

A STRANGE, GRIPPING, MYSTERIOUS SERIAL STORY

In Twelve Installments.

Begins on this page today, Column 1

FROM my earliest childhood the eerie aspect of the old Selwyn house and its weird and lonely isolation from its neighbors, had intrigued my interest.

My grandfather had been a friend and contemporary of Ezra Selwyn when they were both runaway slaves, he from his master's plantation in Virginia and Ezra from the big house of the same plantation where he was a house servant. The two brave-hearted and upstanding youngsters, with the blood of sable kings of an ancient race firing their ambition, decided they would no longer submit themselves tamely to the yoke of bondage. They planned and executed a daring escape. Safely they made their way to Canada and the blessed boon of freedom. There they remained, working and hoping and saving until the day when a country freed from the stigma of slavery, once more beckoned their homesick hearts to the sunshine and beauty of its land of cotton and song. They returned to settle once more in the country of their birth.

A few years later their ways parted again for a brief time.

The education they had attained during their sojourn in Canada fitted them in a very peculiar manner for the places that the new day brought into existence.

Grandfather became one of the first school teachers of his own race for those less fortunate than he had been.

Ezra Selwyn was chosen to represent his government as minister to the black republic of Haiti.

When he parted from my grandfather with his new bride for whom this trip was to be a honeymoon, there was no happier nor more hopeful young man on earth than Ezra, so grandfather said when long afterward people spoke of the eccentric, half crazy old miser who lived almost alone—save for the two old Haitian servants—in the great bleak house set so far back among the huge trees surrounding it.

Mary.

Mary Grant, the girl Ezra Selwyn married, was beautiful. There was never another more beautiful than she. Her dark eyes looked out on the world with that strange magnetic lure of inner spiritual sweetness. Her mouth was tender and her lithe brown body was graceful as wild things are graceful. The fawn and the doe could move no more lightly in the soft green shadow of the jungle fastnesses that came up to the back door of the house set apart for the U. S. minister and his wife, which she occupied with her husband, in those all too short days of her happiness, and his.

Partly by things that Ezra said in those early days fol-



The CREEPING THING

by

CORA JEAN MOTEN

Thoroughly terrified the young husband ran crying into the night. "Mary! Mary!" he cried, but only the sighing of the wind in the trees, and the drums, answered his cry.

lowing the tragedy and partly from bits pieced together from the talk of the two loyal Haitians, who accompanied him back to the country estate that he had designed as a home for the young bride, when he should have been recalled, was the traditional story of her end told in after years. The story I heard as a child.

Behind the detached kitchen of the house where Ezra Selwyn and his bride were settled stood the stone built servant's quarters. A garden of wild tropical luxuriance surrounded these. A long, rambling verandah ran around the dwelling itself on three sides. The house faced the fashionable street that led into the centre of the town. Beyond the garden and gradually ascending to the mysterious and blue-black mountains that towered in the distance were miles of jungle, as virgin as the fastnesses of those primitive ancestors of the people that inhabited the island. Here often Mary liked to wander in those first days while Ezra

was busy with his many new duties in the government service. The cool green fastnesses seemed to have a strangely mystic lure for her. Something of the mysticism seemed gradually to grow and spread to her husband as the days grew into weeks. The nearness of the jungle, the weird call of the voodoo drums through the perfumed twilight as it was borne to them on the soft night winds, seemed to call to some deep strain of mysticism in both. It was as if they were being drawn in spite of themselves, to some strange fate that waited them beyond the borders of the safe, sane life they led.

RESTLESSNESS.

At last one night, as they sat listening to the drum beats, Mary suddenly became restless and strangely agitated. She had been alone all day and something of the jungle in which she had been wandering for hours seemed to have permeated her blood. Abruptly she got up from her chair and with a casual word to her husband explain-

ing that she would go inside and get a wrap, she left him.

For awhile he sat waiting for her. The minutes passed. The steady beat of the drums sounded far, near, farther, nearer, from above, from below, from everywhere. That steady beat flowed from all directions into his brain—into his heart—into his mind. It lured, it mocked, it drowned him. It choked and terrified him in some wild primitive way that he could not fathom. Where was Mary? Why didn't she come back? At last he could stand it no longer. It was foolish but a great terror seemed to grip him.

"Mary," he called, and again "Mary!" But no one answered him. Only the drums beat on and on.

Something like a menace seemed to hover over him. He rose from his chair in frantic haste and entered the house. Within all was silent. The window opening onto that side of the verandah facing Mary's room, was open. The wind lifted and waved the white curtains. In the

darkness they were not unlike the white cerements of the dead being waved from high hillside tombs by the winds that flow between the worlds. The room was empty.

Ezra ran to the window and looked out; there was no one in sight. The stone servant's quarters and the kitchen stared whitely through the darkness. There was no ray of light visible from their blank windows. Thoroughly terrified, the young husband ran crying into the night.

"Mary! Mary!" he cried, but only the sighing of the wind in the trees and the drums answered his cry.

Diaron, the old man who came back with him when he returned to Selwyn House, afterwards, found him crying so, when the mists of morning broke over the still green fastnesses of the dark forests in which he searched, ever crying and calling that name.

The government sent out searchers. Great rewards were offered, but when Ezra Selwyn returned to America

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