

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S

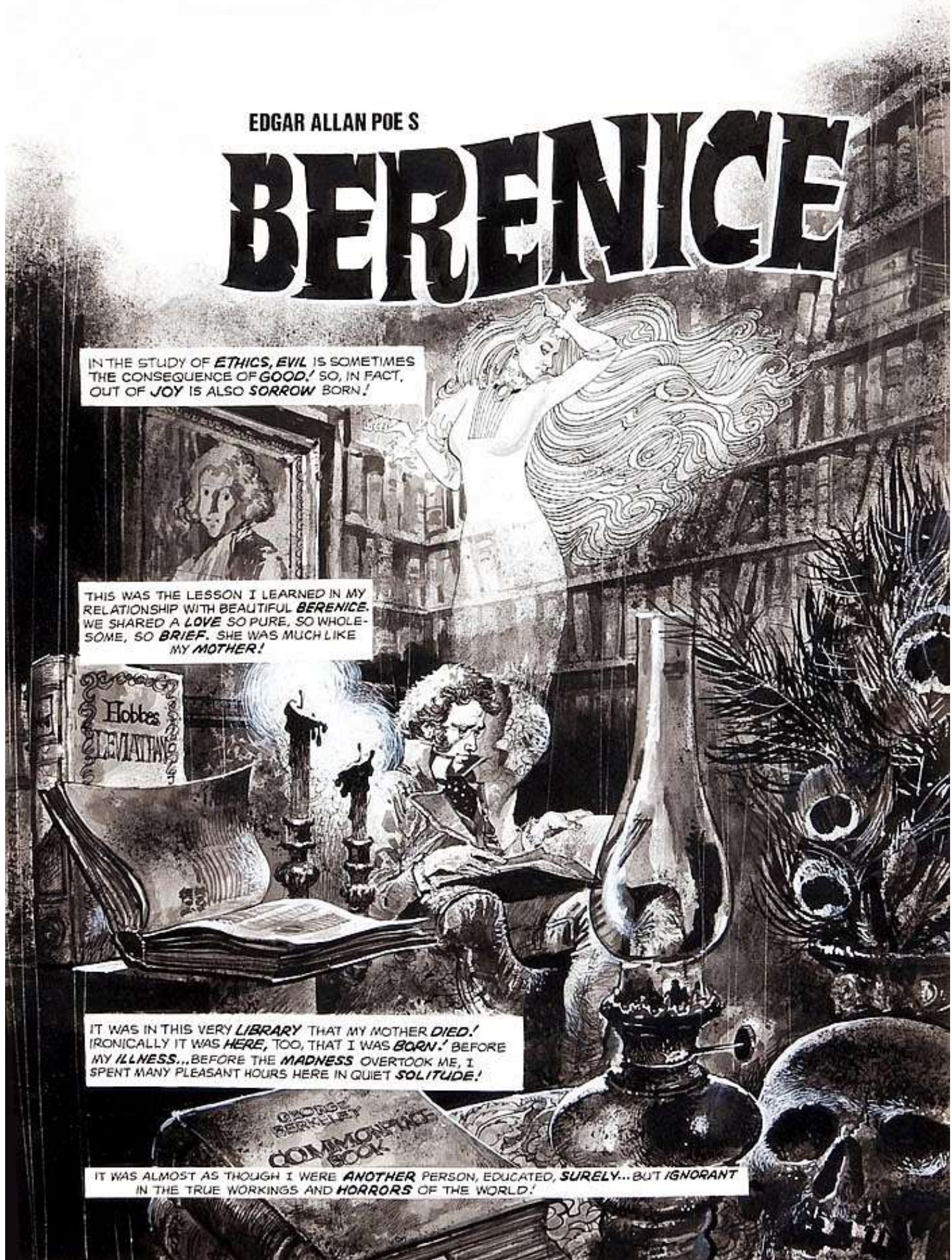
BERENICE

IN THE STUDY OF *ETHICS*, *EVIL* IS SOMETIMES THE CONSEQUENCE OF *GOOD*! SO, IN FACT, OUT OF *JOY* IS ALSO *SORROW* BORN!

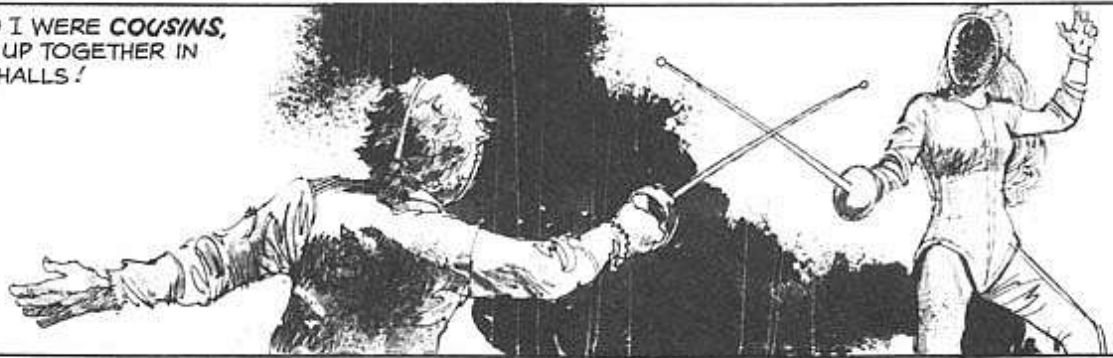
THIS WAS THE LESSON I LEARNED IN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH BEAUTIFUL *BERENICE*. WE SHARED A *LOVE* SO PURE, SO WHOLE-SOME, SO *BRIEF*. SHE WAS MUCH LIKE *MY MOTHER*!

IT WAS IN THIS VERY *LIBRARY* THAT MY MOTHER *DIED*! IRONICALLY IT WAS *HERE*, TOO, THAT I WAS *BORN*! BEFORE MY *ILLNESS*... BEFORE THE *MADNESS* OVERTOOK ME, I SPENT MANY PLEASANT HOURS HERE IN QUIET *SOLITUDE*!

IT WAS ALMOST AS THOUGH I WERE *ANOTHER* PERSON, EDUCATED, *SURELY*... BUT *IGNORANT* IN THE TRUE WORKINGS AND *HORRORS* OF THE WORLD!



BERENICE AND I WERE **COUSINS**,
AND WE GREW UP TOGETHER IN
MY **PATERNAL** HALLS!



YET, **DIFFERENTLY** WE GREW!
I, OFTEN **HAUNTED** WITH A
STRANGE **ILLNESS**... OR ELSE,
BURIED IN TIME-WORN **BOOKS**...



... **SHE**, AGILE, GRACEFUL, AND
OVERFLOWING WITH ENERGY;
HERS WAS THE **RAMBLE** ON
THE HILLSIDE...



... MINE THE **STUDIES**
OF THE **CLOISTER**!



I LIVED WITHIN MY OWN **HEART**...
ADDICTED BODY AND SOUL TO
THE MOST INTENSE AND
INTROVERTED MEDITATION...



... WHILE **BERENICE** ROAMED
CARELESSLY THROUGH **LIFE**... WITH
NO THOUGHT OF THE SHADOWS
LOOMING IN HER PATH!



BERENICE! I CALL UPON HER NAME! OH **BERENICE!** AND, FROM THE GREY RUINS OF MEMORY, A THOUSAND **TUMULTUOUS** RECOLLECTIONS ARE **MANIFESTED!**

AH! VIVIDLY IS HER IMAGE BEFORE ME NOW... AS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF HER **LIGHTHEARTEDNESS** AND JOY!

SHE WAS **GORGEOUS...** A TOTALLY-ENTHRALLING BLOND **BEAUTY!**



BUT, A LONG AND **NEAR-FATAL** DISEASE FELL UPON HER **PERSON!** ALAS! THE **DESTROYER** CAME AND WENT!

AND THE VICTIM...? I **NO LONGER** TRULY KNEW HER AS **BERENICE!**



WHEREAS MY ILLNESS WAS **MEDITATIVE** AND GRIPPED THE **MIND...** HER ILLNESS WAS **EPILEPSY** THAT CLAIMED HER **BODY!**



I FOUND HER MORE THAN ONCE ENDURING SPASMIC THROES IN A STATE OF **SEMI-CONSCIOUSNESS!**

I **DARED** NOT DWELL ON **BERENICE'S** SICKENED STATE... AND, AS A RESULT, THE **INTENSITY** OF MY CONTEMPLATION IN **OTHER THINGS** UNFOLDED **DRAMATICALLY!**



I COULD EASILY BE **ABSORBED** IN A QUAIN **SHADOW** FALLING ASLANT UPON A **TAPESTRY...** OR LOSE MYSELF WATCHING THE STEADY **FLAME** OF A LAMP... OR DREAM AWAY WHOLE DAYS OVER **PERFUMED** FLOWERS!



IN THE *LUCID* INTERVALS OF MY *MENTAL INFIRMITY*, HER CALAMITY, WITHOUT A DOUBT, GAVE ME *PAIN!*



I SOUGHT TO *ESCAPE* HER PRESENCE IN THE *SILENCE* OF MY LIBRARY AT *NIGHT!*



YET, EVEN *THERE*, SHE *FLITTED* BEFORE MY EYES... NOT THE *REAL* LIVING AND BREATHING *BERENICE*... BUT THE *BERENICE* AS OF A *DREAM!*



CONSTANTLY DID MY THOUGHTS TURN TO HER, AND DWELL UPON HER... UNTIL, AT LAST, AN *UNHOLY* LONGING SPRANG UP WITHIN MY SOUL FOR MY *COUSIN*...



...AND, IN A MOMENT OF *EVIL*, I SPOKE TO HER OF... *MARRIAGE!*



TIME *FLEW!* IT WAS *WINTER!* FAST APPROACHING WAS THE *DATE* OF OUR INTENDED *WEDDING!*



I SAT ALONE, IN THE *DIMLY LIT* LIBRARY... *BROODING*, WITH ONLY THE TOWERING SHELVES OF BOOKS FOR *COMPANY*...



...WHEN, **UPLIFTING** MY EYES, I SAW THAT BERENICE STOOD **SILENTLY** BEFORE ME!

WAS IT MY OWN **EXCITED** IMAGINATION OR THE **MISTY** INFLUENCE OF THE **ATMOSPHERE**... OR THE **UNCERTAIN** (ANGLE - LIGHT OF THE **CHAMBER**... OR THE **GREY GOWN** THAT FELL AROUND HER **FIGURE**...

AN **ICY CHILL** RAN THRU MY FRAME! A SENSE OF **INSUFFERABLE ANXIETY** OPPRESSED ME...

HER **EMACIATION** WAS EXCESSIVE, AND NOT ONE **VESTIGE** OF THE FORMER BEING **LURKED** IN ANY SINGLE LINE OF THE **CONTOUR** OF HER FACE!

... THAT CAUSED IT TO **VACILLATE** AND APPEAR **INDISTINCT** IN OUTLINE?

...AND, **SINKING** BACK UPON THE CHAIR, I REMAINED FOR SOME TIME **BREATHLESS** AND **MOTIONLESS!**

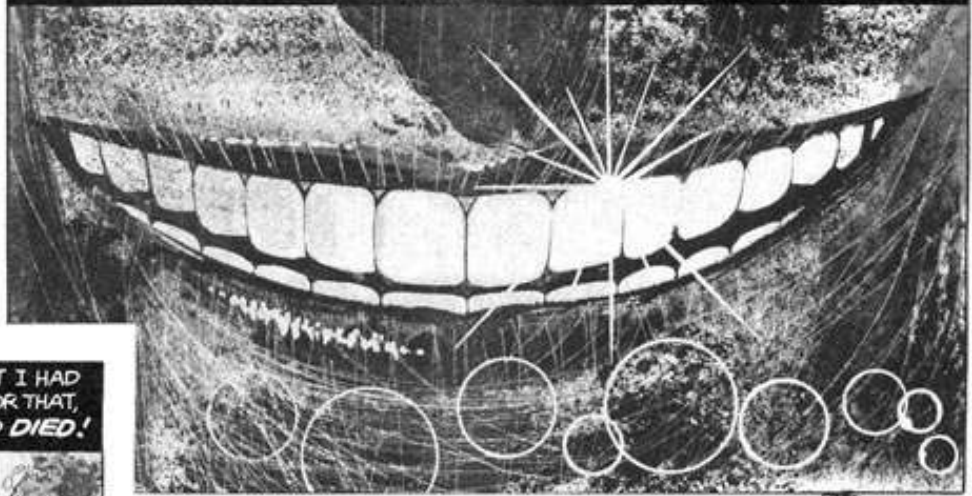


THE **EYES**, IN PARTICULAR, WERE **LIFELESS**, AND LACKED **LUSTER**... AND I SHRANK INVOLUNTARILY FROM THEIR **GLASSY STARE!**

QUICKLY, I TURNED MY ATTENTION TO HER THIN AND SHRUNKEN LIPS! AS I WATCHED, THEY PARTED...



...AND, WITH A SMILE OF MYSTERIOUS MEANING, THE TEETH OF THE CHANGED BERENICE DISCLOSED THEMSELVES SLOWLY TO MY VIEW!



WOULD TO THE LORD THAT I HAD NEVER BEHELD THEM, OR THAT, HAVING DONE SO, I HAD DIED!



THE SHUTTING OF A DOOR DISTURBED ME, AND LOOKING UP, I FOUND THAT MY COUSIN HAD DEPARTED THE CHAMBER!

BUT, FROM THE DISORDERED CHAMBER OF MY BRAIN, THE GHASTLY SPECTRUM OF WHITE TEETH HAD NOT DEPARTED... AND WOULD NOT BE DRIVEN AWAY!



I SAW THEM NOW EVEN MORE UNEQUIVOCALLY THAN I BEHELD THEM THEN! THEN, HORROR OF HORRORS, AN LINGOVERNABLE MOOD OF PAINFUL MEDITATION WAS UPON ME!

THE TEETH! THE TEETH!!



THEY WERE HERE, AND THERE, AND EVERYWHERE... VISIBLY AND PALPABLY BEFORE ME... LONG, NARROW, EXCESSIVELY WHITE, WITH PALE LIPS QUIVERING AND WRITHING ABOUT THEM!



I FELT THAT THEIR POSSESSION COULD ALONE RESTORE ME TO PEACE... SINCE THE TEETH HAD SOMEHOW STOLEN MY POWERS OF REASON!



EVENTUALLY, AFTER A PERIOD WITHOUT TIME, THE MINDLESS MADNESS WITH-DREW, AND I LEFT THE LIBRARY!



IN THE HUSHED AND DARK-ENED CORRIDOR OUTSIDE, I ENCOUNTERED THE MAID, WITH STREAMING TEARS, WHO TOLD ME BERENICE WAS...



...NO MORE!



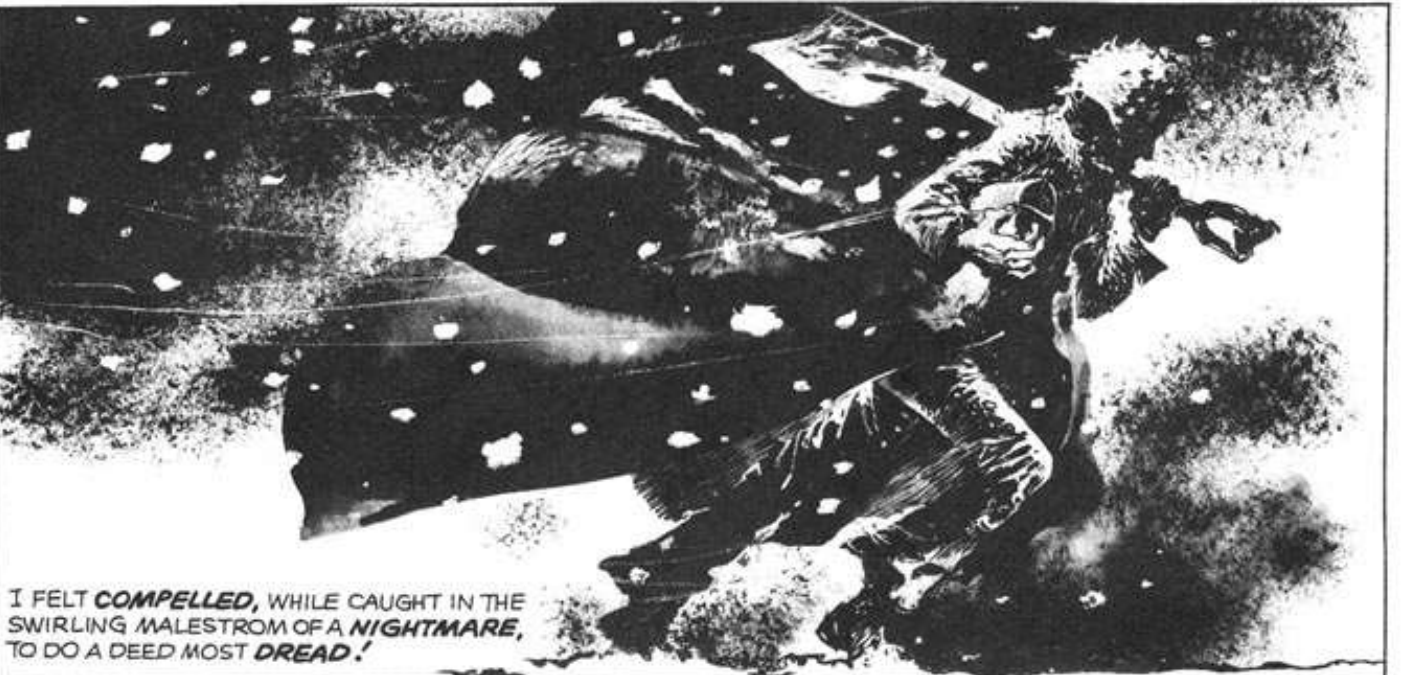
SHE HAD BEEN SEIZED WITH EPILEPSY IN THE EARLY MORNING...



... AND NOW, AT THE CLOSING IN OF NIGHT, HER OPEN GRAVE MADE READY TO RECEIVE ITS TENANT!



MUCH LATER, I FINALLY PASSED INTO SLEEP... AND SUFFERED FROM THE MOST FITFUL OF DREAMS!



I FELT COMPELLED, WHILE CAUGHT IN THE SWIRLING MALESTROM OF A NIGHTMARE, TO DO A DEED MOST DREAD!

I VAGUELY REMEMBER DIGGING WITH A SHOVEL... AND THEN...AND THEN...

BY THE SAINTS! WHAT HAD I DONE?!



SUDDENLY, I AWOKE IN BED... FULLY DRESSED... SPLATTERED WITH DIRT AND GORE... AND KNEW THE TERROR I HAD EXPERIENCED WAS NOT A DREAM, AFTER ALL!

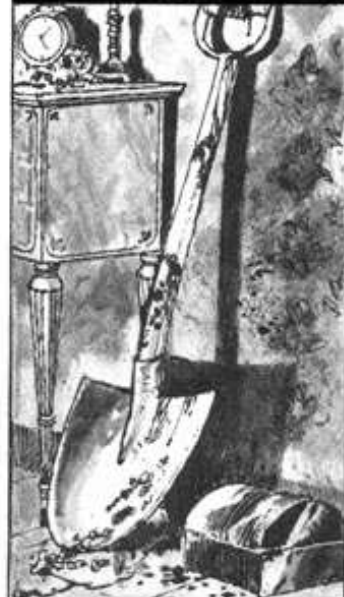


BUT, WHAT COULD I DO THAT WAS SO SORDID THAT I COULD NOT COMPLETELY RECALL IT?

THE METAL SPADE... ALL THE DIGGING... THE BLOOD... HAD I EXPOSED A GRAVE? YES! I HAD! BUT... WHOSE?



IN THE CORNER OF MY ROOM WAS THE GRIME-SMEARED SHOVEL... AND NEXT TO IT, AN OMINOUS BLACK BOX! WHATEVER VILE ACT I HAD COMMITTED...



...THE ANSWER WOULD BE FORTHCOMING FROM THE EBON CHEST!

I HAD UNEARTHED, IT SEEMS, THE BODY OF MY BELOVED BERENICE! AND HER TORMENTING SMILE WOULD PLAGUE ME NO LONGER!

FOR, THERE WITHIN THE BOX, RATTLED THIRTY-TWO SMALL, BRIGHT, WHITE... TEETH!!



I WOULD FOREVER POSSESS THE SMILE OF MY BELOVED!