

The House of Whispers

By WILLIAM JOHNSTON

Copyright by Little, Brown & Co.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

"I guess so," said Wick. "That's where his room is. He's only been here in the Granddeck a few days. I don't know much about it."

"And that's all you know about it?" said the detective, turning to me again. I hesitated. Should I or should I not tell them of the wall safe that I had seen Mr. Wick closing? There was no way I could prove it. Undoubtedly Wick would deny having done so. It would be his word against mine. As superintendent his word would undoubtedly carry. I decided it would be best to withhold my information to a more propitious time.

"That's all I know, except what Mr. Wick has told you," I said.

"Very well," said the detective in charge. "You can go now, and you, too, Doctor."

Mr. Wick was escorting the doctor to the door. The detectives had withdrawn to the room where the body lay and were holding a whispered conference. I stepped quickly to the wall safe, and making sure that I was unobserved, tested the knob. It was securely fastened. I congratulated myself on having said nothing about it. Wick, I felt certain, would deny having shut it, and there was no proof that it had been opened when we had entered.

As I returned to my own apartment upstairs, nearing the top of the short flight of steps between the floors I was astounded to see a female figure flitting across the hall and entering the Bradford apartment. Though I had opportunity for only a brief glimpse, I recognized her at once. It was Claire Bradford.

The door of my apartment was standing wide open. I remembered that as I had run downstairs a few moments ago, I had neglected to close it after me. From the direction in which she had come, it was plain that Claire Bradford had been paying another surreptitious visit to my quarters. What could have been her purpose? There must have been some strong impelling motive to make her dare the perilous journey along the window ledge, and now, at the imminent risk of discovery, to pay me a second visit. I began seriously to doubt whether the explanation she had offered me was the true one. I was beginning to feel that there was more than a possibility that she was again in the clutches of the unscrupulous rascal who had once been her husband.

Greatly puzzled, I made a hasty survey of the apartment, but could find nothing that appeared to have been disturbed. Going back to my own room I hastened to place a handkerchief out of my window as a signal to Barbara, for I knew she would be anxious to know the meaning of the sounds we had heard below. In a very few moments I heard the tap of her riding-crop on my sill and hurried to answer.

"What was it?" she asked in an excited whisper.

"Daisy Lutan, an actress, who lived on the floor below, has been murdered—shot."

"Who did it?"

"I don't know. Mr. Wick and I went into the apartment together. There was no one there."

"How terrible!" she exclaimed.

"It is, indeed," I answered, "but it may help us."

"What do you mean?"

"With the police in the house making investigations, there'll be no more threats from the blackmailers for a while. They won't dare bother you for the present."

"Do you really think so?" she questioned with a little sigh of relief.

"I'm sure of it."

"Have the police been called in?"

"Yes; two detectives are downstairs now."

"I'm glad," she said. "With the detectives here, they won't dare molest us, will they?"

"Of course not," I answered. "Is your sister at home?"

"Yes," she answered. "Our guests have just gone. Mother has retired, and Claire is in the living room writing a note. They heard nothing, so I did not tell them anything about it."

"That was wise. They'll hear it soon enough. Has your sister been in the apartment all evening?"

"She hasn't been out all day unless she went out just to drop the letter she was writing down the mail chute in the hall. Why do you ask?"

"I was merely wondering if there was any way she could learn of the murder."

"How could she? Isn't that too terrible about Miss Lutan? But I mustn't talk any longer. Good night."

"Wait a moment," I cried. "There are some things I must discuss with you before I meet Gorman. How about meeting me at the Astor at eleven?"

"I can't promise, but I'll try. Good night!"

There was nothing further that I could do, and I felt sadly in need of rest. Throwing off my coat and waistcoat I began making preparations for bed. The notion took me to once more investigate the secret passageway. I rushed sharply on the panel as I had

done before, but this time I could not budge it. I tugged and worked and pounded, but it stuck fast in spite of all my efforts. As I was struggling to force it open, there came a sharp ring at the bell of the apartment. As I was, in my shirt sleeves, I answered it. The two detectives I had seen downstairs stood there.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I arrest you for the murder of Daisy Lutan," said one of them, and with that they sprang forward and pinioned my arms.

"Why, this is absurd," I laughed in their faces, conscious of my utter innocence of the crime. "I had nothing to do with it."

"That remains to be seen. Put on your coat and come along."

Still holding me fast, they went back with me to my bedroom. Clutching me tight they made me put on my coat, and no sooner had I done so than one of them snapped handcuffs on me.

"Look at this, Jim," said one of them, pointing to a spot on the front of my coat.

"That's blood all right," said the other, after inspecting it.

"I got that when I was helping Mr. Wick lift the body to the couch," I protested.

"Tell that to the judge," the detective called Jim scoffed. "Better look around for the gun, Cullen."

"You'll find no gun here," I cried. "I never owned one."

Nevertheless Cullen began rummaging through the drawers of my dresser. Suddenly he gave a triumphant exclamation and drew something from beneath a pile of shirts in the second drawer.

"Here it is," he announced, holding



"Here it is," He Announced, Holding Up Before My Astonished Eyes an Automatic Revolver.

up before my astonished eyes an automatic revolver.

"I never saw it before," I gasped. The detective merely laughed.

"There's one bullet gone," said the man who was examining it.

"Come along, young fellow," said the other detective gruffly. "The bullet settles it. We've got the right party."

CHAPTER IX.

A prisoner in a police station cell, I passed a sleepless night. Conscious as I was of my utter innocence and confident of my speedy release, nevertheless I had to admit that the detectives from their point of view were perfectly justified in placing me under arrest.

For a burglar to have gained access to the apartments without the connivance of the employees seemed almost an impossibility. For him to have escaped from the building after having murdered Miss Lutan without being detected seemed also highly improbable. Then, too, there was the damning evidence of the blood on my coat and the fact that I had been found at the door of the apartment. I had not observed the stain on my clothing until the detectives discovered it. My explanation of how it had gotten there was the true one, yet I could readily realize that it might sound fishy to others.

On the face of it the tragedy in the Granddeck looked like an inside job. The revolver, with one bullet missing, was the strongest sort of evidence that I was the murderer. Yet I never had seen the weapon before and could not imagine who could have placed it there. There was only one explanation possible. It had been purposely planted there with the definite object of throwing suspicion on me.

The one person—the only person—whom I knew to have been in my rooms after the murder was committed was Claire Bradford. Could she have done it? I remembered that Barbara had showed me a revolver in her possession. I wondered if this could be the same weapon. I did not think it possible that Claire herself could have used it. I could imagine no motive why Claire Bradford would want to kill Miss Lutan, yet it must have been she who had hidden the revolver in my dresser. What had been her motive?

How had she got possession of the revolver after the murder?

Come what may, I had no intention of telling any one—not even Gorman—of Claire's second visit to my apartment. For Barbara's sake I made up my mind I would keep my lips closed about that incident, even if I had to stay in prison indefinitely. At the police station when the detectives had brought me in, I had quietly but firmly refused to answer any questions, although they had badgered me for nearly two hours before they let me alone.

"Where did you live before you came to the Granddeck?"

"Where did you work?"

"Where is Rufus Gaston?"

"Where do your people live?"

"Why did you kill Daisy Lutan?"

"Where did you get the money you have?"

"We've got the goods on you. Why don't you confess?"

These were the sort of questions that were flung at me, first by one and then the other. Evidently at first they had had hopes of breaking me down.

"I have nothing to say," I had been my unvarying answer to all their questions.

Finally they gave it up and locked me in a cell for the night, leaving me thankful that the honor of being a suspected murderer relieved me from sharing a cell with some of the frowsy prisoners I saw brought past my barred door.

"Haven't you any friends you would like to have notified?" was the last question they asked as they left me.

"I have nothing to say," I repeated once more.

Nor was this answer this time mere stubbornness. Who was there that I could notify of my plight? Birge and Roller, my two intimates, were somewhere on the high seas. The men whom I had known in the office where I had worked, for obvious reasons, were not to be called on. I had no idea of the whereabouts of my aged relatives beyond the fact that they were somewhere in Maine.

I had no intention whatever of communicating the fact of my arrest to my mother. Indeed, I was hoping that she would not hear of it until after my innocence was established.

I thought of Gorman. I would have been glad of his counsel, but I remembered that I did not know where he lived. He had told me he was giving up his position at the hotel. It would be useless to try to find him until morning.

Yet in spite of my apparent friendliness, although to all appearances there was no one in New York to whom I could turn in this time of trouble, it was a wonderful comfort to feel that I was sure of one staunch friend—Barbara Bradford.

Although we had been acquainted but a few days, and although hardly a word of love had passed between us, I knew that her feeling for me already was something greater than friendship. I knew that she trusted me and that she would remain faithful in her affection for me, no matter what accusations were brought against me. I had been madly in love with her from almost the first time I saw her. Whatever happened, I must keep her out of it. I must find some means of warning her to say nothing to any one. I knew that her first impulse as soon as she heard of my arrest would be to come to my rescue, regardless of the fact that in establishing an alibi for me she would be blasting her own reputation. Under no circumstances, even if I was convicted, must she be permitted to speak. No explanation can account for the presence of a young girl alone in a man's rooms at eleven o'clock at night, even though she and I both knew how utterly undeserving of censure her presence there was and how important had been her motive in coming there.

Mention of Barbara's name in any way in connection with a murder case would be certain to wreck her sister's matrimonial plans. It would mean the ruin of her mother's ambitions and the unmasking of the parlor condition of their finances. It would mean that the reproaches of her mother and sister would be heaped on my Barbara's poor head.

I was still unsatisfied in my own mind as to just what part Claire Bradford was playing in the web of mystery about us. She was emotional and flighty, given to doing rash things. I felt that there was a strong possibility that relations with her ex-husband had been in some way re-established. I felt at times that she was being used as a tool by the conspirators in the Granddeck mysteries. If Claire was involved in any way, it behooved me to move carefully lest she should be betrayed in my efforts to clear myself.

There was nothing for me to do but to sit tight and take my plight as philosophically as I could until I could get in touch with Gorman. As soon as it was morning, I bribed a jail attendant to bring me a morning newspaper. On the first page I found an account of the murder under glaring headlines and read it with intense interest, my conviction growing with each line that I read that the

police case against me was far better backed up than I ever imagined it could be.

Then and there I made up my mind never again to believe anything on purely circumstantial evidence. No one knew better than I how utterly innocent I was of that crime, how upright my conduct in New York had been, and how honest my motives for all my recent actions had been, yet this is what I read in the newspaper:

BURGLAR MURDERS WELL-KNOWN ACTRESS

Miss Daisy Lutan Found Mysteriously Shot in her Luxurious Apartment in the Granddeck.

Marks on Throat Where Murderer Had Choked Her

Police Arrest John S. Nelson, a Clerk, Out of Work, in Whose Rooms They Found a Revolver.

Daisy Lutan, an actress, whose matrimonial affairs recently brought her much notoriety, was found last night murdered in her apartment in the Granddeck. She had been instantly killed by a bullet wound through the heart, and there were marks on her throat where her assailant had tried to choke her. John S. Nelson, a clerk out of work, who had been acting as caretaker for one of the tenants in the building, was arrested.

There was blood on his coat when Detectives Cullen and Edwards took him prisoner, and they found in his room a revolver with one chamber empty hidden under a pile of shirts in the dresser.

The apartment Nelson is occupying is directly above that of Miss Lutan. The police theory is that Nelson let himself into the apartment by swinging down from his window, and that Miss Lutan, returning unexpectedly, found him ransacking her rooms.

The crime was discovered by James Wick, superintendent of the apartment house, who was in the elevator when he heard screams followed by a shot. Getting out of the elevator to investigate he found Nelson at the door of the Lutan apartment.

Nelson glibly explained that he had heard a shot and was trying to see where it had come from. Mr. Wick's suspicions were aroused by his manner, and he made Nelson come with him into the apartment and kept him there until the arrival of the police.

Little is known at the Granddeck about young Nelson, and he stubbornly refuses to make any statement about himself. He was employed only a few days ago by Rufus Gaston as caretaker for his apartment. As Mr. Gaston is absent from the city it cannot be learned how he happened to give Nelson employment. The police believe he may have obtained the position through false references in order to gain an opportunity to loot the apartments in the building.

Superintendent Wick had ascertained that Nelson was once employed by a shipping firm in the Wall street district but had been discredibly discharged. His former employer confirmed this, but would say nothing about Nelson beyond stating that he had been discharged for cause.

Although Nelson was not over well supplied with money he had been seen recently ordering elaborate meals in some of the most expensive restaurants. Miss Nellie Kelly, the telephone girl at the Granddeck, reported that only the night before Nelson had taken her to dinner, ordering champagne and hiring taxicabs, and had tried to pump her about the tenants in the building.

The one fact that stuck out in the whole article that seemed of vast importance to me was the fact that Wick had informed the police that I had been discredibly discharged from my last place of employment. How did he know that? Certainly I had not told him. I had told no one of the occurrence except Barbara Bradford, and I was sure she had not revealed it to anyone.

It was indubitable proof to me that Wick, or someone with whom he was conniving, had been having me shadowed. Even my great-uncle Rufus did not know where my place of employment was. Evidently the plot to discredit me had begun the day I arrived at the Granddeck. I had been discharged on account of some mysterious note my employer had received. I began now to believe that Wick must have had me followed to my place of business and to have sent that note for the express purpose of bringing about my discharge. But why? That was the puzzle.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"Old Style" Time Still in Use.

It is not only in eastern Europe, under the influences of the Greek church, that the unreformed calendar may be found still in use. Even in England, where Christmas has been kept on December 25 for many generations, the government does not pay the Christmas dividends on the national debt till Twelfth day, and the midsummer dividends are paid not on June 24, but on July 5.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

By A. MARIA CRAWFORD

(© 1920, by McClure Newspaper Syndicate.)

"Your job is waiting for you, my boy," said Telford McGraw, patting the broad shoulder of a convalescent patient in St. Luke's hospital.

Jim looked up, a little smile twisting his wide straight mouth. "You've been a great boss, Mr. McGraw."

"Tut, tut," said the old man. His merry round face was wreathed in smiles. "I'll be glad when you are well enough to come back to the office. Girls were all right during the war when we couldn't do any better but give me a boy in my place of business, every time. Now that girl who took your position when you had to come out here to the hospital. She's a clever little thing, but you know, sometimes, I actually forget that I am dictating because I am so busy watching the little brown curls around her face and wishing that I had a daughter as pretty. Well, here she comes! I didn't tell you, did I, that she asked to come along with me? Pretty little thing, isn't she?"

He beamed in fatherly fashion on the girl who was walking slowly toward them. "Here's Jim, getting as fit as a fiddle," he called to her. "This is Miss Mary Sue Lenoir, Mr. James McConnell, formerly Sergeant McConnell with the A. E. F. in France."

"I hope that you will soon be able to come back to the office," she said soberly.

Jim flashed her a quick look, half curiosity, half unbelief. "Sure you're glad?" he smiled.

"Yes, indeed," she answered. "I would like to get out of the office by April."

"She's on the level, Jim," said McGraw, as he left. "She's told me the same thing."

"You're making a pretty nice salary for a girl," suggested Jim, after McGraw had gone.

"Don't you like the work?"

She shook her head, turning to look out of a window.

Jim leaned forward a little, looking at her. Mary Sue seemed sympathetic. "I can't hold down a desk job for a long time, maybe never again. I've developed nerves. I'd rather have lost a leg, or an arm."

He leaned back in his wheel chair, closing his eyes, half ashamed of himself for disclosing his secret. She said nothing and presently Jim opened his eyes. She had taken off the sailor hat and was leaning her head against the ledge, looking away at the trees. Again Jim felt a subtle little thread of sympathy between them. "The doctor thinks that six months on a farm will fix me up but I don't know a thing about farming. You know what farmers expect of hired help, brawn and muscle! And I'll have to do something—to live."

Mary Sue got up, smiling a warm, friendly little smile at him. "There are some pear trees in bloom down the path. I'm going to wheel you there and we'll plan something together." Once under the trees, Mary Sue sat down on the grass at his feet. "Isn't it lovely here?" she cried. Look! There's a white throat building her nest in the crotch of that tree, with the white bloom all over it, like a flowering vine on a tiny cottage. I love the country, the birds and the flowers, the green fields, with daisies and buttercups. You'll love it, too, when you go."

Jim smiled. "Not much," he said. "Dark, old muddy roads, have to carry an oily, smelly lantern. I'm through with the dark and candles—had enough of it in Picardy and Flanders. Rats, too! They're always in barns."

"Not our barn! I've a lovely plan for you. It's—it's just fate," she lifted her eager, dream-filled gray eyes and Jim admitted that she was pretty. "I live with my Aunt Fanny and my Uncle Silas Lenoir. You'll like him. He's fine. He wrote to me only today—that they need a young man on the farm this summer and they want me to find somebody for them before I go back. Uncle Sil said that he wanted somebody who was good at figures, who could help him carry out some plans to improve the stock, to make the farm pay a maximum amount. You see, you're it! And Aunt Fannie's cooking! It's too good to talk about. You'll get fat, Sergeant—"

"Oh, say Jim," he pleaded, the shadow on his young face lifting for the first time.

She clapped her hands and, as if in fairy-like answer, a little flurry of snowy pear blossoms sifted down on her head and shoulders.

"Will-o'-the-wisp-o'-spring!" he whispered. "It sounds great, the farm, Aunt Fannie, Uncle Sil—and you—but you'd get tired of your job. I can't let you fool yourself—and me."

Mary Sue moved very close to him, and her hand found his and held it, in warm sympathetic companionship, there on the wheel chair. "We're not dreamers nor faddists in the country," she told him. "We're simple folk and we feel a personal responsibility in our neighbors' welfare. The folks in cities live next door to each other for years and never speak. We couldn't do that. In a month's time in the country, you won't be conscious of a nerve in your body. O Jim," she said softly, "there's peace and happiness and God in the still places. You'll come? What shall I write Uncle Sil tonight about you?"

The boy leaned forward, feeling again the old urge of life, renewed dreams, hopes, the longings common to man. "Tell Uncle Sil," he said eagerly, "that I'll follow wherever you beckon, Will-o'-the-wisp-o'-spring!"

HOME TOWN HELPS

ALL SHOULD HAVE A GARDEN

Health and Profit in the Cultivation of the Ground, Even Though Plot Is Small.

The "city farmer," as they humorously called him, was a very great help, not only to himself, but to the country, during the war-garden time, and the experience he gained from his war-garden activities then has since helped him in the fight to win out against the high cost of living.

He has profited by that experience in every beneficial way, and the best of all is that he fell in love with his garden, and has been in love with it ever since.

He found health there, and more of home happiness; and the profit was then, as it will be now, that he didn't have to take the market basket from home.

To the town dweller, who perhaps hasn't given much attention to gardening, the Albany (Ga.) Herald says: "It's great to have a garden, even though it produce few vegetables. It's great to have a place for outdoor exercise—a place in which to turn up the fragrant earth with a spading fork, level it with a rake and lay it off with a trench hoe. Some folk say it's better exercise than golf or tennis, though on that question we do not presume to sit in judgment. A man can work in his garden before sunrise, when golf links are too wet with the dew to be used, and his garden is a whole lot nearer home than the golf club."

"And there is no reason why Mr. Towndweller cannot have a garden with real vegetables in it if he will give a little practical thought and diligent application to its preparation and care."—Atlanta Constitution.

STRAIGHT ROWS AID GARDEN

Utilize Space to Best Advantage, and Add Greatly to the Appearance of the Plot.

It will add considerably to the ease of gardening as well as to the looks of the plot if the vegetables are planted in nice straight rows instead of helter-skelter. Besides, it will utilize the space better.

Where space is restricted, it is best to have the rows run the long way of the garden—north and south if possible—planting several kinds of similarly grown vegetables like green onions, carrots and radishes, in the same row.

If you plant such crops as beets, radishes and onions in beds these can be made four to six inches high by digging narrow paths around the beds with a hoe and throwing the soil upon the beds.

If the drainage of your garden is not good it is well to grow cabbage, cauliflower and similar crops on small ridges thrown up with the spade or hoe. Other crops, among them early peas and celery, should be planted in shallow trenches scooped out with a hoe. When these plants grow the soil is gradually worked back around the roots.

SEES BILLBOARDS AS WASTE

Eastern Authority Gives Excellent Reason Why Unsightly Structures Should Be Done Away With.

Attacking the American billboard from a new angle, Mr. Joseph Pennell declares that "the lumber expended in unnecessary and unsightly billboards in this country would rebuild nearly everything destroyed abroad. The paint wasted here would cover all the new buildings, and the labor would be of incalculable benefit in what we hear is the great essential of producing more." The argument should do much to help the anti-billboard campaign, for, although many will hesitate to believe that Mr. Pennell's arithmetic is altogether correct in so nice a balance between billboards in America and "everything destroyed" in Europe, there will be plenty to agree that the unnecessary erection of American billboards consumes a vast deal of material that would be very helpful in the erection of buildings in Europe. Meantime the billboards multiply, and by so doing add constantly to the evidence of their own undesirability.

His Fears Realized.

Jane and John, twins, are exceptionally fond of each other, John seemingly much the older with the proprietary solicitude for Jane's welfare. Jane had spent the week end out of town and as the train drew into the station, John was there to meet her. Quickly noting the newly bandaged finger, he exclaimed, "I just knew you'd get hurt if I wasn't along to take care of you!"

Luck and Labor.

Luck is ever waiting for something to turn up. Labor, with keen eyes and strong will, will turn up something. Luck lies in bed, and wishes the postman would bring him the news of a legacy. Labor turns out at six o'clock, and with busy pen or ringing hammer lays the foundation of a competence. Luck whines. Labor whistles. Luck relies on chance. Labor on character.—Cobden.