THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEM, HEM! SO YOU'RE BACK FOR MORE GORE, EH, FIENDS? WELL, THIS IS THE SPOT FOR IT! WELCOME TO THE CRYPT OF TERROR! THIS IS YOUR HOST IN HOWLS, THE CRYPT-KEEPER, READY TO START THE BRAWL ROLLING IN MY REEKING-RAG WITH ANOTHER SPINE-TINGLING TALE FROM MY CREEP-COLLECTION. TIGHTEN YOUR BELTS SO YOU WON'T BE SCARED OUT OF YOUR PANTS, AND I'LL BEGIN THE BLOOD-CURDLER I CALL...

UNDERTAKING PALLOR

MR. ESPOCK’S BLACK PANEL TRUCK HAD PULLED UP BEFORE HIS MORTUARY, AND SOMEHOW HE'D GOTTEN THE SILENT WICKER WITH ITS GRISLY CONTENTS INSIDE, WHILE IN THE LITTER-STREWN BACK YARD, THE KIDS HAD CRESTED TO THE BACK WINDOW ON TIP-TOES, LIKE SO MANY GREY SHADOWS... LIKE SO MANY MICE, THEY'D PEERED INTO THE PORCELAIN AND GLASS-LINED UNDERTAKING PARLOR WITH Wide EYES AND CHATTERING TEETH, WHISPERING...

THAT'S OLD MAN GROVES, HE DIED YESTERDAY!

MR. ESPOCK'S I DON'T GETIN READY TO WANT TO EMBALM HIM. LOOK! I'M SCARED!

Sissy!
There is a morbid curiosity in children, a strange fascination with death. It hurries them to the scenes of accidents, sucks them into movie theaters to watch it unfold on silver screens, prompts them to make-believe about it... and draws them to windows in undertaking parlors... what's he doing, chubby? he's taking off the clothes! oh-h-h-h! he'll hear you! if it makes you sick, old mr. groves! don't look, percy! i don't feel so good! now he's sharpening his scalpel! loafly! he's taking his scalpel! what's he taking his clothes off for? so it was only natural for chubby and pete and billy and percival to want to see more of this unfathomable problem to want to learn what went on behind mr. esprock's closed mortuary doors... if it makes you sick, old mr. groves' skin at the base of his neck... if it makes you sick, old mr. groves! don't look, percy!

inside the mortuary, oblivious to the wide prying eyes that followed his every move, averill esprock labored slowly, deliberately, as if he enjoyed his work... what's that he's doing, billy? stickin' a needle with a tube into the outlet he made in mr. groves' neck! and as he worked, averill hummed softly, filling the mortuary with his muted green music... he's turnin' on some kind of motor! he's pumpin' out the blood, that's what he's doin'! ohaaaaa...

the pump began to chug, gurgling the scarlet liquid out of the dead body through the pulsating tube and sending it into the porcelain sink. loafly! we could charge the rest of the gang admissions to watch this! aw, shuddup! you're always thinkin' of ways to make money! after a while the gurgling stopped and the pump ran quietly... the blood's all pumped out! now what? he's takin' down that big jug of liquid!
Averill pressed a switch. The pump reversed itself. The gurgling began again. The colorless liquid in the jug began to slowly disappear, forced into Mr. Groves' empty arteries.

I'll bet a nickel that's embalming fluid? Okay, smart guy! So you know everything! Really, fellers. Pop's been in bed, an...

Someplace in the mortuary, a bell tinkled. Mr. Esprock stiffened. A figure swept aside the curtains and came into the back room.

Howdy, Averill? I come for my cut! Anybody see you come in, Mont?

The kids peering through their peep-hole whispered excitedly...

It's Mr. Grudnay, the druggist? What's he want? Listen! Maybe we'll find out!

MAYBE WE'LL FIND OUT!

The last drop of the embalming fluid gargled out of the jug as the last drop of a soda is sucked from a fountain glass through a frayed straw. Mr. Esprock shut off the motor...

Is he done? Wait an' see! Listen. Someone just came in the front door.

Fifty bucks each! That's the best I could do! The Groves' family don't have much money. I finally talked 'em into the two hundred dollar funeral. I clear a hundred on that one!

Fifty bucks for cryin' out loud, it don't pay to take such chances for that little dough.

Nope... nobody saw me. How much do we make this time?

Well, next time you poison a prescription, make sure it's for somebody who can afford a big funeral.

Averill rinsed the hose that ran off into the red-stained porcelain sink and pushed it into the neck of the jug with the colorless liquid.

I'll bet a nickel that's embalming fluid? I'm goin' home. My brother's been sick an'...
What'd ya think? I get a chance to do it every day in the week? I got to wait till somebody gets sick first... and needs a prescription filled!

I know! I know! I don't get sore! I'm not sore. In fact, I feel pretty good! The next funeral you get will be the biggest one this town's ever seen!

Who's sick, Mort?

Heh, heh! Good! Good! We ought to know by tonight!

Nobody but the richest man in town... and I delivered his prescription this morning!

Outside, the kids looked at each other, horrified.

The richest guy in town? Why that's Percy's old man...

Hey, where is Percy? He's not here?

Do you think he heard? I don't think so! Golly, what'll we do? O'wan!

Billy and Chubby and Pete drove out of the alleyway behind Mr. Espock's mortuary and ran all the way to Percy's house. When they got there, they found Percy sitting on the front steps, sobbing...

Percy! Mr. Grudny! Mr. Espock! Hey, what's wrong, Percy?

My... do... my pop? He died a little while ago!

Golly, gee!

They were too late. They stood around awkwardly, wondering what to say to poor grieving Percy, and then they left him quietly sobbing...

It's better that Percy doesn't know that Mr. Grudny, the druggist, poisoned his old man... and that he's working in cahoots with Mr. Esprock, the undertaker... do you think we ought to tell the cops?
The funeral's tomorrow morning, Mort. I'll probably get paid tomorrow night! Meet me at the usual place, and I'll give you your share.

He's gone! What's your idea, Pete?

Chubby, you get down to Grundy's Drug Store and you hang around in front... stay there all day if you have to!

When he gives you a package to deliver to Mr. Esbrook, don't bring it to him. Bring it to our clubhouse, understand?

Fine. Say around midnight...

Heh, heh! Well, Averill... did you stick 'em good?

Three brand worth! We clear one thousand. That's five hundred apiece!
Mr. Esprock went back into the mortuary. The kids darted around to the back window in time to hear Mr. Esprock say, "Hello, Mort. Averrill, say er. Maybe you’d better send that tonic over after all. I do feel kinda... kinda run down!"

Outside Mr. Grudny’s store, Chubby waited patiently. Finally, Mr. Grudny came out...

Sure thing, Mr. Grudny!

Chubby took the package and rushed straight to the club house with it. Pete and Billy were waiting...

"Here it is."

Mr. Esprock: You look sick, Mr. Esprock.

Chubby: I don’t know... excuse me, boys.

Mr. Esprock: You look pale, Mr. Esprock. You look sick.

Chubby: You comin’ down with somethin’, me, boys.

Mr. Esprock: Okay, pour it out...

Chubby: Here’s the rat-poison...

The bottle smashed into a thousand glittering fragments and the ‘tonic’ pooled out over the mortuary floor. Chubby released the stray cat...

Mr. Esprock opened the door to his mortuary to see Chubby standing before him, holding a stray cat in one hand and the bottle of ‘tonic’ in the other...

Mr. Grudny asked me to deliver this, Mr. Esprock!

Chubby held out the bottle of ‘tonic’, letting it slip from his fingers...

"Here’s the tonic."

Mr. Esprock wants to see Chubby standing before him, holding a stray cat in one hand and the bottle of ‘tonic’ in the other...

Mr. Grudny asked me to deliver this, Mr. Esprock!

Chubby held out the bottle of ‘tonic’, letting it slip from his fingers...

"Here’s the tonic.

Mr. Esprock: Here! Kitty!..."
The cat was busily lapping up the spilled tonic. Chubby hesitated...

I said get that cat out of here! Look, Mr. Esprock!

The cat wavered, filled with the rat-poison. It squealed and rolled over...

What happened to it? Good Lord... it's dead!

Mr. Esprock stuck his finger into the pool of 'tonic' and sniffed it...

Why that dirty double-crossing... this is poison! Well, I got to go, Mr. Esprock!

The next day, Percy's father's funeral was held in a steady downpour. The boys watched from afar...

Think Esprock fell for it? We'll see tonight... when he meets Grudny!

Late that night the kids waited for Mr. Esprock to emerge from his mortuary. Toward midnight, he came out. They followed him at a safe distance as he made his way slowly out of town...

He's headed for the cemetery! O-s-bolly! C'mon!

Pete and Billy and Chubby followed Mr. Esprock into the cemetery. Mr. Grudny was waiting...

What are you talking about, Averill? I'm talking about that poisoned tonic you sent me, Mort. Luckily, the kid dropped it!

That you, Averill? Surprised, Grudny? You thought I'd be dead by now, didn't you?
The knife in Mr. Esprock's hand glinted in the moonlight. Averill! Don't try to kill me, Grudny. Well, now... I'm going to kill you!

Mr. Esprock brought the knife down into Mr. Grudny's chest. Mr. Grudny's scream echoed through the silent cemetery... Yaaaaaaaaaa!

Suddenly, the night was very still, save for Averill Esprock's heavy breathing as he stood over Mr. Grudny's grotesquely sprawled body. And then... AAAaghoo! Who's there? Golly!

Mr. Esprock spun around, the knife gripped tightly in his hand...

Who's there?! O'mon! Let's run for it!

The kids began to run. Mr. Esprock screamed after them...

Come back! O'mon! Chubby! I... gasp... I can't... gasp... run... any... faster...

They ran wildly over the graveyards... The three terrorized boys with murderous Mr. Esprock close behind them, brandishing the bloody knife...

Run, Chubby! Run! I... can't... I'll kill you! I swear it! I'll...

Suddenly, Mr. Esprock plunged forward, splattering his head upon the sharp corner of a newly cut tombstone...

And when the boys cautiously returned to where he lay...

He's... dead! Look! Look at the name on the headstone! It's Percy's father's grave...

Heh, heh! There's a striking wind-up to a terror-tale, en, creeps? Now, the vault-keeper awaits with his tale of coffins and cadavers, so I'll turn you over to him. I'll dig you later. Talking 'bout digging, as the French bee-digger said when he saw the guillotine... Man, dig that crazy barber chair!
HEH, HEH. AND NOW, VULTURES, IF YOU WILL VENTURE INTO THE VAULT OF HORROR, YOUR HOST, THE VAULT-KEEPER WILL ENTERTAIN YOU. FOR THIS, MY OFFERING IN C.K.'S MAG. I HAVE CHOSEN A GRAVE TALE. YEP! IT'S TOLD BY A GRAVE! SO, CUDDLE UP TO THAT CORPSE OVER THERE AND I'LL BEGIN THE DRAMA OF DREAD AND DEATH CALLED...

THE CRAVING GRAVE!

THE WIND BLOWS BADLY ACROSS THE Gnarled and Bent TREES AROUND ME. IT WHISPERS PAST THE COLD STONE MONUMENTS THAT THE OTHERS PROUDLY HOLD UPWARD TOWARD THE NIGHT SKY. BUT UPON MY BREAST THERE IS NO COLD STONE FOR THE WIND TO SING OVER. I LIE SILENT WITH AN EMPTINESS WITHIN ME... A YEARNING. THE OTHERS SIGH CONTENTEDLY, SHIFTING AND CRACKING, EMBRACING THEIR CHARGES... THEIR RIGH THE CHILDREN. BUT I AM BARREN... FRUITLESS. Beneath MY Mounded OUTER SKIN-CRUST, NO Rigid CHARGE lies, NESTLING. I AM LONELY. I AM WAITING...

I AM AN UNOCCUPIED GRAVE, CRYING WITH THE CRYING WIND... WAITING FOR MY LONELINESS TO END... WAITING FOR A DOBY!
I have waited like this through the centuries, watching the others around me, each in their turn, open wide their yawning mouths and take in their wards, cradling them happily within their earth-wombs...

On nights like this one...when the sky is overcast with low hanging rain-clouds, when I can see no stars...I can only lie and listen to the happy chattering of the graves around me, guarding, protecting, caring for their brood. I can only lie and listen and yearn. I yearn for the day when I, too, will reach forth and draw in my death-fetus and hold it fast, suckling it with my dampness...

When I, too, will reach forth and draw in my death-fetus and hold it fast, suckling it with my dampness...

But, wait! What is that I hear?! Voices in the wind...Voices in the night...Voices over me? And what is that I feel? Cold steel renting my crust...cracking open my earth-skin...

There is a trembling down deep within me...a surge of excitement and anticipation. The wind dies...and the laughter dies...

All these years of waiting. All these years of longing and yearning and crying. They're almost over. Those men upon my chest...they're grave diggers...

There is a trembling down deep within me...a surge of excitement and anticipation. The wind dies...and the laughter dies...

I'll tell my congressman! They'll pass a law!
I listen with a drunken joy to the ceremony, feeling the mourners' feet upon my breast. There are not many mourners... a nephew, his wife, and a lawyer friend. But I do not care. It is not the grieving ones I am interested in. It is the one for whom they grieve...

And now it is morning. I lie with my insides torn from me and heaped up at my side. I lie open, feeling the sunlight, the cold air. I hear the crunching steps that I have heard so often. I hear the grunts of the pallbearers that have never until this day delivered unto me and I smile...

The coffin is lowered. I reach upward for it, accepting it, feeling of its smoothness, and sensing of its contents... my death-ward... my corpse-charge... my own...

Come, Roland! It is done.

Yes... sod... yes, sir!

The mourners leave. The grave diggers step forward with their shovels. I embrace the coffin more and more as they return my soul-innards to me. They stand, finally, upon my repaired body, tamping down my outer skin, stitching up the wound.

All right, ambitious. That's enough. C'mon. Take it easy, Willy.

The grave diggers trudge off. I am fulfilled. The emptiness within me is gone... the yearning vanished. The body lies guarded inside me. I whisper to it, soothing it... comforting it in its final rest.

The days and weeks pass. But the body within my pold does not lie at rest. The body within me is not at peace. There is a stirring inside the coffin nestling in my bosom, a fluttering, a scratching...

The body tells me her story. Her name is Cynthia Meadows. She was, like me, lonely all her life. She'd remained unmarried... barren, fruitless... yearning for the things her married sister enjoyed.

It's a lovely baby boy, Myra. What is his name?

I'm going to call him Rolando!
And the empty years had crawled by...as they'd crawled for me. She made wise investments of the inheritance she'd shared with her sister, and she'd known only the wise, even her sister.

Myra's business failed, Cynthia. He's lost every cent we had!

I'm sorry, Myra. I'll try to help you!

George's business failed, Cynthia. He's lost every cent we had!

I'll... I'll look after him, George... if you want me to.

What... sob... what about Roland, Cynthia? What will I do with him?

And so, the lonely years had ended for Cynthia as my lonely years had ended. She'd taken Roland to her bosom as I'd taken her...

But I want my mommy! You mother has gone away, Roland. She's gone away for a long time.

And she'd waited through the years... as I'd waited. Finally...

It's Myra, Cynthia. She's desperately ill. Please... come, quickly!

What is it, George?

Hurry, Edith! Dinner's ready. Yes, Momma!

She'd felt the laughter... the scorn around her as I'd felt scorn. She'd watched the other women she knew marry and have children, and she'd cried. As I'd cried...

Sob... sob...

Roland's arrival in Cynthia's house had meant the end of the laughter around her... the end of scorn... just as her arrival had meant the end of scorn for me...

Roland's dinner's ready. Yes, Aunt Cynthia!

Myra's fallen ill suddenly, she's died within the week...

What... sob... what about Roland, Cynthia? What will I do with him?
Cynthia, too, had been fulfilled. She'd guarded Roland, comforted him, and he'd grown into manhood, but there was a stirring within him... just as now, Cynthia stirs.

I'm going away, Aunt Cynthia. I can't stay here any longer.

Roland! Don't leave me! Please.

Sob... sob...

And then she'd discovered why Roland had left so suddenly...

The money! I had three hundred dollars in this drawer. It's gone!

Poor Cynthia. How sorry I feel for her... to yearn for something... to yearn for it for so long... to finally get it... and then to lose it once more.

She tells me how broken-hearted she was...

Roland... sob... Roland.

She tells me how she'd tried to forget him. She tells me how her investments had continued to make her wealthier and wealthier and then... six years later...

Yes, who is it? Who... Roland! You've come back!

Yes, Aunt Cynthia, and I've brought someone...

Cynthia'd been so glad to see Roland she'd completely forgotten the crime he'd committed when he'd left...

This is my wife Enid, Aunt Cynthia. Enid, this is my Aunt Cynthia...

Roland's told me so much about you, Aunt Cynthia!

They'd come to live with her. Roland'd begged Cynthia's forgiveness...

I was young and foolish, Aunt Cynthia. It was wrong of me to take the money! I'm sorry!

There, there, Roland. It happened a long time ago!
Once more the laughter and scorn around Cynthia's died away. Roland had come back, and he'd brought his wife. Cynthia had two children now...

You don't know how happy you've made an old, lonely woman, Enid... Roland!

We both love you, Aunt Cynthia... Yes, Aunt Cynthia...

And now I know why the body I embrace within my earth-womb is not at peace. Now I know why it scratches and stirs inside. Cynthia Meadows had been murdered...

EEYYYYAAAAAAAAA!

The body within me turns and pushes and scratches. I try to stop it... try to make my insides hard... but it is determined. Then, one night... months after I had first embraced it... the body pushes upward into the cool air... pushing outward past my crust-skin...

Despite my pleading, it totters off... across the other graves... into the cold wind... the wind that carries back to me once again the laughter and scorn of the others...

And within me there is an emptiness and a yearning once more. I am lonely once more.
We were the same, Cynthia and I. Barren and fruitless and waiting, and then the waiting ended for both of us. Roland was given to her, and she to me. But like Roland left Cynthia to the laughter and the scorn, she too has left me. Now, I can only do as she did. Try to forget.

The wind blows sadly across the gnarled and bent trees around me. It whispers past the cold stones I lie silent with the emptiness within me. And I wait. And then, one night, far away, I hear it. The screaming...

Something is coming toward me, dragging the screaming behind it...

...And I reach for them. Cynthia helps me reach. She shoves aside my skin-crust, scoops out my insides, pushes them, shrieking, into my embrace...

Cynthia is gone away, now. The screaming has stopped. Yes, we were a line, she and I. Each waited...each got what she waited for...only to lose it again. But what we lost was eventually returned to us. Roland's and Enid's twisted suffocated bodies lie deep within me, pressed against my earth-bosom. And now it is I who can laugh...laugh at the others.

HEN, HEN. AND SO, KIDDIES...OUR LITTLE YELP-YARN ENDS ON THIS GRAVE NOTE. ROLAND AND ENID WERE PUNISHED FOR THEIR CRIME...BURIED ALIVE...BY CYNTIA'S CORPSE, AND OUR LITTLE GRAVE ROTTED THEM HAPPILY EVER AFTER. SO NOW...HUH? WHERE'S CYNTIA THESE DAYS, YOU ASK? WHY SHE JUST WANDERED AROUND TILL SHE FOUND SOME OTHER LONESOME GRAVE AND DROPPED IN ON HER FOR AN EXTENDED VISIT. EYE, NOW.

...For now I know my real fulfillment. I wasn't like the others after all. They're all single graves. I am a double one!
Because I have received such a flood of requests (one, the editor's mother-in-law!) I have decided to tell you another infantile insanity. After careful and intense research, I have discovered the true facts behind the grim fairy tale about the princess who slept all those years, you know... the one called...

**The Sleeping Beauty!**

Once upon a time, long, long ago, in a kingdom far away... even farther than Brooklyn, maybe... there stood a castle, completely surrounded by a high impenetrable... impenetrable... impenetrable... it was a thick growth of brambles, all thorny and what-not. And to this castle completely surrounded by the impenetrable... impenetrable... the stuff, came a prince...

**Parson me, my good man. What place is this?**

**Huh?**

I said, what place is this? Who resides in yon palace completely surrounded by that impenetrable... impenetrable... that bramble forest?

So who wants to know?
SO, IT IS... THE HERO OF THIS MISERABLE FICTION... CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING!
Pleased to meet you! I'm Melvin!

MELVIN??

LIKE I SAID, MELVIN... WHO RESIDES IN YON CASTLE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY THOSE THORNY OVERGROWTHS? BEYOND THAT IMPENETRA... THAT IMPENET... THAT... DRAMBLE JUNGLE, SLEEPS THE SLEEPING BEAUTY... SLEEPING!

AH! THE SLEEPING BEAUTY... FAIR DAMEL IN DISTRESS... AWAITING HER RESCUE... WHICH I WILL FOREVER CARRY OUT!

CAN IT, DUSTER! THAT DRAMBLE BUSH IS IMPENETRA... IMPOSSIBLE... IT'S THICK!

FEAR NOT, MY GOOD MAN... ZOUNDS! I, CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING, WILL HUE MY WAY THROUGH THAT GROWTH, WITH THIS...

A SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY SCOUT KNIFE!

WHICH I OBTAINED BY TEARING OFF THE TOP FROM A LARGE GIANT AND BENDING IT ALONG WITH MY NAME AND ADDRESS!

THE DIRTY BLOCK... THEY NEVER SENT ME MINE!

TELL ME, MY GOOD MAN... WHAT IS THE LEGEND OF THE SLEEPING BEAUTY?

DID THE SQUARE? HE DON'T KNOW THE LEGEND!

WHY DOES THE SLEEPING BEAUTY SLEEP?

WHAT A CREEP! EVERYBODY KNOWS THE STORY OF THE SLEEPING BEAUTY!

So?

So how should I know?
Isn't it true, my good man, that many years ago, a king and queen lived in that castle? And the king and queen wanted a child... very badly.

And finally, the queen presented the king with a bouncing baby girl...

Catch, Irving! Ah ah! Not so hard, Josephine!

The king was so overjoyed with his new princess, that he issued an invitation...

Here is a list of everybody who is anybody. Invite them to a feast... in honor of my new daughter...

Yes, your majesty!

The V.I.P.'s of the kingdom flocked to the feast... er... peaked to the feast... er... they came to eat...

Some spread! It must be jelly, 'cause Jan don't share like that...

But the king, who was a forgetful king, had forgotten to invite one big wheel...

And now, ladies and gentlemen... you will all make a prediction concerning the happy future of my new daughter!

C'mon, Ethel! The party's getting dull!

But a thoughtful V.I.P. calmed the horrified gathering by putting in her two cents...

On her eighteenth birthday, the princess will not die, but will go to sleep...

Am, c'mon, Ethel! This party is getting real dull!

Everyone at the feast was shocked at the prediction of the big-shot who wasn't invited...

Did the clown creep? O'boom! Gatecrasher!

You want a prediction, King Irving? All right! I'll give you one... the princess will die on her eighteenth birthday...
And so it came to pass that the baby princess grew up to become a luscious chick that anybody would want to hug and kiss...

TOMORROW IS YOUR EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY, Child! I'm a GROWN WOMAN! LOOK AT ME!

LISTEN, DAD! I'M NO CHILD! I'M A GROWN WOMAN. LOOK AT ME! LOOK!

LISTEN, WOMAN! TOMORROW IS YOUR EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY. NOW I WANT YOU TO STAY IN YOUR ROOM! NOBODY SLEEPS 'ROUND HERE!

LISTEN, DAD! I'M NO CHILD! I'M A GROWN WOMAN. LOOK AT ME!

LOOK, IRVING! BRAMBLES HAVE GROWN UP OVERNIGHT CREATING AN IMPENETRABLE THICK WALL OF THORNS...

TOMORROW IS YOUR EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY, Child! I'M NO CHILD! I'M A GROWN WOMAN. LOOK AT ME!

LISTEN, DAD! I'M NO CHILD! I'M A GROWN WOMAN. LOOK AT ME!

LOOK, IRVING! BRAMBLES HAVE GROWN UP OVERNIGHT CREATING AN IMPENETRABLE THICK WALL OF THORNS...

HOW WILL WE GET OUT? WHAT WILL THE DELIVERY MAN GET? WE'LL STARVE!

HOW WILL WE GET OUT? WHAT WILL THE DELIVERY MAN GET? WE'LL STARVE!

THE PRINCE STOOD BEFORE MELVIN, CLASPING AND UNCLASPING HIS SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY SCOUT KNIFE...

ISN'T THAT THE STORY, MY GOOD MAN?

CORRECT! YOU HAVE WON THIRTY-TWO DUCATS! WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY FOR SIXTY-FOUR?

AND ISN'T IT TRUE THAT THE PRINCE CHARMING AFTER ANOTHER HAS TRIED TO NEW HIS WAY THROUGH THE BRAMBLE BUSH?

YES, AND THEY ALL WERE CAUGHT AND DIED HORRIBLE DEATHS...

LOOK AT ME! LOOK!
The brave prince struck off into the thick growth of thorny brambles—

‘Dye!’ Happy hewing!

See how the lethally armed branches fall before the keen blade of my trusty solid gold-plated boy scout knife...

The prince turned to the brambles...

‘Dye!’ Soon it will be dark! I must hurry!’

Breathlessly, he rushed from room to room...

Sleeping beauty? Where are you?

And then... ‘Ah! The sleeping beauty... sleeping!’

Finally, the prince swung open the castle door...

Sleeping beauty! I am here!

Time and time again, he passed dried-up, shriveled, mummified bodies of prince charmings who had vainly attempted to reach the sleeping beauty...

...one more hack and I’ll be through...

...The sun was just beginning to set when charming Prince Charming reached the castle door...

Hour after hour, he hacked...

Well, what do you expect? It’s a hack story.

That’s because none of them had a solid gold-plated boy scout knife!

The prince stood up, square and strong.

Editor’s note: One more hack a yarn like this and we’ll all be through...
CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING STOOD BEFORE THE SLEEPING BEAUTY...

MAN! WHAT A BEAUTY!

SLOWLY HE BENT AND KISSED HER...

Outside, the sun had set. The sleeping beauty fluttered her eyelids... opened her eyes...

IT IS I, SLEEPING BEAUTY! I HAVE RESCUED YOU!

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY RAN UP...

All these years, you Sucker!

I...

Huh?

Only in the day-time do I sleep, Chum!

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY LEAPED FROM HER BED...

At night, I'm wide awake! I go out into that impenetrable... Impenetrable... that meddles out there and finds the suckers who are trapped in it...

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY'S FANGS BLISTENED...

...And I drink their blood for you see...

...As she sunk them into charming prince charming's throat...

I'm a VAMPIRE... BUCKER...

GOOD LORD!

Heh, heh! Well, that's my CHILDREN CHILLER for this issue, creep. Hope you liked my haunted nursery NOVELETTE! And now I smell the old witch's pot brewing. The old gal is waiting to feed you foul fare and wind up my reen-rag. So I'll be shoveling along! Ready? HOLD NOSE? EYES? RIGHT...

THE END
HEE, HEE! AND NOW IT'S WIND-UP TIME IN G.K.'S MUCK-MAG, AND YOUR HOSTESS IN THE HAUNT OF FEAR, YOUN HOSTESS OF SEWER STORIES, YOUR DISNER-DUER OF DELIRIOUS DESSERTS, THE OLD WITCH, IS HEEDY WITH HER REEKING CAULDRON. SO TUCK YOUR DROOL CUPS UNDER YOUR QUIVERING CHINS AND I'LL BEGIN THE FOUL FARE I CALL...

SHADOW OF DEATH

COME WITH ME TO A LONELY CORNER IN THE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS SECTION OF A LARGE CITY. OVERHEAD, THE LAST FADING STAR IS FINALLY RETREATING BEFORE THE ADVANCING LIGHT OF DAWN, AND THE SLEEPING CITY IS AWAKENING TO THE SOUNDS OF JANGLE'S ALARM Clocks. BUT LONG BEFORE THE CITY'S OFFICE WORKERS AND BUSY HOUSEWIVES HAVE RISEN FROM THEIR WARM BEdS, EZRA MORTON HAS BEEN ON THE JOB. THEN HE IS NOW, UNLOCKING HIS LITTLE NEWSSTAND AND SWINGING WIDE ITS DOORS. NOTICE HOW EZRA LABORS, WINCING IN PAIN. YES, DEAR READER, EZRA IS AN INVALID... A CRIPPLED NEWSDEALER. EZRA MORTON IS PANALYZED FROM THE WAIST DOWN...

NOTICE THE BUNDLES OF WINNING NEWSPAPERS STACKED ON THE CUBE BESIDE EZRA'S NEWSSTAND, NEATLY TO BE UNITED AND LAID OUT NEATLY ON DISPLAY. SEE HOW EZRA STRUGGLES, SENDING IN HIS WHEELCHAIR AND LIFTING THE HEAVY PACKAGES...
Now see the dark and deserted subway kiosk nearby, into which, in a few minutes, the office-bound secretaries and the factory-bound laborers will begin to pour, armed with the newspapers they have purchased from Ezra's stand.

Now, Ezra is ready for them — for the parade of humanity to rush by his stand and toss its copper pennies upon his paperweights and eat away at the stacks until only a few last battered copies remain. See how he smiles.

Yes, dear reader. Ezra smiles. He smiles because he is content. For this is his life... all that matters to him. This little newstand, with its few hundred daily paper sales, is Ezra's castle. Its meager profit is the line drawn between independence and starvation for him. So Ezra smiles, but Ezra does not smile forever. Suddenly Ezra catches sight of a figure standing near the subway kiosk...

And now the people are beginning to hurry from all directions toward the subway entrance. And the big man with the papers under his arm hurried to meet them on strong legs that are not withered and paralyzed as Ezra's are...

Yes, Ezra does not smile. Fear grips Ezra's helpless body. That man... that man with the papers and the healthy legs is stealing paper sales that ordinarily would be Ezra's...
Bur THELESS PEOPLE are blind. In their rush to catch their train, they do not notice that they are buying their morning papers from someone new...

"Please? I've had this corner for eight years! Those are my customers you're stealing! Please find your own corner!"

"No me somethin', gimp! S'head! Paper? Mornin' paper..."

But the sleepy-eyed people are blind. In their rush to catch their train, they do not notice that they are buying their morning papers from someone new...

"Please? I've had this corner for eight years! Those are my customers you're stealing! Please find your own corner!"

"No me somethin', gimp! S'head! Paper? Mornin' paper..."

"But the sleepy-eyed people are blind. In their rush to catch their train, they do not notice that they are buying their morning papers from someone new..."

Finally, darkness begins to fall. Sadly, Ezra ties his unsold papers into bundles and deposits them on the curb for the trucks to pick up when they deliver the next day's editions...

"All sold out, gimp! S'long! See you tomorrow!"

The next morning the man is there again, hurrying about on his strong legs selling his papers to the unaware parade, while Ezra dries in vain...

"Get your papers here!"

"Mornin' paper, lady! Thank you..."
The days pass; every morning the man is there, stealing sales from Ezra. And every night, Ezra counts his unsold papers and ties them into bundles.

"I'll... I'll never make enough to live on this way!"

A week goes by. Two. One morning, a truckman who delivers Ezra's papers warns him.

"If you can't sell more papers than this, Ezra, we'll cut you out of our delivery route. I'll... I'll try. I'll do something!

But what can Ezra do? What can a cripple do to a man with a healthy strong body? The truckman leaves. Ezra sits with his head in his hands...

"If... if I weren't paralyzed... if I weren't crippled and helpless. If I were strong, I'd show him! I'd... sob... sob... sob..."

Suddenly, Ezra's shadow lifts its head from its hands.

"I'd... sob... sob... sob..."
It slides across brick walls...

It reaches in, plucking the shadow of the axe hanging in the window.

...Board fences...

...Lifting away the shadow of the shovel standing among the garden tools...

...Back across board fences...

...Back across brick walls...

...Hesitates before a hardware store...

...To a familiar corner where a familiar shadow stands with the shadow of a huge bundle of papers under its arms...
Ezra's shadow lifts the shadow of the axe it has stolen...  

...and brings it down upon the familiar shadow with the papers under its arm...

The shadows of the papers scatter across the building wall as the figure crumples, spurring a shadow-fountain from its wound...

Ezra's shadow peers at it. The crumpled shadow stirs. Ezra's shadow lifts the axe shadow once more.

Now Ezra's shadow drags the lifeless shadow down the alley between the buildings.

...depositing it in an empty lot beside a faded billboard...
With the shadow-shovel, Ezra's shadow digs a shallow shadow-grave beside the billboard...

...And pushes the lifeless shadow in...

...And shovels the shadow-soil in upon it...

Then, Ezra's shadow returns to the newsstand where Ezra still sits with his head in his hands...

...Ezra's shadow assumes Ezra's position as Ezra hears...

Sob...Sob...That's... Sob...That's what I'd do.

Hey! This guy's dead! Huh?

What happened? Heart attack... Looks like!

Ezra rolls his wheelchair to the crumpled form of the big man with the healthy legs lying among his scattered papers...

Which is the neatest trick of the week, wouldn't you say? Well, that's my revolting recipe for this issue, creep. Now it's time to put out the fire under my pot and close the doors to the haunt of fear. So toddle along. We ghouls will all be back next in V.K.'s mag, The Vault of Horror.

'Bye, now. Er... I said 'bye!' Go on! 'N scram, already!

For, although the morning sun is shining brightly, the dead man's body casts no shadow...