The House of Whispers

By WILLIAM JOHNSTON

Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

Copyright by Little, Brown & Co.

gave any evidence of possessing.

A peculiar apathy came over me as I finished reading the account. Never before had I so fully understood how thoroughly an innocent man could be damned by circumstantial evidence. I knew—Barbara knew—that I was absolutely innocent. I doubted much if we could get anyone else to believe it.

The cunning web had been woven with such malicious thoroughness that escape seemed impossible. What was the use of my fighting further?

CHAPTER XIII.

Coming as it did as a dire climax to all my other troubles, the shock of old Rufus Gaston's murder sent me into an apathetic state from which it seemed impossible for me to arouse myself. Without hope and even without interest I dully awaited the approach of my trial for murder.

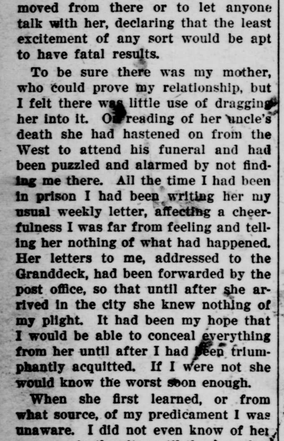
While there never had been an opportunity for any bond of affection to become established between my aged relative and myself—in fact, I had seen him only three or four times in my whole life, and then only for brief periods—still his unexpected and dreadful end had bereft me of practically every hope of being acquitted of the absurd charge against me. Wick, it was plain, intended to disclaim all knowledge of my relationship to Mr. Gaston, and now there was no one else to explain how I happened to be living in the building at the time of Miss Lutan's murder. Unfortunately I had destroyed both Mr. Gaston's letter to me and the note from my mother which had first told me of the old man's intention. My great-aunt, I learned from the newspapers, had been completely prostrated by the tragedy and had been unable to come to the funeral. The shock of the news of her husband's violent end had left her in a very critical condition. It seemed to have wholly deranged her aged brain, and the physicians summoned to the Maine camp where she was refused to permit her to be removed from there or to let anyone talk with her, declaring that the least excitement of any sort would be apt to have fatal results.

To be sure there was my mother, who could prove my relationship, but I felt there was little use of dragging her into it. On reading of her uncle's death she had hastened on from the West to attend his funeral and had been puzzled and alarmed by not finding me there. All the time I had been in prison I had been writing her my usual weekly letter, affecting a cheerfulness I was far from feeling and telling her nothing of what had happened. Her letters to me, addressed to the Granddeck, had been forwarded by the post office, so that until after she arrived in the city she knew nothing of my plight. It had been my hope that I would be able to conceal everything from her until after I had been triumphantly acquitted. If I were not she would know the worst soon enough.

When she first learned, or from what source, of my predicament I was unaware. I did not even know of her presence in the city until the day after my great-uncle's funeral, when—just twenty-four hours before my trial was to begin—a keeper brought me word that she was waiting downstairs to see me.

I steeled myself for the interview with her. Naturally I expected that she would be terribly horror stricken and shocked at my plight, but what her attitude toward me would be I could not conjecture. I fully expected nothing but reproaches from her. She had been so opposed to my coming to New York that I felt certain that she would insist that my conduct must be responsible for my being where I now was. For years, it seemed to me, the relations between my mother and myself had been nothing but continuous misunderstandings. To my great amazement and bewilderment not an unkind word nor the suggestion of a reproachful thought came from her lips.

"Oh, my boy, my boy," she had cried as she saw me, "I know you didn't do it. I know my boy is innocent! What can I do to help you?"



"Oh, My Boy, My Boy!" She Had Cried as She Saw Me, "I Know You Didn't Do It."

In that glorious, wonderful moment of reaction all resentment I had felt toward her forever vanished. I had one sacred, unforgettable glimpse of the eternal greatness of the Mother-heart, ever ready to forgive, ever quick to comprehend, ever prompt to aid. For one sweet hour we talked together, more understandingly than ever before in our lives. Freely and fully I told her everything, even to my wonderful but hopeless love for Barbara Bradford. She was willing, anxious, eager to aid me—but what was there that she could do?—what was there that anyone could do?

It was hopeless for a lone woman of limited means, unacquainted with the big city and unused to its ways, to attempt to battle against such powerful and desperate criminals as were concerned in the far-reaching plot to make me the scapegoat of their heinous misdeeds. I could only advise her that she see McGregor and Gorman and be guided by what they suggested.

When the morning of my trial actually arrived I entered the courtroom in a state of dull apathy. The night before I had not slept at all. I had spent all the black hours reviewing my life, especially the last year, thinking with what high hopes and great expectations I had come to the metropolis and how miserably everything had turned out for me. Step by step I had reviewed the events that had brought me, discredited, all but friendless, all but penniless, into this dismal courtroom accused of a horrible, cowardly deed, seeking to see wherein I might have altered my recent actions or changed the course of my life to avoid having arrived at this shameful goal. Yet, strange to say, I found myself after mature reflection convinced that had I this last year to live over again not in one iota would I have done differently—no, not even if I could have foretold what the future had in store for me.

No sense of shame nor of guilt possessed me. I was aware of having done wrong to no one. A clear conscience kept assuring me that it was misfortune and not error on my part that had brought me here. At every point in the strange chain of circumstances I felt that I had acted as a man of honor should have acted. My sense of innocence upheld me even though the deliberate insidious plotting of evil men might make it appear to the judge, to the jurors, to the whole world that I was a murderer. Even though I should be sentenced to death for killing a woman I never had seen the knowledge that at every point I had done what I still believed to have been right, brought me strong comfort and filled me with new courage.

Yet it was with lack of interest that I listened to the monotonous questioning that formed a part of the selection of a jury.

"So far as I am concerned," I had said to my counsel in our last chat, "any sort of a jury will do. Unless we succeed in upsetting the evidence against me with a crash that all the world can hear it makes no difference."

"I guess you are right," he answered, despondently, it seemed to me, "and if the worst happens, we always can take an appeal."

His reply convinced me that he, too, was anticipating the result, which I long ago had decided to be the only outcome, unless something unforeseen happened—a verdict against me of murder in the first degree.

I heard, almost with amusement, the district attorney, with eloquent oratory, tell the jury the crimes he expected to prove against me, even smiling a little at the picture he painted of a gangster seeking employment in an apartment occupied by families of wealth that he might find opportunities for plundering them, and when he was surprised in the midst of his burglarizing, brutally choking the unprotected woman whose home he was despoiling and then as she lay there, helpless and insensible, shooting her through the heart.

In fact, I quite agreed with all he said, even to his most strenuous adjectives—except for the one fact—that I knew I was not the man he was talking about. It had been a brutal, cowardly murder, and I was fully as anxious as the district attorney could possibly be to see the miscreant who had killed Miss Lutan brought to book.

The testimony that was to come, I devoutly hoped, would give some clue that would lead to the unmasking of the real murderer. The first witness called was one of the detectives who had arrested me. He told concisely, as though repeating a well rehearsed story, of having been summoned to the Granddeck and finding there the body of Daisy Lutan. He said that she had been shot through the heart.

"Was there anyone in the apartment when you arrived?"

"Yes, a doctor."

"Anyone else?"

"Yes, Mr. Wick, the superintendent of the apartment, and the prisoner."

"What did they say? How did they explain their presence there?"

"They said they had heard a shot and had come in to investigate."

He told of examining the body, questioning the physician and of making a search of the apartment for the murderer, but finding no one else there.

"What did you do then?"

"My partner and I followed the prisoner to his apartment and placed him under arrest. We searched his room and in the dresser I found a revolver with one chamber recently discharged."

"What made you suspect Nelson? Why did you arrest him?"

"My partner and I talked it over, and we both were of the opinion that it was an inside job. A burglar would have no chance to get into a building like the Granddeck and make his get-away. It was between the superintendent of the building, who was a man of responsibility, and this young fellow—who was only a caretaker."

"Had anything in Nelson's actions made you suspicious of him?"

"I noticed that he was greatly excited."

"Anything else?"

"After Nelson had gone upstairs to his own apartment, I questioned Mr. Wick. He said he had been in the elevator when he heard the shot. He had gotten out at the fifth floor, where it seemed to have come from. At the door of Miss Lutan's apartment he had found the prisoner."

"That's all," said the district attorney triumphantly.

My attorney waived cross-examination. The second detective was put on the stand and corroborated his partner's evidence in every respect. Both of them told of finding blood on my coat. The physician whom Wick had summoned gave a somewhat technical description of the bullet wound and the prosecution put in evidence the bullet extracted from the body and the revolver the detectives had found, pointing out that they were of the same caliber.

"Call Mr. Wick," said the district attorney.

I leaned forward to listen to every word of Wick's testimony. In fact from the moment he was brought in I never took my eyes from him. It would be black enough for me if he merely stated the facts as they actually had happened, but I doubted if he would be content with that. If, as I felt certain, Wick was in the employ of the conspirators, it was more than likely that they would seek to clinch the case against me with his testimony.



I Leaned Forward to Listen to Every Word of Wick's Testimony.

He gave his name, James Wick, and his occupation as superintendent of the Granddeck.

"How long have you been employed there?"

"Ever since the building was opened."

"Where were you employed previously?"

Wick hesitated. I wondered if Gorman's surmise that he had been in prison were true, what he would say.

"Before that," he stammered, "I was in the employ of Mr. Kent in the West."

"Who is Mr. Kent?"

"He owns the Granddeck. He had known me for years. He brought me on when he built this building."

While his answer seemed to satisfy the district attorney, I was convinced from Wick's nervousness that he was concealing something, that further questioning into his past might lead to unexpected developments.

"Are you acquainted with the defendant?"

"Very slightly."

"How long have you known him?"

I was listening intently. Would he admit knowing that I was a relative of old Rufus Gaston?

"I don't really know him," Wick explained. "I've seen him two or three times. Mr. Gaston, one of my tenants, told me that he was going away and that he had given the key of his apartment to a young man named Nelson whom he had employed as caretaker. He said that the caretaker would arrive at ten o'clock on the Sunday morning that the Gastons went away."

"And did the defendant arrive at that time—at the time he was expected?"

"He did not. What first attracted my attention to him was that he sneaked into the building earlier than he was expected."

"You say he sneaked in," the district attorney's voice expressed a proper horror of such conduct. "Please explain to the jury what you mean by that."

"Instead of announcing his arrival, he watched his chance and waited till one of the tenants was coming in. He slipped in beside her and went up in the elevator without being announced. Naturally the elevator man thought he was a friend of the young lady tenant."

"How do you know he was not a friend of the young woman with whom he entered the building?"

"I asked him if he was acquainted with her, and he said he was. Later that same day she passed him in the hall of the building. I noticed that she did not speak to him or recognize him in any way."

The prosecutor waved his hand to the jury as if to say, "You see, gentlemen," and followed on with another question.

"Was the defendant's conduct in the building in any other way such as to arouse your suspicion?"

"He'd hardly got located before he began buzzing the telephone girl, asking her all kinds of questions about the other tenants in the building. He kept trying to get her to go out to dinner with him."

"Did she go?"

"Yes, she did. She reported his actions to me, and I suggested that she go with him and try to find out what his name was."

"What else do you know about the defendant?"

"That's all—except—"

"Except what?"

"What I saw on the night Miss Lutan was murdered."

ONLY A CENT AND A HALF A YEAR!

THE VALUE of the property used in furnishing telephone service in Maryland, outside of Baltimore City, is

$7,745,000.

AT THE PRESENT TIME our operations, outside of Baltimore City, show

A Loss of $127,400 per Annum.

THE RATES the Company is asking would increase its net revenues by $226,700 per annum, outside of Baltimore, and would turn the loss into

A Net Earning of $99,336 per Annum.

THIS IS ONLY 1.28 per cent. on the value of the property.

IN OTHER WORDS, we are asking that *our* dollars invested in the counties of Maryland be allowed to earn less than a cent and one-half a year. *Your* dollars deposited in a savings bank would earn four cents in the same period.

THE CHESAPEAKE AND POTOMAC TELEPHONE COMPANY

2-A

FARM STOCK

BEGIN FIGHT ON "T. B." NOW

Every Live Stock Owner Should Boost Campaign Inaugurated to Eradicate Tuberculosis.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

Live stock owners are earnestly requested not to wait until the states and federal government come into their localities to eradicate tuberculosis. It would not be possible indeed, at this stage to undertake to eradicate tuberculosis from the live stock of the United States solely through organized official forces established by the respective states and the federal government. The area over which tuberculosis has spread is too vast, the herds too numerous, and funds are insufficient for conducting the work on so extensive a plan even though trained veterinarians were available in sufficient numbers to do the work. Every live-stock owner should be a party to this campaign which has been inaugurated to eradicate tuberculosis. In almost every locality of the United States are veterinarians capable of rendering valuable services to live-stock owners in this great work, and the cost of eradicating is greatly reduced by combating the disease in its early stages. Yet even in badly affected herds eradication can be undertaken with success. There are records of many herds, in which three-fourths of the animals were affected with tuberculosis, which eventually were freed from it and afterwards maintained in a healthy condition.



Bull in Advanced Stage of Tuberculosis.

FISH BY-PRODUCTS FOR HOGS

Bureau of Animal Industry Is Making Tests of Material as Protein Feed for Swine.

Co-operating with the bureau of fisheries, the bureau of animal industry of the United States department of agriculture is making tests of fishery by-products as hog feed. For several years these bureaus have been studying the use of fish meal as a protein feed for swine and the product has been found equal to high-grade tankage, of which the supply is inadequate. During the last fiscal year a new product known as shrimp bran was studied. The result of tests with it as compared with fish meal were favorable, the remainder of the ration being shelled corn and middlings.

PUREBRED HOGS PROFITABLE

At Least Twice as Much Should Be Realized From Breeding Stock as Those for Market.

Purebred hogs of any of the well known breeds are more profitable than grades. As at least twice as much should be realized from the sale of breeding stock as from market hogs. The purebreds also are generally better feeders than the grades. That is they will make better gains for the feed consumed.

RIGHT AGE TO BREED GILTS

Some Breeders Wait Until Animal Is Fourteen Months Old—Aim for Two Litters Yearly.

Some breeders prefer not to breed a gilt until she is about fourteen months old, so that her first litter is produced when she is approximately eighteen months of age, and she is then bred to farrow every six months thereafter.

THREE STOCK FUNDAMENTALS

Feeding, Breeding and Care Are Big Factors in Production of Animals of Quality.

The three fundamentals in live-stock production are feeding, breeding and care, with a strong emphasis on feeding, because good feeding builds the frame work, produces good show animals and makes good records.

Girls Invade the Navy.

And now the women want to join the navy, too, observes the Tulsa World.

Officers of the local recruiting station received the shock of their lives lately when two fair ladies of this city applied at the station for enlistment in the navy. They declared that they wanted to see the world and that they considered the navy as the best place for their pursuit as Uncle Sam paid all the traveling expenses.

When Chief Roth told them that no yeomanettes were being enlisted now as there is no war on, they left the office, saying that they would be back just as soon as another war broke out.

Caged Grizzlies.

Experience in many zoos has shown that subjecting caged grizzlies to close contact with people is usually cruelty to the animals. Often they become cross, and a number of crowd-worried grizzlies have died prematurely from resultant apoplexy. Modern zoo bear pens are constructed so that the bear is beyond the wiles of visitors—so that he can have much privacy—one of the needs of any grizzly. Perhaps we too often think of the bulky grizzly as being coarse and rude. But he is an animal of the highest type, sensitive, independent and retiring. The normal bear is good tempered and cheerful.

PHONE CO. ASKS FOR LOCAL RATE RAISE

Hearing on Telephone Charges Scheduled for June 14, in Baltimore

Baltimore, Maryland.—With the filing of proposed rates for business and residence service throughout the State of Maryland, the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company has announced to the public the slight increase which will be necessary to run the service under existing costs.

Shortly after filing the petition for an increase telephone officials were notified by the Public Service Commission that a hearing would be started Monday, June 14, to which interested parties are invited. The hearing is simply a continuation of the case which was started before the Public Service Commission several months ago and was discontinued shortly before the death of former Chairman Reifsnider.

A. E. Berry, President of the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, in presenting the petition for increase at the Public Service Commission last Monday made the statement:

"The rates for telephone service throughout Maryland can be justified on several grounds. The return on the invested capital is exceedingly low, less than six per cent. being realized throughout the State of Maryland if these rates are allowed. What other business is conducted at so low a profit? On the telephone investment in the rural districts of Maryland we are losing money and the rates which we are asking from the people of Maryland in the counties are simply enough to guarantee a rate of less than one and one-half cents on each dollar invested."

The Noisy Guest.

William Jennings Bryan said at his brother's house in Lincoln:

"It is splendid to see the good order that now prevails at political banquets. There was considerable drunkenness at these banquets in the past.

"At a political banquet one evening the chairman said to a rather noisy guest:

"'Excuse me, sir, but may I ask your name?'

"'Morgan's me—hic—name,' the guest answered.

"'I mean your full name,' said the chairman.

"The guest hiccoughed again.

"'It's just the same,' he said, 'full or sober.'"

The Way It Works Out.

The Agent—Have you seen the new ordinance passed by the city council? It forbids rent profiteering under penalty of a hundred-dollar fine.

The Owner—Yep, I saw it. Raise the rent a hundred dollars on each apartment, to pay the fines.

THAT SOUND IN THE NIGHT

Nothing So Very Terrible, but at Least Henry Found Out Just What Caused It.

It certainly was a strange sound—even though at midnight all sounds are strange. Mrs. Meekton nudged her husband hard.

"Henry," she whispered, loudly, "wake up at once, and go downstairs! It sounds like burglars!"

"Yes, my dear," replied Henry, nervously. "But I don't—"

"If you don't go at once," stated his better half, "I will go myself!"

"I shall certainly go, Maria," Henry said with dignity; then he added, "if I hear it again."

"No, go now," ordered Maria, "or I shall shriek for the police, and tell them that you made no attempt to capture the thieves!"

"Very well," replied Henry, through trembling lips; "but let me kiss you and the baby before I go, and when he grows up tell him that his brave daddy jumped out of bed one bitter night and boldly attacked several armed burglars and fought with them till he was overpowered and—"

"O-o-o-oh, Henry, there it is again! Go at once!" yelled Maria, giving him a mighty push.

And Henry went downstairs, trembling violently. Cautiously opening the kitchen door he turned on the electric light—and found the kitten playing with baby's india-rubber ball.

TO TEACH BLIND TO DRAW

English Idea Is That Art May Help the Sightless to Communicate With Outside World.

One of the many experiments of the Royal Drawing society has been to teach people to draw by touch. The pupil is blindfolded and feels a simple shape, like a hammer of a spade, and draws it with his eyes open. An advanced pupil has drawn the head of a classical bust and the mask of Beethoven.

These experiments fired Mr. C. B. Ablett, the director of the society, with the idea of drawing by the blind. He has devised a medium which looks like the frosted stuff on a matchbox made liquid, by which the draughtsman can follow by touch what he has drawn and correct or add to his work. So far there have been no experiments with a blind pupil.

Mr. Ablett does not claim for it more than that a blind man can draw the plan or a design of something he wishes to record and explain. A blind gardener has been known to go into ecstasies over the unfolding shapes of a plant, and the drawing of these shapes, known to him by touch would undoubtedly give him a form of esthetic pleasure. In any case, it would increase his means of communicating with the outside world.

A great boon, if the method is practicable, would be that it would enable the blind to write and to read writing.—Manchester Guardian.

Airplanes Will Aid Mining.

It is predicted that the airplane and the dirigible will prove a great stimulus to the mining industry in presenting a means of getting material and men to and from locations which are known to be rich with ore and which are at the present time inaccessible. There are many such places known to exist, but the cost of building a roadway to them would be so great as to be prohibitive. Attention to this phase of the subject has been recently attracted by a report made by Doctor Lyon, supervisor of the mining stations for the United States bureau of mines. By this means a regular communication could be maintained with sections which are not to be reached by any ordinary means. It is also suggested that the same means might be of great value for getting rescue apparatus to the scene of mining disasters.

Where Big Industry Began.

The dilapidated old shack, still standing at Eastport, Me., is of interest by reason of its being the starting place of the great American sardine industry.

The experiment of converting the small herring into the canned sardine was tried out in this factory, built for that purpose by Julius Wolff, a Russian, and other New York promoters nearly forty years ago. At that time the picturesque weirs, in which the fish are seined, usually joined the factory property.

From its birth, in this small factory, sardine canning has developed to almost the chief industry on the Maine coast, employing thousands of skilled workers each season, and has placed Eastport on the map as one of the most important fishing ports in the country.

Locomotive Rolled Over.

After a storm that buried the New England coast in snow last March, passengers on a railroad line through Rhode Island were amazed to observe a locomotive standing upright in a swampy brook that runs under the right of way at one point. The engine started out with a snowplow to clear the track, but jumped the rails at the brook trestle, the plow going one way and its motive power the other. Confronted, then, by the problem of removing the new obstruction, and not caring to devote three engines to getting one back on the track, the rail men cut the Gordian knot by rolling the big locomotive down the embankment. Despite the slide and plunge, it finished right side up.—Popular Mechanics Magazine.

DANGER IN STANDING WATER

Sheep and Cattle Should Be Kept Away From Stagnant Pool on Account of Disease Germs.

Standing water should never be allowed to remain where sheep and cattle can get free access to it, as it always has some kind of disease breeding germs in it, and results in the loss of stock occasionally.

©Maryland State Archives, msa_sc2929_scm3543-0205.jpg