Here are tales that will usher you into

The Haunt of Fear

No. 28
Dec.

Featuring...

The Old Witch

The Vault-Keeper

The Crypt-Keeper
IN MEMORIAM

TALES FROM THE CRYPT: Born January 1950 Died November 1954
THE VAULT OF HORROR: Born February 1950 Died October 1954
THE HAUNT OF FEAR: Born February 1950 Died October 1954
CRIME SUSPENSTORIES: Born August 1950 Died October 1954
SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES: Born December 1951 Died September 1954

You may never read this magazine. For that matter, this magazine may never be printed. If it is printed, it may never be distributed. If it is distributed, it may be kept in a bundle behind the counter and never see the light of day. But if, through some miracle, it does reach the newsstand, this will probably be the last issue of this magazine you will ever read.

As a result of the hysterical, injudicious, and unfounded charges leveled at crime and horror comics, many retailers and wholesalers throughout the country have been intimidated into refusing to handle this type of magazine.

Although we at E.C. still believe, as we have in the past, that the charges against horror and crime comics are utter nonsense, there's no point in going into a defense of this kind of literature at the present time. Economically our situation is acute. Magazines that do not get onto the newstands do not sell. We are forced to capitulate. We give up. WE'VE HAD IT!

Naturally, with comic magazine censorship now a fact, we at E.C. look forward to an immediate drop in the crime and juvenile delinquency rate of the United States. We trust there will be fewer robberies, fewer murders, and fewer rapes!

We would like to say in passing:...passing away, that is!...that if you have enjoyed reading E.C.'s horror and crime efforts over the past five years half as much as we have truly enjoyed creating them for you, then our labors of love have not been in vain.

But enough mush! This is not only an obituary notice; it is also a birth announcement!

BOY... WHAT WE GOT IN STORE FOR YOU! (Ya didn't think E.C. was gonna die with the books, did ya? We got talent we ain't even used yet!)

E.C. is planning the NEW NEW TREND. In January of 1955, we hit! In fact, we hit with five (5) sensational new titles. They won't be horror magazines...they won't be crime magazines! They'll be utterly new and different—but in the old reliable E.C. tradition! Naturally, we can't tell you what they'll be YET...we can feel the hot breath of our floundering competitors who followed us into horror on our necks. When the mags are ready to go, they'll be announced in MAD, PANIC, WEIRD SCIENCE-FANTASY, PIRACY, and TWO-FISTED TALES!

We feel it's gonna be a HAPPY NEW YEAR with our NEW NEW TREND!

Your grateful editors.

The Prude.

On a typical, rainy, blustery, miserable March day in the early nineteenth century, a typical group of elected officials sat in the council chamber of the meeting hall of a typical early American town called Northton, cringing behind their long polished table and wincing at the thundering words of Citizen Warren Forbishier:

BUT NOT TO KISS IN PUBLIC, MR. FORBISHER! THIS IS THE YEAR EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTEEN, SIR, NOT THE WOOLE AGES!

SIN IS SIN, MR. KRAUS? EITHER YOU ARE FOR SIN... OR YOU'RE AGAINST IT!

AND IF YOU ARE FOR SIN, YOU ARE AGAINST ME... AGAINST ME AND MY ASSOCIATES! YOU KNOW THEM, MR. KRAUS... YOU KNOW MR. GOULD OF THE NORTHTON TIMES, MR. WALLMAN OF THE WALLMAN BANK, AND MR. BROCK OF BROCK SHIPPING COMPANY. THEY ARE POWERFUL MEN, MR. KRAUS!
Mr. George Kraus rose slowly, drew himself up to his full five feet six and calmly stared back into Warren Forbisher's cold, grey eyes...

Sir, this Council was elected by all of the people of Northton... not by you and your associates! I do not know how the other Council members feel, but I will not be coerced. I will vote against this absurd law...

But Warren Forbisher met sudden and unexpected opposition from one of his own supporters...

Sorry, Forbisher, that wouldn't be true! After all, Councilman Kraus, if you support your request for the death penalty for adultery, he did support the rest of your reforms... now that he thinks you're going too far, he's stopped! And I agree!

Forbisher, the self-appointed guardian of public morals... the pillar of society... the righteous judge of all... staggered at Kraus's rebuff, flushed deep red, and choked out an indignant reply...

I shall see to it, Mr. Kraus, that the people of Northton are informed of your opposition to decency good day, gentlemen...

Yes! I sincerely thought you wanted to do good for our town. I see now that you've become nothing more than a petty tyrant! Laws like yours can go to d farr... they can reach a point of ridiculousness. No, Forbisher, I'm not going to go along with you and blacken an honest man's name. I won't sacrifice the integrity of my paper!

You'll be sorry, Gould! I'll break you and your yellow rag. I'll break Kraus! I stand for good and good means power.

And so, because he was for good, and because he was powerful, the people of Northton listened to Warren Forbisher when he spoke at the next town meeting...

Kissing in public may be a small matter, worthy of no more than a few days in pillory... but if Councilman Kraus opposes so small a reform, doesn't it follow that he will set out to destroy every important reform we have achieved to protect this town's decent people?

He harangued his listeners. He ranted. He spoke in a quavering voice, choked with emotion...

You men with daughters! Yes, even your wives... do you want them exposed to the lechers of this town? To the I won't use the word in Mikeo company! I beg you, then... throw out this Councilman... this Kraus... who is threatening the morality of our beloved town!
The people cheered themselves hoarse, and come election time, George Kraus was recalled by the voters. With the people's mandate, Warren Fordisher surged ahead in his campaign against sin in his home town. Kissing in public was outlawed. Then, holding hands. Then, couples alone without a chaperone. The help- less council weakly nodded approval as reform after reform was proposed.

And since man takes his sins with him to the grave, gentlemen, the burial of men and women in the same cemetery is indecent... immoral! It must be stopped! There must be separate cemeteries for each sex...

Gould's prediction had come true! The anti-immorality campaign had reached the point of ridiculousness. The "separate cemetery law" was passed. Workmen, personally directed by Warren Fordisher, opened every woman's grave.

Does that mean... choke... that you want those already buried to be dug up and separated? Surely you don't believe that the dead... that is precisely what I do mean! Gentlemen! who is to say what goes on in the afterlife? Separate them! I say avoid any possibilities.

Surely you don't believe that the people's mandate, warren fordisher surged ahead in his campaign against sin in his home town. Kissing in public was outlawed. Then, holding hands. Then, couples alone without a chaperone. The help- less council weakly nodded approval as reform after reform was proposed.

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After that, all those that died were buried in their respective cemeteries. Afterward, Forbisher visited the two graveyards to make sure the law was being observed. However, on one of his visits, what he saw turned him livid with rage.

Mr. Forbisher crossed the road to examine the empty graves where the women that had "returned" had been buried. And then he saw the one gravestone still standing.

"Who's responsible for this? This is a woman's gravestone... a woman's grave beside her husband's! And here's another and another! All freshly dug..."

Seth Hoskins shrugged at his pipe thoughtfully.

"If the dead can't move, why'd we separate 'em in the first place?"

"That's not for you to question and if this is some sort of joke, Hoskins... well, I'll hold you responsible to see that they are separated again and stay separated!"

He remembered it all so clearly: that awful day that was the final curtain to his own sin... his own indiscretion.

"What about me, Warren? I love you. I'm not satisfied sharing you with anyone... and what about my future? Don't you think I want to be able to hold my head up when I walk among other women?"

"Don't be a fool, Laura. You can't bluff me!"

Seth Hoskins, the cemetery caretaker, shrugged.

"They won't stay separated! The women set up takes their stones, comes across the road, and get into their graves besides their men. I can't stop 'em!"

He remembered how Laura, poor, sweet Laura... had stared at him for a long moment, then turned to her desk, and drew out the vial... her eyes shimmering with tears...

"This is poison, Warren. Now... for the last time, will you divorce her and marry me?"

"I've told you a hundred times, Laura. I can't divorce her. I have my future to think of. A scandal would ruin me!"

"He remembered how Laura, poor, sweet Laura... had stared at him for a long moment, then turned to her desk, and drew out the vial... her eyes shimmering with tears..."

"If the dead can't move, why'd we separate 'em in the first place?"

"That's... that's... impossible! They're dead! The dead can't move by themselves!"

The passed years rolled away before Warren Forbisher's eyes. He saw himself as he was at thirty-two... and Laura Adams...

"Warren, I can't stand it anymore! I want to be with you always. I want to be your wife!"

"I've told you a hundred times, Laura. I can't divorce her. I have my future to think of. A scandal would ruin me!"

"But what about me, Warren? I love you. I'm not satisfied sharing you with anyone... and what about my future? Don't you think I want to be able to hold my head up when I walk among other women?"

"Don't be a fool, Laura. You can't bluff me!"

"He remembered how Laura, poor, sweet Laura... had stared at him for a long moment, then turned to her desk, and drew out the vial... her eyes shimmering with tears..."
He remembered how Laura put the vial to her lips, tossed back her head, and emptied its contents down her throat.

"My God, Laura! Don't!"

He'd rushed to her side, too late. With horror, he'd realized that to call a doctor would expose himself to scandal. He could do nothing but stand and watch his beloved Laura writhe in agony. He'd watched her foam at the mouth, her face distort—turn purple. He'd watched her die.

LAURA...CHOKING

He'd not been able to sleep for weeks afterward. He'd been tortured with guilt, tortured with the vision of her grotesquely twisted purple face.

NO! NO!

He'd known he'd sinned! And so, at first, he'd punished himself. He'd touched no liquor, no wine. He'd permitted himself no thought of other women, not even his own wife.

WARREN...? PLEASE, HENRIETTA GO TO YOUR OWN ROOM!

He'd finally found escape from his own guilt by convincing himself that fate had driven him to sin so that he might know its torment and thus save others. He'd subconsciously set about righting his own wrongs by exposing and demanding the end of the wrong doings of others...

YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY, MR. FORBISHER?

I'd like to comment on the moral decay of our town. The evils and sins that we are closing our eyes to...

He'd begun speaking at town meetings—demanding reforms—demanding the end of sin...thereby erasing his own dancing. That's what's ruining our youth. Dancing and staying out till all hours! We must have a curfew.

FORBISHER IS RIGHT?

And then he'd crept from her house in the dead of night and left her lying on the floor.
The “good” folks of Northton... those with their own secret hidden guilt had rallied to Forbish. They swallowed his words and demanded to have every suggested reform made into law. He’d become Northton’s symbol of righteousness and goodness. He’d become Northton’s power.

There’s only one sure cure for that kind of moral crime. Death!

So Warren Forbisher smiled down at the gravestone that had not been moved and he thought about the mistakes of his past and how he’d more than made up for them...

Hoskins! You move every woman’s coffin back here and if this happens again, I’ll have you thrown in prison!

Hoskins, I warned you what would happen if you did this again... and I told you I’m not doin’ it! You can’t stop husbands and wives and sweethearts from bein’ together after they’re dead, Mr. Forbisher!

But that night, suspicious of the old caretaker and anxious to trap him in the act, Warren Forbisher returned to the cemeteries... There he is sitting on that box! He’s got a spade! Now he’s lighting a pipe! Vile habit! Smokin’! Must put a stop to it...

And who is to say that the presence of Laura Adams’ body in the town cemetery was not the subconscious inspiration for Forbisher’s demand for “separate graveyards”? His inspection visits, surely at least, had given him a chance to commune with her...
Suddenly Warren Forbisher became conscious of movement all around him. The bright moonlight shone on the struggling forms. The rotting corpses of men and women digging their way into the night air. Laboring with heavy gravestones, returning to the sides of their mates. Forbisher screamed and rushed toward them, waving his arms.

STOP! STOP THIS WICKEDNESS! THERE ARE LAWS AGAINST THIS!

And then Warren stopped amid the "sining" tableau... For suddenly he saw the mouldy, maggot-infested, rotting corpse of Laura Adams come from her grave and stumble toward him.

No, Laura, no! Go back! No! No...

When old Seth Hoskins came to Laura Adams' grave and looked down into the moonlit-illuminated pit, he blushed to the roots of his sparse grey hair and he shook his head and he grinned at what he saw.

WHY, MR. FORBISHER? DON'T YOU KNOW THERE ARE LAWS ABOUT THAT SORT OF THING? GASP SHAME ON YOU!

Why, Mr. Forbisher! Don't you know there are laws about that sort of thing? Gasp shame on you!

Hee, hee! Well, that's the opening terror-tune for this brawl, kiddies. Laura finally dragged Warren down with her and they rotted together happily ever after. Now the vault-keeper awaits with his morbid-melody. I'll be back later with another odious orchestration in the meantime. Don't break any Saturday night dates, hecks! 'Bye...

I sure wish they'd stay put! I'm gettin' awful tired of doin' this every night and then switchin' 'em back when Mr. Forbisher finds out.

Seth Hoskins waited until the tremors and the scraping and the digging had died away and silence had once again descended upon the graveyards. Then he picked up his spade, shrugged, and began filling in the empty, gaping holes...

When old Seth Hoskins came to Laura Adams' grave and looked down into the moonlit-illuminated pit, he blushed to the roots of his sparse grey hair and he shook his head and he grinned at what he saw.

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WE KNOW YOU'LL ENJOY THE LUSTY, SWASHBUCKLING ADVENTURES IN OUR NEW SEAGOING MAG! "PIRACY" IS A TREASURE CHEST OF SALTY SEA YARNS PRESENTED IN THE E.C. TRADITION!

SO SAIL DOWN TO YOUR LOCAL NEWSSTAND, MATES... DO A LITTLE EXPLORING THROUGH THE REST OF THE BILGE... AND COMMANDEER YOUR COPY. IF YOU'RE NOT THE OUTDOOR TYPE AND WOULD RATHER IMPORT "PIRACY" YOU CAN SUBSCRIBE! JUST FILL OUT THE COUPON AND SHIP OFF, TOGETHER WITH ONE HUNDRED PIECES OF CENT (THAT'S ONE BUCK, LANDLUBBERS!) TO:

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NUMBSKULL

This is the scene I view. My domain. This is my refuge from the evil world of the most dangerous of all savage animals—man. This is my home. This deep, dark African jungle—a spacious room walled in by giant tropical trees whose foliage far above meet to form a cathedral ceiling. This is my final retiring-place, far from man and being a man, and knowing man, and possessing all of the treachery and cruelty of man, I was feared by my subjects once. The beasts of this jungle—yet, now, they've learned not to fear me, but to live and play and rear their young nearby, while I survey all with a benevolent silence.
As I look out over my home, I can see my life as it used to be. When I roamed this very jungle glade with a maddening desire to kill...

As I see my life then...as self-made monarch of this jungle waiting by my tent for the frightful shriek to still the chattering din...

And when it came, I would smile in anticipation of the delights that awaited me. Snatch up my rifle and wooden case, and dash off to find the pit that held my latest victim.

Swiftly, I would hurry from trap to trap, a pleasurable tingle coursing through my body, culminating in a wild explosive thrill when I finally came to the one that held my prisoner.

It would be a lion or a panther or some other innocent creature of the overgrowth but to me, it was the personification of everyone I ever hated...my old business partner who'd milked me dry, my wife who'd cheated, my lawyer...my brother...my father. I would fling open my wooden case with glee...

...and I would have my revenge! I would draw forth the instruments of torture, the contrivances of pain and suffering...and I would use them on those I hated—needle-nosed darts, weighted knives...

One after the other, I would fling them into the shrieking beast's tawny hide. Each scream, each piercing of flesh sending the thrill of revenge soaring stronger through my body. For it was my old partner screaming my wife's hide, my lawyer's blood, my father's pain...

After a while, I'd shoot it and put it out of its misery.
My first instinct was to smash the hideous crawlers into jelly, but I thought of a better revenge. I followed them as they dragged their prize to their twelve-foot anthill! Their home.

One day, after I'd finished one of my ape traps and was returning to my camp, I was enraged to see an army of giant carnivorous ants dragging off a succulent section of antelope rump.

Of all the jungle beasts, none gave me greater satisfaction than the ape, for what animal is more like a man? I would dig my pit-traps just deep enough and wide enough to hold one of these humanoid creatures.

I watched them shred the rump and carry it into their nest little by little. When the last of them had vanished into the hole atop the hill, I hurried back to camp and returned with a large can of kerosene, climbed the hill, and emptied it into the hole...

The hill shook slightly with a dull blast. Sheets of flame shot upwards. I was driven off by the fire's heat and the sickening odor of burning life.

Then, I struck a match and tossed it into the hole. I could hear the crackling of their bodies as they fried in their blazing hill. One huge ant managed to crawl from the hole and escape, fleeing in a wild zigzag course, carrying the fire with it...
I drew my pistol—waited for it, it saw me, hesitated, then backed off, its body smouldering. I would have blown it to bits then, but suddenly a startled shriek echoed out of the overgrowth—The shriek of a trapped ape.

I sped back to camp for my wooden case, feeling that surge of excitement pound through my veins.

It was an ape, all right—it's arms pinioned to its sides by the sheer walls of the pit, I approached, leering, studying the snarling hairy face, seeing the faces of those I hated.

I took my instruments of torture—pliers, hammer and nails, brace, saw, ax, and a dozen other cruel pain-inflicting articles—from my case and arrayed them on the ground before my trapped, all-but-human captive who stared at them curiously.

The eyes! That's what was so special about tormenting an ape. The eyes were almost human. They pleaded. They showed the emotions of pain. They were business partner's eyes...and cheating wife's eyes...lawyer's eyes...brother's eyes...father's eyes...eyes I hated...hated...

I savored each look of terror, each flash of pain in those eyes as I used my instruments of torture, crunching bone, smashing flesh...drilling...hacking...cutting...

And when the ape was dead, the people I hated no longer stared at me through its eyes.
Day after day, there were opportunities for me to wreak my vengeance upon my hated enemies. There was the Black Panther I'd caught in one of my many pits... a shadow image of my ex-partner, who'd died shrieking with flaming spears.

But no animal gave me as great a feeling of complete satisfaction as the almost-human sufferings of a man-like ape, and so, for the ape, I dug many traps.

I'd plunged downward, screaming, as so many of my ape-victims had done before me. I'd become wedged there, my arms pinned at my sides... my head just above the ground level... helpless... trapped...

And then they'd come out of the jungle... the lion and the panther, the hyena and the ape... the cousins of those I had tortured. They'd come toward me, snarling and then they'd stopped... as if they were waiting for something.
I'd waited too, terrorized
Helpless, praying for deliverance.

And then I'd heard the rustling,
And seen the giant ant push
Through the high grass at the
Clearing's edge. Seen it drag
Toward me... leading an army of
Giant ants from the brush.

And as it came closer, I'd
Recognized it - saw the horrid
Scars upon its sleek
Shell-like body. The burnt
Scars...

Then, suddenly it was upon me,
Its starving army after it, rip-
Ping, tearing, stripping my
Flesh.

And after they'd fin-
ished, they'd returned
Their bellies bloated
to the brush.

The echoes of my screams have long
Since faded away into my jungle domain
Now, and I can only sit here in death
And survey it all with a benevolent
Silence while the animals that once
Feared me come near and live and
Feed and play...

For what do they have to fear from a human skull, stripped
Clean, bleached white, sticking upward awkwardly, from a pit in a
Matted glade that jungle rains have long since refilled.

Heh, heh! Like my picnic yarn,
Kiddies? I torture would: now
It's time to close the vermin-
Infested vault of horror
And toss you back to the Old
Witch who's waiting with a
Morbid musical masterpiece
That should drive you notes!
It's about a gal who wants to
Play real bad... music, that is!
Then she learns the score! Heh,
Heh! My thought for today is a
Stitch in Time... makes Franken-
Stein! Bye, now.
A COLLECTOR'S E.C. CHECK-LIST

Due to frequent requests from avid collectors of E.C. type literature, we are herewith publishing a complete check list of E.C.’s "New Trend" crime and horror mags.

THE CRYPT OF TERROR
No. 17—April-May, 1950 No. 18—June-July, 1950
No. 19—Aug.-Sept., 1950

(Tales from the Crypt)
No. 20—Oct.-Nov., 1950 No. 33—Dec.-Jan., 1953
No. 21—Dec.-Jan., 1951 No. 34—Feb.-Mar., 1953
No. 22—Feb.-Mar., 1951 No. 35—April-May, 1953
No. 23—April-May, 1951 No. 36—June-July, 1953
No. 28—Feb.-Mar., 1952 No. 41—April-May, 1954
No. 29—April-May, 1952 No. 42—June-July, 1954
No. 32—Oct.-Nov., 1952 No. 45—Dec.-Jan., 1955
No. 46—Feb.-Mar., 1955

THE VAULT OF HORROR
No. 12—April-May, 1950 No. 26—Aug.-Sept., 1952
No. 13—June-July, 1950 No. 27—Oct.-Nov., 1952
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No. 40—Dec.-Jan., 1955

THE HAUNT OF FEAR
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No. 16—July-Aug., 1950 No. 16—Nov.-Dec., 1952
No. 4—Nov.-Dec., 1950 No. 18—Mar.-Apr., 1953
No. 5—Jan.-Feb., 1951 No. 19—May-June, 1953
No. 6—Mar.-Apr., 1951 No. 20—July-Aug., 1953
No. 7—May-June, 1951 No. 21—Sept.-Oct., 1953
No. 8—July-Aug., 1951 No. 22—Nov.-Dec., 1953
No. 11—Jan.-Feb., 1952 No. 25—May-June, 1954

CRIME SUSPENSTORIES
No. 2—Dec.-Jan., 1951 No. 15—Feb.-Mar., 1953
No. 3—Feb.-Mar., 1951 No. 16—April-May, 1953
No. 4—April-May, 1951 No. 17—June-July, 1953
No. 5—June-July, 1951 No. 18—Aug.-Sept., 1953
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No. 7—Oct.-Nov., 1951 No. 20—Dec.-Jan., 1954
No. 8—Dec.-Jan., 1952 No. 21—Feb.-Mar., 1954
No. 9—Feb.-Mar., 1952 No. 22—April-May, 1954
No. 10—April-May, 1952 No. 23—June-July, 1954
No. 27—Feb.-Mar., 1955

SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES
No. 1—Feb.-Mar., 1952 No. 10—Aug.-Sept., 1953
No. 2—Apr.-May, 1952 No. 11—Oct.-Nov., 1953
No. 5—Oct.-Nov., 1952 No. 14—Apr.-May, 1954
No. 6—Dec.-Jan., 1953 No. 15—June-July, 1954
No. 7—Feb.-Mar., 1953 No. 16—Aug.-Sept., 1954
No. 8—Apr.-May, 1953 No. 17—Oct.-Nov., 1954
No. 9—June-July, 1953 No. 18—Dec.-Jan., 1955

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AUDITION

A single large naked bulb atop the iron stard on the stage projected its pale light across the vast emptiness of the theater, where row upon row of gaping seats waited in lonely anticipation. A young lady emerged shyly and hesitantly from the wings, her clarinet under her arm. She, too, felt the sadness of the deserted showplace. Then, from nowhere seemingly, came a sudden scraping of chairs, a vibrant whirring, the melodious blending of instruments with female voices — and from the stygian orchestra pit, a rising platform lifted the band into view.

Phil Vitale stood before his all-girl orchestra, dramatically waving his baton, leading it in its rationally famous theme song. As the final strains faded, he rapped for silence.

ALL RIGHT, GIRLS! LET'S REHEARSE NUMBER TWENTY-EIGHT

Now came the disorganized rustle of music sheets on stands, the unharmonious tuning of instruments. Once again, Vitale rapped his baton. Instantly a deathly hush fell. Then the eager girl with the clarinet stepped forward.

M-MR. VITALE...?
Phil Vitale winced, dropped his arms and stared icily at the intruder...

And... just what do you want, Miss? Mr. Vitale, I'd like a chance to be in your band...

As the girl, Ethel Stark... so obviously in her teens... fumbled with her clarinet case, blustering forth her well-rehearsed story, Vitale's anger subsided, he winked slyly at his band...

...and even while I was playing with the high school orchestra, I kept taking lessons. And I've never missed a day's practice for eight whole years, and...

Silence greeted her spirited performance. Ethel looked from the leader to his stony-faced band... you play very well, Miss...

Mr. Vitale glanced at Belinda, his violinist. She replied with an almost imperceptible shake of her head. He looked back at Ethel... at her shapely figure... her lovely face... and he shrugged:

—But, I'm sorry! Why, Mr. Vitale? You said you liked my playing? Why?

The bandleader abruptly turned his back on Ethel and strode away. She followed him, pleading:

I'll work hard. I'll be good. You'll see. I... it's no use, Miss. You just can't be in my orchestra...

Ethel launched into an impromptu original melody on her licorice stick... sweet and haunting at first... then hot, wildly abandoned. Vitale drank in every note...

Ethel launched into an impromptu original melody on her licorice stick... sweet and haunting at first... then hot, wildly abandoned. Vitale drank in every note...
The young clarinetist left the theater in a state of hopeless dejection. But the next day she was back with renewed enthusiasm.

Ethel persisted, and he whirled on her suddenly... his eyes flashing in fury.

"Why, you ask? All right, I'll tell you why. You're too young to be in my band! You're still a child! Now, take my advice - go home... grow up... find some nice fellow... marry him... and settle down!"

She waited for him outside the stage door.

"It's my ambition for years to be in your band... no, Miss Stark! No!"

She met him again in front of his apartment.

"I can't, Miss Stark! I won't! No!"

She climbed into his taxi cab...

"No?"

She invaded his privacy.

"No!"

Even his dressing room... even there!

"No!"

You've got nerve coming in here! Suppose I wasn't dressed?

Please, Mr. Vitale! Please! If you won't let me be in your band, I'll kill myself!

She invaded his privacy.

"No!"

...even his dressing room...

"No!"

You've got nerve coming in here! Suppose I wasn't dressed?

Please, Mr. Vitale! Please! If you won't let me be in your band, I'll kill myself!
Phil Vitale viewed his shoulders sagged resignedly...

"You want to be in my band, that badly?"

Oh, yes. Yes... please, Mr. Vitale! Please!

'With no further word, the bandleader took Ethel by her hand and led her to the large room beneath the stage where his girls were starting to file onto the platform that would carry them up into the empty theater.

'I can't do anything with her. She's hounding me! Now, she's threatening to kill herself! She wants to be in the band!'"

Phil Vitale looked at his violinist, Belinda, with a slight lift of his eyebrows. She glanced at Ethel and nodded...smiling.

"Okay, Miss Stark. It's all right with my girls!"

"Oh, thank you... thank you."

Joyfully she started toward the platform, but Vitale stopped her...

"Hold it, young lady. You can't be in my band like that! First, you'll have to be made ready!"

He led her to a locker and took out a small leather case. From this, he removed a hypodermic needle and a tiny bottle of greenish liquid. A sinister smile crossed his face as he filled the hypodermic.

"What's that for? You want to be in my band, don't you? Well, this will prepare you."

Before she could object, the bandleader had thrust the needle into Ethel's arm and emptied the jade fluid...

"You can't be in my band as you are. This will make you ready!"

I sob... I'm afraid!

A wave of icy fear gripped Ethel. A numbness came over her, starting from her feet, moving up, possessing her entire being. She saw, yet could not feel; that Vitale was taking her pulse.

No need to be afraid any longer, Miss Stark. You are quite dead!"
He led her from the platform to the stage where the band sat, waiting.

I see it all now! They're all zombies! The crypt-keepers are ready to horn in with his morbid music.

Ethel followed Vitale to the pit-platform, and as it hummed in slow ascent, she began to understand...

Dead? Mr. Vitale said I'm dead! Yet I can walk! I'm a zombie! That's what he's made me into! A zombie! One of the living dead!

And you've got to be dead to be in my band, Miss Stark!

But Ethel was wrong! They weren't rushing to greet her. For when they reached her they were drooling spit and giggling idiotically, and they wildly tore her apart.

You see, Miss Stark. You've got to be dead to be in my orchestra. Phil Vitale's all ghoul orchestra...

As if the announcement was a signal, the girls broke from the bandstand in a wild stampede...

How my ambition is finally realized! How long I've waited and dreamed and prayed for this moment! See now they're rushing to welcome me!

She stared blankly, her face pallid, her eyes fixed, but inside, happiness surged through Ethel.

That's what he meant when he said I was too young! Too young to die! But I don't care! I don't care!

Well, girls! She wanted to be in my band! Here she is! She's dead!

Heh, heh! No, they weren't rushing to greet Ethel — they were rushing to eat her. So the poor girl got her wish... she ended up in the band after all... inside their tummies, that is! "All ghoul" orchestra! Oh, murder! Say those girls are strictly from hunger, eh? Heh, heh! Well... as the starving trombonist said... I'd better blow. The crypt-keepers are ready to horn in with his morbid music.

Oh, by the way, if you see a musician-victim of a maniac ax-killer, make this clever comment: see! Oleft! 'bye, now!
The window slid open easily, his gloved hands grasping the sill, Villani swung lightly into the room. As his feet pressed down upon thick carpet, he turned and lowered the window, snapping the lock shut. No sense in advertising the fact that he was busting into the dump...there'd be plenty of talk later, when the robbery was reported to the cops.

A strange sound made Villani whirl in surprise: a swarm of tiny dogs had hurtled into the room and were frantically nuzzling his trousers, sniffing at his shoes, licking his gloved fingers. Villani's eyes widened with fear as he counted a dozen creatures hemming him in...then a smile of relief creased his anxious face. Miniature Doberman Pinschers! Same kind of poaches he'd seen in the pet shop window on the way over. Their, full-size big brothers were ferocious when riled, but THESE little critters looked friendly enough. Like romping puppies

Kneeling down amidst the horde of tiny dogs, Villani chuckled as the squirming creatures slithered joyfully into his arms, their tongues slobbering frenziedly against his face and neck. "How's about showing me where the family jewels're hidden?" Villani chorlled. Straightening up, he shrugged off the clamoring animals. "Some watchdogs YOU half-pints make!"

With the spindly-legged little dogs frolicking at his heels, Villani moved quickly up the staircase and into the lavish master bedroom. It took him a moment to locate the safe, behind a wall bracket...a few exploratory twists of the dial and the door slid open. The dogs sat watchfully as Villani pulled a tray of glittering gems from the vault and dumped the stones into his coat pocket. With a broad grin, after he had shut the vault and replaced the wall bracket, Villani chirped at the dogs, who swarmed toward him, whining for attention.

"Thanks for your help, pooches!" Villani laughed. "You've welcomed me like a friend of the family...done everything but pour me a cup of coffee! I'd hate to have the likes of YOU guarding MY valuables!"

The dogs frisked down the stairs ahead of Villani, blocking him as he moved toward the escape window...their puny bodies spilling over one another in their violent game. At the bottom of the steps Villani tripped over one of the squalling animals...his smile faded and his foot lashed out in sudden anger. "Time to stop being so palsy-walsy," Villani rasped. "I gotta get outa here before..."

His foot struck another dog, he lost his balance and sprawled headlong onto the thick carpet. Villani's hands jerked to his face to protect himself from the slobbering tongues...instead, he felt the sharp impact of teeth slashing at his flesh, heard enraged snarls deep in a dozen furry throats.

Thrashing wildly, to free himself from the savage attack on his clothes and skin, Villani was engulfed by the horde of writhing bodies pressing in upon him. Gleaming fangs tore at Villani's throat; a gush of blood splattered his shirt and flowed over his ferocious tormentors. The room began to whirl for Villani, as he realized that the skin of his face had been torn down to the bone...his fingers were shredded...he felt his tortured body being buried...

"They...tricked...me...!" Villani gasped in his death spasm. "Five hundred...tricked by a dozen killers with...with five hundred teeth!"
HEH, HEH! AND NOW IT'S TIME FOR YOUR CRYPT-KEEPER, HOST OF THE CRYPT OF TERROR, TO SERVE DESSERT IN THIS MORBID FOUR-COURSE MOLD-MEAL, AND WIND-UP FEASTIVITIES FOR THE OLD WITCH'S MUCK-MAG. SO CRAWL INTO THE CREEPY CavernS OF CADAVEROUS CAVORTINGS AND SUFFER A COFFIN SPELL AS I NARRATE THIS NAUSEATING NOVELETTE OF ECCENTRIC EMBALMING. IT'S A FAVORITE OF MINE CALLED...  

A WORK OF ART!

The air of Jarvis Edwards's laboratory was heavy with the sharp suffocating odor of formaldehyde. The years showed themselves on the aging mortician... his nearly hairless head... the trembling of his veined hands. Yet Jarvis Edwards worked with such deft, bore himself with such dignity, that the corpse on the white marble table looked, as they say, so natural... as if in peaceful slumber. For this was Jarvis Edwards' pride... a deep pride in his art. And when he'd finished the job, he turned with that same pride and dignity to face his daughter, Elaine, and her new husband.  

I don't approve of elopements, Mr. Tully! I'm old fashioned enough to have expected you to ask me for my daughter's hand in marriage...
Andrew Tully had touched a tender sore spot of Jarvis Edwards' life...

"Undertaker, indeed! I forbid you to use that word in this house! I, Mr. Tully, am a mortician! And I am one of the few members of my profession worthy of the name! The rest are butchers!"

"Yes, butchers' money? That's all they're interested in! What about pride in your work, young man? What about love of a fine art? Embalming is a fine art, Mr. Tully."

"I meant no offense, sir..."

"You have no job, Mr. Tully? Then just how do you propose to support your wife?"

"If you'd help me, sir, I'd like to be an undertaker. Elaine says there's lots of money in it..."

"I'm willing to learn, Mr. Edwards! I'll work hard..."

"Let's face it, father! You need me to look after you, and Andrew needs a profession! Teach him embalming and we'll stay here...live with you...and I can go on keeping house for you."

"The old man considered for a moment, then shrugged. His face assumed an air of helpless resignation...

"Yes, I do need you, Elaine! All right. I'll teach your new husband my art. I only hope and pray he'll not become one of those butchers!"

"Thank you, father..."

"And so young, ambitious Andrew Tully became Jarvis's pupil..."

"But, gasp...you're removing all of the vital organs, Mr. Edwards? I thought that only the blood is replaced with formaldehde!"

"I told you, Andrew...when I embalm a body, it is a work of art. It was an art with the ancient Egyptians...and they removed the vital organs!"

"It seems like such a waste of time, Mr. Edwards...after all, when a man is dead, he's dead! And what difference does it make if it takes a little longer for him to rot in his grave? Why, you could do three bodies in the time it takes you to do this one!"

"I just can't seem to make you understand..."
I'LL SEE THEM... AND YOU'LL SEE THEM. IT'S A QUESTION OF PROFESSIONAL PRIDE. A NEAT INCISION SHOULD STOP IT... BOTH OF YOU MUST BE ALWAYS BICKER!

I CALL THEM ALL "BUTCHERS"! HE THINKS I'M ONE, TOO! WELL, I JUST BELIEVE IN MAKING A CORPSE PRESENTABLE ENOUGH FOR THE MOURNERS TO TAKE THEIR LAST LOOK AT IT, AND...

THOUGH THEY STOOD AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE POLE WHERE EMBALMING WAS CONCERNED, ANDREW TULLY TRIED HARD TO LEARN ALL THAT HIS STUBBORN FATHER-IN-LAW TAUGHT HIM. AND, AT LAST, THE YOUNG MAN WAS GIVEN A CADAVER OF HIS OWN...

I TELL YOU IT'S CRAZY OPERATING ON DEAD PEOPLE, ELLAINE! I CAN'T SEEM TO GET MY HANDS SCRUBBED ENOUGH! IT SICKENS ME! NOR CAN I FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR FATHER HAS AGAINST MAKING MONEY!

ANDREW FLUSHED WITH EMBARRASSMENT...

I'M SORRY, SIR! I DIDN'T SEE YOU STANDING THERE! BELIEVE ME, THERE'S NO MAN I'D RATHER WORK FOR! IT'S JUST THAT THERE'S SO MUCH MONEY TO BE MADE IF YOU'D ONLY...

I WOULDN'T FEEL ANYTHING! I'D BE DEAD! I WOULDN'T CARE HOW THEY BURIED ME!

HE CALLS THEM ALL "BUTCHERS"! HE THINKS I'M ONE, TOO! WELL, I JUST BELIEVE IN MAKING A CORPSE PRESENTABLE ENOUGH FOR THE MOURNERS TO TAKE THEIR LAST LOOK AT IT, AND...

I WON'T FEEL ANYTHING! I'D BE DEAD! I WOULDN'T CARE HOW THEY BURIED ME!

YOU'RE AT LIBERTY TO FIND EMPLOYMENT WITH ANY OTHER MORTICIAN WHO'LL HAVE YOU IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT HERE, ANDREW!

THERE'S SO MUCH MONEY I'D RATHER WORK FOR/ IT'S JUST THAT THERE'S SO MUCH MONEY TO BE MADE IF YOU'D ONLY.

I KNOW.. A WORK OF ART! WELL, I'M NOT INTERESTED IN ART! I HAVE TO EARN A LIVING!

IT'S A QUESTION OF PROFESSIONAL PRIDE. A NEAT INCISION SHOULD...

IT'S A QUESTION OF PROFESSIONAL PRIDE. A NEAT INCISION SHOULD...

OH, SO WHAT?? WHO'LL SEE THE INCISIONS ANYWAY??

IT'S A QUESTION OF PROFESSIONAL PRIDE. A NEAT INCISION SHOULD...
Suddenly, Jarvis's eyes filled with horror.

I'll be all right this time, yes... but in a few months, a year, perhaps... I'll have another attack... a fatal one?... choke... What will happen to my body? Who'll be my mortician?

Ah, I see you are busy with another victim, Andrew. Here! I brought you this to work with a cleaver! Very funny! Well, I don't appreciate your humor, Mr. Edwards. By your standards, I may be a butcher. But my prime concern is to support my wife... your daughter.

There, now aren't you glad you taught me, Mr. Edwards. Why, I'll take care of you! I'll promise me, Elaine! I can't!

No, no! You've got to promise me, Elaine! Promise me you won't let Andrew embalm me! Don't let him lay a hand on me! Promise me! Promise!

All right, father! I promise! Calm yourself! Dr. Parris warned you against becoming excited.

I won't have my body mutilated by any of those fumbling butchers. I won't.

Okay, Mr. Edwards! Okay then we'll have your body cremated! I, Andrew!

Cremated! Oh, God, never! I'd be nothing more than an urn of ashes! No! Nobody's going to do that to me! Not no...

Andrew, that was cruel! I can't take much more of this, Elaine! I tell you, if this keeps up, I'll explode!

Before long, Andrew received his license to practise undertaking—yet Jarvis, on more than one occasion, showed his contempt for his son-in-law's ability.

Although Jarvis Edwards recovered fully from his attack, he nevertheless remained somber and depressed. One topic was foremost in his morbid thoughts... even at dinner time.

I won't have my body mutilated by any of those fumbling butchers. I won't.
THAT'S LIKE GIVING HIM FLOWERS AT HIS FUNERAL? WHY? HE CAN'T SMELL THEM?

LISTEN, ANDREW! ALL THROUGH LIFE MAN SUFFERS INDIGNITIES. AT LEAST, IN DEATH, HE DESERVES THE SIMPLE MARK OF RESPECT. A DECENT EMBALMING.

TENSION IN THE MORTICIAN'S HOUSEHOLD MOUNTED WORKING WITH JARVIS BECAME UNBEARABLE FOR ANDREW...

MY LORD, SHE ISN'T A FOOTBALL, SHE SEW HER UP. DON'T LACE HER! OH, HOW I DREAD THE TIME WHEN ONE OF YOU MEATCUTTERS TURNS MY BODY INTO AN ANIMAL CARCASS!

THAT'S ALL YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR BODY! WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT YOUR BODY?

YOU WON'T CATCH ME GOING THERE. I DON'T WANT ANY OF THOSE MEATPACKERS NEAR ME... NOT NOW... NOR WHEN I DIE!

NOW THAT YOU'RE QUIETLY SEATED, THIS LETTER CAME IN THE MAIL. IT'S FROM THE UNITED UNDERTAKERS ASSOCIATION. THEY'RE HAVING THEIR ANNUAL CONVENTION. I THINK ONE OF YOU OUGHT TO GO. IT'D DO YOU GOOD TO GET AWAY FROM EACH OTHER FOR A WHILE.

LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING, MR. EDWARDS! NOBODY IS GOING TO CUT YOU UP LIKE IT OR NOT, THEY'LL FILL YOU WITH FORMALDEHYDE, SLAP SOME ROUGE ON YOUR FACE, NAIL THE LID ON YOUR COFFIN, DROP YOU INTO THE GROUND, AND SEND ELAINE AND ME THE BILL!

ANDREW ROSE FROM THE TABLE, FUMING...

USUALLY IT WAS ELAINE WHO PREVENTED A VIOLENT ARGUMENT FROM DEVELOPING BETWEEN HER HUSBAND AND FATHER.

ARE YOU TWO STILL AT IT DOWN THERE? FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, STOP THE NONSENSE AND COME UP FOR DINNER!

NOW THAT YOU'RE QUIETLY SEATED, THIS LETTER CAME IN THE MAIL. IT'S FROM THE UNITED UNDERTAKERS ASSOCIATION. THEY'RE HAVING THEIR ANNUAL CONVENTION. I THINK ONE OF YOU OUGHT TO GO. IT'D DO YOU GOOD TO GET AWAY FROM EACH OTHER FOR A WHILE.

YOU WOULDN'T LET THEM DO THAT TO ME, WOULDN'T YOU, ELAINE?

YOU WON'T LET THEM DO THAT TO ME. WHO'S GOING TO SHOW THEM THE RIGHT WAY, MR. EDWARDS? YOU'VE ALWAYS SAID YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE THAT REALLY KNOWS HOW TO EMBALM...

ELAINE BROKE IN ANGRILY.

YOU... BOTH OF YOU! STOP...

ELAINE, YOU'RE RIGHT! I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY. I'LL GO TO THAT UNDERTAKER'S CONVENTION!

JARVIS EDWARDS SHUDDERED AT ANDREW'S COLD-BLOODED MATTER-OF-FACTNESS, AND HE LOOKED PLEADINGS AT HIS DAUGHTER.

ELAINE, YOU'RE RIGHT! I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY. I'LL GO TO THAT UNDERTAKER'S CONVENTION!

STOP IT! STOP!

ELAINE BROKE IN ANGRILY.

YOU... BOTH OF YOU! STOP...

ELAINE, YOU'RE RIGHT! I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY. I'LL GO TO THAT UNDERTAKER'S CONVENTION!
AND SO, ANDREW TULLY WENT OFF TO JOIN HIS UNDERTAKERS AT THE CONVENTION IN CHICAGO. MEANWHILE, JARVIS EDWARDS BECAME MORE AND MORE MOODY. ONE NIGHT, HE AND ELAINE WERE SITTING QUIETLY IN THE LIVING ROOM. ELAINE WAS EMBROIDERING AND JARVIS WAS THUMBING ABSENTLY THROUGH A MAGAZINE. SUDDENLY:

WHAT IS IT, FATHER? YOU'RE CHUCKLING? AM I, DEAR? PERHAPS YOU SEE. I'VE JUST SOLVED MY PROBLEM!

THEN JARVIS BEGAN TO WRITE LETTERS AND ENCLOSE CHECKS IN THEM:

WHAT ARE YOU WRITING FOR, FATHER? YOU'LL SEE! YOU'LL SEE!

ANDREW TULLY CAME HOME FROM THE UNDERTAKERS CONVENTION A WISER AND MORE EAGER MAN. HE'D LEARNED MANY TRADE SECRETS WHILE HE WAS THERE. SHORT CUTS TOWARD RUNNING A MORE PROFITABLE OPERATION, HE SPOKE GLOWINGLY OF HIS FELLOW MOR-TICIONS TO ELAINE:

A GREAT BUNCH, HONEY. I TELL YOU, THEY MADE ME PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF THE PROFESSION. AND SHARP, BABY. WHAT I LEARNED IN CHICAGO IS GOING TO MAKE US RICH!

I'M BLAQ, ANDY, BUT WELL, I'M WORRIED ABOUT FATHER!

OH, STILL GRIPPING ABOUT WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO HIM AFTER HE DIES? HE'S BEEN ORDERING THINGS—THINGS IN MAGAZINES. I WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT ANYTHING ABOUT IT EXCEPT THAT HE'S BEEN SO SECRETIVE...

ORDERING THINGS? WHAT KINDS OF THINGS?

I DON'T KNOW! WHENEVER A PACKAGE ARRIVES, HE TAKES IT INTO THE LABORATORY WITHOUT OPENING IT. HE'S THERE NOW. HE'S ALWAYS THERE, HAMMERING AND PUTTERING. I HAVE TO CALL HIM THREE AND FOUR TIMES FOR SUPPER!
Andrew found his father-in-law working on a "customer" in the laboratory. The old man's mood seemed light and gay in contrast to the gloom of the surroundings. His quick, efficient labors on the slush corpse under the overhead light were in the manner of a seasoned performer on a stage. He looked up with a quick smile as his son-in-law entered...

I'm glad to see you looking so well, Mr. Edwards! Ah, Andy, my boy! You're back just in time take over on this fellow, will you? I've got to go out and mail a few orders.

Orders? What orders? We've got all the supplies we need.
Now, now? This doesn't concern you, my boy, not yet.

Andrew reported to his wife:

You're right, dear. He is working on something? I don't know what it is but I'm going to find out!

That night after supper, Jarvis excused himself and hurried to the laboratory. Soon the sounds of hammering and sawing drifted upstairs.

I'm going down and see what he's up to!

Andrew descended to the laboratory, the door was closed. He tried the knob. He shouted above the clatter within...

Mr. Edwards! Open up! Go away and leave me alone!

Andrew when the laboratory had no "customers":

Jarvis would lock himself in all day...tinkering...clanking...buzzing...

This closet, Mr. Edwards, why is it padlocked?

You stay out of that closet, Andrew! Mind your own business, just tend to your butchering!

Father! Please come up for dinner! Oh, this is getting to be unbearable. Let him play around down there! I'm not letting my dinner get cold!
One night, just before supper, the apartment above the mortuary was suddenly filled with a humming sound coming from the lab. Elaine stamped angrily...

**FATHER! COME UP! YOUR SUPPER'S GETTING COLD!** Honestly, Andrew...sometimes I think Father is in his dotage!

You're telling me! Look at these obituary notices James Crock Funeral Home...

Six, seven...nine bodies! They handled today, they know the score! We don't handle nine a week!

**ELAINE:** And a whole week without Father coming up? Awful! I'll...

Andrew's face drained white. His hands shook... **MR. JARVIS EDWARDS REGRETFULLY ANNOUNCES HIS DEATH AT 6:30 P.M. THIS EVENING. SURVIVING IS HIS DAUGHTER, ELAINE TULLY. BURIAL WILL BE FROM THE JARVIS EDWARDS MORTUARY.**

Elaine shot a quick glance at the kitchen clock...swayed momentarily...then whispered... **FATHER.**

It's some sort of joke! Oh, Lord!

Elaine didn't look.

The humming from the laboratory droned on and on. Elaine gave a little whimpering cry and darted down the stairs. Andrew close at her heels. They flung open the lab door and stopped...frozen statue-like in granite horror at what they saw.

The bloodless corpse of Jarvis Edwards lay on the cold marble table. And over him...the weird machine with the metal arms and the spinning scalpel and the clutching claws and the hoses and the jars and pumps and needles hummed and clicked and finished off the embalming job it had started at 6:30 p.m...a job that Jarvis Edwards himself would have considered "a work of art."

Heh, heh! So the old boy built himself his own mortician, eh? Well, that's one way of undertaking one's own undertaking well, then...about embalms or's mad for this issue. Well, I'll see you all again in my mag, Tales From the Crypt. Till then, this is your Crypt-keeper hoping you'll have a norrible shrik-en end! Bye, now...
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LOOK, JOE, LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN MAKE IT RING, TOO!

AW, COME ON, LET'S SEE THE REST OF THE "FAIR"!

HEY, SUGAR HINTS DON'T YOU OYUT THAT HUMAN SKELETON AND GET A REAL MAN?

SEE HERE, YOU BETTER SHUT UP OR I'LL --

YOU'LL WHAT -- YOU POOR CHUMP!

OH, JOE, WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO GROW UP AND BE A MAN?

DOGGONE! I'M FED UP WITH BEING A WEAKLING--I'LL GET CHARLES ATLAS'S FREE BOOK AND FIND OUT WHAT HE CAN DO FOR ME!

GOLLY, ATLAS BUILDS MUSCLES FAST! JUST WATCH MY SMOKE NOW!

ONE HAND IS AS GOOD AS TWO WHEN YOU'RE AN ATLAS CHAMP

THERE GOES THE BELL--JOE, YOU'RE WONDERFUL

OUT OF THE WAY SMALL-FRY, MAKE WAY FOR A MAN!

OH, JOE, YOU'RE MORE THAN THAT--YOU'RE A HE-MAN NOW!

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