



The House of Whispers

By William Johnston

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

A BEAUTIFUL GHOST.

Synopsis.—Spalding Nelson is occupying the apartments of his great-uncle, Rufus Gaston. The Gastons, leaving on a trip, tell him about mysterious noises and "whispers" that have haunted them. He becomes acquainted with Barbara Bradford, who lives in the same big building. He instinctively dislikes and distrusts the superintendent, Wick. The mysteries in his apartments begin with the disappearance of the Gaston pearls from the wall safe. He decides not to call in the police, but to do his own investigating. It is soon evident that someone has access to his rooms. Becoming friendly with Barbara, he learns that her apartments are equally mysterious. She tells him that several years before her sister, Claire, who lives with her, had 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 has stolen documents concerning the affair from the Bradford apartment and is attempting to blackmail the Bradfords. Nelson takes Miss Kelly, the telephone girl, to dinner with the idea of pumping her. Gorman, a hotel detective, recognizes her as the wife of Lefty Moore, a noted burglar. Nelson partly confides in the detective and arranges to meet him.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"You're right about that," I replied, "and say, look here. Why can't you meet me somewhere tomorrow afternoon. There are a lot of mysterious things happening in the Granddeck. Maybe you can help me in trying to clear them up."

"It's a date. I'll be in the back room of Jim Connor's place over on Third avenue at three o'clock waiting for you."

"I'll be there," I said, as I bade him good night.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "Do you know where Lefty Moore's wife lives now?"

I recalled the number she had told me to give the taxi man and repeated it to him, an address way over on East Sixty-second street near the river.

"I like to know them sort of things," he explained. "In our business you never know when you'll be needing them."

On my way home, after I left him, I congratulated myself on having made James Gorman's acquaintance. In him I had found a man with police and detective experience. The fact that he held a responsible position with a big hotel ought to be sufficient voucher for his honesty. Of course Miss Bradford must be consulted before I met Gorman the next afternoon. I could hardly tell him my own almost unbearable experiences without bringing in the attempts to blackmail her sister. Surely Miss Bradford would not object to my plan. We were making such poor headway in solving the mystery ourselves that I was certain she would welcome Gorman's advice.

And would it not be a surprise to Barbara Bradford to learn that a criminal—or at least the wife of a criminal—was employed as a telephone girl in the apartment house? I was hoping that she would be at home and in her room when I arrived at the house so that I might signal her and tell her my great news at once.

I let myself into the apartment and without bothering to turn on the lights made my way back toward my own

was at the bottom of the plots against us.

I gained the door without my presence having been discovered. In the dim half-light that came from the open window I could detect a figure standing on a chair apparently leaning along the wall near the ceiling. I recalled with curiosity that it was from that spot that the whispers I had heard had seemed to come.

Inch by inch I edged noiselessly forward, my eyes on the intruder until at last my fingers found the electric light button. As the light flooded the room there was a suppressed scream, followed by a frightened gasp. The figure on the chair turned quickly and faced me. I saw that it was a woman, a badly frightened woman, with her hands clutching at her heart. Almost instantly I recognized her. It was not Barbara Bradford, but her sister, Claire. She was clad in some sort of a dark house gown thrown over her nightgown. Her slipped feet were bare of stockings, and her hair hung in a great braid down her back.

As I stared at her she sprang from the chair and made a rush for the open window. I grabbed for her and though she fought desperately I managed to hold her fast and to drag her away from the window. After a moment's futile resistance she suddenly collapsed in my arms, moaning in a tense whisper:

"Let me go, please let me go."

I placed her in a chair, and still keeping a tight hold on one of her arms, studied her, debating what to do. What desperate motive could have driven this girl to the daring journey across the narrow ledge by which she had gained access to my quarters? Was she, I wondered, once more in the power of that evil ex-husband of hers, driven by fear of him to such desperate deeds?

"Let me go," she moaned again.

"Not until you tell me what you were doing in my rooms," I answered firmly.

"I did not know there was any one here. I thought the apartment was vacant. I thought the Gastons were away."

"But why did you come?"

"I can't tell that," she moaned. "I can't! I can't!"

"You must," I repeated. "I am going to keep you here until you tell me."

"You must not keep me here," she said. "I don't want my people to know about my having been here. You look like a gentleman. Please let me go."

"Doesn't Barbara—doesn't your sister know you are here?"

At my mention of her sister's name an expression of amazement escaped her.

"Who are you?" she asked excitedly. "How did you know who I was?"

"I am a friend of your sister," I answered. "She will tell you who I am. You must trust me. I feel I have a right to know what you are doing here. Won't you tell me?"

A strange look came into her eyes and she shook her head.

"You wouldn't understand. I was trying to trace the whispers."

"The whispers!" I cried excitedly. "You have heard them, too?"

"Often," she said. "I heard them tonight. Mother and Barbara were out to the theater. They seemed to come from near the ceiling in my sister's room. They seemed to vanish in the direction of this room. I thought there was no one here. I decided to creep along the ledge and see if I could trace them."

"And did you succeed?"

She shook her head.

"When I first came in this room I could still hear them. They seemed to be coming from up near the ceiling. I got up on a chair and put my ear to the wall to listen. Then they stopped altogether and then—you came in. May I go now—before my mother comes home?"

"On one condition," I answered, "that you tell your sister about your having been here."

"I'll tell her if you wish me to," she replied, "and now, please may I go?"

"Could you let me out of your door?"

"See, I brought a key to our apartment with me. I don't think I dare make that trip across the ledge tonight."

As I escorted her to the door, my mind in a whirl over the events of the evening, I suddenly remembered how important it was that I should see her sister for a long talk before I kept my appointment with Gorman.

"Tell your sister," I said to Claire Bradford as she departed. "That it is imperative that she meet me at lunch tomorrow. I have news of the utmost importance—news that concerns all of us. Tell her to meet me at the Astor at one. She must come."

"I'll tell her," she replied.

CHAPTER VII.

It was the next evening that I made my astounding discovery, when pure chance led me plump into what both Barbara Bradford and I recognized at once as our first real clue to the mysteries surrounding us.

room. As I reached the end of the hall my ears detected a scuffling noise that seemed to come from my quarters. I stopped stock-still and listened breathlessly. Unquestionably there was someone in my room.

I tiptoed softly forward. As I crept along in the darkness, making no sound, I found myself devoutly wishing for some weapon. Of course it might be Barbara, who had entered by means of the ledge to leave some message for me, but if it were not she, I felt certain that I would discover who

My find came unexpectedly at the end of an exciting day. As may be imagined I slept little in the hours following my unexpected meeting with Claire Bradford in my room, coming as it did right on top of Detective Gorman's revelations as to the identity of the telephone girl. Coupled with these circumstances was the fact that if my hopes were realized, Barbara would be within a very few hours lunching with me for the first time.

I just had to see her before I met Gorman. The tale I was to unfold to him was so improbable, so almost unbelievable, that I wanted to go over it with her step by step, in order to be able to convince the detective that it was the absolute truth.

I could not help but realize how preposterous it would sound in the telling. Mr. Gorman could hardly be blamed for believing that my mind had been inflamed by witnessing too many movie thrillers. Yet I had proof. There were the entries in my great-uncle's diary that I could show. I had the anonymous notes. My story of the strange whispers, if need be, could be confirmed by the old laundress, by Barbara Bradford, yes, and by Claire, too. That is, if the reason, Claire had given to account for her presence in my room was the true one. It sounded logical, and yet I did not place the confidence in her that I did in Barbara.

But what I relied on most of all to convince Gorman of the truth of my preposterous tale was his own knowledge of the police. I had proof.

"I can't believe it," cried the girl, shocked at my statement. "She's only a girl like myself. I have talked to her lots of times. I'm certain there's nothing wicked or wrong about her."

"I'm afraid there is," I explained.

"I took her out to dinner last night, to the White Room. The house detective, while she was off telephoning, practically ordered me out of the place because I was with her. She's notorious. Her husband is Lefty Moore, a well-known burglar. He's in Sing Sing now. Detective Gorman arrested him. He ought to know."

"Oh, the poor girl," exclaimed Miss Bradford, tears welling up in her eyes. "I'm so sorry for her."

"But think of your sister. Think what they are trying to do with Miss Kelly's aid."

"But how do you know she's aiding them?"

"I don't know it. But I do know that nobody could pull off all the things that have been happening in the Granddeck without some one there helping them. We've found someone used to helping criminals—a criminal's wife. Isn't that enough? All we need to do now is to watch her closely and fasten the thing on her."

"How are you going to do that?"

"That's why I insisted on your coming here today. I am to meet Detective Gorman at three. I feel that he could aid us, and I think we ought to tell him everything."

"Tell the police!" Her face grew white at the thought. "Wouldn't that mean a scandal—the newspapers and all that sort of thing?"

I shook my head decisively.

"Gorman's not with the police now. He is employed as a hotel detective. But he is just the man we need to help us. He knows all about criminals and how to track them. With his aid we can quickly clear the whole thing up."

"Will you have to tell him everything—about Claire's marriage?"

"We've either got to tell him everything or nothing."

"Oh, how I wish we did not have to. The more people there are who know about things the more likely they are to become public."

"Yet you trusted me with your sister's secret."

She gave me a quick glance of confidence.

"You're different."

"I'm afraid most people would not agree with you. They would regard me as a worthless, discredited young fellow out of a job."

"But it's not your fault."

"The point is," I went on, "that we have reached a place where we need expert advice. Gorman has fortuitously turned up to give it. The only way is to tell him everything."

For a moment she debated the matter silently, her pretty forehead pucker-
ed in thought.

"Yes," she said at last, "I suppose it is the only way. But won't he want a lot of money for his services?"

"I'll attend to that," I answered.

"I'll make my great-uncle reward him handsomely for recovering the Gaston jewels."

"If he does."

"He must. We've got to get them back."

From her hand-bag she produced the anonymous letters she had received and handed them to me.

"Will you want to show the detective these?"

"Yes, I think I had better. The whole tale sounds so preposterous that I need every bit of corroborative evidence we can muster."

For half an hour we lingered over the table, discussing all the aspects of the case. Eventually I think I persuaded Miss Bradford that the evidence pointed most damningly to the telephone girl as one of the conspirators or at least one of their aides. She was eager to know what plan of action Gorman would advise and as we parted we arranged to be at our adjoining windows at ten that evening in order that we might have another chat.

I found Gorman waiting for me at the place he had mentioned.

"I told you that girl was a bad one," he said.

"What do you mean?" I cried.

"What have you learned about her?"

"Nothing except that the address she gave you last night was phony. The number she gave is the hospital grounds—he pronounced it 'hor-pa-lit'."

"Where does she live, then?"

"She's keeping that under cover. She shook the taxi at Fifty-ninth and Third."

Detective Gorman to the rescue.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PATHOS IN PLEAS

More Than Humor in Samples of Baboo Writing

Communications Evidently Composed Under Stress—Proposal of Marriage Can Only Be Classed as Remarkable.

Serpents, baboons, tigers and other dangerous and disturbing creatures have not infrequently interfered with the work of progress and improvement in India. The distracted telegram of a baboo station master, asking for instructions in the unpleasant emergency of "tiger dancing on platform," has long been a stock anecdote. He was certainly excusable for being rather upset in his mind and in his English.

The recent plea of a baboo office clerk, addressed to the head of the firm whose son, a confirmed dog-lover, had been recently put in charge, had less to justify its urgency—yet there are many who will sympathize.

"If this office will be continuously infested by sprightly canine with penchant for eating legs," he wrote,

"how shall work be performed to honor's satisfaction? I beseech with honor relegate the friend of man to house and home, where noxious behavior will be suitably admired."

The gentleman who reports this

contingent allowance for her return to stoutness?"

Here is a fine example of baboo, and a proposal of marriage, too:

"Dear sir—It is with faltering penmanship that I write to have communication with you about the prospective condition of your damsel offspring.

"For some remote time to past a secret passion has been firing my bosom internally with loving for your daughter. I have navigated every channel in the magnitude of my extensive jurisdiction to cruelly smother the growing love-knot that is being constructed in my within side, but the timid lamp of affection trimmed by Cupid's productive hands still nourishes my love-sick heart. Needless would it be for me to numerically extemporize the great conflagration that has been generated in my head and heart. During the region of rightness my intellectual cranium has been entangled in thoughtful attitude after my beloved consort. Nocturnal slumberlessness has been the infirmity which has besieged my now degenerate constitution. My educational capabilities have abandoned me, and I now cling to those lovely tresses of your much-coveted daughter like a mariner shipwrecked on the rock of love. As to my scholastic caliber, I was recently ejected from Calcutta University. I am of lofty and original lineage and of independent incomes, and hoping that having debated this proposition in your preoccupied mind you will concordantly corroborate in espousing your female progeny to my tender bosom and thereby acquire me into your family circle. Your dutiful son-in-law."

"Move for Sound Currency.

How the great volume of European currency, unsecured by gold or real estate, is to be reduced is illustrated by what is taking place in Czechoslovakia now, says the Milwaukee Journal.

This is one of the new states carved out of the old Austro-Hungarian empire. It inherited from the old empire its share of inflated war money—more than 8,000,000,000 crowns, worth in the old days about 20 cents each, but whose present value is around one cent. Czechoslovakia

realizes that its money must have more value.

So in the recent reorganization of its financial system all of the old money was called in and new money issued.

But the volume of new money is 38

per cent less than the old, and the state cannot increase this except by

providing adequate security (gold, silver, bonds, commercial paper, warehouse receipts, etc.) upon which to base the issue. Further, plans have been made to withdraw from circulation another 1,500,000,000 crowns.

Girls Invade the Navy.

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