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HEH, HEH! HOW Y'ALL, LI’L OL’ HARPIES AND HOBGOBLINS? PANOON MAH SOUTHERN-TYPE DROOL, CHILLUN, BUT IF YOU’LL JUST HUSTLE INTO THE VAULT OF HORROR SO’S I CAN CLOSE THE CREAKY DOOR AND KEEP OUT THAT FILTHY FRESH AIR, YOUR VAULT-KEEPER WILL LEAD YOU ON A TOUR THROUGH SOME STINKING, MASMIC SWAMPS...THAT IS, IF IT’S ALL RIGHT BAYOU! YOU REMEMBER DAXILLA, DON’T YOU? SHE’S MY ONLY COMPANION HERE IN THE VAULT... OTHER THAN THE RATS! TOGETHER WE DUG UP THIS SORROWFUL SELECTION OF SWAMPLAND SPOONING CONCERNING A LONELY LAD AND HIS LACHRYMOSE (LAHRYMOSE? WHAT DAT??) LOVE FOR A LASS. I CALL IT...

DEADLY BELOVED!
In the southwest, black billowing clouds portend a violent storm, and even now a faint grumbling threat comes from the distant heavens. But here, on this unpaved swamp road, the only clouds are the dust raised by the jouncing of my car...

Salty sweat trickling from my forehead stings my eyes, betraying me to sudden treacherous ruts that slyly try to guide my wheels into the murky sloughs.

My editor had been concerned about my increasing depression. He felt I needed adventure, romance, love! Something was lacking in my life... I needed love, he said, to snap me back to normal.

Love... phooey! There's no love in this crummy world!

Merely thinking of my editor brings misfortune. Had my mind been on my driving, I'd have realized that the car was overheating dangerously. Suddenly hearing the unmistakable sound of the radiator boiling over, and I bring the car to a halt and get out...

Blast it! This is what I get for letting my editor talk me into taking this assignment!

Hmph! Miserable luck! As if things weren't bad enough!

Strange how a man will cling to a life he's tired of living! What unseen force is it that drives a man on to meet his destiny? I linger on this thought but a moment, then return my attention to the squalid looking car.

No two ways about it... gotta just let it simmer down for a while! Better find a spot of shade while I'm waiting.

The boss told me to get material on these old homes. MIGHT AS WELL START NOW! MIGHT GET A COOL DRINK ANYWAY!

Well! A bit of good luck for a change! The boss told me to get material on these old homes. MIGHT AS WELL START NOW! MIGHT GET A COOL DRINK ANYWAY!

Strange how a man will cling to a life he's tired of living! What unseen force is it that drives a man on to meet his destiny? I linger on this thought but a moment, then return my attention to the squalid looking car.
Wading through a meadow of highgrown weeds, the air pungent with honeysuckle and jasmine, I soon find myself in the pleasant shade of the broad veranda waiting for an answer to my knock, yet sensing somehow the place is deserted...

There not being any response to a second knock, I enter. A bitter, acrid smell rushes to greet me... and, as sunblindedness leaves me, I can see the surroundings...

Gasp! Great Scott! The house has been burned out!

The ivy-covered outer wall had withstood the flames that once gutted the interior, stunned with disappointment, I study the charred mouldings and glimpse an occasional spot where their beauty was spared...

Too absorbed with examining the ravaged home, I don't hear her approach. I whirl, startled, at the first sound of her soft, velvety voice...

Can I help you, sir?

Eh? Oh... I'm sorry...

I've the feeling I've known her all my life, yet I know we've never met except, perhaps, in some forgotten dream. Suddenly, my face is hot with embarrassment at my own stupid gaping and I hasten to explain...

I'm Edward Leeds... a writer, I'm doing a series for Hearth and Home Magazine. Won't you come into the drawing room?

The drawing room, too, bears grim reminders of ruin, but yet it is not as damaged as the entrance hall. We sit on a scorched sofa before a low table laden with fruit and a decanter of wine. She fills a goblet and hands it to me. I drink thirstily...

Help yourself to whatever you like, Mr. Leeds... and I will tell you about this home, Willows Plantation!

The drab ugliness of my world, the scarred chamber in which I stand, all else but the warmly smiling vision of beauty framed in the drawing room doorway have vanished from my mind. She speaks again...

Have we met before, Mr. Leeds?... I... I... forgive me for intruding! I knocked...

My name is Eloise Fontagene. Wont you come into the drawing room?
Perhaps I've owned the wine too quickly, for now my head begins to swim. I have trouble concentrating on her words. They come to my ears as through a veil...

...I'll never forget the night of the fire. Ten years ago, we were asleep. I felt myself choking, and I woke! I groped through the smoke...

In spite of my dizziness I somehow sense that it troubles her to speak of the fire. My heart goes out to her in sympathy...

...The whole family... I know you must miss them, dearest Eloise...

Is it the wine alone that has made me this way, or am I hypnotized by her beauty, so that I hardly know what I am saying...

Why did you say that? Why did you call me, "dearest Eloise"...

Because... because you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen...

Her lips move, but I hear no reply, for a deafening clap of thunder shakes the old mansion, and brings me, startled, to my feet! Suddenly I realize it has grown dark out...

Oh... I didn't notice the storm creeping up!

She leads me up the back stairway to the third floor. Here the hallway is completely charred, so that the blackened walls absorb the candlelight. Eloise nods to a closed door...

You might find that room interesting, Mr. Leeds.

My sister and I used to play in there, go in.

She leads me up the back stairway to the third floor. Here the hallway is completely charred, so that the blackened walls absorb the candlelight. Eloise nods to a closed door...

You might find that room interesting, Mr. Leeds.

My sister and I used to play in there, go in.

The thunder speaks in a low rolling rumble. I try to clear my head, to understand what it's trying to tell me. Then I see Eloise before me. She's holding a lighted candle, and its steady glow reflects in her violent eyes. She beckons to me to follow her...

You'll want to see the rest of the house, Mr. Leeds. This way...
The room that was once there had been burned away in the inferno, and only a vivid lightning flash keeps me from plunging to the room far below. I grab blindly for the doorway.

Desperately I claw back to safety. We start down the main stairway, she clinging to the railing, I staying at the center of the steps for fear the railing will collapse...

I'm sorry... It's been so long since I've been up here, I forgot! It's... It's all right! But I'm shaky, feel kind of nauseo, I'd better go back downstairs.

Before her warning can seep through to my muddled mind, a step turns to ashes beneath my weight...

By reflex alone I snatch at the rail! I hang on and then pull myself up, sucking in deep breaths and trembling at my narrow escape.

Edward? Oh! Forgive me, Edward! There's nothing...to forgive, Eloise. You...you warned me.

I stare dumbly into the fathomless,bewitching eyes and try to solve the message there. There's a message, I know, but whether or not it is only a symbol of my own chaotic emotions, I cannot tell. I try, through the mist clouding my mind, to rationalize...to think!

But somehow I can't think! I can only sense a longing for this woman...a desire so strong that even the tingling sensation of fear I feel is overcome and forgotten. I bury my head in her lap, her hands caress my head, her fingers trickle through my hair.
How long we stay there, I don’t know, but suddenly we are in the drawing room once more and she opens wide the doors to the outside. Through the downpour I can see the murky black waters of a swamp, and the vague apprehension that has been gnawing at me now turns to stark fear! Her hand presses on my back, urging me on...

The swamp is fascinating in the rain, Edward... don’t be afraid!

Eloise... Eloise...

I look deep into her fascinating eyes and my fear lessens. The world about me dissolves into the vapors of nothingness...

Eloise...

There’s time, Edward, and there’s much to tell! Come - I have something to show you!

I taste the wine in my mouth... the heavy, sweet nectar that has made my head swim. I can smell the cloying fragrance of her, and her voice drifts through space to my ears, coaxing me to further handle the gun. My eyes stare dully into its black mouth. My fingers sense and fondle the trigger...

See, Edward? There, on the wall, my great grandfather’s musket! Take it down, look at it! Go ahead...

I take the old gun from the wall and examine it... the stock, the hammer, the barrel... even the muzzle...

...Eloise, is it loaded? Edward, of course not. It’s been on that wall for more than sixty years!

I’m afraid? Not long ago I’d have taken any risk. It didn’t matter whether I lived or died. It didn’t matter till I met you, Eloise. Now I want to live so I can be with you. I want to stay with you... always!

Oh, Edward, Edward. I too, want you to stay. How I’ve longed for someone...

Somehow the gun is turned in my hand, my finger still toying with the trigger. There is an ear-splitting explosion, a blinding flash...

Blam!
More than ever I know what she means to me...I have fallen head over heels in love! I can't go on without her! I must tell her. But there is an interruption, an ominous, deep-voiced chiming.

It's the hall clock, Edward! It's eleven thirty. It's nearly midnight! So late? Time goes so fast...

Eloise...Oh, my Eloise...

There's such finality in her voice that it makes me shudder, and again the indefinable fear rises.

You say you love me, that you want to be with me? There's so little time left, Edward! Try to understand...you can't come as you are! As I am, come where? Don't speak riddles, Eloise. Tell me what...

I do love you, Edward? Don't you see? It's the only way!

Eloise! All those accidents to me! The doorway upstairs...the step...the swamp...you wanted me killed! You wanted me dead! But you love me? I know you do!

The fear is definite now! It's definite and growing stronger, and with all my strength I fight to break away as she tries to drag me with her.

You...you said everyone was killed in the fire! That's why the gunblast didn't harm you! You were already dead! You're dead! Dead!

Don't leave me, Edward! Come...please come...I love you so!

Terrified, I shriek and tear loose from her grasp...and, as I streak from the house into the night, I can hear her voice follow me on the wind, whispering that she be waiting...she'll be waiting...
Stumbling, slipping in the mud, I make my way somehow to my car. I drive to a small hotel miles distant, small and drab... but safe. In my room I flop on my bed, I sleep... and dream...

I wake up, seeing visions of her in the room so real, I feel I could touch them! Sleep is impossible! She crows into my very mind...

Eloise... Eloise...
Leave me alone!

I pace the floor nervously, sensing her perfume is with me, seeing her wondrous beauty though my eyes are shut... knowing she is certain death!

I try to write but the page is garren. The magnetism of her unbelievable beauty is astounding! Even the horror of my destiny with her cannot dispel the vivid illusions that surround me at every turn...

Memories of her are too strong! Even the aromas of the countryside do not erase the indelible sensations I know because of her. I cannot stay. As long as I remain, I will never be at peace. I must leave... I must go!

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Heh, heh! Heavens to Betsy! I wonder if Edward made the deadline? What a dilemma... he couldn't live without Eloise, and he sure couldn't live with her! Some gals get sore when a guy walks out on them... but not our Eloise. She was burned up ten years ago! Well, now... time to turn you over to his nips, The Crypt-keeper... but come back, kiddies! Heh, heh! I'll be... waiting?
THE CRYPT OF TERROR

REH, REH! SLOSH RIGHT DOWN THE SLOPPY AISLE, FELLOW FIENDS OF THE FOPLIGHTS! PLENTY OF GLOOM UP FRONT-AND-CENTER HERE IN THE CRYPT OF TERROR! TODAY YOUR CRYPT KEEPER PRESENTS AN ALL-SCAR GASP IN A DOLEFULLY DELIRIOUS DRAMA ABOUT AN AMBITIOUS ACTOR WHO BECAME INVOLVED IN A GRUESOMELY GRAVE SITUATION, WHICH WAS TOPPED OFF IN TRAGEDY! SO NOW, PREPARE YOURSELF. AS THE GRIMY CURTAIN RISES ON AN ONE, SCREAM ONE OF THE CHILLER I CALL TOP BILLING!
The heavy veil of mist rolling over the countryside north of Devonshire clung tenaciously to the backs of the tired, hungry trio of actors as they came upon the dingy fieldstone building and saw the sign.

Shades of Shakespeare!
A Stage Entrance!

Woltham Theatre? Woltham? I've never heard of this one!

I'd better land a part soon! I haven't eaten in two days!

A part is important to all of us—we've all been down on our luck!

Blye, Nash and Winton moved on into the theatre that reeked of dust and decay, and hallowed words fell upon their ears...

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio. A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. Hamlet, By gad!

We'd like to see the director. Be quiet! Can't you see there's a dress rehearsal taking place? Hamlet is speaking!

Suddenly, on stage, the leading actor shouted.

Confound it, Halilwell! Another one has disappeared!

What??
Halliwell: The director, turned purple with rage
and he roared mercilessly at a gaunt, dour-looking
yet ignominious property man.

Phew! What a temper!

Temper or not, I'm going to ask Halliwell
for a part in this play!

Hold on a moment, Winton!
Let him go, Blye!

I don't care where you get it, Dawkins! Just get it!
Percy Winton doesn't deserve a chance any-
more than I!

That loud-mouthed director
is in a bad mood.
Blye! Winton will be tossed
out on his ear!

Eh? A role in Hamlet?
Are you familiar with the Gravediggers'
scene? I do have one part open... a small,
but important, part!

All I ask is a try at it, sir!

You'll find a dressing room just upstairs,
young man!

thrown out on his ear, eh? Hmph!
I'll never forgive Winton for this!

Barry Blye's face darkened, without his friend
noticing, he stooped and picked up a heavy sash-
weight, and hiding it from view, he started away...

Where are you going, Blye? It won't do any
good to try talking Winton out of that
part!

There's no point in being bitter about it, Nash! I...
am... I'm going to wish him luck!

He was breathing heavily when he reached his
friend's dressing room, and he gripped the sash-
weight tightly, murderously as he entered...

I... I'm sorry, Blye! You know
how this business is. Every
man for himself!

That's right.
Winton! Every man
for himself!
Winton turned...too late! The heavy bashweight came down with bone-crushing force and the terrified scream that started from his throat was never finished.

No more than ten minutes later, Barry Blye returned backstage where his other friend, Nash, waited...

I say, Blye, where's Winton? He's liable to lose the part unless he hurries!

He's gone, Nash! He got cold feet. Stagefright, even before he set foot onstage! He lit out for London...for a clerking job!

I can't say I'm sorry, but that still leaves two of us for one part, Blye! Which of us should ask for it?

The two men watched Director Halliwell with anticipation, but he ignored them...

I say, Blye, where's Winton? He's liable to lose the part unless he hurries!

He's gone, Nash! He got cold feet. Stagefright, even before he set foot onstage! He lit out for London...for a clerking job!

All my life I've wanted a chance to do Shakespeare. Winton? And I won't be done out of it now?

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This is wickedness! Someone is surely trying to ruin my career!

Don't upset yourself! The prop man will fix things!

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Suddenly the director's anger subsided and, smiling, he approached Nash and Blye:

Blye, with a wry smile, tried to collar the director, who ignored him and brushed past him to talk to Nash.

Blye's face clouded, and his dark eyes flashed! Slowly, deliberately, he mounted the circular stairway, and muttering fiercely under his breath, headed for the dressing room Nash had entered not even a tryout! He gave Nash the part when it should have been mine! I'm a better actor than he is! Far better!

The murderer's strong hands flew to his friend's throat and he squeezed with an effort that made every muscle, every vein in his body bulge! Nash turned purple and a moment later, went limp, his tongue, black and swollen, thrust horrifyingly from his mouth.

Yeah, Mr. Halliwell! I'm sure you'll be pleased with my ability.

Yes, Mr. Halliwell! I'm sure you'll be pleased with my ability.

I'm not even a tryout! He gave Nash the part when it should have been mine! I'm a better actor than he is! Far better!

Edward Nash started up the rusting iron stairway, looked back and smiled tauntingly at Blye whose face had turned ashen in rage.

The room was dark, but there was enough light from the dressing table for Nash to see the terrible hate etched on Blye's stony face.

I deserve a chance... I'm going to have it, Nash! It's all I've ever dreamed of!

Don't be a fool, Blye! Don't...

After concealing the body, Barry left the dressing room, wiping the perspiration from his face. His hand trembled violently on the bannister as he returned again downstairs.

Now they're both out of the way! The director has to give me the part now!
Nervously puffing on a cigarette stub, he hovered near the director who was becoming very impatient.

I always have to do everything! I can’t wait any longer for that friend of yours! So if you want the part, it’s yours!

Thank you, sir! I’ll go set ready!

Wha...? Who are you? What are you doing in here? And what’s in that sack?

I’m only collecting. Want to see what I’ve got?

No! You ugly old fool! I haven’t time! I have to get into costume! Get out of here!

But you’ll want to see what I have! It’s pretty!

Gleefully, he raced upstairs to the dressing room. As he stepped inside, he saw the little old man...

Barry blie looked darkly. Something in the persistent and extremely agitated manner of the old man forced his eyes downward to examine the sack’s contents, though somehow, he feared what he would see.

His stomach convulsed into knots. The blood all at once slammed into his head with such force that he became dizzy, and he groped for support, while just outside the rim of his consciousness he heard the old man’s fiendish cackle, saw repeatedly the contents of the sack... human heads!

When his dizziness passed he saw that he was alone. Shakily, he glanced around the small room, trying to fathom the horrible occurrence... couldn’t have happened... just my imagination... just nerves! Whew! Need a bit of fresh air...
He stumbled rather weakly to the window and threw aside the dirty curtain covering it...

...ahh... that feels better. Guess I've been under too much strain. Haven't eaten in... in...

His words trailed off into a confused silence. For his eyes for the first time had seen the entrance to the building he was in...

Wha...? What in blazes? Are you ready, young man?

Why, the same part your two friends were supposed to play?

You know... where I, as Hamlet, say, "Alas, poor Yorick. That's where I hold up the skull!

We've been having such difficulty with that part. Someone keeps stealing the prop!

But we won't let your skull disappear 'cause it's the last one we can get! HEE, HEE, HEE!

Oh... yes... that! Just... just what part is it I'm to play?

You know... where I, as Hamlet, say, "Alas, poor Yorick. That's where I hold up the skull!

Heh, heh! All of which brings to mind another line by Shakespeare: "Parting is such sweet sorrow." Nobody was sorrier than sweet Barry Blye when he parted with his head. Of course, it's his own fault for being so completely enthralled with the theatre! He lost his head over it, poor chap! Oh well... the vault-keeper is next, ready with a yarn that will really tickle you... to death! So good bye for now!

Eeeeyaaaaahh!!!

WOLTHAM INSANE ASYLUM FOR ACTORS.

The End.
This carney, the man in the comic baggy pants thought to himself, was a set-up for a gee who was fast with his hands. In the crowd of rubes thronging the midway, a pickpocket had his choice of targets for a quick killing. As "Grendat the Clown," no one would suspect that jostling the customers was anything more than part of his act.

At the ticket booth in front of the ferris wheel, he spotted an old man counting the change of a ten-spot. Grendat slapped a nearby woman across the back with a chalk-filled sock and, while the gawkers howled appreciatively at his antics, sauntered slowly to the spot where the old man would soon exit from the ride.

In a few minutes the big wheel completed its circuit and Grendat saw his victim step from one of the cages. The old geezer shambled toward the long dark alley between the popcorn stand and the fortune teller's booth. Grendat sidled in the same direction, his eyes searching the crowd to make certain no one was watching him.

The scheme went wrong, right from the start. The old rube was suspicious of finding himself alone in the narrow alley with the ludicrously dressed clown...or Grendat's fingers performed without their customary agility. Whatever the reason, the old man began to yell as soon as Grendat had lunged against him. The clown snarled, slid his switch-blade knife from his pocket and hurled the old man backwards. Grendat slashed outward, again and again. In another moment it was all over: Grendat fled toward the crowded midway. He looked back just once at the sprawled body of the old man...the blood was still gushing from the jagged hole torn in the dead man's throat.

Slipping in among the hayseeds, Grendat moved quickly toward the flying-ring concession...a plan already taking shape in his mind. They'll be sure to find the body soon, Grendat thought. I gotta make sure there are a lot of witnesses to testify I was hamming it up at the time of the killing. Gotta attract attention with a real eye-catching stunt. A sensational show-stopper!

Grabbing hold of a flying-ring, Grendat waved gaily to the crowd as the big platform began to accelerate. The crowd chuckled as the clown swung his legs up over his head and slipped his feet into the metal circles. Balancing himself by the pressure of his insteps against the rings, Grendat let his hands slide free...and smirked to the delighted onlookers as he hung upside-down.

The platform whirled faster and the rings whipped outwards so that they were almost horizontal. Grendat groped to pull himself back into a normal position, aware of the brick wall coming ever-closer to his head as he hurtled around the speeding circle...aware that one more burst of speed and he'd never be able to slide out of his perilous predicament.

The shock of hitting the wall was an anticlimax: Grendat was already moaning with fear when his head slammed into the bricks. There was a blinding jar...a momentary realization of horrible disaster. Grendat felt blood pouring over his staring eyes...felt the bones of his skull shattering...felt his breath choked off in a spasm of raw agony. His mutilated body flopped from the rings a moment later.

Most of the chattering onlookers said the act was "terrif!" A real show-stopper!
E.C. WENT TO SEA
IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER NEW TRENDS...

AND WE CAME UP WITH...
SAGAS OF THE SEA, SHIPS, PLUNDER AND...

PIRACY

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ROOM 106
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NAME ____________________________________________
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Heh, heh! Well, I have a tasty bit of information that may come as a surprise to some of you gloops who continually write in addressing your host as Old Hag, "Ugly Old Crone," etc. Fact of the matter is that your truly is most definitely NEITHER a Hag NOR a Crone, nor any other horrible FEMININE being you might care to suggest! At the risk of destroying the love life of a great number of readers who send amorous communications, and with due regard to the many others who have hitherto been under this ghastly misapprehension, I wish to have it known that your VAULT-KEEPER is a MAN!

This may come as a shock in view of the fact that your storyteller has recently acquired a beautiful FEMALE companion, (Drusilla—Ed.) but having advanced knowledge of things to take place in FUTURE issues of the Vault, the making known of the above information to one and all might very well be considered impertinent—especially in SOME circles.

(All right, V.K., that's enough. You're not on the witness stand! Let's have some Perverted Poetry, eh?—Ed.)

Okay, Okay! Here's a delicious recipe to start the ball rolling. It's from Mrs. R. Kindler of Chicago, Ill., and it's called 'Ghoul's Goulash':

First dissect a mouldy ghoul
And place the contents in a bowl.
Then add a spoon or two of glue
And mix it in a cruddy shoe
A shriveled ear, a stringy vein,
A patch of salts and a bloody brain.
Then alternately add more blood,
From a vampire's grave, a blob of mud.
A little spice, a rotted leg,
A patch of hair and one spoiled egg.
This highly refined gourmet's delight,
You'll enjoy every moment till the very last bite.

Here's another morbid mess of moldy, mucky mush submitted by Sheldon Hack, Detroit, Mich.

Miss Feeble was a teacher,
She also was a ghoul,
Poor and twenty children
Will not return from school.
She ate a boy for breakfast,
A girl, she gnawed at night,
And when the people caught her
She put up quite a fight.
She ripped out one man's eyeball
And killed another dead.

She might have even won the fight
Except they split her head.

Now for a limerick from Jim Self in Baltimore, Md.

There was a young man, he was nice
A horrific shrew was his wife.
She laughingly said,
"What a shame to be dead"
While her knife was extracting his life!

Well, that's enough poetry. The following tune titles for our HORROR HIT PARADE were sent in by Don Donaldson of Sylvania, Ohio, Robert Versandi of New York City, John Speight of Yonkers, N.Y.; Judy Louther of Johnstown, Pa., Richard Fragola of Southington, Conn., Betty Farkas of Detroit, Mich.; and Bonnie Brady of Thomaston, Conn.

THAT OLD BLACK CASKET
FROM THE SLIME CAME THE APE
MY HEART'S FRIED FOR YOU
YOU SAW ME CHOPPED UP IN THE SCRAPPLE
KNOCK A FRIED BABY OFF A TREE TOP
A VAMPIRE, A VAMPIRE, (OH, WHAT CAN IT BE?)
SHE WAS FRIED BUT HE WAS TENDER

And now for as many letters as space will permit...

Dear Vault-Keeper,
How come every time someone gets killed, they return and kill the person who killed him?
Joanne Schmidt
Levittown, L.I.

Well, that's all the letters space will permit;
I trust no one noticed that the CRYPT-KEEPER has been given another magazine. Personally, I refuse to comment on it. If you want the info, it's all on the inside front cover... but those idiot editors are gonna hear more about this. Wait'll O.W. hear! Imagine... TWO MAGS! OOOOOOOO, that's dirty old thing!

Commercials: I refuse to give any commercials this issue. I won't tell you how much subscriptions to THE VAULT OF HORROR cost, and I definitely recommend that you do not order one! But the address for fan-mail is:

THE VAULT KEEPER
Room 706, Dept. 39
225 Lafayette St.
N Y C. 12, N Y.
Heavy footsteps echoed hollowly through the dank, smelly atmosphere as King Horace II followed his Captain of the Castle guard down the winding stone stairwell that led to the dungeons below. Their dancing shadows leaped grotesquely about the walls and ceiling, hiding from the flickering light of the torch...

SIR BENJAMIN, I AM NOT IN THE HABIT OF VISITING PRISONERS IN THEIR CELLS! I AM AWARE OF THAT, SIRE! BUT THE WOMAN BEGGED TO SEE YOU TO PLEAD HER CASE! WE COULD NOT PERMIT HER TO LEAVE HER CELL FOR SHE IS A MOST DANGEROUS WENCH!
The scurryings of huge, malodorous rats carried the melody to the rhythmic steps of the men's feet as they passed rows of fetid cells, oblivious to the oppressive stench. The king waited impatiently while Sir Benjamin fumbled the key into the lock.

We would have destroyed her, Your Excellency, but for your order to view all female prisoners personally! Verily, she is beautiful, sire!

Aha! Witchcraft! Indeed it seems odd that one so fair should be in such misery! What is your name, maiden?

My name is Alicia. I pray thee will help me! The devil has forced me to do ill.

You wish to be purged of the devil, fair one?

Yes! Oh, yes! I have no wish to do evil, sire! Cleanse me of Satan so that I will be pure!

Oo not be swayed by her words nor by her beauty, Excellency! Witnesses have told of her vile deeds!

My enemies have told I swear that I am not evil!

Do you not know, my child, that to be purged of the devil is a very painful process requiring the most diligent will-power and fortitude?

I am innocent! I am willing to endure anything to rid myself of this evil!

In truth, she seems sincere! Such a beauty could hardly be truly evil! I shall speak to Keselrood, my Court Wizard! Surely he can combat this terrible curse!

Oh, thank you, Your Majesty! You will not regret it! My gratitude will be everlasting!

The odor swung open on creaky hinges and the blazing torch illuminated the pitiful figure of a young woman standing in the center of the filthy cell. On sight of her king, she fell to her knees before him...
And so the lovely Alicia was brought to the laboratory of the wizard where she underwent the intensely painful measures to which he subjected her. She lay writhing under the dozens of needles that carried a burning mixture of herbs and ointments into her...

Visibly shaken, Keaselrood the wizard led King Horace to a small chamber where Alicia lay weak and crying on a straw cot. Tenderly, the king bent near her...

Fair Alicia! Why do you cry? Pray tell me your sorrow!

Your Majesty... I cannot go on! The agony is unbearable! I can endure it no longer! Have mercy! Let me be executed now!
For what good to continue, Sire? I die a thousand-fold now! I want to be pure, but I am fast losing strength!

Forsooth, thou art the most beautiful flower in my kingdom! I vow that when you are rid of this ill, I'll take you into my court!

You do me great honor, Sire! For you will try again and when it is over, I shall give you all my services.

Most beauteous Alicia, you must continue! You must be purged! I have taken a most personal interest in your case! Do not allow your courage to desert you! I beg the e!

Most beauteous Alicia, you must continue, Sire? I die a thousand-fold now! I want to be pure, but I am fast losing strength!

You have failed! Do you not remember the punishment for failure??

Yea, your majesty! But I implore you not to be hasty! Success is almost within our grasp! I have discovered the method to eliminate the devil!

Then why have you not put this method to use? Why is it you wait?

The girl, Sire! She is reluctant! The devil within her knows he will be destroyed so he has forced the girl to be afraid! It is extremely difficult!

Awhile later King Horace left the chamber and stepped into a corridor where Keselrood waited. Again the wizard sought the magic to cure Alicia. Again she was put through horrifying measures. Again the seven days passed. Again the seven days passed...

Truly, Alicia, thou art most wonderful...

Thank you, Sire?

I trust all went well, Excellency!

Well, Keselrood! Have you reached success?

Sire... I beg to explain! As yet I have not...

Yea, your majesty! But I implore you not to be hasty! Success is almost within our grasp! I have discovered the method to eliminate the devil!

Then why have you not put this method to use? Why is it you wait?

The girl, Sire! She is reluctant! The devil within her knows he will be destroyed so he has forced the girl to be afraid! It is extremely difficult!
I need but a few days more, but her will must be strengthened somehow!

Ah, then I shall speak to her. We must never surrender when our goal is so close!

Again, as before, the king exhorted Alicia to renew her fight.

But the pain, sire! I grow weak from the pair.

Courage, my child. Soon it shall be done with, and thou wilt be mine!

And again as before, the wizard goes his magic to subdue the devil.

And at last, in great joy, Keselrodoo presented himself to the king.

Success, your highness! This very day, did I, in my might, vanquish the mad Satan from the fair one? In truth, it was a sight to behold!

Ah, excellent great wizard! Thou must tell me now it came to pass!

It was a fantastic battle, sire! After the beatings and the burnings the devil at last relinquished his hold on the girl and fled in a huge mass of black smoke.

You shall be well rewarded, wizard! Now, bring the girl to me! I grow impatient!

Forsooth, it grieves me to say this, excellency. But the girl is resting. It was a trying ordeal! She will be well soon!

Of course! I can well understand my heart goes out to her! Bring her to me when she is well!

Several days passed before Alicia recovered from the torments of the purse, but at last she was dressed in the sheerest of gossamer veils, sprayed with exotically-scented herb essences, and anointed with the finest of oils.
Alicia’s heart sank momentarily, for the king had not even turned to greet her. Rather he stood looking from a window. Now, as Alicia drew near, he suddenly spoke...

As he spoke, he turned, and Alicia cringed with overwhelming horror, for she saw by the king’s hairy face, his talonlike claws, and his great, gnashing teeth, that this creature who sprang at her was a loathsome, starving WEREWOLF!

Heh, heh! How do you like that? King Horace? He had all the money a man could want, but was he satisfied? No! He had to put the bite on poor Alicia! What kills me is that he waited so long for that meal! Guess he developed his patience by eating in restaurants! Heh, anyway, it’s time to leave. The VAULT-KEEPER is just waiting to get his clammy hands on you, go so long!

The eldest lady-in-waiting ushered Alicia into the king’s sumptuous chamber, then withdrew. With fast-beating heart, Alicia heard the huge ooms behind men being locked to insure their privacy...

She listened attentively as the footsteps in the hall faded into silence. Her eyes searched every nook examining the luxuries that would be hers. Visions of future happiness filled her mind.

I am Hene, your highness! I await your command! I am your slave!

Of course I want you, my dean.

I am eternally grateful for your kindness in having saved me from the power of Satan! I am ready to serve you... in any way you may command, sire! Do you still want me for your very own?
HEE, HEE! SO YOU DEVILISH DEMONS HAVE FINALLY ARRIVED AT MY HACIENDA OF HORROR, THE HAUNT OF FEAR! AND IT'S ABOUT SLIME, SLOGS! I'VE BEEN WEARING MYSELF TO A FRAZZLE, TRYING TO KEEP PACE WITH C.K. AND V.K... BUT THAT'S O.K. THIS TIME I'VE STEWED UP A SIMPLY SCRAMPTIOUS SLEW OF SLOP IN MY CRUD-CRUSTED CAULDRON! MMMM... TAKE A WHIFF! VRETCHED, ISN'T IT? HOW THEN, PASS ME YOUR PLATTER AND I'LL LADLE OUT YOUR LOATHSOME PORTION OF THE STORY I CALL... ALL FOR GNAWT
Millie Munford tossed her widow's weeds into a corner of the uncleaned room, and flopped her bulky form on the grimy bed. On the same befouled sheets where her fourth husband had drawn his last breaths just two weeks before, pale blue smoke spiraled upward from the butt dangling from her lips as she reached for the bottle on the cluttered night table.

"Charlie...you louse!"

Four husbands, and not one of 'em hardly worth the poison it took to kill him!

She rose suddenly, crossed to the dressing table, cleared off an assortment of cosmetics with a sweep of her arm and stared dolefully into the mirror.

"Hmph! Fat and forty-plus! Not much bait left to hook another sap!"

She returned to the bed, picked up from the floor a copy of "Lonely Hearts and Opportunities."

"Man with five-figure bank account wants twentyish woman. Good housekeeper and cook..." Hmph! Charlie liked my cooking... all but that last meal! Guess I went too heavy on the arsenic!"

Suddenly another item seemed to leap out of the page at her. Millie's crafty eyes avidly scanned the ad...

"Elderly widower, fine, big home, 400 acres. Will wed woman who can learn to love him..." Hmph.

An old geezer with a fine, old home... and an estate! Little Millie smells money... and plenty of it. If I play my cards right..."
A hasty correspondence followed, at the end of which Millie travelled a thousand miles by train and taxi...

"Say! I asked you to take me to the Tuttle Estate, Alvin Tuttle." It ain't no estate, exactly. Lady, but this is where he lives!

In answer to her pounding, the door rasped slowly open. Alvin Tuttle squinted through faded grey eyes, then spoke in a shaky voice...

You must be Millie. I'm Alvin, Millie... come in!

Everything about the house, including Alvin Tuttle himself, had an air of decay. As Millie followed the doddering old man into the parlor, she studied with obvious disdain the peeling wallpaper, the frayed rug and frowsy drapes. He smiled at her... she hardly sat down on the dust-laden sofa when from under it came a loud snap! She jumped up, startled... and old Alvin started toward her...

What was that? Heh... you'll get used to it, Millie...

Millie clambered from the cab and labored along a rutted path toward a sagging, weather-beaten house squatting among overgrown weeds and ancient, gnarled trees...

Wait for me, Cabby! I don't think I'll be long!

He reached under the sofa and pulled out an enormous rat, holding it up by the tail for Millie to see. Its head was all-but-severed by the strong jaws of a heavy, steel trap...

They got a nest in the sofa, Millie? I catch as many as five, six a day in my traps! I reckon they'd eat me alive if I let 'em multiply!

Why, that's disgusting! This whole place is awful! Rats! I hate rats!

But, Millie! You'll get used to it, just like I did! You'll get used to it!
I don't see why I should marry you and live in this filthy house! You obviously have nothing to offer!

Well then, if you couldn't love me enough to share what I got, you can go night now! I don't want you!

Millie hurried back to the waiting cab and slumped sullenly in the rear seat.

Take me back to town, old friend. Let me off at the first bar you come to! I need a drink!

Several drinks at the bar in town failed to brighten her spirits, but it helped loosen her tongue...

The nerve of the old coot, invitin' a lady to what he calls a fine old home which turns out to be a rat-infested dive?

If I had half of that screwball's dough, I'd live it up big! I'd get me a babe like you an'...

Millie gasped, turned pale, frantically gathered up her belongings and hurried toward the door...

Hey! Where you goin', honey? I just found out I'm in love, pal!

That was the opportunity she had been hoping for! Lovingly, she threw her strong arms about his frail body and planted her full, wet lips on his...

Less than an hour later, Millie was back on Alvin Tuttle's worm-eaten doorstep, with a pitiful throb in her voice to match the sorry look on her face...

I guess the trip tired me, Alvin! Can you forgive all the awful things I said?

Oh, you were right, I guess, Millie, but if you could learn to care...

Don't you see, Alvin, darling. That's why I came back! I got to the station and I missed you! I knew I'd fallen, Alvin... fallen hard!
Millie Mumford became Mrs. Alvin Tuttle that same week how happy were those days for him after dinner Millie would sit on the sofa, and he'd stretch out contentedly while she fondled his head...

You're such a good cook, Millie!

Just rest, Alvin. Take a nice nap!

But Millie had to be careful. There were always the rats. Great fierce and hungry rats! And the traps were everywhere, waiting with yawning steel jaws to shut on unwary hands...

Ahhh! You ugly brutes!

She would hunt for hours but find nothing. Then she would return to the sofa, and when Alvin awakened he'd find her there.

Alvin, I'd better go into town tomorrow and get some food. I'll need money.

Money? Of course Millie! I'll give you some in the morning!

Unfortunately for Millie, her plan went awry, for she awoke later that night and found Alvin gone from bed. Before she could go after him, however, he returned, smiling, with several ten dollar bills in his hand.

Where've you been, Alvin? You wanted money, sweetheart! I got it for you!

Why in the middle of the night, Alvin? Where did you have to go for it?

Now, now... no need to worry your sweet head about money... as long as I live! I've plenty of it!
Millie's hunt continued, but it wasn't easy. There were the rats. She'd find a hole in a wall where the lath and plaster had fallen away, and they'd be staring at her with their beady black eyes baring their fangs in a vicious snarl.

...and traps, everywhere! Once she lifted some loose boards from a bedroom floor and poked a stick down. Blazes! It all but snapped the stick in two!

In anger she stomped back to the sofa where Alvin slept, and roughly roused him.

What? What? Millie? What is it?

Your money, that's what! You have a lot of it! Where is it?

Money? My money? What do you want with my money? I won't tell... Awk!

You'll tell me, you little runt, or I'll choke the life out of you!

The money, Alvin! Where is it? Tell me! Tell me or I'll kill you!

All right... (Gasp) All right! It's in the cellar.

She removed four chests from the hollowed wall, steel chests to protect the money in them from the sharp-fanged rats. And Millie could see a fifth chest deep in the hole. Greedily, she plunged in both arms.

The cellar. Millie had never been in the cellar before. She had heard the rats down there. So many of them and had been afraid to go. But her greed was stronger than her fear... and so she went down.

Ah, Alvin wasn't lying! How easy this rock comes from the wall! The money's got to be here!
Cold sweat broke out all over Millie. Her thick wrists were locked past in the mighty steel jaws of a trap that was chained down in the hole! Then Alvin was there. Smiling.

You found it, didn't you, Millie? You found my money, didn't you? Alvin, please! You found my money, didn't you?

Alvin Tuttle kept smiling at his wife as he moved closer to one of the chests on the floor.

You love money, don't you, Millie? Well, now, feast your eyes on it!

A wild gleam lit his eyes as he threw open the lid of the steel chest! Millie stared—not at the money, but at the skeleton lying atop of it that grinned idiotically up at her.

Ah! Lydia! She was my first wife, Millie, gasp!

Rats stood back, their crafty eyes blittering evilly, as Alvin opened his other chests. Suffering hot flashes of pain and chills of horror, Millie watched.

Hee, hee! Four of them, Millie! There was Lydia, Ethel, Bess and Florence! Greedy, Millie... all of them after my money! All caught in my trap!

Chuckling, he took the fifth chest from the cellar wall and opened it. There was money in it... but no skeleton! He started upstairs, dear to Millie's chest as he moved away, the rats began drawing near...

You see, my dear... there's a place ready for you, too!

No! Alvin! Don't leave me! (Gasp!) The rats! (Gasp!) They'll kill me! They'll eat me!

Alvin tuttle sat at a table in the parlor, a tender smile lighting his face, and his gnarled hand shook as he labored over a letter. Perhaps Millie's screams of agony were a trifle disturbing, but then... they soon stopped...

Let's see, now... elderly widower, fine, big home, four hundred acres. Will wed woman who can learn to love him? There! That ought to do it just fine!

Hee, hee! Pfokey! wasn't that gnaw-seous? But that's the way life is, I guess! Millie was a hard-bitten girl after the rats finished with her! Anyway, if you're still hungry, you'll find a surprise in the Booky jar! Hee, hee! All right, my witchlings... I'll have the old boiler bubbling for you in C. K.'s new mag, the Crypt of Terror, so till then I'll say buy-bye!
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