

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 XX.

Braine Tries Another Weapon.

"What I want now," said Braine, as he paced the living room of the apartment of the countess, "is revenge. I've been checkmated enough, Olga; they're playing with us."

"That is nothing new," she replied, shrugging. "At the beginning I warned you. I never liked this affair after the first two or three failures. But you would have your way. You wanted revenge at that early date; but I cannot see that you've gone forward. Has it ever occurred to you that the organization may be getting tired, too? They depend solely upon your invention, and each time your invention has resulted in touching nothing but zero."

"Thanks!"

"O, I'm not chiding you. I've failed, too."

"Are you turning against me?" he demanded bitterly.

"Do my actions point that way?" she countered. "No. But the more I view what has passed, the more disheartened I grow. It has been a series of blind alleys, and all we have succeeded in doing is knocking our heads. I can see now that all our failures are due to one mistake."

"And what the devil is that?" he asked, irritably.

"We were in too much of a hurry at the beginning. Hargrave prepared himself for quick action on your part."

"And if I had not acted quickly he would have started successfully on one of his world tours again, and that would have been the last of him, and we should never have learned of the girl's existence. So there's your argument."

"Perhaps you are right. But for all that we have not played the game with any degree of finesse."

"Bah!" Braine lit a cigarette and smoked nervously. "I can't even get rid of that meddling reporter. He has been as much to blame for our failures as either Jones or Hargrave. I admit that in his case I judged hastily. I believed him to be just an ordinary newspaper man, and he was clever enough to lull my suspicions. But I'm going to get him, Olga, even if I have to resort to ordinary gunman tricks. If there's any final reckoning, by the Lord Harry, he shan't get a chance in the witness stand."

"And I begin to think that that little chit of a girl has been hoodwinking me all along. By the way, did you find out what that letter said?" she asked after a pause.

"Letter? What letter?"

She sprang from her chair. "Do you mean to say that they have not told you about that?" Olga became greatly excited.

"Explained," he said.

"Why, I was at the garden day before yesterday, and a man approached

and asked if I was Miss Hargrave. Becoming at once suspicious that something very important was about to happen, I signified that I was Miss Hargrave. The man slipped a paper into my hand and hurried off. I took a quick glance at it and was dumfounded to find it utterly blank of writing. At first I thought some joke had been played on me, then I chanced to remember the invisible ink letters you always wrote me. Understanding that you were to visit the cave in the morning, I had one man at the garden take the note. And you never got it!"

"Some one shall pay for this care-

lessness. I'll call up Vroon and Jackson at once. Wait just a moment."

He went to the telephone. A low muttering conversation took place. Olga could hear little or none of it. When Braine put the receiver back on the hook his face was not pleasant to see.

"That girl!"

"What now?"

"It seems she had been out horse-back riding that morning. She had seen one of the boys cross the field and suddenly disappear; and she was curious to learn what had become of him. With her usual luck she stumbled upon the method of opening the door of the cave and went in. She must have been nosing about. She didn't have much time, though, as the boys came up to await me. Evidently she crawled into that old chest and in some inexplicable manner purloined the letter from Jackson's pocket. They left to reconnoiter; and it was then that Jackson discovered his loss. When Florence heard them returning she jumped into the well. And lived through that tunnel! The devil is in it!"

"Or out of it, since we consider him our friend."

"And I had her in my hands, note and all!"

"But with all that water there will not be any writing left on the letter."

"Invisible ink is generally indelible and impervious to the action of water; at least the kind I use is. I'd give a thousand for a sight of that letter."

"And it might be worth a million," Olga suggested.

"Not the least doubt of it in my mind. Olga, old girl, it does look as if my star was growing dim. We'll never get our hands on that million. I feel it in my bones. So let's settle down to a campaign of revenge, without any furfews. I want to twist Hargrave's heart before the game winds up."

"You wish really to injure her?"

"I do not wish to injure her. Far from it," he replied, smiling evilly. "You want her . . . dead?"

"Whispered Olga, paling."

"Exactly. I want her dead. And so if all my efforts here come to nothing, so shall Hargrave's. His millions will become waste paper to him. That's revenge. The Persian peach method."

"Poison? You shall not! You shall not kill her!" he vehemently.

"Tender hearted?"

"No. If I must in the end go to prison, so be it; but I refuse to die in the chair."

"Very well, then. We shan't kill her, but we'll make her wish she was dead. I was only trying to see how far you would go. The basket of peaches is in the hallway. Every peach is poisoned. No man in the

country knows more about subtle poisons than I do. Have I not written books on the subject?" ironically.

"And they will trace it back to you in a straight line," she warned. "I will not have it!"

"I can go elsewhere," he replied coldly.

"You would leave me?"

"The moment you cross my will," emphatically.

It became her turn to pace. Torn between her love of the man and the danger which stared her in the face, she was for the time being distracted. All the time he watched her with malevolent curiosity, knowing that in the end she would concur with his evil plans.

"Very well," she said finally. "But listen; we shall be found out. Never doubt that. Your revenge will cost us both our lives. I feel it."

"Bah! The law will have no hand in my end. I always carry a pellet; and that ring of yours would suffice a regiment. She will not die. She will merely become a kind of paralytic; the kind that can move a little but not enough; always wheeled about in a chair. I'll bring in the peaches;

rosy and downy. One bite, after a given time, will do the trick. If they suspect and throw them out we have lost nothing but the peaches. A trusted messenger will carry them to the Hargrave house. And then we'll sit down and wait."

Meantime, in the library of the Hargrave house, Florence and Jim were puzzling over the blank sheet of paper.

"I'll wager," said Jim, "the water washed all the writing away. The fire does not seem to do any good. We'll turn it over to Jones. Jones'll find a way to solve it. Trust him."

"What are you two chattering about?" asked Susan, who was arranging some flowers on the table.

"Secrets," said Jim, smiling.

"Humph!"

Susan pattered about for a few minutes longer, then crossed to the reception room, intending to go upstairs. At that moment the maid was admitting a messenger with a basket of fruit.

"For Miss Hargrave," said he. He gave the basket to the maid, touched his cap awkwardly, and swung on his heel, closing the door behind him. He was in a hurry to deliver another message.

"O, what lovely fruit!" cried Susan, pausing. "I'm going to steal one," she laughed. She selected a peach and began eating it on the way up to her room.

The maid passed on into the library. "What's this?" inquired Florence, as the maid held out the basket. She selected a peach and was about to set her white teeth into it when Jim interposed.

"Wait a moment, dear," Florence lowered the peach. Jim turned to the maid. "Who sent it?"

"I don't know, sir. A messenger brought it, saying it was for Miss Hargrave."

"Let me see if there is a card."

But Jim searched in vain for the card of the donor. At once all his suspicions arose. "Don't touch them. Better let the maid throw them out. Fruit from unknown persons might not be the healthiest thing in the world."

"What do you think?"

"That in all probability they are poisoned. But there's no need trying to prove my theory right or wrong. Ask Jones. He'll tell you to throw them away."

"Horrible!" Florence shuddered. "But they do not want to poison me. I'm too valuable. They want me alive."

"Who can say?" returned Jim gloomily. "They may have learned that they cannot beat us, no matter what card they turn up. I may be wrong, but take my advice and throw them away. . . . Good Lord, what's that?" startled.

"Some one cried!"

"O, Miss Florence!" exclaimed the maid, terror stricken as she recalled Susan's act. "Miss Susan took a peach from the basket and was eating it on the way to her room!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Jim. "I was right. The fruit was poisoned." Jim had had enough to send for a specialist he knew. The specialist arrived about twenty minutes after Susan's first cry. To his keen eye it looked like a certain poison which had for its basis the venom of the cobra.

"Will she live?"

"O, yes. But she'll be a wreck for some months. Send her to the hospital where I can visit her frequently. And I'll take that peach along for analysis. No police affair?"

"No. We dare not call them in," said Jim.

"That's your affair. I'll send down the ambulance. Keep her quiet. She'll have a species of paralysis; but that'll work off under the treatment. A strange business."

"So it is," agreed Jim grimly.

Florence knelt beside her friend's bed and cried softly.

"You called me just in time. An hour later, nothing would have saved her. She would have been paralyzed for life."

Jim accompanied the doctor to the door and went in search of Jones. He found the tactful butler eyeing the fruit basket, his face gray and drawn, though his eyes blazed with fury.

"Poison!"

"A pretty bad poison, too," said Jim. "We can't do anything. We've just

got to sit still. But in the end we'll get them. That she devil . . ."

"No, my friend; that he devil. The woman is mad over him and would commit any crime at his bidding. But this is his work. We want him. He wasn't without courage to send this fruit, knowing that I would instantly suspect the sender. Yet, I have no definite proof. I could not hold him in court in law. He will have bought the fruit piece by piece, the basket in a basket shop. He will have injected the poison himself when alone. Poor Susan! That messenger was without doubt some one over whom he holds the threat of the death chair. That's the way he works."

Jim tramped the room while Jones carried the fruit to the kitchen. The butler returned after a while.

"What about that blank sheet of paper?"

"It has to be dipped into a solution; after that you can read it by heating. I have already dipped it into the solution. The moment the heat leaves the sheet the writing disappears again. The ink is waterproof. I'll show you."

Jones got a candle from the mantle, lit it, and held the sheet of paper very close to the flame. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, letters began to form on the blank sheet. At length the message was complete.

"Dear Hargrave—The Russian minister of police is at the bank hotel under the name of Henri Servan. He is investigating the work of the Black Hundred in this country and can free you from their vengeance if you supply the evidence needed."

"Now, what evidence can he want?" asked Jim.

"Such as will prove Braine an undesirable citizen."

"And then?"

"Quietly pack him off to Russia, where he is badly wanted."

"Who sent this message?"

"One of our mysterious friends. We have a few, as you already know. But I'll go and make this man Servan a visit. I have seen the real minister, and if this man is the same one, something of importance may turn up. I shall want you somewhere about. Here, I'll let you have this letter. Remember, heat brings it out and cold air makes it vanish. Now I'll go up for a moment to see how that poor girl is getting along. We are lucky; there's no gainsaying that."

"You're a clever man, Jones," said Jim.

Jones turned upon him, his face grave. The two men looked steadily into each other's eyes. Jones was first to turn aside his glance, as he had something to conceal and Jim had nothing.

When the ambulance took the tortured Susan away, Jones addressed Florence gravely.

"I am going out and so is Mr. Norton. Do not leave the house; not even if you have a telephone call from me or Norton. Both of us will return; so don't let anything bother or confuse you."

"I promise," said Florence, struggling with a sob.

Jones went downstairs again, paused by a window as if cogitating, and suddenly threw it up and looked abroad. A rustle among the lilacs caused a smile to flit across his face. So they had sent some one to learn the effect of the poison? Or to follow him should he leave the house? He retired to the kitchen and gave some

explicit orders to the chef, orders which did not in any way refer to cooking. Then Jones and the reporter left the house, each quite aware that they were being followed. Near the Blank hotel they separated in order to confuse the stalker. He might do as he pleased, but Jim was not to be deceived and followed the wrong man. But it was evident that this time he had been directed to follow Jones; for he entered the hotel a minute after Jones.

Meantime a second spy, whom Jones had not seen, had observed the transfer of the invisible writing and had immediately informed Braine, who was not far away. That his poisoned fruit had stricken down an outsider troubled him none at all. But that mysterious message he meant to have; it might be a life and death affair, it might be a clue to the treasure, or the whereabouts of Hargrave.

Thus, while only one man followed Jones, several kept a far eye on Jim. Jones scribbled his name on a blank card and had it taken to the Russian's room. The page eyed that card curiously. It was different from anything he had ever seen before. In one corner were written three or four words which resembled a cross between Hebrew and Greek.

"Humph!" muttered the boy.

"Whadda y' know about that? Chick-en scratches; but I guess the bell

rings Russian. On your way, Hortense," he cried to the hall maid, who wanted a look at the card. "Up 't' th' room, sir. He'll see yuh!" The boy kept the silver salver extended expectantly, but Jones went past without apparently noticing the hint.

The Russian was standing by a window when Jones knocked and was bidden to enter.

"You are not Hargrave."

"Neither are you the Russian minister of police," urbanely.

"Who are you?"

"I am Hargrave's confidential man, sir."

The two men eyed each other cautiously.

"You speak Russian?"

"No. I am able to scribble a few words; that is all."

The Russian lit a cigarette and smoked leisurely. He was in no hurry.

"No, I am not the minister; but I am his accredited agent. I am empowered to bring back to Russia a man who is known here by the name of Braine, another by the name of

What I promise to give you something in exchange for it."

"What?" asked Jim with as much nonchalance as he could assume.

"Life."

"Search," said Jim. "You won't object to my smoking?" He began to roll a cigarette while they passed over him. He struck a match; the pleasant aroma of tobacco floated about his head.

"He's got it on him somewhere. I saw him take it. He's got his nerve with him."

The cigarette glowed. Jim smoked hurriedly.

Through every pocket they went. The contents of his wallet lay scattered at his feet; his watch dangled from the chain. The cigarette grew shorter and shorter. Suddenly one of the men stretched out a hand and whisked the cigarette from Jim's lips. He threw it to the floor and stamped out the coal.

"I thought so!" he exclaimed, holding out the scrap of burnt paper towards Braine.

The words "Dear Hargrave" were all that remained of the message. With a snarl of rage Braine whipped out his revolver.

"I will give you one minute to tell me what that paper contained."

"And after that minute is up?"

"A bullet in your stomach."

Quick as a flash Jim's hand shot out, caught the loosely held revolver, gave it a wrench, and brought it down savagely upon Braine's head. Then he reversed it and backed toward the front entrance.

"Au revoir, till we meet again, gentlemen!"

(Continued next week.)

A MERCILESS JUDGE.
One Who Shows No Favor.
A merciless judge is Father Time. Before him the weak and the wanting go to the wall. Only the truth can stand. For years the following statement from an Albemarle resident has withstood this sternest of all tests:
Mrs. W. C. Russell, Parker St., Albemarle, says: "I used Doan's Kidney Pills, procured at Hall's Pharmacy, and received relief in a short time. Another of the family suffered a great deal from weak kidneys and two boxes of Doan's Kidney Pills cured him and he has not been troubled since. I am pleased to confirm the public statement I have given before recommending them."
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LAND SALE.
NORTH CAROLINA, Stanly County.
By virtue of the power vested in me as Administratrix of the estate of E. M. Osborne, deceased, by mortgage trust deed executed by Israel J. Barbee and wife, E. F. Barbee, to E. M. Osborne, on the 9th day of January, 1900, which mortgage trust deed is duly recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds of Stanly county in Book 39 of mortgages on page 474, said mortgage trust deed having been given to secure the payment of a certain note executed by the said Israel J. Barbee and wife, E. F. Barbee, on the 9th day of January, 1900, and default having been made in the payment of said note, I will on **MONDAY, MARCH 22, 1915, at 12 M.** at the court house door in Stanly county, expose to sale at public auction to the highest bidder the following described real estate, situate, lying and being in Furr Township, Stanly county, North Carolina, adjoining the lands of Lee Bratton and others and bounded as follows, to-wit: Beginning at a stake in the old road; thence S. 84 1-2 E. 12 1-2 chains to a bench in the branch; thence up the various courses of said branch 32 chains to Bratton's line; thence with his line North 73 1-2 West 11 2-5 chains to a post oak by white oak; thence South 63 West 15 1-2 chains to a stake by a redoak, white oak and post oak; thence a new line South 5 1-2 West 19 3-4 chains to the beginning, containing 56 acres, more or less.
Said sale is made in accordance with the terms of said mortgage trust deed.
This the 18th day of February, 1915.
MRS. M. A. OSBORNE, Adm.
E. M. OSBORNE, deceased.
A. C. HUNEYCUTT, Attorney.

W. S. SOUTHBOUND RAILWAY
Schedule Effective May 10, 1914.
DEPARTURES FROM ALBEMARLE
3:48 P. M.—Train 63—For Norwood, Ansonville, Wadesboro, N. C., Cheraw, Hartsville, Darlington, and Florence, S. C., connecting at Florence with A. C. L. trains, for Charleston, Columbia, S. C., Savannah, Ga., Jacksonville, Fla., Wilmington, N. C., etc. Through train to Florence.
7:30 P. M.—Train 59—Local Passenger train from Winston-Salem for Wadesboro and intermediate points.
8:30 A. M.—Train 58—Local Passenger train from Wadesboro for Whitney, Southmont, Lexington, Winston-Salem and all intermediate points.
1:48 P. M.—Train 62—For Winston-Salem, Whitney, Lexington, etc. Trains 62 and 63 are through trains between Florence, S. C., and Roanoke, Virginia.
Full information as to rates, schedules, etc., furnished on application.
H. L. Joyce, Agt., Albemarle.
B. P. Collier, Jr., G. P. A., Winston-



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Afloat.

and asked if I was Miss Hargrave. Becoming at once suspicious that something very important was about to happen, I signified that I was Miss Hargrave. The man slipped a paper into my hand and hurried off. I took a quick glance at it and was dumfounded to find it utterly blank of writing. At first I thought some joke had been played on me, then I chanced to remember the invisible ink letters you always wrote me. Understanding that you were to visit the cave in the morning, I had one man at the garden take the note. And you never got it!"



Letters Began to Form on the Blank Sheet.

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NOTICE!

I have put on a wagon for the benefit of Southern Express Services. It is everybody's wagon. Use it from 8 A. M. to 6 P. M. Call phone 20 for this wagon to get express. Before and after hours, residence phone, 135, Dra; man phone, 205. Express matter delivered. Phone us about your trunks and small packages. f4-1mp

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