

Weird Tales

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The FIEND of the MARSH

by
MAJOR ROBERT EMMETT LEWIS
with
MARTHA HAY COCKRILL



"Five bursts of flame flashed from the extended weapon in rapid succession."

"MY GOD! What's that?" Graveland Stannard spoke nervously, the tense, strained tones betraying marked alarm.

From somewhere outside the magnificent residence of the famous expert in plastic surgery there had suddenly come a long, piercing, brutelike wail, splitting the sultry blackness of the warm June night with startling and mournful cadence. Weirdly, like a melancholy warning from the spirit world, the terrifying, unearthly cry had come to these two erring young souls.

The girl-wife of the great surgeon—blond, shapely and pretty, a weak flapper whose prayerbook was a pack of cards, whose rosary was a cigarette case, and whose prayer was made to a bottle of synthetic gin—answered the man's nervous inquiry lightly as

she again pressed her warm, red lips to those of the dark young artist, but there was also a noticeable trace of agitation present in her voice.

"It is only Terror, the doctor's great wolf," she said, reassuringly. "Don't be such a coward, Stan—it's only Terror quarreling with some of the animals the doctor keeps for his nasty experiments! Oh, Stan! He is a wonderful man—but I hate him! I'm afraid of him, too, Stan dear—he's so cold and hard and cruel!"

"The doctor is a great man," young Stannard declared, "but I've heard that in his vivisection-experiments he is absolutely without feeling!"

The doctor's pretty young wife lay contentedly in the young artist's arms. Suddenly he felt her tremble a little.

"Stan, sometimes I'm horribly afraid! He—he's terrible! Once, a young farmer, who used to beat his wife, had bruised his hand in doing so, and when the doctor heard of it he amputated every finger of the man's hand, one by one, without an anesthetic, claiming the encroachment of blood-poisoning to be so rapid he had not the time to use anesthesia! Oh, my God! it was horrible!"

The woman again pressed her hot lips tremblingly to those of the man.

Instantly there came again the long, sinister, baying howl. The woman with difficulty repressed a scream—she clung tightly to the young man.

Graveland Stannard was no coward. But the terrifying significance of that uncanny cry appalled him.

Strange and uneasy yelps of terror and frightened whimperings came from the other animals through the hot night air. Then quite suddenly came a deadly quiet, a fearful, throbbing silence. Like an unspoken prophecy of dread import came the uneasy nerve-racking silence like the sultry calm before a tropic storm. The woman shuddered.

Just outside the open bedroom window, through which the balmy night air of June whisperingly entered and gently fanned, with spirit-like touch, the heated faces of the woman and her lover, there suddenly came a deep menacing growl, followed by a sharp, but low-voiced command spoken by human tongue.

"My God! The doctor!" she whispered brokenly. In frantic fright she clung to Stannard. "For God's sake, Stan, he'll kill me!" The words were inarticulate; chattering teeth forbade clear enunciation, but the woman's attitude bespoke the wildly agonizing fear she felt.

The man thrust her from him rudely. "You said he was in New York!" he reproached her roughly.

In the darkness of the room Graveland Stannard moved rapidly away from the woman. His hand touched his hip pocket—his revolver was there. "Thank heaven for a dark night!" he muttered.

The woman lay quite still upon the couch in a paralysis of fear.

Outside in the inky darkness of the garden a tall, slender man, black of hair and eye and with pointed black beard, spoke quietly again to a great crouching black beast that whimpered at his feet.

Graveland Stannard knew every step he was taking in the unlighted house. His fingers had closed over the switch in the hallway, the quick pressure bringing instant darkness. He crossed rapidly to the side opposite to that from which had come the dread voice of the physician he had so deeply injured.

Stannard straddled the window casing and let himself down cautiously, striving for a safe footing below: Once in the little grove of pines that just skirted the house at this point, he knew he could make his escape to the roadway unseen.

As his feet touched the ground a deep, brutish snarl greeted him. Grim despair seized Stannard. With wild frenzy he jerked from his pocket the loaded revolver, but a human hand suddenly seized his wrist with a grip of steel. The tall, black-bearded man bent Stannard's arm upward and back, until the muzzle of the weapon pointed skyward. Frantically Stannard strove to bring it to bear on his powerful antagonist, but he was as a child in the hands of the silent, grim, unseen foe. Twisting and writhing, he sought to grasp the tall man with his left hand. . . . Suddenly the weapon was discharged. Stannard felt a sharp, stinging little pain, like a tiny pin-prick, in the fleshy part of his left arm—a sudden sickening nausea—faintness—an overpowering drowsiness. Without a

ery, without even a moan, he sank upon the soft grass, unconscious.

The tall, black-bearded man spoke again, calmly, to the great black beast, which had by his command remained a snarling neutral during the struggle. The great shadowy shape again crouched tremblingly at his feet, whimpering in a sudden and inexplicable fear of its master.

The tall, dark man stooped. In his hand was a tiny, bright instrument. With one hand he caught up the loose flesh on the creature's back and then suddenly plunged the deadly little instrument deep therein. A little sting, like the bite of a horsefly, was felt by the beast, then it sank to the ground, an inert, crumpled mass like the senseless man at its side.

The hyoscin had done its work well.

GRAVELAND STANNARD woke suddenly from a nightmare of horrors to the realization that he was alive and the belief that he had been dreaming. Instantly, however, a nauseating weakness seized him. His head and face throbbed painfully; his heart beat violently. He had a strange sensation of unfamiliarity with respect to his physical person; in some inexplicable way he seemed to have lost the sense of his own identity. He felt queerly ill. The acrid fumes of some powerful anesthetic arose from his lungs; its pungent odor filled the room. Dread filled his mind.

He was not in his own quarters—he was in a shaky, ramshackle bed in a cheap and dingy room. And beside him, in a drug-wrought stupor, lay the woman—his companion in sin!

Ugh! He turned from her in sudden disgust and loathing, and the quick movement brought a sharp increase of the queer pain in his face and forehead.

With trembling fingers he touched his face. Merciful heaven! What

was the matter with him? In touching his face his hand had come in contact with long, coarse, bristly, animal-like hair!

“Good God!” Stannard gasped in bewilderment. This was no dream! What horrible thing had happened to him?

He sprang from the bed with a queer, catlike leap and rose to his full height in front of the cracked mirror. For one instant only he looked in horrified amazement at the beastlike visage that glared back at him from the cracked glass, then, with an ejaculation of terror and startled wonder, he backed quickly away from the awful reflection.

For what the amazed and perplexed creature that had once been a man had now seen before him was the black, bristly, sharp-muzzled visage of a wolf—a great black wolf's head covered with long, coarse, matted hair with which his own coal-black hair seemed to mingle as though it had always been an integral part! Narrow, cruel, yellowish-black slant eyes blazed balefully at him!

Through the same mysterious, supernatural agency which had wrought the puzzling, fantastic and mind-destroying change, his chin had, in some inexplicable manner, risen to meet his nose, with which it now formed the long, sharp, horrible snout of a wolf. Black gums, rolling back from the long aperture which now formed his mouth, disclosed a great lolling red tongue flanked by rows of sharp, flashing white fangs—four saberlike incisors interlapping at the forward opening of the saliva-dripping jaws!

With a wild yelping howl, half human, half beastlike in its ferocity, the weird thing leaped madly over the bed and the silent, drug-stupefied woman who lay as one dead. Crouching for an instant, it gave vent to another maddened, terrifying howl of defiance, and then it leaped from the

floor straight through the open window, falling instantly, with wild yells of terror, into the noisily rushing waters of the swollen river below, the madly swirling current of which eagerly caught the unfortunate man in its icy embrace. The hapless creature was carried by the fiercely raging torrent for miles, the limp, grotesque body kept afloat upon some driftwood, and finally thrown upon the shore.

As for the woman, she still lay in deathlike sleep on the unclean bed in the garishly furnished room of a cheap lodging house of questionable repute, in a lurid locality. Her once beautiful features were distorted and twisted out of all semblance of human shape; through the sorcery of a surgical genius the former delicate face had become a hideous, grinning, animal-like mask, covered in patches with grotesque bunches of the long, coarse black hair of a wolf!

2

DR. ARTIE GREEN, the principal druggist of Stappington, stood in the doorway of his store on Main Street, engaged in pointing out to his new clerk from the city, young Mr. Percy Carthage, the various celebrities and notables of the village.

Mr. Carthage—blue-eyed, neatly clad in black, pin-striped suiting, white shirt and collar and little black bow tie—was deeply appreciative of the honor being shown him by his hospitable and unexact employer.

"There goes Bill Tucker! Hey, Bill!" Dr. Green shouted; "c-mon over heah a minute! Bill's our sheriff," he explained to his alert, rather serious new assistant.

A big gaunt man in belted corduroy breeches, wearing boots, a wide sombrero and a big silver star, shambled over to the entrance of the store.

"Howdy, Art!—Glad to know you, sir!" he drawled, acknowledging

Dr. Green's introduction and giving the young man's hand a powerful grip. "How you be, Doc?"

"So-so, Bill! Anything new about the Haunted Marshwoods?"

"Yes!" replied the sheriff grimly. "Tom Hammond's gal, Betty, swears she was chased, and nearly caught, last night by the Old Devil of the Marsh himself! I reckon it's mostly all talk, though—there ain't nothin' bad ever really happened near those rotten old woods—yet. I don't believe there is anything in that ole swamp but snakes and toads and vermin. No self-respecting animal—or devil either, for that matter—would stay in the gloomy foul old place a minute even if it wasn't haunted—it's too derned rotten!" the sheriff declared emphatically. "Well—see you boys again." He bit off an enormous chew of tobacco, and lazily took his departure.

"Mighty queer thing about that worthless piece of ground," said Dr. Green. "Just as Bill says, I don't believe there's a living thing in there 'cept deadly reptiles, poisonous insects and lice. Nothing grows in there but the rankest of weeds; all the trees have died and are rotten, and the whole growth—trees and rotten old stumps—is slowly sinkin' into the miserable place—nasty, gloomy old bog—be a derned good thing if it would sink altogether."

"What was that the sheriff said about something chasing Betty Hammond?" the new clerk asked.

"Oh, yes. Well, we call it the Haunted Marsh! You see, some pretty wild stories have been told about that queer place and a lot of us people think it is haunted by a terrible kind of a Thing—a ghost that is half man—half devil! The Marsh Fiend, folks call it. Some swear they have heard it yell at night, and others say they have seen it, too, but I have never heard anything or seen anything either. Some of the girls claim

to have seen it; others swear the awful Thing chased them—just as Betty did!”

“Shade of Dante! What a fantastic, sinister story! The Marsh Fiend! Half man—half devil! Must be a mighty grotesque creature,” said young Mr. Carthage, with a shudder.

“There goes the smartest man in town, and wealthy, too,” said the fat little druggist, pointing out a tall, white-haired, smooth-shaven man of about fifty, who was driving a big car of foreign make. “That’s Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone—he’s an all-around scientist, I can tell you! A fine, high-principled man, but very peculiar, cold and silent—a cynic, I guess one would call him—hasn’t lived in Stappington very long. That was his daughter Lucille with him—she’s his only child; mother’s dead. Nice child, but queer; she don’t talk much. Old Blackstone has a secretary, a pretty little girl named Mary Tabor; and she told my Jennie that the old man and Lucille live in constant fear of something, nobody seems to know what! But there’s a story going round—Dr. Timmins, our coroner, says he had it right from Blackstone’s housekeeper herself—that Dr. Blackstone won’t let Lucille out of his sight scarcely—fears somebody will kidnap her or kill her, I reckon! — Well, I declare, Miss Rosie! What will you have?” He turned his attention to a plumply pretty, rosy-cheeked, full-breasted country girl who had just entered the store. “Mr. Carthage, this is Miss Rosie Carlinson, the youngest daughter of one of our biggest farmers—shade hands with Mr. Carthage, Rosie.”

Miss Rosie blushed a delightful crimson, and, after a shy word or two, departed with her quinine and peppermint drops.

“Doctor, how long has that old

wooded marsh been haunted?” asked Mr. Carthage.

“Far back as I can remember—ever since I was a boy!” replied Dr. Green. “And I can recall hearing the old folks talk about it being haunted in their young days! Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone says only fools talk such nonsense, but I can tell you, my boy, that my father was no fool, and I’ve heard him tell, many a time, how he saw queer things—lights and white shapes and fiendlike things a-dancing in those old woods at night! And he would swear that he had heard the old Marsh Devil a-howling—always after midnight!”

A solemn-looking old man, crippled, wearing the faded blue of the Union army, entered the store with long swinging strides of his crutches, pivoting easily and rapidly on the one leg the Southern guns had left him.

“Hello, Unele Joey!” Dr. Green called cheerily. “See here, Uncle Joe, I want you to tell Mr. Carthage here, my new clerk, all you know about the Haunted Marshwood—he don’t believe it’s haunted.”

Uncle Joey suddenly straightened up in the crutches and hastily crossed himself. “The less said about such things, the better,” he rumbled in a deep bass. “I prefer to keep my mind on God Almighty—leave the Devil be! He can take care of himself; he don’t need discussin’; he’s far too well known as it is!”

The old soldier got his snuff and tobacco and departed quite agilely in wide, leaplike strides.

Young Mr. Carthage became quite thoughtful. There was certainly something to this fantastic mystery of the Haunted Wood. A gloomy, forbidding, rotten marshland—a sinister, mysterious old bog into whose depths no human foot had penetrated for centuries, perhaps. The “Marsh Devil” they called it. Suppose there was really a fiend—some hideous ap-

partition—some ghostly phantom—in the Haunted Marsh! The young man shuddered. It was uncanny.

“Howdy, Dr. Green!” said a sweet voice with a ripple of silver laughter in it.

A brown-eyed, dark-haired vision of loveliness in a white organdy frock stood framed in the doorway. She wore no hat, and the late afternoon sun shot rich high-lights in the heavy coils of dark brown hair and sought out tiny freckles on her nose and under her lovely eyes. The point of a fluffy, billowy parasol of some white shimmering stuff rested upon the toe of a tiny white kid pump, through which a dainty, highly-arched instep burst, showing the pink tint of the satin-soft white flesh beneath the white silken hose.

“Well, Miss Mary! You surely are a sight for sore eyes! How are you? Just saw your boss and Miss Lucille drive by a while ago. Mr. Carthage, this is Miss Mary Tabor, Dr. Blackstone’s secretary. Miss Mary—Mr. Carthage.”

To the sophisticated young man, the simplicity, daintiness, fresh, natural loveliness of Mary Tabor was a revelation.

Miss Mary Tabor gave one quick look at Mr. Carthage, then held out her cool little hand. Mr. Carthage took that little hand as if it were broken glass. He tried his best to speak, but only a hoarse, choking sound was heard. Thus began another love story.

3

DR. GEOFFREY BLACKSTONE, the scientist, was certainly a most unusual man. There was something very odd about him; a certain reserve which gave one a marked impression of a studied aloofness. Some said it was reticence—the retiring disposition of a great man. Others declared it was fear—an indefinite

fear—a constant, nerve-paralyzing fear of some unknown but dreadful fate! He seemed always on the alert, a continual, nerve-straining *qui vive*; but whether it was for his own safety or that of his daughter, no one could say. All that people really saw was the cold, unsmiling, cynical man of science. Dr. Blackstone was said to be a hard, cruel man. He was certainly a sinisterly silent one!

Lucille Blackstone was a quiet girl. Save for her motor rides with the doctor, she lived in the lonely seclusion of her father’s home, seeing no one other than Mary Tabor, the doctor’s lovely young secretary, and the taciturn and morose old Scotch couple who were Dr. Blackstone’s only servants.

Like the doctor, Lucille was dark; her hair and eyes were black, but there was absolutely no other resemblance. She was not pretty, but she was finely educated and possessed marked artistic talent.

The big limousine of Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone carrying its two silent and morose passengers—father and daughter—passed the Haunted Marsh.

Dark, dank and dismal, enveloped in its almost perpetual fog from which fanciful shredded mists arose like dim specters of long-dead loves, the gloomy, forbidding thing stood before one like a fever-inspired, ghostly mirage, silent as the grave, save for the occasional mournful croak of a frog. Against the gray, soul-chilling fog, the bare black branches of the dead trees rose skyward like skeleton fingers thrusting from the depths of hell.

Far up in the sky, just over the dim, shadowy graveyard of trees, a great vulture hung suspended, a silent, sinister symbol of the decay of all things just beneath.

To the east of the Haunted Marsh-wood a great river flowed turbulent-

ly past its misty edge, slashing its gloomy shore with malevolent fury.

The gray-faced girl in the car gave one quick shuddering look, then turned and moved closer to the stern-faced, silent man beside her, who looked neither to the right nor the left, but whose moody gaze seemed fixed on something far ahead in the future. When he again looked on the girl's melancholy face it was the same old look of fear he saw there—a rigidly set look of hopeless despair. It was the fear of some fantastically terrible fate that was to overtake her that was featured in the depressed mind of the girl—a brooding insanity, or perhaps it was a look of long-fostered, malignant hate and deep distrust of the doctor himself.

But why should she hate him? The girl did not know—she certainly could not even suspect.

Yet, Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone loved his queer, silent daughter better than life itself—he lived only for her!

THE days passed quickly for Percy Carthage. His romantic young soul, craving love and adventure, caused him to divide his time between love's young dream and the Haunted Marsh.

Night after night, after saying good-night to Mary Tabor, he walked past the dreary, mournful waste, his loaded revolver clutched tightly in his side pocket. The lonely, mist-veiled marshwood held for him an eery fascination. Just what he expected to see or hear he did not know—but he hoped and prayed for it no matter what it was.

He saw nothing. He heard nothing save the occasional hoot of an owl or the melancholy croak of a raven.

Upon one night in particular, after he had escorted Mary Tabor home from a motion picture show, some impulse drew him to the desolate but fascinating place. Once there, emboldened by the white light of a full

moon, he made an attempt to pierce the thicket of thorn-brush which edged the treacherous, mud-oozing ground of the gloomy morass. Successful in this, at the cost of bleeding hands and torn legs, his first steps toward the heart of the Haunted Marsh resulted in his body sinking almost to the knees in the clutching mud. Only with extreme difficulty had he extricated himself from the perilous predicament, and again essayed the prickly barrier for the safety of the open roadway.

The awful stillness of the gruesome place had been destroyed by his frantic, crashing exit therefrom. He had no sooner reached the road than there came a long, mournful shriek that suddenly ended in a burst of cackling, sardonic laughter.

When a lad at school, Mr. Carthage had run rather well. He found he had improved most amazingly since then.

ONE morning the village folk were horrified by the finding of pretty little Rosie Carlinson, bruised and bleeding and unconscious, on the roadway at the edge of the Haunted Marsh.

The previous night Rosie had left home about sundown to visit the family of a neighboring farmer. She never reached the home of her friends.

Upon regaining consciousness all she could remember was that when she was crossing the roadway near the Haunted Marsh, she was suddenly and suffocatingly seized by the throat, from behind. Before losing consciousness she had caught one glimpse of a terrible Thing with a great black head, from which, on either side, there protruded short, pointed horns.

Sheriff Tucker and the town marshal quickly organized a posse of eager volunteers, of which Mr. Carthage was an early and ardent member. Attempt after attempt to enter and search the Haunted Marshwood was

made, but the deadly tenacity of the dangerous quagmire forced them to abandon the search after one man had nearly lost his life. At night the loathsome place had again been surrounded by the incensed farmers, and volley after volley from rifles and shotguns had been sent hurtling into every part of its noisome, poisonous depths, but had resulted only in eliciting defiant, ear-splitting howls of rage from the unseen Fiend of the Marsh, which he alternated with shrill bursts of fearful, taunting laughter.

The following day in the bright sunlight a few of the more venturesome younger men succeeded in making a search of the lonely place, endangering their lives in the treacherous bog-land of the Haunted Marsh. Their efforts were unsuccessful—they found nothing alive save reptiles and woodlice. They heard nothing, save the hoarse croaking of the frogs.

Feeling ran high in the little village for a while. Anger was, however, most futile; none seemed able to cope with the situation.

Rosie Carlinson recovered slowly. Excitement, which had been at fever pitch, subsided rapidly, as it always does.

The search for the Fiend of the Marsh was given up as hopeless.

“PERCY,” said Mary Tabor one day, “do you know, I’m afraid of Dr. Blackstone lately! He watches me so closely—he asked me about you, too. Wanted to know if you carried a revolver. I told him I did not know. Do you?”

“No!” replied Percy; “that is, not always. But you tell him ‘no’ if he asks you again.”

Miss Tabor daintily sipped her chocolate soda.

“I really believe Dr. Blackstone is afraid of that old Marsh Devil! When I spoke of the Haunted Wood, I saw fear—positive fear, or dread of

something—in his eyes! I’m not afraid of that old Marsh Fiend—I’d go by there any time—I’ve a pistol,” proudly. “I showed it to the doctor and Lucille; I’ve gone by that nasty old marsh many a time, and nothing ever happened to me!”

Young Mr. Carthage suddenly went quite white.

“Good Lord, Mary! Please don’t do that! Please, if you love me, don’t do that! For God’s sake don’t go near that place alone!”

“Mary, Mary, quite contrary. Shall! *Must!*” defiantly proclaimed that perverse young lady. Her dark eyes grew very bright; the crimson little mouth settled into a straight, determined line, and the flush of coral pink deepened markedly in her cheeks.

“Mary! Please don’t——”

Mary smiled a quick, dimply little smile; her pretty eyes twinkled roguishly. “Thank you so very much for the nice soda, *Doctor Carthage!*” she said with mock formality, and quite calmly departed.

Young Mr. Carthage stared moodily at nothing. He suddenly registered a solemn vow that he would not leave Mary Tabor’s side for a second in the evenings. Why did Dr. Blackstone want to know if he carried a gun? What was Dr. Blackstone afraid of? Surely not of *him*. Or was he really afraid? Was Dr. Blackstone the——?

“Hey! Percy! Ma is waiting for you to come to dinner,” the ruddy-faced little druggist announced.

4

SEVERAL days later Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone, accompanied by Lucille, went to the metropolis, driving the big car himself.

When they did not return from this regular weekly trip at the usual time, Miss Mary Tabor allowed just one hour to elapse before her nerves

got the better of her; then she telephoned to Percy Carthage.

Almost at the same instant Andy McKeown, a farmer, and Sheriff William Tucker, lifted the inert and unconscious body of Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone from the farmer's wagon and carried him into the drugstore. There was an ugly wound in the forehead from which the blood was slowly trickling.

Andy McKeown had found him on the roadway just at the edge of the Haunted Wood. The doctor's car lay overturned in a ditch, evidently having been precipitated there through sudden loss of control. His assailant, no doubt, had sprung upon the running board of the moving car; a struggle, apparently, had followed, in which the doctor had been struck upon the head with some heavy, blunt instrument, and the car, lacking a guiding hand, had veered into the ditch and turned turtle.

The idea of an accident was out of the question, for Lucille had mysteriously disappeared. Not even a trace of her could be found.

On regaining consciousness Dr. Blackstone informed the sheriff and the town marshal, who had taken him to his home, that just about dusk, as he was passing the Haunted Marsh on his way home, a shadowy, grotesque form suddenly burst from the slowly rising mists which partly screened the marshwoods from the roadway, and with apelike agility it had leaped upon the rapidly moving machine.

In grappling with his assailant, which had the face of a devil and emitted demoniac howls of rage as it fought madly, he was forced to relinquish the wheel. Paralyzed with fear, Lucille made no attempt to control the swerving car. Before it plunged into the ditch, the horrible Thing struck the doctor a terrific blow on the head—just as the car overturned.

Led by Sheriff Tucker, the town

marshal, and Sam Carlinson—the father of poor little Rosie, first victim of the Marsh Fiend—the posse of irate farmers quickly organized again.

An all-night search ensued. Sheriff Tucker and Percy Carthage penetrated the marsh for quite a distance before the sheriff, losing the little trail of semi-solid ground which they had found with great difficulty, sank to his armpits in the treacherous bog. An hour was lost in rescuing the sheriff.

Reinforcements were obtained and the entire stretch of loathsome marsh was surrounded. Frantic attempts were made by the incensed men to comb its entire extent. Their endeavors were temporarily abandoned only after three men had sunk in the quagmire.

Sam Carlinson's idea to fire the whole poisonous confine was rejected for the reason that if Lucille was held a helpless prisoner somewhere within the rotten heart of the swamp, her death would be caused along with that of her mysterious captor.

Lanterns, boards and ropes were procured. By laying the boards flat upon the surface of the mire, the men were enabled, after considerable difficulty and only by keeping a tight hold upon the ropes with which they had formed a human chain, to locate the pathway of semi-solid ground again.

Several huge footprints were found upon this pathway closely resembling those of a human being, but gigantic in size and grotesque in shape. These led to the foot of an enormous dead tree in which it seemed the fiend had taken refuge with his prey. Just where its three largest limbs forked there was a large opening.

Whether the loathsome Thing was hidden in the tree with the unfortunate girl, or had simply climbed it, and, swinging apelike from its branches to those of the adjoining

dead oaks, had passed to some hidden lair in the heart of the marshwood was matter of conjecture. But the men lost no time, and the mighty ringing blows of their sharp axes soon leveled the rotten tree, and split its mighty trunk full wide. Save for the loose, rotten bark, the great tree was empty.

Swinging out in a wide circle, but connected by the ropes to the main force who kept to the safer pathway, the sheriff, Sam Carlinson, young Mr. Carthage and the town marshal pushed through the pitch-dark wooded morass.

Fitful little eery bursts of flame, flashing first one place and then another, gave an elfin touch of mystery to the weird scene. The posse of bearded, stern-faced men, carrying lanterns and armed with rifles, revolvers and axes, followed silently, with grim purpose, the devious windings of the little path which wound in labyrinthine circles about the mist-shrouded swampwood.

From time to time, fiendish yells of derision and bursts of sardonic laughter—demoniac, blood-curdling, hair-raising—quicken the pulses of those sturdy men. Abandoning the ropes, leaping from semi-solid ground to points of safety, with mighty efforts the wide line swung toward the point from which the terrible cries appeared to come, only to find, when the two ends converged, that the Devil of the Marsh had disappeared, and to be instantly greeted with its maddening yells and taunting shrieks of derision from some far portion of the wood.

Unable to cope in the blackness of the night with the baffling movements of the uncanny Thing, the men placed pickets about the marshwood in close proximity, and abandoned the search until daylight.

Goaded to madness by the awful crime, the posse, reinforced by horrified farmers from a neighboring vil-

lage, made a thorough and systematic search of the Haunted Marsh. Although they covered its entire extent, not a trace or sign of its inhuman, evil and weird inhabitant could be found.

At daybreak, just within the thorn-brush and poison-ivy thicket which completely edged the entire circumference of the marsh, they found the remains of young Lucille Blackstone.

AT THE conclusion of the inquest, Dr. Blackstone, pale and trembling, his head swathed in bandages, rose from his seat in the crowded office of Dr. Timmins, the coroner.

The room was at once cleared of all except the coroner, the sheriff, the town marshal, Dr. Green and young Mr. Carthage.

"It is rather unusual, Dr. Blackstone." The coroner spoke doubtfully. "But I guess it's all right, in the interest of science; and as it is you——"

"It is quite regular, I assure you, doctor!" Dr. Blackstone spoke slowly and calmly, but a marked suppression of feeling was evidenced by the tense tones of the aristocratic, white-haired old scientist. "It is not only in the interest of science, doctor; it is an attempt to identify, if it is possible to do so, now—the murderer of my daughter!

"By photographing the retina of the eyes of the victim," he continued, in queerly cold, unfeeling tones, "a good likeness of the murderer may be obtained!

"I ask your patience, gentlemen—I shall explain. While pursuing my medical studies in Europe I was fortunate enough to witness many unusual and startling experiments. I met Monsieur Bertillon, the great criminologist; he was engaged at that particular time in endeavoring to construct a photographic apparatus so powerful that with it he could photograph the retina of the human

eye, which at the same time magnified it so greatly that a clear image of the individual last seen by the victim would readily be reproduced.

"But, gentlemen, Monsieur Bertillon failed; I succeeded, after much labor and perseverance. I now propose, gentlemen, to obtain a photograph of the last thing seen by my daughter in life—her murderer, the Fiend of the Marsh!"

With the assistance of Dr. Timmins, the coroner, Dr. Blackstone then calmly and skilfully photographed the retinas of his dead daughter's eyes. He then returned to his home and went at once to his dark room to develop the plates.

Five minutes later, Mary Tabor, at work in the office of the old scientist which adjoined the room in which the doctor was then engaged on his gruesome task, heard an agonized groan and a sudden crash. When she burst open the door of the dark room, Dr. Blackstone lay upon the floor unconscious. At his feet lay the remains of a recently developed plate—still wet from the hyposulfite of soda.

Later, when Mary Tabor pieced the broken parts of the plate together and made a quick print therefrom, it only showed her the rather prepossessing face of a dark, sullen-looking young man—whose features bore quite a marked resemblance to those of Lucille Blackstone.

5

THE picket guard of the Haunted Marsh was rigorously continued, with military precision and discipline, for a whole week. Several further attempts to penetrate its infernal depths had been made, but these, like all preceding ones, proved most disappointing and unsuccessful.

During the night following the finding of the body of the unfortunate young girl, one of the guards

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declared that he had seen a great, apelike creature swinging nimbly among the branches of one of the dead trees. He had emptied both rifle and revolver at the uncanny Thing, but for some inexplicable reason the shots took no effect—the Thing disappearing with, supernatural suddenness, although its defiant screams and yells of derision were heard by the guards long afterward.

Plans had been formed to burn to the ground the entire stretch of the dismal marshwood by means of oils and chemicals. After being carefully considered, however, they were abandoned as impracticable. Other plans were discussed, none of which proved feasible, and these, like the one to fire the terrible place, were abandoned, one by one, as the horror of the murder abated and the anger of the people cooled.

October came, bringing the glorious harvest moon.

About midnight, just two weeks after the funeral of Dr. Blackstone's daughter, the slender figure of a girl, dressed in white, passed slowly and hesitatingly along the edge of the Haunted Marsh. Framed against the somber black of the wood, from which arose gigantic, spectral mists, the dead whiteness of her garments stood out in startling, mysterious relief.

The pale moonlight tinted with eery touch each slowly rising, phantomlike vapor with a fanciful tracery of sickly green. The doleful cry of a whippoorwill broke the silence.

The girl seemed entirely unaware of the lateness of the hour and the loneliness of the dreadful place, and was apparently oblivious to the hidden danger that lurked menacingly within the Haunted Marsh—the horrible, slant-eyed fiend whose lusting glances followed every move of her young body.

Upon reaching the end of the dismal marshwood which led into a

wide, open field, the girl turned and retraced her steps. As she did so, a great, shadowy shape moved noiselessly and rapidly just inside the tangled hedge of thorn-brush and creeping poison-ivy, which, like a bristling array of elfin spears, guarded the entrance to the filthy morass.

The terrible Thing was following her, moving silently and swiftly, with sinister intent.

The moon passed into a cloud-bank, blotting out its mystic tracery of the ghostly mists and covering the Haunted Marsh and the roadway with inky blackness.

With a snarl of frenzied lust the Thing leaped the prickly hedge with tigerlike swiftness, and landing lightly on all fours ten feet from its victim, crouched for the final brutal spring. Just as it leaped the thorn-brush hedge, the girl suddenly whirled about with startling rapidity, and backing off a few feet, quickly extended her right arm in its direction. As the weird Thing sprang toward her in a mighty leap, five bursts of flame flashed from the extended weapon in rapid succession.

The Fiend of the Marsh screeched wildly—flopped grotesquely to the roadway and sprawled out, a great, black, quivering, beastlike shape! The moon left the cloud-bank, throwing a gigantic shadow of the awful Thing on the roadway.

Awkwardly the girl pulled up the white dress and from some hidden pocket drew a second weapon. Keeping her eyes steadily on the still writhing fiend, she advanced upon it cautiously, covering the prostrate Thing with loaded revolver. The Thing on the ground gave a convulsive shudder, then lay quite still.

The Fiend of the Marsh was no more.

Young Mr. Carthage wiped the cold sweat from his forehead with the back of his right hand. Tucking up

the unusual and encumbering skirts, he bent over the Thing.

"Shades of all the demons! Half man and half beast!" he said, in tones of horror, as he gazed at the great, black, hairy head.

6

THE Fiend of the Haunted Marsh lay on a table in the office of the coroner—a cloth covered the grisly head.

In turn, Coroner Timmins, Sheriff Tucker, Talbot Giddings—the gray-haired old town marshal—Dr. Green and many of the farmers had viewed with amazement and repulsion the frightful monster.

Freak of birth or creation of the Devil? The grotesque monstrosity lay stiff and cold, its fiendish activities over. Though its horrid black head of a beast was covered, the body of the queer creature was exposed. The muscular torso, legs and arms of a human being were covered with long black hair, matted and splotched with dried black mud from the awful swamp which had so long served as its abode.

Percy Carthage described how he had tricked and killed the fiend.

The informal proceedings came quickly to an end.

"Well, that is the end of the Fiend of the Marsh. Thank God!" said Dr. Timmins, with a feeling of intense relief that was experienced by all present.

The men arose to leave.

"But—good Lord, doctor! How do you account for this fantastic abnormality?" asked little Dr. Green.

"Yes, doctor," young Mr. Carthage supplemented, "that is the question."

The door opened suddenly and Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone quietly entered. He was very pale. He bowed with quiet dignity to each man present.

"Gentlemen," he spoke solemnly, sadly, "I have a favor to ask. Will

you be seated? I have something to say."

A sense of the unusual, an awed expectancy, an overwhelming wave of curiosity surged through the minds of all present. They resumed their seats.

Dr. Blackstone remained standing. His thin, sharp, esthetic face was almost as white as his hair. He walked to the table whereon lay the Fiend of the Marsh. He raised the cloth, giving a single quick glance of repulsion. With hands that trembled he quickly replaced the cloth, then turned to face his fellow men.

"Gentlemen," he began, with quiet dignity, "that monster was once a man—a handsome, cultured man."

The old scientist was silent for a moment; then he spoke again: "Once, gentlemen, I had the reputation of being the world's greatest neuro-facial surgeon—a specialist in plastic surgery. Of middle age, I had a beautiful young wife. I was happy. But my happiness was short-lived. A handsome young artist named Graveland Stannard won the affections of my wife. I knew she was untrue. My love died instantly, but my vanity and self-esteem suffered a keen hurt. My honor was smirched. A fierce hatred overpowered me; my direst anger was aroused; rage obsessed me. Through my great surgical skill I determined to avenge the soul-killing injury I had been made to suffer, to make them both pay a hellish toll for the wrong they had done me.

"I left my home ostensibly for a trip to New York, but late that very night I returned quietly to my home. Graveland Stannard was there, she was in his arms! I heard their voices as I stood outside beneath the window, in the warm, beautiful June night. I left the garden, skirted the garage, and entered the building where I kept my animals for experimentation. I had a great black Rus-

sian wolf; through much experiment and kindness he had become quite tame, even affectionate, toward me; none else dared touch him. I returned to the garden. Terror, the great wolf, followed me like a dog. Outside the window, Terror heard Stannard's voice, and snarled in sudden inexplicable anger. I was forced to speak to him—to quiet him. The guilty pair heard and recognized my voice; Stannard proved the cad he was and attempted to escape, caring naught for the woman!"

Dr. Blackstone paused. It was so quiet in the little office of the coroner that one could count one's heartbeats.

"Gentlemen, I am taxing your patience; I must also tax your credulity. The great wolf suddenly broke from me, and running to the other side of the house, crouched in the shrubbery beneath a certain window.

"As Stannard's feet reached the ground I grasped his arm; he drew a weapon, but by superior strength I forced his arm upward and back and the weapon was discharged harmlessly. With my other hand I drove home in his left arm a hypodermic syringe filled with hyoscin. The man's muscles relaxed, he sank to the ground, unconscious. I gave the same dose to the great wolf, though it grieved me. I dragged them both to my operating room in a secluded building on my estate. I stole to my wife's room, and unheeding the whimpering fool, I overcame her frantic struggles with a powerful anesthetic.

"All through the night I labored with the three of them—the man, the woman, the great wolf. With diabolical skill I had not dreamed I possessed, I transformed the face of the man into the startling, frightful semblance of a wolf, grafting the skin of the head of that animal on his face. The lovely features of the woman I disfigured forever, giving her a twisted, horribly unnatural countenance,

the face of a satyr, and covered it also with the hair of the wolf.

"For weeks I kept these two confined, under the influence of a drug, until my terrible work was complete. Then, once again under anesthesia, I conveyed them to a room in a cheap lodging house, and left them, to awake in horror and consternation, to gaze at each other with loathing and fright, with hatred, with disgust."

Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone paused and again walked to the table with its gruesome object. Raising the cloth, he displayed the horrible features of the man-beast. A great, black, hairy head, cruel, staring slant-eyes, the long black snout, the gleaming teeth, gums drawn back in the last snarl of the Fiend of the Marsh. The head of a great black wolf glared at him, in wild but impotent anger, it seemed to the doctor.

The doctor suddenly replaced the cloth. He turned again to his audience.

"Gentlemen, that is all that remains of Graveland Stannard. As for the woman, I never saw, or heard of her, again. Just how Stannard arrived at the Haunted Marsh, and made his hidden lair therein, I can not explain; perhaps he came by way of the river, unseen."

Dr. Blackstone ceased speaking. His labored breathing was most audible. He was silent for some minutes, then spoke again. The even, slow tones of the scientist trembled; he labored under some marked excitement.

"There is one thing more I can not explain, for I do not understand it myself," he said nervously; "and that is, gentlemen, when I photographed the retina of the eyes of my dead child—murdered by yonder devil of my own creation—the plate printed most plainly the features of

young Graveland Stannard, *just as he was before I disfigured him!*"

There was the stillness of death in the little room. The faces of his listeners were rigidly set.

Dr. Blackstone handed Coroner Timmins a photograph of the retina of the eyes of his daughter Lucille. This was passed by him to each man in turn. Each viewed it with startled amazement, for despite the cracks, the print showed most plainly and unmistakably the features of a dark, strikingly handsome young man, whose countenance so closely resembled that of the murdered girl that he would have been taken for a twin brother.

Those present in the little room were speechless. Filled with horror at the terrible confession of the doctor, the startling denouement, rendered them almost incapable of thought.

Dr. Timmins broke the spell. He walked to the table, and raising the cloth from the face of the monster, viewed, with coldly professional eyes, the ghastly thing that lay there. "A most wonderful piece of work, doctor!" he said, admiringly.

None heard the valiant speech. Their puzzled brains were busy, struggling with the uncanny result of the unusual experiment in photography; the startling, supernatural thing the camera had done.

Dr. Blackstone picked up his coat and hat. "My revenge, gentlemen"—he seemed quite calm again, and his tones were cold and even—"acted as a boomerang: it came back to me, robbing me of my dearest possession, my daughter Lucille!"

The doctor left the room quietly.

"My God!" said little Dr. Green, under his breath; "horrible!"

Slowly the men filed out of the little room.

