

# The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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## CHAPTER IX.

### The Leap in the Dark.

So far as Jones was concerned, he was rather pleased with the turn of affairs. This was no time for love-making; no time for silly, innocuous quarrels and bickerings, in which love must indulge or die. Florence no



"I Never Saw That Ring Before."

longer rode horseback, and Norton returned to his accustomed haunts, where no one made the slightest attempt upon his life. In his present state of mind he would have welcomed it.

"What's the matter with Jim?" asked the night city editor, raising his eye shade.

"I don't know," answered the copy reader.

"Goes around as if he'd been eating dope; bumped into the boss a while ago and never stopped to apologize."

"Perhaps he's mapping out the front page for that Hargreave stuff," laughed the copy reader. "Between you and me and the gate post, I don't believe there ever was a man by the name of Hargreave."

"Oh, there was a chap by that name, all right. He's dead. A man can't swim 300 miles in rough water, life buoy or no. They ought to have funeral services, and let it go at that."

"But what was the reason for that fake cable from Gibraltar saying that Orts was alive? I don't see any sense in that."

"The man who pulled it off did. I think, for my part, that both Orts and Hargreave are dead, and that the man picked up by the tramp steamer Orient was riding some other balloon."

"You're wrong there. The description of it proved that it was Orts' machine. Oh, Jim probably has got a man's size yarn up his sleeve, but he's a long time in delivering the goods. He's beginning to mope a good deal. Woman back of it somewhere. Haven't held down this copy job for twelve years without being able to make some tolerable guesses. Jim's a star man. When he gets started nothing can stop him. He covered the Chinese Boxer rebellion better than any other correspondent there. I wonder how old he is?"

"O, I should say about thirty-one or two. Here he comes now. 'Lo, Jim!'"

"Hello! Where's Ford? He gave me a ticket to the theater tonight, and I want to punch his head. What's the drama coming to, anyhow? Cigarettes and booze and mismatched couples. Can't they find good enough things out of doors? Oh, I know. They cater to a lot of fools who believe that what they see is an expression of high life in New York and London. And it's rot, plain rot. It's merely the scum on the boiling pot. And any old housewife would skim it off and chuck it into the slops. Life? Piffle!"

"What's the grouch?"

"Looking for the dramatic job?"

"No. I've just been wondering how far these theatrical managers can go without slitting the golden goose."

Norton sought his desk and began rummaging the drawers. He was not hunting for anything; he was merely passing away the time. By and by, when the pastime no longer served, he pulled his chair over to the window and sat down, staring at stars such as Copernicus never dreamed of. Ships

going down to sea, ferries swooping diagonally hither and thither, the clockwork signs; but he took no note of these marvels of light.

"Not at home!" he muttered.

He had called, written, telephoned. No use. The door remained shut. Jones answered the telephone, and the letters came back. He began to think very deeply concerning the Perigoff woman. Had she played a trick? Had that fainting spell been buncombe for his benefit as well as Florence's? But he had not a shadow of a proof. The thing that puzzled him equally with

this was that all attempts against his life had miraculously ceased; no safes thundered down in front of him, and no autos tried to carve him in two. The only thing that kept him active was the daily call of Jones by wire. Miss Florence was well; that was all Jones was permitted to say.

Restlessly Norton spurned his chair and walked over to the telephone booth. It was midnight. He might or might not be able to get Jones. But almost instantly a voice said, "What is it?"

"Jones?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"Norton."

"Why, you called me up not ten minutes ago."

"Not I!"

"It was your voice, as plain as day."

"What did I want?" keen all at once.

The reply did not come immediately.

"You are certain it was not you?"

"Wait a moment and I'll call the editor. He will prove to you that I've been here for an hour, and that this is the first call I've made. Some one has been imposing on you. What did they ask you to do?"

"You asked me to come down to the office at once, and I requested you to come to the house, and you said you could not. I declined to stir."

"What did you think?"

"Exactly what you're thinking—that they have come to life again."

"Jones, is Miss Florence awake?"

"No."

"Do you think there is any hope of having her understand what really happened?"

"I am here only to guard her. I cannot undertake to read her thoughts."

"You're not quite in favor of a reconciliation?"

"Oh, yes, if it went no further. Young people are young people the world over."

"What does that mean?"

"That they would not create imaginative heartaches if they were not young. Better let things remain exactly as they are. When all these troubles are settled finally, the lesser trouble may be talked over sensibly. But this is not the time. There is no news. Good-night."

Norton returned to his chair, gloomier than ever. With his feet upon the window sill he stared and stared and dreamed and dreamed till a hand fell upon his shoulder. It belonged to one of the office boys.

"Note fr you, sir."

Norton read it and tore it into little pieces. Then he rose and distributed the pieces in the several yawning waste baskets which strewed the aisle leading to the city desk.

"I'm not wanted for anything?" he asked.

"No. Clear out!" laughed the night city editor. "The sight of you is putting everybody in the gloom ward."

Norton went down to the street. At the left of the entrance he was quietly joined by a man whose arm was carried in a sling. He motioned Norton to get into the taxicab. They were dropped in a deserted spot in Riverdale. On foot they went forward to their destination, which proved to be the deserted hangar of the aviator, William Orts.

"I want you to tell Jones that a tug and several divers are at work on the spot where he threw the chest. That's all. Now, doctor, rewind this arm of mine."

The amateur surgeon made a very good job of it; not for nothing had he followed fighting armies to the front.

"Did they find anything?"

"Not up to date. But we might if we cared to. They have left a buoy over the spot they're exploring. But just now it floats a quarter of a mile to the east of the spot."

"Who were the men in the motor boat that chased Jones?"

"Only Jones can tell you. Queer old codger, eh?"

"A bit stubborn. He wants to handle it without police assistance."

"And he's right. We are not aiming to arrest anyone," sinisterly. "There can't be any draw to this game. Here, no smoking. Too much gas afloat."

Norton put the cigarettes back into his pocket. "What's the real news?" he demanded. "You would not bring me out here just to rebandage that arm. It really did not need it. Come, out with it."

"You're sharp."

"I'm paid to be sharp."

"I've found where the Black Hundred holds its sessions."

"By George, that's news!"

"The room above is vacant. A little hole in the ceiling, and who knows what might happen?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Tell Jones. When the next meeting come around I'll advise you. I've stumbled upon a dissatisfied member. So, buck up, as they say. We've got two ends of the net down, and with a little care we'll have them all. Now let me have a hundred!"

Norton drew out a packet of bills and counted off five twenties.

"Why don't you draw the cash yourself?"

"It happens to be in your name, son."

"I forgot," said Norton. "But what a chance for me! Nearly five thousand, all mine for a ticket to Algiers!"

A grunt was the only reply.

"I want you to tell me about the Perigoff woman."

"I know only one thing—that Braine is there every night."

"No!"

"The orders are for you to play the game just as you are playing it. When we strike, it must be the last blow. All this hide-and-seek business may look foolish to you. It's like that Japanese game called 'jo.' It looks simple, but chess is a tyro's game beside it. Can you find your way back all right?"

"I can."

"Well, you'd better be going. That's all the light I have, in this torch here. Got a lot to do tomorrow and need sleep."

Norton stole away with great caution. His first intention was to proceed straight to the city, but despite his resolution he found himself within a quarter of an hour gazing up at the windows of the Hargreave house. "Not at home!"

Quite unconscious of the fact, he was as close to death as any mortal man might care to be. The policeman suddenly looming up under the arc lamp proved to be his savior.

The lull made Jones doubly alert. He was positive that they were preparing to strike again. But from what direction and in what manner? He had not met the gift of clairvoyance, so he had to wait; and waiting is a terrible game when perhaps death is balancing the scales. It is always easier to make an assault than to await it; and it is a good general who always finds himself prepared.

But it made his heart ache to watch the child. She went about cheerfully—when any one was in the room with her. Many a time, however, he had stolen to the door of her bedroom and heard the heart-rending sobs, an attempt being made to stifle them among the willows. She was eighteen; it was first love; and first loves are pale, evanescent attachments. It hurt now; but she would get over it presently. Youth forgets. Time, like water, smooths away the ragged places.

## WHEN THE TIRED MOTHER GIVES OUT

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The countess called regularly. She was, of course, dreadfully sorry over what had happened. She had heard something about his character; newspaper men weren't always the best. This one was a more fortune hunter; a two faced one, at that. She was never more surprised in her life when he threw his arms around her. And so on, and so forth, half lies and half truths, till the patient Jones felt like wringing her neck.

From his vantage point the butler smiled ironically. He could read the heart of this Perigoff woman as he could read the page of a book. The effrontery! And all the while he must gravely admit her and pretend when the blood roared in his veins at the sight of her. But he dared not swerve a single inch from the plans laid down. It was a cup of bitter gall, and there was no way of avoiding the putting of it to his lips. She emanated poison as nightshade emanates it, the upas tree. And he must bow when she entered and bow when she left! Still, she had done him an indirect favor in breaking up this love business.

One afternoon Braine summoned his runabout and called up two physicians. When he was ushered into the desert-



It Had All the Hallmarks of an Affectionate Embrace.

office of the first he sent his card in. The doctor replied in person. His face was pale and his hands shook.

"Good afternoon," said Braine, smiling affably.

The doctor eyed him like a man hypnotized. "You . . . you wished to see me on some particular business?"

"Very particular," dryly. "My car is outside. Will you be so good as to accompany me?"

The doctor slowly went into the hall for his hat and coat. He left the house and got into the car with never a word of protest.

"Thinking?" said Braine.

"I am always thinking whenever I see your evil face. What devilment do you require of me this time?"

"A mere stroke of the pen."

"Where are we going?"

"To call on another physician of your standing," significantly. "It is a great thing to have friends like you two. Always ready to serve us, for the mere love of it."

"There's no need of using that kind of talk to me. You have me in the

hollow of your hand. Why should I bother to deny it? I have broken the law. I broke it because I was starving."

"It is better to starve in freedom than to eat fat joints up the river. Today it is a question of sanity."

"And you want me to assist in signing away the liberty of some person who is perfectly sane?"

"The nail on the head," urbanely.

"You're a fine scoundrel!"

"Not so loud!" warningly.

"As loud as I please. I am not forgetting that you need me. I'm no coward. I recognize that you hold the whip hand. But you can send me to the chair before I'll crawl to you. Now, leave me alone for a while."

The other physician had no such qualms of conscience. He was ready at all times for the generous emoluments which accrued from his dealings with the man Braine.

The Countess Perigoff was indispensed; so it was quite in the order of things that she should summon physicians.

There is a law in the state of New

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York—just or unjust, whichever you please—that reads that any person may be adjudged insane if the signs

ures of two registered physicians are affixed to the document. It does not say that these physicians shall have been proved reputable.

There were, besides the physician a woman and a man of benign countenance. Their faces were valuable assets. To gain another person's confidence is, perhaps among the greatest human achievements. A confidence man and woman in the real sense of the word. In your mind's eye you could see this man carrying the contribution plate down the aisle on Sunday mornings, and his wife Kate putting her mite on the plate for the benefit of some poor, untidy Hottentot.

On Tuesday of the following week Florence and Susan went shopping. The chauffeur was a strong young fellow whom Jones relied upon. If you pay a man well and hold out fine promises, you generally can trust him. As their car left the corner another followed leisurely. This second automobile contained Thomas Wendt and his wife Kate. The two young women stopped at the great dry goods shop near the public library, and for the time being naturally forgot everything but the marvels which had come from all parts of the world. It is as natural for a woman to buy as it is for a man to sell.

In some manner or other Florence became separated from Susan. She hunted through aisle after aisle, but could not find her; for the simple reason that Susan was hunting for her. It occurred to the girl that Susan might have wisely concluded the best place to wait would be in the taxicab. And so Florence hurried out into the street, into the arms of the Wendt family, who were patiently awaiting her.

The trusted chauffeur had been sent around to the side entrance by the major domo. The young lady had so requested, so he said.

Florence struggled and called for the policeman, who came running up, followed by the usual idle, curious crowd.

"The poor young woman is insane," said the motherly Kate, tears in her eyes. The benign Thomas looked at heaven. "We are her keepers."

"It is not true!" cried Florence desperately.

"She has the hallucination that she is the daughter of the millionaire Stanley Hargreave." And Thomas exhibited his document, which was perfectly legal, so far as appearances went.

"Hurry up and get her off the walk. I can't have the crowd growing any larger," said the policeman, convinced.

So, despite her cries and protestations, Florence was hustled into the

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