THE VAULT OF HORROR!

WELL, WELL, WELL... THREE HOLES IN THE GROUND AND ALL THAT SORT OF ROT! I HAVE A DILLY OF A STORY FOR YOU THIS TIME, FRIENDS FULL OF PASSION, GRIEF... AND HATE! HEH, HEH! SO RELAX FOR A WHILE... IF YOU DARE... AND READ THE TALE I CALL...

SINK-HOLE!

SIX MONTHS SHE REFLECTED. SIX LONG, WEARY MONTHS. . . THE LONGEST MOST MISERABLE MONTHS OF HER LIFE! SHE WAS LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW OF THE RAMSHACKLE FARMHOUSE AT A CLOUD OF DUST FAR DOWN THE ROAD, AND SHE LET HER THOUGHTS DRIFT BACK... BACK TO THE BEGINNING.
TWO YEARS AGO SHE HAD JOINED A 'LONELY-HEARTS PEN-PALS CLUB' THAT WAS WHERE (BY MAIL) SHE HAD MET ALDOUS BARSTOW...

DH, HE SENT A PICTURE THIS TIME! HE'S NICE LOOKING! AND HIS LETTERS SOUND SO WARM... SO TENDER!

A YEAR OF CORRESPONDENCE HAD FOLLOWED. THE SPELL OF LONELINESS HAD BEEN BROKEN BY THE LETTERS FROM YOUNG, SYMPATHETIC ALDOUS.

HEAVENS! HE WANTS ME TO MARRY HIM AND LIVE ON HIS FARM! HIS BEAUTIFUL, COUNTRY FARM!

SHE HAD ACCEPTED HAPPILY, AND SEVERAL DAYS LATER HAD STEPPED FROM THE TRAIN FACE TO FACE WITH ALDOUS!

YOU'RE ALDOUS? BUT THE PICTURE YOU SENT... I MEAN, IN THE PICTURE YOU... YOU LOOK...

YOUNGER? WHY, SURE! THAT SNAPSHOT WAS TAKEN MORE'N FIFTEEN YEARS AGO! I WAS GOING TO HAVE A MORE RECENT ONE MADE, BUT THEY COST MONEY!

IT HADN'T REALLY MATTERED TO HER THEN, SHE REMEMBERED. ALTHOUGH HE WAS NO LONGER YOUNG, SHE HAD STIFLED HER MISGIVINGS AS THEY BOUNCED ALONG THE DUSTY ROAD TO THE FARM...

THE 'BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY FARM' TURNED OUT TO BE A GROUP OF DILAPIDATED BUILDINGS SQUATTING ON THE PARCHED, SUNBAKED EARTH. IT WAS A TERRIFIC SHOCK TO HER. SHE COULDN'T STEP FROM THE FLIVVER...

IT WASN'T ONLY THE LOOK OF THE PLACE; IT WAS THE FEEL OF IT! SHE STARED DAZEDLY AT THE DINGY, CLAPBOARD FRAME OF HER NEW HOME AND SHUDDERED. IT FELT EMPTY! IT SEEMED LIKE A PLACE WHERE NO ONE LIVED!

ALDOUS! IT... IT'S LOVELY! PREACHER'S WAITING INSIDE! CEREMONY SHOULD NOT TAKE MORE'N A FEW MINUTES! YOU BRING THE BAGS!
I hope everything's all right, Mr. Hudson.

Finally he had to leave, and she found herself trying desperately to keep him from going....

She couldn't have been more pleasantly surprised! Her face flushed, her body tingled at the nearness of him as she checked the farm's sanitary conditions.

I hope everything is all right, Mr. Hudson! Everything's fine, Mrs. Barstow!

She stood there long after the car had disappeared... until the noisy sputterings of Aldous' tractor burst her thoughts like a pin touched to a balloon.

Heavens! Aldous will want his lunch! I didn't realize it was so late!

And so they had been married! She had sensed it wouldn't work out, and had been right! Now, six months later, she watched the small dust cloud move closer... and tried to hold back her tears...

Probable Mr. Farnsworth, the government health inspector...

Morning! I'm Rick Hudson, the new health inspector! I'm taking over Mr. Farnsworth's job! Are you Mrs. Barstow?

Why... why, yes! I'm Mrs. Barstow! I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Hudson. Come! I'll... I'll show you around...

She liked this man who had suddenly enlivened her drab life. She liked him more than was good for a married girl...

Wouldn't you rather call me Shirley?

I guess so! You can call me Rick!

Finally he had to leave, and she found herself trying desperately to keep him from going....

But wouldn't you like to have some coffee, Shirley? So long!

Old fuddy-duddy Farnsworth! She disliked the prying old fool, but he was someone to talk to! As the car drew nearer, she saw that it wasn't Farnsworth! She hurried outside as the car pulled into the yard...

Perhaps Mr. Farnsworth, the health inspector...
Back to the routine! The farm closed around her again and her life was as miserable as before.

Aldous, I'd like to have a new dress... please...

What's the matter with the one you got on?

Why... nothing! I just thought you thought wrong; I think I'm made of money! When you need a dress, you'll get one... not before!

She fought to control a flood of tears, but it was impossible...

The mean, stingy, old skinflint! I hate him! (Sob) HATE HIM!

I wish I could go away... leave this place! But I can't! I have no money... clothes! (Sob) and where could I go? What would I do? I'll never be able to free myself from him!

The only thing that made life bearable for her in the months that followed, were Rick's visits. She was in love with him...

Rick, you've finished inspecting the farm. Can't you stay a while? Must you go?

I'm surprised at you, Shirley! What would Aldous say if he heard you talk like that?

Aldous! That was the trouble! She was certain Rick cared for her, and that the only thing that kept him from showing it... was the fact that she was married!

Aldous! How I detest him! He's ruined my life! I wish he'd die!
At that moment Aldous came in from the fields. He was nearly got myself killed. Those damned sink holes? What's a sink hole?

The ground just opened up not ten feet in front of me. It stopped just in time.

"Oh!"

Danged sink holes! Practically bottomless! If I'd fallen in there, you'd never have found me!

"Oh?"

She dragged the unconscious Aldous from the house. And with great effort, lifted him onto the tractor. Overhead, the dark sky rumbled ominously as if in reproach.

"Have to hurry, he'll wake up soon!" (Gasp)

The entire plan struck her with shocking force! Here was her one and only chance for freedom, for happiness! And she was in no mood to let it slip by...

"Klang!"

Silently, she thanked Aldous for having made her learn to work the tractor. Now, when her future, her life, depended on it, she was able to send the machine lurching across the fields...
Droplets of rain plunged from the sky into the earth, the wind rose, whipping her hair. She reached the sink hole...

...It's big! Big! Plenty big enough for the tractor, too!

Sprawled on the ground, she watched spellbound as the tractor teetered on the edge of the pit, and then toppled into oblivion.

There was an investigation but it disclosed nothing. You'll never find a body down there! Probably carried away by that underground river! No sign of the tractor, either!

...And then there was the inquest... because the body of the deceased has not been found, the verdict is 'death by accident, due to the causes of nature!'

...And then she was free! She knew Rick would soon come to her, and she strolled about the farm while she waited. It was the same ugly, empty-feeling farm. Still the place where it seemed, no one lived!

Rick came... and Shirley ran happily to him.

I... I heard about Aldous, Shirley! I'm sorry! Don't be sorry, Rick. Be glad he was mean, cruel. He stood between us, but now we're free, Rick! Free!
We don't have to be afraid to show our feelings anymore, Rick darling! Tell me! Tell me all the things you've been wanting to tell me! What are you talking about? I came to say 'good-bye'?

"Good-bye?"

Sure! Joe Farnsworth's coming back to take over my job! I'm being sent to another state.

Another state? You'll you'll take me with you, won't you, Rick? For heaven's sake, don't leave me here! Say you'll take me with you! Are you kidding?

Look, Shirley, you're a nice kid, but I can't take you with me! I've been happily married for years! I got a wife and two kids!

Rick...

She never saw or heard from Rick again. She remained, lashed to the desolate farm, while the weeks passed into months. And one day, as she went to draw water from the well...

Chilly out here. Better pull the bucket up and hurry inside!

She wound the crank, drawing the bucket upward once... twice... then, suddenly it stopped!

Ungh! Won't come up any further! Something, something's holding it back!
She pitted all her strength to the task of raising the bucket, but it was no use! The handle was wrenched from her grip!

The rope uncoiled to its full length, and then it snapped taut! It swayed and jerked.

It's...it's as if something is climbing up!

Rooted to the spot, she stared in horror as first one hand slid over the well's wall...and then another...

The bucket's going down! Something's pulling it back down!

She was petrified! The incredulously horrible thing grasped her arm with a slimy, molted hand and pulled her close to its soaking body! She fought hysterically...but the slopping, maggot-covered limbs locked her in a death grip...and dragged her into the depths!

The hollow echoes of her screams ceased abruptly, and a cloak of utter silence seemed to settle over the empty farm! Now it truly was...a place where no one lived!

Heh! Heh! Heh! Well-done! Well-done! If Shirley hadn't gone to the well, she might not have kicked the bucket! Of course, you realize now that the underground river from the sink hole was the water that fed the well! Heh! I'll bet Aldous experienced a sinking feeling when he went to his death! Oh, well...as the saying goes, "How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen dead Aldous?" Heh! Heh! Heh!

HEH! HEH! HEH! HEH! HEH!
H-M-M-M! IS THAT CHILD'S FAIRY TALE THE VAULT-KEEPER JUST TOLD YOU SUPPOSED TO BE A HORROR STORY? BAH! I'LL GET YOU DIDNT BAT AN EYELASH! NOW, IT'S MY TURN! YES, IT'S ME AGAIN! THE CRYPT-KEEPER! I'VE LOOKED THROUGH MY COLLECTION OF TERROR-TALES HERE IN MY CRYPT, AND I'VE COME UP WITH A HUM-DINGER! THIS YARR WILL ABSOLUTELY SEND CHILLS AND SHIVERS FROM THE TIPS OF YOUR CROOKED TOES TO THE ENDS OF YOUR HAIRS OR YOUR UNKEMPT HEAD! IF THE BLOOD DOESN'T FREEZE IN YOUR VEINS FROM THIS SPIRE-TINGER, THEN YOU'RE BITING OR RED-NOT BRIMSTONE! I CALL THIS CRAWLY NARRATIVE...

LEND ME A HAND!

IT BEGAN IN THE CLEAN, WHITE OPERATING ROOM OF THE COUNTY HOSPITAL! DOCTOR HARDLO JOHNSTONE, HIS BROW WET WITH PERSPIRATION, STEPPED BACK FROM THE SHEETED, PROSTRATE FORM OR THE OPERATING TABLE AND REMOVED HIS MASK! HIS WHITE-COATED ASSISTANT GRASPED HIS RUBBER-GLOVED HAND...

CONGRATULATIONS, DR. JOHNSTONE! THE MOST AMAZING SURGICAL OPERATION I'VE EVER WITNESSED! THANK YOU, DR. BROWN, FOR YOUR INVALUABLE AIDS!
Doctor Johnstone turned, and with heavy steps, moved through the swinging doors out of the operating room! The small group of nurses and doctors watched him go... A genius! He is definitely the greatest surgeon alive today! Two years ago, this operation was considered impossible!

Doctor Johnstone entered another white, sparkling room! This one was lined with sinks and lockers! He removed his gloves and washed... Then, tired... so tired! Four hours at the operating table! I'm exhausted!

Down the imposing marble steps of the huge hospital to a car parked at the curb, Doctor Johnstone trudged wearily...

...got to get some sleep! Too much for me... night after night...

The headlights of the hurtling automobile reached into the darkness of the road before it like two ghostly fingers pointing into eternity.

The stillness of the deserted road was shattered by the impact of two tons of metal, glass, and human flesh! Then the darkness closed in on the wreckage of a once sleek automobile! The doctor lay unconscious; his right hand pinned beneath the seven-hundred pound red-hot engine.

When Doctor Johnstone opened his eyes, he gazed at a familiar sight... the sparkling white walls of a hospital room! He looked about! His head cleared... I remember, now! The crash! I must have fallen asleep at the wheel! My hand... it pains so...
The bandages covered his forearm from his elbow down. But the hand...the hand was gone...

Oh, Lord... Lord... what have they done to me?

Just... a little... higher... and I... oh... wha... no... no... no!

Yaaaaaa aaaaaah!

The days went by, and the doctor became sullen and morose.

He brooded... spoke to no one.

It's understandable... and he knew his career was finished.

It was understandable, he was such a brilliant surgeon...

...and then they let him go home! There was nothing more to be done for him! The wrist would heal! But the mind... ah, the mind was a different matter! Hm, hm! How would you feel if you were in Doctor Johnstone's shoes, eh?

They quieted Doctor Johnstone! They told him that his hand had been mangled and burned! That when they brought him to the hospital, amputation was the only recourse! They gave him sedatives... to make him sleep...

I don't want to sleep.
I don't want to live anymore!

Then, one day, about three months after the accident, Doctor Johnstone was reading a medical journal. Something about keeping tissue alive by chemical and mechanical apparatus... when it came to him, an answer... a way out. Why, not? If they did it with chicken hearts and dog's heads, I could do it with a hand!

It was simple. He'd get a hand somewhere... somehow! He could keep it alive until he could successfully graft it to his wrist stump...

It would be so easy! I'm sure I could work out a method of doing it! But I'd have to do it myself--keep it a secret. Because I'll need a hand from a freshly-killed corpse!
The equipment was assembled—plasma... air pumps... glucose for cell nutrition... plastic tubing to act as veins and arteries. Everything was ready! Everything except...

A body! Now, I must get a fresh body!

At last Doctor Johnstone had found his victim! A down-and-out! A chronic alcoholic with no family... no friends... no one to miss him if he... Disappeared.

I don't know why I'm tellin' yuh all this, Mister! Buy me 'nother drink, huh?

Close to midnight, two shadowy figures staggered from a bar! Then, one collapsed and the other carried him to a waiting car...

Cripes! He's a tank! I thought he'd never pass out!

Once at his home, the doctor carried the limp form of his victim directly to his laboratory! The lights in the apparatus-cluttered room burned far into the night, towards morning...

... got to get rid of the body!

Soon the hole was deep and dark! The doctor pushed the body of the unfortunate derelict into the yawning pit and filled it up with the black earth...

I'll bury him here, in my garden! He'll never be missed... but if he is... they'll hardly look for him here!

Thanks, friend! Thanks for the hand... ha-ha-ha!
The work in the garden completed, the doctor returned to his laboratory. The monotonous throbbing of an air pump; the gurgling of plasma coursing through tubing, the steady drip, drip of glucose. We heard Doctor Johnstone stare at the hand lying on the table.

"It's turning blue? Is it dead?"

Doctor Johnstone touched a wire to a nerve ending at the stump of the wrist. A small charge of electricity shot from it. The hand quivered... A finger bent upward.

"Is it? Thank heavens!"

Horror clutched at the doctor's pounding heart! The hand lay on the table. The tubes attached to its veins and arteries pulsating with each stroke of the pump. "I've got to test it! To see if it's still alive!"

Then the doctor began to unwrap the bandages from his right arm. "I only hope... I don't lose consciousness during the operation!"

The clock on the laboratory wall ticked on and on... And then, three hours later...

The weeks went by. Doctor Johnstone remained indoors... His arm in a cast! Finally the fateful day came when the cast was removed.

I've failed. I can't move the fingers!"

Something was wrong! Something had been overlooked! The hand was numb... there was no feeling! The doctor took a pin and jabbed it. There was no pain... dead! It's dead!

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Something was wrong! Something had been overlooked! The hand was numb... there was no feeling! The doctor took a pin and jabbed it. There was no pain... dead! It's dead!
The doctor hurled himself upon the bed and fell into an exhausted sleep. The day darkened and night came on. The dead hand lay at his side...attached to his arm...lifeless...still? Then...a finger moved! It twitched...bent...

When the doctor woke up, he found himself tearing at the lock to the tool room, trying to open the door...

WHA...WHAT AM I DOING HERE? GOOD LORD, I MUST HAVE WALKED IN MY SLEEP!

He lifted the hand...staring at it! He tried to bend the fingers! There was no response. Still...dead! The flesh is alive but the hand itself remains dead!

The next night, the doctor went to bed at his usual time. During the day he had been almost tempted to remove the lifeless hand from his arm. But he decided to wait, to see if his sleep was troubled. He dreamed of walking in blackness...carrying a stick. He was awakened suddenly by...

Huh? What the...? I must have been walking in my sleep again! I fell over this...soft spot in the earth! The spot...

The spot where I buried him!

What am I doing with this shovel? And the hand. The dead hand is holding it!

Doctor Johnstone tried to wrench the shovel from the dead limb! But it held it in a vice-like grip...

How how did it take hold of the shovel in the first place?
IN MY SLEEP, MY SUBCONSCIOUS CAN CONTROL IT... BUT NOW... I CANNOT MAKE IT MOVE. A G农民 APRAIN WHIPPED THROUGH JOHNSTONE'S RIGHT ARM, THE HAND.... THE DEAD HAND...

DOCTOR JOHNSTONE STARDED DOWN INTO THE BLACK HOLE BEFORE HIM. THERE, IN THE SLIMY WET SOIL, HE SAW IT... I... I'VE DUG UP THAT DRUNK I MURDERED!

AN EAR-SPLITTING SHRIEK SHATTERED THE STILLNESS OF DOCTOR JOHNSTONE'S GARDEN! THE GULPING, WRETCHING, GAGGING GROANS OF A MAN BEING CHOKED TO DEATH WERE HEARD...

THE FOLLOWING EVENING, AFTER AN EXHAUSTING DAY OF TREATING THE HAND WITH DIATHERMY TO RELAX THE MUSCLES, THE DOCTOR RETINDED EARLY! HE IMMEDIATELY DROPPED OFF INTO A NIGHTMARE OF CLAWING AT CLOSED DOORS... AND DIGGING. DIGGING!

HEH, HEH! AND THAT'S MY TALE FROM THE CRYPT FOR THIS ISSUE, KIDDIES! LOOKS LIKE THE OLD DRUNK'S HAND RESENTED BEING SEPARATED FROM ITS BODY, EH? IT CAME BACK, THOUGH, IN A GRIPPING FINISH... DOCTOR JOHNSTONE'S FINISH, THAT IS! WELL, I HOPE YOU ENJOYED THIS STORY AND THAT IT'S A FEW CHILLS NOW. I'LL TURN YOU BACK TO THE VAULT-KEEPER FOR ANOTHER BISQU - STORY!

THEY FOUND THE DOCTOR LYING BY THE PIT. HE WAS DEAD! BLOOD TRICKLED FROM HIS RAW WRIST-STUMP AND DOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PIT... A CORPSE! AND IT'S RIGHT HAND IS SEVERED... BUT IN PLACE!

I'M DIGGING! IT... IT'S TEARING ITSELF LOOSE!

An amazing doctor finally removed the shovel from the hand, locked it in the toolroom, and returned to the house. There was no sleep for him the rest of that night. He was sure now the operation was a success and that the hand lived, moved was controllable.

An excruciating pain whipped through Johnstone's night arm. The hand... the dead hand...
I CALL THIS CHILLING TALE...

THE MASK OF HORROR

It was a small costume shop in a dark twisting street at the edge of the theatrical district. Ken Anders stood before its cluttered window and gazed in at the array of death-like masks that stared blankly back at him. Pirates...clowns...apes...famous people...this is the kind of place I've been searching for!

Ken entered the gloomy shop. The musty smell of clothes long-since rotted into uselessness...yellowing newspapers that covered forgotten orders...the odor of drying rubber and aging paper-mache burned his nostrils. The shop was dank and damp, lonely, like a tomb.

"Hello? Anyone about?"
He came from behind a faded curtain... small, wrinkled... an old man, bent from the shriveling of a once young body! He shuffled towards Ken... 

Yes? What can I do for you? I'd like to buy a costume... for a masquerade party! Something... unique!

Ken gesticulated toward the window where the masks hung grinning eagerly at an empty dark desert street... perhaps, a mask...?

What is wrong with the mask you are wearing?

What is wrong with the I. I'd like to buy a costume... for a masquerade party! Something... unique...? But here... ah... here in my shop, things are different. My masks are real! They reflect the character of the persons who wear them...

They... what? One of my masks represent more truly the person that is beneath the face it covers!

Huh? Everyone wears a mask! It hides the evil... the good... the hate... the love... that lies beneath!

Yeah, sure! Only...

But here... ah... here in my shop, things are different. My masks are real! They reflect the character of the persons who wear them...

They... what? One of my masks represent more truly the person that is beneath the face it covers!

Ken Arders left the shop, the package under his arm! He moved down the dark twisting street! A girl passed him... stopped before the costume shop... then entered... crazy old guy! Oh, well! At least I have a costume for the masquerade tonight! At a price I could afford!

Yes! I see! Very interesting! Now, about this masquerade party... here! Take this box! It has a costume and a mask inside! A mask that actually looks like you... the real you!
Once back at his room, Ken showered and shaved! Then he cut the strings that secured the box, opened it...

Now let's see what kind of a costume the old guy gave me anyway... wha??

Ken stepped back horrified! The rotting face of a decomposing corpse, almost skull-like, leered up at him...

Good Lord! The old guy was nuts! That hogwash about real character... hmmm... PH! Big joke!

What a revolting costume! Well... I might as well wear it! It's too late to take it back, now!

Ken dressed in the moldy, rotted clothes of the costume and put the mask back into the box. Then he left! He took a taxi cross-town to his fiancée's house...

Agnes! You're not dressed!

I'm not doing, Ken! I've a terrible headache! You go on alone! I wouldn't want to spoil your evening!

Nonsense! I'll stay here with you this eve...

No! I... I'd rather be alone, Ken! Please.

Ken left! The party wouldn't be much fun without Agnes! Dearest Agnes! Someday she would be Ken's wife! And they'd grow old together and the mask...

I left my mask at Agnes' house! I'll have to go back and get it!

Ken turned around! A car pulled up before Agnes' house! A man got out and went inside! Ken moved toward the door... opened it...

Did you get rid of him, honey?

Yes, the sap! I bent him on without me! Told him I had a headache! He won't bother us again tonight! Now... kiss me!
Ken picked up his package and closed the door! Agnes... Agnes and another man... How... How could she do this to me? I... I thought she loved me!

Ken walked in a daze; he kept seeing them... together, kissing... embracing... and laughing... laughing at him... We... we were engaged? I... I feel like a fool.

And then he found himself standing before a door! From within, the sound of music and revelry drifted onto the dark street. He untied the box and slipped on the mask. The door opened.

"Good Lord! Oh, you gave me a start! What a... a scary mask!"

Ken moved as though in a dream; people in varied costumes, laughing, talking, dancing, drinking... All grew silent as they caught sight of him. But he didn't care; he felt like his mask. Dead... His life ended! The old man... funny... the old man was almost right.

Shay, 'm here! Mishter corsp! I got just the girl for you! C'moh, C'mdr. Hic.

The drunken pirate pulled him to a far corner of the room where a shapely girl, her face covered by the mask of an evil vampire, sat demurely. "Mishter corsp! Meet mishter vampi! I'm shure you two will be bho happy together."

The girl looked up. The drunken pirate rambled on.

He staggered away. There was a moment of embarrassing silence and then... If you can... stand it... shall we dance? Yes! I'd love to!"
Ken took her in his arms! Her warm loveliness was comforting to him! Tonight...tonight he would have fun! Forget Agnes! Over...done with...

I...I'm sorry about the mask! I...I sought it sight unseen!

Ken:

The girl in that dark twisting street that went into the shop...after he came out...

At a little place downtown...Yes! Is that where you bought yours?

A costume shop...with a queer old proprietor?

They laughed! She was sweet! Not hard and cold like Agnes! She was soft...sensitive...

I'll bet under that evil vampire mask, there's a face as lovely and as charming as the voice I hear and the body I see...

The same to you...mister corpse!

The evening went by, and Ken and his mysterious masked partner danced on...and laughed...and talked...and fell in love...

They laughed. She was sweet! Not hard and cold like Agnes! She was soft...sensitive...

The same to you...mister corpse!

Please, darling! Let's go out into the garden! It's almost midnight and I...I'd like to be alone with you when we unmask!

Of course, sweet! We'll find a quiet, lonely spot!
Near a mirror-like lily pool, they stood. Ken and this lovely creature whom he had fallen in love with... "I don't care what you look like, dearest! I'll want you no matter what!"

With trembling hands, Ken untied the evil, ugly, vampire mask from the girl and lifted it away. "Ouch! Good Lord!"

"Yes... I'll want you and this is as good a time as any..."

She sprang at him, burying her sharp fangs in his neck. For a moment, Ken was paralyzed with fear. Then...

They struggled! Ken's foot slipped from under him, and he dropped to the ground! She was upon him... clawing, scratching... tearing! The pool... the lily pool...

"My only chance..."

He pushed her head below the surface! She clutched at his mask, tearing it from his face! The water was churned by the gasping and struggling of the drowning girl...

"Die... human monster! Die!"

And then the splashing and the churning ceased! The vampire was dead! The ripples ran in concentric circles to the edge of the lily pond! Ken gazed down at its shimmering water, at the girl lying below its mirror-like surface! And then he saw it... "Oh Lord, no!"

His own reflection! His face unmasked...

"Heh, heh! Well, that's my tale, kiddies! Ken looked into the lily-pool and decided right then and there to visit a good plastic surgeon! Oh well! He'll find out that it's an undertaker who really needs it and now, I'll turn you over to my fellow ghoullunatic, the old witch! Bye, now!"

Arg, if you don't have a subscription you'll find our address somewhere!
HEE, HEE! YES, IT'S ME AGAIN! THE OLD WITCH! I SEE IT IS TIME
ONCE MORE FOR ME TO LIGHT THE FIRE UNDER MY CAULDRON AND BREW
FOR YOU ANOTHER TALE OF TERROR! I'M SURE YOU'LL LIKE THE
TASTE OF THIS YARN I'VE CONCOCTED? IT'S A SPECIAL RECIPE, FILLED
WITH HORROR, WELL GARNISHED WITH FRIGHT, AND TOPPED OFF WITH
A SHOCKING FINISH! TUCK YOUR SHROUDS UP UNDER YOUR LITTLE
CHINS SO THE DRIPPING CHILLS WON'T SOIL YOUR MUMMY WRAPPINGS,
AND I'LL FEED YOU THE TALE I CALL...

DYING TO LOSE WEIGHT!

MY TALE BEGINS IN A SMALL TOWN! IT'S A NICE
TOWN... WITH NICE PEOPLE... TALL NICE PEOPLE...
SHORT NICE PEOPLE... SKINNY NICE PEOPLE...
AND FAT NICE PEOPLE! AH, THE FAT NICE PEOPLE!
THEY ARE THE ONES MY STORY IS ABOUT! THERE'S
MRS. VAN KLEGE, THE TOWN'S RICHEST WOMAN...

MY DEAR MRS. VAN KLEGE! YOU SIMPLY MUST REDUCE! YOUR
FIGURE IS GETTING MORE IMPOSSIBLE TO FIT EVERY DAY!

REALLY, PIÈRE? BUT... I DO LOVE MY BON-BONS SO MUCH!
AND THEN THERE'S TOM AIRNS, A HEN-PICKED HUSBAND IF YOU EVER SAW ONE...

LOOK AT YOU! I'M ALWAYS MENDING BUTTONS ON YOUR CLOTHES! THEY KEEP POPPING OFF! I'M ASHAMED TO BE SEEN WITH YOU ON THE STREETS! WHY DON'T YOU GO ON A DIET?

AW, LEENA! YOU KNOW I LIKE MY EATING MORE THAN ANYTHING IN THE WORLD!

BUT MOTHER! I... I COULDN'T GIVE UP MY ICE-CREAM FRAPPE SUNDAES WITH WHIPPED CREAM! I LOVE THEM SO?

AND POOR CHARLIE STREET... TWO-HUNDRED AND FORTY POUNDS OF BACHELOR... LIVING IN A FURNISHED ROOM... NEVER GOES OUT WITH ALL THE NICE WOMEN BOARDIN' WITH ME! THEY WON'T LOOK AT HIM 'CAUSE HE'S SO... SO... YOU KNOW!

OH, OF COURSE THERE ARE OTHER NICE FAT PEOPLE IN THIS TOWN, BUT THESE FOUR ARE THE ONES WE ARE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT THESE FOUR AND ONE OTHER... A HEAVY MAN WITH TWINKLING EYES WHO JUST AT THIS MOMENT IS DRIVING HIS EXPENSIVE CAR DOWN THE MAIN STREET...

M-N-M-M! THIS LOOKS LIKE A GOOD SPOT TO SET UP MY 'CLINIC'!

THE HEAVY MAN WITH THE TWINKLING EYES AND THE EXPENSIVE CAR PULLS UP BEFORE A LARGE BUILDING WITH A SIGN HANGING FROM IT... [AR, JUST WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR] 'OFFICE SPACE FOR RENT'!

A FEW DAYS LATER, LARGE POSTERS BEGIN TO APPEAR OR FORCES, BILLBOARDS, AND BRICK WALLS AROUND TOWN...

AREN'T OVERWEIGHT? ARE YOU TIRED, LISTLESS, LONELY, UNPOPULAR BECAUSE YOU ARE FAT? OR PEROO'S AMAZING FORMULA WILL WORK WONDERS FOR YOU! "NO DIETING! NO EXERCISES! EAT ALL YOU PLEASE! LOSE WEIGHT IMMEDIATELY! ATTEND LECTURE TONIGHT!

AND SO, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THAT IS THE STORY OF MY DISCOVERY IN THIS TINY CAPSULE IS THE WHOLE SECRET OF MY AMAZING REDUCING PROGRAM! LET ME WARN YOU! THE COSTS OF MY RESEARCH WERE HIGH. THEREFORE, MY FEE FOR THIS PRECIOUS CAPSULE WILL BE HIGH...
Mrs. van Klege is first in line the next morning when Dr. Perdo opens the door to his 'Clinic!' Behind her are Tom Aikins, Sally Bates, and Charlie Street...

Yes, the fee is high! Two hundred dollars for one little capsule! But, if it is all that Dr. Perdo claims it to be, it'll be worth it!

And in two weeks, if you have all not begun to lose pounds and pounds, I guarantee a full refund to each and every one of you!

Only old Doc Dougherty, the town doctor, is dubious of the stranger's wonderful capsule...

It is impossible that this capsule will do all Dr. Perdo claims it will, Mr. Aikin! Now, if you want to reduce, I can prescribe a diet which...

But Doc Dougherty is ignored! The four nice fat people each take one of Doctor Perdo's capsules...

Here goes, Mother! That's a good girl, Sally!

In a few weeks, the people who have paid Dr. Perdo his fabulous fee begin to lose weight...

Just look at Mr. Street! He looks twenty pounds slimmer already!

And in a month, the nice fat people who have taken Dr. Perdo's capsules are nice slim people...

Can I take you to the Sophomore Dance Saturday night, Sally?

I'd love to go, Irving!

So that when Doctor Perdo closes his 'Clinic' and bids good-bye to the nice small town, there are four grateful thin people to see him off...

Good-bye, Doctor Perdo! Thanks for everything, Doc!

Good-bye! Doctor, I'll never forget you for this!
But a few weeks after Dr. Perdo has gone, the nice thin people who took his amazing capsule have become thinner people...

...I eat all I can, mother! I'm frightened.

Sally! You must eat more! You're getting skinny as a rail!

And still thinner...

Really, Mrs. Van Klege! This is getting ridiculous! I've taken in this dress three times already!

I... can't help it, Pierre! I can't seem to stop!

...Until...

Why don't you go see Old Doc Dougherty, Tom? He'll tell you why you're down to ninety pounds.

I can't, Leena! He warned me! I'd be... embarrassed.

Then, one day...

Come quick, doctor! It's my roofer, Charlie Street! He's dying!

But when Old Doc Dougherty arrives...

Good heavens! He's all emaciated! Thin as a bone! He looks like he starved to death!

He ain't got no family, doctor!

I'll call the city morgue! I have to perform an autopsy to determine the cause of death!

At the morgue, Doc Dougherty takes a scalpel...
The doctor arrives at Sally Bates' house just as Sally passes into the beyond. Tom Aikin is deathly ill when Doc Dougherty arrives. He administers drugs but I'm too late. I can't save him, now. I sob sob my poor Tom he sob just wasted away.

Then the doc rushes to Judge Paradiso's house. What's wrong, you've got to go? You're white as a ghost! This inhuman Doctor Peroo! He he's murdered four people!

The warrant is sworn and the search for Peroo begins. I think it would be wise if the information as to the causes of death be withheld from the families of the victims!

Weeks go by, but the treacherous Doctor is not found. I signed the death certificate without an autopsy on Mrs. Van Klege since I knew what I would find, anyway.

The weeks stretch into months, but Doctor Peroo eludes his pursuers. Then, one day, about six months after his four victims had died, Doctor Peroo, sporting a moustache as a disguise, is driving along a country road.

Ugh, the town cemetery. Let's see? I sold four capsules in this berg. That means I got four customers buried behind that iron gate.

They say a criminal always returns to the scene of the crime. Peroo seems to be no exception. He takes a back route, skirting the edge of town.
Suddenly the engine sputters; Doctor Perdo looks down the gauge registers empty. His car just has enough power to coast into a nearby gas station...

I'll keep my face hidden; this hick won't recognize me! Yes, sir? Gas?

Yes! Fill it up! Right!

Meanwhile, Perdo is racing blindly down the road past an iron fence, he pants. "The cemetery! I could hide there, they'd never think of looking for me in there!"

Perdo leaps from the car. He rushes down the road; the gas-station attendant springs to a phone. "I know him anywhere! Call out a posse! He's headed south on the post road! For my daughter, Sally... and the rest... get him!

Through an opening in the rusted bars up among grey tombstones and grassy mounds, he runs... into a mausoleum. "I can hide in here."

Perdo, in his terror, never notices the name over the door: Van Klege.
The door clicks behind him! He stands beside a coffin reposing grotesquely in the center of the cold stone room! Suddenly, he hears a noise... a rustling sound... coming from the casket!

**PERDO UNLATCHES THE CATCH THAT HAS HELD THE CASKET CLOSED FOR SIX MONTHS! HE LIFTS THE LID...**

**OH, MY GOD... NO...**

Outside the mausoleum, the posse... with bloodhounds hot on Perdo's scent... are startled by a blood-curdling, ear-splitting shriek...


**They rush to the stone vault... swing open the door...**

**Good Lord!**

**Kill it... quick!** What in heaven is it?

**A TAPEWORM! A MONSTEROUS TAPEWORM! The one that killed Mrs. Van Kleeg! It must have grown and fed on her body until Perdo released it from the coffin! Then it attacked him! You see, those reducing capsules he sold each contained a TAPEWORM LARVA! A sure way to reduce!**

Through the milling posse, old Doc Dougherty and Judge Farland push their way! They gaze in horror as the revolting sight...

**What is it, Doc?**

A TAPEWORM! A MONSTEROUS TAPEWORM! The one that killed Mrs. Van Kleeg! It must have grown and fed on her body until Perdo released it from the coffin! Then it attacked him! You see, those reducing capsules he sold each contained a TAPEWORM LARVA! A sure way to reduce!

A huge worm-like monster thrashes about in the dark mausoleum! Then the thrashing is still, as countless bullets plow into its hideous hulk...

**WHERE'S PERDO?**

Look! His shoe... with part of a foot in it! The thing, it must have... devoured him...

Hee, hee! And that's my story from the cauldron for this time, you horror-hungry hoodlums! Perdo gave his victims a TAPEWORM to swallow and finally one swallowed him! I hope you enjoyed this tasty tale! Don't feel sorry for the four nice people who died from Perdo's fiendish plot! In the end, the worm turned... oh, him! Hee, hee! Oh, by the way! If you want to lose weight, don't go to a quack like Perdo! Just keep reading E.C. horror mags! You'll shiver the fat off! Bye, now!