The House of Whispers

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Illustrations by Irwin Myers

"THE LITTLE PEOPLE."

Synopsis.—Spalding Nelson receives an invitation to dinner from his great-uncle, Rufus Gaston. On the way he meets Barbara Bradford and renders her a service. She lives in the same apartment building as the Gastons. They go there together. Gaston and his wife are going to Maine for a trip and ask Nelson to live in their apartments. He accepts. The Gastons tell him of mysterious noises about the apartment—"whispers" and noises that have scared them. Going to the apartment a few days later Nelson again meets Barbara, his accidental acquaintance. Nelson meets the building superintendent, Wick, and instinctively dislikes him. In a wall safe he finds a necklace of magnificent pearls. Next day Nelson finds the pearls have disappeared from the wall safe. His first idea of informing the police is not acted upon because of peculiar circumstances. He has been discharged from his position without adequate explanation or reason, and feels himself involved in something of a mystery. He decides to conduct an investigation himself. That night Barbara signals from the window of her apartment, which is opposite his, and they arrange a meeting for next day. In the morning he finds a note in his room, asking him why he had not informed the police of the loss of the jewels. Barbara tells Nelson her sister Claire had some years before made a run-away marriage with an adventurer, from whom she was soon parted, and the marriage had been annulled. Claire is engaged to be married and someone knowing of her escapade has stolen documents concerning the affair from the Bradford apartment and is attempting to blackmail the Bradfords. Nelson and Barbara exchange confidences about the "whispers," mysterious notes and other queer doings, which are much alike in both apartments.

CHAPTER V—Continued.

—6—

I wondered which had been his bedroom. It was hardly likely that he had occupied the room in which I slept. As I debated the matter I heard someone moving about my room and went to investigate. It was Mrs. Burke, making up my bed. She would know which room my great-uncle had been accustomed to occupy.

As I entered the bedroom for the purpose of cross-questioning her, my first impression—and philosopers tell us that the first is most likely to be the correct one—was of a simple-minded, kindly old Irish woman of the utmost honesty. I was certain just by looking at her that there wasn't a crooked hair in her head, even if she had had the intelligence necessary for crimes beyond the ordinary.

"It's Mr. Nelson I'm seeing at last," she exclaimed with satisfaction. "I was wondering when I would be laying eyes on ye."

"Yes," said I," "I am Mr. Nelson, Mr. Gaston's great-nephew."

"Sure and I'd have knowed ye anywhere. It's as like ye are as two peas, barring the old gentleman's white hairs."

Her statement rather startled me, for while I never had regarded myself as an Adonis, on the other hand I never had supposed I looked anything like old Rufus.

"Was this my great-uncle's bedroom when he was here?" I asked, trying to make my inquiry seem casual.

"It was and it wasn't," Mrs. Burke replied. "He gets queer notions, the ould gentleman does. In the last few weeks he's slept in every room in the house."

"What made him do that?"

"It's not for me to be saying." Devoutly she crossed herself. "Sometimes I do be thinking the house is haunted. The old man was all the time mumbling about—"

"Sometimes I Do Be Thinking the House Is Haunted."

She hesitated and looked furtively about.

"About whispers," I suggested. Instead of replying to my question she shot another one at me.

"And have ye been hearing them, too?"

I laughed, trying to put a note of merriment into my tones.

"I don't believe in things like that."

The old woman nodded her head sagely.

"It ain't believing in them things that makes you hear them. Either you hear them or you don't. The old man heard them."

"How do you know?"

"Didn't I hear him asking meself about it? He heard them, many times."

"How about the others—the servants—did they hear them, too?"

"They may have that. Niggers is always hearing things anyhow. It's what the white folk hear that counts."

"How about the other apartments in the house? Do the people in them hear whispers?"

"Never that I've heard tell of, but how should I know? This is the only place in the house that I work."

"Did Mrs. Gaston ever speak to you about it?"

"She did and she did not. She never in so many words asked me if I heard them. All she says to me was, 'Nora, if ever you see or hear anything strange or unusual here, you're to let me know at once.' And I says, 'Yis, Mrs. Gaston, I will.'"

"And have you ever seen or heard anything?"

The old woman busied herself with making up the bed for a moment before she answered me.

"I'm not saying I've seen anything," she began, "but there's things I could be telling if I was minded to open my lips."

"If you know anything," I said, "you must tell me. Mr. Gaston put me here to find out what was wrong."

"There's no doubt there's wrong here."

"What makes you say that? What have you seen? What do you know?"

"It's neither what I've seen nor what I know." She nodded mysteriously. "It's what I've been hearing myself."

"For heaven's sake, woman," I cried, losing patience, "what is it you've heard?"

"I've heard them walking," she announced with an air of triumph.

"You've heard who walking?"

"The little people, of course. Who else would it be doing it?"

"Oh, bosh!" I exclaimed. I was well enough acquainted with the superstitions of the Irish to understand who she meant by "the little people." It's the habit of the old crones from the Emerald isle to attribute anything they cannot understand to fairies.

"You may laugh," she retorted indignantly, "but I heard them, I tell ye."

"Where did you hear them, these footsteps?"

"Coming right out of the wall, here in this room, and in the kitchen, beyond."

"It was probably somebody in another apartment you heard."

"It was not. The floors do be deadened like, and it's nothing at all you can hear. It was somebody walking soft-like right there in the wall at me back."

"Well," I announced, "if there is anything like that going on, I am going to stay here until I hear it. I want to make sure no one can come into the apartment but myself, so I am going to ask you to give me your key. I'll be home here all the morning, so I can let you in when you ring."

"It's me key you're wanting, is it?"

She produced it from a pocket of her gown and handed it over, first unknotting it from a corner of her kerchief where she had tied it for safe keeping.

"And indeed if it's meself you're not trusting with a key after Mrs. Gaston letting me have it for these ten years back, it's your own bed you can be making. I'll not be coming near the place again."

In fine indignation she flounced out of the place. To tell the truth I was not sorry that she had announced her decision not to return. While my impression of her was that she was a simple-minded old woman of uttermost honesty, I was just as well satisfied that no one but myself should have entry to the apartment until I had finished my investigations and had made further progress in solving the mysteries that were so rapidly developing.

Left once more to myself, I sat down at my great-uncle's desk and made out a list of questions that must be answered:

1. Where was Rufus Gaston? Had the old gentleman really gone away or was he in hiding in the building?

2. Who had removed the Gaston pearls from the wall safe? It must be someone who knew the combination.

3. Who had written the note I found on the floor of my bedroom? How and when had it been placed on the floor there?

4. Who were the persons who were trying to blackmail the family next door?

5. How had the anonymous notes been delivered on the floor of Barbara Bradford's room? (Evidently the writer was the same as in my case.)

6. Was there anything in the past relations of Mr. Bradford and my great-uncle that would cause my great-uncle to plot against the Bradford family?

7. How were the mysterious sounds heard both by my great-uncle, by Barbara Bradford, and by myself to be accounted for?

8. How were the mysterious footsteps heard by Mrs. Burke to be explained? Were they merely the imaginings of a superstitious old woman?

The relations between Mr. Bradford and Rufus Gaston puzzled me. Miss Bradford's recollection of her father's remark about my great-uncle certainly indicated that he held no high opinion of him. My great-uncle's actions throughout had been peculiar. His suddenly sending for me and insisting on my coming here to live, his insistence on leaving his wife's jewels in my care, and on entrusting me with the combination of the safe, all now took on a sinister aspect. It certainly was peculiar that he had gone off without leaving me any address where he could be reached.

Then, too, there was my own unexpected and unwarranted discharge at my place of business. I was positive in some way it was connected with my having come to this place to live. Had my great-uncle himself brought it about for the purpose of discrediting me? Was it the work of the blackmailers to get square with me for having accidentally butted in on the meeting they had arranged with Miss Bradford?

The scar-faced man! Who was he? I was certain that he was in some way involved. It might have been he who had caused me to lose my job. Certainly the malevolent glance he had given me in the restaurant that night showed that he would have wrought me harm if he could. The next time I laid eyes on him I was determined to trail him with bulldog tenacity until I ascertained his identity and where he lived. I felt sure that the trail of the mystery would lead to his door.

I decided not to leave the apartment all day. I had laid in a plentiful supply of food the day before so there was no necessity for my going out. There was plenty of work for me to do. I must try to devise some way of examining the safe door and the jewel box that remained for evidence of fingerprints, and I must inspect the building both from within and without to see if I could learn how the notes were delivered.

From one of the toilet tables I obtained some fine powder and opening the wall safe again I took out the jewel box and carefully dusted it over with the powder. I hoped that the powder would reveal markings of hands on the box, but either I was too inexperienced or my method was wrong, for I succeeded in obtaining no sort of result, beyond finding out what my own fingerprints looked like on a sheet of paper prepared with some home-made lampblack. After an hour or two of experimentation I gave it up as a bad job, and turned to the study of methods by which the notes might have been delivered.

I Gazed at It Horror-Stricken.

The Gaston apartment was on the sixth floor of the building, which was surrounded by ordinary three and four-story dwelling houses. It must have been someone in the building, if not in the apartment itself. It would be quite possible for someone on the floor above to have projected the notes through my window and that of Miss Bradford by attaching them to the end of a long stick. I made up my mind to ascertain who occupied the apartments above.

The mystery of the whispers did not seem to be of such easy solution. While I had been inclined at first to regard my own experience as a dream, the coincidence of Miss Bradford and my great-uncle having had the same illusion convinced me that it was some claptrap devised by the plotters for preying on the fears of their intended victims.

Eagerly I waited for the coming of evening and from half-past seven on I sat by my window waiting for Barbara's signal. It was nearly nine o'clock before I heard the three taps that had so startled me the evening before. Quickly I thrust my head out of the window and was rewarded by seeing hers appear at the same moment.

"We must not talk long," she warned me. "Someone might see us. Have you learned anything new?"

"Yes," I whispered. "In my uncle's diary I found several entries about the whispers."

"How strange!" she exclaimed. "Where is Mr. Gaston?"

"I don't know."

"That's funny."

"It's more than that. It is decidedly odd that he left no word where he could be reached."

"I don't blame him," she almost sobbed. "I wish we could all get away off somewhere, away from it all."

"Don't worry. Everything we find out will help discover the plotters. Tell me from what part of your room did the sounds come."

"Always from the same place, up in the corner, near the ceiling."

"I thought so," I answered. "That's where they came from in my room. That shows it is just some mechanical trick they are using in the hope of terrifying us. Do you know who lives on the floor above?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. Do you suspect them?"

"I suspect everybody until this mystery is solved," I replied almost savagely.

"Not so loud, they may hear you. Have you learned anything else?"

"No, nothing. I questioned old Mrs. Burke, Mrs. Gaston's laundress. She knew nothing, although she insisted that she had often heard footsteps when there was no one in the apartment. Of course it is only her imagination."

"I'm not so sure," Miss Bradford whispered. "I've heard them, too. They seemed to come right out of the wall."

"Why," I exclaimed in amazement, "that's just how she described them."

"Often, too, when I get up in the morning I have a strange feeling that there must have been someone in my room while I was asleep."

"How strange!" I muttered, more to myself than to her. "I wonder if it could be anyone walking in their sleep."

"You mean"—she hesitated—"my sister?"

"I don't mean anyone," I hastened to say. "I was only thinking aloud, wondering if it could be a possible explanation. I have heard of innocent persons doing all sorts of things under hypnotic influence."

"I've read of that, too," she said soberly, "I wonder—"

She left the sentence unfinished, but I felt that the same thought had flashed into her mind as into mine. Was it possible that the unscrupulous Frenchman who had wronged her sister years ago had in some way recently gained an interview with her and had gotten her once more into his power? Could it be that under the spell of another's mind Claire Bradford herself had taken away the papers concerning the annulment of her marriage and was placing the notes in the blackmail plot?

"Look here," I said determinedly, "we've got to see each other somewhere tomorrow and talk this over. Where can we meet?"

"I'm afraid I can't manage it tomorrow. I'm busy with my mother and sister all day long. Tuesday, perhaps. But we mustn't talk here longer. Good night."

"Good night," I called softly but her head had been already withdrawn, so quickly that I hardly knew whether she heard me. As I was about ready for bed I recalled that I had spent most of the money I had in my pockets, so I visited the bookcase where I had secreted my hoard and taking out a twenty-dollar bill, wrapped it about the three one-dollar bills I had left and put the roll in my trousers pocket.

The next morning, as I was dressing, I happened to draw forth my money. I gazed at it horror-stricken.

I distinctly recalled having wrapped the twenty-dollar bill about the three smaller bills. Now one of the dollar bills was on the outside.

There before me was indisputable evidence that someone had been in my room while I slept, someone had gone through my pockets and had examined my money. Someone had put the dollar bill on the outside of the roll.

Who had done it? How had they got into the room?

Enter Gorman, the detective.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PATRON SAINT OF HATTERS

Why St. Clement Has Long Been Accorded Recognition by Makers of Head Coverings.

St. Clement is known as the patron saint of hatters, because of his discovery for the making of a compact fabric out of wool without pressure or weaving. The story goes that this devout priest, while on a journey, became footsore and tired, and, removing his sandals, sought rest by the roadside.

St. Clement was soon disturbed by the bleating of lambs. Looking up, he beheld a fox that had just seized one of the helpless young sheep. He cleared a hedge just in time to destroy the fox and rescue the lamb, in the process of which act he observed loose wool, which he gathered and examined.

The priest was struck by the sudden inspiration that here was relief for his lacerated feet. Binding the yielding wool on his wounds, he was able to continue his journey. On reaching his destination St. Clement removed the sandals from his feet, discovering instead of the fine soft wool a piece of unfinished cloth, seemingly so firm and thick that he couldn't pull it apart. He called the matted material "felt."

This accidental knowledge of the priest caused the basic principle that underlies the men's hat industry. November 23 has been named St. Clement's day and is a red-letter day for the hat manufacturers of many countries.

Rock Cannon.

When the island of Malta was under the rule of the Knights of Malta they defended their sovereignty with cannon bored in the rock. Each one of these strange weapons contained an entire barrel of powder, and as it was not possible to vary the aim of the cannon fifty of them were made ready, facing various directions from which the enemy might approach.

When the fame of these arms of defense became known to the world the idea was conceived of transporting rock to the summits to serve the same purpose but the scheme was impracticable.

Date With a Party.

My partner in business was called out of town and was not expected to return for a few days, so when I met his wife on the street she remarked that she was lonesome and I asked her to meet me late and have dinner with me. It was all arranged and I went to the office to fix up for the occasion when in came hubby and wanted to know why the dolling up, so I said that I had a date with a party. When I met my friend's wife I told her hubby had returned and she said: "Why I know it; I told him you and I were going out to dine."—Exchange.

Find Value of Various Woods.

Investigations by the agricultural department show that one standard cord of well-seasoned hickory, oak, beech, birch, hard maple, ash, elm, locust or cherry wood is approximately equal to one ton of anthracite coal. A cord and a half of soft maple or two cords of cedar, poplar or bass wood are required to give the same amount of heat. One cord of well-seasoned mixed wood equals at least one ton of average grade bituminous coal.

Quite True.

"That fellow got money out of me by telling me he was in the trenches and he never went to war at all."

"But he told you the truth. He is employed laying gas pipes."

The Joyous Negligee

IN THE engrossing business of selecting clothes for spring, women concern themselves first with their outer apparel; hats, wraps, suits, dresses lead off in the procession of new things made ready for the advent of summer. Negligees can afford to come last. It is their mission to be beautiful and comfortable within the four walls of home and their fascinations are never overlooked. Some of their designers pay little attention to the seasons; it is always summertime with them—but others remember there is such a thing as chilly weather occasionally, even indoors. The new negligees include many lovely things made of sheer materials and there is a good representation of heavier goods. They are all made up into graceful garments in which clever draping is the dominant style note.

For the most beautiful negligees designers begin with georgette crepe, or crepe de chine and lace. The handsome negligee pictured takes advantage of a beautiful color in georgette, lays the material in plaits and drapes it in long lines. A sash of very wide soft ribbon is brought across the front of it ending in a loop under the sleeve drapery at the left side. The transparent goods make opportunities for posing one color over another, and negligees may be as colorful and fanciful as butterflies.

Now that oriental modes have so great an influence in fashions, many of the new models in negligees are made of georgette or crepe de chine, with coats and trousers. Many of them are in vivid colors, as peacock and turquoise blue, rose, jade or emerald green.

Suits With Vestees

OCCASIONALLY a new feature in the styles carries a season by storm and sweeps over the entire country in no time. This was the case last year when suits having coats open at the front, revealing vests in contrasting material, were introduced at the beginning of the season and were soon in universal demand. Their success was extraordinary and for this very reason many people thought it would be short lived. But this same feature reappears in many suits this season, to find an enthusiastic welcome.

Embroidery of silk in the color of the suit and often with a contrasting color introduced with the self color, is even more popular this year than last, and small bone buttons are used with it for helping out in the decoration of this spring's models. There is no very great change in the styles, but a great deal of ingenuity in the cut of coats and the management of details, as pockets and sleeves, makes the new models very interesting. Coats and skirts have grown shorter.

Two examples of the use of vests and embroidery appear in the attractive suits that are shown above. In one of them the vest is made of brocaded silk with a wide band of velvet ribbon across the top. The designer arrived at widened hip lines and uneven length at the bottom of the coat, by means of very large pockets and takes pains to center attention on them by covering them with embroidery.

Embroidery is introduced on a suit of dark blue cloth having a vest of heavy crepey material with an embroidered band at the top. It has crescent-shaped pockets with rows of small buttons on them.

Julia Bottomley

Fur Wraps.

Fur wraps, short and with short sleeves are the edict of Paris, but America designs these wraps so that the sleeves may be turned up or down to conform with the desire for short sleeves or the need for long ones.

New Separate Skirts Are Favored.

London, the home of the strictly tailored garment, is showing many pleasant models in separate spirts. Instead of being developed in the wonderful sport silks which characterize those of American or French design, they are of tweeds, jersey, serge and heather mixtures, and are for practical wear. Stripes are used, and a loose weave somewhat resembling the herringbone pattern. These skirts are made on simple lines, often with a short sash girdle. One attractive model of blue serge is fastened with a side inset of plain material; this inset tapers to a point at the skirt bottom.

Fancy Lingerie.

It is the day of fancy lingerie and it must be admitted that eccentricity often enters the arena in this connection. Many are of the opinion that underwear should always be pure white, very fine and washable; it is not enough that it should be "cleanable." But this is rather an old fashionable notion.

SALTS IF BACKACHY AND KIDNEYS HURT

Stop Eating Meat for a While If Your Bladder Is Troubling You.

When you wake up with backache and dull misery in the kidney region it generally means you have been eating too much meat, says a well-known authority. Meat forms uric acid which overworks the kidneys in their effort to filter it from the blood and they become sort of paralyzed and loggy. When your kidneys get sluggish and clog you must relieve them, like you relieve your bowels; removing all the body's urinous waste, else you have backache, sick headache, dizzy spells; your stomach sours, tongue is coated, and when the weather is bad you have rheumatic twinges. The urine is cloudy, full of sediment, channels often get sore, water scalds and you are obliged to seek relief two or three times during the night.

Either consult a good, reliable physician at once or get from your pharmacist about four ounces of Jad Salts; take a tablespoonful in a glass of water before breakfast for a few days and your kidneys will then act fine. This famous salts is made from the acid of grapes and lemon juice, combined with lithia, and has been used for generations to clean and stimulate sluggish kidneys, also to neutralize acids in the urine so it no longer irritates, thus ending bladder weakness.

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