The House of Whispers

By WILLIAM JOHNSTON

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"SOMETHING WRONG HERE."

Synopsis.—Circumstances having prevented Spalding Nelson, clerk, from joining the American forces going to France, he is in a despondent mood when he receives an invitation to dinner from his great-uncle, Rufus Gaston. On his way to the house he meets, under peculiar circumstances, a young girl, apparently in trouble, to whom he has an opportunity to be of slight service. She lives in the same apartment building as Rufus Gaston, and he accompanies her home.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

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Although I tried to pretend an interest in their conversation and absently answered their questions about my family, my thoughts kept constantly recurring to the strange trouble of the girl across the hall, her plight interesting me far more than the purpose for which my great-uncle had sent for me. I had expected that he would broach that subject himself, but the coffee arrived and still the conversation had been limited to stilted family chat. As we returned to the living room, I decided to give him a lead:

"My mother wrote me—" I began.

"Oh, yes," said old Rufus, looking relieved.

"Yes, yes, of course," echoed Mrs. Gaston.

I waited for one or the other of them to proceed but for some reason they both seemed at a loss for words.

"You tell him, Rufus," said my great-aunt at last.

His tired old eyes studied my countenance carefully, searchingly, as if he was trying to read my soul.

"What is it?" I asked impatiently.

"It is this," said old Rufus, speaking slowly and with effort, as if he hated to disclose his intentions. "Three days from now—that will be Sunday morning—my wife and I are going to Maine to be gone for some months. We have leased a furnished cottage there and shall take our servants and our motor with us. We do not like to leave this apartment wholly untenanted, and it occurred to Mrs. Gaston that you might occupy it in our absence."

I am afraid my countenance at that moment must have betrayed my consternation. My great expectations vanished, blew up, disappeared. They did not want me for an heir but for a caretaker. What a fool I had been to imagine for one moment that this penurious old couple had contemplated doing anything for me. They wanted me to do something for them. A sarcastic refusal of their proffer trembled on my lips but was stayed by my great-aunt speaking:

"It will enable you to save your room rent. Mr. Gaston will pay the rent in advance before we go. There will be no one here to serve your meals so you will have to get them elsewhere, but I will arrange with my laundress to come in once a day to make up your room, and you'll be under no expense."

Her suggestion that I would have no room rent to pay decided me. Two other considerations also influenced me. It might be a plan on the part of the old people to try me out and see if I was trustworthy, and then, dwelling under the same roof with Barbara Bradford, I might have opportunities of seeing her again, and who knows, perhaps of assisting her out of her mysterious plight.

"I shall be very glad indeed to come," I found myself saying. "It was nice of you both to think of me."

"We'll consider the matter settled," announced old Rufus. "We are unused to guests here, so you had better come at ten on Sunday, an hour after we have started."

"Rufus," suggested my great-aunt apprehensively, "had you not better



"Something Wrong Here—in This House—I Tell You!"

give him the combination of the wall safe? My jewels are there, and in case there should be a fire—"

"Why not take them with you?" I interrupted.

"They are a nuisance when you are traveling," she objected.

"A safe deposit box would be better, then."

"No," said old Rufus shortly. "Both my safe deposit boxes are full and there is no use hiring another one. The jewels will be all right where they are. In case of fire you can remove them to a place of safety. This is the combination—see that you remember it—six right, four left, two right, eight left, 6,428."

"I'll remember it," I replied, mentally repeating it over and over again.

"And now, my dear," said the old gentleman, "if you will get the keys from my desk, we can permit our nephew to depart."

My great-aunt left the room to do his mission. The minute she was safely out of hearing old Rufus' whole manner underwent a startling change. Into his deep-set gray eyes came a look of terror. His face became ashen, and the withered hand with which he clutched my arm was trembling violently.

"Listen, boy," he hissed, leaning forward that he might speak into my ear and looking about apprehensively as if he feared to be overheard. "Listen—there's something wrong here."

My first thought was that he had been suddenly stricken with senile dementia, but recalling his perfectly rational conduct throughout the rest of the evening, I dismissed the theory as absolutely untenable. His fear, whatever caused it, certainly seemed very real.

"Something wrong?" I repeated, wonderingly. "What do you mean? What is it?"

He clutched my arm in a still tighter grasp, and his voice, suppressed to a terrified whisper, became more insistent.

"I don't know," he breathed. "I wish I did." He glanced timorously about and went on. "There's something wrong! I sense it. I feel it. I cannot find out what it is. All kinds of queer things happen. I am always hearing voices—whispers, whispers, whispers! That is why we are going away. My wife thinks it is on account of my health. I don't want her to know. Please, please, Spalding, find out what it is before we return. I have no son. There is no one else but you to do it. Solve the mystery for me. Find out about the whispers. Promise me you will. Ssh—not a word to her! Not a word!"

He withdrew his hold on my arm and laid his finger on his lips as he heard his wife returning. With a visible effort he straightened up, and when she entered the room he apparently had entirely recovered his self-possession and was his natural self again, a dignified, world-weary old man.

"I can't find your keys, Rufus," said my great-aunt, "you had better get them yourself."

The minute he left the room she hastened to my side and she, too, began to whisper mysterious warnings, exhibiting a terror hardly less than her aged husband's.

"This is a house of mystery," she announced. "I'm always hearing strange sounds here. He doesn't know"—with a nod in the direction old Rufus had gone, "and I do not want him to. That is the reason I am taking him away. Solve the mystery of it before we return. I'll pay you. I'll make it well worth your while."

Her husband's shuffling in the passage warned her of his return, and she quickly dropped my arm. As he entered she was telling me in quite normal tones to be sure to remember her to my mother the next time I wrote.

Old Rufus handed me the keys, explaining which was which.

"And remember," said my great-uncle, as he escorted me to the door, "you are not to come until Sunday morning at ten, after we have gone. And remember the combination of the safe—Remember!"

The insistent way in which he repeated the word conveyed to me forcefully that what he most wanted me to remember was the strange warning he had given me, and as I clasped his hand in parting I tried by the firmness of my grip to let him know that I understood.

"Remember," repeated my aunt, too, as she stood there in the door a little behind him, at the same time giving me a significant look.

Yet, puzzling as had been the conduct of both of them, my memories that night were not of their warning nor of the combination of the safe nor of the hour at which I was to arrive. They were of the most beautiful eyes I ever had seen and of the haunting terror written in them.

CHAPTER II.

Sunday morning came at last.

It was hardly eight when I set out for my new quarters, taking with me only one small handbag and leaving my two trunks for the expressman. In the time intervening since my visit to the Gaston home I had done but little except speculate on the mysterious warnings that both of the old people had surreptitiously given me. It seemed so utterly improbable and impossible that there could be any inexplicable mystery about a home in a modern, up-to-date apartment house in the center of a civilized city. And if there was a mystery, why did they stay there? Why didn't they move?

Yet, as I pondered over the matter, I was convinced that both my great-uncle and his wife were rational. I dismissed without hesitation the theory that there could have been any supernatural happenings to affright them. It was probable, I decided, that their fears might have been played on by some conspiracy on the part of their servants to induce them to spend a season in Maine. Perhaps there was some specter from my great-uncle's past now rising to confront him that he was seeking to hide from his wife. It might be that she knew of it or had received threats and was trying to conceal the matter from him. There are few men of millions without some secret shameful pages in their lives. As I remembered that old Rufus Gaston's dollars had been made in South America, all that I had heard and read of plots and counter-plots below the equator came buzzing into my brain. If such should be the case, that some betrayed conspirator now was seeking vengeance, more than ever I welcomed the unexpected chance that had thrown this opportunity for adventure in my prosaic path.

Yet maybe their warnings were justified. There was Barbara Bradford, who lived under the same roof, on the very floor with them. She seemed to be caught in the web of some plot, to be living in fear of some mysterious peril.

Was she, I wondered, in any way connected with the mystery that overhung the Gaston home? Did my great uncle and his wife know her? Her mission to the park had been to get some papers. Could they have been in any way involved with what was menacing my great-uncle's peace of mind? How I regretted now that I had not asked the Gastons if they knew Miss Bradford. How I welcomed the opportunity I was now to have of living in the same apartment house with her, close at hand if ever I could serve her. I was glad now that circumstances had prevented my going to France with Birge and Roller.

As I arrived at my great-uncle's corner, I saw Miss Bradford approaching from the opposite direction. She was in riding togs. I timed my steps to reach the corner as she did. Would she, I wondered, consider our strange meeting a few evenings before sufficient introduction to justify her speaking to me.

"Good morning, Mr. Nelson," she greeted me pleasantly. "Making an early call, aren't you?"

"I'm coming here to live for a while," I answered, falling into step with her. "The Gastons are going to Maine and have asked me to occupy their apartment while they are away."

As we chatted we had entered the building, and as before I went into the elevator with her. As I left her at the door, wondering if she had had any more encounters in the park, yet hardly daring to ask, she turned to me, half apologetically, and said:

"Mr. Nelson, since you've come to live here in the house, I must be careful. We have not been introduced, and my people will think it strange if they see me speaking to you. You understand, don't you? You must not speak to me or recognize me until—"

"Until what?" I cried eagerly.

"Until we can manage to be properly introduced."

"Yet," I insisted, "you promised to let me help you."

"I have not forgotten. I'm grateful, really I am. Perhaps I may call on your services. I may have to. If I do, I'll find some way of letting you know."

"Some secret way," I suggested, half sarcastically.

"Perhaps," she laughingly nodded as we separated.

As I took out the keys my great-uncle had given me and entered the apartment, I looked about me with a wholly new interest. That little word "mine" makes a vast difference in the way we regard things. Now that these luxurious quarters were to be my home, temporarily at least, I looked about curiously. Certainly at first glance there was nothing mysterious in the atmosphere. Setting my bag down I began an immediate inspection of the rooms.

The Gaston apartment, I discovered, occupied one whole side of the sixth floor of a twelve-story building. Around the elevator shaft that came up through the center was a small square court with four doors, two opening into the Bradford apartment opposite and two into the one I was occupying. The east apartments were known as Six A and the west as Six B. The door by which I had entered led into a lofty foyer, connecting by sliding doors with a great dining room, and beyond it, in the front of the house, with a reception or living room that ran the entire width of the apartment. Back of the elevator, with a separate door for the servants' use, were the kitchen, the butler's pantry, a servant's sitting room and two bedrooms. From the foyer a long hall ran almost the length of the building. On the servants' side it was blank as to doors, save for the passage from the pantry to the dining room, but on the other side several doors opened into spacious sleeping rooms, each with its own bath. As I was wondering which of the bedrooms my great-aunt had expected me to occupy, I noticed still another door which I found led into a small bedroom on the servants' side of the house but unconnected with their quarters. While it was less elaborately furnished than the rooms opposite, it was comfortable enough, and it had a spacious bathroom adjoining. The fact that the bed here had been left turned down was evidence enough that it was intended for my occupancy. Returning to the foyer to get my bag and unpack it, I was startled by the ringing of the front doorbell.

I sprang eagerly to answer it. It must be Miss Bradford. Probably she had reconsidered and had decided to take me into her confidence. Who else could it be? There was no one else who knew I was in the apartment. It must be Miss Bradford!

With an exclamation of welcome on my lips I flung open the door. A man stood there—an utter stranger. In my disappointment I was almost closing the door in his face, but as if anticipating my thought he quickly advanced one foot over the sill and kept it there.

"Well," I demanded, almost savagely, "what do you want?"

"Oh, it is you, is it?" he replied, eyeing me with what seemed to me a most insolent stare.

"What do you mean?" I asked, bewildered. Certainly I never had seen this person before. He was short and stocky, with sparse nondescript hair and weak, shifty blue eyes. His face had an unhealthy pallor, as if he had lived long away from the sunlight, and was sunken in as if from undernourishment, yet the breadth of his shoulders and his huge rough hands seemed to indicate physical strength beyond the ordinary.

"You're Mr. Spalding Nelson, aren't you?"

"That's my name," I answered shortly.

"Mr. Gaston's—" He paused, as if trying to recall the relationship.

"Mr. Gaston's great-nephew."

"I guess you are him, all right," he said, in a manner of evident relief. "I'm Mr. Wick, the superintendent of the house."

"Of course," I answered, feeling rather foolish at my own vexation.

"Mr. Gaston told me you were coming in this morning," he hastened to explain.

"He gave me a description of you," Mr. Wick went on, unperturbed, "and the boys in the hall were pretty sure it was you that came in, but—"

"But what?"

"I couldn't understand it. You didn't announce yourself. It seemed funny,



"You Must Not Speak to Me or Recognize Me Until—"

your coming in with the young lady from next door."

"It just happened that way," I explained, now understanding his mystification. "I met her as I was coming in."

"Twice," he said, rather insolently.

"I can't see that it is any of your business," I retorted angrily, "if it happened a dozen times."

His manner at once became apologetic, and he hastened to offer obsequious explanations.

"Mr. Gaston asked me to take particular notice. The other evening when you were coming to dinner he told me to tell the hall boys to look at you closely so that they could identify you as the right party when you came in today. That was how it happened. You see, sir, in a house of this sort we have to be careful. It doesn't do to let strangers prowl about without finding out who they are and what they are doing."

The hero's troubles begin.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

MAN REALLY KNOWS LITTLE

Even the Wisest of the Human Race Amazingly Ignorant, Asserts a Writer in Boston Paper.

The wisest man in the world knows only tiny fraction of what there is to be learned, and the mass of human knowledge, painfully acquired and handed on since our far-off ancestors came down out of the trees, is only a faint glimmer in the midst of the dark unknown.

Much of the unknown is unknowable; a little of it, the human mind laboriously takes possession of as centuries pass.

Most of us are amazingly ignorant. We are like the classic example of the school children, conning their books, who couldn't tell what kind of wood their desks were made of.

Actually, we are afraid of seeming to know too much outside of the trodden ways; we despise the "highbrow."

And at the same time how contemptuous we are likely to be of some one who seems to be more ignorant than ourselves.

The man who has stopped learning is living at a standstill. Make everyone you meet your teacher, if you would get the most out of life. That boy scout, that venerable farmer, that sharp young salesman—each has a bit of special knowledge for you.

Be a student, even though your schooldays are in the remote past, and not a mere book student.—Boston Herald.

The Ring-Ousel.

The migrant ring-ousel builds year after year in a granite quarry, and I have often heard him there. It is a solitary, forgotten place and he knows it better than most people. . . . His song differs from the intimate music of his kinfolk, the blackbird and thrush. It is thinner, colder, more elfin—the pure tinkle of a mountain brook. With some birds you feel that they like you to listen to them; not so the shy ring-ousel. One pays something in time and patience for his song, and values it the more.—Eden Philpotts.

Rapid Communication.

A receiver which takes down dots and dashes on sensitized tape at the rate of 200 words a minute is the latest device in wireless telegraphy. As the human ear cannot interpret a message so rapidly delivered the transmission cannot be understood except at stations using this machine.

Foregt It.

A slang expression which ought to be applied like a sticking plaster to a large proportion of our schemes to get rich.—Exchange.

Gossip About Spring Coats



ABOUT now, heavy winter coats begin to be somewhat burdensome even in those sections of the country where winter lingers. Farther south spring coats have already made their debut and the vanguard of the host makes it plain that we are to become accustomed to a few changes in the coat silhouette. They are not startling, however; the spring coat rarely undertakes to be sensational—it has a quiet part to play—and short.

The new models so far shown are considerably shorter than winter coats were; those that reach four to six inches below the knees being the longest. Some others are knee length. They have a wide sweep at the bottom, sometimes lessened by plait in the material. Machine stitching and a few buttons assume the responsibility of providing decoration and both the muffler and scarf collars suggest cozy protection for the throat when winds are raw. They are arranged to button up when needed and they may be thrown open when the day is kind.

Belts do not appear to play a conspicuous part in the models so far introduced. When they are present they are narrow and usually extend only part way around the figure, leaving the back of the garment beltless. In some cases pockets are conspicuous by their absence, in others they are a feature of the design, as in the coat pictured. This model, of taupe velour, deserves the consideration of slender women particularly, with its widened hip lines and full skirt. It is very comfy looking with ample collar and cuffs quite equal to withstanding the raw winds of blustering March. Such a coat proves useful for spring, summer, and fall, that is whenever one may encounter cool weather or wind, a bit too keen for comfort.

Stars in the Drama of Blouses



THERE is such an unending variety in blouses and smocks in all the displays of spring merchandise, that it is difficult to make a choice with the certainty that it is a wise one. It takes repeated visits to the shops and a consideration of the constantly arriving new models, to determine what styles are favored and what features persist. Fashion reporters learn from experience that they are expected to detect the successful models and styles features and it is not hard to do this.

In the two new blouses shown in the picture above, two of the outstanding and successful features of the new styles are emphasized. No woman need hesitate to follow their suggestions in making her selections for spring. One blouse of georgette, in two colors, reveals the liking for color combinations and fanciful effects. The other, of fine white voile, with filet lace and needlework as adornment, portrays a different character of blouse, but one that promises to lead all others as the favorite of gentlewomen.

The blouse of white voile is hand made and the lace used on it is an elegant example of fine work. It is at once simply and cunningly designed—with a panel at the front, groups of hand-run tucks at each side and a little fine embroidery in small flower sprays on it. It is the sort of blouse that the fine-grained woman finds adorable. The work in it is worth while because voile and filet are blessed with iron constitutions, with all their daintiness, and will outlast any other fabric used in blouses.

The under and overblouse idea and clever use of color, find themselves happily set forth in the blouse of georgette in which dark blue is posed over pale tan color, with the tiniest buttons in the lighter color playing the part of trimming. They outline all the edges of the slashed body and sleeves, also the neck and cuffs. But the designer's bright, particular achievement in this model appears in the narrow ribbon in a Roman stripe that finishes the neck and sleeves and passes in a band around the underbodice and upper sleeve. It is a gay, brilliant and fine finishing touch.

Julia Bottomley

Fruits for Spring Hats.

New lines of artificial flowers and fruits prepared for spring millinery are receiving favorable comment from buyers. Predictions are freely made in the trade that such goods will have a prosperous season commencing with the Easter lines. While imported goods are up to the usual high standard, the domestic made varieties are said to be of a considerably higher character than any heretofore shown. Some manufacturers are showing a number of ideas that feature grape clusters. Small rose effects also are prominent.

Pretty Cretonne Slippers.

For cretonne slippers which, though a novelty several years ago, are quite common now, use a braid trimming around the top or make the slippers our of white linen and apply cut flowers of cretonne on the slippers. This is a little change from the allover cretonne. These flowers are put on with a long and short stitch or a buttonhole stitch.

Pneumonia often follows a Neglected Cold
KILL THE COLD!
HILL'S CASCARA QUININE BROMIDE
Standard cold remedy for 20 years—in tablet form—safe, sure, no opiates—breaks up a cold in 24 hours—relieves grip in 3 days. Money back if it fails. The genuine box has a Red top with Mr. Hill's picture.
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The national remedy of Holland for over 200 years; it is an enemy of all pains resulting from kidney, liver and uric acid troubles. All druggists, three sizes.
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—containing more than 100 favorite collections for home, school and meeting. Words and music complete; heavy paper cover; postage prepaid. Send 10c. now, coin or stamps.
The Corley Company
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"The House That Made Richmond Musical"

Not Very Far, in Some Cases.

"Pa, who was Darwin?"

"Darwin, my son, was the man who declared that if you climb far enough up into your family tree you will come face to face with a monkey."—Boston Transcript.

"CALIFORNIA FIG SYRUP" IS CHILD'S LAXATIVE

Look at tongue! Remove poisons from stomach, liver and bowels.



Accept "California" Syrup of Figs only—look for the name California on the package, then you are sure your child is having the best and most harmless laxative or physic for the little stomach, liver and bowels. Children love its delicious fruity taste. Full directions for child's dose on each bottle. Give it without fear.
Mother! You must say "California."
—Adv.

The man who makes the biggest success is the man who knows how to get along with other people.

GREEN'S AUGUST FLOWER.

Constipation invites other troubles which come speedily unless quickly checked and overcome by Green's August Flower which is a gentle laxative, regulates digestion both in stomach and intestines, cleans and sweetens the stomach and alimentary canal, stimulates the liver to secrete the bile and impurities from the blood. It is a sovereign remedy used in many thousands of households all over the civilized world for more than half a century by those who have suffered with indigestion, nervous dyspepsia, sluggish liver, coming up of food, palpitation, constipation and other intestinal troubles. Sold by druggists and dealers everywhere. Try a bottle, take no substitute.—Adv.

If tombstone epitaphs were reliable, his satanic majesty would have to look for another job.

RECIPE FOR GRAY HAIR.

To half pint of water add 1 oz. Bay Rum, a small box of Barbo Compound, and ¼ oz. of glycerine. Apply to the hair twice a week until it becomes the desired shade. Any druggist can put this up or you can mix it at home at very little cost. It will gradually darken streaked, faded gray hair, and will make harsh hair soft and glossy. It will not color the scalp, is not sticky or greasy, and does not rub off.—Adv.

It isn't what a man is going to do that adds to his bank balance.

Good health cannot be maintained where there is a constipated habit. Garfield Tea overcomes constipation.—Adv.

Love is an expert magician, but it can't transform nickels into dollars.

MURINE FOR YOUR EYES
Night and Morning. Have Strong, Healthy Eyes. If they Tire, Itch, Smart or Burn, if Sore, Irritated, Inflamed or Granulated, use Murine often. Soothes. Refreshes. Safe for Infant or Adult. At all Druggists. Write for Free Eye Book. Murine Eye Remedy Co., Chicago

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