THREE SHUTTERED HOUSES

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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SYNOPSIS

Driving home through a torrential rain, young, well-to-do Clint Jervies picks up a girl, scantily clad, running in terror-stricken flight down the road. She rides a short ways, leaves the car and runs into the woods. He decides to talk to his dear friends, Inspector Tope and Miss Moss, about his adventure. Clint still thinks of her as Miss Moss, his former guardian, though she and the Inspector are married. Clint, having settled down, now manages the Jervies estate himself.

CHAPTER II
—2—

On the flat crest of Kenesaw Hill, backed against the woods and looking down an open slope toward the marshes and the river, there were three houses, dissimilar and yet alike. Dissimilar in their outward aspect, yet alike in that to the most casual passer-by it must have seemed that fear dwelt in them all, and secrecy, and other things besides. Heavy shutters were at every window, even though those shutters were not always closed; heavy hangings behind the lace curtains next the glass; closed doors, chimneys that seldom wore a friendly plume of smoke, a lawn never sufficiently clipped and tended, and lacking ameliorating shrubs or flowers.

One of these houses was a square box almost exactly as high as it was wide, of dull brown brick, with a dull slate roof that was so flat it threatened to crack under the winter's weight of snow: a square box of a brick house, with a wing like the tail of a dog that is sitting down, extending for a short distance behind. Grass grew tall in the fishbone pattern of the brick walk that led from the road to the front door.

And one of these houses was a sprawling thing of wood, painted that frugal brown which thrifty New England folk so often and so unfortunately prefer. Yet whoever first designed this wooden house must have groped toward beauty, even toward the pleasant ways of living; because there were broad verandas, there were peaks and valleys in the roof. There were even a few remaining traces of an ornamental border still discernible under the overhang at the gable ends.

The third house was of stone. This was the smallest of the three; and its height was greater than either its front or breadth. It had almost the appearance of a tower of stone; and the stone-work extended upward to the window-sills of the second floor. Above that there was stucco; and above the stucco and the low attic windows, there was a steep-pitched roof from which the snow would slide of itself. But this house, even though it was the smallest of the three, was distinguished by one circumstance. There was behind the house a portable garage of sheet metal; and from this garage a drive led around one side of the house, making a sharp angle at the rear corner to pass between the house and a tall pine tree there, making another angle so as to pass the front steps, and thus to the road. And the garage gave evidence of being used; the drive was free of grass, and there were some oil-spots by the kitchen door as though a car often stopped there.

You might have thought these houses, from their aspect, empty, abandoned; yet people lived in them, and by an unchanging routine. Each Saturday night, as a part of this routine, they all forgathered in the sitting-room of the big frame house between the other two, where old Denman Hurder lived with his wife who had been Ella Kenesaw, and with his daughter Kitty Leaford, and her daughter June.

June Leaford sometimes wondered whether other people existed as monotonously as these folk she knew best: her mother, and Grandpa and Grandma Hurder; old Matthew Bowdon and his wife next door in one direction; Aunt Evie Taine, and Uncle Justus, and Rab and Asa in the other. This was the only world she knew; a world a mile square, with the three houses as the focus. And these were the only folk she knew—these kinfolk and one other, the man who lived in the cabin by the pond which was hidden in the sunlit woods behind the house, and who liked to have her call him Uncle Jim.

She had first met this man one day a good many years ago. As she grew from babyhood to childhood, Grandpa Hurder used to take her for long walks about this mile-square tract of land that was the Kenesaw domain; and later, when she was old enough to adventure abroad alone, she explored in all directions. She liked to slip down toward the river, moving secretly among the young growth which was recapturing the old pasture there; and she discovered a screened knoll above the stream where she could sit unseen and watch the bright-hued canoes slip softly by.

At other times she went to roam fearlessly in the woods behind the house. Half a mile below the crest of Kenesaw Hill, the woods ended at a broad highway along which cars passed all day long in a weaving pattern to and fro. She knew the spring-fed pond deep in the woods, and sometimes she took off her shoes and stockings to wade in the clear water there; or she would sit very still on the rocky summit of the knoll above the pond to watch through the intervening branches of the trees the cars go by.

Uncle Jim found her there one day. She was at the time about ten years old. He spoke to her, smilingly, and asked her name; and she told him what it was, and watched with interest how the blood drained out of his lips. Later she saw him more than once again, and one day she told her mother of these encounters.

Kitty Leaford was a soft, querulous woman, who lived resentfully but not rebelliously, complaining without struggle. She heard June's report in an unaccustomed silence, and without comment; but she must have reported the matter to Aunt Evie, because later Aunt Evie told June, in her soft, implacable tones, not to walk in the woods again for a while, and she bade the girl forget this man she had seen.

Kitty Leaford herself would have submitted—though rebelliously—to this prohibition; but June was of a

Mr. and Mrs. Bowdon were playing anagrams at another table.

stronger fiber than her mother. She disobeyed Aunt Evie once, and met Uncle Jim and told him what had happened. He came to the house that afternoon June saw him meet Aunt Evie. She did not hear what passed between them; but after that Uncle Jim built a cabin on the rocky knoll above the pond, and dwelt there sometimes for weeks on end; and June often went that way.

These hours when after her lessons under Aunt Evie's tutelage were done June could slip away to the river, or to see Uncle Jim, made life endurable for the child. As she grew into a young woman, they were a part of the routine of her days. Her days all were routine; just as it was a part of the routine which held them all, that every Saturday night after supper they came together in the big sitting-room in the Hurder house. They did not meet for supper, because that meant extra work and even a certain additional expense. But after supper they all met and were determinedly festive.

"It is a duty we owe the children," Aunt Evie used to say. "To make home pleasant and attractive for them in whatever ways we can."

June and Rab and Asa were the children. When June was eighteen, Rab was twenty-six, and Asa seven years older; children no longer. But the routine bound them still . . .

When this particular evening began—though June would remember its every detail all her life—there was nothing to make it seem any different from others that had gone before. The day had been warm and sullen, and there was promise of a thunder-shower to relieve the heat; but Kitty Leaford hated thunder-showers, so that June did not welcome the prospect of this relief. She was always apt to suffer when her mother did.

The girl did the supper dishes tonight as her regular duty was; and while she was thus engaged, Uncle Justus and Aunt Evie came in through the kitchen from their house next door. There was a half-bottle of milk on the table, and Uncle Justus, as he passed where it stood, knocked it off with his elbow, so that it spilled across the floor. June had to mop it up, while Aunt Evie thrust Uncle Justus on toward the sitting-room. She did not scold him, because she always spoke in low, gentle tones; and Uncle Justus was stone deaf and never heard anything she said. June sometimes thought his deafness was an armor that served him well.

After she had finished her tasks, she went upstairs to her bare, high-ceiled room to wash her hands and smooth her hair, and when she reluctantly came down again, the others were already gathered in the sitting-room. Uncle Justus sat in the shabby old chair by the piano reading his paper. He would go presently to sleep, his chin on his chest, his glasses on his nose, his paper on his knees.

June's mother and young Rab Taine and Asa were playing three-handed contract bridge at a card-table at one side. Rab had a friendly eye, a light and amiable tongue. When June now came to the door and hesitated for a moment here, he called to her:

"Come along and play with us tonight, June. You belong with us young fry, not with the patriarchs!"

Mr. and Mrs. Bowdon, Grandma and Grandpa Hurder, and Aunt Evie were playing anagrams at another table; and a chair waited there for June. June hesitated, but Mrs. Bowdon interfered. Mrs. Bowdon—she insisted that June call her Grandma, although she was in fact June's great-aunt—was a ponderous white lump of a woman, white hair, white cheeks, small tight lips. June thought of her as a crushing weight. Grandma Bowdon said now to Rab, in her slow, heavy fashion:

"Rab, June's place is here with us. June, here is your chair."

June had no thought of exercising any choice in the matter. She might have a choice; but if she had, she kept her wishes to herself. She had found by experience that nothing but bruised knuckles could result from battering a stone wall. She sat down where she was bidden, and she began to play with them the game called anagrams.

Uncle Justus went to sleep in his chair and began to snore, and Aunt Evie made him move into the hall, into the straight, heavily carved chair by the table there. The sound of his snores still reached them, but no longer so disturbingly. That he should thus move into the hall was a usual occurrence and June scarce noticed it at the time. Later she would be puzzled by the fact that Inspector Tope attached to it so much importance,as he did to every movement of the others here this evening.

Shortly after ten o'clock, a mild argument developed. The discussion went on and on, till Kitty Leaford rose with a sudden angry movement and said fretfully:

"I must go to bed! I've a headache. This heat torments me beyond enduring."

Grandma Bowdon protested: "Why, you can't go yet, Kitty. It's not half-past ten. We never stop till eleven."

"I must," said Kitty Leaford. "I must get to sleep before the storm."

Aunt Evie Taine remarked in her calm, gentle tones:

"Of course, Kitty, you ought to go to bed, if you feel tired. I'll bring some milk up to you. I always say when I'm tired, a glass of warm milk makes me feel better than anything else. Where is it, in the ice-chest?"

June confessed: "I'm afraid there isn't any." Uncle Justus had spilled the last of the day's supply.

But Aunt Evie ignored her. "We've none over at our house," she reflected. "Nothing but the top milk that I saved for the coffee. Mother, have you any?" Grandma Bowdon nodded; and Aunt Evie said: "I'll run across and get some."

"It doesn't matter, really," Kitty Leaford repeated. "Good night." She went out into the hall and they heard her speak, loudly, to Uncle Justus. He answered her, his voice sounding from halfway upstairs.

Aunt Evie followed her. "Justus, where are you going?" she demanded. "Come here!" He must have obeyed her, for when June reached the door, he was just sitting down in the hall chair again. Aunt Evie told her: "I'll bring the milk right away, June. From Grandma Bowdon's."

She hurried away, and June started to go upstairs, to be with her mother. Sometimes Kitty Leaford wanted her help in preparing for the night; for there was a considerable ritual involved in this procedure. But Rab Taine called her.

"June," he urged cheerfully, "come back here. It's not bed-time yet. Stay awhile."

She stood uncertainly in the doorway, a tall, dark-haired girl, slender and strong, but clad in a shapeless and unbecoming gown.

"You know," Rab told her smilingly, crossing to speak to her in a lower tone, "you need to learn to play, June. This tomb is no place for you. It's time you were meeting some young fellows."

June nodded.

"I'm not going to stay here always," she told him. "I'm going away some day. Mother has promised me."

"Any time you want to step out," Rab invited, chuckling, "I'll give you a hand. I like you, June. And I can show you around."

Asa passed them on his way to the kitchen. "Glass of water," he said, by way of explanation. June heard Aunt Evie come in to the kitchen, from out of doors, heard them talking together there.

The girl went along the hall to join them, to see if she could be of help. Aunt Evie had poured a little milk out of a bottle into a stew-pan and set it on the gas-stove. The bottle was empty. Asa was standing by the stove, a glass of water in his hand, while Aunt Evie looked for matches. But she did not readily find any; and June confessed:

"I think they're all gone. We meant to order some."

"I'll get some from Justus," Aunt Evie decided. She went into the hall to rouse Uncle Justus, and June picked up the pan of milk.

"Mother has a gas-plate in her bathroom," she told Asa. "I can warm it there."

He nodded without speaking. Asa was always a dour, silent man. He went ahead of her through the hall and back to the sitting-room, and June followed him as far as the hall. Uncle Justus was awake, fumbling in his pockets for the matches Aunt Evie demanded; and June set the milk down on the table beside him.

"I'll warm it upstairs," she told Aunt Evie, and went into the sitting room to say good night to Grandpa and Grandma Hurder. Rab came out with her, when this duty was done, and picked up the milk.

"I'll carry this upstairs," Rab told June, smiling. "I want to say good night to Aunt Kitty. Besides, it's too much of a load for you!" His eyes were twinkling.

June was not particularly attentive; yet later, under Inspector Tope's gentle inquiries, she would remember and relate every detail of this evening. That stew-pan with a little milk in the bottom was to assume a dark and dreadful significance in her eyes.

But just now, she followed Rab upstairs. He knocked on her mother's door, and June was at his elbow. "It's Rab," he called. "June and I have come to tuck you in."

Kitty bade them enter. She was in her dressing-gown, brushing her hair. Her hair was a flaxen yellow. June thought it looked younger than her mother's face looked; but she knew why this was so. These two, mother and daughter, were close in many ways.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

French Archeologists at Work Upon Alesia Battlefield Find Roman Coins

Thirty-seven Roman coins, also 179 diverse objects which might have belonged to Julius Caesar, all of them dating back to the Roman occupation of Gaul, have been dug up by a group of French archeologists at work upon the historic battlefield of Alesia, 40 miles from Dijon.

For three decades excavations at Alesia have been carried on, but during the past few months the "harvest" was so abundant that it has inspired the archeologists, working under the direction of M. E. Esperandieu, to continue their digging with increased vigor. Among the 179 Roman objects found were locks, keys, cramp irons, needles and fragments of pottery; also an elaborately decorated table in the form of an altar and a striking lion in bronze (almost intact). A "hypocaust," an underground furnace for heating baths, was also dug up.

Every American school boy who has plodded through Caesar's "Commentaries" is acquainted with Alesia; it is the place where Vercingetorix, intrepid chieftain of the Gauls, met his fate and was compelled to surrender to Caesar. Alesia today bears the name of Alise-Sainte-Reine and, since the Middle ages, has become a religious shrine much frequented by Burgundians. Saint Reine was one of the early Christian martyrs in Gaul and every September her fidelity to her faith is evoked in a picturesque procession.

Each year an average of 10,000 visitors comes to Alesia, some as religious pilgrims, others as tourists. All of them walk about the battlefield where the independence of Gaul was lost some 2,000 years ago; they stand in awe before the heroic statue of Vercingetorix, erected on the summit of Mont Auxois.

Five Million Years Old

Scientists claim redwood trees found in the Petrified Redwood forest, California's redwood empire, are more than five million years old. Volcanic action centuries ago covered the region with fine dust causing preservation of trees in their present petrified form.

COLD CUTS FOR DELICIOUS VARIETY
See Recipes Below.

Cold Cuts for Variety

For a help-yourself-party (or almost any other lunch or supper) few foods rival in popularity a platter of "cold cuts." Designed to tempt the appetite, and to provide interesting variety, this good-to-look-at and good-to-eat dish is a summer favorite.

Salami, liver sausage, thin slices of flavorsome boiled ham, and corned beef or sandwich slices make an attractive and delicious combination. Wafer-thin slices of cheese, small sweet pickles and radish roses with sprigs of watercress complete the platter.

These same cold meats have other uses, too. For example, cubes of salami add zest to a green salad, corned beef makes a tasty casserole meal, and slices of boiled ham combine with cream cheese and chives to make a tempting and unusual dish for lunch or supper plates.

I've chosen from my file of tested recipes a half dozen which will add new interest to your meals. I hope they may inspire you to do a little experimenting on your own.

Luncheon Slices.
(Serves 4-5)

5 slices of sandwich loaf (½-inch thick)
1 egg (beaten)
Fine crumbs

Dip meat in beaten egg and then in crumbs. Fry in deep fat, heated to 380 degrees, until golden brown. Serve with sauteed pineapple rings.

Ham and Cheese Pinwheels.
(Serves 4)

1 3-ounce package cream cheese
1½ tablespoons mayonnaise
1 tablespoon chives (minced)
4 slices boiled ham

Combine cream cheese, mayonnaise and chives. Spread generously on the slices of boiled ham. Roll each slice firmly, wrap in wax paper and chill. When ready to serve, cut the rolls into slices ¼ inch thick. Arrange on a bed of watercress and serve with French dressing.

Rarebit Sandwich Filling.

¼ pound dried beef
1 pound American cheese
1 cup condensed tomato soup

Grind the dried beef and the cheese in a food chopper. Add soup and blend well. This may be kept in the refrigerator for several weeks.

Ham and Cabbage Slaw.
(Serves 4-5)

3 cups cabbage (finely shredded)
¼ cup green pepper (cut in slivers)
1 cup boiled ham (cut in slivers)
1 teaspoon onion (minced)
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon white pepper
½ cup salad dressing
1 egg white (beaten)

Combine cabbage, green pepper, ham and onion. Add salt and pepper. Fold salad dressing into stiffly beaten egg white, and mix lightly with salad ingredients. Serve in salad bowl.

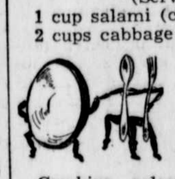
Corned Beef de Luxe.
(Serves 5)

2 cups potatoes (cooked and sliced)
1 12-oz. can corned beef (sliced)
1 cup onions (sliced very thin)
3 hard cooked eggs
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons flour
2 cups milk
¼ teaspoon salt
Pepper and paprika to taste
1 cup cheese (grated)
½ cup buttered bread crumbs

In a greased casserole place alternate layers of potatoes, corned beef and onions. Cut the eggs in two, crosswise, and push into the mixture, cut side up. Make a white sauce of the butter, flour, milk and seasonings. Add the cheese to the sauce and pour over all. Sprinkle buttered bread crumbs over the top and bake in a moderate (375 degree) oven for approximately 30 minutes or until browned and heated through.

Salami Salad.
(Serves 5)

1 cup salami (cut in cubes)
2 cups cabbage (shredded)



1 cup raw spinach (shredded)
¼ cup sharp American cheese (grated)
½ cup French dressing

Combine salami, cabbage, and spinach. Add cheese to French dressing, and pour over the salad ingredients. Chill thoroughly. Serve in large bowl lined with lettuce.

Send for Copy of This Book.

This new-type cook book offers you a wealth of helpful hints on entertaining. Menus for parties ranging from a simple Italian supper to a wedding reception are included. You'll find, too, practical tested recipes for everything from appetizer to dessert. Send 10 cents in coin to Eleanor Howe, 919 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill., and get your copy of "Easy Entertaining" now.

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

Vacuum Cleaner With Clean Dust Bag Best

A vacuum cleaner with a clean dust bag does the best cleaning job, studies at Purdue university experiment station show. For best service the bag should be emptied after each daily use. Never wash the bag, as that destroys the finish that keeps it dustproof.

How much dust a machine draws from a rug, the studies indicate depends partly on how fast it is pushed back and forth. Most machines clean best if they are moved at a speed of from one to two feet a second.

Naturally, the machine should not be allowed to pick up pins, tacks, or glass because these sharp objects may poke holes in the bag or chip the fan blades.

It is also desirable to keep the machine in a clean place, protected from dirt and dust.

Many Electric Outlets Important to Kitchen

When electric outlets are being planned in a new house for lamps, clocks and radios, the kitchen is often neglected. It has more uses for plugs than any other room.

Within reasonable limits, there cannot be too many appliance outlets in the kitchen. In this room electricity is used both for lighting and for motivating power.

Consumption of current varies widely with kitchen appliances, and special attention should be given to the load the outlet is expected to carry.

Just Sterilize Containers To Prevent Ropy Bread

"Ropiness" in bread is caused by a bacillus and it makes the bread unfit for use. All containers in which the bread was mixed, baked, and stored should be sterilized by boiling. Ropiness in bread does not develop immediately after the bread has been baked, but announces itself by a disagreeable odor.

To Remove Jar Covers

To remove covers from preserve jars place the jar top downward in a dipper of hot water (not boiling) and allow it to remain five or ten minutes. Remove the jar from the dipper and insert a steel kitchen knife at different points under the rubber. This will let in the air. The cover can then be removed easily.

On Washing Curtains

When washing curtains put dye or tint in the washing machine with the soap flakes. They color more evenly this way.