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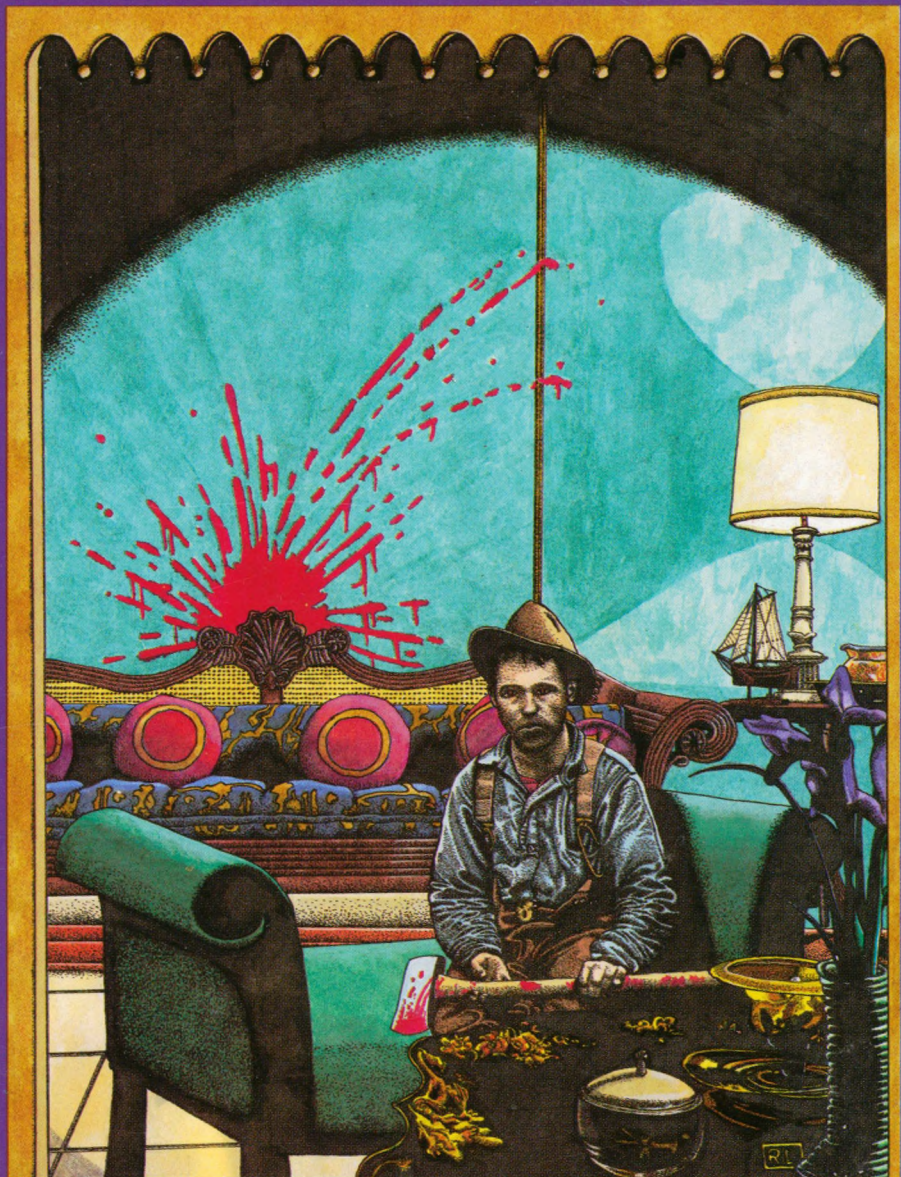
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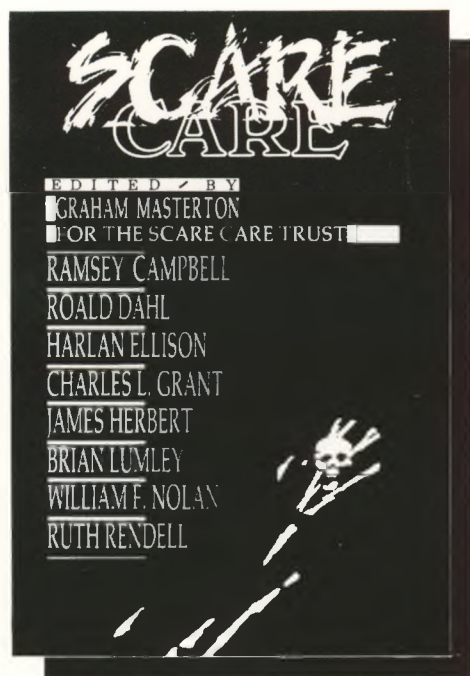
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5. Entries must be typewritten and double spaced with numbered pages (computer-printer output O.K.). Each entry must have a cover page with the title of the work, the author's name, address, and telephone number, and an approximate word-count. The manuscript itself should be titled and numbered on every page, but the author's name should be deleted to facilitate fair judging.

6. Manuscripts will be returned after judging. Entries must include a self-addressed return envelope. U.S. return envelopes must be stamped; others may enclose international postal reply coupons.

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To be eligible for the quarterly judging, an entry must be postmarked no later than Midnight on the last day of the Quarter.

9. Each entrant may submit only one manuscript per Quarter. Winners in a quarterly judging are ineligible to make further entries in the Contest.

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11. Entries will be judged by a panel of professional authors. Each quarterly judging and the Grand Prize judging may have a different panel. The decisions of the judges are entirely their own, and are final.

12. Entrants in each Quarter will be individually notified of the results by mail, together with the names of those sitting on the panel of judges.

This contest is void where prohibited by law.

AFTER HOURS

The new magazine of dark fantasy and horror. It's the only publication devoted *exclusively* to stories that come out after dark! Here's what people are saying:

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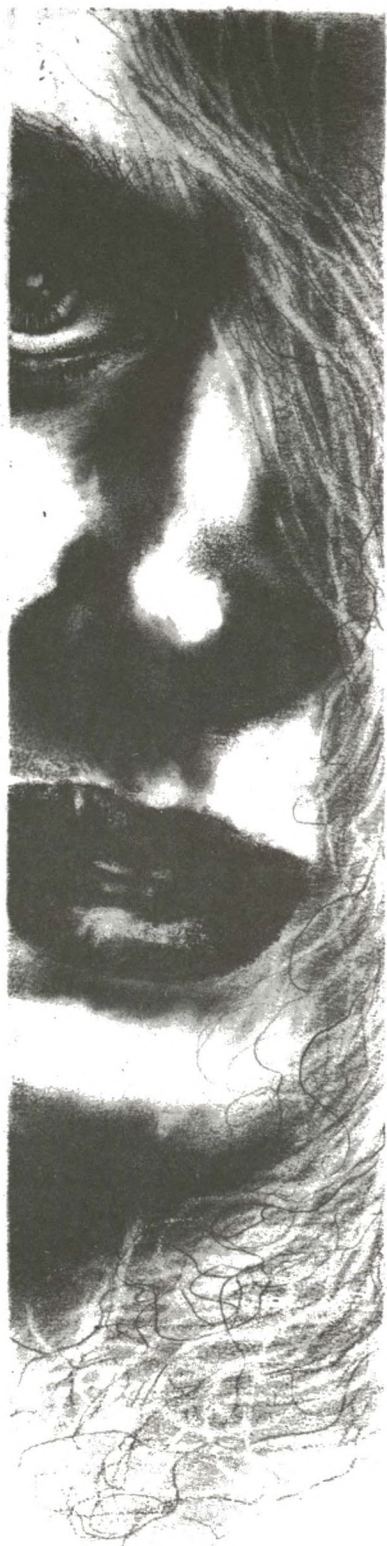
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A special thank you is extended to Donna and Tiffany of Graphics, Too (especially to Tiffany, for putting up with all my phone calls). *We look mahvelous!*





THE CLAN

*Something would turn up, a job . . .
a house full of fertile women.*

by Janet Fox

Arlie paused on the bridge, tipping back his stained stetson and wiping sweat off his freckled bald pate with a bandanna. His feet in the run-over boots were burning, but he decided he'd walk on. Certainly down the road someone would come by and give him a lift. In a long career of getting free rides his luck had seldom failed him, but it was true that the highway stretched lonely and bare beyond the next hill and he judged it some sixty miles to the next place you could rightly call a city.

He really didn't know why he was going there, but something would turn up, a job, a handout; things always seemed to work out that way for Arlie. He stood a moment longer looking out over the bridge at sluggish dark water, his brown, creased face as well-used as his hat, squinting blue eyes always moving restlessly as if he looked for something against the glare of the sun.

At last he sighed and moved on. The only way to see what was over the next hill, he told himself, was to climb it. His boots crunched monotonously in the gravel at the shoulder of the road, and he stopped again as he crested the hill, but not with weariness.

He saw a vehicle off to one side of the road, an old four wheel drive that looked just this side of a demolition derby. The hood was up and leaning against the side of it was a slender figure--a kid, legs long and shapely in jeans cut off high on the hips. A girl, or young lady, he amended. No kid would be shaped like that. Despite the ruckus his corns put up he increased his pace and soon came alongside the stranded vehicle.

"He'p ya, Ma'am?" He doffed the hat and she looked surprised at the old-fashioned gallantry. She wasn't so young as he'd first thought, though you couldn't tell it from her compact, though womanly shape; it was more a look of wariness rather than innocence in the large eyes, a certain bitterness in the down-turned edges of otherwise sensual lips. A long scar began at the outer corner of her right eye and curved around on her cheek, but it was less noticeable since she wore her hair in a loose, frizzy style that let her reddish curls fall about her face.

"Please, if you can," she said, after she had first seemed to size him up. He supposed she was afraid.

He ducked under the hood and a cursory inspection showed that the battery cable had worked loose. "Got a pliers?"

She leaned in through a window and he studied idly the places where her trim brown thighs disappeared into frayed denim. "Yeah, found it," she said, handing him the implement.

He quickly reconnected the cable and signaled for her to try to start the car.

It ground a moment, then coughed into lethargic life. "Thanks a lot, Mister..."

"Just call me Arlie," he said. He had a feeling that she was about to drive away with only that brief word of thanks, leaving him here on this damn deserted stretch of road.

"I'm Syd--Sydney Ryan. I was just taking these groceries home to make supper." She indicated several paper bags in back. "This old wreck is always breaking down, and with no man to fix it--I wonder, would you like to come home with me and let me make you some supper?" She spoke rapidly with little variation in tone, like a child who has memorized a speech.

"Thanks, little lady. I'd surely appreciate it," he said as he took a seat beside her, congratulating himself. "You sure it won't be too much trouble for you and your... family?" he added, hoping for more information.

"Oh, no family--I mean, I do live with some people, but it's no trouble; they're always glad of company. Our farm is pretty isolated."

A few miles down the road, Syd turned off onto a narrow, rutted drive, scarcely more than two worn tracks in the ground. He saw sagging fences around pastures where a few cattle grazed, a cluster of outbuildings, most of them little more than shells of weathered wood, a few rows of corn where a woman with black hair worked listlessly with a hoe. Syd waved to her as they passed. "Callie," she explained.

Arlie made an acknowledging noise in his throat. Callie must have been all of six feet tall, dark skin gleaming with sweat, delineating well-developed muscles.



"She a relative?" Arlie asked, thinking it unlikely.

"None of us are related," Syd said. "We just... well, needed each other, I guess."

"All of this--" he gestured out the window "--is yours?"

"Not mine. Doc Purdy--Anne--bought this place, but she couldn't run it without us. We work hard at it, but with no man around... well, we just do the best we can."

They pulled up in front of an old-fashioned two-story house with peeling paint and other visible signs of disrepair. As they began to unload the groceries he saw two children whispering and giggling as they peered out at him from behind a lilac bush growing against the side of the house. When he looked directly at them they seemed to melt away through other close-grown foliage.

As they came inside, Arlie noticed that the house still showed signs of wear, but various homey touches, braided rugs, potted plants, made it seem quite welcoming, the way a home ought to be. He couldn't really speak from experience because he couldn't remember ever having a home, only a succession of relatives' houses after his parents had died.

A slender, graceful woman with sleekly cut blonde hair rose from behind an antique desk at Syd's introduction. "Are you really a doctor?" Arlie asked, since Syd again used the nickname 'Doc.'

She smiled, extended her hand, which he took, feeling flustered. "Well, I was only an M.D., and I don't practice any more. Running things here keeps me just too busy." She gestured toward an open ledger on the desk. "We manage to stay ahead, but just barely." He studied her as Syd explained why she'd invited him. Nothing about her, from her pale, shining close-cut hair to the bright print dress that followed the modest curves of her body, fit into this old-timey living room. Arlie had never seen her kind, except at a distance or maybe behind the desk at a Welfare office, asking all kinds of embarrassing questions. She made him uneasy and he was glad when Syd asked him to carry his

grocery sack on into the kitchen with her.

The kitchen completed the effect of the other room, everything in it fifteen years out of date, a cluttered, happy, heavenly-smelling place where a heavyset woman stirred something on the stove. At first glance she appeared slatternly in a shapeless chenille robe, her hair piled carelessly on her head, loose strands standing out wildly. When he was introduced, he discovered that Kate Stull was someone who made him feel as automatically comfortable as Doc Purdy made him feel an awkward fool.

A half-grown girl stood peeling potatoes at the sink; he thought she resembled Syd a little with her wildly curly red hair. He was about to say something to her when Syd took his arm. "If you'd like, you can use the bathroom upstairs to clean up. There's plenty of time; we always feed the children and put them to bed before the adults eat."

After drawing a bath, Arlie eased into the tub of hot water with a sigh of relaxation, weariness of the day making everything that had happened to him seem almost dreamlike. To him the situation *was* a dream. For all his thoughts about how lucky his life had been, when he thought of it soberly, he realized that being invited to this house was the closest he'd ever come to being actually accepted anywhere, and it was probably charity on Syd's part, he decided. Just an old, hungry-looking bum she'd decided to be a little bit nice to. He couldn't keep his thoughts from wandering, though, from the departure-point of her long legs in short cut-offs. He soon drifted into his very favorite fantasy of all, which was having not one wife, but several all at once--polygamy, they called it. They'd had it in the Bible-times and he guessed the Ay-rabs and people like that still did it. He supposed he couldn't help thinking about it since there didn't seem to be any men on the place; even the three kids he'd seen were girls.

The bathroom was clouded with steam so it was a moment before he realized someone was standing there. He'd been thinking of Syd, so he

He couldn't
say he was surprised
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stairway
to her
own room . . .

thought at first it was her, but when she leaned closer, her robe falling open, breasts pendulous at eye-level, he saw it was Kate.

"You look lonely in there," she said, letting the robe slither down around her ankles. She was what Arlie had heard described as 'ample,' but as she crawled into the tub, their wet, slick flesh sliding together, he was glad it was her.

The water around them was cooling, but Arlie didn't notice that for awhile. At last, they stepped out to towel each other dry. "Don't want you to think I'd do this with any man," Kate said. "Just that it's been a long time since Albert left . . . a long time."

"Albert's your husband?"

"Ex-husband, thanks. The bastard ran off with his secretary--young, *skinny* secretary. 'Kate, you're getting fat, fat and sloppy.' He musta said that to me a hundred times, then he ran off with her."

"Well, I don't see anything wrong with you," Arlie said, pulling her close again with a firm grip on her love-handles, until she finally protested that the others would be waiting.

Arlie leaned back into the cushions of the easy chair and waved away Kate's offer of more coffee. He did accept the cigar that Syd brought him. He thought again of the table loaded with fried chicken and mashed potatoes and gravy and hot blueberry muffins with apple pie and fresh cream for dessert. Comfortable as he was, he could almost ignore Callie, who sat across the room in the shadows, continuing to stare sullenly at him as

she had all evening. He hated the thought of leaving this place to walk down that empty highway again, hoping for a ride that never came, but as he glanced at the windows, he saw that it had grown dark. Doc probably thought he was outstaying her hospitality. "Gettin' late; guess I should be on my way," he said, realizing he sounded quite unconvincing from his comfortable position in the chair.

"Do you have to go so soon?" Doc asked. "I was just enjoying our evening together; there's something so masculine and comforting about the smell of cigar smoke."

Arlie was silent, dumbfounded for the moment.

He couldn't say he was surprised later when Syd led him up the darkened stairway to her own room, though he was a little puzzled as to how they had all somehow worked it out between them with no arguments or giggles or funny looks. He lay back on the bed, feeling groggy, as Syd undressed slowly, teasingly. She had the compact body of a dancer; above the brownness of her thighs, her hips and torso were almost phosphorescently white. Kate's flesh had been sweet and pliant; touching Syd was like touching a live wire. She laughed as he remembered he was still fully dressed and began to tug ineffectually at buttons that refused to come undone, a zipper that stuck fast.

She let him struggle awhile, then began to help him.

Later, as he lay back, savoring the lingering scents and gentle exhaustion of their sex, he couldn't have said which was the better. It was undoubtedly best to have experienced both. Syd's head lay against his shoulder, a pleasant weight, and he stroked her cheek with his fingertips. Impossible to touch her face without at some point feeling the ropelike texture of the scar. "My old man did it," she said without his asking. "With a broken bottle. He was drunk," she added as if this gave credence to the act. "That was when I met Doc. She sewed me up at the Shelter, told me I didn't have to live with that creep any

more, told me I could live here."

"That was nice of her," Arlie said idly.

"Sure. It's been great. We've got everything we need here. Almost everything . . ." Her fingers travelled lightly down his chest and belly.

Arlie walked about the farm, digesting the stack of pancakes Kate had cooked him. No one mentioned his leaving, so he said nothing about it himself. He wasn't sure what he was expected to do.

He peered into a half-collapsed building where a few molting chickens blinked stupid eyes at him from their roosts on a crossbeam. The place could certainly use a man's touch--a little fixing up. He continued to walk, enjoying the sunshine, the sights and smells, with no railroad guards waiting to waylay him, no fat hulk of a county sheriff to say "Be gone by morning."

Ahead of him three children squabbled over a hopscotch diagram scratched in the bare ground. Their voices were loud and aggressive, their faces grubby. He squatted down and watched them silently and patiently until one of them noticed him and shyly drew near out of curiosity.

He began to tell a silly story someone had once told him and by the time he'd finished it, they were all there, listening intently, giggling at the really outrageous parts. "All I see around here are little girls," he said, trying to keep a joking tone. "Don't you have any brothers?"

One child shook her head. Another thrust out her lower lip, reminding him of Callie with her dark skin and flat cheekbones. "We don't want no boys here. If boys come we feed 'em to the pigs!"

He'd seen no pigs or any place to house them, but he didn't correct her. Probably she'd picked up on his teasing tone and had told what she considered a joke of her own.

When he returned to the house, he found no one there, except for Doc, deep in concentration, scratching away at her ledger, odd-looking little half-specs riding her nose. He stood quietly, studying her face in the clear light. There was something fragile



about her beneath the businesslike manner. He knew he shouldn't be doing this, and was about to withdraw when she looked up.

Her shoulders moved almost imperceptibly in a sigh as she took off the glasses. "Making this place support itself is an impossible job at times," she said. "But it has to; all the others are counting on me."

"I, uh, been looking around the place and can see you could use a little help fixin' it up." He felt his face grow warm as it hadn't since he'd faced the grim teaching sisters at St. Agnes Elementary.

"Would you?" She came to stand beside him and laid a hand on his arm, her touch light and cool, just as he'd imagined it. "I know that Kate and Syd would be glad of it."

"What about Callie? I don't think she likes me a bit."

"You have to understand something about Callie. Her father abused her when she was young and when she couldn't take it any more, she killed him. She didn't go to jail for it, but that's not something you ever get over."

"I guess not," Arlie admitted.

"But Callie will always go along with whatever's best for the Clan."

Arlie looked puzzled.

"The Clan? That's just my name for our little family group. Silly, probably."

"No, I like it. I like the idea of a clan to stand against the evil things in the world." He made a sound of surprise as Doc's hand left his arm and slid into the open neck of his shirt. He was even more ill-at-ease than before as she undid the buttons one by one, her head with its shining cap of hair bent in concentration.

"Should we?" he whispered, though damned if he knew what he was whispering for. "Here?"

"Why not here?" She paused to look around the well-kept room, seemed to see the divan for the first time and led him toward it.

"Somebody might come in--the kids."

"They know about sex," she answered, but he thought that knowing about sex and coming upon it unaware in your own living room weren't the

same. He could have stopped her any time he wanted, he supposed, but he gave himself over to her capable hands. When she unzipped her dress and slid it down over her shoulders, he saw that she was naked beneath it, breasts small and conical, pubes blondly innocent. It was as if one of those stern Sisters of St. Agnes' had crept from her dark habit like an insect from a chrysalis.

"You're so quiet," Doc said after a time. "Didn't I make you happy?"

To tell the truth, he felt odd, like he had had nothing to do with it. Like he was something she had used; he quickly pushed the thought away. "Happy?" he said, forcing the heartiness, "I feel like I've died and gone to heaven."

"The one thing we needed here to make things complete was a man."

"Any man?"

"No, you."

He knew she had to be lying, but at the moment he didn't much care.

Arlie was reaching for another nail to board up one of the gaping holes in the henhouse when he saw Callie emerge from the house and began to walk away in her usual silent, sullen manner. He had seen her go off in that direction before, soon to be lost among close grown trees of a stand of wild timber, and she always carried a bucket, as she did now. Though he had been here for three weeks now, he realized he had never had a conversation with her.

At first he hadn't planned on following her, only asking in a friendly way where she went every other day or so, but she walked rapidly and it was all he could do just to trace her imposing shape through shadow and sun-dapple of the wood. Ahead, he caught sight of a small metal shed. In comparison with the crumbling out-buildings of the farm, this seemed new.

Callie must have heard him behind her because now she stopped and turned to face him. It was disconcerting that he had to look up to meet her eyes, but he saw no look of ridicule on her face, probably because there was no expression of any sort.

"I, uh, saw you carrying that and

Something
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surgical tools;
scalpels,
clamps, needles.

wondered if I could help. It looks heavy." He noticed the bucket was crusted at the edge and brimming with garbage--scraps from the kitchen, he supposed. They were near enough to the shed that they could hear hoarse animal noises and catch the far-off reek of excrement. Callie looked from Arlie to the building and licked her lips nervously, though he found the gesture also vaguely sensual.

"I don't need any help," she said, and put the bucket down. She wiped her forehead with the back of her hand, pushing back thick strands of blue-black hair. "Sure is hot work, though. I could use a rest."

Arlie couldn't help but think there was something of invitation in her posture as she sprawled in a patch of thick grass, her back against the bole of a tree. He sat down beside her--at a little distance; he could have been wrong about the invitation and he couldn't help remembering that Doc had said she'd killed her father. Nothing had been said about her doing it with her bare hands, though she looked strong enough.

For a moment her eyes burned on him as if daring him to come closer. At last he did, scuttling awkwardly across the grass between them. As he dropped his hand to the well-worn denim stretched tautly across her muscular thigh, her whole body seemed to shudder, as if she were a cataclysm ready to happen. When he looked up at her face, he was surprised to see tears running down her cheeks, a sob catching at the back of her throat. There seemed to be nothing to do then but to take her in

his arms and rock her gently until she had cried it out.

After that she was as trusting as a child as he undressed her, helpless and accepting as he drove himself deeply into her, rocking her in a different manner. As he did, it was as if something had been completed.

Arlie rummaged in the hall closet, looking for something he'd put there a month ago. Time had never made any particular impression on him; it was like a tide that washed over him. The roads might have been different ones, but they all looked the same. Now he tended to keep track of the days, the weeks, that he'd been here. It had been a long honeymoon as these things go, but Arlie understood nothing of honeymoons.

Not finding what he wanted, his eyes lit on a provocative-looking black leather case. As he took it out and opened it, something inside winked back the light with a wicked glitter--surgical tools; scalpels, clamps, needles, everything gleaming as if kept in readiness.

"What are you doing with that?" asked an angry voice he didn't recognize at first. Doc snapped the case closed so fast she almost caught his fingers.

"Watch your tone, woman," he said without thinking. "And watch what you're doing, too."

Doc stepped back a pace and seemed about to say something in reply when Kate rushed in and tried to soothe her, whispering something in her ear as she led her from the room.

"Is that stuff really hers?" Arlie asked when Kate returned.

"Doc always wanted to be a surgeon," Kate answered, nodding. "But she didn't make it--claimed the teachers were prejudiced against her because she's a woman. Being an M.D. seems like a lot to you and me, but Doc is a little crazy on the subject. We try not to bring it up."

"I know you girls all have problems," Arlie said, "but you got to forget all that. Everything's going to be okay as long's I'm here to run things."

That evening, Callie announced

shyly in her husky voice that she was pregnant. Doc confirmed it and brought out the champagne. They lifted their glasses. "To the Clan," Doc said, her eyes bright and intense in the lamplight.

"To the Clan," the other women echoed, and Arlie joined in, a second after them. They drank and chatted happily, planning the birth. Arlie felt strangely left out of the conversation, though he knew none of their happiness would have been possible without him. Still, he supposed it *was* pretty much women's stuff. He pushed back from the table and told them he was going out to smoke.

As it grew late and his last cigar burned down, he realized that he'd just had his feelings hurt by Doc earlier that afternoon. He hadn't meant to be meddling in her affairs or trying to bring up old hurts. He wanted to make it up to her, and he could think of only one good way.

The house was dark and silent as he entered; probably they'd drunk too much and were now sleeping it off. He paused at Doc's door and listened a minute. He had never dared to enter her room before without knocking, but maybe it was time, he thought, to assert his rights a little more.

Moonlight spun a silver froth from rumpled white sheets on the bed, Doc lying there asleep. He caught sight of a leg, a bare breast and shoulder, but ... something was wrong. Two bodies lay entangled on the bed. Syd's red-frizzed head lay on the pillow next to Doc's blonde one, face to face and near enough to breathe each other's breath.

Arlie's bellow woke the sleepers and probably everyone in the house.

From some hidden bedroom a child began to wail.

"Queers ... lez-be-uns! And in my own house." He struck with both fists and would have hit them both except that Syd covered Doc's body with her own. She grunted as the punches landed and suddenly the lights were switched on. He saw Callie, with Kate behind her. He had grabbed Syd by the hair and was hauling her out of bed when someone grabbed him from behind. He shouted with rage and swung on whoever had dared to touch him. Callie danced back in time to avoid the blow and back in again as quickly, hitting him hard in the stomach. He felt breath whoosh from his lungs and he was falling. A moment later, he fought to catch his breath, one arm pulled behind his back, the bone of Callie's forearm pressing into his throat.

"Are you okay?" Syd asked Doc, even though she was the one who'd been hit.

"You're all hoors--hoors and dikes," Arlie said raggedly. "I'll get loose and then--"

"All part of nature's plan," Doc said, looking down at him. "Disgusting." She turned to fumble in a dresser drawer and drew out a small black case.

"Hurry up," Callie said, refirming her grip as Arlie began to struggle again. He knew he had to get free, had to whip them all back into line.

Doc approached, seemingly in no great hurry. "We should thank you for helping the Clan to grow and survive, for doing the only thing we can't do nicely for ourselves. But you only acted out of animal instinct and since we're farmers, we know the uses

of animals."

Arlie got an arm free and struck at Doc, but she evaded him. She was holding a hypodermic syringe and she bent to use it but was stymied by Arlie's renewed struggles. Finally she found an opening and rammed the needle home. It hurt, but a widening circle of numbness spread around it, until it grew wide enough to engulf him in darkness.

He stirred.

Under his head was soft earth but soon he was aware as well of the ripe smell of excrement, low grunting and crooning noises. He felt groggy, as if awakening from long sleep, his limbs cramped and weak.

His first conscious reaction was that he could not see. Bringing his fingertips to his eyes confirmed the laxity of eyelids over empty sockets and he wanted to yell and curse full-throatedly but he could make only wordless grunts come out. A body stumbled into his, and at first he thought it was some animal confined with him, but before the creature stumbled on again, he felt a human arm and shoulder. Not animals--men.

He moved haltingly around the perimeter of his enclosure, bare feet squishing in mud and ordure. *They feed them to the pigs!* racketed madly in his brain, and then, *I feel like I've died and gone to ... hell.*

To take away his dream of a perfect life, then to take his eyes, his tongue, and make him live in this place like an animal. What else could they have taken from him?

His fingers fumbled to reach between his legs.

--NB

SAVINI SHOCKER:



"I Only Did The Gory Films To Pay The Bills . . ."

by Stanley Wiater

When one considers how the history of motion pictures can still be changed by an individual, one usually thinks of a director, producer, or an actor. However, this is not always the case, especially in the horror genre. For in the summer of 1980, a low-budget, independently-produced film entitled *Friday the 13th* was released. Not only was it a surprise hit, it spawned a continuing series of sequels (the eighth is due this month) and a television series (aptly called *Friday the 13th: the Series*). More importantly, this extremely gory tale of multiple murders by a masked killer spawned dozens--if not hundreds--of imitators. It was one of the first of the notorious "splatter" films, so dubbed because they were produced primarily to show-

case every grisly death as explicitly as possible: shotgun blasts to the head, arrows through the eye, slit throats, exploding heads. Yet the man responsible for the great success of *Friday the 13th* was not the first-time screenwriter, nor the director or any of the unknown actors.

It was special makeup effects master Tom Savini.

Savini's credits go well beyond *Friday the 13th*. They include *Deranged*, *Eyes of a Stranger*, *The Burning*, *Maniac*, *The Prowler*, and *Invasion U.S.A.* More recognized still is his work for director George A. Romero, which includes the films *Dawn of the Dead*, *Martin*, *Creepshow*, *Day of the Dead*, and *Monkeyshines*.

Savini is also an accomplished actor, fight choreographer, and stuntman, though he is less known in these areas. His acting credits include Romero's *Knightriders*, and the title character in the little-seen *The Ripper*. Savini has also directed several episodes of *Tales from the Darkside*, and is anxiously awaiting his first opportunity to direct a feature film.

At the time of our conversation, Savini had just finished work on *Red Scorpion*, an action-adventure film produced in Africa, and *Heartstopper* (formerly *The Awakening*), an independent horror production shot in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania by his friend John Russo.

NEW BLOOD: Your love for movies



and makeup began when, as a child in Pittsburgh, you saw *Man of a Thousand Faces*, Lon Chaney's biography, correct?

SAVINI: Yes, in the same theatre where I was going to see *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and those kinds of things. (laughs) I had no idea then what the movie was going to be about. At the time I went to see practically every movie that came out; I lived in the movie theatre. But it was that movie that made me realize, "A-ha! Makeup! That's how they do the monsters." And for me, that was the day that the Creature and the Frankenstein monster and all the other monsters I believed in died. Because I suddenly realized, at twelve years old, that they were all created by makeup people. I'm still living in the same neighborhood, but back then I was a poor little Italian kid, loafing around on the street corners. This was the movie that gave me a purpose.

NEW BLOOD: Your talents go way beyond makeup. You have one of the lead roles in *Heartstopper*, in addition to your responsibility for the special effects makeup. What amount of creative energy does that take away from accomplishing your effects?

SAVINI: None! In fact, acting gives me energy. I played a part, staged the fights, and did the effects! It was the most fun I've had in a long time doing a film. It was like *Dawn of the Dead* again, when every day was Halloween.

NEWBLOOD: To what degree do you confer with the screenwriter or the director as to how explicit the final effect should be?

SAVINI: I work most closely with the director, of course. For *Heartstopper*, the director was John Russo, who also wrote the book and did the screenplay. So we had a lot of conversations before we even started production. I always ask, "What do you want to see?" And the director tells me, and we'll see if we can do it, or if it's possible. In fact, nothing's impossible; it's just a matter of working it up. I tell them what I need in order to make a shot work. Like in a magic trick, but on film.

NEW BLOOD: Could you give us an example of your magic?

SAVINI: In *Friday the 13th*, there's the scene where the girl is hit in the face by an axe, but in fact it's a fake one. I like to have a shot of the real axe

hitting a wall or something, so we establish that the real axe has some power and is deadly. When the rubber axe actually hits the actor, the audience still believes it has the power of a real one.

NEW BLOOD: Which type of effect gives you the greatest personal satisfaction--the outrageous one, like the zombie that's decapitated by a helicopter in *Dawn of the Dead*, or the realistic one, like the operating scene in *Monkey-shines*?

SAVINI: Well, you didn't give me the third choice--directing! (laughs) That's my ultimate goal. Because, as a director, I could continue to do the effects and I could still act. I could still do everything--but have control over it all. Of course, if it's bad, then it's my fault. So far, I can look back at a couple of my movies and say it's bad because of the way the editor cut it, or the way the director shot it, or whatever. This would be a way of alleviating some of the frustrations. Second, it's emotionally intoxicating. And third, it's the most rewarding. As the director, you do *everything*. It's ridiculous the way people think directors just say "Action" and "Cut!" You shoot the whole movie on paper before

you even begin anything else; you cut pieces to a puzzle, and when you're done, you put the puzzle together.

NEW BLOOD: Some of the movies you've worked on have been panned by the critics as purely exploitive, to say the least. More often than not, however, your contributions have been singled out as the only item worthy of praise in otherwise forgettable films. In a sense, your effects were the true stars.

SAVINI: I think you've hit it there. I read the reviews and they're always kind to me. "No matter where the movie failed, at least Savini's effects delivered," that sort of thing. I used to hear that Sean Cunningham, the director on *Friday the 13th*, had said, "I made Tom Savini's career. I made him famous." Depending on who it was said to, they would come back with, "Well, Savini didn't do too bad for your career, either. He made you famous, too." Do you understand what I'm saying?

After awhile, I began to realize that my effects were the star of that particular film, just as the reviews had said. But lately, I've seen some films where the effects were *wonderful*, but the film itself stank. I mean, in *Phantasm II* the effects were great, but I fell asleep so many times! Good effects do not necessarily a good movie make. You can have a clunker that's still full of good effects.

NEW BLOOD: How close are you to directing your first feature?

SAVINI: *Very* close. I'm very close to doing a remake of a film which at this time I'm not at liberty to tell you the title. But the script is brilliant. The script is the most unique handling of a remake that I've ever read. So we'll see. (By press time, Tom revealed that he'll be directing the remake of *Night of the Living Dead*, from a script by George Romero.--Editor)

NEW BLOOD: As I'm sure you're aware, censorship of horror films around the world is very common, especially in England. What are your thoughts on the subject?

SAVINI: It's pretty strange about censorship and England. When I was growing up, we used to see the Hammer films with whole chunks missing--like when

Dracula decomposed at the end of *Horror of Dracula*. I understand that those scenes would of course be intact in England, and they would censor it *here*! But now it seems to have gone in reverse, with them censoring scenes in England and leaving them intact here.

Censorship is pretty strange to me anywhere. One of the films I did, *Maniac* (1980), was untouched everywhere except in Miami, Florida! Why? Maybe because at the time there was more violence in Miami? I don't know. But I really don't believe in censorship. It's really illogical when you think about it, because the films released in the video stores can get away with anything, while they attempt to censor films that

play in the theatres. Now I realize there's a lot of films which shouldn't be seen by children. I wouldn't let my own young daughter see any of my films until it's explained who these imaginary people like Elvira and Freddy Krueger and Jason are. But in a theatre, anyone who really wants to get in to see an R-rated film can get in. So do the ratings really work? Who knows.

NEW BLOOD: Actually, you and your colleagues are the very first victims of censorship, since the gory effects in a horror film are always the first to be excised.

SAVINI: Well, I could say I hate the censors because they cut all the effects



out of certain films. But I really believe the less you show, the better. The better the audience should like it, too. Except, lately, the audience would be disappointed if you didn't show them everything. Like in *Fright Night* for example. The effects were so wonderful I had to go back and see it a second time. But then I realized how the first 45 minutes were so boring until the effects came on the screen.

NEW BLOOD: Yet the infamous *Maniac*, which even you disowned, seems to have been designed only to present disgusting scenes of murder and dismemberment. So how can you claim "less is more?"

SAVINI: It was the grossest splatter film that my name has ever been associated with. Yet I can logically say that's okay, because it *was* just a showcase for splatter. When you sit down in a theatre, and you don't know what's coming, and then the effects come--that's glorious! That's great. But when you're getting effects from the very beginning of the film, and it's just splatter, just an excuse to show blood, that's when it comes real close to porno. When an effect happens, and the camera goes right up close to it in graphic, clinical detail, that's pornography to me. That's why I hate porno films, because to me it's like watching someone go to the bathroom. I have no interest in seeing a clinical study of somebody like that.

NEW BLOOD: But you've built your reputation on breaking down the barriers on graphic gore and violence. How can you say it doesn't interest you?

SAVINI: I agree wholeheartedly that's where my initial reputation was made. But we're leading to a point here. The point being that even though I've done that kind of effect before, it doesn't mean I didn't realize it was "splatter-porn." Because that's the way the filmmakers shot the movies: "Let's get some teenagers together, kill them, and go in real close and be really graphic about how we show them being killed."

This is all going back to the less you show, the better, or the more dramatic a movie is. Nobody has been able recently to handle this premise, with the exception of the two *Alien* movies.

Kubrick can. Romero--with the exception of *Dawn* and *Day of the Dead*--can do it. And William Friedkin. And Hitchcock, of course, who was a master at putting himself in the position of the audience, and figuring out how best to entertain them. But you don't see their names on dozens of *Nightmare on Elm Street* movies. Can you imagine if Kubrick did a Freddy Krueger movie? The best way is *not* to show the audience everything.

Unfortunately, today's audiences are looking for the "instant high." They're not patient enough--because we've spoiled them--to wait for the film to present itself in a way which will give them the greatest level of entertainment. It's our fault, because now the greatest

level of entertainment for the audience is the cum shot--the instant porno high. We all know that the main movie-going audience is between 13 and 21, so how do you go about reconditioning them to appreciate the way suspense and violence was done by the masters?

NEW BLOOD: The critics will still damn you by saying that because of filmmakers like yourself, today's audiences not only have to see someone being shot, but witness the bullet blowing the head apart and splattering the wall behind it.

SAVINI: Right, but there *is* a difference here. What most critics do is put the blame on me. But I don't personally like that stuff. And I'm not



saying there's something wrong with those filmmakers who do; there's a reason for everything. But my job, when someone presents a script to me, is to make the effects scenes as realistic as possible. Obviously, my notoriety comes from how well I do that. As an artist, when someone comes to me with a script and wants me to do something, I go in and do the best that's possible. But only when I'm the *director*, can I do it in the way I've been talking about. I'm like everyone else who has to make a living, pay the bills. So I did these films.

At one point, I even said I wasn't going to do any more splatter films, because I wanted to make the transition to creatures and monsters. I was lucky enough to be able to do that for awhile, with films like *Creepshow* and the film I did in Hong Kong, *Scared to Death*. But then *Friday the 13th, The Final Chapter* came along and I did that because I wanted to kill off Jason, who I had created in the original. How did I know they were going to keep making more? And *Day of the Dead* for George Romero. There was no way I was going to turn down that film after *Dawn of the Dead* and my long association with George. So it's not me as a creator of these saying I won't do any more splatter. It's me as someone who makes a living doing these effects who takes the work as it comes.

NEW BLOOD: You've described yourself in the past as a "paid assassin." You go where you're hired, and cinematically you kill who you're ordered to kill. Are there any motion pictures you refused to be associated with?

SAVINI: Listen, I've passed on so many splatter films, you can't imagine! Like a movie where the whole premise revolved around a Swiss Army knife and the killer using different instruments on it to kill his victims. I remember another film where the murder instrument was a cussinart! I turned down *Neon Maniacs*. I turned down *It's Alive III: Island of the Alive*, *Return to Salem's Lot*, *The Stuff*. I mean my resume should be the projects I turned down! (laughs) And I was right to do so, because those films didn't last very long in the theatres.

But I've also done films which aren't splatter, including *Monkeyshines* and the Chuck Norris picture, *Invasion*

U.S.A., which had some variety in it, with bullet hits to the head, and a knife in the hand. Or the torture scene in the new Dolf Lundgren film, *Red Scorpion*. Those aren't splatter films. But you have to remember that I don't write these pictures and I don't direct them. No matter what my effects can do, it's the director who creates the suspense, and it's created before you shoot one frame of the damn movie. So even if I do these films because I have to make a living, I can still feel that they haven't been done correctly. And that all leads back to why I want to direct.

NEW BLOOD: What kind of goals have you set for yourself as a director, when your reputation clearly rests on your effects?

SAVINI: I realize I have to have some effects in my films, or I'll disappoint the audience. They'll say, "I went to see a Tom Savini film and there wasn't a single effect in the goddamned thing!" Okay? But my goal is for somebody to say, "I went to a Tom Savini film, there wasn't one effect in the damn thing, and it was fabulous! It was great! It scared the piss out of me!" To me, that's the highest compliment.

NEW BLOOD: So you're interested in exploring psychological horror, not just capitalizing on gore?

SAVINI: One of the scariest movies I've ever seen didn't have one monster in it, or have one makeup effect. It was called *The Haunting* (1963). It scared the fuck out of me, but it was psychological. Okay, it was made way before every movie that came out had a thousand effects in it. Which is why I'm saying that if a movie came out with my name on it, it would have to have effects in it. But they are *not* going to be pornographic. Hopefully, they're going to have a purpose behind them; they're going to lead to something; they're going to be shot in such a way that no one's ever seen before, so that when the effect happens, it's going to be at the peak of some dramatic moment, and not just be instant gratification for the viewers because they're sitting there, eating popcorn, simply because they paid their money to get in.

--NB

"Heartstopper" Cast & Crew Speak

Horror-novelist John Russo doesn't need any introduction in the pages of NB. However, some of you may not be aware of his extensive career as producer/director/screenwriter, as well. Since co-producing *The Affair*, a predecessor to such romantic comedies as *Annie Hall*, he has since gone on to serve as co-producer and co-director for *The Booby Hatch* in 1975, screenwriter and director for *Midnight*, which was based on his novel, in 1980, and screenwriter and producer for *The Major-ettes*--also based on one his novels--in 1985.

But even with all that experience firmly tucked under his belt, *Heartstopper* proved to be quite different from his previous efforts.

"It was Hollywood style filmmaking," he said over a hurried lunch. "Working this way was much harder, but the results were worth it. The film has a look and texture beyond anything I've ever done before."

Star Kevin Kindlin agrees. Playing a physician who was hanged as a sorcerer in 1776 and who returns to life 200 years later, he said, "I feel extremely fortunate to have been chosen to play this role because I have a deep sense of closeness to the character. Although I'm not a vampire," he said with a wry grin, "I can appreciate his sense of alien-ness in a world not of his choosing."

Moon Zappa, Kindlin's love interest in the movie, claimed she was drawn to the project because of its sense of history. "And because of the sociological and moral questions it raises. The fact that the hero is a vampire is really incidental."

Also appealing was the possibility of a continuation of her character's story. "So there may be a sequel," she said. "There's a lot of Lenora Clayton"--a writer researching Colonial Pittsburgh--"to be explored."

Watch for *Heartstopper* at your local theatres!

This popular author returns to NB with a new story of monsters, Michelle Johnson, and the undead.

WHAT WAS HIS

by Rick Garrett

“**W**hatsamatter, Danny? You scared?”

Danny shifted his gaze from the dark, shadowy hill to the other three boys--Jerry, Daryl, and Billy--then back to his tall, blond questioner. Inquisitor was more like it. Maybe Danny's mom was right. She'd always said that Bruce Dierdeman had been born too late; that Hitler's Youth Movement had missed out on a natural leader. “The Little Nazi,” she liked to call him. Peering through the gloom at Dierdeman's goading little smile, Danny realized that his mom was probably right.

“The Boss's givin' you a real chance here. You ain't gonna wimp-out, are you Perry?”

The habit of calling everybody by their last name like some half-assed drill instructor seemed sort of incongruous with Jerry Meyer's nasal voice.

“Yeah, Perry,” Billy Tanner piped up.

Dierdeman lit another Kool. “Maybe you'd rather be home, hangin' out with your brother.” Exhaling dramatically, he added: “The college drop-out.”

Danny could think of a lot of places he'd rather be, including hanging out

with Joey. But it just wasn't cool for a guy to bum around with his twenty-year-old brother.

“That it, Danny boy? You'd feel safer with big brother Joey?”

“You leave him out of this.”

“Or what?”

Danny had never been in a fight in his life. He didn't want to start with the toughest kid in ninth grade. Maybe reason would do the trick. “Look: it won't do any good t'dig for 'crawlers tonight, anyhow. The ground's too damn dry.”

“Ooh! Danny boy used a bad word. I am fuckin' impressed.”

“Maybe Danny's right, Boss,” Daryl Styles chimed in, pushing his hornrims back up his nose for the umpteenth time since dinner. “It . . . it hasn't rained in days, and besides, how do we know we're gonna find any nightcrawlers up . . . up there?” He pointed to the flattened hill.

The moon and a handful of stars shone purple on the ancient wrought-iron gate. As if on cue, a desolate breeze moaned through the twisted metal. Beyond, a few weed-smothered tombstones were silhouettes against the blue/black sky; tilted and bent like

weary sentinels standing vigil over a world long gone.

"You sidin' with Perry, Styles?"

"No, Jer, I--"

"Sounds t'me like you are." Dieder-
man stepped close enough to exhale
smoke into Perry's lenses. "And, for your
information, dork-face, the reason there're
'crawlers up there is 'cause they
like graveyards. They like t'slide
through the rotten old caskets and party
in the bodies. Get me?"

Daryl mumbled a quick assent and
studied the ground.

"What about you, Fatso?" Dieder-
man whirled on the only one of the boys
not heard from. "You gonna go yellow,
too?"

Billy Tramer proudly held up a col-
lection of pails, trowels and flashlights.
"I'm with ya, Boss. Whatever you say is
cool by me."

"See that, Styles?" Meyer droned.
"Tanner's no wuss."

"I just don't think it's cool t'mess
with the dead, man, that's all. What if we
get caught, or somethin'?"

"But that's the beauty of it, four-
eyes. Nobody's been dumped on Hedge
Hill in years. Somebody goes belly-up
they plop 'em in New Valley. So who
gives a shit enough about the place t'catch
us at anything?"

Danny said, "But since you're right,
Bruce, I mean, since there haven't been
any new . . . additions to the place in
years, what have these nightcrawlers
been livin' on?"

Dieder-
man boiled. "Look, Danny
boy, if you wanna run home t'big brother,
be my fuckin' guest. This was yer chance
t'fit in, punk. To belong. I mean, I was
tryin' t'be yer friend, man, but if you
can't cut it, then fuck off. Now."

Questions raced through Danny's
mind: if he took off now, would Daryl go
with him? After all, he was the only one
of the four Danny really liked anyway.
And, most importantly, did being the
outsider really mean that damned much?
With a sigh, he realized it did. "Okay,
Bruce. I'm in."

Dieder-
man's smile was cruelly tri-
umphant. He draped an arm around
Danny's slim shoulders in mock affec-
tion. "I prefer the title 'Boss,' Danny
boy. But we can work on that." He flicked
his cigarette into the darkness. "Well,

what're we waitin' for, kiddies? Let's
dig us some nightcrawlers."

As they started up the hill, Danny
caught the look behind Daryl's thick
lenses and wondered if maybe that was
how men in war looked when they had to
surrender to the enemy. Or maybe he
just thought that was what he saw in
those eyes, because that's what he knew
were in his own.

So far, Spring had left a lot to be
desired. Despite the lack of traditional
April showers, the weather hadn't been
all that great: days sunny but crisp; nights
downright chilly. Danny's teachers had
been testing almost maniacally, espe-
cially in algebra, as if the first seven
months of the school year hadn't even
counted. And, as if all that wasn't bad
enough, Cinema City, the only theatre
for twenty miles, was still playing catch-
up with the Christmas movies and would
probably continue to do so until the
summer blockbusters arrived. Danny's
science teacher, Mr. Germano, had a
bumper sticker on his VW that read:
"Life's a bitch, and then you die."
Finally Danny'd found something he and
Germano agreed on.

The breeze that now whispered in
their ears had cold, bitter teeth. Danny
pulled up the zipper on his light jacket
and flipped up the collar.

"Tryin' t'look cool, Danny boy?"

"Tryin' t'stay warm--Boss."

"You smart-assin' me?"

"No, Can we just get this over with?"

"Yeah, Boss," Daryl added, tugging
the sleeves of his sweatshirt back down
over his forearms. "It's freezin' up here."

"Whatcha expect, four-eyes?" Die-
derman's eyes widened as he leaned
toward the other boy. "It's a fuckin'
graveyard." To Billy, he said, "Hey, Fatso."

"Right here, Boss."

"The gate."

"Right, Boss."

With a clangor of pails, Tramer put
down his burden and reached for the
gate. For a moment he hesitated, hand
inches shy of the bars, wide eyes drifting
up and up to where the twisted iron
spikes impaled the stars.

"You got a problem, Blimp?"

"Uh . . . well, no, Boss. It's just--"

"Chicken shit." With a shove, Die-
derman pushed past Tramer and seized
the gate. One try. Two tries. Nothing.

But on the third try, the gate surren-
dered, though not without protest.
Hinges long silent suddenly found their
voice, screaming a brief aria of metallic
doom. Something knotted in Danny's
stomach and it wasn't the potpie and
peaches he'd had for supper.

"Let's move, girls," Dieder-
man taunted, leading his procession inside
with a humorless laugh.

As Tramer doled out the tools (in
accordance with Herr Dieder-
man's instructions, of course), Danny took his
flashlight and swept the field. What
am I doing here, he thought, as the beam
played across crumbling stones and
slanting crosses. *I could be home, eating
pizza, having fun. Real fun, not this crap.
I could--*

*Take it easy; this isn't so bad. Hell,
it's not much different from the field out
behind the garage.*

*Are you nuts? There aren't any dead
people buried behind the garage.*

Danny realized that he was shining
the light on the weeds; they seemed to
rise out of the ground like long, slim
fingers, as if trying to pull time down into
the dirt.

A hand fell on Danny's shoulder.
For an instant he thought his bones would
fly out through his skin.

"Hey, Danny."

He stared at the face behind the
thick glasses without really seeing it.

"Danny--you okay?"

"Yeah," he finally answered.
"Yeah. Fine."

"The Boss wants us to team up over
here . . . You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, Daryl. I'm fine. I was just
thinkin' 'bout stuff. You know."

"Yeah. I guess."

Daryl trained his light on the marker
as they both knelt down. "'Remember
Always,' " he read aloud. "'Micah
Hedge. Born: 1836. Died: 1901.' Hey, I
bet they named this place for . . ." His
words trailed away as he read the rest
of the epitaph. "'What was his in life re-
mains so.' What d'ya think that's s'posed
t'mean?"

"I don't know. Probably nuthin',"
Danny said, but the knot in his belly
twisted tighter.

A light streamed into Danny's eyes.
"Get to work over there, girls. Other-
wise, Fatso's gonna beat ya to all the big

juicy ones."

"Hey, Boss! Wait'll ya see this!" Billy Tramer's near-soprano tone cut the night air. "You won't believe it, Boss. You fuckin' won't believe it!"

"Hold it down, Fatso."

"Yeah, but it's great, man! It's really great."

Daryl and Danny stopped their trowels short and added their lights to the two already turned on Tramer.

"Biggest fuckin' 'crawler I ever seen, man. Just like you said, Boss." Billy had abandoned his trowel now and was frantically digging in the dirt like a fat spaniel. "This is great, Boss! This is so fuckin' grea--"

Billy's scream was barely human. It was high and long, like a power saw slicing metal, and before it trailed into mindless gibbering, blood squirted from the hole in the ground where his hands were, spattering his face and shirt. The earth around the hole churned; dirt flew, sticking to the splashed blood. Billy thrust out one leg, trying to pull away, to stand, anything. But for every inch he gained, he lost another three. His wrists disappeared into the bloody ground. Then his forearms. His elbows...

Something vaguely resembling a pink plumber's snake reared up between Billy's arms. For a heartbeat it swayed back and forth in front of his bulging eyes like a cobra before a snake charmer. Then it slammed into his chest, burrowing a gory path through polyester and cotton, flesh and bone. Foot after wriggling foot of the thing wriggled into Billy until, finally, with a flick of what seemed to be its tail, it disappeared completely into the wound. Blood fountained at the moon. With a rip, the thing then burst out of Tramer's back and retreated back into the earth between Billy's legs. Billy's head whacked the tombstone. He pitched forward.

Suddenly Danny was aware of just how much his left arm ached. It was a stupid thing to worry about and he knew it, but it really did hurt. With some effort, he shifted his gaze to the source of the pain.

Some time during the past thirty seconds--it seemed more like thirty years--Daryl had seized his bicep; trembling fingers digging in, white knuckles stand-

His wrists
disappeared
into the bloody
ground. Then
his forearms.
His elbows.

ing out in bold relief against dark nylon folds. Danny tried twice to pull away, or even gain Daryl's attention, but it was useless. The smaller boy just continued to huddle at his elbow and shake uncontrollably. And squeeze.

"Boss? Boss?" It was Meyer's voice. "Boss, what--what the fuck--"

"Shut the fuck up!" Diederman fumbled for a cigarette. Three fell to the ground, but he managed to get a fourth in his mouth. The flame shook out twice before he got it lit. Slamming the lighter back in his pocket, he exhaled raggedly.

"Tr--Tramer," Meyer called meekly. "Tramer? You okay?"

"No, he ain't okay, ya dumb shit!" Diederman snapped. "Ain'tcha got eyes?"

"Maybe one of us should... should see if... if he's still alive," Danny uttered.

"You wanna check'm out, Perry, you be my fuckin' guest." The coolest kid in ninth grade tried unsuccessfully to hide the quake in his voice; he was hunched down as if in some vain hope of pulling himself up into a ball and rolling away.

Danny thought that was funny. Too bad he was too terrified to really enjoy it.

"Well, big mouth," Diederman goaded in an attempt to regain control, "you gonna ch-check him or what?"

Deep down, Danny knew nothing could live through what had just happened. But he also knew that to let Tramer just lie there, to do nothing, was wrong. With a fearful sigh, he began to pry Daryl's hands from his arm.

"Danny... *nono*... that thing... that

thing is still--still there... waiting Danny, waiting..."

"No, Daryl. No." Danny tried to keep his voice as calm as he could as he wrenched and tugged at Daryl's white fingers. "Whatever it was is probably gone. Do you understand? It's gone. Look. You can't see it anymore, can you? It--it went back down into the ground--"

"*Nonono*... no, Danny. It's still there. It's gonna get you. It's gonna get us all."

"No, it won't. We'll be fine. You'll see." Danny looked down at the clutching hands, then back into those trapped-animal eyes. "Let go, Daryl. Please. I gotta check on Billy. Please." As if suddenly too tired to hold on any longer, the small hands dropped limply from Danny's arm. He tried to force a grin. "It'll be okay, Daryl. Honest."

Leaving one flashlight, he took the other and started toward Billy. For an instant, Daryl's hands shot back out, groping empty air where his friend had been.

Danny had been maybe fifty feet away from Tramer when whatever happened *happened*. Yet now the distance seemed more like fifty miles. Thoughts crowded into his head in that same weird, disconnected way that his grampa talked whenever he'd had too much Mogen David. Just what was going on here? What in the hell had happened to Tramer?

What would death be like?

You're not gonna die. Remember what you told Daryl?

Yeah. Lies. That's what I told Daryl. One helluva lotta lies.

Had it all been worth it? Now, at last, did he finally, really belong? Funny, he didn't feel any different. He didn't feel much of anything, really. Except scared. And sick. And maybe a little lost.

Why had he never written that much-planned letter to Michelle Johnson? God, she was so gorgeous in *Blame It On Rio*. Was it fear that she might never receive it or was it something else? Maybe he was afraid she'd read it, think he was a nerd, and never answer him.

And why had it been so long since he'd hugged Joey, told him that he loved him? Why so damned long...?

What would death be like?

Everywhere he trained the light, there was blood; the weeds, the headstone, Tramer's clothes. He caught the gnawed stumps that had once been arms and squeezed his eyes shut. Too late. The camera in his mind had already snapped a picture for posterity.

He forced himself to look at the hole torn through the base of Tramer's back, just in case the thing had managed to get back in and was waiting for him like Daryl'd said.

Something curled up at him; he was ready to bolt until he realized it wasn't moving. He also realized what it was: a shattered piece of spine, tangled in bloody tendons, pointing at him like an accusing finger. Swallowing, he reached for the lifeless shoulder.

Billy's body flipped over faster than Danny would have believed possible. Especially since he hadn't touched it. Instinctively he pulled back, whipping the flashlight into the bloody, dirt-caked face. Unable to run, Danny watched as unseeing eyes snapped open like cheap window blinds. The voice that gurgled through gore-flecked lips never belonged to Billy. Or to anyone human.

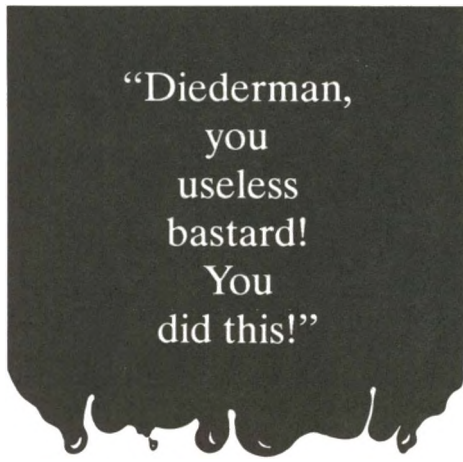
"What was his in life remains so. What was his in life remains so."

The voice grew louder and more garbled with each repetition, until it turned into a strangled wail. A wriggling sea of pale maggots bubbled out of the slack mouth; the head tossed back and forth as more crowded out of his nose and ears...

Danny scrambled backwards, slapping at his legs as the writhing mass slithered toward him.

Jerry Meyer shrieked in pain.

Even before the other three boys redirected their lights they knew the sound had nothing to do with what they'd just seen. Three more worms, each as thick as a body builder's forearm and impossibly long, were already gouging into Jerry's chest and back. A fourth poked out of the ground, lifting him straight up, arms and legs flailing like some grotesque puppet. One bloody hand shot toward the only true constant in his life, Diederman, but Diederman, hunched against a slanted headstone, could only babble



"Diederman,
you
useless
bastard!
You
did this!"

incoherently and slap it away as if, somehow, Jerry's torment was contagious. In a jet of eyes and teeth and gore, Jerry's tormentors exploded out of his face. The screaming abruptly stopped. The puppet, its strings gone, collapsed.

Danny felt his heart slamming against his chest, the wind gnawing at his flesh. "Diederman, you fuckin' useless bastard! You did this!"

Funny. It didn't sound like his voice or even feel like his legs propelling him toward the cringing boy. Even when Danny was straddling Diederman's chest, feeling his own fists slamming into his face again and again, it didn't seem to Danny like it was really him.

Daryl yelled for him to stop. "Danny--no! No! Stop! We gotta run! We gotta run, Danny. We gotta."

Danny looked at Daryl, who was gripping the flashlight tightly, as if it would ward off the encroaching madness, then to the sniveling, defenseless blob lying beneath him.

The earth beneath Daryl Styles' feet began to ripple like a stormy sea. Dirt and stones swirled in the air, stinging his eyes, cutting his face. He tried to stand but the ground wouldn't permit it. He toppled. A hand shot out of the darkness, catching him before he fell. "Danny!" he cried hopefully.

He was wrong.

"Can't run now, boys." The voice was cold and rattled like moldering timbers in an old, deserted house. "You already been promised."

The ruptured ground disappeared below Daryl as he was lifted higher and higher into the night. Somehow he was able to swing his flashlight toward his

captor.

Gangrenous flesh hung in tatters from the skull-face beneath the frayed top hat. A ragged tail coat covered the rotting torso and melded into a thick, wormish tail, the tip of which remained buried in the earth. The massive skeletal hand lifted Daryl higher still, jerking his face closer to its own.

"Scared, boy?" A long, thin centipede crawled out between broken yellow teeth and scuttled down the festering chin. "What was mine in life remains so. Can'tcha read? Life and the land. That's all that matters. That was the deal. The Lord High Wyrms keeps his deals, boy, and so does Micah Hedge." The skull-face tilted slightly, first left, then right. "Whatsamatter, boy--ya dense? The Lord High Wyrms. The Old One. Don't matter. You'll know who I mean soon enough. See, years ago he says t'me, 'Micah, send me souls an' what's really important to ya--life an' the land--will always remain yours.' So, I sent 'em. But I ain't sent 'im anybody in a long time. No sir. Folks just don't come around much no more." The Hedge-thing laughed a sharp, gurgling laugh. "'Til you boys, that is. Well, enough jawin'."

Danny watched as the creature opened its mouth wider and wider, until its lower jaw almost disconnected from the top. Then, suddenly, it engulfed Daryl's head and snapped shut. The small, headless body spasmed in the creature's grip. Daryl never even screamed. The flashlight struck the ground and winked out.

Slowly, the dripping skull-face turned toward Danny and Diederman. "Yer time'll be soon. Right soon." With a laugh, he returned to his feast.

Diederman pushed Danny over, gibbering maniacally about a history test and how he'd be in a lot of trouble if he got home too late and that they'd all have to go fishing together some weekend. Then the words weren't even words anymore. Just sounds, and the sounds wound down into one long, cackling scream as The Boss scrambled off into the night.

Danny's own sanity wasn't far behind Diederman's but he knew it was dumb to run aimlessly. The land, the

creature had said. Maybe if he could get beyond the gate, beyond Hedge's precious land . . .

Danny was on his feet and running, the flashlight he'd grabbed waving yellow zig-zags across the twisted monuments, the gluttonous sounds of cracking bones still echoing on the snarling wind. He ran faster. And faster. It was the right way, he knew it was, but there was still no sign of the gate. Was that thing behind him now? Getting closer and closer? Reaching? Reaching?

Something *thudded* just ahead of him. At least, Danny thought it was ahead of him. Suddenly all the noises around him seemed to stop: Dieder- man's distant screaming, the sound of Daryl's nightmarish fate, even the wind died. Automatically, Danny whirled.

The ground behind him was an inverted furrow of torn-up weeds and overturned headstones; a furrow that was plowing toward him like a freight train.

Danny started running again but the faster he tried to move the slower his legs seemed to churn. He stumbled, caught himself, kept going. The flash- light picked out the gate. Only a few more fee--.

Danny suddenly knew why the screaming had stopped.

Diederman was impaled on top of the fence, twisted iron points gleaming through his knees, draping him back- ward toward the ground. Trinkets adorned the bloody mound of exploded earth beneath him--change, cigarettes, the precious lighter, a Motley Crue but- ton twinkling from the half-eaten chest. Dirt exploded across Danny's back.

"*What was mine in life remains so, boy.*"

Danny dove for the gate. The crea- ture was less than a breath behind him. He grabbed the bars and pulled. They gave, but not enough. He pulled again. A third hand seized the bars and the gate slammed shut.

"You already been promised."

A putrid hand reached toward him. Danny tried to back away but his feet tangled and he sprawled. Gleelessly, the Hedge-thing tugged off Diederman's arm and began stuffing it into his mouth.

Danny groped in the dirt for some- thing--anything. Quarters rolled be- tween his fingers. Pebbles. Cigarettes. He pushed aside a clump of weeds.

Just beyond his reach, a tunnel had been hollowed under the fence, proba- bly by some dog. Now, if he was right about the land, and if the dog had been big enough--

Danny dove into the hollow. For a heartbeat, his jacket caught. Then he ripped free and rolled out the other side.

"*What'veya done, boy?*" The Hedge- thing threw itself at the gate, but try as it might, something kept it from reaching through the bars. "I promised him all five."

The earth rumbled. In the back- ground, a marble cross teetered and fell. "Nooo! I tried," the creature pleaded. "I tried!"

Danny began to back away from the gate. He watched as worms withered and died, as trees toppled and burst into flames. A vortex swirled around the Hedge-thing. The ground split and something slimy and black and enormous began pushing its way out.

"*It was mine, damn you, boy! Mine!*"

Danny's ankle twisted. He stumbled down the hill into the waiting blackness.

Cinema City did book most of the spring movies. Eventually. And the better summer ones, too. But Danny Perry didn't see them. He didn't see the swimming parties, either. Or the picnics. He didn't see the calendar wind down to that hated day in the Fall when school started up again. For six months he didn't see anything. Or hear. Or feel. Then, one day in October, he opened his eyes and he did see some- thing: Joey. And suddenly all that mat- tered was throwing his arms around him and telling him all the things a four- teen-year-old--almost fifteen--isn't sup- posed to tell his big brother.

Later, Joey got him to talk about that night, but it didn't mean much. Danny just couldn't remember. The doctors said he probably never would.

He did remember other things, though: how much his family meant to him and how much he liked paling around with Joey and how crazy he

was about Michelle Johnson who, after he wrote her a fan letter from the hospital, sent him a really sweet get- well card--complete with photo. But somehow, he never seemed to recall that he liked to fish and no matter how many times Joey talked about going to the bait shop and then out to the lake, Danny just never seemed interested. So, one day that following Spring, Joey just decided to stop coaxing.

As Joey drove to Cinema City one sunny Saturday, he said to Danny: "Anyway, there're a lot more fun things t'do in life than sit'n wait for a buncha dumb fish and play with worms." --NB

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PAPA JACK

"i lookt in the BIBLE but i never found nothin a bout blood . . . "

by Tom Elliott

Jenuery 10, 1957

Papa jack left agin for town & so im goin to try and rite down sumthin about my self & my life. Like them awthers i heer about cause i want to be a awther sum day.

Im 15 yeers old or so papa jack tole me & live in the Grait Stait of Carolina. Ever sense mama diid i ben papa jacks little angel he sez too. Yer the lady of the house now he sed to me the day she diid & ever sense that day i ben triin to be good as her. She was a nice woman my mama & teeht me to reed be for she diid wonce wen papa jack was gon. Papa jack sez she was qwite the sportin lady, but not as good as me he sez. Oh my name is jezebel but papa jack calls me jez.

Papa jack is a Man of God & rides Dan Pach all over the hills findin people to bring to The Fold & The Bosom of Jesus Are Lord. Dan Pach is the name papa jack give to his mule. Its a joke he tole me wonce. Thats another name for Satan & the joke is that papa jack rides Dan Pach like hes "over" Satan & forces him to carry papa jack on The Lords work.

Dont seem like much of a joke to

me but papa jack likes it. He laffs & laffs.

march 11, 1957

Papa jack come back for a wile & so i dint have no time for writin here. Ever sense mama passt into The Bosom of Are Lord papa jacks ben treetin me like his new wife. Bean a wife hurt purty bad at furst when i was littel but now it feels okay. Im very proud but i dont say that cause wonce i did & papa jack swicht me for it, sane you shurely got ole Dan Pach in you jez what with yer bean proud & all. So i dont say that no more nor spend so much time lookin in mamas meer when hez around.

Last night after sportin papa jack rollt over & fell asleep like all ways but i waited for a wile cause he likes to trick me sumtimes. But no he was rilly a sleep so i got up & lookt at my body reel qwik with out no clothes on in mamas meer. My teets is big, maybe bigger an mamas & thats good cause papa jack sez hez a teet-man (thats another of his jokes i guess cause wen ever he sez it he laffs & laffs). i got long hair the colour of ole straw on my hed but between my legs its darker. 2 yeers ago i got blood there (between my legs not

on my head) ever month or so & i was so a shame that i never tole papa jack. We got a lot of books on account papa jacks an edjicatit man but i lookt in all the CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS & the BIBLE & even the book papa jack writ ALL WHO SIN ARE DAMNED! but i never found nothin a bout that blood but may be i dint look hard enuff. I thot at first that id dye but its ben 2 yers now like i sed & nothins happent so maybe i wont dye after all. These days wen i got the blood i jest tell papa jack i dont want to sport with him & he all ways leeves me alone. Hes reel kind & treetts me like a perfeck lady tho i dont no if heed do that if he new a bout the blood.

joon 23, 1957

Papa jack left for a week but come back fast with ole Dan Pach looded with food. Unlood ole dan papa jack sez to me for im Ridin For The Lord to morow. There was a lot of food to unlood more than ever before & i ast papa jack how long he was gonna be gon. A long time he sez & then he looks at me in that way so i go to the bed & pull my dress up to my belly

like he likes. We sport for a wile untill he grunts & rolls off like all ways. For a minit i think a bout tellin him i been sic ever mornin for a bout a month but then i think he mite find out a bout the blood so i dont tell him.

The next day he leeves sane ill be back come winter jez.

jewli 15, 1957

The blood must of ben sum kind of sicness like i thot cause its stoppt. But i still sic up my brekfas neerly ever mornin & im gettin FAT. May be i rilly DO got ole Dan Pach in me like papa jack sez not are mule Dan Pach but Satan his self. Papa jack sez Satan can get in side you & make you do all kinds of bad things & i cant think of no thing badder than siccin up brekfas.

awgus 3, 1957

Its kind of peecefull here at the house with papa jack gone. I tend the truck pach like all ways & keep the house cleen. Im reel happy lateley cause i dont get sic no more but im still gettin fatter. Im glad papa jack aint around cause he wood swich me for shure sane yer so lazy yer gettin fat jez. I work harder all the time but i jes keep gettin fatter & fatter. Sumtimes i wish we had naybors like we had wen i was little & mama was a live but i aint seen nor talkt to no one els sense three yeers a fore mama diid & that was a long long long time a go.

sitember 19, 1957

Im scart. My belly is so big now im afraid to go a sleep cause i think i mite blow up in the midel of the nite. The skin is all strecht & tite like sumthins in there triin to get out. I no this cause sumthin in ther moved yester day. I was in the truck pach hoin & weedin & i bent over to pull up a milkweed wen sumthin in my belly went KIK! I stode up & felt my belly but wat ever it was that moved was plane possum. I thot a bout it for a wile & got sic rite there in the truck pach. Theres sumthin inside me & if papa jack was here i no wat heed say. You got Satan inside you jez heed say & heed be rite i think.

oktober 13, 1957

I cant go a sleep at all eny more. Im

reel scart now & wish papa jack wood come back even if i got the swichin of my life. Satans in my belly i no now & if papa jack come back heed cast him out in a minit. Heed swich me after but id be so happy with Satan out of my belly id thank him for every wak of the swich. Satans gettin stronger in there cause now it aint just my belly thats gettin big but my teets too. They was big to start out with like i sed a long time ago but now there even bigger & reel heavy. Sumthin comes out of the tips of them that reminds me of milk but of corse that cant be cause i remember mama tellin me milk comes from cows & gotes. I wonder if Satans turnin me into a cow or a gote. He can do it papa jack tole me wonce.

november 2, 1957

I prayd to Jesus Are Lord last nite & this mornin to & ast him to make Satan go away but so far no anser. My belly jes keeps gettin bigger & bigger & the skin is strecht so tite i think ill pop. I got a idea but i dont want to try it till im shure theres no other way. I shure hope Jesus Are Lord ansers be for i have to do that.

nofember 15, 1957

Its over & dun with & i dint need papa jacks nor Jesus Are Lords help ether. My belly jes kep groin & groin & no body helpt me so i had to try my idea & it workt. I drank sum milkweed tee & smoked one of papa jacks see gars & I got sic like be for & in a bout a hour Satan commenct to kickin & wrasslin so that i got a belly ack reel bad. Like i figerd Satan dint like the smoke or the tee & he started triin to get out & jes kep at it till he made it. He razed a comoshun in there & he hurt me so bad i peed a gallon i think. I was on the front steps wen that happent & rite away tok my dress off so i woodint get it dirty & then i run into the woods so if i diid i woodnt be lettin Satan loos in papa jacks house. I lade down on sum leeves & waited. Satan kep at it for a long time gettin stronger & stronger ever minit un till finly he started comin out rite there from between my legs! It makes since to me now & i no i had Satan in me for yeers. Ever sense the blood started

comin. That was Satan.

It took him a wile to get out & it hurt reel bad so much i went a sleep by axsidint a cupel of times. Wen i woke up there he was lyin in the leeves.

He lookt like a rinklt ole man & reellittel & was so ugly & makin scary screemin noises. He was covered with blood & his skin was all puckered & he stunk bad. I triid to get up but he still had a cord up between my legs & when i thot of havin him atacht to me like that for ever i neerly went a sleep by axsidint agin. I grabbed that cord & tho it felt like a worm or a snake & all most made me sic agin i jerkd it apart & run into the house for the wood-ax.

I dint think heed be there wen i got back but like papa jack sez Satans a proud spirit & he must of thot i wasnt strong enuff to get the better of him but of corse now he nose difernt.

I razed the wood-ax over my hed & Satan lookt up at it & screemed & screemed cause he new heed ben bested. I split his hed open & then jest kep hackin like he was a ole peece of notty pine untill all that was left was little peeces all around. I had to cach my breth & at first i thot i wood feed him to the pigs but then i thot no then heed be in there belly & i woodint wish that on no body not even a pig. So i berryed him in the woods as far from the house as i could walk in a day. I was feelin proud cause id bested Satan all a lone but then like a little voice in my eer i herd papa jack sane Satan was proud & i was Satan if i acted proud to so i stoppt.

desember 10, 1957

Papa jack come back yester day & at first i was gonna tell him a bout bestin Satan but then i decided not to. He was bone tired from Ridin For The Lord & jest wanted to sleep without sportin or eetin or anythin. But this mornin he woke up & thats all he thot a bout. Sportin i meen. Im reel lucky to have a papa like papa jack cause he treets me like a perfeck lady & trys to teech me ever thin he nose tho sumtimes i cant figer out wat hes talkin a bout.

Now that Satans gon & papa jacks
(continued on pg. 56)

Life
was a
picnic . . .
until the
menu changed.

CHOW

by Gary Brandner

Something was wrong with Howard's face. Maybe not *wrong* exactly, but *different*. Howard rubbed his eyes and swiveled his head on the pillow so he could read the glowing numbers of the clock-radio. 6:40. He had half an hour until the radio would come on and the manic morning d.j. would drive him out of bed. He reached over and tapped the kill button to keep the radio silent and allow Tiana to sleep.

Her dark, fragrant hair brushed his nose as he leaned across her. His beautiful wife. Howard Eccles still could not believe his luck. A geeky looking thirty-four-year-old junior accountant, he had been resigned to a life of microwave dinners, the Cosbys for companionship, and porn videos for sex. Then the earthquake hit L.A. A strange quake, it caused minimal damage, but split open a deep fissure along Wilshire Boulevard, just outside Howard's office building. He had been on his way to lunch when the quake hit and, marvel of marvels, he had pulled this beautiful young creature from the crevice. He had scraped the back of his hand painfully, and Tiana kissed it, and

miraculously it was all better.

They were married three weeks later, and in the six months that followed Howard had been happier than he had ever thought possible. With Tiana as his inspiration, he moved out of his dreary apartment and bought this house in a new tract in the Simi Valley. It was probably more than he could afford but with Tiana's encouragement he had come to believe that he could do anything, so he scraped up the down payment and here they were.

Life had been a picnic, and then this morning his face felt funny. He cocked his head this way and that, touched his retreating hairline, his protruding eyes, his narrow nose, his pointy chin. Everything seemed okay, and yet . . .

Tiana awoke and kissed him. She pulled him over on top of her round, resilient body. She opened her legs to him and closed him within her. Twenty minutes later he rolled off her, oiled with sweat, breathing hard, sated.

"You're up early, darling," she said. She massaged his damp stomach with a

gentle hand.

He remembered. "Honey, look at me."

She rolled her head obediently toward him.

"Is there anything wrong with my face?"

"Not to me. I think it's a lovely face."

He sat up in bed and looked down at her. "No, I mean is there something *different* about it?"

Tiana grew serious to match his mood. She shook her head. "What do you want me to look for?"

"I don't know," he said, "it just doesn't feel right."

"You were probably having a dream," she said.

"Yes . . . I suppose so."

He rolled out of bed and padded across the bedroom carpet to the bathroom.

"Cute buns," Tiana called after him.

Howard looked back at her and grinned. He went on into the bathroom and took his shower. As he soaped and rinsed and thought about his wife, Howard grew a powerful hardon that did not subside until he stood in front of the mirror to shave.

He leaned close to the glass, as he always did, so he could see what he was doing without his glasses. That was when he saw what was wrong with his face.

"What the *fuck*!"

Tiana sat up in alarm as he burst back into the bedroom, half of his face still frothed with lather.

"My earlobe's gone!"

"What?"

"My earlobe's gone. Look." He leaned over the bed, grasped his right ear and pulled it out away from his head. "No lobe."

"So?"

"Honey, it's *gone*! Part of my ear disappeared last night."

"Does it hurt?"

"No, that's what so wierd. There's no blood, no scab, no scar. Just a missing earlobe."

"Are you sure you had one? Some people don't, you know."

"Of course I'm sure. You get to know your own face pretty well in thirty-four years. I had two earlobes. Now I have one."

He grasped
his left
foot and pulled
it to his face.
"My big toe.
It's gone."

Tiana pulled the sheet up over her full breasts. "Okay, you don't have to bite my head off."

Howard was instantly contrite. It was the closest they'd come yet to a quarrel. He lay back down on the bed and kissed her. She responded warmly, getting lather on her own face.

"I guess I don't need it," he said. "It's not like I was a gypsy violinist or something."

They laughed together and he held her until it was time to get up and go to work. At the office, the truncated ear bother him at first, but when nobody seemed to notice, he gradually put it out of his mind.

By the end of the week, Howard had resigned himself to living with asymmetrical ears. After all, he really didn't need matching earlobes, and the absence of one was barely noticeable unless you were looking for it.

Then one morning he stepped out of bed and fell down.

Tiana sat up, suddenly wide awake, and stared at him. "What's the matter?"

Howard looked up at her from his hands and knees. "I don't know. I lost my balance."

He stood upright and staggered. "What the hell is the matter with me?" He sat heavily on the bed and looked down at the floor.

"Holy shit!"

"Howard, what is it? What's wrong?"

He grasped his left foot and pulled it toward his face, squinting as he did so. "My big toe. It's gone."

"I've never really looked at your feet," she said softly.

"Well, goddamnit, I know all five

toes on each foot. I had that big toe last night when I went to bed. He rubbed the smooth knob of flesh-covered bone where the toe had joined the foot. "Now it's gone."

"Darling, I'm getting worried about you," Tiana said. She moved behind him in the bed and encircled him with her arms. Her resilient breasts mashed against his back. "Come here and let Momma make it better."

Walking with a missing toe was a tricky proposition, but Howard had it pretty well mastered in a week. It was a nagging worry in the back of his mind, the earlobe and then the big toe, but with the pressures of his job and paying for the new house and enjoying Tiana, he had more than enough to occupy his mind.

Then, on another morning a week or so later, he reached for the clock-radio, saw his hand, and screamed.

This time Tiana had to admit he had lost something. There could be no doubt that Howard Eccles had possessed the full complement of ten fingers. Now the little one on his right hand was gone. Again, no scar, no pain, just a part of his missing.

"You've got to see a doctor," Tiana said, and Howard was more than ready to agree.

Since he had no doctor of his own, Tiana gave him the name of a general practitioner she said could be trusted. Dr. Peter Schaeffer was in his early forties, with a black brush cut and a golf-course-tan. He soberly examined Howard's ear, his foot, and his hand.

"Odd there's no sign of infection or trauma of any kind. The skin is smoothed and unscarred."

"You're not going to ask me if I'm sure I ever had an earlobe, a big toe, and little finger, I hope."

"Of course not," the doctor said. "but you will have to admit this is a decidedly strange story."

Howard had to admit it.

"As far as I can tell from the office examination, there's nothing wrong with you. It's possible we may learn more when the lab results come back, but I can assure you that you're apparently as healthy as a horse."

"Thanks a lot," Howard said morosely.

Dr. Schaeffer wrote him a prescription for a tranquilizer before he left the office. A week later, he told Howard the laboratory tests showed nothing abnormal. None of this made Howard feel any better. Small parts of his body were disappearing, and he had no idea how to stop it. The sympathetic support of his wife and the comfortable security of his job were all that kept him from losing control. Sleep no longer came easily, and he took to swallowing a couple of pills every night.

It was at work that the next blow fell. He had awakened groggy from the pills and all morning had felt vaguely uneasy. At his desk he was restless. He repeatedly changed the adjustment of the swivel chair, squirming this way and that, trying to find a comfortable working position. Shortly before noon, Lou Denehy, the new department manager, came over and laid a hand on Howard's shoulder.

"Howard, have you got a problem? You've been fidgety all morning."

Howard was not about to confide in his new boss. So far, none of the losses he'd suffered had interfered with his performance at work. He said, "I don't know, Lou, it feels like somebody switched chairs on me."

Denehy checked the tape label on the back of the chair. "Nope, this is your chair. Listen, if you're not feeling good, take the afternoon off--get some rest."

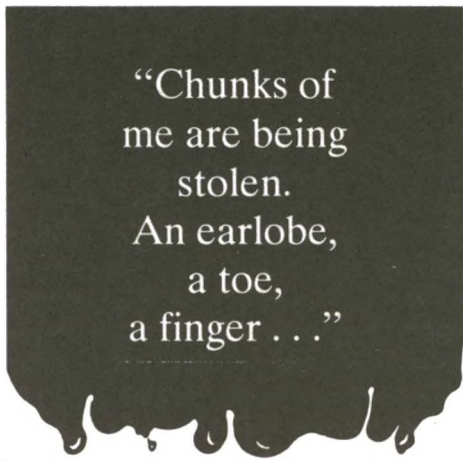
Howard hadn't missed a single day of work because of illness, and he hated to spoil his record. He thought maybe his trouble was indigestion, and went to the men's room to see if he couldn't clear his pipes. It was there he discovered why he could not sit comfortably. A big chunk of his right buttock was gone, leaving only a smooth indentation below his hip.

"Look at that," he said, dropping his pants and turning away from his wife later that afternoon. "Chunks of me are being stolen. An earlobe, a toe, a finger--and now this. What the hell are they going to take next?"

"Howard, try to calm down."

"Calm down? I'd like to see how calm you'd be if half your ass disappeared during the night."

"Darling, I'm on your side, remem-



"Chunks of
me are being
stolen.
An earlobe,
a toe,
a finger . . ."

ber? I just want us to talk this over and see if we can understand what's happening to you--decide what we can do about it. Now . . . you said they. Who do you mean?"

Howard pulled up his loose-fitting pants and fastened the buckle. "Damned if I know. Somebody--something--is taking away parts of my body at night. Sure, it's crazy, impossible, but it's happening. Haven't you noticed anything during the night?"

Tiana shook her head. "But then you know me, I sleep like the dead."

Howard barely touched the lunch Tiana prepared for him. He hobbled out the back door and stood watching his neighbor, Charlie Hickman, as he slashed away at tufts of Bermuda grass with a Weedeater. When Charlie shut off the machine, Howard beckoned him over.

Charlie was a beefy, red-faced guy with just a few strands of blonde hair left to cover his freckled scalp. He mopped his neck with a handkerchief and approached Howard with a cheerful grin on his face.

"Playing hooky today, buddy?"

"Sick leave," Howard said. He went on quickly to forestall any questions. "Charlie, have you noticed anything unusual around the neighborhood in the last month or so?"

"Unusual?"

Howard felt foolish, but he pressed on. "Like strange people, or noises, or anything like that?"

"Nope. Why--you got a problem?"

"I think somebody's been getting into my house during the night."

"Burglars? That's a job for the police. What'd they take?"

"Ah, well, that's difficult to say. I don't want to involve the police unless I'm sure of my ground."

"That's probably wise. I'll keep my eyes open, buddy, and if there is anything funny going on, count on me to help."

"Thanks, Charlie." Howard went back into the house as the snarl of the Weedeater resumed next door. He conjured up a mental picture of the reaction the police would have to a man who claimed his body was dissolving during the night. The last thing he needed was to make himself the object of ridicule.

When he lost his left leg below the knee, Howard decided that ridicule was the least of his worries. He sat for a long time on the edge of the bed, running his hand over the round, smooth stump while Tiana sat beside him with her head pressed into his shoulder.

"I'm going to the police," he said.

"Whatever you think's best, darling."

"You'll have to drive me."

"Of course I will."

With Tiana standing beside his chair, hands resting lightly on his shoulders, Howard told his story to Detective Sgt. Brian McNee. The policeman listened gravely as Howard recited the list of missing parts. His cool, gray eyes gave no indication of what he was thinking.

"Mr. Eccles," he said after Howard had finished, "just what is it you expect the police to do?"

"Well . . . investigate. Find out who or what is doing this to me. Stop it."

"I can certainly understand your concern, sir, but as far as I can tell, no crime's been committed."

"No crime?" Howard hoisted up the stump of his leg. "What do you call this?"

Sgt. McNee sighed and shook his head. "No crime, Mr. Eccles. And no crime, no police."

"He thinks I'm a nut case," Howard said as Tiana helped him down the steps of the police building and into their car.

"I'm sure he'd help if he could," Tiana said. "It's just that nothing like this has probably ever happened be-

fore. The police aren't prepared to deal with things that have no precedent."

"Well, for God's sake, who *is*?"

It wasn't until some weeks later that Howard realized he might have answered his own question. He was by no means a religious man. He had not, in fact, been inside a church since childhood when his parents scrubbed him on Sunday and dressed him up and dragged him along to St. Stephen's to hear the white-haired Father Ryan drone on about Scriptures. As soon as he was old enough to make his own decisions, Howard decided he was an agnostic, and spent his Sundays watching football on TV. But if ever there were a time to seek help from a Higher Power, this was it.

By the time he reached this conclusion, however, both of his legs ended at the knees and he was down to his last arm. He had gone deep into his savings account to buy a motorized wheelchair. The ever-patient Tiana had driven him across town, and waited now in the car while Howard rolled up to the portico of St. Stephen's. He pulled open the heavy door and guided the chair inside. With his remaining hand, he fingered the controls on the chair arm and rolled down the carpeted aisle toward the altar.

A young priest with dark, kindly eyes and a shock of black hair hurried to meet him. Howard felt a pang of disappointment, but he realized it had been foolish to hope that Father Ryan might still be here.

"How may I help you?" asked the young priest.

"I'm not a member of your congregation," Howard said. "But I . . . didn't know where else to go."

"No one is turned away here. I'm Father Fillippo. You are welcome."

"Thank God," Howard sobbed. It took him several minutes to compose himself enough to speak. He began with the night he lost his earlobe. Father Fillippo listened without interrupting until Howard brought his narrative up to date. He stopped and looked up into the warm brown eyes of the priest.

"That is the most foul, disgusting story I've ever heard," Fillippo said. "Your afflictions do not give you the

right to come here and ridicule the House of God. Get out of here at once."

Tiana was waiting for him at the curb when the priest propelled Howard and his wheelchair out of the church. She drove home, fed Howard some soup, and cooled his fevered brow with a damp cloth until he fell into a haunted sleep.

The days that followed blurred into swimming patterns of light and darkness. There were sounds, colors, smells, voices--all around him--but none of it made any sense. His next clear-headed perception was of being propped in his wheelchair like a mannequin. Or, more accurately, half a mannequin. His nose itched. He strained to scratch it, only to find he had nothing to scratch with. He looked down to see that nothing grew from his bare shoulders and his trunk ended at the pelvis.

"*Tiana!*" At least his voice still worked.

He called out again. No answer. The house was dead-quiet. Outside, he could hear the growl of an occasional passing car. In the distance, a dog barked. He was alone in an empty house, just a head and a torso.

He began to rock, forward and back, forward and back, leaning a little farther each time. Finally, he pitched head first out of the chair. His face thumped hard against the floor; he felt the cartilage of his nose crack. The break brought tears to his eyes, but the terror of what was happening blunted the pain.

Slowly, laboriously, he inched across the floor by stretching out his neck, digging his chin into the nap of the carpet, and dragging what remained of his body along. After an endless journey across the room, he reached the telephone table. His trapezius muscles screamed with the effort. Carpet lint stuck to the blood from his nose. He clamped his teeth on the phone cord and jerked at it until the instrument fell to the floor with a muffled *jing*.

Howard put his ear close to the receiver and heard the hum of the dial tone. With his throbbing nose, he punched out 9-1-1, then lay with his cheek pressed to the floor so he could talk into the mouthpiece.

It took him several minutes to make

the emergency operator understand that he wanted to talk to Detective McNee. He didn't have the strength to go through the whole story with someone new.

When at last he was connected, Howard cried with relief when the detective recognized him.

"Mr. Eccles, I'm glad you called. Since you were in here I've been doing some investigating, and I think I know what's happening to you."

"For God's sake, *what*? And how can I stop it?"

"Just stay where you are. I'll be there as soon as I can to explain everything." The line went dead.

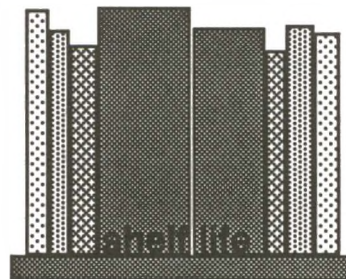
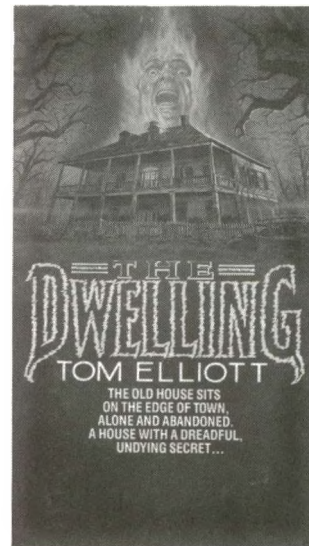
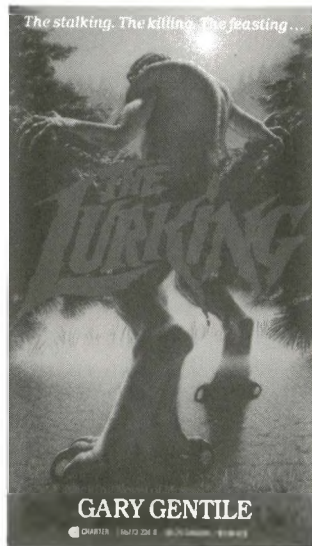
Stay where you are. The armless, legless lump that had been Howard Eccles almost laughed. He pushed his face into the carpet and let the tears flow. How cruelly his life had changed in the last six months. New lovely wife, new home in a new neighborhood, new boss, new friends . . . An ugly thought pushed its way into his mind just before a welcome oblivion overtook him.

Sensation slowly returned. There was a face close to his. Looking at him. Tiana. His beautiful, loving Tiana, who had come into his life so unexpectedly, emerging from the earth as if by magic. She smiled. Reflexively, Howard smiled back.

The light around him grew brighter. Howard recognized his own dining room. There were other faces arranged around him. As they swam into focus, he recognized them one by one. Charlie Hickman, his new neighbor; Tiana's Dr. Schaeffer; Lou Denehy, his new manager at work; young Father Fillippo from St. Stephen's; and Brian McNee, the sympathetic detective.

The ugly thought returned. Who were these new people? Where had they come from? Howard tried to swivel his head, but he could move only his eyes. There was a coldness at his throat. He rolled his eyes downward and saw a silver tray below his Adam's apple. The tray rested in the center of the dining room table. Howard tried to cry out, but with truncated vocal cords he managed only a whispery croak.

"He's awake, everybody," Tiana said. She raised a graceful hand, holding a stainless-steel meat fork. "Time for Dessert." --NB



THE GROTESQUE THE LURKING THE DWELLING

THE GROTESQUE
by Patrick McGrath
Poseidon Press; \$17.95

Every so often, you come across a book that defies definition, one that's totally different from everything else in print. *The Grotesque*, Patrick McGrath's first novel (his previous offering was the much-praised short story collection *Blood and Water and Other Tales*), is one of those unique books.

It isn't exactly a horror story, but it does have more than its share of gruesome and terrifying moments. It's more a bizarre amalgamation of high-brow British suspense and low-brow American vulgarity, biting social satire, sexual

overtones, and black humor. To coin a new sub-genre, *The Grotesque* is a prime example of Postmodern Gothic Splatter.

McGrath's gothic influences are evident throughout the novel, but with a twist. For example, a young woman's boyfriend dies a tragic death, then reappears later to talk to the distraught girl from a dream. Most early gothic writers would have left it at that, as it is a rather disturbing concept, but McGrath carries it to a logical extreme: "She sat beside me, smoking cigarette after cigarette, and tears rolled down her face as she mumbled on about Sidney, who was no longer, it seems, the pale and faintly sweet-smell-

ing ghoulish creature she had conjured in a fit of hysterical weeping that night in February. His features were unrecognizable now, she said, owing to the copious discharge of a yellowy, viscous substance that oozed from his flesh. His eyes and ears and mouth were crawling with worms, she said."

The plot of the novel, on the surface, is very simple and straightforward. Sir Hugo Coal, a country squire, amateur paleontologist and self-professed asshole, fears that his new butler, Fledge, schemes to become the master of Crook Manor by subverting the mores of the residents of the household. Sir Hugo is positive that it's Fledge's goal to completely destroy

the status quo, the rigid unwritten code of decency and honor by which every British gentleman lives.

But beneath the surface, things aren't as simple as they appear, of course.

Sir Hugo tells the story mostly in retrospect. He's suffered a "cerebral accident" and is left paralyzed and speechless, but he's still able to think. And this is what makes *The Grotesque* so fascinating. Even before the accident, Hugo isn't portrayed as the sanest of men--his idea of a good time is to feed maggots to his pet toad at the dinner table (much to the disgust of the other diners, the wussies), but afterwards his grip on reality appears to become even more tenuous. Therefore, should you believe everything he's saying? Is Fledge, as Hugo asserts, a homosexual, or is this just some fantasy created by Hugo's sex-starved subconscious? Is Fledge truly plotting to become the master of the household, or is Hugo simply paranoid? And who killed poor Sidney?

You'll have to read *The Grotesque* to find out for yourself, and you'll have to read very carefully because, as is true of any fine piece of fiction, what isn't said is just as important as what is.

If you're looking for a change of pace--*Whatayou wanna read? I dunno, whatayou wanna read?*--a reading experience that will entertain you as well as make you think, then I recommend *The Grotesque* most highly. It's very well-written, fast-paced and relatively short in length. It doesn't contain any demon-possessed children or psychotic masked killers with scorecards, but it does contain one of the most terrifying monsters of all: the so-called "normal" man.

--Mike Baker

THE LURKING

by Gary Gentile

Charter Books; \$3.95

... *Warning: This novel contains scenes of grotesque inhuman depravity. Weakhearted readers are cautioned to beware...*

Well, bloody, I'll tell you: when I saw this tag on the back cover of Gentile's first novel, I thought this was either

going to be one great book, or one the worst I've ever read.

Unfortunately, the latter is true.

And it really pains me to say that, because I can usually find some redeeming element in the worst of what I read, but the further I continued into this book, the more clichéd and routine it became.

The novel concerns the supposedly true legend--actual legend, as it's described on the book cover, but isn't that a paradox?--of the Jersey Devil. In one of the early chapters, it's mentioned that even the crazy folks from California have heard of the Jersey Devil, but I'm a "crazy folk" from California and I've never heard of it.

Anyway, reporter Elaine Adams--oh, *please*--arrives at the site of what may turn out to be the biggest story of her career: some local teens--pseudo-characters Bob, Mary, Ralph and Karen--have stumbled onto a mass grave in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. The sheriff, a Billie Blow Job character who utters phrases like, "I'm the law 'round here," and "Any questions to be ast, I'll ast 'em," does his best to dissuade the eager reporter but, as she tells the sheriff, the public has a right to know what's happening. For Elaine, and corporate lawyer-husband Cliff, the chance of a lifetime turns out to be a nightmare.

So does trying to finish this fuckin' thing. Get this: Elaine's arch rival at the *Bulletin*, Janice of the long-red-polished-nails-and-multifaceted-diamond-boasting set, begins most of her sentences with "Babe" and quotes Lois Lane--apparently, Gloria Steinem doesn't rate with this babe.

I don't even want to talk about this thing anymore. But I do want to put a quote from one of the early chapters in here:

"But a news item's got to be written by someone who knows the ropes..."

Too bad Gentile didn't take his own advice for novel writing.

--Chris B. Lacher

THE DWELLING

by Tom Elliott

St. Martin's Press; \$3.95

... *Even as John's face was shoved down to the klansman's waist level, he made himself remain still. When the vile-ness began, his stomach roiled in disgust and he almost vomited, but with a will he hadn't known he possessed, John remained motionless; he let them do what they wanted.*

And when the right moment came, John bit down, his front teeth chipping together with a bone-jarring sharpness. There was a deeply satisfying scream, and then he felt the chunk! of something cold and sharp and heavy suddenly wedge itself thickly into his neck.

With something like a sigh, John let the klansman's severed penis drop from his bloody mouth, and joined his family in death...

Okay, the guys can be excused for a moment.

Everything still there? Good.

On the A-side of the 45 is Tom Elliott's *The Dwelling*, a harrowing and compelling first novel written in the tradition of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Shining*, by Stephen King.

For police photographer Katy McClure, the first hint of her mysterious connection to an old abandon house by the bayou surfaces during a routine day on the job: she is called to a local construction site to photograph a man who was crushed to death by a fourteen-foot wall of bricks. But this photo-shoot is anything but routine: instead of feeling the dreamlike detachment so common during this part of her job, she is overwhelmed by a near-psychic insight into the last few moments of the dead man's life--and the first few of his eternal slumber. Katy easily writes off all the weird feelings, but other related, more threatening events bring her to a single conclusion: something terrible dwells in the house by the bayou...

And it ain't pricks and ponies, bloody.

In a recent cable interview, Tom described the novel as "not so much a haunted house story, but a haunted people story." I thought that was neat, and apt, as well. Tom possesses the basic skills that are, unfortunately, lacking in most first genre novelists: he tells a compelling story by, one, actually having a story to tell, rather than simply establishing one-dimensional

characters as nothing more than human bowling pins set up for the slaughter and, two, by revealing the mystery of the story slowly, rather than mashing your face in it with an overabundance of puke and puss. Additionally, the horror--whether it be the horror of savage bigotry or the supernatural vengeance of the dwelling--is actually horrifying: anyone who can read through the quotation excerpted from the prologue and claim they were not the least bit affected should win an Oscar.

The Dwelling is still available from your local retailer or write Bob Weinberg, of Weinberg Books (15145 Oxford

Dr., Oak Forest, IL 60452), and ask about purchasing a copy with a signed bookplate at no extra charge, a unique offer for a unique first novel, as this passage demonstrates:

... The house stood empty for decades, while around it abandoned autos gathered, crouching on flabby tires, their Detroit skins mottled and flaking from countless encounters with an indifferent Southern climate, their rotting grilles leering mutely through curt stubbles of weeds. Inside, ragged wallpaper, ancient and faded bone-white, hung limply from the walls in tatters, as though some-

thing or someone routinely capered down its halls, ripping and slashing without pattern ...

Hurts so good, doesn't it?

--Chris B. Lacher

Fucks pas -- J.N. Williamson's "Absolute Peace and Quiet" (Winter, '89) originally appeared in *Anomalies* (John Maclay & Associates); "Feast of Lilith" (Lilith's poem) was written by Chad Hensley. --NB



"Oh--should I? I've had so many already, but he looks so tasty!"

Into the realm of NB Hostess steps Diva, our *Adults Only!* Hostess who, like her predecessor, Lilith, hides none of her inhibitions--or her intentions.

"I want everyone who sees these pictures to realize that I want to eat them up, just like a child with a bowl of candy. I want everyone to know I can transform their secret desires into reality, that I can lead them down whichever path they choose--or whichever one I choose . . ."

Diva is definately delectable. And, after staring into her deep, dark eyes, it becomes easy to believe that she could lead us wherever she chooses, even into the cemetery in these pictures.

"You haven't lived until you've fucked on marble," she whispers, smiling at our raised--er--eyebrows.

"I've been following all the controversy caused by Lilith," she says, posing for her next shot. "That this type of thing has no place in a horror-fiction magazine. But none of that bothers me. Women have always encountered resistance in the horror field--if we show up for the slaughter in panties and a bra, we're being exploited; if we end up the heroines, we're too strong, too domineering. So my philosophy is to appeal to that aspect of the human condition that does no debating, that raises no objection--the libido.

What else does Diva think of Lilith and the magazine?





"I think *New Blood* is fantastic--there's no other magazine like it in the world. I think Lilith's fantastic, too--she's beautiful! I know Lilith and I have to step aside from the magazine for the next couple of issues, but when we come back, we come back in style--with full-color photographs--and, if it's at all possible, I think we should do our photo layouts together."

An intriguing possibility, to say the least. But for now, bloods, you'll have to satisfy yourselves--"And me," Diva adds--with just a few more glimpses of NB's newest--and hottest--blood of all.

Remember: to receive your 8 x 10 personally inscribed photo of Diva or Lilith, send check or m.o. for \$6 (made payable to Chris Lacher only) to NB, Attn: Hostess Department, 540 W. Foothill Blvd., Suite #3730, Glendora, CA 91740. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

*

Next Issue: a brand new interview with Linnea Quigley, star of *Return of the Living Dead*, *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night*, *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers*, and dozens of your favorite film-shockers, plus exclusive, revealing photos from her brand new film.

Coming Soon: Bobbie Bresee, sexy star of *Ghoulies* and the cult-hit *Mausoleum*; and, for the ladies, a special, surprise guest host!



-- HOSTESS DATA SHEET --

BUST: 34 WST: 26 HIPS: 34

BIRTHPLACE: Plughay

NAME: Diva-1

BIRTH DATE: Halloween
of course!

Hungry

AMBITIONS: Go become the

#1 Horror Hostess in the World!

TURN-ONS: I'm going to

need a lot more space

than just these few

lines! Cold, cold Marble!

Dark, masked men!

Dark secrets revealed in

the heat of lovemaking!

TURN-OFFS: Evangelists





who watch! Evangelists

who do it!

eyes and it'll be

easy to imagine

what I'd like to

whisper in your ear!

FAVORITE FOODS: Men,

desires, anything that
makes your fingers sticky.

FAVORITE PASTTIMES: *

Fucking on marble!

WHAT I LIKE ABOUT CEME-

TERIES: Fucking on

marble!

PERSONAL REMARKS: Just

look deep in to my





"I
revel in
wantonness.
Wallow in
excess . . . "

WRAPPED TREE

by David Starkey

Dongs fascinate me.

And not just man-dongs. But ram-dongs, too, and cat-dongs, elephant-dongs (damn!), horse-dongs (lordy!), even duck-dongs, for Christssake. Dongs truly fascinate me.

Actually, it goes quite a distance beyond mere fascination.

I *worship* them. I worship phal-luses, cocks, pricks, dicks, whatever you want to call them. I adore them. Why, you might ask? Because they're the site of incredible pleasure, of infinite sensual joy! And they have the power to start life! One real man sewing his seed with a vengeance can start thousands of new lives every year. *Thousands!* That, I say, is *power*.

And yet, for a man to ravish a thousand women, he would have to be so amoral, so loathsome, so *disgusting*--that he would positively enrage the masses of mortal fools.

I would find such a man fascinating, however.

I revel in wantonness. Wallow in excess. Wriggle like a phantasmic pig in the conceptual mire of unbridled orgasmic delight.

But I have lived a life of restraint.

I didn't want to upset my mother.

But she's quite dead now. A heart attack. Last month.

And my estate is *very* private now. I dismissed all the servants shortly after Momma died. And now there is no one here but me. The house is on a peninsula at the end of one of those six-mile long driveways you may have heard about but never actually seen. The house is very grand. It's stone, great wondrous grey blocks of it, and there are 4 bedrooms.

I am the last of the McDysons.

Out here, with all the books I've accumulated, I've been rather zealous during this month of freedom.

I've been preparing for the *special* ceremony.

I'd only seen it *alluded* to in the other books. It was always mentioned reverently, and warily. The "ultimate of ultimates," it was called. "The holiest of all the phallic rites." The exquisite secrecy of the ceremony was legendary. Words of caution were abundant.

And the fact that it was forbidden made the ceremony even more appealing. The fact that it would have such

sweeping consequences made it all the more alluring. The *excess* of it all tempted me the most. That, coupled with the certainty that it would hurt you, only spurred me to further action.

So I set to work. I didn't have hundreds of yards of the finest linen at my disposal. The book (I'll talk about that in a minute) said I needed the linen, but I abhor going into town, and I vowed I would not ask anyone there to deliver anything at all to me until I'd eaten the last available crumb of food the servants had left in the house.

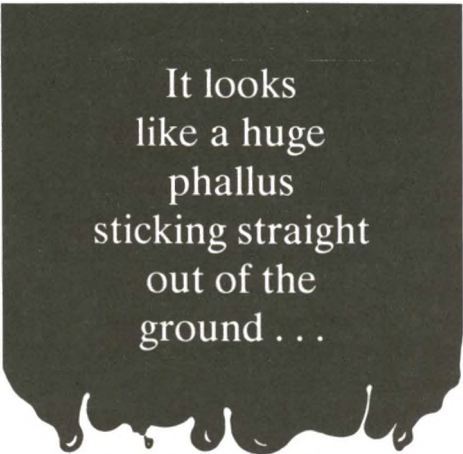
But I did have the curtains. Hundreds and *hundreds* of yards of them. And so, like Scarlet O'Hara herself, I stripped the windows and put the curtains to a new and higher purpose!

I used them to wrap the tree. I wrapped the tallest cedar in the back lawn just like what's-his-name. Cristo? The one who wraps bridges and houses. The gigantic cedar looked *wonderful* when I'd finished.

Even now, it looks like a marvelously huge phallus sticking straight up out of the ground. The back lawn bulges with it. The great phallic god projects mightily from underneath its wrap of curtains toward the waiting sky!

After I'd wrapped it, I simply did what the book said--the handwritten book I alluded to. It, I'm now sure, is the book that all my other books mentioned. It is the book that told me how to perform the ultimate of ultimates. As far as I know, I have the only copy that was ever written. It was sold to me by a simpleton on the isle of Crete almost 23 years ago. I bought it for pennies. He thought it worthless scribbles. And it took me years to translate! Seven years! I studied it, I sweated over it, I tore my hair over it. But finally, I translated it. I translated it over 15 years ago! I've known how to do this for 15 years! Only my concern for Momma stopped me from doing it that long ago.

The language of the book, by the way, was totally unfamiliar to me (and I'm familiar with most languages--ancient and modern. My education was *excellent*). The book was actually written in a coded version of Greek and Persian. And . . . well, it isn't necessary for me to go into the linguistics and cryp-



It looks
like a huge
phallus
sticking straight
out of the
ground . . .

tography here. Especially for *you*, a poorly educated, middle-class bore, no doubt, and a reporter at that. Ugh!

But what I want to say, what I want to *explain*, is that this whole business is all my doing. And when you find this little discourse of mine, as I feel certain you will, because I'm going to telephone the newspaper very soon and tell some loathsome reporter where to find it, you'll know the truth. That *I* caused this thing. *I want the credit*. I want all to know who did this to you. You're all disgusting. You all deserve this!

Well, after I finished wrapping the tree, after I transformed it into the giant phallic god, I said the words that the book specified--I said them in the full of the moon at the morning's stroke of three.

And thus it began. They began arriving that very night. They came to worship together. They came to bask in the presence of their own mighty god--the god that summoned them to my back lawn, to slither together, and to writhe and writhe in a serpentine slurry of juice.

Dongs.

Horse-dongs, cow-dongs, dog-dongs, human-dongs--all slithering toward their phallic god, all paying homage to its might, to its power. All writhing together to worship at its linen-wrapped base.

My back lawn is beginning to stink. The odor is terrible. I'm surprised no one has inquired about it yet. But I guess the smell is understandable. Little annoyances like that have little significance now. And my house is so far away from everything.

Maybe no one's noticed the smell yet.

They are dying now. Oh, there are new arrivals all the time. Every minute, it seems, a thousand more arrive. A thousand dongs trailing a thousand sets of abducted balls. The late arrivals must be swimmers, those that braved the stormy waters of the rolling seas. Religious pilgrims from the tiny islands of the blue Pacific, haunts of men who may never know why this thing has happened to them.

You'd think that someone would *follow* them here, wouldn't you? You'd think that *someone* would try to find out where they've all been headed, wouldn't you? Perhaps they're doing that now. Perhaps the angry hoards are descending upon me as I write.

I suppose I'll allow you to take some slight consolation that mine was the first to go. There was a quick, sharp pain as it abandoned me and slithered down my leg. But I shed no blood. And I felt no further physical pain worth mentioning. I felt elation as it slithered across the grass, dragging its orb'd brothers jauntily behind it. In a matter of minutes, it was lost in a writhing sea of early arrivals.

They've nearly stopped arriving now. All the restless dongs of the world renouncing their owners and traveling here to the stench of my back lawn to worship and writhe and die.

The curtains have started to come loose from the cedar. I can no longer see tree underneath them. Instead, I see flesh. A great tan tube of it, showing itself through the widening seams of its wrapping.

Think of it!

A forty-foot cock!

And I *created* it! I *made* a god! I did this thing to all of you.

You do realize you are witnessing the end of the human race?

That soon there will no longer be any cattle. And no pigs. No more wolves, nor sheep, nor birds, nor mice. And, of course, no more human beings.

For this land will remain sacred ground forever. Phalluses will continue to slither here until the last has arrived. Even those from newborn babes. They will never know the joys of their own sweet tools. Their tiny dongs will abandon them at birth.

I'm going to call the newspaper.

You do know that bees have tiny little cocks, too, don't you? And since all the males will lose them, the bees won't be able to pollinate the plants. As a result, no more plants. No more corn or wheat.

Starvation will sweep the planet clean.

Well, not *all* will starve, though. I'm expecting the first of the fated survivors to arrive any time now.

Meanwhile, I write this letter, and watch the dying cocks writhing obscenely on the slimy lawn--the living wriggling sensually among the stinking dead.

Suddenly, I see the shadow falling over them all. It is growing bigger. And the sky itself is becoming dark.

I hear the flapping of gigantic wings. A terrifying wind is blowing! The curtains are being ripped from the god! And I see it clearly now. Yes! It is fully revealed! Naked! A spire of turgid flesh! Throbbing straight and strong into the darkening sky.

And the darkness descends!

It is settling over my back yard. A

giant bat! Its legs spread wide, its taloned feet easing toward the littered ground, it settles cunt-first onto the pulsing tip of the giant cock, taking the full length of it deep inside itself.

It screams in orgasmic pain.

And then, while still impaled upon the shaft, it bends itself double, its great fanged mouth dripping putrid saliva, pushing its nose through the layers of the dead, biting into the earth itself! It hungrily scoops out a great brown chunk of soil, and swallows it loudly.

There will be no starvation for the eater of the dirt.

It raises its ugly head to the sun, and then propels itself skyward, sliding easily off the staff.

She is screaming in joy now.

Screaming in triumph.

Announcing herself to the world.

Announcing to all that she is pregnant with the new inheritors of this tiny, swirling, stinking globe. She will be spewing them across the planet before too long. She will bear both male and female. The females will be the flyers.

The males are fated to be only wingless shafts, anchored to the soil

on which they will feed through vast and slimy roots. All the females will be lusty breeders, always ready to seek out the forever-willing and potent males. Both sexes will share the same fervent goals: to eat, to copulate, to reproduce.

Occasionally, groups of females will return here to worship their primal father; some will even be allowed to mate with him. No incest taboos among these liberated flyers.

The primal mother will be back for me soon.

The book describes the next part quite clearly. She will circle the god twelve times, and then she will come after me.

"The beast will eviscerate the male who summoned her. She will pull out his entrails and spread them to bake and ooze in the sun as her own offering to the glory of the phallic god."

I lay down my pen, now.

Afterwards, in my finest Promethean stride, I will walk to the god and wait patiently for that which is destined to be.

--NB

SIGHT UNSEEN

Little Cindy Ann knew things no one else knew;
saw things no one else saw. Ever since she'd nearly died
of fever, the gift of second sight had been hers.

Only it didn't seem like such a gift when the other
children called her a witch and wouldn't play with her.

Or when her visions resembled nothing so much
as her worst nightmares...

DEATH UNDYING

Then her older brother disappeared in the vicinity
of the old tobacco barn. And Cindy's visions began to
burn with a bloodthirsty relentless hatred.

What horrors lay buried in the cold earth of the barn?

HINDSIGHT

RONALD KELLY



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UN LISTED

Merry Fucking Christmas!

by William Relling Jr.



Paul Sandoval dialed the number for the first time at 11:40 P.M. on New Year's Eve.

A woman's voice answered, her tone sweetly sympathetic, undercut with compassion. "Crisis Hotline."

Sandoval's voice quivered. "I--um--I think I need to talk to somebody..."

"What's your name?"

"My name?"

"Um-hm."

"Um--Sand--Sandoval."

"Is that your first name?"

"No," he said. "It's Paul. Paul Sandoval."

"That's better," said the voice. "What's the matter, Paul? How can I help you?"

The words flowed as if from a spigot. "I just--I just can't take it any more. I don't see the point." He paused, screwing up his courage, then said in a defeated voice, "I can't see any reason to go on."

The woman's voice clucked. "You poor, poor man. You have no idea how badly it makes me feel to hear you say that. But things can't be so awful that you'd want to kill yourself--"

"Oh no?" he said indignantly.

"Well, how 'bout this? Last week, on Christmas Eve, I lost my job. It was like something out of Ebenezer Scrooge. The district manager of the store where I worked came up to me and said, 'Mr. Sandoval, we warned you three months ago about cashing your checks out of the store's register, and now I find out this morning that you've been doing it again.' 'But I thought you just meant I couldn't cash my paychecks,' I said, 'not my personal checks.' 'I meant *any* checks, Mr. Sandoval. You're fired.' Boom. Just like that. Merry Fucking Christmas."

"My God," said the voice, "that's terrible..."

His own voice was breaking. "That was only the first thing. Three days ago, I came home from looking for a new job--and who the hell is around in any personnel department to hire somebody during the holidays, have you ever thought of that? I came home in the middle of the afternoon, and my wife was gone. The whole damn apartment was empty, except for my clothes. And a note that said, 'Have a nice life.' That's it."

"Oh, Paul, why--?"

"And then, this morning," he sobbed, aware of warm tears dribbling down his cheek. "My mother--she--had a stroke. She's only fifty-five, for Christssake, and the doctor said it was as if a bomb went off inside her brain..."

"Oh my..."

"She's the only one I've got left," he choked. "And she doesn't--neither one of us has any insurance. I don't know how we'll pay the bills..."

Sandoval paused. The other end of the line had become silent, as if whoever was there had gone away. After a moment, he said into the phone, "Hello?" A dark uncertainty colored the world.

When the woman's voice spoke at last, all traces of compassion had deserted it. "I think you're right, Paul," she said, her tone now tinged with weary resignation. "You *should* kill yourself."

Sandoval gasped. "What did you say?" he asked, his voice clutching with disbelief.

"I said I think you should do it."

(continued on pg. 58)



THE HAUNTED GARDEN

*Winter kills,
but love is quicker . . .*

by Francis J. Matozzo

“You lookin’ for topsoil? I can get you a truckload . . . Cheap, too.”

Joel Farrington turned from the bar and stared at the two scruffy men at the other end, a hot-wire of anger surging through him. That was the worst thing about bars, he decided: strangers sticking their noses into other people’s business.

He turned to the thin, blonde man who had spoken. “You writing a book or something?”

The man laughed. The bartender leaned over the counter with both hands folded and said: “Looks like your problems are solved, Mr. Farrington.”

“Just couldn’t help hearing, mister,” the blonde man said. “You say you can’t get no topsoil anywhere, right? Well, I can help.”

“Must be my lucky day,” Joel said contemptuously.

The blonde man laughed again and nudged his partner, whose head hung so low over the bar that it threatened to tip over his glass of beer. Both were dressed in dirty plaid workshirts, as if they’d come straight from the farm.

Two hicks, Joel thought. Two drunken hicks. It had been a bad day all around and his mood with everyone had been hostile. He’d stopped at the bar to unwind, but now felt more wired than ever. Part of his ugly mood was because of the damned topsoil—he wanted to plant the garden before June, but because of the recent heavy rainstorms, all the local nurseries were unable to deliver the supply he needed. The rest of it—Joyce, the mounting bills, the corresponding lack of money, the difficulties of first-time parents—he tried not to think too much about.

Why does getting a lousy pile of dirt have to be as complicated as everything else?

“So—how cheap?” he finally asked in a less abrasive tone.

Blondie’s friend looked up with blood shot eyes; he had black hair, three days growth on his face, and more than a few wrinkles. “F’free,” he slurred.

Blondie laughed; not a cocky laugh, only insincere and nervous. “Course it’s not free. How’s thirty bucks sound?”

“I need a full truckload--”

“Thirty bucks, mate.”

“And I’m not talking rocks--”

“No sir. Roto-tilled!”

The man with his face in his drink looked up again. “Tell him where ya got the stuff. Go ahead.”

The blonde man frowned. “You’re drunk.”

“Maybe, but I still know what I know. You’re buyin’ cemetery dirt, mister. Graveyard gravel! Dirt that’s been sittin’ on top of the dead fer over a hunnert years!”

“Cuz, you’re crazy--drunk and crazy.”

“Is this true?” Joel asked.

“It’s true the old Sandy Hill Cemetery just been razed to make way for condos,” Blondie said with a wry grin. “And yeah, it’s true I got the dirt from the contractor at the building site. But this ain’t no dirt ever covered a grave.”

The older man snorted and motioned to the bartender for another beer. “Ya ain’t got no morals, Jake.”

“Sounds like a good deal to me,” the bartender said, moving to the tap. “What the hell--thirty dollars? Dirt is

dirt, know what I mean?"

When Joel returned home from work that Friday, a pile of topsoil was waiting for him at the end of the driveway like a sized-to-scale mountain.

"Where did you find those two?" Joyce asked when he entered the house.

"Hello to you, too," he answered, walking past her to where Joel Junior was sitting in his highchair, crying for the bottle that was warming on the stove. Scooping him out of the highchair, Joel nuzzled his fat cheeks and inhaled that special baby scent, part Johnson's powder, part Gerber applesauce. Joel Jr. smiled and clucked in return, tears forgotten on his cheeks.

"So they brought the topsoil?" he asked without turning.

"You mean you didn't see it?"

"Of course, I saw it. Excuse me for trying to make small talk."

"Those two derelicts dropped it like garbage in the driveway."

"Is it asking too much to come home just *one* night and have you be civil?"

"Oh, I beg your forgiveness," she retorted, staring at him with harsh, bitter eyes.

He looked at her then, and in that instant wondered at how they had changed. Joyce had gained forty pounds carrying the baby--too much for her petite frame--and all of her attempts to lose the weight seemed doomed to failure. Her entire appearance, once so lithely sexy, now seemed haggard; she rarely wore make-up, her straight brown hair needed a perm, and her eyes were perpetually darkened by circles. For the first time in her life, she was sitting at home, not earning a wage, caring constantly for the baby and watching the bills mount. As much a blessing as Joel Jr. was, he had changed their lives irrevocably.

"Look," he said, softening his voice, "I didn't mean anything. I just asked a simple question. Why do you always get so upset?"

"Oh, sure," she snapped. "I *always* get upset. It's all fine, you come home, kiss the baby, sit and eat supper. But who was up with him all last night? Who's been carrying him around all day because he won't stop crying? Don't come home and expect some

kind of red-carpet treatment. Just don't"

"This is a damn waste of time," Joel said angrily, and he stormed out of the room and climbed the stairs to the bedroom, the renewed cries of the baby ringing in his ears.

Joel started work early the next morning, loading the wheel barrows with soil and rolling it to the side of the house, where he had measured out a space for the garden. The sweat quickly poured off him as he worked, and with each trip the wheel barrow grew heavier. Still, he worked like a man possessed, fueled by the anger that lingered in him, and the day went quickly. By mid-afternoon, he found himself crouching in front of the completed garden, exhausted but calm.

The garden was a two-tiered affair, approximately twenty square feet, set off with railroad ties and spaced evenly with large rocks. Reaching out, he touched the dirt, enjoying the moist texture between his fingers, wondering what history it held. He imagined the voices of people who worked the soil before him, people who had made their sweat one with the earth. He smiled at the thought of farmers, at the sound of their voices calling in the fields; or children at play--surely children had at one time built roads and forts with this dirt. He could almost hear them laughing.

He heard the clanking of artillery and infantry, the passionate sighs of lovers, the dreams of newlyweds, the hot desperate breath of killers.

His smile faded.

Slowly he pulled his hand back, encrusted with dirt.

Graveyard gravel.

The phrase echoed in his head, along with a vivid picture: a spade sweeping dirt over a black coffin, a mist-shrouded cemetery.

"Joel?"

He turned swiftly and saw Joyce standing behind him with the baby in her arms. "God, don't sneak up on me like that."

"I thought you heard me."

He sighed, looked at the garden, then back at his wife. She was dressed in a tan blouse and a tight pair of designer jeans that she had bought before the pregnancy. A pair she had

worn only once; now she could only wear them around the house with the top button undone.

Joyce smiled at him and he felt whatever was left of his anger vanish. "I can't wait to plant."

"It's going to look good."

Joel Jr. looked at him and started to punch the air in excitement. Joel laughed, tickling the child's neck. "You think so too, huh buddy?"

"Joel, I'm sorry," Joyce said.

"For what?"

"I don't mean to be the way I am. I don't mean to be so miserable all the time. You must be sick of me."

"Don't say that! And don't apologize."

"You must hate to walk in the door at night."

"C'mon, Joyce, give yourself a break. You've had a bigger adjustment to make than me. I mean, this is all new to us. You can't get down on yourself. Everything'll work out."

"I hope you're right," she whispered.

"Of course I'm right," he said, taking the baby out of her arms. He lifted him high above his head, the sun reflecting off his blue, evanescent eyes--his mother's eyes. The wet, toothless smile the baby gave seemed to be the most perfect thing in the world.

In the first two weeks, Joyce took an avid interest in the maintenance of the garden. She planted a variety of colorful flowers, took great pains to properly spread the cedar mulch so that it was both attractive and useful and, when the garden was set the way she wanted it, watered the plants twice a day. Joel himself had little to do with it at first; occasionally, on weeknights after work, or on the weekends when the baby was napping, he would help pull the few weeds that managed to squeak through the mulch.

Then Joyce just stopped. It wasn't a gradual loss of interest, but simply an abrupt halt, like a recently opened window that unexpectedly slammed shut.

Joyce didn't offer any reason, and Joel didn't press her. He simply took over her duties.

But despite the change in caretakers--or perhaps because of it--the garden
(continued on pg. 57)



Prose & Conversation

Horror critic Edgar F. Tatro returns with "Eddie & Amontillado," the truth behind Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado."

On long hot summer nights my family and I often drive ten miles north of Braintree, Massachusetts, to a small peninsula in South Boston to beat the heat. Despite the roaring engines of Logan Airport, thousands of Bostonians trek to Castle Island nightly. The visitors are unusually friendly and the food at Sullivan's is simple, but delicious. The ocean breezes lower the temperature considerably and there are long walkways to enjoy good exercise, pleasant company, and the beautiful Atlantic sea coast.

Ah, but there's also a *New Blood* reason for touring this ponderous granite-stoned "castle" known as Fort Independence. In 1817 a perfect crime--a vengeful murder--was committed within its confines, which later inspired the master of the horror story, Edgar Allan Poe, to pen one of his finest achievements, "The Cask of Amontillado." Be seated, class, and we shall begin.

In 1827, Poe, using the alias "Henry Le Rennet," stowed away on a coal barge from Virginia to Boston to escape his tyrannical stepfather, John Allan. His late mother, an actress, had always spoken kindly of Boston, also Poe's birthplace. Thus he travelled north, but none of his early associates could be located.

Down on his luck, Poe enlisted in the army under another assumed name, Edgar A. Perry, to hide his whereabouts from Allan and to avoid detection that he was only seventeen years old and therefore officially ineligible for military service. For these same reasons Poe's first collection of poems, "Tammerlane and Other Poems," published that same year, identified the author only as "a Bostonian." (A copy of the forty-page booklet, recently purchased at an Sotheby Gallery auction, sold for \$198,000.

Only twelve of the original fifty manuscripts are known to exist. Poe had sold them on the streets of Boston for two or three cents apiece in 1827.)

During his stay at the fort, Private Perry's curiosity was piqued by a gravestone situated upon a grassy incline just outside his granite domain. A monument had been erected by officers of the fort "as a testimony of their respect and friendship for an amiable man and gallant officer."

Another inscription read: "Beneath this stone are deposited the remains of Lt. Robert F. Massie of the U.S. Regiment of Light Artillery. Near this spot on the 25th, Dec., fell Lt. Robert F. Massie, aged 21 years."

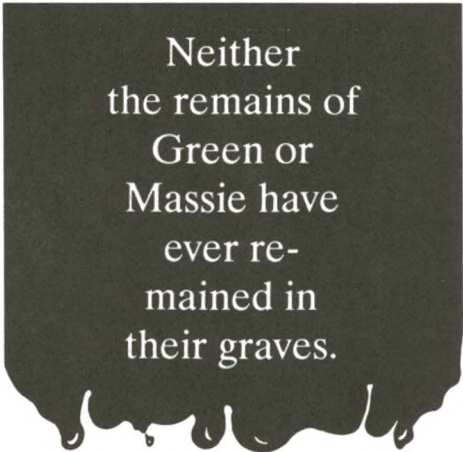
It is easy to imagine the detective in Poe, the inventor of tales of ratiocination, searching for the truth about the death of a young man so close to his own age, so popular and successful already, and on Christmas Eve, of all nights. The fact that Massie was a native Virginian would no doubt motivate Poe also, who had grown up with the Allans on their estate in Virginia.

Poe apparently had difficulty learning the actual circumstances surrounding Massie's demise, since all officers with direct knowledge of the entire incident were no longer stationed at the fort. Such an unusual occurrence, a virtual disappearing act, must have made Poe suspicious, as well. At any rate, Poe's knowledge was, at best, secondhand and ten years old, but he managed to assemble the mysterious pieces of the puzzle.

On Christmas Eve, 1817, one Captain Green accused Lt. Massie of cheating at cards. A duel was arranged to take place at Dearborn Bastion Christmas morning. Green, a master swordsman, proceeded to run Massie through and the young man died later that day at the fort. Merry Christmas, indeed.

After the Massie monument was erected, word reached Massie's loyalists that Green had perpetrated similar atrocities upon at least half-dozen other victims at other military installations.

Vengeance was inevitable, but the Army never officially learned or revealed the truth. Captain Green



Neither
the remains of
Green or
Massie have
ever re-
mained in
their graves.

simply vanished one night and was subsequently declared AWOL.

Poe's version was circumstantial, gruesome, and bad for Army public relations, but was clearly more realistic. Massie's friends in the dead of night coaxed an intoxicated Captain Green down to the bowels of the fort. There in some obscure alcove of an unused dungeon, they shackled him inside and walled up the entrance like a sealed tomb. Amen Captain Green.

Once the commander of the fort was informed of Poe's "findings," he forced him never to reveal the Massie/Green story outside the walls of Fort Independence. Technically, he never did, but in 1846, he released "The Cask of Amontillado," a tale of murderous revenge set in Italy. No duels, no soldiers, no monuments--not even a fort, but a hapless individual is buried alive. More importantly, Poe wrote what most modern critics consider the perfect short story and perhaps the finest example of dramatic irony in literature.

And speaking of irony, neither the remains of Green or Massie ever remained in their graves. In 1905, workmen discovered the shackled bones of Captain Green in the walled-up alcove, but true to form, the Army merely buried them in a Castle Island cemetery plot marked "unknown," thereby certifying Captain Green as AWOL for eighty-eight years.

Meanwhile, Massie's bones have been moved four times since 1817: from Castle Island to a Governor's Island cemetery in 1892 to an officers' cemetery at Deer Island in 1908, and finally in 1939 to Fort Devens in

Ayer, Massachusetts.

Fort Independence received a partial facelift several years ago when some of the upper internal rooms were modestly refurbished. These areas can be visited free of charge on certain summer weekends, but once Proposition 2½ passed--a tax reduction bill--the project ceased. The opportunity to gaze upon Captain Green's hellhole will probably never occur. Perhaps that only adds to the mystique.

Let's talk a bit now about why "Amontillado" is considered a masterpiece. For starters, "Cask" is a classic prose-poem--a short, tightly-knit slice of man's inhumanity to man climaxing with a totality of effect, just as Poe had planned.

Recently, J.N. Williamson, a modern horror wordsmith, said of *New Blood* stories: "Outstanding! What I like about the fiction is the way it gets to it, with none of the tales actually beginning somewhere on page three, but with the first line!"

"Cask" is the archetype for such stories. The opening sentence "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge" reveals to us the role of the narrator, the nature of the motive, and the name of the intended target as deftly as a surgeon making his first incision.

Before the first paragraph has ended, the narrator informs us that he did not give "utterance to a threat," indicating that Fortunato is unaware of his danger. His profound philosophy for revenge is economical with words, but no less menacing. Sweet vengeance is twofold: one must "not only punish, but punish with impunity," thus not being apprehended by the law for the deed which is planned, and making himself "felt as such to him who has done the wrong," which stipulates that the victim shall know the identity of his tormentor. For the astute reader the plan has been revealed. Only murder will allow the avenger to escape retribution while revealing his identity to the victim.

From this point forth the quintessence of irony takes center stage. Not even the magnificent wit of O. Henry

or Saki can compete with the clever handiwork of Edgar Allan Poe. Fortunato's nickname in a modern setting would be "Lucky," a sign of good fortune, yet Fortunato is about to meet a ghastly fate.

When our killer meets Fortunato, he smiles in his face to show good will, but the ironic intent is one of intense malice, not friendship. Similarly, when the narrator finally encounters "his friend," a sheer case of blatant sarcasm, he claims he is so pleased to see Fortunato that he has difficulty in refraining from "wringing his hand." Shaking hands is no longer a gesture of comradeship, but one of sadistic bliss at having found his unsuspecting mark.

The story takes place "during the supreme madness of the carnival season," a type of European Mardi Gras. (Poe often used masquerade parties in his stories as a means to depict people as deceivers and charlatans. See the "Masque of the Red Death," "Hop-Frog," and "William Wilson" as perfect examples.) Reminiscent of Halloween, the narrator and Fortunato are wearing costumes, only theirs possess allegorical implications. The narrator wears a roquelaire and mask of black silk--the outfit of an Inquisitorial executioner--and Fortunato wears "a tight-fitting parti-striped dress" and "the conical cap and bells," the garb of a court jester.

Throughout literature the court jester or fool has represented the shrewd seer of the king's regime. Regardless of setting or time, the fool is our profound guide through the purpose of existence. He, alone, has worldly perspective and insight. He reveals the significance and themes in man's acts.

Whether we are discussing Shakespeare's many jesters or Melville's Swede in *Billy Budd* or Poe's own crippled dwarf in "Hop-Frog," the fool is never a fool. In "The Cask of Amontillado" Poe reverses literary tradition by depicting Fortunato as the ultimate buffoon who voluntarily walks to his own destruction without any semblance of awareness. Poe has developed an ingenious ironic coup by disclosing his fool as the king of fools, an unmitigated, drunken idiot.

We now learn the narrator's plan. He intends to murder Fortunato in his

The narrator
wears a
roquelaire and
a mask
of black silk--
the outfit
of an Inquisitorial
executioner . . .

wine cellar by enticing the fool, a self-styled wine connoisseur, to visit his subterranean vaults under the pretense that he has purchased a pipe, or keg, of Amontillado, a very expensive sherry which is extremely rare and virtually impossible to obtain, especially during the carnival season.

The murderer is very confident and clever. He is aware that he must convince Fortunato to willingly offer to visit his vaults, not simply request his presence. Fortunato might easily refuse to perform such a mundane task in favor of party time, but the narrator knows that all potential witnesses are preoccupied with carnival merriment and now is the time to act.

He uses reverse psychology to sucker his victim into the vaults. He preys upon Fortunato's pride by informing him that he intends to ask Luchesi, another wine taster and obviously a rival of Fortunato's, to determine the Amontillado's authenticity.

When the name Luchesi is announced, it is like a knife searing into Fortunato's pride, who proclaims his own ignorance by exclaiming "Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from sherry." The narrator replies "And yet, some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own." The "fool" remark manages to slip past Fortunato's dull brain. It is inevitable that Fortunato will not only insist upon visiting the nitre-encrusted vaults despite the insufferably damp conditions, but he will also hurry his own murderer to the scene of his demise.

The killer has employed reverse psychology with his servants as well, only to a different end--he informs his

attendants that despite his absence all night, they were "not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well know, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned." The narrator's awareness of human nature is uncanny.

The men begin their descent. They carry flambeaux for lighting. The cheerful atmosphere of the carnival no longer exists. The narrator, his voice drenched in sarcasm, asks Fortunato "to be cautious" on the winding staircase. Pathetic Fortunato, who has a cold, begins to cough and the narrator warns about the engulfing nitre, an underground potassium gas that is unhealthy for weakened lungs.

The narrator offers Fortunato an opportunity to escape. "Come, we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi--"

Fortunato is metaphorically stabbed by the second mention of Luchesi. He is so blinded by his own foolish pride that he fails to ask his associate why he is no longer happy or why his life no longer matters. He responds with a superficial "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough." The narrator's "True--true." is a classic in gallows humor and one of Poe's most memorable witticisms.

Venturing farther toward their non-existent goal, the men drink a bottle of Medoc. Fortunato's bells occasionally jingle as he guzzles the wine. Poe is reminding us that Fortunato is dressed as a silly fool, an allegedly sophisticated connoisseur in a clown outfit. The jingling of the bells assures us that he is still a buffoon.

Fortunato proves the point by toasting "the buried that repose around us," not realizing that he has just toasted his own carcass. The narrator joins in by toasting Fortunato's "long life," another sarcastic salvo that falls upon ears that might as well be deaf.

Our narrator finally reveals his name by informing Fortunato that "the Montresors were a great and numerous family." Again Fortunato does not grasp

the significance of the use of past tense. It's clear that Fortunato's "insult" is central to the destruction of Montresor's family, riches, honor, and happiness, but we never learn whether Fortunato is guilty of some heinous libel or slander or whether Montresor is incurably paranoid and thereby insane. Our only chance for resolution is lost since we must depend upon Fortunato's inquisitiveness and sensitivity to Montresor's anguish, but the fool has none to offer.

Instead of questioning the past tense of Montresor's greatness or comforting Montresor in his depressed state, Fortunato the simpleton asks for a description of the Montresor coat of arms. Montresor's quick wit invents an allegorical whopper—a huge human foot of gold crushing a serpent whose fangs are embedded in the heel.

We have two revealing symbols representing two doomed characters. The golden foot's death will be consummated with Fortunato's burial in the crypt, but the serpent representing Montresor is also being fatally crushed by the foot. Three possible interpretations exist. The first—that Montresor is arrested for his crime—is wrong. The second, that Montresor has already been annihilated by Fortunato's mysterious insult is acceptable, but a third possibility will emerge at the closing of the tale (patience, class, patience). Is it possible that Montresor's warning about nitre and his gloomy innuendos are more than a taunting game foreshadowing Fortunato's death? Is it possible that he would rather avoid murdering his former friend and abort his diabolical plot? Stay tuned.

Fortunato now asks for Montresor's family motto and the response in Latin is far from subtle: "Nemo me impune lacessit," which means "None injures me with impunity." Fortunato's response is "Good," which is proof positive that he truly is a drunken dunce.

After another eerie warning about nitre and moisture trickling among the bones, Fortunato empties a flagon of DeGrave and performs an unspecified grotesque movement with the bottle, apparently a common activity to those of the Masonic brotherhood. When Montresor expresses astonishment at

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the act, Fortunato claims that Montresor is not a Mason. When confronted to substantiate he is one, our prospective murderer produces a trowel from beneath the folds of his robe. Poe scores admirably again. Not only is a trowel an actual emblem of the Masonic Order, but it is also a primary tool of a stone mason or bricklayer.

Fortunato dismisses the incident as a clever play on words and ventures forth in search of the Amontillado. He never even momentarily wonders why Montresor would possess such an implement in these circumstances. Montresor says "Be it so," which is the death knell for Fortunato. No more warnings, no more innuendos, no more games.

As the foulness of the air causes their flambeaux rather to glow than flame, they reach their destination. Fortunato is instructed to enter the alcove. "Herein is the Amontillado," Montresor says; "As for Luchesi—" but Fortunato interrupts by calling his rival an ignoramus.

At this point Fortunato, standing "stupidly bewildered" at the absence of the Amontillado, is immediately shackled in chains to the granite wall. The irony of Fortunato's scorn for his rival's intellect hits dead center. Man is always seeing his own faults in others. Luchesi is not an ignoramus. Guess who is?

After Montresor spews out a vindictive and sarcastic offer to allow Fortunato's return, he begins "vigorously to wall up the entrance to the niche." For seven tiers Montresor appears to enjoy Fortunato's agony, the cry that was not from a drunken man

and "the furious vibrations of the chain," but "a succession of loud and shrill screams" cause him to hesitate and tremble. He considers using his rapier to finish the deed, but once he is secure that no one can hear the man through "the solid fabric of the catacombs," Montresor performs a hellish act so fiendish that very few evil characters in fiction or fact have surpassed it.

Montresor gloats "I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I re-echoed—I aided—I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamor grew still."

Mankind has always cringed at humiliation, at rejection, at death. Poe marries the three into a hideous web as Montresor mocks Fortunato's last desperate cries for sanity and salvation. There is a macabre sense of twisted humor here, that razor-sharp line between comedy and tragedy that *New Blood* readers know only too well. But ultimately, the grimness of the act holds dominion.

It is now midnight, the witching hour, the Poe hour, and we hear "a low laugh" that erects the hairs on Montresor's head. Only Poe could exploit hyperbole as a serious effect and succeed. No reader envisions Buckwheat's curly locks floating in mid-air as he confronts some silly ghost in Spanky's backyard. We are too busy reeling within our own insecure minds.

Fortunato considers one last possibility. Perhaps the whole incident is a charade, a warped practical joke pushed to the extreme. He asks "Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone."

Montresor replies "Yes. Let us be gone." The seething mockery persists like a strangle-hold. Montresor intends to exit the crypt while Fortunato will leave this life.

At last even the ironic fool catches on and screams "For the love of God, Montresor!" The final overwhelming plea for life wails in our ears, but his last words are met with mockery again, as Montresor replies "Yes, for the love of God," as if to say "Good riddance, fool!"

Our last communication from Fortunato is a jingling of the bells, no longer a device for comic relief, but a grim reminder that the deed is done and irreversibly so.

Montresor claims "My heart grew sick--on account of the dampness of the catacombs." The dash is Poe's effective means of exposing Montresor as a liar. The dash signifies hesitation, a brief opportunity to invent some lame excuse for his sick heart.

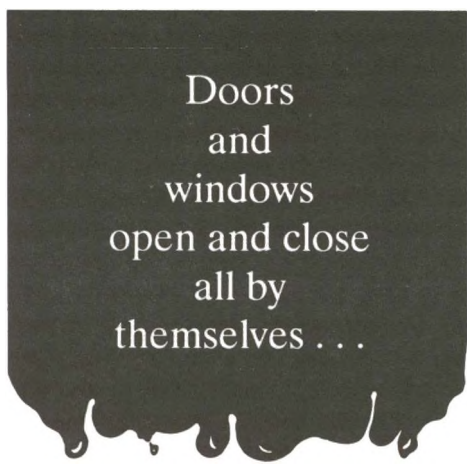
He hastens to end his labor. Only minutes earlier he had ceased his work to enjoy Fortunato's torment, but such is no longer the case.

We learn that the murderous deed was committed fifty years ago. Why is Montresor confessing? Does an old man wish to make peace with God? The answer is given in Latin, the last three words of the story. "In Pace Requiescat!" The familiar words "Rest in Peace"--always pronounced over the dead, in sermons, at graves, on floral displays--are foolish words wasted on those who *are* at peace simply because they are dead.

Poe's *raison d'être* was to make us squirm uneasily. He was aware that it is the living who never rest in peace, and so Montresor lived his own private hell for fifty years knowing he killed his friend. Montresor, the crushed serpent, felt the acid of guilt eating at his conscience for half a century, while Fortunato rested peacefully. A classic irony--we mourn the dead, but it is the living who must rise each morning and face the world. Ah, then, who is the fool?

On a lighter note, a sequel to "The Cask of Amontillado" was written by Archie Goodwin and published in comic book form some fifteen years ago. Our old friend, Montresor, decides to visit the crypt on the fiftieth anniversary of the murder. As he reaches the tomb, an odd rumbling sound arrests his movements. Water from the river above has leaked into the niche of the crypt. The building pressure bursts the wall and tons of gallons of water inundate the narrow catacombs.

An ancient Montresor, hoping to reach the winding staircase in time, makes every effort to wade through the



Doors
and
windows
open and close
all by
themselves ...

torrent of water. Suddenly he gasps; his leg is snagged on something. The something is a gleeful skeleton in a jester outfit clinging to his leg!

For those with a taste for real ghosts, let's return to Fort Independence for a moment. In 1974, two teenagers picked a lock, entered the fort at night, and found themselves lost in the underground vaults for four terrifying hours. When rescued and charged with breaking and entering, they admitted to hearing noises within the closed-off dungeon. Probably rats, right?

Enter Thomas O'Brien, the fort's maintenance man who keeps an open mind. "There are a lot of unexplained things in this world," O'Brien says, "and just because a person doesn't believe in them doesn't mean he isn't afraid of them. There have been times when I've heard moans or cries and I would like to find the source. When I arrived at a closed-up passage, the noises mysteriously stopped."

Poe and ghosts seem inseparable. In the ghetto district of Baltimore--known as the Poe projects--stands an old house at 203 North Amity Street. In 1832 Poe wrote the taboo "Berenice"--perhaps the first unofficial *New Blood* story.

Jeff Jerome, the curator of Poe House, admits "We've never been robbed. The kids in the neighborhood are afraid to come in. They swear there are things in the basement."

The inner city gangs of Baltimore believe Poe House is haunted by the ghost of "Mr. Eddie" and perhaps they're right. During the rioting that followed the assassination of Martin

Luther King in 1968, all electrical power in the area was interrupted, yet neighbors reported to the police that the Poe House lights flickered all night long. The police surrounded the house and witnessed lights also, but no explanation surfaced.

The curator also admits to seeing doors and windows open and close by themselves and that mystics and mediums who have visited do believe the house to be haunted. Probably rats again, right?

Regardless of what you believe, it is still appropriate to label Edgar Allan Poe the grand master of the horror genre. One of his contemporaries said Poe was "three-fifths genius and two-fifths fudge." If so, the rest of us must be five-fifths fudge, or worse.

Fortunately, some Bostonians still recognize his immense literary status. There are even some wise elderly folks of South Boston who offer informal tours of Fort Independence during spring and summer and still tell the tale of Lt. Massie and Captain Green. They call themselves "The Friends of Castle Island."

On January 19, 1989--the 180th anniversary of Poe's birth--members of the Edgar Allan Poe Memorial Committee place a plaque honoring Poe in the alleyway near the luggage shop at 176 Boylston Street in Boston. The alleyway--all that is left of Carver Street (Poe was born at 62 Carver Street, near what is now part of a Boston-Edison parking lot)--has been renamed Edgar Allan Poe Way.

Poe's mother, Elizabeth, an accomplished actress, often received public and critical acclaim in Boston. She once drew a sketch of Boston Harbor and penned the following inscription: "For my little son, Edgar, who shall ever love Boston, the city of his birth where his mother found her best and most sympathetic friends." It is comforting to know that her son still has plenty of friends in Boston who revere his memory and greatness.

Perhaps next summer you can visit Castle Island and we can organize a search party to look for Captain Green, Amontillado, and "Mr. Eddie." I know I'll be there. After all, we Edgars stick together. --NB

ROTTEN MEAT

*No one noticed any smell. Except Kramer.
But he had other things on his mind . . .*

by Crispin Burnham

Where's that wretched smell coming from?

The smell, like that of a nest of dead rats left in the wall a very long time ago, worsened with each succeeding day. Freddy Kramer checked his refrigerator to see if any meat had spoiled, but that wasn't the answer. He scratched his Marine-regulation haircut, wondering, *If not the refrigerator, then what?*

Kramer asked his neighbors if they smelled anything, but everywhere he went, he got the same story: no one had even noticed a hint of any bad smells. Kramer definitely knew the smell of rotten meat.

Until a few weeks ago, he worked as head cook at the Town Inn in Lawrence. He had thrown out a lot of meat that had sat in the walk-in for way too long. Actually, he gave it all to the dishwasher to either dump down the garbage disposal or throw out in the trash.

He hated dishwashers, or one dishwasher in particular: Frank Reed. He'd worked at the Inn for over ten years and was their best dishwasher, except that he followed the orders of

the management, not Kramer's.

One night, the manager, Mike Towers, came back to the dish area and asked Reed, "Frank, could you please hurry on the silverware? We're completely out!"

Kramer, noticing that he was running low on platters, screamed, "Platters!"

"Sorry," Reed replied, "they need silverware out front. You'll have to come and get your own platters."

"Can't! Platters!" Kramer roared again, hoping someone else would help out.

"Shut up, Kramer!" Towers responded.

"Damn managers!" Kramer said later to his best friend and fellow cook, Willie Sykes. "They should work the line and see what it's like to run out of plates during a rush, that the dishwasher's too busy sorting silverware or unloading overloaded busses that the bus people should've brought back a long time ago. Damn busses. If *I* had *my* way, all the busses would be *shot* at the end of their shift!"

Sykes laughed and joined in.

"While you're at it, shoot the waitresses, hostesses, and *especially* the managers and the dishwashers."

Everyone on the cooks' line joined in with the laughter, even Kramer, but in the back of his mind was the overpowering desire to get back at Reed.

And he did, for the next several weeks.

He put dead rats under plates in the cooks' bus tub, left unemptied boxes lying about on delivery day, forcing Reed to stay late and clean the equipment inside; he even knocked over all the batter buckets in the walk-in. Finally, Towers had to have a talk with him.

"Know how much that last stunt cost us, Kramer? Not only did you waste a week's supply of pancake batter, you *also* cost overtime for Reed. What are you trying to do, bankrupt us?"

"N-no sir."

"Well, let me tell you, Kramer, if I catch you pulling anything else, I'll *fire* your ass. Understand?"

"But what about the plates? Your
(continued on page 59)

FLUSHED

"Danny turned his head and spit out another maggot."

by Michael Olson

She'd sat right down at the water's edge, not even giving a thought to the staining she'd given her white denim shorts.

How unlike her, Danny had thought. But it had obviously been a clear sign of her objection.

He could just remember . . .

Anna had said, "But why do you keep going back? I don't even know who these people are." She'd looked up at him then, pleadingly. "After all this time together, why does this one great mystery come between us?"

But that had been yesterday. Yes, it had been less than 24 hours ago that Danny had actually been free to marvel, without compunction, at the beauty of Anna. The touch of her hand, so gentle. The warmth of her smile, so genuine and unrestrained.

And now he wondered if he was justified in playing out yesterday's happiness-turned-illusion for the thousandth time in order to lend himself distraction from his present and uncompromising horror.

But why not? It had been such a long time ago. Hours have minutes have seconds and surely he'd

deserved someone like her. It must have happened.

Dan turned his head to the side and spit out another maggot. *I'll get him next time. I'll name him first, though. A John or another Sylvia or one of the others.*

He wondered what Anna had eaten this morning.

Anna. The walk on the beach. The gulls crying never far off. Yes. He was there again.

He was almost able to bypass the fearful part now. The part about having asked her to come along. What if she'd agreed? What if she'd said yes? It could be her instead of him. Or maybe both of them together.

That was worse, thinking of the possibilities.

Anna. The walk on the beach. And . . . the gulls. They cried and sounded almost human. Thank God she hadn't come.

"He's dead, I tell you!"

Sylvia looked up from her peeling and glared at John. "He ain't neither dead," she screeched. "Why, he squirmed plenty when I went out to

do nature!"

She bounced a potato off John's head.

"Oww." John rubbed his head and turned to Jeremiah for support.

"Maybe we shouldn't of done it to him," Jeremiah said. "Maybe we could of learned him how again." He winced at the threat of flying potatoes but Sylvia didn't let it go.

Mare stepped in. "Nope. We done the right thing. He forgot the rites. He lost the Way. Why, I could see it happenin' to him already years ago. Each time he visited, could tell he was changing, becoming not like us. Becoming more . . . city-like and . . . praww-per."

John said "If only they hadn't taken him to that ugly building when we all was so young. They shrank his head there, you know."

Sylvia shrieked. "They didn't neither shrink his head there! They just changed it so's he would have something in common with the others inside there!"

"And did ya see the way he looked at us?" Mare asked. "Like we was all toads now and he was a prince.

I'm gonna go do it to him again."

She turned her sagging bulk toward the door and as she waddled out her mounds of flesh bounced and jiggled.

Jeremiah smiled a toothless smile, showing where the years of chewing tobacco and bad dental hygiene had eaten large white holes in his gums.

Sylvia threw her greasy hair to the side and slammed one large brutish paw onto the table. And smiled.

John chuckled nervously.

Anna knew Danny would welcome a visit from her. It would be unexpected but she knew he loved pleasant surprises.

But, she knew, that wasn't the real driving force compelling her to make this trip. It was time to take matters in hand and free the both of them of this last barrier that stood between them and a successful relationship.

She turned her Coronet onto what she hoped would be the right road this time. Boy, she thought, these people really live out in the boonies.

Her thoughts turned back to Dan. *Why did he have to come here, anyway?* She felt a twinge of jealousy. *He's got me, now.*

But she knew from their conversations on the matter that it was some enduring sense of unity with these old friends that he came to miss. That was what always drew him back. He'd shared some deep (if not dark) secret with these people that had caused them to become perpetually inseparable.

She wondered what could have been that strong that it would still hold him fast. Well, she was going to draw the line--or cut it, as the case may be.

From Dan's description she recognized what must finally be the driveway. It didn't seem to go anywhere but deeper into the woods, but she maneuvered her car onto the grassy path nonetheless.

The lane was barely wide enough, and sticky, pointy branches clung to the door handles and scraped along the roof as she carefully worked her way in.

Anna winced as her bladder gave a sharp pang that told her again she was badly in need of relief. She wondered again if she shouldn't just park and do it in the woods.

She giggled. Who would see her?

She glanced off to her left at the dense foliage. For just an instant, she thought she saw something slinking along in there, keeping pace with the car.

Startled, she looked again and saw nothing. She realized that it must have been a shadow play.

Well, it can't be far now. And even in the boonies they must have a bathroom. An outhouse, she corrected. It would be an outhouse. Her bladder complained again and finding a bathroom abruptly became her primary concern.

Anna parked the car at the end of the lane and got out apprehensively. There was a run-down shack and a few outbuildings beyond the end of the drive, but surely this couldn't be the right place. Danny wouldn't have meant this dump--he couldn't possibly have any connections here.

She'd made up her mind to leave and retrace her route if need be when a sound behind her made her spin. She found herself being regarded solemnly by four of the ugliest people she had ever seen.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm looking for someone, and--"

"We know who you are!" John screamed.

Stunned, Anna rocked back on her heels.

"So you think we'll just go willingly, huh?" John raised a crudely-fashioned club into the air. "Well, I'm not going to the ugly building! We didn't go when they came before and we ain't going now!"

"No. Please, I'm just lost." Anna cringed, frantically feeling behind her for the door handle. After a heartstopping second she located it and clung to it reassuringly.

"Who are ye, girl?" Sylvia demanded. "What you want hereabouts?"

Anna struggled to catch her breath. "I'm sorry. Like I told you, I'm lost. I was looking for someone, a friend, Daniel Wakeman. I got lost. I'm sorry. I'll just leave..." She jerked the door open.

"Danny, you say? He's here."

Anna was almost inside the safe, familiar confines of the Coronet when

she heard Danny's name. Swallowing her panic, she said, "Danny? Danny's here?" She straightened up and looked around disbelievingly. "Where i-is Danny?"

"He's in the outhouse," Sylvia said. She flung her greasy mop of hair over her right shoulder, indicating the direction of a small outbuilding down the trail.

Anna was confused. It was just getting through to her that these were Danny's friends and that she'd have to deal with them on a more realistic level. She took another look at them.

They were definitely... human, but so grotesque!

And they were staring at her, waiting. "Oh! The bathroom!" Anna huffed, shaking off the spell. "Would you mind if I used it? I've got to let it fly, if you know what I mean." She laughed nervously, her eyes darting from one stonefaced stare to another.

Finally Mare said, "Sure, honey. Jeremiah. John. Take the nice lady to the outhouse."

The tall skinny one grabbed her arm and squeezed it a little too tightly. The other one said "Come on, Missy." They began pulling her toward the outhouse.

She went along slowly. "O-okay," she said, then called out, "Danny? Honey?"

But no answer came from the outhouse. The two men sniggered again and hurried her along.

Anna began to sense just how desperate her situation might be. The outhouse loomed.

They gave her a little extra shove and she went in. But the outhouse was empty.

Behind her the door slammed shut, leaving her nearly sightless in the dingy gloom. Scratching sounds came from outside and the sniggering continued.

"Hey out there!" She tried the door. An icy chill ran down her spine as she realized it was locked from the outside. "Hey! What do you think you're doing? Where the hell is Danny?" She slammed the palm of her hand against the door but it didn't budge. "Owww!"

They laughed more openly from the other side.

"Christ." Anna tried the door again but it was fastened securely. Why were they laughing at her? This wasn't normal behavior. *Who are these people? Why are they doing this to me?*

Anna turned to inspect the interior, trying to keep a cool head. Her bladder reminded her of another predicament that needed immediate attention.

If those really are Danny's friends out there, he's going to have a lot of explaining to do.

She leaned over and examined the bare boards of the seat. There was a gaping, rough-cut hole in the middle of them. She supposed that one would actually have to sit on there if . . .

"Oh Christ." She really had to go.

Anna bent down to get a better look in the semi-darkness and something else became uncomfortably apparent. The smell.

Stench, actually, and it was overwhelming.

She began to have second thoughts about sitting down. *I'll bet there's all sorts of creepy things down there. Ick!*

But some things will wait for nothing. She dropped her slacks and panties and with one hand on either side for support, she lowered herself until her bottom was inches from the leering, gaping hole.

She momentarily forgot her fears as she relieved herself. Who was it that said a good piss was better than sex?

Right now she believed it.

"Please, stop this."

Anna stood up and yelped. *What the Christ had that been?* It had sounded like a voice, coming from right below her!

Fear-driven tears trickled down her face and her bladder continued to empty of its own volition. She forced herself to bend her head down close against the overpowering stench.

Through a crack in the foundation came enough light for her to see. Way down, as if in another world, Danny's barely recognizable face stared back at her. A maggot slowly ate its way out of his cheek.

He was gasping helplessly, "Please . . . no more . . ."

Anna turned, screaming, and kicked the door with sudden hysteria.

Like an explosion, it shattered *inward*, knocking her senseless to the floor. Rough hands grabbed her, and she felt herself being lifted, almost floating. Her head was thrust unceremoniously into the hole; she heard a voice say "Let's go see Danny. 'At's a girl."

Her shoulders caught for an instant, then they too were shoved through. A cataclysm of sensations. Slipping. Retching. The stench. Danny . . . down there. No--

Her feet suddenly caught on the lip of the seat.

Screaming again, she felt her feet being grabbed and held together.

Then abruptly she was falling and her last sensation before she blacked out was the wet slimy smack of her face kissing the ruin of Danny, legs and arms twisting and frantic . . .

Danny was dying. Anna knew it. And her time was coming, too. The finality of their decision had stopped the retching. At least it had done that.

She hugged him closer to her. "Oh, Dan," she whispered, matching his own barely audible voice. "I'm afraid to die." She brushed a maggot off her chin.

He gathered his remaining strength. "It won't be bad. We'll think of that last walk we took on the beach like we agreed."

She looked into his eyes, imploring, beseeching. "Yes . . . the beach."

They joined hands. He said "I can hear them, you know. The gulls. They sound wonderful."

She felt him pulling her down and she went without resistance.

His face went under slowly. She forced hers down to meet his lips, not bothering to take a last breath, the one she'd been wondering about.

The water lapped gently at the sandy shore, then receded. It came back and stayed. The sand was wet and squishy between their toes. They hugged each other tighter. --NB

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*"Her
eyes
felt dry,
scratchy, as
if the eyelids
passing over
them were
dull razors."*

THAT TIME AGAIN

by Judith R. Behunin

It was that time again, those special days. Jana woke feeling drugged and hungover. She groaned. It couldn't be time to get up for work already, but the radio was playing. She flipped it off and dozed again in the darkness.

Time to go. She got up, wincing with the pain and cupping her breasts with her hands for a moment. As if that would stop the aching, burning heaviness of longing and loss. She pushed the drapes aside and looked out at the darkness. Moonlight sketched eerie patterns across her bed. She blinked. Her eyes felt dry, scratchy, as if the eyelids passing over them were dull razors. For a moment, she considered going back to bed; but it was time to go.

She opened the window a little and slipped through. She grunted with the pain, knowing she had to hurry. She yearned for the rusty taste of blood, the thick, pungent smell, the replenishing of her loss.

"Buy me a drink?" she said later, slipping onto a barstool, bold and beautiful, not at all herself. Somehow, the pain enhanced her femininity.

He eyed her. "Sure; what'll it be?"

"Whatever you're having."

"Scotch rocks," he barked.

When the drink came, she held it to her lips for a moment. The cool glass felt good on her fevered lips.

"Where've you been all my life, pretty lady?" he asked.

She laughed. The nausea and aching were almost forgotten now. She wondered how she could want it so much, how she could so terribly want to feel it inside her--deep inside her--when she hurt so much.

He was staring at her. "You have the strangest eyes. They change colors. Weird." He leaned away.

She moved closer. "It's nothing, just the lights in here." She couldn't let him get away. She liked his looks--young; dark; curly hair; gleaming brown eyes; a blue collar man. Her kind of man.

But she hurt so much, in every joint. Never mind. She'd soon forget all that, release the pain, give it away to him.

"Want to come to my place?" he asked, grinning.

(continued on page 56)

"Wanna
see what
I can
do with
my hands?"

DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

by Kim Issaac Greenblatt

The three tumble-down houses leaned next to each other like Druid enchanters attempting to summon a spook. Black roofs covered gray brick like ceremonial hoods. The first fixer-upper had a sign alerting Mills that he could get BED AND BREAKFAST FOR \$30 A NIGHT. The second offered a better deal: BED AND BREAKFAST - TWENTY FIVE DOLLARS, but the R in dollars was pointed the wrong way.

Hicks.

The third "dream house" volunteered the best deal yet, at least according to its sign: GOOD EATS/GOOD SLEEPS/\$5 A NIGHT. He coasted his Dodge Dart in front of the last house and braked. It was nearly dark, so the plump, middle-aged man with the stogie in his mouth felt that this was probably the best deal he could jew out of these retards; and hell, he was hungry.

Mills opened the car door and pulled himself out with a grunt. It took him two minutes to unload his two crates of comic books over to the front door of the old house. He tried the knob.

Locked.

Dumb asswipes.

Mills rapped his fat knuckles on the old gray door. A pudgy, pale boy wearing faded jeans, PF flyers (they still made those?) and an LA Olympics t-shirt opened the door. He looked about eight.

"Yeah?"

"Got a room for rent?" Mills asked.

"Yeah."

"Food good? And izzit only five bucks?"

"Yeah."

Time for some PR, then. He reached into one of the crates and pulled out a comic book. "Ya like comic books, kid?"

The boy's face exploded into a grin. "Yeah!"

Mills went inside.

Your basic, garden-variety hillbilly, Mills thought. The floorboards creaked under his weight. Springs protruded from the old couch like miniature steel geysers. *Buncha white trash.* A fat woman of about forty waddled out of the kitchen. She was wiping her hands on a blue apron. Mills and the boy plopped the crates on the living

room--more like dying room--floor.

"You here for the room?" she asked, still wiping her hands.

"You bet. Name's Mills. I'm in comic distribution and was in your neck of the woods when I saw how late it was gettin.' Some December so far, huh?"

The woman's expression didn't change.

Not the social Emily Post we think we are, huh babe?

"I'm Mrs. Keeper. That's my son Zach. Mind Mr. Mills' comic, child."

Zach looked up from his magazine. "It's Superman, Mom. He looks different, though."

Mills laughed. He rotated the stogie to the other side of his mouth. "He's the new Superman, kid. New artist. John Byrne introduced him. Whadaya think?"

Zach replaced the comic on top of the crate nearest him. "I liked the other one better."

"That ain't what sells, my boy."

Zach stared directly into Mills' eyes. His face was colorless. "Wanna see what I can do with my hands?"

Mrs. Keeper nearly yanked the boy's arm out of its socket. "Pay the boy no mind, Mr. Mills. Got your five dollars?"

Mills reached into his pockets and peeled off five singles from a small wad of bills. "Five exact. What time do we eat?"

The kitchen reminded Mills of Green Acres. The old icebox had turned brown from rust stains, and there was enough dirt under the rickety table for the legs to take root. But the plates were clean and the food was good. Mrs. Keeper and Zach stared at him while he ate, though. After he was finished, she poured him some more coffee.

"That was a great meal. Exactly what kind of meat was that?"

"Venison," she said. "You'll be sleeping in the attic, Mr. Mills."

"Fine by me. Gotta be on the 405 by ten, though."

Mills smiled at the boy. The kid sat as still as granite.

"One more thing," Mrs. Keeper added. "My son sometimes bothers

The kitchen re-
minded Mills of
Green Acres . . .
There was enough
dirt under the
table for the
legs to take root.

guests at night. He's disturbed."

No surprise, there. Why not shout it from the rooftops? "What should I do if . . ."

"Ignore him. He reads too many of those comic books. I normally wouldn't let you stay--comics give him . . . ideas--but we need the cash."

Mills chortled. "I love it. Something that gets the kid to thinking scares you?"

She stared at him with the eyes of a Medusa. He felt a chill.

"Don't show him any more of your comic books, Mr. Mills. I don't want his getting any ideas."

Serious snatch, here. "Sure. Anything you say." He took another swig of coffee before rising.

"Wanna see what I can do with my hands?"

Mills glanced at the boy's mother. "Another time, Zach. I gotta hit the hay."

Crates in hand, Mrs. Keeper led him to the attic, which consisted of nothing but an old brass bed. The sheets were surprisingly clean, though.

"Anything else you need," she said, "you come down and get it."

"Thanks."

She ambled down the staircase and closed the trap behind her. Mills checked his watch. Nearly eight. Time for some R&R before beddy-bye. He pulled out a *Hustler* magazine from the center of one of his crates and kicked off his shoes. When he turned to the girl-on-girl pictorial, he masturbated until he came on his shirt. He was dozing a few minutes later.

A creaking sound soon woke him. He quickly slid the girlie magazine

under his pillow, then checked his watch. After eleven. He looked up to see Zach standing a few feet away from the bed.

"Hey, Z-Zach," he stuttered. "Isn't it a little late to be up? Your mom'll get mad at you."

"My mom doesn't know I'm here."

Whatever. "You wanna see some more comics?"

"Okay."

Mills sat up in bed, belly quaking. He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a fresh cigar. He struck a match and began puffing. "So; whadaya wanna see first? Wanna see some girls doing naughty things?"

"Flash."

"Flash? Sure. You know he died, though. They got a new one."

"Supergirl?"

Mills laughed. "You've been out of it for awhile. They killed off a whole shitload of the old characters."

The kid's reaction was a blank stare. *She got him on drugs maybe?*

"Is there still a Superdog?"

"Naw. All a'that stuff is out of the picture." He reached under his pillow. "How 'bout one of these? It's better than Krypto."

Mills was half asleep. His watch read ten to three. The attic was filled with cigar smoke. The kid was still staring at the magazine. "Tell you what, you can keep that one, okay?"

"No thank you," he said, putting the magazine back on the stack.

"Why? You chicken your mom'll catch you?"

"My mom's gonna get up soon and fix breakfast."

"Good. You're mom sure can cook. Now take one of my books."

Zach reluctantly picked up a Legion book. He turned toward Mills.

"You wanna see what I can do with my hands?"

"No, Zach, I don't. I wanna get some zees."

Zach sighed. "You can be a very aggravating man, Mr. Mills."

"What?"

"I suspect it's due to your insecurity," Zach said.

Mills sat up and leaned closer to the boy. "You watch your talkin,' brat.

What happened to the shy little kid that was in there?"

Zach dropped the book and offered up his hands. "Wanna see what I can do?"

"Can it, punk. What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Zach sighed again. "Only a man with some real heavy problems has a gut like that. And the dried ejaculate on your shirt tells me you're obviously not satisfied sexually."

Mills lunged for him, seizing his hair. The boy didn't resist. "Disturbed or not, I'm gonna teach you some manners."

He turned his leg over the bed and turned Zach over his knee. With a smack, Mills spanked him once, then again. He didn't even flinch.

"Further signs of insecurity," the boy grunted. "Physical aggression toward a helpless juvenile. My guess is latent homosexuality, Mr. Mills. Nothing wrong with that--it's just you have all this misdirected anger."

"I'll show you some aggression," Mills said, setting the boy upright and slapping his face. Again, no reaction.

This was getting too weird for him. He pushed the boy away from him.

Zach picked up a comic book. "What kind of life is it for a middle-aged man to be going around the state selling comics and porn?"

Mills didn't answer. Finally, he said, "What did your mother do to you?"

Zach smiled. "I've been around for a long, long time, Mr. Mills. What are you running from? Look at yourself. You're overweight, you smoke cigars, you're grossly self indulgent--"

"Gimme a fuckin' break--"

"You've been giving yourself a break for years," Zach said. "Isn't it time to turn over a new leaf?"

Suddenly, Mills' face softened. "You're right, kid," he said. "If you forget about my smacking you around, I'll think about what you said."

"That's the spirit, Mr. Mills. Let's get things going on the right foot, shall we?"

"Sure, Zach. Whaddaya got in mind?"

"How 'bout we get some fresh air in here?"

"Good idea."

Mills stepped over to the window and opened it. He took a deep breath. It felt good--really good. "Yeah. Yeah,

kid--I really feel the difference."

"Good for you, Mr. Mills."

When Mills turned around, Zach was standing right in front of him. "You wanna see what I can do with my hands?"

"Sure, kid. What can you do with your hands?"

Zach ran his fingers over his lips, making BEEPA-BEEPA-BEEPA sounds. As Mills was laughing, Mrs. Keeper crawled through the open window and grabbed him in a bear hug. She squeezed. Mills screamed. His body was crushed at the waist. Zach looked on dully.

Later, when Mrs. Keeper was stirring a pot of broth, Zach walked into the kitchen carrying a comic book. He sat down at the table. Before him were Mills' wallet, his belt, and his shoes.

"I think he would've changed. Really, Mom, I do."

"Hush child. Mind."

"His comics weren't all that bad."

She pointed an accusing finger at him. "And how many times have I told you not to play with your food before eating?"

--NB

The Joy of Necrophilous Bestiality

And she says it's hopeless.

And she gets dressed.

And she leaves the bedroom.

And you lay there in your own sweat.

And you listen to her strangle the cat on the way out.

And you twist the sheets in the grip of an impotent rage.

And you cry like a baby.

And you scream for her to come back.

And she drops the cat.

And she closes the front door behind her.

And you get up.

And you find the body of the cat.

And you pick it up.

And you pet it.

And you become aroused.

And you take it back into bed with you.

And when she calls later,
you don't recognize her voice.

-- Cliff Burns --

DISCOVERING THAT THE
ROSARY HAS 108 BEADS,
THE SAME NUMBER OF STITCHES AS BASEBALLS,
WHITE BOY CLIMBS THAT
MOUND THINKING THUS

1. It's a sure way
to Heaven

2. He's got God
on his side.

3. It'll take the
place of having to go to church
Sun--

AFTER BEING KNOCKED ALL
OVER THE PARK, THE MANAGER
TELLS WHITE BOY THAT HE
HASN'T GOT A PRAYER NOW

-- Paul Weinman --



"Well, I priced funeral homes, and then I remembered how much I always wanted a grandfather clock . . ."



New Blood Test

Okay, bloods, put your best to the test with our new game and trivia feature, the *New Blood Test*. In each issue, you can pit your wits against a new set of trivia questions or a new trivia game--including a Gary Brandner double-acrostic. But that's not all: you can win one of 13 free subscriptions or cash prizes, whether you're a new reader or a faithful family member. Here's all you need to do: if you're a new reader, jot down your answers to the questions below on a separate piece of paper--or use a photocopy of this page--then send a check or m.o. for \$10 (made payable to Chris Lacher *only*) along with your answers to *New Blood Test*, 540 W. Foothill Blvd., Suite#3730, Glendora, CA 91740. If you're one of the first 13 to respond, you'll get three extra issues added on to your paid subscription at no extra charge! But even if you're not one of the first 13, your paid subscription will entitle you to a free back issue of your choice! We don't even care if your answers are correct or not--hey, write in your own, if you want--but don't pass up this special opportunity to join the NB family. By the way, the names of those subscribers who *do* answer all the questions correctly will appear in the next issue. So send your answers in now and sink your teeth into 6 full-color issues of the hottest genre magazine on the newsstands today! (Current subscribers: answer all the questions correctly and 3 free issues will be added to your current subscription. Lifers: do the same and receive a check from NB for \$10!)

1. Who was the author of *Dracula*?
 a. Arthur Conan Doyle b. Bram Stoker c. H.P. Lovecraft d. Mary Shelley
2. Name the first vampire film ever to appear on the big screen:
 a. *Dracula* b. *Nosferatu* c. *Vampyr* d. *Carmilla*
3. Which famous actor was buried in Dracula's cloak?
 a. Bela Lugosi b. Lon Chaney, Jr. c. David Niven d. Divine
4. Sharon Tate appeared in what vampire film?
 a. *Black Sunday* b. *Blood and Roses* c. *The Fearless Vampire Killers*
5. Who produced the X-rated version of *Dracula* in 1975?
 a. Bob Guccione b. Roman Polanski c. Andy Warhol d. Billy Barty
6. What magazine interviews the Count in *Old Dracula* (1973)?
 a. *Rolling Stone* b. *Playboy* c. *Life* d. *Molar's Monthly*
7. What was the name of the vampire on the TV series Dark Shadows?
 a. Count Alucard b. Barnabas Collins c. Vodka N. Collins
8. In the film *Queen of Blood*, astronauts found vampires on what planet?
 a. Saturn b. Mars c. Uranus d. Myanus
9. In *Horror of Dracula* (1959), where does the Count die?
 a. a graveyard b. his castle c. Van Helsing's basement
10. What keeps the Baron bound to the wall in *Brides of Dracula*?
 a. ropes soaked in garlic b. silver chains c. the shadow of a cross
11. What was the name of the famous 1959 Mexican vampire film?
 a. *Draculo* b. *Conde Dracoul* c. *El Vampiro*
12. In *Curse of the Undead* (1959), the vampire is:
 a. an undertaker b. a woman c. a gunslinger d. a drifter
13. Name the X-rated vampire spoof starring Jamie Gillis:
 a. *Dracula Goes Down* b. *Dracula Sucks* c. *Dracula Bites the Big One*

That Time Again . . .

"Sure. Let's go."

He looked surprised, then silently picked up his money off the bar and stuffed it into the pocket of his jeans. In shadow, the jeans revealed what she desired.

They rode in silence.

He glanced at her nervously.

"Very nice," she commented once inside his apartment. And then didn't waste any more time on preliminaries. She leaned into him slowly, pulling his shirt from his pants and caressing his flat, hairy stomach. He moaned and kissed her, opening his mouth to hers, massaging her breasts through her blouse, pinching hardened nipples until she almost shrieked from the added pain from his hands.

"C'mon, baby, c'mon," he pleaded, backing her into the bedroom as if he were afraid she might suddenly change her mind.

Once there, they undressed quickly, separately, eyeing each other.

"You're a strange one," he said, his voice husky, "but I like you."

She smiled, eyes glittering in the dimly lit room. He lifted her to the bed and lay beside her. She couldn't wait. Instead, she was on him, riding him, dripping down him, rubbing him against her pain, aching, throbbing, a receptive agony.

She screamed once as he grabbed

her breasts and threw her off. She opened like a flower in full bloom, her pinkness turning to violet, pulsing red as he rubbed and sucked at her. She wanted to be filled, ached for it.

He entered her again. This time he was on top, dominating, holding her legs high over his shoulders, pounding, lunging in and out with obscene wet smacks.

"Good God," he uttered once.

When she finally spoke, her voice came out husky, guttural. "Let me eat you," she said.

Instantly, he complied.

She panted with the pleasure and sensation of it. She bit her own lip and the blood ran down the length of it. She suckled, replenishing for later. She flashed, a strobe, a violent rainbow. She became everything and nothing as she continued to suck and nip--vampire, shrew, harpy, serpent, goblin, witch and bewitched, the glorious shapeshifter. A black cloud appeared above her head. She was color and light, yet a piece of eternal darkness, slithering, floating, flying, gyrating, a fantasy, Everyman's dream.

She sucked harder, caressed with a crusted tongue, a sandpaper massage on an insatiable tool. He was oblivious, eyes closed tightly, caught up in his own need. She bit at him with teeth grown long and sharp. He came in her mouth, mixing colors, red with white. She bit and tore as she would have with a dull knife, until she could

wrench it free. And she ate it, still warm and pulsing juice, chewing until the bed resembled a battlefield. Soon, she was satisfied. Soon, it was over.

Until that time again.

She turned over in her own bed, moving sullenly, knowing she had to get up from work. She touched herself, investigating the thickness of what had come in the night. She did it in quick, shuddering seconds. Blood, and juices and other things coated her fingers and ran down her spread-out thighs. She lay there for another moment. Then she got up.

Time to get ready for work. --NB

papa jack . . .

back ever thin is wunderful agin tho hes still very tyrt cause this trip took a lot out of him he sez & probly he wont do it agin un till the yeer after next or may be never.

Papa jacks so tyrt cause he sez the world is gettin worst & its shurly the Last Times cause hes lookt up on the Nakit Face of Satan this yeer & i wanted to ask him if Satan lookt like a littel rinklt ole man but i decided not to cause thats all be hind me now & life is perfectly byoutifull as the awthers say. --NB

VACAnt Eyes

Face shines
wet in the rain
will I stand here
forever -- nowhere
I want to go
being brave
is another way
of not showing fear
I want to feel
what I'm feeling

-- Sister Mary Ann Henn --



BUCKY 89

Garden . . .

flourished. The impatiens and crocus grew to an extraordinary size; the roses and hyacinths bloomed with colors so deeply rich they appeared artificial. By mid-July, the garden had become a brilliant fecund tapestry, a garden as fertile as the virgin land had of a century ago.

It had also become--for reasons Joel dared not admit--an obsession.

All of his spare time was absorbed by the garden. When he wasn't watering or weeding, he was simply studying the interlacing veins in the green petals, the sinuous curves of young stalks. And listening . . . he was always listening.

At first he pretended that the voices came from a distant radio or television, sounds filtering out through an open window and traveling on the breeze. He believed this despite the fact that the closest neighbor was nearly a mile away, and that the voices were like those in a crowded stadium--indistinguishable whisper-roads.

He didn't mention anything about the voices to Joyce. Yet he could not help but wonder if her sudden loss of interest was because she too had heard something other than the chirping of the cicada or the rustling of the trees, something that frightened her, that made her question her own sanity.

Finally, neither of them talked of the garden at all. The rift widening between them soon grew larger.

Near the end of July, after a week of hot and muggy weather, the storm exploded upon them, plastering the earth with all its pent-up fury.

Joyce was awakened by the sound of hail on the roof. Her first thought was of the baby. Then she noticed that Joel's spot next to her was cold.

She threw on a housecoat, quickly checked on the baby, then went to the top of the stairs, listening. She heard only the rain and hail, echoing in the empty house.

She went down to the kitchen and found the back door wide open, raindrops dabbling the linoleum. A shaft of light from the porch outside split through the screen and glistened on the

rain like diamonds. She shivered and leaned toward the door. "Joel?" she called, staring at the hazy outline of the car in the driveway.

Suddenly, he was on the other side of the screen, hair clinging to his forehead like black moss.

"Joel? What's wrong?"

"I want to show you something," he said, voice trembling with both terror and joy. He opened the door and pulled her out into the rain. He swiftly led her to the side of the house. "Thought I was crazy, huh? All those *voices!* They were coming from the garden, the flowers. I never said a word, though, because you would've thought I was crazy, like I *already* thought I was. But I was hearing them. I wasn't dreaming. I thought maybe you heard it too. That's why you stopped going near it--maybe you thought you were crazy too."

When they stopped, Joel pointed to the garden. "We're not crazy . . ."

Sitting on the grass in front of the garden was a black dog, a retriever, its head cocked, wet tail flopping in the mud as it listened to the voices.

Joel crouched next to it. The dog turned and gave him a friendly lick. Together, man and dog listened as the flowers sang joyously.

"My God, Joel!"

He smiled at her. "The drunk in the bar was right. He said it was graveyard gravel."

"What?"

"The dirt, Joyce. It came from a cemetery. Now the dead live in our garden . . ."

"This is *insane!*" Joyce screamed, feet numb from the cold rain, her nightgown clinging to her like a silky leach.

"You heard them too. All those times you worked out here. You heard."

"I didn't hear anything!"

"You're lying--you hear it now. Admit it."

"I hear the rain! I hear the rain and the wind--*please* Joel . . . come inside!"

He turned back to the plants, pressing his face against one of the resonating flowers. "There's nothing to be afraid of," he whispered, reaching back to gather her next to

him. He turned around, but saw only a flash of white rounding the corner of the house.

The singing grew as loud as the sounds of the storm. Joel stood, mesmerized. Then the dog began to growl. He looked at it, smiling, but it skulked away. Seconds later, screams from inside the house shattered his reverie.

Joyce stood at the top of the stairs, holding the baby in her arms, holding it tightly against her wet nightgown. Too tightly, Joel thought, she'll hurt him. He wanted to climb the stairs, but they seemed mountainous. And his body--dripping wet puddles onto the rug--suddenly felt like a slab of concrete, heavy and immobile.

Joyce came toward him. She moved slowly, as if in a dream. She held the baby's head tightly to her chest.

"You're hurting him--"

By the time she reached the bottom of the stairs, he could see that the baby's head was buried deep between her breasts, half his body hidden by her arms. Except for the fat legs and the plump white toes dangling loosely over her stomach, she looked like she was carrying a bundle of dirty clothes.

"He was just sleeping," she said, her voice strangely calm. "But somehow I knew . . ."

Joel had to hold his own voice prisoner--if he opened his mouth, he'd scream forever.

"No, no, no . . . We haven't lost him," she said soothingly. "You said it yourself--about the garden."

Revulsion washed over him, an unspeakable madness . . . and a terrible hope.

The new-comer was so powerful it quickly invaded the roots of the strongest white rose, where it reigned for the duration of the summer, flourishing like no other flower around it, garnering the most love and attention from the humans who cared for it.

In the fall, it was the last to die screaming.

--NB

Unlisted . . .

I really think you should kill yourself."

He pulled the phone away from his ear, staring at the handset with incredulity.

"Paul?" the tinny voice floated up from the receiver. "Are you still there?"

He slammed down the phone.

His dialed the number again at 11:52. "Crisis Hotline," the woman's voice answered.

"I've got a gun," Sandoval said. "I'll use it. On myself."

"Go ahead," the voice told him.

He hung up.

Sandoval dialed the number for the last time at 11:58. As soon as he heard the words "Crisis Hotline" he began to speak in a quiet voice.

"Don't say anything," he muttered. "I want you to know that I'm dead serious about this, and I don't want you to say anything until I'm finished. I wasn't lying before when I told you I had a gun. I'm holding it in my hand right now. It's pointed directly at my temple."

He paused to take a breath, then went on. "I thought . . . I thought you suicide prevention types were supposed to help people in trouble. I thought you were supposed to say kind things to them. 'Now, now, it's not that bad.' Stuff like that. But you're an awful person, aren't you? I bet that's how all of you are. You don't really help people at all, do you? You don't give a damn if somebody lives or dies."

He paused once more, awaiting a response. At last he said, challenging, "Well?"

The woman's voice was a poisonous hiss. "People like you make me sick, do you know that? Always whining and complaining and feeling sorry for yourselves. 'Oh, my life is so terrible, it's so awful, I just want to end it all.' Well, just go ahead and do it. Do the rest of us a favor and blow your brains out. Make the world a better place."

Sandoval flinched. He could feel his finger twitching on the trigger of the

gun. Horrified, he muttered into the phone, "You can't mean it . . ."

"I mean it. Just shoot yourself and get it over with."

His finger tightened.

"Get it over with, Paul. Just do it."

So he did.

The supervisor of the Crisis Hotline's nightshift stepped from his office into the tiny, windowless room where a bank of ten telephones stood in individual carrels. The room was deserted. From the office behind him, he could hear half a dozen people singing "Auld Lang Syne." He moved into the room, crossing to the phones.

Another man who was holding two paper cups filled with champagne called from the doorway, "Something wrong?"

The supervisor turned. "I heard a phone ring. That was the third time . . ."

He moved to the end of the line of carrels. Attached to the last phone was an answering machine. The machine's power light was glowing. "Goddamn it," snapped the supervisor. "Who the hell turned the goddamn answering machine on?"

The other man came up behind him. "Did we get any calls?"

The supervisor looked at the machine's message counter. A luminous green numeral read: "0."

He pressed the replay button. A woman's voice, her tone sweetly sympathetic and undercut with compassion said from the speaker, "This is the Crisis Hotline. Please don't hang up, because we're here to help you. It's just that all of our counselors are busy at the moment. But your call will be answered in the order that it was received--"

The supervisor stopped the machine.

"I thought you told me that thing's been acting up lately," the other man said. "It sounds fine to me."

The supervisor shrugged.

"If there weren't any calls, then don't worry about it. Here." He handed his supervisor one of the paper cups, then raised the other in salute. They touched cups. "Happy New Year."

"My sentiments exactly," said the supervisor. --NB

A.

my sister
said she
saw it grow
under
my sheet

B.

sometimes
sis woke
me
pinching
its tip

C.

I told
her none
of your
beeswax
how big

D.

spitting
saying she'd
die laughing
to have those
droopings

-- Paul Weinman --

The Maid of Firth

The dark and handsome maid of Firth
Often lost herself in mirth;
And laughing thus, she fell far back,
Beheaded by a wayward axe.

-- Don Fred --

Rotten Meat . . .

insistence that silverware come first makes us run out of dishes too fast. How can we serve food without plates?"

Towers glared at him. "You've got two legs. Use them. Walk over to the clean dish area and carry a stack of plates back to your area. Understand?"

"What if I'm too busy?"

"Kramer, if you're too busy to get your dishes, then that's too bad. Because if I hear you yell for plates when the dishwashers're doing silverware you'll be out on your ear. Understand?"

"Yes sir," Kramer replied through gritted teeth.

"I didn't hear you."

"Yes, *sir!*" Kramer answered, then marched out of the office.

From then on, whenever he ran out of dishes during a lunch rush, Kramer stopped cooking, went to the clean dish area and carried the plates back to his grill. The waitresses got angry with him; they complained that the food either took too long or was burnt. Kramer's only response was: "That's the way Towers wants it, so that's how it's gonna be. Sorry."

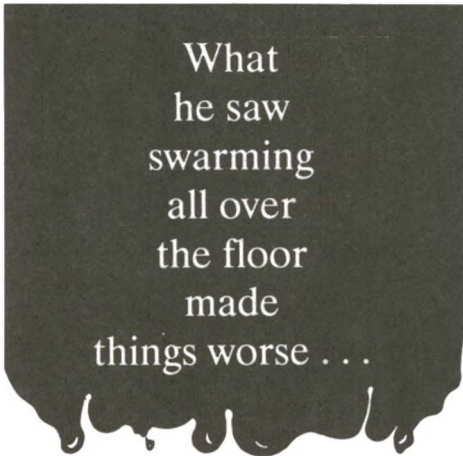
Kramer was bringing a box of rotten hamburger out of the walk-in when Sykes called in through one of the windows. "Hey, Freddy! Your buddy's going on a break."

"The asshole! He should be doing this. Tell the hostess not to let him go."

"Sorry, old buddy, but he's already hung his break ticket. He ordered a cheeseburger."

"Goddamnit." Kramer looked down at the box he held and smiled. He told Sykes, "Never mind, Willie. In fact, I'll personally prepare the best cheeseburger Reed's ever had."

Kramer tossed the rotten hamburger patties down the garbage disposal, but only after secretly removing one patty and smothering it with Worcestershire sauce and garlic pow-



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der. He cooked it medium rare, melted cheese on it and served it to Reed with a sardonic smile. "Just for you, old buddy."

"Wow, thanks, Freddy," Reed said as he admired the burger. He took a bite, then said, "It's the best burger I've ever eaten."

"You deserved it," Kramer said.

Half an hour later, just as Reed stood, he suddenly doubled over and collapsed. A waitress, also sitting at the break bar, screamed. Suddenly, the hostess appeared, then ran back into the dining area to get help. An ambulance arrived a little while later.

Towers came back to the break bar after everything settled down. He said Reed had been poisoned. He grabbed Freddy and pulled him aside. "I warned you, Kramer. Don't try telling me you weren't behind this."

"What does that mean, sir?"

"Don't play innocent. You damn well *know* what I mean. I want you out of here until I decide what I'm going to do."

That was a week ago. And now his apartment was infested with the rotten-meat smell, and it was growing stronger and stronger each day. With the last of his severance pay, Kramer bought ten canisters of air freshener, but they didn't work. In fact, the smell got even worse.

He was checking the phone book for exterminators--it had to be dead rats--when the phone rang. Holding his nose, he lifted the receiver and said

"Hello?"

"Freddy?" said the voice on the other end, "You don't sound too good."

"Who is this?"

"This is Willie. I thought I better call'n tell you that Reed died a couple days ago; he never regained consciousness."

Kramer started to shake. He felt tears well up in his eyes. "I just wanted to make him a little sick, so's to show him who was boss. I didn't mean to hurt him."

"Well, that isn't the worst of it, Fred. Towers has decided to press charges. I tried to talk him out of it, but it cost me my job. He said he's gonna have you locked away forever. I suggest you hightail it out of Lawrence as soon as possible."

"Thanks for the warning. I'll take it into consideration." Kramer hung up. Then the phone rang again.

"Hello?"

"Kramer?" It was Towers. "I wanted you to know that Reed died from your stupid little stunt."

"Yes sir. I was just informed. I'm sorry."

"Sorry won't do it, Kramer. I called the police. Too bad Kansas doesn't have a death penalty. Life in prison--."

Kramer let the phone drop. Suddenly the smell seemed to swirl all around him. Kramer felt sick. With his hand covering his mouth, he ran to the toilet. He didn't make it. If that weren't bad enough, what he saw swarming all over the floor made things even worse.

Maggots. They were everywhere he turned, crawling out of electric sockets, faucets, even the toilet.

Then came the flies.

They covered him and bit deeply into his flesh. They crawled into his nostrils and mouth until he couldn't even scream.

Now comes December, and almost zero temperatures outside. Willie Sykes has opened all of his windows, but he still can't get rid of the awful smell...



A DAMN BAD DAY FOR DADDY

Talk about your cats with an attitude problem!

by Ardath Mayhar



The heat on the freeway was terrific. And of course the air conditioner conked out a third of the way home, leaving Calvin to swelter along, bumper to bumper with fume-snorting diesels and rotten-egg smelling burners of unleaded gasoline. He got the full benefit of the combined bouquet, for he had to leave his windows down--he would have succumbed to heat stroke in ten minutes with them closed.

By the time he reached the turnoff he was breathing fumes, too, as his temper rose. It had been a stinker of a day: he had found a serious set of problems in the middle of a complex program, and he'd been forced to scrap all of the work he had done for the past six weeks and begin over again. When he thought of the deadline, now only two weeks in the future, his internal temperature rose to match that outside. His mood had not been good to start, and now it was rotten.

If Lila had only consented to live in Dallas, his life would have been so much easier. This commute was killing him! But no, she had to live out in the country, on account of the children. He pushed aside the memory of his own

insistence on that very thing.

He honked futilely at a green pickup veering into his lane from his right. It crossed in front of him and screeched into an inadequate space between two cars in the fast lane. Idiot! he thought. His head was thumping with a combination of anger, heat, and carbon monoxide.

With some relief, he turned off onto the relative calm of the state highway. On his right, the park showed spots of shade, where the young trees the County had planted were beginning to branch out. That added to his anger . . . only someone who had helped in the unsuccessful crusade to padlock that park behind unclimbable fences could appreciate his feelings. His nose wrinkled as he smelled long-past stench from the buried chemical dump beneath it.

His kids had orders never to play there. They had three acres of their own, with every attraction he and Lila could afford. They had an above-ground pool, an elaborate swing set, a small tennis court. Even then, those little idiots came in the day before with a bedraggled animal they'd found

in the park, in defiance of all his rules.

His pulse pounded in rhythm with the *ca-thock! ca-thock!* of his tires across the tar sealing the cracks in the old cement highway.

He had known they'd been playing there, just by looking at their expressions. Lila shushed them and took them into the kitchen to question them, but he knew what she would find. They had been intrigued because the park was forbidden ground. He'd been the same when he was small.

He had warmed their pants for them, but the damage was done. He knew they'd sneak over there when he was out of sight. He found that understanding their thinking didn't cool his temper a bit.

And that animal! He didn't like fuzzy little creatures to begin with, and he couldn't say if this was a big cat or a small dog. It was too shaggy and dirty and matted to tell. But he had given strict orders--it was to go to the Pound today. He'd lay odds, however, that it was still in the house, stinking up the place with its rank odor. The thought made his temples pound harder than before.

He turned into the long drive leading to his comfortable frame house. It had captured their hearts at first sight . . . big shady trees and high ceilinged, cool rooms were just what they had wanted. The drive was measurably cooler than the pavement behind him as he pulled around to the garage.

The band about his head seemed to loosen a bit. Lila would have a cold drink ready and his khakis laid out for him to put on after his shower. She might be a hard-head, but she sure met his needs--he hoped he met hers as well. She was a commercial artist who managed, somehow, to juggle the house and the kids and his moods along with her own work, without stress or irritation. He could have done a lot worse.

He stopped with a jerk. Cal Junior's bike was sprawled across the driveway, and he was going to get what-for. The boy had been told a thousand times! The beat in Cal's head picked up again.

He set the bike in the garage rack, crawled into the car and pulled it into its

space. He secured the outer door. Crime was moving into the county, now, sad as it seemed. When he opened the interior door into the kitchen, he paused, startled. There were no cooking smells purling through the air-conditioned air of the house. Lila always had supper near completion when he got home!

He called, "Lila! Calvin! Kenny! Dollie!"

There was no reply. Somehow that struck him as ominous, for there was no note on the kitchen door. Lila's station wagon was in place, and if they'd gone off on some expedition, she would have let him know. The family had agreed that if someone must be gone unexpectedly and couldn't tell the others face to face, a note would be posted on the kitchen door. There was so much to worry about in the world, now, that it was cruel to cause anyone extra and useless concern.

He looked on the floor and behind the door. No note. The house was cool, the air conditioner purring quietly, but a trickle of sweat moved down his spine. Something was wrong . . . he could feel a sort of tense watchfulness in the house. There was someone or something here, for he felt a living presence, and he was certain that it was not one of his own.

Calvin stepped into the garage and picked up a length of galvanized pipe he had meant to use when he replaced the plumbing in the washroom. He moved quietly into the kitchen, which was cool and dim, for Lila hadn't pulled back the curtains, as she did when she started to cook. She liked to see outside as she worked.

The hall beyond was dark, and all the bedroom doors were closed. No light had been turned on there. Calvin hefted the pipe and swallowed hard. He didn't want to see what waited in his house, but he had no choice.

If something had, God forbid, happened to Lila and the kids, he would do what he could. He was not one to leave such things to the authorities . . . they were his own people, and he didn't leave such matters to others. That was not the way his family worked.

His steps sounded loud, even on

the carpet of the hall. He looked into the living room, which was empty. The westering sun stared directly into the windows . . . the draperies were closed as soon as the sun moved around to that side, always. Now they were still open.

Lila's studio was empty; Cal and Kenny's bedroom was its usual mess, Dollie's anonymously neat. But still he knew that something listened as he came, waiting for him. Only the master bedroom remained. Calvin gulped down bile, but he put a cold hand onto his burning forehead for an instant. Then he reached for the doorknob.

The draw drapes were pulled wide. The reflected light of the sun from the pool outside warmed the room with reddish tinges. The floor was marked with a red that was not that of sunlight.

They had been sitting in a circle, as he had seen them do so many times as they engaged in some project of interest to all of them. Their bodies sprawled outward like spokes of a wheel, as if whatever they had focused on in the middle of the circle had suddenly exploded in their faces. But it was not an explosion that had killed his family.

Their throats had been torn out, and he could see other lacerations, even in the sick and sweeping glance he gave before turning to vomit on the hall floor. When he turned back, he was in control, and he looked closely. There wasn't nearly enough blood soaked into the carpet to account for the bleeding to death of four people.

Worst of all, the shaggy animal sat in the midst of the circle, watching him. He raised the pipe and started toward it as the thing stood upright on its inadequate hind legs. It began to . . . open. The scraggly hair hiding whatever face it might possess stiffened outward in spiky grayish-green tendrils. As the top was revealed, he saw to his horror that the entire top and front was mouth . . . round mouth, studded with circles of needle-sharp teeth, like those of a lamprey eel.

The thing streaked toward him with blinding speed, but the day had honed his nerves so fine that the pipe

was on its way, sweeping around to smash the beast into bloody rags against the wall. He pounded it into unrecognizable pulp before he thought that someone might have needed to examine it.

He stared down. It was no animal ever encountered in a zoology book, he was certain. It had come--of course!--out of the park. Some chemical or combination of them from the old dump must have mutated a rat or a cat or a possum or . . . something over the years. And now it was a new beast, dangerous and deadly.

He told them it was insanity to do anything but bury that dump beneath layers of dirt and concrete, and then to lock it away so that nobody and nothing could get at it. For years he had argued with the people who didn't want to spend that much money for something that nobody got any use out of. Now his point had been proved to him . . . but there was no more fight left in Calvin. Not after today.

He sat heavily at Lila's desk and switched on her computer. He accessed his own machine at work through the modem and began to type. Everything went into the record, and at the same time he saved his work to print out here at home. Nobody could ever cover it up now, for it was also going out through the computer network to which he subscribed.

When he had written out everything, from beginning to end, he printed it out and signed the last sheet, initialling the others and dating every one of them.

"There will be those who will try to make of this a complicated act of insanity--an unbalanced father killing his family and then himself. But do not believe it for a moment. I am going with my wife and children, for I don't care to live without them. You will find the remains of that creature in the corner. I did a good job on it with my pipe, but you may be able to learn something from what is left.

"Go into that park and exterminate everything with the most powerful stuff you have. Cover it over. Lock it away. Keep any child, ever again, from suffering what Cal and Kenny and Dollie have suffered. You owe me

that. For you in this county, you who allowed the federal authority to approve the park, you who didn't listen when I tried to interest the state, all of you are guilty of our deaths. And the facts are known. Don't doubt it . . . I have distributed them so widely that

you can never sweep them under your bureaucratic rug again."

He reread those last words, nodded, and rummaged in the drawer for Lila's antique .25 Colt. Then he moved to sit in the circle of his loved ones and he blew out his brains. --NB



"Why do you guys always squeeze up against the back wall when I do Show and Tell?"



Butcher's Block

"I saw the body. A poker was stuck up inside her. I think that's what killed her."

That was what Neville Heath told his new girlfriend about the brutal murder that occurred in London at the Pembroke Court Hotel on June 21, 1946. But how did Heath know the details?

Police found the mutilated body of Margery Gardner in Room No. 4, beneath a heap of bloodsoaked bedclothes. The dead woman's nipples had been bitten loose of her breasts, and there were 17 welts across her back, chest, stomach and face, apparently made by a whip with a metal tip. Her ankles were bound together with a handkerchief and she had bled from the vagina.

After a short investigation turned up an overwhelming amount of evidence against Heath, police quickly arrested him for the gruesome murder of Margery Gardner. He was found guilty by a jury on September 24, and executed one month later, on October 26.

His last request before heading for the gallows was for a whiskey. "And under the circumstances, governor, you might be kind enough make that a double," he added.

"Kroll took steaks from his victims if their flesh struck him as suitable tender."

Joachim Kroll was one of Germany's worst mass-murderers, operating unhindered for nearly 20 years. He was a sex-killer with a ghastly trademark—he removed pieces of his victim's bodies and ate them.

The first body found was that of Manuela Knodt, a sixteen-year old virgin who was strangled to death and raped. Kroll sliced flesh from her buttocks and thighs.

Young Petra Giese was raped and both of her buttocks were removed, as was her left forearm and hand.

Fourteen in all, perhaps more, died at the hands of Joachim Kroll.

The police caught the cannibal-killer quite by accident: a neighbor of Kroll's told police that Kroll had told him not to use the bathroom because it was stopped up with "guts." The police dispatched a plumber to investigate and discovered Kroll wasn't kidding. The toilet was blocked with the internal organs of a small child. More parcels of flesh were found in the freezer. Carrots, potatoes, and a child's hand were bubbling in a saucepan on the stove.

When questioned about his cannibalism, Kroll said he might as well save money on meat.

"Look, bitch, I don't care . . . I have no mercy for you."

Susan Atkins screamed these words over the frantic pleas of Sharon Tate as she begged for the life of her unborn child.

Mrs. Tate was eight months pregnant and was the target of a stab-fest conducted by Susan Atkins, Charles Watson, and Patricia Krenwinkel. Between the trio, they repeatedly stabbed Sharon Tate in her neck, breasts, back, and womb, continuing their barbarism even after she had died.

Before they left, Susan Atkins dipped a towel in Tate's blood and daubed "Pig" on the living room door.

The murder of Sharon Tate was but one of the senseless killings inspired by Charles Manson in the summer of 1969, exactly twenty years ago this month. He ordered his "family" members to commit the murders because he was jealous of the rich and famous.

Manson, Atkins, Watson and Krenwinkel were all found guilty by a jury and sentenced to death. To this date, none have been executed.

by Ray R. House

THE DWELLING TOM ELLIOTT

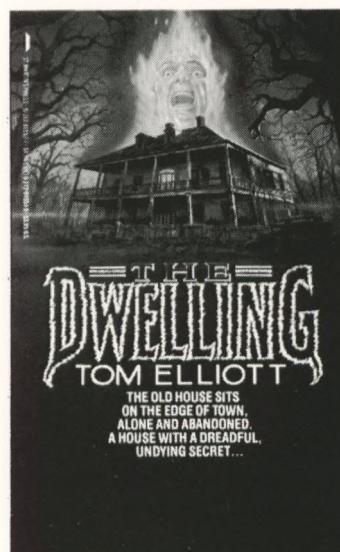
**The Louisiana bayou harbors evil secrets in this
eerie tale of horror from the past**

THE HOUSE sits by the bayou, old and forgotten. Paint peels from its worn and musty walls. The front porch sags at an odd and disturbing angle. Tattered lace curtains flutter in the windows.

Police photographer Katy McClure finds herself standing at the steps of this house. A series of strange incidents in town have brought her here—why, she can't say. Nor can she explain why two others—a petty criminal and a former college professor—have also made their way to this broken and abandoned building.

But now the house beckons to Katy, beckons her to enter, to partake of its aura of silent, brooding menace. She is about to learn all too well the secrets within this house—and the true nature of raw, unbridled terror.

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