THREE SHUTTERED HOUSES

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued
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But it must have been a quarter of an hour after Clint heard the garage-door roll back before he saw a light in the garage. Then he heard a starter grind, and a car backed out of the garage, its headlights swinging as it turned.

Clint stood frozen in attention. The car followed the drive around the house on this side, the lights for an instant shining almost directly toward where Clint stood. Then it went on toward the road.

So Asa was gone; Clint felt a faint relief. He wondered what had become of Inspector Tope, and he hissed a signal, but had no reply.

Then he heard the car returning! He saw no lights; but he did see, dimly, a dark moving bulk as the car rounded the corner of the house yonder. It moved fast, dangerously so . . .

He heard a great crash, a shattering of glass, a tinny crumpling of metal—a great crash, then silence.

And then Tope's voice, yonder, in imperious summons: "Clint! Quick! Here!"

And a police whistle, shrill and long.

CHAPTER XIV

After that crashing impact and Tope's cry, and the shrill blast of his whistle, silence descended. Clint took one bound toward where he guessed Tope to be; then he checked, and turned. June from the window above him spoke softly: "Clint, you all right?"

"You'd better come," he said hoarsely. It was a matter of seconds only, until she stood beside him. Her fingers caught his.

"Here, you take this!" she bade him, and pressed Tope's old revolver into his hand.

He saw Tope kneeling beside a man who lay here on the ground. The flashlight illumined his countenance. Rab Taine! His cheek was smeared. Blood from a cut on his head had flowed out over his ear and trickled down his brow and face. He lay limp and lifeless.

"Dead?" Clint asked hoarsely.

Tope shook his head. His hand was on Rab's wrist, feeling for the faint pulse that fluttered there. "Not dead yet," he said.

June pressed close to Clint, and she said miserably:

"It's Asa. Oh, what is it, Clint? What happened?"

Clint shook his head, staring at Asa Taine, who sat here under the jammed wheel of the car. Asa was unconscious; and there was something mysteriously affrighting in his posture. His hands hung down limply by his sides; and the bent steering-column pressed the wheel itself against his body, so that he seemed to bulge in the middle. His head was in a grotesque and unnatural position. Cricked to one side, it rested against the frame of the door. His head was erect, even tilted backward, but his chin seemed to be pressed down on his chest. It was as though he were frozen in the very act of a hiccough.

Tope said reflectively, as though thinking aloud: "I guess he piled into that tree faster than he meant to. He must have seen me, and that would surprise him. I guess he lost his head, stepped on it. He didn't mean to hit so hard."

Rand and another policeman in uniform came panting through the rain. "What happened?" Rand gasped.

Without explanation, Tope said crisply: "One of you watch the other house. Rand, you go call Inspector Heale. If he's not too sick to move, get him up here."

Since they first discovered Asa here, Inspector Tope had not left the man's side, had kept him fixed in the flashlight's beam. Now they saw that his lips began to stir and mumble. Then he blinked. The light was in his eyes.

June cried softly: "We'll get you out in a minute, Asa."

Mrs. Taine came running out of the kitchen door, brushing past Rand as he entered, drawing some wrap around her. She reached the side of the car. "Asa!" she cried, and caught at his shoulder, tugging at him.

"Oh," he whispered. It was like a whistle of pain. "My head. Neck. Don't touch—"

Mrs. Taine whirled on the Inspector. "Quick," she commanded. "Get him out of there." And she looked all about. "Where is Rab?" she cried.

Asa muttered through stiff lips; his lips were blue.

"Sorry, Mother," he said, and tried to smile. "He dodged in front of me. I ran right into him. I couldn't help it."

His lips closed and opened again. "I couldn't help it," he repeated. "We both dodged the same way."

"I was going to town," Asa murmured. "But my headlights went out as soon as I hit the road. I came back to get a new fuse—"

His words were spaced widely; there were long pauses between them.

Mrs. Taine did not understand. "What does he mean?" she protested. "Where is Rab?"

Tope said gently: "Rab's hurt too, ma'am. We'll need the Doctor bad. Quick, you call him up!"

Understanding, she obeyed him, she hurried away, and after a moment they heard her voice, within-doors, demanding that Rand yield to her the telephone.

Asa asked some hoarse question, indistinguishable. "My neck hurts," he complained. "Rab? He's dead? I tried to miss him."

And Tope answered him, in slow stern tones. "You didn't hit Rab, Asa," he said. "I pulled him away in time. I pulled him away from the tree, where you'd propped him up!"

His voice had in it the inexorable ring of doom.

"He's alive?" Asa asked slowly, carefully, his mouth twisted.

"He'll come around," said Tope. "He'll be all right by and by."

Without any movement of his head, Asa's eyes swung to seek out their countenances. He peered in the darkness, and his lips writhed so that his teeth were hideously bare. Then he moved. It was as though he leaped, as though he would have sprung to action. His lips set hard; his shoulder rose; his whole body contorted; one hand darted down. . . . It whipped up, and a gun showed in the flashlight's gleam.

Inspector Tope, leaning into the car, sought to seize the gun.

But before he could touch Asa, could grasp the weapon, the need for action passed. When the hurt man thus leaned sharply forward, his head was tardy in following his movement. It seemed to hang back, and then to be jerked aside as though by an invisible hand; and this was a strange, unnatural thing

"It's Asa. Oh, what is it, Clint? What happened?"

to see. Asa's head turned at a grotesque angle, as though it had slipped; and instantly Asa himself was smaller, like a pricked balloon. And quite still.

Clint whispered: "For God's sake, Inspector! Is he dead?"

Tope nodded slowly. "Yes, dead," he said, in a low tone.

CHAPTER XV

For a moment more these three stood silently by the car with a dead man at the wheel. Then Rand returned.

"Heale's coming," he reported. "Right away."

Tope nodded. "This man in the car is dead," he said. "Stay by him. Don't touch anything."

And he turned back to where Rab lay on the ground. Then Mrs. Taine came running from the house. "Doctor Cabler will be here at once," she gasped; and she cried: "Where's Asa? What have you done with him?"

June put her arms about the older woman, held her away. "Rab needs you now," she urged. "Rab, Aunt Evie."

"Asa?" the older woman demanded.

"He's dead," June told her, mercifully frank.

"Who killed him?" There was a dreadful challenge in the slow, soft tones. "He was alive a moment ago. Talking to me. Who killed my son?"

"He—just died," June told her. "Please. We must take care of Rab now."

But Mrs. Taine swung toward the car. Tope with his flashlight bent on the hurt man on the ground, heard the mother brooding over Asa, calling his name, pleading with him—then June compelling her to turn this way. There was strength in the girl's tones; she was able to command Aunt Evie at last, to fetch her here where Tope and Clint knelt beside the unconscious man.

"We'll carry Rab to the house," said the Inspector. "Out of the rain. Clint, you take his legs."

They bore him into the house, where Tope knelt beside him, and with careful fingers appraised his hurts. Mrs. Taine stood still as ice, watching, and June held her fast.

Tope looked up at last. "Just a bump on the head, ma'am," he told Mrs. Taine. "I can't feel that the skull's broken."

Mrs. Taine began suddenly to cry; and this was a strange thing to see in that woman of iron.

June said: "I'll make her lie down." She led Mrs. Taine, submissive, away.

When they were gone, Clint knelt by the Inspector's side, asked the question he had not dared ask before. He nodded toward the door, toward Asa outside in the rain.

"You think he—did it?" he whispered.

Tope assented gravely.

"But I liked him," Clint protested. "He was the best of them all!"

The doorbell rang; Clint went through the dark hall; lighted the gas, opened the door. Doctor Cabler.

Clint came back with the physician on his heels; and Doctor Cabler, with no more than a nod toward the Inspector, knelt beside the man on the floor.

Presently he finished, tipped back on his heels. "Concussion," he said. "I shall make a spinal puncture, try to relieve the pressure on his brain. Otherwise the young man may die without recovering consciousness."

And he directed: "Help me. Push those two tables together. Put water on to boil. Where's Mrs. Taine?"

"In the front room," said Tope. "With June." And he explained: "Asa's dead, in the car, outside. He ran into that pine tree. Neck broken, I believe. Alive at first. Talked, then he tried to move, his head twisted to one side, and that was the end of him."

"Well, such things have happened," the Doctor confessed, after a moment. "Some shock dislocates the vertebrae without dislodging them. Then a movement, an attempt to turn the head, and the big neck muscles drag one vertebra across the other like a pair of shears. Snip the cord."

Doctor Cabler and Mrs. Taine, Clint and June could do all that was needful here. Tope watched them for a moment; then he went to the telephone, called Miss Moss and told her guardedly that Rab was hurt and Asa dead.

She whispered: "Asa dead?"

"Yes," he said.

"Is his wife there?" Miss Moss asked. "Lissa?" And at Tope's negative: "She would want to be. She has a right to be. I'm coming out. I'll bring her."

He was full of a deep comfort to know that she would come. "All right," he assented. "Do."

He looked at his watch and returned to the veranda. As he did so, Inspector Heale came hurriedly across the lawn from the road.

Heale exclaimed: "Tope, what's happened here?"

Tope said slowly: "Rab's hurt—got a bad crack on the head. Doctor Cabler's working on him." He added: "And Asa's out in the car with a broken neck."

"Broken neck?" Heale echoed. His voice was husky. "Is he dead?"

"Just as dead as if he'd been hanged," Tope assented. He said it with something like contentment in his tones, as though he perceived a seemliness and order in the world: "They don't hang in this State any more; but I always said it was the thing—for murderers, I mean."

Heale ejaculated: "Murderers?"

And Tope told him briefly: "Yes. He and Rab had an argument tonight, in the garage. He hit Rab with a monkey-wrench propped him against that pine tree by the corner of the drive, got out his car. He drove to the road and turned around and came back again. He meant to run into Rab, finish him.

"But I was there. Before Asa got back, I'd dragged Rab away from the tree. Asa saw me. Seeing me must have startled him so that he stepped on the gas. Anyway, he rammed into the tree so hard it snapped his own neck."

Heale stood in an incredulous amazement, and Tope concluded: "Didn't kill him right off. He came to. He thought he'd hit Rab, and he told us it was an accident, that Rab dodged in front of the car. When I told him he hadn't hit Rab, that Rab was alive, he went for his gun.

"But when he moved, his neck snapped. Finished him!"

Heale was almost wordless. "Gun?" he repeated.

"Here it is," said Tope, and delivered Asa's weapon to the other man.

Then Doctor Cabler came out to them. "Gentlemen," he said, satisfaction in his tones, "Rab is showing signs of returning consciousness."

"He'll live?" Tope asked.

"Oh, that, certainly," the physician confidently agreed. "And I think by morning he may be able to talk to you."

He went back into the house; and Heale roused from his paralysis of surprise. "You think Asa did the rest of it?" he asked.

"I've known that, since this morning," Tope replied.

"Why didn't you tip me?"

"Knowing isn't proving," Tope reminded him; and Heale ruefully assented.

"I guess I'll call Derrie," he decided at last. "Have him up here in the morning!" And he confessed a little grudgingly: "You've made a double-barreled fool out of him, Inspector."

CHAPTER XVI

The Inspector's call had come to Miss Moss like an expected summons. Before she dressed, she telephoned for a taxicab; and when she came out it was at the door.

"The Providence road," she directed. "I'll tell you when to stop."

When she rang the doorbell of the house behind the garage, it was far into the small hours; the rain still sheeted down.

A window opened above her head, and Thayer called a question.

"I must speak to Miss Thayer," Miss Moss explained.

The garage man himself came to the door with his daughter, sleepily protesting and bewildered. Miss Moss hesitated, unwilling to betray to him the girl's secret unless she must. Yet there appeared no other way. "Miss Thayer," she said. "I have bad news for you. Young Mr. Taine—"

She saw Lissa white in the dim-lit hall.

"He is — hurt," Miss Moss explained gently.

"I'll come," said the girl quickly.

Thayer put a swift protecting arm around his daughter, so that Miss Moss understood he had known the truth. "If Lissa's going, so am I," Thayer suggested. "Send your cab away. I'll take my car."

Miss Moss assented. And presently they started up the hill, Thayer driving. In the seat behind, Miss Moss held the girl close.

"There, there, my dear," she whispered comfortingly.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Pastels Vie With Prints in Midsummer Fashion Picture

By CHERIE NICHOLAS

WHEN it comes to the voguishness of prints versus pastels in the present mode the matter resolves itself into pretty much of a fifty-fifty proposition. Which is to say that the midsummer collections are made up of a goodly showing of each.

There is no doubt as to the importance of pastels especially for cleverly tailored daytime dresses that observe a nicety of detail which gives them "class" in the eyes of discriminating women who know their fashions. Favor for pastels is expressed not only in silk crepes and sheer woolens but a hue and cry is resounding for smart linens in delectable muted pinks and blues, rose shades, cool-looking greens and grays, light yellows, lavenders and novelty shades as cyclamen, tulip shades and such. White linens and linens au natural are also chic.

One reason for the big splurge that linens are making this season is that through the wonders of modern scientific processing newer linens carry a promise of non-wrinkling and non-shrinking.

At the top of the picture to the left see the attractive spectator sports dress of pastel blue crease-resistant imported linen. It has one of the very smart umbrella-tucked skirts. A belt braided in matching blue, fuchsia and yellow silk floss says color in unmistakable terms. The boutonniere is of self-linen and the cunning poke bonnet is of white straw.

The dress to the right in the background of this group is of a nubby sheer, pure linen in a delectable shell pink. Fitted waistline and sleeves cleverly appliqued with contrasting bands of periwinkle blue and strawberry linen are highspots in its styling. Sunburst tucks at the neckline, and unpressed pleats in the skirt, are also significant details. Every dress with a jacket is fashion's decree this season which accounts for a matching shell pink bolero which you carry or which you wear according to pomp and circumstances.

Before leaving the linen theme, just a word in regard to the smart looking redingotes tailored of white or natural linen which ladies of fashion are wearing over their lingerie frocks this summer. They are a modern version of the one-time honored "linen duster."

In regard to the silk prints that are everywhere present, and which are in friendly rivalry to smart linens, there is a decided flair among women who dress in the height of fashion for patternings that run to neat checks, and to plaids and stripes with nothing less than a stampede for dotted effects of every description. As the mid-season approaches suits of the new check silks will come into play in perfect fashion.

To the left in the foreground of the illustration a fashionable miss is wearing a smart frock for a day under the sun in the country. The dress is of blue silk with white pin dots. The collar piece is white, likewise belt and buttons.

A gay and colorful evening gown is shown to the right. It is of Scotch plaid trimmed with lace. The white organza blouse is also trimmed with lace. The full floor length skirt of gay print with dainty lingerie shirtwaist is a favorite evening fashion formula.

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

Play Suits Adopt 'Little Girl' Air

Some of the new play suits have a little-girl air. A 1939 variation of the popular shirt, shorts, skirt combination is made of gay floral striped cotton, and links a one-piece, puff-sleeved play suit and a detachable skirt hemmed with a frill.

Another, of ticking, is made up of a square-necked puff sleeved frock and shorts of the same material.

Tennis fans are choosing more dresses than shorts for play this year, one of New York's smartest shops reports. The smartest are white pique rayon or linen, designed with brief gored or plaited skirts ending above the knee.

Enthusiasm Grows For White Jersey

The practicality of white jersey, the smart appearance, the adaptability to sculptural draping and exquisite tailoring has so impressed designers they are expressing an enthusiasm for it that knows no bounds. Try out a costume of jersey and see what it does for you. It will slenderize you, it will be to the touch the sort you "love to wear." The white rayon jersies especially come out after a tubbing "white as snow" which is exactly what every woman hopes for, even longs for in her white costumes.

Diamond Earrings

Earrings, particularly diamond and pearl ones, are becoming increasingly important as accents for every costume.

New Hobby

Looms a new hobby on the horizon. It's handkerchief collecting. Not just ordinary handkerchiefs, but handkerchiefs that depict memorable events in American history. There is an interesting group of four, just out, created by Burmel, designer of note. They include Mark Twain's Mississippi, Covered Wagon, Mount Vernon and the Landing of the Pilgrims, printed in vivid tableaux against fetching floral borders. Landing of the Pilgrims is the theme of the handkerchief design carried by the charming collector pictured.

Tips Picked Up in World Fashion Centers

Black silk jersey evening dresses with snugly draped bodices.

Long fingerless gloves in the same fabric as the dress for formal evenings.

Shoes considerably higher than you've been wearing them and with spat tops for fall.

Fur coats with dress-like details, many on princess lines, with the new slim silhouette.

Chiffon alpaca to fashion a stunning, sheer bolero frock.

Bright red feathers to perch atop a jaunty white pillbox hat.

Thin black for formal afternoon wear is hot weather black at its best.

Coats that look like dresses, tailored of smooth, dress-like woolens for early fall. Many with braid trimming.

Floyd Gibbons' ADVENTURERS' CLUB

HEADLINES FROM THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF!

"Noises in the Night"

HELLO EVERYBODY:

There came a time when Frank Barry had to prove he wasn't a coward—and this is what happened!

Frank's address is Albion, Mich. He lives out in the country with his wife and at night the place gets sort of lonely. That would be all right as far as Frank was concerned, but Frank says that his wife is "somewhat nervous."

On top of that, Frank's wife is a light sleeper. And what with one thing or another, she was beginning to suspect that Frank had a yellow streak in him about a yard wide. Frank didn't feel that way about it. With him it was just a case of wanting to sleep at night. I'll let him tell you about the trouble in his own words.

"Every time a mouse would scamper across the floor," says Frank, "my wife would poke me in the ribs and whisper, 'Frank—Frank! Wake up! I hear noises!' Not being of a nervous nature myself, it was hard to wake me up. When I finally did awaken to hear a mouse playing about the room, I would mumble, 'It's only a mouse,' and fall asleep again."

It was just plain sleepiness on Frank's part—but his wife began to believe Frank was afraid to go down and take a chance on meeting up with a burglar. She never said so, but Frank could tell from the way she looked at him at times. And Frank, on the other hand, began wishing a burglar would bust into the house, just so he could go down and show wife that he wasn't afraid.

Frank's Wife Hears a Noise in the Cellar.

"Well," says Frank, "one night the opportunity came, and now my hair is gray." That night was October 25, 1922. Frank sort of had burglars on his mind that night.

That day he had picked a lot of apples and vegetables and stored them in the cellar. He had left the outside cellar door open.

That night, just as he was drifting off to sleep he heard a crash and felt his wife's elbow in his ribs. "Frank," she whispered, "did you hear that?" Frank had heard it. It was no mouse this time. A box had fallen down in the cellar! And then Frank remembered that open cellar door. Here were his burglars!

"And then," says Frank, "I began to realize that I was scared to death."

The cold shivers were running down Frank's back, but he didn't tell his wife. "As I lay there debating whether I should be a live coward or a dead hero," he says, "my wife said, 'Did you hear me,

Frank, clinging to the Thing, was carried up the cellar stairs.

Frank? If you didn't something must be the matter with you.' And there was something the matter with me. I was scared."

But Frank knew that if he showed the white feather now, his wife would remember it the rest of her life. He slipped out of bed and drew on his pants and socks. He left his shoes off because he didn't want to make any noise, and he took no light because a light would only make him a better target for robbers' guns. He picked up his own revolver and groped his way down stairs.

Down in the cellar he could hear boxes moving and apples rolling around. He locked the inside door so the burglars couldn't get into the house. Then he crept outside, down the cellar steps and into the cellar.

Frank Hears an Inhuman Sound.

"By that time," says Frank, "my fear had left me. If a robber shot at me, the flash of his gun would show me where to shoot. I had as good a chance as he." But Frank's fear of burglars had only moved out to make room for a greater fear—the horrible fear of the unknown.

It was deathly still in that cellar. Frank listened breathlessly, intently. "The stillness," he says, "seemed to grow even more silent, and the suspense increased. Then, all of a sudden I heard a strange, blood-curdling sound—a sound that I knew came from nothing human. My God, what could it be? I didn't have long to ponder that question. In a split second the Thing was on me, sweeping me off my feet."

Frank had arrived at that cellar door ready to fight burglars, but he wasn't prepared to meet up with something that wasn't human. He fell forward across the Thing, and clutched at it in panic. The Thing was immense—a veritable monster. It dashed up the cellar steps and Frank, still clinging to it, was carried up feet first.

"Its strength," he says, "was irresistible. I felt as though I was nothing more than a feather in a giant's hands. Many fears passed through my mind during the few seconds which that ghastly ride lasted, but all of them were too preposterous to believe. If I could have believed one of them I might have felt better. Anything was better than being at the mercy of an unknown monster."

But suddenly the monster was out in the open and Frank was losing his hold. He rolled off and fell to the ground. When he got up he had regained his composure—and also his senses.

Frank went into the house and got a lantern. Then he went out again and walked to the barn. Sure enough there was his monster, and his hunch had been right. Standing by the gate was Frank's 500-pound boar hog. He had escaped from the barnyard and gone into the cellar looking for an evening snack. And when he ran out of the cellar in alarm, his nose went between Frank's wide-spread legs, throwing Frank over on his back.

Frank says his wife thinks this story funny, and tells it to all her friends. "But it was mighty real to me," Frank says, "I didn't know fright could be that bad!"

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

New 'Back Drop' Aids in Television Transmitting

A black "back drop" for the screens of television transmitting tubes results in more sharply focused and detailed television image according to a patent (No. 2,156,391) issued to Willard Hickok of Bloomfield, N. J.

The "back drop" is a film of graphite at the back of the transparent mica support on which are mounted the photo-electric elements that convert the scene being televised into an electric image which is broadcast through the ether.

It is explained that when the scene is focused on the ordinary photo-electric screen of the "teleeye" tube, light from the image is reflected, bounces off the walls of the tube back on to the screen so that a double image may be formed. At the same time the photo-electric elements scatter the light. All this, it is indicated by past experience, blurs and makes hazy the image to be broadcast.

The black "back drop," which is the subject of the patent, on the other hand, absorbs the light which would thus ordinarily be reflected. The result is a sharper, more detailed image.

Beetles Are Hijackers

Government scientists announced they had discovered hijacking and racketeering among insects. Entomologists of the agriculture department reported lazy beetles in Kansas grain fields rob small red ants of seeds which they carry home.

Woman Is Constable

California has a woman constable, the state's first. Mrs. Jeanne Petersen of Coalinger was appointed to succeed her late husband.

Dairy Long in Business

Charles Dickens made a habit of visiting a dairy in Dukes road, Euston, each morning for a glass of milk. This dairy, which Dickens immortalized in "The Old Curiosity Shop," is still doing business in the same place.

Elephants Wreck Phones

Because elephants use jungle telephones as "back-scratchers," bringing down the overland lines, remote states of Malaya have resorted to the radiotelephone.