# THREE SHUTTERED HOUSES

## By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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### CHAPTER IX—Continued

—9—

"You'll see lots more with me," Clint promised. "This is a bum one, really." And he urged: "Let's start home. We can drive slowly and—be together without so many people round. Unless you want to see the rest of this?"

June—a little reluctantly—professed a complete lack of interest in the film; yet she looked back wistfully as they went up the aisle. Upon their arrival, she had not removed her coat till they reached their seats; but now in the lobby she expected some word from him about her new gown. When he said nothing, merely offered to help her into her coat, she protested:

"You haven't noticed my dress. Don't you think it's nice?"

Clint stood back to survey her, chuckling. "Sure, grand!" he declared. He came close to her again. "But what you wear doesn't make any difference to me, June."

"Asa gave it to me!"

"Asa?" Clint echoed, frowning faintly. "Why?"

She slipped her arms into the sleeves of the coat he held. "He told me to wear it to catch a young man!" she confessed, laughing up at him over her shoulder. "He knows about you and me."

Clint chuckled with pleasure. "It will be my turn to buy pretty things for you soon," he said happily; and her hand tightened on his arm as they went out to the car.

They drove slowly, Clint clinging to this hour; and when they came in front of the great sprawling house at last, he stopped and turned off the lights, and said urgently:

"Let's sit here a few minutes. You don't have to go right in."

"I must, soon," she urged, yet made no move to leave.

They found no great need of words. They were snug in the car, the windows raised against the rain. There was a light in the rear part of the Taine house; and June said, with a ripple of mirth in her tones:

"Uncle Justus is still asleep in his chair. If no one wakes him up, he may sleep there all night."

"Is that his room?" Clint asked, surprised.

"No, he's in the kitchen." Her tone was mirthful. "He likes to warm his feet in the oven door."

"Who's sitting up over there?" he asked, nodding in the other direction.

"Aunt Evie and Asa are staying with Grandma Bowdon," she explained. "Rab had to go to Providence."

They felt, rather than heard, a low rumble of sound; and Clint said: "Hullo, that was thunder. I didn't see a flash."

"I did, out of the corner of my eye," she told him. "Off through the woods that way." She pointed past the houses; and she said, and he heard her voice shake: "We had a thunder-shower the night Mother died. A terrible one. And she added:

"Uncle Justus has turned out his light. The thunder must have wakened him." Clint saw that the Taine house was indeed dark now; and then June cried, a sudden tension in her tones: "Clint, look!"

"What?" he asked, surprised; and he stared past her.

There was a faint brightness, in the shape of a rectangle, against the front of the Hurder house. The brightness assumed color; and Clint reached across the girl to lower the window so that he might see more clearly. That rectangle identified itself as the open front door of the house, outlined in red.

And suddenly this dull red became bright; they saw the flicker of a flame.

They scrambled out together; they started to race across the lawn. As they did so, a car passed along the road behind them, and Clint turned back and shouted:

"Hey, fire! Ring in an alarm!"

He saw the driver dimly, saw the man's head nod. Then he ran after June toward the house, toward that front door through which billows of smoke began to pour. He caught her on the steps, caught her fast; for she would have gone headlong in. And she was crying:

"Grandpa! Grandma!"

When Clint held her, she swung to him in terror, beseeching him. "They're in there, Clint. Oh, quick, dear!"

### CHAPTER X

—

Miss Moss had never seen June Leaford, and as she watched Clint's increasing devotion to the girl, during the fortnight after Mrs. Leaford died, this fact sometimes disturbed her.

She said to Tope one evening: "I've been—asking about her, here and there. You know Lissa Thayer. I've spoken to you about her."

"I know her, yes," Tope assented.

"Lissa and I have become almost friends," Miss Moss explained. 'She knows about Clint and June. He often leaves his car there when he goes in to the cabin. And Asa and Rab buy gas there for their car. She says Rab is—unpleasantly familiar sometimes, too friendly, offensive. She doesn't say much about Asa, but I think she knows him rather well."

Tope reminded her: "Asa went to see her, the morning after Mrs. Leaford died. Remember? We met him in the woods, and you saw him down there."

"I remember," Miss Moss agreed. "It didn't seem to me she was glad to see him, that day . . . You know—I've been trying to guess who will inherit the Bowdon fortune, now that Mr. Bowdon is dead. And Mr. Hurder's money, when he dies. Mrs. Leaford would have been Mr. Hurder's heir, you know."

Inspector Tope stared at her.

"You could outjump a kangaroo, Mrs. Tope," he said, in a deep admiration. "You're three jumps ahead of me." He rose. "You've given me enough to think about to keep me awake," he said. "And I had as much as I could stand already. Let's go to bed."

Hours later, however, something disturbed Miss Moss. Her eyes opened and she lay listening. Inspector Tope here in the bed beside

And then Asa came—

her was sleeping. Then she heard again the sound which had roused her a moment ago.

It was the doorbell, ringing in a long peal, shrill and imperious.

In a swift haste she snapped on the shaded light beside her bed and found dressing-gown and slippers. Then the doorbell rang again, and Inspector Tope woke and asked:

"What's the matter?"

"Someone at the door," she said softly. She went out along the hall to the living-room, and heard the Inspector bestir himself behind her, but she did not wait for him. She came to the front door and opened it; and she uttered a low ejaculation of surprise and of dismay.

For Clint stood there, with a girl in the circle of his arm; and they were both smoke-begrimed, their faces sooted and dirty and streaked with water. Also, Clint's forehead was red and inflamed in a streak across above his eyes, and his eyebrows were singed, and she saw in that first glance an angry blister on the back of his right hand.

. He said grimly: "Miss Moss, here's my June. I've brought her home!"

"You're hurt!" Miss Moss cried. She remembered to welcome the girl too. "Come in, both of you. Miss Leaford—"

June whispered: "His hands are burned! I wanted him to stop and get them fixed, but he wouldn't. Oh, take care of him."

Tope uttered a low ejaculation; he stood blinking in the light. There was a moment's silence; and then Clint, his arm still encircling June, added slowly:

"Mr. and Mrs. Hurder—we got them out; but—"

Miss Moss saw June shudder and tremble, and she spoke commandingly.

"Come in," she directed; and as they obeyed, she shut the door behind them. "Miss Leaford, are you hurt too?" she asked.

"No, no," June told her. "You must fix Clint. I'm all right."

Miss Moss nodded. "Don't try to talk," she insisted. "Clint, sit down. Miss Leaford, come help me. Soda, I think, is as good as anything. He needs to be cleaned up, too. And you'll want to wash your face, I expect."

"I don't matter," June said. "But Clint's burned terribly."

Clint protested with a wry smile: "Now, sweet, it's just this blister on my hand. That's nothing at all."

They found in the end that he had in fact suffered no more than minor burns on his hands and wrists, and that flame-stroke on his brow.

"I wrapped a wet handkerchief across my mouth," he explained. "To keep the smoke out. Had my hat on, and that helped too."

Miss Moss said cheerfully: "You've no more eyebrows now than a baby, Clint; and not much in the way of eyelashes." She was busy tending him.

Clint whispered, through set teeth: "That's a lot more comfortable." Miss Moss ached for him. He grinned at June, said then to the older woman: "This sweet kid has come to live with you for a while, Miss Moss. It won't be long. Just till she comes to live with me."

Miss Moss looked at June, and saw in the girl's eyes something like a plea for forgiveness; and June said softly: "He's talked so much about you. I know you must be hating me."

Miss Moss smiled fondly. "No, dear," she said gently. "No, I'm glad for both of you."

Inspector Tope chuckled. "Well, now that's all settled, to the satisfaction of the womenfolks," he suggested. "How about me? Miss Leaford, do you mind if I ask what happened? You mind telling me?"

June shook her head. "No," she said in a dull tone. "No. I'd rather talk, I think, than not." She made an uncertain gesture. "I'm—I feel as though I were walking in my sleep, ' she confessed. "It doesn't seem real to me."

Miss Moss said briskly: "We'll have a cup of chocolate; all feel better. June, come help me, will you?" She led the girl toward the kitchen, called over her shoulder: "Inspector Tope, let Clint rest till we come back. I want to hear."

But Clint said: "I don't want to rest." His tone suddenly was grim. "Let's go with them, Inspector," he suggested; and Miss Moss saw them come on her heels. In the little kitchen, while she was busy about the electric stove, Clint sat on the sink and drew June close beside him; and these two told what there was to tell.

"I'd taken June to see a picture," Clint explained. "But the picture didn't seem to mean much to us, so we left early, drove back to her house. And—parked outside for a little while.

"We sat there talking awhile, and then she saw that the house was on fire."

Tope nodded; and June explained:

"I must have left the front door open when I came out, or else I didn't latch it and it blew open; because we saw the flames in the front hall." And Clint continued:

"So we started to run toward the house. A car passed, and I shouted to the driver to ring in an alarm. By that time June was on the front steps. I caught her just in time. She was going in. The smoke was pouring out of the door, and there were flames inside; but she told me Mr. and Mrs. Hurder were in there."

He held June closer, and she watched him with wide eyes.

"It was raining," he explained. "I wet my handkerchief in the rain, and wrapped it over my mouth and started to crawl in the hall. But the smoke drove me back, and then June said they slept in the wing, on the ground floor; so we ran around the house to the windows of their room."

He hesitated, then went on: "The windows were shut, and the curtains were drawn, but some of the curtains were on fire. The windows were all shut tight. I managed to climb up and break the glass, with my pocket-knife for a hammer. I reached in and sprung the catch and pushed the window open. I guess that's when I burned this hand; because when I opened the window a gush of flame came out in my face, and I let go all holds and fell."

He looked at June.

"I fell on her," he said. "She was right under me. I fell on top of her."

"It didn't hurt," June insisted.

"So we tried to get in through the bathroom," Clint explained. "There wasn't any fire in there, so I got that window up and climbed in; but when I opened the door into their room, it was all on fire inside. Fire was spouting out of the wall right beside the bathroom door."

"The laundry-chute is there," June interrupted.

"And it was roaring in the cellar," Clint confessed. "I could feel it hot under my feet. The smoke was pretty bad. Then a piece of the floor in front of me burned through; and then the flames licked up at me, and I had to back out and shut the bathroom door."

"But you said you got them out," Tope reminded him. "Mr. and Mrs. Hurder."

"I'm coming to that," Clint explained. "We tried another window, right beside their beds. I smashed it open, and smoke poured out, but no flames. So I straddled the sill and my foot hit their bed inside." He spoke rapidly, his eyes fixed straight ahead. "I felt someone, and I dragged Mrs. Hurder up and lowered her out of the window to June, and then him. The bed was all afire, little flames."

And he said, looking at the girl beside him: "They weren't burned much, I don't think. We were just in time. The fire spread awfully fast."

Inspector Tope suggested: "Fire department must have been there by then!"

Clint shook his head. "No, they weren't! They didn't get there till after Mrs. Taine did. Not till after Asa did, as a matter of fact. June and I had been pretty busy, but it must have been quite a while."

Miss Moss echoed: "Mrs. Taine?"

"You see," Clint explained, "Mrs. Taine and Asa were staying with Mrs. Bowdon last night. Mrs. Taine said they didn't hear anything till their lights went out, and she went to look at the fuses, and saw the fire through the pantry window. She came running over, just about the time we got the old people out; and then Asa came. He and I carried them into the Bowdon house, out of the rain. And Mrs. Taine and June started taking care of them. But June came out again when I did."

"Were they dressed?" Tope asked. "Mrs. Taine and Asa?"

"Oh, yes," Clint said casually; and he went on: "By the time the fire engines came, one wing was all afire, and the other was well started; and they couldn't get the plug off the hydrant right away. There's only one hydrant and that was three or four hundred yards down the hill. The whole thing went, before they got it checked at all."

"Burn to the ground?"

"The floors fell in," Clint assented. "And part of the roof. I don't know; maybe the walls wouldn't go."

June's eyes were closed, and Miss Moss tried to sign to Inspector Tope to be still; but he asked insistently: "What about the others? Mr. Taine, and Rab? Where were they?"

It was June who answered: "Rab had gone to Providence right after supper," she said. "He had a case in court there tomorrow morning. And Uncle Justus is deaf. He wouldn't hear anything." She remembered: "We saw him turn out his light to go to bed, just before we saw the fire."

"Saw him?" Tope echoed.

"Saw his light go out," June amended. "In the kitchen. He liked to go to sleep in his chair after supper, and sometimes he didn't wake up at all. But we saw his light go out."

*(TO BE CONTINUED)*

## Finds Death Trees, Feared by Indians, Tribesmen Also Claim Aid in Gambling

"Trees of death," gnarled shrubs which are held in superstitious awe by Indians, have been discovered in a lonely canyon.

John W. Hilton, authority on desert lore, has disclosed that he found the trees after a long fight to overcome superstitious fears of Indians.

The sap of the "tree of death," or elephant tree, is believed by the Cahuilla Indians to be a deadly poison for doing away with enemies quietly, Mr. Hilton said.

They also believe, he said, that in the hands of medicine men it can drive away evil spirits and that, if prepared and used properly, it gives extra keen perception in playing pion and other gambling games.

The recently discovered trees are believed to be the farthest north on record.

"Knowing better than to ask direct questions about the fabled trees, I had to wait until some Indian told me about the whole affair," Mr. Hilton said. "Finally the son-in-law of a very old and powerful medicine man claimed to know where the tree was and agreed to lead me to the spot for $5.

"High up in the canyon we stopped, but the Indian, saying that the wind was blowing toward us from the tree, took a zig-zag course up a mountain so as to approach the tree from behind. But our search was fruitless. The guide decided that the tree did not wish to be found, and we went home.

"Later, however, a young educated Indian took me directly to the tree.

"The Indian guide stabbed the trunk of the tree and a blood-like substance oozed out."

Mr. Hilton then carefully plucked sample sprouts from the bush and took them to the government date gardens at India, where experts identified them as Bursera microphylla, or elephant tree.

### The Term 'Kowtow' Chinese

The term "kowtow" is derived from the Chinese ceremonial act of prostration as a sign of homage, submission or worship. The word is formed from ko, knock, and tou, head. To the emperor the kowtow was performed by kneeling three times, each act accompanied by touching the ground with the forehead.

### HASTE MAKES WASTE

"Fine piece of land out here!" said the dusty, shrewd-looking man as he descended from his trap outside the farmer's house.

"You're right there," replied the farmer, eagerly. "It's the best to be found in the country."

"Bit too high a figure for a poor man, I reckon?" asked the stranger.

"It's worth every penny of three hundred dollars an acre," answered the farmer, with an eye to business. "Were you thinking of buying and settling in these parts?"

"Hardly," murmured the traveler, making some notes in a book. "I'm the new tax assessor."

### TOO MUCH CHEWED

Mrs. Blabb—Look at yonder flag! One of my ancestors was the first to carry it round the world. But my, what a rag it is!

Mrs. Stabb—Well, that's not strange—some of his descendants have been chewing it ever since he brought it home.

### Like Christians

"How's Ireland?" was the question once put to the famous "Tay Pay" O'Connor in America, at a banquet given in his honor.

"O, Ireland's in a terrible, terrible way," Mr. O'Connor replied.

With his fingers he traced an imaginary map upon the table cloth.

"You see," he continued, "there's one religion in the North and another in the South, and they are continually at each other's throats." He paused and shook his head sadly. "I often wish they were all of them haythens, so they could live together like Christians."

### Golf Courtesy

Two golfers were playing a match for a wager. After the first hole, the Englishman turned to his Scotsman opponent.

"How many did you take?" he asked.

"Eight," replied the Scotsman.

"I took seven, so that's my hole," said the Englishman.

After the second hole, the Englishman asked the same question.

"Na, na, laddie," he replied, "it's mae turn to ask feerst now."

### NEXT ROUND?

He—Gee, but that was a knockout not being able to get the license on account of youth!

She—But we're still in the ring, are we not, dearie?

### Always Has Time

Pretty Caller—Do you think the superintendent will see me now?

Bookkeeper—Certainly, madam, the superintendent always has time to see pretty girls.

Pretty Caller—Well, tell him that his wife is here.

### Explained

"Talking about long drives," began a member of the golf club, "I had one that went 375 yards the other day. Yes, really I hooked, the ball hit the nearby concrete roadway, and from then on, it rolled."

### Relic

Janie, looking through an old trunk, found a pair of embroidery hoops.

"Look, mother," she said, "I found a pair of wooden garters."

### Small Fry

Mrs. Noowedd—Aren't these eggs rather small today?

Grocer—Yes'm, but the farmer who sells me my eggs had to start to town early this morning and took them out of the nest too soon.

### Overhaul Job

Chuzz—Having your car overhauled shouldn't put you in a tight spot.

Alford—It does me—a cop overhauled it and now I have a speeding charge against me.


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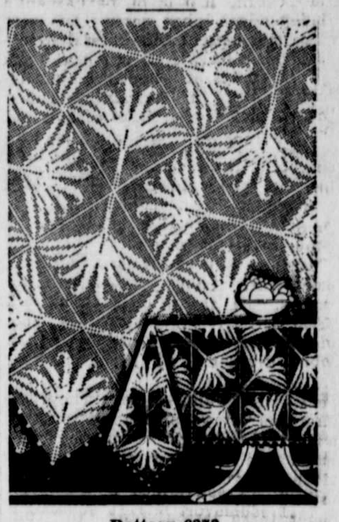

Pattern 6373

The palm, since ancient times, has inspired artists. It is no wonder, then, that this lovely square in such simple crochet uses it as a motif. A stunning cloth or spread of mercerized string—smaller articles in finer cotton—will give you handiwork you'll treasure. Pattern 6373 contains instructions and chart for making the square; illustrations of it and of stitches; materials needed.

To obtain this pattern send 15 cents in coins to The Sewing Circle, Household Arts Dept., 259 W. 14th St., New York.

Please write your name, address and pattern number plainly.

## AROUND THE HOUSE

**When Shirring Cloth.**—Lengthen the stitch on your machine and use ruled writing paper and stitch over. The rows will then be even.

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**Remove Paint Spots.**—To remove fresh paint spots from clothing, saturate with turpentine and spirits of ammonia.

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**For Stains in Vase.**—To remove stains from a vase or bottle, put into it two tablespoons of salt and four tablespoons of vinegar and shake well. Let stand for several hours, empty and rinse out in hot soapsuds.

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**Cleaning Leather Coverings.**—To clean leather-seated or leather-covered chairs boil together equal quantities of sweet oil, turpentine and vinegar. Bottle until you are ready to use it, then pour a little on a woolen cloth and rub well into leather.

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**Keep Picture Dustproof.**—The backs of pictures should be inspected frequently. If the paper on the back of the picture is torn, a new piece should be fastened on, so that dust may not get into the picture.

• • •

**Cooking String Beans.** — Cut string beans lengthwise into splinters. Cut in this way it takes a shorter time to cook than when cut in short pieces.

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**Treating Wax Floors.**—If dirt becomes ground into a waxed floor moisten a cloth with turpentine and rub the turpentine well into the floor until the wax is removed, then wash the floor anew and polish it.

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**Cleaning Window Shades.**—Window shades may be easily washed. Spread the shade over a flat surface and rub it briskly with a sponge dipped frequently in soapsuds. Rub off the suds with a soft cloth, rinse with clear water and dry thoroughly. Do this first on one side, then on the other.


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