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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"She heard snarls of rage,
and the pack swept by her."

Norn

By LIREVE MONET

*A tale of stark horror—a powerful and thrilling
story of dark forces*

MY FIRST recollections of my aunt date back almost to infancy. I was passionately fond of her, so fond of her that when she was about

I never cared much for my mother. I can see them both now, as they were in the early years—Mother, rather tall, graciously full of figure, often laughing, a little

mercurial in temper, but with the kindest, sweetest, most whimsical pair of gray eyes that ever shone beneath soft brown hair. Norn—whether the name meant what I took it from my early reading to mean: the Norse word "Fate"; or whether it was a childish contraction of some more usual name, such as "Norma", I shall never now discover. Norn, I started to say, was the name of the idolatrously worshipped aunt; and I not only loved the name as being a part of her, but also thought it highly appropriate. She was still taller than my mother, and in a different way—a rangy, long-limbed height most unusual. I have known her to boast that her arms were longer than those of any man she had ever seen, and I believe it. Her features, too, were unusual in their stern, thin-lipped, long-jawed precision, but to me they were more fascinating than any I had ever contemplated. Her eyes were coldly gray, with large, black pupils which never dilated or contracted, but were always set a certain size. As I read what I have written, my picture of Norn—I never called her Aunt—sounds strangely forbidding. I do not know if, in my childhood, I had ever shrunk from her; I know my own child did, on later coming into her presence; but if I ever did that as a child, it was long forgotten in the early mists of infantile perceptions before my acquaintance with her seems to be recorded clearly in my mind.

Beside Norn, my mother, called unusual and fascinating by many people whom we knew, faded into complete nonentity. Her very high spirits seemed trivial and foolish; I can never remember hearing Norn laugh aloud. My mother's occasional lapses from good temper seemed pointless and ineffective in contrast to the cold disapproval, or rarer cold furies, of this favorite aunt. Strange that I should have idolized her—the

aunt? But I have painted only half the picture. This aunt, cold toward most of her contemporaries, knew occasional attachments to young children which amounted to a longing and craving for them—for their childish caresses, their admiration. One reason I never cared for my mother when we were with Norn was that my mother was usually busy. Norn did what work about the house she liked to do, sporadically and occasionally. She had a grim love of heavy tasks, and would do the hardest things by choice, avoiding and detesting the routine operations of cooking; and this arrangement of her occupation left her considerable time for me. She would spend hours daily, sometimes whole days at a time, holding me in a close embrace, telling me stories, reading to me, working puzzles. . . .

My mother and I are visiting on the old Iowa farm which Norn has not yet left, in one of my earliest memory-pictures. It is late afternoon of a winter day, and the bluish tinge of early dusk is creeping over the snow-fields.

"Norn! Put that child down and *make* her stir around a little. I want to get her out of doors before it is too late. She hasn't stuck her nose outside today—and she's sat listening to you for three hours without moving. She doesn't eat or sleep so well when she does that all day——"

"You'd better go, Mary Rose. Your mother doesn't want you to listen to me any longer."

No straight answering flare of open anger in reply to my mother's criticism; only the level look of those coldly gray eyes with the large, unchanging pupils. But I felt unutterable things: that my mother was foolishly, pettishly interfering; that, probably, she was jealous of my adoration of Norn; that she was showing an inclination to interfere with the deepest longings and yearnings of my childish

nature; that I must defend myself against my mother, now and in the days to come. I looked into Norn's eyes and thought those things. Later, when it was really night and the lamplight shone in my mother's eyes as she tucked me into bed and gave me my good-night kiss, I could not quite remember those other things I had thought about her. Her eyes were gray too—a warm gray, like the soft gray blanket she still wrapped and rocked me in sometimes—"babied" me in, Norn said. My mother's babying would be only for a little while at a time, bedtimes, or in little spells of illnesses, or in odd moments, but I knew that Norn thought the things my mother did with me were silly. I supposed they were. I didn't remember what Mother had done this afternoon—she had been unreasonable, mean, to me and Norn when we were happy together. But of course, Mother was—Mother. . . .

My eyes were shutting, and as I fell asleep I was wrapped around in the warm gray light that was so different from that other. Little children are so much younger, just at bedtime.

Father and Mother never got along very well, and I thought in my baby-days that was Father's fault. He was very wise and clever; I often heard him sneering at the minds of other people, though never at Norn's mind. He sneered at Mother, though, very openly. He had married mentally beneath him, and some money both he and Mother had expected her to inherit had been left in the wrong place, and that had gone against Father's plans. I knew without being told, that each of them wished they had not married, but that my mother's whole life was bound up in me, while Father had not that compensation. Men are different. Norn helped to teach me that men are on a bigger plane, and children are to admire and revere their fathers very much,

whether they feel that they know them very well or not, and whether or not their fathers seem to care very much about them. Also, if men are disagreeable around home, it is the responsibility of the wife and mother to make them feel agreeable. A successful wife always does that, but my mother never managed it.

With my eleventh year, came a parting which agonized me. The Iowa farm was sold. My father, whose business had been in a small, Middle Western town, moved east. Norn came with us to visit, as did also another aunt, Mugsie, a fat-tish, indeterminate sort of aunt, with her little girl Dorothy, a blond, plump, babyish thing like her mother and yet unlike her, since Dottie was utterly and irresistibly adorable. I shall never forget the utter sweetness, the innocence of Dottie's clear blue eyes, or the warmth of her baby smile. I loved her with all my little-girl heart, and longed for her back as I longed for Norn. I was to have them again. . . .

NORN decided to go to the west coast with Aunt Mugsie and Dottie, who were shortly to join Dottie's father there. I listened to my mother talking this over with Norn. Though I think she must have been jealous of Norn's domination of me, of her assumption of superiority, and of the superiority conceded to her by every member of the family, my mother joined in the universal admiration—which amounted nearly to adoration—of Norn.

"Stay with us, Norn. You and Mugsie will have a good time, but after all, Mugsie can't get around and keep up with you. You and I would go to shows, camp in summer—we're both so much more energetic. And I've always looked after you, made your clothes and fixed them, because I was the oldest girl—you'll miss that."

"Mugsie will learn to do those things

for me." There wasn't an idea that Norn would wait on herself.

"Mugsie *is* selfish. She barely looks after herself."

Norn fixed my mother with that gray gaze.

"I say Mugsie will learn to look after me. Besides, Mugsie and Ralph are going to have money. I think Ralph's investments on the coast will be very good, very soon. I can use a lot of money, and money comes where money is. I care a good deal about having the things I want. I know exactly what I want, and I am going with Mugsie."

That ended that talk, but there was another. I don't know where Norn met Mr. Wolf. I didn't know—I never learned, and can't conjecture now, the nationality of Mr. Wolf. He was the head of a sports-goods establishment, and he employed mostly foreigners—Jews, Armenians, a Chinaman of the tall, raw-boned, Chu Chin Chow type. I have heard Mr. Wolf accused of being all those various things—Jewish, Armenian, Chinese or Tartar, and I have seen him smile suavely and answer "No." The name, of course, is English, but the word "wolf" is known to every race. I am sure the Jews and Armenians in his store feared him. I was never so sure about the Chinaman, but then I have never had to do with Orientals.

Norn brought Mr. Wolf to the house one evening, and it developed that by an odd chance he was going to establish a large branch of his business in the coast city to which Norn was going with Mugsie, and that Norn was to be his secretary-treasurer.

"But that's almost the whole executive staff, and Norn has only studied a little shorthand!" my mother cried in amazement which held an undertone of sheer consternation. "I never heard of——"

That suave smile of Mr. Wolf's bared

his gleaming teeth for the first time in my presence, as he laid a hand ever so lightly, yet ever so possessively, on Norn's arm.

"A marvelous intellect—a genius for efficiency!" he said, and I believed him—yet wondering how he could know so soon. And then that thought faded before other thoughts.

He was like Norn! Norn was a good six feet tall, and slender, yet showing, somehow, steel-like strength in every fiber; long-limbed and rangy; awkward with her feet and hands, I know now, though my childish idolatry did not permit that observation then; awkward of foot and hand and wrist and ankle, as though those hands were made for no ordinary tasks, in their long-boned strength, as though the shoes she wore never quite did justice to the freedom of the stride which ought to be hers. And Mr. Wolf was like that too, well over six feet, and thin with a steel-like, rangy strength. His jaws and facial bones were long and clearly cut, and his hands and feet seemed somehow a little out of the picture, a little out of place—no such thought of Norn's feet and hands had entered my mind *then*; but even then I noticed that characteristic of Mr. Wolf's. There was a queerness of Norn's voice, very low and husky for a woman's, which I found in his voice also, and because I loved the sound of Norn's voice I conceded that Mr. Wolf's voice was beautiful. And there was a likeness in their eyes—a steady coldness of gaze, a likeness of pupil—Mr. Wolf's eyes were a lightish, amber brown, but the pupils, like Norn's, were enormous, and did not change or alter in the slightest degree.

It was a partnership that was to last and be life-long, and though I saw that similarity, and though I admired Mr. Wolf, I hated the thought of it then. And when they all went west together,

driving in Mr. Wolf's low-hung, gray car, I cried days and nights until my eyes were swollen day-long and my pillow wet night-long, and I could eat nothing Mother fixed for me.

She cured me—Mother—by giving me a kitten, after the storm had spent itself. I felt it was silly of me to be so won by a ball of gray and white fluff, to learn laughter again from the kitten's crazy antics. But I was only eleven, and little girls whose hearts have been broken are so babyish, so peculiarly their mother's again, for just a little while.

A YEAR later we visited the west coast. That visit was the first real horror of my life.

Norn resented our coming, or rather she resented my mother's presence. She would have been glad to have me, but she did not want her. I wondered what was wrong with my mother, why she was so unwelcome. I looked down on her for not being desirable in Norn's eyes. The old fascination had reasserted itself in me with terrific strength. I was eleven now, nearly twelve; and people said that I was a very beautiful young girl. I had hair darker than Mother's, which curled naturally, and black-lashed dark eyes which I knew held a good deal of expression and appeal. Strangers talked about my coloring and said that I was like the second part of my name, Mary Rose. I would look in the glass and wonder what it was that made them notice me. I looked so ordinary beside Norn, who was wearing expensive clothes now that made her appear very distinguished and exotic, besides being exquisitely groomed. In my adolescent acuteness of perception I noticed for the first time that queer awkwardness of hand and foot which she could not overcome; but it drew me to her, that one so overwhelming should condescend to a human imperfection, as

I thought of it. I noticed, too, rather in spite of myself, a something raucous in the husky voice, and though my ears were very sensitive, I grew used to that again, as I had been used to it in my childhood. I saw the coldness and hardness in the fixed, gray gaze more clearly, and that did fascinate and draw me with all the greater power—because those great gray eyes glowed on my face with a yearning, possessive sort of hunger, when we sat and talked alone in the twilight. (Norn hated lights, and would never have turned on a light in evening or dark night if she had lived by herself.)

Afterward, Norn said that everything was my mother's fault, and my mother, who turned against Norn at last, said that everything was Norn's fault. There was a terrific fight one morning, over some trivial domestic detail. It was a holiday, and on holidays Norn always gave everybody directions as to just what they were to do. I know that at first I thought it was about nothing, and suddenly voices rose and rose, till I could hardly tell what they were talking about, but Norn was—actually—ordering my mother to leave, to get out of the house, telling her she was not wanted there. My mother seemed to be reproaching Norn with memories of the old days when she had rather mothered her—but Norn said Mother was getting personal and not telling the truth, and that she was a liar. Then Mother called Norn a liar, and suddenly Norn seemed to leap out of herself. I can think of no other phrase.

She seemed to lengthen out, to tower even taller, to grow beyond the natural size of any woman. She did leap forward, but it was something more than that. It was like the unleashing of a thing in prison. It was a cold, violent, elemental fury that was not like any anger I had ever seen. It was more like—far

more like—the dart of a lightning-bolt out of a storm-racked sky.

It seemed to me that she struck Mother in the face, and that Mother struck blindly, without hitting Norn at all. It seemed that Norn knocked her down, or threw her to the floor, that she was actually hanging over her, crouching down in a posture not like any I had ever seen a human being assume. . . .

There was a shifting and a changing. Was it the actual picture in that room, or in my swimming sense-perceptions, or in my mind itself? Certainly the room had changed—other people had come into it. Mugsie and Ralph, little Dottie—my Uncle Robert, who had turned up in town a few days before.

Norn was standing erect, now, her thin, finely chiseled lips drawn back over her rather large, even white teeth, her breath coming hard, her eyes for once seeming dilated beyond their wont. And my mother was lying in a crumpled heap on the floor, sobbing—and she was too large a woman to lie in a crumpled heap, and, after one look in Norn's eyes, I was ashamed of my mother.

"You all saw! I never lose control of myself. My nerves are iron. I had nothing to do with this. She flew at me and I pushed her away, and she threw herself down there, as no decent woman would, in a neurotic tantrum. No one can have any respect for her, after this, in this whole family."

I was watching Norn as she turned that steady, cold gaze into the eyes of each person in the room in turn—she had looked into my eyes first of all. She looked last at little Dot. And I was more ashamed of my mother than ever, as she scrambled awkwardly to her feet, the very personification of futile, embarrassed, outraged and uncomprehending rage. I saw them all, as they looked back at Norn. It reminded me of stories of mediæval days,

when allegiance was sworn to some mighty queen without the need of a spoken word.

MY MOTHER and I returned to the East and to my father, and soon after that we bought the home that was ours through the years of my growing up. This was a darling little house with a shingled top which stood on a hill surrounded by beautiful trees, and which seemed deeply endeared to my spirit from the first day they brought me to see it. We were all three happy there in spite of the fact that sentiment had long since died between my mother and father—young as I was, I felt the coming of a greater peace into our home after the pretenses and demands of their youth had definitely failed between them. Those two were mismated, but there was something essentially sound in those days in my father's nature, and there was an infinity of sweetness and fineness in Mother, and with greater maturity the two of them achieved, with me, a lovely home. I remember yet how happily the flames seemed to play in the wide brick fireplace, as though they were a sort of bright and shining genius of the place.

And I remember how sweetly and naturally, here, my nature blossomed into love.

Kerry Shane was the fulfilment of life, to me, and I married him, in my early twenties, and went away with him—with frequent visits home during the five years of our life together. When he died suddenly, of a cramp taken while swimming in the surf of the south Long Island shore, I took our baby and went home to live. My baby was a girl, named after me—Mary Rose. Kerry had called me Rose, without the Mary, and sometimes it was Rosebud. He said I reminded him always of very young, of incurably young things, like a rosebud or the crescent moon. Not

that that has anything to do with my story, which is more the story of Norn, and not that kind of thing.

Mother had been all broken up over my marriage, which had taken the center out of the home she had finally welded so finely together. Now she was broken by Kerry's death, in feeling that the whole thing—my marriage—had been futile—agonizing to her, and ending in heart-break for me. She resented my grief, which I could not altogether conceal, wanting me back in my old, untouched girlhood. She turned to little Mary Rose in passionate devotion, but she was never quite herself, it seemed to me, and six months after Kerry's death she died too, of a cold which had seemed very trivial.

As for me, I had, long before her passing, achieved a considerable degree of contentment, except for worrying about her. Kerry, it seemed to me, was not so very far away from me. I seemed to see rifts of light in the heavy curtain men call death—these are things impossible to explain, but very real to me. I still loved the house on the hill, set around by fine trees. And I idolized, worshipped and adored little Mary Rose, who looked at me out of eyes that were mine—and his—thus eternally united. I could picture a long life of happy usefulness, nurturing, guiding, launching and always loving little Mary Rose.

I shall never forget the night Dan Reavers called with a woman he said he wanted me to meet.

"This is an incomparable honor for you, Mary Rose," Dan said to me. "Mrs. McDonald never goes out to people's homes professionally. They come to her and pay well enough for that. She likes me—I don't know why.

"I told her about you—about your bereavement, Mary. I thought—perhaps I thought she'd have a message from Kerry, though she never knows whether she will

or not, or just what she will get. Anyhow—something seemed to be driving me, fairly, to see that you two met—and here in your home."

At Mrs. McDonald's suggestion we sat silently for a while, in a darkened room, my father being away. And she did speak of Kerry, dreamily, giving me several messages that surprised me, rather.

But what she said of Kerry was only in line with thoughts that seemed to come to me directly from him—to stream in upon my life as the light of the sun streams into a darkened corner. And again, it has little or nothing to do with my story. It has to do with my story, that, suddenly, she spoke of the house.

"This house. Mrs. Shane, I wish you could leave it. There are places that are said to have a *genius loci*. That means, there is a spirit of the place, usually benevolent, sometimes not; and if it is evil, it is hard to prevail against it—to be good or happy there, or even—safe."

SHE paused. I burst impetuously into speech. I loved our old house!

"This house is not like that, Mrs. McDonald. We've been—in spite of the things life brings—we've been happy here."

"I know that, child. But this house is not the kind of place I just described, but its direct opposite. There is another kind of place which is a sort of focussing-point for whatever enters there. You and all of yours have been, in varying degrees, spirits of the light. Good, and not evil souls have crossed this threshold, and it has, when life's normal rhythm flowed through its walls, heightened the brightness of its current.

"But the people who have dwelt here are ordinary people—you, Mrs. Shane, very psychic, but with undeveloped powers; your mother, your husband, bright spirits a little psychic too—not quite so

much. Your baby—only a baby as yet. Your father—there's something undefined. . . .

"Something else is coming into this place. I feel the creeping of a long, cold shadow. Something dark. Something cruel. A sinister thing. Can't you stop it, Mrs. Shane? Do you know what—whom—I mean?"

"No." She answered herself. "You'll know soon, but you won't be able to stop it. Paths cross where they are fore-ordained to cross. Too much love is a challenge to the powers of darkness, Mary Rose—and there has been much love in your life. Your husband loved you as few women are loved—and still loves, across the narrow Border. Still his love reaches you. Your baby adores you, and your poor mother loved you too much for this world. You will understand what I say better than I can—know."

Her breathing was growing irregular. I thought, with a little fear, that she might be about to go into a trance. But she seemed to will herself out of that, and continued more steadily.

"Get away if you can, Mrs. Shane. If you can't—for money reasons, for instance—be warned, and always ready to leave. Someone is coming who has dark powers, and this place will reflect those powers, concentrate and magnify them like a burning-glass. It is a focal point, and will develop what is latent, make a true adept of one who is maliciously uncertain and stumbling. Someone is coming, and you will know who. At least, it is better to be warned."

MY MOTHER had been dead only six weeks, then, but it was on the next day that Father told me he was going to marry Norn. I did not at once think of, or remember, the evening before, or Mrs. McDonald, but I know that his words shocked me—startled, even frightened

me. And that is odd, because I had long ago put down that scene between Mother and Norn as being Mother's fault. People didn't knock people down, leap at them, crouch over them. Norn had let me see, before we left, that she still loved me. She had wanted me. She had told me I would be happier with her, asked me to ask my mother to give me to her. We had had whispered talks, huddling together in the dusk, before I went away with Mother out of that keen sense of duty a child so often knows, and is so seldom credited with having.

I ought to have said, too, that in keeping with the great vein of generosity she often manifested—or perhaps partly because, as she scrambled ignominiously from the floor at Norn's feet that day long ago, Mother too had looked deeply into her eyes—Mother had let me visit Norn. Always and always the old domination had reasserted itself. I was a child worshipping at a shrine. . . .

And now I know that is the reason for the sick shrinking of my heart at my father's words.

I had been a child, worshipping at a shrine; but I was no child, now. I was a woman—baptized to womanhood by love, and by the birth of a child, and by bereavement. Perhaps it took all of those three to weld my soul to what it was now—a thing that stood alone, fairly its own creature, and looked back at the Norn of my childhood with the eyes of a woman. She could not, again, dominate me—even so much as she had dominated my mother. I did not want her to dominate my baby. And I remembered that she had always disliked or scorned women—reduced them to a sort of slavery, as she did with Mugsie, or hated them as she had Mother. She would hate me, and I would still be myself, owning and knowing incurably my unchangeable self and soul, refusing to be swallowed up and

diminished to nothing. And she would be my stepmother, and—all at once I knew this—the thing that was really wrong with Father was, you couldn't trust him. He could be made into almost anything, but not by a daughter. It would take woman's hands, *his woman's hands*, and not hands like my mother's that had not cared either to mold or to caress him. Norn, though—she could mold him into any shape. Yes, into any shape.

I shuddered in the June air. And it was only after that, that I remembered Mrs. McDonald's words last night. I had been shocked out of remembrance of lesser things.

ONE midsummer day Norn came to our house on the hill. Father had met her in a strange city half-way between the coasts, and now he brought her home. It was an hour of golden twilight, when they came up to the porch. Mary Rose—brown curls all over her head, running and talking and a perfect darling nearly two years old, now—was crawling in a last shaft of sunlight. And suddenly that ray of light faded, and it was dark. Clouds coming up in the west? Oh, yes, of course, it was perfectly natural, but I say that our place was altered in that moment. The tall trees told secrets that they had not known a moment before. All their whispering had been kindly, and they had stood like guardians around the house. They were guardians no longer. Aloof, stern, ready—*hoping*—to look on tragedy. What tragedy, I wondered? And my heart whispered: "Something is going to happen here."

At the steps, Norn paused and looked deep into my eyes. She had aged—and developed. Truly, there was something timelessly unchanging about the tall, thin woman standing there in the dusk. Her eyes gleamed, and her teeth—she had

perfect teeth, I saw. The lines of her mouth were set and firm as of old—but had they been so cruel?

Her eyes held mine, compelling them to a reply. And I gave the reply in spite of myself. I wanted to fool her, to play for time. I wanted to rear little Mary Rose nicely, not to skimp on her food and clothes and doctor's bills and future education—those things, living on in this house would mean to me. Could I do it? I could try, and I wanted to veil my eyes from Norn. But my eyes were always true mirrors of my thoughts, I know; and they were then. In her eyes I saw the knowledge grow—the knowledge that she could bully, but not dominate; frighten, but not absorb; dictate without conquering. All I wanted in the whole, wide world was freedom of soul, and a safe and happy future for little Mary Rose; Norn wanted—what darkly, deeply schemed, strange things? Complete dominion of my father's every thought, she wanted. And that she would have. She wanted more. . . .

Her eyes left mine, furious in defeat, and turned upon my child. And little Mary Rose cringed back, trembling, and ran to me and clung to me.

"You haven't taught her very pleasant manners!" Norn said abruptly, and passed on into the house. My father lingered behind her.

"If you can't get that child to behave respectfully and politely, you'll have to begin to spank her. Spanking doesn't hurt——"

"I do spank her. I spank her hard, when she does things that will hurt her. I spanked her three times for turning on the gas heater. She's a little too young to make pretend to like people——"

"She's not too young to learn manners!"

It was the first of my bitter arguments—bad for me, and bad for Mary Rose,

the child. But within a month Norn had won so much of Mary Rose's heart that I trembled. And my trembling was not jealousy. I was afraid of Norn, in a queer, wordless way. . . .

JUNE passed and July came, and it was a hot July; a month of drought.

And near the end of that month we had company. Mr. Wolf, like Norn unchanged, except to be older and harder-looking, driving a still longer, lower-hung, gray car, and bringing with him Norn's favorite niece with whom she had lived out these long years—little Dottie. Little Dottie no more, as I remembered her, but changed—so strangely. Not intensified, but altered. Sly, where she had been candid. Something almost rodent, in her blond, red-lipped face under the perfect blond marcel. To look at her made me feel sick, remembering the child she had been; made me brood by little Mary Rose when she was asleep, longing to keep her close, to hold her spirit close to my spirit. For Dorothy now was a shell of something left tenantless, and operated by something alien from without—or so it seemed to me.

About this time we all went to see *Rasputin and the Empress*. And I think the picture precipitated things for us. To me it was so horrible—the sinister altering and absorbing of the innocent child-spirit of the young prince by the hypnotic powers of Rasputin. I was looking for jobs, for apartments, furnished rooms—and a telephone call came for me from one of the men I had interviewed about a position, and the message came into Norn's hands.

When she gave it to me, I knew that it was the beginning of the end of some pretense that had been between us. And I wanted to move that very day, but waited. Positions that paid anything at all were almost non-existent, and I was

still hoping for something better than I had found.

Night came, and it was the night of the full moon. In the room I shared with little Mary Rose, the air was motionless, and almost too hot to breathe. Outside the windows, the black leaves hung on the boughs of the trees, motionless. Those trees seemed weighted down with doom, hushed, expectant.

Mary Rose was restless in her sleep to-night, and a beam from the moon kept reaching her face, her closed eyelids. I moved and shifted her bed, but I could not push it far from the window on so hot a night. I thought the direct moonlight was bad for her, and perhaps making her moan and toss. But there was nothing I could do about it, and at last I fell into an exhausted sleep.

It was midnight by my watch when I woke suddenly. I glanced, instantly and instinctively, as every mother does, at my child. And her bed was empty.

My heart thudded heavily, sick with terror. Mad fears of kidnappers hurtled dizzily into my mind. I ran, heavily, like a person in a nightmare, into the hall. And then I saw my little Mary Rose.

There was a window in the curve of the stairway, and the moon shone in there on her, as she made her way—slowly and falteringly—down the stairs. I called to her:

"Mary Rose! Rose! You're sleep-walking. Don't fall."

I had made my voice very soft, as I hurried toward her.

"I'll take you back to bed. Into Mother's bed. We'll cuddle, till you go sound back to sleep. Mother will pin you in so you don't get away again."

I shall never forget the face she turned on me in the moonlight—and she was not two! There was something in that little, baby face that was utterly an anachronism. It was not merely hate, though that was

there too. It was a sense of outrage—as though I were a stranger, say, tearing her from her mother's arms, and pretending to be her mother. I have imagined that, of course. I do not know whether it would be possible for any child to look again as I saw my own child look that night. I know that I got clearly the message of her baby mind, which was that she was through with me (at less than two years old!); that she was going—God knew where—to do her own little will—God knew what!

It made me sick, as the thought of kidnappers had made me sick. But I was her mother, of course, and I did not falter. I knew there was something here that I must get at the roots of. To have caught her in my arms, dragged her to our room, spanked her into submission, pinned her into bed—this would all have been possible. I did not think it the thing to do.

"You'll have to tell me where you want to go, Mary Rose." I kept my voice steady, but defiance shrilled in her baby voice.

"To Norn. I want to go with Norn."

"Go where?"

Slyness. On a baby face. That was another thing I had never seen.

"Maybe nowhere, Muvver. Maybe to sleep with her. I want Norn. Then, when she does go somewhere, I want to go too."

"But *is* she going somewhere?"

"I don't know. Oh, no, no, no!" (An old baby phrase of impatience.) "Norn told me I could come to her *any time*. This Norn's house. She said so. Norn! Norn!"

My aunt came hurrying out of the room she shared with my father.

"I think you're demented, Mary." (We had all rather dropped the last part of my name, leaving it for my baby; and Mary always meant me.) "I think you're

utterly insane. You mistreat this child horribly. She should be taken from you. Some day, I'll see you can't torment her any more. You're insanely jealous; a cruel mother. She wants to come to me in the middle of the night—and no doubt you know better than I, what you did to her to make her run away from you. Children don't do such things without reason. She wants to sleep with me anyway. She has said so. Well, I'm taking her over tonight. I'm her best friend, and she knows it. Go back to your room, Mary, and let the child alone. You'll sleep without her now——"

My nerves broke.

"I will not! I'll keep her, Norn! She's my baby—you can't do this——"

My father came out of the dark doorway of their room, rotund in his pajamas.

"I've been listening to this! You'll sleep where and how you're told to, in this house. If you want to go on seeing that child, you behave yourself. I'll support Norn's statement. No child runs crying from her mother in the dead of night without reason. You're a troublemaker. Norn and I bear witness for each other in everything——"

Was there a mad glitter in his eyes? So rapt, so obedient to her will, yet so violating the fatherhood that must lie dormant in his breast. Yes, he could be made into—anything. Norn could do it. . . .

The best thing to do—the best thing to do. They were on the verge of taking Mary Rose right out of my hands. Then if I planned to go away, even a day later, it might be too late. They would stand together on any story—railroad me into an asylum? That, I knew, was the backlog of their thoughts; and I remembered hearing Norn tell outsiders, calmly and regretfully, that Mary Rose was not the same since her double bereavement. I wasn't insane. I'd welcome alienists—

then I shuddered. Suppose they got me separated from Mary Rose, got her utterly alienated—and that she already was. I had stood a good deal. How much more could I stand?—I had studied psychology in college. I remembered the simile of the weak cart and the shallow mudhole, the stout cart and the deep mudhole. Well, my mental cart was stout enough, and proven over and over; but this hole was pretty deep—deep as they could make it. . . .

God! How little I knew that they could dig a pit under my very feet, which would be bottomless, a slimy gateway to the depths of hell!

So quickly it happened. There are not words for the lightning speed of the next moments. . . .

AS THOUGH aroused by our commotion, two others appeared with silent swiftness. Mr. Wolf and Dorothy, from their respective rooms in the other wing of the house. And they all drew together, facing me. All together against me. All staring at me. And none of them looking—quite right—quite natural. . . .

My baby Mary Rose was clinging to Norn's hands. Her baby face was upturned, worshipfully, to that dark, long-jawed, sharply cut countenance. Before my eyes, Norn stooped to the baby and kissed her. Such a kiss! Never on this earth, I hope, has woman kissed child like that. Something was being given and taken—and the upturned baby face seemed to swim in a veritable swoon of rapturous response. I could have fainted where I stood, but my shrinking gaze, which I could no longer bear to keep upon my child, dimly comprehended the look on Dorothy's face. Dorothy hated little Mary Rose for that caress. Dorothy would like to kill Mary Rose. . . .

Mr. Wolf's eyes were on Dorothy. He would do anything she liked. His mo-

ment was to come. . . . And did I say they all looked—*unnatural*? It was like the old nursery tale. "But, grandmother, how long your teeth are!" "The better——"

I remembered a very horrible murder story I had read, which was based on psychological workings out of old nursery rimes. And I remembered something else.

My adult reading had carried me far into the field of ancient superstitions. Now my reason seemed toppling, as the possible reality of some of these swept into my reluctant mind. Lycanthropy—wasn't it?—where certain Things could be in turn human in form and animal—and bore always the stamp of some ferocious monster traits of nature? Lycanthropy—that was it!

And as I watched those awful changes—the dizzy swimming of the air between us, through which I yet saw clearly the fast-changing, definite outlines—Norn, growing in stature, assuming a leaping posture—her face reaching out before her, the long jaw still elongating, the fixed pale glare of her wide eyes with the unchanging pupils now seeming to come to life, to shoot red sparks. . . . The long arms hanging down, now, before her—those strangely awkward feet and hands seeming at last at ease, wildly graceful, *the hands turning to wolf's paws*. . . .

Mr. Wolf, changing similarly, instant by instant. Dorothy—no, she was not a wolf. She was a sly little fox, and had dropped to all fours.

My frantic gaze sought my father's face. Not he, not he!

No. He was what he had been. A man, angry, opinionated, rotund. His easily led nature too flaccid, too plastic, perhaps, to take on any horrific alteration. But he would not, even now, sustain or support my cause. He had done what

they would have wanted him to do, *what they had doubtless imposed upon his subconscious mind to do*. He had simply fallen asleep. My single frenzied scream did not reach his ears. He was leaning in the angle of the balustrade—and as I looked, he slipped quite simply and easily to the floor. And it came to me, that if these devils did not tear me to pieces, they could do a worse thing—they could reassume human form at will, I was sure, as I was sure that many times before they had gone into these more elemental expressions of their natures. And they could laugh at me, and sneer at me, and know that my first desperate outcry against them, my first accusation of their being the things they were, would put me for ever behind the bars. Away from little Mary Rose!

And now I plunged into the ultima thule of horror.

Here and there the moon shone in through the windows of the dark lower story rooms, and from polished floor and furniture and light walls and ceilings a dim diffusion of its light made barely visible the gaunt form which hurled itself furiously down upon me. It was that one of the transfigured three which had worn Norn's features, which still showed a dim likeness to her: the smaller of the two monster wolf-things. And in my nightmare shock I was overtaken and overwhelmed by its first plunge. I fought my way backward, falling, falling. . . .

And how can I describe the uncanny dreadfulness of what I must try to make clear? The change from woman to wolf was yet only partial. Something was lacking—later I knew what it was that was still required to make the woman all wolf, till the rising beams of tomorrow's sun should restore the more common and original form. At any rate, it was the more concrete, physical manifestation which was not yet altered to the semblance

of the beast, and to this I owe my life. Over me, muzzle near my face, eyes gleaming red in the dusky gloom, bent the wolf-head. I *saw* the claws that tore at my face and body—but what I felt was the large, bony hands of a woman, tearing and clawing as the claws of the beast should have done, but so much more ineffectually that I was not mangled, as the evidence of my sense of sight told my frantic brain from second to second I was about to be mangled.

Those claws tore at my face, and I felt scratches; but only the scratches of fingernails. Bony fingers closed around my left eyeball in its socket, as though they would tear it from its place. It was the sort of attack which could only be made by human hands and fingers prompted by the workings of a mind gone down to the level of a beast. Then, just as I uttered a despairing cry at the sharpness of the pain shooting from the back of my eyeball to the top and back of my head, the grip shifted, and brutish hands, that still were only hands, tore at my breast, and beat and tore and mauled at my body. I screamed out loud, and a tiny form was upon me—my little girl, rushing to my defense in spite of the spell that was upon her. The hands loosed their hold, and I staggered to my feet, circled, crouched low, got away—and dashed through the rooms of the dark and silent house.

A tiny white form leaped away before me—little Mary Rose, running madly, I suppose, wild with terror, from all of us now. And I followed, with the sound of running feet behind me. And as the pack crossed a broad band of moonlight on the black floor, the sound of those following footsteps changed—awfully. It was now the clatter of claws that sounded on the polished floor, and to be overtaken by them now meant instant death.

In the kitchen I snatched from a table

a sharp-bladed paring-knife that lay in a shaft of moonlight. And I half fell over something wet and slippery, as the arc made by my hand knocked down something else from that table that broke at my feet, spilling liquid.

WHAT happened now was more horrible to me than all that had gone before. The little white figure of the flying child uttered a queer, choking cry, and rushed for the spot where the gurgle and splash had been. I saw her, prostrate on the floor, sensed that the little face went down, heard the sucking of eager little lips—

And heard another most unchildish cry, as the little thing got to her feet again. Those following monsters had paused as I paused, no doubt in exultation. Now we all flew forward again, the child ahead, I trying to overtake her and to escape myself. . . .

We circled once more through the silent house and flew out over the door-sill, and I felt the hot breath of one of the following monsters.

And as the clear light of the full moon touched my child, she dropped to all fours—a tiny, perfect wolf-cub. Straight for the forest that lay the length of a city block away, she sped. And I knew with a terrible sense of loss like the sense of loss I had felt at Kerry's death—that she would never come back to me. As she ran with the swift patter of tiny claws on the hard path, I could hear her whimpering. And yet she ran straight and fast—faster than I could go. My heart labored desperately. I had read of these dreadful transmutations. At dawn those other monsters would resume human form. They would, if by any chance I had escaped death from them, love the game of baiting me to madness that they would carry on. They might even spare me for the sake of that game, if their

brute fury left them reason after a while. They would love the conflict of wits, the utter deceitfulness of it, as all things evil love darkness and guile.

But little Mary Rose with the dawn would be an outcast. She would know instinctively that she had crossed a dark threshold. She still would run from me, hide from me. With what seemed like a clear vision, I actually seemed to see what would happen when dawn came to her in the little wood to which she was running for sanctuary. There was a narrow, rather deep, very muddy little stream in that wood. I could see a little body floating, a little upturned face for ever quiet. . . .

And I ran faster.

The scratch and thud of heavy, shaggy forms rising and falling on rough padded paws and scraping claws came nearer. I could feel a fetid breath fanning my shoulder. I knew the foretaste of death.

And a small, yellow body flashed by me, and I heard snarls of rage, and the pack swept by me, one huge body knocking me from my feet. Even as I scrambled up, I sensed that the immediate interest of the brutes, more imperative even than the destruction of me, their enemy, was the flying little cub ahead. And I knew a flash of sheer telepathy such as most of us have experienced in moments of desperate stress, in dealing with our kind. These were not my kind—but their instincts were primal in their force, and I felt their impact.

I had known that Dorothy hated little Mary Rose, because she was jealous of Norn's love for her. And I had known that Mr. Wolf had turned from Norn to the blond young girl Dorothy. And now the yellow fox wanted to kill the little cub, and the largest wolf was ready to help. But the other wolf actually loved the little cub, would fight for its life, that she might make her into the unholy

thing she herself had become, that she might know her comradeship in evil adventures. . . .

The yellow fox was closing in on the cub, and the huge timber wolf was ahead. Desperately I felt the knife in my hand, and raised my arm. And I seemed to hear Kerry's voice. It may, of course, have been the projection of my own sound instinct, a hallucination founded on reason. I do not know. But what I seemed to hear him say, was this:

"If you throw the knife at the wolf or the fox, you will kill whichever one you aim at, for this night your aim is as true as your need is desperate. Don't—don't! Morning will make the dead body back into the human shape it must wear by day, and you will be accused by the others. And the little cub will get away.

"Throw at the cub! Hold the knife by the blade, and throw handle first. It is the only way."

I obeyed—as I should have obeyed if Kerry had stood at my side—as perhaps he did stand there. I shall never know that—but I obeyed what seemed to come to me clothed in his words, uttered by his voice. And my aim was true, and the little cub gave a little moan, and dropped upon the path.

The yellow fox leaped at it, and the huge wolf closed in to help the fox. But the other wolf uttered a cry that was strangely human, after all, and closed with the larger wolf, and they fought and tore each other there in the moonlight, till drops of blood flew through the air and splashed warm on my face and bare arms.

The yellow fox must have been hurt in the mêlée, for it gave a cry of pain and bounded away, toward the forest. And I came to as the blood touched my shrinking flesh—for it was like the touch of something unspeakably unclean. I crept to where the little cub was lying, for the

smaller wolf, fighting desperately for her life, had forced the battle a little away from it. And did I catch the gleam from those mad, beast's eyes, of a brief, but piteous entreaty? I thought I did. But I forgot everything but the little cub as I reached it, and gathered it in my arms.

It was stunned, but I could see that it breathed, and I uttered a prayer of thankfulness. I ran back toward the house through the moonlight, hearing that awful clamor behind me, feeling death in the air. At least we were safe while the brutes fought. At the house I could lock myself in till morning. With morning, there would be only human things to contend with, and later I must get away.

I felt my eyes swimming with hot tears. The sight of that grotesque little head lying on my arm. The wolf-head—of my child. Dawnlight! Did it always bring the metamorphosis? I was not sure.

I REACHED the house and crept up the stairs. On the landing my father still slept, unless he had died in that heavy stupor. I did not pause, but gained my own room and laid my burden down on my own bed and knelt beside it. And through the night I prayed, and with the dawn it came—the heavenly change of the beast back to the likeness and being of the child I loved!

I went out of our room then, carrying her in my arms, and she nestled to me as though she knew how nearly we had been parted for ever.

In the lower hall I met my father, worried, querulous, old-looking in the dawnlight.

"I've looked for Norn everywhere. I can't find her. Last night you were quarreling with her—we'll have no more of that, in this house!" he said. "She'll take over the care of the little girl. She is so wise, so efficient. You're always upset, you know. Norn has warned me that

she believes you are going to get to the point of actually seeing hallucinations. You will have to be looked after, but we won't have you looking after your baby any more. But where—where is Norn?"

"When you fell asleep——" I began.

"I fainted," he corrected me irritably. "Your quarreling with Norn was too much for me. Don't do it again."

"I won't!" I promised light-heartedly. I was becoming increasingly sure that Norn would never return. Something about the house told me so—my own house again, protecting and sheltering me and my child. The very look of the morning sunlight, the sound of the birds in the tall, whispering trees, were telling me good tidings. I felt sure the monsters would never come back—would never come back. I felt sure. . . .

"After you became entirely unconscious, Mr. Wolf, Dorothy and Norn all went outside—I suppose they wanted to look at the moon. It was beautiful last night.

"Little Mary Rose ran out too, and was running away, and we all went after her. But Norn, Dorothy and Mr. Wolf got into an argument. Dorothy slipped off somewhere by herself—but I left Norn and Mr. Wolf fighting it out, down the path toward the wood. I caught up with Mary Rose and brought her back. I left them fighting——"

My father made one more effort at command.

"Don't say 'fighting'. Show some respect. Mr. Wolf has been Norn's good and lifelong friend, and if they had a disagreement——"

"They had!" I interrupted blithely. "Somehow, I believe you'll have a chance to know where they went if you'll walk down the wood path. Please do. I will get breakfast."

He went away grumbling, and I set the table—for three. But only little Mary

Rose and I could eat. It was horrible, what my father found down there, and the events of the next few days were sad and gruesome. But I could not be sorry, and they did not take my appetite. I had been through too much for that.

He found my aunt and her old friend, Mr. Wolf, literally torn to pieces beside the wood path. Some huge animals, escaped from God knew where—there was never a theory advanced to account for the marks on their bodies.

And the little yellow fox never was seen again, nor was my cousin Dorothy. Police searched for months for the yellow-haired girl, and Aunt Mugsie still writes to me sorrowfully about her. I am sorry, desperately sorry for Aunt Mugsie. Even to think of losing a child of one's own——

I KNOW that I ought to close this record with a word of explanation; not to explain away what actually happened—not to throw up a smoke screen, to pretend to offer any alternate theory to the dreadful conjectures such things force upon the unwilling mind. There is no sense in such an attempt. I know now, of course, just what is meant by lycanthropy. I know how the old, discredited legends first came into being, on what desperately true phenomena they were based.

I do not know, I do not pretend to know, the exact mechanics of such dire transmutations of being as I unwillingly witnessed. I do not know how far the inner nature of man molds his body, the atoms of which are all thrown off and changed, replaced and altered in their entirety, every seven years. I do not know to what extent the mere giving of one's self to evil may in rare instances effect the working out of alterations beyond anything we have ever suspected or dreamed of.

My personal theory is that Norn was from her birth one of those beings so utterly egoistic (Lucifer, star of the morning!) that she threw herself beyond the pale of common motives, common guidances and inspirations. We all blunder and sin; but deep in most of us is an occasional humility, a yearning desire to be better. To these, I believe Norn was a stranger.

Mr. Wolf was different—how different, I shall never know. He was perhaps the product of some older race, some strange admixture of races, even—a sort of human chemical compound fraught with the dangers of a high explosive. He had lived in far parts of the world, become an adept of forbidden knowledge. He had tutored Norn, made her what he himself was—and, after her, Dorothy. The difference between the fox and the wolves was, I think, one of inherent, in-born characteristics. Little Dottie had

been so innocent—yet not, perhaps, ever brilliant or over-strong of nature. She wasn't capable of the ferocities of those others—but, degraded and perverted by their machinations, she, too, slipped downward into that form of animal life she could achieve.

I gathered up and studied the shards of the container I had broken that night on the kitchen floor, and I know, of course, that the liquid it held, of which little Mary Rose drank before the change came upon her, must have been an essential part of the transmutation from human form into that of the beast. The light of the full moon also did its part. The characters and carving on the outer and inner curvatures of the shards were not very distinguishable, but in some way that I can not explain, they frightened me. I buried them—deep. And I have planted violets over the place where they are buried.