THREE SHUTTERED HOUSES

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER I

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Objects at rest have inertia; they are hard to move. But objects in motion may by the least force be diverted, and their whole future course thus changed. It is so with lives; for life is motion, and this is particularly true in youth. A young man's most casual encounter may modify his whole life thereafter, in splendid or in dreadful ways.

It was Mabel Gaye who performed this function for Clint Jervies. Mabel was of no least importance in Clint's eyes. He had never met her till Enid Mason's dance at the Somerset, and he saw with some distaste upon their first encounter that Mabel had had a little too much to drink. But the youngster who was her escort for the evening was in worse case than she, and in no condition to drive a car; so a little before midnight Clint, who had on this occasion no feminine responsibilities of his own, volunteered to take Mabel safely home, and had Enid's thanks for that consideration.

When he and Mabel emerged from the hotel, it was raining, gusty squalls with an occasional roll of thunder; and Mabel lived a dozen or fifteen miles out of Boston along the Providence road, so that the drive was a long one. As soon as they were in the car, she went to sleep and stayed asleep till Clint roused her to direct him through the last stages of the journey. When they reached her door, she urged him to come in, and when he declined this invitation, she insisted on being kissed good night.

Clint thus far obliged her; but he said at once afterward: "I'll have to run along now. There's some construction on the road. I had to detour, coming out. It will take me an hour to get back to town."

"Oh, you don't have to hurry," she pleaded. "You can dodge all that by going over Kenesaw Hill."

And to his questions, she gave him directions how to find this byway. At a certain traffic-light he must turn to the right . . . He nodded his understanding, but good-humoredly insisted on departing. She stood in the open doorway still pleading, while he got into the car at the foot of the steps; but when she saw that he was bound to go, she called softly:

"Well, good night! And thanks a lot! You were a peach to bring me home. Telephone me tomorrow."

"Sure will," Clint promised. "I'll be seeing you."

He was perfectly sincere in this promise; but as a matter of fact it was more than two years before he saw her again, and he had by that time completely forgotten their former encounter. Yet if he had not taken Mabel home, and returned to town by way of Kenesaw Hill, there is no reason to think he would ever have seen June Leaford, and Kitty Leaford's death must have gone unremarked, and those three shuttered houses on the Hill might well have hid their dark secret to the end . . .

Clint left Mabel Gaye standing in her own door and drove away. He chuckled and rubbed his lips with the back of his hand where she had kissed him; and he thought soberly that someone ought to tell her a few things, and was amused at his own puritanic mind. He had not always been so austere, and he forgot Mabel now to think about himself, as a young man is apt to do.

Before Clint's father died, the older man must have suspected that Clint and his sister Clara were not ready for self-management; for he created the Jervies Trust; and Miss Moss, an angular middle-aged woman with a surprising tenderness beneath her iron exterior, who had been Mr. Jervies' secretary, became the actual if not the titular head of that Trust. She had been almost like a foster-mother to these children since their own mother died, and continued in that role. Clint, reflecting tonight in a mild amusement on his own virtuous disapproval of Mabel Gaye, thought Miss Moss would likewise be amused at his attitude. She had used to be so deeply distressed by Clint's own recklessness, and Clara's too.

But that was better than a year ago, and times were changed. Clint himself now administered the Jervies Trust, and shrewdly too; he was become a sober-minded young man of affairs. He thought tonight that sobriety and virtue might sometimes mean a certain loneliness. When she could trust Clint to stand on his own feet, Miss Moss had married Inspector Tope; and Clara, long before that, was married to young Mat Hews, whose new play would open in Chicago in a day or two.

Considering these things tonight, Clint decided it must be fun to be married, if you found the right girl. Then he came to the traffic light Mabel Gaye had described to him, and turned off the main highway, up Kenesaw Hill.

It was near one o'clock in the morning; and the shower was on in full force—a drenching rain, flares of lightning. He passed for a while no residences at all; but as he crossed the flat top of Kenesaw Hill he saw, dimly through the rain, some houses set absurdly close together, to one side of the road. Clint thought it was as though they huddled near one another in this solitude for the sake of company. The front door of the middle one of these houses was open, with a light burning in the hall, and he decided that the door had blown open, that someone would presently come down and shut it. Then the houses fell behind him as he drove on.

"No, no," she stammered. She was breathless, panting.

In the illumination of an especially bright flash of lightning, he had an impression of something white, moving, beside the road ahead of him, and just beyond the range of his headlights. You often saw creatures along the road at night, saw them usually as two red spots that were eyes, saw them later as dark shadows where a cat or a dog squatted to watch you pass.

But this thing was not two red spots; it was a white bulk. His headlights caught it now. Moving—yes, running.

He leaned forward more intently. This was a person, running ahead of him along the road. It was a woman, running ahead of him through the rain. There was a curious shapelessness about her; and he recognized the reason for this: her dark hair was streaming over her shoulders, so that she seemed to have no head. Her feet, he thought, were bare. A woman in a nightgown.

He was within fifty yards of her now, overtaking her. The nightgown, he saw, was not of silk or satin or any soft material; it appeared to be a sober garment, entirely lacking in frivolity; yet it was indubitably a nightgown, and by the same token there could be no doubt that it was the only garment this woman wore.

Clint was driving slowly, and the woman ran swiftly, so that she kept for an instant this distance ahead of him. Then, like a wild animal which perceives the hopelessness of straightaway flight, she suddenly turned aside off the road, and she tripped and fell headlong, and swung around in one swift motion and came to her feet again. Like a creature at bay she faced him, her back set against the trunk of a great tree.

He would remember the picture she made. He saw her face, a white oval framed in the dark shadows of her hair. One strand of hair was plastered across her brow and cheek by the rain, like a black band across her countenance. She brushed this desperately aside.

That nightgown, for all its severe simplicity, was pressed close to her body by the wind; it was glued to her by the rain. Clint saw that this was, incredibly, a girl, not a woman at all. A rather tall girl, slender without being thin. She had run gracefully, he remembered that.

His heart was pounding, shaking him. He pulled up the car and opened the door on the side toward her.

"What's the matter?" he asked. He spoke carefully, in a gentle tone, so that he might not frighten her further. "What's the matter? Anything I can do?"

"No, no," she stammered. She was breathless, panting.

"I can give you a lift," he urged. "This is no night—"

She appeared to change her mind. She came toward him, and he swung the door wide. "Yes, take me on," she bade him. "Straight on." And she climbed into the car and sat down beside him in the wide seat here.

She was, of course, drenched. "Put on my coat," he urged, and started to strip it off.

"No, no," she repeated. "It's not far." And she urged: "Go on. Quickly, please!"

He set the car in motion; and he looked at her sidewise in an incredulous and delighted wonder. Her hair, heavy with water, lay across her shoulders in dark ribbons; her single garment was so much a part of her that she seemed like wet marble. He thought of sculptured nymphs under a fountain's arching screen. In one swift glance he saw her entire, and unforgetably.

She did not return his glance; but neither did she seek to cover herself from his eyes. Her own were fixed straight ahead; yet by something in her very posture, in the rigidity which she maintained, he knew she was conscious of his scrutiny, fighting to ignore it, choked and stifled by her own sudden realization of how she must appear to him.

Clint, in a swift sympathy and tenderness, switched off the dash-light, so that she sat in a cloaking darkness. He kept his eyes thereafter upon the road and did not look at her again. So presently he felt her relax a little, beside him; and he was conscious that she studied him for a long moment, with a deep attention.

Suddenly she said: "Thank you!"

"No trouble," Clint assured her. "I'll take you anywhere—"

"I didn't mean that," she said honestly. "But—it's not far."

He felt, rather than saw, that she was breathing with long careful inhalations, as though she had to be on guard lest she shudder or sob. He asked slowly:

"Something—frighten you? Can't I help?"

"No, no, no," she told him, her voice trembling. "I'm not afraid. I'm not." She whispered with a sudden passion: "I'm not! I won't be afraid!"

Yet he saw that she was desperate with terror.

"Listen," he urged. "I don't want to butt in. But—don't you need someone to stand by?"

"I'm all right," she insisted.

He nodded; but he said gently: "I'm Clint Jervies. I'm—respectable. If you ever want help, I'd like to—"

She said: "Let me out, please."

Clint protested: "I don't mean to bother you. You needn't run away from me."

"This is where I want to go," she insisted. "Quick. Stop."

Clint obeyed her. The car had scarce ceased moving before she slipped to the ground. She closed the door behind her. She called: "Thank you." Then she was gone, vanishing into the wood beside the road.

He hesitated, all reluctance. The rain still pelted; lightning flickered remotely, or crashed close at hand. He saw something like a path where she had disappeared.

But she was gone, and Clint ruefully drove on. He passed a cross-road; and presently the way he followed joined the main thoroughfare into Boston.

Before he came home he had decided what to do. Inspector Tope had proved long ago his capacity for finding an answer to the most obscure conundrums; the old man might be able to read the answer to this riddle of a lovely girl, scantily clad, running so desperately along a lonely country road in the night and in the rain.

It was too late to seek out the Inspector and Miss Moss tonight; but tomorrow, Clint decided, he would go to them with this fantastic tale.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

'THREE SHUTTERED HOUSES'

Ben Ames Williams' story of death and intrigue in the lives of three families will thrill you. Inspector Tope and Miss Moss, your old detective friends of fiction, finally solve the mystery, but only after enlisting the aid of June Leaford and Clint Jervies, two young people involved in the unfolding of the drama.

• Begins Today

Hats With Veiling Galore Are in a Capricious Mood

By CHERIE NICHOLAS

MILLINERY has indeed come into its own this spring. The new hats are everything a spring hat should be—the most refreshingly springlike hats that have graced fashion's stage for many a season. In them romance in millinery has been recaptured.

The very ecstasy of spring breathes through the flowers that bedeck the pretty straws and through the ribbons and fantastic scarf trimmings on colorful felts and suedes, likewise through the dainty lace and immaculate lingerie trims, new this season, and through the glorified spring colorings and beyond all the final touch of charm is achieved via mists of frivolous whimsical veiling that swirls and whirls and cuts pretty capers throughout the entire picture.

You can be as choosy as you like in selecting your spring bonnet. Whether you decide on one of the very new and amusing elfish tall crowns that style the latest models or whether you declare in favor of a crownless type, whether your hat be huge of brim or have no brim at all (flower toques with pert bonbon colored veils are quite the rage) whether it be a breton or Gibson girl sailor you choose, or if you are ultra enough to want one of the very smart Paris-inspired bonnet types that tie under the chin, no matter in what direction fancy leads you, you can't go wrong in fashion's eyes.

New in crowns is the postilion. See it pictured in the group to the left above. This model in miniature blue (an attractive blue featured this season) felt is trimmed with contrasting plaid taffeta ribbon and an allover crisp blue veil. Plaids and stripes have invaded the millinery world with great display. Hat and bag sets of striking plaids or stripes are among the fetching conceits that tune to the enthusiasm shown for high color.

Veilings galore are enlivening the millinery scene this spring. The hat without a veil is the exception rather than the rule. In arranging veils you are supposed to do just as fancy dictates, the more whimsical, the more erratic, the more altogether adorably irresponsible so far as following form and conventions, the smarter.

Navy is classic for spring suits, coats and dresses. The navy blue hat of chic peach-basket variety shown below to the left in the picture is topped off with a cluster of soft pink ribbon bows nestled inside the top of the crown. A sheer navy veil is draped around the crown with ends flying in the back. This model is also available in other fashionable color combinations.

Black hats with colorful accents are an accepted mode for dressy spring wear. The crown of the black felt Wateau, shown above to the right, is sprightly decked with chartreuse and fuchsia flowers. The big bow at the back is of stiff chartreuse veiling.

With her black lace afternoon dress Hildegarde, glamorous American radio songstress, wears a black felt turban with bright Tuscan straw brim as pictured below to the right in the group.

The newer shallow-crowned bretons stress forward moving slightly rolled brims higher at the back than front as pictured in the inset below. This charming model is a Pixie green felt with contrasting veil and ribbon band in navy. It is also seen in various other color combinations.

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Bouquet Bracelets

Newest fashion whimsy is to wear bouquet bracelets matched to the color of your nails. Flowers on a band of velvet that are matched to nail-polish shades will make your hands the talk of the card table. Flowers in fuchsia are matched to fuchsia polish, pale faun-pink buds are matched to regency, tulip nails match tiny tulips. Winning hands at beauty as well as at card table may be graced with dainty orchids at each wrist as pictured.

Aromatic Earrings

Perfumed earrings are a recent whimsy. They come in the form of tiny metal flowers, in color to match your ensemble. The perfume fragrance rises through a gold mesh center from a wad of cotton inserted below.

Combining Jacket Being Modernized

The fussy "combining jacket" that mother used to wear has been superseded by a trim rubber cape which has many other uses besides keeping stray hairs from settling on a clean dress or blouse. Slipped on and off in a jiffy, it is ideal for repairing complexions and for washing up at odd moments when there isn't time to disrobe.

One of the newest make-up capes on the market has a little pocket in the form of a flower for holding hair pins, powder puff, or comb. The soft rubberized fabric takes to soap and water like a dish cloth, thus making it possible to keep its delicate pastel colors flower-fresh.

Fashion Designers Turn Lilac-Minded

Each season this flower or that flower is especially featured. Paris milliners have turned lilac-minded this spring, either trimming with lilac clusters or in some instances making toques and even tiny sailor hats of them. Wear a lilac spray on your dark or light coat, it is one of the popular flowers of the moment in fashion's realm. Carnations are also worn.

Checked Costume

It is considered smart this season to have at least one Shepherd's checked costume in the wardrobe.

Silk for Action

Washable and noncrushable silks for active sportwear have been endorsed by Paris.

Shells for Lapels

Tiny bouquets of flowers are made entirely of shells and are to be worn in your lapel.

Latest Hints from the Studios of Designers

Dressmaker blouses seem to hold an important place in the fashion parade.

A new and clever way of changing the appearance of a frock is to drape the neckline with veiling.

Flower jewelry that matches the tone of one's nail polish is a fad which comes with the springtime.

Adorable to wear over a white chiffon frock is a little bolero of bright red velvet trimmed with gold thread embroidery.

The circus horse inspires the latest feathered headdress.

The gypsy clothes launched in Paris are reflected in gypsy jewels.

A black wool suit, worn with a beaded jumper or a handsome Persian silk brocade, is a favorite formula.

To trim an evening dress, nothing could be more effective than insertions of appliques of white lace that is studded with rhinestones at sparing intervals.

Floyd Gibbons' ADVENTURERS' CLUB

HEADLINES FROM THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF!

"Rails of Death"

HELLO, EVERYBODY:

Well, sir, for a long time I've been warning young fellows to stay off of side door pullmans. I've seen so many adventure yarns about lads who have come to grief beating their way on freight trains that I'm pretty well convinced it's a dangerous pastime. But here's a lad I can't very well warn to stop riding freight trains. In the first place, that was his job. In the second place, he's reformed and isn't working on the railroad any more. And in the third place, he knows all about the hazards of railroading. He probably knows a doggone sight more about it than I do.

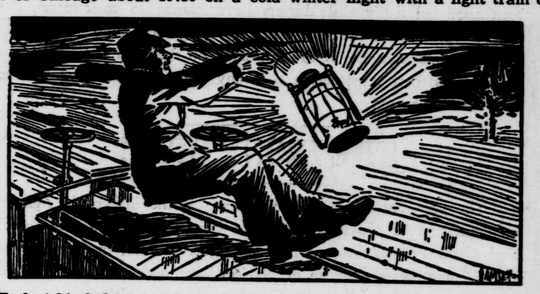
If those aren't enough reasons, I could probably think up some more. But here comes today's distinguished adventurer, Edwin F. Eckdahl of Young, Saskatchewan, Canada—another fellow who has come a long, long way to join our club. And here's the story:

Ed started railroad work in the early part of the century, braking on the Pennsylvania. His run was out of Logansport, Ind., and those were the days when the men had to contend with the old style link-and-pin drawbar and when air brakes were few and far between. There might be a few air-braked cars on every train, but most freights consisted principally of "jacks" or hand-braked cars.

Ed says every brakeman tried to get a few air-braked cars up at the head of the train, where they'd help a lot in holding back the other cars, but some of the old die hard conductors wouldn't allow that. "There are brakes on top," they used to say, "and the brakeman is getting paid for braking them. Let him work for his money." It was one of those conductors that Ed was working for—and it came near costing him his life.

Tops of Cars Covered With Thin Ice.

It was one day early in 1906 that that happened. Ed's train pulled out of Chicago about 10:30 on a cold winter night with a light train of



He lost his balance and was forced to step off the flat running board.

meat and merchandise. "We had a nice string of air-braked cars," he says, "but there were behind about ten or twelve 'jacks' and the conductor said 'nothing doing' when the rear-end man and I wanted to switch them. It had rained in Chicago and the tops of the cars were covered with a coating of thin ice, and my first job was to go over the tops and chip that ice from the running boards on the ten or twelve cars I was to use for braking."

Ed had ice clips on his shoes to keep him from slipping. They were pretty dull, but he thought they'd last him one more trip. He worked his way along until he was about ten cars back of the engine and then, near the I. C. crossing at Riverdale, the train hit a slight curve. Ed was unprepared for it. He lost his balance and was forced to step off the flat running board onto the sloping, ice-covered top of the car.

The instant he did his feet shot out from under him. He started sliding off the top. "I was on my back," he says, "but when my legs were over the side I managed to turn over on my stomach—and, as luck would have it, a nail that had worked up from a board in the car top caught in my coat. I was so far over the side that there was more of me in the open than on the roof. I was just able to keep part of my chest and arms on the car. And there I hung.

"I knew if I slid off I wouldn't have much of a chance. All I could do was hang on—and get back on top if that was possible. It was cold weather and the position I was in was tiring me out. The longer I stayed there the worse it would be."

His Hands Slipped on the Smooth Ice.

Ed knew he couldn't look for any help. The engineer would think he was in the caboose and the conductor would think he was in the engine. His lantern had shattered and gone over the side when he fell and he couldn't signal with that. He tried pulling himself forward with the flat of his hands against the car top, but they slipped on the smooth ice.

"I tell you it kept me busy," he says. "I didn't know how long that nail would hold me, or how long the cloth of my coat would stand the strain. But believe me, I stuck tight with all the strength I had."

But now Ed noticed something that was working in his favor. The heat of his palms as they pressed against the top of the car was melting the thin coating of ice. In one spot his hands were beginning to take hold. He began to move his palms forward to melt the ice up ahead.

It was a long, slow process. "By wriggling my body as a snake would," he says, "I was able to bring it forward a little. I had to melt quite a bit of ice to get myself in a fairly safe position and even then the wind and the swaying of the car threatened to throw me off at any minute. And then I ran into another obstruction."

The Nail Holds Him Back From Safety.

It was that nail which had caught in his clothing. In the beginning it had saved his life. Now it was holding him back, keeping him from moving any farther forward. Ed didn't dare move a hand to free it. And there he was, fastened to the car, unable to move any farther and not knowing when a low spot or a curve in the track would shake him off.

He began to get a bit panic-stricken then. He clawed at the top of the car with futile hands. And suddenly his groping palms struck on another nail worked up out of the boards like the first one.

"I caught hold of it by a thumb and finger," Ed says, "and only then did I dare to move the other hand down and loosen the nail that was caught in my coat. I wriggled back on the top and when I reached the running board I was covered with sweat and my hands and face were full of slivers. All I did was lie flat on my face and pant."

The train was pulling into a station and the engineer whistled for brakes, but Ed didn't move. "Of course the train ran past the station," Ed says, "and I was in line for a bawling out. But when I told the engineer what had happened he had to make his excuses for not seeing my lantern disappear. I've had lots of close calls in railroading, but that was my closest one."

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First U. S. Post Office Was Located in Boston in 1641

The first postal establishment on the North American continent was located in Boston in 1641 in the tavern of Richard Fairbanks who was given authority to charge one penny for each letter delivered, Prof. R. Del French of McGill university told members of the Rotary club of Montreal, says the Christian Science Monitor. In Canada, the first record of postal service was during the French regime when a road was opened between Quebec and Montreal more than 200 years ago.

Private dispatches by mail in Canada were delivered on schedule only after the fall of Quebec into British hands. This marked the final real attempt to organize a postal service on a regular basis, and Benjamin Franklin was instrumental in developing this work between Montreal and New York by way of the Champlain and Hudson route. Postal service was instituted between Halifax and Liverpool in 1755.

Tiny Eel a Delicacy

In the waters off northeastern Spain the Basque fishermen place oil lamps along the quays to attract the tiny, white, two-inch eel which frequents this corner of the Bay of Biscay. They are able to scoop them up by the thousand. When fried in oil this eel is considered a delicacy.

To Enjoy Solitude

Every home should be spacious enough for any member of it to enjoy solitude when he or she wants to.

Origin of Word 'Assassin'

The word "assassin" is from the Arabian hashashin, eaters of hashish, the name of a sect in the Thirteenth century. The Old Man of the Mountain roused his followers' spirits by this preparation and sent them out to assassinate his enemies.

Menthol, Camphor Become Liquid

When an equal quantity of the two solids, menthol and camphor, is pulverized and mixed, says a writer in Collier's Weekly, it becomes a liquid.