

## **Incident at Willow House By Arthur Denton**

It was late afternoon and sunset was approaching. Willow House sat proudly on the top of a small hill, surrounded by forest. It was quite a plain house, with a straw thatched roof, glass windows and whitewashed walls, but something about it set it apart. It could have been the fountain, spraying water around, the tall trees standing strong or the lamp, sending flickering shadows across the mossy floor. The verdant green forest surrounding it was alive with life, the inhabitants getting ready before darkness set in. Jane and Rose sat, lounging in the dying sunlight, one completely engrossed in an exciting Detective novel, the other, fussing about and shrieking at the slightest glimpse of an insect. As usual Jane took no notice of her sister, preferring to delve into her world, the land of stories. Around them, the garden was starting to die down, the flowers, in full bloom, drooping their heads for the night, roses, tulips, marigolds, lillies and countless others, all resting for the next day. Frogs leaped from rock to rock, the stream gurgling underneath them while tadpoles danced in the rays of sunset. The great trees swayed in the breeze, weeping willows wooing, grand oaks creaking and young shoots at the will of the wind. Blossom drifted soundlessly, covering the garden in a kaleidoscope of colour, each carrying their own, tantalising scent.

A voice called from inside, Mary. As their mother was away, she was in charge, and taking her role very seriously. Throughout the day she had worked them like slaves, washing, dusting, polishing the house until it glimmered in the setting sun. She had insisted on using the leftovers of the previous day, ignoring the protests of the others. Elizabeth, the fourth sister, by this time, was already dragging Rose upstairs, ignoring her vengeful protests, forcing her to get ready for bed. Jane, still outside, took one more wistful look at the dense forest before turning briskly and walking inside, closing the kitchen door quietly, but not locking it. She helped her older sister clear away the dinner, stacking the plates next to the washing basin and then scrubbing them vigorously, tidy the house and blow out the candles which had been lit throughout the afternoon. Then, they both trooped up the ancient stairs which creaked their arrival into their sisters bedroom. They walked into their room, Jane running her hand across the old columns that rose out of the floor, noticing how they groaned under the weight of the house. Paintings hung on the wall, drawn by Rose who, under the encouragement of the whole family had started taking art lessons, paid for by Jane's recent literary success. Both beds sat in two corners of the room, each completely different. While one was neat, clean and orderly the other was messy, chaotic and specks of paint could be seen on the white duvet. Once both the younger siblings were tucked in, Mary and Jane both got ready for bed themselves. Each taking their turn into the adjoining bathroom, showering under the ice cold water, combing their knotted hair, brushing their teeth until they shined and getting into their nightgowns. Mary read for a bit, enjoying the revelation she felt when reading her sister's novels and Jane took out her pencil and paper, jotting down

ideas for her next book, one she had decided, which would involve a rogue detective hunting down his lost wife. After half an hour had passed, they blew out their candles and both turned in for the night...

Little did they know that that same day two unscrupulous thieves, Peter Smith and John Smith, had just escaped from the prison only a few miles away. They had spent the day wandering the countryside, looking for a place to acquire what they would need for the night. By coincidence, as they had been lost for a few hours, they had happened across the quaint cottage. They had scouted the house out, unseen and unheard by the house's occupants. When the final lights were extinguished, they crept across the lawn, making for the back door. Their rubber soles made no sound, their black clothing, invisible, their breathing, calm and controlled. John silently opened the back door, creeping inside and what a shock it gave him to see Rose, her mouth stuffed with chocolate, her eyes bulging open and her hand, clutching a custard pie, moving instinctively to hit him square in the jaw. A scream echoed through the house and, all at once Jane was there, pulling Rose away and throwing herself at the lanky thief. Hearing the noise that an indiscrete Rose had made, she had started to follow her down when she had heard the scream. They fought, growling and scratching, neither side giving an inch, until at last Jane came out on top, knocking the assailant unconscious. Peter ran in, wondering what had happened after hearing the scuffle inside. His eyes widened as he took in the scene. He launched himself at the surprised Jane only to be hit repeatedly on the head by Rose who had recovered her wits and had thought to take the large metal saucepan which was drying on the towel rack. By this time, Elizabeth and Mary were downstairs, their stricken expressions fearing the worst. They were greeted with a guilty but fierce Rose wielding her saucepan like a club and a disheveled but grinning Jane sitting aside an unconscious man who seemed to be tied up with what looked like kitchen towels.

Mary took this in quickly and started to move efficiently to rectify the mess that the two girls and two thieves had made. She ordered Jane and Rose to take the two criminals into the cellar which had no windows and only one exit which she asked Jane to lock and bolt until they could contact the police to come and take them out of their hands. Jane did as she was told and while she did, Mary instructed Elizabeth to clear up the mess of food and ripped clothes on the kitchen floor. She scolded Rose for her greedy behaviour but pulled her in a quick embrace, her worried look starting to disappear.

The police inspector came round the next day, and listened, bewildered at the night's happenings. "And where are these robbers now?" he inquired, still half dazed, the thieves were then procured from the locked basement angry and cursing, and were handed over to the inspector. The police inspector then told the girls that the criminals they had apprehended had robbed over 200 pounds and that they were

wanted, with a reward of 10 pounds. The girls protested profusely explaining to the inspector that they had done what any normal person would have done but the inspector was having none of it. They reluctantly took the reward and wished the inspector good day, before his police car rumbled off with the two convicts inside.

When their mother came home that night, what a sight greeted her. A huge feast had been prepared, roast duck sitting on a steaming plate of potatoes as well as salad, carrots, pickled onions, relish, garlic bread, butter, ginger beer and much, much more. When she had recovered from her amazement and had asked where all this had come from and how it had been paid for, the girls just shrugged, winked at each other and dug right in.