THREE SHUTTERED HOUSES

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued
—13—

Tope nodded, and he asked after a moment: "Do you know whether the front door was bolted or locked, the night your mother died, before you went to bed?"

"Yes," June said. "Uncle Justus bolted it. That's why, when the door blew open, it scared me. I knew it had been fastened, and I thought there must be someone in the house. But I didn't wait to—find out. I just ran."

"Mr. Taine bolted it, did he?" Tope repeated thoughtfully.

She said: "Yes, after Mother was in bed, I came to the head of the stairs, and I heard him tell Grandpa Hurder the door was fast." She remembered suddenly: "And he tried to slip upstairs during the evening before Mother died. Aunt Evie saw him, called him back."

Tope was silent for a moment, and he asked then a new question:

"If you went back, where would they likely have you stay?"

"There isn't any room at Aunt Evie's," June explained. "It's just a small house, you know. I'd have to stay at Grandma Bowdon's."

"They've put Mr. Hurder upstairs, in the Bowdon house," Tope reported. "The back room on the west side."

"That's a spare room," June assented. "Grandpa and Grandma Bowdon used the east rooms."

"If you go out there, then, you'd probably have the front room on the west side."

"I suppose so."

"I'd want you to try to arrange to take care of him," Tope told her. "To sit up with him tonight—in the room with him." He considered. "They may not let you; but if you're in the next room, you can hear, listen."

"The stairs are between," she said. "But the doors are just across the hall, opposite one another."

"Are there locks on the doors in that house?" Tope asked gravely.

"Locks, yes," June said. "There are locks everywhere. Even the closets are locked. Grandma Bowdon always carries a bunch of keys on her belt."

Clint said urgently: "Inspector, I'm going to have a ladder ready, so I can get up to her room, get in the window if I have to."

"Yes," Tope said seriously. "That's good. Or so she can get out and down to us, quickly, if anyone tries to get at her. And I'll give her a revolver, show her how—"

The telephone interrupted him, and Miss Moss went to answer it. She turned to say softly, her hand over the receiver: "It's for June."

So June crossed to the older woman's side; she took the telephone in her hand. They heard her say:

"Hello. Yes . . . Yes, Grandma."

And after a long time: "Yes . . . Yes, I'm coming."

And then: "Yes . . . They will bring me out, in a little while."

Clint felt his pulses pound with a deep terror; but he could not check her now. A moment later she said, "Yes," again, and put the instrument down and faced them all.

"That was Grandma Bowdon," she explained. "Grandpa Bowdon's funeral is this afternoon, late. She wants me to be there, and to go home with them afterward." She added slowly: "That's what I will do."

In the preparations that followed, Clint's hopeless protests were all overborne. June's dress, that new dress Asa had given her, was sooted and soiled. Miss Moss made Clint drive her to the nearest shop, and they brought home two or three dresses for trial, found one that would serve. When they thus returned, Inspector Tope had rummaged out his old revolver and was explaining to June its simple mechanism before she left for the funeral.

The ritual was scarce finished before Mrs. Taine came swiftly toward them. "It is hard for me to forgive you for this, June," Aunt Evie told the girl, in her low, whispering tones. "You have added much to the burden we have all had to bear today."

Clint saw Rab guiding old Mrs. Bowdon to their car; he heard June say calmly: "This is Mr. Jervies, Aunt Evie." Her eyes met Clint's, and she added proudly: "I'm going to marry him. I'll stay with you as long as you need me, if it isn't too long; but then I'm going to him."

"That is as may be," Mrs. Taine commented. "Such matters are not decided so quickly, June."

Then Asa came up beside her. He drawled cheerfully: "Hullo, June. Hullo, Jervies. June, with a man like this one to take care of you, you'd better hang on to him."

Mrs. Taine said softly: "Asa!" The word hissed on her tongue.

Asa looked at Clint. "Why don't you keep her, Jervies?" he suggested insistently.

Clint cried: "I want to!"

But Mrs. Taine said: "Come, child." She took June's arm; Clint saw her fingers tighten cruelly. He started forward, but June freed herself, and she said calmly:

"I'm coming, Aunt Evie. You need not hold me!"

And she nodded to Clint in a deep reassurance, and led the way toward the waiting car.

Tope had promised to meet Clint beside the road, on the way up Kenesaw Hill, as soon as it should be dark. It was still no more than dusk when Clint took the road up the hill; but at an angle the Inspector stepped out to halt him.

"Doctor Cabler's at the house," he said. "He and Mr. Taine stayed with Mr. Hurder during the funeral. I want to see him when he leaves. Go ahead, over the top of the hill."

Clint obeyed; and Tope explained: "Heale can't be here. He's laid up—a bad cold from last night. But he's lending us a couple of men."

And he said, half to himself: "Here are two women killed. A man don't often kill a woman unless he loves her, or has loved her."

They passed the two houses which still stood atop the hill; but Clint scarce noticed them. "You mean Mr. Leaford?" he cried, in incredulous astonishment.

"But a woman don't mind killing another woman," said the Inspector grimly, as though finishing his thought; and Clint looked at him with wide startled eyes.

Before he could speak the question in his mind, a man appeared in their headlights, a policeman in uniform; and they stopped. Tope opened the car door.

"Hello, Rand," he said. "Doctor still there?"

The policeman nodded. "And I've got the ladder," he reported. "Hid it over in the woods."

"Good man," Tope approved, and they got out and waited, till presently Doctor Cabler in his car came down the road. He stopped at a signal, and Tope spoke to him apart in low tones. When the Doctor drove on, the Inspector returned to them, and he explained:

"Mr. Hurder is better! Tomorrow will tell the tale, whether he's going to live. The Doctor thinks he will. He's given the old man something to make him sleep."

The house on this side all was dark, except that there was a light-

"Mrs. Taine is giving her a glass of milk."

ed window in the kitchen. Tope was at the rear corner there. The window-blind was drawn; but by moving out a little from the house, Clint could see a rectangle of light where the window was. Some one was preparing supper — talking, probably. Tope stood just below the window, as though listening.

Inaction began to madden him, when at last there came an incident to relieve the strain: a door opened; someone came out.

Clint saw that this must be Justus Taine, a heavy figure of a man, walking with head bowed. He saw this man pause yonder by the ash-filled cellar of the Hurder house and stand for a moment beside the pit as though in some dark recovery, before he went on.

Later a light appeared in the Taine house, behind a curtained window; then nothing happened for a while.

Clint had time for thought, and he remembered his own suspicions of Justus Taine, and was glad Taine was no longer here in the house with June. But—Tope had dismissed Clint's theory, and the young man remembered this, and his nerves drew taut again. When someone touched his elbow, he leaped like a startled horse, ready to cry out, but Tope whispered:

"Hush, steady, son!"

Clint nodded; he tried to speak, but his voice croaked dangerously. He lifted the ladder, Tope helping him; and they leaned it against the window-sill above them without a sound.

Clint climbed it instantly; he stopped with his head level with the sill. Since there was no light in the room, he could not see whether the shade was drawn or not; but he waited, striving to peer into the blackness behind the glass.

Once he looked down cautiously, and saw Tope's round figure huddled at the foot of the ladder, Tope's round face watchfully upturned.

He then saw June and Mrs. Taine come in, June with a lighted candle. Behind them he saw Rab and Asa in the hall, and Mrs. Bowdon's ample form.

And then his heart suddenly was in his throat; for Mrs. Taine had a glass of milk in her hand.

Mrs. Leaford had drunk a glass of milk that night she died; the Hurders too. There was to Clint something hideous and sinister in this innocent beverage now. He took an impulsive step higher, his hand raised to break the window in.

But Tope below him hissed a warning; and Clint leaned down to whisper desperately: "Mrs. Taine is giving her a glass of milk!"

"She won't drink it," Tope promised. "I warned her not to drink anything, or eat anything except what the others did."

And Mrs. Taine suddenly, still talking, withdrew.

June did not move. She watched the door. Clint waited, his pulse racing.

Then, after a long minute, Tope whispered: "Down!"

Clint was on the ground in an instant; and Tope breathed in his ear; "The door."

Clint at first did not understand. Then he heard the click of a latch, and toward the rear of the house a figure did appear—Mrs. Taine, he guessed. She walked briskly away. They saw her figure in silhouette against the light when she opened the kitchen door of her own home yonder and went in.

Then Clint started to climb the ladder again.

"Careful," the old man warned him. "Don't show yourself above the window-sill. She might see you from over there."

But Clint could not resist looking once to be sure June was unharmed. He saw her carefully propping a chair under the door-knob; saw that the milk stayed untasted. She secured the door, and then blew out the candle, and so came to the window and opened it. She leaned here above him, and he whispered:

"All right, June?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "But Aunt Evie gave me a glass of—warm milk. To make me sleep, she said. I promised to drink it when I was in bed."

"She's gone home," Clint told her reassuringly.

"Home?" the girl exclaimed. "She said she was going to stay with him. He's all alone. I'm going in—"

"No," Clint insisted. "Rab and Asa are still in the house. And she's coming back. Give me that milk, June. I want Tope to taste it."

She brought the glass and gave it to him. He said: "I'll be right here. All night."

"Poor darling!" she whispered. "In the rain."

"Near you," he told her. "I shan't feel it."

He took the milk down to Inspector Tope. The old man dipped a finger into it, touched the finger to his lips. "Can't taste anything," he said. "But I'll send Rand to have it tested, right now." And he directed: "You stay here!"

Clint nodded, and Tope started away. He moved past the corner of the house; and suddenly, when he was six paces off, he stumbled over something lying in the uncut grass, and fell heavily. Clint heard the breath go out of him with a grunt.

The young man moved swiftly toward him; but before he could come to Tope's side, the Inspector was on his hands and knees.

Clint whispered: "Hurt?"

And Tope said gravely: "There's another ladder here. I tripped over it." He added ruefully: "Spilled the milk. That's bad!"

"Another ladder?" Clint echoed. There was a dreadful clamor in his ears, his own pulse was pounding so.

Then from the window above them, June called very softly: "Clint, dear, are you there? Are you all right?"

"Yes, sweet," he whispered.

"What happened?" she asked.

"The Inspector fell down," he said reassuringly. "Didn't hurt him!" He climbed to her window, and her arms held him fast, her lips trembling against his own. "You mustn't be afraid," he urged.

"I'm coming back to you tomorrow," she declared.

"For good and all," he agreed.

She said wistfully: "You could come in here, out of the rain." And she urged: "They've left Grandpa Hurder all alone. I want to go to him."

But he said sternly: "No. Maybe that's what they want you to do. You stay here. If anyone tries to open your door—" He kissed her again. "Good night, sweet," he said. "And sleep sound."

He descended to the ground once more. "Mr. Hurder's alone," he reported to Tope. "She wants to go to him. I wouldn't let her."

Then June spoke, whispering, above their heads; and Clint was up the ladder in a bound.

"Rab and Asa have gone into Grandpa's room," she explained. "Asa wants to stay with Grandpa; but Rab's arguing about it. I can hear them talking."

She turned her head at some sound in the hall, whispered, "Hush," and crossed to listen at the door. Clint, even from where he was, could hear the murmur of their voices. Then this sound receded, and June returned to him.

"They're going," she reported. "Asa said he had to go to town later tonight, and he wanted to stand his turn with Grandpa now, and let Rab and Aunt Evie sleep. But Rab insisted it was all right to leave Grandpa, insisted that they both go home."

"I'll tell Tope," Clint assured her, and looked down. But Tope had vanished.

She urged in shaken tones: "I want to see if Grandpa's all right—if they did anything to him. Please!"

Clint hesitated. "I'll come in with you," he decided then. He climbed over the sill, and with their hands entwined, they crossed the room. Very quietly she removed the chair braced under the knob and opened the door.

"He's sleeping so peacefully, like a child."

When he descended the ladder, Tope had not reappeared; but Clint was content in the certainty that June was safe. He stood by the foot of the ladder, tense, ready for any alarm; and minutes drifted by.

Once there was a sound, toward the Taine house, a rumbling sound as though a garage-door had been rolled back on its track. If Asa were departing for town now, then Rab, or Uncle Justus, or Aunt Evie, might presently come this way. Clint was in a sweat of tense, fearful anticipation. He began to wonder why Asa did not start the car and go.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Look Pretty as a Picture in Frocks of Dainty Silk Sheer

By CHERIE NICHOLAS

SO LITTLE MISSY and Miss Sweet Sixteen are dated up for just one party after another this summer? Hearts set all a flutter as to delectable gowns that will make young moderns look pretty as a picture? Which leads up to the why and wherefore of the accompanying illustration. This group of adorable party frocks conveys an all-important style message in regard to summertime party frocks, namely that of the supremacy of fine silken sheer fabrics in the mode.

The weaves in the category of silk sheers that are favored most include silk organdies in white or pastels, marquisettes, mousseline de soies, also either soft or starched silk chiffons, frothy white silk tulles, silk nets and of course the loveliness of silk laces is not ignored. Not a sheer in the above mentioned list but that works like magic in accenting the endearing young charms of party-going young daughters this season.

The outstanding characteristic of the new sheer frocks is a quaintness that reminisces of Civil war fashions. To give the ultra-feminine look and the coy simplicity that present styling implies, designers are indulging freely in such fetching details as flounces, dainty ruffles, bow-knot or flower appliques, and the newest gesture is the revival of gay ribbons (supposed to change the color of your ribbons to tune to your mood) run through yards and yards of beading, just like in the old-fashioned days.

The majority of party frocks look very bouffant with their wide skirts, and the most ultra models have nipped-in waistlines like heirloom daguerrotypes portray, for the trend at present is more and more to wasp waist silhouettes. The flounce that flourished in Civil war times have returned.

Sometimes just one knee-deep flounce gives added fullness about the hemline. Then again flounces are tiered one above another. The old-fashioned way of heading the flounce with lace or embroidery beading, through which colorful beading has been run, adds to the quaintness of present day styling.

In the lovely girlish frock to the left the bow-knot applique done in ribbon enhances the full skirt. The little girl in the background has her silk organdy dress similarly fashioned, thus carrying out the popular idea of sister fashions. Frocks of this type are equally lovely fashioned of either white or pastel chiffons or silk organdies.

The little girls in the foreground are charmingly gowned. The diminutive lace jacket worn, as shown centered in the picture, is enough to delight any little girl's heart.

Very prettily styled is the other little girl's dress. It is made all of lace with flutings of self lace adorning the bodice top and outlining the waistline.

A styling trend very noticeable in the smartest new gowns is that of the all-over shirred waist. The new sheers yield to this treatment very pleasingly. The shirring can be easily done by the home dressmaker, by loosening the tension of one's sewing machine and lengthening the stitch. Then when the machine stitching is done pull the top thread and even shirring will result. Thin paper placed under chiffon while stitching keeps material flat. It tears away easily.

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

Lumber-Jacket Top

The lumber-jacket influence continues throughout summer fashions. So much so many of the daintiest sheer lingerie blouses are now made with belts (some worked with lace insertion and edging) that fasten over the skirt. Printed silk sheers such as pictured proclaim the new fad in this youthful lumber-jacket silhouette that has come in on the crest of the widely heralded "little girl" vogue. Note how its belt buttons over the skirt. The remarkable thing about the silk that fashions this dress is that it is the new sanitized type, treated with process that acts as a deodorant.

Flare for Rubber Flowers Growing

The idea of wearing the new rubber flowers as a corsage or boutonniere elsewhere than on the beach is gaining. These lovely flowers are too attractive to confine within a limited realm. Then, too, they are eminently practical, for soap and water will keep them fresh-looking indefinitely.

Natural colors, grace of design and true reproduction of nature marks these corsages as outstanding. Anemones in pastel colors enliven a swim suit with true artistry. Deep pink camelias are lovely to wear in an evening coiffure. Roses of realistically colored rubber and dahlias in colors true on sport jackets are ever so effective and outstanding.

Stripes Back in Fashion Picture

The cycle of fashions continues to revolve and now the indicator stops at 1915, the era of the Castle walk and, from the sartorial standpoint, of stripes.

But striped materials in the hands of the modern designer have a spicy verve wholly different from those recorded in the fashion books of almost a quarter of a century ago. One of their paramount virtues is that they are slimming. However, their chief charm is that they lend themselves to such varied and exciting adaptions.

Flowers and Snoods

A charming evening headdress, if you wear your hair long enough to use a snood, is the combination of snood and flowers.

What Women Want to Know About Fashions

This summer, fabrics will have a way of not being what they seem.

An unusual bracelet features two round clusters of natural pearls set in tiers.

For a variety of neckwear to use with simple dark basic dresses, try making your own.

From hoop skirt to slim sheath, from gypsy to Chinese modes, fashion for this season is international.

Instead of the traditional tea rose in undergarments, light blue is the new color.

For women who make their own clothes, spun rayons come to the rescue for a two-seasons' dress.

Among recent novelties are belts and scarfs of pliable leather with the wearer's name written all over them in either gold or silver metal script.

Floyd Gibbons' ADVENTURERS' CLUB

HEADLINES FROM THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF!

"Ghost at the Door"

HELLO EVERYBODY:

You know, boys and girls, Old Lady Adventure is the most democratic female in the world. She doesn't confine her attentions to any particular class of people, but visits her favors on all alike. Why, kings and queens have had adventures, and so have doctors, lawyers, cab drivers and preachers.

Today I've got a yarn from a dentist—Dr. Robert Lentz of Danville, Ill.

This adventure happened to Doc along about the summer of 1912, and in those days he was living in Williamson county, near Wolf Creek, Ill. That's down near the Ozark ridges and in 1912 there was some pretty lonely country in that neighborhood.

Doc knew, because he used to ride through some of it pretty regularly. He was courting a girl who lived about five miles from his home and he used to ride out there on horseback, along a winding road that was almost impassable in places because of the thick growth on either side.

That road led down into a place known as Big Grassy Creek bottom, and that bottom was midway between his home and his girl's house. There was a ford across the creek, and near the ford, an old tumble-down church that hadn't been used for upwards of 50 years.

Woman Burned to Death in Bygone Days.

Near the church was an old chimney—all that was left of a house that people told strange stories about. According to one tale a woman had been burned to death when that house took fire.

There was something eerie about the old church and the old chimney. Doc used to feel shivery when he passed them riding home at two o'clock in the morning. But one night he made the mistake of going into that church, and then—

It was one dark night when Doc was coming back from a date. It had started to rain just after he left—a thin drizzle at first.

But, as he rode along, he heard the rumble of thunder and the rain began coming down harder. He had reached the bottom then, and the

It was a human form of some sort, standing there with arms outstretched.

church would afford shelter of a sort. Doc tied his horse to a sapling, and plunged through the underbrush to the door.

The church was all but fallen down. It leaned over crazily to one side as if it had been pushed over by some giant hand into a great parallelogram. The windows were out and the floor was partly gone, but guided by intermittent flashes of lightning, Doc worked his way forward to a point near the rostrum, where the roof was good and the rain didn't come through. The rain didn't show any signs of letting up, so Doc lay down on a front bench to go to sleep.

Hunch Makes Him Stay Awake.

"I lay there about 15 minutes," he said, "when something caused me to open my eyes and look at the doorway at the other end of the church. Lightning flashed just then—flashed just enough to enable me to see dimly through the door. Something told me to stay awake and, with sleepy eyes I gazed at that door inspecting it each time the lightning would permit me.

"I heard a twig break outside, and could tell that my horse was uneasy. I felt the hair rise on the back of my neck, and my heart began to beat faster. It seemed that it would be hours before the lightning flashed again to tell me what might be there, and in the meantime I straightened up just as quietly as I could."

And along about then there entered Doc's mind the thought that this old church might be haunted. There was that old chimney—charred remnant of the house in which a woman had burned to death. And as if that wasn't enough, Doc began thinking of the countless people who must have been buried from that old church—whose bodies must have lain in their pine coffins before that same rostrum near which he was lying now. Those thoughts were running through Doc's mind then, suddenly, lightning flashed again.

And this time Doc saw something in the doorway. It was a human form of some sort, standing there with arms outstretched, touching both sides of the door. "Now," says Doc, "I wanted to make my exit. I began to get ready to do so, but how was I going to go about it? The only door was blocked, and the windows were too high up. I waited anxiously for the next flash of lightning.

"It came, and my ghostly visitor was disclosed standing in the doorway looking at me. It was plainly silhouetted and it seemed to be an old woman with matted, twisted hair hanging down to her shoulders, no hat, no shoes, and wearing some sort of a sack apron.

Lightning Reveals the Thing Coming at Him.

"She moved with as little noise as the spirit itself. Could it possibly be a spirit? I couldn't move. How was I going to get out? Was the Thing coming closer? To my disordered imagination, it seemed as if it was. What would it do when it discovered me? Would it block my entrance? Would it take out after me? All those things I anticipated before the next flash of lightning. When it came, the Thing was about two feet closer, coming onward with outstretched arms!"

Still there was no sound. The apparition had advanced noiselessly. In the darkness before the next flash Doc could imagine cold, clammy fingers on his face.

"Now," he says, "I decided it was time to move. I slipped up slowly, hoping to get past the Thing before the next lightning disclosed me. I reached the position that I thought was by her side, and then came another flash. I jumped, and yelled out loud. She followed suit with a yell equally as intense and made a grab at me. But too late!

"Just one jump and I was outside the door, running to my horse and off like a streak. I believe if Tom Mix could have seen me ride he'd have envied me."

And what was the Thing that Doc saw in the doorway? Well, the next day Doc heard a report that an aged insane woman had escaped from the Anna asylum not far away. And that was Doc's ghost.

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

Cowbird Unfriendly

The cowbird is not only a wild bird but is totally lacking in a social conscience. Cowbirds do not even build nests. They deposit their eggs in others' nests and leave the upbringing of the young to other birds. "Like the European cuckoo it leaves all family care to others," writes an ornithologist in "Birds of America." He continues: "It might well serve as the emblem of free love."

What France Taught Us

The custom of erecting signs at the entrance to towns and villages saying "go slow," and at the city line, "Thank you," is said to be copied from France and was brought to America by tourists several years ago.

Many Kinds of Fish

A family could eat a different kind of fish once a week for three years without sampling all the varieties produced commercially in the United States.

Golden Egg Goose

Jacob Putman, Bellevue, Iowa, believes he has the goose that laid the golden eggs, and here's why: Since last spring the goose has laid more than 200 eggs and for 10 days in October averaged two a day. In addition, the goose laid 21 eggs while she was sitting on a nest in the hatching period. She started with a nest of 16 eggs; ended with a brood of 37.

Garage in Venice!

Paradoxically, Venice whose highways are canals, has the largest auto garage in Europe, having a capacity for 2,500 cars. They are the cars of all the folks who come to the resort in them, but who cannot use them until they are ready to leave again.

Silver Production High

Silver production in the United States and possessions last year totaled 60,796,673 ounces worth $39,302,900.