

The Creepers

by

William Merriam Rouse

Author of "The Four-Leaf Clovers," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

BLACK MICHAUD.

THERE were those who said, afterward, that there had been a certain meaning in the manner in which Thomas Michaud first arrived at Ste. Anne des Monts. Gossips see signs in everything; but however may have been this matter of signs and portents, it cannot be denied that the stars of beautiful Canada never looked upon more terrible things than those that happened in the village. Red death, and black death, and the death that slinks by night, marched out of nowhere, with musty robes swirling and claws hooked for prey. The day of the arrival of Thomas Michaud had been overcast from the beginning, so that no one had seen the sun rise. For heat it was worse than the worst the old men remembered out of many hot summers; and in the valley, where the village lay surrounded by cliffs and mountains and frowning, dark forests, that heat was probably twice as great as upon the plateaus. All day storm-clouds gathered, only to break or go around the valley; all day men and women hoped for cooling rain.

The clustered stone houses, whitewashed or tinted pink or mauve or apple-green, seemed to have lost all their usual freshness—inside they were ovens—and those men who had no pressing business gathered un-

der the overhanging roof of the shop of Antonin B noit to wait for the storm. There were M. Georges Pujos, mayor for many years, Father Joseph Paradis, and perhaps a half-dozen others. And, naturally, a clutter of lolling dogs.

When the storm did come it spread so quickly over the bowl of gray sky roofing the valley that not all those who had prayed for it realized its presence until water came down as though from a leaky dipper. A black knot of clouds untied directly above Ste. Anne des Monts. Tongues of yellow flame licked along the granite edges of the cliffs; solid and familiar house walls quivered and blended in a cataract of sound.

The watching men in front of the shop, half stunned and pressing back against the wall for shelter, saw a huge ball of blinding fire strike down beside an ancient pine and send it teetering with roots stripped naked.

They had no more than time to breathe a prayer after this shock when those whose eyes were able in a measure to penetrate the sheets of falling water saw a shape that seemed like neither man nor beast coming up the long road from the south. The shape resolved itself into a little cart upon which sat a man driving a big and savage-looking *chien dompt *—a dog trained to harness. Man and beast were muddied and wet, but neither seemed to have been badly used.

A momentary lull in the storm gave a good view of the man as he left his dog and walked toward the shop. He was a lumpy, powerful-looking fellow, with a broad, dark face and with eyebrows forming a straight, black, bushy line above the bridge of his nose. He was dressed in shirt, homespun trousers, and moccasins—such clothes as any man might wear—so there was nothing remarkable in his appearance except that he grinned, with a twist at the corner of his mouth, as he glanced at Father Paradis. Two or three dogs that had remained outdoors rose up growling, with their heads lowered.

In that moment of abatement the storm had gathered itself for the climax. Before any one could speak to the stranger a sheet of white light blotted out the world—a sheet of light so near and vivid and terrible, with its instantaneous, ripping burst of thunder, that Alphonse Racine, a half-wit, was stripped of what little sense he had. He leaped into the air at the flash of lightning; and while the rolling jar of thunder still shook Ste. Anne des Monts he ran blindly, hands covering his eyes, to dash his skull against the sharp corner of the stone doorway. Alphonse sank dead at the feet of Father Paradis just as the old priest himself recovered from the shock.

Nor was this all. The *chien dompté* of the stranger lay singed and lifeless on the spot where he had stood; the cart and harness were in scattered fragments of wood and leather over the width of the street. The man, however, remained unharmed, hands in pockets, and smile still drawing back his lips. He stood like that, looking on indifferently, while they lifted Alphonse Racine and carried him home through rain which had suddenly reduced itself to a drizzle. The clouds broke immediately, curiosity revived, and public interest was almost equally divided between the death of Alphonse and the miraculous escape of the stranger.

He, having shrugged his shoulders at the carcass of his dog, leaned against the wall and appeared to invite the questions naturally put to a newcomer in any village. Now, among those who remained at the shop was Jules Perron, a young man who up to

this time, as will be seen later, had been greatly blessed by Heaven. He was not as big as the stranger, by many pounds, but to the eye he seemed much more alive—alive from his smiling eyes and his fair, sun-bleached hair to the ease and rhythm with which he moved.

Just at this moment his body was braced gracefully backward and his tanned forearm corded with ridges of muscle as he strained to hold back Boule, his *chien dompté*, and the biggest dog in all the village. Boule's teeth gleamed white, and a ridge of hair stood up from neck to tail.

"Your dog takes me for a bit of fresh meat," said the stranger carelessly.

Perron laughed and apologized.

"I don't know what makes him such a fool to-day—the little ones pull his ears and ride on his back when he is not at work. *Parbleu!* It must be the storm."

"Lay a stake over his head, and perhaps he'll learn to be polite."

"Not I! I have had Boule since he was a sprawling pup, and I have never struck him!"

Thereupon the stranger opened his mouth and laughed; and from that time until the end of the strange events that took place in Ste. Anne des Monts, Jules Perron and his dog were of one mind. At the time Jules kept his tongue still; partly from natural good nature and partly because *monsieur le maire* returned at that moment from the *maison* Racine and addressed himself to the man who had come out of the storm.

"*Bonjour, monsieur!*" he said gravely, as was befitting after a sudden death. "I am sorry for your misfortune—you are traveling north, perhaps?"

"The dog is nothing!" with a shrug. "I was coming to Ste. Anne des Monts to work. I am called Thomas Michaud, and I've been working at Lake St. John."

"You have a trade?" To Perron it seemed that M. Pujos did not like this Michaud. In the place of the mayor the young man would have invited the stranger to go on, or back to Lake St. John; but M. Georges Pujos, while not an old man, was weakened by a malady which doctors had said would some time cause his death.

Moreover, he was not accustomed to the need for exercising firmness.

"What trade do you need here?" asked Michaud. "I see the signs of a baker and a blacksmith."

"A man who could repair shoes and harness would be of great use, *monsieur*."

"Very well," with a smile. "I am a shoemaker, and I will rent any rooms that are vacant and buy any tools that are for sale. From now on, the feet of Ste. Anne des Monts shall tread differently."

M. Pujos laughed rather feebly, and he confessed afterward to Perron that he had hoped to get rid of the man, although labor was needed. He did not admit that he lacked the firmness to tell Michaud in the beginning that he was not wanted there.

"I shall be glad to sell *monsieur* the necessary tools, such of them as I have," said Bénédict, who had come outdoors and joined the little group in order to hear what was going on. Michaud promptly followed him into the shop, and those who remained began to discuss the man.

"As black as the storm itself," grunted old Téléphore Vilas, scratching his nose.

"Black Michaud!" laughed Richard Bordeleau, who was ready to laugh at anything because he had for his wife one of the prettiest girls in the parish and for his first child a mischievous little witch who was a replica of her mother.

At that instant the face of the stranger appeared in the doorway, immediately to disappear after having cast upon the men of the village a look which justified his new name. Undoubtedly he had heard; and the memory of those careless words, spoken with no real intent of malice, now sent a kind of chill through those outside. They wandered away, one by one, each man to his own affairs and each with a little appearance of depression.

It had been a bad day, take it all in all, thought Jules Perron as he went home with Boule. However, an excellent supper prepared by old Mélisse, the woman who did his housework, dispelled both the gloom of Perron and the ill-temper of Boule; and after supper Jules set out through the long twilight for the home of the mayor.

Here it is necessary to explain how Jules

Perron had been especially blessed by Heaven. In addition to his good appearance and his friendliness, which created the same feeling in the hearts of others, he had been left an inheritance. He was young enough to enjoy everything and old enough to appreciate that enjoyment. But the great blessing in his life was Mlle. Chloé Pujos, to whom he was betrothed. She was a little flower of the north, dark and delicate and beautiful, with the slender grace of one of the *haute noblesse* and the virtues of a *habitant's* daughter.

Jules knocked at the house of the mayor as a mere polite formality, and opened the door with a light in his eyes and a quicker heartbeat at the thought of seeing his betrothed. He knew how she would look up at him from beside the big table where she sewed or read in the evening. *Monsieur le maire* would smile and call him "my son," and there would follow two or three hours of perfect happiness.

It was all quite the opposite of that. Mlle. Pujos raised a face that seemed very sober and ill-pleased in the yellow lamp-light, and her father said his "*bon soir, mon fils*" with fingers drumming nervously on the table. Black Michaud, so placed in a comfortable rocking-chair that he could watch all the occupants of the room, no matter where they sat, was the only one who smiled.

Perron stared at him in astonishment; and then remembered that it really was not strange that a new resident should call upon the mayor.

"You've left your dog at home, I see," said Michaud, by way of greeting.

"Yes," answered Jules shortly. An impulse made him walk across the room with just a hint of a swagger and find a place between his fiancée and Black Michaud.

"That dog will die some time if his manners do not improve, M. Perron."

"Not before his time comes through old age," replied Jules, with the same feeling along his spine that had raised the hair of Boule.

"And do you like the brute, *mademoiselle*?" demanded Michaud, turning toward Chloé.

"I love him," she said, almost with de-

fiance, "both because he belongs to M. Perron, to whom I am betrothed, and because he is a faithful dog."

"*Nom de Dieu!*" swore Michaud. Then he turned upon *mademoiselle* such a frank look of unpleasant admiration and desire that Jules half rose from his chair. "Both betrothals and dogs have been broken before this!"

With that insult he strode carelessly out of the house; while Perron sprang to his feet and looked expectantly toward M. Pujos. He would have tried to hurry Thomas Michaud with a kick had not the eyes of the mayor remained cast down and his voice silent. The door slammed.

"That fellow must be sent out of town!" cried Jules. "I would be in favor of telling him to-morrow!"

"He is a beast!" agreed Mlle. Chloé. "He was here half an hour, with his insulting looks and his sneer, before you came."

The mayor cleared his throat and looked at the wall, after a quick glance at the face of Jules.

"It is better not to be too hasty, my son," he said. "M. Michaud is disagreeable and, I think, dangerous. Such men have been known to rob and set fires. *Eh bien!* He should not be angered—he will go when he finds that no one likes him. I should not be surprised if he were merely in hiding for a time after having had trouble with the law."

"If he is dangerous, then why not face the danger and get rid of it?" cried Perron. "I will undertake to deal with him myself if you will give me authority!"

"Could you watch the village night and day to see that he did not come back for revenge? Avoid trouble, my son, when you can!"

"Fight it!" growled Jules; but after an argument he had to yield to the greater age and authority of *monsieur le maire*.

M. Pujos soon left them and went to his room; and the remainder of that evening Perron spent discussing with Chloé the case of Black Thomas Michaud. She was of one mind with Jules as to the quality of M. Michaud, and she was equally emphatic in the belief that her father would do noth-

ing unless some act against the peace and security of the village were committed, when he would be forced to action by popular demand. The mind of the stranger seemed to have dominated his, enfeebled as it was by long illness. Jules was forced to go home with small comfort and considerable apprehension as to the future.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIFOLLET.

WITHIN the week that apprehension was fully justified. As to his relations with the village Thomas Michaud grew into a mixture of both good and bad repute. He paid cash for everything, a custom rare and much appreciated; on the other hand, he had broken the nose of young Fabien Beaudry with one blow of his fist for referring to him, all in jest, as Black Michaud.

He was a good workman, and reasonable in his charges; yet no one, man or woman, left the little house he had rented in the center of the village without carrying away a touch of gloom. It was as though the man absorbed the natural gaiety of others and left upon them instead the shadow of his own dark brooding.

The cause of this brooding Jules Perron learned all too suddenly; and from the time of the revelation dated the beginning of the greater things that were to come. This revelation took place on a Sunday afternoon—a perfect afternoon, filled with the rustlings of green leaves, and that happy, sleepy quiet which comes after every one had got home from mass and eaten a good dinner and smoked a pipe or two of *tabac Canadien* in shirt-sleeves and contentment.

There was a garden in the rear of the *maison* Pujos, and Jules went there directly in making his Sunday call. He had passed the corner of the house when tense voices and the sight of the three persons in whom he was most interested brought him to a quick halt. That there was trouble seething like a kettle of *soupe aux pois* in that peaceful garden was confirmed by the first words that came to his ears.

"It is impossible, I tell you!" M. Pujos

was speaking with all the authority he could command, although in a voice shaken by a hint of tremor. "My daughter is betrothed to M. Jules Perron, whom you know. There is a contract—"

"And I love him!" cried Chloé, carried out of all thought of deference to her father by her anger. "Do you hear that? Who are you, that you dare to come here and demand that I break my pledged word? You—"

In turn she was interrupted by Michaud. Jules, growing angrier second by second, but restrained by desire to know how far the fellow would go, could see his face. It was wholly self-possessed, with the lips parted in that disagreeable smile which all the village of Ste. Anne des Monts had come to know.

"I am one who gets, usually, what he sets out to get," said Michaud. "That is who I am. I saw you two months ago, when you were in Lake St. John with your father, and I made up my mind to have you. *Et voilà!* Here I am! I shall have you!"

"Not even if I were never to marry!" exclaimed Chloé, her sudden anger cooling to disgust as she named a fate much dreaded by the young women of the province. Such egotism was not worthy of anger.

Perhaps it was her tone that forced Michaud out of his self-complacency. Certainly something stirred him so that, with one bound, he reached her side and laid hold of her arm. What his purpose may have been was not revealed, for at that instant the fist of Jules Perron hit him behind the ear, and he went reeling across flower-beds to come to a ludicrous stop in a tangle of grape-vine.

He was up instantly, with the longest knife Jules had ever seen gleaming in his hand. Then Perron thanked the chance that had made him absent-mindedly pick up his belt with the hunting-knife attached this Sunday afternoon. He drew it, unheeding the shrill protests of M. Pujos, and moved to a spot where the footing was clear and not too soft.

That fight, however, was not to be. At the cries of the mayor, neighbors came pouring into the garden, and, after the man-

ner of men under such circumstances, a dozen or more felt it necessary to cumber the arms of the fighters. Father Paradis, who had been passing, entered the garden and placed himself facing Thomas Michaud and in front of Perron.

"Put up that knife!" he commanded in a voice aged but strong with the strength of a spirit unbroken and unafraid. Very slowly the knife of Black Michaud sought its sheath, and cautiously the men relaxed their hold upon him.

"Where's the mayor?" demanded M. Michaud insolently. "Let him stand out there!"

The step of Georges Pujos was little less than faltering as he moved past those who were guarding Jules and placed himself beside Father Paradis.

"Now!" cried Black Thomas. "You can answer here before everybody so that they will know whom to blame later on! Will you let me have the girl to marry—with a priest and ring and book? Or will you give her to that other there, who has to keep a dog as big as a panther to guard him?"

At the insult Jules heaved against the grip of his captors, but there were too many of them. He swore softly and with a degree of ability he had not known himself to possess, while every one, even Father Paradis, waited for the answer. It came in the wail of a man pulled one way by fear and another by honesty.

"I cannot! I tell you there is a contract, and that my word is passed! You are mad—you cannot do the things you threaten—the law—"

"Bah!" snapped Michaud. "Thou doddering old fool—"

"Stop!" thundered the priest. "Scoundrel! Your presence is no longer welcome here—go before to-morrow, and be thankful that you are not punished any worse!"

"I care as much for a priest as I do for a louse!" Black Thomas put his hands on his hips and stared Father Paradis in the face. "I have had both on my back before this! I do not leave without the girl; remember that well!"

Now, had any one else shouted this defiance of Father Joseph Paradis, most of

those present—and the number grew moment by moment—would have expected to see the sinner withered or struck dumb on the spot.

In this instance, on the contrary, not only did nothing happen to Michaud, but there was no patent astonishment at his immunity, no rush to overwhelm him with blows, no cries of horror at the sacrilege. Only murmurs here and there, the purport of which Jules could not understand. He saw the old man turn and look into the faces of the little flock with amazement no less than his own.

"My children," he began in a voice strong, despite the bitterness of his disappointment, "my children—"

"*Pardon, mon père!*" spoke up a certain Mathilde Roberge, whose tongue had ever been hung at both ends. "Do you know that the dog of Cécille Senecal, who lives three houses from M. Michaud, bit him on the leg last Friday? And that the dog was found dead yesterday morning?"

"That is true," agreed Téléphore Vilas. "I saw the dog after it was dead, and I buried it for Mme. Roberge!"

"Poison, of course!" cried Father Paradis, his eyes now flashing fire. "What is this that has come to my children?"

"That's not all," stubbornly persisted Vilas. "I had the misfortune to displease M. Michaud the day he arrived, and I'll swear by the good St. Anne that I have not felt well since! Even my pipe tastes—"

"Enough! I have heard that you and Richard Bordeleau gave this man his sou-briquet when he arrived, and it seems to fit him very well. Because of that you believe in what? Black magic? Witchcraft?"

"Oh, no!" protested half a dozen voices. "Not at all, father; only it is just as well—"

"Be silent!" Father Paradis lifted his hand with the familiar gesture of command which was still able to secure their respect. "How can the good God take care of those who pay homage to the devil?"

With that he turned on his heel, brushed aside the men who still had their hands on Jules, and led him into the *maison* Pujos with a backward glance which drew Mlle. Chloé and her father. From the windows

they watched while the neighbors left the trampled garden, with Thomas Michaud sauntering last.

Then Father Paradis set himself to talk to Georges Pujos as he had seldom found it necessary to talk to a man before; and all without any really good and permanent effect. The mayor of Ste. Anne des Monts looked at the wall, at the well-scrubbed floor, at the ceiling—anywhere but into the eyes of the priest. He was, as Jules had felt, intimidated by Black Michaud—probably a victim both of his own physical weakness and of the superstition which seemed to be in the very air. Twenty years before the father of Chloé would not have shamed himself thus.

When sunset came, and *mademoiselle* set about the business of getting supper, Father Paradis at last gave up his task, with a shake of the head at Jules, and went away to his duties. Perron realized then that Chloé, the priest, and himself stood practically alone against Thomas Michaud; and that they alone would have to make the fight against whatever villainy he might concoct.

That evening, when Jules was alone with the girl, he made her promise always to carry a weapon and always to guard herself night and day against the unexpected. He feared it in the form of a sudden attack or abduction—whereas Black Thomas chose to work in another way.

Contrary to all the expectations of Jules Perron, there was quiet in Ste. Anne des Monts for many days. He bought a little revolver for Chloé, and he kept Boule always with him so that there could be no chance of poison for the dog.

This was wise and well, for other dogs of the village which had the misfortune to show in some plain way the general dislike of all dogs for M. Michaud died sooner or later. As there was no tangible evidence of poisoning, Michaud was more feared than hated, and his reputation as a dangerous man maintained itself through the latter weeks of the summer. During this time he remained away from the house of the mayor.

On a warm evening in September, at the end of a day of showers and clouds, Perron

entered the store of Antonin B noit to make some small purchase on the way to the *maison* Pujos. On the benches under the overhanging roof many of the men of the village were gathered, as usual, for their evening pipes and gossip.

Thomas was not an infrequent visitor there, where he had much the position of an oracle; speaking only when his words would have telling effect. He held himself aloof just enough to arouse a stir of interest when he did come and to create the belief that he was a being superior to the common need for companionship.

Perron halted in the store door to light his pipe, and saw that Michaud was sitting on a bench, occupying space enough for two men because no one dared to crowd him in the least. There was a little moment of silence, indicating that the oracle had said something of importance, when T l sphore Vilas came shuffling up out of the dusk, mopping his face.

It was this silence, at the right time, that made possible the understanding by all of what was said a half-minute later. Vilas found a place for himself and sat down with a puff of relief.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "I'm tired! I've been setting posts for that new fence around the churchyard for three days now—and to-day I was wet half the time. To-night the mist came up from the river—a chunk of it floated along until I couldn't see the post I was driving!"

"What did you say?" demanded the voice of Michaud with startling clearness.

"A big chunk of mist, *monsieur*," repeated Vilas very respectfully, "that floated over the very spot where I stood, and took its own time about it, too!"

"The *fi follet*!"

A quick, sharp breath here and there. Then stillness. Thomas Michaud could hardly have spoken a word that would have carried more dread into the hearts of those who heard him, filled with belief in his mysterious power as they then were, than this word *fi follet*. For the *fi follet* is an awe-some thing, according to those who repeat the legends of the country. It cannot be described, because it is neither angel nor devil, man nor beast. It appears near

cemeteries, in misty, changing shapes, and he who sees it will surely die within a twelvemonth. Men have been known to go home with "*fi follet*" on their lips—to go to bed and die in spite of the best-intentioned doctors.

CHAPTER III.

THE RED DEATH.

THE hush in front of the shop was broken by T l sphore Vilas. He rose to his feet and stood for a moment with arms held pleadingly toward Black Thomas.

"No, *monsieur*!" he cried. "Oh, not I beg of you! No! No! No!" He staggered away into the gathering darkness, still repeating his prayer.

Jules Perron ran, caught up with him at the end of a few rods, and put his hand upon the old man's arm.

"Stop that nonsense!" he barked. "Have you no faith in God or the prayers of Father Paradis that you should believe such a thing?"

Vilas halted long enough to see who it was, and then shook the hand from his arm in terror.

"Leave me alone!" he shrilled. "You'll only make it worse! You've brought this on us all, curse you!"

Perron made no further attempt to comfort Vilas as that stricken one started on toward his own house. Well Jules knew the hold which such superstitions had outside of the larger towns, and he thanked Heaven for that thirst within him which had made him read books and think beyond the other men of the village.

However, he had something more pressing than self-congratulation to occupy his mind—something that the parting words of old T l sphore had told him: "You've brought this on us all, curse you!"

So that was what they were saying behind his back! He had not thought of that angle of attack from Michaud, but it now seemed clear. If Jules Perron were not in the way Thomas Michaud could become betrothed to Chlo  . Perhaps—yes, undoubtedly—he would remove that vague threat of evil which every one had now

come to feel in a greater or less degree: better still, perhaps he would marry her quickly and take her away to live.

Jules, knowing the minds of his people, followed their reasoning with a certainty as strong as though that reasoning had been written in words for him to read. He was thoughtful that night as he tried to talk lightly to Mlle. Pujos; and he went home early in order to better consider some way of fighting the menace of Black Michaud.

Three days later it was reported that Téléphore Vilas was in his bed, very ill. Inasmuch as there was no doctor within twenty miles of Ste. Anne des Monts, the older women, grown experienced by long practise, did most of the healing. Father Joseph Paradis was skilled in the use of certain drugs and the treatment of wounds, so that, with him and willing nurses, most of the sick ones of the village recovered or died without having to think of a doctor's bill.

Jules Perron, on his way to the house where Vilas, long a widower, lived alone, met the priest and joined him. They saw a group of men and women before the house. These drew back at the approach of the priest and Jules; whispering together in a fashion that smacked of something more than ordinary illness. The story of the *fiévre*, however, was by this time well known, with a hundred details that had no truth in them, to every child in the village; and to the incident of sudden illness following the sight of the *fiévre* Perron attributed the whisperings.

Then Mathilde Roberge came out of the front door. She stopped at the sight of Father Paradis and Jules, crossing herself. There was no more expression now than at any other time on her wrinkled, yellow face; but her eyes were like big, black, shining battons, and a glance was enough to see that she was filled with terror.

"Smallpox!" she cried to all those within reach of her voice. "Marie Laplante has looked at him, and she says the same thing!"

For a few seconds no one moved or spoke. Then Mme. Roberge clattered down the stone steps in her heavy shoes and made off toward her own home with all speed,

looking at no one and muttering to herself words that might equally well have been prayers or incantations against the devil.

As snow goes in April, so the group in front of the house melted; some of the first to go mumbled excuses as to pressing business elsewhere, but as the contagion of panic spread men and women ran without saying anything, and in little more than a minute the house was left alone except for the sick man inside and the priest and Jules Perron without.

"Come!" said Father Paradis, his lips relaxing a little from the straight line into which they had drawn. "After forty years I have only you left!"

"You forget *mademoiselle, mon père,*" corrected Jules, gently.

"Pardon!" apologized Father Paradis, as he stepped over the threshold. "She will come if we think best to permit it."

They found Vilas tossing, half dressed, upon his ill-made bed. There was the red rash which brought a nod and something in the nature of a groan from the priest—and fever and delirium. He sent Jules to collect remedies, food, and arrange the multitude of small affairs demanding attention before they settled down to take care of the sick man.

Perron left Boule in the care of Mélisse and went away again, despite her hysterical protests, to do his errands. He noticed that Antonin Bénoit filled his order with frightened haste, that heads peered at him from windows as he passed along the single street of the village, and that those whom he met took sudden pains to cross over to the other side of the road. At the time he was too occupied with his own affairs to give much heed to these things, and he got back to the *maison* Vilas with no thought but of immediate duty.

Father Paradis met him with the information that Mlle. Pujos had been there, in admitted defiance of her father's order, and that he had had fairly to drive her away from the door. She had promised to keep them in food every day.

"A wife worthy of you, even as you are worthy of her, my son," said the priest.

"Neither of you yields to this superstition or to the fear of death—otherwise

I should be a broken man, for you are all I have left."

"Bah!" replied Jules, uncomfortable at the praise. "Vilas has made at least two journeys out of town within the past month or six weeks. He has been exposed to the contagion somewhere; that is all."

"And after this absurdity of the *fiollet* fear gripped him, he became weak, and the malady could lay him by the heels. *Mon Dieu*, how far my children have gone from the truth!"

"Be tranquil," said Perron. "We will make Vilas well, and then perhaps Black Michaud and his *fiollet* will lose standing in Ste. Anne des Monts."

Such a happy termination might have come if Téléphore Vilas had recovered. But he grew worse that night. All through the next day he raved of the *fiollet* and pleaded with Thomas Michaud to spare him. Over and over he apologized in the humblest words his tormented brain could find for that remark of his as to the blackness of M. Michaud's appearance. Perron ground his teeth with rage as he listened and anew he swore to himself to drive Michaud out of the village.

During the second evening Vilas died, after having received final ministrations from Father Paradis. Perron, anticipating the end, had made a rough coffin from such materials as he could find during the day so that well before midnight the labors of the two men were practically completed. There was nothing more to do except dig a grave and carry the coffin to the churchyard.

They had burned sulphur in every room of the house and they now believed it time to go to their own homes, destroy their clothing, and purify themselves as well as possible from danger of contagion. It was agreed that if one fell ill the other would nurse him: if both were stricken Jules was to go to the presbytery, where he could at least die like a Christian.

Perron completed a long and thorough fumigation in his woodshed, using that place in concession to the terror of Melisse. At intervals during the process he fancied that he heard distant shouting, only to dismiss the evidence of his ears. Without doubt all Ste. Anne des Monts knew of the death

of Vilas for, although the hour was late, news in a little village travels as though by electricity. There could be, Jules thought, only cause for relief to the fearful in the fact that Téléphore Vilas had left them.

But when he stepped into the street a red glare met him; and now came unmistakably the sound of many voices. The high flames, from which came the ghastly glare, had their source in the house where Téléphore Vilas lay dead. Perron ran lightly but with all his speed until he arrived within the circle of light about the burning building. There he stopped; hands falling to his sides in utter helplessness.

Fire filled the whole house; it leaped out of the windows and streamed upward where the roof had been. Standing well back from the heat and falling embers was all that part of the village not bed-ridden or too young to walk. Among them, nearer to the flames than anyone else, was Black Thomas Michaud.

As Perron grasped the meaning of the picture he saw Michaud turn his head—he followed the look of triumph, red-lighted by the fire. A half dozen men, firm, but still keeping a semblance of respect, were barring the way of Father Paradis. The priest had evidently given up his attempt to get into the burning house, but he did not yield a step, and as Jules ran toward him he spoke.

"Because of your base fears of the pestilence you have burned this man!" he said. "You have denied him the right to lie in holy ground! And for this act of selfish cowardice toll will be taken out of your own lives—for such is the law of God! Beware!"

He moved away from them, his *soutane* whirling as though it would shake off the dust of their presence, and went toward the presbytery. There Jules Perron followed him a little later, and found him bowed with the sorrow of what had been done but determined to keep fighting the evil that had grown up in his parish. He still believed that, with the help of God, it could be conquered.

The next day Ste. Anne des Monts was much like a man after a hard spree, ashamed and sullen and nervous. Most of

all, the people were afraid. They knew how smallpox could, if it were so fated, wipe out every man, woman, and child in the village. Therefore, every window and every door in town was kept tight closed, although the weather was warm and damp for the season. The doors and windows remained shut to keep out the air which people imagined had become tainted. Black Michaud, the oracle, let it be known that he thought this a wise precaution: also, probably through him, came the ostracism of Jules Perron, which continued up to a time when the minds of the people were filled with a new and greater terror.

A week after the burning of the body of Téléspore Vilas the aged mother of Richard Bordeleau fell ill with a malady that was not at first taken seriously by those of her household, even though everyone was watching with all keenness for the first manifestations of smallpox. Chills and fever and pain throughout the body might easily be no more than a bad cold, the volunteer nurses agreed, with a hopefulness which they perhaps did not feel in their hearts. On the third day, however, the unmistakable red rash appeared; and on the fifth day Madame Veuve Bordeleau died.

By this time others were ill; old and young, the robust and the weak. Red death went stalking up and down the street, knocking at the doors of the stone houses and searching out its victims under the dormered roofs. Terror was abroad by day and by night. And about the time the plague had taken a firm hold upon Ste. Anne des Monts *monsieur le maire* showed a flare of initiative and sent a man twenty miles for a doctor.

When the physician came he swore. Being an educated and intelligent man he had not only the *patois* of the woods, but many new and strange oaths with which to express himself so that it was said afterward that he actually scorched the hair of Antonin Bénéoit's dog, which got in his way during the first fury of his wrath.

Immediately he ordered every window in Ste. Anne des Monts opened, except during such time as the rain might fall in torrents. Then he left medicine in each house, with directions as to hot drinks and food for such

as might get well. He went away, cursing to himself.

The back of the doctor had not been turned upon the village for more than half an hour before every window save those in the houses of the mayor, the priest, and Jules Perron were closed again. His medicine, however, was taken in double doses by many; and it is likely that his visit did quite as much harm as good.

All the little world hurried to Father Paradis to seek help, and to the now wholly inadequate supply of women who had skill in nursing; but there were many who made secret trips to the shop of Black Thomas Michaud, seeking some kind of a charm against the dread sickness.

To all these Michaud shook his head and disclaimed interest in the matter; but he nevertheless managed to let the village believe that he could stop the plague if he were minded that way. He was offered money, which he refused contemptuously, with the intimation that if he were able to do anything it would not be done for money, but for a reward much nearer his heart.

During these days the ostracism of Jules Perron continued with such completeness that his proffered aid was seldom received by those families afflicted—and the number of them included nearly all. When the smallpox raged worst and there were half enough nurses and half enough men to bury the dead then Perron was of necessity allowed to work with his fellow men. Through it all he was careful to take such precautions as the doctor had ordered and of the half dozen households that escaped entirely his own was one.

The epidemic burned itself out, as had the fire in the house of Téléspore Vilas: the one left ugly, blackened walls, and the other broken families. An addition was made to the churchyard that fall and Father Paradis was very busy saying masses for the dead—the people still went to church faithfully, perhaps because they did not dare to stay away.

In all probability it was the cold weather, coming early, that brought an end to the disaster. Heavy snow fell before St. Catherine's day, which was unusual, and the *vieillards* shook their heads and predicted

that it would be a hard winter—hard to get firewood from the forest, hard to find game, and hard to work because of cold and deep snow.

So it proved. Men who had never grumbled before, or hesitated because of crackling cold and breast-deep snow, declared this winter too filled with hardships for steady work. The belief that there was a curse upon the village was general—together with the general impression that Black Thomas Michaud could remove it if he so willed. But he would remove it only if his strange courting were successful. In the meantime Ste. Anne des Monts sighed and hoped and treated Jules Perron with coldness.

CHAPTER IV.

LOUP-GAROU

INTO this atmosphere of strain, of fear, of hatred, Richard Bordeleau came back one day from a hunting trip with blood-shot eyes and deep lines cut into the brown of his face. He had lost his pack, and one of his snowshoes was broken when he staggered up to the shop of Antonin Benoît and flung himself inside as though he believed that Satan himself was at his heels. They had to give him a drink of whiskey *blanc* with a handful of crackers soaked in it before he could speak.

"Wolves!" was his first word. "They've come down from the north!"

At that everyone drew a breath of relief; and yet everyone leaned forward with interest because wolves had not been south of the Hudson Bay country for as long as twenty years. Older men had their stories of them—half fiction and half fact. In this experience of Bordeleau, then, there was promise of adventure and pelts without much danger.

"They're hungry, those wolves!" panted Bordeleau. "Only the fire I had saved my life last night. There was a strong pack, more than I could count, and they ate the ones I shot almost as soon as the bullets struck. *Dieu Seigneur!* It was horrible! I dozed off once, when the fire went down, and they closed in. It was then that I lost my outfit. I made a running fight until

dawn, my friends, and but for the goodness of God I should not be here!"

There were shrugs at this. No doubt, said those who had hunted wolves in their time, Bordeleau had taken the matter too seriously: he had become frightened and run without cause, or he had not built a big enough fire. One old hunter boasted that he had slept from dark to dawn with a ring of shining eyes around him. All wolves were cowards, he said.

"Not these wolves," Richard Bordeleau told him, rising to go home to his wife and child. "Not the leader of this pack, for he jumped across the fire at me!"

"Not the *loup-garou*!" announced Black Thomas Michaud, from a corner behind the stove. "The *loup-garou* is no coward — and he of all the pack does not fear fire!"

That name was one with which to blanch lips and to make even those sitting nearest the stove suddenly very cold. The *loup-garou* is a wolf possessed by the spirit of a man upon whom the devil had already put his claws. He runs at the head of the pack and he seeks battle with mankind, for only through that can come his salvation—if blood be drawn from him by a man his soul becomes liberated for another chance in the world.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" swore Jules Perron, who had been a witness to all this. "The *loup-garou* is only a fear in the hearts of cowards!"

Unfriendly eyes turned upon Jules—Black Thomas laughed. Bordeleau, with a shrug, picked up his rifle and went out.

"I will lead a hunt for this *loup-garou*!" offered Perron, meeting the eyes of the men there one after another. "Who will go with me?"

For a long time no one answered; and again Michaud laughed from his corner. Then spoke old Charles Papineau, once a hunter of renown.

"I will stay in my house after dark," he said, "with the shutters barred and the rifle ready. If this animal is the *loup-garou* then the man who goes out to hunt him should first arrange his affairs and say farewell to his wife. Once I saw a dead man who had tried that trick—"

"*Imbéciles!*" said Perron, and went out of the shop to tell this new folly of Ste. Anne des Monts to *Mademoiselle* Chloé.

This was new strength given to the enemy; and both of them were wearing down under the strain. They longed for spring, when they were to be married. Black Michaud must do something before that time, if at all; for then Perron would have the right to take his wife away to a place not hung with the somber draperies of fear and death. But they felt that Michaud would strike somehow before the wedding day.

The coming of the wolves filled the imagination of the village to overflowing. At first even those who most firmly believed in the existence of the *loup-garou* doubted the permanent presence of any wolf near Ste. Anne des Monts. But one starless night a long howl sounded from the top of a cliff that overhung the churchyard; and another answered it from the direction of the black cedars on the opposite side of the village.

After that no arguments were needed to convince anyone. Men fastened their doors and windows at night as their forefathers had done in the old days when there were savages in the forests. No woman or child was allowed to go out of doors alone after dark, and no man went without his rifle in his hands. Thomas Michaud became finally the great man of the village—his place was fixed at last and he could give advice as to the best way, to be protected against the danger with the certainty that his advice would be followed as a law.

Now he grew aggressive, where he had merely had a kind of bold stubbornness before. From old Mélisse and from Chloé, through her father, Jules heard little odds and ends of gossip and vague hints that made him think hard—made him sometimes awake at night sweating with the terrors which seemed to be inexorably closing upon him while he remained helpless. Jules prayed for an end to the torment; and as though in answer to his prayer the end came with stunning swiftness.

One afternoon, just before sunset, Thomas Michaud was seen upon the cliff above the churchyard with his face turned away toward the north. That night the wolf

pack came into the village for the first time, and the dog of Antonin Bénéoit, locked out by accident was killed and eaten upon his own door-step. Bénéoit, crouching inside with hands that trembled too much to hold his rifle, heard the dog's cries as it died. Other men of the village, either braver or more curious, looked out through cracks in the shutters as the pack raced down the street. These swore that it was headed by a big animal, as big as Jules Perron's Boule.

That had been between midnight and morning. But the next night Perron was just leaving the *maison* Pujos, between nine and ten o'clock, when a torrent of swift moving forms came down the street. Their eyes seemed like a thousand yellow-green lights as they bore down upon him, and in that brief moment he regretted the scorn of Ste. Anne des Monts which had made him come without his rifle. A big wolf swerved from the trail of the gigantic leader—a leader truly as big as Boule—and leaped for Jules. He missed, stumbled, and went on. With a sound of soft, rushing feet the pack vanished.

Then from a house a dozen rods away came a woman's scream. Jules had heard the sounds of suffering more than once in his life, but never had he heard from human throat the anguish of that cry. He ran toward it, seeing other human forms running in the darkness, and found that it came from the *maison* Bordeleau. Richard held his young wife in his arms and tried to comfort her; but she gave no attention to what he said. She stared out into the darkness and moaned, twisting her fingers in and out against each other.

The wolves had killed their little daughter, Hélène; that laughing imp who had grown just big enough to dart here and there almost as fast as the eye could follow her. It appeared that Richard and his wife each had thought that the other had locked the kitchen door—and neither had done it. They had both seen Hélène playing with the latch.

Then Madame Bordeleau saw the door standing open. A shriek of "*Maman! Maman!*" came from without. Richard leaped for his rifle, but he was too late—while he stood blinded by the sudden change

from light to darkness, seeking something to fire at, the pack went on. Of the child's death there was proof upon the snow.

Now indeed was Ste. Anne des Monts beaten to its knees. All that night many families remained awake: all the following morning no work was done. It was about noon when Mélisse stumbled into the *maison* Perron from the shop of Bénédict, where she had been on an errand, with a tale which she gasped out in fragments. A dozen men of the village, including Black Michaud, had been gathered there in secret conclave, and Mélisse, not at all averse to eavesdropping, had overheard much of their talk.

"They are going to take Mademoiselle Chloé and give her to M. Michaud!" cried Mélisse, crossing herself at the name of the shoemaker. "They believe they are going to save the village that way—they will force M. Pujos to consent! *Mon Dieu!* It is terrible! Either that, *monsieur*, or the *loup-garou*—"

Jules did not wait to hear the end of her prediction. His rifle had leaped to his hand as she talked, and without waiting to put on jacket or cap he ran for the mayor's house, taking a roundabout way which would bring him to the back door. He rushed through the kitchen and into the *salon* just as a heavy pounding sounded at the front door.

In the *salon* stood M. Pujos, pale as his own corpse and holding to the table for support, Father Paradis, and Mademoiselle Chloé, whose hand gripped her revolver and whose eyes were as steady as though worse than death were not clamoring for entrance.

"Up-stairs!" cried Perron. "They are coming to take Chloé—"

"We know," interrupted the priest. "Since the love of God has gone from their hearts I am not much good, my son, but such as I am, I am ready to die here!"

"Come, then! We can hold the stairs long enough for mademoiselle to get away—she can jump into a drift from one of the windows!"

They ran, half carrying the mayor; while at the door a steady and insistent hammering went on. Once on the upper floor M. Pujos sank down upon one of the beds. Father Paradis stood beside Jules at the

head of the stairs—and Chloé took a place behind them.

"Go!" commanded Perron. "While they're on the stairs, Chloé, jump from a window, and get to Mélisse. She will harness Boule, give you blankets, and a chance to get away!"

"And leave you here to die for me?" exclaimed the girl, with red climbing up her cheeks. "What kind of a woman did you ask to marry you, my Jules? I shall live if you do—and die if you do!"

There was no time for Perron to voice the pride that filled him, for the end of a six-inch log swept the stout door from its hinges as though it had been made of cardboard. Through the opening tumbled a handful of men just as others found their way in from the kitchen. There were, as Mélisse had guessed, about a dozen—including Richard Bordeleau, Antonin Bénédict, and Black Thomas Michaud.

CHAPTER V.

PERRON GOES FORTH.

MICHAUD stood away from the others, looking up with a hint of that peculiar smile of his playing about his lips. The men of Ste. Anne des Monts hesitated a moment, and then pushed Antonin Bénédict forward as spokesman. He advanced and set his foot on the lowest step, with an eye to the rifle of Perron, while the others gathered compactly behind.

"We want to see *monsieur le maire!*" demanded Bénédict.

"He is a sick man," replied Perron. "Say what you have to say to Father Paradis and to me."

"Jules," began Antonin, "you might as well give up. M. Michaud, here, wants to marry Mlle. Pujos. It may be right or wrong. But there are some of us who think it is better that she should marry him than that all the village should die!"

Now at last Michaud had his desire. Other men were fighting to get what he wanted for him. What he could not have done by force in the beginning was being accomplished through the *loup-garou* and the fear that it inspired.

"So Black Thomas has agreed to take himself and the *loup-garou* back to the devil, where he belongs, if he can have mademoiselle? Is that it?" asked Jules.

"I've made no bargains!" snapped Michaud. "The people think what they please!"

"We know!" shouted Richard Bordeleau, almost a madman from his excess of grief. "The *loup-garou* must have what he wants! *Mon Dieu!* It might be my wife next!"

Then Father Paradis stepped forward and lifted his veined hand with all the authority of old. At least he held them in leash for the moment—they listened while he spoke.

"My children! Be warned before you bring upon your heads more sin than is already there! You left Téléphore Vilas to die alone because of your lack of charity, and you burned his body in his own house because of a crawling fear that did not save you from the red death! Who, in God's truth, killed the little child of Richard Bordeleau! You, no less than this *loup-garou*!

"You cowards! You should have gone into the forest and broken up this pack of wild beasts! Is there any blood in you? Turn on that helper of the Prince of Darkness—that Michaud—and drive him out! Then stand and face both good and evil with the love of God in your hearts and the wrath of God in your strong right arms!"

The voice of the priest died away, but he still stood with hand upraised and his eyes beating down the eyes of those who heard him. For a moment it seemed that he was about to conquer—and then Thomas Michaud laughed with a sound like the very mockery of hell.

"Say that to the *loup-garou*!" he said.

In the wink of an eye hope was lost. The men turned back to the memory of what they had come for—they wavered, and then took the stairs with a rush. There was murder in their eyes; and Michaud, waiting in the rear, smiled.

Perron's first impulse was to fire point-blank into the nearest face. He checked it, and instead, stepping down to meet them, drove his rifle butt into the stomach of the leader. He was swept back and downward,

toppling the others over as though they had been wooden soldiers. One man was out of the fight for the moment; but the cursing tangle of bodies straightened out.

Now, added to the fear that had first impelled them, was the lust of battle, and as they gathered for the second attack Jules realized that this time both he and Chloé must shoot—they must shoot with intent to kill, but without any certainty that the victory would go to them. Perron fired once, a snap shot, at Black Michaud—only to see through the smoke and haze that his enemy had moved with uncanny deftness to one side. The bullet brought down plaster from the wall at the level of his heart.

The rush up the stairs was on again when something in the nature of an inspiration came to Jules—a plan that might gain a respite, if no better odds, in his battle with death. He held up his rifle, and cried out with all the power that was in his lungs:

"Stop! Attend to what I say!" They halted, uncertain, panting, while Michaud moved forward with a scowl.

"If you will leave this house in peace now I will go out to-night and fight the *loup-garou* when he comes! If I am killed then Black Thomas Michaud will be happy, and you can deal with Mademoiselle Chloé as God wills! If I kill the *loup-garou* you will be free—can Black Michaud do more than that for you? What do you say, men of Ste. Anne des Monts? Will you give me a chance to fight? Are you Frenchmen or savages?"

That appeal gained the respite. Heads turned questioningly toward one another; feet shuffled awkwardly. The attack had been broken by words.

"We are Frenchmen, Perron!" cried Antonin Benoît; and even Richard Bordeleau agreed.

"*Nom de Dieu!* We are not savages!"

Thomas Michaud, looking more blackly villainous than Jules had ever seen him, opened his mouth as though to speak—and thought better of it. He went out behind the others.

"*Dieu merci!*" breathed Perron, turning to Chloé with a great sigh of relief. "Boule and I will at least kill the *loup-garou* before we die!"

"You will drive the wolves off!" she cried, shaking his arm in a sudden fury at the doubt in his voice. "Go out with that belief—and remember that I shall be at our door here with the bar drawn! You will have a refuge!"

"And my prayers," added Father Paradis.

Suddenly their perfect faith flowed into Jules, and through him, as good wine warms even to the tips of the fingers. He took the hands of Chloé in both his own and with infinite gentleness kissed her on the lips.

"Until to-night," he said, "when I shall drive the devil out of Ste. Anne des Monts forever!"

Perron went down the stairs and to his own house with a singing heart, despite the danger which he must face before another day. With a kind of peace he had never before known he lay down and slept until supper time.

After the meal he cleaned his rifle, filled every pocket of his homespun trousers with cartridges, belted on two knives, and went out into the darkness with a wail from Mélisse following him. The time of trial had come, he kept telling himself over and over; so he patrolled slowly up and down the street, from his own house to that of the mayor, for a time which he did not attempt to gauge.

The upstanding ears of Boule first warned him. He made his own ears free by pushing up the sides of his muskrat cap, and caught the end of a long, thin wail from somewhere beyond the cliffs. The beasts would be coming now within a short time. Another call came from the forest, and much nearer. Boule growled, and trembled at the touch of his master's hand. In a sudden rush of affection Jules knelt and laid his cheek against the muzzle of the dog. Boule understood.

They came as they had before, swift as shadows, black against the snow, close together, either for protection or attack, as they brazenly tore through the lair of mankind. Perron was standing in front of the mayor's house, as he had planned, when he first glimpsed them bearing down upon him, and as yet unaware of his presence. At the

first howl he had taken off his jacket. Now he flung up the rifle and fired deliberately.

At the second or third shot the pack came to a halt, and he knew that at least one bullet had gone home. There was a snarling fight over the wounded while Perron reloaded; then the wolves came on again, but not so swiftly. They had his scent, and that of the dog; but they would be cautious until they knew that there was no ambushcade of other men.

Three times more he stopped the pack with a burst of shots; and three times they delayed long enough to eat those that went down. Again and again he saw the big leader, but never at a time when he dared take precious seconds to draw a steady bead on him.

They drew quite near, circling, Jules began to think of getting his back to a wall when a sudden shift by Boule warned him of danger from behind. He wheeled. The shapes were all about him. They slunk along the walls on each side of the street—a row of eyes gleamed nearer and nearer from the rear.

He fired once from the hip and turned back to face the main body of the pack. Then it seemed that a hand of ice shut down on his heart for the giant that had been called the *loup-garou* was in the act of springing, and a score of his followers were behind him.

Jules clubbed his rifle. The big body had launched itself—to be deflected in mid-air by the impact of Boule. That was what the dog had been waiting for, that moment of greatest danger—thus Perron thought as he charged, firing into the faces of the animals that had crowded the heels of the leader. As they gave before him he turned and ran back toward the *maison Pujos*.

Boule was now fighting for his life with the *loup-garou*, and the other wolves were everywhere. Jules shot into jaws that snapped at him, he brought his rifle butt down on bodies that sprang up in his path. His shirt was ripped half way. A streak of fire down his right arm told him he had been wounded.

He reached the door at last, only to have his rifle spin out of his hands as he thrust it between his breast and one of the brutes.

He drew a knife in each hand, but a wolf was tearing at one foot and he sat down heavily upon the stone steps. This was the end he thought, as he slashed right and left. He hoped that it would come quickly. Poor Boule.

A big rectangle of lamplight struck the snow. The bark of revolver shots beat against his ears, and the smell of burning powder filled his nose. A kicking wolf lay before him as he staggered up—he finished it with a knife. The voice of Chloé rang like a pæan of joy at his side.

"They've gone! You've won, Jules! You've won!"

It was true. The pack had faded into the darkness from which it had come. Only the dead wolf by the doorstep remained—and two struggling forms at the corner of the house. Perron ran to them; his knives gripped hard and ready for a thrust that would give the victory to Boule.

Through seconds heavy with fear for the life of his dog Perron waited. Then, just as he despaired of ever finding a mark on the shifting body of the wolf, the animals became suddenly rigid. Jules saw that the teeth of Boule had at last got their grip—at last they were set through and through the corded throat of the *loup-garou*. The hand of Perron drew back for a ripping thrust—but he stayed it.

When at last the wolf's great muscles yielded he went down to the hard packed snow like a stricken rabbit. The jaws of Boule set themselves more firmly—the leader of the pack that had terrorized Ste. Anne des Monts quivered and stiffened. The *loup-garou* was dead.

Coincident with the death agony of the *loup-garou* a scream pierced the cold, still air. From the house of Richard Bordeleau the night before had come a cry which was the apotheosis of human agony, but the cry that now darted, serpent-like, to the ears of the village, was more terrible. It was such a shriek as might come from a soul wrung by terrors other than those of this world. It dripped with malice as a cavern drips ooze.

The sound held Jules Perron rigid for an instant: then he spun on his heel to make

sure that Chloé was safe. She was almost at his side, trembling a little, but steadfast. Boule, his hair bristling at the echoes of the cry, wobbled toward them and licked the hand of Jules.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" whispered Perron. "That scream was from the house of Michaud!"

He ran toward the little place that the shoemaker had rented; to stop half-way there with a sudden thought for the other men of the village. It were better that they should be witnesses to the fullness of the defeat he intended should be the fate of Black Thomas. He filled his lungs and cried out so that his voice penetrated the shutters of many of those houses of fear.

"Stand up, you creepers! Come out like men and help me drive the devil back to his own!"

They came; at first slowly, and then by dozens as the news that the *loup-garou* was dead flashed from house to house. They followed Jules Perron to the house of Michaud and watched him break in the door with his rifle butt. Then, while Chloé moved at his side with a lighted lantern, they followed him over that dread threshold and into the shop.

Chloé held the lantern aloft—to shudder at what she saw so that the light swayed and smoked in her grasp. Black Thomas Michaud lay upon the littered floor of his shop with his throat ripped open by a jagged wound—a wound the same as that by which Boule had let the life blood out of the *loup-garou*. He was dead.

This is the end of the story, *messieurs*; except that even now in Ste. Anne des Monts they will tell you that Black Michaud, who himself was the *loup-garou*, hoped to liberate his soul through a wound from the hand of man. He failed, they say, only because the devil needed his help in hell on the very night when Jules Perron and Boule fought for the prettiest demoiselle north of Lake St. John. Naturally, Father Joseph Paradis maintains that Michaud killed himself—but the good father admittedly does not believe in the *loup-garou*.

(The End.)