

# THE CREEPING THING

By  
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A Story of Gruesome and Haunting Mystery

The Well-Known  
Serial Writer

**WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE**  
An eccentric old recluse, Ezra Sylwyn, has been found murdered in his octagonal tower room in his mysterious home, known as Selwyn House.  
Diaron and his wife, Meme, two Haitian servants that have been with him ever since his return as a young man from a tragic stay in Haiti where his young bride was lost in the Yoodoo-riden jungles, were the only other occupants of the house.  
Diaron heard a huge something creeping overhead and then heard wild shrieks. Just before he found his master's body. He summoned the neighbors. The body has been left for the coroner. When he arrives, they go to the octagonal room only to find that the body has disappeared.  
Tom Fredrick, a clever detective, is summoned to the case by his friend, Alec Jonas.  
Now go on with the story.

CHAPTER II

**T**HE strange gauntness of Alec's brown face turned anxiously upward toward the slowly moving coach windows of the incoming train, prepared me for something more than his letter had told me. It did not save me from the shocking impact of the news his very first words carried to my consciousness, however.

"It's got old Meme this time, Tom," he shot at me in a hoarse whisper without other greeting or preface.

"What do you mean, Alec?" I clutched after my vanishing composure with the question. It was not like Alec to be so agitated. His emotions had always been held as well under control as were my own. It gave me an uncanny sense of imminent fear to see him apparently so upset. It must be the effect of his physical weakness.

I could tell by the gray pallor that underlay his ordinarily healthy bronze color, that he was still far from well. This thought brought me up with a jerk, and my mind automatically dropped back to normalcy. I smiled. But Alec did not return my smile. His eyes seemed to grow more anxious as he stared straightly and seriously into my face.

**Weird.**

"It's passed the smiling stage, Tom," he said, and his voice was as grave as his face. "It's weird and horrible beyond thinking about, the way this mysterious Death creeps upon its victims and takes them into oblivion. Snatches them out of life and then—consumes them, leaving no trace."

I picked up my parcels that I had set down to grasp my friend's hand, and fell into step beside him. We turned toward the high boardwalk leading into the single paved Main street of Melville.

"Now, tell me about it," I queried, my own voice grave as the mood demanded and my confidence in his judgment decreed.

"You know old Meme wasn't afraid of anything, Tom. Member how us kids used to try our Hallowe'en tricks on her and how flat they fell, no matter how weirdly successful they might be on the more gullible old folks? Well she was just the same with this Thing.

"Spite of the fact that she

had old Diaron's version of the occurrence, she scoffed at the idea of supernatural agencies."

"Old Meme knew too much about the really inexplicable happenings that occur in the voodoo ceremonies of her native Haitian jungles," I threw in, "to allow a mere unexplained murder and the disappearance of the body to frighten her."

"Yes?" But for once her reasoning must have been at fault. There was sadness in the conviction of Alec's voice, sadness and a thin thread of what in anyone else I would have called fear.

**A Plan.**

"In spite of all any of us could do," he continued, "she insisted that if we would let her stay in the room all night alone, she could solve the mystery of old Ezra's death and maybe—her maybe was almost sinister in its implication as she said it—produce his body, or part of it. There is no doubt that Meme suspected something that was explicable, at least to her if to none of the rest of us.

"Old Diaron seemed almost as fearful of her in that mood as we were, who at length consented for her to remain for the night in that uncanny octagonal room." Alec paused and drew a long breath. The eerie mystery of this thing had gotten Alec. I could see it in the awed and baffled look of his.

"Well—" I wanted to rouse him from the brief silence that seemed to grip him. He started and looked at me. The ghost of a smile touched his lips. "Yeah, it's got me, old man." Alec could almost always read my thoughts like that. He said he could see them in my eyes though no one else had ever been able to read any more than I wished them to read there.

I had learned to control my features in the best and most dangerous of schools—the school of crime detecting. But, Alec Jonas and I had been boys together and, besides that, inseparable chums in pleasure and in danger. So, he, perhaps of all persons, could sense changes that others could not, and he felt the knowledge that was mine without words.

He cleared his throat and shrugged as if throwing aside the incubus of puzzled fear-someness.

"Well, the upshot of the whole matter was that we all thought maybe, Meme, being a woman and a bit—well, a bit uncanny—might get to the bottom of the mystery or at least get a line that we might catch hold of and—she was very firm and insistent about it. Old Diaron is so completely at her bidding after forty years of henpecking, that he made only the poorest of allies in the general attempt to dissuade her.

**Attempted Solution.**

"Anyhow, Meme, with



"Leaning forward and bracing myself against the bulk of the man in front of me, I gripped the heavy iron knob in both hands and gave a great heaving turn without warning. . . ."

some liniment for her rheumatism, retired to the octagonal room about dusk and shut herself in. She was firm in her stipulation that no undue precautions should be taken. We felt it best to humor her, so, with the sole difference of our presence in the back sitting room at the left below stairs and Diaron in his usual seat at the entrance of the 'narrow hall,' she was left to deal with the occasion in her own manner.

"Who besides yourself was in the sitting room?"

I was a detective, and in my study of crime and criminals I knew that every detail and every individual, however remotely connected with a crime, must be accounted for. I knew that Alec Jonas was a keen witted observer and unusually well endowed with the instincts of the true detector of crime, but I saw that the weird and unusual character of the crime he was picturing out for me had blunted his ordinarily sharply analytical mind.

A brief questioning glance shot across Alec's face. He looked up at me with an odd little shadow in his eyes.

**Garland**

"Oh, I forgot," he said. "I hadn't told you about the coming of old Ezra's nephew, Garland. You knew, of course, of his younger brother who died years ago—the one who married the Haitian woman and lived with her in the hinterland of the Haitian jungles. Well, Garland is the son of that marriage and—the heir to old Ezra's wealth.

"He turned up quite suddenly the day after the murder; no one seems to know just why or how. It is certain he was not in the vicinity prior

to the murder, but he appeared very mysteriously the day after it."

Alec seemed to be waiting for some comment from me but I made none, so he went on.

"He was there with us that night and Alene Hardmore, the new woman detective that wanted to come in with us on that last case. She came into this on the invitation of young Selwyn (Garland) it seems. Then there was Jake; you know Jake is the marshal now, and the county coroner, Doctor Varant, that was all except myself."

We were at the gate of my mother's home now. I wanted to hear the rest of Alec's story. I knew mother would understand. Unlike most mothers, mine was not of the nervous, apprehensive kind. She loved bravery, and she was proud of my record as a detective, although she knew the dangerous character of my work full well. I invited Alec in.

**A Strange Prescience**

The warmth of greeting between mother and me was in no wise interfered with because of its brevity. She knew with few words of explanation that I was home to take a hand in the solution of the mystery of Selwyn house and THE CREEPING THING, and she was the kind that made everything easy for those about her. So it was only a matter of a very few minutes before Alec and I were installed in the library in comfortably deep chairs with coffee and sandwiches and our pipes and the assurance of an undisturbed hour of talk over the plans and, in my case, to gather up all the information available.

"We were all talking," Alec resumed at length, "when suddenly it seemed that some strange prescience of evil fell about us like a pall. Each one looked at the others. We all felt silent. It was almost as if we were waiting for something—we knew not what.

"Then, faintly at first, we sensed something unusual about the quality of that silence. It seemed to develop a new element. Something was moving above our heads—furtively. I bent forward. The faces of my companions seemed tense and breathless in the stillness so horribly disturbed

We all listened intently.

"There was a dull swishing sound such as a heavy body might make if dragged over an uneven surface—a sound as if some huge ungainly reptile were crawling over the ceiling above our heads. The sound awoke in me a very paralysis of terror. It seemed to chain us helpless as we sat staring at each other. Then—as it seemed—the horrible THING had wound its slow length across the width of the room in which we sat. There was a short silence.

Then a dull thud that sent a tremor through the whole house, and—silence.

**Horror**

"In premonitory dread the listeners in that room rose as one man. Alene Hardmore was the first among us to reach the outer hall, but Garland Selwyn passed her there and in six bounds was up the stair and at the entrance to the narrow hall before old Diaron, wide-eyed and fearful, had time to gather his wits about him. I was at his elbow when he reached the door of the octagonal room.

"Before he could lay his hand on the knob we heard it again. The horror was nearer now, nearer and more sinister. It was as if we could feel the undulating tremors of its body quivering through the room. Its huge bulk moving, slowly, dreadfully in such close proximity to us was like the vibrations of no earthly creatures, rather it was as if the very corridor recoiled under the dragging length of some super-human monster.

"Behind us in a line, filling the narrow passage to its length, were

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