The House of Whispers

By WILLIAM JOHNSTON

Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

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and caught Mr. Wick furtively closing the wall safe. His action in surreptitiously closing this without saying anything to me made me suddenly suspicious of him. I recalled that Detective Gorman had put Mr. Wick into his circle of suspects along with the burglar's wife. Could it be possible that the superintendent of the building himself was in connivance with the band of criminals who had been harassing the Bradfords and me? I determined to watch his every move.

"There's no one here," I said, as we completed our round of the various rooms. "The murderer has made his escape. Hasn't that boy 'phoned for the police yet?"

Mr. Wick seemed so averse to carrying out my suggestion about the police that I think he must have sensed the suspicion in my voice.

"I think I had better ask Mr. Kent about it first," he said nervously.

"Who's Mr. Kent?" I demanded.

My thoughts were so taken up with the unexpected tragedy that the name at first meant nothing to me. Suddenly I remembered. It was to the apartment of Mr. Henry Kent that Miss Kelly had 'phoned last night when she was dining with me. I recalled, too, that Gorman had charged me to find out all I could about him.

"Who's Mr. Kent?" I repeated sharply. "What's he got to do with it?"

"He's the owner of the building," explained Mr. Wick. "He doesn't like the Granddeck to be mentioned in the papers. He says any notoriety is bad for its exclusiveness. I don't believe he'd want the police called in. In fact, sir, I'm sure he wouldn't."

"Whether he wants it or not," I said firmly, "it's got to be done. You can't keep murders out of the paper. Either you call the police right away or else I will."

My threat forced him to telephone against his will. I could quite understand his employer's aversion to having a crime in the Granddeck made public. But there was no help for it. There had been a dastardly crime committed, and the police must be informed. Yet it was not to the police that Mr. Wick was telephoning. It evidently was to Mr. Kent's apartment in the building.

"Miss Lutan's been shot by a burglar in her apartment," I heard him say. "Mr. Nelson and me just discovered her body. Wh 's that, sir?"

Just what M Kent's reply on hearing the shocki news had been I had, of course, no means of knowing, but whatever it was over the superintendent's face cam an expression of incredulity and a nazement.

"What do yo think," said Mr. Wick, turning to me; "he says for me to call up Headquarte s at once."

"Of course," I said, "it is the only thing to do."

Nevertheless as Mr. Wick waited for the number, he kept shaking his head and muttering under his breath something that sounded like:

"To think of his telling me to call in the police!"

With the doctor summoned and the police sent for, there seemed to be little else for us to do but wait, so Wick and I sat down together in the rear sitting room with the elevator boy still on guard at the door.

"Who was Miss Lutan?" I asked.

"Why, Daisy Lutan, the actress," said Mr. Wick in surprise. "I supposed every one knew her."

"I've heard about her," I hastened to say, "but I had no idea that she lived in the Granddeck. Did she live here alone?"

"She keeps a maid, an old woman that has been with her for years."

"Where's the maid tonight?"

"Out to the movies, I s'pose. That's where she goes every night when Miss Lutan isn't playing. When she is, she goes to the theater with her."

"Then Miss Lutan is not playing now?"

"Not for the last month."

"Had there been any one here with her tonight?

"I'll ask the elevator boy."

"John says she came in alone about fifteen minutes ago," said Mr. Wick when he came back. "She went out about seven. Her own chauffeur was driving her then, but when she came back she was in a hired taxi. That's something I can't understand."

"How do you suppose the murderer escaped?"

I was trying every avenue of questioning to see if I could not surprise Wick into some damaging admission. I was beginning to suspect that he knew far more about Miss Lutan's murderer than he was telling. I felt somehow that his whole search for the man who had killed Miss Lutan had been entirely perfunctory, a bluff to deceive me. In my growing dislike for the man, I felt that it would not be beyond the range of probability for Wick to have been standing guard at the door while a confederate rifled the apartment.

"I'm no detective," he answered noncommittally. "All I know is that he has gone. He certainly ain't here in the apartment."

It was on the tip of my tongue to suggest that we look in the secret passageway. I felt that the shock it would be to Wick to learn that I knew about this might lead him to open his lips. I felt certain that it was by way of a similar passageway to the one I had discovered in my room that the murderer had escaped. But before I could make up my mind to speak the doctor arrived.

He made a hasty inspection and then said tersely:

"There's nothing here for me to do. This woman has been dead for some time."

"How long?" I asked.

"It is impossible for me to judge—maybe twenty minutes, perhaps an hour. I should say that death was practically instantaneous. She was killed by a bullet penetrating the heart. Who shot her?"

He looked sharply from me to Mr. Wick, as if suspecting that it might have been one of us.

"A burglar got her just a few minutes ago," Mr. Wick explained. "Mr. Nelson and me heard a scream and a shot. We let ourselves in here with my pass key and found her here. It must have been a burglar that she surprised when she entered the apartment."

"It looks like it," assented the physician. "There are marks on her throat where he tried to strangle her screams. Have you notified the police?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wick.

"There's nothing more that I can do, then," said the doctor, making his preparations to depart.

"Would you not wait until the police come?" suggested the superintend-



"Women of Her Type Always Have a Lot of Men Friends."

ent. "They'll be here any minute and probably they'll want a statement from you."

"Very well," said the doctor, "I'll wait."

As we waited the three of us chatted about the crime and about the dead actress. From the conversation I learned that at the height of her meteoric career on Broadway Daisy Lutan had become the wife of the young son of a very rich family. His parents insisted that she had trapped him into matrimony and after long legal wrangling she had been divorced about a year ago. She had received a large sum in settlement, and this with her earnings as an actress enabled her to live in luxury.

"Hadn't she a sweetheart now?" I asked.

"Better make it plural," sneered the doctor. "Women of her type always have a lot of men friends."

"No men ever came to see her here. I'm positive of that," said Mr. Wick.

"Of course not," said the doctor sarcastically. "The reputation of the Granddeck apartments must be protected at all costs."

As we talked two detectives in plain clothes arrived. They viewed the body and proceeded to question the doctor.

"How was this woman killed?"

"By a revolver shot right through the heart."

"Who is she?"

"Daisy Lutan, the actress."

"Who did it?"

"It must have been a burglar," interjected Mr. Wick. "My theory is that she came in unexpectedly and found him at work."

"Who found her?"

"These gentlemen," said the doctor, including both Mr. Wick and me with a wave of his hand.

The detectives turned to Mr. Wick first.

"Tell us about it," one of them directed.

"My name is James Wick," he began as if he was reciting a familiar lesson. "I am the superintendent of the Granddeck apartments. I was in the elevator about half an hour ago when I heard a woman screaming and then the sound of the shot. I took out my revolver and got off at this floor to investigate. At the door I found Mr. Nelson. He, too, had heard the screams and the shot and thought they came from this apartment. I took out my pass key and we went in."

"Were there any signs of the burglar?" asked the other man.

"No, we looked all through the apartment and found no one."

"Was anything missing?"

I waited with bated breath to hear if Wick would tell of having found the wall safe open. If he did not I felt it would be conclusive evidence that there was something he was trying to conceal.

"I didn't notice anything missing," he said glibly. "I wouldn't know, anyhow. I don't know what stuff she had here."

"Who would know?"

"Her maid might. She's out now. Generally she's home by eleven o'clock."

"Did she keep only the one servant?"

"Only the maid and a chauffeur."

"Then she was all alone in the apartment?"

"Yes. She'd gone out all dressed up about seven in her own car. She came home unexpectedly in a hired taxi not more than half an hour ago."

"Did she come home alone?"

"Sure she was alone. At least the hall boys told me so. I did not see her come in, myself."

More and more I was convinced that Wick was lying. I was sure he knew far more about affairs than he was admitting. Why did he keep harping on the fact that Miss Lutan had come in "unexpectedly?" What means had he of knowing what time she was expected home? Furthermore he said he was in the elevator when he heard the screams and the shot. I did not believe it would have been possible for the sounds to have carried that far. The walls were all deadened, and the room where the tragedy had taken place was at the back of the house many feet distant from the elevators. I wondered if the burglar had not been in the place with Mr. Wick's connivance, while he stood guard outside. As he heard me coming he might have taken refuge in the elevator. And why did he have his revolver so conveniently ready?

The detective who had been questioning Wick turned to me.

"Who are you?"

"Spalding Nelson."

"What do you do? Where do you work?"

"I'm a clerk."

"A clerk living at the Granddeck apartments," he sneered. "You must have a good job."

"I haven't any at present," I replied. "I'm living here in Mr. Gaston's apartment, taking care of it while he and his wife are away."

I could see that my statement that I was only a clerk and was not at present employed had not made a favorable impression on the detective.

"Will you explain what you were doing at the door of this apartment when the superintendent arrived?" he demanded with a growing suspicion in his tones.

"That's easy to explain," I retorted. "I was in my apartment directly over this one. I heard her scream and then the shot. It seemed to come from the floor right below me, so I ran down to investigate."

"Is that right?" he asked, turning to Mr. Wick.

"I guess so," said Wick. "That's where his room is. He's only been here in the Granddeck a few days. I don't know much about him."

"And that's all you know about it?" said the detective, turning to me again.

I hesitated. Should I or should I not tell them of the wall safe that I had seen Mr. Wick closing? There was no way I could prove it. Undoubtedly Wick would deny having done so. It would be his word against mine. As superintendent his word would undoubtedly carry. I decided it would be best to withhold my information to a more propitious time.

"That's all I know, except what Mr. Wick has told you," I said.

"Very well," said the detective in charge. "You can go now, and you, too, Doctor."

Mr. Wick was escorting the doctor to the door. The detectives had withdrawn to the room where the body lay and were holding a whispered conference. I stepped quickly to the wall safe, and making sure that I was unobserved, tested the knob. It was securely fastened. I congratulated myself on having said nothing about it. Wick, I felt certain, would deny having shut it, and there was no proof that it had been opened when we had entered.

As I returned to my own apartment upstairs, nearing the top of the short flight of steps between the floors I was astounded to see a female figure flitting across the hall and entering the Bradford apartment. Though I had opportunity for only a brief glimpse, I recognized her at once. It was Claire Bradford.

The door of my apartment was standing wide open. I remembered that as I had run downstairs a few moments ago, I had neglected to close it after me. From the direction in which she had come, it was plain that Claire Bradford had been paying another surreptitious visit to my quarters. What could have been her purpose? There must have been some strong impelling motive to make her dare the perilous journey along the window ledge, and now, at the imminent risk of discovery, to pay me a second visit. I began seriously to doubt whether the explanation she had offered me was the true one. I was beginning to feel that there was more than a possibility that she was again in the clutches of the unscrupulous rascal who had once been her husband.

Greatly puzzled, I made a hasty survey of the apartment, but could find nothing that appeared to have been disturbed. Going back to my own room I hastened to place a handkerchief out of my window as a signal to Barbara, for I knew she would be anxious to know the meaning of the sounds we had heard below. In a very few moments I heard the tap of her ridingcrop on my sill and hurried to answer.

"What was it?" she asked in an excited whisper.

"Daisy Lutan, an actress, who lived on the floor below, has been murdered—shot."

"Who did it?"

"I don't know. Mr. Wick and I went into the apartment together. There was no one there."

"How terrible!" she exclaimed.

"It is, indeed," I answered, "but it may help us."

"What do you mean?"

"With the police in the house making investigations, there'll be no more threats from the blackmailers for a while. They won't dare bother you for the present."

"Do you really think so?" she questioned with a little sigh of relief.

"I'm sure of it."

"Have the police been called in?"

"Yes; two detectives are downstairs now."

"I'm glad," she said. "With the detectives here, they won't dare molest us, will they?"

"Of course not," I answered. "Is your sister at home?"

"Yes," she answered. "Our guests have just gone. Mother has retired, and Claire is in the living room writing a note. They heard nothing, so I did not tell them anything about it."

"That was wise. They'll hear it soon enough. Has your sister been in the apartment all evening?"

"She hasn't been out all day unless she went out just to drop the letter she was writing down the mail chute in the hall. Why do you ask?"

"I was merely wondering if there was any way she could learn of the murder."

"How could she? Isn't that too terrible about Miss Lutan? But I mustn't talk any longer. Good night."

"Wait a moment," I cried. "There are some things I must discuss with you before I meet Gorman. How about meeting me at the Astor at eleven?"

"I can't promise, but I'll try. Good night!"

There was nothing further that I could do, and I felt sadly in need of rest. Throwing off my coat and waistcoat I began making preparations for bed. The notion took me to once more investigate the secret passageway. I pushed sharply on the panel as I had done before, but this time I could not budge it. I tugged and worked and pounded, but it stuck fast in spite of all my efforts. As I was struggling to force it open, there came a sharp ring at the bell of the apartment. As I was, in my shirt sleeves, I answered it. The two detectives I had seen downstairs stood there.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I arrest you for the murder of Daisy Lutan," said one of them, and with that they sprang forward and pinioned my arms.

"Why, this is absurd," I laughed in their faces, conscious of my utter innocence of the crime. "I had nothing to do with it."

"That remains to be seen. Put on your coat and come along."

Still holding me fast, they went back with me to my bedroom. Clutching me tight they made me put on my coat, and no sooner had I done so than one of them snapped handcuffs on me.

"Look at this, Jim," said one of them, pointing to a spot on the front of my coat.

"That's blood all right," said the other, after inspecting it.

"I got that when I was helping Mr Wick lift the body to the couch," I protested.

"Tell that to the judge," the detective called Jim scoffed. "Better look around for the gun, Cullen."

"You'll find no gun here," I cried. "I never owned one."

Nevertheless Cullen began rummaging through the drawers of my dresser. Suddenly he gave a triumphant exclamation and drew something from beneath a pile of shirts in the second drawer.

"Here it is," he announced, holding



"Here It Is," He Announced, Holding Up Before My Astonished Eyes an Automatic Revolver.

up before my astonished eyes an automatic revolver.

"I never saw it before," I gasped.

The detective merely laughed.

"There's one bullet gone," said the man who was examining it.

"Come along, young fellow," said the other detective gruffly. "The bullet settles it. We've got the right party."

CHAPTER IX

A prisoner in a police station cell, I passed a sleepless night. Conscious as I was of my utter innocence and confident of my speedy release, nevertheless I had to admit that the detectives from their point of view were perfectly justified in placing me under arrest.

For a burglar to have gained access to the apartments without the connivance of the employees seemed almost an impossibility. For him to have escaped from the building after having murdered Miss Lutan without being detected seemed also highly improbable. Then, too, there was the damning evidence of the blood on my coat and the fact that I had been found at the door of the apartment. I had not observed the stain on my clothing until the detectives discovered it. My explanation of how it had gotten there was the true one, yet I could readily realize that it might sound fishy to others.

On the face of it the tragedy in the Granddeck looked like an inside job. The revolver, with one bullet missing, was the strongest sort of evidence that I was the murderer. Yet I never had seen the weapon before and could not imagine who could have placed it there. There was only one explanation possible. It had been purposely planted there with the definite object of throwing suspicion on me.

The one person—the only person—whom I knew to have been in my rooms after the murder was committed was Claire Bradford. Could she have done it? I remembered that Barbara had showed me a revolver in her possession. I wondered if this could be the same weapon. I did not think it possible that Claire herself could have used it. I could imagine no motive why Claire Bradford would want to kill Miss Lutan, yet it must have been she who had hidden the revolver in my dresser. What had been her motive? How had she got possession of the revolver after the murder?

Come what may, I had no intention of telling any one—not even Gorman—of Claire's second visit to my apartment. For Barbara's sake I made up my mind I would keep my lips closed about that incident, even if I had to stay in prison indefinitely. At the police station when the detectives had brought me in, I had quietly but firmly refused to answer any questions, although they had badgered me for near-

FORTY IDEAL AGE FOR WOMEN

English Artist Sweeps Away Time-Honored Ideas Having to Do With Spinsterhood.

There is a flurry among English spinsters. A prominent artist has come to the conclusion that a girl of forty should be man's ideal. He sweeps away all the time-honored rubbish about spinsters at the age of forty being mostly interested in cats and canaries. Here is what he has to say about the new old girl.

"The ideal age for a woman from the viewpoint of the man who studies the sex as an artist is forty years. The woman of forty is at the perfection of her beauty and has attained a settled mentality which she did not possess as a girl in her teens, or as a young woman in her twenties and thirties. At forty she is an ideal companion, pleasantly matured, tolerant and understanding. Only the ignoramuses in life find joy in the society of young girls or undeveloped women."

During the war and since many women of the so-called "sweet-and-forty" age got married, a considerable number of them widows. This has led to frequent lamentations by younger women that, with the huge number of unmarried beauties about, it is unpatriotic for Cupid to show such favoritism for widows and spinsters.

CLASSED HIM AS BEGINNER

Retired Sea Captain Evidently Knew Little of "Impressionistic" School of Painting.

"I once engaged board and lodging at the house of a retired New England sea captain," says a New York artist, "and from him I received some sincere advice.

"One day, while I was busy painting, I became aware that the captain was standing behind me, gazing at the canvas over my shoulder.

"'How do you like it?' I asked.

"Now, it chanced that the captain's house has been without an artist boarder for several years and that I was the first follower of the impressionist school it had ever harbored.

"The old sea dog gazed thoughtfully at the lower righthand corner of the canvas where I had thrown a mass of parti-colored splashes and splotches.

"'You're kinder young,' said the captain, kindly. 'This is your first summer outdoors at it?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well, now, see here,' resumed the captain. 'There's two or three old palettes up in our shed chamber. You get one of those and try out your paints. You'll have to lose that whole corner of your canvas, I'll bet you, and it'll make your picture considerably smaller. I wouldn't do that again if I was you.'"—Harper's Magazine.

Nickels in London.

A letter in the Times of London points out the advantages England should gain by substituting nickel coins for bronze. To one who has merely visited Switzerland, this proposition requires little argument. In weight, bulk and convenience nickel is unquestionably preferable. With what ease can Swiss 20-centime pieces to the value of, say, 2 shillings, be carried, as compared with 2 shillings' worth of "copper!" And how this reform would lighten the bus conductor's burden! The combined weight of the 20-centime, 10-centime and 5-centime Swiss nickels is, writes the Times correspondent, only 137 grains, against the 515 grains, which 3½ pence weigh. Apropos of this subject, the London chamber of commerce has decided to recommend that the government prepare for issue, when required to supplement the silver currency, nickel coins of the value, say, of sixpence, a shilling and half a crown.—Christian Science Monitor.

Imports of Precious Stones.

The value of the precious stones imported into the United States in the fiscal year that ended recently was greater than it had been in any previous year. Pearls are growing more popular, but because the war interfered with the fisheries they have become so scarce that dealers cannot supply the demand. The South African diamond producers are taking advantage of the favorable market to unload the diamonds that they have been accumulating during the war. According to the National City bank of New York half the diamonds in the world are already owned in the United States.—Youth's Companion.

Japan Taking Western Sports.

Japan is offering somewhat of a market for American sporting goods at the present. Since the end of the war there has been an increased interest in sports, and it may be said of Japan that western games played there are essentially scholastic in nature, baseball being the most popular, with tennis second. The latter named sport has now found favor outside of student circles, and tennis courts are scattered here and there throughout the larger cities.

Demand for House-Cat Fur.

In a report on the London fur market prepared by Alfred Nutting, clerk in the American consulate general in London, a comparison of the total number of skins sold by C. M. Lampson & Co. at public auction in 1918 and 1919 shows that the number of house-cat skins sold during the current year was 35,934, or almost double the quantity sold in 1918. The price of house-cat fur had advanced 50 per cent since spring.

Use for Helgoland.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in England and the Permanent Wild Life Protective Fund of the United States join in suggesting that Helgoland be made a reservation for the birds that migrate along the coast of Europe. The island is less than one-fifth of a mile square, but it is directly in the path of migratory birds, and when Germany has removed the fortifications and other military establishments the birds will

AIR SERVICE GOES TO AID OF SALVATION LASSIES



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Salvation Army lassies all over the United States are busy just now getting ready for the nation-wide Home Service appeal for $10,000,000 the Army is to make from May 10 to 20. Here are some of the popular blue-bonneted girls loading an airplane with printed matter so urgently needed that the usual method of shipment would have been too slow.

The supplies which were in New York City had to be in Albany the same afternoon. The United States Air Service stepped into the breach and got them there from the flying field on Long Island in a little over two hours. The obliging aviator is Sergeant J. Cole. The three lassies are all "war veterans."

SALVATION LASSIES WIN CHILDREN TO A NEW GOSPEL



Crippled limbs bear mute witness to infantile paralysis ravages among New Jersey children to whom the Salvation Army is giving the "milk treatment."

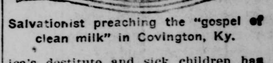
A new gospel is being preached by Salvation Lassies in at least two cities in the United States.

It is a "gospel of clean milk"—and lots of it. School children in Union Hill, N. J., which is just across the Hudson River from New York, and Covington, Ky., are already benefiting from the modern gospel.

Union Hill Salvationists were the first to start the milk crusade, and there 60 quarts of the healthful fluid are dispensed free each day. In this town the ravages of infantile paralysis about two years ago were especially severe, as is shown by the number of crippled poor children who benefit from the Army's treatment.

In Covington the crusade is educational as well as charitable in nature, and the lassies preach the clean milk gospel with all their usual fervor.

Charitable and relief work for Amer-



Salvationist preaching the "gospel of clean milk" in Covington, Ky.

ica's destitute and sick children has long constituted a big part of the Salvation Army's activities. Through milk stations, fresh air farms, seashore homes, nurseries, orphanages, hospitals and with food, clothing, medicines and the like the Salvationists aided almost half a million children in the United States last year. This child-saving work is one of the organization's many non-self-supporting activities which is financed by the once-a-year Home Service Appeal. This year's appeal is scheduled for May 10 to 20.

RESEMBLED AN UNUSED HOME

Archeologist Describes Sensation of Entering Egyptian Tomb More Than 3,000 Years Old.

In February, 1905, an American explorer in Egypt, T. M. Davis, discovered the tomb of Yuaa and Thuaa, father and mother of that Queen Ty, whose influence played so great a part in Akhenaten's religious reformation.

The tomb was intact and the objects it contained were as perfectly preserved as if they had been shut up only a few weeks. One of the archeologists described his sensations on entering the place as being very much like those of a man who enters a town house which has been shut up for the summer. Armchairs stood about beautifully carved and decorated with gold, the cushions on one of them stuffed with down and covered with linen so perfectly preserved that they might have been sat upon or tossed about without injury. Two beds of fine design, decorated with gold, occupied another part of the chamber, while a light chariot in perfect preservation stood in a corner. Most startling of all was the discovery of a jar of honey, still liquid and still preserving its characteristic scent after 3,300

MICKIE SAYS



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