
Weird Tales

November
1953

- WAY STATION Mary Elizabeth Counselman 2
A haunted house is a poor place for a honeymoon. . . .
- THE LEGS THAT WALKED Justin Dowling 24
. . . with every clap of thunder they came marching on.
- THE RED BALLOON Q. Patrick 31
Something "awfully funny" had happened to those kids.
- SUSPICION (Verse) Harriet Bradfield 41
- THE MAN UPSTAIRS (A novelette) . . . Harry W. Currier 43
*No one else had seen him, yet the little professor could swear
that three times he had been there.*
- THE BLACK STONE Robert E. Howard 59
. . . some unspeakable monster from the Elder World.
- THE CRYING CHILD Dorothea Gibbons 75
It was two hundred years ago the plaything had been lost.
- DEMON LOVER (Verse) Dorothy Quick 83
- THING OF DARKNESS G. G. Pendarves 84
A novelette of a Thing of Horror that brought death to Troon House.
- THE DISC RECORDER August Derleth 117
Can such contrivances be ghost-operated?
- THE EYRIE 2nd Cover

Published bi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.
W. J. Delaney, President & Treasurer, R. M. Cogan, Secretary. Reentered as second-class
matter January 24, 1940, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.
Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions \$2.00; two years \$3.50.
Canadian: one year \$2.25; two years, \$4.00. Foreign: one year \$2.30; two years, \$4.10.
The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts.

Copyright 1953 by WEIRD TALES. Copyright in Great Britain.



Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

Printed in U. S. A.

Vol. 45, No. 5

D. McILWRAITH, Editor

. . . a thin plaintive sound above the storm.



THE CRYING CHILD

BY DOROTHEA GIBBONS

IT HAD happened again. In the dim maze of half sleep, Tamar Forrest had thought it a dream, the restless imagining of an overtired mind. But now it was different and she was fully awake and conscious of the sounds of night. The light wind barely moved the stifle of leaves near the window, an owl hooted

in the woods below the garden and there were the creaking sounds which an old house makes at night.

But from among those faint sounds it came again and it stabbed her brain for all it was such a little noise. Thinly and far off she could hear the crying of a child.

She sat up in bed, every sense alert while she fumbled for the switch of the lamp, but when the light flooded her room the crying had ceased.

She thought she knew each room in the house, every cupboard, and the only other living thing in it beside herself was her West Highland terrier, Flora, who lay on the bed, her eyes fixed on the door.

There it was again, and Flora growled softly. A cold feeling slid into Tamar's heart for surely something, someone must be trapped here in this house, for the crying had an insistent and heartbreaking quality.

But a search of the old house brought no solution. Tamar looked into every room and cupboard, every corner. Her torch roamed emptily on dust and disuse, but nothing human could be found, and she had to own to herself that she was afraid.

She returned to bed. "An owl in the wood," she said aloud, "they often sound like people, like a child crying."

But she was not comforted and fell into uneasy sleep.

"**T**HE house is in a bad state of repair but I intend to work at it until it's fit to live in. I do admit, however, that it will be very difficult with things as they are today."

Tamar's voice had echoed

drearily in the forlorn room, empty of everything but dust and cobwebs and the hot slanting rays of the sun on the dirty floor. Without lay the sad parched garden, untidy and derelict.

The man who was looking out of the window had turned his head.

"It will break your heart," he had said sourly, "as it has broken mine."

Tamar had laughed. "My heart," she answered, "is fairly well toughened against heart-break. It will take more than Abegale to do it."

The dark sullen face opposite her half smiled, and something like appreciation had come into the man's eyes for a moment. He had lit a cigarette, throwing the match out of the window before he answered her.

"I sold you Abegale because I was hard up and because—of other things. Why an attractive young woman like you wants to live in this old place beats me." His voice was quite impersonal. "That, however, is none of my business," he went on, "and now you'd better ask me any questions about the house, which is the reason, I gather, that you asked me here today."

"I want to know quite a lot of things," said Tamar, note book in hand, "and among others I'm interested in Abegale itself, its history. I want the house to

be happy so that I can have people here who aren't," she ended bravely, flushing under the man's derisive grin.

He threw his cigarette on the floor, crushing it under his heel.

"You'll never succeed at Abegale, never," he said. "Do it up, fill it with your friends who like drinking parties. That's the only hope for the place. Never give it time to think or to remember—"

"To remember what?" cried Tamar sharply.

The man turned away as if he was tired of the conversation.

"Oh, I meant nothing. Now is there anything else you want to know?"

"I want to know everything, Mr. Montfichet," Tamar had said.

But Simon Montfichet left Abegale five minutes later and strode off down the drive in the sweltering heat and Tamar had watched him go, a frown between her eyes. She pushed back the hair from her hot brow, staring down at her note book, open at the front page which was blank.

THE hot August days drew on towards September and still the weather showed no sign of breaking. Plumbers and decorators arrived and the air was filled with the noise of hammering and Tamar measured and sewed and gradually the spacious rooms

of Abegale became inhabited with furniture, old and lovely. But for all the outward show that Tamar put up, both to herself and to other people, something quite outside her own personal affairs was making her uneasy.

Simon Montfichet found her one evening sitting in a chair by the open window, her hands idle in her lap and her little dog beside her.

"Are you sleeping better?" he asked abruptly, which was his usual way of speaking. "You told me the other day you lie awake a lot."

"Not very well," she answered him sighing. "The heat doesn't help."

"Some weeks ago you told me also a ridiculous story that you heard a child crying in the house and you mentioned it again a few days ago," said Simon irritably. "Is your imagination still playing you tricks?"

Tamar turned on him with a hot anger which surprised her.

"You wouldn't tell me anything about Abegale, not about the things I wanted to know—the history of it, things you could tell and which are not in the guide books. You could have told me and you wouldn't. Why?"

Simon looked at her flaming cheeks and angry eyes with an odd expression. But he merely said, "You know as much about

the history of Abegale as I do. As for my own personal experiences while I lived here, I hardly feel you can expect me to tell you those. You know I was married and that my wife died here. I must admit I find your curiosity rather vulgar."

His curt words cut her and she bit her lip. "I do assure you I'm not in the least vulgarly curious, as you so aptly put it," she answered coldly. "Your affairs are nothing to me, Mr. Montfichet. Naturally I'm very sorry for the trouble which came on you here. But there's something in the house, something I don't understand. I keep on thinking about it and I can't sleep because I hear it, you see. I'm always listening for it—it grieves me so that I should hear a child crying. It's so horrible!"

Simon made an exclamation of annoyance. "Oh for heaven's sake!" he said. "Look here, you must be fearfully overwrought or something. D'you usually get like this? I mean, do stupid things prey on your mind, things which aren't there?"

A tinge of concern had crept into his voice but Tamar didn't notice because she was crying. She cried in a brave way, letting the tears run down her face and not trying to wipe them away.

"There, you see what you've done!" she said angrily, "I never thought any man or woman

either, could ever make me cry again."

"Oh God!" said Simon Montfichet and he turned sharply away and was gone.

ALL the next day the heat was worse than ever. Not a breath of wind stirred the tired trees and the late summer flowers drooped, too dispirited to raise their heads to the burning sun. Wasps and flies buzzed ceaselessly against the windows and from the overloaded apple trees the fruit thumped to the earth. They seemed to fall with infuriating frequency and Tamar waited for the thud which she knew was coming, wincing when it came. The apples should be picked, she thought feverishly, but the initiative to see to it had left her.

The evening light crept into the airless room and still Tamar sat there, the sweat running down her face, though her hands were clammy. The shadows took shape behind the chairs and tables. The gracious colors of the rugs and cretonnes faded to gray, and as the light faded, so the heat and the silence grew.

Little Flora climbed up beside Tamar to lick her hands and then through the heat a sound came, faintly and far away. From beyond the woods she heard it, sullen and menacing. Presently the still air was rent with noise,

as a roar sounded much nearer and a gust of wind tore past the house, taking Abegale in its grasp, shaking her old timbers till the bricks and tiles chattered like teeth in an ancient face. Enormous drops of rain were hurled against the windows with the noise of a thousand hail stones and a terrific crash outside brought Tamar to her feet. Evidently a branch of a tree had struck the side of the house.

With a noise louder than the thunder something banged to the floor of the room, and in the weird half light she saw that an old corner cupboard had been wrenched from its fastenings and was lying face downwards in clouds of dust and rubble.

An odd lethargy stole over Tamar, in spite of the spattering rain and roar of thunder. The light faded to blackness which was lit by greenish flashes of lightning, and the dust settled quietly on everything in the room. Though she had eaten nothing all day she felt no thirst or hunger, but just a sorrow, deep and penetrating, and a fear as she waited for something which she knew she would hear.

The storm grew louder and the old house bowed its head before it. Within it the wind raised sounds as boards creaked where a light foot might have pressed; a curtain flapping could have been a woman's dress mov-

ing as she ran terrified across the hall. What was her fear and who pursued her? Then in a lull of sound came the thing for which Tamar had listened and it jolted her into stark terror.

From away up near the roof tops came the thin, high cry of a child. Tamar screamed, but a deafening roar of thunder drowned the noise so that she scarcely knew she was doing it, and she called out something without knowing what she said.

She ran, still screaming from the room. She wrenched open the front door and seizing the little dog cowering beside her, staggered out into the drive. The sheets of rain stung her face like a whip and the winding whiteness of the way before her flickered wetly in the ghastly light of lightning. The thunder roared above her head and flashes of light tore the sky in half in gaping wounds. The sweet smell of the grateful thirsty earth was all about her, but she heeded nothing. With her dog in her arms she ran, leaving Abegale behind her, its ancient head bowed before the storm.

The rain and her hair streaked wetly across her eyes prevented her from seeing, and so unknowing she bumped into something which held her fast. A flash of lightning revealed who it was.

"Simon! Oh Simon!" sobbed

Tamar, and her wet arms still clutching poor little draggled Flora were held up to him.

PRESENTLY at Abegale a certain normality took shape. Simon lit a fire, fetched dry clothes and produced whiskey for Tamar and a towel for Flora. The storm was gradually abating.

"You'd better change by the fire while I fetch some logs," he said, "go on, don't mind me, I shall be quite a while. I'll boil up some coffee—yes, I know what you were going to say, but I've eyes in my head and can find it. Lucky I discovered these candles, because the electric light has fused."

When Simon returned with cups of steaming hot coffee, he found Tamar huddled in her dry clothes rubbing Flora with a large towel, but her eyes were on the cupboard lying on the floor, the rusty nails sticking out of its back like ancient claws. They were of a pattern which had not been used for perhaps two hundred years. Dust lay everywhere and still wreathed round the room where the candle flame caught it.

"Now," said Simon, leaning forward to throw another log on the fire, "now that I've saved you and Flora from drowning, I think we shall have to talk to one another, not just say things which we've done up to the present."

His voice was different and very kind.

Tamar caught her breath. "Have you heard—the crying?" she asked him quickly. Simon looked at her queerly, then gave attention to his pipe which needed filling.

"It cries at night," Tamar persisted, her hands clasped together, "It cried sometimes in the day as well. It—did it tonight in the storm. That's why I ran out of the house. I'm ashamed, but it was awful. It's—as if it were unhappy and neglected and alone."

A SUDDEN gust of wind blew open the long doors into the garden, driving in the wet leaves like little creatures coming in to shelter from the rain.

Then from away upstairs they heard it, plaintive and thin, a thread of sound which chilled their hearts.

Tamar gave a shuddering sob and Simon was beside her, his arms holding her.

"Don't listen," he said urgently. "Don't listen. It can't hurt you, it can't and—wouldn't want to." He held her tighter and again it came, but fainter now and emptied itself into the air.

The rain hissed against the window and a log fell spluttering to the hearth. Simon bent to

put it back and then drew Tamar close to him again.

"Stay still and listen," he said, and his voice had some of the rough urgency which Tamar remembered so well. "I ought to have told you something before, but I tried to think you were imagining things. Part of it's an odd story and some people might think I was mad to attach any importance to it. I've never wanted to believe these sort of tales but the war taught me something—about things you can't account for—and I've no option but to wonder whether what I'm going to tell you is possible, to say the least of it."

"Tell me, Simon," said Tamar.

"The Montfichets have mostly been an evil lot," said Simon. "Several hundred years ago they had a bad reputation for theft and rape and even witchcraft. Latterly they haven't gone to those extremes, but there's usually a few rotters in each generation. I don't know in what category you'd put me," he added grimly. "He sighed sharply and held Tamar still more tightly.

"There's a story—about a child," he said, picking his words with difficulty. "I rather hate telling it because I loathe it so. I'm afraid there was a small girl who was delicate and hadn't kind parents. She'd got a mother who was no good and a father who was an evil fellow. It happened

about two hundred years ago and the poor little kid was supposed to have lost something—at least that's the story, a plaything of some kind I should imagine, and no one would look for it.

She died and I know there's always been a story of a child crying. I never heard it till I got married and then I thought I was imagining things. I was—blown up at sea during the D-Day business and it made me jumpy. But I hated the story, hated thinking I heard the crying, particularly as my wife was going to have a baby. She didn't want it and she never heard the crying, I'm sure of that or I'd have taken her away. Avice—my wife, died. I think she hated children."

SIMON cleared his throat. "I like them and I wanted the baby. I don't know exactly what this part of the story has to do with the little girl of two hundred years ago—only that I think the crying has been worse since Avice lived here. She—tried to get rid of the baby. That's why she died. There was an awful woman living in the village who'd been a nurse, a gaunt ghastly woman who used to tramp the damp woods that autumn with a pack of half-breed wolf hounds as raffish as herself.

I met her in the clearing be-

low the house just after Avice died. The doctor had told me why she was so ill and I accused this woman of having been the cause of it. She denied it, of course, but I knew it was true and that she was afraid. I can see her long viperish face now, with the rain running down it and those damned wolf dogs snarling round my heels. I love dogs but these were awful. It seemed that more evil had come to Abegale when there had been so much."

"Can't you forget that woman and the evil, Simon?" asked Tamar gently.

"I always wanted a son," he answered hardly, "and Avice cheated me out of it."

"No good can come out of bitterness," said Tamar gently.

Simon put his mouth against hers. "It's like this with me," he said as if he was exhausted. "I've tried not to let it because I'm a hard man and very bitter, and you'll think I want to marry you because you've bought Abegale. That's not true, I love you and not Abegale. I hate it."

In the flickering candlelight the white face and soft brown

eyes of Flora peered at them as she rested her two front paws on Tamar's knee with something in her mouth.

Taking it from her, Tamar held it out to Simon.

"It's a doll, isn't it?" she asked and her voice was awed. "It must be very old. The cupboard, you see. It must have been pushed behind it many years ago, and when the cupboard came down it must have fallen out. And now Flora's found it."

The odd little painted thing lay in Simon's large hand, its garish face smiling at him. The crude colors were blotched and worn, but here they knew lay the plaything which had been lost two hundred years ago, and for which a little child had cried in an evil house where no one cared.

They also knew, each of them in their hearts, that because the beloved toy had been found that the child was comforted and would cry no more. Where the evil of Abegale had been the two of them would build up something grand and good in its place.

