

EERIE STORIES

*Startling Adventures
in Chilling Horror*

AUGUST, 1937

- VIRGINS OF THE STONE DEATH (Novel)** . GATES ALEXANDER 10
The glorious young body of the girl Terry Grant loved was fated to feel the cold embrace of death, instead of his own warm, protecting one—as her shapely limbs turned slowly into solid stone!
- THE SOUL-SCORCHERS' LAIR (Cover Story)** . RONALD FLAGG 36
He had a mad desire to scorch his wife's soul, sending the intense heat of a blow-torch through her flesh.
- CORPSE GIRL'S RETURN** ERIC LENOX 44
She was alluring, desirable—but the newshawk shuddered. For he knew she had slept the sleep of death with the cadavers in the morgue.
- DEVIL'S BREW** BRANTON BLACK 52
Sardonically, Gavin Clark planned murder, and visioned his trembling young wife bestowing her caresses upon a corpse. . . .
- HER ISLE OF HORROR** CLIFF HOWE 55
Loretta's dark-eyed invitation made the young investigator face the horrific monsters of her storm-lashed island.
- THE PAIN MASTER'S BRIDE** REXTON ARCHER 67
It was stark horror that Edmund Neymores learned when he witnessed the ghastly torment of a helpless girl as she posed for a statue of agony.
- SINISTER SKEIN** HORACE STONER 76
Trooper Trant had to untangle a bloody murder skein—depending on the help of a beautiful girl who didn't trust him because he had seen her wearing the briefest of clothing.
- REHEARSAL WITH DOOM** TERRENCE FLINT 86
Middle-aged Graham Munster arranged a rehearsal with doom to force his pretty young ward to become his bride.
- LUST FOR BLOOD** CLIFFORD GRAY 94
The boat club's secretary floated over corpse currents to a madman's hideaway where the price of life was blood.
- MATE OF THE BEAST** LEON DUPONT 102
Len Oakley found that no mortal man could steal a bride of the beast.
- TERROR'S TOMB** JOHN GREGORY 107
Private Detective Manton wanted to know why lovely Anne Seymour went willingly into a pit of terror with a parchment-faced fiend.
- STEP-DAUGHTER TO GREED** PETER REGINALD 119
Terrified, the girl forced her trembling legs to carry her into the tomb of the dead—to search for an inheritance in hell. . . .

*Cover by Norman Saunders
From "The Soul-Scorchers' Lair."*

Published bi-monthly by Magazine Publishers, Inc. Office of publication, 29 Worthington Street, Springfield, Mass. A. A. Wyn, President. Editorial and executive offices, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y. Application pending for second-class entry at Post Office at Springfield, Mass. Title registration applied for at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1937, by Magazine Publishers, Inc. Manuscripts will be handled with care, but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. For advertising rates, address Ace Fiction Group, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.

Twelve Issues, \$1.50; Single Copies, Fifteen Cents

Mate of the Beast

By Leon Dupont

LONG, quavering cries of timber wolves keened through the great forest as Len Oakley hurried along a narrow path, staggering slightly. With a stone jug in his left hand, and a Winchester in the crook of his right arm, he was this night going to make Mary Timmons his own, without further delay, wolves or no wolves.

The long-drawn, primitive notes carried an eerie, knowing message that made the man's spine stiffen under his coarse flannel shirt. Those accursed beasts—they had been hemming him in closer and closer since Ruud, that fool of a step-brother, had gone. Of late they had trailed him for a part of the five miles he walked, early every morning, to the mill where he worked. And they were costing him a fortune in ammunition.

"Damn you, Ruud," he mumbled, "it's you what's a-doin' this. They're signallin' each other again. A-comin' fer me. And it's you as is a-sendin' 'em, damn yer devil's soul!"

Nearer and nearer the mournful cries broke forth; and he knew that the gray, savage creatures were moving through the trees on their side of him, keeping to cover with careful cunning. But he kept on, legging it along the moonlit trail that led to the log house where Mary Timmons lived. Cursing, he lifted the stone jug to his whisker-stubbed face and gulped a long draught of fiery liquid.

The liquor was making Len Oak-

ley's brain reel; also his steps, somewhat. Yet the long strides of a born woodsman carried swiftly over the ground. Every so often his mind's eye showed him Ruud's face lurking in a shadow here, in a shadow there—and with that same calmly vengeful look with which it had been stamped when he had last seen him.

"You think as how yer c'n keep me from havin' Mary," Len mumbled thickly, "but yer can't stop me, Ruud Oakley, any more than yer could before!"

That majestic wolf of the mountains was always close by when Len Oakley tried to make Mary Timmons his wife. And Oakley found that no mortal man could steal a bride of the beast.

Ruud Oakley . . . Legend said his life had been a strange one since early childhood. His father and step-mother, burdened with many children,

had had little time for any one of them. As a little tot of six, Ruud was wont to wander off and spend many solitary hours alone among the tall trees of the forest. The day he had brought home a little, fat-stomached wolf pup, which he had freed from a trap, the strangeness had begun.

As soon as the wound in the animal's left foreleg had healed, no amount of begging from Ruud's mother, nor beatings from his father, would keep him and the baby wolf from wandering afar from sunup to sundown. About the time that old man Oakley vowed he would put a bullet through the limping little animal, it disappeared. But Ruud would continue to go out into the woods, and sometimes he would not return with the coming of night.

Old man Oakley had gone to search for the six-year-old Ruud, when the boy had been absent for almost two days. With luck, and perhaps partly through the consummate skill of an expert hunter, he had come upon an amazing spectacle.

In a mossy bank, over which the bole of a large tree had fallen, was the entrance to a wolf's lair. Before the dark hole burrowed under the tree trunk, lay a female wolf. Ruud was feeding from her dugs, along with several of her cubs.

The elder Oakley shrank back among some concealing shrubbery, rifle aimed, watching breathlessly, hoping the air currents would not change and carry his scent to the nostrils of the she-wolf. He dared not shoot, for the boy partly shielded that big gray form. And then, too, a female wolf would become a raging fury if her young were threatened.

In fact, as he watched, she growled ever so slightly at young Ruud. She half rose and sniffed suspiciously at the boy, but apparently satisfied with the wolf smell that permeated his sketchy and ragged clothing, she settled back again.

Presently the man in the shrubbery sighed with relief as the mother wolf, shaking the pups free of her dugs, disappeared down the hole. One by one her family followed; the last was Ruud's limping pet. The boy started off through the woods. His father soon caught him and took him home.

When Ruud grew to manhood he had occasionally been seen, in the distance, speeding through the woods, surrounded by his savage companions—the wolves. And many a hunter, out for the government bounty that wolves' ears would bring, believed Ruud warned the gray beasts of their danger.

The step-brothers, Len and Ruud, had often fought bitterly over Mary Timmons, who loved only Ruud. One week ago, he had disappeared. It was believed he had forsaken mankind; even Mary, for a wilderness life,

although many said he had taught her to know his gray friends as well as he did.

“DAMN his soul!” cursed Len Oakley as he swung along the narrow, winding trail. “The devil's his master, I say. He cared more for beasts than men. Said they're more honest. An' he took Mary out with 'im, too, an' got her to a-gettin' like himself.”

Closer and closer the gray beasts of the forest were hemming the path that led to the Timmons' log house. Len Oakley, now almost running, could hear their nearness. A snapping twig, a short, snuffing grunt, panting breathings; and, farther back, ominous, shortened howls.

He took another long swig from the jug. His eyes were red-rimmed and bloodshot as he muttered:

“Damn you, Ruud! Since yer can't come out an' fight like a flesh-and-blood man, yer got to use yer devil's tricks of sendin' them beasts fer me—eh? Well, I'll have the girl fer myself, wolves er no wolves. You—”

Then he saw the great wolf with the silver-white markings on its chest—biggest of them all—the leader who had been bringing the pack against him for the past week. Perched high on a rocky boulder that jutted out from the roots of a tall fir tree above the path, it half crouched, eyeing him intently.

Down dropped the stone jug and up came the heavy Winchester. It flamed four times before the leader of the pack leaped away into the shadows, seemingly scornful of the deadly rifle. Len Oakley shuddered involuntarily, and eerie, fantastic thoughts worked slowly through his brain; then, shouting words of blasphemous rage, he grabbed the stone jug, drained the last of its contents down his throat and hurled it at the shadows where he had seen the leader vanish. Still swearing, he increased his pace. He had not many shells remaining.

Len Oakley was out of breath after he had circled a dank-smelling quagmire in Owl Hollow and, about a hundred yards farther on, reached the Timmons' log house. He banged on the door with the butt of his Winchester. A gray, scraggle-haired old woman opened the bark-covered portal.

"Glad yer come, Len Oakley," she greeted. "Walk in an' set down. Powerful lonesome, what with the wolves an' Mary actin' so strange since Ruud took himself off."

Oakley grunted, asked: "Strange—how yer mean?" He walked over to the young girl who sat in a rocking-chair by the fireplace. He looked at her with burning eyes. She was barelegged, dressed in a checkered gingham dress. It bagged in some places; in others it stretched tightly, showing the firm roundings of her body. Silent, she rocked back and forth, staring steadily at a window.

For a few moments Len Oakley stared moodily at the girl. Deliberately his eyes roved from the plump, unstockinged calves to the small, pear-shaped breasts that were half revealed by the carelessly unbuttoned top of her gingham dress. He took a step toward her, reaching out a hand to jerk her up out of the chair, to crush her in his arms, force her to his will then and there. But the old woman started chattering again, and he checked his movement.

"Strange it is; and yer don't know what I've been a-puttin' up with," said the old woman, her voice rising. "That girl never did do nothin' to earn her keep, what with goin' off with that hell-damned step-brother of yourn. Goin' out with the wolves—like no decent human bein'—like a witch. That's it—like a witch!"

"What's the matter with you, Mary?" Oakley rumbled.

The girl said nothing. Monotonously she rocked back and forth, staring toward the window.

"I got to watch her every minute since Ruud took himself off," the old

woman whined. "Twice she tried to kill herself with a kitchen knife. She ain't et nothin' these last three days. An' them wolves! They come around so thick a soul ain't safe no time. Pa'll be back from the village, soon, a-bringin' traps fer the critters. Shells is too expensive."

Oakley put his rifle in a corner, then said to the old woman: "Get me somthin' to drink, Annie Timmons—somethin' strong. I ain't a-goin' to wait no longer. I'm takin' Mary to the village an' git us married by Judge Wilkins. He c'n fix it tonight."

"I'm glad—mighty glad, Len, if you'd take her off my hands. Look at her—a-layin' around like that. All she does—all day and all night. It's a queer girl she is. Took this spell—and the wolves started a-howlin' an' comin' around so's a body ain't safe. But that Ruud's a bad one. He'll be out fer your blood when he sees you two wedded."

Len Oakley took a long swallow from a crock that old Annie passed to him. He wiped his mouth with the back of a gnarled hand and turned at the sound of Mary's voice. It was soft, low and monotonous.

"Ruud'll never see us. I know, I know. He ain't never comin' back here."

Oakley's eyes narrowed. "Not a-comin' back?" he said. "Maybe he might be comin' back—after he's through fer awhile with them wolves. But if he does, he ain't a-goin' to have nothin' to do about us."

The three were silent for a moment, and they heard the distant sound of wolves growing nearer and nearer.

"I wish Pa'd hurry back with them traps," Annie grumbled.

THE young girl slowly turned in her chair, her dark eyes lackluster and staring. "Traps? . . . Who said anythin' about traps?"

Annie Timmons eyed her daughter fearfully and took a pull at the mouth of the crock. "Course I said

traps," she shrilled. "What you think I said?" Angered, her voice rose still higher. "Traps! Traps to kill them damn beasts with!"

Mary leaped wildly from the rocking-chair, her apathy gone.

"Set still, Mary!" roared Oakley, lunging for the girl.

But she twisted away from his reach and ran out of the house, screaming:

"No, no! No traps! I'll warn them. I will! I'll warn *him!*"

A deep-throated snarl, followed by a ululant howl, suddenly came from near-by. Oakley was halfway out the door, after the running girl, when he caught sight of Annie poking his rifle through a window. He whirled back and knocked the barrel aside as she fired.

"The big wolf—the one that's always brung the others!" the old woman was screeching. "Shoot him, shoot him—an' then the others'll stay away!"

With another hamlike blow of his fist, Len floored her, unconscious. Seizing his rifle, he ran out.

Ahead of him sped the girl, her plump brown calves flashing up and down. As Oakley ran he saw a slowly crimsoning stain spread down the left side of her dress. He drew nearer and could see that Annie's bullet had hit her in the left shoulder.

That fool of an old Annie Timmons. When he had knocked aside the gun she was aiming at the wolf, the bullet had hit the girl. But the blood coming from her shoulder couldn't mean a bad wound. For she raced nimbly over the ground, without the slightest falter. The damned accident wouldn't spoil his bridal night.

On and on raced the girl, straight toward the quagmire.

"Stop, you fool!" he shouted. "Stop! Git away from that quag!"

Mary stopped abruptly and turned to face him. He slowed down to a walk, came on cautiously. The girl's heels were on the edge of the bank.

"Now, Mary, come like a good girl.

Git away from there. Don't git yourself so worked up. It's your Len—a-comin' to take yer away—to git married. Be a good girl, Mary."

She took several steps forward, away from the bank, and stood motionless. A slow smile came to her lips. Oakley eagerly ran the remaining distance between them. Her arms lifted up halfway. He pulled her to him.

"Now yer actin' right," he said as her arms went around his neck.

For a moment the two, in close embrace, did not move. Then Mary's arms jerked down. She yanked hard at the rifle Oakley held in one hand at her back. There was a slopping plop as the Winchester fell into the quagmire and sank from sight.

"Why, you—you hell-cat!" he roared, lunging at her.

But when the man neared her, Mary retreated to the edge of the bank. He was afraid it would crumble under her feet, so he held back.

Before he could speak again, the girl with the bleeding wound in her left shoulder said one word: "Murderer!" Then, after a pause: "You killed him. You murdered Ruud an' threw him in the quag."

"What? You—you couldn't say I killed him. He's just off in the woods somewheres. You—"

The girl's cold, eerie-toned voice cut him short. "You did murder him," she almost whispered. "You wonder how I found out, don't yer?" Then, more slowly: "Well—I—*know.*" She turned her head and stared with a strange fixity at the forest.

As if her motion had been a signal, the weird sound of a wolf's howl wailed out in the night. Oakley shivered slightly and tightened his muscles for a leap at the girl. But the sudden change in her face stopped him.

HER features were contorted in a mask of blazing hatred, lips parted, teeth showing in a way that was wolfish.

"Murderer!" she repeated wildly.

Abruptly the girl wheeled to face the quagmire. Her face again calm, a smile on her lips, as though walking in a deep sleep, she quickly stepped off the bank and began forcing her way out.

Oakley rushed forward, a hand outthrust to clutch her. The bank began to cave in under his feet. Terror showed on his face and he jerked backward to safety. In another second the girl was beyond reach from the bank.

Barely audibly she murmured: "Ruud—Ruud—"

Shaking with anger, Oakley shook his fist at her and grated: "Go ahead, you fool! You'll find Ruud down in there—all right. Let 'im have yer—in hell! Damn yer both! Sure, I done 'im in—but nobody seen me do it. Nobody knows but you—an' now yer goin' too!"

The girl sank shoulder-deep in the bog, her lips still smiling, as Oakley turned away from the quagmire and glanced furtively about. What he saw made him stagger back in sudden fright. His eyes dilated, his jaw fell.

Before him, and to each side, but a scant two yards off, that gray, silent pack ringed him round—and at his back was the quagmire, silent save for the slopping sound of the girl's sinking body. Quiet, watching, those great timber beasts sat there on their haunches, their eyes gleaming greenly in the moonlight. Their lips were grinning, drawn back from vicious, shining fangs. The hackles on their broad necks stood up stiffly.

Near the center of the horseshoe circle that they formed, was the huge one with the silver-white markings on its chest. The leader's teeth were not bared, but he growled slightly, deep in his throat, and the pack closed in on Len Oakley. He shouted and bellowed to Annie Timmons, but there was no reply.

The man's fight on the edge of the quagmire was desperate and short. He battled furiously with heavy boot

and hunting knife. But relentlessly that leaping pack drove him back with slashing fangs, never once allowing their circling formation to be broken. The edge of the bank gave way under his feet, letting him down into the sucking ooze. He tried to claw his way up the bank, out of the mire. He screamed as the flesh of his hands was torn, the bones of his fingers crushed between snapping jaws.

Still madly shouting for help, Oakley attempted to thrash his way out into the bog where a tuft of weeds showed above the surface, hoping that there he might find solid ground. But he sank faster and faster. He saw the wolf pack trot leisurely off into the surrounding woods.

Louder and louder his shrieks knifed through the night, sending terrified implorations to the old woman he had knocked unconscious. Now he was facing the opposite bank. There sat the great leader of the pack gazing at him with a weird and calm intentness, but a few yards away.

As the slime of the bog began to envelope Len Oakley's whisker-stubbed face, the gliding form of another wolf appeared at the border of the opposite bank. Its gray figure seemed to form from the gray of the very muck near the solid ground so near and yet so far away. As though rising out of the bog which no living creature could conquer, this wolf came.

Len Oakley's hysterical shrieks rose to crescendoes of frightful sound. Dimly his fading senses told him that it was a she-wolf. As though through a misting fog, he saw her go up to the leader and nuzzle him. And he saw the leader bend his majestic head and lick the *blood welling from a wound in the she-wolf's left shoulder.*

Just before the quagmire reached Len Oakley's eyes and cut off his sight, he saw the pair wheel about, glance gravely over their shoulders at him and lope off together into the forest.