

The MILLION DOLLAR MYSTERY By HAROLD MAC GRATH

\$10,000 FOR ONE HUNDRED WORDS.

"The Million Dollar Mystery" story will run for twenty-two consecutive weeks in this paper. By an arrangement with the Thanouser Film company it has been made possible not only to read the story in this paper but also to see it each week in the various moving picture theaters. For the solution of this mystery story \$10,000 will be given by the Thanouser Film corporation.

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 motion picture drama will be made and the last two chapters of the story written by Harold MacGrath.

Solutions may be sent to the Thanouser Film corporation, either at Chicago or New York, any time up to midnight, Jan. 15. This allows several weeks after the last chapter has been published.

A board of three judges will determine which of the many solutions received is the most acceptable. The judges are to be Harold MacGrath, Lloyd Lonergan, and Miss Mae Timos. 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 theaters 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 pictures 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 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 accidentally meets Braine, leader of the Black Hundred. Knowing Braine will try to get him, he escapes from his own home by a balloon. Before escaping he writes a letter to the girl's school where eighteen years before he mysteriously left as the doorstep his baby daughter, Florence Gray. That day Hargreave also draws \$1,000,000 from the bank, but it is reported that this dropped into the sea when the balloon he escaped in was punctured.

Florence arrives from the girls' school. Countess Olga, Braine's companion, visits her and claims her as 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. Countess 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.

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

Norton and the countess call on Florence the next day, once more safe at home. The visitors having gone, Jones removes a section of flooring and from a cavity takes a box. Pursued by members of the Black Hundred, he rushes to the water front and succeeds in dropping the box into the sea.

Accomplices of Braine kidnap Florence while she is shopping and hurry her off to sea. She leaps overboard and is picked up in a dazed condition by fishermen. The Black Hundred locate her, and Braine, disguised as her father, takes her back to sea with him. Florence sets fire to the boat and is rescued by a ship on which Norton has been shanghaied.

Norton and Florence, safely ashore, take the train for home. The train is wrecked. Norton, who tries to rescue her, is tied to the railroad tracks. Florence saves him and finally Jones comes to the rescue of both.

Concealed above the rendezvous of the Black Hundred, a man learns of the recovery from the sea of the box of jewels by a sailor and of its subsequent return to the bottom of the sea, and he quickly communicates the fact to Jones. A duplicate box is planted and later secured by the band, but before its contents are examined the box mysteriously disappears.

Owing to the falling off of contributions to the parent organization in Russia, an agent arrives and assumes the leadership of the American branch of the Black Hundred. Through the connivance of the countess and Braine the new head is thoroughly humiliated.

Finding himself checkmated at every turn, Braine endeavors to smash the Hargreave household in the law in order to gain free access to the house. The timely discovery of the plot by Norton sets the police at the heels of the pack and results in a raid on the gang's rendezvous, which, however, proves to be barren of results.

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CHAPTER XV.
ANOTHER TRAP SET.

If the truth is to be told, Jones was as deeply chagrined over the outcome of the counterfeit deal as was Braine. They had both failed signally to reach the goal sought. But this time the organization had broken even with Jones, and this fact disturbed the butler. It might signify that the turning point had been reached, and that in the future the good luck might swing over to the side of the Black Hundred. Jones redoubled his cautions, reiterated his warnings, and slept less than ever. Indeed, as he went over the ground he conceded a point to the Black Hundred. He would no longer be able to keep tabs on the organization. They had deserted their former quarters absolutely. The agent of whom they had leased the building knew nothing except that he would have to repair the place. The rent had been paid a year in advance, as it has been these last eight years. He had dealt through an attorney who knew no more of his clients than the agent. So it will be seen that Jones had in reality received a check.

More than all this, it would give his enemies renewed confidence; and this was a deeper menace than he cared to face. But he went about his affairs as usual, giving no hint to any one of the mental turmoil which had possession of him.

It is needless to state that Norton did not scoop his rivals on the counterfeit story. But he set to work exploring the cellar of the gutted building, and in one corner he found a battered die. He turned this over to the secret service men. There was one man he wanted to find—Vroon. This man, could he find him, should be made to lead him, Norton, to the new stronghold. He saw the futility of trying to trap Braine by shadowing him. He desired Braine to believe that his escape from the freighter had been a bit of wild luck and not a preconceived plan. Braine was out of reach for the present, so he began the search for the man Vroon. He haunted the water front saloons for a week without success.

He did not know that it was the policy of the Black Hundred to lay low for a month after a raid of such a serious character. So the Hargreave message had thirty days of peace; always watched, however. For Braine never relaxed his vigilance in that part of the game. He did not care to lose sight of Jones, whom he was positive was ready for flight if the slightest opportunity offered itself.

Norton went back to the primrose paths of love; and sometimes he would forget all about such a thing as the Black Hundred. So the summer days went by, with the lilacs and the roses embowering the Hargreave home. But Norton took note of the fact that Florence

was no longer the light hearted schoolgirl he had first met. Her trials had made a serious woman of her, and perhaps this phase was all the more enchanting to him, who had his serious side also. Her young mind was like an Italian garden, always opening new vistas for his admiring gaze.

He went about his work the same as of old, interviewing, playing detective, fattening his pay envelope by specials to the Sunday edition and some of the lighter magazines. Sometimes he had vague dreams of writing a play, a novel, and making a tremendous fortune like that chap Manders, who only a few years ago had been his desk mate. He really began the first chapter of a novel; but that has nothing to do with this history.

Already, then, the chess are once more on the board, and it is the move of the Black Hundred.

The day was rather cloudy. Jones viewed the sky wearily. He could hear Florence playing rather a cheerless nocturne by Chopin. Fourteen weeks ago this warfare had begun, and all he had accomplished, he and those with him, was the death or incarceration of a few inconsequent members of the Black Hundred. Always they struck and always he had to ward off. He had always been on the defensive; and a defensive fighter may last a long while, but he seldom wins; and the butler knew that they must win or go down in bitter defeat. There was no half way route to the end; there could be no draw. It all reminded him of thunderbolts; one man knew where they were going to strike.

The telephone rang; at the same moment Florence left the piano. She stopped at the threshold.

"Hello! You? Where have you been? What has happened?"

"Who is it?" asked Florence, stepping forward.

Jones held up a warning hand, and Florence paused.

"Yes, yes; I hear perfectly. O! You've been working out their new quarters? Good, good! But be very careful, sir. One never knows what may happen. They have been quiet for some time now. . . . Ah! You can't work the ceiling, this time? . . . Window over the way. Very good, sir. But be careful."

The word "sir" caught Florence's attention. She ran to Jones and seized him by the arm.

"Who was that?" she cried, as he turned away from the telephone.

"Why?"

"You said 'sir.'"

"Jones' eyes widened. "I did?"

"Yes, and it's the first time I ever heard you use it over the telephone. Jones, you were talking to my father!"



SHE FLUNG HERSELF INTO THE WATER.

"Please, Miss Florence, do not ask me any questions. I cannot answer any. I dare not."

"But if I should command, upon the pain of dismissal?" coldly.

"Ah, Miss Florence," and Jones tapped his pocket, "you forget that you cannot dismiss me by word. I am legally in control here. I am sorry that you have made me recall this fact to you."

Florence began to cry softly.

"I am sorry, very sorry," said the butler, torn between the desire to comfort her and the law that he had laid down for himself. "It is very gloomy today, and perhaps we are all a little depressed by it. I am sorry."

"O, I realize, Jones, that all this unending mystery and secrecy have a set purpose at back. Only, it does just seem as if I should go mad sometimes with waiting and wondering."

"And if the truth must be told, it is the same with me. We have to wait for them to strike. Shall I get you something new to read? I am going down to the drug store and they have a circulating library."

"Get me anything you please. But I'd feel better with a little sunshine."

"That's universal," replied Jones, going into the hall for his hat.

Had the telephone rung again at that moment it is quite probable that the day would have come to a close as the day before had, monotonously. But the ring came five minutes after Jones had left the house.

"Is this the Hargreave place?"

"Yes," said Florence. "Who is it?"

"This is Miss Hargreave talking?"

"Yes."

"This is Dr. Morse. I am at the Queen hotel. Mr. Norton has been badly hurt, and he wants you and Mr. Jones to come at once. We cannot tell just now how serious the injury is. He is just conscious. Shall I tell him you will come immediately?"

"Yes, yes!"

Florence snatched the receiver on the hook. She wanted to fly, fly. He was hurt. How, when, where?

"Susan! Susan!" she called.

"What is it, Florence?" asked Susan, running into the room.

"Jim is badly hurt. He wants me to come at once. O, Susan! I've been dreading something all day long." Florence struck the maid's bell. "My wraps. You will go with me, Susan."

"Where, Miss Florence?" asked the maid, alive to her duty.

"Where? What is that to you?" demanded Florence, who did not know that this maid was a detective.

"Why not wait till Mr. Jones returns?" she suggested patiently.

"And let the man I love die?" vehemently.

"At least you will leave word where you are going, Miss Florence."

"The Queen hotel. And if you say another word I'll discharge you. Come, Susan."

There happened to be a taxicab conveniently near (as Vroon took care there should be), and Florence at once engaged it. She did not see the man hiding in the bushes. The two young women stepped into the taxicab and were driven off. They had been gone less than five minutes when Jones returned with his purchase, to find the house empty of its most valuable asset. He was furious, not only at the maid, who, he realized, was virtually helpless, but at his own negligence.

In the midst of his violent harangue the bell sounded. In his bones he knew what was going to be found there. It was a letter on the back of which was drawn the fatal black mark. With shaking fingers he tore open the envelope and read the contents: "Florence is now in our power. Only the surrender of



WITH FLORENCE SAFE IN THE MACHINE, THE RETURN HOME CONSUMED BUT A FEW MINUTES.

the million will save her. Our agent will call in an hour for an answer.

"THE BLACK HUNDRED."

As a matter of fact, they had wanted Jones almost as badly as Florence, but her desire for a book—some popular story of the day—had saved him from the net. The letter had been written against this possibility.

Jones became cool, now that he knew just what danger to face. The Queen hotel meant nothing. Florence would not be taken there. He called up Norton. It took all the butler's patience, however, as it required seven different calls to locate the reporter.

Meantime the taxicab containing Florence and Susan spun madly toward the water front. Here the two were separated by an effective threat. Florence recognized the man Vroon and knew that to plead for mercy would be a waste of time. She permitted herself to be led to a waiting launch. Always when she disobeyed Jones something like this happened. But this time they had cunningly struck at her heart, and all thought of her personal safety became as nothing. For the present she knew that she was in no actual physical danger. She was merely to be held as a hostage. Would Susan have mentality enough to tell Jones where the taxicab had stopped? She doubted. In an emergency Susan had proved herself a nonentity, a bundle of hysterical thrills.

As a matter of fact, for once Florence's deductions were happily wrong. When the chauffeur presumptuously deposited Susan on the lonely country road, several miles from home, she ran hot-foot to the nearest telephone and

sent a very concise message home. Susan was becoming acclimated to this strange, exciting existence.

Norton arrived in due time, and he and Jones were mapping out a plan when Susan's message came.

"Good girl!" said Jones. "She's learning. Can you handle this alone, Norton? They want me out of the house again, for I believe they were after me as well as Florence. Half an hour gone!"

"Trust me!" cried Norton.

And he ran out to his auto. It was a wild ride. Several policemen shouted after him, but he went on unsmiling. They could take his license number a hundred times for all he cared. So they had got her? They could wait till their enemy's vigilance slackened and then would strike? But Susan! The next time he saw Susan he was going to take her in his arms and kiss her. It might be a new sensation to kiss Susan, always so prim and officious. Corey street—that had been her direction. They had put Florence in a motor boat at the foot of Corey street. He was perhaps half an hour behind.

Florence never opened her lips. She stared ahead proudly. She would show these scoundrels that she was her father's daughter. They plied her with questions, but she pretended not to hear.

"Well, pretty bird, we'll make you speak when the time comes. We've got you this trip where we want you. There won't be any jumping overboard this session, believe me. We've wasted enough time. We've got you and we're going to keep you

"Let her be," said Vroon morosely. "We'll put all the questions we wish when we're at our destination." And he nodded significantly toward the ships riding at anchor.

Florence felt her heart sink in spite of her abundant courage. Were they going to take her to sea again? She had acquired a horror of the sea, so big, so terrible, so strong. She had had an experience with its sullen power. They had gone about four miles down when she looked back longingly toward shore. Something white seemed to be splashing over the water far behind. At first she could not discern what it was. As she watched it it grew and grew. It finally emerged from the illusion of a gigantic bird into the actuality of an everyday hydroplane. Her heart gave a great bound. This flying machine was coming directly toward the launch; it did not deviate a hair's breadth from the line. Fortunately the men were looking toward a huge freighter a quarter of a mile farther on, and from their talk it was evident that that freighter was to be her prison—bound for where? Nearer and nearer came the hydroplane. Was it for her?

It was impossible for the men not to take notice of the barking of the engines at last. "The thing's heading for us!"

Vroon stared under his palm. It was not credible that pursuit had taken place so quickly. To test yonder man-bird he abruptly changed the course of the launch. The hydroplane veered its course to suit.

Florence heard her name called faintly. One of the men drew his revolver, but Vroon knocked it out of his hand.

"There's the police boat, you fool!" "Jump!" a voice called to Florence.

She flung herself into the water without the slightest hesitation.

All this came about something after this fashion. When Norton arrived at the foot of Corey street a boatman informed him that a young woman of his description had gotten into a fast motor boat and had gone down the river.

"Was there any struggle?" "Struggle? None that I could see. She didn't make no fuss about going."

"Have you a launch?" "Yes, but the other boat has half an hour's start, and I'd never catch her in a thousand years. But there's a hydroplane a little above here. You might interest the feller that runs it."

"Thanks!" But the aviator would not listen.

"A life may hang in the balance, man!" expostulated Norton, longing to pommel the stubborn man.

"What proof have I of that?" Norton showed his card and badge.

"O, I see!" jeered the aviator. "A little newspaper stunt in which I am to be the goat. It can't be done, Mr. Norton; it can't be done."

"A hundred dollars!" "Not for five hundred," and the aviator callously turned away toward the young woman with whom he had been conversing prior to Norton's approach. The two walked a dozen yards away.

Norton had not served twelve years as a metropolitan newspaper man for nothing. He approached the mechanics who were putting about the machine.

"How about twenty apiece?" he began. "Eer what?" the men asked.

"For sending that paddle around a few times."

"Get up into that seat, but don't touch any of those levers," one of them warned. "Twenty is twenty, Jack, and the boat is a sorehead today anyhow. Give her a shove for the fun of it."

It was a dumfounded aviator who saw his hydroplane skim the water and a moment later sail into the air. These swift-moving days a reporter of the first caliber is supposed to be able to run railroad engines, submarines, flying machines, conduct a war; able to shoot, walk, run, swim, fight, think, go without food like a pygmy, and live without water like a camel. Norton had flown many times during the last four years. At the moment he called out to Florence to jump he dropped to the water with all the skill of an old timer and took her aboard. And he could not use a line of this exploit for his paper!

Jones heard the bell. It was the signal from the Black Hundred. He smiled faintly.

"Well, old fox, we've cornered you at last, haven't we? I want that money, or Hargreave's daughter takes another sea voyage, and this time she will not jump overboard. A million, and no more nonsense."

"Give me fifteen minutes to decide," begged Jones, hoping against hope.

"Fifteen seconds!"

"Then we can't do business. What! Give you a million, knowing you all to be a pack of liars? Bring Miss Florence back and the money is yours. We are tired of fighting." As indeed Jones really was. The strain had been terrific for weeks.

"The money first. We don't lie any better than you do. Fork over. You'll have to trust us. We have no use for the girl once we get the cash."

"And you'll never touch a penny of it, you blackguard!" cried Norton from the doorway.

The agent turned to behold the reporter and the girl. He did not stop to ask questions, but bolted. He never got beyond the door, however.

"Always the small fry," sighed Jones. "And if I could have put my hands on the money I'd have given it to him! Ah, girl, it doesn't do any good to talk to you, does it?"

"But they told me he was dying!" Jones shrugged.

(To be continued.)