

THE CREEPING THING

A Story of Gruesome and Haunting Mystery

By
Cora Jean Moten
The Well-Known
Serial Writer

SYNOPSIS

THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF GRUESOME MURDERS IN SELWYN HOUSE. They have occurred in the octagonal tower room, a mysterious addition to the house. It was built by old Erik Selwyn years before, on his return from a tragic stay in Haiti where his young bride, Mary, has been lost in the roudou infected jungles. The tragedy has made him an ascetic recluse. He lives in the house alone save for his two Haitian servants, Diaron and his wife, Meme.

Erik himself is the first one murdered. Each murder is preceded and followed by the sound of some huge reptilian body being dragged over an uneven surface. But there are no entrances to the room large enough to admit such a body and no apparent hiding places.

The bodies have disappeared one by one until the last one, the gigantic detective, Alonzo Hardmore, who is killed in an effort to investigate the mystery. Her body is watched by detective Tom Frederick and his friend and co-worker, Alec Jonas, until the undertaker, Al Jarion, comes for it.

But—the next day that body is stolen from the undertaking establishment, presumably by Garland Selwyn, a nephew of the elder man, whose mother is a Haitian roudou priestess. The bodies have all been scalped and, after the mysterious disappearance of old Meme's body, an Indian scalping knife is found with a few strands of long black hair attached to its blood-stained blade.

Detective Frederick and Al Jarion subsequently interviewed Diaron, who attributes the Selwyn mystery to Zombis, which he claims are supernatural beings which often act in this manner. Diaron is so sincere in his belief that this will account for the Selwyn house murders, that detective Frederick and Al Jarion regard the tale very carefully.

In the meantime, it is discovered that Garland Selwyn has suddenly left the Beal House on Maine street, where he had been lodging. Detective Frederick and Al Jarion then make an appointment with Alec Jonas to confer at the Beal House. The three of them meet there in order to find out more about the suspicious movements of Garland Selwyn.

Detective Frederick and his associates find a clue at the Beal House. They also find that Garland Selwyn has left suddenly with an old woman whose identity is unknown.

In the hope that he will discover further clues, Detective Frederick engages Garland Selwyn's empty room.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

INSTALLMENT X.

IT WAS at Alec's home that I secured the old packing case with an improvised handle. We filled it with odds and ends from our youthful scientific research outfits. There were several old retort tubes that had miraculously escaped the general debacle that overtook scores of their fellows, a crucible, some pestles and a mortar.

We packed them in the case, and as the dusk fell I set out for the environs of the Beal House. I hoped that I would not have to use the

manufactured evidence represented by the crude bit of amateur laboratory equipment, but we had decided, after my pseudo-arrangement for my non-existent friend, with Amanda Beal, it would be best to have some tangible evidence to account for my presence at or about the room lately occupied by Garland Selwyn if I were discovered.

By arrangement, Alec followed me after an appreciable time. The Beal House was the last house on Maine street. Beyond it was the beginning of the road that led through a short space of cleared commons to the fringing undergrowth that scattered itself for a mile or more among scraggly trees and old tree trunks. Then it deepened into the heavy forest growth that became almost primeval just before one came to the one-time clearing, now over-run with new forest, surrounding Selwyn House and its octagonal tower of mystery.

The state highway did not approach Maine street from the end of the town where Alec Jonas lived. It swung out just beyond the little white cottages that began with the modest Jonas home and went for almost a mile around to make a sort of a spur junction with that street, just a few short blocks above the Beal House.

In this out-thrown curve it was bordered by more woodland on the outer margin. To avoid any prying eyes that might possibly be upon me I entered this shielding growth and proceeded to skirt the highway. I kept just far enough away to avoid discovery by anyone proceeding along that rather rough bit of road that rather here broke the continuous line of hard surfaced pavement stretching across the state and on across other states to only the Lord knew where.

When I came to within a

quarter mile of the junction with Maine street, I kept on pushing farther into the depths of what was beginning to be more sparsely wooded land. When I arrived at the edge of the last sheltering shrubs, darkness had fallen.

I waited for some minutes,

watching and listening for any unusual or suspicious sounds before venturing out into the opening. But for the gentle sighing of the wind and the occasional sound of the waking night life or the far away barking of a dog, the night was still.

I gripped the handle of

the packing case securely and felt with my other hand for the comforting safety of the handle of my automatic. Then I stepped out onto the highway and crossed it to the clear unbroken space that lay for the length of about a city block beyond. At the

(Continued on page four)



Cautiously, and with my soaking feet making little squashing sounds as I set them down one after the other on the rounds of the ladder.

THE LIFE OF BERT WILLIAMS No. 11 . .

Text by BEN DAVIS, JR.
Drawn by A. W. RENNEGARBE



1. In 1910, Mr. Erlanger, well known producer, sent for Bert and persuaded him to make a contract for three years in the Follies.



2. It is here that the famous "Poker Game," which is today imitated very widely, became famous. In this Bert sat at a poker table with three imaginary players.



3. It was an experiment to place a Negro actor in a company of white people. But Bert was more than equal to the situation, and became an instantaneous hit in the



4. Whenever traveling with the Follies, as the star, he often had access to the finest hotels, but always he chose to remain in the simple habitats of his own people.

A. W. RENNEGARBE