HERE ARE TALES THAT WILL Usher YOU INTO
THE HAUNT OF FEAR

NUMBER 25

FEATURING...

THE OLD WITCH
THE VAULT-KEEPER
THE CRYPT-KEEPER

REPRINT EDITION
HEE, HEE! FOND FELICITATIONS, FREAKS! COME INTO THE HAUNT OF FEAR... THE REVOLTING RESTAURANT OF REEKING RECITATIONS, SQUAT DOWN AT THE TERROR-TABLE THERE, AND GET READY FOR SOME GORY GORGINGS OF GRUESOME GAGGINGS. YEP, IT’S YOUR SHIVER-CHEF, THE OLD WITCH, STIRRING UP HER CRUDY CAULDRON, READY TO METE OUT HER MORBID MENU. TODAY’S TIDBITS INCLUDE MOLDY MILK, WHIPPED SCREAM, PUTRID PABLUM, FOUL FARINA AND CHOPPED COD LIVERS. ALL BABY FOODS!” PERFECT CHILDISH CHOW—INSI ELOPED PAST YOUR GREEZY GUAMS TO WHET YOUR APPETITE FOR THE MAIN COURSE... A DISGUSTING DISH CALLED...

THE NEW ARRIVAL

TAKE A GOOD LONG LOOK AT ME. NOT VERY PRETTY, EH? I’M JUST AN OLD, DILAPIDATED, WEATHER-BEATEN, PAINT-STARVED, ONCE-PROUD MANSION NOW! I’VE KNOWN BETTER DAYS... THE DAYS WHEN I WAS BRIGHT AND NEW AND PROUD, WITH CRYSTAL WINDOWS, DRESSED UP IN FRESH CLEAN COATS OF PAINT, STANDING STATELY UPON A LUSH GREEN LAWN. BUT THOSE DAYS ARE GONE... GONE AND ALMOST FORGOTTEN. NOW, PEOPLE SHUN ME... HURRY PAST ME IN DREAD... AS IF I WERE A HAUNTED HOUSE...
Well, that's what I am. A haunted house? Not the haunted house of horror tradition, with blood-stained staircases and reenactments of evil deeds echoing down my musty old corridors, and ghosts of long-dead occupants flitting and swirling through my empty plaster-cracked rooms, wailing and clanking chains. No, I'm a different kind of haunted house. I'm haunted by a horrible living secret.

There's another kind of wailing within me. Listen...

A-hahah... A-hahah... A-hahahhh...

Who would be fool enough to be out in this dismal night of pouring rain and lurid lightning flashes that lift the curtain of dark momentarily from time to time? There it comes, down the unpaved dirt road, now just a rutted quagmire of mud...

A car, scarcely dragging itself through the clinging sludge. But... no... no, it mustn't stop, it mustn't, keep going past me! Don't stop here! It would be dangerous for you to stop here tonight...

I feel my ancient timbers groaning as the wheels spin uselessly, sinking deeper and deeper into the mud. I feel a shiver run through my eaves as the driver steps from the stuck car... cursing...

He stares hopelessly at his mired automobile, and then turns, scurrying into the darkness. Don't! Don't look toward me! Please, don't...

I'll keep utterly silent and try to hide myself behind the cloak of night. Perhaps he'll walk on down the road, perhaps he won't see me. Perhaps... Oh, dear! That lightning flash silhouettes me against the fluid sky...

What luck! There's one... close by...
'What luck,' he says. 'The poor fool! Bad luck! Now he's sloshing toward me. I've got to discourage him... for my own sake. I'll bang my shutters closed, hiding the dim light from the nursery, concealing the fact that someone lives here. Perhaps he'll be frightened then at my brooding empty unfriendly appearance and go away...

He's hesitating, shivering at my brooding air. I'm winning! I'm... oh, the idiot! He's thinking logically... placing practicality above fear and dread...

Oh, well? It's the only house for miles, and any port in a storm! I can't just stand here all night getting soaked to the skin... maybe catch my death of cold! So... here goes...

Hmmm. Sure is an eerie looking place. I'd hate to spend a night in... in there...

It doesn't frighten him! What else can I do? Nothing but let the wind whistle and sigh mournfully through my chinks and crevices...

Huh? Aw, C'Now, Lockwood! It's just the wind... howling past the eaves...

But still he comes. What else? The bats? Of course! People are frightened of bats. Easy to rattle my rafters and chase a flock from my attic...

What the...? Oh... just a bunch of bats. I must have frightened them. They won't bother me...

What's that? Oh... just the shutters clattering open and shut. Say! There's a light up there!

Hey!
Oh, how stubborn can he be? He just picks himself up and calls himself 'clumsy!' It's enough to make me blow my roof! He's defied all my attempts to send him fleeing. Now, he's at my front door...knocking...not knowing he's begging entry into a hideous trap...

My door creaks open on hinges that have not tasted oil for long, long years. He's shocked at the face that appears in the doorway. One of those young-old faces, wrinkled as if with great age, yet stamped with a kind of youthfulness...

I'm sorry to disturb you at this hour...but, you see, my car got stuck in the mud, and I...

Oh, you poor man! Come in out of the rain!

Suddenly the mewling sounds start...the crying...coming from up the old winding stairs...coming from the nursery...

A-wahh...A-wahhhhh! Oh, please excuse me! My baby is crying!

What a pitiful fool! Why are all human beings so logical when they want to be? Why didn't he take my warning? He doesn't even suspect, as Mrs. Ackroyd returns...

The baby's still crying! It sounds as though it's in pain!

He is, Mr. Lockwood! My baby is rather ill! But everything will be all right!

Poor thing! Can't you phone for the doctor?

There's no phone here, Mr. Lockwood. Now, don't you trouble yourself. I've doctored my little dumpling through many a crisis!

See how eagerly she welcomes him. He's taking it as a sign of hospitality? Oh, what an idiot! Well, he'll find out soon enough...

My name is Cynthia Ackroyd. I'm a widow. Take off your wet things and warm yourself by the fire!

Lockwood's my name! Edgar Lockwood! I'm a salesman! Thanks...

Her baby? She's a mother! Oh, she probably adopted one. No, she couldn't have. She's a widow! She said. I guess she's younger than she looks. Perhaps the death of her husband with the baby on the way aged her like that!

Watch her climb the stairs, Lockwood...her baby? Use your head! Think about that for a minute. That's it! That's it...

Her baby? She's a mother! Oh, she probably adopted one. No, she couldn't have. She's a widow! She said. I guess she's younger than she looks. Perhaps the death of her husband with the baby on the way aged her like that!

What a pitiful fool! Why are all human beings so logical when they want to be? Why didn't he take my warning? He doesn't even suspect, as Mrs. Ackroyd returns...

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Poor thing! Can't you phone for the doctor?

There's no phone here, Mr. Lockwood. Now, don't you trouble yourself. I've doctored my little dumpling through many a crisis!
Yes, Lockwood! Go! Rush for a doctor! Leave any excuse! Just don't come back. Go ahead! Don't listen to her...

You're sweet to offer, Mr. Lockwood, but it's nothing, really! My baby isn't that sick!

But that pitiful, Hailfing! So loud...

He's just hungry! It's time for his bottle. This will quiet him...

May I help? May I see your baby, Mrs. Ackroyd?

Can't you hear my beams broaching in dismay, Mr. Lockwood? Look around you! Look around for a clue to her sinister secret...

Ah, that's it! The framed picture on the dust-covered piano! Pick it up, Lockwood! Pick it up and read the inscription. Study it!

To my darling Cynthia...1917

Oh, well! Mothers are queer about their kids. Overly protective...Shielding. She probably figured I'm the one with the germs! She what's this?

But the anguished howls of the baby disturb you, don't they, Lockwood? You feel sorry for the little tyke... Make one more gallant offer...

Can I go fetch the doctor, Mrs. Ackroyd? My car is stuck but I could make it on foot! I mean, if your baby's life is in danger...

No! You can't see him! Um...that is...you might catch his germs. No use risking your health, Mr. Lockwood! You just stay down here till I take care of dumpling! I won't be long!

All right, Mrs. Ackroyd?

Don't you think it's odd, Mr. Lockwood? Don't you see, now? Don't you sense why every moment you spend here is marching you closer and closer to a night-march fate? Don't you see? Of course not, you fool! Instead, you listen to the age-old heart-warming sounds drifting down to you from the nursery door...the sounds of the loving mother and her child...and you smile...

Mudder's 'little dumplin' darlin' is hungry...isn't he? Hasum got naughty pains? My poor baby! Here's some nice warm milk...
That's it, Lockwood! Set up! Face the floor! That's it! Think!

I can't sleep with that going on! But that crying is odd somehow! Not just pain! Something else! Something I can't put my finger on!

That's it, Lockwood, you're on the right track! Hurry! Discover the truth and leave my mouldering terror-filled insides. Run! Run from me before it's too late...

I've got to see that baby! I've got to...

What's this?
Yes! Yes! Your door is locked. She locked you in. Why? To prevent exactly this...

Now I know something's wrong! She wants to keep me from taking a look at that baby!

That's it, Lockwood! Put your shoulder to the door! Heave! I'll help you! I'll warp and buckle the rotted jams...loosen my hold on the hinges! There...

Now we'll see what this is all about!

No one heard...not above that loud, loud caterwauling of her sick baby. Go on, Lockwood...down the dim hallway...to the nursery door. Look out!

Pick it up, Lockwood! Look at it! Strange, isn't it?

A rag doll, sewn together from scraps! But why would she make one so big?

Listen, Lockwood! Stand outside the nursery door and listen! Hear it? Hear it?

It's sure loud, all right! But then, of course, all sounds seem louder at night...contrasting against the stillness. Especially a baby's cry...

No, Lockwood! Don't think of silly explanations! Don't give up and go back now. Listen! Listen to the other sounds...the sounds besides the baby's squealing...

What's that? The clanking of chains! What's going on in there?

Push open the door, Lockwood! Push open the nursery door and see...

Oh, my Lord...choke...
Yes, Mr. Lockwood. That's her "baby." That's "dumpling!"
Look at him. Look at him and be sick...

A gag... a grown man!

She comes at you, savagely. She's just like she was almost 40 years ago, wanting desperately to keep her infant forever young... the image of his father... with her always. She never taught him to walk or talk. She kept him a baby in mind as he grew to manhood in body. And now, this night, he is dying. And you, you fool! You had to let her surprise you...

But I'll have a new baby now!

No!

No!

And now, as the blackness fades, you can see your future, Lockwood... clearly! You can see what you're going to have to go through for the rest of your life! I warned you! I tried! I really did...

Oh, you sweetums! Little dumpling! Mommy love you! Mommy take care of you! Izzum sleepy? Rock-a-bye baby, in the tree top... when the wind blows...

And it's time for me to blow, kiddies! The vault-keeper awaits with a delightful little tale from his collection. I'll be back later to feed you more foul fare from my groovy cauldron! Oh, as for poor Mr. Lockwood, I wouldn't worry about him, he's really happy now. Seems he lost his mind! Too much hitting the bottle, I guess! The sucker! Well, I gotta deliver some diapers to dear Mrs. Ackroyd. She uses old shrouds. Bye!
Henry grinned down into the bloody kitchen sink and listened with rapture and relief as the brand new garbage disposal unit stopped grinding and sucking and chattering and began to hum smoothly. It had done its job well. Henry sighed with satisfaction, Stoope opened the cabinet doors below the sink, and switched the unit off. The silence of the house closed in around him. He turned and knelt and began sponging up the pool of scarlet on the kitchen floor.

Good-bye, Rita! And good riddance...

Henry worked swiftly and meticulously, wringing out the blood into the sink, then lathering the linoleum till it gleamed clean.

Got to hurry! The boys will be here any minute!
He scoured the sink carefully, rinsed out the sponge, and dried his clean wet hands on a new kitchen towel. Everything had been taken care of. There was no trace . . . no sign . . . nothing to attest to the hideous deed he'd just committed. Henry shot a quick glance at the clock . . .

Took me longer than I expected. It would! I'd better get dressed. It's almost time . . .

The kitchen sparkled. Henry took one last look around, satisfied that everything was perfect, and switched off the light. He moved down the hall to the bedroom, stepped out of his red-spotted overalls, removed his crimson-smeared shirt, and stuffed them into the bathroom laundry hamper . . .

I'll wash these things out tonight when the gang has gone.

He inserted the knife in its wall-rack, hung the cleaver on its hook below and slid the hack-saw into the tool drawer . . .

Rita never liked my tool drawer. It was always a mess. She used to say, Hmph! Well, she won't complain about that anymore!

He dressed quickly . . . slacks . . . sports shirt . . . the way he always liked to dress . . . the way Rita never let him. Down the hall, the front doorbell chimed softly . . .

Oh-oh! They're here already!

They moved into the living room . . . laughing, joking . . . congratulating Henry upon his good fortune . . .

Boy, I wish my wife would go to Florida for a few weeks, Henry!

Guess you won't be home much these nights, eh, boy?

Well, wolf! This is your chance to howl!
Henry laughed good-naturedly, opening the bar-console, lifting out the glasses, the whiskey, the soda...

Open 'em up, boys! I'll get the ice!

Atta boy, Henry!

Hope you got a good supply of chlorophyll, Henry! If my old lady smells my breath...

He wondered for a moment if George had seen. He wondered if George could hear his heart beating so wildly in his chest. He stepped to the refrigerator, swung it open...

You know what I would have charged an ordinary customer for that installation, Henry?

Plenty, I'll bet, George!

...and removed an ice-cube tray...

Three times as much, Henry! Maybe four. You got a real bargain!

Thanks, George! It's good to have a plumber as a friend!

George followed Henry out of the kitchen, glancing sadly wistfully...

Old a good job, too! You don't appreciate the work that goes into one of those installations...

Hooking it up with the waste pipe...

The whiskey and ice and soda seemed to bring warmth into the living room. Henry sat back smiling...listening to the idle chatter...the latest joke...the laughter. Henry was content...

Nah-nah! That's a good one, Bill!

Say, did you guys hear the one about the guy with the nagging wife...

'The guy with the nagging wife.' That was Henry, all right. Not anymore, though. Rita wouldn't nag him any more. Rita was dead. Henry thought about Rita...thought about the way it used to be...

Well, this guy had a real shrew for a wife. Always nagging him. "Melvin, do this... Melvin, do that..."

He means, "Henry do this. Henry do that..."
Yes, that's the way it used to be. Just like the joke Phil was telling. Rita'd been a shrew. She'd nagged and nagged Henry over the years. Unmercifully. Henry remembered...

Look at that rug! All tracked up! How many times have I told you to wipe your feet before you come inside...

I'm sorry, Rita...

He remembered how she'd make him miss those rare nights out with the boys...

Bowling!? Oh, no! Not tonight! I'm cooped up in this house all day long! The least you can do is stay home with me in the evening!

He remembered how she'd nag...

What do you mean, "you're tired"? So am I! Do you think I play games while you're at the office? You'll wash the dishes! I'll wipe!

... and nag...

Well, if you'd make more money, we could afford a clothes dryer! Now, do hang these up on the line!

He remembered how she'd make him account to her for everything...

You took five dollars for an allowance this week! What happened to it? Go ahead! Tell me! What did you spend five dollars on...

... and nag...

Please, Rita! I didn't gamble it away. I didn't drink it! I spent it... on carfare and lunches! I... I... oh, get a pencil! I'll give you every item!

He remembered how she'd nag...

... and nag...

What was it that first gave Henry the idea? He tried to remember. Was it that radio program he'd been listening to when Rita made him turn it off?

... without a body, it's awfully difficult to break a case, Chief. But Jenkins made one mistake. Time takes a long time! We found what was left of her...

MRS. GREEN down the block has a garbage disposal unit. Her husband has consideration. So, until you can buy me one... you can take out the garbage. Here! And the can's full under the sink!

Yes, Rita!

... and nag...

FOR GOD'S SAKE, turn that shoul'ish thing off, Henry!

Yes, Rita!

And Mrs. Green down the block has a garbage disposal unit. Her husband has consideration. So, until you can buy me one... you can take out the garbage. Here! And the can's full under the sink!

Yes, Rita!

... and nag...

What was it that first gave Henry the idea? He tried to remember. Was it that radio program he'd been listening to when Rita made him turn it off?
Hemny wasn't quite sure, anyway, it came to him one night...just like that! The perfect way to get rid of Rita: No body! No trace!

Well, Henry! Long time no see! How come you ain't been bowling with us?

Oh, Rita! Doesn't let me, George! Listen! I...I want information!

Some'd gone to George. George was a friend. George was a plumber. And he'd asked him...George, how much would a garbage disposal unit cost?

I could find out, Henry! Why? Thinking of giving the wife a present?

Yes, George! I'm thinking of surprising her!

Well, Henry. I'll tell you since you're my friend, I'll do it cheap, they seem to be getting popular and I need the experience of installing one. Never had a chance before...

...so, I'll charge you for materials only. Labor is free. Whatever it costs me, it costs you. We'll both be doing each other a favor! Fair enough?

Fair enough, George! Thanks! Thanks a lot!

Then he'd announced to his wife...

I...I think you ought to go to Florida for a few weeks, Rita. You haven't been looking well! I've got a bonus coming, and...

What's on your mind, Henry? You trying to get rid of me?

Get rid of you, Rita? Why I'd be lost without you! Absolutely lost! I just thought...

I have been looking badly lately! Yes, Henry! I think I will go to Florida.
Rita's acted exactly as Henry had expected. She'd grabbed to all the neighbors...

And early this morning, George came with the disposal unit. Henry's timed everything perfectly. Rita was busy packing... Not yet! Just start installing it! It'll be a surprise!

What's this? Oh... Henry! A garbage disposal unit! Oh... you darling!

Rita's come into the kitchen and squealed with delight... For when you come back, Rita!

That's right! I'm off to Florida tomorrow night! Henry got a bonus! I just hope he behaves himself while I'm gone!

Florida! Oh, you lucky girl. Well, don't you worry about Henry, Rita! We'll keep our eyes on him... give you a full report!

What's this? Oh... Henry! A garbage disposal unit! Oh... you darling!

For when you come back, Rita!

And so, at 3:45 that evening, Henry's backed the car out of the garage and Rita'd waved good-bye to everybody and he'd driven her into town to catch the 6:00 train. Only, on the way, he'd stopped, and beat her head to a bloody pulp...

Ugh... ugh... ugh...

Sure thing, Henry! We'll have a regular stag party! Heh, heh! Sh-n-n-h-h-h! Here she comes!

And so, at 5:45 that evening, Henry's backed the car out of the garage and Rita'd waved good-bye to everybody and he'd driven her into town to catch the 6:00 train. Only, on the way, he'd stopped, and beat her head to a bloody pulp...

And Henry'd told George...

Rita's leaving on the six o'clock train, George! Get in touch with the boys! Have 'em all come over here tonight! About nine...

Sure thing, Henry! We'll have a regular stag party! Heh, heh! Sh-n-n-h-h-h! Here she comes!

Henry slinked, erasing the sordid scene from his mind's eye. Phil was finishing his joke and everybody was laughing...

"Sure," he says. "Hodkins trying to take the undertaker!"

"Hah-hah! Henry? I'd like a glass of water! Got some on ice?"

"Don't need it, Ned! We've got our own well water!"

He's driven back, turned into the garage, closed the doors, dragged her body from the trunk, and proceeded to dismember it. He'd sawed and hacked and chopped it into tiny pieces and shoved them into the growling, grinding, sucking garbage disposal...

Neh, neh! Who'll think of searching for what's left of Rita in the sewerage when she doesn't come back from Florida! And just what will they find?

Neh, neh! Who'll think of searching for what's left of Rita in the sewerage when she doesn't come back from Florida! And just what will they find?
George, the plumber, looked up.

He said, "You mean you haven't got town water, Henny?"

Nope! Rita made me install our own well years ago. She said we'd save money on taxes.

They all went into the kitchen, laughing. George looked puzzled.

George went down into the cellar! Henny turned to his guests.

The well is directly under the house! A pump brings the water up through a pipe in the cellar floor.

It was George. Henny walked across the kitchen to the cellar door where he stood. The others stared at the plumbed tap.

What?!

Henry! I... I feel terrible! I... I didn't know about the well! I... I thought the well water intake was the waste pipe. I attached the garbage disposal unit to it! You... you haven't used it yet, have you?

Henry spun around. The others... Phil... and Bill... and Ned... were staring at the crimson liquid and ground-up red fresh slime that oozed in a continuous sickening stream from the kitchen faucet.

Y-yes, George! I... I used it!

Good lord! Choke! Raaaah!

Heh, heh! So Henny... the drip... poured out a confession to the boys unexpectedly, eh, kiddies? Well, I might call this a 'hack' yarn. I might even say I had to 'faucet'! But I won't punt like that can be a 'drain' on your patience! I'll just say it was a 'yelp-yarn' with everything in it... plus the kitchen sink! Heh, heh! Well, I'll turn you back to the old witch now... for more of her garbage and then C K will 'rin' up the hag. 'Bye!
At 6 o'clock on the dot, a soft chime echoed through the offices of Pierce Products Inc., announcing to the relieved staff that it was quitting time. The scratching of pen-points on ledgers, the chatter of typewriters, the click-click whirring of adding machines all faded away. Ralph Corah hurriedly thrust the ‘L-N’ accounts back into their respective folders, pushed his swivel chair away from his desk, and started toward the file cabinets. As he crossed the office, he kept looking back at the new girl they’d just hired. He’d been looking at her all day. Ralph just hadn’t been able to take his eyes off beautiful Wilma Boone...

Maybe I’m wrong, but I’m sure she’s giving me the eye!

Soon, everyone in the office had left... everyone, that is, except Wilma and Ralph. His heart pounded with excitement. What, since that morning, had been merely a vague dream, then a faint hope, was now a thrilling certainty...

She’s standing purposefully waiting for me. Wilma wants to know me as badly as I want to know her! Well, why not? I’ll offer to drive her home. Ask her for a date...
Ralph would have offered Wilma a lift home in his car, and she'd have accepted, happily. In a few minutes, they'd have been calling each other by their first names...

And as they reached Wilma's tree-shaded street in the suburbs, Ralph would have noticed several black cats playing in his car's path. And Wilma would have cried out to him in an angry voice...

"Don't stop for them! Run them over! Kill them!"

Ralph would have offered Wilma a lift home in his car. And she'd have accepted, happily. A few minutes, they'd have been calling each other by their first names...

"I have a confession to make, Wilma. I haven't been able to take my eyes off you all day."

"Better keep them on the road, Ralph, if you want to get me home in one piece!"

He'd have been impressed with Wilma's lovely home, and, holding her hand, Ralph would have escorted her to the door...

"How about going out with me tomorrow night, Wilma? We can take in a show, dinner... anything you like..."

"I'd love to go out with you, Ralph, but not at night this week. I want to get my sleep for my new job. I wouldn't want to get fired now that you and I..."

And Ralph would have adored the way Wilma's face flushed with angry loathing and her green eyes flashed their hate when they'd done to the panther's cage. For by then, he would have been madly, blindly in love with her...

"Look at him, Ralph! Sly, sneaking, beast! Choke... oh, how I hate cats! Take me away from here... Take me home!"

"Sure, honey..."

She'd have smiled at him warmly and agreed to go out with him the following Saturday afternoon. They'd have taken a walk through the park, gone through the zoo. By then, he'd have been feasting his eyes on her beautiful face, her glorious figure, the way the sunlight gleamed on her soft, red hair...

"Aren't they cute, Ralph? Look how that one almost talks to you with his eyes. All right, feller... here's a peanut for you..."
So Ralph would have taken Wilma home...

AREN'T you going to invite me in, Wilma?

AND I was going to take you out tonight, however, I'll forgive you if you'll let me pick you up tomorrow...

OR COURSE, Ralph! We can ride out into the country! I'd enjoy that.

Ralph would have driven home, his car floating like a pink cloud, carrying him to a land of happy hungry dreams. And, seeing Wilma's beautiful face in his mind, he would have been only momentarily troubled by the fleeting thought...

NEVER saw anyone who hated cats so! Oh, well... a phobia, I suppose...

The next day would have been a wonderful one for Ralph... warm and sunny. And, except for the small, disturbing incident that would have happened when he called for Wilma...

OCH!Don't bother to come in, Ralph! I'll get my coat and be right with you.

F idious! She doesn't seem to want to let me pass the front door...

Wilma would have forgotten and left the door slightly ajar, and the big black cat would've padded out, purring and rubbing against Ralph's legs...

Well, I'll be darned! I and thought Wilma couldn't stand cats...

And a few seconds later, Ralph's beautiful redhead would have rushed out after the cat, her eyes blazing in fury. The cat would've arched its back, spitting and baring its fangs at the sight of her...

KEEP away from him, you treacherous black hellion!

But, in another instant, that memory would have vanished...

TOMORROW, I'll find just the right setting to put her in the right mood... and then I'll ask her to marry me!
But the incident would have been quickly forgotten by Ralph, whose heart and mind would have been too full of love for Wilma to harbor any bad thoughts of her. And they’d have driven out to some calm, quiet, rustic spot...and he’d have proposed...

Oh, darling! I do want you...you’ll never know how much, but I can’t marry you...

But why, dear? If two people love each other, nothing else should matter. Wouldn’t your family approve of me?

Ralph would have been shocked at the cold bitter malice in Wilma’s voice...

You mother, Wilma? How can you hate your own mother?

She’s not my real mother! She’s my stepmother! Oh, please! Don’t make me talk about her anymore! It’s spoiled the whole day for me...

Ralph would have worried about what Wilma had said, and the next morning, he’d have come to a decision. He’d have called his boss and told a white lie...I don’t stay out often, Mr. Pierce, but I’m just too sick to work today...

And he’d have left his apartment planning exactly what he was going to say to Wilma Doone’s stepmother...

I’ll make her understand that Wilma and I love each other and she can’t stand in our way...

Ralph would have forced himself to walk to the door, and he’d have pressed the doorbell with trembling hand. It would have sounded like the knell of doom to him...

What’s taking so long? Maybe she’s not home? Maybe...

He’d have grown more and more uneasy with each block he’d passed bringing him nearer to the Doone home. And by the time he’d arrived, he’d have been shaking with nervousness...

If she’s as bad as Wilma says she is, she may not listen to reason. Well, I’m not going to back down now...

Ralph would have forced himself to walk to the door, and he’d have pressed the doorbell with trembling hand. It would have sounded like the knell of doom to him...
Mrs. Doone would have let Ralph into the house, and he'd have been astonished to see what a sweet-looking little old lady she was, with a kindly light in her soft blue eyes, and a wrinkled face wreathed in a pleasant smile.

You're a friend of Wilma's, you say? How nice! Wilma's at work, but why don't you come in, Mr. Cowell?

Oh, Poppycock. Young man! I insist that you stay to dinner. Let me pour you some of this wine...

Oh, n'lo, Wilma. See...feel...sleepy...

You did it again. You wretch! You tricked me again!

I did no such thing. He came of his accord.

When Wilma would have come home, she'd have shouted angrily at her step-mother the moment she'd seen Ralph brawling drowsy from his second slabs of wine...

Ralph would have liked the old lady right off. Her motherly manner would've filled him with the confidence he needed to lay his heart bare before her. And as he spoke, her cats would have come out and pranced around him.

You see, Mr. Cowell? The moment I saw you, I knew you were good! My cats like you!

Gowan, Mrs. Doone! But please...call me Ralph! How about Wilma and me? I...that is...we...

She'd have told her of his love for Wilma and he'd have begged for and gotten her approval...and before long...

Five-twenty! Say! I'd better be going. Wilma will be home from work soon and I don't think she'd like my seeing you behind her back!

Ralph's body would have gradually begun to ache as every sinew and muscle tightened, then grew numb...

You put some of that stuff in his wine!

That 'stuff' as you call it, is my best potion...

And he would have realized that he could no longer move...that he was paralyzed. He would be able to do nothing but watch the marrow-chilling change come over mother Doone...

No, you witch! No! I won't let you have him! Not this one! Don't be an idiot, Wilma. How many opportunities do we have to get fresh meat? You...and my cats?

Ooh, you rascal! You did it again. You wretch! Trick me again!

I did no such thing. He came of his accord.

Do you think my cats like the stinking, rotting dead meat you drag home from your grave-diggings, you ghoul!
Yes, Ralph would have been unable to do anything... except listen and watch as the old lady sharpened the cleaver and Wilma pleaded with her.

Please! Not this one! I wanted him... for a husband! A woman needs a man... even if she is a ghoul. You got the others! Leave this one. I'll bring the cats heat...

It's too late, you fool! He knows now! How could you expect him to love you now...

He'll look at you and he won't see your beauty any more. He'll see you scratching at graves... digging down to the rotting coffins with their moldy putrefied corpses... and tearing at their flesh...

She's right, Ralph! She is! It's no good any more! I tried to hide it from you! I tried...

No! No! No!

And the last thing Ralph would have remembered before he died was the anguished spitting of the hungry cats and the whining of the cleaver as the old lady hacked at him and Wilma's voice laughing... laughing...

I hope he's as good as the others...

Yaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhh

As I said, kiddies, I could have told you that story! But actually, you see, that's not what happened! That's what would have happened to Ralph if he didn't... well, let's go back! You remember he was in the office, alone with Wilma, walking toward the file cabinets. And she was stalling, and giving him the eye... inviting him to a horrible fate...

Well, Ralph was lucky, kiddies! Very lucky! He was so absorbed in Wilma's exciting beauty, he didn't look where he was going...

...missed the file cabinets, and went out the open window, flinging twenty stories to the street below...

I'll offer to drive her home... ask her for a date... and...

Ooops...

Yaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh

Why, the stupid @##!...

...to a very easy death!

The other end
The Crypt of Terror

Meh, meh! And now, it's Wind-Up Time in O.W.'s Morbid Mag. And your host in the Crypt of Terror, the Crypt-Keeper, is ready to put a final feeble fire to the festering festivities with a blood-curdling yarn about the frozen north. This chilling tale is called...

The Light in His Life!

The wind howled and glew icily around the lone man on flogging snowshoes struggling through the wintry wastelands. Snow still lay in a thick white carpet as far as his aching, tearing eyes could see, even though the spring thaws had begun back at the river. Wheezing... his breath frosting whitely in a cloud and turning to ice on his cheeks... the man stumbled on, and at last saw the welcome light gleaming into the gathering darkness ahead... the Trapper's Cabin... nestled among the towering snow-laden pines.

He didn't have to knock with his numbed hands. The door opened before him and he lurched in on half-frozen feet, escorted by a last flurry of snow, whipped in by the shrieking, cruel wind...
After a while, as the penetrating warmth of the fireplace stole through the visitor’s shivering body and the blueness drained away from his lips, he spoke..."

"Lord! I never knew Alaska would be this cold! My name’s Ned Drake... just up from the States looking to settle down in these parts and try my luck at trapping..."

"I know. They told me back at the settlement that Jake Barrow would sell out his cabin and gear. I came to make terms and buy you out..."

"Well, good... just let me know what you’re willin’ t’ pay. I’m ready to start packin’ right away..."

"Howdy, Ned... I’ve been trapping these parts for quite a spell... and I’m ready to pull up stakes and quit, myself..."

"Why, yes! My wife’s waiting back at the settlement! I’ll bring her up. Must be cozy here through the winters, sittin’ by the warm fire and..."

"Yes, I know. They told me back at the settlement that Jake Barrow would sell out his cabin and gear. I came to make terms and buy you out..."

"Just let me know what you’re willin’ t’ pay. I’m ready to start packin’ right away..."

"A man and his wife trapped in a little cabin for so long... with nothin’ t’ do but look at each other..."

"Pardon my curiosity, Ned... but why are you quitting? Everybody says you got mighty good trapping up here... plenty of silver fox... lynx... beaver... everything!"

"A lonely life... mighty lonely. It can set on your nerves after a while! You married?"

"Son, this a lonely life... mighty lonely. It can set on your nerves after a while! You married?"

"Why, yes! My wife’s waiting back at the settlement!"

"Soon as the thaw cleans the trail, I’ll bring her up. Must be cozy here through the winters, sittin’ by the warm fire and..."

"Cozy, you say! Let me warn you, son! Alaska’s got long, harsh winters! Sometimes you get snowed in for weeks... even months..."

"Speaking of wives, Jake... where’s yours? They said back at the settlement..."

"She... she... well, son, it’s a long story. You ought to hear it though. You might think twice about sassin’ a woman up here. An’ since I can’t leave till mornin’ anyway, I might as well tell it to yuh..."

"The two men settled the matter quickly, and Ned Drake was surprised at the reasonable terms. Somehow, Jake Barrow appeared anxious to go... which seemed odd to Ned..."

"Pardon my curiosity, Jake... but why are you quitting? Everybody says you got mighty good trapping up here... plenty of silver fox... lynx... beaver... everything!"

"A man and his wife trapped in a little cabin for so long... with nothin’ t’ do but look at each other..."

"Dying... I ain’t so cozy!"

"She... she... well, son, it’s a long story. You ought to hear it though. You might think twice about sassin’ a woman up here. An’ since I can’t leave till mornin’ anyway, I might as well tell it to yuh..."

"The two men settled down, stuffed their pipes, and lit up. Curiosity consumed Ned Drake as he waited for the story to begin. Jake’s eyes narrowed, fixing themselves upon the flickering oil lamp on the table. The trapper stared moodily at the dancing flame with a secret smile tugging at his lips, before his voice rose above the wind..."

"Had a blizzard back about the middle of January. It was a whopper..."
With mc not able to get out and get to the settlement for supplies, it didn't take long before I realized.

Food's runnin' low! Jerked beef's all gone. One can of beans left... a little flour... some dried fish. You gotta stop eating all the time, Miranda! We gonna go on strict rationing...

To Miranda, always a voracious eater, the idea of conserving food was the worst kind of torture. She was miserable from then on as each meal was reduced to a bit of dried fish, washed down with some weak coffee...

Miranda pointed to my oil lamp:

What about that? The whale oil you burn in that lamp... just to read some stupid books? That's good rich food... whale oil! And you're wasting it!

Don't you ever touch that oil! Never? That's for me... to read by! Understand?

Jake! For God's sake! I'm hungry! I'm starvin' to death! I can't stand it...

You'll just have to stand it, you fat fool. What'll you eat when this is gone?
Miranda didn’t understand, of course. She couldn’t see that my books... my precious reading... was a treasure that kept me from going mad... occupying my mind during those long dragging hours... days... weeks... eternities.

Oh, you won’t starve, Miranda... not with all that fat you float in! You could probably hibernate for weeks... like a bear. So stop trying to make me pity you!

Trouble was, Miranda had nothing to keep her mind occupied... nothing but the thought of how her gnawing stomach craved food. It was a day or so later... when I was refilling the lamp... that I noticed...

That’s funny! Oil’s setting low! The lamp isn’t burning it up that fast! Unless... unless...

For a moment I wanted to kill her, and then I remembered! Even with the whale oil gone, I could still read...

Tallow candles, made from whale blubber! They’ll give me the light I need...

The candles! Why there’re only a few left! But I didn’t burn them! There were plenty... oh... Miranda! Miranda!

I fought off sleep that night... fought to keep awake. And sure enough, when Miranda thought I was asleep, she got up out of bed, tiptoed to the whale-oil keg, and...

I sprang at her in a fury... cursed her... pulled the keg from her fat greasy paws...

I drank my stupid books!

For a moment I wanted to kill her, and then I remembered! Even with the whale oil gone, I could still read...

Tallow candles, made from whale blubber! They’ll give me the light I need...

By burning several candles at once, I obtained enough light to read by. And once more I settled down to long, quiet, satisfying hours of indulging in my printed pleasures.

Until one day...
She was lying! Covering up! I knew it! I tried to force the truth from her but she kept denying it...

'You female shine! Where are my candles? Answer me!'

Jake... Don't let me go! It's rats! I tell you! I heard them gnawing last night!

I wanted to strangle her but my fingers only sank into flabby fat folds of her neck, and I didn't have the strength to penetrate that protection...

Bloat ed tub of lard...

Yeah, it was a rat, all right! A big, fat female rat with Miranda...

...Eating my candles! You! You...

I gave up! I let her go. But in the middle of the night, as I lay sleepless and tossing, I heard the gnawing and munching...'

Chomp... Chomp... Chomp...

What's that? Chewing sounds! Is it rats, after all, at my candles?

She fought fiercely... like a wild elephant, she managed to shove me away and cram the last candle down her greedy bul let...

Dirty, fat, overstuffed slob..."
'Then she wiped her blubbery lips deliberately... in front of me grinning...'

'I'll kill you for that, Miranda! I'll...'

'She laughed at me...mocked me...knowing she was safe...'

'Shut up! Shut up! You...'

'Then what will you do? Sit here with my body rotting away into a stinking mess?'

'Go ahead! Shoot! Hah! Hah! Shoot!'

'She can't eat wood, thank heavens! But my eyes... Lord...'

'She turned bloodshot and smarted and gave me intolerable headaches, as I was forced to read by the dim wavering firelight...'

'The wood supply for the fireplace was running low. My eyes turned bloodshot and smarted and gave me intolerable headaches, as I was forced to read by the dim wavering firelight...'

'Suddenly I thought of one last way to furnish myself with good reading light...'

'These uncured furs! I could scrape off the excess animal fat... boil it down... burn it in the lamp...'

'I spent the whole day carefully scraping off every shred of fatty tissue still clinging to the hides, hoarding each knife blinder into a can, as if it were gold...'

'viewer awful smell! But I'll be able to read my books again without going blind!'

'I fell, exhausted, into bed that night. Every muscle in my body ached. I was tired but happy...'

'Tomorrow, I'll render the fat... boil it down in the iron pot... good animal grease... to burn... to read by... yawnnn'

'But in the morning, when I looked into the can that should have held the scraps of animal-fat that I'd painfully collected bit by bit...'

'Empty! Empty! Miranda! Did you...'

'I spent the whole day carefully scraping off every shred of fatty tissue still clinging to the hides, hoarding each knife blinder into a can, as if it were gold...'

'PHEW! Awful smell! But I'll be able to read my books again without going blind!'
'She sat there, grinning...wiping the last of the plate...licking her stubby little greasy fingers...and mocking me...

I looked at her...and yet I didn't see her...I saw my last chance slipping away...I felt my eyes smart and tear even in anticipation of reading by firelight again...I felt my headache return...throb...throb...and Miranda swam before me...like a big fat rubber balloon, swinging in the wind...

Jake? What is it, Jake?

Jake Barrow paused, he shrugged and sighed. He was still staring fixedly at the missing, dancing flame of the oil lamp. Then, he went on...

So that's the story, son. That'll give you an idea of what an Alaskan winter can do to a man and wife snowbound together.

But Jake, you didn't tell me what happened to Miranda...

Jake looked at his guest and smiled.

Send your wife back to Nome, son. Get in a good supply of books. Nothing like curling up with a good book by an oil lamp on dark wintry showed-in nights.

The oil lamp! It...I...I thought you said Miranda drank up all the whale oil! And...and those tallow candles...where did you get those?

Heh, heh! Of course, all you fiends have guessed Jake Barrow's charming secret! Yep, he finally got so boiled up over his wife, she was boiled up, period! And a "fat" chance she had, too! She couldn't run away! The only running she did was from the big iron pot into Jake's whale oil keg! You might say Miranda was finally the light in Jake's life! Well, we'll all see you next in my 'Tales from the Crypt.' 'Bye, now!