

READY FOR A CHANGE OF PACE, FELLOW-FIENDSTERS?
LET'S SEE IF I CAN'T ARRANGE FOR YOU TO FACE
THE BROODING MENACE OF...



THE CHANGELING!

Gene Colan

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON, BUT DARKNESS HAD ALREADY OVERTAKEN MUCH OF THE AGING MANSION'S INTERIOR, ADDING TO THE SINISTER EFFECT OF ITS RAMBLING ARCHITECTURE. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE LEAVING BOSTON, RACHEL MEREDITH WAS HAVING REGRETS...

THE BUTLER USHERED RACHEL INTO THE LIBRARY. SHADOWS CAST BY THE FLICKERING FLAMES OF THE FIREPLACE ADDED ONE MORE MACABRE TOUCH TO THE OLD BUILDING'S GLOOM. COLD EYES PEERED BALEFULLY AT HER FROM UNDER THE DARK BROW OF THE MAN FACING HER...

THIS WAY, MISS MR. HAZELTINE'S BEEN WAITING...

ALL THOSE STARES FROM THE TOWNSPEOPLE WHEN I SAID I WAS COMING HERE ... SMALL WONDER I'M NERVOUS!

I'M EMMETT HAZELTINE, MISS MEREDITH. WELCOME TO MY HOUSE. MY LAWYER GAVE YOU A GLOWING RECOMMENDATION... I'M SURE YOU'LL BE A FINE GOVERNESS FOR THE BOY.

T-THANK YOU, MR. HAZELTINE... I HOPE YOUR WIFE AND SON THINK SO TOO. I CERTAINLY WILL TR---



EMMETT HAZELTINE'S FACE GREW DARKER...

NO ONE TOLD YOU? MY WIFE'S BEEN IN AN ASYLUM SINCE JUST AFTER GIVING BIRTH... INCURABLY INSANE! WHAT THE BOY THINKS DOESN'T MATTER!

I'M SORRY... I-I DIDN'T KNOW... BUT IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE CHILD AND I GET ALONG, OR ELSE...

THAT'S BETWEEN YOU AND HIM! MY WORK HERE IN THE LIBRARY DEMANDS ALL MY TIME... IT'S ESSENTIAL! HANDLE THE BOY AS YOU WILL!

THIS TIME OF DAY, HE'S USUALLY IN THE GARDEN... BY THE POND. LATHROP WILL SHOW YOU THE WAY!



HAZELTINE FACED HIS BOOK SHELVES SHUTTING RACHEL OUT WITHOUT CHANCE OF REPLY. THE BUTLER APPEARED AND LEAD HER TO THE BACK OF THE HOUSE, OUTSIDE INTO THE FADING SUNLIGHT...

MASTER DONALD! MASTER DONALD, I'VE BROUGHT MISS MEREDITH, YOUR NEW GOVERNESS...

WHAT'S BEHIND YOUR BACK? WHAT ARE YOU HIDING?

NOTHING, LATHROP...



RACHEL FELT HERSELF AT ONCE IMPRESSED AND REPELLED BY THE BOY. NEAT AND HANDSOME, YET SOMEHOW DISTANT AND REMOVED, HIS DELICATE FEATURED FACE AN IMMOBILE MASK. AS THEY APPROACHED, DONALD BROUGHT HIS HAND OUT FROM BEHIND HIS BACK...

...NOTHING BUT THIS!

DEAR LORD! IT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN KILLED BY SOME KIND OF... A-ANIMAL!



FLUSHED WITH ANGER, THE BUTLER SPRANG FORWARD SENDING THE MUTILATED CARCASS FLYING FROM THE CHILD'S GRIP...

I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR TRICKS! TIME YOU LEARNED A LESSON...

YOU LITTLE MONSTER!

NO, MR. LATHROP!

AS LONG AS I'M GOVERNESS, YOU'RE NEVER TO LAY A HAND TO THIS BOY! ANY CHILD'S NATURALLY CURIOUS ABOUT DEATH... THAT'S WHY HE HAD IT!



VERY WELL, MISS, WE'LL SEE... SEE HOW YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEAR ABOUT THE **FIRST** GOVERNESS!

RACHEL TOOK THE BOY TO HIS ROOM, THEN BURST INTO THE LIBRARY OUTRAGED AND ANNOYED, REPEATING THE INCIDENT TO THE BROODING-MASTER OF HAZELTINE HOUSE...

IT'S NOTHING TO ME, MISS MEREDITH! WHERE THE BOY'S CONCERNED LATHROP WILL OBEY YOUR WISHES! NOW IF YOU'RE

DONE DISTURBING MY RESEARCH...

JUST ONE MORE THING, MR. HAZELTINE... ANOTHER WOMAN HAD MY JOB. WHAT HAPPENED TO HER?



HAZELTINE'S LARGE, STRONG HANDS BROUGHT HIS BOOK SHUT WITH A LOUD SNAP. RACHEL COULD NOT BE SURE IF IT WERE THE MAN'S WORDS OR THE BOOK'S TITLE THAT SENT A SHIVER THROUGH HER...

SHE WAS KILLED, MISS MEREDITH!

BY SOME MANNER OF WILD ANIMAL THE AUTHORITIES SEEMED TO THINK...

ANIMAL THE AUTHORITIES SEEMED TO THINK...

THE CHILL OF FORBODING STAYED WITH HER THROUGH THE EVENING, UNTIL BEDTIME...

I'M NOT SORRY ABOUT THE CAT, IT SCRATCHED ME ONCE. I'M GLAD IT WAS KILLED, BUT HAVING SOMEONE TAKE MY PART WAS NICE... NO ONE EVER DID IT BEFORE!

DON'T WORRY, DONALD. I'M HERE TO HELP WHENEVER I CAN... NOW YOU SHOULD BE GOING TO SLEEP...



RACHEL PAUSED AT THE WINDOW. THE GARDEN BELOW WAS A DARK MASS OF SHRUBBERY AND SHADOWS! THE FINE HAIR ON THE BACK OF HER NECK SUDDENLY TINGLED. FOR AN INSTANT, ONE OF THE SHADOWS SEEMED TO MOVE, THEN MELT INTO THE DARKNESS...

I-I MUST BE TIRED...THE STRAIN OF THE FIRST DAY...

THE NIGHT'S STRANGENESS FADED INTO MORNING AND THE FIRST OF HER TUTORING WITH DONALD...

WEARILY SHE RETURNED TO HER OWN ROOM. RACHEL COULD NOT BE SURE, BUT AS HER HEAVY EYELIDS CLOSED THERE SEEMED TO BE A FAINT SHUFFLING SOUND IN THE HALL, PAUSING, THEN MOVING ALONG PAST, DOWN TOWARD THE ROOMS OF THE OTHER SERVANTS...

DONALD! DONALD! HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO LEARN HISTORY WHILE STARING OUT THAT WINDOW?

THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON...SOMETHING IN THE GARDEN!

IT'S HAPPENED AGAIN! IT'S HAPPENED AGAIN!

GOD HELP US!
IT'S LATHROP!
LIKE THE HOUND OF THE HELL HAD RUN 'IM TO EARTH!

RACHEL STARED, TRANSFIXED WITH HORROR, THEN SLOWLY NOTICED A CHILLING SOUND... A SOFT CHILDISH SNICKER...

DONALD!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING? STOP IT! A MAN'S DIED OUT THERE...

ONLY LATHROP, NASTY OLD LATHROP! I HATED HIM AND HE HATED ME... EVERYONE HATES ME...

THAT'S A **TERRIBLE** THING TO SAY... IT'S NOT TRUE! WHAT ABOUT ME? WHAT ABOUT YOUR FATHER?

HE'S **WORSE** THAN LATHROP! WORSE THAN ANYONE... YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO DOESN'T MISS MEREDITH... THE ONLY ONE!

RACHEL WANTED TO CONTRADICT THE TERRIBLE ACCUSATION OF THE SMALL SOLEMN FACE, BUT THERE WAS NO WAY. DONALD'S WORDS WEIGHED HEAVILY ON HER UNTIL EVENING WHEN SHE COULD STAND IT NO MORE...

MR. HAZELTINE, I'VE GOT TO SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT DONALD... **NOW!**

THERE'S NO NEED. AFTER WHAT'S HAPPENED TO LATHROP, EVERY OTHER SERVANT'S QUIT... I SEE NO REASON FOR YOU TO STAY ON!

I HAD HOPED TO HAVE A SOLUTION BEFORE NOW, BEFORE ANOTHER DEATH... BUT IT'S NOT EASY... SO MANY BOOKS, SO LITTLE TIME...

NO REASON? WHAT ABOUT YOUR SON? YOUR OWN SON!

BOOKS?!
YOU SPEND YOUR DAYS LOOKING FOR ANSWERS AMID THIS JUMBLE OF WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY? FOR THAT YOU NEGLECT YOUR OWN SON?

STOP CALLING HIM MY SON!
I KNOW THAT LITTLE HORROR FOR WHAT HE IS!

A CHANGELING, MISS MEREDITH! DO YOU KNOW OF THEM? SPAWN OF THE DEVIL'S CREATURES, LEFT IN THE CRADLE IN EXCHANGE FOR HUMAN INFANTS... MY CHILD WAS STOLEN, AND THIS... LEFT IN HIS PLACE!

WHY ELSE DO YOU THINK MY WIFE WENT MAD?!

THE PURE FURY OF THE EMMETT HAZELTINE'S WORDS HIT RACHEL LIKE Mallet STROKES. SHE BACKED SLOWLY FROM THE ROOM...

BUT SOME-DAY I'LL FIND IT... THE SPELL, THE CURSE, THE MEANS TO DESTROY HIM... TO SEND HIM BACK TO THE PIT FROM WHICH HE CAME!

DEAR LORD! HE'S INSANE... COMPLETELY INSANE!



SHE FLED THE LIBRARY, RACING UP FLIGHTS OF THE DARK CREAKING STAIRS...

DONALD! WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP?

NOISE WOKE ME... I HEARD VOICES... SHOUTING!



DONALD, DEAR, LISTEN TO ME... IT ISN'T SAFE HERE ANY LONGER! YOUR FATHER'S NOT WELL... I'VE GOT TO GET YOU AWAY...

YES... I THINK I'M READY TO LEAVE NOW!

NO! DEAR GOD, NO! THIS TIME IT'S NOT NERVES...

DONALD... LET'S GO BACK TO YOUR ROOM...

THE MOON-LIGHT OUTSIDE THE OPEN LANDING WINDOW SOMEHOW PULLED RACHEL'S EYES. A DEATHLY QUIET HUNG OVER THE MANSION AND DARKENED GARDEN... THEN RACHEL HEARD THE SOUND...



THIS WAS NO SLEEP-FOGGED DELUSION. NOW SHE COULD HEAR THE DOOR FROM THE GARDEN, THEN AGAIN THE SHUFFLING... SLITHERING... NOW INSIDE!

D-DONALD, I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD BE OUT HERE... LET'S...

COME ON, MISS MEREDITH, THIS WAY...

FROM THE YAWNING BLACK DEPTHS OF THE STAIRWAY, MORE SOUNDS DRIFTED UP... WOOD SPLINTERING AND CRACKING AS THE LIBRARY DOOR GAVE WAY!

DONALD! DON'T GO DOWN THERE! GET BACK! DONALD...

COME ON, WE WANT TO SEE WHAT'S GOING ON... COME ON, MISS MEREDITH!

THE GLOW OF THE KEROSENE LAMP CREPT SURELY DOWN THE WINDING FLIGHTS AND DISAPPEARED IN THE VICINITY OF THE LIBRARY. SECONDS LATER, THE DARKNESS WAS SPLIT BY SHRIEKING HORROR!

DONALD! OH, MY GOD... DONALD!



HALF-RUNNING, HALF-FALLING, RACHEL DESCENDED THE STAIRS ONLY TO FREEZE IN MADDENING TERROR AT THE MACABRE TABLEAU BEFORE HER, AS SOUNDS AND ODORS OF UNEARTHLY CARNAGE STUNNED HER REMAINING SENSES.

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE



THEN, AS THOUGH ONLY A NIGHTMARE INSTEAD OF THIS PHANTASMAGORIC REALITY, SHE RACED FORWARD FOR THE BOY, HOPING STILL TO SAVE HIM...

DONALD! LISTEN TO ME! COME BACK! COME BA---

THE LAMP! YOU'VE DROPPED THE LAMP!



HE SHRUGGED FREE SENDING RACHEL REELING BACKWARD AS THE LAMP HIT THE CARPETING AND SCATTERED BOOKS... ABOVE THE CRACKLING FLAMES AND HAZETINE'S SCREAMS, SHE COULD HEAR THE GROWING GIGGLE OF THE BOY...



THE LIBRARY BECAME AN INFERNO WHICH WOULD SOON SPREAD TO THE ENTIRE HOUSE, AND THE DANCING SHADOWS OF ITS FLAMES ALL BUT DROVE RACHEL MAD. AS SHE SANK INTO OBLIVION, DONALD'S LAUGHTER GREW TO A WORD SHOUTED OVER AND OVER... THE NAME OF THE LOATHSOME THING CLAWING AND DESTROYING HAZELTINE...



MEN FROM THE VILLAGE FOUND HER THE NEXT MORNING SPRAWLED ON THE LAWN OF WHAT ONCE HAD BEEN HAZETINE HOUSE... INSIDE, THEY FOUND THE CHARRED REMAINS OF EMMETT HAZELTINE, NOTHING MORE!

SHE'S GONNA BE OKAY... LITTLE DELIRIOUS NOW, BUT SHE'LL BE OKAY...

... THAT'S WHAT HE CALLED IT... THAT THING... HE CALLED IT... MOTHER!



SO! DONALD HAD A PRETTY HOT TIME AT HIS FAMILY REUNION... LIKE ALL MOTHERS, HIS TENDED TO BE OVERPROTECTIVE... AS MR. HAZELTINE FOUND OUT! AND YOU'LL FIND OUT THERE'S MORE MONSTROUS MAYHEM AWAITING YOU WHEN YOU PICK UP ISSUE NUMBER 7 OF EERIE!

