

DEATH HAS RED HAIR—A Tale of Alien Doom—By GREYE LA SPINA

SEPTEMBER

# Weird Tales

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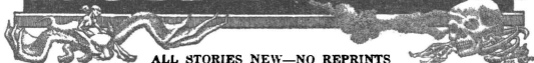
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# Satan's Bondage

*A Werewolf Western*

*By MANLY BANISTER*

**T**HE desert seemed molten when seen through the windshield of the green coupé. That was because of the angle the rays of the afternoon sun made with the glass, and Kenneth

Mulvaney was driving directly into the glare.

The car labored up an incline, pacing a whirling dust-devil on the climb. Incandescent boulders shimmered along the

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*You're going to get the werewolf's slant on life—as you read how these accursed man-beasts roam the American West in a hellish quest for human food!*

---

rough, rutted way. Dessicated cacti showed dusty green against the ochre and yellow of desert background. On the horizon, blue hills wavered in Mulvancy's vision, dim and indistinct. He mopped the sweat from his forehead for the dozenth time, clinging with one hand to the wretchedly twisting wheel.

"God, what a road!"

The engine punctuated his exclamation

with a sharp cough, gave a straining wheeze and died.

A glance at the instrument panel discovered the red of the thermometer had squeezed as far to the right as it could possibly go. Boiling water plunked tunefully in the radiator. He switched off the ignition with a motion of abrupt disgust.

Nothing for it now but to sit out here on this damned desert until the engine



cooled—if it ever would under this blazing sun. Now that the machine was no longer moving, the heat clamped in upon him with reeking fingers. The sun was a burning lance that thrust through the top of the car and into his skull.

Enough of that was enough, he decided. He crawled from behind the wheel into the dust and pulverized grit of the roadway.

"A hell of a road," he remarked and eyed the twisting length of it along the way he had come. Dust-devils galloped playfully—writhing brown towers with roots in the baking earth and crests smudging the blue-tinted brass of the sky.

There was water in the luggage compartment. A good drink would lower Lizzie's fever. Dust spurted from under his shoe-soles as he trudged forward with the five-gallon gasoline tin in his grip.

He lifted the hood, took caps off water-can and radiator, and stood back as a cloud of steam first spurted, then drifted into the astringent heat of the air. When the cloud had thinned somewhat, he tilted the can and permitted the precious water to gurgle throbbingly into the overheated intestines of the radiator.

"Need help, Mister?"

Mulvaney hadn't heard the girl approach. He nearly dropped the water-tin from surprise.

"You gave me a start," he said, controlling himself. He focused the glance of his gray eyes upon her face.

SHE wasn't smiling—but it seemed that she was. The set of her face was made for laughter. Her eyes were blue. Her hair was golden blond; her complexion well-tanned. She was dressed in some sort of boots and breeches arrangement, designed for hiking. Dust covered her slim figure from the toes of the awkward boots to the grayed bandanna that held her vagrant curls in place.

"I wear it to keep the sun from doing unmentionable things to my hair," she explained. The corners of her full mouth twitched. "Not to speak of boiling my brain in its own water!"

He set the water-tin carefully at his feet.

"Where'd you come from? I'd no idea there was a soul within miles!"

A shadow crossed her face.

"So there isn't," she said strangely. Then, "I was hiking along just over the rise." She gestured. "I heard your car thumping up the hill. I was all set to thumb a ride when it stopped. So I came back to see what's up."

"The motor overheated and conked on me," he explained.

He eyed her speculatively, almost prompted to ask what business brought her on foot into this God-forgotten wilderness. He wondered if it was possible she were bound for the same place he was. He forced an end to his speculation.

"She'll be cool enough to start off again pretty soon," he said. "You're welcome to ride along as far as I go."

There was a certain blankness in her gaze that troubled him. Her blue eyes clouded briefly.

"How far are you going?" More than ordinarily curious, the tone was.

"Wereville."

He wondered if it were only imagination that made him believe she gasped as he pronounced the name. It was devilishly hot. Enough to fry your brains and make you imagine almost anything. She didn't ask why he was going to Wereville.

He took advantage of their momentary silence to replace the water-tin in the luggage compartment. She stood silently in the blazing sun, shoe-soles sunk into the powdery loess. Her look as she regarded the dead motor was as if she hoped by some alchemy of glance to bring it to life again.

"I think it ought to run now," she said.

He tramped forward through the dust and peered at the thermometer. The crimson line had shrunk somewhat, although it still hovered near the danger-line.

"A few more minutes, anyway," he told her.

DUST churned from under the wheels of the green coupé. Its engine was functioning wonderfully again.

Mulvaney had never seen ten such miles. That's what a native of Lastwater had said it was. Lastwater was on the highway. Wereville was in the foothills of the mountains looming bluely ahead. In between were ten scorching miles. The road they were on—if it could be called a road—led to Wereville and a few isolated ranches in the mountain valleys.

They passed a cowboy cantering along on a paint pony—a thin, gray-faced man with the clean look of the open about him. A ten-gallon hat shaded his lean face. He reined to one side, waved as they passed. Then he inclined forward in his saddle, cut short the salutation and sat rigidly, staring. Mulvaney observed the dancing image in his rear-vision mirror and clucked.

"Almost friendly for a minute, wasn't he?"

Already the cowboy was hidden in the dust that swirled behind them. The girl did not turn to look. She shrugged only slightly, and the expression of her eyes was singularly blank.

"You live on a ranch out this way?"

She shook her head.

If she didn't live on a ranch, she must—He put the thought into words.

"Then you must live in Wereville."

She turned her head quickly and stared full in his face. A faint expression of scorn curled her red lips, and her eyes were flashingly cold.

"Suppose I do? So what?"

The tone of her voice was sharp, combative. He recoiled from the fierce glow of her expression. A sterner man would have been tongue-tied. Mulvaney was completely stopped.

In spite of her sudden, wolfish ferocity, he felt that her attitude was not meant for him. Somehow, he realized vaguely that she directed it at the cowboy they had left sitting his paint pony by the roadside.

The question Mulvaney had been about to ask her was stilled on his tongue. Chance was, she couldn't help anyway. Better to wait until he got to Wereville and make his inquiries there. Then he thought of the grim figure the cowboy had made after his initial gesture of friendliness. Something very like a chill prickled along his spine.

It was an eerie feeling he had that all was not well with the town of Wereville. He recalled vaguely things he had read about range wars. Could he be getting into something like that here? If so, the girl and the cowboy evidently belonged to opposing factions. That would explain this slight incident—or would it? He shrugged dismally and scanned the road ahead.

They were skirting the shoulder of a tan hill. In front of them the dusty green foliage of a clump of cottonwoods glimmered in the sun. A small herd of cattle browsed on the grass that grew sparsely. A creek tumbled out of a ravine here, spanned by a wooden bridge. The girl laid her hand on his arm. The touch electrified him.

"Stop here," she commanded.

He eased in the clutch and let the green coupé roll to a halt at the approach of the bridge.

The road continued straight ahead, angling across the desert.

"Wereville is that way," the girl said, pointing across the bridge, toward the ravine. "I'll walk in from here. You better go back to Lastwater—or stop at one

of the ranches hereabouts and go back in the morning."

She started to get out.

"Forgive me for not telling you sooner." She smiled slightly. "It was awfully hot and I was tired of walking."

He looked at her with blank amazement.

"But you don't understand! *I'm* going to Wereville, too!"

She shook her head. "You *thought* you were. You're going back to Lastwater—really."

She slid toward the door.

"Here!" Mulvaney said. "You can't do that! I'm taking you to Wereville!"

Her eyes grew stormy.

"Don't be a fool, Mister—whatever-your-name-is! They won't let you in! Go back now and save yourself trouble!"

"I'm not in the habit of saving myself trouble," he said grimly and let out the clutch.

THE green coupé nosed into the bridge-approach and roared into the cotton-wood grove. Just in time, Mulvaney plunged his foot upon the brake. The coupé halted with not six inches separating its front bumper and the massive palings of a wooden gate.

A lean stranger in dusty overalls sat hunched on the top rail, meditatively chewing a blade of grass.

"Ain't no passage beyond this gate, Mister!" he called out.

Mulvaney's glance swiveled to a weather-beaten sign. WEREVILLE—5 MILES, it said, and had an arrow pointing off up the ravine.

"You had to be smart," the girl said. "I told you so—but thanks for the lift."

She got out and waved to the man perched above them.

"Hi, Jim!"

"Hi, Joan! Your paw and maw is waiting for you. Better git along."

"You can't block a public thoroughfare like this!" Mulvaney cried out hotly.

The man Jim pointed silently to a cloth sign tacked upon the gate. It bore the signature of the Sheriff, proclaimed that intruders were trespassers, and such would be prosecuted.

"I don't care what that says," Mulvaney thrust at him. "I've got business in Wereville, and I'm going there!"

"What business you got in Wereville?" Jim said, and whistled softly.

Three men armed with shotguns stepped out of leafy concealment. The eldest of the trio had a white beard. They stared levelly at Mulvaney.

"No strangers. It's for your own good," the beard said flatly.

The girl was watching Mulvaney with something like grim amusement in her glance.

"Maybe you'll give up now," she suggested.

He surveyed the armed group doubtfully. They appeared menacing enough, but not overly dangerous.

"Damn it—no!" he explained. "I'm *not* a stranger!"

"What's that you say?"

The bearded man stepped closer and peered at him through the bars of the gate.

"I'm not a stranger," Mulvaney repeated. "I—I—well, I belong here!"

"Who are you?"

"Kenneth Mulvaney. I was born in Wereville. I left with my parents while I was still a baby."

"Tod and Mary Mulvaney?" questioned the oldster.

"The same."

The man Jim had clambered down off the gate and joined the armed group. Mulvaney remained angrily at the wheel of the green coupé. The girl Joan—he wondered vaguely what other name she had—regarded him with startled wonder. The

graybeard harangued the group in low tones, then turned back to Mulvaney. Mulvaney stuck his head from behind the windshield.

"Well?"

"I'm Hank Simpson. Where's your folks, boy?"

Mulvaney hesitated. "—Dead, sir," he said reluctantly. "When I was still a boy. I was raised in an orphanage."

"You remembered your people coming from Wreville?"

Mulvaney crushed back a desire to resent Simpson's questions.

"No, sir," he said truthfully. "I read about it in my mother's diary. I thought maybe—maybe I might find some relatives here."

Simpson shook his bearded head, pale eyes bright.

"No. Tod and Mary had no kin. But if you're who you say you are, you've got friends. If you're not, may God help you. He's the only one can!"

Hank Simpson stepped aside and jerked his head to the others. Watching Mulvaney curiously, they came forward and swung the great gate wide.

THE green coupé left the quartet standing by the gate and chugged along the narrow road. The way rose gently, twisting through the narrow canyon. It followed the course of the creek, sometimes crossing it only to recross it farther upstream. The narrow bridges were rickety, and Mulvaney eased the coupé over them with trepidation.

He felt like Alice in Wonderland. Things were getting curiouser and curiouser. He didn't pretend to understand what was going on here, what subtle cause prompted the people of the valley to bar their town to strangers. Mulvaney recalled the words of the service station proprietor at Lastwater. He had stopped there to get gas.

"A queer bunch up there," the fellow had told him, gnawing a generous chunk from a plug of tobacco. "Holed up in that valley since God knows when. Nobody ever goes to Wreville—them that does, comes right back. Never say nothin', neither. 'Shamed o' gettin' run out, I guess." He laughed sharply and leered at Mulvaney.

He glanced sideways at the girl in the seat beside him. Beyond a certain amount of reticence, she had displayed no peculiarity that he could discern. She had seemed tense on the journey across the desert—especially after they had passed the cowboy—but that seemed gone now. She laughed and the tips of her teeth showed white between red, half-parted lips.

Only her eyes were the same—almost ingenuously blank. And the men at the gate. A sinister feeling shook him. Their eyes were the same. It baffled him. He could not know that his own bore the same look.

"It's all very confusing," he said drawing the words from nothingness.

She smiled briefly. "I suppose it is." Shadow hovered over her full, soft mouth. "There's no reason why you shouldn't know," she said slowly. "As long as you're one of us."

Her acceptance of him as one of the people of the valley comforted him, at the same time that it repelled him strangely. He steered the coupé expertly around a curve, waiting for her to continue.

"It's the ranchers, of course."

He nodded. "That explains the cowboy?"

She divined what he meant. "Yes. He recognized me. I suppose he did, anyway. I'm in Lastwater frequently. Everyone for miles around is there at one time or another. We're poison around here, Mister Mulvaney."

"Cut the formality," he said. "You don't look poison to me."



"You're one of us," she said simply, as if that explained everything. "There's been a kind of feud between our people and the ranchers for more years than I can remember. It's more bitter now."

"So bad you have to guard the road to keep strangers out?"

"Of course. Besides, the moon is full tonight. We're particularly careful now."

Mulvaney furrowed his forehead. Rangeland hate must be at fever pitch to make them fear an attack in the night. Whatever side the girl was on, he felt, must be the right side. So he pictured the ranchers as inconsiderate monsters.

The walls of the canyon sloped and fell away. The green coupé thrust itself around a bend and into as beautiful a valley as Kenneth Mulvaney had ever seen.

The valley bottom was a prairie perhaps a mile wide by twice as long. The creek meandered through its middle, bisecting green and yellow fields with its line of standing cottonwoods. On either side, pine-clad slopes rose steeply, stepping up toward the head of the valley.

THE quick glance Mulvaney cast in that direction chilled him. A mountain guarded the valley's upper end. Even in the sunlight, it had seemed somber and brooding, like a giant wolf frozen in solid granite, overshadowing the valley with its baleful presence. Mulvaney spared it another quick glance, and the feeling it inspired in him increased. He shrugged and avoided looking at it, turning his attention to the valley.

A quarter of a mile ahead, a small aggregation of houses glinted in the rays of the westering sun. Details were hidden in the foliage of the many trees that sheltered the town.

"Wereville," the girl said. "It isn't much—only a dozen or so houses—a general store—a blacksmith shop—population sixty-three."

Grazing cattle were brown dots in the fields around the town. Wheat stood waist high, rippling with golden waves on either side of the road. The blaze of the sun was fierce and mellow at once. The green coupé streamed into Wereville like a comet preceding a fanned-out tail of tan dust particles.

Most—if not all—of the town's population was gathered in the square in front of the general store. Mulvaney braked the dusty car to a halt near the tail of a bay mare tied to the hitching rack. The mare's flanks were covered with dust and sweat. The animal was winded as if from a hard ride.

Mulvaney squinted through the insect-spotted windshield at the group facing them.

Sullen expressions were there. Some of the women were fierce in their looks, as though resenting his intrusion into their town. The female of the species has the more protective nature, he thought.

His eye caught sight of a familiar figure in blue denim, loafing in the foreground. Jim—the man at the gate. A short-cut, Mulvaney thought fleetingly. Jim had taken advantage of it to ride ahead and warn the villagers of their coming.

The girl opened her door with a shrill screech of metal and got out. The crowd kept silent. An elderly man stepped forward and the girl greeted him.

"I'm back, Dad."

"Joan! Who's that feller with you?"

She explained rapidly as Mulvaney got out beside her. Then she caught sight of the man who had ridden the mare from the gate. She stopped abruptly.

"Why—there's Jim! He could have told you!"

"He told us what this feller said. How do we know it's true? Maybe it's a trick."

Mulvaney felt seriously uneasy before the menacing look of the crowd. There was something about them—a wolfish

ferocity held in abeyance—that made his flesh crawl.

"Look!" the girl cried. "Look at his eyes!"

Mulvaney felt the intensity of the crowd's gaze focussed on his face. He was embarrassed.

"I can prove I'm Kenneth Mulvaney," he said.

He brought a packet of papers from the pocket of his jacket and held them out to Joan's father. Hoofs clattered across the square.

Mulvaney looked up and met the fierce, lupine gaze of the man on the black stallion. The beast reared, and its rider leaned out of the saddle, seized the papers from Mulvaney's grasp.

"I'll look at these!"

The valley people fell back with respect and awe. The horseman was darkly, cruelly handsome. Black eyes darted over the papers he took from the packet. It contained Mulvaney's birth certificate, a picture of his parents, and his mother's diary bound with a faded blue ribbon. The man held the picture out for the townspeople to see.

"That's Tod and Mary, all right," agreed Joan's father.

THE attitude of the crowd changed perceptibly. Their expressions became friendly. All but the lupine rider of the black stallion. He passed the packet back to Mulvaney. He roamed his glance possessively to Joan. Mulvaney felt his scalp tighten as the probing stare rested on the soft, warm curves of the girl's body. The eyes came back to Mulvaney. Thin lips smiled sneeringly.

"It takes more than credentials to hold your proper place in this valley, Mulvaney. We don't run alone here."

With these cryptic words, he wheeled the restive, wild-eyed stallion and galloped away across the town square.

"Who does he think *he* is?" Mulvaney queried resentfully.

"Bock Martin," Joan said quietly.

"Bock's a hard feller to get along with," her father added. He held out his hand. "My name's Jordan. Welcome to Were Valley, Mulvaney."

Mulvaney shook hands. "Thanks. I'll probably not stay long. I just came to find if I had any folks living here. . . ."

"You'll stay," Jordan said, peering at him. Mulvaney could not describe the look—the queer lack of expression—that was in his eyes. "Few ever leave," Jordan went on. "Those who do generally come back—unless something happens." He turned to his daughter. "Find out anything in town?"

"The place was practically deserted. Even the priest was gone."

"Where's your horse? Leave it at the gate?"

Mulvaney lifted his head. The girl had been walking when he picked her up. She shrugged slightly.

"It's dead. One of the ranchers shot it."

"Shot your horse!"

A sigh went up from the villagers.

"Yes. I was taking the shortcut through Baxter's Canyon. A man was hidden behind a rock, and he shot my horse. He shouted that that was just a warning, and I heard his horse's hoofs as he rode away. I never did see him."

Jordan's face was stony. He put his arm around her.

"What did he say, honey?"

Her lip curled. "Said our kind wasn't wanted in these parts. Said we better 'git'."

Jordan pulled thoughtfully at his chin.

"They're gathering against us," he muttered. "That priest—!"

He shook his head somberly and took Mulvaney's arm.

"I suppose you'll want to move into your old home, lad. It's just like your

daddy and mother left it. I'll take you there."

Before driving from the square, Mulvaney cast a glance about in search of Joan. But she had slipped away with the dispersing crowd and he did not see her.

Mulvaney was not surprised to learn that the house his parents had occupied was vacant and waiting for him. He was not even surprised to discover that it was clean and well-kept in spite of the twenty years or more it had been separated from its owners. The people of the valley look after their own, he thought to himself.

"We figured they'd come back sooner or later," Jordan told him. "We kept it ready."

No, Mulvaney was not surprised. There was something about the atmosphere of this strange valley, its town and its people that precluded the possibility of such feeling.

Long shadows had begun to steal across the valley bottom when Jordan left him in the large, frame dwelling that was his by birthright. He stood in the middle of the worn carpet in the living room. Outside the window, the leaves of a dusty cottonwood fluttered in the evening breeze.

Mulvaney brought his glance inside with an effort. He looked lingeringly over the old-fashioned furnishings. A sofa, a platform rocker, a couple of straightback chairs, what-not shelves in the corners, loaded with bric-a-brac. It was here—in this very room, amid these same surroundings—he had played when he was a baby.

He was home. He took time out to think of that. Home. He had lived from his sixth to his eighteenth year in an orphanage. The following seven years he had spent wandering from job to job. Never long in one place, never one to make friends, he had always been restless, unquiet. Was this what he had hunted all those years—without knowing it? He was home now.

He sat suddenly on the sofa, and it creaked under his weight. He rubbed his hand over his eyes. He had driven quite a distance today. He was tired. He wasn't hungry at all.

Twilight came to the valley. Gloom rushed in to fill the corners of every room in the old house.

Mulvaney stood erect at last and groped his way to the lamp he had observed earlier on the dining table. He struck a light and held it to the oily wick.

Odd people—an odd place. He resented Bock Martin—the way he had looked at Joan. He saw the girl's lovely young face in his imagination. A pleasant tingle passed through his flesh.

He held the lamp high to light his passage up the creaking stairs. The whole place was wrong somehow. He felt it even more strongly now. He couldn't place the wrongness. Gave him an eerie feeling, though.

In a bedroom upstairs, he placed the lamp on a dresser. The wick flared, casting grotesque flickers throughout the room. He leaned forward and scanned himself in the glass. He was Kenneth Mulvaney, just as he always had been. He would not have been surprised to find himself different, too.

He recalled Joan telling the crowd to look at his eyes. He squinted, frowning. There was a difference there, somehow. They seemed to lack their normal luster. The look of them reminded him of—The valley people! It was the look that characterized their eyes!

He could not understand the significance of this fact, but it troubled him. He turned around to survey his surroundings and reeled with his discovery. Sweat gathered on his forehead as he recognized now the wrongness that had haunted him. It had been the same with Joan Jordan—with the valley people—and now—himself. His body, as hard, physical, opaque as ever

*did not cast a shadow in the shine of the lamp!*

One takes a shadow for granted. To be without one is—is—Mulvancy did not know the portent of it. He was shaken with the discovery. He blew out the lamp quickly and got into bed in the dark.

No shadow! The argent moonlight splashing through the window fascinated him. A full moon was rising above the ridge along the eastern rim of the valley. Its orb lighted the land with a weird, eldritch illumination. It lay in a puddle on his floor and rose in a silver tide along the opposite wall.

The moonglow soothed his senses. He believed his imagination was overwrought. Maybe a touch of the sun. He drifted hazily in the shadowy borderland of consciousness.

**F**IVE miles over the ridges and tangled ravines from Kenneth Mulvancy and his troubled thoughts, big Sam Carver shook his grizzled white head and gestured with mahogany hands.

"If you ain't right," he rumbled at the small, dark-skinned man, "we'll be in a mess. Ever been a laughing-stock before?"

The small man was dressed in black, white collar turned back to fore. He was a priest and his name was Father d'Arcy.

"It is my duty to stamp out evil where I find it."

His appearance and accent marked him as French-Canadian.

"How long have you had this trouble?" he went on.

Carver shrugged. "Maybe two, three years. We've always had trouble in winters—when the snow drove the wolves out of the mountains. Before, we drove our critters to summer pasture up in the mountains. Don't figger we lost many then. But the ground's barren up there any more. We pasture 'em in the valleys all summer long—an' that's how our trouble

comes. Never knew wolves to come down to the foothills in summertime."

"Yet you think I may be wrong; the wolves attack only when the moon is full?"

"Seems like its always happened that way," the rancher responded wearily. "Full moon last month—and the month before—and before that. There's a monstrous pack o' them—they ruin a terrific lot o' good beef."

"I know. Financially, the wolves are hitting you hard. But how about tonight?"

"Don't worry. Every rancher in these parts is ready. I'm ridin' out to join them pretty soon."

"The water?"

"Yeah. Crazy idea, though."

The priest shrugged.

"You have supplied yourself with a mirror? And the silver—you did with it as I ordered?"

"Yes—my God! Didn't I tell you we'll be the laughing stock if you ain't right about this?"

The priest made a steeple of his fingers and regarded the structure with calm meditation.

"The *loup-garou* cannot withstand these things," he said.

The rancher snorted weakly.

"If I ain't crazy now, I'm goin' to be when this is over! I'd as soon think those folks in the other valley were siccin' their dogs on our cattle. Though I've no doubt they've a hand in it somewheres."

"Very likely," agreed the priest.

"'Course, Yancey had no right shootin' that girl's horse out from under her to-day an' leavin' her afoot in the desert. I gave him the bloody devil. The sooner those people leave these parts, the better off we'll be. But I don't truck with shootin' horses out from under women."

"Getting back to the wolves, Mr. Carver. You don't really suspect those are dogs attacking your cattle?"

"No. Slim says they ain't dog-tracks. Slim used to trap wolves for the bounty. When he says wolf, I have to believe him."

"You have set traps for these wolves?"

"Of course."

"And the wolves avoid them—I know. They have the cunning of man. Have any of your riders ever seen these . . . wolves?"

"Sure. Shot at 'em, too. Missed."

"Perhaps," reflected the priest. "Perhaps not. You don't miss with silver. These *loups-garous*—"

"You better be right," the big rancher murmured. He stood up and combed his fingers through his shock of white hair. "Hateful damned business! You staying here, *padre*? I'm ridin' out to meet the boys. See you when I get back."

"I will still be here," the priest said, smiling confidently.

KENNETH MULVANEY opened his eyes in the dark. Moonlight no longer flooded the wall. There was only a faint reflection from the argent puddle that spilled across the foot of his bed.

The voice of Joan Jordan sounded in the room.

"You're awake now."

He swiveled his head, blinking in consternation. The moonlight glowed on the naked body of the girl sitting at his feet. He started to sit up, then drew back, ashamed for her. Her eyes gleamed feverishly bright. White breasts throbbled with the rapidity of her breathing. She murmured in ecstasy.

"Isn't it a lovely moon!"

Words strangled in Mulvaney's throat.

"After all," he broke out hoarsely. "Isn't this a bit—?"

He choked then, and his face and neck burned. The girl laughed, matching the silver of her voice against that of the moon-glow. The sound of it was naïve, ingenuous. This was a different Joan Jordan

than the girl he had met that afternoon. He wondered apprehensively if she still possessed her reason.

Without knowing or understanding, he realized the effect the change had wrought in her. She did not know she was naked—not in the sense she would have that afternoon. She was as innocently naked as Eve in the Garden before the Fall.

His feeling of shame for her went away. It was best to humor her. He smiled in the dark. She smiled in return. The moonlight glinted from tiny, sharp teeth, astrally brilliant against the blood-red of her lips. In spite of their sparkle, the blue eyes remained curiously blank.

Mulvaney found that he was no longer surprised at her being there, even though he did not know the motive of her presence. And he did not think it strange that her gleaming body cast no shadow in the moonlight. It was only a point he noticed in passing.

"You have no shadow," he remarked.

"Of course not. The moon is full."

"I had no shadow tonight in the lamp-light," he continued.

"No. You wouldn't have. The moon is full and you are one of us."

The repetition irritated him.

"I always had a shadow before!"

"Things are different . . . in the Valley."

Mulvaney was beginning to believe that they were.

"I don't understand you at all," he said petulantly.

She threw back her golden head, and her slim, white body arched in the moonlight. Red lips parted breathlessly.

"Hurry! The full moon calls!"

He thought of his clothes on the chair across the room.

"My clothes—" he began.

The change in her—he could not define it. But he knew she would not understand about clothes.

"Come like this?" he asked feebly.

She sprang gracefully to her feet, eyes sparkling. She nodded eagerly, held out her hand to him.

Mulvaney would not have been astonished had she stepped out the window and floated lightly to the ground. He would have followed heroically after. She did nothing of the kind, however. She took his hand and led him down the stairs to the front door.

Then they were treading barefoot through soft grass, and he felt the caress of the nightwind on his body.

"Pinch me," Mulvaney said. "I want to know if I'm dreaming!"

Joan Jordan—the *new* Joan Jordan—laughed up into his questioning face. She sobered quickly.

"Tell me, Kenneth—how did your parents—die?"

He frowned and remained stubbornly silent.

"I'm so tired of the Valley, Kenneth. I plan to leave it soon. It may some day save *my* life to know."

She *was* mad. He could no longer doubt it. What had he let himself in for? Suppose the fierce inhabitants of the town should find them naked together like this? He thought of horsewhips and rails and feathers and tarpots.

**N**ONE the less, some of the girl's ecstatic exuberance flowed into him. Abandonment began to throb in his veins. The accident suffered by his parents so long ago seemed somehow less personal than it had.

"I was only six when it happened. They went swimming—and drowned."

"Oh." She sounded disappointed. "Is that all?"

"No. We lived on a farm. A neighbor lost some of his stock. Wolves, he said. He'd seen them crossing the irrigation ditch between our two places. My folks always enjoyed swimming in the ditch on

moonlight nights—" He halted and looked at her suspiciously.

"Go on," she breathed.

"They went out one night to swim. They didn't come back. Our neighbor found them next morning—drowned in the ditch."

"But how? Not both. It couldn't just happen."

"No. Our neighbor had secretly set traps under the water for the wolves he claimed to have seen crossing there."

"Oh!" Horror throbbed in the cry. Then, "The wolves—did they ever come to his farm again?"

"I don't know. I was sent away to an orphanage."

Her white forehead wrinkled.

"Sometimes the ranchers around here set wolf-traps. But never under water. That's—too cruel!"

Perhaps Mulvaney was beginning to guess the truth. Perhaps he preferred to believe that both of them were delightfully mad. Thought of the truth was so devastating. And worse than madness. For the moment, he was content to reject the thoughts that pounded at his brain. There was a primal joy to trotting across the soft pasture in the moonlight, the thrillingly naked girl at his side.

The moon was reflected in silver spangles from the dark, massed leaves of the cottonwoods along the creek. They paused in the shadows, where the bank dipped down to the cool dark waters.

The girl put both hands on his chest, forcing him to sit. Her vibrant young body was trembling with eagerness.

"Don't move," she whispered. "Watch me!"

A stray shaft of moonlight flashed upon her marble skin. She dipped into the creek, rolled over in the shallow water, flanks gleaming. He could see the water foam, and the girl's body struggling; then she pawed toward shore. Emerging, it was

not Joan Jordan, but a huge dog-like beast, white-furred from slim muzzle to graceful haunches. A wolf!

Mulvaney started to get up, a cry rising in his throat. The white wolf whipped around and plunged into the creek. Joan Jordan emerged, naked and dripping.

The breath whistled out of Mulvaney's lungs. Bad night. Seeing things. The girl touched his bare shoulder with a cool, wet hand.

"You see? Now you do it!"

She pulled him to his feet, pushed him to the water's edge. Mulvaney's senses swam. It was out of all reason. He wanted to back away and run. Then he saw Joan naked in the stream, dark water gurgling about white thighs. He plunged forward.

The white wolf galloped out on the bank. Kenneth Mulvaney pawed after her. He found footing in the mud, lunged toward shore.

A thousand scents he had never known before swarmed upon his consciousness. The night was bright with a new acuteness of vision. He threw back his head to laugh aloud in sheer joy of living. Sleek, gray muzzle lifted to the moon, and Kenneth Mulvaney howled as a wolf howls, fiercely, savagely, with the eternal sorrow and loneliness of the wolf-kind.

Then he romped with the white she-wolf. The sky was a field of blazing gems, the earth a garden of Paradise. But she quickly ended their play.

"We don't run alone here. The others are waiting. Bock will be angry."

Mulvaney trotted obediently at her flank. He wanted to stay and romp, but Bock Martin said the pack must run together.

"It was different before Bock came," the she-wolf told him. "We hunted deer in the mountains. Bock came from the Outside. He made himself our leader. He insists we attack cattle—and men!"

"Men have guns," he said, bringing

the thought into his wolf-brain with a vicious tug.

"We don't fear guns, Kenneth. Only silver. Silver kills our kind. Men know that. When they realize what we are, they can arm against us. That is our danger from men. Another is the day. Never let dawn find you in wolf-form."

The she-wolf quickened her pace. On the other side of a low mound, they found the wolf-pack waiting. Mulvaney stood atop the knoll, strong wolf-legs braced, gray-furred ears cocked forward, and received their voiceless greeting.

A great black wolf rose crouching from the midst of the pack and slunk forward, belly hugging the ground. Despite the change in form, Mulvaney knew that this black beast was Bock Martin. The hackles lifted on his sturdy shoulders, and he growled ominously.

"Don't!" the she-wolf whispered. "It's Bock!"

The slinking black wolf glided nearer. Mulvaney crouched, heaving loins pressed against the cool earth. The gray-furred muzzle wrinkled hatefully. Deadly fangs glistened in the moonlight.

**B**OCK MARTIN was evil. Mulvaney sensed that now as he never had before. Had he been older and wiser in the ways of the wolf-men, Bock Martin would not have mattered. But Kenneth Mulvaney had never committed an evil in his life. It was through no fault of his he was one of the were-people. The training of his years in the orphanage was strong within him.

With hate-filled eyes and the promise of death in his snarling jaws, he awaited the sneaking advance of the sable hound of Hell.

Mulvaney had the advantage of height. When he saw the beast crouching and trembling for the leap, he launched his body forward. The wolf-people stood by

in silent fear as the flashing, gray-furred shape streaked upon its enemy.

Mulvaney's mind was the mind of a wolf. He was not afraid. The hot blood pounded fiercely in his veins. He was a new wolf—a young wolf. He had strength and advantage. Cunning did not matter.

Snapping, snarling, growling hideously, the black and the gray threshed down the slope. The two were a tangle of legs and muzzles, of bushy tails and hard, whipcord muscles.

They fought as wolves fight—fang to fang and claw to claw. Rage and murderous hate flamed in Mulvaney's wolf-brain. His man-brain looked askance, observed what he did, and approved.

The night was made fearful with their hate. Their snarling rage struck silence and terror to the tiny denizens of the field. The moon and the stars looked on impassively.

Mulvaney sought with murderous fangs the throbbing jugular of his enemy. His jaws ached for the feel of thick, hot blood spilling over them. Gnashing teeth bit into the black wolf's tender gorge. The beast panted frenziedly, clawed at Mulvaney's ribs and flanks. The gray wolf sank its fangs deeper into hot flesh—and then he went spinning bewilderedly end-over-end, to land crashing a dozen yards away.

The were-people whimpered. A voice croaked hysterically.

"The Master! The Master!"

Confused with shock, bruised and gasping, the wolf-shape of Kenneth Mulvaney drew trembling legs under itself. The solid earth seemed to roll maddeningly, and he whined with pain. The thunderous symphony pounding in his brain receded and grew faint. He lifted his muzzle and scented fiercely for the black wolf.

A biting, acrid odor dug at his sensitive nostrils—the reek of glowing sulphur. And then he saw the Shape!

It was cloaked with the Blackness and the Stink of the Pit, evil of eye and visage, black, grim, utterly hideous. The hair rose on the gray wolf's back. A snarl gnarled deep in the panting chest. Purplish lightnings flickered in the gloom that clothed the hateful Shape.

The Demon's silence was its most utter terror. Mulvaney struggled against the fear that ate at his heart. The Monster spoke. The solitude resounded with the whiplash of its voice.

"Neither man nor were-beast can destroy me, Kenneth Mulvaney! I have tested you and found you strong. Strength be in the evil you shall do for me! In my stead, from now on you shall lead the pack—and shall render unto me these souls, one by one as death shall claim them. It was for this purpose I sent the call of the Valley into your being where you roamed Outside and did not know yourself!"

The gray wolf snarled its hatred.

"**H**ATE is my strength," the Prince of Evil derided him. "All my loyal subjects hate me. They serve me well, nonetheless. But remember—I hold your souls in bondage. When you shall die, they shall be rendered unto me and my Kingdom of the Damned!"

"This is your portion—of you who are the descendants of the witch-folk of eld. Through the years, I have gathered this band together in my Valley, to increase and become strong—to battle the race of men for supremacy.

"The ancient practices shall return. The ancient laws shall be in order. Not in this century nor in the next. But by and by. Eternity is not too long to wait for my vengeance!"

The Shape fell silent, a brooding, awful silhouette against the sleeping wolf of a stone mountain that jutted into the star-spangled sky at the head of the Valley. The sooty lips moved again.



"Now, Kenneth Mulvaney, begone with your shadowless curs! You've work to do tonight!"

Whimpering with fright, the pack broke and fled. No less defiant, the grim gray wolf retreated down the slope. And with him cowered the white she-wolf.

When Mulvaney looked again, the Shape had disappeared. The night was clear and cool. From far away, his furry ears caught the tinkle of water splashing in the creek.

He understood now. He knew he was a were-wolf descended of were-wolves. The circumstance of his parents' death was no longer a mystery. Nor was the soulless look in his eyes and in those of these others without explanation—nor the lack of shadows to follow them. They were all of the same tribe—they all bore the taint of Evil.

The thought was a hateful one. What unholy pact with Satan had made this possible? Through how many misty aeons of time had it continued in force? Whose dark deeds and hellish desires had brought about this unwilling bondage upon generations unborn?

These were questions Mulvaney might never answer. The truth was sealed with the silence of Time. He knew instinctively that the were-beast glorified in its unclean condition. Some strain of the human in him found it repulsive. He would find a way to deliver them of their detestable slavery.

But how? Could they return to the state of men and defeat the purpose of the Beast by refusing to serve? The thought was a vain one. The pack had gathered around him, and the moon shone pitilessly down. The ground under each heaving belly was bright with its glow. The were-wolf had no shadows—and no souls.

"Tonight we drink—or we die," spoke a grizzled old wolf. "Can you lead us to fresh blood, Kenneth Mulvaney?"

Mulvaney was aware of the thirst that had begun to torment his own throat. The moon had passed the zenith and time was short. They must make the kill before dawn; it was their portion—their Fate.

The problem confronting Mulvaney could not be solved before they had fed—as feed they must. Into his wolf-brain crept an image of the cattle that had grazed contentedly in the fields. But they belonged to the villagers. It was senseless to kill them and rob themselves.

The gray wolf threw back its head, muzzle to the moon, and howled. The keening cry released hot excitement into his feverish veins. The blood of the witch-folk of old Ireland awoke in him, exultant and maddening. He departed toward the nearest pine-clad slope at a swift, easy lope.

At his flank ran the white she-wolf, fierce joy and pride blazing in her eyes. Behind them streamed the wolf-pack, silent as shadows, shadowless as they sped.

THE cowboy on the paint pony halted at the edge of the sleeping herd and rolled a cigarette. His companion was a somber shadow in the moon-glow.

"Fust time ridin' night range ever gave me the willies," he growled. "How 'bout you, Larry?"

Larry shrugged, tilted back his sombrero and applied a match flame to the twisted end of his cigarette.

"Dunno, Joe. You're a nervous type." He inhaled vigorously. The glowing tip of the cigarette lighted his lean face with a ruddy flare.

Joe's horse moved restively, swaying the man in the saddle.

"A funny business," he said.

"Yeah." Larry pondered the situation. "The old man and the *padre* has got their heads together. Maybe the *padre's* right—I dunno."

"In which case," opined Joe gloomily,

"we oughta be allowed to shoot. If'n they come at all."

"The *padre* claims they're bound to. Full moon, he says." Larry reflected on the words he had heard from Father d'Arcy. "Here's what he said. There was a were-wolf—like one o' these—raidin' a village up in Canada where he had a parish. They tracked it down an' shot it with a silver bullet. Turned out to be the town's lead-in' banker. Seems like the critters turn back to their human shape when they're kilt."

"Were-wolves!" Joe snorted. "Mangy ol' timber wolves, I says! Didn't I see 'em streakin' for the woods las' winter after they'd got into the stock-corrals an' chewed up thirty head o' fine steer beef?"

"I ain't passin' no opinions," Larry returned calmly. "I'm tellin' you what the *padre* says. Mebbe he's right an' mebbe he ain't! We ain't to shoot, anyway—'less they attack us. In which case, we got silver in our guns."

"I know," Joe growled distrustfully. "We're just to douse 'em with this water the *padre* blessed." He patted the moist flank of a water-bag slung to his saddle-horn.

"That's how it is," Larry agreed. "Chase 'em back, the *padre* says. Only back to where, he didn't say. The old man backs him up. Guess they're figgerin' something they don't want ever'body to know about."

He tossed the end of his cigarette upon the hoof-churned earth and wheeled his pony.

"Keep a sharp eye, Joe. S'long."

The paint pony circled slowly back, while the rider sang softly to lull the herd.

THERE was nothing human in the spirit of Kenneth Mulvaney as he loped across the timbered ridges with the white she-wolf at his side. The silence was a tonic to him. The keen scent of pine-balsam mingling with the dank odor of

rotting mould tingled in his flaring nostrils. He ran with lean muzzle thrust eagerly forward, the scent of hot blood a maddening urge.

A small creature of the forest sensed the coming of the ghost-wolves. It cocked tiny ears, eyes bright with fear. The gray wolf sprang. Great jaws crunched on tender flesh and fragile bone. The wolf took its first taste of blood, while the white-furred she danced eagerly and licked at his scarlet muzzle with impatient tongue.

Hunger inspired of Hell drove him on. The scent of cattle in the draw tingled in his nostrils.

The wolf-pack skulked at the edge of the forest, wormed through tall grass, plunged snarling among the sleeping herd.

The frightened beasts leaped erect. Hooves churned the earth, horns tossed against the sky. Dust rose in a cloud to obscure the moon.

Fierce, primal joy flooded Mulvaney's senses, and he made the kill with his white-furred mate leaping at his side.

A man's voice shouting brought him with a snarl from the unholy feast. He crouched, ready to spring, eyes blazing at the horse and rider bearing down upon him.

The rider passed, horse's hooves thundering, and slashed at the water-bag slung to the pommel of his saddle. In midspring, Kenneth Mulvaney felt the gush of the fluid in his face. Burning rivulets seared down his forelegs.

*Eau bénite!* Powerful muscles sent him tumbling from the menace of the water the priest had blessed. He fled to the forest and rolled in the cool earth to soothe the agony of his burns. Then he streaked for home.

Full-fed, the pack loped through the forest behind him. At his flank, the white she-wolf whimpered in sympathy of his pain.

The pain had cleared the hellish blood-

lust from Mulvaney's brain. He calculated coldly, returned to his original problem. There must be a way!

He thought of exorcism and rejected it. They would need the services of the priest at Lastwater. But he wouldn't do. The presence of holy water showed his hand behind the readiness of the ranchers. Mulvaney could not know the futility of exorcism as Father d'Arcy understood it. The priest had another thought in mind.

The moon sunk low in the west while they ran. The day would break before long.

At the edge of the timber ringing their own valley, the gray wolf halted the pack and scented the breeze. The gray-furred muzzle twitched at the hateful odor cloying the air. It was the smell of men—men between the pack and the water they must gain before dawn!

**I**T HAD been clever of the ranchers to enter the valley while its people were gone. For a long time they had waited in the shadow of the cottonwoods. At Sam Carver's back, the dark waters of Were Creek gurgled musically. In front of him, the westward slanting rays of the moon shed a dim radiance over the silent fields of Were Valley. The lanky man at his side uttered a low-voiced curse.

"What's eatin' you, Slim?"

"Damned if I know, boss," replied the man who used to trap wolves for the bounty. "'Spect it's ants!"

He backed cautiously out of the undergrowth and lay down a yard farther away. "We have to wait all night?" he complained.

"The *padre* says they'll come back before dawn."

"How do we know they will?"

"Reckon the *padre's* about right, don't you? We find the whole damn town deserted. It's enough to give you the creeps!"

"If it's so certain they was goin' to at-

tack the herd tonight, why didn't we trap 'em there?"

"It's a problem we got to solve all at once, Slim. Most of 'em would have got away. This way, we've got 'em all. They have to reach this creek before sunup. It's the only water for miles around."

He peered sharply at the somber forest on the slope. Slim started to move again.

"Hold it, Slim!"

The lanky cowboy wriggled closer, showing the muzzle of his rifle into the clear.

"What's up?"

"There—at the edge o' the timber! See anything?"

Slim peered earnestly through the baffling light.

"There—somethin' white moving in the woods!"

Slim cursed softly.

"Them's wolves, old-timer!"

He readied his piece. Carver restrained him with a hand on his arm.

"Wait'll they get in the clear. It's nearly mornin' an' they're desperate for the water. We can wait."

The slim cowboy relaxed and made a sound like a sleepy owl. Another owl answered from upstream, and one from lower in the valley.

"The boys are ready, boss."

"All right. Give 'em the signal to fire when I say so."

The old rancher stared hard at the fleeting shapes that skulked at the forest's edge. The wolves appeared to be nervous and restless. A blot detached itself from the shadow of the woods and trotted a few yards into the open. A white shape joined it, and the two stood sniffing.

"Damn!" growled the rancher. "They've got our scent!"

One by one, the wolves began to leave the shelter of the timber. There seemed to be hundreds of them to the breathlessly waiting ranchers. The mass moved cautiously down the grassy slope.

Carver put a hand into his shirt and brought out a mirror. Briefly the glass caught the gleam of the moon.

"What's that fer?" whispered his companion.

Carver tilted the glass toward the approaching pack, craned his neck to peer into it. He had a difficult time registering the image, but he saw finally. He passed the mirror to the cowboy with a trembling hand.

"You look," he commanded gruffly.

The cowboy held the mirror in position and peered into it. He jerked it back swiftly.

"God!"

"You see?"

"Them ain't wolves—they're people!"

"The *padre's* right, Slim."

"I look at 'em and I see wolves. How come the mirror shows people out there?"

Carver shrugged and his mouth drooped bitterly.

"I don't know. It's somethin' to do with the silver on the glass. The *padre* can explain it maybe. I can't."

He watched the wolf-pack fixedly. He was hesitant, reluctant to give the next order.

"They're gettin' set to attack us," he observed. "They can't know we got a hundred and fifty men here. They ain't got a chance. Give 'em the signal, Slim."

The cowboy's face was a pale blur in the gloom.

"You—you can't, boss! It's murder!"

"It's them or us. They wouldn't hesitate to tear *your* throat out. Come on with the signal."

**S**LIM hooted twice like an owl. Carver's rifle cracked immediately and lashed an orange tongue into the gloom. Rifle-fire rippled through the cottonwoods, like a fierce flame devouring a forest of dry twigs.

The great white wolf at the head of

the pack leaped convulsively, fell sprawled and kicking. Silver death whined through the night, and lean gray shapes died with the thunder of gunfire in their ears.

The mass of wolves halted fleetingly, spun and fled for the timber. The hateful fire raked them again and again. Dozens fell, twitched and lay still. Half the pack succeeded in melting safely into the shadows. The firing came to a ragged end.

"Some of 'em got away," Slim said.

Carver got to his feet.

"They'll be back."

The moon shining through a rift in the foliage lighted his face wanly. His eyes stared darkly and his mouth was twisted in sickish lines.

"Can't get over the fact they're human . . . in a way."

He parted the brush and stepped into the clear.

"Where yuh goin', boss?"

The rancher's white head looked frosty in the moonlight. The gloom made a huge, formless bulk of his body. He went forward across the field, lighting the way with a small pocket torch. Hesitating, Slim crawled out of the brush and followed. Behind them, the cottonwoods murmured with the voices of the ranchers.

Sam Carver knelt at the side of the first form huddled in the long grass. The lamp played across the naked white body of the girl who lay with her golden head cradled upon her arm. Her face was hidden in the pool of shadow cast by her own body. A crimson wetness gleamed on the smooth round of her breast. Carver snapped off the light and stood erect. The moon made molten silver of the dead girl's body.

"Poor, damn kid!" he said softly.

The lanky cowboy sighed hoarsely.

"It's murder! We've done murder!"

The old rancher placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Tain't murder, son. See—when I put the light on her—" The flash glowed

briefly. "She casts a shadow. They was lost souls—an' lost souls ain't got no shadows. The *padre* knows these things. The silver bullets kill them—an' give them back their souls. I dunno how, but the *padre* ought to know. He's a man o' God."

"I never believed in souls," Slim said hollowly.

Sam Carver shook his head slowly. "Never took much truck in 'em myself—'til now. Guess people ain't as smart as they think they are, Slim. Lots o' things we don't know—an' lots o' things we do know an' won't believe."

The old man brooded in the moonlight, a somber shadow towering over the dead girl. Then he turned and shuffled with his companion toward the shelter of the cottonwoods.

Three yards from the pitifully naked body, eyes glowed in the deep grass. A lean, gray wolf wriggled forward on its belly. The beast's jaws quivered. From between them, the pink tongue reached slowly forth and licked tenderly at the still warm cheek of the dead girl. The faint breeze stirred in her golden curls, and the gray wolf turned away. He drew his legs under him and sprang swiftly up the slope.

"There goes one! Git 'im!"

Rifles spat a ragged volley. Silver slugs whined and crackled around the fleeing wolf. The prodigal waste of precious metal was a sign of the ranchers' determination.

**T**HE were-beast reached the shadows in safety and skulked there, looking down upon the valley. The human eyes showed grief and sorrow, but no hate or fear. The creek and its cottonwoods was a black snake wriggling the length of the valley. Men hid in the cottonwoods—men with silver death in their guns.

In the west the moon hung low. The starshine had begun to pale in the east. So, little time was left.

He turned and trotted up the slope, among the whispering pines.

The clan had gathered on the ridge. Above lay only gloomy rocks and barrenness. The ranchers waited below. The gray wolf moved silently among the pack. They were afraid, and he knew it.

Picking his way carefully, the gray wolf moved to a spot above them, atop a gaunt, ill-shaped boulder leaning out of the mountainside. In black silhouette against the milky dawn, he lifted his muzzle to the jewel-spattered velvet of the sky. He howled as a wolf howls, savagely, mournfully, with desperate loneliness and grief. One by one, the pack took up the cry and gave voice to their own requiem.

The men in the valley shuddered at the hideous sound that floated down from the ridge upon the chill breath of dawn. Some crossed themselves. Others cursed under their breath.

The wolf looked with glowing eyes upon the remainder of his people. He would lead them. He would lead them into the deliverance he had promised himself they should have. The words of Sam Carver had shown him the way.

The moon slipped behind the shoulder of the mountain that was like a great, sleeping wolf set to guard the valley. The shadow of it cut ominous and menacing across timbered slopes and grassy prairies. The chill of dawn fingered into the cottonwoods.

Like shadows came the wolves, streaming down the slope. The sky in the east grew whiter and whiter still. In the heart of the gray wolf was calmness and peace. His people followed him into the face of death by silver. And it freed them of Satan's bondage.