

The Creeping Man

by Frances Shelley Wees

YESTERDAY, Michael decides to take Murchison's assistant, McBain, into his confidence and perhaps gain information. He learns that Murchison and his wife were not happy, and that Murchison got Devoe his post.

Chapter 24

Ridiculous Question

"MISS LISSEY is your anonymous letter writer," said McBain. Michael rubbed his ear. "I don't think so," he said slowly. "I asked her, pointblank, today. She knew what I was doing here, having guessed some and ferreted out the rest."

"You asked her?" "Yes. And no one could have been quite so guileless if she'd had guilty knowledge. No, I think we're off the track there."

McBain shook his head heavily. "It's a damned puzzle to me, from beginning to end," he said. "And those love letters—that's a greater puzzle. I told you what I thought of such a rotten idea once before. He dropped into his chair and sat thinking, while Michael watched his expression. 'Did it ever occur to you?'"

"What do you mean, sir?" "Why—they were with the diamonds. Surely, if Murchison had gone with a woman he would have taken his valuables with him, of that nature. It appears that he didn't. Is it possible that the diamonds have some strange and secret history and the letters aren't what they seem to be but something else, in code, relating to the diamonds? Do I make myself clear?"

"By the Lord Harry," said Michael softly. "I wonder if you've struck something? You're suggesting... let me think now... supposing the diamonds were stolen. He went on, disregarding McBain's hand. 'Stolen? Not necessarily by your friend—but still—quite possibly by him. Supposing, as you say, these letters are code letters, from someone familiar with the circumstances. Someone who is warning him... rather?'"

"That would fit in with your letter from Chicago," McBain said abruptly. "It would," Michael replied happily. "Murchison's afraid to give his address or any hint of his whereabouts to his wife. In that case, she may or may not have a hint of the real truth... and is acting accordingly. You can interpret her actions differently according to the light you see them in. But the thing that gets me, is, why haven't you heard about the theft or loss or misappropriation... whatever you like... of fifty thousand dollars worth of diamonds?"

"They may have come from some other city," McBain said. "I don't believe of any hint of that Murchison stole them, Forrester. I think you're barking up the wrong tree there. But certainly there's something strange about them... and it may be his keeping them to protect someone else... don't you know any level thief. But as for thinking of Murchison in that light... it would mean a sort of double identity... it's preposterous."

"You've got to come back to that letter warning the Commission about Murchison's letters. At a moment, 'Somebody sent it. As for Miss Lissey... I'm convinced she thinks she knows something. I found her today out on the river bank, inspecting the rocks with a species of microscope. Can you tell me what might have been in her pretty little hand?"

"Whose hat?" McBain laid his pipe down on the arm of his chair. "Inspecting the rocks with a microscope?" "Something of the sort."

"Where?" "Along the bank between the University path and the first big ravine. I don't think she found what she was after, but she was certainly searching."

McBain laughed shortly. "Personally, I shouldn't like to venture an opinion. She's a bit off. I've always thought."

"Any special reason why she might want to cause trouble for the Murchisons?" McBain smiled suddenly. "Perhaps the fact that she once expected to marry Jared Devoe might have something to do with it," he replied.

McBain's mouth tightened. "Surely, Forrester, there is a more direct way than this of going about this business?" "I'm afraid not. It's a case of patient untying of knots until we find the straight thread. No one pretty hopeless right now. By the way..." he paused. "There's another knot I want to untie. It's a very small one. Do you happen to have a hat around here that doesn't belong to you?" Michael's smile was very engaging.

"A hat?" "What kind of a hat? Whose hat?" "I don't know. Miss Lissey informed me this afternoon that there was a hat left here the night school closed that might have been in this situation. It sounds ridiculous, but I ask merely to try and see what she was getting at."

McBain shook his head impatiently. "The woman's a fool," he said angrily. "There wasn't any one here on that night. No one could have left a hat here. I was at home all evening—I'm positive."

"Still—do you mind if I ask you your wife? There might be some reasonable suggestion back of Miss Lissey's words."

"For answer, McBain went to the door and called, 'Lucy? Where are you, my dear?'" "In the garden," a woman's voice came faintly. "I'm in the garden, John."

"We'll go out if you like," McBain said, pressing Michael down the long passage that led to the back door.

An Owl Hoots MRS. McBain was sitting in a garden chair in the dusk. She sprang to her feet lightly as Michael hollered her husband's name. "I didn't know we had a guest," she said chidingly. "I was enjoying the evening quiet. Why didn't you call me, John?"

"We've been talking, my dear, and I didn't notice the time flying. Lucy, Mr. Forrester has rather a ridiculous question to ask you—can you tell him if there is a hat here that was left on the night school closed?"

She stared at him. "A hat?" she repeated slowly. "Whose hat?" "I don't know," Michael said lightly. "Just any hat, that was left here that night."

"Perhaps... it might... perhaps that was the night I found a strange hat hanging in the passageway... I don't just remember. Is it important?"

"What kind of hat?" McBain asked her. "Why... a gray felt. I think it was."

"A man's hat?" Michael asked. "Yes, certainly."

"Is it still around, Lucy? Do you mind getting it?" "I think it is—certainly not," she said, and turned into the doorway. They followed her. She lifted the lid of a carved chest standing just inside the door; it held several hats and caps. She snapped on the light and examined them.

"That's strange," she said. "It doesn't seem to be here any longer."

"When did you see it last, Mrs. McBain?" Michael asked quietly. "I don't remember." She looked at him, and her brow was smooth and untroubled again. "I really didn't pay any attention to it. I remember wondering at the time who owned it, because no man had called here the day I found it."

"No man? A woman, then?" "No one but Miss Lissey, and she only ran in for a few minutes."

"A gray felt hat, Lucy? Do you remember if it had a round brim?" She looked at her husband. "I think it did," she said. They left her, and McBain walked to the gate with Michael. "The last time I saw him," he said, and there was no need to tell who he meant. "He was wearing a gray felt hat with a round brim. And Heaven only knows why it was left here. Perhaps if we knew that we should know everything."

Michael took the path that wound along between the edge of the woods and the hedges at the back of the gardens, and started for home. He walked slowly, thinking over the events of the day, and the strange information he had just received, and his steps were noiseless on the pine needles which had drifted across the little-used pathway. He passed the Deanes', and was rounding the curve of this outer horseshoe when he saw movement on the path ahead. He stopped involuntarily, and watched. There was someone just outside his garden gate, someone who crept rather than walked, and kept close in the deep shadow of the hedge. As Michael peered at it, the figure melted into the hedge and could be seen no longer. He waited.

It seemed to him that he could hear heavy breathing, and other small noises, which he could not quite distinguish; but there was no longer any movement on the path, so he went on, because of the darkness. Suddenly, out of the woods behind him, an owl hooted loudly. Michael jumped. The sound of breathing stopped.

The owl hooted again. Continued tomorrow

On the RADIO CHAINS

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Thursday
8:00—Rhythm Factory, KPO, KGW; Frank and Archie, KEX, KJR; Sunset Shadows, KGO.
8:30—Drama, KOMO; Kelsey's Orch., KGO, KEX, KJR; Army Band, KPO, KGW.

8:00—Major Bows, KXN, KOIN, KSL; Good News of 1940, KPO, KFI, KGW; Beyond Reasonable Doubt, KGO, KEX, KJR.
7:00—Workshop, KOIN; Music Hall, KPO, KFI.
7:30—Pop-Offs, KXN, KOIN; News, KSL.

8:00—Fred Waring, KPO, KGW, KFI; Cutler's Orch., KEX, KJR; Aloha Land, KGO; Amos and Andy, KXN, KSL, KOIN.
8:15—Sam Hays, KXN; Cutler's Orch., KGO; Myrtle, KPO, KGW, KFI.
8:30—Symphony Hour, KPO, KGW, KFI; Ask-It-Basket, KXN, KSL, KOIN; Lyman's Orch., KGO.

9:00—Strange As It Seems, KXN.

Friday
8:00—Frank and Archie, KEX, KJR; Sunset Shadows, KGO; Melody Time, KPO; Don't Forget, KGW, KFI.
8:30—Echings in Brass, KGO, KJR; Musical Vignettes, KGW, KFI; Quiz Program, KPO.
9:00—Plantation Party, KGO, KEX, KJR; Waltz Time, KPO, KFI, KGW; Prof. Quiz, KXN, KSL, KOIN.
9:30—First Nighter, KXN, KSL, KOIN; Janel's Program, KPO, KFI, KGW; Who's In Town Tonight, KGO, News, KJR.

7:00—Drama, KXN, KOIN, KSL; Lombardo's Orch., KPO, KFI, KGW; Congress, KGO, KJR.
7:30—Story, KGW; Young Man With a Band, KXN, KSL; Olsen's Orch., KGO, KJR; Drama, KPO.

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9:00—Strange As It Seems, KXN.

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8:00—Rhythm Factory, KPO, KGW; Frank and Archie, KEX, KJR; Sunset Shadows, KGO.
8:30—Drama, KOMO; Kelsey's Orch., KGO, KEX, KJR; Army Band, KPO, KGW.

8:00—Major Bows, KXN, KOIN, KSL; Good News of 1940, KPO, KFI, KGW; Beyond Reasonable Doubt, KGO, KEX, KJR.
7:00—Workshop, KOIN; Music Hall, KPO, KFI.
7:30—Pop-Offs, KXN, KOIN; News, KSL.

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8:15—I Love a Mystery, KPO, KFI, KGW; Sketch, KXN, KOIN, KSL.
8:30—Dance Orch., KEX; Death Valley Days, KPO, KGW, KFI; Johnny Presents, KXN, KOIN, KSL; Aloha Land, KGO.
9:00—Austin's Orch., KGO, KEX; Noble's Orch., KPO; Kate Smith's Hour, KXN, KOIN.
9:30—Musical, KGO, KEX; University Explorer, KPO, KFI, News, KJR.

10:00—Martin's Orch., KGO, KJR, KEX; News Reporter, KPO, KFI, KGW, News, KXN, KSL; News, KOIN.
11:00—Martin's Orch., KGO, KJR, KEX; This Moving World, KEX, KJR; Grays Orch., KSL, KOIN; News, KGO, KXN, KGW.

10:15—Noble's Orch., KGW; Concert Hall, KPO; Clark Ross and Yeo, KOIN, KXN.
10:30—Ravazza's Orch., KPO, KGW, KFI; Boland's Orch., KOIN, KXN; Nottingham's Orch., KGO, KJR, KEX.
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Italy Interested In Finn Air Force

Rome, Dec. 7. — (AP) — Italy closely watched today the accounts of the performance of the Finnish air force in its counter-attacks on the Soviet union, because Finland's planes are mostly of Italian manufacture.

Robins Fooled

Baker, Ore., Dec. 6. — (AP) — The fine weather in Baker is even fooling the robins. Junior high school students report that

Artist Dies

Seattle, Dec. 7. — (AP) — Edward F. Brotze, 71, Seattle Times staff artist since 1907 and creator of the widely-known Seattle Post-latch "Bug," died at a hospital last night. He was stricken with a heart ailment a week ago.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



SOLOMON ISLANDERS-- WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD IS ROUND! THEY THOUGHT IT TO BE A HUGE COCONUT SHELL

GUSTAV V-- KING OF SWEDEN! IS NOT SWEDISH! HIS ANCESTRY IS FRENCH AND DUTCH...

HELENE PENNY-- 130 LBS. of Los Angeles, CALIF. CAUGHT A MARLIN SWORDFISH NEARLY TWICE HER OWN WEIGHT! (235 1/2 pounds, 9 1/2 feet long) -1938-

RULER OF SWEDEN
Strange as it seems, Gustav V of Sweden has not one drop of Scandinavian blood in his veins. The Swedish royal line has been extinct for more than 100 years—since 1818, when Bernadotte of France succeeded to the throne as Charles XI V, on the death of the Crown Prince of Sweden.
Bernadotte's wife was Desree, Clary, a Marseillaise merchant's daughter. The ruling family of Sweden remained pure French until the present ruler's father, Oscar II, married Princess Sophia Wilhelmina, youngest daughter of Duke William of Nassau.
COCONUT WORLD
Solomon Islanders believe the world to be a giant coconut shell, cut at the top with a single aperture communicating with the upper air, where human beings dwell.
TOMORROW: Air Raid That Saved a City!

LETTING IT RING

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



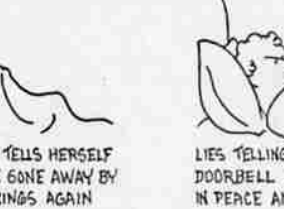
IS JUST LYING DOWN, VERY TIRED, FOR AFTERNOON NAP, WHEN DOORBELL RINGS



CLOSES EYES, MUMBLING LET IT RING, SHE'S BEEN RUNNING TO THE DOOR ALL DAY AND IT'S PROBABLY JUST A SALESMAN OR ONE OF THE CHILDREN WANTING JUNIOR



BEGINS TO HAVE MISGIVINGS, BUT TELLS HERSELF THAT WHOEVER IT WAS MUST HAVE GONE AWAY BY NOW - AT WHICH MOMENT BELL RINGS AGAIN



LIES TELLING HERSELF SHE'S JUST A SLAVE TO THE DOORBELL AND WISHING SHE COULD HAVE A