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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 VII.

When all three finally met at the Hargreave home Florence suddenly took Jones by the shoulders and kissed him lightly on the cheek. Jones started back, pale and disturbed.

Norton laughed. He did not feel the slightest twinge of jealousy, but he was eaten up with envy, as the old wives say.

"You are wondering if I suspect the Princess, Perigot?" said Jones.

"I am," said Jones. "This man Jones was developing into a very remarkable character. The reporter found himself side-glancing at the thin, keen face of this resourceful butler. The lobe of the man's left ear came within range. Norton reached for a cigarette, but his hands shook as he lit it. There was a peculiar little scar in the center of the lobe.

"Well," said Jones, "I can find no evidence that she has been concerned in any of these affairs."

"You are suspicious?"

"Of everybody," looking boldly into the reporter's eyes.

"Of me?" smiling.

"Even of myself sometimes."

Conversation dropped entirely after this declaration.

"You're a taciturn sort of chap."

"Am I?"

"You are. But an agreement is an agreement, and while I'd like to print this story, I'll not do it."

"You are a newspaper man, aren't you?"

"Sometimes I wish I'd started life right," said the reporter gloomily. "A newspaper man is generally imprudent. He never looks ahead for tomorrow. What with my special articles to the magazines, I earn between four and five thousand the year; and I've never been able to save a cent."

"Perhaps you've never really tried," replied Jones, with a glance at his companion. It was a good face, strong in outline; a little careworn, perhaps, but free from any indications of dissipation. "If I had begun life as you did, I'd have had real and solid use of the great men I met. I'd have made financiers help me to invest my savings, or savings men, as they might be. And today I'd be living on the income."

"You never can tell. Perhaps a woman might have made you think of those things; but if you had remained unattached up to thirty-one, as I have, the thought of saving might never have entered your head. A man in my present condition, financially, has no right to think of matrimony."

"It might be the saving of you if you met and married the right woman."

"But the right woman might be heiress to millions. And a poor devil like me could not marry a girl with money and hang on to his self-respect."

"True. But there are always exceptions to all rules in life, except those regarding health. A healthy man is a normal man, and a normal man has no right to remain single. You proved yourself a man this afternoon, considering that you did not know I occupied the wheel seat. Come to think it over, you really saved the day. You gave me the opportunity of steering straight for the police station. Well, good-by."

"Queer duck!" mused the reporter as, after telephoning, he headed for his office. Queer duck, indeed! What a game it was going to be! And this man Jones was playing it like a master. It did not matter that some one so laid down the rules; it was the way in which they were interpreted.

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"Do Not Speak or Make the Least Noise."

There was a meeting that night of the Black Hundred. Four men were told off, and they drew their chairs up to Vroom's table for instructions. Braine sat at Vroom'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 "aut bandits," and the men took a deal of pride in the furore they had created.

Vroom 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 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, Vroom, 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, intercept her, draw and order them to dismount. That method will prevent any accident."

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"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.

"He is still inside," he whispered.

"Good! Spread out. If anyone leaves that house, catch him. If he runs too fast, shoot. We can beat the police."

The man obeyed, and the watcher ran back to his post. He was desperately hoping the affair would be terminated tonight. He was growing weary of this eternal vigilance; and it was only his fear of the man known as the boss that kept him at his post.

He wanted a night to carouse in, to be with the boys.

The man for whom they were lying in wait was seen presently to creep cautiously round the side of the house. He hugged a corner and paused. They could see the dim outline of his body. The light in the street back of him showed almost a silhouette of him. By and by, as if assured that the coast was clear, he stole down to the street.

"Halt!"

Instantly the prowler took to his heels. Two shots rang out. The man was seen to stop, stagger, and then go on desperately.

"He's hit!"

By the time the men reached the corner they heard a rumble of a motor. One dashed back to the car, they had left standing at the curb. He made quick work of the job, but he was not quick enough. Still, they gave chase. They saw the car turn toward the city. But, unfortunately for the success of the chase, several automobiles passed, going into town and leaving the checkpoint.

Braine was keen enough tonight.

"Is he hit? Whether badly or not remains to be seen. We can find that out. Drive to the nearest drug store and get a list of hospitals. It's a ten to one shot that we land him somewhere among the hospitals."

But they searched the hospitals in vain. None of them had that night received a shooting case, nor had they heard one reported. The man had not been unmistakably hit. He would not have dared risk the loss of time for a bit of play-acting. Evidently he had kept his head and sought his lodgings. To call up doctors would be utter folly; for it would take a week for a thorough combing. This was the second time the man had got away.

"Perhaps I'm to blame," admitted Braine. "I should have advised Miles to stall him and get him if he got the chance. There's a master mind working somewhere back of all this, and it's time I woke up to the fact. But you, turning to the auto bandits, 'you men have your instructions. More than that, you have been given a free rein. See that you make good, or by the Lord Harry I'll break the four of you like pig-pistons.'"

"We haven't had a failure yet," spoke up one of the men, more courageous than his companions.

"You are not holding up a bank messenger this trip. Remember that. Drive me as far as Columbus circle. Leave me on the side street, between the lights, so I can take off this mask."

Later Braine sauntered into Pabst and ordered a light supper. This night's work, more than anything else, brought home to him the fact that his luck was changing. For years he had proceeded with his shady occupations without encountering any memorable failure. He moved in the high world, quite unsuspected. He had written books, given lectures, been made a lion of, all the while laughing in his sleeve at the gullibility of human nature. But within the last two weeks he had received serious checks. From now on he must move with the utmost caution. Some one was playing his own game, waging warfare unseen. A battle of wits? So be it; but Braine intended to play with rough wits, and he wasn't going to care which way the sword cut.

He hated Stanley Hargreave with all the hatred of his soul; the hatred of a man balked in love. And the man was alive, defying him; alive somewhere in this city this very night, with a bullet under his skin.

"Is everything satisfactory, sir?" he heard the head waiter say.

"Satisfactory," Braine repeated blankly.

"Yes, sir. You struck the table as though displeased."

"Oh! Then Braine laughed relievedly. "If I struck the table, it was done unconsciously. I was thinking."

"Beg pardon, sir! Anything else, sir?"

"No. Bring me the check."

"Your master gives riding lessons?"

The groom who had led the horse back from Hargreave's eyed his questioner rather superciliously.

"Yes," the groom fondled the animal's legs.

"How much is it?"

"Twenty dollars for a ticket of five rides. The master is the fashion up here. He doesn't cater to any but the best families."

"Pretty steep. Who was that young lady riding this morning with your master?"

"That's the girl all the newspapers have been talking about," answered the groom importantly.

"Actress?"

"Actress! I should say not. That young woman is the daughter of Stanley Hargreave, the millionaire who

was lost at sea. And it was a long before she puts her finger in a pie of four or five millions. If you want any rides, you'll have to talk it over with the boss. He may or may not take any more rides. You'd probably have to ride in the afternoon, anyhow, as every nag is out in the morning."

"Where's the most popular road?"

"Toward the park; but Miss Hargreave always goes along the river side road. She doesn't like strangers about."

"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 falling off a log.

"Susan," said Florence as she came late 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's go back to Miss Parlow'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 Parlow'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 Parlow'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! Oh!"

"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 sea, 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!"

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 him, 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 earliest start. She felt depressed. She loved horses, and the thought of them dying in those wooden stables was horrifying.

The fire, however, proved to be ineffectual. But it was plainly incendiary. Some one had set fire to 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 join 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 sheerest luck had he turned up in time.

Meantime Florence was walking her mount slowly. For once the scenery presented a picture. 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 he staggered upon her face. 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 bat yonder, near the fork in the road? We'll stop there. Now, march!"

"She dropped her handkerchief, 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 he had to, and 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 her had realized by this time that he had made a mistake. He attempted to retreat, but he was too late. He was surrounded by Norton and his men. He was forced to defend it till his companions were 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 flung open 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 white bandits, looking like an ordinary taxicab, was high-powered machine, and it gained swiftly on Norton's four-cylinder. The reporter waited grimly.

"Keep your head down!" he warned Florence. "I'm going to take a pot at their tires when they get within range. If I miss I'm afraid we'll have trouble. Under no circumstances attempt to leave this car. Herby, you say!"

He suddenly leaned back and fired. It was only chance. The manner in which the cars were lurching made a poor target for a marksman even of the first order. Chance directed Norton's first bullet into the right forward tire, which exploded. Going at sixty miles an hour, they could not stop the car in time to avoid failure. The car leaped 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.)

A Great Britain's structures on copper have not disturbed production or smelting in British Columbia.

Lloyd's, in London, made a quotation of 60 per cent. on insurance against peace by June.

Several prominent clubs of London are facing bankruptcy as a result of the war, the members having fallen out of members economizing.

Many German towns are issuing special loans for the purpose of supporting families of soldiers. Dresden has issued one for \$750,000.

Norway has decided it will be impossible for it to send a warship to take part in the naval ceremonies at the opening of the Panama Canal.

The subscriptions for Holland's war loan of \$110,000,000 were \$160,800,000. British orders in Canada, aggregate \$30,000,000.

The prospects are good for an increased strawberry and vegetable crop in Eastern North Carolina.

A party of Greensboro people will call on President Wilson January 28th to invite him to attend the Fourth of July celebration at Guilford battle-ground.

The Buncumb County Board of Health recently elected Dr. D. E. Seiler as health officer for Buncumb County, the present official being chosen to succeed himself unanimously.

STATE DEPARTMENT WARNS CARRANZA

SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES MAY FOLLOW CONFISCATION OF FOREIGN-OWNED WELLS.

MAKES AN URGENT PROTEST

Sent by British Ambassador to the British Consul at Vera Cruz for General Carranza.

Washington.—The United States Government has warned Gen. Venustiano Carranza that "serious consequences may follow" his threatened confiscation of foreign-owned oil plants in Tampico.

This announcement was made by Secretary Bryan to day after a conference with Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, the British Ambassador and representatives of the American oil concerns.

Already the Carranza officials have enforced a virtual embargo on the exportation of oil by a big English company.

The British Ambassador at Mr. Bryan's suggestion, sent to the British Consul at Vera Cruz an urgent protest for General Carranza. As the British fleet obtains much of its fuel from the Tampico oil fields, the possibility of serious complications over Carranza's attitude is fully realized by the American government.

Mr. Bryan said that the foreign owned oil companies "feared confiscation of their wells" by Carranza and that today's action had been taken to forestall such action. A decree issued by the Carranza government makes it impossible for some foreign oil companies to operate without the consent of the Carranza authorities and it is said some American concerns have been forced to pay so heavy a tax that they have been compelled to shut down.

The prospect of a battle on the outskirts of Tampico is expected here to develop the situation further. If Villa forces are victorious, a solution of the problem is confidently expected because of previous assurances by the Villa Gutierrez officials.

EVERY BUILDING DESTROYED.

Only 2 or 3 Per Cent. of Aveezano's Population Escaped.

Rome.—William Marconi who returned here from Aveezano on board the train with King Victor Emmanuel, said words could not describe the horror he had witnessed. The town had been wholly leveled, he said, and residents who escaped death were destitute.

"King Victor Emmanuel told me," said Mr. Marconi, "that he had visited the scenes of all earthquake disasters in Italy since he was a child, but that this surpassed all, including Messina. The king said survivors of Aveezano were only between two and three per cent of its population, while in Messina one-third escaped."

Describing the damage in Aveezano Mr. Marconi said:

"Aveezano has ceased to exist. In Messina some buildings give one the impression that they are still intact, their facades having survived the shock."

"Not so with Aveezano. No wall there remains erect. It seemed as though the town had been ground to powder by some gigantic machine."

Nation Unready For Fight.

Washington.—In urging upon the senate the need for a commission to report on national preparedness or a permanent council of naval defense, Senator Lodge declared that the national defense of the country "is not in a satisfactory condition."

He said that the navy was unbalanced by that it has grave and in some instances fatal deficiencies. "He designated what he termed many of the defects and said they were 'almost wholly due to congress.'"

An adequate national defense the senator said, could be obtained without additional expenditure. "Cut off our needless army-posts, navy yards and stations," he advised the senate.

"Lay aside for a few years appropriations for the public buildings and river and harbor improvements where they are not needed. Drop all the expenditures which are designed for spots where votes are lying thick."

He said that he had money enough to provide for a sufficient army and an adequate navy without adding to the burden of taxation."

He warned that the ocean barrier that defended the country in 1776 and 1812 had been destroyed by steam and electricity. "Unarmed, unready, un-defended, the nation stands an invitation to aggression and attack," he said.

Senator Lodge asserted that not only the regular army, but the militia was highly defective, adding that the Panama Canal was "miserably and most inadequately protected" against being blown up and blocked for months by agents or spies of a hostile nation.

Senator Lodge declared the army was without sufficient artillery and artillery ammunition and said available testimony showed that the guns in the fortifications were of shorter range than those carried by foreign warships of the latest designs.

The North Carolina Builders' Exchange in session at Durham elected J. T. Salmon of Durham, president.

The Oceanic Hotel, one of the two leading hotels at Wrightsville Beach, was sold at auction at the court house door recently under foreclosure of mortgage held by the Southern National Bank being bid in for \$23,425 by J. E. Clayton, a well-known traveling man.

The supreme court has adjourned until the opening of the spring term the first Monday in February.

GERMANS GRANTED PARTIAL SUCCESS

FRENCH OFFICIAL STATEMENT ADMITS REVERSES ALONG THE AISNE.

RUSSIANS EXPLAIN MOVE

Were Not Forced But Retired to Concentrate Troops—Furious Fighting in Poland.

London.—A reverse of the Allies along the Aisne in the neighborhood of Soissons is admitted in the latest French official statement although the possible effect of the German advance is officially minimized. After continuous engagements, which lasted nearly two days, the Germans forced the French to yield in front of Vreg