THE CRYPT OF TERROR

Chester Wayne trudged tremulously along the macadam road leading from Plainsville. His high-powered rifle was ready, his nervous finger on the trigger. Above, a full round moon threw a pale light on the countryside, silhouetting each shadowy bush into an ominous crouching figure. Around him, each faint whisper of wind warned, "Go back! Go back!"

I swore over Mamie's naked bones I'd get the one who did it to her. I've got to keep trying! I've got to... Who, who's there?

The startled creature turned from its human prey. A clammy sweat broke out on Chester when he saw the hairy face, the blood dripping from its lips and chin...

The werewolf bared its fangs at the hunter and snarled. Chester dropped to one knee, threw the rifle to his shoulder, and squeezed the trigger. A hollow-nosed .33 shrieked across the road after the now-fleeing beast.

Hit him! For Mamie! Rip him open!

He was numb with horror, half-blind with rage as he blasted away at the disappearing monster till the magazine was empty and the hammer clicked dead on the empty rifle chamber.

Missed him! Bob... Mamie! I'm go... missed.

Loath to look upon the gory remains that lay in the ditch, Chester was nevertheless drawn toward them as though by some magnet of morbidity. He approached on trembling legs... looked... then recoiled in horror at the sight of bare bone, and raw, half-eaten flesh...

A great violent sickness wreathed at Chester's innards... and he turned, retching, and ran the whole way back to Plainsville... Choke...
It already got someone close to me, Paul! My wife, Mamie!

Chester tossed off a double bourbon... And while it was still burning down, he panted out the terrible details of his harrowing experience...

God, man! Tell us who it was! We've all got families!

A farmer has a place three miles out... Seen him in town... Quiet, he's gonna be quiet a long, long time now... Like my Mamie!

Fifteen minutes later, Mayor Elwood Hanson was awakened by shouts of his name. He leaned uneasily from the bedroom window of his colonial home and looked down at the angry crowd below...

Please, gentlemen! Then come on down, Mayor!

Soon his portly pajama-clad figure wrapped in a silken robe, the dignified mayor of Plainsville stood before his townspeople, listening to the frightful news...

Terrible! Terrible! I'll send official condolences to his widow in the morn...

A fat lot of good that'll do, Mayor! What about the protection you promised us?

What can I do, Mr. Wayne? For one thing, this fiendish attack took place outside of town... beyond my jurisdiction.

My wife's body was ravaged right here on the streets of Plainsville!

We want more than words, Mayor! What're you going to do about it, Hanson?
Mayor Hanson tried to pacify the roiled mob...

Please, gentle-mer! Now, Mr. Wayne, you say you fired several silver bullets at this werewolf. They were silver bullets, of course! Silver?! I don't get you, Mayor. I used hollow-nosed .32's. Lead, not silver. They're like dum-dums...

Mayor Hanson was very adept at shifting the pressure from himself...

Well, I might have known someone would go off half-cocked! My dear Mr. Wayne... if you'd taken the trouble to read up on werewolves, as I have, you'd know that only a silver bullet can kill a werewolf.

The crowd fell silent with embarrassment, for no man wished to admit ignorance to his neighbor. Mayor Hanson smiled patronizingly...

I'll welcome anyone of you to my library who'd care to inform himself on the habits of the lycanthrope. Meanwhile, my fellow citizens, be calm... and... good-night.

The mayor went back into his stately home, the crowd dispersed, and Chester Wayne joined Paul Myers and Chick Rogers in a gloomy session at Marley's tavern...

There never was a man better at squirming' out of a hot spot than Mayor Hanson!

We're no better off than before we called on him!

Chester Wayne grimaced...

Yes, we are! We have time... a whole month before the next full moon. We can start meltin' down silver coins for bullets! We can be ready the next time that werewolf shows himself.

So most of the people of Plainsville lived in dread of the coming full moon... and the night it arrived, everyone stayed behind locked doors and shuttered windows. Only Clara Hanson, the mayor's wife, ventured out to visit her aged and ailing mother...

I've got to be running along, Mama Elwood will be worrying about me! Promise you'll take it easy.

What else could I do in this wheelchair, Clara?

It was just three short blocks from her mother's house to the Hanson home. Clara walked unafraid, until she saw the full yellow moon handing high above the village square...

gulp... thank heavens it's not far!

What else could I do in this wheelchair, Clara?
Her attempted scream came forth as no more than an asthmatic wheezing squeal. The flesh-starved beast sprang... sinking its gleaming fangs into her throbbing throat... ripping it open... fountaining the blood over its hairy face... into its red boiling eyes...

Sheepishly, they picked up their silver-bullet-loaded carbines and stalked from the tavern, across the square. They got no further than where the ghastly skeleton of Clara Hanson lay in a pool of congealing gore, her blood soaked clothes strewn about...

Mayor Hanson was plainly troubled when he faced the two white-faced men across his threshold...

...struck again! Oh... lord! No! No! I just phoned my mother-in-law! Clara hasn't come home yet! Was it a... a woman?

Paul! Yeah! I'm thinkin' the same thing! You better get dressed, Mayor!
The mayor recognized his wife's clothes at once, with much loud wailing and anguished sobs, he fell across her flesh-striped bones...

Clara!... My Clara... All that carryin' on won't help her none...

Leave him alone, Paul!

At last the mayor arose and his tear-reopened eyes blazed that filthy vile thing! I'll get every able-bodied man in this town after it! This time it's your wife, and the shoe's on the other foot!

Every man will be armed! There'll be silver bullets for all! A vigilante committee, that's what we'll have! We'll divide into groups. Come the country side! Come the next full moon. We'll be waiting!

Within twenty-eight days, every capable man in Plainsville had received a rifle and five silver bullets. Everyone had practised with moving targets. Everyone was ready. The afternoon before the night of the full moon the men thronged before Mayor Hanson's mansion...

We'll start now. In groups of six... in daylight—so we can acquaint ourselves with each area!

Now, remember...

It was twilight when Mayor Hanson, wearing a red suede shooting jacket and scarlet hunter's cap, climbed from his car at the rendezvous spot for his group. Chester Wayne grinned...

Pipe the fancy outfit on his honor, Paul. You could see it in a coal mine at midnight.

Hunting in the dark is a dangerous business, Mr. Wayne. I'd rather be safe than sorry.

When darkness came, the men were alert and jumpy! Matt Stevens, with his group in town, saw a suspicious figure, screamed out after it, and began shooting...

Cut that out, Matt! The mayor said to make sure what you're shooting at!
Fortunately, Matt's shots were wild, the figure turned out to be a familiar drunk they all knew well...

Well, what'd you run a buzzed I'm for if you aren't the weren-wolf? When someone opens up on me, Matt Stevens!

Meanwhile, Mayor Hanson and his party'd surrounded a strange old woman walking along a lonely dark road...

Lady, you're taking a chance being out tonight! Better let us see you home! I don't need the seed home! I ain't sneered!

Mayor Hanson and Paul Myers revealed their theory to the others of their party...

Well, how can we tell if she is the were-wolf? We'll take her back to my place! I have that book! It tells how to recognize a were-wolf... even in human form!

Chet Wayne brandished his rifle and scoffed...

Aw, nuts to your book, Mayor. In less than twenty minutes, the moon will be full. Then, if the old bag turns out to be what we're after, we let her have it!

Chet... this is kidnapping! After all, we still have no proof! You shouldn't have hit her...

They made their way back to the mayor's car. The old man fought them as they tried to push her in. She even bit Paul's hand...

Ow! The dirty witch! I ain't goin'! You can't make me go!

Paul solved the problem. He swung his rifle-butt, clouting the old woman across the side of her head. Aah, climb off my back, mayor! And step on it! She's out cold!

Chet... this is kidnapping! After all, we still have no proof! You shouldn't have hit her...
It took him over fifteen minutes to reach the mayor’s house in town. By that time, the old hag had revived.

Mayor Hanson hurried into the house, stumbling down the dimly lit hall to the dark library. He stopped suddenly as he reached the door… and stared at the gleaming fangs flashing from behind the snarling cruel mouth. He screamed…

Outside, the men heard the shots and tore for the house… the mayor stumbled to the library light switch, flicking it on. He shrieked as the glow flooded the room…

It’s the werewolf!

The vile ferocious beast just stood there… snarling at him…

My god! The silver bullets! They don’t kill him! I couldn’t miss… not at this range…

Yaaaaaahhhhhhh!! In there! The library! It’s the mayor! He’s probably being attacked by the werewolf!

Mayor Elwood Hanson stood before the full-length library mirror, snarling and shrieking, staring idiotically at the bullet holes he’d made when he’d shot at his own reflection. Good Lord! Choke!

And that’s the first scream-story in my new pulp fiction series. Naturally, they shot mayor werewolf after that. In fact, they pumped him so full of silver bullets, he had to be lowered into his grave with a derrick! Then a couple of grave-robbars heard about the silver and out that’s another story! I’ll dig that up some other time. Now the vault-keeper awaits with his creepy contribution to this morbid mess. I’ll be back later. ‘Bye, now.
HEH, HEH! AND NOW THAT C.R. HAS CURDLED YOUR ANEMIC BLOOD, IT'S TIME FOR YOUR HOST IN THE VAULT OF HORROR, THE VAULT-KEEPER NAMELY, ME. TO ENTERTAIN YOU WITH A SPINE-TINGLING, NAUSEATING NOVELLETTE FROM MY CREEP COLLECTION. LET'S SEE! OH... LET'S NOT SEE! YES! THIS IS A GOOD GORY ONE! IT'S CALLED...

BLIND ALLEYS

THE "HOME" WAS OLD AND PAINT-STARVED AND DRAFTY AND BADLY IN NEED OF REPAIR. THE ROOF LEAKED AND THE WINDOWS RATTLED AND WERE COVERED WITH YEARS OF DUST AND GRIME. THE INMATES OF THE HOME WALKED GRIM-FACED AND SILENT THROUGH CRACKED PLASTER HALLS, OR SAT IN DINGY ROOMS ON CRAWLING BENS. THEY SHIVERED IN THE COLD WHEN WINTER CAME... WHEN THERE WAS NO STEAM TO WARM THE RUSTED RADIATORS...

...AND THEY SWEATED IN THE HEAT WHEN SUMMER BURNED... WHEN LONG-BROKEN FANS LAY IDLE AND UNREPAIRED AND UNABLE TO WAFT A BREATHE OF COOLING RELIEF...
But they could not see the paint-peeled walls, the dirt clouded windows, the dusty and cob-webbed halls of this, their home...these inmates. They could not see the roaches and the rats scampering across the unwashed floors...

...as this was a "home" for the blind. For wretched souls who lived in worlds of darkness, who stared with unseeing eyes at the misery around them...and yet knew and hated all of it...

For the loss of one sense only tends to sharpen the others...to tune them more finely...to make them more acute. The inmates knew because they could taste...and touch...and smell and hear. They could taste the spoiled and rotted food placed before them at mealtimes.

They could touch the sticky, filmy cobwebs, the dusty layers covering everything...They could smell the foul odors of mildew and faulty plumbing and poor sanitation and neglect...

They could hear the rats scampering and the roaches crawling and the termites burrowing and the lice and bed bugs and flies and a thousand other creatures of filth that moved.

And they could hear other creatures too...other creatures of filth that moved. They could hear Mr. Brunwald, the home's director, in his office-apartment downstairs, entertaining his latest lady-friend with the money he'd saved on them...the inmates...

Bunnen, please come, now. Honey? don't you like bunnen.

They could hear his almost maniacal laughter and the clinking of champagne glasses. They could smell the mouth-watering odors of the lavish supper he was enjoying, and they could see, in their minds' eyes, the luxuries with which he'd selfishly surrounded himself at their expense...

Here, beautiful. Have another drink! Mmm! This is more like it!
Yes, Gunner Brunwald had indeed surrounded himself with luxuries... paid for with the allotments given him for each blind inmate. Why paint and plaster dreary halls that they'd never see, when he could have an air-conditioner for those blistering summer days?

Why give those poor miserable blind fools beauty if they could not appreciate beauty? Gunner Brunwald'd felt that way! So he'd skimmed on the inmates... cut corners here... denied there... and with the surplus, he'd supplied himself with beauty...

Fine furniture. Good books. Plush rugs. Expensive drapes. An occasional evening of female companionship... they were all Gunner's to enjoy. He'd even bought a dog... a vicious dog. He'd had a good reason.

For Gunner'd known that another sense had replaced the inmates' sense of sight... a deep-seeded sense... growing each day. He'd seen it in their webbed-blind eyes, in their silent blank faces. He'd seen their growing hate... so he'd bought the dog for protection.

And with the dog at his side, Gunner'd walked self-confidently before them, knowing that his sight and the dog's strength would keep him from harm.

And so, he'd been able to continue to enjoy his fiendish little amusements... like tripping helpless unsuspecting inmates as they'd totter blindly by him...

Ooohh! Men!
...AND TONIGHT, THEIR OPPORTUNITY CAME...

...HUNGRY? DOGGY? HUNGRY? HERES SOME MEAT!


...AND TONIGHT, THEIR OPPORTUNITY CAME...

...HUNGRY? DOGGY? HUNGRY? HERES SOME MEAT!


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...AND TONIGHT, THEIR OPPORTUNITY CAME...

...HUNGRY? DOGGY? HUNGRY? HERES SOME MEAT!
And then they waited. They waited for Gunner's friend of the evening to leave...

Goodnight, Gunner! Thank you, my dear.

They waited for Gunner to miss his dog...

Bru... Bru... Bru... Where are you, Brutus? Brutus! Where are you?

...and then they struck blindly. Unseeing... They surrounded their hated enemy...

What is it? What do you want? Go back to your rooms, all of you!

...and dragged him to the cellar too... To another waiting cubicle...

No, no! Please! Brutus, help me! Where are you? Brutus!

But Gunner's only answer was the soft whine of the dog in the adjoining cubicle...

Brutus! They've got you too!

Then they began to work. They dragged old hammers and rusty nails and long idle saws.

And they went through the home and cut and ripped and chopped the lumber they needed.
Gunner listened to the hammering echoing through the cellar. He listened to their singes and chatter, and he wondered...

What are they up to? What are they making?

And he listened as the night passed and dawn came and the dog in the cubicle next door grew hungry and paced and growled and scratched as its stomach gnawed...

Feed Brutus, you fools! He'll get wild if you don't! He'll be dangerous!

We know, Mr. Grunwald!

The day passed and night came again. Gunner's own stomach ached with hunger, and still they hammered and sawed and laughed and talked...

You'll see, Mr. Grunwald! What are you going to do?

Food! Give me some food! Please!

Do you call what you've been feeding us food, Mr. Grunwald?

Dawn came again and the second day passed. Next door, the dog was fighting with itself, throwing itself against the cubicle sides and howling madly...

Brutus will kill anyone that sets foot in there now!

Gunner himself was half-crazed with hunger as the third night came. And then, towards midnight, the hammering stopped. The cellar was suddenly flooded with light. Even Brutus stopped snarling in anticipation...

They're... they're opening my cubicle...

They stood before him... dirty, sweated, tired from long hours of labor... the inmates... the blind unseeing carpenters. Gunner blinked out at them...

Come, Mr. Grunwald! You are free to go!

Follow us, Mr. Grunwald! We built this just for you! It leads to the cellar steps... and freedom!
Gunner stood up as they darted off. He could
mean their footsteps fade as they rounded cor-
ners and ran down long corridors that turned
and twisted and doubled back. Gunner stared-

"They. They built a maze!
A puzzle! I have to
figure it out!"

He brushed against the razor blades, slaming
his flesh. He stumbled and sat up...ran on...fright-
ened...wild down through the twisting,doubling-
back maze corridors with the razor-lined walls
and the slobbering hound close behind.

Gunner laughed to himself as
he started out of his cubicle...
"The fools! If I'm careful.
If I take my time... I'll
never have to touch the
walls... just walk slowly
like this careful.

A sound behind Gunner froze
his blood. A snarl and a squeak
of a door opening.
"Brutus! Hunger-crazed
Brutus! They've freed
him too!"

And then some idiot
turned out the lights!
And then Gunner saw the gleaming glittering
slivers of steel embedded in the maze walls...
"Razor blades! The walls are
lined with razor blades!
They want me to cut myself!
Hurry, my snun wall! Hurry!

As the sound of the loping
mean dogs behind him

Gunner began to run. He had to
reach freedom before that
starved dog caught him. He ran
down the twisting maze corri-
dors... the sound of the loping,
mean dogs behind him.

He began to run. He had to
reach freedom before that
starved dog caught him. He ran
down the twisting maze corri-
dors... the sound of the loping,
mean dogs behind him.

Oh, lord... lord.

Ooops! Wrong turn, Gun-
ner! Now, now! Don't do to
pieces! After all, it's
almost like being blind!
Well, kiddies. That's my
sickening story for this
first issue of C.K.'s new
mag! Now it's time to close
the vault of horror
and turn you back to him.

As the dismembered parts of a
corpse said when they were
shipped to the undertaker's,
"We'll get together
again!" Boy!
It was back-breaking work, but it had to be done. Right away, too. He couldn’t risk hiding the body of his wife in the cellar any longer... one of the farm hands might accidentally stumble over the corpse and start asking mighty dangerous questions. It was urgent, Dan Gret knew, to dispose of Emily right now, in this field he was plowing for spring planting. No sense in leaving a murdered wife around for the law to find!

Dan Gret heard the farm hands chattering over in the next field... he’d have to bawl ‘em out about all this horsing around on his time. But at the moment he was too busy trying to gouge a hole in the ground. At first he’d been worried about the noise his shovel would make as he burrowed into the earth, but that had been taken care of without much trouble. The motor of the idling plow made so much noise that those loafers working for him wouldn’t pay him any mind. And the bulk of the machine had been carefully maneuvered into place so that it acted as a shield between him and the overalled men seedling the adjoining acre. Thus, Dan Gret had resolved, was to be a private burial!

Dan Gret crouched low, in the shadow of the plow. By stretching out full length, he managed to tug the corpse from behind the grumbling machine andudge it into the makeshift grave. There would be less than a foot of dirt blanketing Emily’s body... but as soon as the hired hands got a day off he’d hurry back and dig a good deep hole to house the corpse. Within a few weeks the seeds’d be sprouting and the field would burst into furious bloom. Dan Gret grinned as he patted the last shovelful of dirt into place. Not only was he getting rid of this devil he’d grown to hate... he was also helping to fertilize the coming crop!

He straightened up and surveyed his work with a critical eye. His eyes popped: one of Emily’s hands was sticking up out of the soil! He lunged forward... and heard, with dread, the sound of voices approaching. Those bums who worked for him were coming across the field in his direction!

Dan Gret sprang toward the droning plow. If he could move the machine sideways just a few feet... set it directly over Emily’s body... the danger of the moment could be averted. He turned once, to look back at the tell-tale mound... and his foot slid out from under him. His arms flailed the air frantically as he tried to regain his balance: his hand crashed sharply against the gear lever. The plow started immediately to swing in a rumbling circle, because of the way he be had cramped the steering wheel. In motionless horror he saw the glittering blades bearing down on him!

Dan Gret screeched in alarm. Then the razor-sharp metal slashed through his flesh... the ponderous steel crushed over his writhing body... the huge wheels groaned over him so that he was drenched in his own gushing blood.

By the time the farm hands reached him, Dan Gret was slashed almost beyond recognition. With gaping wonder the hired men stared down at Dan Gret’s corpse... buried alongside that of his wife Emily, in the gory, blood spattered grave. It was a real family plot!
E.C. WENT TO SEA IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER NEW TREND...

AND WE CAME UP WITH...

SAGAS OF THE SEA, SHIPS, PLUNDER AND...

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(Original comic strip content)

INVESTIGATE YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND FOR THE FIRST "JUST-AS-GOOD" ISSUE! HOWEVER IF YOU'RE TIED UP WITH RED TAPE (ADHESIVE, THAT IS!) AND YOU'D RATHER SUBSCRIBE, FILL OUT THE COUPON AND SEND IN, TOGETHER WITH AN UNDOCTORED PHOTO OF GEORGE WASHINGTON ON A $1.00 BILL YOU'LL RECEIVE 8 UNCROPPED ISSUES IN THE MAIL.
Elmer's face took on a thoughtful expression and his eyes shaded over with a distant look, haunted with memories of the past. He sighed deeply, then spoke again in a colorless, droning voice:

"I... I was always a timid man. It's not good for a man to be timid... especially a married man. Especially a man married to a woman like Ida!"

"Maybe we could have been happy together in our little apartment... Ida and I. But one evening, her folks came to dinner. Her father was all tense, bursting with news that he finally exploded on me at dessert..."

"Elmer, you must be wondering how why, no, Mr. Wallace. I never."
I should have said, "no thank you," but I saw no hidden trap at the moment. And when, exuding good will, Mr. Wallace offered me his hand, I clapped it gratefully...

Just be good to my daughter, Elmer... And be happy together!

THANK YOU, SIR...

That was the first faint rumbling of the tempest yet to come. The Wallaces gave up their apartment and moved in with us. Ida was a most generous daughter...

And my loving bride had the steering wheel in her own little clutching hands...
Believe me, I'm grateful... but that money was just enough to let me go into debt for the next twenty years. Saddled with a mortgage, I've got payments to meet...on that, and the other furniture...and...

Then a few more dollars a month won't hurt! Tell you what! I'll put the ten bucks down on the t.v. set!

Temporary, she said? But before I knew it, they've been there five weeks, I could just about manage to meet my bills, if there weren't other demands on my small income.

But, I can't afford a t.v. set. Mr. Wallace. Not even a small-screen set.

That's gratitude! I give you $1000 for a home, and you expect me to furnish it, too?

Months went by. My burden grew and weighed upon me like a millstone. One day I found the courage to talk to Ida.

I like your folks, Ida, but I can't go on supporting them for supporting me.

You're blaming mother and daddy because you're not a good provider. You might as well know it, Elmer. I'm not satisfied...not even satisfied. I thought you had ambition! I thought you'd go places...get ahead in the world. Instead, you're stuck in a poor paying job.

I wanted you to know that money was just enough to let me go into debt for the next twenty years. Saddled with a mortgage, I've got payments to meet...on that, and the other furniture...and...

Then a few more dollars a month won't hurt! Tell you what! I'll put the ten bucks down on the t.v. set!

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Ida spoke bitterly and loudly...loud enough for her parents to hear. They accepted it as an invitation to join her fierce harangue.

Sometimes I wish Ida hadn't...well, I'd better not say what I'm thinking.

I thought you had guts, son! I thought you'd want to get ahead!

Driver more by desperation and need than by their scorn, I finally gathered the courage to ask my boss, Mr. Bentley, for a raise. But the minute I entered his plush office...

I've been meaning to talk to you about your work, Preston. You've been getting careless lately... sloppy.

Very sloppy?

I didn't realize, Mr. Bentley! I'm sorry, sir! I'll do better in the future! I promise!
I had uncorked a dam by complaining against Ida's folks, and from that day on, a spiteful torrent of criticism poured through the floodgates at me...

What about that raise I told you to ask for, Elmer? When are you going to get enough nerve?

Ask for? You don't ask for a raise? You demand it! That's the only way to get ahead... by demanding...

...And I'd always get the same response...

You... didn't... Good Lord, man! Don't you want to get ahead in this world?!

Every meal became a nightmare from the time I'd sit down...

You're a failure, Elmer! I can't stand a failure! All my life I fought to get ahead...

Suddenly there'd be a violent churning in the pit of my stomach and I'd have to run from the room...

So on! Run! If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't want to hear the truth about myself, either!

Gee!! You try to tell him something for his own good and he runs off in a huff! He's insulted!

'Go on! Run! If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't want to hear the truth about myself, either!'
No,Ida would nag me till she was hoarse, and I'd cover my head with my pillow, but I'd still hear...

Only sixty-seven miserable dollars a week... in these days. I'm ashamed for mother and Daddy to know... but of course they do know. They know the kind of clothes I wear... they see the furniture... threadbare... junk!

'So the months dragged into years and the Wallaces stayed on with us... nagging me... hounding... complaining... always complaining...

You remember when you bought that washing machine? I told you it didn't pay to buy cheap... well, it's ready for the junkheap!

'It won't set you lonely there, believe me. It'll have that stinking twelve-inch-screen t.v. set for company...

'Please... Ida! It's late...

'I was too timid to admit it to myself then, but I'd come to hate Ida and her mother and father. I'd be shaving in the morning and my wife would come in and the day's nagging would begin...' I don't see why Daddy should have to keep pounding it into you? You should want to get ahead yourself, Elmer...

Never mind, Mother! From now on, I'll do the buying! We can't afford much, maybe, but what we do get will be the best!

'Storm... I'm going to stay in there all night, Elmer? Listen... about the t.v. set... I was downtown today, talking to a dealer about a trade-in on a larger screen, and...

This morning, as always, we sat at the breakfast table and I listened to them talking... talking... and nearby, the storm gathered. I could hear it rumbling...

And today, for the first time in years, I didn't go to work. I wandered around the streets, wondering what was wrong with me, listening to the storm thundering in the distance, coming closer... closer... ready to break at any moment...

A man without ambition is a walking corpse, Elmer! I know I'm repeating myself, but try to be a success. Try, Elmer. Elmer? You listening?

'Why don't I get ahead? Everybody else does! I've got to! I've... h.e.n... I've... e.h... e.g.

'Mother! I'm ashamed for Mother and Daddy to know... but of course they do know. They know the kind of clothes I wear... they see the furniture... threadbare... junk!'
When I got home that night, late for dinner, they just stared at me...Ida and Mr. Wallace and Mrs. Wallace. The storm rumbled around...threatening...threatening to break there. In my throbbing head...and I just stared back at them...

Well! It's about time! Where were you today? Mr. Bently called.

"I ran out...but not to the bathroom this time. I ran to the kitchen...through the raging storm. I came back with the meat cleaver!"

Elmer Preston stared straight ahead, smiling. The wild gleam returned to his eyes, and he choked out more words between short, high-pitched bursts of laughter...

So you see, I...eh, eh...did get ahead...eh, eh...after all!

And slowly, the policemen followed Elmer's wild gaze to the dinner table...to the neat place settings...and the plates with their harrowing fare staring back at them...

I...eh, eh...I not only got a head...I...eh, eh...I got three heads!

Yeah, Preston! Choke—We see you were a real success, Preston!

You said you'd try to get ahead, Elmer? Why can't you get ahead, Elmer?

Elmer Preston stared straight ahead, smiling. The wild gleam returned to his eyes, and he choked out more words between short, high-pitched bursts of laughter...

So you see, I...eh, eh...did get ahead...eh, eh...after all!

I got three heads!
I...I BEEN MEANIN' T' ASK YOU, FANNY. I JUS' DON'T KNOW HOW? I...I BEEN MEANIN' T' ASK YOU IF YOU'LL MARRY ME!

OH, TONY! I'VE BEEN DREAMING OF IT... BUT NEVER REALLY BELIEVING YOU WOULD! OH, YES, TONY! YES! I WILL MARRY YOU!

SURE I WANTED THAT WOE-BEGONE WITCH FOR A WIFE. I WANTED TO MARRY THE HUNDRED GRAND FORTUNE I'VE HEARD ABOUT... THE MOTHER HER FIRST HUSBAND HAD LEFT HER. THE MISERABLE MISER WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE EVERY LAST CENT OF IT... NO... THERE... IN THAT FOUL- SMELLING FILTHY HOUSE...

THEN I GUESS... CHORE... THIS CALLS FOR A KISS? IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE BEEN KISSED, TONY!
Well, I'll skip the disgustin' details except to say Fanny became Mrs. Tony Barrett, and I started hittin' the bottle to brace myself against livin' with her...

TROUBLE WITH DRINKIN' was it used to set me down. I'd worry. I'd worry REAL bad...

After the first two weeks, I got real disgusted. There was no hint of the dough...

I'm beginnin' I think I've been a sucker, saddlin' myself with a dried-up withered excuse for a female. I'll wake up one day and find out there ain't no hundred b's...well, in a pig's eye I will!

So I went up into the bedroom where Fanny sat with that straggly mop of hers up in curlers. But I didn't look at Fanny twice. I headed for the closet...for my suitcase...
I'm a ragman! Mrs. Oeden is Mrs. Barrett now, Mister. My wife! Don't you remember me? You told me about her...

You have a nice wife, sir. She's very good to me. She always has rags to sell me. I'm a ragman...

But at that minute, Fanny tumbled down the stairs with a load of old rags... Men's suits... Women's dresses... Kids' clothes. The ragman grinned like an idiot when he saw them...

Fine, Mrs. Barrett! Seven bucks... for that old garbage? Wow!

The old creep stopped cold and gave me a fishy stare, like I'd insulted him. Fanny tried to cover up...

Tony didn't mean anything, he just doesn't understand.

Yeah, ma. No hard feelings! If you want to overpay, it's your business...

Your wife has been good to me... and I try to be good to her. Here you are, Mrs. Oeden... Mrs. Barrett!

After the ragman paid Fanny, he left. I felt pretty sick inside... you can imagine...

Fanny didn't say what she was going out for, but I knew it was to do some rag-pickin'! Well that was okay with me. That gave me time to rummage through the rubble-crammed attic after some pickin's of my own...

Nice, huh? Bein' married to an old hag wasn't enough! Now I had to find out she was a rag-picker besides. That was the last straw. I'd made up my mind when Fanny announced after lunch...

I'm going out, dear. Don't be too lonely while I'm gone!

Yeah, Fanny! Sure!

I got to find that dough! I got to find that dough and get away! I'm married to a toad-faced rag-picker! I'll go nuts if I have to keep on livin' with her!
I turned that attic upside down but it was no soap. I didn't find a thing...

It was Fannie... callin' me. I went down and got nauseous lookin' at her... that patched and faded dress. The two different colored cotton stockin's and on her feet... no kiddin'... sneakers. She had a dirty sack stuffed pull over her shoulder...

Looks like huntin' was pretty good today, Fanny. How much you got eight bucks worth maybe ten?

Finally Fanny left with her rag sack and I went to work on one of the upstairs rooms. Feelin' through battered moth-eaten furniture, plowin' through the trash-stuffed closet...

It'll take me months to find that dough a year, maybe... unless I'm lucky.

I could tell she knew what I was up to, 'cause she had a smile inside that glinted through her eyes. She was laughin' in her guts 'cause I couldn't find her hoard and it made me mad.

Yeah, that's what I'm doin'... cleanin' up this filthy pigstye! Maybe you don't like that.

I couldn't stand the mess around this house any more. So I started cleanin' up... in the attic! Oh, well... THAT'S NICE.

Fanny didn't seem disturbed about me nosin' around up in the attic, so I figured that's not where the hundred b's was stashed away. I was all on edge waitin' for her to go out again so I could start lookin' somewhere else. But first the gas man turned up...

I could swear he's the same guy that told me about Fanny. Such nice rags, Mrs. Barrett. Such beautiful rag!

After a while I got mad and ripped open the mattress on the old brass bed. I was so busy, I didn't hear Fanny sneak upstairs and creep into the room like a scrawny old cat but suddenly I felt her there...

Fanny... I'm glad to see you're still cleanin' up, Tony.
That's how it went for weeks, every day that ragman came and got practically delirious over some foul rags my wife sold him... Lovely... absolutely lovely, Mrs. Barrett.

And every day, after she went out scroungin' through lord-knows-what trash for rags, I plunged into my treasure hunt... I gotta find it soon! I gotta get out of here! Every minute I stay is time outta my life worse! It's torture!

And she'd come back... knowin' what I was up to, but I didn't give a hang except that she was all the time laughin' at me and I'd get all choked up with hate for her... You men are all alike. When you try to tidy up a house, it looks worse than when you started.

Finally I couldn't take it no more. I couldn't stand Fannie givin' me the horse-laugh. I couldn't stand lookin' at her. So one day, I went down the cellar and started diggin'... but not for her money.

Now, let her come down here! Just let her come.

And when she got home that day, I listened to her call me, but I didn't answer. I made some noise and waited...

Why, Tony! How clever! You're going to bury all the old trash instead of having to carry it outside...

Aw, come off it, baby! You know that's not what I'm doin'...

Fannie looked at me real cold like and whispered sarcastically...

Of course! You're diggin' for treasure! A hundred thousand dollar treasure!

Wrong again! I'm diggin' a grave! Your grave!

Fanny could see by my face I was levelin', it was like she'd never expected this turn of events. She let out a little squeal and started to run. I swung the pick hard...

Gogerghhh!
The pick hooked her deep in her back and she hit the cellar floor like an old log. Then I went to work on that face... that awful ugly face. It was just somethin' I had to do. Like I was gettin' even for havin' degraded myself by makin' love to it all those months... uh... uh... uh... uh...

I was dog-tired from what I'd done so I hit the hay early that night and slept until I heard a knock on the front door. It was the ragman... look, pal. My wife took off on a long trip she won't be back for a couple of weeks, come back then, huh? can't you sell me some rags?

I was ready to slam the door in his face but, just to get rid of the pest, I dragged down some old towels from a closet. He didn't seem happy with them... these aren't very nice rags, Mr. Barrett! I can't pay you much for them...

Forget it, pal! Take 'em... as a gift! Now, go away and don't bother me!

I spent days combin' through the rest of the house. I even tore up the kitchen, smashed about the old stove. He wouldn't let me down... it's got to be here... somewhere! It's gotta stop. I can't quit! I can't.

And to top it all off, that crummy creep kept comin' back. Till this morning, I flipped my lid... I've seen over this dump from attic to cellar! I gave you every rag I could find! I got no more rags! Now, for God's sake, leave me alone!

I've been over this dump from attic to cellar! I gave you every rag I could find! I got no more rags! Mrs. Barrett would have rags for me... now, for God's sake, leave me alone!

Mrs. Barrett would have rags for me now, for God's sake, leave me alone!

Now I'm a guy with a strong conscience, so what with the ragman pesterin' me and Fanny layin' dead in the cellar, I couldn't sleep tonight. Around midnight or so, I heard a noise in the house. I got a gun out of my suitcase and went downstairs for a look...
The sun was comin' from the cellar. I went down. It was him again—In my house... mos'n' around.

I told you I got no more rags now. BUT YOU DO! NICE RAGS! THE CLOTHES ON HER?

He was pointin' to Fanny's grave. He knew I'd killed her, and I knew then I'd have to kill him. I pulled the trigger... once... twice... he didn't even wince...

I emptied the gun at him. Four more shots. But he just stood there.

She needed more than I could give her... someone young... someone like you? That's why I told you about her money! I wanted her to be happy. I shot you six times! Die already!

I kept starin' stupidly at the six holes burned into his chest. Then I snatched up the pick I swung it, catchin' him below the shoulder... sinkin' it into his back.

You're not HUMAN! You're not! There's no blood! You're not even flesh and bone!

Of course not, Mr. Barrett. That's why I sent you to her! She needed more than me! I loved her...

But I knew she could never love a ragman!

Rags! You're nothing but... choke... rags!

That's why I sent you to her! She needed more than me! I loved her...

She's diggin' that rag time music, no doubt, Tony! Well, don't feel bad! Now that you're dead you won't have to do it! They'll do you a grave! That is! Well, kiddies... Next time you hear the old expression: 'Clothes make the man!'... Remember the ragman! Old clothes didn't. In his case! Well, I've got to be shoveling off! Hope you enjoyed the crypt-keeper's new morbid muck-mag. We three shoul' Lunatics will see you next in my putrid periodical, The Haunt of Fear! Till then, keep a stiff...
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