

**MILLION DOLLAR MYSTERY**  
(continued from first page)

the Black Hundred. Four men were told off, and they drew their chairs up to Vroon's table for instructions. Braine sat at Vroon's elbow. These four men composed the most dangerous quartet in New York city. They were as daring as they were desperate. They were the men who held up bank messengers and got away with thousands. They had learned to swoop down upon their victims as the hawk swoops down upon the heron. The newspapers referred to them as the "autc bandits," and the men took a deal of pride in the furor they had created.

Vroon went over the Hargreave case minutely; he left no detail unexplained. Bluntly and frankly, the daughter of Stanley Hargreave must be caught and turned over to the care of the Black Hundred. It must be quick action. Four valuable members were in the Tombs. They might or might not weaken under pressure. For the first time in its American career



The Daughter of Hargreave Rode Horseback Every Morning.

the organization stood facing actual peril; and its one possible chance of salvation lay in the fact that no one's face was known to his neighbor. He, Vroon, and the boss alone knew who and what each man was. But the plans, the ramifications of the organization might become public property; and that would mean an end to an exceedingly profitable business.

The daughter of Hargreave rode horseback early every morning. She sought the country road. She was invariably attended by the riding master of a school near by.

"You four will make your own plans."

"If she should be injured?"

"Avoid it if possible."

"We have a free hand?"

"Absolutely."

"We risk a bad fall from her horse if it's a spirited one."

"Pretend a breakdown in the road," interpolated Braine. "As they approach, draw and order them to dismount. That method will prevent any accident."

"We'll plan it somehow. It looks easy."

"Nothing is easy where that girl is concerned. A thousand eyes seem to be watching her slightest move."

"We shan't leave anything to chance. How many days will you give us?"

"Seven. A failure, mind you, will prove unhealthy to all concerned," with a menace which made the four stir uneasily.

The telephone rang. Braine reached for the receiver.

"A man just entered the Hargreave house at the rear. Come at once," was the message.

"Is your car outside?" Braine asked.

"We are never without it."

"Then let us be off. No one will stop us for speeding on a side street."

Fourteen minutes by the clock brought the car to a stand at the curb a few houses below the Hargreave home. The men got out. The watcher ran up.

"O, I see. Well, I'll drop in this afternoon and see your master. They say that riding is good for a torpid liver. Have a cigar?"

"Thanks."

The groom proceeded into the stables and the affable stranger took himself off.

A free rein; they could work it to suit themselves. There wasn't the least obstacle in the way. On the face of it, it appeared to be the simplest job they had yet undertaken. To get rid of the riding master in some natural way after he and the girl had started. It was like sailing off a log.

"Susan," said Florence as she came into breakfast after her exhilarating ride, "did you hear pistol shots last night?"

"I heard some noise, but I was so sleepy I didn't try to figure out what it was."

"Did you, Jones?"

"Yes, Miss Florence. The shots came from the street. A policeman came running up later and said he saw two automobiles on the run. But evidently there wasn't anybody hurt. One has to be careful at night nowadays. There are pretty bad men abroad. Did you enjoy the ride?"

"Very much. But there were spots of blood on the walk near the corner."

"Blood?" Jones caught the back of a chair to steady himself.

"Yes. So some one was hurt. Oh, let's leave this place!" impulsively. "Let us go back to Miss Farrow's. You could find a place in the village, Jones. But if I stay here much longer in this state of unrest I shall lose faith in everything and everybody. Whoever my father's enemies are, they do not lack persistence. They have made two attempts against my liberty, and sooner or later they will succeed. I keep looking over my shoulder all the time. If I hear a noise I jump."

"Miss Florence, if I thought it wise, you should be packed off to Miss Farrow's this minute. But not an hour of the day or night passes without this house being watched. I seldom see anybody about. I can only sense the presence of a watcher. At Miss Farrow's you would be far more like a prisoner than here. I could not accompany you. I am forbidden to desert this house."

"My father's orders?"

Jones signified neither one way nor the other. He merely gazed stolidly at the rug.

"That blood!" She sprang from her chair, horrified. "It was his! He was here last night, and they shot him!"

"There, there, Miss Florence! The man was only slightly wounded. He's where they never will look for him."

Then Jones continued, as with an effort: "Trust me, Miss Florence. It would not pay to run away. The whole affair would be repeated elsewhere. We might go to the other end of the world, but it would not serve us in the least. It is not a question of escape, but of who shall vanquish the other. There is nothing to do but remain here and fight, fight, fight. We have put four of them in the Tombs, to say nothing of the gunmen. That is what we must do—put them in a safe place, one by one, till we reach the master. Then only may we breathe in safety. But if they watch, so do we. There is never a moment when help is not within reach, no matter where you go. So long as you do not deceive me, no real harm shall befall you. Don't cry. Be your father's daughter, as I am his servant."

"I am very unhappy!" And Florence threw her arms around Susan and laid her head upon her friend's shoulder.

"Poor child!" Susan, however, recognized the wisdom of Jones' statements. They were safest here.

The morning rides continued. To the girl, who loved the open, it was glorious fun. "Those mad gallops along the roads, the smell of earth and sun, the tingle in the blood, were the second best moments of her day. The first? She invariably blushed when she considered what these first best moments were. He was a brave young

man, good to look at, witty, and always cheerful. Why shouldn't she like him? Even Jones liked him—Jones, who didn't seem to like anybody. It did not matter whether he was wise or not; a worldly point of view was farthest from her youthful thoughts. It was her own affair; her own heart.

Five days later, as she and the riding master were cantering along the road, enjoying every bit of it, they heard the beat of hoofs behind. They drew up and turned. A rider was approaching them at a run. It was the head groom. The man stopped his horse in a cloud of dust.

"Sir, the stables are on fire!"

"Fire?"

All the riding master's savings were invested in the stables. The fact that he had solemnly promised never to leave Florence alone, and that he had accepted a generous bonus slipped from his mind at the thought of fire, a terrible word to any horseman. He wheeled and started off at breakneck speed; his head groom clattering behind him.

Florence naturally wondered which of two courses to pursue: follow them, when she would be perfectly helpless to aid them, or continue the ride and save at least one horse from the terror of seeing flames. She chose the latter. But she did not ride with the earlier zest. She felt depressed. She loved horses, and the thought of them dying in those wooden stables was horrifying.

The fire, however, proved to be inconspicuous. But it was plainly incendiary. Some one had not fire in it with a purpose in view. Norton recognized this fact almost as soon as the firemen. He had come this morning with the idea of surprising Florence. He was going out on horseback to take her.

His spine grew suddenly cold. A trap! She had been left alone on the road! He ran over to the garage, secured a car, and went humming out toward the river road. A trap, and only by the shortest luck had he

turned up in time.

Meantime Florence was walking her mount slowly. For once the scenery passed unobserved. She was deeply engrossed with thoughts, some of which were happy and some of which were sad. If only her father could be with her she would be the happiest girl alive.

She was brought out of her reverie by the sight of a man staggering along the road ahead of her. Finally she plunged upon his face in the road like the tender hearted girl she was, she stopped, dismounted, and ran to the fallen man to give him aid. She suddenly found her wrists clasped in two hands like iron. The man rose to his feet, smiling evilly. She struggled wildly but futilely.

"Better be sensible," he said. "I am stronger than you are. And I don't wish to hurt you. Walk on ahead of me. It will be utterly useless to scream or cry out. You can see for yourself that we are in a deserted part of the road. If you will promise to act sensibly I shan't lay a hand on you. Do you see that but yonder, near the fork in the road? We'll stop there. Now, march!"

"She dropped her handkerchief, later her bracelet, and finally her crop, in hope that these slight clues might bring her help. She knew that Jones would hear of the fire, and, finding that she had not returned with the riding master, would immediately start out in pursuit. She was beginning to grow very fond of Jones, who never spoke unless spoken to, who was always at hand, faithful and loyal.

From afar came the low rumble of a motor. She wondered if her captor heard it. He did, but his ears tricked him into believing that it came from another direction. Eventually they arrived at the hut, and Florence was forced to enter. The man locked the door and waited outside for the automobile which he was expecting. He was rather dumfounded when he saw that it was coming from the city, not going toward it.

It was Norton. The riderless horse told him enough; the handkerchief and bracelet and crop led him straight for the hut.

The man before the hut realized by this time that he had made a mistake. He attempted to re-enter the hut and prepare to demand it till his companions have in sight. But Florence, recognizing Norton, held the door with all her strength. The man snarled and turned upon Norton, only to receive a smashing blow on the jaw.

Norton hung upon the door. "Into the car, Florence! There's another car coming up the road. Hurry!"

It was not a long chase. The car of the auto bandits, looking like an ordinary taxicab, was a high-cower machine, and it gained swiftly on Norton's four-wheeler. The reporter waited grimly.

"Keep your head down," he warned Florence. "Get going to take 'em out their fire; when they get within range, if I miss I'm afraid we'll have trouble. Under no circumstances attempt to leave this car. Here they come!"

He suddenly leaped back and fired. It was only chance. The manner in which the cars were breaching made a poor target for a marksman even of the first order. Chance favored Norton's first bullet into the right forward tire, which exploded. The car slid sixty miles an hour, they could not stop the car in time to avoid fatality. The car careened wildly and plunged down the embankment into the river.

Florence covered her eyes with her hands, and, quite unconscious of what he was doing, Norton put his arms around her.

(To be continued.)

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