

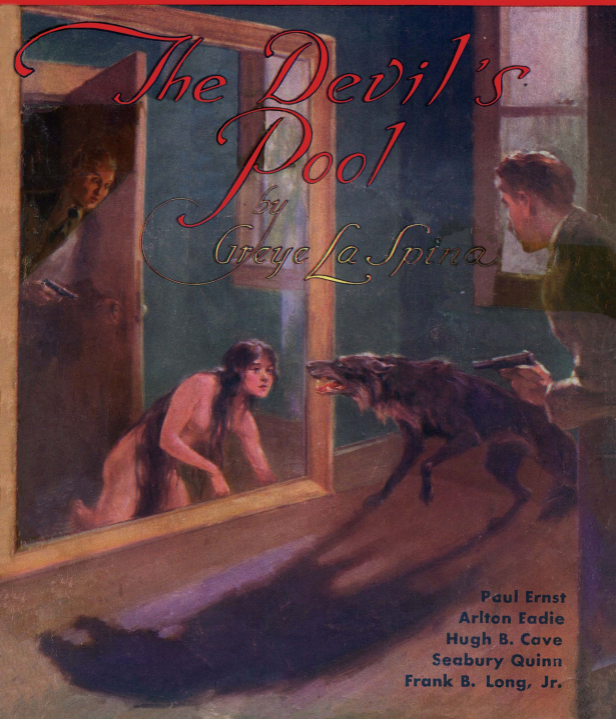
Weird Tales

June
1932

The Unique Magazine

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CENTS

The Devil's Pool by *Greye La Spina*



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The Devil's Pool

By GREYE LA SPINA

*A thrilling novel of an evil pool in an abandoned quarry—an
eery werewolf story*

1. "I'd willingly sell my soul to the
Devil. . . ."

"THERE ain't going to be no weddin'," said the taxi-driver, his thick brows scowling upon Mason Hardy.

"No wedding? You're crazy," said the prospective best man, and laughed easily. "Yeah?"

"Mr. Baker would have gotten word to me, if that were the case," Hardy asserted, his keen eyes upon the driver's dour, melancholy visage.

"Yeah?"

Hardy lost patience. "Listen, my good fellow! If you've anything to impart, be kind enough to get it over without delay. The wedding is set for two o'clock today and it's now noon."

The taxi-driver drooped heavily in his seat. "Mister, kin there be a weddin' without a bride?" he asked. This was indeed a pointed query.

"A wedding without a bride?" echoed the other, puzzled.

"Says you."

"What on earth do you mean?" Hardy snapped.

"I mean that Miss Selene Arkwright left town about six weeks ago."

"The hell she did!"

"Hell's got more to do with it than you might think, mister. If you ain't heard from Mr. Baker fer the last coupla months you've got a nice earful comin' to you. Me . . . I lost my little kid Jacky the same way," said the taxi-driver's harsh

voice, and was suddenly tremulous and tender.

Mason Hardy stripped off his rucksack and tossed it into the cab. He mounted the front seat with the driver.

"Step on it," he ordered briskly. "And give me a line on things as we go along."

"My kid was only five years old," began the driver brokenly, slipping the clutch into gear, "an' he was playin' around with a bunch of other kids on the edge of Baumann's woods one afternoon about a month ago, an' the other kids said later that a tall, thin, ugly-lookin' man came out of the woods and promised any of them a bag of candy if they'd go along with him. An' my kid was so little . . . he went."

"Well?" prompted Hardy impatiently, yet with an undertone of sympathy.

"He ain't never come back, mister. The chief of police sent out a coupla men, and we hunted and hunted, but all we found was little Jacky's cap lyin' at the foot of a tree near the old quarry. The chief questioned Lem Schwartz . . . we was sure he was the man the kids was tellin' about . . . but Lem said the kid must've fell into the pool and got drowned."

"Sorry, old chap. But what has this to do with Miss Arkwright?"

"Well, mister, perhaps she fell into the pool, an' maybe it put a spell or somethin' on her, so she can't leave Baumann's any more."

Had it not been for the man's loss of his little boy, Hardy would have given



*"He hunched into full moonlight
for another look at what he felt
he simply could not have seen."*

way to derisive laughter, but the taxi man's face, distorted with grief, restrained him from giving voice to his amusement at the absurd theory.

"We'll have to look into this," he said sympathetically. "What do you figure is wrong with the pool?"

"That's queer, too, mister," said the taxi-driver. "Old Eli's granddaughter had a bad fall about a year ago an' ain't been able to walk sence. Old Eli sets store by that little gal, the way I did by my Jacky. Folks say he bust out cryin' one day down at the post-office an' said he'd willin'ly sell his soul to the devil if he could only give his little Janie the things she wanted. An' they do say it weren't long after that they was a bossy hired man out on Eli's place, an' if Lem Schwartz ain't close to bein' a devil I miss

my say-so." He concluded with a grunt of disgust.

"Interesting," commented young Hardy, "but hardly conclusive."

"That ain't all," continued the driver, punctuating his remarks with nervous movements of his foot on the accelerator that sent the taxi forward in spasmodic jerks. "There ain't been no heavy rains about these parts for mo' n a year, an' yet that hole in the quarry is all filled up . . . with water, I suppose, even if none of us that's seen it likes the queer looks of it. Acts as if it was alive," muttered the taxi man half under his breath.

"Probably a spring?" offered the younger man.

"Spring nothin'," snorted the driver with the utmost contempt for such an easy solution of his puzzle. "That quarry pool

wasn't there the day before Lem Schwartz was first seen on old Eli's farm, and the day after *he* was there, the *pool* was there." His tone said plainly: Now, don't think you can get around *that*.

HARDY thought it best not to dispute the miraculous appearance of the pool that had synchronized with the coming of the devilish Lem. He remained silent until the cab drew up before an unpretentious bungalow prettily set in an attractively landscaped plot.

"Here y'are, mister. An' if there's a weddin', I'll drive you free of charge," scoffed the driver, accepting his fare and tip with a brief nod of thanks. "No weddin' without a bride, an' you'll find Miss Arkwright can't get away from that pool," he prophesied in a low, fierce voice. "It ain't got no bottom, that pool . . . we dragged it . . . an' I believe it goes straight down to hell. An' if it does, I'm the man that'll be sendin' that devil at Baumann's back to where he belongs, one of these here days."

He threw in his clutch, stepped on the gas, and his cab departed rattling down the village street.

Hardy looked after the cab with puzzled face. When he turned to walk up the gravelled path to the bungalow, he was disturbed to see his old college friend dashing out of the front door and down to meet him. In that hasty oncoming he read something of ill omen.

"Mason! You didn't get my letters?" cried out the bridegroom in a kind of wild abandon to the nervous excitement all too clearly pervading him.

"I didn't stop home at all, old man," deprecated Mason. He did not elucidate, thinking it unnecessary. Earl Baker knew that he spent weeks at a time hiking in out-of-the-way places for antiques, rarely getting in touch with home or office during his absences,

"I am almost out of my head, Mason," groaned Earl Baker, seizing his friend's arm with frenzied grasp. "Come into the house. I've so much to tell you, and I don't know where to begin," he choked.

Hardy slung his knapsack over one shoulder and hurriedly went up the path. He was shocked and perturbed at the evidences of nervous strain shown by his ordinarily poised friend. Apparently there had been fragments of truth in the taxi man's strange innuendoes.

Once inside the house, he flung the knapsack to one side and pushed his friend down into a big chair, seating himself opposite.

"Control yourself, Earl," he commanded sharply. "Why, man, your nerves must be in ruinous shape, for you to let yourself go the way you're doing."

Earl Baker jerked out a short, wretched sound that may have been meant for derisive laughter, but that fell harsh and jangling upon the ear.

"Do you think it's so easy for a man to lose his bride without her offering the slightest reason for jilting him?"

"Selene has jilted you?" cried Hardy incredulously.

"Well, it amounts to that," almost moaned the deserted bridegroom.

"For the love of heaven, get this story out of your system, Earl," exploded Mason Hardy. "The taxi-driver nearly drove me frantic with wild yarns about devilish hired men and mysterious pools and a drowned child and Selene's disappearance. Pull yourself together, man, and tell me what it's all about. Do you get married today, or don't you?"

"I don't," admitted Earl wretchedly. "A couple of months ago Selene went down to Eli Baumann's farm to teach Janie kindergarten work, and after she'd made two or three visits there, she just didn't come back."

"Just stayed on? You mean, she re-

fused to come back here? That she isn't being detained forcibly?"

"That's what I mean."

"It's incredible, old man. Selene loved you. She—she couldn't just stay away like that without a good reason."

"There is a reason, but she won't tell me what it is. So I asked Father Paul to see her."

"Father Paul is still here, is he? Good old man. . . . When did he see her?"

"He went this morning. I'm expecting him back any minute."

Hardy drew the curtain aside and stared down the street against the light of the blazing afternoon sun. As yet there was no sign of the plump gray horse that took Father Paul about the country on parochial visits. He shook his head and let the curtain drop into place. Earl sighed heavily, lips quivering. Mason's alert blue eyes slipped past that thin, ascetic face, for he disliked to confront the trouble he read only too easily upon it.

"You don't suppose the mysterious attraction on the Baumann farm has gotten its clutches into Father Paul, do you?"

Earl shook his head decidedly. "Oh, no," he asseverated.

"But if it got hold of Selene, why not Father Paul?" argued Mason, not illogically.

Earl pushed back his untouched lunch. "I believe he knows too much for them, Mason. They're afraid of him."

"They?" queried the other significantly.

"They . . . or it. I really don't think I quite know what I do mean, old man. This business about Selene has just broken me up. Everything was fine until she went down there at old Eli's request, to give Janie kindergarten instruction. From then on, it's been . . . well, inferno," he ended, bitter sharpness pointing his words. "Hark! I thought I heard hoofs."

Mason lifted the curtain again. "He's coming. Sorry, old chap, but he's alone."

2. *"The dead man on his feet,
staring. . . ."*

"GOD!" ejaculated Earl Baker, clasping and unclasping his nervous hands and throwing an impassioned look upward. "For nearly two months she's been down on that impoverished farm, telling me to keep away from her and forget her. Why?"

"It's a darn queer situation, Earl, I must admit. Hello, Father Paul," and Mason turned to greet the newcomer, who had let himself into the house with the freedom of a welcome intimate.

The priest was short, sturdily built, slightly florid. From his round, wide face beamed small but pleasant blue eyes of the understanding kind that can twinkle impartially upon saint or sinner. He stamped in heavily, pulled out a chair and sank into it, puffing.

"This July heat is phenomenal," he gasped, as soon as he could catch his breath sufficiently to speak. "Pour me a glass of water, my boy. I'm that perishing with thirst I can hardly think."

Earl Baker, pouring the requested water, spoke with downcast eyes as if he feared to meet the other's gaze.

"Selene—?"

Over the priest's round face a troubled expression deepened.

"Is she . . . well?"

"Not exactly well . . . but neither is she ill," appended Father Paul cryptically.

Earl's finely ascetic face darkened. He struck the table with his clenched fist, a blow that set the dishes a-dance.

"I can't stand this sort of thing much longer," he said in a soft, restrained voice, addressing himself to no one in particular. "It is incomprehensible. She loved me

and promised to marry me. Yet she goes down and stays there without a word of explanation and only tells me coldly to forget her."

The kindly blue eyes of Father Paul narrowed with thought. "If she bids you forget her, my son, she must have sufficient reason, for she was a good girl."

"Why do you put it in the past tense?" Earl snapped. "I ask you, why should my betrothed leave her work, and the man whom she had promised to marry, and settle down to spend her life among complete strangers on a wretched backwoods farm where there is quite nothing to offer attraction to a young and beautiful girl? It's inexplicable, I tell you, by any process of logical reasoning."

"Perhaps it might help matters to look at the situation from some other than a logical standpoint," suggested Father Paul gently. "You know that my opinion is——"

"I can not give credence to wild superstitions," exclaimed Earl impatiently. "What can a drowned child have to do with my Selene?"

Father Paul sighed heavily. "It might have much to do with her, but I pray God it has not . . . yet."

Earl stared at him a moment, then uttered a wretched laugh. With ironical intonation he said to Mason: "Father Paul believes that some ancient evil entity has been drawn into manifestation on old Eli's farm, and that my future wife has somehow been snared in his net. The bare idea of Selene's being involved in anything that isn't splendid and fine is an insult!" cried the lover angrily.

Mason Hardy held up one hand to quiet his disturbed friend.

"Well, Earl, it's possible even if not probable. Aren't you always saying that there are spiritual laws available for those human beings who come into knowledge

of them, to make life easier, richer? Why couldn't an undesirable individual get hold of the workings of those same laws, applying them for purely selfish ends?"

"Absurd. Old Eli is the most harmless of antiquated farmers, wrapped up in his orphaned granddaughter Janie, who's a cripple. Besides those two, there's only their hired man."

"Lem Schwartz is about the most evil individual I've encountered in all my years of ministration," interrupted the priest, his wide face paling as he looked from one man to the other. "He's so evil that I felt the disturbing spirit of him in his very atmosphere. He's tall, and gaunt, and of saturnine aspect. There's something so repellent about him that I fail to find words for adequate explanation," mused Father Paul. "That man is . . . I dislike to say it . . . thoroughly bad. I'm convinced of it. I don't know how I can be so positive, but I am."

"What influence could that country boor have upon a girl like Selene?"

Father Paul disregarded the younger man's contemptuous query, and went on thinking aloud. "From the way old Eli acted this morning, I rather think he'd be glad to get out of whatever mischief he's managed to get into. I don't understand yet just what it is, for while he is terrified by Lem Schwartz, he is also resentful and bitter against him. It's an odd situation."

"Is it possible that Selene's feelings have been acted upon by Janie's pathetic condition?" inquired Mason thoughtfully.

"For me," pronounced Father Paul with decision, "Janie is the key to the whole situation."

"Janie!" almost snorted Earl Baker, with an exasperated look at the old priest, who bore his scrutiny with tranquil poise.

"What could that fourteen-year-old girl have to do with the situation, Fa-

ther?" inquired Mason. He was frankly curious.

"Well, my son, it is difficult to put my feelings into words. Janie isn't stupid, but she isn't very . . . what I'd call bright. She has moments of peculiar insight that are positively uncanny, and then again she is just a very childish, ingenuous little girl. Her grandfather is wholeheartedly devoted to her. Yes, I feel assured that in Janie we shall find the key to the situation."

Earl Baker crumpled the tablecloth under one hand that kept opening and shutting nervously upon it. "All this is unbearable. We keep talking, talking, speculating, speculating. . . . And Selene stays in that miserable place, held by some mysterious attraction which has allured her to the extent of making her withdraw her promise of marriage."

FATHER PAUL, again disregarding the young man's outburst, commented irrelevantly, brow furrowed: "Eli has another guest, by the way; a young Jewish fellow, named Harry Epstein. He was around town during the week of the county fair. Drove a little canvas-topped Ford truck with an old piano on it and sang popular songs to his own accompaniment. Sold sheet music."

"Do you mean to tell me that that fellow's being held there, too?" asked Earl, his ascetic face all at once drawn into a sneer. "This is too much!" He groaned and dropped his distorted face into his twitching hands.

"Epstein warned me off," said Father Paul, a reminiscent smile drawing wrinkles into the corners of his kindly blue eyes. "Said he hoped to leave there, bringing Miss Arkwright, in the course of a couple of months. And old Eli, at whom he kept looking strangely as he

said it, gave a terrible moaning cry and rushed off to hide himself somewhere."

"I can't get my soul quieted!" cried the tortured lover wildly. "They won't let me go onto the Baumann place now, Mason."

"Listen, old man. What's to prevent my scouting about a bit and trying to find out what this mess is, anyway?" offered Hardy, his keen blue eyes alight with eager speculation. "Bet you I can bring Selene away!" He looked across the table and up at the mantelpiece, where stood a large photograph in solitary importance, the portrait of a grave-faced, beautiful girl. "Where did that Schwartz fellow hail from, Father Paul?"

"Nobody seems to know. He appeared one day on the Baumann place, shortly after old Eli had been heard to make a statement about selling his soul to the devil for Janie's sake. The fellow has as evil a face as I have ever seen," and the good man crossed himself rapidly at the memory of it.

"What do you think of my chances of getting in and finding out how matters stand?"

"You may get in there and you may be able to get a line on what the whole thing means, unless you are drawn into it yourself."

"And suppose I am?" contemptuously. "Why can not I get word then to you people, so that you'll be able to come down to the rescue?"

"That might help us greatly, my son."

"Strange that Selene won't tell me what it's all about," complained the deserted bridegroom. "If you can do what you say, Mason, I shall never be able to repay you." His eyes were eloquent.

Hardy laughed.

"It's the peace of my soul, too. I shall never be able to go on with my 'Y' work here, if Evil is to be allowed to triumph

over Good, as it seems so far to have done," finished Earl despondently.

"How big is that Schwartz fellow? Bigger than I?" asked Mason of the priest, squaring his broad tweed-clad shoulders with the shyly conscious air of a man who does not have to be told that he is in the pink of condition.

"You won't have to fight him the way you're thinking," retorted the priest. "At least, I don't think so. But you'll have to make up your mind not to be afraid of anything that might happen. The fact that a thing *does* happen, Mr. Hardy, brings it within the jurisdiction of the laws of natural phenomena."

Mason caught a certain significance of tone and said, with a flash of keen blue eyes: "I don't think I'm afraid of anything . . . regular."

"It's not the regular thing that makes the blood run chill, my son," replied the priest. "It's the irregularity of a thing that sometimes makes it seem terrible. The dead man lying at rest in his coffin isn't terrifying. It's the dead man on his feet, staring at you through the half-light of a dim room that makes your hair stand on end."

"There won't be any dead men walking on the Baumann farm," the younger man asserted skeptically. "So I shall have nothing to fear."

"There is the Destruction Which Walketh at noonday," suggested the priest softly.

Mason met the old eyes squarely. "As long as it is noonday, I can see it and keep out of its way. And as the full moon is due in two days, even the nights will be bright for a while yet." He laughed again, his easy, confident laugh.

"The light of the full moon does not bring security, my son. It has its own peculiar perils," murmured Father Paul, oddly.

"All this mysterious chatter gets us nowhere," snapped Earl Baker, his nerves obviously at the breaking-point.

"Buck up, Earl. I'll go there tomorrow morning. And I'm a go-getter, you know. We'll have your sweetheart back, or know the reason why."

"Knowing the reason why might not be a consolation, my son," murmured an ironical voice, as Father Paul tugged down the vest that immediately wrinkled back on his plump body.

"I've an idea, Mason," offered Earl Baker, eagerly. "Suppose you go down and can't get word to us if you're detained? Why not pretend you're a violinist on vacation?"

"Can't play a note, old man," scoffed Mason. "And why?"

"That means nothing in this case. I'll give you my violin. They'll surely ask you to play. Then if they do, and won't let you come back, pretend to be temperamental and tell them you've got my violin by mistake, and have them take it back for exchange."

"Sorry, but I don't see——"

"Can't you give me a chance? If that violin is sent back here, instead of your coming yourself, we'll understand that you're being detained."

"I get you. In the nature of an SOS?"

"Exactly."

"Not so bad, Earl," commended Hardy.

Father Paul turned, where he stood in the doorway on his way out.

"Your friend is loaning you his violin, Mr. Hardy. I'm going to give you something, too. Something that ought to be useful, and you can have it for your own all your life." His voice was dark with import. "Don't forget that Evil can not utterly triumph as long as there is the slightest desire or effort to hold on to Good."

His heavy tread went down the hallway like the portentous footfall of Fate.

3. *"For God's sake, get away from here while you can!"*

His hiking knapsack strapped on his back, and Earl's violin-case in his hand, Mason got through the boundary fence that separated the Baumann farm from the state highway, disregarding the many large warnings against trespass that were nailed every few yards. Mason did not wish to let his presence be known until late afternoon, for when the shadows lengthened a lost hiker might be expected to ask some direction to town, or even a night's shelter. Moreover, he was in hopes that Selene Arkwright might, by some happy chance, stroll in the woods, in which case he could have a few words with her alone.

His wrist-watch said it was a little after one o'clock. He had plenty of time to follow up trails in the Baumann woods, and with this in mind, and a keen gratefulness for the thick shade of the sheltering trees (the July sun was unbearably hot), he took a slightly worn path that he figured would lead him into the center of the woods. By half-past two he had succumbed to the stifling humidity of the super-heated air and was looking about for a favorable spot under a tree, where he could safely take a siesta.

From time to time the pathway led past great granite ledges, and all at once an agreeable sight met the wayfarer's eyes. One of these ledges had been quarried out deeply; almost the entire center had been cut away, leaving a deep hollow some twenty feet across. In this great artificial bath of granite sparkled, as if with some innate life of its own, such clear and glittering water as Hardy had rarely seen. Usually forest pools are dank, stagnant, full of decaying unpleasant-

nesses. But this water attracted by its appearance of inviting coolness; the sparkling ripples almost called their message of refreshment. What Hardy did not notice was that there was not a breath of a breeze to stir the surface of that ever-in-motion pool. . . .

To a man melting in July heat, the temptation was insuperable. Hardy made a quick survey of the near-by woods, finding no opening in the infrequently used trail that might point out a possibility of embarrassing interruption. Promptly the knapsack tumbled at the foot of a tree, and near it the violin-case was laid. The khaki outing shirt flew over Mason's head and he sat down on the mossy ground to remove his shoes. Busied with the laces, he did not notice the approach of a man who stopped directly in front of him, until the newcomer spoke in a sharply incisive tone, with significant tenseness.

"Stop!" said this man, and with one foot pushed away Mason's busy fingers that were engaged in untying shoe-laces.

Young Hardy jerked his head upward with a startled exclamation, then got quickly to his feet, eyeing the newcomer curiously.

"You're trespassing. Didn't you see the signs?" asked the man, with a gesture toward the very tree under which Mason had laid the violin and knapsack. As he spoke, his eyes shot agitated glances over his shoulder, in what Mason surmised might be the direction of the Baumann farmhouse.

"What's your trouble?" countered Mason lightly. "This place yours?"

The other man jerked an impatient head. "Never mind whose place it is. What I'm telling you is to get off it as quickly as you can make it, if you value your life and your sanity!"

"I think you must be Harry Epstein," observed Mason acutely.

The dark, Hebraic face scowled. "How did you know?"

"Father Paul."

"Hmm. Well, I'm Epstein. What of it? Listen, whoever you may be. Get away from here while the going's good. Understand? And thank your God——"

He broke off abruptly, as a sharp whistle cut the air imperatively. Then he added hastily, in a half-whisper: "I mustn't be seen talking to you. But for God's sake, get away from here while you can."

With that he sped up the forest trail and disappeared.

MASON HARDY deliberated for a moment. He looked at his outing shirt and one shoe lying on the moss. Then he laughed shortly, got off the other shoe, and in a moment had stripped and was ready for his attractive plunge into the inviting forest pool.

The quarrymen had cut the rock on that side into the semblance of a rude flight of wide high steps. He descended until only his head could have been glimpsed from the woodland trail. As he dipped one foot into the water, which was delightfully, exhilaratingly cool, his eyes fell upon his wrist-watch, which he had forgotten to remove. He sprang up the steps, leaving a damp trail on the granite under the foot that had tested the water's temperature. Suddenly he stood stock-still, fumbling at the strap of the watch.

Sitting cross-legged on the ground like some ugly Eastern god was a man who must have been extraordinarily tall when he stood upright, for there seemed to be an abnormal length of limb tucked under him. Earl Baker's violin-case lay open on his lap and he was in the act of picking at the strings with his long, wiry fingers, just as Mason came up out of the pool. The impudence of the newcomer struck

Mason momentarily dumb, but in a moment he had recovered his usual poise.

"Hey! What do you think you're doing, my man? Put that violin down!" His wet foot tracking moist blots on the granite, Mason neared the man, who lifted his face sufficiently to inspect that damp trail with a kind of sneering satisfaction.

"I really don't understand why you should object to my looking at property that belongs to you," said he pointedly, leisurely closing the violin-case and putting it down with composure. "You seem to have been making use of other people's property yourself."

Mason stopped short as the speaker rose, attaining his full height, that of a man of unusually gaunt and meager proportions for what must have been six feet four inches. One look at that dark and saturnine face was sufficient to apprise the adventurer that he was encountering Lem Schwartz; for only to Lem could have belonged those piercing black eyes that lowered evilly under bushy, overhanging eyebrows that met in a straight line over the hooked nose; only Lem could have smiled with such a wide spread of snarling, thin lips that the impression between them of those sharp and glistening white teeth was as of a fierce and implacable wild beast, restrained momentarily, but momentarily only.

"Sorry," deprecated Mason, somewhat abashed at this inapropos meeting with Lem Schwartz, which was not at all of his planning. "But the heat was so oppressive and the pool so inviting——"

Lem Schwartz bent his terrible smile upon the granite, from which the July heat had already begun to evaporate the younger man's moist trail. He permitted a gurgling laugh to escape him, a laugh that subtly conveyed malevolence.

"Swimming in this pool is trespassing, my fine young man. You'll have to go

along with me to see what the owner thinks about it."

Taken at a disadvantage, although getting into the Baumann house on one excuse or another had been his primary intention, the trespasser did not speak for a moment, and Schwartz misunderstood his silence, for he leaned down and picked up violin-case and knapsack with a conclusive air.

"If you don't choose to dress, come along as you are," invited he with an ugly grin. "But it's just possible you may prefer to dress. There's a nice young lady up at the farmhouse."

Mason bit his lip in the difficult attempt to keep his temper. He had not planned to make his appearance under escort like a captured criminal. However, there was nothing to do but appear to fall in with the saturnine Lem's scarcely concealed commands. Mason motioned angrily for the hired man to put down the violin and knapsack. He then dressed hurriedly and presently strapped the latter article to his shoulders, and would have picked up the violin as well, but—

"I'd better take charge of this, young stranger," murmured Lem, significantly. "Too hot to chase anybody through the woods today," he grunted. "Suppose you enjoyed your stolen swim?" he inquired suddenly, and again that snarling laugh rent his thin lips across gleaming teeth horribly.

FIGURING that his intentions, if not the actual facts, had made him a trespasser, Mason shrugged his shoulders in acquiescence and followed his guide down the trail until the woods opened into fine pasture land, across from which stood a great two-family stone farmhouse. It was built of granite undoubtedly taken from the quarry that now offered such delights to a swimmer. From the chimney on one side of the house clouds of heavy smoke

hung; the other half of the house had drawn shades and the chimney belched no sign of cooking preparations.

Sitting on a long, decrepit-looking bench on the rear porch was the round-shouldered form of a man who straightened his dejectedly hanging head as Lem and Mason approached. This was old Eli, Mason figured, and looked with secret interest upon that mysterious old farmer who was playing host to two such different individuals as Selene Arkwright and Harry Epstein. The old man was gray and wizened of countenance; straggling white hair hung in confusion on either side of his meek brown eyes that stared out under the shabby straw hat; his once-black trousers and vest were white at the seams and shiny green from long wear and exposure to weather.

"Brought you a fiddler this time," called Lem Schwartz loudly, as he approached. "Janie'll like that, won't she? You can't reproach me with forgetting my side of a bargain, Eli."

The old man staggered uncertainly to his feet, the meek brown eyes staring upon the youthful figure behind Lem. One hand lifted, waved them back; the other covered a trembling old mouth from which issued a pitiful, wailing cry which he seemed struggling to smother, his eyes shifting to Lem's hard face in what appeared mingled resentment and fear.

"No! No! No!" he exclaimed quaveringly. "I—I don't want any more people here. I—I haven't room for them. I—I can't afford any more."

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Baumann," Mason Hardy reassured the old man, "I have no intention of remaining. Just happened to be strolling in your woods, and took the liberty of stopping for a swim in your inviting pool, when your man—"

"Father in Heaven! The pool? You—you swam in the pool?"

Lem interrupted. "He had a nice cool swim, and I brought him here for safe-keeping until . . . day after tomorrow," he finished, in significant tone and with a sardonic grin. The old man's face went white. "Tomorrow night is the full of the moon, you know."

"Sorry I trespassed," Mason began to apologize. "If you will permit me to do so, I'll gladly pay whatever you feel I should, and then you can direct me on my way."

"No . . . you've got to stay . . . now," quavered the old man, brown eyes wide, mouth loose-lipped and trembling. "Sorry . . . but I can't let you go now . . . until . . . until——"

"Until after the full of the moon," finished Lem Schwartz, evil black eyes hard with ominous menace. "And then you may see fit to remain here, Mr. Fiddler, and play for Janie."

Lem might have received a sharp re-tort had not Mason's attention been diverted by the stirring of a woman's garments. At the open door appeared a girl of twenty-two or three, a girl whom he recognized from the photograph on Earl Baker's mantel, although the eyes that had been tranquil in the portrait were now wide and startled, the firm lips tremulous as if on the verge of crying out. . . . The plainly dressed, unbobbed black hair, the dark gray eyes, were those of Selene Arkwright.

As Lem spoke, she pressed both hands convulsively against her bosom. Her gray eyes turned with shrinking pain and horror upon the newcomer. When she spoke it was as if the words pressed out without her volition, from her overflowing soul.

"Oh, you poor, unhappy man! You have been in the quarry pool!"

Not seeing fit to make detailed explanations at that moment, in the presence of so many witnesses, Mason Hardy nodded.

"Harry!" called Selene, without turning.

A man appeared from the dim room behind her and stood looking over her shoulder. It was the man who had warned Mason back in the woods, and he was now looking at the newcomer with a kind of cold fury.

"Idiot!" he said accusingly. That one word, but it expressed volumes of emotion.

Lem looked from one man to the other, a sardonic smile distorting his dark visage. "You two have met before," he stated rather than asked. "Did you attempt to warn him, Mr. Epstein?" His mocking assumption of respectfulness could have deceived no one. "Rather unwise on your part, wasn't it? You should have welcomed him instead, for the larger the company grows, the more will dear Mr. Baumann feel his moral responsibility. . . ."

Old Eli, with a shrill cry of agony, pressed gnarled hands to his temples, brushing off the wide straw hat with an unheeding gesture of desperation.

"Devil! You devil!" he stammered wildly. "I won't! I won't do it! You shan't force me to do it! I'll put up a sign at the pool, to warn people——"

Lem silenced him with a wide, unpleasant smile that drew the thin lips tightly back against the pointed white teeth. He did not speak a single word, but old Eli's hands dropped to his sides, and the old man turned abruptly around, pushed precipitately past Selene Arkwright and disappeared into the house.

For a moment the hired man stood regarding the girl who clung, white-faced and trembling, to the door-frame. Then his glittering black eyes turned slowly until the whites gleamed at the corners, to rest with malicious satisfaction upon Harry Epstein's furrowed brow. Last of all, those hard orbs, shining with reptilian

coldness, shifted to Mason Hardy's wary, puzzled countenance.

"I leave our fiddling friend in your custody, Mr. Epstein, until after the full of the moon," said he, and a horrid chuckling choked him into further silent merriment.

4. *"Tonight, watch from your window. . ."*

HARRY EPSTEIN, watching Lem's departure, lifted one clenched fist and shook it with impotent menace at the gaunt man's back, muttering something of dark malediction under his breath.

Selene touched his arm nervously. "Don't, please, Harry. Aren't things bad enough as they are, without swearing?"

The young Jew turned sullenly but with gentle deference, and went into the room, beckoning Mason to follow.

"For tonight the old man will probably give you a room this side of the house," opined Harry Epstein, as they went inside.

At these apparently innocent words, Selene gave a soft little exclamation of distress. Her eyes and the young Jew's met, held, then turned away in embarrassment, avoiding Mason's puzzled gaze. Mason made a wild guess.

"Until after the full of the moon?" he murmured, ironically, and his keen blue eyes flashed from Selene's face to Harry's, for the two had swayed together as if by common impulse and were regarding him with a kind of incredulity.

"Then you *know*?" the music-peddler accused resentfully. "You came here on purpose. I didn't have to warn you against the pool. Why did you go into it, then?" sharply.

Mason hesitated. However much he might distrust the other man, a complete stranger, yet Harry had tried to warn him against something once that afternoon,

and it was evident that Selene trusted the young Jew.

"Earl sent me," said Mason, finally, to Selene.

"You came from him?" she whispered. "You dared come to this accursed place, risking so much, for Earl's sake?" Tears stood in her fine eyes, and she had to choke back the sob that rose in her throat. "I recognized you almost at once, Mason Hardy, from Earl's old class photograph."

"Say, Harry, if you knew all about the affair, why the dickens did you make a bee-line for the pool and jump into it? Especially after I'd warned you to keep out?"

Mason laughed, his easy laugh. "You may think you told me something, but you didn't get that far. Besides, I wasn't really in the pool at all. I just stepped in and out again, when *he* appeared." He jerked his head in the direction Lem had gone, to designate the object of his remark.

Selene's gray eyes lifted. "You didn't immerse yourself in the pool?" she whispered, with an eagerness oddly anxious for such a simple query.

"Just tried the temperature with one foot, and then found I'd forgotten to take off my wrist-watch. So I went out, and there was that chap Lem sitting with my violin. . . . He's no regular hired man, Epstein; the language he employs—"

"Whatever he is, Mr. Violinist, he's got the drop on all of us here," jerked out Harry unwillingly. "Selene and I—" he hesitated, with a quick glance at the girl.

"Go on, Harry," she directed him. "We can not consider conventions under these conditions of stress," she explained to Mason.

"I was just going to say that Mason, here, will naturally eat with old Baumann tonight. But tomorrow night," pointedly, "he will probably be with us."

"Hmmm. After the full of the moon," commented Mason dryly, and was once again astonished at the girl's little choked outcry.

"What do you know? How much do you know? Why do you keep on repeating that?"

"My dear Selene, I don't know a thing," confessed Mason. "But all I've heard since I came here has seemed to hinge upon the full of the moon. Can you tell me why, yourself?"

Selene exhaled slowly. "I thought perhaps you knew about things here, and could help us to get away," she whispered, her eyes turned to an inner door, through which old Eli could now be seen, pattering over a cooking-stove.

"If you want to leave here," declared Mason, smiling, "say the word. It is just a matter of leaving, as I see it."

She shook her head with a hopeless air.

"Impossible. You don't understand the real situation. It's not just a matter of walking away. It's far more complicated than that. Listen, Mason. . . ." She lowered her voice to a cautious undertone. "We must remain here until we learn just what old Mr. Baumann has to do to save us from Lem's clutches. Oh, I daren't tell you more, but tonight . . . *watch from your window,*" she whispered fearfully.

"Selene!" Harry's voice was sharp. He laid one finger against his lips warningly.

"But Mason is Earl's friend," she murmured tensely. "I owe him some explanation, don't I, after he's risked coming here to help us? And perhaps, after tomorrow night," she faltered, "he'll be condemned to stay here, too."

The young Jew turned to Mason, his face strained with anxiety.

"If only you hadn't stepped into the pool!" he deprecated. "But perhaps it won't mean so much; you weren't fully

immersed. I hope it'll turn out that way, because then you'll be free to go back and tell Father Paul whatever you've seen down here. He's a wise old bird. If *he* can't help us, we're sure done for," finished the music peddler in his low, guarded voice.

"But how did Selene get into the pool?" curiously inquired Mason, glancing cautiously toward the inner door.

The girl herself replied. "Janie asked me to bring her some wild columbine blossoms from the woods. Lem offered to show me where they were, and when we were on the verge of the pool, he pushed me into the water." She shuddered, her gray eyes closing for a moment as if to shut out the very memory of the scene.

"Completely immersed. Get me? Same here," Epstein said.

"But Harry jumped in to save me," Selene murmured quickly, with a grateful glance at the young Jew.

"Any decent man would have done the same. That wasn't anything, Selene."

"What Earl owes you, he can never repay," the girl replied, controlling her trembling voice with difficulty.

"Nonsense! Sh-sh-sh! Here comes Eli."

"SUPPER is ready for the violinist," said the old man from just without the door. "It's—it's getting dark," he added, in a tense tone with a shade of something fearful in his implication.

Selene sighed audibly. "Come, Harry. It's time for us to go. Don't ask questions, Mason, please." She stepped close to him and put her lips against his ear. "Don't let them know you weren't completely immersed in the pool," she breathed warningly, and left him, to follow Harry across the next room to a door that communicated with the apparently untenanted side of the house,

As she approached, this door swung open. Selene stopped short, so that Harry narrowly escaped collision with her shrinking form. Mason Hardy, straining to see beyond the two into the darkness of the room beyond, became aware of two redly glittering points that seemed to reflect the pale light of the kerosene lamp upon the kitchen supper table. Like eyes were those points; evil eyes, that gloated vindictively.

"It's getting dark," said old Eli, again. He seemed to be shrinking in abject horror from that opening door. "The sun has set. Go! Why are you standing here? Go! Go!"

His voice, his words, pushed against the reluctant two. Selene Arkwright did not hesitate then, but moved resignedly into the enveloping darkness of that other room. Behind her trod Harry Epstein. The door closed upon them. Old Eli, in a kind of relief mingled with apprehension, sprang across the room with astonishing agility for so old a man, and turned the key in the lock hastily, trying the door with care to be sure it was securely fastened. Then he turned to his sole remaining guest.

"Vegetable soup," he offered prosaically. "Hope you like it. . . . Janie!" His voice raised slightly as he went to the foot of the staircase. "Is the soup all right?"

From the upper floor a girlish voice floated down gayly.

"Awful good, gramper. Got some more crackers for Janie, gramper?"

"Find a seat, mister, and help yourself. . . . Gramper's coming, Janie."

Two places had been set at the supper table. There was some kind of dark-colored jam, a hunk of cheese, a pot of passable tea, as Mason discovered, pouring himself a steaming cupful; plenty of rye bread, and the vegetable soup as a

main dish. The soup was good, as Janie had said. Mason made a fairly good meal, in silence.

Old Eli ate little except his plateful of soup. His conversation (if it could be called such) was monosyllabic, elicited by questions directed at him in such a way that he could hardly have avoided a reply without discourtesy.

That the child upstairs was listening eagerly to every word became apparent when she occasionally called down to the men, and finally asked Mason if he wouldn't play for her. Supper being over and nothing ahead for the evening but bed, he could hardly refuse; so he opened the violin-case and took out the instrument with awkward and amateurish care, old Eli watching in uninterested dejection.

"This isn't my violin!" exclaimed Hardy, with as much excitement as he could manage to muster. "I've left my Strad at my friend's house and taken his violin by mistake!"

"That shouldn't keep you from playing," said old Eli, with a suspicious look from under his meek brows.

Mason shrugged his shoulders in as nearly a temperamental manner as he could achieve. "What? Use a common violin? *Never!*" cried he tragically, choking back his impulse to laughter.

Old Eli narrowly watched the restoration of the violin to its case. "I'll have Lem take it back tomorrow and get yours," he offered slowly.

"Oh, please do, gramper! Mr. Fiddler, I want *so* to hear you play!"

All at once Mason straightened up from the violin-case and stood in a listening attitude. "What's that?" he asked brusquely.

"The—the dogs," replied old Eli, in patent uneasiness. "Time you went to your room, mister. That way," and he in-

icated the stairs leading to the upper floor.

"Dogs?" echoed Mason, brow furrowed. "I haven't seen any on the place, so far."

Old Eli avoided the keen blue orbs of the younger man, as if he feared lest some secret be surprized in his own brown eyes that now sought the floor. The noises in the next house increased, so that they could be heard plainly: snarling, growls, snapping of teeth.

"Some dogs!" commented Hardy, as he turned reluctantly to go upstairs.

5. *"Little piles of gnawed white bones. . ."*

THE room to which Mason had been assigned was separated only by a thin painted-board partition from the hall and the next room, which was Janie's. Mason could hear every word of the old man and the child, as Eli gathered up Janie's tray. Also, in spite of the fact that the wall between this little whitewashed room and the next house was of heavy granite, the young man continued to hear that heavy scratching, whining, snarling. Dogs? So old Eli had said.

He unpacked his knapsack, stopping occasionally to listen to that scratching and clicking as of heavily nailed beasts scampering about. The snarling, and then a pitiful whining, began to set his nerves on edge. If Eli kept dogs, he evidently kept them loose in the house next door, the house into which an hour past Mason had seen Selene and Harry disappearing. He wondered how the girl could sleep through those noises, and no longer wondered at her sleep-heavy eyes.

He exchanged his hiking-shoes for rubber-soled sneakers and laid out his automatic pistol and an electric flashlight. Then he drew a chair to the window and settled down listening, occasionally lean-

ing out over the unscreened sill to gaze upon the moonlight-flooded beauty of the night.

The murmuring of voices from Janie's room had ceased. Silence reigned oppressively. Once he thought he heard the tip-toeing of some one across the hall to his door. He would have spoken, but flashing intuition bade him remain silent. Let old Eli think him asleep.

The combined heat, and an overpowering drowsiness that made him speculate sleepily if anything could have been put into his food, had about put him off guard, when the creaking of rusty hinges came faintly to him from below. He was wide awake in an instant, and bolt upright, listening intently. Then he leaned recklessly over the sill, and found he could see a door on the other side of the house, a door opening into the back yard from which one could step in a few paces directly into the woods. The door was opening slowly upon the yawning darkness of the other house's interior.

From that opening a long, gaunt gray beast slunk, keeping in the shadow of the house as if to escape observation. As it went, belly to the grass, stretching itself across the green in long strides, its head turned upward toward the watcher's window. A double row of terrible teeth flashed as it emerged from the shadow, and two fiery eyes glinted redly in the moonlight as if they reflected a fire.

"Dog?" the young man asked himself in astonishment. "Never! That is a huge wolf!"

His head whirled with impossible surmises. He sat back out of the moonlight's spreading radiance and thought hard and fast. He had seen a girl and a man going into that other house, and he inferred that the saturnine hired man also slept on that side of the building. Now he had watched a great gray wolf creep stealthily out, to

disappear into the near-by woods. A low whine from without. . . . He peered cautiously across the sill. Two other beasts sprang, bounding over the patch of grass, and streaked into the woods.

Mason picked up his automatic and tucked it into a hip pocket. He took up the electric torch, unbolted his door and tried it. To his relief it opened quietly. He closed it cautiously and tiptoed to a door at the head of the stairs, which he had noticed when he had come up to bed. It led to the adjoining house. It was provided with a huge bolt in addition to the key that stood in its lock. Although the possibilities in what he might be walking into made the hair prickle on his scalp, he unfastened that door and went into the darkness, drawing it closed behind him.

For a moment he stood motionless, listening, hardly daring to draw a full breath. In the gloom and strange chill of that other house reigned a stillness oppressive, ominous. He drew out the automatic and from his left hand the space about him flooded with light.

He stood in an upper hallway similar to old Eli's half of the house. Giving upon it were three wide-open doors. Hesitating at his presumption (for he had every logical reason to believe that Selene and Harry were occupying two of these rooms and Lem the third), he stepped to the open doorway of one room after another, cautiously illuminating each as he did so. Astonishing . . . chilling . . . emptiness alone met his gaze.

At the threshold of the last room he paused, his straight nose wrinkling distastefully. The odor that came from it was fetid, as if some forest creature had been denning there for weeks with windows never opened to air it. This room had no dresser, no chairs; nothing but a ragged mattress on the floor, upon which was heaped a tumbled mass of soiled—

unspeakably soiled—blankets and bedding, at sight of which Hardy turned away feeling sickish, so disgusting was the incredible mess.

As he started down the stairs, a long-drawn-out ululation struck his eardrums with the hammering pulsation of something more than sound; carrying, as it were, a psychic message of terrible import. A duet of answering howls followed. Cold shivers raced up and down the young man's spinal column, although he realized fully that the sounds came from the distant woods. It was the full cry of a wolf-pack in sight of its prey! And the rooms that should have been occupied by Selene, and Harry, and that mysterious and terrible being known as Lem Schwartz, were . . . empty. . . .

AS MASON, shuddering at his own imaginings, moved down the stairs toward what should be the kitchen of the house, he sensed the odor of decomposing animal matter. The stench of wild beasts' bodies in a closed, unaired place grew overpowering, sickening. It was even worse than Lem's room upstairs, and, at thought of that Mason felt his stomach heave with ghastly threats of nausea. Step by step, he moved down the staircase, the torch turned off so as not to apprise any one below, if indeed anybody waited in ambush there, of his coming. But upon reaching the lower step, he flashed the light quickly about.

The kitchen was empty, but the door from it into the back room was open, and Egyptian darkness gloomed ahead. He sprang across the kitchen, automatic in readiness, and illuminated the parlor. It, also, was empty. Empty? . . . As he looked about, his nostrils contracted disgustedly against the fetid smell of decay, and his eyes went roving in search of the cause,

The floor was of bare boards; there were no chairs or other furniture in either of the two rooms. But here and there on the bare boards were—things—that Mason turned the light on, shuddering as he looked. There were black stains here and there . . . There were bits of decaying furry skin. . . . And there were little piles of gnawed white bones. . . . And almost at his feet as he stood lay a crumpled bit of material . . . He leaned down and turned it over. Good God! There had been the taxi-driver's missing child . . . and that material was . . . a child's stained, torn little rompers. . . .

Mason groaned aloud involuntarily. Then he became keenly aware of what the pervading odor conveyed. It was the unforgettable stench of wild beast kennels in the public zoos. It was unbearable, sickening, disgusting. Nausea got the better of him. He went back through the kitchen, avoiding with inward shrinking those dark stains on the wide boards, and leaped up the staircase with the disagreeable feeling that some one behind him would presently lay a chilling hand on his shoulder, or pull at his ankles. Just as he opened the communicating door, he caught the sound of padding feet and clicking nails upon the flagstone terrace outside the back of the house.

Hastily he locked and bolted the door and then fastened himself into his own room. He sprang across it to the window. Yes, the wolf-pack was returning from the chase with its quarry. A huge ground-hog hung limply from the extended drooling jaws of a gaunt gray wolf, and the brown beast had a small rabbit between its glistening white teeth. Behind those two shrank a glossy little black wolf, which all at once stood still, and lifted its head toward Mason's window.

The young man's gaze met those lambent eyes, a curious stirring of surging

pity in his heart. The black wolf stood for a moment only; then it slunk into the other house, tail dragging as if in shame. Mason received a distinct impression of the animal's humiliation.

The door of the other house was still open. Drifting up to his window came sounds of snarling, tearing, crunching, whining. He listened, nervous chills sending their shuddering impulses through him. The three wolves were devouring their prey. But where, then, were Selene, Harry and the mysterious, saturnine Lem . . . while those three wolves held high carnival over their prey?

Not until dawn had touched the tree tops with pale, prophetic fingers, did Mason Hardy sink back onto his bed into troubled sleep, and throughout the dreams that haunted him there stood always three empty rooms that should have been humanly tenanted.

6. *"That fast retreating form owned no following shadow. . . ."*

FROM his uneasy slumbers Mason was awakened by scratching and thumping at his door-panels. For a moment he stood half dazed, where he had sprung from bed still haunted by the nightmares of the preceding night. His impression was that some savage beast had leaped against his door from without.

"Who's there?" he demanded sharply, his nerves on edge.

"Schwartz," replied a harsh voice.

"What d'you want?"

"Your friend Baker says he'll bring your own violin tomorrow. He wanted to come today, but I put him off. Tonight's the full of the moon, fiddler." A snarling laugh, and Lem's retreating footsteps, as light as if he walked upon padded paws. . . .

Through the partition Janie's voice: "Please, Mr. Fiddler, come in before you

go downstairs. I've never seen a truly violin-player. Gramper says you must play in regular concerts. I'm just crazy to hear you, Mr. Fiddler."

Mason's curiosity to see this strange child who Father Paul had believed held the key to the mystery at the Baumann place urged him to dress hastily. He donned a light outing shirt and a tweed jacket that covered the bulge on his hip occasioned by the automatic, which he decided he would not leave in the room to be appropriated either by old Eli or the saturnine Lem.

As he opened his door, old Baumann was coming up with a tray. At sight of Mason, the ancient drew back with a curious intaking of breath and an avoidance of the younger man's gaze.

"This is Janie's breakfast," he said hastily.

Mason laughed. "I had no idea you would bring my breakfast to me," he said shortly. "I can go down for it myself, and I'm hungry, I can tell you. Your vegetable soup was good, but it doesn't seem to stick to a fellow's ribs very much, Mr. Baumann."

"You'll have to see Lem about your breakfast," hastily said old Eli, still avoiding his guest's eyes.

"See Lem? What for?"

"You're not supposed to eat today," stated the old farmer briefly and strangely, after a long pause.

"I presume for the usual reason," was Mason's sarcastic observation. "The full of the moon tonight?"

Eli Baumann involuntarily went backward down two steps and leaned against the wall, staring. The tray shook in his trembling old hands.

"Who and what are you?" he whispered, meek brown eyes wide with awful apprehension.

"Is that anything to you?" asked the

young man coolly, following up his seeming advantage.

"Why did you come here? Oh, God of Heaven, what have I done? What will become of my little Janie?"

The tray would have gone crashing down the stairs had not Mason sprung forward to save it. Old Eli pushed him off with frantic hands, gnarled by toil, and curled now into the semblance of claws. Mason looked speculatively at him for a long moment, then turned and carried the tray to Janie's door. At his tap she called for him to enter.

"What's the matter with gramper?" was the first thing the little girl asked, as Mason set the tray into the semblance of the bed, and bent his keen blue eyes upon the child sitting there against plumped-up pillows.

"Nothing, Janie. He's just nervous," shrugged Hardy, surveying with appreciation the pretty picture the child made.

Light brown curls hung over her shoulders, lying on the gay patchwork quilt like some French doll's marvellous locks. Her brown eyes, green-glinted, appraised the visitor, canny to a degree that Mason had not expected from Father Paul's hesitating, half-derogatory description. This child was no dolt; shy or reserved she might be, but not stupid.

Warm color flowed over Janie's pale cheeks at the admiration that her visitor permitted to appear on his face, in his pleasure at the little girl's fragile beauty. She blossomed under it like a sun-kissed rosebud.

"I like you, Mr. Fiddler," she said with naïve frankness. "You have kind eyes," she finished, contemplatively.

"Now, I call that nice of you," smiled Mason, and gave his easy laugh.

Janie dimpled. "I wish I could walk around the way everybody else does," she said all at once, tearing into little bits a

piece of toast and pushing the scraps about her plate with one finger.

"Can't you walk, Janie?" Mason asked pityingly.

She shook her head. "I fell on the rocks out in the woods a year ago. I was running after a rabbit that had gotten out of its hutch. But gramper thinks maybe some day I can walk again. He rubs my feet and legs every morning and every night, so they won't wither up. The doctor told him to."

She lifted a scrap of toast, pushed it between even little teeth, and munched slowly. "I'd love to give you some of my breakfast, but if he found it out, Lem would be furious, and he *does* make such scenes. Miss Selene and Mr. Harry don't eat with us any more; they eat with Lem, on the other side of the house. I suppose you will, too. Lem says it won't cost gramper a cent to feed anybody who stays here to teach me things."

Cold shivers were running up and down Mason's backbone.

"Gramper was worried at first. He kept telling Lem he couldn't afford a lot of people here, eating and eating. Our farm isn't so very big, and gramper is old and can't do much with it. Lem said gramper was just to leave it to him. Lem's awful smart, but I just don't like him, myself."

Janie paused, then added in a lower tone: "Sometimes I wish gramper'd send him away, only gramper says he can't afford to," and she sighed. "He says if he sent Lem away, I couldn't have Miss Selene to show me how to weave paper mats, nor Mr. Harry to play his piano and sing his funny songs to me."

MASON was listening with more than ordinary interest to the little girl's outspoken thoughts. Somewhere here he hoped to find a clue to the mystery that hung thickly about everything on the

Baumann farm. Apart from that mystery, Janie was refreshingly naïve, and perhaps the most untouched and natural human being in that house of weird happenings.

"Mr. Harry is funny, isn't he? But he's very nice to me. Sometimes he pats my head as if I were a ve-e-ry little girl," she smiled mischievously, "and pulls one of my curls. Mr. Fiddler!" She leaned toward him and whispered: "It's a secret, mind, but when I grow up, I'm going to marry him. He doesn't know yet," she dimpled, an impish look flashing across her face. "Gramper says Mr. Harry is a natural-born farmer. Gramper thinks Mr. Harry ought to buy a farm instead of going around singing his funny songs. Hark! What's that?"

The agitated steps of a man who tramps carelessly because he is not thinking how or where he treads. . . . The loud voice of a man who has gotten past caring whether or not his words are diplomatic or his intonation ingratiating. . . .

"Baumann! Where are you? Oh, skulking behind the curtain! Just what might be expected of the dirty old sneak you are! Come out! Come out, I tell you!"

A squeak, as of a cornered rat. Scuffling of feet. Sharp sound of a chair striking the board floor as it is overturned. Dull thud of some heavy body pushed hard against the partition, and then Harry Epstein's voice, loud and furious.

"You let that poor girl come under Lem's curse, and never lifted a finger, when you could have taken it off in a moment, you dirty Dutch dog! Yes, Lem told me. . . . I don't care about myself, but you're going right now to the quarry, pool, and I'm going with you to see that you go in, by the eternal God!"

The low, penetrating whine of old

Eli. . . . "Let me go! I tell you, it won't do you any good to drag me down there. It wouldn't be of my own free will. It has to be my own free will. . . . Stop—stop—you're—choking—me."

Janie, the faint color gone from her cheeks, stiffened and made a convulsive movement as if she would have tried to get to the floor and onto her feet. She fell back and began to sob softly.

"I can't! Oh, I can't! Mr. Fiddler, please help gramper! Mr. Harry mustn't talk that way to poor gramper!"

Hardy went down the stairs two steps at a time, arriving in the kitchen to see Harry's hands loosening their grip on the old man's wizened throat; Harry's horrified eyes staring at that ashen visage.

"What have you done, you idiot?"

"Killed him!" gasped Harry, and leaned horrified over the limp body that had slipped supinely to the floor and now lay motionless.

"Indeed?" asked a voice, smoothly, silkily, amusedly. "How very careless of you!"

Mason looked up. Without interrupting the long shaft of sunlight that fell through the open door, stood Lem Schwartz, his glistening teeth bared in a snarling smile so venomously vindictive, so maliciously triumphant, that Mason could not help the low exclamation of horror and repulsion that forced itself to his stiff lips.

Lem seemed trying, vainly, to bring his cruel mouth into a less triumphant expression, but at last he broke into a low, snarling chuckle, stretching his head forward until the lean long neck poked out like a vulture's over its prey.

"Don't flatter yourself, Lem. It's too early in the game," snapped Hardy sharply. "The old man's very much alive. . . .

Harry, lift his feet and I'll get hold of his shoulders. So. . . . We'll get him up onto his bed."

Lem wheeled and strode away from the doorway. Mason, with a backward glance over his shoulder, gave a low, incredulous whistle. He realized now that Lem had stood in the pathway of the sunshine but a moment since and had thrown no shadow. And now, although the July day was blazingly bright, and long shadows stretched from barn and fences and trees, the fast-retreating form of Lem Schwartz owned no following shadow. . . .

THERE was no time to ponder over this, for old Eli had to be gotten up the stairs, and his heavy form, inert as it was, proved no easy burden for the two men. As it was near her door, the little girl called frantically: "Bring him in here! Please, Mr. Harry. Put him on my bed. Oh, gramper, gramper!"

Harry's face had not yet lost its ghastly pallor from the shock he had received in that moment when he had thought himself a murderer. As the blood flowed back into Eli's wrinkled face, and Eli's withered eyelids twitched with returning consciousness, the young Hebrew turned his dark, melancholy eyes upon the muscular hands that had so nearly committed a crime at the behest of his aroused anger.

"God of Israel, I thank Thee!" he breathed softly, his eyes closed for the moment of his involuntary prayer.

"Leave gramper with me," snorted Janie. "He's all right now, and I've got a lot to say to him. He's been getting into mischief, with me tied up here," said the little girl quaintly, "not able to keep an eye on him."

Smiling now, the two young men left old Baumann to his granddaughter's gentle ministrations, and went down into the

kitchen, Janie's cooing voice drifted after them softly.

"I'm hungry," announced Hardy, looking about him to see if there had been any breakfast preparations.

Harry looked troubled and flung a quick glance in the direction of the barn.

"Where are things?" Hardy continued.

Hesitating for a moment, Harry Epstein finally opened a cupboard and with obvious reluctance fished out a loaf of bread and the remains of the supper cheese. He found milk, sugar and cold coffee. Then he sat down opposite Mason and watched the other man start in with hearty appetite.

"I'd give a whole lot if I could eat those things the way you do," Harry burst out all at once with strange wistfulness.

Mason stared, frankly curious.

"And you mustn't tell any one that I gave you food this morning," went on the peddler, nervously. "Lem would——"

As if the mention of his name had been a conjuration, the gaunt form of the hired man strode in at the kitchen door. He strode across the room and snatched the half-eaten cheese sandwich out of Mason's fingers, flinging it from the doorway, where it was immediately seized upon by a pleased hen with loud cackles of surprize and appreciation.

"Tonight is the full of the moon!"

"But I'm hungry," objected Mason, resentfully.

The glass of coffee went into the sink with a crash. Dark and threatening was the mien Lem Schwartz turned upon the indignant young man.

"Save your appetite for tonight. For you shall eat . . . I promise you . . . such food as you have never tasted before.

But until tonight, nothing must pass your lips."

Hardy's first impulse was to pick up the plate from the oilcloth-covered table and fling it at the speaker's head. His next was the opportune recollection of his errand to that place of mystery. He stood watchful, silent, quiescent, regarding Lem with speculative blue eyes that nevertheless smoldered.

"You, Epstein, shall remember your stupidity and disobedience tonight," menaced Lem, with venomous emphasis and a long, hard look from his glittering black eyes. "Tonight you shall eat what you and that other foolish one refused to eat a few weeks ago. . . ."

Harry Epstein caught at the edge of the table with hands that showed white about the knuckles.

"No!" he choked. "God of my Fathers, no! Not that!" His eyes were on those of his tormenter, as if he pleaded with one who he knew beforehand was obdurate and relentless.

Lem snarled. His great nose wrinkled like an angry dog's.

"Quite that," said he with cool insolence. "And *she* shall eat of it, also, to punish *you* for your rebellion."

"Not that poor girl! Have pity! Do what you will with me, but spare Selene!" begged Harry, and flung out his hands in Oriental abandon as he pleaded.

Lem regarded him sneeringly. "Well," he conceded, "we'll see how well you keep your watch over this fiddler until after tonight. He must make his initiate fasting," he ordered, and then was gone from the doorway.

Harry Epstein staggered over to a chair, sank into it and buried his face in his hands. Behind that inadequate shelter he sobbed like a heart-broken and terrified child. His agony shook Mason Hardy with apprehension of he knew not what.

7. "That devil's baptism in the pool. . . ."

DRAGGING minutes passed. Mason arose and put one hand on the sobbing man's shoulder, until Harry had finally managed to control himself. The young peddler wiped his eyes shamefacedly.

"Sorry to have made such a fool of myself, but it's thinking of Selene and poor Janie that's upsetting me. That little kid'll be the next one dragged into this accursed business, I'm afraid."

Mason's lips set hard before he spoke. "I've lost all patience, Harry, waiting to find out what this is about. What's the hold that rotten bluffer out there has over you people? Why am I to go without food today?"

"You must be desperately hungry tonight," whispered Harry. "After tonight, if the curse has fallen upon you . . . you'll eat . . . what Lem and Selene and I have been eating," he muttered thickly.

"Absurd," grunted Hardy skeptically. "I'm going to make a fresh sandwich," he announced determinedly.

Harry caught at his sleeve, detaining him in a kind of desperation.

"If you eat a single mouthful while you're in my charge, Lem will know it somehow; don't ask me why; I sometimes think he's the devil in person. And if he finds out, he will force Selene to eat . . . God of Israel, it is too much! I can not tell you the horror of it!"

He collapsed again into a little moaning heap, his shoulders heaving convulsively. Mason caught at him and shook him with a disgusted vigor.

"Don't be a simpleton! You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink, Harry. Lem can't force Selene to eat what she doesn't relish."

"You don't understand," moaned Harry.

"Then help me to understand!"

"Impossible. You would never believe me if I told you."

Mason snorted impatiently. "What, for instance, is this food that is so highly repugnant to you that the bare thought of eating it sends you into near hysterics?"

"I tell you, I dare not tell you. The whole situation is incredible. Half the time I don't believe it, myself. It is like a terrible nightmare. But—haven't you seen how thin Selene is?"

Mason thought of the full-faced girl whom he had seen pictured in his friend's house. It was undeniable that Selene's face had become very thin. Why, when he considered it, she was almost hollow-cheeked. . . .

"She's not eating regular food, because of the curse of that hell-water in the woods," explained Harry incoherently. "Raw flesh . . . of animals we catch in the woods . . . at night . . . is all she can digest . . . now."

Mason was exasperated, and showed it.

"Do you take me for an absolute idiot, Epstein, expecting me to swallow such wretched insinuation entire?" Even as he spoke, doubts assailed him. He remembered the glossy little black wolf, which had looked up pitifully at his window the preceding night, as if it had expected to see him looking down upon it. "My God!" he exploded. "Am I mad? Or are you?"

"I wish I knew," Harry said wearily. "The horrible side of this situation is that Lem is trying to force Selene and me yet deeper into his devil's clutches by making us eat . . . oh, God!" He gulped, shuddering violently, and went silent, his eyes avoiding the other man's penetrating gaze.

Mason acceded grimly: "You hunt rabbits and ground-hogs at night in the woods, and eat their raw flesh? Ugh! We'll let that pass for the moment. What

I wish to learn is, why are you and Selene under the evil domination of such a creature as Lem Schwartz?"

"That's just what I can't tell you . . . now, Mason. You'll know all tonight," sighed Harry, "without being told. One thing only I ask you: If you have any real pity for Selene Arkwright, you will fast until tonight. If you let food pass your lips today, Lem Schwartz will force Selene to eat . . . that . . . which will damn her soul for ever," Harry Epstein declared with a terrible and ominous gravity. "After tonight you will be at liberty to do what you please, within limits," he added hastily.

"I don't like it at all," Mason conceded, his head on one side as he listened subconsciously to the murmur of voices from Janie's room. "I think I'll have a talk with Selene."

"Don't flatter yourself that she'll tell you more than I have," said the peddler sharply. "She's trying to make herself believe that she's the victim of bad dreams; nightmares of terrible and incredible vividness," he shuddered.

Lowering his voice cautiously, Mason inquired: "Where were you and Selene and Lem, last night?"

The young Jew paled as he stared back at the other man.

"You—you did look from the window, then, as she told you? What—what did you see?" he jerked out tensely.

"I saw three wolves returning from the chase, Epstein. And there was nobody in that other house, because I——"

"You dared go there?" groaned Harry. "Then . . . you know?"

"I know that I'm a victim of the same kind of nightmare you seem to be afflicted with," replied Mason grimly.

"Did you . . . did you find remains . . . of half-devoured——?"

Mason looked queerly at the young Jew's eager, pleading, yet anxious face.

"Don't you know, yourself?" he asked pointedly in reply.

"We never go downstairs there in daytime," Harry explained. "If we have to go to our rooms, we go through that upper door in the upper hall. And . . . and the odor," he cried out in a wild but guarded voice, "makes me afraid——"

"The other side of this house was empty last night," Mason pronounced with finality. "I don't know yet just what evil and incredibly horrible things are going on in this accursed spot, but downstairs I found," and his nostrils contracted with disgust, "decaying bits of furry skin and bloody, dried flesh, and half-gnawed bones of animals. . . ."

"Then it isn't a dream! It's true!" exclaimed the peddler, and jumped to his feet in such nervous agitation that Mason grasped his arms and shook him forcibly to constrain him into some semblance of self-control. "Then it's true! That damnable devil's baptism in the quarry pool——" his voice died away into silence, as his eyes darted this way and that to avoid Mason's keen glance.

"Go on, Epstein. Now I must know the rest," he ordered, grimly.

The peddler shook his head. His eyes were wild.

"Tonight is the full of the moon. If you have fallen under the curse, you'll know the worst tonight. If you haven't, you can leave here tomorrow, unless Lem manages to give you that devil's baptism of his, somehow."

MASON changed tactics abruptly. "From what you said to old Baumann a short time past, I infer that he knows how to remove the spell, or whatever it is that holds you here."

Harry nodded sullenly. "Yes, but he won't stir to remove it."

"Why not?"

"Would you, if you had to give up your life voluntarily, knowing that the devil would get your soul when you died?" was the astonishing reply.

Mason's stare was incredulous. "You people sure have been well hypnotized," he asserted.

Harry laughed hardly. "And how about you, who found three empty rooms, and saw three wolves returning from the chase with their prey?"

"Lem or old Eli must have put it over me, too," Mason admitted with reluctance. "But from now on I shall be on my guard, to maintain mental and spiritual supremacy." Despite his attempt to make his voice and words assured, there was no convincing quality there, and he knew it.

Janie's voice broke the ensuing silence. "Gramper, is what Mr. Harry says true?"

"Janie! Janie! I did it for you! Don't ask me more!" moaned the broken voice of old Eli.

"Can you un-hypnotize them, by jumping into the quarry pool?" demanded the little girl's voice, with sharp persistence. "Is Miss Selene staying here because she's hypnotized and not because she loves to teach me things?" Her voice, in turn, broke pitifully.

"Janie! Janie!" The old man's cry was monotonously the same.

"Lem Schwartz is mixed up in this, isn't he, gramper? That's why you're so afraid of him," declared the child with a flash of that uncanny insight which Father Paul had divined. "And if you went into the quarry pool, Miss Selene could go away? Oh, I want her to stay!" suddenly sobbed Janie childishly. "She's so sweet to me. I just love Miss Selene."

"Janie! Don't cry, gramper's little

girl! Miss Selene shan't go, while you want her here. Lem promised me that, when I gave him my word——" he broke off abruptly.

"When you promised him what, gramper?" demanded the little girl, cleverly seizing upon those pregnant words. "What did you promise him? You'd better tell me. I'll find out anyway, if you don't. I'll ask Lem myself," she threatened.

"Oh, no, Janie! You mustn't ask Lem anything," wailed old Eli in abject terror. "He's not fit to be near you."

"Why not, gramper? We don't need him around here, anyway. I'm going to ask Harry to be our hired man," Janie announced with serenity. "He'd be lots better than that scowling old Lem. So you can send Lem to me, and I'll tell him he can go."

"He won't go, Janie. He . . . don't you see, I can't tell him to go? I've promised him he can stay, until——" and here the old man's voice broke off in a wild and moaning incoherent outburst, which he evidently tried to smother among Janie's quilts.

The child's uncanny intuition played her true. "You've told him he can stay until you bathe in the pool, haven't you, gramper? Well, then, it seems to me you'll have to do it."

"God in heaven! Janie, no! You don't understand what that would mean. Lem would take my soul if I did that. I'd be for ever damned into hell!"

"Gramper, I just don't believe any such silliness," declared the child's clear voice contemptuously. "You've let yourself get all excited over that ugly Lem Schwartz, as if he were the devil in person. He doesn't do any work; you've told me that yourself. He just goes prowling around the woods trying to find

trespassers. He hardly ever helps you with the farm work.

"Now, Harry would be another kind of hired man. His hands are so strong, gramper, and his heart is so kind. And he loves farm work. He's told me so, himself," she added in a lower tone, singular sweetness in her accents; it was as if she were smiling happily to herself.

"Janie, it's no use your talking. I can't send Lem away. If I tell him to go, I must give up my life and soul to him in exchange for those others. . . . Can't you understand?"

"I understand that that is what you think, gramper. But I don't believe it for a minute myself," the little girl retorted. "What I'd like to know is, why did you let Lem think you so silly?"

"I did it for you, Janie. For you. . . ."

"Gramper! For me? What good would your silliness do me?"

(Father Paul had been right, thought Mason, straining his ears so as not to miss a word of that pregnant conversation. Janie was indeed the key to the whole situation.)

"Janie, I wanted you to be amused, and have company, while you were lying here helpless. And I hadn't money to pay anybody. I couldn't even feed them, even if they stayed here for nothing. The farm hardly pays just to keep us two; I'm too old to work it."

"So you let Lem live here and hypnotize people so that they'd stay with me?" demanded Janie. "What, gramper, who wants people that *have* to stay with them?" In Janie's voice was more than a hint of mortified tears. "I thought Miss Selene wanted to stay. And Harry. . . . Oh, how could you have been so silly?"

"Don't cry, gramper's little girl! Gramper can't bear to have you cry," begged old Eli, voice quavering.

"Lem must go away, gramper," said the child imperatively.

"Janie, I can't send him."

There was a long silence.

Harry's eyes lifted to Mason's flashing blue orbs, and in that dark gaze Mason fancied he read thoughts too closely allied to violence. He shook his head at Harry, imposing further silence with up-lifted, warning finger.

"We won't talk about it any more just now, gramper," Janie went on, in a tranquil voice but with an elaborate casualness that stirred Mason oddly. "I think I want to be alone now. I have a lot of thinking to do."

A moment later old Eli's dragging footsteps sounded in the upper hallway. Mason seized the young Jew's sleeve and jerked him out of the lower room and into the front yard.

8. "*Dare use that Name again, and see what'll happen to you. . . .*"

"I've got to find Selene, Harry."

"To tell her her dreams aren't nightmares but horrid realities?" demurred Harry in bitter reproach. "She's still trying to deceive herself."

The other man scowled thoughtfully. "H-m-m. Seems there's nothing to do then but wait for tonight and the full of the moon."

"If these hideous nightmares are realities, Mason, will you get Father Paul to come down, after you return?" asked Harry, after a moment's painful silence. "He's the only one who can help us. I have a strong feeling that he understands something of what has been going on here. He warned me when he was down a couple of days ago, against letting Lem force me into . . . into joining that . . . devil's orgy."

"So you confided in Father Paul, who came and went, and you don't see fit to

tell me, who am here to take my chances with you?"

"But you see . . . he . . . knew. He . . . asked me . . . where the missing child was," whispered Harry, head hanging dejectedly.

"No! Impossible. . . . Horrible. . . ." Sick horror seized upon Mason as he remembered Father Paul's words. ("And the missing child?" Father Paul had said, with such a strange intonation.)

"Don't look at me like that!" exclaimed the young Jew wildly. "I had nothing to do with it. Neither had Selene. It was Lem who brought the child here. God of my fathers, was it a dream? He tried to make us join him in his horrid feasting, but Selene refused. He . . . bit her on the shoulder. Oh, it *is* true. It is no dream . . . Janie bandaged that shoulder the morning after," he added in a sick whisper.

"Man, man, get hold of yourself," admonished Hardy sternly. He was ghastly sick with nausea and loathing, for Harry's words had brought back vividly the fetid stench of those downstairs rooms in the other house, as well as the bits of decaying flesh and the half-gnawed bones. Then he cried out in protest:

"That devil actually brought a live child here? And . . . and devoured it? Why, that isn't possible! It's absolutely incredible!"

Then it was Harry's turn to quiet him. "Don't let Lem hear you. You don't know yet what he's capable of. If he were to realize that you came here purposely to spy upon him . . . oh, for pity's sake, don't cry out so loudly!"

Mason controlled himself with a mighty effort. "I'm going in there tomorrow," he said, brow contracted, teeth set grimly. "I'm going to clean up all that mess . . . and . . . bury those bones somewhere . . . and put a mark over . . . over the

grave. A child! That devil! . . . A child!"

"You see how mere words have moved you," Harry murmured despondently. "Yet Selene and I have been constrained night after night by we know not what fearful force from without ourselves to go into the forest with that . . . that devil . . . and hunt wild creatures, to satisfy our hunger. We are still . . . calm," but a tremor in his voice belied the bravery of his words. "If you intend to get through this night and keep your sanity and help Selene, you'll have to put everything out of your mind now, or you'll go mad, the way I've thought more than once that I would," he finished, and groaned.

DOOMED thus to fasting and inactivity, there was nothing for it but to let the hours slip past. Stretched under the black walnut tree that shaded the front of the Baumann farmhouse, the two men lay in silence on the grass, watching the hot July sun's progress across the sky and its final decline into the west.

Tomorrow, Mason cogitated, Earl Baker and Father Paul would arrive, demanding to see him in person. Tomorrow he himself would know how successful had been Lem's incredible powers over himself. Dream and reality seemed so confusingly close to each other that Mason almost welcomed the moment when the red sun disappeared behind the hilltop, leaving a rosy glow in the sky, and Lem Schwartz strode down from the barn, a hideous and sardonic grin distorting his lean countenance as he beckoned the two men with claw-like finger.

"Hush! Say nothing. It would only make it worse for us all," whispered Harry in agitated warning.

Mason stretched cramped limbs and followed Lem into the Baumann kitchen, where the hired man stood at the foot of

the stairs, the handle of the communicating door in one hand. The red sky was reflected luridly in those deep-set eyes that peered ominously from beneath their shaggy brows. His gaze went significantly to Harry.

"Selene!" called Harry, as if in obedience to some esoteric message. "We're waiting."

"Coming," answered the girl's voice from above. "Janie, let go my skirt, dear. I have to be going."

"I don't want you to go," replied Janie's determined voice. "Why should you run away in the middle of this lovely story? It leaves me all alone. Just gramp, and he can't read the way you do."

"Let go my dress, Janie. Let go, dear. You don't understand. I *have* to go."

There was an exasperated exclamation. Selene came to the head of the stairs, pausing to tuck a breadth of skirt under her blouse, where Janie's disrespectful and demanding little hands had ripped it apart.

"The sun has set. Hurry! Why are you waiting?" urged old Eli's trembling, importunate voice in agitation.

Mason's face showed irritation as he looked at the old farmer, whose bent form wavered as he leaned against the oilcloth-covered table, set now for one. . . . Selene drew in a long, quivering breath, and came slowly down the stairs.

"The sun has gone down! God in heaven. . . ."

With a snarl as of a savage beast, Lem wheeled upon the old man. His nose seemed longer and larger than ever. To Mason it was as if the bushy eyebrows had straggled down the high cheek-bones hairily, like a thicket from behind which those garnet-gleaming eyes glared fiercely. The hand that the hired man lifted to hurry Selene through the door into the other house looked gray and shaggy in the

fast-fading light. The fingers seemed pointed together, like a great nailed paw.

"Dare to use that Name again!" said a thick voice darkly.

"I'm coming! Don't touch me, Lem! I'm coming, I tell you," cried out the girl in an outburst of terror. She shrank from that hateful contact, her lips tightening unpleasantly over her teeth, so that her whole aspect altered subtly.

Mason took one of her limp hands in his and followed Harry into the next house. In the tiny hallway he hesitated, until Harry's hand urged him up the stairs.

"You can share my room," said the peddler in a low tone.

Lem had lingered in the doorway below. Mason strained his ears to hear whatever was passing between the hired man and old Baumann.

"Dare use that Name again," Lem was snarling viciously, "and see what'll happen to you . . . and *yours*," pointedly.

"Janie! Oh, Janie! What have I done? What have I done?"

The only response was a bestial growl, so startling in character that Mason, gently assisting Selene up the dark staircase, stopped short in astonishment. The door slammed; old Eli's key could be heard, hastily securing him from unexpected invasion from their side of the house. Harry's hand reached down and pulled at Mason urgently.

"Be quick!"

Selene had apparently regained her poise. Arrived at the upper hallway, she ran into her room with a hurried good-night, and her door closed. The bolt slipped into place rustily.

"This way," directed Harry, with an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. "Hurry! Lem warned me never to linger at this hour between dusk and dark. It's . . . dangerous." He pushed Mason

ahead of him into the room, closed the door and shut the bolt. His finger went to his lips in warning.

There came a sound of padding footsteps on the staircase. Then a low whine. A scratching at Selene's door. Then those clicking nails . . . padding paws . . . went down the stairs again.

"I'll go to his room now," whispered Harry in a cautious undertone. "Bolt this door when I go out. No, don't detain me. I have no time now to explain, even if this is only a dream. There'll be plenty of light soon, from the moon," Harry offered vaguely.

He unbolted the door, slipped out quietly, and pulled it to behind him.

MASON pushed in the bolt. He was glad the flashlight was in his pocket, for it might perhaps serve him now, although the moonlight gave unmistakable signs of shortly flooding the room with its pallid light. As this light became stronger and brighter, there came odd rustlings and scratchings and soft whinings from the rooms on either side of him. He held his breath; he could have sworn that Selene had cautiously drawn the bolt of her door. This was more than his curiosity could stand; he opened his own with painstaking care, quietly lifting the latch of the door until he could look out through a narrow crack into the upper hallway.

Through Selene's open door the moonlight fell in a broad swath, and in the midst of that uncanny brilliance cowered a glossy black creature that slunk, belly to the board floor, toward the staircase. At the top of the flight it hesitated as if reluctant, turning its pointed head backward over furry shoulders. In his astonishment, for he thought he recognized the black wolf of the preceding night, Mason let his door slip from his hands,

It flew open, outlining him as he stood against the flooding moonshine.

The glowing eyes of the black wolf fell upon him. It gave utterance to a low, pitiful, whining cry. Almost in the same moment, another door opened, and a large brown wolf bounded out, stopping short at sight of Mason in the doorway. The fur bristled on its body; it growled, but stood stock-still, glaring at young Hardy with its redly scintillating eyes.

It seemed to Mason that hours passed while he stood there motionless, daring to make no slightest movement lest it might precipitate an attack from one or the other of the two wolves. From the kitchen below came a call, a long-drawn-out, importunate whine. As if that sound had broken the spell holding all three creatures like statues, the black wolf fled down into the darkness, followed closely by the bristling brown beast.

Mason sprang across the hall and glanced into Selene's room; it was empty. No occupant was in Lem's room, either. Mason was back in a flash to Harry's room, bolting the door. He sprang to the window, breathing hard as he told himself that it was all a too-vivid dream.

As they had done on the previous night, the three wolves emerged and trotted toward the woods; the long, gaunt gray . . . the big brown . . . and the slim black one. As they sped across the moonlit landscape, the black one deliberately paused under the window and looked up at Mason again. Then it, too, disappeared into the forest shades. The wolf-pack's raucous cry rose on the still night air.

9. *"The mirror reflected a thing that did not lie before it. . . ."*

A STRANGE and disturbing sensation diverted Mason's attention to himself, all at once. His mind was drawn absolutely away, for the moment, from

those savage, ominous howls from the woods. With unpleasant suddenness he realized that his left foot and leg were prickling painfully, as if they had "gone to sleep." A vigorous stamp to restore circulation moved him to a cry of amazement and dismay, for when he stamped, the tan oxford at the extremity of his left leg flew from the foot and across the room, striking the opposite wall and dropping behind Harry's tumbled bed.

Also, Mason completely lost his balance; went heavily on the floor on his back. As he instinctively flung his head forward to save it from the severe blow it must otherwise have sustained, he beheld a strange, an incredible sight. His right foot was neatly clad in silk sock and well-polished tan oxford, but the sock on the left foot was wrinkled, slipping; the oxford had already flown through the air. As he went down, the limp sock followed the shoe.

Mason Hardy lay on the floor a full sixty seconds before he dared raise himself to a sitting posture and hitch into full moonlight for another look at what he felt he simply could not have seen, because it was altogether too incredible. He closed his eyes, blinked them rapidly once or twice, then opened them directly upon that prickling left foot and leg. The blue eyes widened amazedly then, for what he saw only too plainly was the slim, hairy leg of an animal, with a well-padded nailed paw at the extremity.

He closed his eyes with a snap; opened them again; fixed them incredulously upon that impossible sight. Then he touched one finger gingerly to that strange appendage. It was rough and hairy. Sight and touch concurred in their messages to his bewildered, horrified consciousness.

With some difficulty he got to his feet, for this strange leg bent under him dis-

agreeably, in the wrong direction; he could hardly straighten it enough to stand upright. The old priest had been right, quite right; Evil Incarnate was rampant on the Baumann farm. And Mason Hardy, in his friendly endeavor to be of service to his old college chum, had come into direct contact with that Destruction that Walked at Noonday, as Father Paul had hinted so broadly.

Meantime, the pallid moon had climbed the sky. Louder, nearer, came the cry of the weird wolf-pack, altering strangely and subtly in tone. A rushing of padded feet . . . a whimpering wail. Mason went leaping in awkward bounds to the window; that last cry had come from no wild beast; it had sounded like a frightened child. At the thought, his blood ran cold; horror clutched him. His body pimpled pricklingly with goose-flesh.

Scratching . . . whining . . . snarling . . . growls . . . below.

In Mason's mind now stood out, like letters of flame, those final words of Father Paul: "Evil can not utterly triumph as long as there is the slightest effort to hold on to Good."

The young man took the automatic from his pocket, unbolted the door, and stumbled uncertainly across the upper hall, metamorphosed foot and leg hindering him dangerously. Down the stairs, holding to the stair rails; going sidewise to keep from falling . . . God, how terrible to be handicapped at such a moment by that wolf-like limb! . . .

THE door in the tiny hall below was open into the kitchen. Mason peered cautiously around the corner, from which he could see through into the parlor. At what his eyes beheld, he could with difficulty restrain his lips from the cry that pushed impetuously to them. He was looking directly upon the cowering form of the black wolf, trembling there upon

the board floor. Beyond the beast stood the great pier-glass. And in that glass . . . the mirror showed no wolf. The mirror reflected a thing that did not seem to lie before it. What the wide blue eyes of young Hardy beheld was the white, crouching body of a girl, half concealed by streaming black hair, as she trembled there in a spasm of obvious revulsion and fear.

Almost paralyzed at the weird paradox of what lay before the mirror, and what the glass reflected, Mason found himself incapable, for the time being, of any movement. He could only stand, staring and listening.

Another beast farther back in the room snarled. The nailed paws came clicking across the boards, and presently into his field of vision slouched the brown wolf, head pushed down against its own furry breast, as if to hide its eyes. Another ferocious growl, and the gaunt gray beast bounded across, snapping viciously at the brown. The brown animal recoiled, snarling, lips back from bared teeth. And all the time the little black wolf kept up a continuous pitiful whining, as it cowered against the floor; while in the mirror was reflected that shuddering, quivering white body. . . .

For a moment the gray wolf glared upon the other two, drawn lips tight against glistening, slavering teeth. Then it bounded back. When it returned, it held something white between those pointed fangs . . . something that wailed weakly, impotently, pitifully.

Mason Hardy could not check the gasping cry that now surged upward from his throat. The spell of horror that had until this moment held him petrified, broke. He made a clumsy leap into the middle of the kitchen; another that carried him staggering into the parlor.

With a smothered snarl of mingled sur-

prize and fury, the gaunt gray wolf leaped backward, dropping its screaming burden. Mason caught up the infant and began an awkward retreat. The gray's threatening jaws opened as that gaunt beast slunk menacingly after him. A crisis seemed imminent; then the brown wolf sprang, crouching in the gray's way, its tail switching from side to side, a long snarl threatening the other beast.

Mason directed his automatic at the glowing garnet orbs of the gray, and backed away until he had reached the staircase. He would have drawn the door to, when a sudden rush . . . a whining, pitiful cry . . . gave him pause. The little black wolf had crept swiftly after him and was crouching abjectly at his feet, looking up with almost human intelligence in its dog-like, piteous eyes.

Mason Hardy remembered the paradox of the mirror. He backed up one step, permitting the black wolf to pass him on the stairs, and pulled the door to. He was just in time. He had one whirling, dizzy glimpse of the other two beasts, engaged in frightful struggle, as the brown disputed the gray's advance. They flung themselves together upon the closed door, which rattled perilously as if the latch would spring open any minute. Mason would have bolted it, but bolt there was none; so up the stairs he stumbled in haste.

HE HAMMERED on the communicating door, while against it leaned, whining fearfully, the little black wolf, eyes rolling whitely in the darkness. The young man's heart beat irregularly with pity and apprehension as he listened to the hellhounds' uproar below. Also the child in his arms continued to scream lustily. At any minute the fight would be decided, and the staircase invaded. He struck the door imperatively with the butt

of his automatic and shouted for admittance.

Scuffling and exclamations on the other side. . . . The old man's voice, raised shrilly: "No, Janie, no!" Janie's voice, hard with some passionate emotion. . . . The key turned briskly. The door opened. Mason almost fell into the other house, the salvaged infant shrieking in his arms. In good time. The door below swung wide, and clicking feet scrambled up the stairs. The young man flung his weight against the door, pushing the bolt and then turning the key.

It was only when safety was assured that he became aware of the miracle. Barefooted, clad only in her little white night-robe, Janie stood, her eyes wide with incredulous amazement at her own feat. She was balancing on her long-unused limbs with the airy fluttering of an uneasy butterfly, but there was no uncertainty in the starry light of her eyes, despite the expression of questioning fear on her childish face.

Her eyes fell in astonishment upon the black wolfish form cowering at Mason's feet. With a startled exclamation, she turned back toward her room, paused, and cried out again sharply. In the mirror opposite her open door, Janie had seen what Mason also saw as the child cried out . . . the shuddering white form of Selene Arkwright, shielded solely by long black hair. Janie on her little unsteady white feet was into the room and out again, dragging a quilt after her. With a tenderness beyond her years, she laid this covering about the wolfish form cowering on the floor.

"Come with me, dear Miss Selene!" cried she, and tugged at the glossy black head of the beast fearlessly. "Oh, whatever have you wicked men been doing to Miss Selene?" She stood in the doorway of her room, supporting her slender

body against the door-frame. "All of you are devils!"

Old Eli stood staring stupidly, jaw dropped. One shaking finger wagged at the infant, still shrieking lustily in Mason's arms.

"Give that baby to me this instant!" commanded Janie imperatively. "Oh, gramer, I don't exactly understand what Lem's been trying to do here, but he's going to leave tomorrow," she announced with definiteness. "Now that I can walk, I know how to drive him away," she added mysteriously, as she slipped back into her room.

The door closed upon her and the black wolf, but her flashing backward glance carried strange import to Mason's now keenly awakened intuition.

"Janie! Janie!" wept the old man piteously, outstretched hands groping after that retreating figure that had been so triumphant in its yet uneasy carriage, so dominated by the child's strange spirit.

"Tomorrow there's going to be a show-down," declared Hardy, staring down at his strangely altered limb. Cold fury stirred him. "Whatever you've been up to, old man, your deviltry's going to stop."

Old Eli whimpered weakly. He was bent over, listening now to the wicked snarls on the other side of that upper door. His body shook as if with an attack of ague. "Nothing . . . I've done nothing," he protested, whining.

"Look at this leg of mine!" snapped Hardy. "Don't tell me you haven't some idea of how it got this way. I have my suspicions, old man. Tomorrow you'll walk the plank into that pool and get an all-over bath. Understand?"

"No! Oh, no!" shrieked old Eli, cowering in abject fear, his head going down into his shaking hands. "Oh God, no!"

Mason's laugh was hard and bitter.

"You're going in. I'll see to it myself. There's something hellish about that pool, and if the rest of us are infected, you're going to get your dose, too."

A long moan, that quavered off into silence. Old Eli went down on the floor in a trembling, abject heap. Janie's door opened.

"What are you doing to gramper? Let him alone, I tell you. I know all about it. I made him tell me. I can make it come right. . . . Poor gramper, don't be afraid," she murmured tenderly, like a young mother to her fearful child. "Janie'll make it all right."

The child's eyes flung at Mason Hardy the menace that might lie in the shining orbs of a tigress protecting her young, as she looked proudly at him across that crouched, quaking, fear-stricken old man.

"You let him alone. You hear?"

Mason laughed. He turned his back on the child, and approached the communicating door, now safely bolted and locked, but against which leaped heavy bodies with snarls and growls. He struck it with the butt of his automatic.

"Keep away, or I'll shoot through the wood," he shouted. "If you are what I suspect, you'll understand. I give you sixty seconds to get away from here."

The snarls ceased. Presently he heard the clicking of nailed claws as the beasts retired downstairs. A soft whining sounded from the landing a moment later. Intuition told him that the brown wolf had returned and was begging for entry, but he dared not open the door to it. Whatever it might be, other than wolf, it must fend for itself that one night.

10. "It was the Sacred Wafer. . . ."

THE young man spent the remainder of the night alone in the kitchen, for Janie soon prevailed upon her grandfather to go to bed. The light of a kero-

sene lamp made the room cheery, and Mason spent those wee, small hours putting together the pieces of the puzzle to which he now felt he held a key. But daylight was to bring upon him much which he had not calculated. With day-break the communicating downstairs door was flung open, and Harry Epstein, followed closely by the saturnine Lem, ugly eyes filled with unholy lights, came running into the Baumann kitchen.

Lem advanced upon the young man, great hairy fists clenching and unclenching. His glowing eyes fixed the young man's resentful gaze with malevolent confidence and power.

"You would mix up in my business, eh?" snarled Lem, showing his furious countenance up against that of Mason Hardy. "Well, since you've asked for what you're going to get, we'll have it over with at once. I don't want any nonsense on this farm from now on."

The look he shot at old Eli, who had come tottering down the stairs, sent the old man shrinking back against the wall, uplifted hands shaking as if to hold off some horrid specter.

"It's certainly time something was done," agreed Mason, endeavoring with difficulty to maintain an icy calm. "This morning you are going to pack up and get off this place, for good."

Lem flung his head back, uttering as he did so a loud, grating laugh.

"I'm leaving, eh? Well, you'll have to make me go, then. And you wouldn't care to have a fight and a fuss, with a woman in the house, little fiddler, would you? I'll fight you, poor fool, but not here."

Harry Epstein was shouting: "Don't go out into the woods, Mason! Don't go into the woods! Keep away from the pool!"

"Shut *your* mouth," ground out Lem,

with a slow turn of his furious eyes upon the young Hebrew that was somehow more terrible, more menacing, than a quicker movement would have been, for it betrayed Lem's complete confidence in his own supremacy. "Come along, since you must let me batter you before I give you your baptism in the pool!"

He shot out of the house door and was off into the woods, without glancing behind him. It was as if he knew well that he would be followed.

"Don't go, Mason! Don't let him entice you near the pool," again begged Harry, trying to hold the other man by the sleeve.

Hardy thrust those fingers away gently but firmly.

"My dear fellow, you can't dissuade me. Why, that fellow's sheer devil! Do you think I could go away in safety, before having a whack at him? I'm a pretty fair boxer. I may have a good chance to give him his just deserts."

Harry nodded. His eyes were humid. He stood back resignedly.

"If I can't get the better of him, I'll throw *myself* into the pool," exclaimed Hardy, kindling. "Better that, than to be tossed in by him, and I've about figured it out that a voluntary sacrifice will break the spell for you others."

He flung out of the house, hardly realizing that the hindering metamorphosis of the preceding night had disappeared. Harry followed more slowly.

AS THE young Jew ran lightly down the path to the woods, he heard hoof-beats. He stopped to look back. A horse and buggy were coming along the lane. The horse was plump and gray, and apparently not at all pleased at feeling the unaccustomed whip now flicking its sides, for it gave occasional little resentful jumps as it half trotted, half

balkily walked, along. Harry turned back. He knew Father Paul's outfit. As he approached, he recognized also the pale, harassed face of Earl Baker.

"Where are they?" called the priest anxiously, as Harry came within speaking distance.

"Lem and Mason have gone into the woods to fight it out," Harry explained.

"Holy Mother!" ejaculated the priest piously, and gave the astonished gray horse such a stroke as that plump hide had never experienced before. The beast jumped and set off at a clumsy gallop. Harry ran after the buggy, caught at the back, and managed to hang on as the vehicle bumped and bounced over the ruts of the country lane.

As they passed the Baumann house, two figures emerged, but Harry did not see them. He was by far too seriously occupied, retaining his hold on that jouncing vehicle. Nor did he see a taxi that came slowly down the lane behind.

At the verge of the quarry pool Father Paul reined up the gray nag and sprang out, horse-whip in hand, righteous indignation burning in his usually kindly eyes. He walked toward the two struggling figures by now engaged in a deadly clinch, swinging and swaying as each in turn strove to throw the other into the strange waters that sparkled, and surged, and leaped up at the rocky verge where they were fighting.

Behind the good priest came Earl Baker, frantic with the apprehensions that had been making such inroads upon him.

"Hold him, Mason! I'll be with you in a moment!" Earl was shouting wildly.

Father Paul found no opportunity to use his horse-whip, so interlaced were those tense figures that hardly seemed to move, strained as they were, each against the other.

And so it was Harry only who glimpsed the slender white form that sprang straight out through the air, plunging into the pool despite Selene Arkwright's frantic attempts to prevent Janie's unexpected action. It was Harry who again came to the rescue of a woman, and flung himself into the gurgling waters, swimming frantically in the direction of that little, poignant face that had gone under, come floating up, and disappeared once more.

Father Paul, whirling at Harry's outcry and the ensuing splash as the young Jew's body struck the pool's sparkling waters, reached into a fold of his clothes and brought out a folded napkin. With his left hand he scattered the contents of the napkin onto the surface of the pool, while his right hand made the sign of the cross over the greedy, lapping ripples.

The moving waters broke into a foaming fury that for a moment flashed over the two heads now appearing together. Old Eli had reached the scene; his wild cry of utter despair brought a vindictive and scornful smile to the face of Lem Schwartz, who now flung off his opponent easily, for Mason's attention had been diverted by the things happening so swiftly about the pool. As the waters subsided, Harry swam vigorously with one arm, drawing the pale little Janie to safety. Willing hands aided her to land. Lem, gleaming orbs rolling from one to the other of the assembled company, had begun to draw his dark, saturnine face into a heavy scowl. Apparently things were not entirely to his liking.

"Go!" Father Paul ordered brusquely, pointing into the depths of the forest with imperative gesture, and facing the malevolent grin of Lem with intrepid courage.

"Too late, Father. If I go now, these

others are bound to go with me," sneered Lem.

"That isn't true!" shrieked Janie excitedly. "I jumped into the water to save them all. You can't touch them now, Lem."

In beast-like fashion he snarled at her, then laughed horribly.

"I can't touch them now, Janie, my dear, thanks to you. But you have put yourself in their place, of your own free will." He made a quick step toward her.

Harry Epstein, white and fearfully afraid but dauntless, stood in his way. "One finger on Janie, and I'll pull your eyes out, you devil!" he ground out. Janie shrank against her defender for a moment, then drew herself away and went trembling to meet the grinning Lem, who held out his arms to her with mock invitation of welcome.

"No, Janie, no!" cried Harry.

"Yes, Harry, I must. It is what has saved you. And Miss Selene. I belong to him now, instead of all of you."

Lem shouted, a berserker burst of triumph. He put out one ugly, hairy hand. Janie shrank, shuddering. She closed her eyes.

Then Father Paul's horse-whip cut down sharply upon that dark and evil hand, and Lem's scream of astonishment and pain followed upon its whistling errand.

"You can not touch that dear child," asserted Father Paul with calm confidence.

"Indeed? You'll see how she shall suffer for this," Lem began, darkly menacing.

FATHER PAUL'S calm gaze left Lem's face and shifted to the pool. Lem also looked. Something like dismay and incredulity passed across his lowering visage.

"It was the sacred wafer," said Father Paul quietly. "The water is itself again. The spell was broken, while those two were in the water."

Harry ran forward and pulled Janie's drooping form into his arms. His exclamation was one of incredulous joy.

"Then Janie is all right? And Selene? And I? God of my Fathers, how good Thou art!"

Lem Schwartz turned, grinding his teeth audibly, and gave vent to an ugly laugh. His fists were clenched with impotent fury as he slouched along the side of the pool.

A loud, hoarse voice hailed him as he slunk off.

"Wait a minute, feller. You ain't gettin' off as easy as you might be thinkin'," cried the taxi-driver, coming around the side of the pool at a run. "Where's my little Jacky, huh?"

Lem's shoulders shook with sardonic merriment. His dark face distorted with a convulsion of malevolent triumph.

"You'll find his clothes back at Eli's farm," he shouted. "The wolves ate him." And he suddenly gave vent to howling laughter, flinging his head back like a wild beast about to call his mates to the kill.

The unshaven face of the driver was so dark that Father Paul's heart trembled at sight of it. "Stop! Think what you're doing!" cried the good man hastily, foreseeing the next action of Jacky's grief-infuriated father.

"Yeah? I've done my thinkin' a piece past, Father. What I'm goin' to do now is actin'," and with that he launched himself upon Lem's back and by sheer weight of his surprize attack staggered the sinister being so that he lost his balance completely.

"Back to hell with you, you devil, where you belong!" shouted the taxi-driver, recovering himself just in time to avoid going over the edge of the rock into the pool, which now, with a mighty splash, received the dark form of Lem Schwartz.

Father Paul had held up one hand to delay the involuntary movement of Mason Hardy. "No, my son, this matter is in other hands than ours. That man——"

He was interrupted by Lem's body striking the pool. A sudden thick and noisome cloud of stinking smoke arose from the water . . . obscured the vision momentarily . . . cleared.

"——that man, if man he was," continued Father Paul serenely, "is better left to his own devices. If he were an illusion of the deceived senses——"

"Why, there's nothing there!" cried Hardy, astonished. He was bending over the water, and the clear limpidity of the pool now showed every detail of its rocky bottom distinctly. Nowhere could be seen the leering face of that strange entity that had called itself Lem Schwartz.

"It was the sacred wafer, my children," said Father Paul softly. "The powers of evil could not combat the forces for good that lie behind that blessed symbol. The Destruction that Walketh at Noonday need no longer be feared."

In Earl's arms stood Selene, her face hidden against his shoulder. Janie, very happy, leaned on Harry's solicitously supporting arms; one of her hands was in Eli's; the old man was crying. Across these passed the good priest's glance, very tenderly. His eyes met Mason's. The two men smiled understandingly at each other:

"'God's in His heaven, all's right with the world'," quoted Father Paul, and nodded contentedly.