

The Creeping Man

by Frances Shelley Wees

Chapter 23 Garden Party

IT WAS Saturday afternoon before the Sunday of Tuck's garden party. Michael sat on the edge of his father's desk, swinging his legs, and looking gloomily over the drab city roof visible through the open window. His father sat at the big desk, whistling tunelessly between his teeth.

Michael had been talking. He went on with his story.

"So I tried to figure it out," he said. "It seemed to me that there must be some reason why it should be the meat that he... to use Gordon's term... chose to poison."

"You just got through saying it wasn't poisoned," his father said sharply.

Michael glanced at him. "Perhaps I did," he said mildly. "But of course it was 'The dog died. The cat died. What Jethro meant was that it wasn't poisoned with anything he knew anything about. With anything that had any known reaction. But we should have died very suddenly if we had eaten that meat."

"You're moving immediately?"

"No. We're not moving."

"You've got to, lad."

"No. It's too late. It wouldn't do any good to move. He doesn't know how much we know, you see. We're on our guard now. Watching... at least, I am. The girls don't know of course. They think the dog had a fit, or I hope they do."

John Forrester compressed his lips. "You're the only boy I've got," he said shortly.

"Always thinking of yourself, aren't you?" Michael said reproachfully.

The District Attorney glared. Michael lit a cigarette.

"As I was saying," he went on, "I wondered why it was the meat and not the soup or the pudding. Or the bread. And I found out."

"Why then?"

"Well, you see, it's this way. The butcher boy came without the meat. He left the shop with it—he was sure. Anyway, I phoned the butcher, and asked. So we came to the conclusion that the meat was intercepted on the way. Why the meat? Because, my well beloved father, the groceries and all the rest of the supplies come from the city, direct to our door; while the butcher is on this side of town, and invariably sends the meat supply to the University first. The boy stops his cart there at the back door of the residence, and carries in armloads of supplies. And, while he is carrying in armloads of supplies, the meat for the Horseshoe is... where? It should be reposing peacefully in the cart, waiting to be taken for a further ride."

"Well?"

"Well, it wasn't."

"Where was it?"

Michael took an envelope from his pocket. From it he drew a square of butcher's paper. In the center of it was a hole, a neat round hole that might have been punched out with a lead pencil, save that it bore no pencil marks. Michael held it up.

Animal Souls

"You see that hole?"

"Of course."

"Syringe," said Michael laconically.

"Syringe?"

"Well, hypodermic. Clever. Graceous poison that leaves no trace. Hypodermic so that he doesn't have to untie the parcel. I don't think our friend intended to take the parcel from the cart, no. But he'd scarcely dare stand there too long, even in the covered area where the cart was. I think he barely got his hands on it when he heard something—footsteps probably, and he steps into a convenient doorway. The footsteps turn out to be the butcher boy's, who thereupon drives off."

"Who was around that door between half past five and six?"

Michael looked down at his foot.

"Well," he said slowly, "Katie didn't see anyone perhaps. But she saw Duncan Murchison, coming across the campus. He probably entered the back door, and went up to his room. That was just as the boy's cart stood in the area way. She didn't watch him, no. She just saw him coming while she held the door open for the boy. And then, a few minutes after the boy had driven off, she saw Mr. Deane crossing the campus toward the Horseshoe, on his way home. But that doesn't mean a thing. Everybody who lives out here has to pass along the back of that residence to get home. Deane passes there almost exactly at the same time every day."

Forrester filled his pipe. "Does the butcher boy call at the same time every day?"

"Approximately."

Forrester lit the pipe carefully and smoked for a moment in silence. "You've had the body of the dog analyzed? There might be reaction there to the poison."

"There's none in the body of Jethro's cat. As for the dog..."

Michael got up and sauntered to the door. "Do you suppose dogs have souls? Freddie must have one. Because he's walked. I tried to dig him up just an hour or two after we buried him. Freddie had gone."

Sunday dawned bright and clear and warm, a perfect day for a tea party in the garden. Tuck had the wicker table set out of the sun on the east side of the house, facing Miss Lissey's.

Whether the Devoes and Mrs. Murchison would accept Tuck's invitation had been rather a matter for speculation. It seemed scarcely possible that they would after

Jared Devoe's elaborately constructed alibi for them, and considering the fact that Tuck was violating one of society's rules in inviting them when they had not called upon her. But in spite of everything, they came at four o'clock—almost too promptly, Tuck thought. Mrs. Murchison had gowned herself in red... a color quite inappropriate for Sunday afternoon in the garden but Mrs. Murchison obviously was not thinking of the garden.

Her eyes flashed at Michael as she shook hands with him, and Tuck got a sudden shock, a sudden insight into the woman's mind. Did she think that her smile might accomplish what Devoe's disarming manner had failed to do? Tuck stiffened mentally.

"We're so glad you could come, Mrs. Murchison," she said sweetly. "We have been looking forward to coming," the red lips said, just as sweetly. The eyes were so dark it was difficult to read any expression in them.

Subjects For Conversation

MRS. Devoe stood behind her. She looked ill. Her eyes were heavy and lustreless, and the flesh on her cheeks hung flabby and pendulous as if she had suddenly lost weight. She was in black again, a heavy shapeless black, that somehow seemed more sinister than the red. Tuck shook herself.

"It's lovely day, Mrs. Devoe."

"Yes," her hand was limp—limp and cold.

"I think you'll find this chair comfortable," Michael said as he greeted her. She sank into it with a word of thanks, and sat there all afternoon as inscrutable as any Buddha. Inscrutable, but never unnoticing. Her heavy eyes saw every movement.

Her son was as affable and polished as ever. He complimented Tuck on the condition of the garden, and moved on to Bunny with suspicious haste. Bunny sat quietly in her chair, and let him talk into her ear without evincing the slightest interest in what he was saying.

Mrs. Murchison and Michael drifted off together. Tuck caught one gray amused glance from Bunny, and turned resolutely back to old Mrs. Devoe. She picked a subject out of the air at random, as one reaches for a mosquito on a hot summer night.

"Have you seen our lovely sundial?" she asked. "I suppose you must have when your niece lived here."

The heavy lids fluttered for the merest instant, and the eyes turned toward Tuck. "My niece?"

Devoe broke in. "It was the sundial she spoke of, mother," he said with a swift glance that Tuck caught.

"The sundial. Yes. Yes, I have seen it."

"I never owned a sundial before. They're so romantic, aren't they?"

Mrs. Devoe did not answer, and Tuck was casting about wildly for another subject when she saw with relief that Miss Lissey, smart in a flowered chiffon, coming hastily down the outer path. Tuck almost liked Miss Lissey at the moment. Certainly, she told herself, there would be no more of these awkward pauses in the conversation.

Then she remembered what Devoe had told Michael about the Devoe-Lissey contretemps, and groaned inwardly. That would probably stop even Miss Lissey's agile tongue. But other than a slight raising of her chin Miss Lissey showed in no way her disgust or indignation at Devoe, and Devoe was very polite, if a trifle distant, with Miss Lissey, — so affairs moved rather more smoothly than might have been expected.

But the afternoon was fated not to go smoothly; not with the ease and lack of restraint that had characterized Mrs. Deane's party. It may have been the fact that the Forresters and Bunny... and Dr. McBain too, when he finally arrived, were putting every movement, every word, under a strong microscope, that put the tension into the atmosphere. Not only that, but Tuck had a feeling that everyone, excepting perhaps Mrs. Deane and Mrs. McBain, was conscious of this. There was apprehension, wonder, mystery, ever fear in the air. No conversation seemed able to live.

Tuck decided mentally that it was no use to keep to harmless subjects. With an air of utter innocence she introduced one, that might have a sting... of which she, of course, couldn't be expected to know. The servant problem.

"We were told that it was very difficult to keep a maid out here," she commented. "But, luckily, Charlotte Jean likes it very much and hasn't any notion of leaving us. I'm very thankful."

Mrs. Deane, hot and puffing as usual, spoke. "I have always a perfectly terrible time with servants. I always think my boy Gordon just might have something to do with it. He's very trying, at least we find him so, even ourselves. Really I don't know what to do about it, so I rarely try to keep a maid at all."

There was a curiously furtive look in Marie Murchison's eyes. She glanced at Tuck with a little frown, then looked immediately away.

"Well, I have an old country girl, and I couldn't get along without her," Miss Lissey said. "She's honest and working and sensible, and she hasn't any of the silly notions of servants in this country. She belongs to the servant class, and she knows it, and she stays where she belongs."

"Is there a servant class, Miss Lissey?" Bunny asked.

"Of course there is. Some people are born to be ladies' maids just as some are to be. Let them keep to their own levels. I say it's no use their trying to pretend they belong to another class." She tossed her head angrily, and the red flamed in her cheek.

Continued tomorrow

Rum Store Costs Cut

Salem, Dec. 12. —(P)— State Liquor Administrator J. J. Hague told Governor Sprague today that costs of operating the liquor control administration have declined materially during the past six months.

Record

Missoula, Mont. —(P)— Montana State university claims the largest majorette corps of any college in the United States. Fifty-eight corps spin batons in their twirling drill between halves of football games.

On the RADIO CHAINS

STATIONS

Where to Find Them or the Dial:

Kex, Portland, 1180; KFI, 640; KGO, 790; San Francisco; KGMW, 620; Portland; KJR, 970; Seattle; KNX, 1050; Los Angeles; KOA, 630; Denver; KOIN, 940; Portland; KOMO, 926; Seattle; KPO, 630; San Francisco; KSL, 1180; Salt Lake.

Tuesday.

8:00—Aldrich Family, KPO, KFI, KGW; Frank and Archie, KJR.

8:30—Sherlock Holmes, KGO, KEX, KJR; Heidt's Orch., KPO, KFI, KGW; Tuesday Night Party, KSL.

9:00—Hollywood, KGO, KEX; Music Room, KPO, KGW, KFI.

9:30—Fibber McGee, KPO, KFI, KGW; Crosby's Orch., KNX, KSL, KOIN; Human Side of Literature, KGO, KEX; News, KJR.

10:00—Shield's Revue, KGO, KEX; Variety Program, KPO, KGW, KFI; Calling All Cars, KNX, KFI.

10:30—Sports Huddle, KNX, KOIN; Drama, KGO, KJR; Dog House, KPO, KFI, KGW; News, KSL.

11:00—Fred Waring, KPO, KFI, KGW; Amos and Andy, KEX, KOIN, KSL; Information Please, KGO, KEX, KJR.

11:15—Jimmy Fidler, KSL, KNX, KOIN; I Love a Mystery, KPO, KFI, KGW.

Wednesday

8:00—Frank and Archie, KJR; Sunset Shadows, KGO; Waring's Orch., KPO, KGW, KFI.

8:30—Kelsey's Orch., KPO; We Present, KGO, KJR.

9:00—Bob Garred, KNX, KOIN; Organist, KGO, KEX; Two in the Balcony, KPO.

9:30—Beyond Reasonable Doubt, KGO, KEX, KJR; Star Theater, KSL, KOIN, KNX; Drama, KOMO; Safety First, KPO.

10:00—Horse and Buggy Days, KGO, KGMW; Playhouse, KPO, KFI, KGW; News, KJR.

10:30—Sketch, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Kysner's Pgm., KPO, KGW, KFI; Shields' Orch., KGO, KJR, KEX.

11:00—Burns and Allen, KNX, KOIN, KSL; Adventures in Photography, KGO.

11:30—Waring's Orch., KPO; Johnny

Presente, KGO, KJR, KEX; Amos and Andy, KNX, KOIN, KSL.

8:30—Whiteman's Orch., KNX, KSL, KOIN; Quiz Program, KGO, KJR, KEX; Avalon Time, KPO, KFI, KGW.

9:00—Pearce's Gang, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Fred Allen, KPO, KGW, KFI; Marriage Club, KGO.

9:30—Noble's Orch., KGO, KEX; News, KJR.

10:00—Martin's Orch., KGO, KEX; News, KNX, KSL, KOIN.

10:30—Madriguera's Orch., KGO, KEX; Ravazza's Orch., KPO, KFI, KGW.

11:00—Gray's Orch., KOIN, KSL; Nottingham's Orch., KPO, KFI; This Moving World, KEX, KJR; News, KGO, KGW.

GERMANY CLAIMS 2 TANKERS SUNK

Berlin, Dec. 12. —(P)— The German supreme command announced today two British tankers of a total tonnage of 18,000 had been sunk in the English Channel. They were not identified.

The official communique covering yesterday's war operations follows:

"Slight artillery disturbance

fire on some parts of the front between the Moselle River and the Palatinate forest.

"Otherwise, the day passed quietly on the entire western front. Two British tankers, together 18,000 tons, were sunk in the western exit of the English Channel."

Closing time for Too Late to Classify Ads is 1:30 p. m.

SKATES NOT NECESSARY FOR GIRLS ON JOY RIDE

Portland, Dec. 12.—(P)—Roller skates aren't necessary as "just in case" equipment for girls who go for automobile rides, a resourceful young girl demonstrated last night.

The girl left her boy friend's car on the edge of the city

limits and called police, who drove her home.

Can't Tell.

Lexington, Ky.—(P)—Proclamation of a new date for Thanksgiving this year probably led to this sign on a local merchant's store: "Do your Christmas shopping early! Who knows? Tomorrow may be Christmas!"

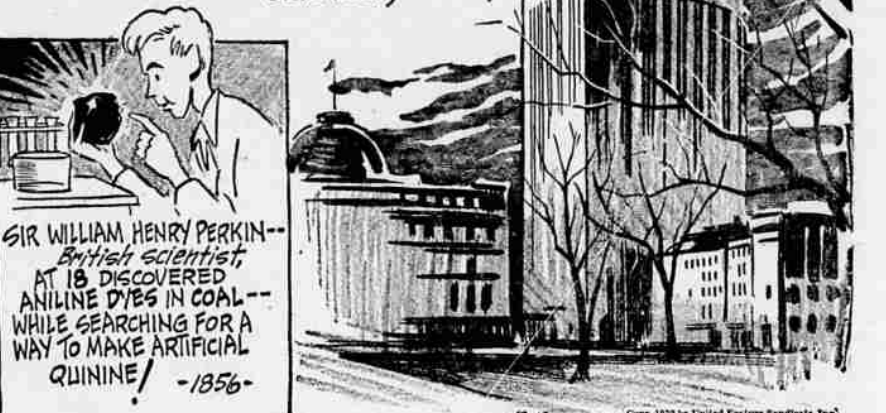
STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



IT WAS FOUND IN A DISCARDED BEER CAN IN PUGET SOUND...

BIG BERTHA OF INDIA—THE 21 FOOT, 7 INCH MUSTAFABAD GUN—BIJAPUR, WAS CONSTRUCTED FROM 74 RINGS OF IRON WELDED TOGETHER!



WOOLWORTH'S SECRET

One of the oldest practical jokes of all time was the effort of Frank Woolworth to keep the height of his giant skyscraper in New York a secret during construction. According to Louis J. Horowitz, the builder, Woolworth sought to insure for himself for a long time the glory of owning the world's tallest building.

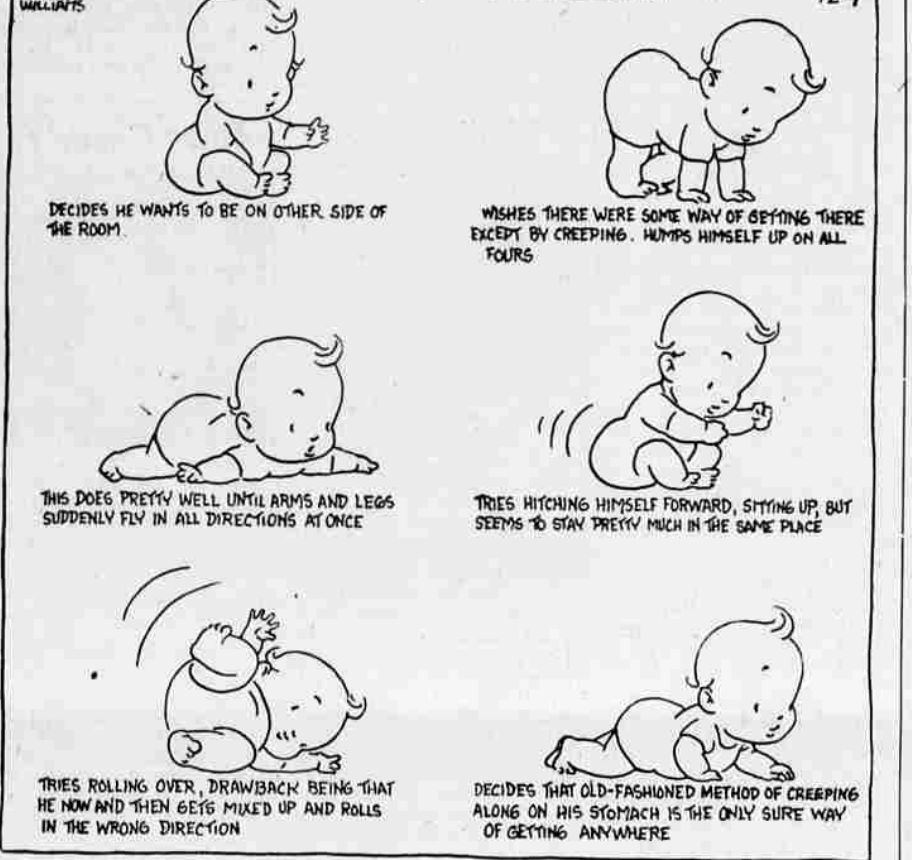
When first projected, the Woolworth Tower was designed to rise 692 feet, but when the building opened in 1913, Woolworth revealed its real height was 792 feet!

DYE DISCOVERY

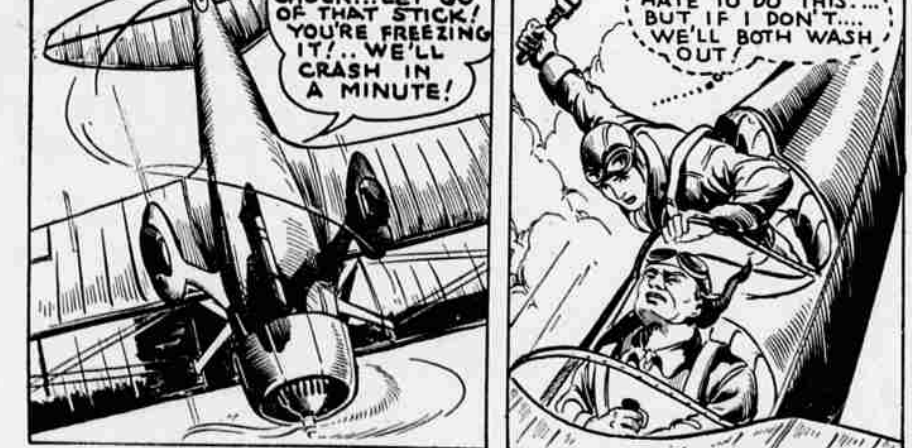
Sir William Henry Perkin, at 18, discovered the first aniline dye, mauve, in 1856. While oxidizing aniline oil he obtained the dye because of the presence of impure chemicals. Repeated with purer aniline, the experiment failed.

TOMORROW: Mystery of the Extra Skull.

FROM HERE TO THERE By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—From One Danger Into Another!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Another Solemn Pledge!



THE NEBBS—It's Wonderful!



By HAL FORREST



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HESS

