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. In three shuttered houses, all gloomy and forbidding, on Kenesaw Hill, near where Clint picked up the frightened girl, lived three families. In one house lived old Denman Hurder, his wife, who had been Ella Kenesaw, and his daughter, Kitty Leaford, and her daughter June. Living in a second house was Aunt Evie Taine, Uncle Justus and brothers Rab and Asa. The third held old Matthew Bowdon and his wife. Living on the estate was a man known only to June as "Uncle Jim." Following their usual custom the three families gathered in the Hurder home Saturday night. Kitty, June's mother, retired early with a headache. She was given warm milk, and insisted on taking two sleeping tablets, one more than usual. Strangely upset, June slept fitfully, and in the middle of the night went in to see her mother. Her uncomfortable position warned June that her mother was not sleeping. She was dead. Panic stricken, June ran from the room, out the unlocked door, and into the storm to get Doctor Cabler. It was here that Clint Jervies picked her up.

CHAPTER IV

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Inspector Tope and Miss Moss had found in marriage the calm happiness of middle age. The Inspector had looked all his life on violence, yet with gentle, comprehending eyes. For a score of years or more he was at the head of the Homicide Bureau at Police Headquarters, and won for himself there a reputation not soon to be forgotten. Miss Moss was in a different fashion as shrewd as he.

While they were away on their leisurely honeymoon, Clint had planned a surprise for them: There was among the properties of the Jervies Trust a one-story, six-room house sandwiched on a narrow lot in Longwood, hidden in a backwater away from the traffic arteries, with four trees on this lot, and room for a flower-garden. Dana Jervies, Clint's father, had taken his bride there thirty years ago; and he had kept it afterward for the sake of sentiment. Clara and Mat lodged in this house for a while after their marriage; and when Inspector Tope and Miss Moss came home from their honeymoon, Clint met them at the station and drove them to this familiar door.

Miss Moss, with tears of pleasure in her eyes, protested; but Clint said strongly:

"Why, of course you'll come here. This is where all the Jervies family starts housekeeping, you know. Can't go against tradition." And when she argued she was not of the Jervies family, he insisted gently:

"You're the only mother I can remember, you know."

She yielded at last, said they would stay a little while; but Clint said they should lodge here till he wanted the house for his own bride. "And that will be a long time, by all the signs," he promised.

On the morning after Clint's ride over Kenesaw Hill, he rang the bell as they were about to sit down to the breakfast Miss Moss had prepared; and Tope, in an old blue dressing-gown and slippers, the morning paper crumpled in his hand, opened the door for him.

He greeted Clint; and he called over his shoulder:

"Mrs. Tope, here's Clint for breakfast."

She appeared for a moment in the dining-room door to smile a welcome, and bade them both sit down at the table.

"Almost ready," she promised. She watched these two for a second, a deep fondness in her eyes, before she disappeared into the kitchen again. When she presently returned, with the coffee in one hand and a platter of eggs and bacon in the other, Tope said:

"Wait, Clint. Start over now." And he said to Miss Moss: "Mrs. Tope, Clint's had a curious adventure. See how it sounds to you."

And Clint told them how, driving back to town, he had overtaken a girl in her nightgown, running through the rain upon that lonely road. "Now what do you make of that?" he asked, challenging them.

Miss Moss reflected. "I know a little about that place!" she told them. "I know there are three houses, side by side. Matthew Bowdon lives in one. He's a lawyer, trust law mostly. The firm is Bowdon and Taine. Mr. Bowdon must be an old man now. Two of his grandsons are in the firm with him, and Justus Taine, his son-in-law."

Clint exclaimed: "Well, what I want to know is, who was this girl? What had frightened her?"

The Inspector got up and crossed to the telephone. "I wonder if Charley Harquail is downtown," he said. "He might know if anything has happened out there." Charley was a reporter, and he and the Inspector were old friends. Tope called the newspaper office, and Miss Moss and Clint listened to the one-sided conversation.

When the old man turned back to them again, there was a quickening interest in his eyes; and Clint caught him by the arm, demanding:

"What is it, Inspector? What did Harquail say?"

Tope sat down at the breakfast-table again. "I need another cup of coffee, Mrs. Tope," he said. "To think this over." And while she poured it, he began to explain:

"You heard me ask Charley if Denman Hurder had any children," he reminded them; and he chuckled. "That surprised Charley," he said, with a certain gratified vanity in his tones. "Charley wanted to know how I got onto it, and I asked him what he was talking about."

He hesitated, said soberly: "This is what he told me: Mr. Hurder had a daughter named Katherine. She eloped, twenty-odd years ago, with a man named Jerry Leaford. Leaford didn't amount to much, Charley said. He said there was a row at the time, and finally she and Leaford went home to live with

Under the pretext of inspecting the tires, Clint looked attentively at the three houses.

her folks; and then Leaford left her, and disappeared for good and all."

He added, and his tones were somber now: "The reason Charley had all this stuff so pat, Mrs. Leaford died last night, and he'd been getting up an obit for her."

"Died?" Clint cried. "She was alive—"

"It wasn't her you saw," Tope reminded him. "She must have been past forty now."

"You asked something about children?" Miss Moss prompted.

"I asked Charley if she had any children," Tope explained. "He didn't know. They just got a flash about her death, from the district man out there; and they wanted to give her a good obit, because of course Hurder is a big advertiser. Charley said the district man was going to get all the dope, children and so on."

The others sat thoughtful, watching him; and the Inspector was silent for a moment. He said at last with an apologetic glance at Miss Moss:

"You'll think I'm seeing things at night, but—there's something wrong out there!"

Miss Moss urged slowly: "Why do you think so? Mrs. Leaford was sick, and the telephone was out of order, and they sent someone for a doctor. Isn't that all?"

Tope shook his head.

"No one runs for a doctor, no matter how big the hurry is, without putting some clothes on."

"What was the matter with Mrs. Leaford?"

"Charley said heart trouble," Tope explained. "But that covers a lot of ground. If a man gets shot, or stabbed, he dies of heart-trouble, as far as that goes. Heart failure will kill a person; yes. But it takes something to make a heart fail. Takes quite a lot, too. These hearts of ours go on pumping pretty steadily, unless something happens to them. I'd like to know what made her heart fail."

He took up the telephone, and Miss Moss moved to his side. "Inspector," she urged, "it isn't our business."

He smiled at her. "Let me poke my nose in," he begged. "I can't keep out of a thing till I know."

He used the phone for a while, turned back to them again.

"That was Inspector Heale," he said. "At Headquarters out there. He hadn't even heard about Mrs. Leaford being dead. I guess it's nothing." He grinned at Clint. "Son," he demanded, "what do you mean, coming in here and stirring us up this way? Can't a girl go for a walk in her nightie along a country road in the rain without starting so much talk? I don't believe there was any girl, anyway. How much did you drink last night, young fellow?"

Clint chuckled. "Had one high ball," he confessed. "It bores me to see these kids lushing it up the way they do." He spoke to Miss Moss. "This girl I took home, Mabel Gaye—she was tight. Bound she'd kiss me good night. Wanted me to stay—"

Miss Moss smiled at the austerity behind his words. "She'll be grateful to you today," she suggested.

Tope said in a mirthful tone: "And you no sooner get rid of her, than another one comes out in her nightgown to waylay you, Clint. What is this strange power of yours?"

Clint laughed, and then the telephone rang. Tope went briskly across the room. He said:

"Hello! . . . Yes, speaking . . . Oh, yes, Inspector."

A silence, while he listened. Then: "Yes, thanks."

Another silence; and then Tope said:

"Why, I'll come out and see you, and bring him along. Sure."

He put up the receiver and turned back to them; and Miss Moss saw that his eyes shone.

"What is it?" Clint demanded.

"Inspector Heale tells me he called up the Medical Examiner," Tope explained. "Doctor Derrie had had no report on the death, so Heale called the family doctor. Doctor named Cabler. He says Mrs. Leaford died from an overdose of some sleeping-powder." He added, after a moment: "Accidental."

"Accidental?" Miss Moss repeated, in a flat tone.

There was a moment's silence, and then he added:

"Inspector Heale wants to know how I knew about it. And he wants to talk to you, Clint. I think you'd better drive us out there."

CHAPTER V

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Clint swung the car off the main thoroughfare. "This is the road," he said. "I'll show you."

And he drove more slowly, studying the way. Woodlands shut them in on either side before he stopped at last, where there was a path, and a house among the trees.

"This is where I let her out," he explained.

Tope nodded, looking toward the house. "Probably Doctor Cabler lives there," he suggested. "How far had she ridden with you?"

"I was coming down this hill," Clint explained, and he drove on, said presently: "It must have been along here somewhere that I overtook her."

Tope commented: "No houses anywhere near."

"They're on top of the hill," Clint replied. He put the car swiftly up the grade and the three houses came into view.

Tope said, in a low tone as though he might be overheard: "Drive slowly, Clint."

"I'll stop," Clint amended. He pulled up the car beside the road, and got out, under pretext of inspecting the tires; but at the same time, under the brim of his hat, he looked attentively at these three houses by the road. So did Tope and Miss Moss too.

There was an undertaker's garland attached to the door of the house in the middle; and a car with a doctor's tag stood beside the road. The day was warm and fine after the shower; yet nowhere did Clint see a window open. Some of the shutters were closed and at other windows thick curtains hung. Behind the houses, the woods were dark and still.

When Clint presently drove on, he looked at Tope to see what impression the older man had received. "Well, there they are," he said. "What do you think?"

Tope answered with a slow smile: "Why, I get notions. Fool notions, maybe, Clint; but I've got in the habit of believing them. It feels to me as if the people that lived in those houses were afraid."

"The girl was afraid," Clint agreed. "But what would they be afraid of?"

"Well," Tope reminded him, his tone suddenly grim, "A woman died of poison in there last night. If she'd known it was going to happen, she'd have had a right to be afraid."

So Clint was silenced; and they came on into the suburban town that was their destination, and found Police Headquarters. Miss Moss elected to stay in the car while they went inside.

Inspector Heale came to meet them. He was lean and gray, and his brows were extravagantly bushy. He shook Tope's hand, and spoke some hearty word.

"Might have known you'd be around," he said humorously. "You old buzzard! How do you hear about these things so soon? I didn't even know Mrs. Leaford was dead till you called me up."

"Done anything?" Tope asked seriously.

Inspector Heale bade them come into his office and closed the door, and he shook his head. "No," he confessed. "Doctor Derrie's gone to look her over, of course. Doctor Cabler hadn't notified him. Cabler was called in late last night, slept late this morning. That's why he hadn't phoned Doc Derrie. He said there wasn't any hurry."

And he explained: "Mrs. Leaford had been taking this dope for years. She took an overdose once before, and came near passing out. This time it was nearer than that."

"Dead when Doctor Cabler got there?" Tope inquired.

"Before that, I guess," Heale explained; and he looked at Tope and then at Clint inquiringly. "But I want to know how you heard about it," he reminded them, and Tope bade Clint tell the tale of his adventure the night before.

So Clint repeated his story; and Inspector Heale listened without interruption till he was done.

"The girl was Miss Leaford," he explained then, "Mrs. Leaford's daughter. She found her mother dead, and the tetephone was out of order on account of the shower, so she ran to get the doctor." He grinned. "I didn't know she made the trip in her nightie," he admitted. "They're a queer lot up there, and she's as queer as the rest of them."

"They're that way about everything," Inspector Heale insisted. "You take electric lights. Hurder put them in his house, here a few years back; and then the others hooked his meter, to save meter deposits. The light company kicked, but those folks on the Hill, they mostly get their own way when they want it. Old Mrs. Bowdon—she's seventy if she's a day—you can argue with her till you're blind and she don't give an inch.

"And Mrs. Taine's as bad," Heale continued. "She's one of these thin, stringy women in a black dress; and she talks in a kind of whisper as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. She can strip the hide off you and never raise her voice. She's a worker, too. She'll put on overalls and go right at it. Do anything. For instance, she wired her own house and Bowdon's, and hooked up the wires in Hurder's cellar. If I didn't know they had money, I'd think they didn't have a cent, the way she works all the time."

Clint began: "Miss Leaford—"

The Inspector said guardedly: "Why, she might be all right, for all I know. She's always slipping around through the woods, alone, like a wild animal; and she never speaks to you. Passes you right by—"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Tibetans Depend on Species of Worms To Provide the Necessary 'Pick-Me-Up'

A curious little worm, which is used by Tibetan natives as a "pick-me-up," has attracted the attention of missionaries.

Locally known as "grassworms," they make their habitat in lofty mountain ranges of the Tibetan border, near the Tatsienlu leper home conducted by the Friars Minor of the Hankow Vicariate.

Natives eat them dead or alive for medical purposes. In either form they bring fancy prices. They are in great demand for the mentally depressed and for sufferers of stomach trouble.

When dead they are mixed with boiled chicken. In this concoction they are said to react wonderfully as "pick-me-ups." When live worms without cocoons are dug up they are mixed with a strong liquor, distilled from maize. Taken in this form they are considered a potent remedy against stomach ills.

So valuable is the "grass-worm" considered that hundreds of hunters make a living by gathering them. The hunters swarm the mountain slopes to search for these worms. They easily find eager buyers, anxious to purchase all they can dig up.

In the winter season, the ground is covered with these insects. More often they are found in the cocoon, less often without. In either form they find a ready market.

Though somewhat smaller, they resemble silk-worms in appearance. The head is covered by a bright-red crust. As winter approaches they burrow head-first straight down into the ground. Here they spin thin cocoons in which they wrap themselves. When the snow melts, their heads begin a sprouting process. Thin hairs, resembling grass, spring from the soil.

The people of the district believe that the sprouting blades open like flowers and scatter spores which in due time develop into other worms.

Who's Afraid of Pilate's Ghost

Tourists and botanists who climb the slopes of Mount Pilatus in Switzerland to collect some of the 500 different wild flowers that grow there, have long forgotten that it was not till the Sixteenth century that anyone approached it. Pilate's ghost was supposed to hover there.

YOUNG PSYCHOLOGIST

An employee of the public library has just reported a conversation she overheard between a progressive schoolboy and a non-progressive pal. Evidently the progressive scholar was trying to explain the difference between an inferiority complex and a superiority complex to his unenlightened contemporary. "Suppose," he said, "I asked you if you could jump ten feet and you said sure. Then you'd have a superiority complex. But if you said no, then you'd have an inferiority complex." "What would I have," the other boy inquired, "if I said maybe I could and maybe I couldn't?" The progressive boy pondered. "I guess," he remarked, "you'd have a split personality."

LAUGHS AT HOME

"Do you go to many amusements these days, Bill?"

"No. Don't have to now. My son's gone to wearing Oxford bags and cretonne vests.

Why Not 'Crepe de Chine?'

A man and his wife decided to dine at a tearoom or cafeteria on Sundays. Recently some very delicious lemon chiffon pie was served to them. The next Sunday after church services Mrs. Green inquired:

"Where shall we eat today, John?"

To her amusement her husband answered:

"Let's go where they have that good georgette pie."

Moving De Luxe

The J family was moving across the city. When the moving men came, the small family kitten was no where to be found. Donnie burst into tears but a neighbor promised to keep the kitten when it appeared and let Mr. J pick it up the next day.

When the family arrived at their new home, however, and mother opened the cabinet to get a dish towel, there was the kitten fast asleep on the pile of towels.

Five Year Plan

It was during the empanelling of a jury; the following colloquy occurred:

"You are a property-holder?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Married or single?"

"I have been married for five years, your honor."

"Have you formed or expressed an opinion?"

"Not for five years, your honor."

SUN STROKE

"How did he get a sun-stroke?"

"Jimmy Sunfish bumped into him."

Kept Out

"If time hangs heavily on your hands, why don't you go into politics?"

"A man as rich as I am," answered Mr. Dustin Stax, "doesn't dare go into politics. He is considered lucky if they let him shove a card under the door with a check attached to it."

Turn About

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Fillip. "The baby has eaten a lot of that dog biscuit!"

"Never mind, dear," said a caller, "it just serves Fido right. He's often stolen the baby's food—haven't you, Fido?"

By Comparison

Diner (after a long wait)—Waiter, have you ever visited the zoo?

Waiter—No, sir, I haven't.

Diner—Well, you ought to—you wouldn't half enjoy watching the tortoises whiz past.

Quick Thought

The nurse came into the library to proclaim the good news. "It's a little boy," she announced.

"What?" asked the absent-minded professor. "Oh, yes, just ask him what he wants."

CLASSIFIED DEPARTMENT

POULTRY

BRED FOR PRODUCTION: Ducks
RAISED FOR PROFIT: Chicks
SOLD BY QUALITY: Turkeys
STARTED CHICKS: Pullets
MILFORD HATCHERY Rockdale, Md. Pikesville P. O.

Showing the Latest Button-Front Styles

NO WONDER button - front dresses are so popular for midsummer! They go on without mussing your hair or getting mussed themselves. They look so smart, crisp and tailored, and they are easiest of all to press! No. 1787 is an unusually pretty version, so easy to make that even beginners can do it. Inside pleats make your waistline small. Gathers give a nice round bustline. Make this of gingham, linen, pique or sharkskin, and trim it with lace or braid.

Buttons to the Waistline.

A new and delightfully different version of the button-front is No.

1790. It has buttons to the waistline only. The skirt is cut with a wide lap-over, and a pretty, circular swing. For this, choose gingham, percale, linen or pique, with snowy frills to make it the more cool-looking and becoming.

The Patterns.

No. 1787 is designed for sizes 14, 16, 18, 20, 40 and 42. Size 16 requires 4⅝ yards of 35-inch material with short sleeves; 1¾ yards of lace or braid.

No. 1790 is designed for sizes 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46 and 48. Size 36 requires 4⅝ yards of 39-inch material without nap; 2¼ yards of trimming.

Send your order to The Sewing Circle Pattern Dept., 247 W. Forty-third street, New York, N. Y. Price of patterns, 15 cents (in coins) each.

(Bell Syndicate—WNU Service.)

How Women in Their 40's Can Attract Men

Here's good advice for a woman during her change (usually from 38 to 52), who fears she'll lose her appeal to men, who worries about hot flashes, loss of pep, dizzy spells, upset nerves and moody spells.

Get more fresh air, 8 hrs. sleep and if you need a good general system tonic take Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made *especially for women*. It helps Nature build up physical resistance, thus helps give more vivacity to enjoy life and assist calming jittery nerves and disturbing symptoms that often accompany change of life. WELL WORTH TRYING!

Motto of Quarrels

Weakness on both sides, as we all know, is the motto of all quarrels.—Voltaire.

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It is the cause and not the death, that makes the martyr.—Napoleon.

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