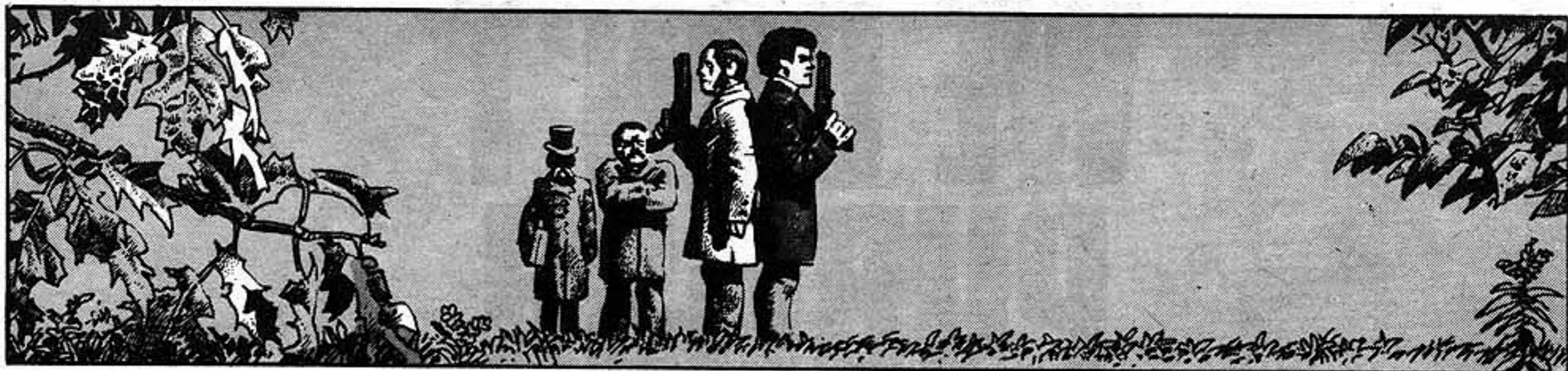
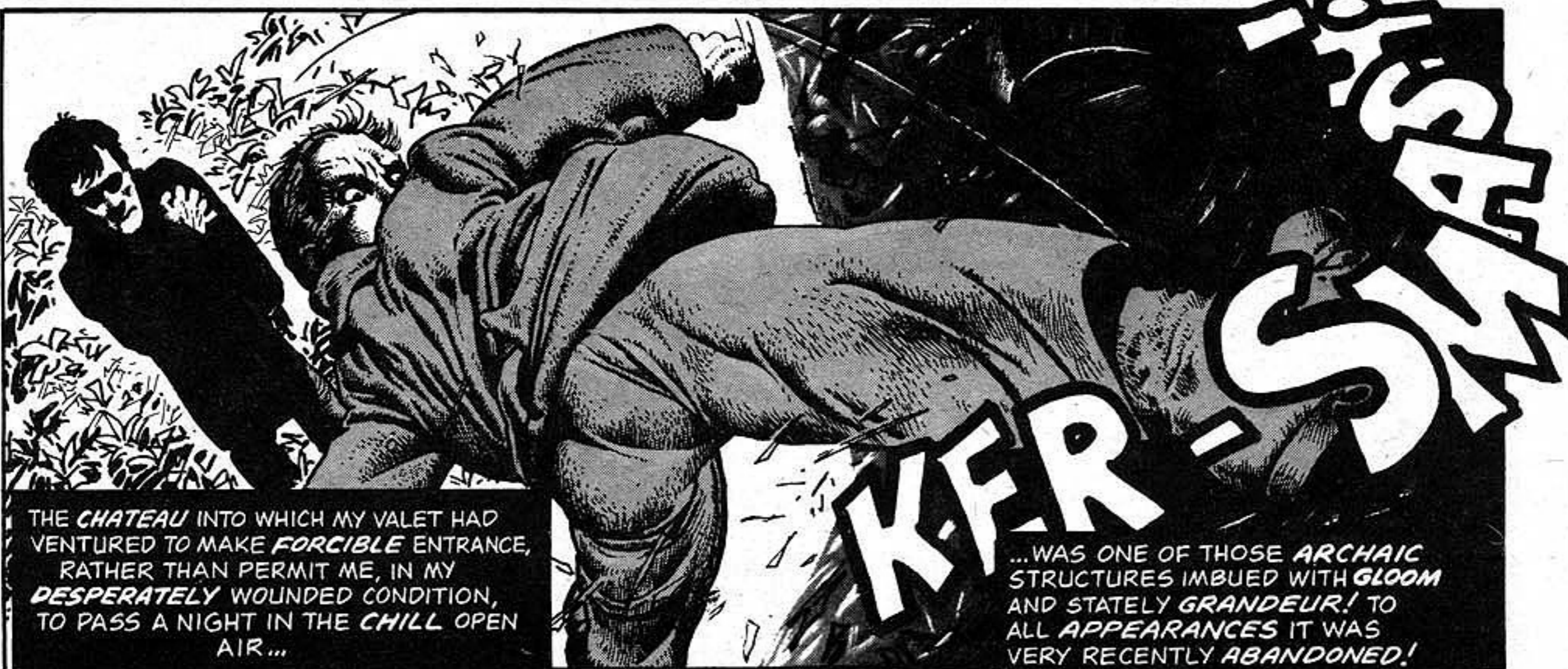
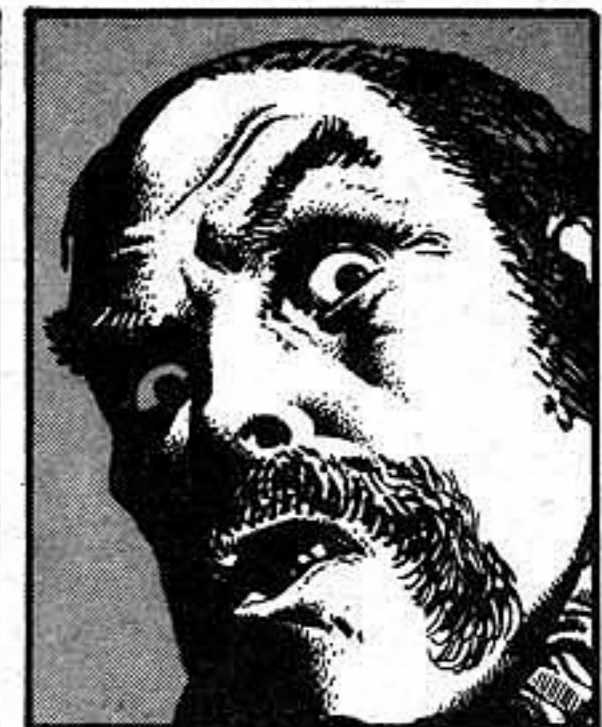


PROLOGUE





THE CHATEAU INTO WHICH MY VALET HAD VENTURED TO MAKE *FORCIBLE* ENTRANCE, RATHER THAN PERMIT ME, IN MY *DESPERATELY* WOUNDED CONDITION, TO PASS A NIGHT IN THE *CHILL* OPEN AIR...

... WAS ONE OF THOSE *ARCHAIC* STRUCTURES IMBUED WITH *GLOOM* AND *STATELY GRANDEUR!* TO ALL *APPEARANCES* IT WAS VERY RECENTLY *ABANDONED!*

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S

THE OVAL BORROW!



WE THEN *ESTABLISHED* OURSELVES, UPON ENTERING, IN ONE OF THE *SMALLEST* AND LEAST SUMPTOUSLY FURNISHED *APARTMENTS!*

IT LAY IN A REMOTE *TURRET* OF THE BUILDING!

ITS DECORATIONS WERE RICH, YET
TATTERED AND ANTIQUE!

ITS WALLS WERE HUNG WITH
TAPESTRIES AND BEDECKED
WITH MANIFOLD AND MULTIFORM
ARMORIAL TROPHIES...

... TOGETHER WITH AN UNUSUALLY
GREAT NUMBER OF SPIRITED AND MODERN
PAINTINGS FRAMED IN GOLD!



I BECAME ABSORBED IN THE
OILS WHILE MY SHOULDER
WAS ATTENDED TO!

THIS WAS, PERHAPS, DUE
TO MY INCIPIENT DELIRIUM
INDUCED BY MY STILL-
BLEEDING WOUND!



ON MY COMMANDS ... THE
VALET, PEDRO, LIT THE
ROOM'S CANDLES...



... AND PREPARED THE BED BY PULLING
BACK THE GOSSAMER BLACK CURTAINS
THAT ENVELOPED IT!

AFTER DOING THAT, PEDRO
QUIT THE **CHAMBER** AND
RETIRED FOR THE **EVENING!**



MYSELF, I
COULD NOT
SLEEP!

GETTING UP, UNSLEEPY AND
RESTLESS, I MOVED
THE **CANDELABRUM** TO
AGAIN VIEW THE **PAINTINGS!**



THE **FLICKERING**
RAYS ILLUMINATED
A DARKENED NICHE
I HAD NOT BEFORE
SEEN...

... REVEALING A **GODDESS** CONTAINED IN AN
OVAL PORTRAIT!



I **CLOSED** MY EYES!
IT WAS AN **IMPULSIVE**
MOVEMENT TO GAIN TIME
FOR **THOUGHT...** TO MAKE
SURE MY VISION HAD NOT
DECEIVED ME...



...TO CALM AND SUBDUE
MY **FANCY** FOR A MORE
SOBER AND CERTAIN GAZE!



IN A VERY FEW MINUTES, I AGAIN LOOKED **FIXEDLY**
AT THE **PAINTING!** THE **PORTRAIT** WAS THAT OF
A **RADIANT** YOUNG GIRL!

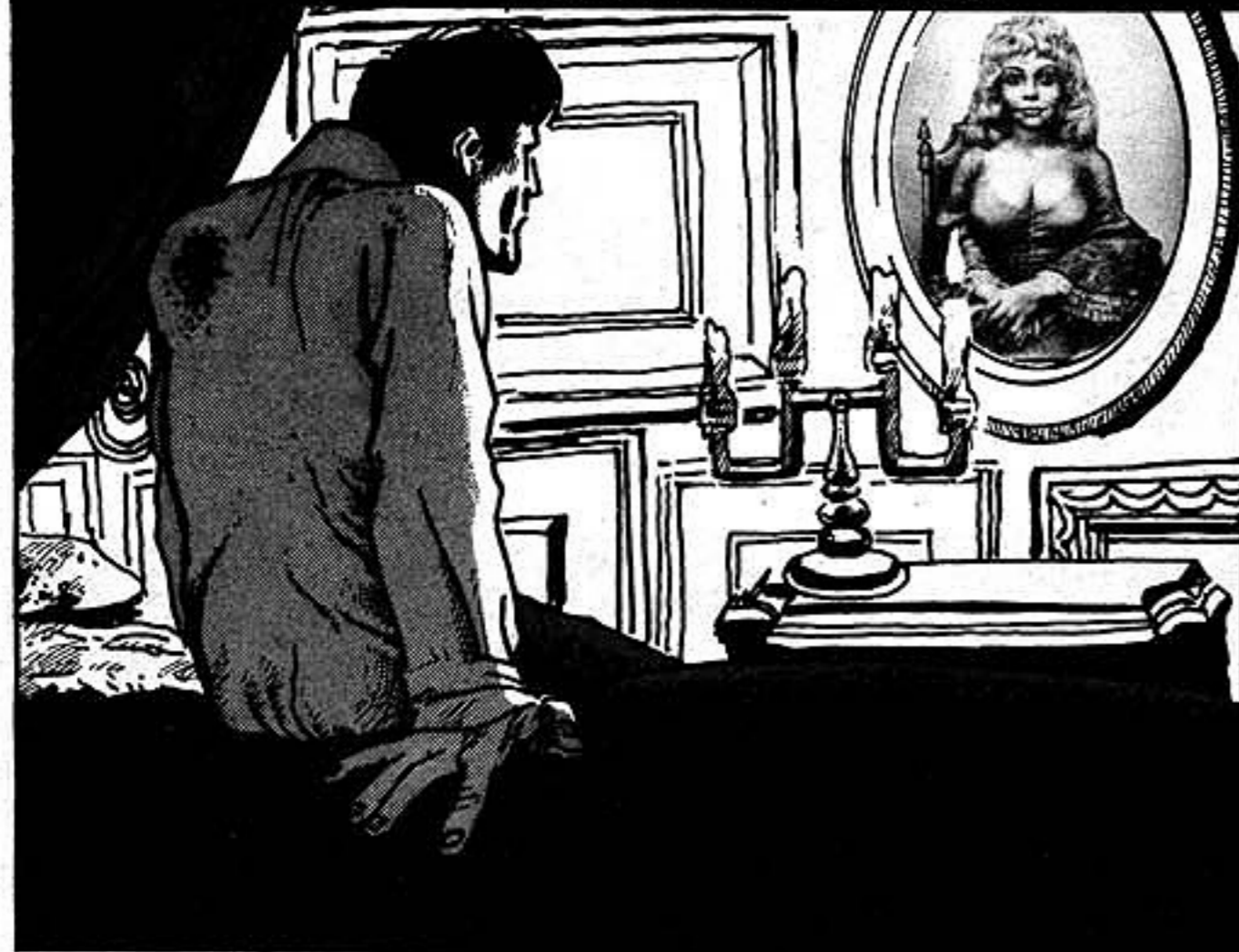
AS A THING OF ART *NOTHING* COULD BE MORE ADMIRABLE THAN THE PAINTING *ITSELF!*



BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN *NEITHER* THE EXECUTION OF THE WORK... NOR THE IMMORTAL *BEAUTY* OF THE COUNTEenance... WHICH HAD SO *VEHEMENTLY* AND *EMOTIONALLY* MOVED ME!



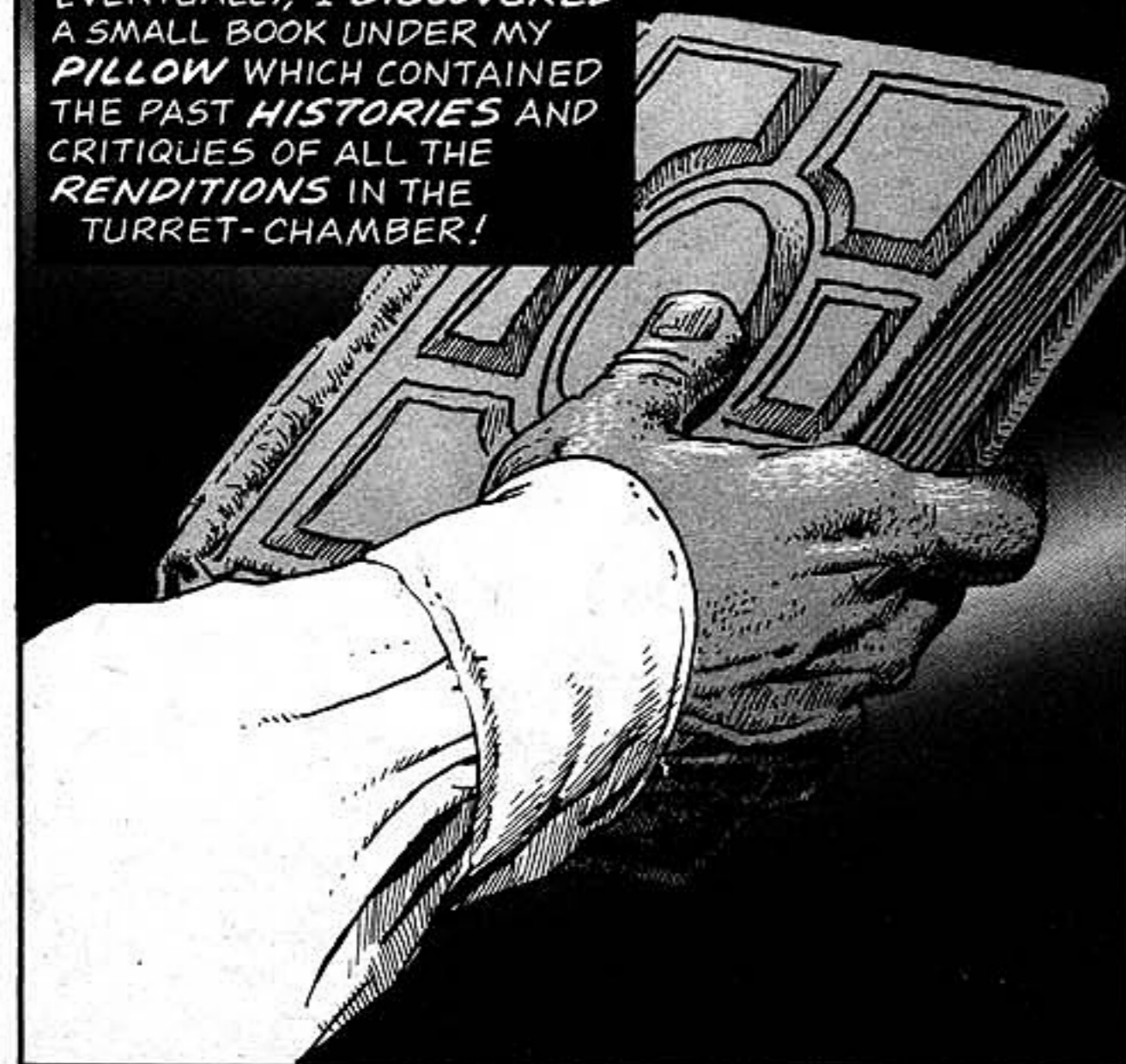
CONTEMPLATING THE SENSE-STAGGERING WENCH, I REMAINED FOR PERHAPS AN HOUR, *HALF-SITTING* AT TIMES, OR ELSE *HALF-RECLINING!*



AND *SUDDENLY* I KNEW WHAT *EXCITED* ME SO! THE WORK OF ART APPEARED TO BE A REAL, *ACTUAL* FACE OF A FAIR-HAIRED MAIDEN!



EVENUALLY, I *DISCOVERED* A SMALL BOOK UNDER MY *PILLOW* WHICH CONTAINED THE PAST *HISTORIES* AND *CRITIQUES* OF ALL THE *RENDITIONS* IN THE TURRET-CHAMBER!



TURNING TO THE PAGE THAT HELD *INFORMATION* CONCERNING THE *OVAL PORTRAIT*, I THERE READ A STORY ENTWINED WITH ELEMENTS OF BOTH *LOVE* AND *HORROR!*



SHE WAS A WENCH OF *RAREST* BEAUTY,
AND NOT MORE *LOVELY* THAN FULL OF
GLEE!

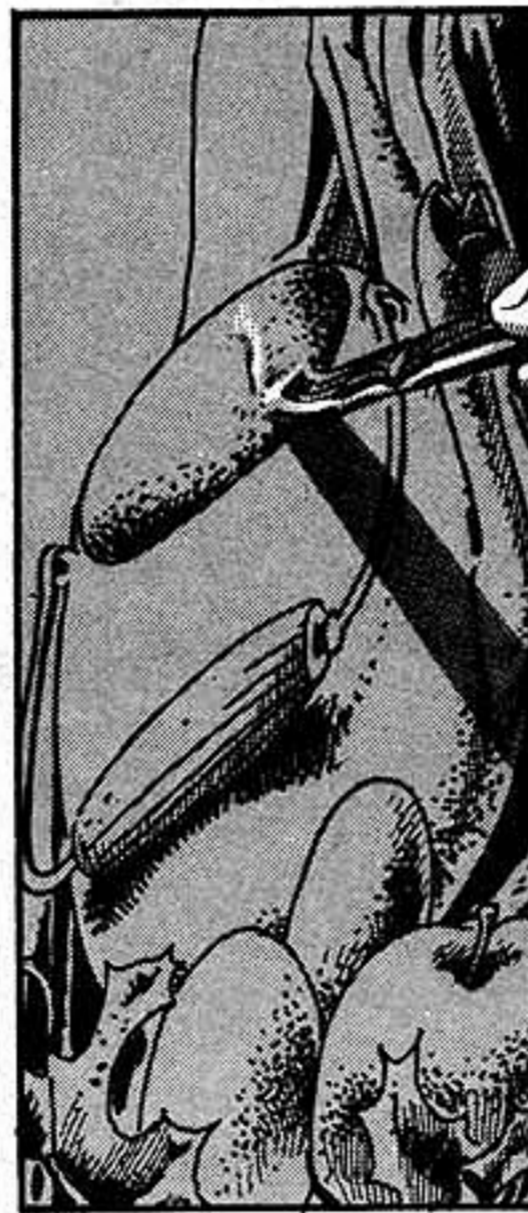


... SHE A MAIDEN, ALL *LIGHT* AND SMILES,
AND *FROLICKSOME* AS THE YOUNG FAWN...

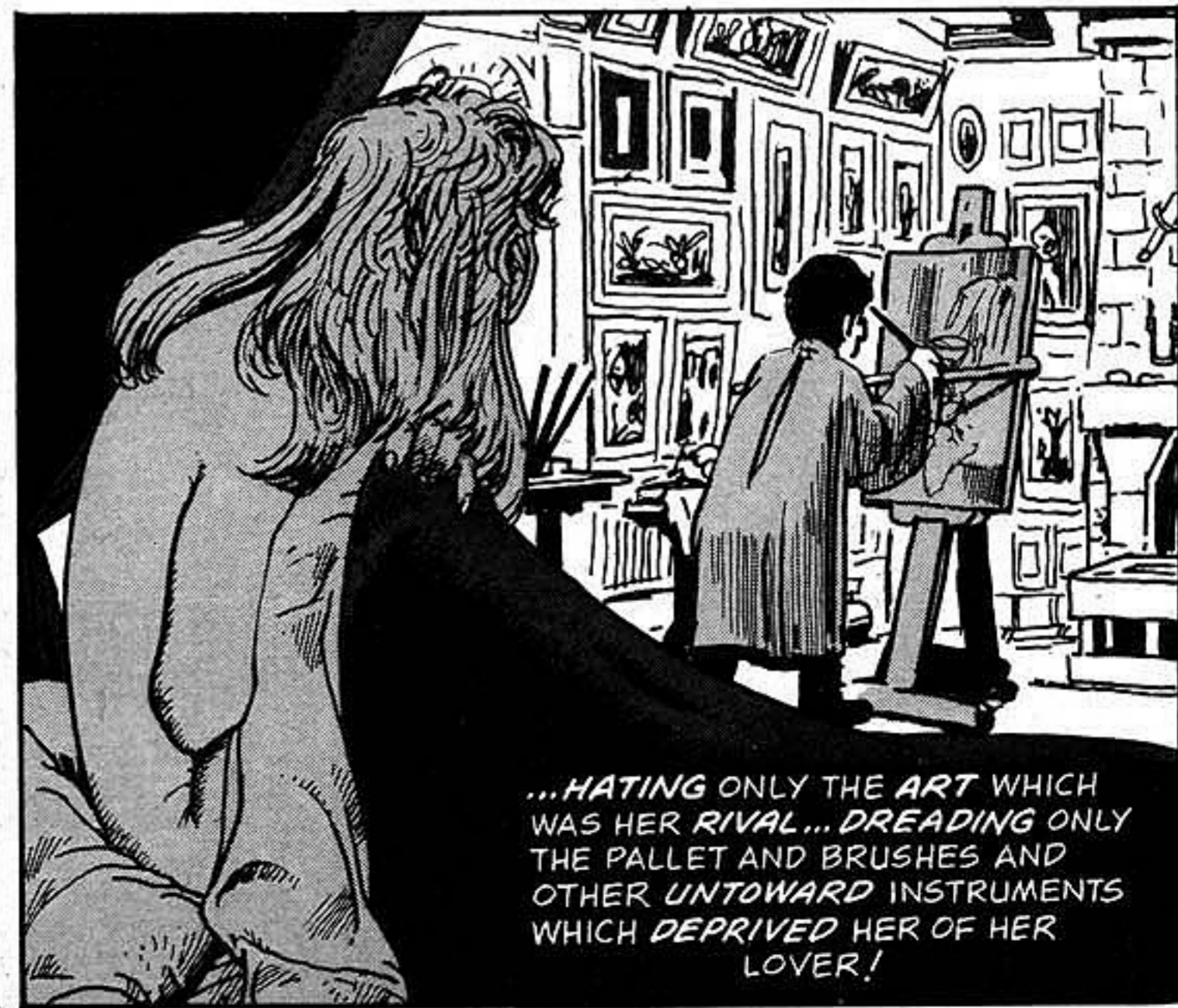
... *LOVING* AND *CHERISHING* ALL THINGS...
ESPECIALLY HER BELOVED *HUSBAND*...



AND *EVIL* WAS THE HOUR SHE *SAW*, AND
LOVED, AND *WEDDED* THE PAINTER!

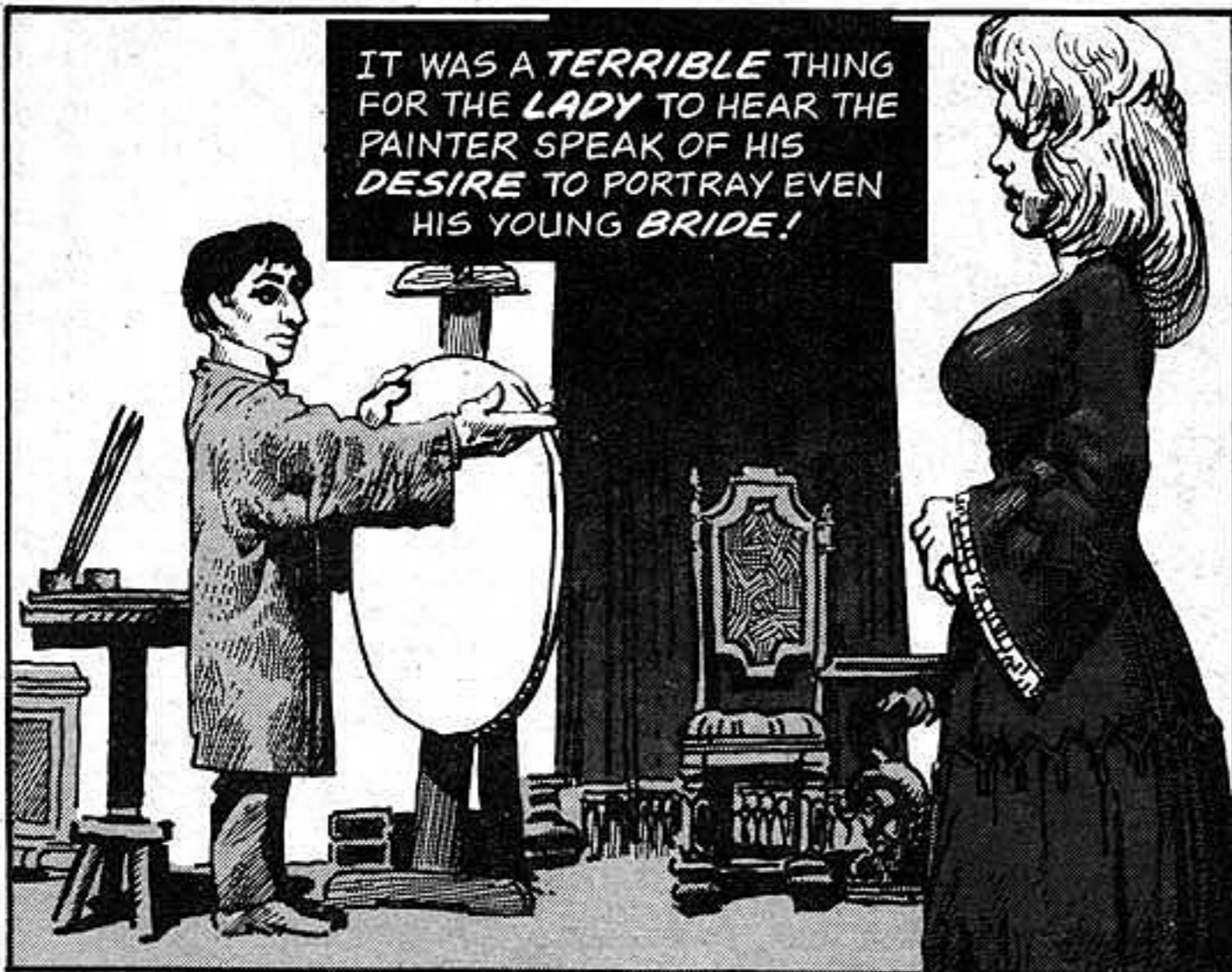


HE, *PASSIONATE*, *STUDIOUS*, *AUSTERE*...
AND ALREADY HAVING A *BRIDE* IN HIS
ART...



... *HATING* ONLY THE *ART* WHICH
WAS HER *RIVAL*... *DREADING* ONLY
THE *PALLET* AND *BRUSHES* AND
OTHER *UNTOWARD* INSTRUMENTS
WHICH *DEPRIVED* HER OF HER
LOVER!

IT WAS A **TERRIBLE** THING FOR THE **LADY** TO HEAR THE **PAINTER** SPEAK OF HIS **DESIRE** TO PORTRAY EVEN HIS **YOUNG BRIDE!**



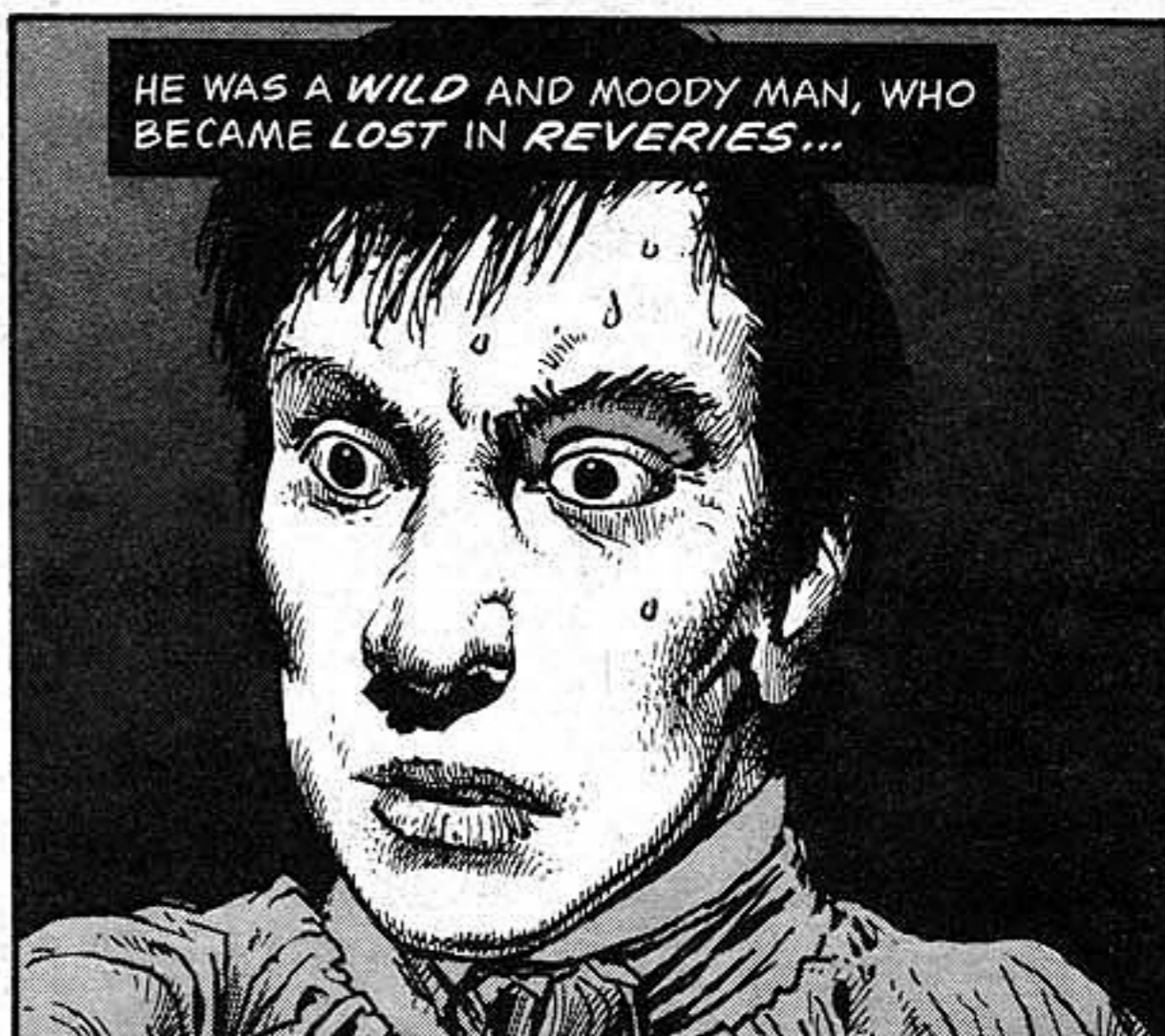
BUT SHE WAS **HUMBLE** AND **OBEDIENT**, AND SAT **MEEKLY** FOR **MANY** WEEKS IN THE **DARK**, **HIGH-TURRETED** CHAMBER...



...WHERE THE **LIGHT DRIPPED** UPON THE **PALE CANVAS** ONLY FROM **HIGH OVER-HEAD**, WHICH WENT ON FROM **HOUR TO HOUR** AND FROM **DAY TO DAY!**



HE WAS A **WILD** AND **MOODY** MAN, WHO BECAME **LOST** IN **REVERIES**...



...SO THAT HE **WOULD NOT** SEE THAT THE **GHASTLY** LIGHT WHICH FELL SO **HARSH** IN THAT **DAMP** AND **CHILLY** ROOM **WITHERED** THE **HEALTH** AND **SPIRITS** OF HIS **WILLING MATE!**



YET, THE **LASS SMILED UNCOMPLAINING** SINCE SHE **KNEW** HER **HUSBAND** EXTRACTED MUCH **PLEASURE** IN HIS **CREATIVE TASK!**



AS THE MONTHS
WORE ON...

...THE PAINTING
BECAME MORE
LIFE-LIKE...

...AND THE MODEL
HERSELF...

...GREW WEAKER
AND WEAKER!!

FINALLY, THE PORTRAIT WAS COMPLETED!
FOR ONE MOMENT, THE PAINTER STOOD
ENTRANCED BEFORE THE UNBELIEVABLY
REALISTIC WORK! HE TURNED TO HIS
WIFE...

... ONLY TO FIND HER DEAD!! HER LIFE HAD FLED HER FACE
AND FORM... AND TRANSFERED ITSELF TO THE OVAL
PORTRAIT... THERE TO DWELL FOREVER!

AS I HAVE
PREVIOUSLY
STATED, IT WAS
A TALE OF
BOTH LOVE...

...AND
HORROR!!

END