not understand then, but I do now. It's in the blood. Hargreave was as peaceful as a St. Bernard dog, till you cornered him, and then he was a lion. O, the devil! Slipped out of our fingers like an eel. And across the street, Jones in a racer! I never paid any particular attention to Jones, but from now on I shall. The girl may or may not know where the money is, but Jones does. Jones does! Two men shall watch. Felton on the street and Orloff from the windows of the deserted house. With opera glasses he will be able to take note of all that happens in the house during the day. He will be able to see the girl's room. And that's the important point. It was a good plan, little woman; and it would have been plain sailing if only we had remembered that the girl was Hargreave's daughter. Be very careful hereafter when you call on her. A night like this will have made her suspicious of every one. Our hope lies with you. Anything on your mind?"

"Yes. Why not insert a personal in the Herald?" She drew some writing paper toward her and scribbled a few words.

He read: "Florence—the missing piece is discovered. Remove it to a more secret spot at once. S. H.—He laughed and shook his head. "I'm afraid that will never do."

"If she reads it, Jones will. The man with the opera glasses may see something. There's a chance Jones might become worried."

"Well, we'll give it a chance."

It was midnight when he made his departure. As he stepped into the street, he glanced about cautiously. On the corner he saw a policeman swinging his night stick. Otherwise the street was deserted. Braine proceeded hastily down the street.

And yet, from the darkened doors of the house across the way, the figure of a man emerged and stood contemplating the windows of the deserted apartment. Suddenly the light went out.

The watcher made no effort to follow Braine. The knowledge he was after did not necessitate any such precaution.

Of course, Florence read the "personal." She took the newspaper at once to Jones, who smiled grimly. "You see, I trust you."

"And so long as you continue to trust me no harm will befall you. You were left in my care by your father. I am to guard you at the expense of my life. Last night's affair was a miracle. The next time you will not find it so easy to escape."

Nor did she. "There will be no next time," gravely. "But I am going to ask you a direct question. Is my father alive?"

The butler's brow puckered. "I have promised to say nothing, one way or the other."

She laughed. "Why do you laugh?"

"I laugh because if he were dead there would be no earthly reason for your not saying so at once. But I hate money, the name of it, the sound of it, the sight of it. It is at the bottom of all wars and crimes. I despise it!"

"The root of all evil. Yet it performs many noble deeds. But never mind the money. Let us give our attention to this personal. Doubtless it originated in the same mind which conceived the letter. Your father would never have inserted such a personal. What! Give his enemies a chance to learn his secret? No. On the other hand I want you to show this personal to all you meet today, Susan, the reporter, to everybody. Talk about it. Say that you wonder what you shall do. Trust no one with your real thoughts."

"Not even you, Mr. Jones," thought the girl as she nodded.

"And tell them that you showed it to me and that I appeared worried."

That night there was a meeting of the organization called the Black Hundred. Braine asked if anyone knew what the Hargreave butler looked like.

"I had a glimpse of him the other night; but being unprepared, I might not recognize him again."

Braine described Jones minutely. Braine could almost see the portrait.

"Vron, that memory of yours is worth a lot of money," was his only comment.

"I hope it will be worth more soon."

"I believe I'll be able to recognize Mr. Jones if I see him. Who is he and what is he?"

"He has been with Hargreave for 14 years. There was a homicidal case in which Jones was active. Hargreave saved him. He is faithful and uncommunicative. Money will not touch him. If he does know where that million is, hot irons could not make him own up to it. The only way is to watch him, follow him, wait for the moment when he'll grow careless. No man is always on his mettle; he lets up sooner or later."

"He is being watched, as you know."

Vron nodded approvingly. "The captain of the trading steamer Orient, by the way, was seen with a roll of money. He was in one of the water front palaces, bragging how he had bookwinked some one."

"Did he say where he'd got the cash?" asked Braine.

"They tried to pump him on that, but he shut up. Well, we have agreed that Felton shall watch from the street and Orloff from the window. Orloff will whistle if he sees Jones removing anything from any of the rooms. The rest will be left to Felton."

"And, Felton, my friend," said Braine, gently—he always spoke softly when he was in a deadly humor—"Felton, you slept on duty the other night."

Hargreave stole up, consulted Jones, and got away after knocking me down. The next failure will mean short shift. Be warned!"

"I saw only you, sir. So help me, I was not asleep. I saw you run down the street after the taxicab. I did not see anyone else."

Braine shrugged. "Remember what I said."

Felton bowed respectfully and made his exit. He wished in his soul that he might some day catch the master mind free of his eternal mask. It was an iron hand which ruled them and there were friends of his (Felton's) who had mysteriously vanished after a brief period of rebellion. The boss was a swell, probably belonged to clubs and society which he adroitly pilfered. The organization always had money. Whenever there was a desperate job to be undertaken, Vron simply poured out the money necessary to promote it. Whenever Braine and Vron became engaged in earnest conversation they talked bluff. Braine was never called by name here; the boss, simply that.

Well, ten per cent of a million was a hundred thousand. This would be equally divided between the second ten of the Black Hundred. Another ten per cent would go to 30 members; the balance would be divided between Vron and the boss. But his soul rebelled at being ordered about like so much dirt under another man's feet. He would take his ten thousand and make the grand getaway.

The next afternoon the princess called upon Florence. Nothing was said about the adventure, and she felt created a vague unrest in the young woman's mind. She realized that she must play her cards more carefully than ever. Not the least distrust must be permitted to enter the child's head. Once that happened good-by to the wonderful emerald. Was it that she really loved the stone? Was it not rather a venom acquired from the knowledge that this child's mother had won what she herself, with all her cleverness, was not sure of—Braine's love? Did he really care for her or was she only the cat's paw to push his hot chassis from the fire?

When Florence showed her the "personal," her vague doubts became ineluctably deepened. The child could not have known her the afternoon

had there been any distrust on her part. "My child, your father is alive then?" animatedly. "We don't know," sadly. "Why, I should say that this proves it."

"On the contrary, it proves nothing of the sort, since I have yet to discover a treasure in this house. I have

tucked the box under my arm and made his exit.

The man lounging in the shadow heard a faint whistle. It was the signal agreed upon. The man Felton ran across the street and boldly rang the bell. It was only then that Florence missed the ever present butler. She hesitated, then went to Susan to the door.

"I must see Mr. Jones upon vitally important business."

"He has gone out," said Susan, and very sensibly closed the door before Felton's foot succeeded in getting inside.

It was time to act. He ran around to the rear. The ladder convinced him that Jones had tricked him. He was wild with rage. He was over the wall in an instant. Away down the back

street his eye discovered his man in full flight. He gave chase. As he came to the first corner he was nearly

hunted in every nook, drawer; I've searched for panels, looked in trunks for false bottoms. Nothing, nothing! Ah, if I could only find it!"

"And what would you do with it?"

"Take it at once to some bank and offer the whole of it for the safe return of my father, every penny of it. I don't know what to do, which way to turn," tears gathering in her eyes and they were genuine tears, too. "There are millions in stocks and bonds and I cannot touch a penny of it because the legal documents have not been found. I can't even prove that I am his daughter, except for half an old bracelet, and my father's lawyers say that that would not hold in any court."

"You were born in St. Petersburg, my dear. Have the embassy there look up the birth registers."

"That would not put me into possession. Nothing but the return of my father will avail me. And there's a horrible thought always of my not being his real daughter."

"There's no doubt in my mind. I have only to recall Katrina's face to know whose child you are. But what will you live on?"

"Here was a far greater mixup than she had calculated upon. Supposing after all it was only a resemblance, that the child was not Hargreave's, a substitute just to mislead the Black Hundred? To keep them away from the true daughter? Her mind grew bewildered over such possibilities. The simple and only way to settle all doubts was to make this child a prisoner. If she was Hargreave's true daughter he would come out of his hiding."

She heard Florence answering her question: "There is a sum of ten or twelve thousand in the Riverdale bank, under the control of my father's butler. After that is gone, I don't know what will happen to us, Susan and me."

The door of Miss Farrow's will always be open to you, Florence," replied Susan, with love in her eyes.

This interesting conversation was interrupted by the advent of Norton. He was always dropping in during the late afternoon hours. Florence liked him for two reasons. One was that Jones trusted him to a certain extent and the other was that . . . that she liked him. She finished this sentence in her heart obediently.

Today he brought her a box of beautiful roses, and at the sight of them the princess smiled faintly. Set the wind in that quarter? She could have laughed. How was her revenge against this meddling who took no particular notice of her while Florence was in the room. She would encourage him, poor grubbing newspaper writer, with his beggarly pickanin. What chance had he of marrying the girl with millions within reach of her hand?

The peculiar thing about this was that Norton was entertaining the same thought at the same time; what earthly chance had he?

In the second story window of the house over the way there was a worried man. But when his glasses brought in range the true contents of the box he laughed exultantly.

"This watching is getting my goat. I smelt a rat every time I see a shadow." He wiped the lenses of his opera glasses and proceeded to roll a cigarette.

When the princess and Norton went away, Jones' eye quickly ran to the princess' room and thence up the curtain. Two round points of light shined from the watcher's window, but the returning smile on Jones' lips was not observed. He went to the door, opened it cautiously, a hand to his ear, then he closed the door, turned out the light and removed a section of the flooring. Out of the cavity he raised a box. From the box he took a book. On the book, he saw the name of the doctor, and

knocked over by a man coming the other way.

"Who are you bumping into?" growled Felton.

"Not so fast, Felton!" "Who the devil are you?" The stranger made a sign which Felton instantly recognized.

"Quick! What has happened?" "Jones has the million and is making his getaway. See him hiking toward the water front!"

The two men began to run. There followed a thrilling chase. Jones engaged a motorboat and it was speeding seaward when the two pursuers arrived. They were not laggard. There was another boat and they made for it.

"A hundred if you overtake that boat," said Felton's strange companion. Felton eyed him thoughtfully. There was something familiar about that voice.

Great plumes of water shot up into the air. It did not prove a short race by any means. It took half an hour for the pursuer to overhaul the pursued.

"Is that Jones?" "Yes," Felton fired his revolver into the air in accents of terrifying Jones' engineer; but there was five hundred dangling before that individual's eyes. "Let them get a little nearer," shouted the butler.

The engineer let down the speed a notch. The other boat crept up within twenty yards. Jones sought a perfect range. He would have to find this spot again.

"Surrender!" yelled Felton. In reply Jones raised the precious box and deliberately dropped it into the sea. Then he turned his automatic upon his pursuers and succeeded in setting their boat aflame. All this within the space of an hour. During dinner that night (there was now a cook) Jones walked about the dining table, rubbing his hands together from time to time.

"Jones," said Florence, "why do you rub your hands like that?" "Was I rubbing my hands, Miss Florence?" he asked innocently. (To be continued)

"A Hundred If You Overtake That Boat."



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