

# The House of Whispers

By WILLIAM JOHNSTON



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## CHAPTER XII—Continued.

"Nothing doing," he sneered. "Any crook jacking enough to steal those pearls, once he had got his hands on them, never would return them. Pearls are too easily disposed of. You've got to dig up a better explanation than that."

"What did Mr. Gaston think? What did he say when he found them there?"

"He had nothing to say. He was so tickled at finding them again that he hustled with them right away to the safe deposit vaults and did not rest until he had them safely locked up. He took both jewel cases with him and made me go along with him to protect them."

"Didn't you look at all for the secret passageway I told you about?"

"Still dreaming about that, are you?" scoffed Gorman. "No, we didn't. On the way up to the Granddeck the old man, spoke about it and I told him that in my opinion there was nothing to it. After he recovered the pearls he was too excited to think about anything else. It seemed to break him all up, and I took him back to his hotel and left him there. He said he had some writing to do, and that he would meet me at my office at noon today."

"How do you account for the return of the pearls?" I cried desperately. "What's your theory about them?"

"I haven't any," he replied. "It's up to you to explain it. Maybe by the time I come to see you tomorrow you'll have thought up a new yarn to spin."

"Please, please," I called after him as he turned away, "do look tomorrow and see if that secret passage is not where I said it was."

He walked away without answering. Back once more in my cell, I stretched myself despondently on my little iron cot, and closing my eyes, tried to concentrate my thoughts on an attempt to solve this new mystery, which I could plainly see had all but destroyed Gorman's faith in my honesty. I must solve it if I was to retain him in adding me to get free, yet the whole thing seemed inexplicable. I could hardly blame him for doubting me. The great value of the pearls had been motive enough for their theft, but what possible motive could there have been for the thief returning them?

With a shock it came to me, too, that the restoration of the pearls practically upset the whole theory of my defense. If I could have established the fact of this theft, a jury might be persuaded to believe my tale of anonymous notes, mysterious whispers, and a secret passageway by which the thief had gained access to the apartment, but without the motive of theft, my story, unsupported by witnesses and uncorroborated by other evidence, surely would be incredible of belief.

I had just one hope left. Old Rufus must find that secret passageway and see whether it led. That, with our knowledge of the identity of the telephone girl and the possibility of proving Gorman's belief that Wick was an ex-convict, seemed likely to be my only salvation. Old Rufus must find that passageway. He must! He must!

For hours I lay there racking my brains over the unsolvable problems. My luncheon was brought in, but I waved it away untouched. Wearily I wondered whether the recovery of the pearls had destroyed my aged relative's faith in me, as it seemed to have destroyed Gorman's. I could hardly blame him if he doubted me after finding that my story of the disappearance of the pearls was apparently untrue. In my brief experience as a prisoner I had learned all too well the bitter fact that once a man is discredited, henceforth no one trusts him. If Rufus Gaston failed me at this juncture I did not see how I could possibly extricate myself unscathed from the web that unseen hands had so skillfully and maliciously woven around me. The only ray of comfort that I could find anywhere in the whole situation was in my firm belief that though old Rufus and Gorman and the whole world doubted me, Barbara Bradford—my Barbara, I ventured to call her in my innermost heart—would continue to believe in me. She would be sure, no matter how much appearances went against me, that I was telling the truth. Barbara and I knew. Even if she had not known that I could not possibly have fired the shot that killed Miss Lutan, I was certain that she still would have trusted me.

Thinking about Barbara, I recalled that it was the day of her sister's wedding. I had one of the prison attendants get me the evening papers to see what they had to say about it. For I was fearful, lest some breath of scandal at the last moment involving the Bradfords might bring about a postponement. Eagerly I was hoping that nothing had happened to prevent the marriage taking place. With the fortunes of her sister assured and her mother's future safe, I realized that the career of my relations with Barbara would be likely to be much

smoother sailing, provided of course that I was acquitted. In the few chats I had had with her, I had realized that wealth and luxury and social position meant nothing to Barbara's happiness. She was the sort of girl who for a man she loved gladly would brave poverty, hardship, everything—a sincere, true-hearted woman with a clear vision of the real values of existence.

My messenger returned with the newspapers, and as I picked them up, everything went black. "Millionaire Gaston Found Murdered," was the startling headline that flashed before me, right there in the column next to the account of the Bradford wedding.

The sinister effect of this terrible news dawned on me instantly. With my great-uncle Rufus dead, without the possibility of his corroborating any part of my story, my case was hopeless, desperate. Unquestionably it would mean that I would be found guilty of murder and sentenced to death in the electric chair. As soon as I could sufficiently compose myself I read every word there was in the newspapers about this new tragedy, smiling grimly at the thought that at least they could not blame this murder on me.

Mr. Gaston, it appeared, had come to the Granddeck about ten o'clock in the morning and had gone at once to his apartment. On his arrival he had been greeted by the telephone girl and had informed her that he was only in the city for a few days and was staying at a hotel. He had added that he would not be occupying the apartment for several weeks until his wife's return to the city. About half-past twelve there had come a telephone call for him. The girl had been unable to get any response from the apartment. Knowing that he had not gone out, and fearing that he might have had a sudden attack of illness, she had become alarmed and notified Mr. Wick, the superintendent.

The superintendent, the account continued, had summoned Mr. Henry Kent, the owner of the Granddeck apartments. Together they had gone to Mr. Gaston's rooms. Being unable to get any reply to repeated rings and knocks they had finally let themselves in with a pass key in possession of the owner of the building.

In his study in the rear of the apartment they were horrified to find old Rufus Gaston, fully clad, lying on the floor, face down, stone dead. A great wound on the back of his head showed that he had been killed, probably instantly, by a terrific blow from some sort of a blunt instrument. A search of the rooms failed to show any sort of a weapon.

The police theory was that the crime was undoubtedly the work of a burglar who had been trapped by the return of Mr. Gaston so unexpectedly to his apartment. How the murderer escaped after attacking Mr. Gaston was a puzzle to the detectives at work on the case. The superintendent of the building expressed the opinion that the murderer had gained access in the guise of a meter inspector. Attendees in the hall recalled that there had been such a man in the building that morning. As he wore the usual uniform and presented the customary credentials, he had been permitted to enter and leave the building unmolested.

There followed a long review of Rufus Gaston's business career and an estimate of some of his extensive holdings in stocks, bonds and real estate.



"Millionaire Gaston Found Murdered," Was the Startling Headline That Flashed Before Me.

from which it appeared that his fortune was likely to run to over ten million dollars. It was with some surprise that I learned that a score or more of years ago the old man apparently had been a powerful figure in the life of the metropolis, active both in its business and social life.

What interested me most was the attention paid to the remarkable coincidence that only a few weeks before a murder had taken place in the apartment just below, under practically the same circumstances. The police, the account stated, were inclined to believe that the murderer was one

of the gang to which young Nelson, now in prison charged with the murder of Miss Lutan, undoubtedly belonged. Their theory was that a burglar gang succeeded in planting Nelson in the apartment as a caretaker, and that this enabled them to get their bearings in the building and provide themselves with false keys for ransacking the rooms at their leisure. The guilt of young Nelson, the police say, is established beyond question, and they are hopeful of being able to round up his associates.

There was also a brief interview with Wick, in which he was quoted as saying:

"I was suspicious of Nelson from the start and tried to keep an eye on him. He was very secretive about his comings and goings and was always prying about trying to learn something about the other tenants. How Mr. Gaston came to employ him as caretaker I never learned, but it would be no hard matter for a slick young crook like him to impose on so old a man as Mr. Gaston with a cock and bull story."

I sniffed indignantly as I read this. I knew that Wick was deliberately trying to still further discredit me. I recalled that he himself had told me that Mr. Gaston had mentioned our relationship. It was obvious that he was deliberately withholding this information with a sinister purpose.

That Wick knew well who had killed Rufus Gaston, just as he knew who had shot Daisy Lutan, I was morally certain. I was inclined to agree with Gorman that Wick himself was not the murderer. The fact that he was of a cowardly and cringing nature seemed to argue against associating him actively with crimes of violence. Yet the virulent way in which he was adding to the evidence against me showed plainly that he was industriously engaged in masking the real murderer.

Who could the murderer be? I was confident that the same person who had killed Miss Lutan had killed my great-uncle. I could only conjecture as to the motive. The police theory that it was burglary seemed as logical as any. The more I pondered over the matter the more firmly I became convinced that there was a numerous criminal band at the back of it all. No one man or two men could carry out all the devilry, even with the help of the telephone girl.

I recalled, too, how I had been skillfully shadowed, work that evidently required organization and employees. I was convinced that Wick and the telephone girl were only two—more than likely two minor members—of a powerful body of criminals. That it was this same sinister force that had caused my discharge from the office I was equally sure. This sort of thing took brains—far bigger brains than Wick gave any evidence of possessing.

A peculiar apathy came over me as I finished reading the account. Never before had I so fully understood how thoroughly an innocent man could be damned by circumstantial evidence. I knew—Barbara knew—that I was absolutely innocent. I doubted much if we could get anyone else to believe it.

The cunning web had been woven with such malicious thoroughness that escape seemed impossible. What was the use of my fighting further?

## CHAPTER XIII.

Coming as it did as a dire climax to all my other troubles, the shock of old Rufus Gaston's murder sent me into an apathetic state from which it seemed impossible for me to arouse myself. Without hope and even without interest I dully awaited the approach of my trial for murder.

While there never had been an opportunity for any bond of affection to become established between my aged relative and myself—in fact, I had seen him only three or four times in my whole life, and then only for brief periods—still his unexpected and dreadful end had bereft me of practically every hope of being acquitted of the absurd charge against me. Wick, it was plain, intended to disclaim all knowledge of my relationship to Mr. Gaston, and now there was no one else to explain how I happened to be living in the building at the time of Miss Lutan's murder. Unfortunately I had destroyed both Mr. Gaston's letter to me, and the note from my mother which had first told me of the old man's intention. My great-uncle, I learned from the newspapers, had been completely prohibited by the tragedy and had been unable to come to the funeral. The shock of the news of her husband's violent end had left her in a very critical condition. It seemed to have wholly deranged her aged brain, and the physicians summoned to the Maine camp where she was supposed to reside had to be removed from there or to let anyone talk with her, declaring that the least excitement of any sort would be apt to have fatal results.

To be sure there was my mother, who could prove my relationship, but I felt there was little use of bringing her into it. On reading of my great-uncle's death she had hastened on from the

Went to attend his funeral and had been puzzled and alarmed by not finding me there. All the time I had been in prison I had been writing her my usual weekly letter, affecting a cheerfulness I was far from feeling and telling her nothing of what had happened. Her letters to me, addressed to the Granddeck, had been forwarded by the post office, so that until after she arrived in the city she knew nothing of my plight. It had been my hope that I would be able to conceal everything from her until after I had been triumphantly acquitted. If I were not she would know the worst soon enough.

When she first learned, or from what source, of my predicament I was unaware. I did not even know of her presence in the city until the day after my great-uncle's funeral, when—just twenty-four hours before my trial was to begin—a keeper brought me word that she was waiting downstairs to see me.

I steeled myself for the interview with her. Naturally I expected that she would be terribly horror stricken and shocked at my plight, but what her attitude toward me would be I could not conjecture. I fully expected nothing but reproaches from her. She had been so opposed to my coming to



"Oh, My Boy, My Boy!" She Had Cried as She Saw Me, "I Know You Didn't Do It."

New York that I felt certain that she would insist that my conduct must be responsible for my being where I now was. For years, it seemed to me, the relations between my mother and myself had been nothing but continuous misunderstandings. To my great amazement and bewilderment not an unkind word nor the suggestion of a reproachful thought came from her lips.

"Oh, my boy, my boy," she had cried as she saw me, "I know you didn't do it. I know my boy is innocent! What can I do to help you?"

In that glorious, wonderful moment of reaction all resentment I had felt toward her forever vanished. I had one sacred, unforgettable glimpse of the eternal greatness of the Mother-heart, ever ready to forgive, ever quick to comprehend, ever prompt to aid. For one sweet hour we talked together, more understandingly than ever before in our lives. Freely and fully I told her everything, even to my wonderful but hopeless love for Barbara Bradford. She was willing, anxious, eager to aid me—but what was there that she could do?—what was there that anyone could do?

It was hopeless for a lone woman of limited means, unacquainted with the big city and unused to its ways, to attempt to battle against such powerful and desperate criminals as were concerned in the far-reaching plot to make me the scapegoat of their heinous misdeeds. I could only advise her that she see McGregor and Gorman and be guided by what they suggested.

When the morning of my trial actually arrived I entered the courtroom in a state of dull apathy. The night before I had not slept at all. I had spent all the black hours reviewing my life, especially the last year, thinking with what high hopes and great expectations I had come to the metropolis and how miserably everything had turned out for me. Step by step I had reviewed the events that had brought me, discredited, all but friendless, all but penniless, into this dismal courtroom accused of a horrible, cowardly deed, seeking to see wherein I might have altered my recent actions or changed the course of my life to avoid having arrived at this shameful goal. Yet, strange to say, I found myself after mature reflection convinced that had I this last year to live over again not in one iota would I have done differently—no, not even if I could have foretold what the future had in store for me.

**(TO BE CONTINUED.)**

**Teacher Fugit?**  
The teacher gave Margaret some yarn and cardboard, and after showing her how to work a design, told her to finish it at home. When she came to school the next day with the half-finished work, the teacher asked her why she had not finished it. "It had rained out of yarn," "Oh, no," answered Margaret; "I just run'd out of time."

**For the Poor.**  
The Revenue Collector—you can't see that you show and pocket the proceeds without paying the war tax. That's not a benevolence as you claim. The Overseas Manager—My friend, if you were familiar with my circumstances and my show you'd consider the purchase of every ticket a real charity.

## GOOD IN POVERTY

### Mr. Goslington Does a Little Philosophizing.

Sees Much Benefit in the Necessity to Work and Also in the Worry Which Falls to the Lot of Majority of Mankind.

"Glimmerby, my friend Glimmerby," said Mr. Goslington, "propounds the theory that both poverty and worry are conducive to longevity; and I think there is something in that. I am not so sure about the worry, and yet I think even that may be true. I can see, for instance, that if a man worried hard enough he would keep himself lean and so escape the ills and inconveniences attendant upon obesity; but that poverty tends to lengthen life I have no doubt whatever.

"The man who is poor, as we most of us are, has to work for a living. Surely it is in work that we are most blessed; and if we have work to do in which we are interested, that appeals to us, then are we fortunate indeed; we find a pleasure in labor and a joy in accomplishment; and it makes me smile to think how in such work we forget our worries entirely.

"So we don't really need to consider whether worry is a life prolonger or not; all we want to lengthen our days is to be poor, poor enough so that we have to work and keep plugging; but I do wonder that Glimmerby did not mention along with poverty and worry, as among the things that might tend to prolong life, our physical ailments.

"Some years ago a friend of mine began to lose weight and he kept on in that way until he had lost 25 pounds. Then he consulted a doctor. It was something that could be checked, controlled and perhaps entirely cured if the patient would follow faithfully the prescribed treatment; and then he was told that the general benefits he would derive from the treatment were such that his life might be prolonged to a greater limit than it would have reached if he had never had this ailment at all.

"I might add that this friend has now regained several of his lost pounds, he is feeling very chipper and cheerful and he fully expects to live to be a very old man.

"The fact is that many things that we may look at, when they come upon us, as drawbacks are in reality blessings in disguise."

### Australians Well Off.

In no part of the world is there a population apparently better fed and better provided with the ordinary necessities of life than in Australia and New Zealand. There is an absence of indications of poverty, and in the cities slums are rare. On the streets there is a healthy, bustling population of a type more like the dwellers in the cities of the middle West than those of London or Liverpool. The visitor recognizes the self-reliant spirit of a people detached from the rest of the world who have their own problems to solve, and are peculiarly ready to accept innovations. There is a great fondness for sports, football, tennis, surf bathing, which is possible all the year round in portions of Australia, and, most of all, for horse racing, in connection with which there is a great amount of gambling, which the state sanctions by taking a certain percentage of the sales in the pool rooms.—Exchange.

### Old Rome Has Paper Shortage.

The Figaro of Paris has unearthed for its readers what it believes is the world's first recorded paper shortage. It quotes from the "Causeries du Lundi" where Sainte-Beuve, translating from Pliny, says that under Tiberius there was such a scarcity of paper in the Roman empire that it was necessary to appoint senators to regulate distribution; in other words, a congressional board of control.

Sainte-Beuve, grown cynical in his day of excessive erudition, books, ink and paper, added:

"How welcome such a shortage would be now! But such things happened only under Tiberius. We cannot hope for like happiness today."

Le Figaro finds Sainte-Beuve refreshing reading, but in view of the situation in 1920, unduly appreciative of Tiberius.

### Sheep Should Be Sheep.

A recently published book dealing with political and social affairs in England is called "The Island of Sheep," whose authors (one of whom is a prominent British statesman) are disguised as "Cadmus" and "Harmonia." The sheep refer to the English and the Island Great Britain. The Butcher's Advocate, amused by the happy thought of an island filled with muttons, writes for a copy of "Cadmus H. Harmonia" to review. "It being," they claim, "of exceptional interest to the people reached by our weekly."

### River Football Revived.

Some athletic enthusiasts of Derbyshire, England, have recently revived the game of river football, which is said to be a combination of polo, soccer, basketball, wrestling, swimming and pugilism. It is not exactly a lady's game.

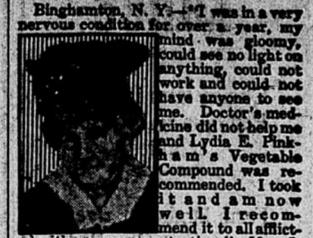
### China Thirst for Education.

The sudden demand for popular education in China is shown by the fact that the school attendance in one province has increased 1,000 per cent in five years.

## NERVOUS

## PROSTRATION

### Mrs. J. Christmas Found That Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound is a Remedy for this Trouble.



Binghamton, N. Y.—"I was in a very nervous condition for over a year, my mind was gloomy, could see no light on anything, could not work and could not have anyone to see me. Doctor's medicine did not help me and Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound was recommended. I took it and a new well. I recommend it to all afflicted with nervous prostration."—Mrs. J. CHRISTMAS, 193 Oak Street, Binghamton, New York.

The success of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made from roots and herbs, is unparalleled. It may be used with perfect confidence by women who suffer from nervous prostration, displacements, inflammation, ulceration, irregularities, periodic pains, backache, bearing-down feeling, flatulency, indigestion and dizziness. Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound is the standard remedy for female ills.

If there are any complications about which you need advice write in confidence to Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Co., Lynn, Mass.

## WATCH THE BIG 4

### Stomach-Kidneys-Heart-Liver

Keep the vital organs healthy by regularly taking the world's standard remedy for kidney, liver, bladder and uric acid troubles—



The National Remedy of Holland for centuries and endorsed by Queen Wilhelmina. At all druggists, three sizes. Look for the name Gold Medal on every box and accept no imitation.

After you eat—always use

## EATONIC

### FOR YOUR STOMACH'S SAKE

One or two tablets—eat like candy. Instantly relieves Heartburn, Bloating, Gassy Feeling, Stomach indigestion, food souring, repeating, headache and the many miseries caused by

## Acid-Stomach

EATONIC is the best remedy, it takes the harmful acids and gases right out of the body and, of course, you get well. Tens of thousands wonderfully benefited. Guaranteed to satisfy or money refunded by your own druggist. Cost a trifle. Please try it!

### The Language.

"I tell you, young Smith is a coming man."  
"Yes, I notice he is going some."

### Important to Mothers

Branline carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, that famous old remedy for infants and children, and see that it

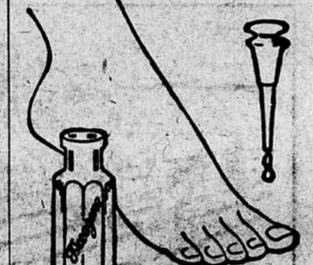
Bears the Signature of *Dr. H. H. Fletcher* In Use for Over 30 Years.

Children Cry for Fletcher's Castoria

Touch-and-go visitors may be the sort who never want to find out whether you are wearied of them or not.

## Lift off Corns!

Doesn't hurt a bit and Freezone costs only a few cents.



With your fingers! You can lift off any hard corn or callus on your feet, between the toes, and the hard skin calluses from the bottom of feet, with a few drops of "Freezone" costs little at any drug store; apply a few drops upon the corn or callus. Instantly it stops hurting, then shortly you lift that bothersome corn or callus right off, root and all, without the bit of pain or soreness that "No Humbug!"—Adv. all day long.

One way to flatter a woman is to tell her you can't.

**MYRINE** Night and Morning... **YEARS**... **YEARS**... **YEARS**...