Here are tales that will usher you into
The Haunt of Fear

Featuring...

The Old Witch
The Vault-Keeper
The Crypt-Keeper

No. 24
April

10¢
I was uplifted from the depths of despair by this revealing experience! I laughed so hard I almost bust the binding! I was the center of attraction... the star. Everybody wanted to dance with me! I was rushed! So be popular like me! Wear panic! Run down and get into your copy at your local newsstand. If you're the shy type and would rather dress at home, then you can subscribe by filling out this coupon and mailing to:

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DRINK TO ME ONLY WITH THINE EYES...

Night after night, Bethy had watched her husband, Jake Watson, drink from the brown earthenware jug. Jake was an expert with the jug from long years of devoted practice, never spilling a drop of the precious liquid the burning fluid had gurgled endlessly down his throat. As if he'd had a thirst that he could never quench...

GLUK... GLUKK... GLUKKK... HMMMMPH!
More often than not, firing his blood, the cheap mountain swill would bring out the beast in Jake. He would turn angry, blood-shot eyes on his woman and have his rightful way with her...

Yet she'd never kept the jug from him... never tried to hide it or claim they couldn't afford to buy more. In fact, like a dutiful wife, she'd always plied him with the swill, regardless of the consequences.

It was those times that Bethy would dread the most, she almost preferred the beatings. She could hardly bear his slobbering kisses... hardly choke down her utter loathing and disgust... her hate...

Betty would end up bruised and more, barely able to crawl into her bed.

Sometimes the liquor would have the opposite effect on Jake, and he would drag Bethy with a different objective...

His urbane arms would almost crack her ribs, he would pant and gasp, breathing heavy fumes into her face, and mumble his animal wants to her...

It was those times that Betty would dread the most, she almost preferred the beatings. She could hardly bear his slobbering kisses... hardly choke down her utter loathing and disgust... her hate...

To those passing by, it was nothing out of the ordinary. The cries... the thuds of hard fists on soft flesh... were a time-honored custom among the mountain-folk...

No'OOOOOh! J sure does a good job! Never could git mah old lady t' screech like thot!

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BETHY DID NOT DARE RUN AWAY, FOR THERE WERE TIMES WHEN JAKE WOULD WIPE HIS THICK LIPS ACROSS HIS DIRTY SLEEVE AND THREATEN...

YER MY WOMAN, GAL, IF'N EVER YOU FETCHED UP WITH ANOTHER MAN, I'D KILL YUN BOTH...SMASH YER BRAINS OUT WITH MAH JUG THAT'S WHAT I'D DO.

YAE, JAKE!

BUT BETHY HAD 'FETCHED UP' WITH ANOTHER MAN. CLEM PARKER, THE MAN WHO SUPPLIED JAKE WITH HIS PRECIOUS MOONSHINE. BETHY AND CLEM HAD IT ALL Figured out. He'd come to deliver his wares during the day, when Jake was away.

OH, CLEM! IF I COULD ONLY RUN AWAY WITH YOU...TODAY...NOW. BUT HE'D FOLLOW US...HE'D KILL US BOTH, I KNOW HIM!

WE WON'T HAVE T' RUN AWAY, HONEY!

CLEM WOULD HAND HER A FRESHLY FILLED JUG FROM HIS WAGON AND TAKE AWAY THE EMPTY...

JUS' KEEP FEEDIN' HIM THIS ROTTEN CORN LIKER. IT DON'T COST ME NUTHIN', AH MAKE IT IN MAH OWN STILL. LET HIM DROWN HISSELF IN IT! LET HIM DRINK NISSELF T'DEATH!

YES, CLEM! I'LL FEED HIM MORE...MORE...MORE...

IT HAD BEEN A YEAR NOW, AND JAKE HAA SHOWN NO SIGNS OF WEAKENING UNDER THE RIVER OF BREW HE SWALLOWED EAGERLY...

SEE, BETHY? I'CHOP WOOD FASTER'N EVER THAT'S GOOD CORN LIKER WE GIT FROM CLEM. IT'S MAKIN' ME STRONGER ALL THE TIME, BY GAR!

IF THAT AXE WOULD ONLY SLIP, JUST ONCE!

SO WHEN CLEM CAME

THE LIKKER AIN'T LICKIN' HIM, CLEM! CAIN'T WE GET RID OF HIM FASTER?

AH GOT AN IDEE, BETHY! BRING HIM OVER T' SEE MAH STILL TONIGHT. IT'S BACK O' SKUNK HILL!

BETHY KNEW HOW TO GET JAKE TO THE STILL EASILY ENOUGH, SHE LIED.

EMPTY!? WHY DIDN'T CLEM BRING A JUG TODAY?

REVENOOGERS AROUND, JAKE. CLEM'S SCARED T'DELIVER. WE GOTTA GO GIT IT OURSELVES!

IT WAS A ROUGH TRAIL PAST THE FORK, THROUGH THE THORN-PATCH, UP OVER THE ROCKS TO THE STILL BACK OF SKUNK HILL. JAKE CURSED ALL THE WAY, BUT HIS THIRST MADE HIM GO FASTER...FASTER...

I SMELL IT NOW, BETHY! G'MON! G'MON, YUH CREEPIN' TURTLE

GASP...JAKE!

I'M COMIN'...
IT'S US, QUICK, CLEM!
WHO'S THERE? STOP OR AH SHOOT?
IT'S US, CLEM! G'ME A DRINK? I'M SPITTIN' COTTON!
JAKE LED HIS GUESTS INTO THE SHED, POINTED TO A ROW OF JUGS
HELP YERSELF, JAKE! AN' WHILE YER HERE, COME ON IN BACK AN' SEE THE STILL. AH MAKE THE BEST STUFF IN THESE PARTS, IF'N AH HAFTA SAY SO MUNSELF!
LEAD TH' WAY, CLEM!
BEHIND THE SHED, IN A CLEARING, THE STILL STOOD SILOUETTED IN THE MOONLIGHT.
THERE'S THE MASH COOKIN' AND OVER THERE'S THE VAT WHERE IT'S DISTILLED OUT WANTA TAKE A LOOK, JAKE? THERE'S MORE LIKKER IN THERE THAN YOU'LL EVER GUZZLE...

JAKE'S EYES GLEAMED GREEDILY AS HE STARED DOWN INTO THE BIG VAT FULL OF THE FIERY LIQUID HIS THROAT CRAVED, AND HE SPOKE WORDS WHICH HAD A SIGNIFICANCE HE WOULD SHORTLY DISCOVER.
LORDY, THAT'S BEEYOOTIFUL STUFF! AH COULD SWIM IN IT!
STRONG HANDS PUSHED JAKE OVER THE VAT GRIM.
HELP YERSELF, IT'S ALL YOURS, JAKE!

JAKE STRUGGLED WILDLY, TRYING TO CLAW BACK UP THE SMOOTH SLIMY SIDES OF THE VAT AS THE TWO LOVERS WATCHED AND LAUGHED. FINALLY HE SLIPPED, SCREAMING, BELOW THE BURNING SURFACE. ONE HAND ERUPTED, CLUTCHING UP AT THE MOUNTAIN NIGHT.
WE DID LIKE WE SAID, CLEM! WE LET HIM DROWN HIMSELF IN IT!

THE HAND VANISHED, ONLY BUBBLES AROSE. JAKE HAD HIS FILL AT LAST... IN HIS THROAT... HIS STOMACH... HIS LUNGS, SOON HIS BLOATED CORPSE ROSE TO THE SURFACE... BLOODSHOT EYES STARING... MUTE WITNESSES TO THE DRINKING BOUT WITH DEATH...

THE BODY CLEM! IF YOUR M'nH SEE IT TOWMORROW...
DON'T WORRY, AH THOUGHT OF EVERYTHIN'! THIS SACK OF LYE WILL TAKE CARE O' THAT! EAT THE BODY UP ALL NIGHT. EVEN THE BONES, THERE'LL BE NOTHIN' LEFT O' JAKE BY MORNIN'...
After Clem had poured the lye into the vat, he and Beth went back to the shed...

*Come inside, Clem! It's your place now! Take me home.*

Clem snatched a jug full of moonshine, and he and Beth hurried, arm and arm, to the cabin where Jake would drink no more.

*Come inside, Clem! It's your place now! That's right! We don't have t' worry 'bout Jake comin' home.*

Laughter rang out from within Jake's cabin... giggling passionate laughter, punctuated by swigs of moonshine, while out past Skunk Hill, the silence of the grave overhung the deserted still... silence broken only by the steady drip-drip from the loose spigot of the vat...

The oozing liquid dripped earthward, forming a puddle in the soil below the vat, standing silently in the deserted mountain clearing.

It slid and slurped slowly along like a huge snail or slug that had crawled out from beneath some slimy rock, and it seemed to have a destination. It left the clearing, climbed over the hill, slithered smoothly over the rocks.

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It was a strange puddle, slimy and viscous. It did not soak into the dirt as an ordinary liquid would. It lay there...shimmering...quivering...and then, toward dawn, it moved...

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It moved as if it were alive... as if, perhaps, the lye, by dissolving living tissue long impregnated and now submerged in a preservative alcohol bath, had created a loathsome form of creeping liquid life...

It slid and slurped slowly along like a huge snail or slug that had crawled out from beneath some slimy rock, and it seemed to have a destination. It left the clearing, climbed over the hill, slithered smoothly over the rocks.

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...through the thorny growths... past the fork... and on to the house whose lights still gleamed into the coming dawn...

C'mon, Beshy! Ish almosh jus' one mornin'. We've celebrated a mo' drink, all night! Now, lesha... Clem!
Outside, the raccoon’s screams died to a gurgling death rattle. Clem stumbled about in the grey dawn, searching for the hidden trap. And then he heard the sound...behind him. The horrifying gurgling slithering sound.

Clem whirled...gasped...stood rooted in paralyzed terror at what he saw glinting in the dawn’s light, quivering like jelly, slithering toward him instinctively, he raised his rifle, fired again and again.

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The rifle slugs tore into the fleshy slime, spattering droplets which quickly reformed with the main body. But the holes closed behind the bullets with a soft sucking sound. The thing did not stop...did not even slow down. It kept coming...

Clem raised his foot to stamp at it as it flowed eagerly toward his boots. That was his mistake...

Bethy came running, summoned by the blood-curdling screams of her new man or what was left of him. Clem was half-gone now, sinking into the slimy pool. She looked...horrified...and then she saw the two blood-shot eyes...

Bethy reached for her man pulled at the only thing she could grasp. Clem’s hair...
But she had no time to be sick, for the closed door did not shut out the creeping fluid horror...

Oh, Lord! It's coming in beneath the door-crack...

An hour later, sunlight streamed in through the window. It was morning. She'd sat, huddled in misery, sick, waiting, and now she'd won. She'd kept out the hideous, revolting form that was once her husband. Her courage flowed back...

Somebody'll come by, and I'll be able to go away from this awful place...

She looked about wildly, tore the blanket from the bed, and stuffed it into the door crack...

Oh, Lobby! It's coming in...

Frantically, then, she scurried about the cabin, stuffing each crack, each chink, through which the liquid monstrosity might be able to flow...

Got to get everyone... gagh! Got to keep ya... that thing out!

She heard a rustling on the roof. Stirred up the fire. Heaped on more logs...

It... sob... it won't get in.

Down the chimney...

She looked at the pot of water hanging by the fireplace. Steaming and bubbling. She felt suddenly crawling and vile and dirty from what she'd seen and what she'd done during the night...

What? What I need is a bath!
She pumped cold water from the sink pump into the emptied pot.

Jus’ cool it off a little.

Poor Clem! But I can’t think of him now. I got to think of my future. There’ll be plenty of men in the city lookin’ for a gal with what I’ve got.

She slipped off her shabby dress... stepped into the tub and screamed:

EEEEAAAAAHhh!

She fought wildly, shrieking at the ghastly malevolence that enfolded her in its burning sticky embrace and slowly dragged her down with a strength she had known before only too well.

The well-water 'he got in through the pump. Jake!

Jake! Please... EEEEEEE GHHHHH!

Her gurgling scream faded away and the turgid liquid roiled a moment... and then it, too, quieted. And there was silence...

But not the silence of death! Nor that merciful finality! Two small objects bobbed to the surface to float beside the blood-shot ones.

And as the slithering liquid sucked out of the tub, quivered across the cabin floor, and reached a shapeless blob-arm upward for the brown earthenware jug, Bethy knew that she could never again escape Jake’s hated embrace.

So if you’re up in the mountains some night, kiddies, and you hear a slurping rendition of ‘Little Brown Jug’, duet, of course... you’ll know who’s doing the gurgling. Bethy and Jake... the happy cu-pool! Now, I’ll turn you over to the vault-keeper, who’s waiting to curdle your blood. I’ll be feedin’ you later. ‘Bye, now!
THANKS,
BUSTER

THANKS A LOTT

DROP DEAD, BUSTER? I'M BUSY...

HELLO, HONEY!
LONESOME?

I COME IN, CREEPS! IF YOUR OLD MAN WON'T COME ALONG, THEN DROP OAD! HEH, HEH, YEP! IT'S YOUR VAULT-KEEPER AGAIN, INVITING YOU INTO THE VAULT OF HORROR FOR ANOTHER REVOLTING READING FROM MY CRAWLY COLLECTION OF TERROR TOMES. I CALL THIS YELP-YARN...

...ONLY SIN DEEP

NIGHT SHROUDED THE CITY. THE MAN LAY IN THE DARKNESS OF THE ALLEY, UNAWARE... IN HIS ALCOHOLIC STUPOR OF THE PILFERING HANDS THAT ROLLED HIM FOR THE TAWDY TREASURE IN HIS POCKETS. HIS WATCH SHONE IN A YELLOW GLEAM, MATCHING THE GLEAM OF THE WOMAN'S CALCULATING EYES. SHE LAUGHED AT THIS MALE PICK-UP OF AN EVENING. MEN WERE HER FOOLS, HER PAWNS, HER PREY IN THIS GRIM GAME OF LIFE. LORNA VANSON LAUGHED AGAIN IN A THROATY PURR... AS A TIGRESS OVER HER KILL...

THANKS, BUSTER!
THANKS A LOT

SHE MOVED THROUGH THE NIGHT, WEARIED OF HER PRECARIOUS OCCUPATION, SCHEMING OF BIGGER PREY. SHE HAD THE ONE THING THAT SOLD HIGH AMONG MEN BEAUTY. BEAUTY TO DRIVE MEN WILD, INNOCENT, WIDE-EYED MADONNA BEAUTY... MASKING THE GREEDINESS BENEATH. BEAUTY THAT MADE MEN TURN AND LOOK AND LUST...

HELLO, HONEY LONESOME?
DROP DEAD, BUSTER! I'M BUSY...
She would have none of them now...not any more...not if she could sell her beauty for what it was really worth...at its highest price...to the highest bidder. But beauty like hers was no good hidden in rags, buried in poverty, like a jewel...obscured in a dull, leaden setting.

What I need is a stake...fancy clothes...a beauty shop treatment...the works! And this watch can get it for me...

All her dreams tumbled, expecting so much more. She turned away, her lovely face twisted in bitter rage, but even that did not hide its classic perfection. The old pawnbroker called her back...his eyes narrowing...

Wait! Your face! Lovely brown eyes...spun-silver hair...luring lips, listen. I have a proposition...

She did not like his final cackling words as he handed her a pawn ticket, but she put it down to the follies of the aged...in case you ever wish to redeem your beauty!

She absently stuck the ticket into her purse as she left the foolish old man's shop...but the laugh's on him. I've got one grand. I've got my stake!

The pawnshop she found was a hole in the wall...musty and decrepit...and its proprietor seemed just as musty and decrepit as he rubbed his gnarled hands greedily, taking her offering...only to toss it back at her in scorn...

Phah! Worthless! Imitation gold, it belongs in a junkyard. Out of pity, I'll give you a dollar for it!

No, no, you little fool. You misunderstand. One thousand...my only mistress is money...always faithful and trustworthy. This is strictly business! I offer you one thousand dollars for your beauty. Is it a bargain?

She thought him mad, but he counted out the money before her eyes. Then he led her into the back room and seated her in a chair...

You mean... mmm...all you want is this wax mold of my face?

Yes, my dear. Call it a hobby of mine...capturing beauty like yours...
Exciting days followed for Lorna. Preparing the lure, the seductive bait for the hunt to follow, the deadly female on the prowl...the oldest game in history...

I'll take this dress, madam. Sonya...

Do a good job, Emile. Now you're ready, baby.

Heads turned around as Lorna was conducted to a table. Women's faces froze...still smiling...with hate flashing beneath. Hate for this creature who suddenly turned them into bloisy trumps in comparison.

More champagne, Charley! Er...Charley! Charley! Oh, snut up, let me drink that in!

But Lorna ignored them all! Her prey was picked...Ronnie Altgelb III...Bachelors' playboy. Human gold mine. He was always there with his following of uncrowned Miss Americas. But Lorna was glad they were there. She needed them, as a comedian needs a straight man.

Hey! I thought I knew why. Every gorgeous doll in this town how did I miss you, baby?

She struck him hard...this man she wanted to win and marry. She bruised his cheek and left the deeper bruise of angry humiliation inside.

Oh,my! Despicable wolf.

But Lorna had played her game with age-old shrewdness...with womanly wile...for she knew that, to men, the forbidden fruit promised always the sweeter taste...

Get lost, trash! I want to meet that angel! No earthly girl could be so lovely!

Here he comes. My fool...Was there ever any doubt?

It took Lorna six months of hard work...always leading with her chin...to get her quarry penned, but at last...

Lorna, honey! No lips have tasted the same since yours! I must have them for my own! For life? Marry me?

Oh, Ronnie! Yes! Yes! I'll marry you.

The bored doorman of the swank club 711 swung open a taxi door one evening. He'd been an endless parade of beauties traipse into the club during his years and none had rated more than half a glance to his sated eyes. But that night, his eyes snapped wide...

Gasp! A vision! I feel sorry for the other damsies inside! Their evening is ruined the moment this stunning beauty marches in!

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AND SO... WEDDING BELLS... THE HONEYMOON... AND LORNA MOVED INTO THE EARTHLY PARADISE SHE'D ALWAYS CRAVED... MISTRESS OF A MANSION FULL OF SERVANTS, WEALTH, AND LUXURIES. RONNIE, DEEPLY IN LOVE, SHOWED HER WITH COSTLY GIFTS, AND LORNA LOVED DEEPLY IN RETURN. HIS BANK ACCOUNT, THAT IS...

OH, YOU WONDERFUL, SWEET DARLING! BREATH OF SPRING MINK! IT'S BEAUTIFUL. IT'S THE NEWEST SHADE AND HERE'S SOMETHING ELSE TO BILD THE LILY TROUBLE IS, EVEN DIAMONDS LOOK CHEAP AGAINST YOUR RADIANT BEAUTY...

BUT THEY WEREN'T GONE THE NEXT MORNING, OR THE NEXT... OR MANY NEXTS... UNTIL LORNA KNEW THAT SOMETHING DREADFUL WAS HAPPENING TO HER YOUTHFUL FACE, AND THE OLD SAYING CAME TO TORMENT HER... "BEAUTY IS ONLY SKIN DEEP." 

WORSE AND WORSE... ALMOST LIKE THE WRINKLES OF OLD AGE? I'VE... I'VE GOT TO HIDE IT FROM RONNIE! THANK GOODNESS HE'S GOING AWAY FOR A FEW DAYS. I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE A DOCTOR...

As soon as Ronnie left, Lorna called the best skin man in the city.

I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU, DOCTOR! YES? TUESDAY MORNING? FINE! I'LL BE THERE.

LORNA'S UNEASINESS FADED DURING THE EXAMINATION. MODERN SCIENCE COULD CURE ALMOST ANY ODDBALL AFFLICTION, BUT WHEN THE DERMATOLOGIST TURNED WITH PUZZLED EYES, AND WHISPERED...

Queer! Somehow your facial tissues are aging... aging at a much faster rate than your body! Your skin is... well... dying!

THE CURE, YOU FOOL! I'M RICH! I'LL PAY ANYTHING.

HEAVILY VEILED, LORNA LEFT HIS OFFICE. HIS HELPLESS REPLY BOOMING LIKE A GONG OF DOOM IN HER MIND... OVER AND OVER.

But science has never been able to halt the aging process. No doctor can stop your skin from dying.

Secure in the lap of luxury, Lorna winked at her mirror each night. But one night she frowned... looked again in perplexity... then a third time, in worry...

LINES ON MY FACE! BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I'M YOUNG! I'M ONLY TWENTY-THREE. OH, I SLEPT POORLY LAST NIGHT. IT MUST BE THAT. TIRED LINES. THEY'LL BE GONE TOMORROW...

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But science has never been able to halt the aging process. No doctor can stop your skin from dying.
She pushed the pawn ticket into her purse and hurried out into the night...down crooked deserted streets...

It can't be! It's silly! Black magic? Yet, I hope it's true! Then I can redeem my beauty! Lucky I kept this old pawn ticket! Let's see...his shop was around here somewhere...

Finally, she found the dilapidated old shop, tugged open the creaky door, and stumbled into its unkempt musty gloom, still presided over by the evil human spider who had bargained so cunningly with her a year and a million dollars ago. She ripped off her veil in fury, exposing the hideous monstrosity that now reposed on her young lovely shoulders...

Did you do this to me? You filthy little old fool? Did you?

Certainly, my dear. See? Here's your beauty...among my pawned wares.

Of course, you can buy your beauty back! But at my price, now! Let's see! As Mrs. Ronald Altgold III, you should be able to afford let's see...$100,000! What? $100,000? How could I ask my husband for that much out of the clear blue sky? Besides, if he saw my face now.

Yes, he'd divorce you! He'd turn from your hag face and be sick on the floor and kick you out. So, think it over. Business is business! $100,000! Not one cent less! Good night!

Please or please.

She stood outside the shop, shivering in the cold. And then, she thought of a way...a desperate way to raise the money...

My jewels... my mink coats... all the expensive gifts from Ronnie. Together, they might total $100,000. I'll tell him we were robbed...
Her face veiled, hiding the hideous hag-horror beneath, she was able to enter her house only because the servants recognized her young voice...

Who do you think it is, you fool? Step aside! I'm going to bed! If anybody calls, I'm asleep.

Yes, Mrs. Altgeld!

Hate to part with them, but I must get my beauty back before Ronnie returns from his trip.

Hey! What goes on here?

She'd heard his voice too late! Ronnie! He'd returned unexpectedly. She'd had no chance to turn...to run...to hide from his eyes...

Choke...oh, my god! That face! Ugly...horrible! Who are you? What are you doing rifling my wife's room?

How could she reveal she was Lorna...his beautiful wife? Not there was another way! Let him think her a burglar...run!

No you don't, sister! I'm holding you for the police...

She struggled with him, realizing...

The police! Oh, no, no, no, no! Then I'll be trapped in jail...never pay off the pawnbroker...never be able to prove I'm Lorna Altgeld! No! There's only one other way...one last way...

Yes! One final way...one final way...for Ronnie! Lorna reached for the heavy brass statuette...

So this chump has to die! So what? The important thing is to get my beauty back...my golden asset! Plenty of other rich idiots like Ronnie around to bid for it.

Again and again she swung her instrument of murder. Ronnie's first groan sank to a bubbling moan and then faded to the belching gusts of a fresh corpse losing its fluids and gases.
She hurried to the pawnshop with her treasure...

Locked! Closed for the night! Now I'll have to wait until morning... find a hotel.

The policeman stood behind her, reading over her shoulder...

Too bad! Pretty face, too! Now it's a one-way ticket to the electric... or say ma'am I'm sorry? But... well... I have my orders...

I understand, officer! You want me to remove my veil so you can be sure I'm not that... that murderer.

Heh, heh! So Lorna ended up stuck with a dead pan. Well, there's many a wife who'll say the same about their husbands! Now it's time to turn you back to the old witch for one of her idiotic slime servings. Remember, if you're addicted to E.C. Mass, if you're a real gone fan... then you ought to join the E.C. Fan-Addict Club? Why? Well... er... that is... er... ah... Hmmm? Look, I'll see you next in my mag, The Vault of Horror! Bye, now!

And she knew that she could never redeem her beauty now. She knew that she was stuck with this horrible nauseating hag-face for all of her life... unless she wanted it to end... in the electric chair...
Carty had warned him, but still it was a shock when Holloway opened the front door and silently stepped into the house he had come to rob. Carty had whispered that the old dump was bursting its seams, stuffed with junk the two brothers had been collecting frenziedly for forty years. Carty was right.

The entryway was so massed with piles of grimy, yellowing papers that Holloway had to slither sideways to get into the front room. Here, rotting cardboard boxes were wedged tightly together, reaching from floor to dust-shrouded ceiling. The dining room was clogged with layers of rags matted into a wormy mass, the stench was the odor of decayed clothing stripped from a long-dead corpse. Holloway wiped the bubbles of sour sweat from under his nose, thinking these cracked Cort brothers been boled up in this stinking mausoleum for forty years, and it don’t look like they never even thun out one dirty napkin in all that time.

Squirming on, through what seemed like acres of putrid rubbish, Holloway finally saw the door with cracked paneling. That’s it! he exulted, That’s the closet awright! He sucked in a mouthful of foul air and held his breath, listening for the sound of approaching footsteps. The house was silent—the old crumbs must be upstairs, snoozing among the garbage on the second floor, Carty was right, so far.

Holloway turned the doorknob and eased it open. He slipped into the murky closer, tense until he heard the knob click shut solidly behind him. The tiny cubicle was stifling and musty, and the walls felt clammy under his fingertips, but it was worth it. Twenty-five thousand bucks was stashed away here. Carty had said, This is where the old misers had buried their lousy dough!

A minute later, his eyes beginning to pick out the fuzzed outline of objects in the closet, Holloway started to probe through the boxes piled in clogged profusion on all sides. Carty had warned him to be careful. Holloway remembered as he searched sagging boxes and folds of wormy cloth. The place might be alive with rats! There was only one box left now. The big one on the floor at his feet. He fought down the revulsion he was beginning to feel, and dug into strips of mouldering fabric. Then nest-egg got to be in here, Holloway thought, his heart hammering so hard he felt the pressure in his ears. He scooped up a handful of rotting cloth and hurled it to one side with a shudder. And then it hit him, like a swarm of bees. Only it was moths... thousands of them, all at once. He staggered backwards, his hand groping for the doorknob. He tasted the dry-dustiness of their wings in his mouth, the twitching of the moths’ oozy bodies as they fluttered against his eyelids. His fingers circled the knob and wrenched: the door was locked! Holloway shrieked, once. That was all the time he had before the frantic whirring drowned out all sound. The writhing, powdery bodies blocked all vision. He felt his stomach knotting as he tried to gulp air, but it was no use. A generation of moths had hatched undisturbed in the miserable closet by the thousands, now, they were blocking the passages of his nose, forcing their way into his gaping mouth and down his gagging throat. Then, when he had stopped writhing and his last scream had strangled in his throat, they went to work on the delicious shreds of clothing which had been Holloway’s suit just minutes before.
For an individual membership, fill out the coupon and send it in, together with 25¢ if five or more of you wish to join as an authorized chapter. Enclose each member's name and address along with 25¢ for each name, and indicate the name of the elected chapter president. We will notify each president of his chapter number. Each member, chapter or individual, will receive his kit directly... by return mail!

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Send for your membership kit today receive a full-color 7½ x 10½ illuminated certificate, a sturdy wallet identification card, a snazzy embroidered shoulder patch, and a stunning antique bronze-finish bas-relief pin.

Here's my two bits! I want the things and stuff like the kid's wearing! I want to meet new friends like the kid's meeting! I'm a fan addict! I'm mad!

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY ____________ ZONE NO.
STATE ____________
Hummmph! Just because they’re being sued, I gotta lose part of my column this issue! So now let me turn you over to my two criminal editors, who’ll try and worm their way out of this one! Talk fast, boys!

... Yep, bless her ice-cube heart, the old gal is right! As of this writing, E.C. is being sued! And of all things, we’ve been accused of attempting (in the words of the papers served upon us by Gilberton Company, Inc., Albert L. Kanter, President, in seeking a preliminary injunction) to “... intentionally, unfairly and unlawfully adopt, copy and imitate the title and style and format of the art work of plaintiff’s said periodical ‘Classics Illustrated’...”!

The magazine that the Gilberton Company claims is an imitation of “Classics Illustrated” is none other than our own “Three Dimensional E.C. Classics,” Mr. Kanter’s attorneys go on to allege that “... In so using the word ‘classics’ and in adopting the same style, size and format for defendants’ first issue of their magazine, defendants (E.C.) adopted such title, size and format in bad faith and with an intent and tendency (a) to deceive and mislead the trade and public in general; (b) to pass off their magazine as the work and property of the plaintiff; (c) to appropriate for themselves the plaintiff’s title, reputation, trade name and good will; and (d) to convey to the members of the trade and of the reading public the misleading impression that defendants’ (E.C.’s) said magazine was in fact one of the numbers of the plaintiff’s (Gilberton’s) prior established periodical, ‘Classics Illustrated’.

In Mr. Kanter’s own words from his sworn affidavit: “... the attempt to pass off defendants’ magazine as plaintiff’s periodical is self-evident.”

William M. Gaines, in his seventeen page answering affidavit (of which only a small portion can be reproduced here due to space limitations) stated, “... Before meeting and disposing of the plaintiff’s untoward and unfounded criticisms, I herewith emphatically and categorically deny that the title of our book ‘Three Dimensional E.C Classics,’ its cover or any of its art work was intentionally chosen, conceived of or created so as to simul- late the appearance of the plaintiff’s ‘Classics Illustrated.’ Until the plaintiff registered its complaint with me... it never occurred to me that there was any peril of our ‘comic’ book in question being mistaken for the plaintiff’s. The receipt of that complaint momentarily concerned me not because of a fear of unwitting wrongdoing on my part, but rather because the last thing I could possibly desire—and I’m not being facetious—would be for anyone to identify our book as one of the plaintiff’s.

... Manifestly, the defendants (E.C.) have neither the intention nor the desire to have their books confused with the plaintiff’s.

... The plaintiff has professed that its books are ‘acceptable,’ smidly instructing that the defendants’ are not. Is it perhaps true that the readers of the plaintiff’s (Gilberton’s) books do not purchase the defendants’ (E.C.’s) products. It is equally true that ‘Classics Illustrated’ is not ‘acceptable’ to our readers.

... I respectfully pray that their motion for a preliminary injunction be denied.”

It was—ed.

O.K. you old bag... take it away! You may have the last two inches!

Hee, hee! You may be laughing out of the other sides of your mouths, come the trial! And my two inches just leaves me enough room for the commercials! E.C.’s 3-D mags are still available by mail order! 15¢ each, 2 for 30¢! A subscription to this mag will set you back one buck for eight issues! The address for 3-D orders, sub orders, fan mail, and legal advice is:

The Old Witch
Room 708, Dept Lawsuit
225 Lafayette Street
NYC 12, NY
YOU’LL BE HORRIFIED ALONG WITH THEODORE WHEN HE DISCOVERS

THE SECRET

They’re talking about me again... Miss Heather and Miss Graves... the orphan asylum matrons. At night when the other kids are asleep, I sneak down and listen. I’m scared coming through the dark hallway and down the stairs. Some of the steps creak. I know where to walk so they don’t, only sometimes I forget to step in the right place and the creak sounds like someone screaming. Some nights it’s windy and the shutters bang and I want to scream too, only I hold it in, because I want to know. I want to know why nobody’s ever adopted me and taken me home with them. I want to know the secret.

He’s almost thirteen, Miss Graves! You know how difficult it is getting them adopted once they reach their teens!

And that... that means he’ll be with us until he turns eighteen! Oh... what will we do, Miss Heather?

I used to think it was because they liked me that they kept me here at the orphanage. I used to think they wanted me for their very own...

He’s reaching maturity, Miss Graves! We’ve got to get him off our hands! Don’t you see?

I, I understand, Miss Heather. I’ll start doing everything I can to encourage his adoption.

But when they started treating me bad... when they started locking me in the room... when they started whispering about me, I knew there was a secret...

And you’ll forget about the... the... it will be our secret, Miss Heather!
It always keeps me awake after I hear them talking. I go back to the dorm and I lie on my bed and I think hard about what they said and try to make the secret come out of it. But I can't, so I pretend I know what it is.

I've got a real mom and dad somewhere! That's it! And some day they might come for me and take me to a real home...

I don't mind living in the orphan asylum. Miss Graves and Miss Heather are okay except when they get mad. They get mad at me when I start complaining. But gee... I'm bigger than most of the other kids. I need more...

...food, Miss Graves! I'm hungry! Miss Heather! Come he's complaining with me, again, he's hungry! Theodore.

After a while, I can't stand it in the little room anymore. So I climb out of the window and slide down the drainpipe...

And I run away... There he goes again! Oh, if he'd only leave for good!

But now Miss Heather and Miss Graves aren't going to tell anybody. They want to put me up for adoption and keep it a secret. And all because I get bad once in a while, and they have to lock me in the room...

They always lock me in the room when I complain. It's a little room with nothing in it. It's a bed, and it's lonesome in the room.

Please, Miss Heather! Don't lock me in! I'll be good! I can't help it if I'm hungry! Please...

When I come back, Miss Heather is always waiting for me. She doesn't get mad. She just takes me back up to the little room and makes me go to bed again. She even lets me sleep late. But not this morning...

No, go wash up and comb your hair and dress neatly, then come downstairs to my office.
I'm scared about going down to the office. Miss Heather always yells at me when she sends for me to come to her office, but this time, she smiles at me.

THEODORE: This is Mr. and Mrs. Colbert. They want to take you home with them.

GOLLY Are you my real parents finally? I knew you'd come; I knew.

Miss Heather gets angry at me sometimes, but never like this. Her face gets all red and her eyes bulge and she grabs my arm tight and she shakes me.

YOU LITTLE BRAT! You're not going to ruin this chance for me to get rid of you! Real parents.

I know Miss Heather won't yell at me or punish me for listening outside her office now, so I'm not scared to ask...

...Then, what is the secret about me?

SECRET? What secret? I don't know what you're talking about, Theodore.

I want to stay here! I want to stay with Miss Heather! I...

I want to stay with Miss Heather! I...

Please leave me alone with him for a few moments, of course.

The Colberts keep talking about nice things on the way to my new home, but I just think about the secret... and how maybe now I'll never find out what it was.

Theodore Colbert: How does that sound to you, son?

Theodore Colbert: How does that sound to you, son?

MOM: Oh, Edwin! It'll be wonderful having him!
It's a long trip to where my new parents live and I don't feel good about my new home. It looks so lonesome, and I don't hear any kids laughing and playing like back at the orphanage...

Well, here we are, Theodore! Now come inside and I'll fix you a good supper. You must be famished.

I'm not very hungry, ma'am!

Mrs. Colbert...er, mom... fusses about in the kitchen and makes me a big supper. I try to eat so she won't be angry with me...

Finish your milk, Theodore! It's half cream. It's good for you!

Yes...choke... ma'am!

They make me eat. They stand over me until I finish every last drop. I feel all sick inside.

We're going to put a lot of beef on you, Theodore!

We'll build you up, son! Why in a month Miss Heather won't recognize you!

After supper they take me upstairs to my room...

Like it, Theodore? Yes, ma'am!

Outside, it's dark and quiet! There are no houses for miles. Nothing but woods. I'm scared and lonesome. I want to be with somebody even the Colberts.

Gulp... locked!

They've locked me in! They've locked me in my room just like Miss Heather used to do when she was angry with me...

She told them! She told them the secret!

I want to run away! But the windows...

The windows are barred! I can't get out! Why? Why? What did I do? Mrs. Colbert! Mr. Colbert! Why did you lock me in?

It's a secret, Theodore! You'll find out someday!
They keep me locked up in my room. Every few hours, Mrs. Colbert comes in with a tray of food.

"Eat it, Theodore! Why do you keep me locked up, ma'am? Why won't you let me go out and play?"

I never thought I'd get too much to eat. Back at the orphan asylum, I used to get hungry all the time, but now I get more than enough...

"Four fried eggs! I could never eat that much!"

And all the time that I'm locked in my room... when Mom Colbert isn't stuffing food into me... I think about the secret. I wonder what it is...

If you'd just let me go out and play... instead of keeping me locked in like this, maybe I could develop an appetite!

We can't have you running around losing weight, Theodore! You were terribly run-down when we took you from the orphanage. Why, you're just beginning to look half-way decent!

And time that I'm locked in my room... when Mom Colbert isn't stuffing food into me... I think about the secret. I wonder what it is...

Bed time, Theodore! You must get plenty of sleep. But first, drink this chocolate milk! It has two raw eggs in it!

"Yes, ma'am!"

That's a good boy! What's the secret, ma'am? Tell me, please!

I guess they're just trying to be good to me. I'd be happy about it too, if they didn't keep me locked up all the time...

You'll find out, Theodore... very soon, now!
I know the secret now! It's been a month since Mr. and Mrs. Colbert took me from the orphan asylum and brought me here and locked me up in this room. And now I know the secret. I heard them coming up the stairs...

They stand there, drooling, their fangs bare, staring at me, staring into the shadows where I cower...

Isn't that a nice secret, Theodore? Come out, Theodore!

It's no use screaming, Theodore! There isn't a house for miles.

Now I know why I used to get hungry when the moon was full and shone like silver on the orphanage lawn and Miss Heather used to lock me in the little room. I spring at them...ripping, tearing, slashing...like I used to do when I'd run away...

That is the secret...my secret...I know now that I am a flesh-hungry, ferocious, loathsome werewolf...

You're just right, now, Theodore! Just right! You're fat and full of rich red blood. Blood to drink! That's our secret, Theodore! We're vampires!

Only I was wrong! Their secret...mom and dad Colbert's...their secret isn't my secret. I pad forward softly.

Edwin! Choke! Look! Good lord!

Hee-hee! Delicious little tidbit, eh? And if you don't think that a young wolf can take care of two grown-ups, let me tell you about these two old maids! Seems this young...ah...but that's a different story. We'll save that one for another dime. Now, I'll turn you over to C.K., who's waiting to wind up my muck mag with a tale from his collection in the crypt. I'll be cooking up more of this creep when...as one creeper said to the other as they entered the slaughter house...next, we meet!!

Bye, now. E.G., that is!
Lola Pederson stood behind the small pitted desk of her flea-bag hotel and watched her latest guest scrawl an illegible signature in the register. Outside, a quiet mist crept around the hotel like a stealthy grey cat, and there was no sound save the scratching of the pen in his large hairy paw and the regular animal grunt of his heavy breathing. Lola shivered. She was suddenly aware, for the first time, of the dank, fetid reek of rotted wood in the ancient lobby, but there was something more: there was a subtle nauseating aura that seemed to come from the man himself.

Lola tried not to look at him, but her gaze was held by a morbid fascination. He was ubly beyond description, a revolting figure of evil with a face that no Hollywood make-up man could ever dream up even in his worst nightmares. She handed him the key and her voice was hollow and shary...

That will be ten dollars a week... in advance. Second floor rear.
She shuddered as he took the key and dropped the ten dollar bill on the desk. The thought of touching his money made her flesh creep. He turned and started up the stairs...

Don't forget. You must be out by six every night.

She listened to his grunt of agreement and the muffled echo of his footsteps fading away along the upstairs hall. That's...choke...the vilest, most hideous face I've ever seen. I never should have let him have the room. What will Otto say when I tell him?

Lola thought of Otto Kearns. She thought of how he'd come to the hotel a little less than a month ago, and how he'd asked...

I'd like a room. I have a nice cheap one if you have it. I can't afford too much.

Lola had never left her desk before to show a room, but she'd felt good about Otto right away. She'd taken him up and lingered there, even after he'd agreed to take it and had paid her. Lola had not understood her feelings at that time. She'd never wanted a man before Otto...

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She had tried to encourage him with sympathetic attention, but Otto's needs, whatever they might have been, had not included her companionship. And his seeming reluctance to be alone with her had only served as fuel for Lola's burning desires.

Good evening, Otto. Er...why don't you come into my room? I'll fix some tea. We can talk.

Another time, perhaps. Lola's very tired. Good-night!

Podr Otto. Waking up at the crack of dawn and rushing out with his sample case when most men are waiting for their wives to serve their breakfast!

If I'm not first on the spot with a customer, I don't make a sale, Lola!
Lola remembered how she'd told Otto she'd think it over about his sharing a room, but she hadn't liked the idea at all. With another man living in his room, he wouldn't be alone anymore. Her chances would be even less and so, when the phone rang this morning... 

"Yes, yes, this is the Gotham Hotel! What? Rent a room? No! We're all filled up! What? You work at night? You'd want it during the day? No, I'm sorry..."

But Lola'd been in a private little world of her own imagination, so she'd only half-heard the harrowing report...

"The Ripper" attacks women on lonely deserted streets and decapitates them, carrying away their heads. All citizens are warned...

Wait a minute! If I have your assurance that you'll only need the room during the day, that you'll leave by six at night and not come back till after six in the morning, perhaps.

No! She'd not thought much of the radio report. She'd been thinking of how pleased Otto would be with her for making these arrangements and how she'd be able to reduce his rent even more. And then, she'd looked up to see the ape-like figure standing there, suitcase in hand.

"Gasp! You you startled me! Yes? What can I do? Oh, you must be the one..."
He shuffled silently across the lobby and out the door, suitcase in hand... maybe... maybe he doesn't like the room? maybe...

Lola was shocked out of her reverie by footsteps on the old creaky hotel stairs. She looked up. He was coming down again.

Lola waited patiently for Otto's return that evening. When he finally came in, she rushed to him whimpering...

Oh, Otto! I did such a terrible thing! I rented your room to someone else for during the day! Why, that's wonderful, Lola! That's better than sharing the room.

But he's horrible! Just horrible! He's the ugliest creature I've ever seen! He looks like... like a... like a murderer!

He'd looked at her warmly... almost suggestively.

This is a much happier arrangement than sharing a room, Lola. This way, I still have my privacy in the evenings! So we don't care what he looks like. Do we?

Here! Let me carry your sample case up for you, Otto! You must be tired! I can bring you a cup of hot tea if you like. I...

Oh, Otto! Otto! I've thrown myself at you! I must have you! I need you. Sob...

That night Lola tossed and turned, unable to sleep. She kept seeing that horrible, horrible face, and then she'd drive the sickening vision from her mind by thinking about Otto, and how she wanted him and how it would be in his arms...

He moved up the stairs, rebuffing her, adding to the bitterness of her passion... no... thank you! I can carry it myself! I want nothing! I... good... nothing but rest... and privacy! Good-night, Lola!

No... thank you! I can carry it myself! I want nothing! I... good... nothing but rest... and privacy! Good-night, Lola!

But... I...
She would try to erase him from her mind by thinking about Otto, but it wouldn't work any more, and there were those newspaper headlines, the radio bulletins... "The Ripper's six victim was discovered today in an abandoned..."

He's the Ripper! I know it! I know it!

Again and again she rushed to the phone to call the police, to tell them that the murderer was under her roof..."

No! They won't believe me! I'd be just another crank calling! I've got to have proof..."

The long walk down the second floor corridor only increased the agonizing tautness in her stomach. She had an urgent need to go down to her room, but she went on, finally reaching the door. She inserted the passkey in the lock... turned it... the grating sound tensing every nerve in her tortured body...

The door swung open. She stepped inside, a chill sweeping over her. The room was heavy with the smell of perspiration. She moved to the two closets... swung open the one on the right... clothes! Nothing but clothes! Otto's clothes...
She turned to the other closet. She tried the knob...

She fitted the passkey to the closet door... unlocking it. She flung it open. A powerful stench burned her nostrils...

It was the smell of that man. The smell of death. She peered in. The proof was there...

Oh, my god...

The heads... six staring heads grinned at her—hanging grotesquely from the clothes hooks inside the closet. Lola screamed.

Eeeaaak!

She threw her arms around him, sobbing hysterically...

He's the one, Otto! That hideous creature... He's "the ripper"!

There was comfort and reassurance in Otto's voice and in the feel of his body against hers. He looked concerned, and Lola felt safe in his strong arms...

The one I share the room with? Don't be silly, Lola. You've been reading too much!

I saw, Otto! In the closet! I saw the heads!

Otto... Gasp. What is it, Lola? What happened? I found you on the floor. You must have fainted.

What is it, Lola? What happened? I found you on the floor. You must have fainted.
He smiled down at her coldly...

It was a bad night for business, Lola. Not a customer. How lucky for me I came back early...

Lucky for me, Otto! Why did you come up here, Lola?

Oh, hold me... why?

She closed her eyes, turning her lips upward toward his, inviting...

You're so strong, Otto! I need someone strong!

Why did you have to spoil it, Lola? Why did you have to look in the closet?

He held her in a vice-like grip. His features grew ugly, vile, evil. He drew forth the knife...

Otto! My god!

I didn't want it to be this way, Lola! You were good to me! I didn't want to have to kill you!

Why did you have to spoil it, Lola? Why did you have to look in the closet?

There was a fluid red haze, and through it Lola saw that two men were one and the same, then the blackness...

Why did you have to find my heads, Lola?

Heh, heh! And that's what happened to poor Lola, kiddies. She lost her head over idiotic Otto. And you'll lose your head over the stuff you get in your E.C. fan-club membership kit?

So join now! Join the club that's sweeping the country. Join the street-cleaner's chapter of the E.C. fan-club. We'll all see you next in my mag, tales from the crypt? Till then, 'bye! E.C., that is!

But Lola could no longer hear the animal grunt of his breathing. She could not smell the sickly odor of death...
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