THE CREEPING THING

by CORA JEAN MOTEN The Well-Known Serial Writer.

.(Continued from page three)

for anything else. She had committed no overt act that could by the farthest stretch of imagination be tortured into antagonism. The slight emphasis on the word "great," preceding her description of my detecting ability, might have been merely imagined, rather than hinted sarcasm.

"It depends on how you see the thing, Miss-er-Hardmore," I re-turned, keeping my voice non-com-mittal and yet on a polite note of deferences

deference.

Her penetrating black eyes traveled up and down me from my head to my feet and back again. The scrutiny wis peculiarly irritating in its deliberation. When she spoke, her deep masculine voice was as deliberate as her gaze had been.

Miss Hardmore Surprises

"Well, maybe so, after tonight. But for tenight, it don't happen to

and held it out to me. It bore the seal of the county.

I took it as deliberately as she had offered it, and opening it, extracted the folded legal sheet from it. It was an order from the county court enjoining everyone on the premises or elsewhere from interfering with Miss Alene Hardmore's occupancy of the octagonal tower room of Selwyn House for the night, and further calling on all resident guards, or others engaged therein, to aid and assist her in her "efforts at solving the gruesome and mysterious crimes that have recently been committed there."

I read it a second time, and returned it to her. Comment was superfluous. Her authority was indisputable. With my usual method of accepting the inevitable with as good grace as possible. I determined to accept this first setback to my own personal investigation of the mysterious murders, in a sporting manner. I took it as deliberately

mysterious murders, in a sporting

depend on thinking but rather on authority, and I've already got that."

She smiled, an ironic smile of ronical satisfaction.

I choked back the epithet that rose to my lips.

The huge, black woman pulled a long legal looking envelope from the capacious folds of her black dress.

The huge of tening but rather on manner.

Laving my hand reassuringly on the hervously twitching arm of old Diaren I gave it a warning pressure. I looked at Alec with the veiled look we both understood. I said: "Take it easy, old scout. It's the other fellow's move: ours will come later."

Alec nodded almost imperceptibly

I smiled reassuringly in return "Later, if you will, Diaron," I said, "but just now perhaps Miss Hardmore would do me the kindness to allow me to examine the room of mystery." I shot a conciliatory glance in the direction of the big woman.

"Oh, certainly," she acquiesced

woman,
"Oh, certainly," she acquiesced
drily. "It is the only wise thing to
do. I may need your as 'stance,
and if you know the geography of
the premises you will be in better
position to lend aid in an emerrener."

gency."
At the end of the narrow corridor that has been previously described, the huge woman paused. Pollowing her single file. Alec and I were unable to pass her or indeed to see beyond her save above her and through the interstices between her arms and body as she fumbled at the lock of the tail narrow door leading into the octagonal room.

In a brief time, she pushed the door open. It swung inward easily. We passed in behind her. Once in-

"This trick is certainly yours, Miss Hardmore," I said easily, smiling disamything I can do to help you, command me. We—my friend, Mr. Alecand I—will be on hand. Diaron, here, is putting us up for the night." I looked at the old man significantly. He nodded with alacrity.

"The Messieurs will of the most certainty be on hand, Madame, if you need them. Monsieur Frederick will be with me here in the passage—way. Is it not so, Monsieur?" Diaron turned almost with a look of supplication on his wrinkled old face toward me.

I smiled reassuringly in return second fiddle to Miss Alene Hardmore's first. In this examination at least, I would proceed independently and without interference or advice from her.

The great, high ceiled room was dim with shadows. Its many corners were indistinct in their blackness. They hung like gray bats' wings above the huge four-poster bed that occupied the space just opposite and facing the door. In the sudden draft, the musty old curtains that shrouded it swayed back and forth like black cerements of some monstrous creature of the tomb. Slowly and sinisterly they billowed and sank back upon themselves, caving in like the hollow cheeks of a dead miser's ghost.

I felt Alec draw in a sharp breath behind me. "Lend me your flash, Alec," I said quietly. I knew how to still Alec's jumpy nerves. He was one of those responsively sensitive chaps. A quiet word, a commonplace command or entreaty, and he was assured and calmed. Alec passed me his flash light. I switched it on.

Examining the Room

Without further ado I turned my attention to a minute examination of the room.

Alec's desciption had been authen-

of the room.

Alec's desciption had been authentic as to every detail. There was absolutely no possible opening large enough to admit or give exit to any body larger than that of a normal six-year-old child.

Of turnishings, there, were only

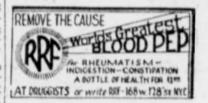
six-year-old child.

Of furnishings, there were only the great bed, a deal table beside it, and a single chair. Scattered here and there were huge built-in candle-sticks in which were several half-burnt-out candle ends. They were the only means of illumination in the room. The windows, set high and shrouded by the heavy leaf-curtains of the trees were negligible.

(Continued on page eight)

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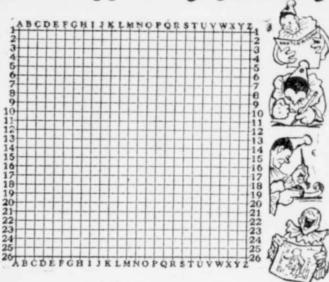
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Points are located at intersecting lines. S-Start new line at next point given. F-Finish line at last point given.

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