The House of Whispers

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Illustrations by Irwin Myers

CHAPTER X—Continued.

—13—

"It looks like you were guilty from reading the morning papers," he answered with a grin. "But I don't believe all I read. They've made out a strong case against you, though."

"I didn't do it!" I cried passionately.

"If you didn't, who did?"

"It must have been Mr. Wick."

"There you go, jumping at conclusions. Why not Claire Bradford?"

"Why do you mention her? Do you suspect her?"

"If she didn't do it, why did she come down here to see you?"

"How did you know she was here?"

"I was watching you all the time you were talking to her."

"But how did you know who she was?"

"I saw the other one this morning. They look alike."

"But how did you know which sister it was?"

"You didn't seem to get along well enough in your talk for it to be Barbara," he answered with another grin.

It had not been my intention to reveal even to him Claire Bradford's second visit to my apartment, but I saw how foolish it would be of me to attempt to deceive or to withhold any information from such a shrewd observer.

Without reserve and with the utmost detail I proceeded to relate everything that had happened since I had seen him the afternoon before. I told of my discovery of the secret panel in my room and of the blind passageway into which it apparently led, of Barbara's having made the perilous journey over the window ledge to inspect my find, of the screams we had heard, followed by the shot, of how Barbara had fled back by the way she came, and I had run downstairs and with Wick had discovered the body. I told him every detail so far as I could remember it, winding up with my catching Claire Bradford leaving my apartment, just before my arrest and the finding of the revolver.

"You don't think the detectives themselves planted the gun on you?" he asked. "I've heard of them doing things like that."

He spoke with such an air of innocence that I had to smile. I doubt if there were many tricks of detectives that Gorman did not know all about.

"They had no opportunity whatever. Neither of them had been near the dresser before, and I was watching them every moment."

"Well, who did hide the revolver there, if they didn't?"

"I don't know."

"Couldn't Wick have done it?"

"I was with him every moment after we discovered the body."

"Maybe it was Claire Bradford?"

I shook my head.

"I thought at first it might have been she, but I'm convinced since talking with her that it was not. She's either entirely innocent or else the most wonderful actress in the world."

"I think we can leave her out of it," ventured Gorman.

"That leaves only Wick."

Gorman shook his head positively.

"No, Wick didn't do it. He's a bad one all right, and he has done time, but he's only a tool."

"Wick has done time!" I exclaimed. "How did you find that out? What have you learned about him?"

Gorman grinned at my eager questioning.

"I don't know much about him yet, but I'm sure he's an ex-con. While you were in court this morning," he explained, "I went up to the Granddeck to take a look at things for myself. Wick showed me through the Lutan apartment, thinking I was from the coroner's office. I spotted him at once. A crook that has done time is always sure to give himself away."

"How?" I asked.

"Well," said Gorman judicially, "men's businesses leave their marks on them. A clergyman don't have to be wearing a high vest for you to spot him, and nobody ever took a dancing teacher for a pugilist. A man that has looked at as many crooks as I have knows them by instinct, and then there's little ways you can tell. As I was going up to the apartment with Wick he just naturally fell into step with me, showing he had been used to marching with other prisoners. He talks, too, without moving his lips. That's a sure sign. They learn that in prison so they can talk without the guards knowing it."

"That's so," I cried. "It struck me that there was something funny about the way Wick talked, but I couldn't have told just what it was."

"Wick's a crook, all right, "but I think he comes from somewhere upstate or maybe out West, but he hasn't intelligence enough to be anything more than a runner for the gang."

"Well, what's your theory?" I asked. "If Wick didn't murder Miss Lutan, who did?"

"I don't know yet. Wick ain't big enough. Big jobs take big men to plan them. This whole thing is a big affair, carefully planned out. It takes more brains than Wick ever dreamed of having to plant anonymous notes and terrify people nearly out of their senses with mysterious whispers and then to steal the Bradford papers and the Gaston pearls and then when things get hot to have you already framed as the goat to blame things on."

"Then you think my discharge from the office was part of the plot?"

"Sure it was. You butted in on their blackmail plans, and they wanted to get square with you, and a young fellow out of work and discharged in disgrace is always an easy mark for suspicion."

"And was it part of the plot to blame Miss Lutan's murder on me?"

"I don't think so. The Lutan murder was an accident. Even the biggest crooks seldom deliberately plan murder. They're all afraid of the chair. She came in and surprised some one of the gang in the apartment. He had to shoot her to make his getaway. It was quick thinking on somebody's part after the murder to plant that gun in your rooms. That sort of scheming takes brains, and Wick hasn't got them."

"Who was it, then?"

"We've got to find," said Gorman, speaking slowly and with emphasis, "the big crook that is back of all this—the master-mind."

"The master-mind," I echoed.

"Yes," he said, "there's a big crooked brain somewhere that has been directing the whole plot, and planning the actions of Wick and of the telephone girl, and maybe of Claire Bradford, too."

"I wonder if it could be her ex-husband. She told me, though, a few moments ago, that she had not heard of him for years, and she seemed to me to be telling the truth."

"I don't think it was him," said Gorman. "He was only a chauffeur. If he's in it at all, he's only one of the gang. He's not the master-mind."

"I hope we can keep the Bradfords out of it altogether," I said. "You see, Gorman—"

"I understand," he interrupted. "I know how the land lies. You need not worry about that. If Claire Bradford had any part in the plot, you can bet she was forced into it and driven to do what she did. Have you seen her sister?"

"No, and I hope she'll make no effort to see me. She mustn't. You'll see her, won't you?"

"Leave it to me," said the detective. "I'll manage to reach her without even her own family knowing anything about it. I'll make her understand that if she tries to see you or says anything, she'll only be damaging your case. Don't worry about her."

"There's one thing, though," I said, "that I wish you could do."

"What's that?"

"Can you find some way of getting to the Gaston apartment and exploring that secret passage and see where it leads?"

He turned savagely on me.

"Say, young fellow," he said, "if I didn't know that you were innocent, I'd swear that you were a dope fiend with this tale of a secret passage. You've been reading too many thrillers or going to the movies too much. They don't have secret passages in modern apartment houses. You better keep quiet about that. You can't get anybody to believe you, and you'll only hurt your case."

"But I know there's a passageway there—along the hall. I found the opening, a panel in my bedroom. There's a place there big enough for a man to walk in. I saw it."

He looked at me pityingly, and I could see that he did not believe a word I was saying.

"All right, there's a passage there, and we'll leave it there. A young fellow in love is apt to imagine all sorts of things."

I saw there was no use in my insisting further about the passageway. His mind was stubbornly made up

"We've Got to Find the Crook That Is Back of All This—the Master Mind."

that it could not exist. He was the only friend I had in all the great city, and I must leave it to him to work the thing out in his own way.

"What about a lawyer?" I asked.

"Didn't the court assign you one?"

"Yes, but he took it for granted that I was guilty, so I got rid of him."

"Well, there ain't much a lawyer could do yet. I'll dig up one when we need him. Bail is not possible in a murder case, so there is nothing for you to do but to sit tight and take it as easy as you can. By the way, have you heard anything from old Gaston since you were arrested?"

"Not a word," I answered. "I have not the least idea where he is or how to reach him."

"Humph, that's funny," said Gorman abstractedly. "Good-by, I'll see you again tomorrow."

He pounded on the cell door, and a guard released him, leaving me alone to ponder over my plight, and especially over his last question. What had he meant by it?

Where was old Rufus Gaston?

Once more suspicion of my aged relative shot through my brain. Was it possible that his was the master mind behind all this plotting? Gorman had insisted that the arch criminal behind Wick and the others must be some man of intellect. My great-uncle Rufus had brains. Out of a clear sky he had summoned me to live in the Granddeck and then had mysteriously disappeared. Certainly he had had opportunities for knowing Wick and the telephone girl. Barbara had recalled once having heard her father speak of him in disparaging terms. Had it been he who was plotting against the Bradfords and had brought me into the case as a scapegoat?

Was old Rufus Gaston the master mind? Where was he?

CHAPTER XI.

Fortunately for me, there had recently been a wave of public criticism of the courts for the long delays in bringing criminal cases to trial, and the district attorney was moving with all celerity to bring my case to a conclusion. An indictment against me for the murder of Daisy Lutan had been quickly found and the date had been already set for the trial—one week hence—so that the period of my incarceration and doubt as to my ultimate fate seemed likely to be very brief.

Utterly absurd as the situation was, accused of murdering a woman whom I never had seen and hardly had heard of until I saw her lying dead in her apartments, conscious as I was of my entire innocence in the matter, still, as in the solitude of my cell I reviewed the case, I found myself facing the ordeal of a trial for murder with considerable apprehension.

Circumstances certainly looked much against me. There was absolutely no way in which I could refute the testimony of the two detectives that they had found the revolver with one chamber discharged in the drawer of my dresser. I myself had seen them find it. While Gorman still held that there was a possibility that they themselves had put it there, I knew that neither of them had been near the dresser after I had admitted them to my rooms. The only person whom I had the slightest ground for suspecting was Claire Bradford, yet what motive could she have had?

Wick undoubtedly would testify that he had met me at the door of the Lutan apartment directly after he had heard the shot. He might say that I appeared to be greatly excited. This would be the exact truth. There was even the possibility that he might swear that he had found me coming out of Miss Lutan's apartment. Even if he did not make the statement direct, shrewd questioning on the part of the district attorney could easily make it appear that I had just left the Lutan apartment. How could we possibly controvert his testimony?

Then, in addition, there were the damaging statements that would be offered by Nellie Kelly. She would swear that the evening before I had taken her out to dinner and had been questioning her about the other tenants in the house. Even though we knew that she was a tool of Wick and was the wife of Lefty Moore, the burglar, unless Gorman was able to discover that she herself had a criminal record, it seemed utterly hopeless to attempt to confute her statements.

It would also militate against me that at the time of the murder I was out of a job and almost without funds. They were likely, too, to bring out the fact that I had been discreditably discharged from the only position I had held in New York. The only man who knew anything about the matter, Mr. Wood, the head of the firm, had been suddenly called to France in connection with an order for munitions, and was not expected to return for several months. The fact would weigh against me, too, that I would be unable to offer the testimony of any character witnesses. Birge and Roller, my classmates with whom I had roomed ever since I had come to New York, were "somewhere in France" with the American troops and could not possibly aid me.

All of this was pointed out to me by John McGregor, a young attorney whom Gorman had employed for me. While Gorman and I had, I think, succeeded in convincing him of my innocence, the fact that he was continually citing the difficulties in the way of our proving it made me realize that he was very dubious as to the outcome.

The trouble was that we were absolutely without witnesses. Old Rufus Gaston's whereabouts still remained a mystery. If we could discover him in time, we could at least explain satisfactorily my presence in the Granddeck and could establish that I was not the homeless, penniless vagrant they would try to prove me. The longer old Rufus remained in hiding, the stronger became my suspicion that he might be in some way involved in the plot. His action in keeping his address a secret from me seemed to have been with deliberate intent.

After some discussion Gorman and I had agreed not to mention either of the Bradford girls.

"If one word about either of them slips out in court," said Gorman, "they'll be in for it. The papers will jump to it and print their pictures and all that. We'd better leave them out of it."

With this I heartily concurred. I was determined that Barbara Bradford must be in no way involved, come what may. I knew that she herself would be apt to be restrained from attempting to communicate with me by the fact that her sister's marriage was set for the day after tomorrow. Her loyalty to her family was such that she would not risk scandal by trying to aid me, at least not until her sister was married and the future for Claire and her mother assured.

Two small rays of sunshine lightened the gloom of my cell—the fact that the newspaper mention of the tragedy seemed thus far to have escaped my mother's notice and the fact that Barbara still believed in my innocence and trusted me absolutely. A day or two after my arrest Gorman had managed to see her and had told her that it was my wish that she keep entirely quiet her knowledge of the affair and that she should make no attempt whatever to communicate with me while I was in prison. He had brought back with him a hastily penciled note which often in my cell I read and re-read:

"Dear Mr. Nelson:

"I'm so sorry to hear of your trouble and the absurd charges against you. I'll do whatever you wish, of course. I trust you absolutely. If anything I can tell will aid you at any time, I am ready to speak—cost what it may. I know you are innocent and must soon be freed. Hoping to see you,

"With all confidence,

"B. B."

Each time I read anew the penciled lines, my heart rejoiced. Come what may, I felt sure that Barbara's heart was mine. I joyed to know that come out of prison to her though I might, she would be glad to see me. Joyfully would I have gone to the electric chair rather than have her fair name in the least smirched by scandal in trying to defend me. She alone could prove an alibi for me, but no one must ever know it.

What would a scandal-loving world say if the fact became public that she had been alone with me in my apartment near midnight? If only by

Each Time I Read Anew the Penciled Lines My Heart Rejoiced.

the sacrifice of her good name could I go free, then let me stay in my cell. Let me even go to the electric chair. I would not have my life at the loss of my beloved's reputation.

One other thing I had kept from my lawyer—my discovery of the passageway between the walls in my great uncle's apartment. If I could not get Gorman to believe in this secret passage, which I was convinced had some connection with the mysteries and the whisperings at the Granddeck, there was little likelihood that McGregor would believe my tale either. Given one single hour in my quarters at the Granddeck and I would have discovered whither it led and who used it but once a man is charged with murder, his hands are tied. It was futile for me to mention it again, even to the detective or to my lawyer, until such time as I could show it to them and convince them that I knew what I was talking about.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

NEW OCCUPATION FOR GOAT

Billy and Nanny May Be Profitably Employed in Clearing Away the Impeding Underbrush.

The monkey cotton picker was never an entire success. The monkey could pick the cotton, but it cost more to provide human direction to guide his efforts than the negro cotton pickers asked for the whole job, picking, directing and all. But the Angora goat as a clearer of land requires no direction. Just string a few strands of barbed wire around the land to be cleared so that Mr. and Mrs. Goat and the kids shall not clear the land that is not to be cleared and they will do the job without even a casual suggestion from the land owenr.

The success which has attended the raising of Angora goats in the rugged Ozark country of southwestern Missouri has suggested to specialists of the department of agriculture that it might be equally profitable to place such herds on many other wild tracts, particularly those which have been cut over, because these goats are proving of great help in clearing away underbrush. Growing mohair and producing kids, the Angoras in the Ozarks are also trimming down the brush, manuring the hills and preparing the way for grass, cattle and sheep.

According to reports secured by a representative of the state college of agriculture in Missouri, the Angoras required to clear an acre of land varies from two to five, depending on the density and size of the brush.

Lamps for Brides.

In early times the courtship and marriage customs among the Greenlanders were simple and unceremonious enough, since we are told that when a lovelorn youth made up his mind as to the girl he wanted to adorn and be useful in his hut of ice and snow, he went to her house, seized her by the hair or wherever he could secure a good grip on her, and dragged her to his own domain, where she was expected to remain, without any further marriage ceremony. If an affluent bridegroom he would perhaps soothe her lacerated feeling by presenting her with a new lamp or some other article of household utility.

Where He Was Weak.

The other day, my little cousin brought home his report card marked A plus for everything except deportment. His father said: "Why, John, how does this happen?" John's reply was: "Well, but daddy, that's my hardest study."—Exchange.

Do You "Hate" Yourself?

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think."—Paul in his letter to the Romans, 12:3.

New Order of Outdoor Clothes

IF THE chic young woman whose picture is just above, could rise and stand, we would probably ask her to turn slowly around, and let us sum up the details of her perfect costume. It is an example of the new order of things in outdoor summer dress—elegant and informal—an evolution that retains only a flavor of sport styles in street dress. It is spirited but quiet, and possesses both vivacity and dignity.

The suit, consisting of skirt and smock, may be imagined in linen, or in suitable silk weaves or in certain cottons, linen having the preference. Its long smock is set off by groups of tucks with an embroidered band between them, all done with unimpeachable neatness. Elbow sleeves make one wonder that anything else was ever tolerated for summer weather, and, whatever the material used, four flat pearl buttons find a place on these turned-back cuffs. The smock is split and turned back at the throat, with an embroidered sailor collar on. This arrangement makes place for a dainty vestee of tucked organdie. A very heavy cord, ending in a single big tassel, disposes of the waistline in the best manner possible.

Above this smart suit there rests, on the lady's clever head, a smart sport hat with soft crown and rolling brim, trimmed with an embroidered motif applied at one side. Over this she is prepared to carry a parasol that does her judgment credit. It is made of strips of silk joined and gathered to the frame and is bordered with velvet ribbon. There are gay butterflies embroidered on it and its general make-up proclaims fair Japan as its inspiration and perhaps its home. Altogether this costume is worth studying. It is a type that grows in favor and is worn by matrons and maids to advantage—it has a trick of outwitting time by a few years anyway, for it makes its wearer look younger.

Veils Are More Than Kindly

ASIDE from the becomingness of a well-selected veil, there is the item of neatness to recommend the universally-worn face veil. This is so well appreciated that some women declare they do not feel themselves completely dressed for the street without a veil. Besides keeping the hair from being disarranged they do wonders for the complexion and eyes—but, like hats, they must be selected with discrimination.

Manufacturers make the becomingness of face veils a constant study and their elaboration with odd figures, to add interest and vivacity, reveals a world of ingenuity. Dots used to be the story of their embellishment, but now everything on the face of the earth appears to lend suggestion to the veil makers.

Just at this time veils with rather large mesh of soft, but heavy threads, seem to be favored. The mesh appears in oblongs, hexagons, squares, diamonds, circles and irregular forms, so that the individual may suit her own fancy in this regard, providing it lights upon the most flattering weave. The heavier weaves are chosen by younger women as a rule and only for them are the eccentric figures introduced on the mesh, sometimes in widely scattered spaces and sometimes only in one place. Older women find the veils made of finer threads better suited to them and they wear the larger, floating veils to great advantage. These are very much in evidence at present, some of them having scalloped edges and borders in floral patterns made with a chain-stitch in silk on the mesh.

Veils should be tried on where there is plenty of daylight and viewed from all angles. The group pictured here shows a variety of weaves and sizes—but a single picture cannot do more than suggest the really marvelous number of patterns which lend their aid to beauty.

Julia Bottomley

Linen Bedspreads.

Hand embroidered linen bedspreads ample enough to cover the bed, pillows—and dresser scarfs to match, are exquisitely dainty for the boudoir. Some of them are made of dimity and voile, but the majority are of a fine, firm quality of linen unexcelled for its laundering qualities. A voluminous spread may be made from five and three-quarters yards of linen divided into three lengths. An additional yard and a half will make two dresser scarfs. This material allows for wide hems, which should be double hemstitched, with the initial embroidered in the center, plain or in an artistic scroll.

Newest Blouses in Black.

Some chic new blouses have been developed in black this season. Black lace and net are used for elaborate blouses of knee length, worn with skirts of satin or silk. Many are made of black georgette or crepe de chine. Black cotton blouses are also very smart. Black organdie waists are trimmed with collars of white organdie, while black dotted Swiss blouses have collars of white batiste or organdie.

Wear Clanking Chains.

Clanking chains of the most fantastic sort girdle cloth and silk dresses. Here we find extremely thin links of shell in the form of alternating circles and bars. The most whimsical thing about shell girdles is the use of a plaque where the tassel would have been on a silken girdle. The plaque has a realistic Egyptian head carved on its surface.

Fashion's Latest Note.

Black lingerie has made its appearance. A window display of the latest mode in woman's "undies" showed a black chemise, consisting of accordion-pleated georgette with a silver band top; a camisole, made of the flimsiest black gauze with gold stars embroidered on it, and black bloomers, knee and ankle length. They are for travel and to wear under dark evening gowns.

Use Metallic Brocades.

Metallic brocades are used for dressy handbags.

DADDY'S EVENING FAIRY TALE

By MARY GRAHAM BONNER © by the Author.

BILLY BUGLER'S RIDE.

"I've been asked," said Billy Bugler, the Boston Bull dog, "to tell you about the ride I had the other day in the automobile.

"I don't know why I should speak of it as the automblie, for of course there are other automobiles in the world, though that day I hardly felt as though there were. It just seemed as if we were in the only automobile and as though I were the only lucky dog in the world. Of course I know that isn't so.

"How we dogs do like an automobile ride. My missy used to own a little one and we used to ride about all the time, but she hasn't had one lately, though within the last week or so I've heard a good deal of automobile talk going on in our house and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Billy Bugler owned an automobile before long. Of course it really wouldn't be mine, but it would be almost the same.

"My missy and I share everything together. And I've heard talk about which sorts of horns were the best, or which horn made the loudest and at the same time the most pleasant noise of all.

"It strikes me that when they begin to talk of horns there must be something going to happen in the way of getting an automobile. Now I heard them speak of which engine was better than another and of which make required least repairs. Repairs, you know, are things being mended. Automobiles have to be mended just like ladies' dresses and little dog's jackets and blankets.

"And there was talk about which one went more smoothly than another. But I was going to tell of the ride I had the other day. I sat up in the front seat very proud and feeling very fine. I sniffed the air and thought it was delicious air. One goes through the air in such a fascinating way in an automobile. One just sniffs in lots of it—wind and little breezes and all.

"Even if one sniffs in a little of the gasoline which helps to run the automobile—or whatever it does do—it has

In the Front Seat.

something to do with an automobile that is most important—I do not even mind that. In fact, I like it.

"I know when I've been riding in an automobile we've stopped for gasoline. I've always been glad of that, for that has meant that we were going on riding and we wouldn't stop in a hurry.

"On this ride of the other day I sat up and looked about me and my missy talked to me, too.

"'Billy Bugler,' she said, 'do you see a kitten? I pricked up my ears, and there, true enough was a kitten walking along the side of the road.

"Then she said, 'Billy Bugler, do you see a bossy cow?' And I looked and there was a bossy cow.

"'Billy Bugler,' she said, after a moment, 'do you see a little chicken?'

"I looked where she pointed and I put up my ears to let her know I had heard and to let her know too, I had seen what she was pointing out to me.

"'Billy Bugler,' she said, 'do you see another little dog?' And true enough I did.

"Oh, it was a fine ride, simply fine. And it was so nice to have one's missy point out all the things of interest to see along the road.

"You know how folks will talk to each other about the scenery and such things. They will say, 'My dear, do look at that old-fashioned rosebush. Isn't it glorious?'

"But my missy knows just what is the sort of talk I like to hear. I love to see the animals in the fields and along the roads and the little birds on the telegraph wires. It is great fun to see the sights when riding! And it makes a dog feel of a good deal of importance, too, when someone talks to him like that and speaks of the things that will interest a dog most. "And," ended Billy Bugler, "this is almost a never-failing rule—

"The more you love your little dog the more he will love you!"

He Knew It.

George, three years of age, appeared on the Easter program at his Sunday school in Greenwood, singing a solo. As he was leaving the church with his mother, a friend said to him:

"George, you did fine."

"I know it," he replied.

His mother, reproving him, said: "Why, George, you should not have said that to the lady." Whereupon George answered:

"Well, mother, I guess I could hear my own voice."—Indianapolis News.

No Marrying in Heaven.

"The Bible says there will be no marrying in heaven," said Willie. "I wonder if that is true?"

"Of course it is," replied his little sister Hazel. "How can the women marry when there are no men in the place?"

Speed.

The frigate bird is capable of getting up a speed of 96 miles an hour with hardly a movement of its wings. The greater part of its life is spent in the air.