



# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 24                      CONTENTS FOR JULY, 1934                      Number 1

|   |                                 |     |
|---|---------------------------------|-----|
| Cover Design  | M. Brundage                     |     |
| <i>Illustrating a scene in "The Trail of the Cloven Hoof"</i>   |                                 |     |
| The Trail of the Cloven Hoof  | Arlton Eadie                    | 2   |
| <i>An astounding weird mystery novel by an English master of eerie stories</i>  |                                 |     |
| The Master of Souls   | Harold Ward                     | 30  |
| <i>A gripping tale of a Satanist, to whom murder was a commonplace and who wallowed in human misery</i>                 |                                 |     |
| The Illusion of Flame   | Paul Ernst                      | 53  |
| <i>A withered stranger from far-off Tibet made the blood run cold in the Great Caprini's veins</i>                      |                                 |     |
| Through the Gates of the Silver Key   | H. P. Lovecraft and E. H. Price | 60  |
| <i>A brilliant story, cosmic in its scope, by two acknowledged masters of weird fiction</i>                             |                                 |     |
| Wild Grapes   | August W. Derleth               | 85  |
| <i>A strange story about the white cloud that hung over the unmarked grave of a murdered man</i>                        |                                 |     |
| Magic Carpets   | Ethel Morgan-Dunham             | 88  |
| <i>Verse</i>  |                                 |     |
| Vampires of the Moon (end)  | Arthur William Bernal           | 89  |
| <i>A sensational weird-scientific novel of the mind-stealers that inhabited the moon</i>                                |                                 |     |
| The Thunderstones of Nufflo   | Ralph Allen Lang                | 104 |
| <i>A story of revived corpses and the gruesome death that stalked the deck of the Oberon</i>                            |                                 |     |
| The Disinterment of Venus   | Clark Ashton Smith              | 112 |
| <i>Strange yearnings beset a brotherhood of monks when the statue of a pagan goddess was dug up in the abbey garden</i> |                                 |     |
| One Christmas Eve   | Elliott O'Donnell               | 117 |
| <i>This peculiar story was told to the author by a little boy who generally speaks the truth</i>                        |                                 |     |
| Drowned Argosies  | Jay Wilmer Benjamin             | 121 |
| <i>A weird story of the sea</i>   |                                 |     |
| Weird Story Reprint:  |                                 |     |
| The Dead Man's Tale   | Willard E. Hawkins              | 124 |
| <i>A fascinating story from the very first issue of WEIRD TALES</i>   |                                 |     |
| The Eyrie   |                                 | 138 |
| <i>An informal chat with the readers</i>  |                                 |     |

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3.00 a year in the United States, \$4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 846 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.                      FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1934, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# One Christmas Eve

By ELLIOT O'DONNELL

*This strange tale was told to the author by a little boy  
who generally speaks the truth*

"POOR Auntie May, I do feel sorry for her," said the little boy with the solemn eyes.

His sister nodded her head dismally. "So do I, Charlie, and I feel sorry for myself. Granny's temper is awful."

There was a long pause after this, and both children gazed thoughtfully into the fire.

"I would rather have stayed at school for Christmas," the boy murmured, kicking the heel of his left foot, "but for auntie and you. I—well, I detest granny—she is always scolding someone."

"If I were auntie, I would elope," the girl said. "I am sure Mr. Carson would do it."

The sound of footsteps echoed along the passage, and a sharp, high-pitched voice called out, "May, May, wherever are you? It's too bad of you to be idling away the morning doing nothing. Come and read the *Guardian* to your father, or alter this blouse for me. You know the dressmakers can never fit me."

"Oh, dear," sighed the little girl, "poor Auntie May. It's granny. I really can't stand her temper today of all days. She is sure to scold me for something."

So saying, the little girl gently stole to the door, placed her brown head against it for a moment, smiled assuringly in the direction of Charlie, and stole out.

The fire was warm, the weather intensely cold, and Charlie felt too comfortable to move far. So he simply crawled on all fours to the big screen near the fender, and curled himself up behind it. By and by he fell asleep.

He hadn't been dozing very long before voices awoke him. At first, in his dreamy state, he couldn't imagine who they were, but he soon recognized them as those of his Auntie May and her fiancé.

There was nothing Charlie hated so much as eavesdropping, and he would have been the first to denounce anyone else; yet he didn't like to call out, for fear they should think he had been listening, and he didn't know how long they had been talking. He tried to think of something else; he stopped his ears, but he couldn't help hearing some of their remarks.

"She really is beyond endurance," the young man was saying. "I never met a woman with such a temper."

Auntie May sighed. "I can't help it," she replied. "I know she is very trying. I have often thought I would leave home and earn my living."

The young man laughed ironically.

"Earn your living!" he said. "Good heaven! no other girl in England would do what you do for the paltry allowance you get, and with such an irritable step-mother to bully and hamper you every minute of the day. I feel as if"—here he kicked the hearth-rug fiercely—"as if I would like to——"

"Hush!" Auntie May whispered, placing her little hand over his mouth; "remember, after all, she is a sort of mother, and, I think, at the bottom she means well."

"I wish we had enough money to marry at once; don't you, darling?"

Auntie May's eyes beamed. "I do indeed! Oh, wouldn't it be delightful, Hugh!"

Just then a big flame illuminated the wall by their side and made them both look

"Isn't she some ancestor of yours, darling?" the young man asked, gazing at the portrait of a lady with curly hair and gray-blue eyes. It was a very pretty face.

May nodded. "My great-aunt," she replied. "Poor thing, she had a sad history."

"What happened to her? She interests me because she is very like you, only not so pretty."

May smiled a little sadly.

"You only say that to please me," she said. "I'm not pretty now, I'm too old. Well, my great-aunt was engaged to be married to a poor man; her parents were very rich and they disapproved of the match. I imagine her mother's temper must have been a bit like my stepmother's, perhaps worse." Here Hugh grunted. "Anyhow she was sorely tried, and in

the end eloped one Christmas Eve. At least so it was generally supposed, as she vanished, taking with her a diamond necklace of immense value. If we only had the money it is said to have cost, we could marry. The funny part is that her young man was seen in the village afterward, and was alleged to have made inquiries about her. What became of them both no one ever knew, and the parents would never allow her name to be mentioned."

"Rather strange about the young man," Hugh said, stirring the fire thoughtfully with the poker. "Do you think she really did elope?"

May shook her head. "I can't say," she replied, "her parents declared that the young man was a bad lot and wouldn't have him near the house. It was snowing when she was supposed to have left home, and no footmarks or any other traces of her were to be found. If she didn't join the young man, where could she have gone?"

"Perhaps she committed suicide; she was very unhappy, wasn't she?"

May shuddered. "How horrible!" she murmured; "and do you know she is said to haunt the house on Christmas Eve, though I can't say I have ever met anyone who has seen her."

Hugh caught hold of the little hand nearest to him and kissed it tenderly.

"Well, I wish I could see her, darling," he said, laughing. "Perhaps she might tell us a way out of our difficulty."

Just then a well-known voice was heard from the dining-room. "Now then! May, come! your father wants you to make his tea. I suppose you are only canoodling as usual. Do you hear me? Oh, what a thing it is to be old!"

"Oh, dear!" sighed May, as she tore herself away from the strong pair of

arms holding her down, "there is no peace for the weary."

Hugh gazed longingly after her.

"There goes an angel of a girl," he said aloud, "with a—well, a most unpleasant stepmother," and a subdued murmur from behind the screen re-echoed those sentiments.

## 2

**A**FTER they had gone, Charlie came out of his hiding-place.

The room was delightfully cozy, with its fire no longer throwing out yellow flames, but rich with crimson embers. Outside were knots of elms and oaks, erect and silent, with their branches covered with snow, and the moon peeked between them as much as to say, "You shan't shut me out; I am determined to see what Santa Claus is doing this Christmas."

Charlie loved the snow. He thought Churchdale was at its very best when the leaves and meadows glittered with their mantle of white.

But his heart was bitter within him as he thought of his grandmother's treatment of Auntie May, whom he loved passionately. He sat and gazed at the picture of her ancestress, and the longer he looked the more his imagination led him to believe the beautiful eyes smiled into his.

He heard a door open and a shrill voice cry out, "Charlie! come down to tea at once. We can't keep the things on the table for ever!" Then Auntie May as usual caught it. And his grandfather's voice joined in with quotations from the *Guardian*, to which they all had to listen, although it bored them very much.

Then his granny came out and stood at the foot of the stairs and called louder than before.

But Charlie felt very rebellious and he

did not go. He wanted to annoy her as a punishment for her behavior to Auntie May, and he also couldn't remove his eyes from the picture.

Then he heard Mr. Carson suggest in a mild voice that Charlie must have gone out to tea at the vicarage.

After that there was a lull in the angry storm, and the old people's voices subsided into calmer and more rational tones.

The room grew darker, for Charlie didn't put any more coal on the fire, and the shadows from without filed in through the bay windows in rapid succession.

"You are pretty," Charlie sighed, as he looked at the clear eyes. "I am sorry for you if you had a mother with such a temper as granny. She is enough—well, enough to make me almost hate her; she is such a beast to Auntie May, always scolding. Yes, picture, I am awfully sorry for you. I heard this afternoon, you know, what a rough time you had. You have lovely eyes—just my favorite color. How I should get ragged if the boys at school heard me talk like this! They don't care for reading, as I do. I think most of them will be doctors or lawyers, or some such things, but I couldn't stand anything like that. I shall be a poet or an author, and make a name that will go down to—I don't know what people call it—but I shall be in the papers and *Idler* and tip-top magazines like that. But I won't love anyone as I do you. Do you hear me, picture? You are my first love! Granny says, 'Love at first sight is all rubbish!' She told auntie so, but she doesn't know everything, although she thinks she does.

"Oh, I wish you would help Auntie May! It is Christmas Eve, and they say you haunt the place tonight. I shouldn't be afraid if I saw you. Won't you come and talk to me? I would like to ask you to kiss me, you have such pretty lips, only

it sounds a bit soft; and then a ghost couldn't touch one—at least, one can't touch a ghost."

It grew darker and darker, and the fire flickered out its farewell in a tiny yellow flame that shot up its fork-like head and licked the face on the wall.

Charlie gave a little jump—the eyes were most certainly smiling at him now, and — why — good heavens! the hand moved.

He bounded to his feet; the picture was holding out its hands to him to help it down.

He didn't feel the least bit afraid, but took the outstretched hands in his own. They were so cold that they sent a chill right through him. The lady shook her curls from her forehead, and leaped lightly to the ground.

She didn't speak, so Charlie held his tongue. He felt horribly shy, too, for the lady looked lovely; he was struck with admiration for the Empire gown she was wearing.

Putting one finger on her lips to enjoin silence, she glided to the conservatory door, and Charlie, who remembered the duties of a gentleman, hurried to open it for her. To his surprize, she passed right through it, and was waiting for him on the other side.

She smiled assuringly at him, and his momentary fear departed. He followed gladly after her, and though he had neither overcoat, hat, nor boots, he was unconscious of the cold.

She passed through the conservatory as if she was familiar with every inch of it, and then out onto the lawn, where the snow lay thick.

He kept close to her heels, and she led him down the avenue, dark, save for the few patches of light made by the moon.

Finally she struck off to the right, down a path he seldom visited, and came to a

halt in a tiny siding. Before her lay a dark hole overgrown with bushes and brambles. She pointed to it, and Charlie saw great tears in her eyes, while her lips moved as if she was talking to him. He knew she was in trouble, and a wave of love and pity swept through him. He sprang forward, forgetting the death-trap before him. But she anticipated his movement, and he felt for the second time cold hands stretched out to save him.

"Oh, kiss me!" he whispered, "just one—for you are too lovely for anything."

It seemed to him then that something icy cold fell on his cheeks, just like the salt spray of the sea, and the next moment he was in her arms. A wild paroxysm of happiness surged through him—a joy so intense and restful that the feeling of it came back to him again and again in the gray days of his manhood.

A drowsiness crept over him, and though he struggled hard to keep awake to see her face, it was without avail—he sank swiftly to sleep.

When he awoke someone was bending over him. It was Auntie May, and he was lying on the hearth-rug beneath the picture.

## 3

"I WONDER if there is anything in it," Auntie May asked herself, as Charlie finished his tale. "I'm afraid it was only a very pretty dream, dear," she added, aloud. "See! there is the picture in its old place."

Charlie raised his eyes. Yes, what auntie said was true. There it was, and he saw with a pang that the eyes did not recognize him.

He felt his shoes. "They are wet, auntie," he cried. "Yes! they are, indeed," and so they were.

In the morning, Charlie took May and

Hugh down the avenue. He was wild with excitement, and even Hugh was obliged to own that it looked promising. At last they came to the path, then to the siding, and then, with a shout of triumph, to the dark hole.

"By Jove!" Hugh exclaimed, "the kid is right. I don't believe it was a dream, but the ghost after all. I will get down here."

Auntie May begged him to be careful, but Hugh was a Celt, and very superstitious.

So a rope was fetched, without the granny's leave, and Hugh was lowered into the well. It seemed an eternity to all before he reappeared, but when he did so, they were rewarded for their patience.

At the bottom of the well, which was dry, lay a skeleton, still clutching in its hand a jewel-case. The latter contained a diamond necklace.

"That is it!" Charlie cried, the moment

he saw it. "That is the one the picture was wearing!"

And what little doubt they had on the point was set at rest, when the medical authority pronounced it to be the skeleton of a woman.

So they found a clue at last to that mystery of the Christmas Eve of long ago. The poor lady had missed her way in the snowstorm and had fallen down the well. She was laid to rest in the churchyard, and her spirit has never been seen again, though Charlie had implored it to come just for one minute.

Even the cross grandmother became in a better humor when she saw the jewels, and yielded, with a good grace, to the unanimous desire that it should be given to Auntie May.

It was, and with the money it fetched, a substantial wedding dower was provided for the young bride.