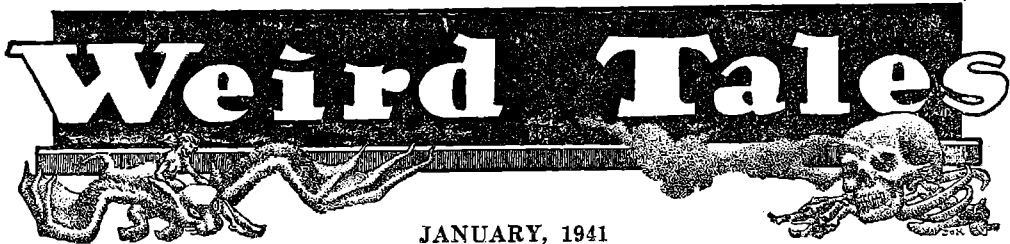


# Weird Tales



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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

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H. AVELINE PERKINS, Associate Editor.



"She knelt there in the snowdrifts, arms upflung, to cover her face, abject fear expressed in every line of her body."

# Lupa

By ROBERT BARBOUR JOHNSON

*Lupe Dzarkas was a tender, lovable woman—but what was that shape of horror that was found dead on the couch in her room?*

"GOD!" said the man in the white coat, huskily.

The hot little room was very still. Almost you might have thought

that only its shadows were alive. They moved incessantly, those stark black shadows in the candlelight. They danced and leaped and gibbered. They were never

quiet. But the men who threw those shadows—the man in the white coat bending over the bed, the small man with the cigar beside him, the big man with the twinkling brass buttons at the broken door—all these might well have been dead images in some grotesque waxworks group; so white their faces, so still they were.

The man with the cigar said at last, not moving, "It's—it's not normal, huh, Doc?"

The other nodded, still absorbed. "We'll do a complete dissection down at the morgue," he muttered. "That's the only way we can say positively. But even without it, I can see—the variances are slight, Inspector, slight but definite. The length of limbs, the shape of the head, the very hang of the skeleton and texture of the hair. Nothing is quite right. It's the queerest freak——"

The man with the cigar looked at him. "Freak?" he echoed softly. "Freak, eh? Well, maybe, Doc. Maybe. It's a handy word to call it by, although I could think of others. . . . Anyhow, it's dead. We can be thankful for that!"

He drew the sheet back up over what lay on the bed; mopped at his forehead with a handkerchief. Somewhere, far off in the night, a dog was howling mournfully.

"Yeah, Doc," said the man with the cigar, "it's dead, and that's just swell! How'd you like to have seen it when it was alive, as Cassidy and that young man say they did? There was still life in the eyes when they broke the door down, they tell me; they rolled in their direction with a sort of pleading look. And the lips twisted in—oh, I guess it was just a dying snarl, Doc. But it looked for all the world as if the thing were *smiling* at 'em. No wonder the young fellow fainted dead away—and that Cassidy got sick at his stomach.

"Just imagine how they felt, Doc! Breaking into a room where they thought

a young girl was lying sick and helpless, and finding a thing like that lying on her bed in her place; just as if it was some awful travesty on *Red Riding-Hood*, Doc. Why, it was enough to drive any man out of his mind; much more that poor young devil who was so in love with her. He just sits with his head in his hands and moans 'Lupa! O God! My Lupa!' over and over again. I tell you, if I don't locate that girl and bring her back to him——

"I've thrown out a police dragnet all over town, of course. And I'll have a nation-wide broadcast of her description. If she's to be found, Doc, we'll find her for him; that much is sure. But—you'll notice I said 'If'! Myself, I've got no faith at all that we'll ever see her again. Why? Well, Doc, partly because of that thing over there on her bed. . . .

"What am I talking about? Well, Doc, it's awfully hard to put my meaning into words that a scientist like you can understand. Those queer, monstrous hintings that have come down to us from mankind's very beginnings—they don't mean a thing to you. You aren't superstitious. But I am, Doc! I'm Irish, you see. I believe in ghosts and hoodoos and banshees and—well, in whatever I'm afraid this girl was, Doc. Maybe it's silly to be like that, and then again maybe it isn't. It's a question we can't settle, Doc, no matter how much we talk. But all I know is that after I leave this place tonight I'm going to church, Doc; to a church I've not set foot in since I was a little shaver! And I'm going to pray to the good God that protects us all from the Powers of Darkness. . . .

"Look, Doc! I'll try to put this thing in some sort of way so that you can get it. I'll take it according to *evidence*, not just according to what I happen to think or feel. I'll give you facts, Doc; hard concrete facts that there's no getting away from—as solid as that stiff, dead thing under the sheet yonder. . . .

“OH, I don’t just mean the fact of this girl’s disappearance and the fact that *something else* was found dead in here after she vanished. That isn’t conclusive, Doc; and I know it just as well as you! But let me ask you just one question, Doc: How did the girl get out? That door wasn’t just locked when they broke it in, you know. It was bolted, with a bolt set on the inside! And the window was locked and shuttered, also in a way that couldn’t be done from without! So unless there’s some trick exit from this room we’ve not found yet—either there’s a secret passage out of this place or else—or else I’m right and you’re wrong, Doc! There’s just no other way of figuring it. You and your thousand years or so of ‘scientific progress’ are wrong, and we’re right back in the Dark Ages amid all the terrors of forgotten superstition. . . .

“How’d she get out of here, Doc? Not a living soul in the boarding-house saw her go. None of ’em doubted for an instant that she was still locked up in here with one of her ‘spells’. . . .

“Oh, yes, she had ‘spells’, Doc! Just what sort they were no one seems to know, because she never let anyone see her at such times. She’d just lock herself in her room for days at a time, refusing to let anyone call a doctor or do anything for her. She’d just lie in the dark like some poor sick animal. Half the time she wouldn’t even eat anything; trays the landlady brought up just piled up untasted in the corridor. Oh, they say that once in a while a tray would disappear, but never while anyone was near to see the girl open the door and take it in!

“Sometimes she wouldn’t even answer ’em when they tried to talk to her through the door, to ask her whether she was in pain or needed anything. And when she did reply, her voice—well, they tell me it didn’t sound like a human voice at all, Doc. It was strange, hoarse, guttural, as if the poor kid could hardly talk at all, as if she

were forcing every word through a throat twisted almost out of human semblance. But all she’d say to them was ‘I’m—all—right!’ over and over again. ‘Don’t worry. I’m—all—right.’

“It must have been hell for all the boarders at such times, Doc, but worst of all for this young man I told you about. The suspense of it, the awful mystery! But he always respected her wishes, you see, and never disturbed her. It was only after a week had gone by without a word from her, when he couldn’t even hear her breathing or moving on the other side of the door, that he got scared and called in Cassidy off the beat. Oh yes, she’s had plenty of time to get away in, Doc—providing she could go out under the crack of the door or through the keyhole like a ghost! There just isn’t any other way out of here.

“And this thing in her place, dead on her bed, I suppose it came in through the crack or the keyhole too, after she was gone? If it were any other girl but this Lupa Dzarkas, you might think she’d been keeping a pet up here secretly, and left it behind when she disappeared. I’ve heard of people doing things like that. But not this girl, Doc! No, sir! Because, you see, pets and this Lupa Dzarkas just didn’t mix! There was some queer quality about her that frightened beasts and birds. Just a pretty, sweet, harmless-looking kid, Doc, and yet the mere sight of her would send almost any animal into paroxysms of terror. . . .

“There was that time her young man told me about, when the dogs—although their attitude wasn’t exactly fearful on that occasion, I’ll have to admit. But perhaps their very numbers gave ’em confidence. Perhaps they ganged up against something they hated more than they dreaded.

“But I’d better tell this yarn the way he tells it, Doc. This Ralph Evans, a decent sort of chap, bookish and bespectacled and sort of frail, but nice—I liked him a lot.

"H'E'D been working late at the library that night, he says; the night of the worst blizzard of the year. He left about eleven, and plowed home through the thick snow-clouds with his coat-collar turned up against the howling wind and his arms full of books, his mind a thousand miles removed from Lupa Dzarkas. As a matter of fact, he says, he'd only met the girl a few times up until then. She'd been at his boarding-house only a few weeks, and they'd said 'Hello' to each other when they met in the corridors or in the dining-room and chatted a bit, and that was about all. He wasn't even thinking about her now as he turned into his home-street—though the blizzard was so thick he couldn't even read the sign-posts, and waded up it through the fast-piling drifts and the sifting white curtain that was freezing cold against his face.

"Then suddenly he halted as if he'd hit a brick wall. There ahead of him, not ten feet off—

"The thing he saw just didn't seem real to him at first, he says. It was more like some sort of queer stage tableau. There was even a handy lamp-post to throw a sort of spotlight over the scene, leaving everything beyond in deepest shadow. And in that circle of dazzling light, he realized, a girl was kneeling.

"She knelt there in the snowdrifts, arms flung up to cover her face, abject fear expressed in every line of her body. The white flakes sifted gently down over the scarcely lesser whiteness of perfect arms and shoulders, over the delicate curves and molding of a figure that might well have been the masterpiece of some old Greek sculptor. Stark naked she knelt there in all that bitter cold, naked save for her unbound white-gold hair that shimmered over her body like a garment, or an animal's white fur. And about her, as she cowered there, a dozen smaller shapes were crouching.

"It seemed to him that every dog in the neighborhood was gathered there. He knew several of them by sight; an old lady's pet 'Peke', a wire-haired terrier the children next door played with, the corner grocer's dachshund, a couple of small mongrels—all the most harmless sort of little beasts imaginable. But they weren't harmless to the girl, you could see that! They ringed about her with hackles standing up with rage and little bodies tense, with teeth bared and eyes glowing a yellowish green. And the whole circle of them was slowly closing in. . . .

"H'OW long he stood there staring like a fool, he has no idea. It must have been a long time. He simply couldn't believe what he saw. The girl, kneeling helpless and stricken there in the freezing snow, the slowly tightening circle of little creatures that hunted her down—good Lord! Those harmless little neighborhood tykes! And yet it might almost have been a scene from some old Russian folk-tale, with the wolves about to pull down some forlorn exile on the steppes! . . .

"He came to life at last, of course. He sprang forward, shouting at the dogs. Just as he did so a big black mongrel, an evil-looking brute he'd never seen about before, launched himself straight at the girl's throat. Young Evans' rush caught him in mid-leap, bowled him over in the snow. Then the rest of them charged. There was quite a *mêlée* for a moment, a boiling-up of little shapes about him, the flash of savage worrying little fangs and a rush of thudding forms against his body. He struck and kicked and cursed and almost went down beneath the savage, silent rush of them—that was the most terrifying part of it all, he says. The silence! Not one of those little beasts gave tongue, Doc. Not one of them yelped when hurt or snarled when attacking. They fought silently, grimly as shadows.

"Then suddenly it was all over. He stood holding an unconscious girl in his arms, amid a circle of trampled, blood-stained snow. The dogs were gone. He hadn't seen them go, hadn't seen the flitting shapes of them fade away in the blizzard. They just weren't there any longer! There were only those fast-disappearing little tracks in the snow to show that the whole thing hadn't been some sort of delusion. Far off, through the storm, he made out the glowing lights of his boarding-house, beacons of sanity. He made for them, carrying the girl, her unconscious head on his shoulder. . . .

"He says he knew right then that he was in love with her, Doc! Right then. It didn't need all their ripening friendship during the months that followed. He'd fought for his woman like some knight of old, and he felt that she belonged to him and him alone.

"And yet he never really learned much about her in all that time. About this pretty, platinum-haired girl with the queer lisping accent that hinted at a foreign origin, for all her American dress and American ways—about her there was always a veil of mystery he couldn't penetrate. Up to a point her life was an open book. She was not in the least reticent or secretive about herself; he'd never known a franker, more open, more winning personality. She was everybody's friend in the boarding-house, always ready to do a kindness, always gay and friendly and loyal to a fault. And yet, for all her frankness and friendliness, she contrived it somehow that no one should ever really know much about Lupa Dzarkas.

"Queer name, ain't it, Doc? Lupa Dzarkas. A name you wouldn't run across very often. The first word means—well, I know enough Latin for that, Doc. And that last name, what is it? Central-European, Magyar, Pole? The young man says she spoke of Transylvania several times, seemed to

know that country very well. Does that mean anything to you, Doc? Well, it does to me. You see, we had a guy on the squad once who came from that part of the world. He used to wear a sprig of 'wolf-bane' in his buttonhole all the time, Doc, as a charm to keep off things that were neither quite human nor quite unhuman, Doc, but that ranged the steppes of his native land in either shape at will and lived off human blood—I wish we had him here now, Doc. He could make this thing clearer to you than I can hope to.

"Look, Doc! These 'attacks' of hers were genuine, whatever they were. Everyone in this house agrees on that. But why wouldn't she let anyone do anything for her at such times, or even see her? Why did she hide herself away from everyone for at least three days out of each month, Doc; days corresponding roughly to the full of each moon? Why is it that no one ever saw her when she was ill, until this time when they burst in her door and found—well, not a human being in this room at all?

"What did it mean, a young girl hiding herself away from everyone like that, at a time when she was supposed to be so ill that she could hardly move, when she couldn't eat anything or drink anything, when she was so stricken that all she could do was lie on her bed and moan and whine and howl—yes, howl, Doc! Even her young man admits that there were delirious intervals when her weird cries kept everyone in the house awake at night—when the only answer she could make to questions was to croak in that changeling voice, 'I'm—all—right!—I'll—be—all—right!'

"And she always would be, too! That was the strangest part of all. After days of lying helpless, hardly able to talk, stricken—days and nights during which the whole household would almost go crazy with worry for her—then suddenly the

door would open and out she'd come, looking not a whit worse for her ordeal. Indeed, she'd look better, somehow, the young man said; refreshed, strengthened in some bizarre way he couldn't describe. Her color would be better, her eyes clearer, her smile gayer and more ready. And she'd laugh at all their questions about that cloistered interval, treat the whole thing as if it had been some sort of monstrous hoax.

"**I**T USED to drive this young man of hers almost crazy, not knowing what was wrong, not being able to help her. He begged her to see a doctor, to try to do something for the trouble, whatever it was.

"There's no medicine on this earth for what I've got,' she told him once, 'and no doctor on earth who could help me. There's no treating a thing that's in the blood, that's been bred into a family strain over long generations. Every man and woman of my line since time immemorial has borne this taint from birth until death. There is no escaping it. My parents fled to America from the old country hoping that they might leave it behind, escape into a new world and a new life. But the taint followed them, dogged them to their dying day. It cannot be cured. It can't even be explained. A doctor? Ah, my poor friend, I should like to see the face of any doctor to whom I so much as tried to tell what is wrong with me! And even if by some miracle he should believe me, what could he do? There is no drug that can stay, no medicine that can cure a malady like mine; a thing that's seared into the very bones, twisted into the very fibers and sinews and veins of the body, eaten into the very mind by generation upon generation of evil heredity! There is no hope for me in heaven or hell.

"'But I have sworn,' she went on, 'that I shall bear my cross alone, that no one else shall suffer or be harmed through me. The sickness I have is contagious—not per-

haps quite in the sense that you use that word, but contagious nevertheless, at the time when it is at its height. And so I shut myself away from everyone, lock myself up, lest unknowingly I should hurt those who seek to help me, that I should make them too into beings like myself, outcasts from all hope either here or hereafter.'

"And that was all the young man ever found out about what ailed her, Doc, throughout all those long months when he was her constant companion, when he was quite certain that love of him was growing in her heart. He tried in every way to find out what disease, what strange obscure ailment could have symptoms like that. He says he haunted every medical library in town, read everything that he could get his hands on. He even consulted physicians unknown to Lupa. But of course they only pulled long faces and spouted long Latin words that meant only 'Damned if I know!' Doc, when you figured them out. And the medical books told him just as little.

"At last he couldn't bear the suspense any longer, Doc. He cornered the girl one night last week on the porch swing, after the rest of the boarders had retired and they had the veranda to themselves. It's been an unusually hot fall, you know; and the air that night was sultry and still, like the weather just before a storm, you know. A sort of suspense was in the air. The noises of the city were as faint and far off as if they were alone in the heart of a wilderness. A nearly-full moon was rising. . . .

"'Lupa,' young Evans told her then, 'this thing can't go on. I love you, dear—don't you understand?—I love you! I can't let you go on facing the horror of this secret by yourself. Whatever it is, we'll share it, fight it, beat it together. Will you be my wife, darling, and let me help you with all your troubles—always?'

"He took her into his arms. A little breeze rustled among the few last wisteria blooms left on the porch vines. . . .

"**H**E SAYS for one moment of heaven he thought he'd won, Doc. She answered his kisses, her body pressed against his, her arms locked tight about him. Her soft lips crushed against his so vehemently that he could feel little sharp teeth through them. And her eyes—well, he'd heard of a woman's eyes 'shining with love,' Doc, but he'd never realized that it was literal before. But her eyes actually did shine in the darkness, he says. They began to glow, with a sort of queer greenish inner light.

"Then suddenly she wrenched herself free of his embrace and sprang up. 'Oh, no!' she cried, her voice strangely hoarse. 'What am I thinking of? What was I about to do—oh God, no!' She retreated from him, hands thrown up before her—how horribly that gesture reminded him of that other night long months before!—retreated until he couldn't see her face any more, but only the whiteness of her dress and the whiteness of her strange hair, a blurred outline that might almost have been a wreath of fog but for the glinting of green eyes in it.

"Lupa!' he begged; 'Lupa! Please, dear, come back! Please!'

"She didn't answer, just stood there motionless and utterly still. He could hear the soft whispering of that little breeze in the vines, the far-off howling. Then suddenly her hands went to her throat. She made a little sound, as if she were trying to speak—a strange, guttural sound that somehow terrified him. Then she turned and ran across the veranda and into the house. He caught a glimpse of her, silhouetted against the hallway's light for an instant as she passed; a silhouette with vaguely disturbing outlines. Then she was gone. There was a pattering of footsteps

along the upper hall and the distant closing of a door. . . .

"Whatever was the matter with Lupa Dzarkas?' his landlady asked a moment later. 'She just passed me on the stairs, running like mad, and didn't speak or look up. She was all crouched down, and her hair was hanging over her face.'"

**I**T WAS very still in the hot little room. Almost you might have thought, as the voice of the man with the cigar died away in the silence, that only its leaping shadows had life.

"And you think——?" the man in the white jacket said at last, softly.

The man with the cigar nodded.

"Yeah," he said with equal softness; "yeah, Doc, that's exactly what I think. That's why I sent for you, Doc, after I'd heard this young fellow's story just as I told it to you just now. I sent for a doctor because I wanted to know whether that—well, whatever it was that he found when he broke into his sweetheart's room—was normal or abnormal. Not that it really makes a bit of difference, Doc, because it's the thing's very presence here that strains all coincidence.

"For listen to one last bit of proof, Doc. Listen to this description of Lupa Dzarkas that her young man gave me. It's accurate, I think. He wants me to look for someone 'tall and slim and aristocratic-looking, graceful and quick in her movements, beautiful and intelligent, with great melting black eyes and almost snow-white platinum hair and skin.' And that isn't at all hard to do, Doc. Because, you see, what answers that description to the last detail is lying right here, on this very bed."

He flung the sheet back. In the candlelight the sprawled form there was very hard to see. But you could make it out. . . .

"A wolf-hound, Doc!" the man with the cigar muttered. "A great snow-white wolf-hound! . . ."