

The Million Dollar Mystery

By Harold MacGrath

CHAPTER III.

The Safe in the Lonely Warehouse.

HE princess did not remain long after the departure of the police with the bogus detectives. It had been a very difficult corner to wiggle out of, all because Braine had added to his plans after she had left the apartment. But for the advent of the meddling reporter the coup would have succeeded, herself apparently perfectly innocent of complicity. That must be the keynote of all her plans—to appear innocent and leave no trail behind her. She had gained the confidence of Florence and her companion. And she was rather certain that she had impressed this lazy-eyed reporter and the stolid butler. She had told nothing but the rina Pushkin's cousin. But blood with her counted for naught. She had rina in her heart but for two things. Braine had meant to spend on her caprices.

"How long has your highness known Mr. Braine?" asked the reporter idly, as he smoothed away all signs of his recent conflict.

"O, the better part of a year. Mr. Hargreave did not recognize me the other night. That was quite excusable, for when he last saw me I was not more than twelve. My child," she said to Florence, "build no hopes regarding your mother. She is doubtless dead. Upon some trivial matter—I do not know what it was—she was confined to the fortress. That was seventeen years ago. When you enter the fortress at St. Petersburg, you cease to be."

"That is true enough."

"I did not recall myself to your father. I did not care at that moment to shock him with the remembrance of the past. Is not Mr. Braine a remarkable man?" All this in her charming broken English.

"He is, indeed," affirmed Norton. "He is a superb linguist, knows everybody and has travelled everywhere. No matter what subject you bring up, he seems well informed."

"Come often," urged Florence. "I shall my child, and any time you need me, call for me. After all, I am nearly your aunt. You will find life in the city far different from that which you have been accustomed to."

"She limped down to her limousine. In tripping up Norton he had stepped upon her feet heavily."

"She is lovely," cried Florence.

"Well, I must be on my way also," said Norton. "I am a worldly wise man, Miss Florence. As Jones here never goes any place without letting him know; not even to the corner store. I am going to find your father. Some one was rescued. I'm going to find out whether it was the aviator or Mr. Hargreave."

"Jones drew in a deep breath and his eyes closed for a moment. At the door he spoke to the reporter.

"What do you think of that woman?"

"I believe she has told the truth," she is charming."

"She is. But for all her charm and truth I cannot help distrusting her. I have an idea. I shall call up your office at the end of each day. If a day comes without a call, you will know that something is wrong."

"A very good idea," Norton shook hands with every one and departed.

"What a brave, pleasant young man!" murmured Susan.

"I like him, too; and I'd like him for a friend," said the guileless girl.

"It is very good to have a friend like Mr. Norton," added Jones, and passed out into the kitchen. All the help had been discarded and upon his shoulders lay the burden of the cooking until such time when he could reinsta the cook.

"There was a storm scene between Braine and the princess that night.

"Are you in your dotage?" she asked vehemently.

"There, there, bring your voice down abit. Where's the girl?"

"In her home. Where did you suppose she would be, after that botch-work of letting me go to do one thing

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while you had in mind another? And an ordinary pair of cutthroats, at that!"

"The thought came to me after you left. I knew you'd recognize the men and understand. I see no reason why it didn't work."

"It would have been all right if you had consulted a clairvoyant."

"What the deuce do you mean by that?" Braine demanded roughly.

"I mean that then you would have learned your friend the reporter was to arrive upon the scene at its most vital moment."

"What, Norton?"

"Yes. The trouble is with you, you have been so successful all these years that you have grown overconfident. I tell you that there is a desperately sired man somewhere back of this. Mark me, I do not believe Hargreave is dead. He is in hiding. It may be near by. He may have dropped from the balloon before it left land. The man they picked up may be Oris, the aviator. The five thousand might have been his fee for rescuing Hargreave. Here is the greatest thing we've ever been up against; and you

mercies."

The Butler she said has powers of attorney to act for Hargreave while absent, up to the day the girl becomes of legal age."

"I'll keep an eye on our friend Jones. From now on, day and night, there will be a cat at the knothole, and 'ware mouse!' Could you make up anything like this girl?" suddenly.

"A fair likeness."

"Do it. Go to that ship which picked up the man at sea and quiz the captain. Either the aviator or Hargreave is alive. It is important to learn which at once. Be very careful; play the game as only you know how to play it. And if Hargreave is alive, we win. Tomorrow morning, early. Tears of anxiety and all that. Sailors are easy when a woman weeps. No color, remember, just the yellow wig and the salient features. Now, by-by."

"Aren't you going to kiss me, Leo?"

He caught her hands. "There is a species of Delilah about you, Olga. A kiss tonight from your lips would snip my locks; and I need a clear head. Whether we fail or win, when this game is played, you shall be my

self in the crowd. Fifty reporters came aboard, but he was gone. And I could only tell them just what I'm telling you."

"He had money?"

"About five thousand."

"Please describe him."

"The captain did so. It was the same description he had given to all the reporters. Norton looked over the rail at the big warehouse.

"Was it an ordinary balloon?"

"There you've got me. My Marconi man says the balloon part was like any other balloon; but the passenger could be driven against the wind."

"Driven against the wind. Did you tell this to the other chaps?"

"Don't think I did. Just remembered it. Probably some new invention; and now it's at the bottom of the sea. Two men, as I understand it, went off in this contraption. One is gone for good."

"For good," echoed the reporter gravely. Gone for good, indeed, poor devil? Norton took out a roll of bills, "There's two hundred in this roll."

"Well!" said the captain, vastly as-

"No. I'm going to ask you to do a little favor."

"They always say that. But spin her out. If it doesn't cost me my job, it's yours."

"Well, there will be persons making inquiries about the mysterious aeronaut. All I want you to say is, that he left a packet with you, that you've put it into that safe till he calls to claim it."

"Grannis nibbled the end of his pen. 'Supposing some one should come and demand that I open the safe and deliver?'"

"All you've got to do is to tell them to show the receipt signed by you."

The warehouse manager laughed. "Got a lot of sense in that ivory dome of yours. All right. But if anything happens you've got to come around and back me up. What's it about?"

"That I dare not tell you. This much, I'm laying a trap and I want some one I don't know to fall into it."

"On your way, James. But if you don't send me some prize fight tickets next week for this, I'll never do you another favor."

In reply Norton took from his pocket

captain saw her his promises to Norton took wings.

"This is Captain Hagan?" she asked, balling the handkerchief she held in her hand.

"Yes, miss. What can I do for you?"

He put his hands embarrassedly into his pockets—and felt the crispy bills. But for that magic touch he would have forgotten his lines. He squared his shoulders.

"I have every assurance that the man you picked up at sea is my father. I am Florence Hargreave. Tell me everything."

The captain's very blundering deceived her. "And then he hustled down the gang-plank and headed for that warehouse. He had a package which he was as tender of as if it was dynamite."

"Thank you," impulsively.

"A man has to do his duty, miss. A sailor's always glad to rescue a man at sea," awkwardly.

When she finally went down the gang-plank the sigh the captain heaved was almost as loud as the exhaust from the donkey engines which were working out the crates of lemons from the hold.

"Maybe she is his daughter; but two hundred is two hundred, and I'm a poor sailorman."

Then Grannis came in for his troubles. What was a chap to do when a pretty girl appealed to him?

"I am sorry, miss, but I can't give you that package. I gave the man a receipt and till it is presented to me safe. You understand enough about business to realize that. I did not so-

licit the job. It was thrust upon me. I'd give a hundred dollars if the blame thing was out of my safe. You say it is your fortune. That hasn't been proved. It may be gunpowder, dynamite. I'm sorry but you will have to find your father and bring the receipt."

The young woman left the warehouse dabbling her eyes with the sodden handkerchief.

"I wonder," mused Grannis, as he watched her from the window, "I wonder what the deuce that chap Norton is up to. The girl might have been the man's daughter. Good Lord, what an ass I am! There wasn't any man!" And so he reached over for the telephone.

Immediately upon receipt of the message, the reporter set his machinery in motion.

On the morning the newspapers had searched about an attempt to rob the Duffy warehouse. It appeared that the police had been tipped beforehand and were on the grounds in time to gather in several notorious gunmen, who, under pressure of the third degree, vowed that they had been hired and paid by a man in a mask and had not the slightest idea what he wanted them to raid.

Norton was in a fine temper. After all his careful planning he had gained nothing, absolutely nothing. But wait; he had gained something, the pretty girl, a cunning and desperate man, who had been forced to remain hidden under the pier until almost dawn.

(Continued next Saturday.)



I KNEW HIM BUT SLIGHTLY. I WAS AN ERE CHILD MYSELF WHEN HE USED TO PINCH MY CHEEKS

start in with every day methods!"

"Little woman don't let your tongue run away with you too far."

"I'm not the least bit afraid of you, Leo. You need me, and it has never been more apparent than at this moment."

"All right. I fell by the wayside this trip. Truthfully, I realized it five minutes after the men were gone. The only clever thing I did was to keep the mask on my face. They can't come back at me. But the thing looked so easy; and it would have worked but for Norton's appearance."

"You all but compromised me. That butler worried me a little. Her expression lost its anger and grew thoughtful. 'He's always about, and somewhere. Do you think Hargreave took him into his confidence?'"

"Can't tell. He's been watched straight for forty hours. He hasn't mailed a letter or telephoned to any place but the grocery. There have been no telegrams. Some one in that house knows where the money is, and it's ten to one that it will be the girl."

"She looks enough like Katrina to be her ghost."

Braine went over to the window and stared up at the stars.

"You have made a good impression on the girl?" with his back still toward her.

"I had her in my arms."

"Olga, my hat is off to you," turning, now that his face was again in doubt. "Your very frankness regarding your relationship will put the wool over their eyes. Of course, they'll make inquiries and they'll find out that you haven't lied. It's perfect. Not even that newspaper weasel will see anything wrong. Toward you they will eventually ease up and you can act without their ever dreaming your part in the business. We must not be seen in public any more. This butler may know where I stand even though he cannot prove it. Now, I'm going to tell you something. Perhaps you've long since guessed it. Katrina was mine till Hargreave—never mind what his name was then—till Hargreave came into the fold. So sure of her was I that I used her as a lure to bring him to us. She fell in love with him, but too late to warn him. I had the satisfaction of seeing him cast her aside, curse her, and leave her. In one thing she fooled us all. I never knew of the child till you told me."

He paused to light a cigaret.

"Hargreave was madly in love with her. He cursed her, but he came back to the house to forgive her, to find that she had been seized by the secret police and entombed in the fortress. I had my revenge. It was I who sent in the information, practically bogus; but in Russia they never question; they act and forget. So he had a daughter."

He began pacing the floor, his hands behind his back; and the woman watched him, oscillating between love and fear. He came to a halt abruptly and looked down on her.

"Don't worry. You have no rival. I'll leave the daughter to your tender

wife." He kissed the hands and strode out into the hall.

The woman gazed down at her small white hands and smiled tenderly. (The tigress has her tender moments!) He meant it!

She went into her dressing room and for an hour or more worked over her hair. She was certain that if the captain of the ship described her to any one else, he could not fail to give a fair description of Florence Hargreave.

But Norton reached the captain first. Other reporters had besieged him before she did. All but justified, he gave the vaguest kind of information. They had no description of Hargreave, while Norton had. Before going down to the boat, however, he had solved into the past of the Princess Olga Petroff. It cost him a pocketful of money, but she did justify it.

"The princess had no post-mentioning. By pinching this girl and that together he became assured that she had told the simple truth regarding her relationship to Florence's mother. A cablegram had given him all the facts in her history; there were no gaps or discrepancies; it read clear and frank. Trust a Russian secret agent to know what he was talking about.

So Norton's suspicions—and he had entertained some—were completely laid to sleep. And he wouldn't have doubted her at all except for the fact that Braine had been with her when he had introduced Hargreave. Hargreave had feared Braine; that much the reporter had elicited from the butler. But there wasn't the slightest evidence Braine had been in New York for nearly six years. The princess had arrived in the city but a year gone. And Braine was a member of several fashionable clubs, never touched cards, and seldom drank. He was an expert chess player and a wonderful amateur billiardist. Perhaps Jones, the tactless and inscrutable, had not told him all he knew regarding his master's past. Well, well; he had in his time untangled worse snarls. The office had turned him loose, a free lance, to handle the case as he saw fit, to turn in the story when it was complete.

But what a story it was going to be when he cleared it up! The more mystifying it was, the greater the zest and sport for him. Norton was like a gambler who played for big stakes, and only big stakes stirred his craving.

The captain of the tramp steamer Orient told him the same tale he had told the other reporters; he had picked up a man at sea. The man had been brought aboard totally exhausted.

Was there another body anywhere?"

"No."

"What became of him?"

"I sent a wireless and that seemed to bother him. It looked to me that he did not want anybody to learn that he had been rescued. The moment the boat touched the pier he lost him-

tonished.

"If you're young if you will do me a small favor."

"If it doesn't get me mixed up with the police, I'm only captain of a tramp; and some of the harbor police have taken a dislike to me. What do you want me to do?"

"The police will not bother you. This man Hargreave had some enemies; they want either his life or his money; maybe both. It is a peculiar case, with Russia in the background. He might have laid the whole business before the police but he chose to fight it out himself. And to tell the truth, I didn't believe the police could do any good."

"Leave her over; what do you want me to do for that handsome roll of money?"

"If any man or woman who is not full of money, but she did justify it, a reporter who comes to pump you tell them the man went ashore with a packet under his arm."

"Tie a knot in that."

"Say that the man was gray haired, clean shaven, straight, with a scar high up on his forehead, generally covered up by his hair."

"That's battered down my lad, go on."

"Say that you saw him enter your warehouse, and later depart with out his packet."

"Easy as dropping my mudhook."

"That's all. Norton gave the captain the money. 'Good-by and many thanks.'"

"Don't mention it."

Norton left the ship and proceeded to the office of the warehouse. He approached the manager's desk.

"Hello, Grannis, old top!"

The man looked up from his work surlily. Then his face brightened.

"Norton? What's brought you here? O yes; that balloon business. Sit down."

"What kind of a man is the captain of that old hooker in the slip?"

"Shifty in gun running, but otherwise as square as a die. Looks funny to see an old tub like that fixed up with wireless; but that has saved his neck a dozen times when he was running it into a noose. Not going to interview me, are you?"

two bits of pasteboard and laid them on the desk. I knew you'd be wanting something like this."

"Ringside!" cried Grannis. You reporters are lucky devils."

"At 3 o'clock this afternoon I went over to Riverdale. Five times he called up, why the game is up. But if some one does come around and make inquiries, don't fail to let me know."

"I'll be here till 5. I'd better call you up then."

Then Norton returned home and idled about till afternoon. He went over to Riverdale. Five times he walked up and down the front of the Hargreave place. Finally plucked up his courage and walked to the door.

He chatted with Florence for a while and found that for all she might be guileless to the world, she was a good linguist, a fine musician and talked with remarkable keenness about books and arts. But unless he roused her, the sadness of her position always lay written in her face. It was not difficult for him to conjure up her dreams in coming to the city and the lightning from a clear sky, had shattered them ruthlessly.

"You must come every day and tell me how you have progressed," she said.

"I'll obey that order gladly, when ever I can possibly do it. My visits will always be short."

"That is not necessary."

"No," said Norton in his heart, "but it is wise."

Always he found Jones waiting for him at the door, but always in the shadow.

"Well, the butler whispered.

"I have laid a neat trap. Whether this balloon was the one that left the top of this house I don't know. But if there were two men in it, one of them lies at the bottom of the sea."

"And the man found?" The butler's voice was tense.

"It was not Hargreave. I met Oris but once, as he wore a beard then, the captain's description did not tally with my recollection."

"Thank God! But what is this trap?"

"I propose to find out by it who is back of all this, who Hargreaves real enemies are."

Norton returned to his rooms, there to await the call from Grannis. He was sorry, but if Jones would not take him into his fullest confidence, he must hold himself to blame for any blunder he (Norton) made. Of course, he could readily understand Jones' angle of vision. He knew nothing of the general run of reporters; he had heard of them by rumor and distrusted them. He was not aware of the fact that the average reporter carries more secrets in his head than a prime minister. It was then, up to him to set about to allay distrust and gain the man's complete confidence.

Meanwhile that same morning a pretty young woman boarded the Orient and asked to be led to the captain. Her eyes were red; she had evidently been weeping. When the

Childhood Constipation

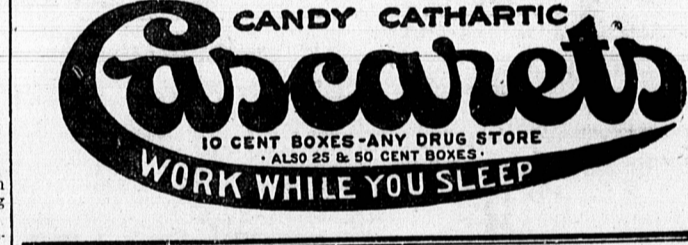
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