

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE



A MAGAZINE of the

BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XV

NUMBER 3

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, \$2.50 a year in the United States, \$3.00 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 810 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1930, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

Contents for February, 1930

- Cover Design Hugh Rankin
Illustrating a scene in "Thirsty Blades"
- The Eyrie 148
A chat with the readers
- Shadows Clark Ashton Smith 154
Verse
- Thirsty Blades Otis A. Kline and E. Hoffmann Price 156
A swift-moving tale of the devil-worshippers of Kurdistan, and the colossal issues that hung upon the clash of blades
- The Comet-Drivers Edmond Hamilton 172
From the void of space it came, a cosmic vampire looting the lives of universes—a weird-scientific novelette

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

- The Black Monarch (Part 1)**-----**Paul Ernst** 193
A stupendous five-part serial story of incarnate evil—a tale of an unthinkable doom hanging over mankind
- The Curse Kiss**-----**Theodore Roscoe** 223
An unusual story is this—a tale about Lot's wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt
- Piecemeal**-----**Oscar Cook** 232
A grim, powerful story of a weird crime—a fearful fate befell Mendingham on a London houseboat
- Behind the Moon (Conclusion)**-----**W. Elwyn Backus** 239
A three-part weird-scientific serial story of eery perils and blood-freezing horrors encountered on the moon
- The Daughter of Isis**-----**Hal K. Wells** 250
This exquisite story of the beautiful Zhanthores, who could not die through the ages, breathes the spirit of old Egypt
- At Eventide**-----**Hanna Baird Campbell** 258
Verse
- The Falling Knife**-----**Harold Markham** 259
Meuriere promised Piron to save his sweetheart from the guillotine—a weird story of the French Revolution
- The Lilac Bush**-----**August W. Derleth** 265
A very brief tale—the children were unjustly blamed for the picking of the lilacs
- The Horror on Dagoth Wold**-----**Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** 267
Verse
- The Fearsome Touch of Death**-----**Robert E. Howard** 268
Ghastly was the fear that gripped the man in the silence and darkness—a blood-chilling story
- Weird Story Reprint:**
- A Ghost**-----**Guy de Maupassant** 283
A tale of the supernatural by one of the most famous of French story-tellers

For Advertising Rates in WEIRD TALES Apply Direct to

WEIRD TALES

Western Advertising Office:
HARLEY L. WARD, INC., Mgr.
360 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, Ill.
Phone, Central 6269

Eastern Advertising Office:
GEORGE W. STEARNS, Mgr.
Flatiron Building
New York, N. Y.
Phone, Algonquin 8328

Piecemeal

by OSCAR GOOK



"He slipped in a pool of blood that had dripped from the severed head."

WARWICK put down his drink, lighted a cigarette, looked round the club smoking-room to discover that, in our corner at least, we were alone. Then, leaning toward me, he asked in that abrupt disturbing manner of his, "What happened to Mendingham?"

I was startled, the more so as at that moment the threatening storm broke with a streak of forked lightning and a clap of thunder that seemed right overhead. Then the deluge came.

I looked at Warwick with a feeling of dismay, for I knew the expression on his face, the set of his lips and jaw and the curious rigidity that somehow seemed to stiffen even his ears. There was no gainsaying him: if he meant to learn Mendingham's fate, nothing I could say would put him off; also, as it happened, we both had time hanging on our hands.

And yet—

It was on just such a night as this, stormy, wild, "filthy" in sailor parlance, that I found him. The memory

of that discovery would never die, but a storm always accentuated it.

"What happened?" Warwick repeated. "Out with the story, for I mean to know. I'm hard up for copy, and the stream of ideas is low. They're bread and butter to me in the writing trade, so——" The gesture of his hands was more eloquent than words.

I signed to him to draw his chair closer, and called a waiter to replenish our glasses. Then, and not till then, I began the story.

"I'm going to tell you, Warwick," I began, "one of the most gruesome stories the world has ever known."

He rubbed his hands together and looked pleased.

"So gruesome," I went on, "that I won't even extract from you a promise not to make use of it, for I feel certain you'll never want to write it up. You remember Gregory?"

"Yes," Warwick nodded. "Met him quite a lot at one time. Then he too seemed to fade away. He'd a most wonderfully and gorgeously beautiful wife."

"Exactly. She was the cause of the mystery."

Warwick chuckled. "Then there was a mystery! I thought so."

"Yes, but not in the way you imagine. You went abroad a good while before their divorce case."

"*Cherchez la femme!* I always thought Gregory too careless and too cold-blooded to have such an attractive piece of goods about. He was asking for trouble."

"Perhaps. But Mendingham was after all his greatest friend."

"And thundering good-looking, with a taking air and an eye for the ladies, eh?"

"As you say, but that's no excuse. Mendingham was a friend of mine, but I can't hold him guiltless in this matter. Some things just aren't done."

"Such as?"

"Making love to and running off with your best friend's wife, even if she weren't happy with her husband."

Warwick gave vent to a low whistle.

"That was at the bottom of the trouble, was it?" he stated, rather than asked.

I nodded, and he went on: "Well, I'm not surprized. What did and still does surprize me is how on earth Moyra married Gregory. He was a queer fish always: a great brain full of medicine and surgical ideas, but the coldest, most calculating human being I've ever met—and I've traveled a lot and met some. Ever seen him in the operating-theater?"

I started. He put the question with that sudden disconcerting manner of his. It almost made me think he knew more than he admitted, while it brought back with redoubled intensity that awful final scene when—but I'm rattling on too fast.

I took a long pull at my whisky and soda. Warwick saw my agitation and smiled.

"Don't worry," he said. "Tell me the story in your own way. From now on I'll try and not interrupt, but for heaven's sake, man, keep the tension strong and hot: at present you're about as exciting as Tennyson's *Brook*."

I made no comment; the desire for super-horrors among the present-day host of sensation-mongers masquerading as journalists—once members of an honorable profession—is beyond my power of speech.

Instead I settled down as comfortably as my own prickly memories and the raging storm would let me to tell the story in my own way. And I must admit that it was a relief to get the gruesome tragedy off my chest; for up to now I'd shared a solitary secret, as the affair was somehow kept out of the press.

"GREGORY had planned a great tour," I began, "into the heart of Dutch Borneo, one of the few places of the earth today still really unknown. He was intrigued with the idea of finding the race of natives, the most backward in the world, which is reputed to be possessed of tails not less than three inches long, who live in trees, and who still practise cannibalism. He was going alone; that is, Moyra was not to accompany him. It was no journey for her."

Warwick smiled his cynical grin. "Mendingham's opportunity."

I paid no heed. "Gregory was away a little over a year. On his return he wirelessly Moyra two days out of Liverpool to meet him. She was not at the quayside when the steamer berthed. Arrived in London, he went straight to his house in Harley Street. It was shut up and showed no sign of life. He got in with his own key. Most of the furniture was gone; only his bedroom, consulting-room and smoking-room were furnished. The house was otherwise completely empty; more, it was thick with dust. That night he slept at his club and early the next morning went round to the house agents. They knew nothing, save that the rent had been regularly paid by a check from the bank. The bank and solicitors could be no more explanatory or communicative."

I paused to light a cigarette and in doing so took a long look at Warwick. He was thrilled. There was no mistaking the expression of beatific glee on his face as he listened to the sensational tragedy of his one-time friend.

"When did you learn all this?" he asked.

"From Gregory himself," I answered, having blown out the match. "I saw a lot of him in the time that followed, when he was hunting for his wife."

"And Mendingham?" Warwick pointedly asked.

"That's what gave him the clue. Mendingham was absent quite a lot

from his favorite haunts, and when they met he seemed distrait. What gave Gregory an inkling was the fact that Mendingham never once mentioned Moyra's name, whereas previously he had always asked after her and joked about her being Beauty and Gregory the Beast. Gregory put a detective on to him. The rest was easy. They were living together in a minute lonely cottage in the New Forest."

Warwick took a long gulp at his drink.

"Cut the cackle and get to the losses," he snapped, as he put the glass down. "You can skip the intervening bit—I can find it any day in the back files of any newspaper catering for the public that likes spice. Like the little girl with her new story book, I want to hear the end."

At that moment the little liking I ever had for Warwick nearly died. He was positively reveling in anticipatory horrors. It revolted me. It was, however, my turn to smile.

"You'd search the papers in vain," I said, rather acidly. "The suit was undefended, so there was nothing to report. It was from that time onward, though, that things began to happen. In due time the decree was made absolute and Mendingham and Moyra married and even talked of coming back to town."

"And Gregory?" Warwick interpolated with that almost fiendish quickness of his for seizing upon the heart of a story.

"Gregory," I continued slowly, "was gradually becoming a recluse. He gave up coming to the club, sold the lease of his house and acquired a dilapidated houseboat on a little-known and unfrequented backwater on the Thames. Here he 'did' for himself, once a week brought his stores from the village and in this seclusion wrote the *magnum opus*—an account of his Dutch Borneo trip. From the point of view of ethnology, it is unsurpassed."

"You've read it?" Warwick shot the question at me.

"Of course. Then for some time I practically lost all touch with him, though I occasionally saw the other two, who were tremendously happy. Moyra absolutely adored Mendingham. Then one day I heard from Gregory that he was going abroad. I asked him to dine with me on his last night in England, but he refused and I never saw him again, until——"

Just then a terrific clap of thunder made me start, and I spilt a lot of my drink. Warwick was frankly impatient.

"It is certain," I continued, "that he bought tickets for the Congo, but whether he went is another matter. All I know is that as far as I am concerned, and others interested in him also, he completely disappeared into the blue."

"A monomaniac, nursing his grievance," Warwick sneered. "What an end to a great brain! But where does Mendingham fit in with all this?"

His devilish persistence annoyed me.

"I'm coming to that now," I answered, "only for God's sake, don't interrupt. It was nearly three months after Gregory supposedly went abroad that Mendingham became missing."

"You mean dead?" Warwick asked.

I turned on him in fury. "No!" I snapped. "I don't. I mean missing. He went out one morning as usual and was never seen again."

"Never?" Warwick's eyes were bulging out of his head and he was breathing hard in his excitement.

"Not till I found him," I answered slowly, "or, to be accurate, his remains—the little that was left of him."

"A rotten mass of decomposing flesh, or just dried bones?" Warwick asked, almost licking his lips in ecstasy.

"Neither," I replied, and then lapsed into silence as the poignant

memory coupled with a nausea for the human ghoul alongside me nearly proved more than I could bear. At length, however, I was able to continue, strengthened by the desire to share, at last, my terrible secret.

"Moyra, as you may imagine, was frantic, and the strain and suspense nearly killed her. But she survived, chiefly, I think, on account of an indomitable desire to get to the bottom of the mystery. There was no question, you must understand, of desertion for another woman. Mendingham was this time really and truly in love. I saw a lot of Moyra during this time and helped all I could, but all in vain. The police, the wireless, the motor associations, all were roped in: all did their utmost, but Mendingham was not to be found."

"Not a trace?" Warwick's tone was a mixture of skepticism and glee.

"Not a trace, but rumors by the score. He had been seen in every part of England; every report and identification tallied, yet it was never he. There must be hundreds of doubles in the country, were it known.

"THE next item of interest, at the time seeming quite irrelevant, was Gregory's return. This was about a month—a little less perhaps—after Mendingham's disappearance. Though not really sociable as of old, he was not so hermit-like as before he went abroad. He took a room at his club and was seen now and again about town—a theater, an exhibition and such like—but he still owned the houseboat, where he admitted to spending a lot of time.

"About three days after his return, Moyra telephoned me. She was hysterical; that was clear over the wire. She wanted me to go round to her at once, she had a—I never heard what, for her voice died away in a choking groan. I hurried round. She was beside herself. She couldn't speak, but with white frozen face, with wide open eyes and bloodless lips, she

pointed to a parcel that lay open on the divan in her drawing-room. I crossed over and picked it up; then, although braced up for something uncanny or dangerous like a bomb or a snake, I dropped it with a startled cry, for it contained—a hand."

"Just one?" There was actually disappointed interest in Warwick's tone.

"God, man!" I burst out. "Wasn't that enough to send by post? A dried, fleshless, skinless hand. Imagine Moyra opening it! The shock, and then—and this is the awful part of it—finding it to be Mendingham's hand, with his signet ring, one she had given him, on the little finger."

For the fraction of a second I noticed Warwick wilt; then he was himself again.

"Nothing else inside?" he asked. "Not even the usual printed note or mystic sign?"

"Not a line—just the hand and the ring. I got someone to come and stay with Moyra, collected the parcel and its gruesome contents and took them to Scotland Yard. That's all there was to be done: all they could do. There wasn't a fingerprint or clue, though the postmark was Balham."

"What next?" Warwick inquired, and I was glad to notice even he was a little subdued.

"A week later," I continued, after following his example and emptying my glass, "Moyra received another parcel. This one contained the other hand, and Mendingham's fountain pen—his initials were on the gold band and Moyra had no doubts in identifying it. It had been posted in a W. C. district and bore the label of a shop at which she had the day before bought some wool. So when she opened it she was not suspicious."

"She sent for you?"

I nodded.

"And you? What did you do?" Warwick asked, with hardly suppressed excitement.

"Same as before," I replied. "And the result was the same: no clues."

"But she was being watched?" Warwick's tone was vibrant. "The rest was easy."

"That's what the police thought, but they made a mistake. How could they watch everybody who came into contact with Moyra or passed her in a shop, in a train, on a bus? There were a hundred people a day to watch. They had to give it up. Moyra went away to the country, and for a month nothing happened. I had to stay in town and, as it chanced, twice met Gregory, but we never mentioned the subject. When Mendingham first disappeared, he had made some quite appropriate remarks, but naturally it wasn't for me to refer to the subject."

"Hardly!" Warwick offered me a cigarette, and threw away an unlighted one that he had chewn to bits.

"Then," I continued, "Moyra received a foot by post—the other foot by special messenger. She was nearly mad, and I don't wonder. Then the right forearm and later the left leg to above the knee, and in each case a little personal belonging of Mendingham's was included, though there was no need for such refinement of cruelty."

"Pointing the moral with a vengeance, what?" Warwick said a little unsteadily.

"Exactly. But the last parcel proved too much. Moyra collapsed and was taken to a nursing-home and from there to a lunatic asylum, where her one idea is that she is the farmer's wife, her one cry and plea is for a carving-knife, and her only exercise running after 'three blind mice'."

I PAUSED and put my hand up to my eyes—I was fond of Moyra, and had once been more than that. For a little while only the thunder rumbled and the lightning cracked, while the rain sizzled down. Then Warwick broke the silence.

"Is that all?" he asked.

I took my hand from my eyes. "I wish to God it were!" I cried. "Do you want the rest?"

"You may as well get it off your chest," he answered quietly. "But it's the toughest, saddest story I ever heard."

I pulled myself together. There wasn't much more to tell and I'd get it over and then we could have another drink.

"Well, from the time Moyra went into the nursing-home, the parcels stopped coming. She had letters, even in the asylum, but no more gruesome parcels. Suddenly that fact struck me, and the one word, Revenge, blazed into my mind."

"Gregory!" The word was a breathless whisper from Warwick.

"Yes. That's how I saw it. He was cold-blooded, but in a possessive manner he had loved Moyra. She and Mendingham had, vulgarly speaking, 'done him down.' He would be revenged on both—a cruel, subtle, lingering revenge. Then came another thought. Was Mendingham by any chance alive? Gregory was a surgeon, one of the cleverest of his day. Mendingham had never been found, and no vital part of his body had been contained in those parcels. Another point in favor of this idea, mad as it seemed, was the lapse of time between the receipt of the parcels. It would have given Mendingham time to get strong enough to bear another operation.

"That very day I was dining with Gregory, the first meal we'd had together since he had gone abroad. Casually, I noticed that he missed the meat course, but in every other way made a good meal. I referred to Mendingham, but he was merely polite. I mentioned Moyra, but he would not be drawn. Then we fell to discussing his book. Over this he became thoroughly enthusiastic, and communicative. He waxed emphatic on the morality of those natives, who, he maintained, neither lied nor stole and

who considered adultery the deadliest sin. Murder with them was a just punishment, if any crime deserved it. They were, according to him, not immoral but unmoral, and to emphasize the point he referred to a particularly nasty divorce case which was at the time something of a *cause celebre*. "In such a case—" he began, then suddenly stopped, passed a hand wearily over his head and went deadly white. After a minute or two, he got up, made an excuse about having forgotten an appointment, and hurriedly left the club. I was frankly curious and full of my idea, so I decided to try and follow him. It was a ghastly night, raining hell-for-leather, thundering and lightning."

"Like this?" Warwick was sitting bolt upright and his hands gripped his knees so tightly that the knuckles shone white.

"Worse," I answered, and went on. "I got to the backwater by the houseboat an hour and a half later and there met a check. Gregory crossed to the far side in a dinghy. I had no means of getting over. It took me half an hour to find a boat and another quarter to row upstream, but eventually I got alongside. In one window through the gaps of closely drawn curtains I could see a light. I had no need to go quietly, for the storm drowned all noise. I crept on deck and tried to peer in, but all I could see was an empty corner of a room. Yet I waited, fascinated, glued to the spot. Then I became conscious of a smell—a cooking, roasting smell, and in a lull of the storm I could have sworn that I heard a horrible laugh.

"I never quite knew how long I waited, but suddenly I became aware of the most severe cramp. I tried to move, my leg refused to support me and I fell with a crash against the long French window. The latch failed to withstand the shock and I was pitchforked into the room. In an instant I was on my feet, cramp or no cramp, and was standing face to face

with Gregory, who looked like an incarnate fiend.

"Behind him was an old-fashioned open grate, built in the far side of the houseboat. The fire was burning, a big glowing mass now, and on a huge grid was what I took to be a side or half-side of beef."

For a second I paused to moisten my lips. Warwick's face was ghastly to look at and from his parched mouth he just managed to gasp, "Go on!"

"Without a word Gregory sprang at me with a huge butcher-knife in his hand. Somehow I dodged him and it, and as I sidestepped I struck him with all my force. He fell down, completely stunned. That he was mad, I realized almost at once—almost as quickly as I realized he *had* something in the houseboat he wished to hide. What?"

"Mendingham?" Warwick whispered through trembling lips.

For a moment I could not answer. All I was capable of, so acute was memory, was to nod. Then at last I found my voice.

"That joint roasting over the fire was Mendingham—all that was left of him—his trunk. Hanging from the roof like a round ball of fly-paper was his severed head. God! but it was awful—utter hell. I was sick. Just as I recovered, Gregory came to. He staggered up, first to his knees, then to his feet, laughing and chuckling all the time. He came slowly toward me,

while I waited. Nearer he came, nearer, the long knife in his hand. I was frozen with fear and sheer horror. Nearer, two more paces and—he slipped in a pool of blood on the floor that had dripped from the newly severed head, and fell face downward into the fire."

"Yes?" In his excitement Warwick had clutched both of my wrists and his eyes were burning into mine. "What next?"

"I had no time to think," I whispered hoarsely. "It was my chance. My life or his, and he was mad, and a cannibal. There was no doubt of this. I put my foot on the back of his head and pressed and pressed."

Warwick let go my wrists and a great sigh escaped him.

"Good man!" he said at last. "You've got pluck! What about the rest? You couldn't leave it at that?"

"No," I answered, "for my own sake as well as for his. I looked around and found two kerosene tins, full. I used them and put a match to the lot. But before doing so I saw Gregory's book lying open on a table in another room. A passage was underlined, the passage in which he said the only time he found those natives addicted to cannibalism was as a solemn ritual. It was the tribal punishment for adultery and——"

Warwick put out a hand.

"Enough," he said. "For heaven's sake, man, order another drink!"

