

Weird Tales



MAY, 1953

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(Copyright 1936 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company)

THE EYRIE

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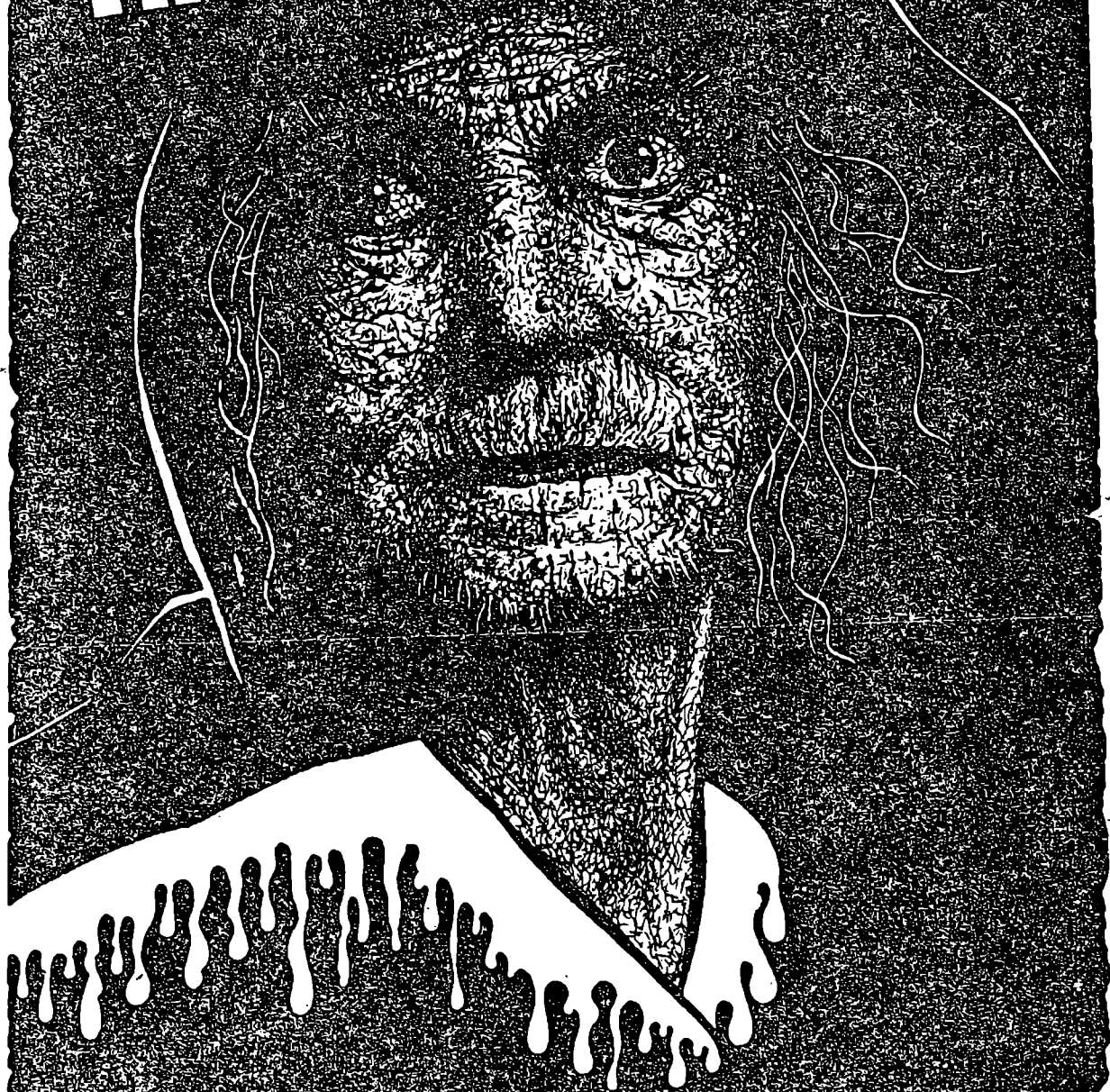
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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

THE LIVING EYES



by Justin Dowling

EBERLE

Mrs. Weir might die; her eyes would live forever. . . .

Heading by Joseph Eberle

I WAS fifteen years old when I first saw Mrs. Weir's eyes, and her useless hands.

If I shut my eyes, I can still see her house, standing apart from others in the village on a hill overlooking the sea on a wild coast.

But above all I can still see Mrs. Weir's eyes and the useless hands, lying across a special board fixed on her wheel chair.

My father, a widower, knew Mrs. Weir and took me to stay with her one winter. "Remember," he said to me, "pass no rude remarks. Mrs. Weir is a queer woman. She has paralyzed legs and hands. Don't stare at her eyes, whatever you do."

"Why are we going, father?" I asked.

"Mrs. Weir has money. She may want to help me. I was a very good friend of hers."

"Will anyone else be there?" I went on.

"Yes," he answered, "her two sons live with her, while a niece will probably be there, with her husband."

The house had the squat, uncomfortable appearance of an old prison. At our knock, the door opened and a large man appeared. "Wot you want?" as asked.

"We want," my father replied, "to see Mrs. Weir. Tell her Mr. Rowlands and his son are here."

The servant said, "Of course, sir. She is expecting you. Come in." As an afterthought he added, "My name is Leonard."

We were ushered into the great hall, and led across to the lounge. "So you have come, Richard," a voice said.

We were both startled because we had thought the room empty. Then we saw a wheel chair, with the dim outline of a figure in it.

"I hope we find you well, Mrs. Weir?" said my father.

"Well enough, Richard," said the voice. "Put on the light."

I sat on the edge of a stiff-backed chair when the light came on. Remembering what my father had said, I stared at her feet. She had on black slippers. Then I looked at her chin, and wanted to laugh at her whiskers. But her mouth, thin and bloodless, choked my mirth. I paused. Then I lifted my head. The shock nearly made me cry out!

I stared into eyes so prominent, grotesque, hideous and terrifying, that I wanted to run from the room.

They protruded from their wide sockets as if on sticks. The white parts were a mass of red veins entangled in a million tiny threads, writhing and twitching, expanding and shrinking, as she blinked.

They were alive in a manner strangely apart from the rest of her.

I dropped my glances to the useless hands, lying on the board fixed across her chair. There was nothing unusual about them. They lay on their backs, with the fingers slightly curled. I wanted to pull the fingers straight; to whip some action from them; stir life into them; to make them move. That they could not do so without aid, chilled me; fascinated me; frightened me.

ALL this time my father and Mrs. Weir had been talking, but I had not heard a word of it. Then I heard Mrs. Weir say to me, "You will sleep in the west wing. Leonard will unpack your clothes. Remember to dress for dinner, wash your hands and face and do not be late. Do not stare so, boy!"

I ran from the room. Finding my bedroom, I flung myself down upon the four-poster bed. I covered my face with my hands, but could still see the protruding eyes, with the veins twisting and turning, knotting and untying—and the useless hands lying on their backs.

I was introduced to the other guests. The sons, who were as old as my father, lifelessly shook my hand without looking at me.

Mrs. Weir's niece was thin and short, beside her lanky husband. At dinner Mrs. Weir sat at the top of the table, her useless hands on a board. One son sat at an angle to the table, so that he could feed his mother.

By candlelight, her eyes were even more startling than before. I had resolved not to look at them, if possible. I might as well have tried to walk on water. The veins had gathered in a blotch, and throbbled. Then they quickly flowed back in all directions, twisting and entangling themselves in a mad flurry. Again I was aware of their alive-

ness, which was so apart from the rest of her. Eyes that lived in a dead face.

It was obvious to me, even though I was so young at the time, that Mrs. Weir's eyes dominated everybody with whom she came into contact. They cowered all opposition. Those who spoke did so in a low tone. Heads were raised and dropped hurriedly. People full of life and vigor, happy and strong, dried up under those eyes like an orange left in the sun.

Leonard took great delight in frightening me. He told me about a pretty girl of fourteen, who had once insulted Mrs. Weir at a flower show. She cried: "Oh, Mummy, look at those awful eyes!"

Leonard said that Mrs. Weir had been very angry. She never forgot or forgave. When the child had grown into the full blossom of beautiful womanhood, she had been invited to stay at Doonside, Mrs. Weir's house. She was as beautiful as a rose until Mrs. Weir crushed her; crumpled her until her senses left her. Leonard said that she still screamed in her room at the asylum: "The eyes! They are eating me!"

I could imagine them doing that, and how the little veins would leap in excitement in the process.

Leonard hated Mrs. Weir. "She's not 'uman," he said.

During a meal the son fed her carefully. He did not eat himself until he was sure she had finished. All the time her eyes lashed him as effectively as a whip. Head sunken on his chest he would, each time he lifted the spoon to her mouth, gaze into her eyes.

After dinner, that first night, I went out and down the path through some tall trees. I went to a place where I could see the water spraying against the rocks. The sound of the sea soothed me—I almost forgot the eyes. A rustling behind made me spin around. It was Leonard.

He grinned and said, "Mrs. Weir says you must go to bed."

I was furious. What right had she to tell me what to do?

He went on: "Mrs. Weir said that if you refused I was to bring you to her."

The prospect of facing her eyes again that night decided me. I went to bed.

The next day, when my father told me he was going to marry Mrs. Weir, I threw myself on my bed and cried.

"You'll get used to her," he said. "She won't live for ever."

She lived for another three years.

The wedding ceremony was performed in the lounge. I could never forgive my father for such an act. To think that Mrs. Weir was to be my stepmother! That I was to live under the permanent lash of the eyes. They would crush me; eat me alive!

The only consolation I had was that I was to go to a boarding school. I would be home only in the holidays.

Mrs. Weir was dressed entirely in black, except for a white veil. My father looked grim and handsome in his frock coat and knife-edged trousers. Mrs. Weir sat in her wheel chair, propped up straight with cushions. Her hands lay on their backs on the board. I only saw her eyes once. The mass of veins were taking a leading part in the ceremony. They leapt and fought each other in a whirl of excitement; brilliantly red. The eyeballs protruded further from their taut sockets.

Then I knew what was really happening. *Mrs. Weir's eyes were being married!*

There could be no other explanation. The rest of her was dead.

Then I glanced at the hands, lying on their backs. On one of the fingers was now a ring—glittering. Mrs. Weir had moved her fingers! Impossible! Incredible! But it was true.

The eyes were married!

The next three years of my life were ones of happiness at school and horror at "home." Every holiday I came under the merciless lashing of the eyes. Every time it became worse.

My father hardly spoke to me. He was now a constant attendant on my stepmother.

One holiday the relatives came, carbon copies of each other, dejected, miserable people with one thing on their minds—the death of Mrs. Weir and whether my father was now going to be left the vast Weir fortune.

One night, when I was in the library, I heard Mrs. Weir raise her voice, passionate-

ly. She said, "I know what you are all thinking! You wish me dead. And now I warn you. Should I die unnaturally, I shall return to strangle my murderer, and the marks of my fingers shall be upon his, or her, throat. My eyes shall follow the rest of you until death."

Ten months later she was dead.

I WAS home for the holidays, and most of the relatives were there. My father called me into the room, with the others.

She was dead, but the eyes were open, staring. Alive—as if they refused to die. My father tried to pull the lids down, but they shot up each time, like a blind.

The veins continued to writhe and twist, turn and contract expand and leap.

I do not know what made me say it, but I startled the others in the room. I said, softly, "*Mrs. Weir is dead, but her eyes will live forever.*"

Then everybody remembered her dreadful warning. All were afraid.

The next few days were ones of tramping police feet. The doctor had been suspicious. A post mortem was held. Poison was found in her stomach. A fat detective asked questions. His pig eyes suspected everyone, but most of all, Leonard.

When they arrested him he cursed and swore at them. He shouted to us from the police car, "She'll be back for the real murderer. She said so. She's inhuman."

On the last night we slept at the house, screams awoke us at midnight. We tumbled out into the great hall.

Someone said, "Where's Rowlands?"

He was missing—and there had been screams!

We rushed to my father's room and burst open the door. He lay on his back, staring up at the ceiling, but not seeing. He was dead.

He had been strangled. There were finger marks on his throat.

Someone shouted, "Look! Look!" as the lights failed.

In the gloom we saw Mrs. Weir's eyes. They were hanging in mid air, staring at us, bright, horrifying *and alive*. Like they had been on her wedding day.

Then they were gone.

We tried to convince ourselves that it was an hallucination. We took a fainting woman to the lounge. One of the sons moaned, "It can't be! We imagined it! It's against the laws of nature."

Mrs. Weir's niece suddenly shouted: "She said she would come back and strangle the one . . ."

Leonard got off. There was not enough evidence. I was glad.

THIRTY years have passed since the death of Mrs. Weir and my father, but the eyes are still alive. They haunt me. Alive, they are destroying me.

My doctor says it is my imagination, and I never actually see them. That my mind was so vividly impressed when I was young that I now project them from my subconscious mind into reality.

The two sons are dead. Mrs. Weir's niece is in an asylum. Her husband shot himself.

I know the doctor is wrong. Mrs. Weir's eyes will come again. I hope this document is found.

Her eyes will come again. And I will be waiting. I have made up my mind.

This time I will tell them. Tell them to bring the hands. The hands for my throat. The hands to leave their finger marks. Hands that were useless in life, deadly in death.

I will tell the eyes they were wrong. Wrong about my father. He did not kill Mrs. Weir.

It was me. I put the poison in her glass of wine. The poison I found in my father's bag.