

The House of Whispers

By William Johnston

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"WHO SHOT HER?"

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 scared 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, hotel detective, recognises her as the wife of Louis Moore, a noted burglar. Nelson tells his story to Gorman and puts the case in his hands. Nelson finds a secret passage, with a panel door in his room. He realises he loves Barbara. He and Barbara hear a shot in the building.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

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I sprang after her, but she moved so quickly that she was out of the window and safely home before I could stop her. Only waiting to see her off the ledge I turned back and hastily pulling the panel into place I dashed for the front of the house. The screams and the shots I was sure had come from the apartment directly below mine. I was certain that there had been murder done there, and my mind was made up to investigate it at once. If I moved quickly there might be an opportunity to catch the murderer red-handed. I let myself out and dashed down the one flight of stairs. As I arrived there, the ascending elevator stopped, and Mr. Wick burst out, followed by an excited elevator runner. Wick was carrying a revolver in his hand.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked excitedly.

"I heard a woman screaming in this apartment and then a shot."

"I heard it, too. In which apartment was it?"

"Right here," I said, pointing to the door.

"Miss Lutan's," he said. "Let's go in. Here's my pass-key. You open the door. I'll be right behind you with my revolver."

CHAPTER VIII.

Inserting the key Mr. Wick handed me, I turned it sharply and flung the door wide. It revealed a luxuriously furnished apartment, the front rooms of which were extravagantly ablaze with light.

For a moment the three of us, Mr. Wick, the elevator boy and myself, stood there with our ears alert for any sound from the apartment. While I do not admit to being a coward, the unknown has its terrors for all of us, and I must confess, that the knowledge that Mr. Wick had his revolver drawn was indeed comforting. All was silence in the place.

"John," said Wick to the elevator boy, "you stand here right by the door



"She Has Been Murdered," I cried; "Get the Police at Once."

and keep your eye on the elevator. If anybody tries to sneak past you, you holler for us."

"Deed I will, Mr. Wick," said the boy, with chattering teeth. "I'll holler, all right."

"Go ahead, Mr. Nelson," said the superintendent. "I'm right behind you with the revolver."

Without waiting to explore the front rooms, I turned at once and ran down the long hall to the sitting room. If

"Mr. Nelson and me just discovered her body. What's that, sir?"

Just what Mr. Kent's reply on hearing the shocking news had been I had, of course, no means of knowing, but whatever it was, over the superintendent's face came an expression of incredulity and amazement.

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

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

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

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

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

"Who was Miss Lutan?" I asked.

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

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

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

"Where's the maid tonight?"

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

"Then Miss Lutan is not playing now?"

"Not for the last month."

"Had there been any one here with her tonight?"

"I'll ask the elevator boy."

"John says she came in alone about fifteen minutes ago," said Mr. Wick when he came back. "She went out



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

about seven. Her own chauffeur was driving her then, but when she came back she was in a hired taxi. That's something I can't understand."

"How do you suppose the murderer escaped?"

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

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

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

He made a hasty inspection and then said tersely:

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Miss Lutan's been shot by a burglar in her apartment," I heard him say.

"Yes," said Mr. Wick.

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

"Would you not wait until the police come?" suggested the superintendent. "They'll be here any minute and probably they'll want a statement from you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How was this woman killed?"

"By a revolver shot right through the heart."

"Who is she?"

"Daisy Lutan, the actress."

"Who did it?"

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

"Who found her?"

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

The detectives turned to Mr. Wick first.

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

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

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

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

"Was anything missing?"

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

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

"Who would know?"

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

"Did she keep only the one servant?"

"Only the maid and a chauffeur."

"Then she was all alone in the apartment?"

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

"Did she come home alone?"

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

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

The detective who had been questioning Wick turned to me.

"Who are you?"

"Spalding Nelson."

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

"I'm a clerk."

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

"How long?" I asked.

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

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

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

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

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

The net about Nelson is drawn closer.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A New Style.

"Does that new author burn the midnight oil with his toll?"

"No, but he burns the roads with his easel."

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

MARVELOUS IS HUMAN MIND

Five Hundred Million Brain Cells Responsive to the Call of Ruler of the Intellect.

On a rough estimate, the brain contains 500,000,000 cells, each having a consciousness of its own. Your self-consciousness, your personality, should be the master of all these willing slaves.

They are the genii of the mind, humbly waiting to do your bidding; guardians of the vast stores of ideas that you, more often than not without realizing it, have gathered along life's highway. Are you one of the reckless kind, who have "no idea," or are you in the ranks of the sensible, who summon the spirits of the intellect to their aid?

How is this done? Nothing more simple. Get the problem fairly and squarely into your head, and then forget it! The little genii of the brain refuse to be coerced; humor them, however, and there is no limit to what they can, and will, do for you. You have to make a decision. Turn the problem round and round in your head till you are giddy, you will get no nearer to the solution. Put it away from you. Don't force your thoughts; leave them alone, and behold, suddenly, when you least expect it, the idea you have been searching for will jump into your mind, to be instantly recognized as the idea you wanted.

The magicians of the brain would appear to be more amenable to feminine than masculine rule, for the proverb of all nations agree that women's best ideas are her first ones, while man has to wait for second thought if he would act rightly.

Our search for ideas, too, must be systematic if we want to get hold of useful ones.

According to the Platonic philosophy, ideas are the universal types of which individual specimens are the more or less imperfect copies; so that we need not be downhearted if we cannot carry out our ideas in practice exactly as they occur to us in the mind. Thought grows snowball fashion, and is the opposite to money. The more we spend the more we have.—London Answers.

Good Causes and Poor Tunes.

Mr. Bernard Shaw, who has fallen foul of "The Red Flag," which he regards as an air that would ruin any movement, seems to forget that many a good cause has been supported by a poor tune. The Belgian national anthem is a remarkably insane melody but that did not impair the resistance of Liege. And neither the words nor music of "God Save the King," are particularly uplifting. The air of "Lillibullero," that is said to have whistled James II off the throne of England, cannot have been a very distinguished one, for nowadays no one seems to know what it was. On the other hand the Russian national anthem was easily one of the most stirring examples of its kind in Europe, but it did not save Russia from collapse. If the soviets have provided a substitute for it the result would probably please Mr. Shaw as little as "The Red Flag," which he considers should be rechristened "The Eternal March of a Fried Egg."—Manchester Guardian.

Freight Auditor.

Freight Auditor—Were you in on it when our directors cut the melon?

Cashier—No. But I cut some figs when they cut the payroll.