

The MILLION DOLLAR MYSTERY By Harold MacGrath

\$10,000 FOR 100 WORDS.

"The Million Dollar Mystery" story will run for twenty-two consecutive weeks in this paper. By an arrangement with the Theatrical 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 motion picture theaters. For the solution of this mystery story \$10,000 will be given by the Theatrical 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 Theatrical Film corporation either at Chicago or New York, any time up to midnight, Jan. 15. This allows four weeks after the first appearance of the last film release and three weeks after the last chapter is published in this paper in which to submit solutions.

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 Tice. 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 during this winter, 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 picture of the winner, his or her home, and other interesting features. It is understood that the newspapers, as 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.

Stanley Hargreave, millionaire, after a miraculous escape from the sea of the gang of brilliant thieves known as the Black Hundred, lives the life of a recluse for eighteen years. Hargreave one night enters a Broadway restaurant and there comes face to face with the gang's leader, Braine.

After the meeting, during which neither man apparently recognizes the other, Hargreave hurries to his magnificent Riverdale home and lays plans for making his escape from the country. He writes a letter to the girls' school in New Jersey where eighteen years before he had mysteriously left on the doorstep his baby daughter, Florence Gray. He also pays a visit to the hangar of a seaplane.

Braine and members of his band surround Hargreave's home at night, but as they enter the house the watchers outside see a balloon leave the roof. The safe is found empty—the million which Hargreave was known to have drawn that day was gone. Then some one announced the balloon had been punctured and dropped into the sea.

Florence arrives from the girls' school, Countess Olga, Braine's companion, visits her and claims to be 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 Braine's outfit in 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.

Braine conceives the idea of giving a coaching party to which Florence is invited. Jones and Norton both go along and are fortunately on hand to save Florence from being imprisoned in the country house to which she is lured.

"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. We newspaper men seldom break our word."

Jones held out his hand.

"Sometimes I wish I'd started life right," said the reporter gloomily. "A newspaper man is generally improvident. 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 made real and solid use of the great men I met. I'd have made financiers help me to invest my earnings, or sav- ings, little 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 unmarried up to 31, 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 helless to millions. And a poor devil like me could not marry a girl with money and hang onto 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 else laid down the rules; it was the way in which they were interpreted.

Braine heard of the failure. The Black Hundred was finding its stock far below par value. Four valuable men locked up in the Tombs, awaiting trial, to say nothing of the seven gunmen gathered in at the old warehouse. Braine began to suspect that his failures were less due to chance than to calculation, that at last he had encountered a mind which anticipated his every move. He would have recognized this fact earlier had it not been that revenge had temporarily blinded him. The spirit of revenge never makes for mental clarity.

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

Vron 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 police 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, Vron, 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

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 pipe stems."

"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

"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 won't be long before she puts her finger in a ple 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 riverside 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 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. O, let's leave this place!" impulsively. "Let us go back to Miss Farlow'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 Farlow'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 Farlow'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! O!"

"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 sweet 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 it 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 ride 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 incipient. 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 shrewdest 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 her 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 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 fruitfully.

"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 reënter the hut and prepare to defend it till his companion bore 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 auto bandits, looking like an ordinary taxicab, was a high power 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. Here they come!"

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-odd miles an hour, they could not stop the car in time to avoid fatality. The car careened wildly, swerved, 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.]



NORTON PUT HIS ARMS AROUND HER



THE DAUGHTER OF HARGREAVE RODE HORSEBACK EARLY EVERY MORNING

the Hargreave home. The men got out. The watcher ran up.

"He is still inside," he whispered.

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

The men obeyed, and the watcher ran back to his post. He was desperately hoping the affair would terminate 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 the grounds almost made 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 the 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 it. Checkmate.

Braine was keen enough tonight.

"He is 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 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 stalk him and pot 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.

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 he hit; 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."

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

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 Countess Perloff?" said Jones.

"I am." 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 cigar, 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?"

"You are suspicious?"

"You are suspicious?"

"You are suspicious?"

"You are suspicious?"