

The Million Dollar Mystery.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK—LOOK FOR NEXT ISSUE.)

down the steps, across the lawn, with Braine close at his heels. "Just a moment, Mr. Hargreave," he called ironically; "just a moment!" The man he addressed as Hargreave turned with lightning rapidity and struck. The blow caught Braine above the ear, knocking him flat. When he regained his feet the rumble of a motor told him the rest of the story.

By the dim light of her bedroom candle Florence read the note which had found entrance so strangely and mysteriously into her room. Her father! He lived, he needed her! Alive but in dread peril, and only she could save him! She lunged to fly to him at once, then and there. How could she wait till tomorrow night at eight? Immediately she began to plan how to circumvent the watchful Jones and the careful Susan. Her father! She slept no more that night.

"My Darling Daughter: I must see you. Come at eight o'clock tomorrow night to 78 Grove street, third floor. Confide in no one, or you seal my death warrant."

"Your unhappy FATHER." What child would refuse to obey a summons like this? A light tap on the door started her. "Is anything the matter?" asked the mild voice of Jones.

"No, I got up to get a drink of water." She heard his footsteps die away down the corridor. She thrust the letter into the pocket of her dress, which lay neatly folded on the chair at the foot of the bed, then climbed back into the bed itself. She must not tell even Mr. Norton.

Was the child spinning a romance over the first young man she had ever met? In her heart of hearts the girl did not know. Her father!

It was all so terribly and tragically simple, to match a woman's mind against that of a child. Both Norton and the sober Jones had explicitly warned her never to go anywhere, receive telephone calls or letters, without first consulting one or the other of them. And now she had planned to deceive them, with all the cunning of her sex.

The next morning at breakfast there was nothing unusual either in her appearance or manner. Under the broad scrutiny of Jones she was just her everyday self, a fine bit of acting for one who had just been the stage. But it is born in woman to act, as it is born in man to fight, and Florence was no exception to the rule.

She was going to save her father. She read with Susan, played the piano, sewed a little, laughed, hummed and did a thousand and one things young girls do when they have the deception of their elders in view.

All day long Jones went about like an old hound with his nose to the wind. There was something in the air, but he could not tell what it was. Somehow or other, no matter which room Florence went into, there was Jones within earshot. And she dared not show the least impatience or restiveness. It was a large order for so young a girl, but she filled it.

She rather expected that the reporter would appear some time during the afternoon, and sure enough he did. He could no more resist the desire to see and talk to her than he could resist breathing. There was no



She Tried the Doors. They Were Locked.

use denying it; the world had suddenly turned at a new angle, presenting a new face, a new vision. It rather subdued his easy banter. "What news?" she asked. "None," rather despondently. "I'm sorry. I had hoped by this time to get somewhere. But it happens that I can't get any further than this house."

She did not ask him what he meant by that. "Shall I play something for you?" she said. "Please."

He drew a chair beside the piano and watched her fingers, white as the ivory keys, flutter up and down the board. She played Chopin for him, Mendelssohn, Grieg and Chaminade; and she played them in a surprisingly scholarly fashion. He had expected the usual schoolgirl choice and execution; "Travnia," the "Moonlight Sonata" (which not half a dozen great pianists have ever played correctly), "Manservant Bells," and the like. He had prepared to make a martyr of

himself; instead, he was distinctly and delightfully entertained. "You don't," he said whimsically, when she finally stopped, "you don't, by any chance, know 'The Maiden's Prayer'?"

She laughed. This piece was a standing joke at school. "I have never played it. It may, however, be in the music cabinet. Would you like to hear it?" mischievously. "Heaven forbid!" he murmured, raising his hands.

All the while the letter burned against her heart, and the smile on her face and the gayety on her tongue were forced. "Confide in no one," she repeated mentally, "or you seal my death warrant."

"Why do you shake your head like that?" he asked. "Did I shake my head?" Her heart fluttered wildly. "I was not conscious of it."

"Are you going to keep your promise?" "What promise?" "Never to leave this house without Jones or myself being with you."

"I couldn't if I wanted to. I'll wager Jones is out there in the hall this minute. I know; it is all for my sake. But it bothers me." Jones was indeed in the hall, and when he sensed the petulance in her voice his shoulders sank despondently and he sighed deeply if silently.

At a quarter to eight Florence, being alone for a minute, set fire to a veil and stuffed it down the register. "Jones," she called excitedly, "I smell something burning!"

Jones dashed into the room, sniffed, and dashed out again, heading for the cellar door. His first thought was naturally that the devils incarnate had set fire to the house. When he returned, having, of course, discovered no fire, he found Florence gone. He rushed into the hall. Her hat was missing. He made for the hall door with a speed which seemed incredible to the bewildered Susan's eyes.

Out into the street, up and down which looked far away he discovered a descending taxicab. The child was gone. In the house Susan was answering the telephone, talking incoherently. "Who is it?" Jones whispered, his lips white and dry.

"The princess..." began Susan. He took the receiver from her roughly. "Hello, who is it?" "This is Olga Perigoff. Is Florence there?"

"No, madam. She has just stepped out for a moment. Shall I tell her to call you when she returns?" "Yes, please. I want her and Susan and Mr. Norton to come to tea tomorrow. Good-by."

Jones hung up the receiver, sank into a chair near by and buried his face in his hands. "What is it?" cried Susan, terrified by the haggardness of his face. "She's gone! My God, those wretches have got her! They've got her!"

Florence was whirled away at top speed. Her father! She was actually on the way to her father, whom she had always loved in dreams, yet never seen.

Number 78 Grove street was not an attractive place, but when she arrived she was too highly keyed to take note of its sordidness. She was rather out of breath when she reached the door of the third flat. She knocked timidly. The door was instantly opened by a man who wore a black mask. She would have turned then and there and down out for the swift picture she had of a well-dressed man at a table. He lay with his head upon his arms.

"Father!" she whispered. The man raised his careworn face, so very well done that only the closest scrutiny would have betrayed the paste of the theater. He arose and staggered toward her with outstretched arms. But the moment they closed about her Florence experienced a peculiar shiver.

"My child!" murmured the broken man. "They caught me when I was about to come to you. I have given up the fight." A sob choked him. What was it? wondered the child, her heart burning with the misery of the thought that she was sad instead of glad. Over his shoulder she sent a glance about the room. There was a sofa, a table, some chairs and an enormous clock, the face of which was dented and the hands hopelessly tangled. Why, at such a moment, she should note such details disturbed her. Then she chanced to look into the cracked mirror. In it she saw several faces, all masked. These men were peering at her through the half-closed door behind her.

"You must return home and bring me the money," went on the wretch who dared to perpetrate such a mockery. "It is all that stands between me and death."

Then she knew! The insistent daily warnings came home to her. She understood now. She had deliberately walked into the spider's net. But instead of terror an extraordinary calm fell upon her.

"Very well, father. I will go and get it." Gently she released herself from those horrible arms. "Wait, my child, till I see if they will let you go. They may wish to hold you as hostages."

ending some one. Write down the directions I gave you. I am very weak!" "Write down the directions yourself, father; you know them better than I." Since she saw no escape, she was forced to keep up the tragic farce no longer.

"I am not your father." "So I see," she replied, still with the amazing calm. Braine, in the other room, shook his head savagely. Father and daughter; the same steel in the nerves. Could they bend her? Would they break her? He did not wish to injure her bodily, but a million was always a million, and there was revenge which was worth more to him than the money itself. He listened, motioning to the others to be silent.

"Write the directions," commanded the scoundrel, who discarded the broken man's style. "I know of no hidden money." "Then your father dies this night. Grange put a whistle to his lips. "Sign, write!"

"I refuse!" "Once more. The moment I blow this whistle the men in the other



"She Has Thrown Herself Out of the Window!"

room will understand that your father is to die. Be wise. Money is nothing—life is everything."

"I refuse!" Even as she had known this vile creature to be an impostor so she knew that he lied, that her father was still free.

Grange blew the whistle. Instantly the room became filled with masked men. But Florence was ready. She seized the lamp and hurled it to the floor, quite indifferent whether it exploded or went out. Happily for her, it was extinguished. At the same moment she cast the lamp she caught hold of a chair, remembering the direction of the window. She was superhumanly strong in this moment. The chair went true. A crash followed.

"She has thrown herself out of the window!" yelled a voice. Some one groped for the lamp, lit it, and turned in time to see Florence pass out of the room into that from which they had come. The door slammed. The surprised men heard the key click.

She was free. But she was no longer a child.

CHAPTER V. The Problem of the Sealed Box. "Gone!" Jones kept saying to himself that he must strive to be calm, to think, think. Despite all his warnings, the warnings of Norton, she had tricked them and run away. It was maddening. He wanted to rave, tear his hair, break things. He tramped the hall. It would be wasting time to send for the police. They would only putter about fruitlessly. The Black Hundred knew how to arrange these abductions.

How had they succeeded in doing it? No one had entered the house that day without his being present. There had been no telephone call he had not heard the gist of, nor any letters he had not first glanced over. How had they done it? Suddenly into his mind flashed the remembrance of the candlelight under Florence's door the night before. In a dozen bounds he was in her room, searching drawers, paper boxes, baskets. He found nothing. He returned in despair to Susan, who, during all this turmoil, had sat as if frozen in her chair.

"Speak!" he cried. "For God's sake, say something, think something! Those devils are likely to torture her, hurt her!" He leaned against the wall, his head on his arm.

When he turned again he was calm. He walked with bent head toward the door, opened it and stood upon the threshold for a space. Across the street a shadow stirred, but Jones did not see it. His gaze was attracted by something which shone dimly white on the wall just beyond the steps. He ran to it. A crumpled letter, unaddressed. He carried it back to the house, smoothed it out and read its contents. Florence in her haste had dropped the letter.

He clutched at his hat, put it on and ran to Susan. "Here!" he cried, holding out an automatic. "If anyone comes in that you don't know, shoot! Don't ask questions, shoot!"

"I'm afraid!" She breathed with difficulty. "I'm afraid!" he roared at her. He put

the weapon in her hand. It snipped and thudded to the floor. He stooped for it and slammed it into her lap. "You love your life and honor. You know how to shoot when the time comes. Now, attend to me. If I'm not back here by ten o'clock, turn this note over to the police. If you can't do that, then God help us all!" And with that he ran from the house.

Susan eyed the revolver with growing terror. For what had she left the peace and quiet of Miss Farlow's; assassination, robbery, thieves and kidnapers? She wanted to shriek, but her throat was as dry as paper. Gently she touched the pistol. The cold steel sent a thrill of fear over her. He hadn't told her how to shoot it!

Two blocks down the street, up an alley, was the garage wherein Hargreave had been wont to keep his car. Toward this Jones ran with the speed of a track athlete. There might be half a dozen taxicabs about, but he would not run the risk of engaging any one of them. The Black Hundred was capable of anticipating his every movement.

The shadow across the street stood undecided. At length he concluded to give Jones ten minutes in which to return. If he did not return within that time, the watcher would go up to the drug store and telephone for instructions.

But Jones did not come back. "Where's Howard?" he demanded. "Hello, Jones; what's up?" "Howard, get that car out at once."

"Out she comes. Wait till I give her radiator a bucket of water. Gee!" whispered Howard, whom Hargreave often used as his chauffeur, "get on to his nips! First time I ever saw him awake. I wonder what's doing? You never know what's back of those mummy-faced headwaiters. . . . All right, Jones!"

The chauffeur jumped into the car and Jones took the seat beside him. "Where to?" "Number 78 . . ." and the rest of it trailed away, smothered in the violent thunder of the big six's engines.

During the car's flight several policemen hailed it without success. Down this street, up that round this corner, 50 miles an hour, and all the while Jones shouted: "Faster, faster!"

Within twelve minutes from the time it left the garage, the car stopped opposite No. 78 Grove street, and Jones got out.

"Wait here, Howard. If several men come rushing out, or I don't appear within ten minutes, fire your gun a couple of times for the police. I don't want them if we can manage without. They'd only bungle."

"All right, Mr. Jones," said the chauffeur. He had, in the past quarter of an hour, acquired a deep and lasting respect for the butler chap. He was a regular fellow, for all his brass buttons.

As Jones reached the curb, Florence came forth as if on invisible wings. Jones caught her by the arm. She swung him aside with a strength he had not dreamed existed in her slim body. "Florence, I am Jones!"

She stopped, recognized him, and without a word ran across the street to the automobile and climbed into the tonneau. Jones followed immediately. "Home!"

The car shot up the dimly lighted street, shone palely for a second under the corner lamp, and vanished. "Ah, child, child!" groaned the man at her side, all the tenseness gone from his body. He was Jones again.

Still she did not speak but stared ahead with unseeing eyes. No further reproach fell from the butler's lips. It was enough that God had guided him to her at the appointed moment. He felt assured that never again would she be drawn into any trap. Poor child! What had they said to her, done to her? How, in God's name, had she escaped from them who never let anybody escape? Presently she would become normal, and then she would tell him.

"I found the lying note. You dropped it." "Horrible, horrible!" she said almost inaudibly. "What did they do to you?" "He said he was my father. . . . He put his arms around me. . . . And I knew!"

"Knew what?" "That he lied. I can't explain." "Don't try!" Suddenly she laid her head against the butler's shoulder and cried. It was terrible to hear youth weep in this fashion. Jones put his arm about her, and tried to console her.

"Horrible!" she murmured between the violent hicoughs. "I was wrong, wrong! Forgive me!" Unconsciously the arm sustaining her drew her closer. "Never mind," he consoled. "Tell me one what has happened. Go about as usual. Don't let even Susan know. Whatever your poor father did was for your sake. He wanted you to be happy, without a care in the world."

"Do you realize what that mere child did?" "I do." "Planned to the minute. We had her; seven of us; doors locked, and all that. No weeping, no wailing; I could not understand then, but I do now. It's in the blood. Hargreave was as peaceful as a St. Bernard dog, till you cornered him, and then he was a lion, O, the devil! Slipped out of our fingers like an eel. And across the street, Jones in a race! I never paid any particular attention to Jones, but from now on I shall. The girl may or may not know where the money is, but Jones does, Jones does! Two men shall watch. Felton on the street and Orloff from the windows of the deserted house. With opera glasses he will be able to take note of all that happens in the house during the day. He will be able to see the girl's room. And that's the important point. It was a good plan, little woman; and it would have been plain sailing if only we had remembered that the girl was Hargreave's daughter. Be very careful hereafter when you call on her. A night like this will have made her suspicious of every one. Our hope lies with you. Anything on your mind?"

"Yes. Why not insert a personal in the Herald?" She drew some writing paper toward her and scribbled a few words.

He read: "Florence—the hiding place is discovered. Remove it to a more secret spot at once. S. H.—He laughed and shook his head. "I'm afraid that will never do."

"If she reads it, Jones will. The man with the opera glasses may see something. There's a chance Jones might become worried."

"Well, we'll give it a chance." It was midnight when he made his departure. As he stepped into the street, he glanced about cautiously. On the corner he saw a policeman swinging his night stick. Otherwise the street was deserted. Braine proceeded jauntily down the street.

And yet, from the darkened doors of the house across the way, the figure of a man emerged and stood contemplating the windows of the Perigoff apartment. Suddenly the lights went out. The watcher made no effort to follow Braine. The knowledge he was after did not necessitate any such procedure.

Of course, Florence read the "personal." She took the newspaper at once to Jones, who smiled grimly. "You see, I trust you."

"And so long as you continue to trust me no harm will befall you. You were left in my care by your father. I am to guard you at the expense of my life. Last night's affair was a miracle. The next time you will not find it so easy to escape."

Nor did she. "There will be no next time," gravely. "But I am going to ask you a direct question. Is my father alive?"

The butler's brow puckered. "I have promised to say nothing, one way or the other."

She laughed. "Why do you laugh?" "I laugh because if he were dead there would be no earthly reason for your not saying so at once. But I hate money, the name of it, the sound of it, the sight of it. It is at the bottom of all our crimes. I despise it!"

"The root of all evil. Yet it performs many noble deeds. But never mind the money. Let us give our attention to this personal. Doubtless it originated in the same mind which conceived the letter. Your father would never have inserted such a personal to learn his secret? No. On the other hand I want you to show this personal to all you meet today, Susan, the reporter, to everybody. Talk about it. Say that you wonder what you shall do. Trust no one with your real thoughts."

"Not even you, Mr. Jones," thought the girl as she nodded. "And tell them that you showed it to me and that I appeared worried."

That night there was a meeting of the organization called the Black Hundred. Braine asked if anyone knew what the Hargreave butler looked like. "I had a glimpse of him the other night; but being unprepared, I might not recognize him again."

Vroom described Jones minutely. Braine could almost see the portrait. "Vroom, that memory of yours is worth a lot of money," was his only comment.

"I hope it will be worth more soon." "I believe I'll be able to recognize Mr. Jones if I see him. Who is he and what is he?"

"He has been with Hargreave for 14 years. There was a homicidal case in which Jones was active. Hargreave saved him. He is faithful and uncommunicative. Money will not touch him. If he does know where that million is, hot irons could not make him own up to it. The only way is to watch him, follow him, wait for the moment when he'll grow careless. No man is always on his mettle; he lets up sooner or later."

"He is being watched, as you know." Vroom nodded approvingly. "The captain of the tramp steamer Orient, by the way, was seen with a roll of money. He was in one of the water front saloons, bragging how he had hoodwinked some one."

Hargreave stole up, consulted Jones, and got away after knocking him down. The next failure will mean short shift. Be warned!"

"I saw only you, sir. So help me. I was not asleep. I saw you run down the street after the taxicab. I did not see anyone else."

Braine shrugged. "Remember what I said!"

Felton bowed respectfully and made his exit. He wished in his soul that he might some day catch the master mind free of his eternal mask. It was an iron hand which ruled them and there were friends of his (Felton's) who had mysteriously vanished after a brief period of rebellion. The boss was a swell; probably belonged to clubs and society which he adroitly pilfered. The organization always had money. Whenever there was a desperate job to be undertaken, Vroom simply poured out the money necessary to promote it.

Whenever Braine and Vroom became engaged in earnest conversation they talked slow. Braine was never called by name here; the boss simply said: "Well, ten per cent of a million was a hundred thousand. This would be equally divided between the second ten per cent would go to 80 members; the balance would be divided between Vroom and the boss. But his soul rebelled at being ordered about like so much dirt under another man's feet. He would take his ten thousand and make the grand getaway."

The next afternoon the princess called upon Florence. Nothing was said about the adventure, and this fact created a vague unrest in the scheming woman's mind. She realized that she must play her cards more carefully than ever. Not the least distrust must be permitted to enter the child's head. Once that happened good-by to the wondrous emeralds. Was it that she really craved the stone? Was it not rather a venom acquired from the knowledge that this child's mother had won what she herself, with all her cleverness, was not sure of—Braine's love? Did he really care for her or was she only the catspaw to pluck his hot chestnuts from the fire?

When Florence showed her the "personal," her vague doubts become instantly dissipated. The child would not have shown her the newspaper had there been any distrust on her part.

"My child, your father is alive, then?" animatedly. "We don't know," sadly. "Why, I should say that this proves it."

"On the contrary, it proves nothing of the sort, since I have yet to discover a treasure in this house. I have



Florence Gray.

hunted in every nook, drawer; I've searched for panels, looked in trunks for false bottoms. Nothing, nothing! Ah, if I could only find it!"

"And what would you do with it?" "Take it at once to some bank and offer the whole of it for the safe return of my father, every penny of it. I don't know what to do, which way to turn," tears gathering in her eyes and they were genuine tears, too. "There are millions in stocks and bonds and I cannot touch a penny of it because the legal documents have not been found. I can't even prove that I am his daughter, except for half an old bracelet, and my father's lawyers say that that would not hold in any court."

"You were born in St. Petersburg, my dear. Have the embassy there look up the birth registers."

"That would not put me into possession. Nothing but the return of my father will avail me. And there's a horrible thought always of my not being his real daughter."

"There's no doubt in my mind. I have only to recall Katrina's face to know whose child you are. But what will you live on?" Here was a far greater mixup than she had calculated upon. Supposing after all it was only a resemblance, that the child was not Hargreave's, a substitute just to blind the Black Hundred? To keep them away from the true daughter? Her mind grew bewildered over such possibilities. The single and only way to settle all doubts was to make this

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