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The House of Whispers

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Illustrations by Irwin Myers

(Continued from Last Week.)

Incredulously he listened. I could see that he did not believe a word I was saying.

"You don't look like a dope fiend, either," he observed scathingly.

"Look here," I retorted, "it is bad enough to have the police take it for granted that I am a criminal and a murderer, but when the counsel the court assigns me starts out on the same course, we quit right now. I'll get a lawyer of my own when I need one."

"I'll come around this afternoon and see you again," he said coolly. "A few hours in the Tombs will make you see things differently."

A few minutes later I found myself escorted in a cell again, still confident of my speedy release, but somewhat puzzled as to what would be my best method of procedure. I was unacquainted with any lawyers; in fact, with any one in the whole city with whom I could consult. My immediate hope lay in my friend, Detective Gorman. There was nothing for me to do but to wait until I heard from him.

Fortunately I had had the forethought when the detectives were arresting me to take from its hiding-place in the bookcase my little board



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of money. This enabled me to send out of the prison and have a luncheon brought in. Making myself as comfortable as possible, I sat down to wait for Gorman, occupying my mind meanwhile with thinking of Barbara Bradford.

The thing uppermost in my mind was how to prevent her from being in any way involved. She must never know that only by her testimony would I be able to prove an alibi. Should she ever realize this, I knew that her sense of justice would make her come forward and tell the truth, even though it meant the loss of her own reputation and the scandalizing of all her acquaintances. She must not be permitted to talk.

She must not even try to see me while I was in prison.

The one way—the only way—I saw by which I could escape from the law's toils without implicating her was through the speedy rounding up of the band of criminals who I was positive were responsible for Miss Lutan's murder as well as for all our troubles. I was relying on Gorman to do this.

A keeper's voice interrupted my chain of thought.

"You're wanted down in the counsel room," he said. "There is a visitor for you."

"A visitor," I cried excitedly. "Who is it?" I thought of course it must be Gorman come to my rescue.

"It's your sister," he announced.

My sister! A thrill shot through me at his announcement. I knew of course it could not be my sister. Both of them were mere children far away in the West. It must be Barbara. Undoubtedly she had resorted to this ruse to make sure of seeing me while at the same time concealing her own identity.

Overjoyed at her coming, delighted to know that I had read her heart aright and that my confidence in her trust in me was justified, I hastened with the keeper to meet her.

Delighted as I was at her coming, I was formulating in my mind how best to make it clear to her that she must

leave at once and that no matter what happened she must keep her lips closed about the events of last night. Under no circumstances would I permit her to sacrifice herself to save me.

In the counsel room a veiled figure awaited me. I sprang forward eagerly toward her. The woman standing there put up one hand in a repelling gesture and then flung back her veil. I stood there astounded. It was not Barbara. It was her sister Claire.

CHAPTER X.

For a full minute Claire Bradford and I stood there observing each other. Even before a word was spoken I think we both sensed our mutual distrust. As I studied her, I was trying to conjecture what could have been the motive so impelling that she had dared to come even within prison walls to see me. Had Barbara sent her? I doubted it. I was sure that more than likely her visit was to plead with me to keep silent about her part in the tragedy. I was certain she was going to ask me to pledge my word to tell no one of her second visit to the Gaston apartment.

Yet as I studied her weak, beautiful face, so like Barbara's and yet so different, with its sensuous mouth and roving, brilliant eyes, I still was wondering how it was possible for a girl of her refinement and social position to have become enmeshed with such common criminals as the two employees of the Granddeck, Wick and the telephone girl.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit," I asked at length, adding with some sarcasm, "from my sister?"

Never for a second had I imagined that other than a selfish motive could have brought her thither, and the conversation that followed was all the more surprising to me on that account.

"I had to say I was your sister," she answered quickly. "I wanted to be sure of seeing you and I did not wish anyone to recognize me. You know, I believe, who I am?"

"You are Barbara's sister," I replied.

"That's why I came," she cried, "for Barbara's sake. I have come to plead with you for her."

"To plead—with me—for her," I echoed in astonishment.

"Yes," she cried passionately. "She's young. She's little more than a child. She did not realize what she was doing. You must not let anyone know you even know her. You must never, never tell."

"Never tell what?" I answered non-committally.

She answered with a convulsive sob. I thought for a little that she was going to break down completely. Her manner and the pallor of her face attracted the attention of the keeper who was in the room with us, and he started forward as if expecting her to fall in a faint. Resolutely she pulled herself together and went on in calmer tones.

"Oh, I know all about it. I know that she is completely fascinated by you. I know that she has been meeting you in the park. I know that she has lunched with you at the Astor." She hesitated and her face crimsoned—"I know that she has even visited you in your rooms late at night. Oh, please, please, I beg of you, if there is a spark of manhood in you, do not take advantage of a silly girl's weakness. Please help me protect my little sister's name; promise—you will, won't you?"

"Why should I?" I replied carelessly, repressing my desire to leap at once to Barbara's defense and explain how pure and honorable her conduct had been and how lofty the motive that had governed her actions. Tempted though I was to defend her, I realized that this might be an opportunity to learn something of Claire Bradford's associates, and I determined to make the most of it. How else could she know of all my meetings with Barbara unless she was in league with the persons who had been having me shadowed? How the knowledge that Barbara had been in my apartment could have come to her was a mystery beyond me. I would have sworn that that was a secret sacred to our two selves.

"Listen to me," she commanded, speaking in low tones. "Barbara is

my only sister, innocent of the ways of the world. I must save her from herself, and her heedlessness. Never, never, if I can help it, shall she suffer the agony and shame and disgrace that I have known. Years ago I, just as she is now, became infatuated with a man far below me in the social scale. He, too, was a criminal."

I sniffed indignantly at the "he, too," but she paid no attention.

"I ran away from school and married him and learned too late that he had a wife and child already. All my life, ever since, that terrible thing has followed me. It's like a specter ever

rising to confront me. Even if I have to kill you, I am going to save my little sister from following in my steps."

"Where is Gaston Maurice now?" I asked. "Have you seen him recently?" She gasped and shuddered, looking at me incredulously.

"Not for years—not since long before my father's death—not since the marriage was annulled."

"Nor heard from him," I persisted.

"No, nor heard from him," she hesitated, "unless—"

"Unless what?" I insisted, as she stopped abruptly.

"I can't tell you," she said firmly.

"I don't know. They must have come from him, from someone that knew—the letters."

"What letters? Tell me about them."

"I can't tell what I don't know. I haven't the least idea where Gaston Maurice is. I had hoped he was dead in the war. Yet he can't be. I have had anonymous letters threatening me. They must have come from him or from someone whom he told of our marriage? How else could they know?"

Her distress was so real and her manner so convincing that I decided that she must be telling the truth.

"Well," said I, "if you cannot tell

me where to find Gaston Maurice there is one thing that you can tell me."

"What is that?"

"Why did you visit my apartment late last night? Why did you put that revolver in my dresser?"

"Revolver," she queried in a puzzled tone, "what revolver?"

"The revolver with which Miss Lutan was killed."

She eyed me in shocked surprise.

"Why do you say this to me? I never saw the revolver."

"You cannot deny that you were in my apartment last night."

"But the revolver," she protested.

"What do you mean by that? I know nothing of any revolver."

"Last night, a few minutes after Miss Lutan was murdered," I said sternly, "some man or woman entered my rooms and placed a revolver with one chamber discharged in the dresser in my bedroom. It was the revolver

placed there for the purpose of throwing suspicion on me, of making me out the murderer. The detectives found it there and arrested me. If you did not enter my apartment to hide the revolver, why then were you there?"

"I knew nothing about the murder," she answered irrelevantly, "until this morning—until I read about it in the papers."

"What about Wick?" I hurled at her. "Didn't Wick tell you?"

"Wick," she repeated in a puzzled way. "Oh, Mr. Wick, the superintendent. No, I have not seen him for several days."

"Did you do nothing yesterday at his direction?"

"How absurd! Of course not."

"Why, then, did you go into my rooms?"

She looked at me with a frightened face, and her manner became more confused.

"I really believe you are trying to

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