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Overhead, the sky is a dismal grey. A distant rumble of thunder seems to mutter the threat of a coming storm. There is a death-silence hanging over the cemetery, broken only by the pitiful sobbing of black-draped Agnes Wheatley, the deceased man's housekeeper. She stands at the foot of the yawning grave, her face buried in her handkerchief. The other mourners shift uncomfortably, watching the grave diggers step forward and begin shoveling the damp earth back into the excavation upon the simple coffin. An oddly shaped headstone rests nearby, the date of death recently carved into its weathered surface.

Came, Agnes! It is done! Come away...

No... sob. Let me... sob... stay... a while...
It began one night on the Horton estate where Agnes Wheatley was employed as housekeeper. It began with an orange glow in the night sky—a fire, rampaging wildly, leaping and crackling, consuming the boat-house down by the lake...

Mr. Horton? Mr. Horton? Wake up! Quickly! Oh, Lord! The boat-house? It's on fire! It's burning! And Mrs. Horton... is inside! Sob. Sob.


Alex Horton leaped from his bed and ran wildly out of his palatial mansion towards the roaring inferno, Mrs. Wheatley following...

Are you sure, Agnes? Are you sure she's in there? Oh, Lord...

I'm positive, Mr. Horton!

By the time Alex reached the boat-house, there was nothing that could be done... nothing except watch the flames level it to a pile of smoldering blackened ruins...

Sylvia... sob... Heaven help her...

Later, when the ashes had cooled, the firemen probed the leveled remains...

She was in there, all right, Mr. Horton. They're bringing her body out now. I suggest you don't look...

No! No! I must see her. I must. Please, Mr. Horton, don't torture yourself. Remember her as she was, not... not like this...

I must see her...

And so for the last time, Mr. Horton gazed upon the charred remains of his beloved wife...

Choke... Sylvia... sob...

Come, Mr. Horton, come away.

She was in there, all right, Mr. Horton. They're bringing her body out now.
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Choke... Sylvia... Sob...

Come, Mr. Horton... Come away...
Alex Horton had been a devoted husband. He'd loved his wife dearly. He'd taken her loss very hard, shutting himself away from his business, his friends, the world, to mourn her. Agnes Wheatley tried her best to comfort him...

It's been a month since the funeral, Mr. Horton. You can't just sit around like this. You can't change things. You're still young... still alive.

No! I'm dead, Agnes! My life has left me. It lies buried in the cemetery out there.

Yes. Yes. Exactly what I wanted. Of course, you will make arrangements to have it placed upon my cemetery plot...

Alex Horton 1888- Sylvia Horton 1910-1953

One night, Mitch Fairchild visited Alex. Mitch was the Horton's lawyer...

About your will, Alex. Now that Sylvia has passed on, you'll be naming a new beneficiary...

I'll give you a ring in a day or so. I'll probably give it all to some charity, now. It doesn't matter anymore...

Someday, we'll be together again, Sylvia. Someday...

And every Sunday, Agnes would accompany Mr. Horton to the cemetery and stand and watch him place flowers before the huge double stone and listen to him sob softly...

A large double stone, with my wife's name on the right. Mine on the left... so that... as in life... we will again be side by side... in eternal death!

Someday, we'll be together again, Sylvia. Someday...

Agnes opened the door for Mitch when he was about to leave. Alex never noticed the look that passed between them.

In life, Alex had been death to leave Sylvia's side... even for the short business trips he'd been forced to make after her death, he'd ordered a special gravestone...
It was on the following Sunday at the cemetery that Agnes broke down. She'd been watching her employer, listening to his sad voice, and finally, she burst out crying.

**Alex stared at his housekeeper...**

*What... what are you saying, Agnes? She doesn't deserve this. She deceived you and she doesn't merit your grief. I can't let you go on like this. You've got to know the truth!*

*Stop! Stop! I can't stand this any longer. She doesn't deserve this...*

**Agnes turned away, sobbing.**

*She never loved you. She married you for your money. She loved someone else.*

*Nos! It's the truth. She was carrying on with him... behind your back. I never told you because I wanted to protect you. I didn't want to see you hurt...*

**Alex read the letter with tear-filled eyes...**

*My beloved sweetheart, last night, in the boat-house, was a moment of heaven. When Alex is dead, and his money is yours, we will go away and be together always instead of having to steal those precious heavenly moments. Only your love for me gives me the patience to wait.*

*I love you. Mitch...*
"I watched the kerosene pool out over the null... watched the flames leap upon it... Sweep through the roof..."

"I could have saved her... but I... sob... I let her die! She deserved it... sob. She was no good. And she doesn't deserve your grief..."

"I've been a good and faithful servant to you, Mr. Horton. If... if you want, you can turn me over to the police. I've done wrong, I guess."

"No, Agnes! You did right. It's just that I was so blind... so very blind."

"That night, Alex Horton returned to the cemetery where Sylvia lay buried. He carried with him a chisel and mallet. Savagely, he split the double gravestone in two..."

"Only, when Mitch left, she continued to drink, instead of sneaking back to the house as I'd watched her do so many times before. She passed out, knocking over the hurricane lamp."

"Agnes's voice was filled with hate... Only she ruined it all... That night she died. They'd been together... as usual... drinking and... sob..."

"Don't you see? They meant to kill you? Oh... no..."
Then he returned home and made out a new will, naming Agnes Wheatley, his faithful housekeeper, as sole beneficiary.

...and so, in gratitude, I leave all of my estate to Miss Agnes Wheatley, who, through the years, has proven herself.

The chauffeur and his wife were aroused that night and requested by Mr. Horton to witness the document.

I'm sorry to disturb you at this hour. Oh, that's all right, Mr. Horton! Is this where I sign?

The gravediggers have refilled the grave and the mourners wait for Agnes to leave. But she does not turn. She just stands there before the mound with the jagged-edged gravestone at its head.

Come, Agnes... It's all over. The rest of you can go. Let me stay a while...

Mitch Fairchild, the lawyer, steps forward... Go ahead, all of you! I'll stay with her...

The mourners file off, and Agnes stands with her head in her hands, sobbing quietly... They've all gone.
Agnes lifts her head, a broad smile on her face...

 HE FELL FOR THAT STORY I SPUN HIM ABOUT HIS WIFE BEING UNFAITHFUL...

 WE HAD TO DO SOMETHING THE FOOL WAS GOING TO LEAVE THE DOUGH TO CHARITY!

 AND ALL OF OUR WORK WOULD HAVE BEEN WASTED, WE WOULD'VE TIED HER UP AND DRAKED HER DOWN TO THE BOAT-HOUSE AND SET FIRE TO IT FOR NOTHING! KILLED HER FOR NOTHING!

 BUT, HOW DID YOU CONVINUE HIM? YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY PROOF.

 THIS LETTER, THIS LETTER YOU WROTE TO ME? I SHOWED IT TO HIM. I TOLD HIM YOU WROTE IT TO SYLVIA... HIS WIFE!

 YOU MEAN.. HAH.. YOU MEAN I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE SYLVIA'S LOVER!

 I TOLD HIM SHE'D BEEN MEETING YOU AT THE BOAT-HOUSE AND THAT THE NIGHT SHE DIED, SHE'D GOTTEN DRUNK AND KNOCKED OVER A HURRICANE LAMP...

 THAT'S A LAUGH. WE SPILLED ENOUGH KEROSENE AROUND THE PLACE TO FILL UP FIFTY LAMPS.

 THEY STARTED OFF, ARM IN ARM, LAUGHING...

 THE POOR STUPID FOOL. HE WAS SO ANGRY, HE CAME OUT HERE AND SPLIT THAT DOUBLE MONUMENT IN TWO. HE LEFT WORD THAT HE WANTED TO BE BURIED AT THE OTHER END OF THE CEMETERY WITH HIS HALF...

 THEIR LAUGHTER FADED AND THE GREY SKY SEEMED TO HANG HEAVIER... AND ONCE AGAIN CAME A DISTANT RUMBLE OF THUNDER, MUTTERING THE WARNING OF THE COMING STORM...
Death is a strange state. The body lies immobile, decaying, falling to dust. Words that the body hears take time to penetrate into the dead brain. Take time to be assimilated... take time for their meaning to be understood. It was over six months later that the threatened storm finally broke. The soft grave earth before the jagged headstone crumbled... the body pushed upward.

Bits of flesh fell away as it tottered over the countryside. Finally it stood before the Horton mansion, grinning in at the couple seated before the fire.

They found the lawyer's and the housekeeper's bodies in the cemetery the next morning, lying grotesquely beside the double gravestone that had been carefully fitted together during the night.

As the French doors smashed open and the rotten and foul-smelling thing came through, Mitch and Agnes screamed.

The thing moved awkwardly forward, stumbling on decayed legs covered with slime.

Bits of flesh fell away as it tottered over the countryside. Finally it stood before the Horton mansion, grinning in at the couple seated before the fire.

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Heh, heh. Yep, kiddies. Sylvia and Alex are side by side again... in death, as in life. And, unless one looks carefully these days, one can hardly tell that their double gravestone was ever split in two. Well, I'll be back a little later with another terror-tale from my collection.

Now the crypt-keeper awaits with his odorous offering. In the meantime as the prospective murder victim said to his assailant when he saw the knife...

So long?

The End.
THE SKY HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO DARKEN WHEN THE CHILDREN, DRESSED IMPECCABLY IN THEIR BEST SUNDAY CLOTHES, CAME SLOWLY UP THE STREET, CARRYING THE CRUDE WOODEN COFFIN ON THEIR SMALL SHOULDERS. THEIR LITTLE MOUTHS WERE SET GRIMLY... THEIR EYES GLISTENING WITH TEARS, MR. COOTES LOOKED UP FROM HIS GARDENING WORK AND GRINNED... WELL, I'LL BE BURNED...

MR. COOTES CHUCKLED SOFTLY AS THE PROCESSION PASSED UP THE STREET TOWARD THE EMPTY LOT AT THE FAN CORNER. HE CALLED TO MRS. COOTES, WHO SAT DOZING IN THE ROCKER ON THE FRONT PORCH...

Herbert Draper, the Coote's next door neighbor and the town's sole undertaker, shook his head in amazement as the grim entourage moved past his front yard.

"Why...went an' held that funeral they said they wanted to hold, Mrs. Coote's. I thought they was kiddin'!

Mr. Draper, the Coote's next door neighbor and the town's sole undertaker, shook his head in amazement as the grim entourage moved past his front yard.

"Why...went an' held that funeral they said they wanted to hold, Mrs. Coote's. I thought they was kiddin'!

Mr. Draper shook his head, staring after the sad little group.

I never thought they was serious, though. I thought they was pullin' my leg. Hmmm! Look at 'em!"

Well, for cryin' out loud, what's goin' on?

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I never thought they was serious, though. I thought they was pullin' my leg. Hmmm! Look at 'em!

Well, for cryin' out loud, what's goin' on?
Old Doc Stacey, the town doctor, scratched his head as he stared at the procession moving along the street in the gathering twilight.

"Oh, evenin', Doc! That's somethin', eh? The kids are havin' a funeral. Ed says some dog died!"

"You know, they were in my office this afternoon..."

"At the time, I didn't think anythin' about it. They asked me..."

"How can you tell when somethin's dead, Doc?"

"Well... its heart stops beating, kids! Why...some- thin' die?"

"Yeah, Doc! Er... an' what do you do with some- thin' if it is dead?"

"Why... bury it, I guess. There's nothin' else you can do!"

Doc Stacey shrugged as the procession passed on up the darkened street.

"Poor kids! They take everythin' so serious these days, what you say it was that died, Herb?"

"Why... a dog... hmph! Morbid kids!"

Frank Sundage, the town's candystore owner, stood on his front steps staring at the silent, sad-eyed children...

"Oh, evenin', Frank! You say somethin'?"

"I said they're morbid kids... that's what I said, Doc. Always interested in death and dyin'..."

Doc Stacey just grinned.

"It's perfectly normal for kids their age to be curious about death, Frank. After all, it is one of life's unsolvable mysteries."

"Not natural dyin', Doc. They're interested in violent dyin'!"

"Why, just t'other day they all stopped down at my store and then one of 'em saw them head- lines... you know..."

"'Killer executed. Dies in chair'!"

"What? Let's buy a copy! I got a penny..."
Between 'em they scraped up the nickle and bought a copy of the paper... Here y'are, Mr. Bundage. "Hmmpf!"

I tell you, it ain't natural for kids to be so morbid about some maniac gettin' electrocuted. Guess maybe you're right, Frank. But they sure were interested. They brought me the paper... asked me all about it.

"I tol' 'em I didn't see no harm...""Why, it sends thousands of volts through the body, kids. The shock paralyzes the heart... stops everythin' from functionin'..."

"Oh, evenin', George! You say they asked you 'bout that story... Yep, wanted to know how an electric chair kills somebody..."

"Yep, why it's just like gettin' struck by lightnin', or steppin' on a live wire..."

"Thanks, Mr. Sparkman!"

George Sparkman, the town electrician, grinned over the picket fence that separated his and Frank Bundage's front yards...

"Oh, evenin', George! You say they asked you 'bout that story... Yep, wanted to know how an electric chair kills somebody..."

"I tol' 'em I didn't see no harm..."

"Why it sends thousands of volts through the body, kids. The shock paralyzes the heart... stops everythin' from functionin'..."

"Yuh, die?"

"And yuh, die!"

"Yeah, why it's just like gettin' struck by lightnin', or steppin' on a live wire..."

"Thanks, Mr. Sparkman!"

The procession had almost reached the lot, now. George Sparkman smiled at 'em...

"Yep, they sure were interested in that newspaper story... You mean the one about the electrocution, Mr. Sparkman?"

"Matilda Priddy, schoolteacher, came up the walk from the back of her house... That's the one... Miss Priddy..."

"Strangely, they brought the paper to class yesterday... or was it the day before... they they... what's going on there?"
George shrugged... "Oh, isn't that too bad. Er... what was I saying...?"

"Oh, yes! They brought that article about the electrocution to me. They wanted to know... Why does he have to die, Miss Priddy?"

"Because we believe in capital punishment in this state, children!"

What's capital punishment, Miss Priddy? It's punishment for a capital offense like murder, for instance.

If someone takes someone else's life, then the state takes the guilty party's life in punishment!

Is robbing somebody a capital offense, Miss Priddy?

No, and I think that's enough! I'm no lawyer. Now if you'll open your spellers to...

Lawyer Sye Shuster's booming voice interrupted Miss Priddy's narrative... So you sent those kids to me, Miss Priddy?

I did no such thing, Mr. Shuster!

Well they sure were interested in law. They came to my office yesterday askin' all kinds of questions...

About about capital punishment?
NOT EXACTLY. THEY WANTED TO KNOW WHAT THE PUNISHMENT FOR ROBBERY WAS. AND I TOLD THEM…'

OF COURSE, IT DEPENDS UPON THE JUDGE WHO SENTENCES HIM.

OH, NO! ONLY A CAPITAL CRIME IS PUNISHABLE BY DEATH. LIKE MURDER… OR KIDNAPPING!

KIDNAPPING? WHAT'S KIDNAPPING?

SO I HAD TO EXPLAIN ALL ABOUT KIDNAPPING TO THEM. LOST OVER AN HOUR… THANKS TO YOU, MISS PRIDDY.

WELL, I DIDN'T SEND THEM, MR. SHUSTER?

OH, LOOK…

THE GRIM-FACED PROCESSION HAD ENTERED THE LOT. NOW, THEY STOOD SOLEMNLY BEFORE THE CRUDELY DUG PIT…

AREN'T THEY SWEET…

SO SERIOUS, TOO…

SLOWLY, THEY DROPPED THE COFFIN FROM THEIR SHOULDERS AND LOWERED IT INTO THE YAWNING HOLE…

HEM, HEM…

SOMETHIN', EH?

LAWYER SHUSTER LEANED ON HIS NEIGHBOR'S FENCE, WATCHING THE CEREMONY…

KIDS SURE DO STRANGE THINGS THESE DAYS, EH, JUDGE DELANEY…

FUNNY THING YOU SHOULD MENTION THAT, SIR!

THOSE KIDS CAME TO SEE ME IN MY CHAMBERS YESTERDAY. THEY WANTED TO KNOW ALL ABOUT JURY TRIALS!

JURY TRIALS…? WHY?
Mrs. Phillips came up the street, calling her six-year-old son's name. She stopped for a moment, studying the grim group of four through seven year olds standing in the empty lot...

| I'm afraid not, Judge Delaney. The kids don't speak to Freddy any more. |
| Mrs. Phillips? |
| I told them that when someone steals someone else's child, that's kidnapping. |

Now, the solemn-faced mourners were shoveling the soil back into the grave upon the roughly hewn coffin. Judge Delaney shrugged...

Mrs. Philips shuddered, a dead silence seemed to fall upon the darkened street. A breeze stirred, moving along, making the others shiver in its chill. The lawyer... the teacher... the electrician... the rest. Mrs. Phillips whispered... Horrified.

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Across the street, in the empty lot, one of the children was saying some words over the grave of the departed...
Carlson squinted through the tiny cab window: Jaffrey was on the other side of the skeletal structure, working over the wall which Carlson's wrecker had just demolished. Twelve stories up like this, Carlson thought, a fall would prove instantly fatal. And no one could say that the wrecking machine hadn't gotten out of Carlson's control. Jaffrey's death would be listed as accidental... one of the things that made wrecking such a dangerous profession!

Carlson sighted along the derrick-like arm projecting in front of his cab, intent on the steel cable which hung from the towering derrick. The iron ball dangling at the end of the metal line was immense: ponderous enough, when crashed against a wall, to reduce concrete to dust. One swipe would certainly send Jaffrey spinning over the side of the half-demolished building!

Carlson's fist tightened on the control knob... the derrick slowly moved and the heavy iron ball began to swing like a gargantuan pendulum. Now its arc brought it fifteen yards from Jaffrey... now ten... now five. Another delicate turn of the knob and the derrick was precisely where it must be if the wrecking ball was to crash into Jaffrey...

There was a sickening crunch, a sharp scream of agony and desper-
ately flailing arms. Even as the workers turned in dismay, Carlson leaped from the cab and peered down through the girders. A momentary flash, like that of a figure fading away as it dropped, told the story of Jaffrey's plunge to the street far below. Slowly Carlson straightened up, a smile of triumph flickering across his face. Now there'd be no more trouble from Jaffrey...Carlson was once again the unchallenged boss of this labor gang!

He turned and, out of the corner of his eye, saw the steel cable plunging toward him! He tried to scramble out of the way, cursing himself for moving from the cab in order to watch Jaffrey's fall. Overhead Carlson heard an ominous roar: saw the cable slashing toward him with incredible speed...

Suddenly he felt a searing stab of pain at his throat. He was aware of being lifted bodily and hurled flat against the wooden scaffolding of the temporary floor. Before he could scream aloud he was conscious of the fiery agony running like wild flame through his throat...of seeing blood pouring darkly over his eyeballs. Weakly he tried to touch his tortured neck, to soothe the skin that felt as if it had been mangled raw. Then blackness closed in on Carlson like a stifling shroud...

A minute later, the workers stood solemnly over Carlson's crumpled body. "That steel cable," one man whispered, "it wrapped around his throat like a hangman's noose! Tore through his skin the way a knife cuts through butter! I-I never saw a man's head cut off so quickly!"
A pox on my mercenary idiot editors! They have just informed me that they desire to take over my entire column this issue to announce their latest insidious money-grabbing scheme to "con" a few more coins from your . . . or your old man's . . . grimy little piggy bank . . . namely, the formation of a national E.C. fan organization! O.K., bird-brains . . . you're on the hot-air! — V.K.

Thank you, V.K., you old bagel-head, for the confidence-inspiring manner in which you broke the deliriously happy news to our deliriously happy readers! But before launching into the sordid details of the club, we would like to sketch in a little background. We started out with two conditions that positively had to be met:

1) Our club would have to be a different kind of fan club . . . a continuously active club that would provide long-range interest, enjoyment and benefits for its members! And . . .

2) Our club would have to be a non-profit fan club! The Vault-Keeper to the contrary notwithstanding, the only income we at E.C. derive . . . or care to derive! . . . from our efforts comes from the newsstand sales of our 10c mags. We actually lose a little on subscriptions, and make very little on the annuals . . . both are primarily offered as services to promote good will! If you readers want a fan club, we're more than happy to oblige . . . but, again, as a service, not for profit!

So here's what we've come up with

1) THE NAME: As one writer wrote a while back, "E.C. magazines are habit-forming." So what could be more logical than to call the organization, "THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB"?

2) THE SET-UP: The E.C. Fan-Addict Club will consist of the national "parent" organization, and local chapters. Everyone who joins will be a member of the national organization. In addition, any group of five or more prospective members may join as an authorized chapter of the national organization. Each such chapter will be assigned a charter number. The name and address of the elected president of each authorized chapter will be made available to all members, so that those who are not already a member of a chapter will be able to join the one nearest them if they wish to.

3) WHAT YOU GET: Each member will receive a full-color 7½ by 10½ membership certificate, suitable for framing; a wallet-size membership identification card; a striking membership patch for sweaters, jackets, etc.; and a very distinguished-looking membership pin!

4) COST OF JOINING: Membership in THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB will set you back two hits . . . 25c! This 25c represents the exact cost to us (plus or minus a fraction of a cent!) of one envelope, one stamp, and the above mentioned four items . . . certificate, card, patch, and pin! (The cost of Ruby's and Nancy's loving labor in packing and mailing is lovingly donated by E.C.)

5) POSSIBLE FUTURE PLANS: We are considering publishing an E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB BULLETIN, containing such features as national and local chapter news; advance inside information on new titles, future stories, and special issues, etc.; articles and stories submitted by members, and a "hack-issue trading post!" Only club members would be eligible to subscribe, with the price and frequency of publication yet to be decided upon.

We are also considering some sort of "E.C. Surprise-of-the-Month" plan for members. What the surprises might be, and what we might have to clip you for this one, is also as yet undetermined.

6) IF YOU'RE STILL INTERESTED: For an individual membership, send 25c, along with your clearly printed name and address, to:

THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB
Room 706
225 Lafayette Street
N.Y.C. 12, N.Y.

If five or more of you wish to join as an authorized chapter, enclose each member's name and address, along with 25c for each name, and indicate the name of the elected president. We will notify each president of his chapter's charter number . . . but each chapter member will receive his membership credentials, etc., individually.

So that's it! Meet new friends. Make new enemies. See the world. Spend money. Join THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB!!!

(In honor of the occasion, we will forego the usual subscription plug that 6 issues of this, or any other E.C. mag, cost 75c.—ed.)
The newspaper stories and word-of-mouth rumors that had been coming out of the terrorized town of Hilldale had deeply disturbed old doctor Swanson, and he'd finally packed a few things into an overnight bag and taken a train there. Now, standing upon Hilldale's empty station platform, listening to the train whistle fading in the distance and gazing up at the abandoned mansion on the far hill overlooking the sleepy town, the old doctor nodded grimly.

Doc Swanson stared at the distant run-down boarded-up old mansion for a few minutes. Then he shrugged, slowly picked up his bag, and started wearily down the deserted dusty main street. As he'd stop before each building and store, he'd smile or frown or shake his head sadly and move on. Then, he came to the building he was looking for. He entered...

Afternoon, stranger. My name's Moulton. I'm sheriff of Hilldale. Kin I help you?

I came to help you, Sheriff Moulton! I came about the murders you been havin'. I think I know who's doin' 'em! Of course it's only a theory...

Sheriff Moulton eyed the old doctor suspiciously.

Listen, stranger. I'm full up to here with crackpot theories 'bout them murders.

This is no crackpot theory, sheriff. I have the answer. The person you want...
The sheriff laughed...

PERSON! WHAT PERSON? 'TAIN'T NO PERSON WHAT'S BEEN DOIN' THE KILLIN', STRANGER. 'TAIN'T NOTHIN' HUMAN.

OH? AND WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?

THE FACTS PROVE IT WEREN'T NO HUMAN, STRANGER. NO HUMAN BEING COULDA COMMITTED THE MURDER. NO HUMAN BEING COULDA GOTTEN IN...

...POINTED THE LIT MATCH AT THE OLD DOC...

TAKE LILA MARTINSON, FOR EXAMPLE. SHE WAS THE FIRST T'DIE. SOMEBODY HEARD HER SCREAMIN' AND PHONED ME UP...

...POINTED THE LIT MATCH AT THE OLD DOC...

LAUGHED...

POINTED THE LIT MATCH AT THE OLD DOC...

LAUGHED...

POINTED THE LIT MATCH AT THE OLD DOC...

LAUGHED...
The sheriff's eyes gleamed in the match-light... What are you drivin' Killer is, sheriff? I know who your where to trap him! The sheriff stared at old Swan-son. The old doc stood up... Meet me at the bottom of mansion hill tonight, sheriff. I'll show you the murderer... I'll be there. I'll be there...

The sheriff puffed thoughtfully on his pipe for a moment after the doc left. Then he cursed and tossed the match to the floor.

Ooh! Strangers!

Old Doc Swanson continued on down the deserted main street. His next stop was a small run-down shop at the far end of town...

Old Phil Ingram's face darkened... Strangest dang mystery this town ever had. Doc. Four murders, and everyone practically the same. Four pretty young women, each locked in nice and tight in their rooms with no way for anybody to get in or out. Nothin' human, that is. And then, all of a sudden, they're dead!

The wizened old man in the green eye shade shook the old doc's hand warmly...

What brings you back to Hilldale after all these years, doc? Murder, Phil!

Phil. Anyways, I have a favor t' ask of you...

The whole town's convinced the thing that murdered them four gals wasn't human, doc. Couldn't be! Perhaps it isn't human after all, Phil. Anyways, I have a favor t' ask of you...
HE POINTED TO THE ANCIENT EDIFICE LOOMING DARK AND FOREBODING ON THE CREST OF THE HILL. I KNEW MYSELF, SHERIFF. I AM DOCTOR SAM SWANSON. I LIVED HERE IN HILDALE OVER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO. I FIRST STARTED PRACTICIN’ MEDICINE HERE...

I WAS JUST A YOUNG SQUIRT, THEN... FRESH OUT OF MED SCHOOL. I’D COME TO HILDALE TO SET UP A PRACTICE. ONE DAY I HAD A VISITOR...

DOCTOR SWANSON. DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

OF COURSE. YOU’RE AMELIA BATES. YOU LIVE IN THE MANSION UP ON THE HILL OUTSIDE OF TOWN. YOUR HUSBAND IS JOHN BATES, THE FAMOUS WORLD TRAVELER...

AMELIA BATES WENT INTO HIDING AFTER THAT, AND NO ONE IN THE TOWN SAW HER, ALTHOUGH THEY ALL KNEW OF THE COMING EVENT. THEN, ONE DAY... I RECEIVED HER URGENT CALL...

YOU’D BETTER COME UP RIGHT AWAY, DOCTOR. I THINK IT’S TIME...

AMELIA BATES WAS GOING TO HAVE A BABY. SHE WANTED ME TO BE THE ATTENDING PHYSICIAN WHEN HER TIME CAME...

I’D BE DELIGHTED, MRS. BATES. AND... CONGRATULATIONS. YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND MUST BE VERY HAPPY...

MY HUSBAND WILL NEVER KNOW, DOCTOR. I JUST RECEIVED WORD THIS MORNING THAT HE HAS BEEN KILLED IN AN AIRPLANE CRASH...

THE BATES... SAY, I THOUGHT YOU WERE A STRANGER HERE!

WE’LL FIND THE KILLER UP THERE, SHERIFF... IN THE OLD BATES MANSION! I’M SURE OF IT!

THE BATES... I’M SURE OR N’T.

THAT YOU, SHERIFF? YEP! IT’S ME, NOW, WHERE’S THE KILLER...

THEY’D STARTED UP THE HILL TOWARD THE BOARDED-UP OLD MANSION...

BUT WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THE KILLER’LL BE UP THERE, DOC?

JUST A HUNCH, SHERIFF. YOU SEE, SOMETHIN’ HAPPENED TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO... UP THERE... IN THAT MANSION... AND I THINK IT’S THE ANSWER...

AMELIA BATES WENT INTO HIDING AFTER THAT, AND NO ONE IN THE TOWN SAW HER, ALTHOUGH THEY ALL KNEW OF THE COMING EVENT. THEN, ONE DAY... I RECEIVED HER URGENT CALL...

YOU’D BETTER COME UP RIGHT AWAY, DOCTOR. I THINK IT’S TIME...

AMELIA BATES WAS GOING TO HAVE A BABY. SHE WANTED ME TO BE THE ATTENDING PHYSICIAN WHEN HER TIME CAME...

I’D BE DELIGHTED, MRS. BATES. AND... CONGRATULATIONS. YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND MUST BE VERY HAPPY...

MY HUSBAND WILL NEVER KNOW, DOCTOR. I JUST RECEIVED WORD THIS MORNING THAT HE HAS BEEN KILLED IN AN AIRPLANE CRASH...
The two men, the aged doctor and the sheriff, climbed the rickety old steps of the weatherbeaten abandoned mansion... And you... delivered the widow Bates's child, Doc? If you could call it a child, sheriff, it was just one of those unfortunate things. The child was a misshapen monster...

Mrs. Bates took her monstrous child in her arms... You can tell the townsfolk the baby was born dead. Doc? This will be our secret? Yours and mine.

The door to the old mansion squeaked open on time-worn hinges. Doctor Swanson stepped inside. The sheriff followed... I saw the child once more after that, sheriff. It was just before I sold my practice and left Hillbale. I came up here to say good-bye to Mrs. Bates. The child came out of the kitchen there... slithering...

Mrs. Bates saw the expression on my face after I delivered the baby. It's head was normal, but its body and arms and legs had not developed fully. Mrs. Bates saw the expression on my face after I delivered the baby: choke... what is it, doctor? what's wrong? my baby...

The doctor stared into the darkness of the empty, dust-laden living room of the old mansion, listening...

...slithering along on its undeveloped hands and feet like some weird lizard with a human head.

And you think this... this monster-child is our killer, eh, doc?

A creature of that sort could get into a room that is ordinarily inaccessible to a fully developed human being. It could slide through ventilation systems... come down chimney flues...
The sheriff eyed the doctor quizzically.

But, the motive? What motive did it have?

Revenge, perhaps. The creature could have been in love with each of the murdered women.

When it revealed itself to the women it loved, they were disgusted and revolted; it killed them in order to safeguard its secret.

The sheriff moved toward the doctor awkwardly stiffly.

After I spoke to you this afternoon, I went over to the Clarion Office. I examined all the back issues of the paper you were mentioned as having kept company with each of the murdered women, sheriff.

When you lit your pipe, you let the match burn down to your finger tips. You never felt the flame. Sensed no pain.

I'm going to have to kill you, now, doctor. To protect my secret.

Sheriff Moulton lunged at the doctor suddenly. The room was filled with the sounds of running footsteps, hoarse cries.

We've heard enough, boys. The old doc was right.

Let's get him.

No, no!

Moulton screamed, realizing that he'd been trapped. He flailed as Phil Ingram and the others struggled with him. Throwing him to the dusty mansion floor, tearing the clothes-covered framework from his neck, ripping the artificial legs...the mechanical arms away...exposing his hideous undeveloped lizard-like body...

Good Lord! How horrible!

Heh, heh. Yep, kiddies. Sheriff Moulton was the Bates monster-child in disguise. He'd built his mechanical human body and come out of hiding, hoping to lead a normal life. The trouble was, so had his prospective spouses. Well, the old witch awaits with her slop serving, so I'll turn you over to her thanks for dropping into the vault. Don't forget anything when you heave...er leave...bye, now. Remember I do unto others...

—THE END—
Hee, hee! And now that those two old geezers have tempted your appetites for horror with their... shall we say, evil entrées... it's time for the last course... the who-up to V.K.'s putrid periodical. Yep, it's me, the old witch, mistress of the haunt of fear, ready to serve a delightful dessert of celvings into the delirious. Ready? Then open your mouth and I'll puppet in 'I call this scream-scooping STRUNG ALONG!'

The marionettes, hanging limply from their rack beside Tony's bed, turned lazily in the night breeze that wafted through the open window. Tony fingered them absently, staring up at the heavy beams that crossed the arched ceiling above his head. Tears filled his eyes and ran down into the wrinkles that etched his forty-odd-year-old face. His voice was soft and sad and touched with loneliness.

I'm dying, my little strung-out friend, I'm dying and she doesn't care. She doesn't care at all.

Tony turned to the lifeless figures suspended beside him. Koko, the clown... Vanya, the ballet dancer, Sir Thomas, the gallant knight... the others, he shook his head sadly.

She could have waited! She didn't have to tell me tonight... of all nights. She could have let me die believing she loved me...
I WORKED WEEKS ON YOU, CARVING YOUR HEAD, YOUR ARMS, YOUR LEGS, AND SEWING YOUR COSTUME...

TONY SMILED WARMLY AS HE FINGERED THE BRIGHTLY COLORED FIGURES...

REMEMBER WHEN I MADE YOU, KOKO, SO MANY YEARS AGO. I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MARIONETTE IN THE WHOLE WORLD.

YOU'RE ALL I HAVE LEFT NOW. LITTLE ONES, ALL I HAVE LEFT.

THE MARIONETTES HUNG MOTIONLESS NOW, FOR THE BREEZE HAD FADED. TONY TOUCHED EACH ONE LOVINGLY, TUGGING A STRING HERE... THERE, MAKING KOKO WAVE GAYLY, VANYA KICK IMPISHLY...

TONY TOUCHED EACH ONE LOVINGLY, TUGGING A STRING HERE... THERE...

MOKO WAVE GAYLY, VANYA KICK IMPISHLY.

REMEMBER OUR FIRST SHOW TOGETHER? I WAS SO NERVOUS, BUT WHEN THE CURTAIN WAS OPENED AND YOU WERE PERFORMING AND THE AUDIENCE WAS LAUGHING, I WASN'T AFRAID ANYMORE...

WE WERE A SUCCESS, WE THREE... AND I MADE MORE OF YOU, SIR THOMAS... THE REST OF YOU, I HAD MORE BOOKINGS THAN I COULD FILL, BUT YOU WERE MADE OF WOOD AND CLOTH AND WORKED BY STRINGS. AFTER THE SHOWS YOU JUST HUNG THERE, SILENT, MOTIONLESS, AND I WAS LONELY.

AND AFTER THAT, I MADE YOU, VANYA, AND YOU JOINED OUR SHOW, AND THE PEOPLE CHEERED YOUR GRACEFUL ARABESQUES... YOUR DAINTY PIROUETTES...

I PULLED YOUR STRINGS AND YOU CAME ALIVE AND MADE ME RICH, BUT YOU COULDN'T GIVE ME WHAT I REALLY NEEDED. YOU COULDN'T GIVE ME LOVE... COMPANIONSHIP. AND THEN I MET SOMEONE WHO COULD GIVE ME THESE THINGS...

I'VE OFTEN ADMIRE YOU, MR. ZANGOND.

CALL ME TONY, AND I WILL CALL YOU NORA!
I fell in love with Nora, and she in turn loved me, so we were married. Good luck, you two! Happy honeymoon!

Nora brought light into my dark lonely life. Together, we toured the world, and she sat with presidents and kings as I entertained. Bravo! Your husband is amazing, Mrs. Zargono. Yes.

And you, my faithful friends, you performed well for me. I was able to buy Nora everything...jewelry...furs...

Like it, Nora? It's beautiful, Tony!

This lovely Tudor mansion with its stained-glass windows and beamed cathedral ceilings. It's all yours, darling. Oh, Tony...

I'll have you fixed in a jiffy, koko.

But there was no repairing me when I broke down. The doctors told me. It's your heart, Mr. Zargono. You can never work again.

Nora seemed all broken up when I told her the bad news. I thought she was concerned about me...my health...

Never work again, Tony? But what will we do?

We have the house, Nora. We'll retire...take it easy.
"I went into forced retirement. Bookings were cancelled...contracts torn up the Great Tony Zar60no...the master puppeteer...was nung away like one of his own marionettes."

"The great Tony Zar60no...the master puppeteer...was hung away like one of his own marionettes."

"Nora tried to nurse me back to health. She called in doctor after doctor, but they all shook their heads...if he works again, it will kill him, even an emotional shock..."

"Bills piled up. Our savings went. Nora was forced to sell her jewelry...her furs...her car. She grew cold."

"Nora, don't be angry. I know how you loved your pretty things, but I can't help it. If I were well..."

"All right, Tony! All right! Let's not talk about it."

" Soon, all that was left was this house...and you...dear friends...I am like to make me sell you also...but that, I refused to do..."

"No, Nora! Not my marionettes! Now that I'm bedridden, they need the money! You're ridiculous!"

"Darling Nora, you've made my life complete, knowing you love me has..."

"Don't kid yourself, Tony! I never loved you! I loved the things you could give me..."

"I was dying. I knew it. But I could face death. Nora was beside me. Nora, my wife...who loved me. As long as I believed that, I could face anything..."

"Nora, don't be angry. I know how you loved your pretty things, but I can't help it. If I were well..."

"I was dying. I knew it..."

"Soon, all that was left was this house...and you...dear friends...I am like to make me sell you also...but that, I refused to do..."

"No, Nora! Not my marionettes! Now that I'm bedridden, they need the money! You're ridiculous!"

"But we need the money you love me has..."

"Darling Nora, you've made my life complete, knowing you love me has..."

"Don't kid yourself, Tony! I never loved you! I loved the things you could give me..."

"Then, Nora told me the truth. She stood beside my bed and told me...tonight..."

"Nora! What are you saying? I married you for your money! That's all! Your money! You could give me pretty things, and I wanted pretty things so I put up an act."

"Actually, I despised you! I loathed you...your touch...your careess...your kiss! But while you could give me what I liked, I tolerated you."

"Her eyes were filled with hate and her mouth was twisted into a scornful sneer as she spewed forth her invective."

"Actually, I despised you! I loathed you...your touch...your careess...your kiss! But while you could give me what I liked, I tolerated you."
And as she raved, I felt the pain in my chest grow in intensity.

When you got sick, I stuck around. I thought you might get better. Now... when I think of the time I've wasted...

And she's in pain. She feels the pain growing until it felt as if a steel vise were crushing my heart between its powerful jaws.

Don't you like the truth, Tony? Don't you? Well, now you know! I've hated you from the beginning...

Nora... choke... you're killing me.

Am I, sucker? Am I killing you? Well, that's what I want to do. I'd like to be free of you... while I'm still young.

The attack came... just as the doctors had predicted. Nora stood there, her face a stone mask, watching me writhe.

And I've been lying here, waiting... listening... hoping she'd return... hoping to awaken from this bad dream. The attack has passed, and I feel myself fading... knowing I am dying.

And then she walked out... laughing.

Nora... come back.

And I've been lying here, waiting... listening... hoping she'd return... hoping to awaken from this bad dream. The attack has passed, and I feel myself fading... knowing I am dying.

Nora... sob.
The breeze coming in the open window stirred the suspended figures as Tony closed his eyes... murmuring sadly...

...And after a while he slept...

A sound made Tony open his eyes. He looked toward the doorway of his bedroom. She stood there, silhouetted in the wall light...

She glided toward him. He reached for the light. She put her hand on his, shaking her head...

But I can't see you! Or don't you want me to see you?

Are those tears, Nora? Are you crying? Is that why you won't let me turn on the lights?

She fell to her knees beside his bed. He reached out, touching her cheek...

She nodded, kissing his hand, her body heaving with pitiful quiet sobs...

Oh, Nora! You didn't mean what you said, did you? You're sorry! You've come back to tell me...

She nodded again, lying her head upon his chest.

Nora, Nora... I knew you loved me! I knew it... Don't say anything! There's no need!
Tory cupped Nora's chin in his hand, stroking her soft hair.

"I'm glad you came to me, Nora. I'm glad you wouldn't let me die believing you didn't love me..."

She shook her head... clamping to him, kissing his cheek... her lips damp and twitching with passion... "I am going to die tonight, Nora! I know it!" But I can die happy now, my dearest, knowing that you do love me...

He took her in his arms, kissing her soft wet lips... whispering...

"Come to me, darling. Make my last night complete..."

After a while Tony lay back upon his pillow, gazing up into the darkness, gasping for breath. His words were a soft whisper carried away by the night breeze.

"Thank you, Nora... gasp..."

But Nora had died much earlier... violently. She lay with the blood that had been mistaken for tears now dried upon her cheeks. She lay, limply, beside Tony. The rigid dismembered sections of her body held together by tiny hinges screwed into the joint-bones. Countless fine, almost invisible, strings ran from each movable section to the ceiling beam overhead. The marionette pack was empty. The grinning marionettes were found sprawled upon the beam. Nora's strings tied to their lifeless hands...

They found Nora and Tony lying side by side the next morning. They were both dead. Tony had died happily during the night, a smile upon his face. Nora had died much earlier... violently. She lay with the blood that had been mistaken for tears now dried upon her cheeks. She lay, limply, beside Tony. The rigid dismembered sections of her body held together by tiny hinges screwed into the joint-bones. Countless fine, almost invisible, strings ran from each movable section to the ceiling beam overhead. The marionette pack was empty. The grinning marionettes were found sprawled upon the beam. Nora's strings tied to their lifeless hands...

Hee, hee... Now there's a story that tugs at the heart-strings, eh, kiddies? So Nora had Tony on the ropes... and Tony's marionettes had ropes on her. Well, I'll have the old pew-pot seething once more in my own mag, the Haunt of Fear, when... I see the side of beef said to his old range-pal hanging next to him in the butcher's ice-box... "We meet again..."

— The End —
THE SHOW'S ON, GANG!

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Mr. Anthony Avrille, Wash. $135.00 first week spare time
Mrs. Agnes Michaels, Ind. $84.16 first week spare time
Mr. Russell P. Hart, New York $63.30 first week spare time

Mrs. W. E. Fees, S. Dak. $49.87 first week spare time
Mr. E. A. Johnson, Ga. $62.26 first week spare time
Mrs. Emery Shoats, Wyo. $49.86 first week spare time
Mr. J. Hillman Jr., Ohio $78.72 first week spare time
Mrs. John Gorman, Conn. $71.54 first week spare time
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