THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! SO YOU MANAGED TO SCRATCH UP ANOTHER DIME FOR YOUR COPY OF MY MAD MENU FROM THE HAUNT OF FEAR! WELL, I'VE COOKED UP A RATHER REVOLTING RECIPE I'M SURE YOU'LL RETCH OVER... SO COME IN! THIS IS THE OLD WITCH, STIRRING UP HER CRUDDY CAULDRON, READY TO DISH OUT ANOTHER TASTY TALE OF TERROR! HERE GOES WITH THE SLIME-SERVING I CALL...

NOBODY THERE!

THE THROBBING SOUND FILLED THE LABORATORY, HAMMERING AWAY LIKE THE AMPLIFIED BEAT OF A PULSATING HEART! THE OLD MAN STOOD WITH HIS ARMS FOLDED, A LOOK OF DEFIANCE ON HIS AGED WRINKLED FACE! HE LEERED DOWN AT THE YOUNGER MAN...

ERIC! WHAT... WHAT DO YOU MEAN: YOU'RE THROUGH? THAT'S WHAT I SAID ALAH! I'M FINISHED! I WON'T HAVE ANY MORE TO DO WITH THIS EVIL!
Eric Monorum, the aged but still famous surgeon, stared at the younger looking Alan Thorky’s wide-eyed face...

Yes, Alan! I’m quitting! And you... you can’t do anything about it! You’re helpless, Alan! Trapped! Trapped & I was that night thirty-three years ago...

I looked up and down the hall... because I didn’t want to be seen! I never knew you were watching...

Kiss me, Eric! Just once more... Someone may see us!

Yes, Alan, I didn’t want to be seen! You knew that, didn’t you? You knew you’d be able to blackmail me...

Hello... Doctor, Huh? I’m sorry! You’ve made a mistake! I’m not...

G’mon, Doctor! I’d know you anywhere! No use pretending where we are. I want to talk to you!

I don’t know you! What would we have to talk about?

Why... we could talk about your wife, Doc! We could talk about what she would do if she found out about Louise & there!

What do you want money? Is this blackmail?

And then, Alan, I noticed how you limped as you walked! Remember, Alan? Remember your club-foot?...

I know all about you, Doc! I’ve followed your fabulous career carefully! Graduated med-school at twenty-two... married a rich society debutante... and now, a famous surgeon!

How much do you want? Name your price...
"SHATTER DOG? SCARED?"

"I SCARED THAT A SCANDAL MIGHT RUIN YOUR REPUTATION. YOU LIKE THOSE HIGH FEES YOUR PARK AVENUE PATIENTS PORK OVER, EH? IF YOUR WIFE FOUND OUT ABOUT LOUISE YOU'D BE KICKED OUT OF THE BLUE-NOSE CROWD."

"THAT'S WHAT I MEAN DOG! I WANT TO WALK LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE... LOOK LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE.

"I'LL... I'LL HAVE TO EXAMINE YOU, I DON'T KNOW WHETHER I CAN DO ANYTHING FOR YOUR FOOT!"

"YOU CAN'T! IT'S INCURABLE! BUT THERE IS A WAY FOR ME TO BE ABLE TO WALK... A REVOLUTIONARY WAY! SOMETHING THAT'S NEVER BEEN DONE WITH HUMAN BEINGS BEFORE!"

"I... I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!"

"'And then you told me, Alan! You told me your mad scheme.'"

"NO! NOT OH LORD, NO! I WON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT..."

"'Your plan sickened me, Alan! But I was trapped! So I agreed! I had to.'"

"NOW YOU'RE ACTING SMART, DOG! YOU GET THE EQUIPMENT SET UP... AND I'LL BE AT YOUR OFFICE IN AN HOUR."
"Yes, Alan! I was trapped! Trapped... and frightened! I went to my office—laboratory and nervously prepared the equipment...

Let's see! Rubber hose... clamps... oxygen... gasp...

I went to the door... opened it! You stood there... the youth in your arms... he's unconscious! I chloroformed him! Help me get him inside.

And then, I did it! I performed that horrible operation! It was almost dawn when you climbed down from the table...

How... how? That's about all!

And then you went away! I prayed I'd never see you again! Oh, the nightmares I had... trying to forget that horrible thing I'd done...

No! No! No! I... Huh!

Eric? You all right? You were having a bad dream!

I'm... I'm all right, Brenda! It... it's nothing! Go to sleep!

Good-night, Eric!

It was more than ten years later when you came back! I'd almost forgotten! Almost...

Hello, Doc! Yes, it's me! Alan Thorky! I... I want you to examine me! I think there's something wrong!

You!
"It was cancer, wasn't it Alan? You had cancer? The incurable malignant kind..."

Then we've got to do it again! It's the only way out!

No! No, I won't perform that fiendish operation again!

Aren't you forgetting something, Doc? That kid... that kid we killed!

"You...you'd tell..."

"I was helpless, Alan! Helplessly trapped! There was blood on our hands! A young man's blood! The one you'd brought to my laboratory over ten years before! And now, you were asking me to do it again..."

That's smart, Doc! After all, you have your reputation to protect! I'll be back... tonight! Be ready!

"And so, for the second time, I prepared the equipment necessary for that horrible operation! And that night, for the second time, you brought a victim to my laboratory..."

Examine him first, this time! I don't want what happened last time to happen again! Make sure he's healthy!

"And once again, I did it! I killed that poor man! And you got up from the operating table healthy and cancer-free..."

S'long, Doc! And... thanks!

Don't come back! Don't ever come back!

"And once again, I had those horrible nightmares..."

Eric! Eric! Wake up!

"Huh? Wha... what's wrong Brenda? Oh! I... I must have been dreaming..."
'But you still weren't satisfied, were you, Alan? Twelve years later, you were back! You'd discovered something wonderful about those operations!'  

Eternal youth?! I don't understand!

That's what I said. Ooo! Eternal youth!

Just look at my face! When I first came to you, I was thirty-one. Now... twenty-two years later...

You... You look thirty-five... at the most!

Exactly! It's those operations you performed! An operation like that performed every ten years, will keep me looking like this indefinitely!

Okay, Doc! Have I told you anything to go with it? Get someone else!

All right! All right! Come tonight! I'll... be ready!

Am I mad, Cotton Mon-Drum? Look at you! Look how you've aged! You're fifty-one... and you look it! Me? I'm fifty-three...

I won't have anything to do with it! Get someone else!

All right! All right! Come tonight! I'll...

That was ten years ago, Alan! That night ten years ago, I performed this evil... this horror... for the third and last time...

See you in ten years, Doc!

'But I didn't die, Alan! And so, this afternoon, you came for the fourth time...'

Gasp! Alan! I'm here, Doc... as I promised I'd be...
'And so, tonight, you brought me our fourth victim — help me set him on the table, Eric!'

'You hadn’t aged very much in those ten years, Alan! You still look as though you were in your thirties! Not bad for a man of sixty three, eh, Eric?'

'Alan! Let’s leave well enough alone! Please!'

'Hold me, Alan! I’m not going to kill him! I’m not going to leave him like this! Go on with the operation!

Eric stood with his arms folded, staring down at Alan...

Eric took a needle from the instrument tray and stared down at Alan...

Eric! No! Don’t leave me!

Eric! No! Don’t puncture the blood hose!

Brenda died last year, Alan! I’m old man! Life doesn’t mean anything anymore! I’m going to the police and confess everything!

Eric! No! I’m not going to kill him! I’m not going to give you his body!'
The head on the table. Stared in horror as Eric jabbed the needle into one of the throbbing hoses that ran to its neck...

Eric! I'll die! And the secret of exchanging living bodies will die with you, Alan!

Eric rolled the table with the unconscious fourth victim lying upon it past the pleading head.

Eric! Have pity! This time the police won't find an unidentified decapitated corpse to puzzle them all.

Eric! Come back! Good-bye, Alan...

And then the noxious red fluid stopped gushing from the punctured tubing. The head & eyes blazed. Alan. Thony... whose body had died thirty-three years before... had finally joined it...

Hee, hee. Doesn't that top all kiddies? So Eric had been switching Alan's head from body to body! Well, that's one way to keep one's youth, eh? Hee, hee! As for Eric's fate... well... he's in the booby hatch now... padded cell department! Who'd believe a story like this? Hee, hee! And Alan wasn't much help in corroborating Eric's story! A regular deadhead, that boy! Dig you later? Here's V.K.!
HEM, HEM! WELCOME TO THE VAULT OF HORROR, CREEPS! THIS IS YOUR HOST IN HOWLS, THE VAULT-KEEPER, SPEAKING... ER... SPEAKING! GONE W. SIT DOWN! GANE TO JOIN A RED-HOT POKER GAME? I HAVE A FEW EXTRA RED-HOT POKERS! NO? OH! THEN I MIGHT AS WELL GO NIGHT INTO MY HORROR YARN! I CALL THIS SPINE-TINGLING, BLOOD-GURDLING TALE...

ACREEP in the DEEP!

The moonlight shimmereed over the nervous black water on the lake. The man adjusted the rubber diving mask over his face and started down the silken sand beach. The spear and lamp hung limply in his hands. The black rubber flipper on his feet slapped against the wet lake shore.

Philip had brought Margaret, his young bride, to his lakeside get-a-ceat almost a year before. She'd stood on the porch of the cabin and announced:

OH, PHIL! IT'S BEAUTIFUL! SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL!

I TOLD YOU YOU'D LIKE LIVING HERE, MANGE! O'WON! I'LL SHOW YOU MY STUDIO... WHERE I PAINT!
The water lapped against the man's ankles; he flicked on the lamp! Its yellow beam reached out into the night...

Philip had gotten into his suit and taken marine out in the rowboat! When he'd reached that 'special' spot, he'd slipped on the rubber flippers.

What are they for, Phil, dear?

Spear fish, Phil? At night? How?

Spear fish, Marge! I have a water-tight lamp! The fish are paralyzed by its light! They freeze just long enough for me to...

Simple, Marge! Now it was cold! Cold...like that night...

Then he'd donned the rubber mask with the circular glass window... and that? What's that for?

Then he'd lit his water-tight lamp, taken his three-pronged spear, and...

Well! Here goes!

You look like a man from Mars!

Speed! Kick these things and you really shoot through the water...

Yes, the water had been cold that night! The bubbles from the dive had cleared away and Philip had kicked downward into the blackness...

There goes one... a beauty...
The Man moved forward into the lake! The water lapped against his thighs! The moonlight flashed on the surface...
The fish had flashed through the lamp beam! Philip had kicked after it, but it'd swerved sharply and shot off into the blackness! So Philip had come to the surface for breath...
Gasp...gasp... missed him, darn it! Philip! You're so far from the boat!
That strange sound? Philip had heard it then, but he hadn't thought about it...
I'm okay, honey! See you...

He'd gone back down! That time he'd found one! A nice-sized lake trout! He'd chased it and speared it just as his breath had given out! When he'd popped to the surface, Margie was screaming...

Silence! Just the water lapping against the boards! Phil'd shot the lamp in the boat's direction! It was out of range! There'd been a splash...
Margie! Margie? Speak to me!

And then the screaming had stopped, and he'd heard Margie kicking around in the boat...
Look, Margie! Isn't she a beauty?

That noise again? That queer noise! Like someone beating an old dusty carpet! Phil'd started toward the boat, calling her name! No answer! Then, when his light could reach it, he'd seen...

Good lord! Margie! Margie!
The man muttered to himself as the water sucked and gurgled around his waist...

*Muttered* AS THE WATER SUCKED AND GURGLED AROUND HIS WAIST...

*Coughed* Couldn't swim! Couldn't swim a stroke!

Philip had dived again and again, looking for Margie! Finally, after half an hour, he'd crawled onto the overturned rowboat... Breathless... Sobbing... Margie! Margie... Sob... Sob...

And he'd watched from his porch the next day, as the boats moved back and forth... Dragging for her body...

But they never found her body! For three days, they dragged... with no luck! So Philip had cursed the cabin, and the lake... and gone away...

But they never found her body! For three days, they dragged... with no luck! So Philip had cursed the cabin, and the lake... and gone away...

I'm sure sorry's I see yeh so, Phil! We'll all miss you 'round here! I'll try and get a good price for the place!

But three months later Phil'd come back...

But three months later Phil'd come back...

And the man muttered to himself as the water sucked and gurgled around his waist...

I'm sure sorry's I see yeh so, Phil! We'll all miss you 'round here! I'll try and get a good price for the place!

What do you mean you've been havin' trouble getting rid of the place? I've got to have the money!

Sorry, Phil! No one's buyin' these days! First your wife's disappearance—And now these mysterious deaths...

I'm sure sorry's I see yeh so, Phil! We'll all miss you 'round here! I'll try and get a good price for the place!

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Deaths?? What deaths?

Oh, that's right. You been away? You couldn't'a-known! YEP! Deaths? Three! All in two months! Time! Found their bodies—floatin' on the lake?

Drowned? No! No water in the lungs! Their blood had been drained!
The water slid upward, over the man's chest! He moved forward slowly... deliberately.

Blood... drained! YEP!! Folks say here's leeches in the lake! Nobody wants to buy now.

Leeches? YEP! So that's why I can't sell your place Phil! Not now... anyway! I suggest you start livin' there again! Till all this blows over!

I'll... have to... Ed! I... I haven't earned a dime since... since Margaret drowned! I... I can't seem to paint anymore!

Oh, you'll start again, Phil! Maybe bein' back at the old studio will help!

So Philip had come back... come back to the lake! And then... about a week later, the fourth victim was found...

Well! Not a drop! Blood completely drained.

He... he... went swimming... so... last night! I... I told him not to go! The... the leeches... so...

Within a matter of months, the lakeside homes had all been boarded up and abandoned! Ed had many more to sell beside Phil's...

What's up, Ed? Why the urgent call?

Sit down, Phil! Listen! I got a theory!

Theory, Ed? What about?

About their bodies... and the leeches! There ain't no leeches in that lake, Phil! Never were! No, it ain't leeches what's been drainin' the blood from them bodies! It's... it's...
The man looked down as the water climbed over the mask! The man was searching for something...

You're mad, Ed! Is it? Weren't all those people swimming in the lake at night?

Yes, but... but a vampire! Yes, a vampire... in the lake!

But... but Margie... my wife! She wasn't swimming in the lake! She...

I'm not including your wife in this. Phil! Her death was different! Besides! We never found her...

That sound! That sound Phil had heard the night Margie had drowned! Like someone beating an old carpet... like... like...

Like the beating of wings... large wings!

Huh? You say somethin', Phil?

Phil had darted out of Ed's office...

Phil? Where you goin'? To get your lake vampire, Ed?

...sped back to the cabin... ripped the three-pronged fork-end from its long wooden shaft... and...

Shoap! Got to get it good... and... shooap...
The man was swimming now...kicking into the blackness! His lamp tunneled into the inky liquid before him! Suddenly...

**EYES BLANKING AT ME...**

**IT** came at him...SLOWLY...WHITE AND TURNING! The light gleamed on its shiny fangs...

**JUST A LITTLE CLOSER?**
**JUST A...LITTLE...**

**SUDDENLY, IT FLASHED AT HIM...** ITS SHARP LITTLE TEETH LASHING AT HIS THROAT! PHILIP RAISED THE NEEDLE-LIKE WOODEN SPEAR, KICKED HARD WITH HIS RUBBER FLIPPERS, DODGED THE ATTACK...

...AND, AS IT TURNED SO THAT THE LIGHT FELL ON ITS FACE, PHILIP LUNGED, RAMMING THE STAKE THROUGH ITS VAMPIRE HEART...

**MARGIE'S LIFELESS BODY SETTLED TO THE LAKE FLOOR, THE WOODEN SPEAR STICKING ANGULARLY FROM HER CHEST...SENDING UP LITTLE BUBBLES...**

**AS PHIL MOVED OUT OF THE LAKE INTO THE COLD NIGHT AIR...**

**HEH, HEH! YEP THAT'S THE STORY, KIDDIES! MARGIE WAS ATTACKED BY A VAMPIRE AS SHE SAT WATCHING PHIL FISH! WHEN THE BOAT TURNED OVER, SHE BECAME THE FIRST UNDERWATER VAMPIRE IN HUMAN HISTORY! WELL! NOW I'LL TURN YOU BACK TO THE OLD WITCH! OH, BY THE WAY? NEXT TIME YOU GO SWIMMING AT MONT, BE CAREFUL! HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF, Y'KNOW! 'BYE!**
Duke Aldo Braggadocio and Duke Gino Severini were two powerful nobles of 15th century Tuscany. Their duchys were in neighboring provinces and they hated one another! One boasted that he had more brave men-at-arms to defend his land, the other bragged that his castle was impregnable to any attack!

Duke Braggadocio was famous for his fertile vineyards and rare Chianti wine-making. Duke Severini charged Braggadocio with having diverted streams from his land to supply his rich vineyards with an elaborate irrigation system. Severini’s grapes were quite inferior, as was his soil! But he had something to make Braggadocio envious... sanctuaries of beautifully plumed live birds from all parts of the world!

Both Dukes were young and impetuous and madly in love with dark-eyed Gracioso Bevacqua, a nobleman’s daughter! Gracioso was equally impressed by the power and possessions of both suitors. When they proposed marriage to her separately, but simultaneously, she knew she must choose one by the process of elimination!

One night, while sitting in Severini’s bird-inhabited gardens, her eyes glittered like starlight on a stiletto as she wheedled and cajoled the Duke into undertaking a quest... to prove his love for her. He was to disguise himself, gain entry into Braggadocio’s domain, and steal a bottle of rare Chianti from the latter’s wine cellar. She would know the bottle! It would bear the personal seal and coat-of-arms of the Casa Braggadocio.

Then she paid an unexpected call upon Duke Braggadocio, whom she found strolling amongst his sun-lit, fruit-laden trellises. The Duke was soon mesmerized, too, by the grape-stained lips that spoke of a quest for the proof of love!

Braggadocio was to disguise himself, slip unsuspected into Severini’s “impregnable” duchy, and pluck a feather from a blue heron tethered in his rival’s gardens. The exquisite bird was the favorite of his master!

Braggadocio had the flowing blue feather in his hand when the deprived and indignant heron beat its wings in wild alarm! The din created by the frightened bird attracted the Captain-of-the-guard and his soldiers. Duke Severini was absent at the time, being away on his quest. Without waiting for their Duke’s counsel... nor his return... they chopped off the violating Duke’s limbs! Then they sent the shaft of Braggadocio’s dead body back to his duchy with just the calamus of the feather which had been stripped of all of its flowing azure bars.

A few days later, the body of Duke Severini came home to his duchy in a cask full of wine!

Braggadocio’s men had captured him... and drowned him in a barrel of the rarest Chianti!
Once upon a time... long long ago... there was a kingdom... an unhappy kingdom! The reason that this kingdom was unhappy was because the people in this unhappy kingdom were unhappy! And the reason that the people in this unhappy kingdom were unhappy was because the people were starving!

The baby is crying! The baby is hungry! Beelzebub, we have no food!
Now high up on a mountain, overlooking this unhappy kingdom, was a majestic castle...

...and in this majestic castle was a majestic dining-room...

...and in this majestic dining-room sat a majestic king...

All day long, this majestic king would sit in the majestic dining-room (of the majestic castle high up on the mountain overlooking the unhappy kingdom) and eat... and eat... and...

Chomp... chomp...

Now it seems that in this majestic castle was a kitchen! And in this kitchen was a chef... the ROYAL CHEF...

ROYAL CHEF!

Y-y-yes, your majesty?

MORE FOOD!

All day long, while the majestic king ate in the majestic dining-room (of the majestic castle high up on the mountain overlooking the unhappy kingdom), the royal chef would soon pogo poni him...

Eat... eat... eat! That's all he does is eat! The fat pig!

Hurry! More food, royal chef!
And every night, after the majestic king had stuffed himself until he could eat no more...

NO... BURRRRPP... MORE, Y-Y-YES, YOUR MAJESTY!

...the royal chef would leave the castle and make his way down the mountain to his starving family...

FAT PIG! While the people starve, he stuffs himself so full he cannot move!

When the royal chef would arrive at his ramshackle house, his starving family would meet him at the door...

DADDY!... HUNGRY, WE'RE... DADDY! DID YOU... DID YOU BRING ANYTHING TO HIGHT, DEAR?

I managed to steal a drumstick that still has a little meat on it! HERE!

BOOY!

And while his starving family would nibble the last bits of meat still clinging to the stolen drumstick, the royal chef would watch... and simmer...

PIG! BLUTTONOUS PIG!

I was caught... stealing a calf! They... choke...

Those who tried to steal food from the king were always severely punished...

BEELZEBUB! What happened to your hands?

But the other people of the unhappy kingdom were not as fortunate as the royal chef's family! They could not steal any food! The majestic king kept his livestock herds well guarded...

Look, captain! A PEASANT... He is stealing a Calf!
SO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNHAPPY KINGDOM GREW MORE AND MORE UNHAPPY...

THE BABY... SOB... HAS... SOB... STARVED TO DEATH, SEELZEBUB?

I... SOB... I TRIED, HASTURTIUM!

MORE FOOD, ROYAL CHEF!

Y-Y-YES, YOUR MAJESTY!

While the majestic eins snore fatheh and fatter...

AND HE'D SLIMMER...

...IT'S MY TURN, TONIGHT!

...IT'S MY TURN TO SNUCK THE JUICHE FROM THE BONE!

Children! Children! Please!

Besides...

He would watch his starving family hisshe the scraps he'd stolen...

DADDY!... Hungry. Did you we-EE... DADDY! Bring anything tonight, Dean?

No! No! It's my turn! My turn!

And he'd simmer...

DADDY!... Daddy!... Bring anything tonight, Dean?

The royal chef prepared to go home! He poked around in theDangerous searchings for a bone!

PICKED CLEAN! Not a scrap of food! The pig! The fat pig!

Then, one night...

No suhrehhh! More royal chef!

Y-Y-YES, YOUR MAJESTY!
Suddenly, the royal chef spotted a meat-laden bone on the table before the sleeping king.

If... I... could... tiptoe... in... and...

But just as the royal chef was lifting the meat-laden bone, the king woke up.

Burrppp! Huh? J-J-just cleaning up the table, Your Majesty!

Burrppp! But I'm not through! Give me that bone!

Yes! Give... burrrrrp... it to me!

H-her, Your Majesty!

Chomp! Chomp!

Oh! Pigs!

What? What did you call me?

A pig! You're a pig! An over-stuffed fat pig! Do you know what a pig is good for?
And so, for the last time, the royal chef made his way down the mountain to his starving family...

**Fat pig!** Well, he'll stuff himself no more!

**This time he carried a large sack. When he arrived home...**

Daddy... Hungry, did a we're... Daddy... A feast! Feast!

**MELVIN!** w-what did you do to the king?

**But, daddy! Where did you...**

...Get the food?

**The fat pig! The gluttonous over-stuffed pig!**

Hee-hee! Hot dog! There's a tasty little grim fairy tale en' kiddies! As for the poor starving people of the unhappy kingdom... When they found out that their troubles were all wrapped up, they all lived happily ever after!

Oh, by the way! If you're thinking of visiting that little kingdom, don't drive! Leave your car home! Hee, hee! There's no place to pork! And now the crypt keeper awaits! 'Bye!

---

The royal chef reached into the huge sack...

**What do you usually do with a huge fat pig? Look!**
HEH, HEH! YEP, IT'S YOUR CRYPT-KEEPER AGAIN, FIENDS... WELCOMING YOU ONCE MORE TO THE CRYPT OF TERROR! FOR MY SPOT IN THE OLD WITCH'S SLIME SHEET, I'M GOING TO TELL YOU A YELP-YARN ADAPTED FROM A STORY BY ONE OF AMERICA'S TOP FANTASY WRITERS... RAY BRADBURY! MR. BRADBURY ORIGINALLY CALLED THIS YARN 'THE COFFIN'! I, BEING A CLEVER TALE-TELLER, MYSELF, CALL IT...

THE COFFIN!

Richard Braling had listened with increasing difficulty and much curiosity for a number of days to the banging and rattling about in his eldest brother's workshop. Finally, he could stand it no longer...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, CHARLES? GO AWAY AND LET ME ALONE! CAN'T YOU SEE I'M BUSY?
CHARLES BRALING WAS A DYING MAN... A BADLY DYING MAN? HE SEEMED TO BE IN A GREAT HURRY, BETWEEN RACKING COUGHS AND SPITTLINGS, TO PIECE TOGETHER ONE LAST INVENTION...

PLEASE, CHARLES! I'LL BE DEAD IN ANOTHER WEEK AND I'M... I'M BUILDING A COFFIN!

A COFFIN, MY DEAR CHARLIE! THAT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A COFFIN! A COFFIN ISN'T THAT COMPLEX! COME ON, HOW MUCH ARE YOU UP TO?

I TELL YOU, IT'S A COFFIN! AN ODD COFFIN. YES, BUT NEVERTHLESS... A COFFIN!

BUT IT WOULD BE EASIER TO BUY ONE! AND THAT TRANSPARENT TOP! WHO EVER HEARD OF A COFFIN LID YOU CAN SEE THROUGH? WHAT GOOD IS A TRANSPARENT LID TO A CORPSE?

AND THAT TRANSPARENT TOP! WHO EVER HEARD OF A COFFIN LID YOU CAN SEE THROUGH? WHAT GOOD IS A TRANSPARENT LID TO A CORPSE?

OH, JUST NEVER YOU MIND AT ALL! TUM-TUM... DA-DEE.

YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY LYING! WHY, THAT COFFIN IS A GOOD TWELVE FEET LONG! SIX FEET LONGER THAN NORMAL SIZE!

YES!

AND THAT TRANSPARENT TOP! WHO EVER HEARD OF A COFFIN LID YOU CAN SEE THROUGH? WHAT GOOD IS A TRANSPARENT LID TO A CORPSE?

OH, BUT OF COURSE, YOU DON'T KNOW HOW IT WOULD DO THAT! DO YOU? HOW STUPID OF ME! WELL, I SHAN'T TELL YOU IF THIS COFFIN COULD BE Mass-PRODUCED, OH, WHAT MONEY PEOPLES WOULD SAVE!

I ONLY WISH I MIGHT LIVE TO PATENT THIS AMAZING COFFIN! IT WOULD BE A GOD-SEND TO ALL THE POOR PEOPLES OF THE WORLD! I THINK HOW IT WOULD ELIMINATE THE EXPENSES OF FUNERALS...

OH, GO TO BLAZES!
Richard stormed out of his elder brother's shop! Poor Richard! Yes, it had been an unpleasant life! Young Richard had always been such a bounder, he'd never had two coins going to clink together at one time! All of his money had come from Old Brother Charlie, who had the indecency to remind him of it all the time...

SELFISH OLD TIGHTWAD! Well, that's what I've been waiting for, Charles... For you to die! So ahead, you old fool! Hammer your life away!

One morning, the old brother toddled upstairs and stole the insides out of the electric phonograph...

Another morning, he raided the gardener's greenhouse...

Still another time, Charles received a delivery from a medical company...

Sign here, please!

Yes... cough... thank you!

Richard was never allowed to buy anything for himself; it was always bought for him... Given to him! He had to ask for everything, even writing paper! Richard considered himself quite a martyr to have put up with taking things from that rickety old brother for so long! So, now, while the hammering and the murmuring excursions went on, Richard just sat... and waited...

Finally, on the fourteenth morning, Old Charlie announced...

I'm finished!

AND DROPPED DEAD?
Richard...without showing his inner excitement...Anson went to the window, watched the sunlight playfully glinting among the empty pat beetle-like champagne bottles, then picked up the phone and perfunctorily dialed a number...He looked to the stairs where Dear Old Brother Charlie lay peacefully sprawled against the banister...This is the railing residence! Will you send around a wicker, please? Yes! For Brother Charlie! Yes! Thank you!

Later, as the mortuary people were taking Brother Charlie out in their wicker, they received instructions...An ordinary casket! No funeral service! Put him in a pine coffin! He would have preferred it that way...simple! Good-bye!

After they left, Richard rubbed his hands together...Now we shall see about this 'coffin' built by Dear Charlie! I do not suppose he will realize he is not being buried in his 'special' box! Hah!

Richard darted into the shop! The coffin sat before the wide-flung French windows, the lid shut, complete and neat, all put together like the fine inwards of a Swiss watch! It was vast, and rested upon a long table with rollers beneath for easy maneuvering...

The coffin interior, as Richard peered through the transparent lid, was six feet long...

There must be a good three feet of false body at both head and foot of the coffin, then! Three feet at each end covered by secret panels which, when I find the way of opening them, will reveal...

Of course! Money! It would be just like Old Charlie to suck his riches into his grave with himself, leaving me with not a cent to buy a bottle with! The old #x?!!
Richard raised the transparent lid and felt about, but found no hidden buttons! There was a small sign, studiously inked on white paper, thumbtacked to the side of the satin-lined box.

What's this? 'The Brailing Economy Casket!' Copyright, April, 1832.

Simple to operate! Hmph!

Richard snorted thinly. Who did Charlie think he was fooling? There was more writing! He read on...

'Directions: Simply place body in coffin... and music will start! What? It can't be...? Don't tell me all this work has been for a...? We'll find out...!'
The music began to play—it seemed to come from somewhere within the coffin! It was green music! Organ music, very slow and melancholy, typical of Gothic arches and long black tapers! It smelled of earth and whispers! It echoed between stone walls! It was so sad that one almost coudn’t listening to it! It was music of potted plants and crimson and blue stained-glass windows! It was late sun at twilight and a cold wind blowing! It was a dawn with only fog and a far away foghorn moaning...

You old fool! You old fool!

Richard’s eyes roved aimlessly about! His fingers tapped soft little rhythms on the satin shrouds! Through the transparent lid he saw sunlight shooting through the open French windows... dust particles dancing on it! It was a lovely day! The organ music quieted! The sermon began...

...to give him our homage and our due...

Charlie, bless you! That’s your voice! A mechanical funeral, in heaven, organ music and... lecture? And Charlie giving his own oration for himself!

The soft voice continued...

Richard! Why, I’m Richard!

Richard was a fine man! We shall see no finer in our time!

My... my name again!

It was hardly a mistake, using that name twice... Richard Braling! Richard Braling! Whim! Whim! Whim! Flowers! Six dozen bright blue, red, yellow, sun-brilliant flowers leaped up from behind the coffin on concealed springs...

Help!

In life, Richard Braling was a connoisseur of great and good things! He savored life, as one savors of a rare wine... holding it upon the lips...
Little shinino spades leaped out of the moose of the basket. They began to dig. Richard saw the spades toss up dirt. The coffin settled, bumped, settled. Bump and settled... Ashes to ashes... dust to dust...

Now it is the time when we must consign this part of this man to the earth.

Richard Sralins... Richard Sralins... Richard Sralins...

The coffin was deep! The music played! The last thing Richard Sralins saw was the spading arms of the Sralins economy gasket reeling up and pulling the hole in after it.

Richard Sralins... Richard Sralins... Richard Sralins...

The record was stuck! Nobody minded! Nobody was listening...

Some time he did not scream. His tongue was motionless in his anaesthetized mouth... a pump started to work; while his blood drained out one side of his body, his right wrist was punctured, held a needle moved into it, and the second pump began to forge formaldehyde into him...