

# PROLOGUE



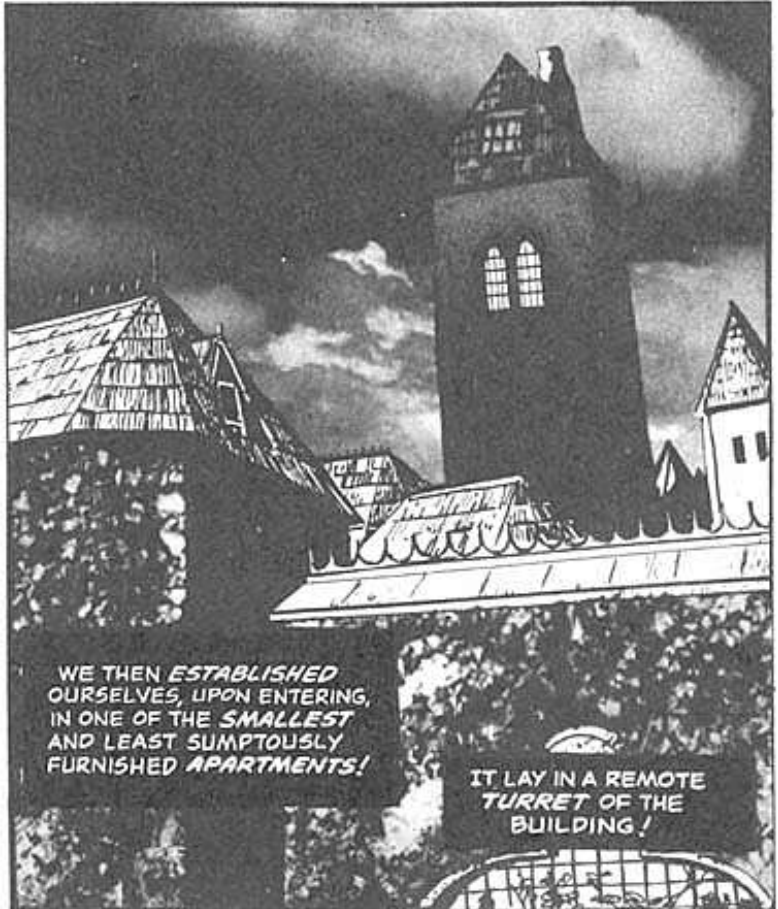


THE CHATEAU INTO WHICH MY VALET HAD VENTURED TO MAKE *FORCIBLE* ENTRANCE, RATHER THAN PERMIT ME, IN MY *DESPERATELY* WOUNDED CONDITION, TO PASS A NIGHT IN THE *CHILL* OPEN AIR...

... 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 PORTRAIT!



WE THEN *ESTABLISHED* OURSELVES, UPON ENTERING, IN ONE OF THE *SMALLEST* AND LEAST *SUMPTUOUSLY* 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 SUBDUCE  
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!

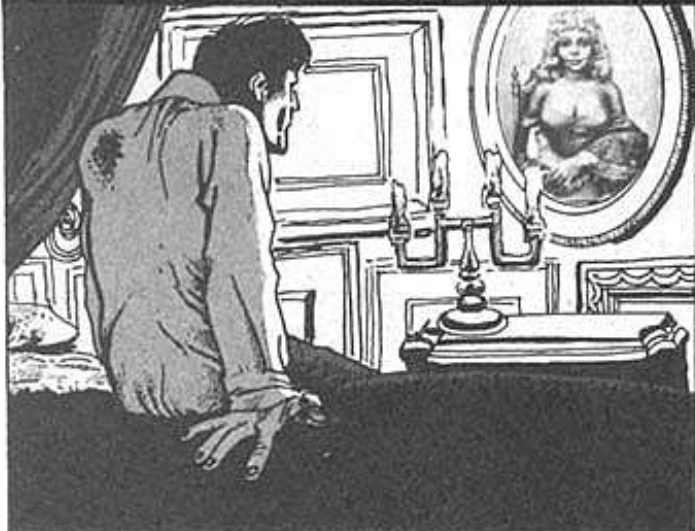
AS A THING OF ART NOTHING COULD BE MORE ADMIRABLE THAN THE PAINTING ITSELF!

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



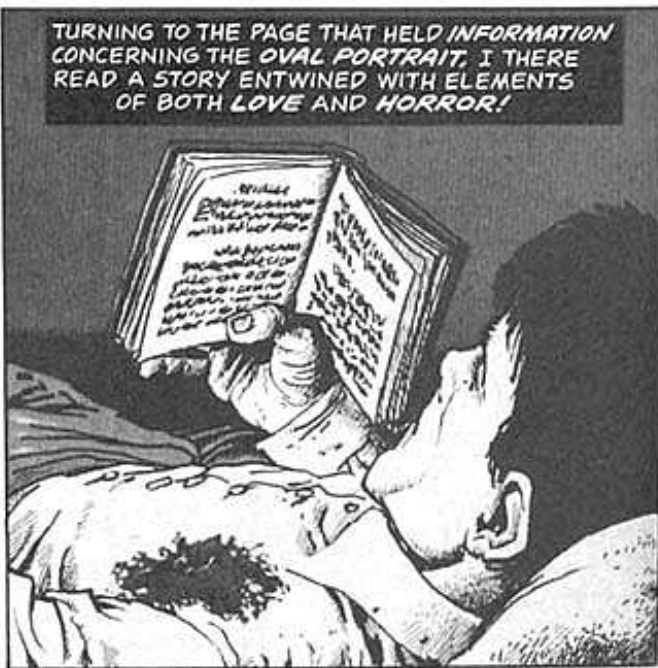
CONTEMPLATING THE SENSE-STAGGERING WENCH, I REMAINED FOR PERHAPS AN HOUR, HALF-SITTING AT TIMES, OR ELSE HALF-RECLINING!

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



EVENTUALLY, 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*...

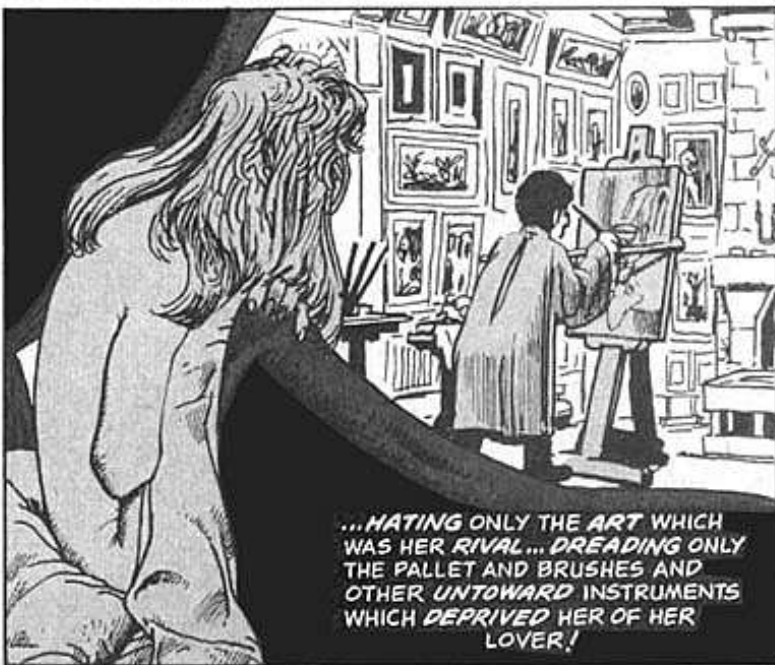
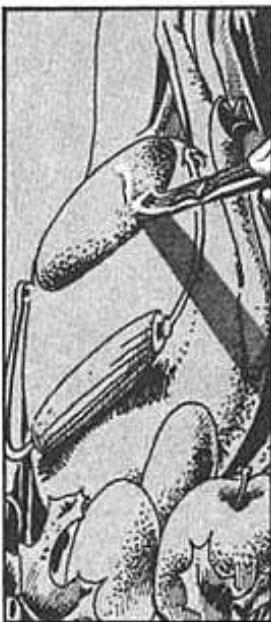
... *LOVING* AND *CHERISHING* ALL *THINGS*...  
ESPECIALLY HER *BELOVED HUSBAND*...



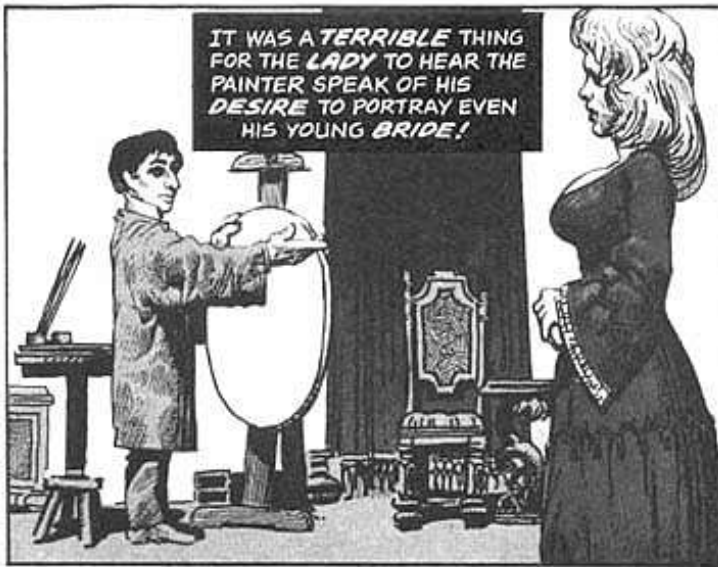
AND *EVIL* WAS THE HOUR SHE *SAW*, AND  
*LOVED*, AND *WEDDED* THE *PAINTER!*



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



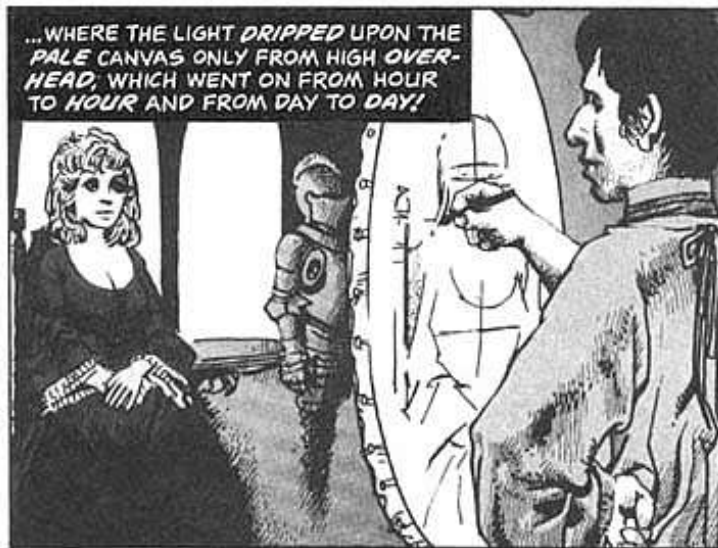
... *HATING* ONLY THE *ART* WHICH  
WAS HER *RIVAL*... *DREADING* ONLY  
THE *PALLET* AND *BRUSHES* AND  
OTHER *UNTOWARD* INSTRUMENTS  
WHICH *DEPRIVED* HER OF HER  
*LOVER!*



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



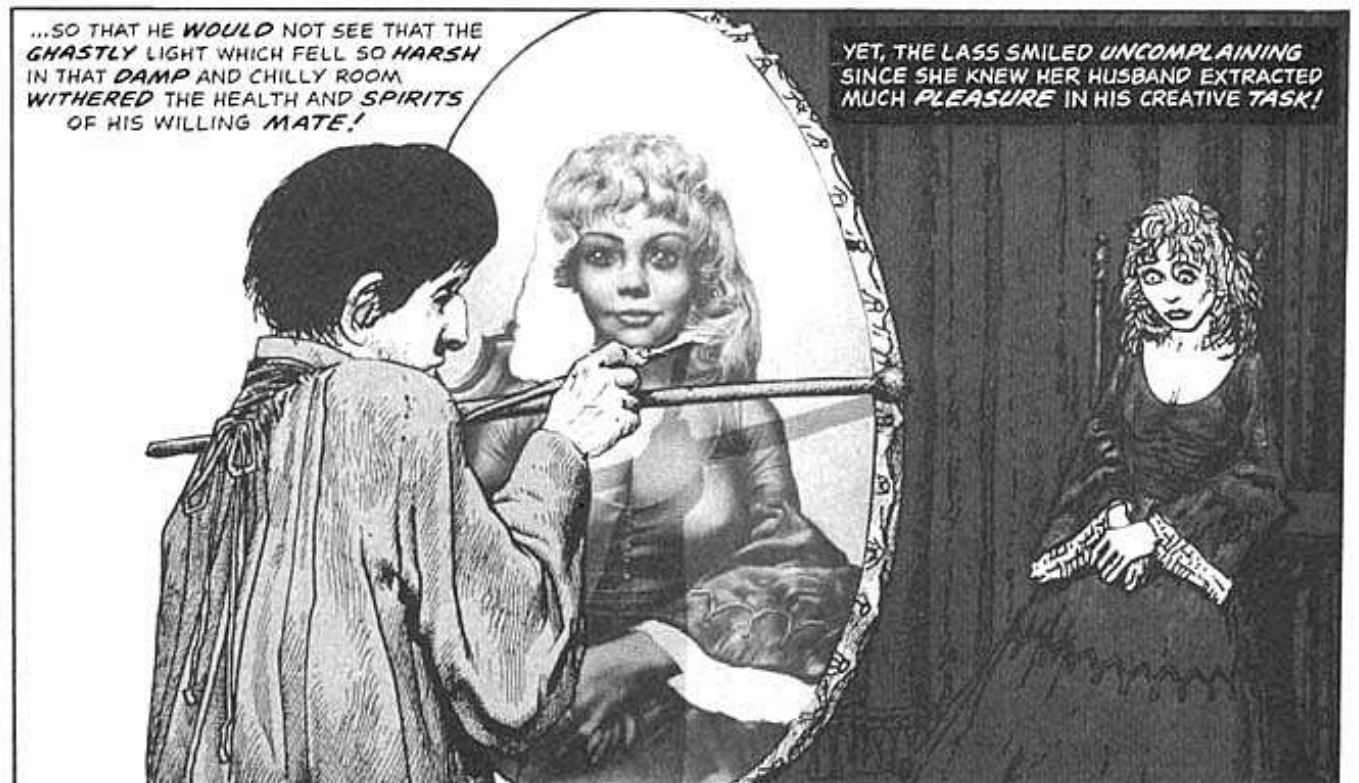
BUT SHE WAS **HUMBLE** AND **OBEDIENT**, AND SAT **MEEKLY** FOR **MANY** WEEKS IN THE **DARK**, **HIGH-TURRETED** CHAMBER ...



...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!**

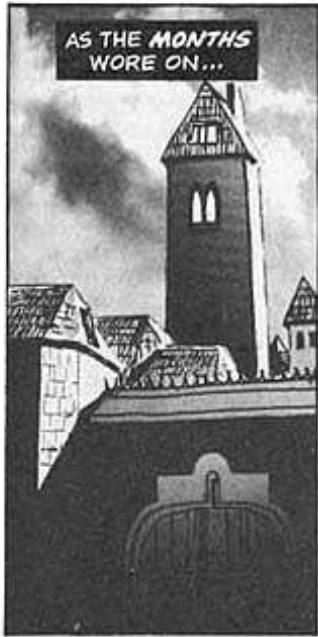


HE WAS A **WILD** AND **MOODY** MAN, WHO BECAME **LOST** IN **REVERIES**...



...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...



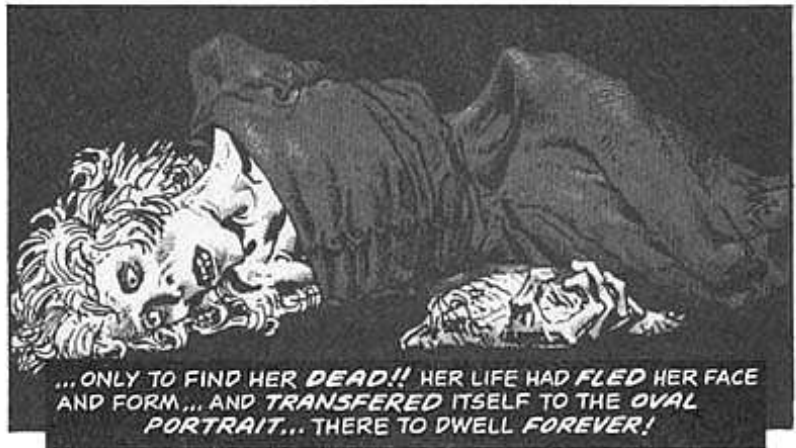
...AND THE MODEL HERSELF...



...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!!