

THE CREEPING THING

By
CORA JEAN
MOTEN

CLASSIFIED ADS

(Continued from page four)

There were many inexplicable things this, besides the things that everybody knew to have occurred in Selwyn House and its octagonal sewer-room.

By common consent no one left the room save Jarton, and he returned shortly. I was talking to Selwyn, when he entered the room from his necessary errand

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of telephoning for the conveyance that twice before had made fruitless journeys to this house of mystery.

"You have not been in the United States long, Mr. Selwyn?" I tried to keep my voice casually interested although I had determined to learn all the facts about this Haitian dandy before another week should have passed over our heads.

"No, not on this trip. But, I was educated in the U. S." The man's English was perfect, there was only the slightest suspicion of an accent in the broadened English and the tendency toward deliberation in enunciating the last letters of his words.

"In the East, I presume?" My question was more a statement than an interrogation. I felt assured that the man had received that careful training in enunciating the end sound of his words in no school of our section of the country.

The man smiled. His smile gave me an unpleasant sensation. It was a smile that touched his lips only. His eyes had no part in it. "You are a very keen observer and analyst," he remarked calmly. I noted that his eyes kept their quiet film of indifference although there was a bright intelligence back of their stillness that I knew, unerringly, was weighing and measuring things and persons.

Then Jarton's man entered. We all fled out of the room and left the undertaker and his man to their grim business. I stopped at the door and asked whether I could be of any assistance, but Dr. Varant, who was just behind me, cut in with the remark: "Oh no, Mr. Frederick, there will be no need. I am staying to help Mr. Jarton and Ben." Without giving time for further conversation, he shut the door. "Checkmate," I said to myself resignedly, adding within my mind, "but there's lots of moves left."

The Doctor's Orders

I made my next move the next morning, early. I knew that Jarton would sleep late after the night's work, and I also knew that Ben would have no scruples against rest and no reasons for refusing me any ordinary privileges. I was right. There was nothing about a trip through the morgue to intrigue Ben; especially not after a night disturbed as his had been with that long trip to Selwyn House and its attendant labor. Also there was no reason that I, whom he knew to be interested in the case of the mystery of that house and of any other possible mysteries, should not be accorded full freedom of the place.

No one had given Ben any specific orders about me, although, as I was about to close the door leading to the morgue behind me, he said: "Dr. Varant was mighty particular about his orders on that stiff, Mr. Frederick. Said it wasn't to be disturbed at all. So for Cripe's sake, don't tech it."

I called my assurance back cheerfully and closed the door.

When I paused before the long

sheeted thing on the cold slab I wondered whether, after all, I mightn't be on a wild goose chase for any thing unusual. What could Dr. Varant have to conceal in the way of evidence? It was preposterous to think he knew anything of this Creeping Horror of Selwyn House. But—I lifted the sheet and gazed down at the gray blackness of the big boned face of what had been Alene Hardmore.

There was nothing in that face that could give any clue to the dread Thing that had caused her death. I examined it carefully for a long while. Then carefully, and with the utmost caution, that I might leave no trace of my tampering fingers, I lifted a corner of the white cloth that covered the mutilated top of her head. It stuck. As I exerted an even, gentle force in my effort to pull that bit of shrouding cloth loose from what I felt was some secret that it covered, I heard a step behind me. Whirling about I looked into the muzzle of a small black automatic.

—END OF FIFTH INSTALLMENT—
(To be Continued Next Week)

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