

The Creeping Man

by Frances Shelley Wees

Chapter 49 Explanations

THE little breakfast room was bright with sun. The French door from the study was pushed open and four young people entered. All bore marks of strain, of sleepless nights and of worry, but the air of tension had disappeared.

"Will you sit here, please, Duncan?" Tuck murmured, indicating the chair on her left.

Michael dropped into his own chair when she was seated.

"And I?" Tuck agreed. "It was so nice of you to come to breakfast, Duncan. How is your brother?"

The fine eyes darkened. "Not very well, the doctors say, but they think they'll pull him through. He's had almost three months of... torture, you know. Drugs. He isn't sane yet."

The percolator bubbled and sang. Bunny leaned forward, her hands on the edge of the table. "There are seventeen things I absolutely must know before I can stop this whizzing in my head," she announced, "and I've been waiting for years, it seems, although it's only thirty-six hours to ask them. Has the time arrived? May I?"

Michael tried his best to look like an oracle. "You may."

"Thank you, Michael. It's so kind of you... Very well. I've got most of it straight, you know. It's true, isn't it, that all the things you told us yesterday, all the dreadful things you heard about Edgar Murchison from that poor soldier Smith and from everyone... the things you so carefully kept from our tender little ears... were not true? Or, rather, were true only if you put McBain's name in each time instead of Edgar Murchison's? It's true that Dr. McBain was deliberately impersonating Dr. Murchison just to keep himself out of trouble and get the other man into it?"

Duncan's brows drew together.

Michael looked at him swiftly. "That's it, Bunny. But I was pretty stupid about it. I got an inkling of the truth when Jameson described how Murchison acted when the delegation came to him with that paper from the pound bearing his signature. He had a perfect right, you see, to get angry at the experiment on from the pound. It's a ways done that way. If he had been guilty of torturing those animals, I figured, he'd have had a story ready for them. But he didn't. He insisted on seeing the signature and then he said, 'Very well, gentlemen, you win. Now, why did he insist on seeing the paper? That's what I asked myself. Because, I argued, he hadn't been getting animals from the pound to use in the ordinary way, anaesthetized. Because he didn't believe they had any such paper. If he didn't believe they had it, then he could never have signed it. Therefore, since the paper obviously existed, someone else had forged his name. Who? Well, reasoned it could only be one of two, because Duncan Murchison or Dr. McBain. In either case Dr. Murchison might have acted as he did, through a sense of responsibility. In his brother's case it would be because he wanted to shield him. In McBain's case it would be because Murchison felt responsible for whatever went on in the lab anyway and knew that he must settle it with McBain himself."

"But the shrieks, Michael! The poor tortured animals... wouldn't he have known about them?"

"I doubt it. I don't think it happened very often, you know. A thing like that doesn't need to happen very often before people start talking. That very story about the animals crying at night made me suspicious. You see, Jameson couldn't say that it was Murchison himself who worked in the lab at night. He wasn't on duty then. No one was; and McBain had managed so cleverly to spread a net of insinuations over his colleague that when anything went wrong, it was Murchison who was accused. That's why he gave that paper to Smith signed presumably by Murchison. I got a hint of that the night of Deane's party, when I talked to McBain. He said, 'I was trained in a day when the human body was sacred, when men had souls, when every life was of value, but I refuse to condemn a younger man who was trained differently and has the courage to act according to his training.' Pretty clever, and I swallowed it almost whole... then, I thought, just what he wanted me to think, that Murchison was a pretty cold-blooded lot."

"Piecing Things Together"

"When Smith sent for me," Michael went on, "and said that he'd seen Murchison himself I got it all. It couldn't have been Murchison, with every man on the force on the lookout for him; and by piecing things together it was plain, McBain had been using Murchison's name and identity to further his own pleasant little plans, and Murchison had found it out. They had quarreled, and McBain had taken the quickest way out. He was bitterly jealous of Murchison anyway, a younger man who had been brought in over his head, and had hated him from the beginning because of his cleverness. The motive was plain—jealousy, and a fear for his own skin, in case Murchison exposed him. So I decided that he had killed Edgar Murchison and dropped his weighted body into the river."

"What I didn't think of," Michael went on after a pause, "was the truth! I wondered what happened to the bodies of those animals Jameson talked

about, and I'd come to the conclusion that McBain had invented some new sort of solvent that would dissolve animals matter completely... and I admit, I thought of that later... however, he went on hastily at the expression on Tuck's face, "I didn't suspect for a moment that he had a secret laboratory near by. I should think that fact would explain the disappearance of those bodies... as it explains so many other things. He'd have had no trouble getting them through the woods unseen at night, and into his boat. If I'd guessed of the existence of that place... oh, dreamed that matter would still alive, I'd have had McBain shadowed, sooner."

"Sooner?"

"Yes. Donovan was shadowing him the night... the night he got you, Tuck. Hall was up here, you see, but too late. After Smith said he'd seen him buying an oar-lock, I decided it was time to keep an eye on him. I thought he had some devilish scheme in his sleeve to dispose of us through this boat, and we couldn't take any more chances. We'd thought, you see, that it was enough to search for the boat. It wasn't. So Donovan was watching him down town that night for an hour or two until I could get fresh men on the trail, but then he was pretty tired, and McBain gave him the slip. My fault, but Donovan insisted on doing it. He hated McBain after what he did to Gordon."

Duncan looked up quickly. "What about the attack on you, Forrester? The gas? How did he do it? There wouldn't have been time for so much gas to have escaped just while the two men were at Deane's, would there?"

Michael shook his head. "There are a lot of places where he was too clever. I don't see how he pulled that stunt about the poisoning of the meat but he did. Perhaps he'll tell. However, he certainly had the furnace fixed, possibly weeks before, with the chimney pipe disconnected, and certainly he pulled the gas lever with that string through the window. When, we don't know. He must have done it just after our bedroom lights went out. At first the gas wouldn't be noticeable, you see, and we'd get off to sleep. Then it crept up and caught us. I think perhaps he had a second cord tied to the first, running out to the hedge. I don't know. It was a very dark night. You can ask him yourself, Dunc. If you'd like to try it sometime."

"Key Or Keys?"

"THANK you. I'll remember that. Another thing—will you tell me now why you were having me followed?"

"I want to. That's just it. If you were followed, McBain himself was doing it. I was afraid of that. He was away from home a great deal too much. I knew he'd do it, after Miss Lissey talked to you on Sunday. You see, he was almost sure she suspected or knew the truth. In any case, she knew too much. And he was sure that you'd discovered that he'd signed your brother's name once or twice, and he didn't know exactly how much your brother had told you. He thought you might be working only for confirmation before you spoke, and you were very dangerous to him. That's why he put the keys and the poison in your rooms, you see. He hoped you'd be arrested long ago. He was counting on the enmity between you and the Devoes—and perhaps he got the idea itself from what—shall we say Mrs. Jared Devoe... said about the keys. She overheard your brother saying he would leave you the key, I take it—the key to the mystery of the diamonds and the papers relating to her future—those love letters from another man after she had testified at the inquest that your brother said keys. McBain got a new idea. So did I."

"So that's it," he said. "Key... keys. Certainly. And those love letters. Edgar expected to leave a message as to where I could find them—certainly he did. I told you that. The key. It hadn't occurred to me just what she meant that she'd overheard. And the moment I saw those letters I knew what they meant, that she wasn't worthy of any consideration from Edgar." He fell silent, thinking. Then—"How'd you know he had planted those things on me?"

"Katie. Katie Jameson. I answered promptly. 'Katie Jameson. She was watching for me. The first time McBain showed his nose around the residences she was to telephone me. She called nearly a week ago. I told her to look for the things in your room, and she found them. We just left them there for a while letting things transpire. I hoped McBain would make a move to cast you further into suspicion and incidentally get himself into the limelight. My hands were tied, you see. He couldn't be arrested for the murder of Edgar Murchison when we had no body. He'd have gotten off on some count, trust him. With Miss Lissey's death, the evidence was against you, and with poor old Mrs. Devoe it was going to be hard to prove it wasn't suicide. He didn't take many chances. For instance—he stole Fred's body because he didn't know what the reactions might be to that poison. Of course he didn't know that Jedro had tried it on his cat. Mrs. Devoe's death was suicide. She was standing there that night when he came up out of the stump. He stabbed her. But the proof? Well, one of these transcendental detectives could have managed it, but not I. I can't see far enough. I can't see that Tuck wouldn't have had to stand that... that..."

Concluded Monday

On the RADIO CHAINS

Where to Find Them on the Dial:
 KEX, Portland, 1180; KFI, 640, Los Angeles; KGA, 1470, Spokane; KGO, 790, San Francisco; KGW, 620, Portland; KJR, 970, Seattle; KNX, 1050, Los Angeles; KOA, 830, Denver; KOIN, 940, Portland; KOMO, 920, Seattle; KPO, 630, San Francisco; KSL, 1180, Salt Lake.

Tuesday
 5:00—Aldrich Family, KPO, KFI, KGW, Frank and Archie, KJR, KEX.
 5:30—Sherlock Holmes, KGO, KEX, KJR, Pot of Gold, KPO, KFI, KGW, Court of Missing Heirs, KNX, KOIN, KSL.
 6:00—We, the People, KSL, Cavalcade of America, KPO, KFI, KGW, 6:30—Fibber McGee, KPO, KGW, KFI, Human Side of Literature, KGO, KEX.
 7:00—Shiloh Revue, KEX, Drama, KGO, Bob Hope, KPO, KGW, KFI, Calling All Cars, KNX, KSL.
 7:30—Sports Huddle, KNX, KOIN; Mammoth Minstrels, KGO, KJR; Dog House, KPO, KFI, KGW, News, KSL.
 8:00—Fred Wazing, KPO, KFI, KGW; Amos and Andy, KNX, KOIN; KSL; Information Please, KGO, KEX, KJR.
 8:15—Jimmie Fidler, KSL, KNX, KOIN; I Love a Mystery, KPO, KFI, KGW.

8:30—Aldrich Family, KGO, KEX, KJR; Johnny Presents, KPO, KFI, KGW; Big Town, KOIN, KNX.
 9:00—We, the People, KNX, KOIN; Beyond Reasonable Doubt, KGO, KJR; Dorsey's Orch., KPO, KGW.
 9:30—Battle of the Sexes, KPO, KGW, KFI; Lorch's Orch., KNX, KOIN; Messner's Orch., KGO, News, KJR.
 10:00—News Reporter, KPO, KFI, KGW; Paul Sullivan, KNX, KSL; Heidt's Orch., KGO, KEX, KJR; News, KOIN.
 10:30—Foster's Orch., KFI, KGW; Saunders' Orch., KGO, KJR, KEX; Ted Rio Trio, KSL; City of St. Francis, KPO.
 11:00—Ravazza's Orch., KPO, KFI; This Moving World, KEX; Gray's Orch., KSL, KOIN; News, KGO, KNX, KGW.

Wednesday
 5:00—Frank and Archie, KJR; Sunset Shadows, KGO, KFI, KGW, 5:30—Kelsey's Orch., KPO; We Present, KGO, KJR, KEX.
 6:00—Star Theater, KSL, KOIN, KNX; Radio Guild, KOMO; Musical Solace, KFI, KGW; Safety First, KPO.
 6:30—Horse and Buggy Days, KGO; Hollywood Playhouse, KPO, KFI, KGW.
 7:00—Miller's Orch., KNX, KSL, KOIN; Kymer's Program, KGO, KGW; KFI; Shiloh's Orch., KGO, KJR, KEX.
 7:30—Burns and Allen, KNX, KOIN, KSL.
 8:00—Waring's Orch., KPO; John-

by Presents, KGO, KJR, KEX; Amos and Andy, KNX, KOIN, KSL.
 8:15—I Love a Mystery, KPO, KGW, KFI; Lum and Abner, KSL, KNX, KOIN.
 8:30—Sketch, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Quiz Program, KGO, KJR, KEX; Avalon Time, KPO, KFI, KGW.
 9:00—Al Pearce, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Fred Allen, KPO, KGW, KFI; Beyond Reasonable Doubt, KGO, KEX, KJR.
 9:30—Noble's Orch., KGO, KEX; News, KJR.
 10:00—Martin's Orch., KGO, KEX; News, KNX, KSL, News Reporter, KPO, KFI, KGW, News, KOIN.
 10:30—Heidt's Orch., KGO, KJR, 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.

Radio Highlights
 By Associated Press (Pacific Standard Time)
 New York, Jan. 2.—Opening of congress and the president's message will be broadcast from the nation's capital tomorrow. All three networks will transmit both programs, the opening session to go on the air over MBS at 8:45 a.m. and via WJZ-NBC and WABC-CBS at 9 a.m. Broadcast of the president's message will be started at

10:45 a.m. by MBS and at 11 a.m. by WEA-FWJZ-NBC and WABC-CBS.
 Tonight: Europe—WABC-CBS 5:55, 8; MBS 6, 6:15; WEA-FWJZ-NBC-East 8.
 Wednesday: Europe—NBC 5 a.m.; WABC-CBS 5 a.m.; 3:30 p.m. WJZ-NBC—2 Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt on "Training For Democracy."
 Use Mail Tribune want ads.

Happy Texas
 Happy, Tex., Jan. 2.—(P)—Thousands of persons throughout the country received "happy New Year" greetings bearing the postmark, Happy, Tex. The volume of year-end mail was a third heavier than a year ago.

Air Lines Set Record
 Washington, Jan. 2.—(P)—The civil aeronautics authority estimated today that commercial airlines in the United States had

flown 750,000,000 passenger miles in 1939, with only nine passenger fatalities and three crew fatalities. The 82,000,000 passenger miles flown per passenger fatality was nearly four times the 1938 record.

Seven tea tasters distaste the tea tastes of America. They meet annually to test tea samples and to decide which teas shall be admitted to the United States.

LATE TRAIN

GOES DOWN TO SUBURBAN STATION TO MEET COUSIN IRMA ARRIVING ON LATE EVENING TRAIN, STAMPS TO KEEP WARM

DOESN'T SEE WHY HE GOT HERE SO EARLY, WALKS UP AND DOWN PLATFORM AND READS ALL AVAILABLE ADVERTISING SIGNS

NEVER KNEW TIME TO PASS SO SLOWLY, THINKS WATCH MUST HAVE STOPPED

BRIGHTENS UP WHEN AT LONG LAST HE HEARS APPROACHING TRAIN, WHICH PROVES TO BE A SLOW FREIGHT

WANDERS THROUGH DESERTED WAITING ROOM, HOPING TO FIND A DISAPPEARED NEWS-PAPER TO READ

WANDERS OUT AGAIN AND IMMEDIATELY GETS A CINDER IN HIS EYE

REMOVES IT AND WANDERS IN TO TRY TO ENGAGE TICKET AGENT IN TALK. AGENT IS BUSY MAKING OUT REPORTS

RETIRES TO CORNER OF WAITING ROOM AND BROODS UNTIL TRAIN PULLS IN, FIFTEEN MINUTES LATE

INVALID'S MASTERPIECE!

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON -- SICK IN BED, WROTE "DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE" IN 3 DAYS... THEN, DISSATISFIED, BURNED IT AND REWROTE THE ENTIRE STORY IN 3 MORE DAYS!

A ROBIN -- BUILT HER NEST UNDER A FENDER OF A CAR IN DAILY USE -- AND OWNED BY A GAME WARDEN!

Clemmer L. Miller, Augusta Co., Ga.

HENRY VIII -- of England, WAS SO PLEASED WITH A PUDDING THAT HE AWARDED HIS COOK WITH THE GIFT OF A MANOR!

COMMODORE THOMAS JONES -- U.S.N., TOOK POSSESSION OF CALIFORNIA FOR 48 HOURS -- BY MISTAKE! IT BELONGED TO MEXICO, WHICH HE BELIEVED TO BE AT WAR WITH THE U.S. -- October, 1842 --

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STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

TAILSPIN TOMMY—A Heavy Assignment!

I WANT YOU AND SKEETER TO FLY THE NEW 3-POINT 4-MOTORED BOMBER TO ELVANIA!

W-WHAT? W-WHERE'S ELVANIA?

OUR EXPORTS TO ELVANIA IN SMALL SHIPS HAVE BEEN HEAVY, TOMMY. BUT NOW WE'RE GOING IN FOR THE BIG STUFF!

LIKE THE FLYING FORTRESS I TEST HOPPED, CHIEF?

YES! AND FLYING IT OVER THE OCEAN... TO ELVANIA IS ONE WAY TO CONVINCE THAT COUNTRY OF ITS LONG CRUISING RANGE!

WILL IT PROVE ANYTHING IF WE MAKE A 3-POINT LANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF TH' OCEAN?

THAT DEPENDS ON HOW LONG YOU STAY AFLOAT! THERE ARE LOTS OF SHARKS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC!

O-OW

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—But, Is He?

YOU SAW THE MASS MEETIN' LAST NIGHT, DITCHA, BEN? BIG CROWD? YEAH! ONE BUM! ALL RIGHT WE'RE LICKED!

WELL, MY FRIEND, WHO OWNS THE MOST LAND IN HAPPY VALLEY? WE DO, DON'T WE?

SURE, WE DO!

WHATTA WE SELLIN' LOTS FOR? FIVE HUNDRED, SEVEN FIFTY, A THOUSAND BUCKS? AN' WE MAKE A PROFIT?

THAT'S RIGHT—

HOWUA LIKE TO SELL ONE LOT FOR THIRTY THOUSAND BUCKS?

OH, RUSTY, DON'T BE SILLY!

THE NEBBS—Come Out of It

NOW LOOK HERE, RUDY. THIS THING HAS GOT TO STOP! YOU'LL HAVE A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN.

I AIN'T DOING THIS BECAUSE I'M GETTING FUN OUT OF IT—WE JUST LOST MILLIONS OF DOLLARS WHEN I LOST THAT FORMULA.

WE DON'T NEED ALL THAT MONEY

DID YOU EVER STOP TO THINK IF YOU HAD EVERYTHING YOU WANT WE WOULDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO ARGUE ABOUT, AND WEVE ENJOYED SOME STRENUOUS ARGUMENTS. I DON'T THINK WE QUITE FINISHED THE ONE WE STARTED THE DAY AFTER WE WERE MARRIED!

Hoboken Blaze

Hoboken, N. J., Jan. 2.—(AP)—Firemen fought late Monday a blaze which broke out in the recently completed home of Mayor Bernard N. McFeely and spread to a nearby factory and several other buildings. No other information was available immediately.

Congressman Has Stroke

Johnstown, O., Jan. 2.—(AP)—Rep. William A. Ashbrook (D-Ohio) suffered a paralytic stroke today and his family said his condition is critical. Ashbrook, 72, first was stricken last October in Washington but had improved rapidly.

By HAL FORBES

INVALID'S MASTERPIECE
 Robert Louis Stevenson was ill in bed when he wrote "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." His inspiration was a real character—Deacon William Brodie of Edinburgh, Scotland, a town councillor who spent his nights at burglary. Brodie invented the gallows drop, and later was hanged on his own invention.

THE COMMODORE'S MISTAKE
 Two years before the United States officially took over California (then part of Mexico), Commodore Thomas Jones, U. S. N., heard rumors of war and sailed into Monterey Bay to hoist the Stars and Stripes over the Presidio. Two days later he learned his mistake. TOMORROW: Four Centuries of Mourning!

By EDWIN ALGER

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