RAY BRADBURY

Ray Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Ill., on Aug. 22, 1920. His mother was of Swedish descent, and his father's ancestors came to America in 1630. Ray spent much of his childhood in Arizona. At the age of 12, he received his first typewriter, a toy model, and started to write sequels to Edgar Rice Burroughs novels. As a boy, his greatest interests were magic, acting, and reading the Oz books, Tom Swift, Edgar Allen Poe, and Jules Verne. So it was quite natural, when he began writing, that his first stories were fantasies. He took a short-story course in Los Angeles High School in 1937, graduated in 1938, and had no further formal education. He started submitting stories to magazines at the age of 15, and sold his first story at the age of 21. His early acceptances appeared in the leading pulp magazines. Then in 1945, he sold his first "quality" story to the American Mercury, and followed this with sales to most of America's best-known slick magazines. His stories have been reprinted in some 60 anthologies, including the 1946, 1948, and 1952 volumes of The Best American Short Stories. In 1948, Ray won third prize in the O. Henry Memorial Prize Stories Awards. The only other job Bradbury has ever held outside of writing was during the three years from 1939 to 1942, when he sold newspapers on a street corner at night, while writing during the day. He has had three books of stories published: DARK CARNIVAL, from Arkham House in 1947; THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, from Doubleday in 1950, and THE ILLUSTRATED MAN, Doubleday, 1951. His new book of stories, THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN, is due, again from Doubleday, about the time this blog hits the stands. Ray has just finished writing a science-fiction movie script for a big Hollywood film studio, and has started another. He now lives in Los Angeles with his wife Marguerite, whom he married in 1947, and his two daughters... Susan, age three, and Ramona, eighteen months. Having been a fervent collector of comic strips and panels since the age of eight (owning a complete file of Buck Rogers strips from 1928 through 1937, Flash Gordon from 1934 through 1938, Prince Valiant from 1937 through the present, and Tarzan (drawn by Hal Foster) from 1932 through 1936, plus hundreds of old Popeyes, Out Our Ways, Alley Oops, etc.), Ray was most enthusiastic when we suggested adapting some of best stories into the comic format. His reaction to the job E.C. is doing can best be summed up in his own words: "... My thanks and gratitude for the really fine adaptations and beautiful art work you are doing on my stories. This is an entirely new experience to me, and I cannot tell you enough how much I appreciate the painstaking detail and thought you are putting into your efforts. It seems to me that again and again you achieve the exactly right atmosphere and angle in carrying out the story... You people have a way of continually making me happy. I can't thank you enough!"
The miserable wretch wandered aimlessly through silent, foggy streets. Hissing raindrops pelted his uncovered head, ran down his face, mingling with tears. Towering street lamps formed his shadow into grotesque shapes on solemn buildings, painlessly elongated it to explore along the wet, shimmering pavement into the darkness...

Rainwater gurgled angrily in the gutter, reached out, caught, and carried everything it could with it into the sewer depths. The miserable wretch shuffled on, and once, an agonized sob erupted from his lips to be snatched away by the wind...
His footsteps carried him out on the bridge. He gripped the rail with trembling, whitened knuckles, stared unseeing into the blackness at the water he knew was somewhere below, and listened to the vicious whisperings of the rain...

He stood there for long minutes, thinking a million thoughts, seeing a million visions, recalling a million memories...

...but I'm only twenty-nine! Most people are just beginning to live at twenty-nine! Why am I trying to end it? Suicide? Is that the real solution? Why have they driven me to this?

A sparkling bubble of female laughter in a passing taxi, gone in an instant. He whirled at the sound.

The woman tumbled from the accordioned machine, platinum hair now tinted red, flesh once powder-white now wine-colored/ Delicate, jeweled fingers clutched her face, changed color with the streaming blood that stained her clothes, dripped to the ground and fused, dissolved with the frolicking gutter water. She teetered drunkenly... and fell!

He crumpled to his knees in the middle of the road, fist raised shakily in defiance...

I hate you! I want you to suffer as I have! I want you to feel the pain I've felt! (Sob!) I want you to know the hunger... the loneliness!

He was only dimly aware of the motor's roar behind him. Only half-heard the complaining squeal of tires skidding on slippery pavement; but he clearly saw the car bullet past him, spin out of control, flip over! He saw the body thrown in the air, heard it strike the ground, memorized the sound. He listened to the cacophony of grinding metal and shattering glass, felt the jarring impact as the auto slammed against the concrete barrier!

He stumbled into the roadway on watery legs...

I'm an artist! I paint pictures! Why do you all hate me? (Sob!) Why can't you give me a chance? Why? (Sob!) Why?

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Go ahead! Laugh at me! Everyone laughs at me! (Sob!) Why can't someone understand how I feel?!

I hate you! I want you to suffer as I have! I want you to feel the pain I've felt! (Sob!) I want you to know the hunger... the loneliness!

He crumpled to his knees in the middle of the road, fist raised shakily in defiance...

I hate you! I want you to suffer as I have! I want you to feel the pain I've felt! (Sob!) I want you to know the hunger... the loneliness!
The cold, bleak light of morning found the artist sitting dumbly on his cot, staring with reddened eyes at the finished painting...

"It's good, the best I've ever done... but the subject is so despicable! I know of only one person who would even look at such a picture... and like it!"

Some time later the artist spoke excitedly with a small, lecherous old man whose rimmed eyes ravaged the painting...

"That... you like it? You'll buy it?"

"It's magnificent! Profoundly filthy, yet magnificent! I'll give you a hundred dollars for it!"

"One hundred dollars is a lot of money to a pauper, but with rent to pay, clothes to buy, and an empty belly to be filled, it doesn't last long..."

"Money's almost gone? Ho-hum, guess I'd better knock off another sadistic painting for the old man!"

"But wait! They'd feel differently if I were a success. If I had money they wouldn't turn from me. They'd look up to me, smile at me. They'd want to talk to me, not run from my sight. They'd gather 'round me and thrall just to touch my hand. They'd grovel at my feet and plead with me to cast them a glance. A word! All this if I had money."
A black realization illuminated his face...

Money I can get money from the old man! He'll but paintings from me if they're like the other one. And if I have to watch their blood spill and see their agony to get inspiration... all the better! I like to see other people in pain!

He looked at the detour signs with their red lanterns, used to re-route traffic while the smashed auto had been cleared away. He looked at them standing idly, innocently on the walk... and the hours slipped by...

It was almost midnight when, in despair, he left the bridge to prowl the streets. Somewhere in the city there must be anguish and bloodshed. Why did they hide it from him? Why did they frustrate and torment him so? He must find inspiration...

At three a.m. he again trudged out on the bridge. The city had successfully hid its sins from him thus far, but he was not to be put off. He lifted the detour signs and set them in the road, guiding them toward the barrier...

He had to wait but a short while before he heard the humming of tires on moist pavement drawing rapidly near. The car rocketed out of the fog and with a screeching of brakes, swerved to avoid the signs. He laughed diabolically as it careened and crashed into the wall...

He raced to the wreckage and peered inside, laughing as he saw the broken bodies, flowing blood. He rejoiced in the moans and screams, danced merrily and clapped his hands and laughed till his head spun in a whirlpool of sublime inspiration...

The evening fog closed in around the hunched figure standing on the bridge. All evidence of the previous accident had long since been removed, but the artist waited for hours... hoping, praying that another accident would somehow miraculously occur...
Morning, exhaustion the finished painting. The old man cackling and giving him money... Delirium...

Morning again... a blank canvas... and a realization.

Oh, God, I must be insane! Is my mind so twisted that I cause blood to flow merely for the thrill I derive from its sight? Am I so envious of the world that I rejoice in their suffering? When it inspired a painting, there was a purpose... but now... now my depravity has reached its lowest depths! I've got to stop this madness!

Night. The fog-shrouded bridge. Confused, hateful emotions and the impatience of waiting. The decision to wait no longer for an accident. The sheer thrill of viciously beating a passerby.

For days he remained in his shabby room trying to stifle the urge to hurt someone, trying to forget the satisfaction he received from punishing the world as the world had so often punished him...

His room. The straw cot feeling again the warm blood, hearing again the terrified cries, reliving the entire experience... but painting nothing! Not caring to paint. Just reveling in the glorious satisfaction..."
She had just moved in upstairs and needed his aid to complete some small task. He accepted gladly... and while he helped her, listened to her tender voice, reveled in her melodious laugh, her radiant loveliness, eyes unbelieving, he marveled at this wondrous creature who lessened his tensions, dispelled his hates, his fears... and for the first time in ages, he heard himself laugh...

But though he laughed quite easily now, there dwelt within him the guilt and shame of his past. He longed to tell her of these things, to cleanse himself as she was clean...

So he confessed the horrible emotions, the vile deeds that once consumed his soul, blackened his heart and caused him to despise the goodness in life. She listened...

... I was so confused. I started out loving life, but with each failure I became embittered. I felt the world was deliberately trying to frustrate and wound me, so I fought back...

Perhaps it's merely that because a man has so many emotions inside him, anything that ignites them will cause them to explode. The more emotions there are inside and the longer they've been confined, the greater the explosion and if they can't find escape in the right direction... they're bound to backfire...

Jealousy, for instance, and love are very close to one another. Only a fine line separates them. Jealousy is a form of hate... but, actually, it's only love, inverted!

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I guess that's been my problem. I had so much love within me that when the world shunned me and refused to accept it, I turned the love inside out... and it became hate!

That night he slept the sleep of the innocent, and dreamed the dreams of the peaceful. In the days that followed, he realized she liked his company and wanted to be with him. He painted her often. He painted other things, also... pleasant, soothing pictures...

In the days that followed, he realized she liked his company and wanted to be with him. He painted her often. He painted other things, also... pleasant, soothing pictures...
I realized these things now, but only because you came to give me the release I so sorely needed. I'm like a rubber-band that's been stretched almost to the breaking point, and at last finds the release that allows it to snap back to normal.

I need you not just love you and want you. I need you...urgently! Without you, I know I'll just revert to my former self and be lost forever. With you, I know I'll just be lost. I have found happiness...by being with you.

There was a silence. Then, tenderly, she cupped his face in her hands and said the words that all his life, it seemed, he had been waiting to hear.

...I love you...I want to be your wife.

Early the next morning the artist waited for the girl. Today they were going to bet their marriage license, but several hours went by and she didn't arrive, and with each passing minute he became more discouraged.

A mad race through the streets, tears streaking his face, her name trailing behind him or the rain drops, and then, whiteness, whiteness everywhere. Walls, rooms, clothing...and then, the doctor...They brought her in last right. Hit and run victim, she came out of her coma long enough to give us your name and address, but I'm afraid there's very little hope. Her condition is extremely serious.

By mid-afternoon he was at his wit's-end, he stormed about his room in a frenzy...

She's left me! I told her the truth about myself and frightened her away! Oh God, what am I to do without her? What am I to do?

Late evening. The frustrated, torturous sobbing, the urge stirring deep in his breast, growing much stronger, to hurt someone. The telegram from the hospital.

She...she's been injured...condition critical...calling for me...calling for me?

How serious? How serious? Can't something be done? Anything?

Only a delicate and dangerous brain operation can save her. There's but one surgeon skillful enough to do it, and he wants $3,000 for the job. Obviously, you can't...
Three thousand dollars? Might as well be a million. But he could get it! There was one way to get it... a painting for the old man. The artist went instinctively to the bridge...

The long waiting, another clicking of heels, the figure disembowelling itself from the mist and rain, fusing into solidity. The struggle, the hacking and bloodying, the snapping of the neck! The thrilling, floating, dizzying reel of satisfaction...

The pained look in the doctor's eyes. The nurse lowering her head, turning her back...

I'm afraid I have bad news for you. You see, the one man who could have performed the operation... was brutally murdered last night while crossing the bridge on his way to the hospital! Must have seen the work of a maniac... neck broken... hacked to pieces... horrible!

The miserable wretch sat huddled on the bench in the dark corridor, listening to the floor around his feet was a green confusion, useless and forgotten. He sat there, tears streaming down his cheeks, tiny, pitiful sobs racking his body. He sat there, staring blankly at the wall, listening to the clock overhead relentlessly tick away the seconds... and then she would be dead...

Heh, heh! Care for a game of Bridge, anyone? You be the dummy! By doing those paintings, the artist gave his girl a brush gift! Did I know is, nobody betten so walking on that bridge late at night! Heh, heh! Well, I see the crypt-keeper is chomping at the bit, so I'll leave before he starts chomping me! He's got a peachy story for you, so until next time drop dead!
Michael lane turned away, fighting the nausea that swept over him. Beside him, Lieutenant Phil Dolan, homicide, stared at the corpse lying amid the twisting tangling roots of the young peach tree. He stared at the holes where eyes once shined, at the mouth that was once so kissable, at the crawling flesh of the once lovely neck, and at the tree trunk erupting from the rotted chest...

I always knew you murdered her, lane. I always knew it. I would have gotten away with it if it weren't for...
THE DETECTIVE INTERRUPTED HIM...

AH, BUT IT DID, LANE. AND YOU'LL BURN BECAUSE IT HAPPENED. YOU PLANNED IT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING! CAN'T TELL ME THE WHOLE THING NOW?

THEN I'LL TELL YOU, LANE. SEVEN YEARS IS A LONG TIME. LONG ENOUGH TO DO A LOT OF SEARCHING AND ASKING, LOOKING FOR PIECES TO A PUZZLE, AND LAYING EACH PIECE IN...WHERE IT FITS. TONIGHT, I FOUND THE FINAL PIECES TO THE PUZZLE. TONIGHT, THE PUZZLE IS COMPLETE. SO, I'LL TELL YOU.

YOU MET SARAH BRANDON AT A COCKTAIL PARTY IN 1948. SHE WAS RICH AND LOVELY AND YOU WANTED MONEY. YOU STARTED WORKING ON HER, UNTIL FINALLY...!

SHE BELIEVED YOU, DIDN'T SHE, LANE? SHE REALLY BELIEVED THAT YOU LOVED HER AND NOT HER MONEY, SO YOU WERE MARRIED. BUT AFTER THE HONEYMOON, YOU DID COME OUT HERE TO LIVE...TO SARAH'S COUNTRY HOME...!

AND THEN YOU WAITED, YOU WAITED UNTIL PEOPLE BEGAN TO TALK...

'AND NOT YOU, LANE! YOU HAD PLANS. BIG PLANS. AND YOU WANTED PEOPLE TO TALK LIKE THAT. YOU DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO GET A JOB...TO EARN YOUR OWN KEEP. BUT SARAH DIDN'T CARE. SHE LOVED YOU TOO MUCH. SHE DIDN'T MIND YOUR LIVING OFF HER INCOME...'

...AND YOU DON'T MIND WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING? OF COURSE I DON'T MIND, DARLING. I DON'T MIND IF YOU NEVER GO TO WORK. I LIKE YOU BEING NEAR ME ALL DAY LONG.

'OH, MIKE, DARLING. WE'LL BE SO HAPPY, WE'LL LIVE AT MY COUNTRY PLACE AND...

'YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT ME. AFTER ALL, I WANT TO MARRY YOU BECAUSE I LOVE YOU, NOT BECAUSE OF YOUR MONEY...'

'ONLY TILL I GET LOCATED, HONEY.' I'M A LITTLE FLAT, NOW.

'I UNDERSTAND, MIKE.'
It was frustrating, wasn't it, Lane? You wanted Sarah to mind. It was part of the scheme. You even began taking advantage...trying to antagonize her.

But, Mike. You can use my car whenever you want to. Why do we need two...

I want my own, Sarah! I don't want to have to ask you all the time...

...so you pressed the argument.

It is true, isn't it? That's all you married me for! My money!

So what? It's a fair trade, we each have what we wanted.

...created quite a scene...

You...never wanted...me! You never loved me!

The dough, baby! I loved the dough!

...and the servants heard it all.

Just what you wanted...

Then...then it's no use going on...so...like...this!

There's the door!

You'd timed it perfectly, eh, Lane? The servants had gone for the day by the time Sarah had finished packing...

I'm...leaving, Mike. I'm going to get a divorce.

You're a little fool, Sarah. How could you believe that of me?

It was what she wanted to hear, wasn't it, Lane? Suddenly she was in your arms and you were holding her quivering body and hating her and saying the things you had to say...

Oh, Mike. Mike, tell me it isn't true.

Of course it isn't true, darling. I married you because I loved you. You'll see. I'll make it up. Tomorrow, I'll look for a job. Really...
"That last night was fun, wasn't it Lane? Making love to her and waiting... waiting to catch her off guard."

I'm so ashamed, Mike! I'm sorry about those things I said.

Remember how you carried her limp body out of the house and buried it out in the back garden...?

Remember the gurgling sound that she made and the peach juice dribbling out of her mouth and her eyes bulging and her face turning blue as you beat her to death? Remember, Lane...?

Remember how you carried her suitcase... the one she'd packed in the fireplace."

...and cleaned up. Remember how you scooped up the half-chewed mouthful of peach from the rug where it had fallen from her lips and threw it away together with the uneaten half of the peach...?"
You called us the next day. You reported that your wife was missing, and I came over.

You didn't notice that the peach pit was missing, did you, Lane? You didn't know that Sarah had swallowed it as you strangled her!

Well, yes. We did have an argument last night. She accused me of marrying her for her money!

I see. Well, we'll try to trace her, Mr. Lane. Don't worry! I'm sure she's all right.

That was when I got suspicious, Lane! When a wife walks out on her husband, she's usually easy to trace. A train reservation. A plane ticket. Something...

Your wife just seems to have disappeared, Mr. Lane.

People who plan on suicide don't pack bags, Lane! I started asking questions. The servants...

Yes, they argued that night! She threatened to leave!

Something's happened to her. I know it. Oh, Lord... if she committed suicide...

You got a little worried, didn't you, Lane? You decided to take a little trip. Were things getting too hot for you...

You just thought I'd let you know. I have to go to Europe... on business. If you find my wife, get in touch with me, won't you?

Sure, Mr. Lane! Sure!

I think you murdered her, Lane! If it's the last thing I do, I'll prove it.

You're crazy, Dolan! I'd like to see you try.

Remember how I came to you...

Sure, Mr. Lane. Sure!

Some of her clothes are gone, Lieutenant Dolan. Do you think she's left me?

Did you and your wife get along, Mr. Lane? Any arguments?

People who plan on suicide don't pack bags, Lane! I started asking questions. The servants...

Yes, they argued that night! She threatened to leave!

He admitted he didn't love her. That it was her money...

I see! Well... thanks...

Well, yes. We did have an argument last night. She accused me of marrying her for her money!

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Did you and your wife get along, Mr. Lane? Any arguments?
"You stayed away, didn't you, Lane? You stayed away for seven years. You figured you'd come back and your wife would be legally dead and her fortune would be yours. But I didn't give up, Lane. I kept plugging..."

"Hmmm... Perhaps he buried her out here in the garden. It's so overgrown now, I couldn't know where to begin. I'd have to dig the whole place up!"

"The years passed and the green shoot became a stalk..."

"...Then a young tree..."

"...Growing stronger with each passing summer..."

"...Until, last week... it bore fruit... a peach..."

"I'd heard you were coming home to claim Sarah's fortune. Today, when you arrived, I was waiting..."

"Well, Lieutenant Dolan. Welcoming me home I see! Never found my wife, eh? Too bad!

"No, Lane. You were too clever. I still say you murdered her, but I can't prove it."

"You let your country place go to ruin! You didn't want anybody tending the garden, digging around. So no one noticed the green shoot push through the ground over Sarah's grave..."

"I know he murdered her! I know it! If I could only find out what he did with her body, if I only knew where to look!"

"You were triumphant, weren't you, Lane? You invited me in. You gloated. And then, you spotted the tree..."

"...You know, Dolan! Seven years! Her fortune is mine... now... I..."

What is it, Lane? What do you see?

"The years passed and the green shoot became a stalk..."

"...Then a young tree..."

"...Growing stronger with each passing summer..."

"...Until, last week... it bore fruit... a peach..."
"You were pretty good at composing yourself, Lane. I liked the way you strode over to the tree...smiling.

Well! So it is! I'd almost forgotten I planted it! Look! It's borne fruit.

I didn't know you liked peaches, Lane! I know your wife did!

...and how the sickly red liquid splattered out, over your face, into your mouth, gagging you with its salty richness, covering your shirt with a crimson smear.

Good Lord! Choke.

Blood.

...and how happily you plucked the peach from its limb!

Me? I love peaches!

...ano sank your teeth into its pulpy succulent meat.

'...and the sickly red liquid splattered out, over your face, into your mouth, gagging you with its salty richness, covering your shirt with a crimson smear...'

They were lifting the foul-smelling, decayed corpse and carrying it off. Michael retched, looking down at his blood-soaked shirt. Lieutnant Dolan smiled ...

Yes, Lane! It was blood. Human blood. So I knew where to look! I knew then where Sarah was buried.

Things like this don't happen...choke.

HEN, NEH. Now wasn't that a juicy peach of a yarn, kiddies? Of course it was a bloody shame that Mike pit off more than he could chew. By the way! I've taken some cuttings from the tree growing from Sarah's chest. I'm going into the nursery business, landscaping vampire gardens! Now, I'll turn you back to the vault-keeper! 'Bye!

You tried to cover up your shock at seeing the peach tree growing out of Sarah's grave. You made a feeble explanation.

It's...it's just...that the garden is so neglected.

Yes. It IS a shame. Is that a young peach tree, Lane?

...how happily you plucked the peach from its limb!

Me? I love peaches!

Yes, Lane! It was blood. Human blood. So I knew where to look! I knew then where Sarah was buried.

Things like this don't happen...choke.
Through the bushes, where he crouched, Metcalf could see the man standing high above him, looking out over the valley from what seemed the very edge of the towering cliff. Silhouetted that way against the pale noonday sky, the rankest beginner would find it hard to miss the kind of target the man presented. And, Metcalf reflected, he was far from an amateur when it came to firearms. This was the moment he had been anticipating so long...

For a whole minute, hidden there among the scrub brush near the foot of the sheer rock wall, Metcalf sighted along his rifle barrel. When he finally squeezed the trigger, it was almost with a feeling of sadness that he must finally relinquish this complete control over the destiny of the creature up there above him. The shot that sounded clangorously through the canyon was almost an anticlimax. Then, for a second, there was a surge of exhilaration as Metcalf saw the man spin, sprawl out in space and plummet down a thousand feet... a flailing and most ungraceful object amidst the hail of rock which crashed to the valley floor with a reverberating hiss.

It was only a few seconds later that Metcalf came crashing through the underbrush and knelt beside the man he had just murdered. The sight was one of utter revulsion: Metcalf felt the triumph was a hollow one when he saw the pitiable object he had finally conquered. For a long moment he glared at the dead man he had hated so many years... the man who had sworn that someday he
would bring about Metcalf's own death.

Metcalf straightened up and a smile slowly thawed his grim features. One more shot, he thought, would make it appear . . . to anyone in the vicinity . . . that there had been an exchange of bullets: that he had fired in self-defense. His rifle swung out in front of him and, once again, he sighted along its shining length. Slowly he zeroed in on a solitary rock far above him. His fingers tightened and he felt the gun buck against his shoulder; far above he saw the rock disintegrate into a thousand pieces. With a broad grin he lowered the gun and began to retrace his steps into the undergrowth. Like the sound of an oncoming wave, at that moment, he heard the sound billowing up there on the cliff. The smile vanished from his face in the next instant; the rock he had smashed had evidently dislodged another rock . . . and that one still another. The whole mountain seemed to be crumbling . . . cascading down upon him . . . !

He dropped his gun and started to run, but already the first loosened stones were pelting him . . . stinging against his face and chest, and thudding painfully into his skin. He screamed once . . . but the sound was drowned beneath the raging thunder which was engulfing the valley.

He slipped and sprawled full length; then the whole cliff seemed to explode down upon him. The word "landslide" entered his hysterical brain . . . and he felt the crunch of sharp stone piercing his lungs, crushing his arms, pinning him there under a blanket of rock. A final meteor seemed to be plunging straight at him . . . and he shut his eyes in horror, just a fraction of a second before it smashed his face into a thousand agonized splinters, pounding him like grains of sand beneath a savage steel-shod boot...
THE VAULT-KEEPER’S CORNER

Dear Vault-Keeper,

The story by Mr. B. as you call him, sure was a thriller! I hope you have many more of this type. I recommend your comic to all of my friends. All of your stories are really good! (And of course, that’s what we’re paying our dimes for!)

Montana Lamb
Brookline, Mass

Dear Vault-Keeper,

Ray Bradbury is the best horror writer in the business, but none! And I’m glad to see a teaming up between Ray and E.C. I’m also glad to see that the picture of you in the circle on the cover has finally been brought up to date, so that it looks like you! I hope the other two Ghoul-Lurkies get their pictures modernized too.

Don Thompson
Grand Valley Pa.

As you can see by a quick glance at the cover of this here issue, Don, a complete new set of putrid portraits, monstrously modernized by our respective hands. Johnny Colin Craig, Dredding Jack Davis, and Ghastly Graham Ingels has replaced the outmoded set.

Dear Stop-face,

Alter reading V.H. No. 29, I’m convinced that Jack Davis is THE artist to do the Bradbury stories! No one can approach him.

Peter Kroll
Delph! Ind

Jack does a fine job, Pete—no doubt about it! But take the job Joe Orlando does on “The Lake,” which starts on the page facing this one. WHOA, THERE! NOT YET! LATER!

Dear Vault-Keeper,

As far as I’m concerned, E.C. is the only comic book publishing company in the world. It makes me sick to see how those imitators copy our work. I’d rather have ONE E.C. mag., than a hundred of these maggot-infested, slimy, putrid, cruddy, vulgar—well I’ll leave the other adjectives up to you. I sure do like Ray Bradbury! How about a thing like that “Artist-at-the-Issue” business, but call it the “Writer-at-the-Issue”

Ted Finch
(no address given)

Mr. Bradbury’s bio appears on the inside front cover of this issue. Ted. As to the “other adjectives” you left up to me, I will in turn leave them up to my own readers.

Dear Vault-Keeper,

I’ve just read your pitiful little tale in V.H. No. 29 of

how much of a struggle you have to put up with. I thought I would peck out a few words of encouragement to you and tell you how much I enjoy your mag. Although I am a college student, and theoretically supposed to be above pursuing such literature, I get a large charge from yours, and all the other E.C. publications. My gal buys them, every one, and I borrow or steal them as soon as I can. Even a cynical old dad of mine, who doesn’t like anything or anybody, enjoys your comics to the hilt. He likes the art-work the say.

I believe you monsters will outlast all the rest at the newsstands. There’s plenty of us horror-hungry, half-witted college joes to keep your mags going.

Ronald M. Wade
Commerce, Texas

Dear Vault-Keeper,

We just wanted to thank you for all the nice things you said about us, the readers of E.C. We are happy to know that we are helping, in a small way, to keep E.C. head and shoulders above the rest of the comic magazine publishing companies. That’s the way it always has been, and always will be.

Matt Flynn and Norman Benedict
(no address given)

So WHO said nice things? So WHO writes pitiful little tales of woe? Me! WHOA THERE! NOT ME! E.C. THE EDITORS! THE MAGGOT-INFESTED, SLIMY, PUTRID, CRUDDY, VULGAR IDIOT EDITORS! THEY took my column from me, and THEY slobbed out their tale, and THEY said nice things, and THEY are looking to make money, and THEY don’t give ME none, so I don’t give a howling hoot what happens! WHOA THERE! NOT NOW! AND NOT LATER, Eeither, YOU FLEA BITTEN, VINEGAR-VEINED OLD WIND-BAG! Let US take over at this point and give you a chance to thank you for the very nice letters you’ve sent us in response to the appeal for your support that we made to you in V.H. No. 29! Just to keep you posted on the latest events bearing on the over-crowding of titles...and subsequent poor-sales...situation in the comic industry, we have it on fairly reliable authority that practically every comic publisher is in the process of dropping titles and curtailing activities, that three of the larger ones have suspended operations, and that at least one other has permanently left the scene! We at E.C. will continue to publish...at least for the time being...our entire line of ten titles. Again, we thank you! O K. V.K! Take over! You have just enough space left to remind everyone that the Third Annual TALES OF TERROR is still available for 25c, that a subscription to any E.C. title costs 75c, and that the address for mail, T., at orders, subscription orders, and other business publishers is:

The Vault-Keeper
Room 706, Dept. 31
225 Lafayette Street
N.Y.C. 12, N. Y.

So go to it, old man!—editors

Hmmm hmmm!
Everyone else was in school. I was not. Tomorrow, I would be on my way west on a train. I had come to the beach for one last brief moment. I went down to the water and let it cool up my stomach. Always before, with the crow, I hadn’t dared to look, to come to this spot and search around in the water and call her name. But now...

Funny, but you really expect answers to your calling when you are young. You feel that whatever you may think can be real, and sometimes, that is not so wrong. I thought of Tally, swimming out into the water... last May...
Tally with her pigtails trailing, blonde. She was laughing, and the sun was on her small twelve year old shoulders...

Tally never came out. The lifeguard tried to persuade her to come out, but she did not. He came back with only bits of water-weed in his big-knuckled fingers...

I was only twelve, but I know how much I loved her. It was that love that comes before all significance of body and morals. It was a love that was made of warm long days together at the beach...

It was made of the humming quiet days of droning education at the school, and all the long autumn days of the years past when I had carried her books home from school...

I thought of the water settling quiet...

...of the lifeguard leaping into it...of Tally's mother screaming, "my baby!"

Tally was gone. She would not sit across from me at school any longer, or chase indoor balls on the brick streets on summer nights. She had gone out too far and the lake would not let her return. And now in the lonely autumn when the sky was huge and the water was huge and the beach was so very long, I had come down for the last time, alone... "Tally!" Come back, Tally!
I called her name for the last time. I shivered. I felt water on my face and did not know how it got there. The waves had not splashed that high...

 Turning, I retreated to the sand and stood there for half an hour, hoping for one glimpse, one sign, one little bit of Tally to remember. Then, I knelt and built a sand castle, shaping it fine, building it as Tally and I had often built so many of them...

But this time, I only built half a sand castle. Then I got up.

Tally, if you hear me, come in and build the rest.

After a while, the water came in...

...blending the sand-castle, mashing it down, little by little, into the original smoothness...

Silently I walked along the shore. Far away, a merry-go-round jangled faintly...but it was only the wind.

But this time, I only built half a sand castle... Then I got up.

Tally, if you hear me, come in and build the rest.

The next day I went away on the train. A train has poor memory. It soon puts all behind it. It forgets the corn lands and rivers of childhood, the bridges, the lakes, the valleys, the cottages, the hurts and the joys. It spreads them out behind and they drop back of the horizon...

I lengthened my bones, put flesh on them, changed my young mind for an older one, threw away clothes as they no longer fitted, shifted from grammar to high school, to college books, to law books...

The next day I went away on the train. A train has poor memory. It soon puts all behind it. It forgets the corn lands and rivers of childhood, the bridges, the lakes, the valleys, the cottages, the hurts and the joys. It spreads them out behind and they drop back of the horizon...
A ND THEN THERE WAS A YOUNG WOMAN... MARGARET...
IN SACRAMENTO, I KNEW HER FOR A TIME, AND
WE WERE MARRIED...

LAKE BLUFF, POPULATION 10,000, CAME UP OVER THE
SKY. MARGARET LOOKED SO HANDSOME IN HER FINE
NEW CLOTHES. SHE WATCHED ME AS I FELT MY OLD
WORLD GATHER ME BACK INTO ITS LIVING. SHE HELD
MY ARM AS THE TRAIN SLID INTO BLUFF STATION, AND
OUR BAGGAGE WAS ESCORTED OUT...

WE STAYED ON TWO WEEKS IN ALL, REVISITING ALL THE
PLACES TOGETHER, THE DAYS WERE HAPPY. I THOUGHT
I LOVED MARGARET WELL. AT LEAST I THOUGHT I DID.
IT WAS ON ONE OF THE LAST DAYS THAT WE WALKED
DOWN BY THE SHORE.

I HAD THAT FEELING AGAIN OF
WANTING TO BE ALONE. BUT I
COULD NOT FORGE MYSELF TO
SPEAK OF THIS TO MARGARET...

IT WAS LATE IN THE DAY. THE
BEACH WAS ALMOST DESERTED.
THE LIFEGUARD BOAT PULLED UP
ON THE SHORE. THE LIFEGUARD
STEPS OUT OF IT, SLOWLY, WITH
SOMETHING IN HIS ARMS...

I FROZE THERE. I HELD MY BREATH
AND I FELT SMALL... ONLY TWELVE
YEARS OLD, VERY LITTLE, VERY INFINI-
TESIMAL AND AFRAID...

STAY HERE, MARGARET?

BUT... WHY?
The wind howled. I couldn't see Margaret. I could see only the beach, the lifeguard slowly emerging from the boat with a grey sack in his hands, not very heavy, and his face almost as grey and lined...

I waited. Funny. Funniest thing I ever saw. She's been dead. A long time.

I stared at the sack. The wind was loud...

Open it...

The way I know it's a little girl is because she's still wearing a locket. There's nothing much else to tell by...

The lifeguard kept looking at me for a long time and he couldn't speak. He put the grey sack down on the sand, and the water whispered wet up around it and went back...

I walked slowly down the sand to where the lifeguard stood. He looked at me...

What is it?

I nodded...

Ten years, I'd say. There haven't been any children drowned here this year. There were twelve children drowned here since 1942, but we recovered all of them before a few hours had passed. All except one, I remember. This body here. Why it must be ten years in the water...

Hurry, man! Open it!

I better not. It's... it's not very pleasant.
Then, perhaps he saw the way my face must have looked. He fumbled with the sack, opening it only part way. It was enough. There was only the sky and the wind and the water and autumn coming on lonely. I looked down at her there...

Tally... Tally... Found her down the beach, that way, in the shallow water...

I thought...

People grow. I have grown. But she has not changed. She is still small. Death does not permit growth or change. She still has golden hair. She will be forever young and I will love her forever, oh God, I will love her forever.

And then I knew...

I'll... help you finish it, Tally...

The lifeguard tied up the sack. I walked by myself, down the beach, down toward where he'd found her. There, at the water's edge, lay a sand castle, only half-built...

Just like Tally and I used to build them. She half... and I half. I looked at it. I knelt beside it and I saw the little prints of feet coming in from the lake and going back out to the lake again and not ever returning...

I did. I built the rest of it up very slowly, then arose...

... and turned away and walked off, so as not to watch it crumble in the waves the way all things crumble. I walked back up the beach to where a strange woman named Margaret waited for me, smiling...

The End.
The last four months had been wonderful months for Jennifer. Things had changed. Eagerly she would rush home each night to tell Edwin, her husband, of her latest exploit. And Edwin would lie there, listening to Jennifer, while she described her recent accomplishment. Poor dear Edwin, bedridden Edwin. Paralyzed for the last eight years. Yes, things had changed for Edwin and Jennifer. Things were different now...

"It's Jennifer, Edwin, dear! I'm home!"

Jennifer stood in the hall, shivering from the bleak winter cold that gripped the outside world. In its icy fist, carefully, she removed her threadbare coat and hung it in the closet...

"Oh, I've had such a wonderful day, Edwin, dear. Wait till I tell you!"
Jennifer toddled down the hall to the bedroom door. She opened it a crack and peeked in. Edwin lay, silent, in the huge antique double bed.

Just let me fix myself some tea, my darling, then I'll come to bed and tell you all about it.

Jennifer lit the gas and put out a cup and saucer, humming softly. She raised her voice so Edwin could hear her.

Making people happy can give one such a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction, Edwin.

She sat solemnly at the spotless table, sipping the warm brew...

Oh, Edwin. I'm so glad I found that people need me. It's so nice to know you're needed. It's so nice to know you can do things for people.

Jenny drained the teacup dry and washed it in the sink and put it away. Then she refilled the pot and put it back on the stove.

I'll be with you in a minute, darling. Soon as I wash up and get into my gown...

The water splashed loudly in the sink. Jenny sang softly as she washed and wiped and combed and creamed and did all the things that women do in preparation for bed.

There. Now I'm ready. I wasn't too long, was I, Edwin? I hurried as fast as I could. Dear Edwin. Is it awful being left alone all day?

Oh, Edwin. I'm so glad I found that people need me. It's so nice to know you're needed. It's so nice to know you can do things for people.

She was beside him now, between cool sheets, snuggling up to him, stroking his hair, kissing him...

It was so wonderful today, Edwin. I met him near the river. He lived in an old shack. You should have seen him, Edwin! He was so unhappy. He told me all about it...

His name was Bentrim. I called him Bert. He told me how, once upon a time, he'd been rich...very rich.

But then I lost it all, Jenny! The crash, you know. And I lost my friends, too, and my wife. And I was too old to start all over again...

Poor Bert. You must be very unhappy.
OH, I WAS, JENNY? I WAS VERY UNHAPPY. I'D LIKE TO MAKE YOU HAPPY AGAIN, BERT.

OH, THAT'S ALL RIGHT, JENNY! IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO. I'VE GOTTEN OVER IT. JENNY? WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THAT KNIFE?

NO! NO, JENNY! MY GOD! I AM HAPPY. NOW! I'VE GOTTEN USED TO THIS. I... JENNY! KEEP AWAY...

IT'LL BE SO NICE, BERT, YOU WON'T BE SAD ANYMORE.

JENNY SIGHED AND SMILED. HER EYES FILLED WITH TEARS. SHE STROKED EDWIN'S CHEEK.

SO I STABBED HIM, MY DARLING! OH, EDWIN! YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN HIS FACE. SO CALM. SO SERENE. HE LAY THERE ON THE FLOOR WITH THAT KNIFE IN HIS CHEST... SMILING!

SOMETHING WRONG, MY DEAR? CAN I HELP YOU?

SOMETHING WROUGHT, BERT, CAN I HELP YOU?

SOB... SOB... LEAVE ME ALONE, PLEASE!

SOB... SOB... LEAVE ME ALONE, PLEASE!

COME, MY DEAR. LET'S TAKE A WALK! YOU'LL TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT!

REALLY... SOB. ALL I WANT IS TO BE LEFT ALONE... SOB...

AND THAT'S THE STORY, JENNY! HE WALKED OUT ON ME. LEFT ME FLAT, WITHOUT A DIME. AND I TRUSTED HIM... BELIEVED IN HIM.

YOU POOR, DEAR GIRL! HE'S MADE YOU SO WRETCHED. I WANT TO DO SOMETHING FOR YOU.
"The rock lying on the deserted path in the park made everything so easy. I brought it down on Grace's skull again and again until she smiled as the blood gurgled from her lips...

"Now... Grace... now you're happy!"

"He was so unhappy, Edwin. So sad. And so eager for comfort. When I took him into the alley, he stopped crying..."

"Where are we going, Aunt Jenny?"

"Trust me, Sidney. I'm going to make you happy again..."

"These last four months have been so wonderful for me, Edwin. So wonderful making people happy... rescuing them from their misery and despair..."


"Oh, dear..."

"Can anyone be more wretched... more sad than a blind man, Edwin? I had to help him. I had to..."

"All of them? Oh, bless you, lady! Bless you!

"Now you can stop for the day, you poor dear. Come. Dive me your hand..."
One minute, sadness and misery...the next minute, peace and contentment...so easy to lead him to the street...to guide him off the curb...into the path of the truck...

I'll take you home.

TH-THANK YOU, LADY! YOU'RE SO...KIND...

One minute, sadness and misery, the next minute, peace and contentment, so easy to lead him to the street...to guide him off the curb...into the path of the truck...

Squealing brakes, like peals of laughter, the only thing I regret was not being able to see him happy at last...having to leave the scene...

Another soul, lifted from the depths of despair to the glorious joy of death...

Remember her, Edwin? she wore a gold star, she was so sad...

He was a wonderful boy, Jenny. A good boy...with his whole life ahead of him. I hate to see people unhappy...

How can people go through life without a mission, Edwin? I used to think my mission was caring for you...making you comfortable after you became paralyzed...

Oh, Edwin! you're in pain! I can tell! your eyes...

But that was before I found my real purpose in life. That was before the old woman on the pier...

I sit here, day after day, and I wait. I know he'll never come home to me but I wait anyway...

How she floundered in the water, how she screamed, and how serene and content she looked as she went down for the last time, the murky river pouring into her lungs through her smiling lips...

Four months it's been, Edwin. Four months since I discovered my mission in life. Remember the day?

It was Sunday. You lay in your bed, staring out at the snow falling on the bare dead tree outside our bedroom window...

What is it, Edwin? You look so sad today. Why...you're crying...

How can people go through life without a mission, Edwin? I used to think my mission was caring for you...making you comfortable after you became paralyzed...

Oh, Edwin! you're in pain! I can tell! your eyes...

But that was before I found my real purpose in life. That was before the old woman on the pier...

I sit here, day after day, and I wait. I know he'll never come home to me but I wait anyway...

How she floundered in the water, how she screamed, and how serene and content she looked as she went down for the last time, the murky river pouring into her lungs through her smiling lips...
Jenny lay beside Edwin in the huge antique bed. She whispered softly, stroking his cheek...

I could see the tears filling your staring eyes. I could see all the sadness and despair overflowing your eyelids and trickling down your cheeks...

Don't cry, Edwin! Don't be sad. I can't stand to see you unhappy.

I know what, Edwin. I know what! I'll make you your favorite drink. I'll make you a hot chocolate. Wouldn't that be nice...

I'll be finished soon, Edwin.

And suddenly, on that day four months ago, I knew. I knew how to make you happy. So I went into the kitchen and I made you your favorite. Hot chocolate...'

Jenny looked at the tiny badge that one of them held out to her. She glanced over her shoulder down the hall...

Mind if we came in, ma'am?

We'd like a word with you.

Well...all right. You can come in for a minute, but please...keep your voices down. My husband's in the bedroom...

We just want to ask you a few questions,

There were two of them...bumer-faced men peering out of the darkness at her...
Jenny closed the door behind them. They looked around. One of them grimaced.

"Something's wrong here, Steve! Take a look, Phil! Wait! Where are you going?"

The taller one started down the hall... toward the bedroom...

"Stop! You can't go in there! Edwin's in there! You'll disturb him! You'll make him unhappy!"

The one named Phil turned into the bedroom. Jenny screamed...

"Stay out of there! Leave him alone! I made him happy four months ago. Don't spoil it!"

Phil came out again, his hand clamped to his mouth. Jenny began to sob...

"Good Lord, man! What have you done? Let's take a look! No! No! I don't want to look! He won't be happy anymore!"

Edwin lay on the huge antique bed. The flesh of his face was beginning to fall away, revealing whitened, grinning teeth. What the detectives had noticed was the foul odor of decay that sprung from his long-dead body...

"I made him happy four months ago when I put cyanide in his hot chocolate!"

Hee, hee! That's it, creep. That's my foul fare for this issue. They took poor Jenny away and put her in a padded cell where she can't make anybody happy anymore. But she tries. The keepers have a devil of a time with her. And now it's time to put out the fire beneath my cauldron and close the vault-keeper's mag for this issue. Well, all see you next in my mag, The Haunt of Fear. 'Bye, now!

8-8-5-8-8-5-8-5..."
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