

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1948

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Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 20 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.00. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. Copyright, 1947, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain.

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Vol. 40, No. 3

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Ghost Hunt

BY H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

WELL, listeners, this is Tony Weldon speaking. Here we are on the third of our series of Ghost Hunts. Let's hope it will be more successful than the other two. All our preparations have been made, and now it is up to the spooks. My colleague tonight is Professor Mignon of Paris. He is the most celebrated investigator of psychic phenomena in the world, and I am very proud to be his collaborator. We are in a medium size, three-story

Georgian house not far from London. We have chosen it for this reason. It has a truly terrible history. Since it was built, there are records of no less than thirty suicides in or from it, and there may well have been more. There have been eight since 1893. Its builder and first occupant was a prosperous city merchant, and a very bad hat, it appears; glutton, wine-bibber and other undesirable things, including a very bad husband. His wife stood his cruelties and in-

The house was "bad" since the day it'd been built . . . and no wonder



Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

fidelties as long as she could and then hanged herself in the powder closet belonging to the biggest bedroom on the second floor, so initiating a terrible sequence.

I used the expression "suicides in and from it," because while some have shot themselves and some hanged themselves, no less than nine have done a very strange thing. They have risen from their beds during the night and flung themselves to death in the river which runs past the bottom of the garden some hundred yards away. The last one was actually seen to do so at dawn on an autumn morning. He was seen running headlong and heard to be shouting as though to companions running by his side. The owner tells me people simply will not live in the house and the agents will no longer keep it on their books. He will not live in it himself, for very good reasons, he declares. He will not tell us what those reasons are; he wishes us to have an absolutely open mind on the subject, as it were. And he declares that if the Professor's verdict is unfavorable, he will pull down the house and rebuild it. One can understand that, for it almost seems to merit the label "Death-Trap."

Well, that is sufficient introduction. I think I have convinced you it certainly merits investigation, but we cannot guarantee to deliver the goods or the ghosts, which have an awkward habit of taking a night off on these occasions.

And now to business. Imagine me seated at a fine satinwood table, not quite in the middle of a big reception room on the ground floor. The rest of the furniture is shrouded in white, protective covers. The walls are light oak panels. The electric light in the house has been switched off; so all the illumination I have is a not very powerful electric lamp. I shall remain here with a mike, while the Professor roams the house in search of what he may find. He will not have a mike as it distracts him, and he has a habit, so he says, of talking to himself while conducting these investigations. He will return to me as soon as he has anything to report. Is that all clear? Well, then, here is the Professor to say a few words to you before he sets forth on his tour of discovery. I may say he speaks English far better than I do. Professor Mignon.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, this is Professor Mignon. This house is without doubt, how shall I say, impregnated with evil. It affects one profoundly. It is bad, bad, bad! It is soaked in evil and reeking with emanations from its wicked past. It must be pulled down, I assure you. I do not think it affects my friend, Mr. Weldo, in the same way, but he is not psychic, not mediumistic as I am. Now shall we see ghosts, spirits? Ah, that I cannot say! But they are here and they are evil; that is sure. I can feel their presence. There is, maybe, danger. I shall soon know. And now I shall start off with just one electric torch to show me the way. Presently I will come back and tell you what I have seen, or if not seen, felt and perhaps suffered. But remember, we can summon spirits from the vasty deep, but will they come when we call for them? We shall see.

WELL, listeners, I'm sure if anyone can, it's the Professor. You must have found those few words far more impressive than anything I said. That was an expert speaking on what he knows. Personally, alone here in this big, silent room, they didn't have a very reassuring effect on me. In fact, he wasn't quite correct when he said this place didn't affect me at all. I don't find it a cheerful spot by any means. You can be sure of that. I may not be psychic, but I've certainly got a sort of feeling it doesn't want us here, resents us, and would like to see the back of us. *Or else!* I felt that way as soon as I entered the front door. One sort of had to wade through the hostility. I'm not kidding or trying to raise your hopes.

It's very quiet here, listeners. I'm having a look around the room. This lamp casts some queer shadows. There is an odd one near the wall by the door, but I realize now it must be a reflection from a big Adams bookcase. I know that's what it is because I peeped under the dust-cover when I first came in. It's a very fine piece. It's queer to think of you all listening to me. I shouldn't really mind if I had some of you for company. The owner of the house told us we should probably hear rats and mice in the wainscoting. Well I can certainly hear those now. Pretty hefty rats from the sound

of them. Even you can almost hear them, I should think.

Well, what else is there to tell you about? Nothing very much, except that there's a bat in the room. I think it must be a bat and not a bird. I haven't actually seen it, only its shadow as it flew past the wall just now, and then it fanned past my face. I don't know much about bats, but I thought they went to bed in the winter. This one must suffer from insomnia. Ah, there it is again. It actually touched me as it passed. Now I can hear the Professor moving about in the room above. I don't suppose you can; have a try. Now listen carefully.

Hello! Did you hear that! He must have knocked over a chair or something—a heavy chair from the sound of it. I wonder if he's having any luck. Ah, there's that bat again. It seems to like me. Each time it just touches my face with its wing as it passes. They're smelly things, bats. I don't think they wash themselves often enough. This one smells kind of rotten. I wonder what the Professor knocked over, because I can see a small stain forming on the ceiling. Perhaps a flower bowl or something. Hello! Did you hear that sharp crack? I think you must have. The oak-paneling stretching, I suppose, but it was almost ear-splitting in here. Something ran across my foot, then, a rat perhaps. I've always loathed rats. Most people do, of course. That stain on the ceiling has grown quite a lot. I think I'll just go to the door and shout to the Professor to make sure he's all right. You'll hear me shout and his answer, I expect.

Professor! Professor!

Well, he didn't answer. I believe he's a little bit deaf. But he's sure to be all right. I won't try again just yet as I know he likes being undisturbed on these occasions. I'll sit down again for a minute or two. I'm afraid this is rather dull for you, listeners. I'm not finding it so, but then of course—there, I heard him cough. Did you hear that cough, listeners, a sort of very throaty double cough? It seemed to come from—I wonder if he's crept down and is having a little fun with me, because, I tell you, listeners, this place is beginning to get on my nerves just a wee little bit, just a bit. I wouldn't live in it for a pension, a

very large pension. Get away, you brute! That bat! Faugh! It stinks.

Now listen carefully.

CAN you hear those rats? Having a game of rugger from the sound of them. I wonder if you could hear them. I really shall be quite glad to get out of here. I can quite imagine people doing themselves in in this house. Saying to themselves: after all, it isn't much of a life when you think of it; figure it out, is it? Just work and worry and getting old and seeing your friends die. Let's end it all in the river!

I'm not being very cheerful, am I? It's this darned house. Those other two places we investigated didn't worry me a bit, but this—I wonder what the Professor's doing besides coughing. I can't quite make that cough out because—get away, you brute! That bat'll be the death of me! Death of me! Death of me!

I'm glad I've got you to talk to, listeners, but I wish you could answer back. I'm beginning to dislike the sound of my own voice. After a time, if you've been talking in a room alone, you get fanciful. Have you ever noticed that? You sort of think you can hear someone talking back.

There!

No, of course you couldn't have heard it, because it wasn't there, of course. Just in my head. Just subjective, that's the word. That's the word. Very odd. That *was* me laughing, of course. I'm saying "Of course" a lot. Of course I am. Well, listeners, I'm afraid this is awfully dull for you. Not for me, though, not for me! No ghosts so far, unless the Professor is having better luck.

There! You must have heard that! What a crack that paneling makes! Well, you must have heard that, listeners, better than nothing. Ha! Ha! Professor! Professor! Phew, what an echo!

Now listeners, I'm going to stop talking for a moment. I don't suppose you'll mind. Let's see if we can hear anything. . . .

DID you hear it? I'm not exactly sure what it was. Not sure. I wonder if you heard it. Not exactly, but the house shook a little and the windows rattled. I don't think we'll do that again. I'll go

on talking. I wonder how long one could endure the atmosphere of this place. It certainly is inclined to get one down.

Gosh, that stain has grown. The one on the ceiling. It's actually starting to drip. I mean form bubbles. They'll start dropping soon. Colored bubbles, apparently. I wonder if the Professor is okay? I mean he might have shut himself in a powder-closet or something and the powder closets in this house aren't particularly—well you never know, do you? Now I should have said that shadow had moved. No, I suppose I put the lamp down in a slightly different position. Shadows do make odd patterns, you must have noticed that. This one might be a body lying on its face with its arms stretched out. Cheerful, aren't I! An aunt of mine gassed herself, as a matter of fact. Well, I don't know why I told you that. Not quite in the script.

Professor! Professor!

Where is that darned old fuzzy-whiskers! I shall certainly advise the owner to have this place pulled down. Emphatically. Then where'll *you* go! I must go upstairs in a minute or two and see what's happened to the Professor. Well, I was telling you about Auntie . . .

D'you know, listeners, I really believe I'd go completely crackers if I stayed here much longer. More or less anyway, and quite soon, quite soon, quite soon. Absolutely stark, staring! It wears you down. That's

exactly it, it wears you down. I can quite understand, well, I don't say all that again. I'm afraid this is all awfully dull for you, listeners. I should switch off if I were you.

I should! What's on the other program? I mean it, switch off! There, what did I tell you; that stain's started to drip drops, drip drops, drip drops, drip drops! I'll go and catch one on my hand . . .

Good God!

Professor! Professor! Now then up them stairs! Now which room would it be? Left or right? Left, right, left, right—left has it. In we go.

Well, gentlemen, good evening! What have you done with the Professor? I know he's dead. See his blood on my hand? What have you done with him? Make way, please, gentlemen. What have you done with him? D'you want me to sing it, Tra-la-la.

Switch off, you fools!

Well, if this isn't too darned funny. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Hear me laughing, listeners.

Switch off, you fools

That can't be him lying there. He hadn't a *red* beard! Don't crowd round me, gentlemen! Don't crowd me, I tell you! What d'you want me to do? You want me to go to the river, don't you? Ha! Ha! Now? Will you come with me? Come on, then! To the river! To the river!

