

Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE



July
1925
25¢

A. Bronschart-25

A Complete Novelette

THE WEREWOLF OF POKERT by H. Warner Munn

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME VI

NUMBER 1

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 30, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor. Copyright, 1925, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

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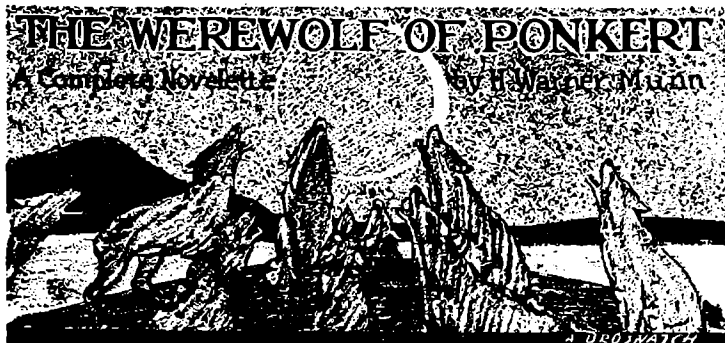
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They are neither brute nor human—
They are neither man nor woman—
They are Ghouls.

—Poe: The Bella.

PROLOGUE

IN THE past, when I toured in France, invariably I made a point of never failing to stop at a certain tavern, about thirty miles from Paris. I will not give you more definite directions for reaching it, for it was a discovery of my own and as such I would share it with no one. The fact that the inn has very pretty serving maids is but incidental, the real reason of my visits being the superlative excellence of the wine.

Many a night have I and the old Pierre sat, smoked and drunk till the wee hours of the morning, and many have been the experiences we have exchanged of wild, eery adventure in various parts of the globe. Pierre also was a great traveler and seeker after adventure before he drifted into the backwater of this placid village, to finish there the remainder of his days.

One night (or morning, I should say), Pierre grew indiscreet under the influence of his nectar, and let fall a few words so pregnant of possibilities that I scented a mystery at once; and when he was sober I de-

manded an explanation. And, having said so much, seeing that he could not dissuade me, he brought forth proof of his dark hints in regard to a horrible occurrence in the annals of his family.

The proof was a book, bound in hand-tooled leather and locked by a silver clasp. When open it proved to be written in a crabbed hand in old Latin on what was apparently parchment, which was now yellow with age, but must when new have been remarkably white.

It comprized only four leaves, each a foot square and glued or cemented to a thin wooden backing. They were written on only one side and completely covered with this close, crabbed Latin.

On the back of the book were two iron staples, and hanging from each, several links of heavy rusted chain. Evidently, like most valuable books which were available to the public in the past, it had been chained fast to something immovable to prevent theft.

Unfortunately, I cannot read Latin, or in fact any languages but French and English, although I speak several. So it was necessary for my friend to read it to me, which he did.

After I had recovered from the numbness which the curious narrative had thrown over me, I begged him to read it again—slowly. As he read, I copied; and here is the tale for you to judge and believe as you see fit. Told in Hungarian, transcribed in Latin, translated into modern French and from that into English, it is probably both garbled and improved. No doubt anachronisms abound, but be that as it may, it remains without dispute the only authentic document known of a werewolf's experiences, dictated by *himself*.

1

HAVING but a few hours in which to live, I dictate that which follows, hoping that someone thereby may be warned by my example and profit by it. The priest has told me to tell my story to him and he will write it down. Later it will be written down again, but I do not care to think of that now.

My name is Wladislaw Brenryk. For twenty years I lived in the village where I was born, a small place in the northeastern part of Hungary. My parents were poor and I had to work hard—harder, in fact, than I liked, for I was born of a languid disposition. So I used my wits to save my hands, and I was clever, if I do say it myself. I was born for trading and bargaining, and none of the boys I grew to manhood with could beat me in a trade.

Time went on, and before I had reached manhood my father died in a pestilence. Although my mother was pestilence-salted (for she had the plague when she was a girl and recovered), she soon gave up, grew weaker and weaker, finally joining my father in the skies. The priest of our village said that it was the trouble in her lungs that killed her, but I know better, for they had loved each other much.

Alone and lorn for the first time in my life, I could not bear to remain longer amongst the scenes of my happy boyhood. So on a fine spring morning I set forth carrying on my back those possessions which I could not bring myself to part with, and around my waist a well-stuffed money belt, filled with the results of my trading and the sale of our cottage.

For several years I wandered here and there, horse-trading for a time, then again a peddler of jewelry and small articles. Finally I came to Ponkert, and started a small shop in which I sold beautiful silks, jewels and sword hilts. It was the sword hilts that sold the best. They were highly decorated with golden filigree and encrusted with precious stones. Chiefs and moneyed nobles would come or send messengers for many miles to obtain them. I gained a reputation for honesty and fair dealing, likewise a less enviable notoriety for being a miser. It is true that I was careful and cautious, but I defy anyone to prove that I was parsimonious.

I HAD closed up the shop for the night and harnessed the horses for the long drive home, when for the first time I wished that I lived in the village instead of being so far away. I had always enjoyed the ride before: a man can think much in a ten mile ride and it gave an opportunity to clean my mind of the day's worries and bickering, so as to come to my dear wife and little daughter with thoughts of only them.

What made me look forward with anxiety to the long ride home was the many broad gold pieces secreted in my wallet. I had never been molested on that road, but others had been found robbed and partly devoured, with tracks of both man and beast about them in the snow. Obviously, thought I at the time, thieves had beaten them down, leaving them for the wolves.

But there was a disturbing factor in the problem: not only were the bodies horribly mutilated and the beast tracks about them extraordinarily large for wolf tracks, but the feet of the men were unprotected by any covering whatever! Barefooted men roaming through the forests, in the snow, on the slim likelihood of discovering prey which could be forced to yield wealth! The very idea was improbable. If I had only known then what I know now, my entire life might have been changed, but it was not so to be.

To return to my story: It was known that I had a large amount of money in my possession, for that afternoon the chief of a large Tartar caravan, which was passing through, had stopped at my shop and taken six of my best sword hilts with him, leaving their equivalent in gold. So I had cause enough to worry. I looked about for some sort of weapon, and found a short iron bar, which I tucked beneath the robes of the sleigh; then I spoke to the mares, and we were off on the long ride home.

For a long time we went creaking along, the sleigh runners squeaking on the well-packed snow. Frost was in the air, and the stars gleamed down coldly upon the dark forest, hardly lighting the road. As yet the moon had not risen.

I turned from the main traveled highway and took the river road. This left the forest behind, but the traveling was much worse. Exposed to the winds, the light snowfall of the morning had drifted, and the roadway was choked. I thought of leaving the road and taking to the smooth surface of the river which gleamed brightly to the left, but this would have meant a mile or more extra to travel, for the river curved in a great bend opposite our home, and there was an impassable barrier of small trees and brush for some distance.

The moon was now rising over the hill I had just quitted, and as the beams struck upon me, I was suddenly seized by a fit of the most unaccountable terror. This peculiar feeling held me rigid in my seat. It seemed as if a hand of ice had been suddenly laid upon the back of my neck.

The mares, it was evident, had felt this strange thrill also, for they imperceptibly increased their speed without urging of mine. Indeed, I could not have moved a muscle while that spell was upon me.

Soon we dipped down into the hollow at the hill's foot, and the power that had frozen me was removed. A strange feeling of exaltation and happiness swept over me, as if I had escaped from some terrible and unthinkable danger.

"Hai!" I shouted, rising in the sleigh and cracking my whip.

The mares responded nobly and we started to climb the next hill. As we did so, a fiendish howling came down the wind, but faintly, as if it were some distance away. I stopped the mares and stood up in the sleigh, the better to listen.

Faintly and far away sounded the cries, mellowed by distance. Then they grew louder and louder as the brutes came nearer, and over the top of the hill I had just quitted swept the devilish pack! They were on my trail, and it was only too plain that before I could reach home they would be upon me.

There was only one chance, and I took it. I clucked to the horses and turned them on to the ice of the river where lay a straight, smooth roadway. As long as the mares kept their feet, I was safe. But if one should stumble —!

Then that same spell of horror threw its icy mantle over me again; I sagged back; the mares took the bit in their teeth; and we rushed like a thunderbolt down the river.

Little puffs of diamond dust shot from the ice into my lap, as the steel-shod hoofs rang and clicked. On we tore, while I sat in the sleigh like a stone, unable to move a muscle. Faster and faster we rushed between the banks of brush that fringed the icy causeway.

Fainter re-echoed the demoniac ululations behind me, until at last they ceased altogether and the horses gradually slackened their furious pace.

Here the spell left me, nor did it ever come again. Now we traveled at a trot, which slowed until the mares were but walking along, their panting breath paling their dark heaving sides to gray, in the frosty air.

Then we rounded the bend, and I saw black, open water ahead. Here progress, perforce, ceased. There was no way out, except to turn back and mount the bank where less underbrush grew, then into the smooth plain beyond and homeward.

So I tugged at the rein, and we swerved half-way around. In that moment of unpreparedness, all became confusion.

A gloating chuckle sounded evilly from the farther bank, and five great gray shapes charged at me across the ice.

TO THINK was to act with me. I have always been a creature of impulse, and almost instinctively I turned back, slashing the mares till they reared and we plunged straight forward into the onrushing mass of bodies. This resolute move took the beasts by surprize and halted them. They scattered, and I was through, with a clear road before me. But my escape was not so to be accomplished.

Silently, from the shelter of an overhanging rock, trotted two more of the creatures; a very giant of a beast, gaunt and gray, beside which moved a small black one. Roaring, the gray flung himself at the horses,

which reared and plunged in terror; and the rest were upon me from the rear.

Then, turmoil of battle, pandemonium of sound, through which cut like a knife the scream of a horse. One was down! I felt the sleigh lurch to one side; heavy bodies struck at me, sharp teeth tore; but I kept my balance until one, such was his velocity, struck me and laid me flat in the bottom of the sleigh, himself rebounding and shooting over the side.

Something offered itself to my hand, something cold and metallic. I raised my arm, smote, felt steel bite bone, felt bone crunch beneath my stroke. I laid about me like a madman, with the bar, and cleared a space. I stood erect and waited for the attack.

But no instant attack followed. The menace of the bar was apparently too strong, and one by one they sank down on their haunches to rest or to wait. Jaws gaped wide and tongues lolled. Panting, they rested after the long run.

As I stood there in the sleigh, watching them, it seemed as if they were laughing, ghoul-like, at my horrible plight. As I soon found, they were!

I became conscious of a noise behind me, a small noise, such as the wind might make blowing a dead leaf across the bare ice; a sound like dead twigs rustling in the breeze, a faint scraping of claws, a padding of feet; and turning, I looked straight into the red glaring dots which were the eyes of the black wolf!

I shouted hoarsely, swung up the bar and brought it down with every ounce of force that I possessed. Unfortunately for myself, the beast, and Hungary, the great gray creature which ran at his side swerved and took the blow instead, squarely between the eyes.

He grunted, choked; a stream of blood shot from his mouth and nos-

trils. His eyelids opened and closed convulsively. Then he collapsed. The bar had crashed halfway through his head.

I whirled, expecting to be overwhelmed by the six that still lived, but to my intense surprize the surge of bodies that I had seen from the tail of my eye, when I struck at the black wolf, had subsided and they were now loping round and round the sleigh.

As they moved, the stricken mare followed them with her pain-filled eyes, while the one that was unharmed struggled constantly to be free. As the black leader passed me in the circling rout, I, likewise, slowly turned to keep him always in sight. Instinct told me that from him would come my greatest danger.

Now I noticed a strange thing: about the necks of each of the five gray beasts there hung upon a thong a leathern pouch, about the size of a large fist. These pouches hung flat and flaccid as if they were empty. The black, examine as closely as I might, wore none.

Then, as with one accord, they stopped in their tracks, and sank on their haunches. That for which they had been waiting had at last occurred. There seemed to be some sort of a silent signal given. Simultaneously they lifted their heads and loosed a long, low wail, in which seemed to hang all the desolation and loneliness of eternity. Thereafter none moved or uttered a sound.

Everything was deathly still. Even the wind, which had been sporting in the undergrowth, had now faded into nothingness and died. Only the labored breathing of the two mares and the hoarse panting of the brutes were to be heard.

Little red eyes, swinish and glittering like hell-sparks, shone malevolently at me by the reflected light of the now fully risen moon.

In this unaccountable pause I had time to see the full beauty of the trap. As I have stated, the river formed a great bow, and while I was traveling on the curve between nock and nock, they quitted the river and waited at the rapids, the line of their pursuit forming the string to the bow.

Also, for the first time, I could examine carefully and note what manner of beasts these were that held me in their power.

Far from being wolves, as my first thought had been, they were great gray animals, the size of a large hound, except the leader, who was black and more the size and shape of a true wolf. All, however, had the same general appearance, and the same characteristics. A high intelligent brow, beneath which gleamed little red piglike eyes, with a glint of a devil in their glance; long and misshapen hind quarters, which caused them to move with a rabbitlike lope when they ran; and most terrifying of all, they were almost hairless and possessed not the slightest rudiment of a tail!

THE circle was so arranged that as I stood, wary of possible attack, I could see four of the six. The small black creature was directly in front of me, tongue hanging out, apparently chuckling to himself in anticipation of some ghastly joke to follow.

Two were behind me, in whichever way I turned, but the night was so still that I could have heard them approaching long before they could have rushed me.

As I watched the creatures, I suddenly noticed that they were no longer glaring at me, but at something behind and beyond me and on the ground. I whirled, fearing a charge, but not a move anywhere in the circle had taken place. So I glanced with the tail of my eye for a rush at my back, and set myself to solve the mystery.

There was nothing before me, on the bare ice, but here and there a white line extended across the river, caused by the snow drifting into cracks. Now I noticed that across one of these there lay, inside the circle, the dead body of the thing that I had slain with the bar. The four creatures which I could now see were watching this intently. I did likewise, with senses alert for treachery. I glanced from one end of the warped, twisted and broken thing, to the other. Somehow it seemed more symmetrical than before; longer in a way, and of a more human cast of feature.

Then—God! Shall I never forget that moment?

I looked at its right forepaw, or where its right forepaw should have been and was not. A white hairless hand had taken its place!

I screamed, hoarsely and horribly, grasped my bar firmly, leapt from the sleigh and rushed into the pack, which, risen, was waiting to receive me.

Everything from that moment until my arrival home in the morning is a blur. I remember a black figure, standing erect before me, burning eyes which fixed me like a statue of stone, a command to strip and a sharp stinging pain in the hollow of my elbow, where the great vein lies.

Then more dimly, I seem to recall a moment of intense anguish as if all my bones were being dislocated and re-set, a yelping, howling chorus of welcome, a swift rushing over ice on all fours, and a shrill sharp screaming, such as only a horse in mortal fear can give!

Then there is a clear spot of recollection in which I was eating raw flesh and blood of my own mare, with snarling creatures like myself gorging all around me.

How I reached home, I have not the slightest idea, but the next that I remember is a warm room and my dear wife's face bending over mine. All after that, for nearly a week, was

delirium, in which I raved incessantly, so they told me, of wolves which were not wolves, and a black fiend with eyes like embers.

2

WHEN I was well again I went to the scene of my adventure, but the ice had broken up in an early thaw, and only the swollen river rolled where I had been captured. At first, I thought that my half-remembered fancies were freakish memories, born of delirium, but one night in the early spring, as I lay in bed, only half asleep, something occurred which robbed me of this hope. I heard the long, melancholy wail of a wolf! Calling and appealing, it drew me to the window in hopes of seeing the midnight marauder, but nothing was visible as far as I could see, so I turned to go back to bed again. As I moved away from the window it came again, insistently calling. A powerful attraction drew me. I silently opened the window and melted into the darkness outside.

It was a warm spring evening as I padded silently along on bare feet, through the forest, drawn in a direction that led toward the thickest portion of the wood. I must have gone at least for half a mile under the influence of a strange exhilaration that had come over me, like that of a lover who keeps a tryst with his beloved.

Then the wailing cry echoed again, but with a shock I realized that there was no sound in the wood save the usual night noises. I realized the truth! The sound did not exist in reality, but I was hearing with the ears of the spirit rather than my fleshly ones. I suspected danger, but it was too late to turn back.

A figure rose to a standing posture, and I recognized the master, as he called himself, and we also, later. Under a power not my own, I stripped off my night garments, concealed them in a hollow tree which

the master showed me, and fell to the ground, a beast! The master had drunk my blood, and the old story that I had never quite believed, to the effect that if a *wampyr* drinks one's blood, he or she has a power over that person that nothing can break, and eventually he also will be a *wampyr*, was coming true.

We raced off into the night, were joined later by the other five, and paused for a time in the forest. Here the master transformed himself, and I also. We stood there, and for the first time I heard the master's voice.

"Look well!" it croaked. "Look well! Welcome you to the pack this man?" (From the tone and actions I judged that he was speaking by rote, and using set phrases for the occasion.) Here there arose a howl of assent.

"Look well!" he said to me. "Look well! Do you wish to be one of these?" pointing to the pack. I covered my eyes with my hands and shrank back. "Think well," he spoke again, catching my bare shoulder with one talon, and mouthing into my ear. "Will you join my band of free companions, or furnish them with a meal tonight?" I could imagine that a death's-head grin overspread his features at this, though my eyes were still blinded.

"You have a choice," he said. "We do not harm the poor, only the rich, although now and then we take a cow or horse from them, for that is our due. But the rich we slay, and their jewels and fine gold are ours. I take none myself, all belongs to my companions. What do you say?"

I cried "No!" as loudly as I could, and stared defiantly into his face. Over his shoulder I noted that the pack was gradually moving in, stealthily with eager leering looks.

"Hal!" he cackled, as I paled before that menace; "where now is your bravery? Make your choice. Die here and now, or make a promise to obey me unswervingly, to deviate not a jot

from my orders, no matter what they may be, and be my willing slave. I will make you rich beyond your wildest dreams, your people shall wear sables and ermine, and the king himself will be proud to acknowledge you as friend. Come, what say you?" he asked.

I hesitated, temporizing. "Why do you single out me? I have never harmed you, do not even know you. There must be hundreds stronger than I and more willing, within easy reach. Why not use those you have or take someone else?"

"There must be seven in the pack," he answered simply. "You slew one, therefore must you take his place. It is but justice."

Justice! I laughed in his face. Justice, that a man fighting for his life should also perish if, slaying one of his enemies, he himself still lived!

My laughter infuriated him. "Enough delay!" he cried impatiently. "Come, decide! Go to them, or promise to obey! Death or life. Which? Do you promise?"

What a terrible choice I was offered! A horrible death beneath fangs of beasts which should never have existed, with no one ever to know that I had resisted the temptation of proffered life; or an even more terrible existence as one of these unnatural things, half man, half demoniac beast! But if I chose death, I should have a highly problematical hope of future life in the skies, and my wife and daughter would be left alone.

If I chose life, I should have high adventure to season my prosaic existence; I should have wealth with which I could buy a title. Besides, something might happen to save me from the fate which otherwise would sometime inevitably overtake me. Is it any wonder to you, why I chose as I did? Would you not do the same, in my predicament? Even if I had it all to do over again, knowing what I now know, I think I should say again

that which I answered the master: "I promise!"

But God! if I had only chosen death!

The things that I saw, heard, and did that night made a stain on my soul that all eternity will never erase. But finally they were over, and we separated, each returning to his home, and the master where no one knows.

I resumed my form by the tree, and as I did so, I remembered the events that had taken place that night. I fell prone on the grass, screaming, cursing, and sobbing, to think of my fate to come. I was damned forever!

ALTHOUGH I have called myself a *wampyr*, I was not one in the true sense of the word, at the time of which I speak. Neither were any of the rest of my companions, except the master, for although we ate human flesh, drank blood, and cracked bones to extract the last particle of nourishment therefrom, we did so to assuage our fierce hunger more than because it was necessary for our continued existence. We ate heartily of human food also, in the man form, but more and more we found it unsatisfying and came to possess a cannibalistic appetite, which only flesh and blood would conquer.

Gradually we were leaving even this for a diet consisting solely of blood. This, in my firm belief, was that which the master lived upon. His whole appearance bore this out. He was incredibly aged, and I believe an immortal. (He still may be, for no one has seen him dead, although they tell me that he is.)

His face was like a crinkled, seamed piece of time-worn parchment, coal-black with age. His eyes glittered with youth, seeming to have almost a separate existence of their own. Gradually, very gradually, the expressions of our faces were changing also, and we were turning into true *wampyrs* when self-brought catastrophe overtook us.

I will not dwell long upon the year or so in which I was the master's slave, for our dark and bloody deeds are too numerous to mention in detail. Some nights we wandered about in fruitless search and returned empty-handed, but usually we left death and destruction behind us. Most times, however, we would be summoned on some definite foray, which culminated in each of us being, the next day, somewhat richer.

We delighted in killing horses and cattle. We went blood-mad on these occasions, sometimes even leaving our original trail to take up an attractive scent of ox or cow. For these, I do not condemn myself, in so far as no human souls were destroyed in these slaughters, to become *wampyrs* after death. But as I think of those who are ruined forever because of me, I shudder at the thought!

On one occasion when we dragged down humans, my conscience has always rested easily. We had set out on the track of a sleigh, loaded with wealthy travelers from foreign parts; an old man and his two grandsons about three to five years of age. We followed for several miles to find the sleigh lying on its side, the horses gone, and the three travelers, stiff and stark on the dark stained snow, which was churned by many footprints of horse and man. Enraged, not by the murder (for we ourselves had intended no less), but by the loss of our anticipated loot, we took up the trail which led away toward the mountains. Five men on horseback made up the party. They spurred their horses to the utmost when we sang the Hunger Song, baying as we ran, but they were too slow for us. One by one, we pulled them down, slew the slayers and despoiled the thieves, which was a grim and ghastly jest.

But not often could I console myself thus. Many were the helpless and harmless that we removed from existence, and more horrible did we become. Day by day we were growing

hardened and inured to our lot, and only rarely did my soul sicken as at my first metamorphosis. At one of these times, I crept into the village church. It was late at night, and except for myself the building was empty.

I knelt at the altar and unburdened my soul. I confessed everything to the unhearing ears of the Great-hearted One, abased myself and groveled on the floor. For hours it seemed, I prayed and begged that I might be given a sign, some small hope, that I should not be damned forever. . . . No sign!

I cursed, screamed and prayed; for a time I must have been mad.

Finally I left. At the church door I bared my head and looked up at the sky across which dark clouds were scudding, obscuring the stars. I rose on tiptoe, shook my fist at the racing clouds, cursed God Himself and waited for the lightning stroke, but none came. Only a light rain started to fall and I arrived home, drenched to the skin, with a heavier load on my heart than when I left.

Yet even then, so mysterious are the ways of an inscrutable Providence, my salvation was approaching in a horrible guise. For on that night I had the thought which was to result in annihilation for us all.

3

SOMETIMES, when I walked the village streets, I had met people who seemed to glance furtively at me with a wild look. These glances were quickly averted, but by them I had begun to decide within myself just who were the other members of the pack. Growing bolder and more certain, I had accosted certain of them, to find myself correct.

One by one, I sounded them out, but found only Simon the smith to be of my own sentiments toward our gruesome business. The rest all exulted in the joyous hunt, and could

not, we were certain, be persuaded to revolt against this odious enslavement.

But gradually, as we became more hardened and unprincipled, more calloused to the suffering we caused, we had become yet more greedy and rapacious. Here Simon and I found a loophole to attack.

As I have said before, the master never took any of the money, jewels or other portable valuables which we found on the bodies or amongst the possessions of those whom we slew.

So I dropped a word here, a hint there, a vague half-question to one individual singly and alone, while Simon did the same. The gist of all our arguing was, "What does the master take?"

This was a very pertinent question, for it was obvious to all of them that the master was not leader for nothing. He obtained something from each corpse when he went to it, alone, and we sat in the circle, waiting eagerly for the signal to rush in.

To me it was plain that this was nothing more material than the life blood of the slain unfortunates, which kept the master alive! Simon and I said nothing of this, gradually forming the opinions of the others to the effect that the immortal souls were absorbed into the master's being, giving him eternal life.

This staggering thought opened great possibilities in the minds of most, and as we thought, all; later I was to learn to my sorrow that not all were so credulous. But more and more they became dissatisfied, less patiently did they restrain themselves from leaping in ahead of their turn, on our bandit raids. For working in their minds, like worms in carrion, or smoldering sparks in damp cloth, which will presently burst into flame, was this: "Why not be immortal myself?"

So were discord and revolt fomented, and so was I the unwitting cause

of my further undoing and, strangely enough, my redemption.

Now, my wife was a good woman, and I am sure that she loved me as much as I loved her, but this very love worked our ruin. All people have a weakness in one way or another, and she was no exception to the rule. She was jealous—insanely jealous!

My frequent absences, which I thought had been unnoticed, since I had been careful not to make the slightest noise in opening the window and quitting the house, had been observed for weeks.

I found later that one had told the master what Simon and I had started, and it was the only female member of our pack. But he had already perceived, with his cunning senses, the almost imperceptible signs of revolt against his absolute power. Determining to crush this at the start, he decided to make an example of someone to bind the rest more closely to him by means of a new fear.

Why he chose me instead of Simon I have not the faintest idea, unless it was that I was more intelligent than the ignorant clods that made up the rest of the pack. But so it was, I was chosen to be the victim, and this is the way he set about to bind me forever to him.

He enlisted the aid of old Mother Molla, who was regarded as a witch that had sold her soul to the devil. How she got into the house I never was able to discover, for the original excuse was either forgotten later, or merely left untold. But to the house she came one day, probably obtaining an entrance on some flimsy pretext of begging for cast-off clothing, or of borrowing some cooking utensil.

Before she left she casually mentioned that she had seen me in the early morning before sunrise, coming past her hut. There were only two houses in that part of the wood,

Mother Molla's and the charcoal burner's, whose name was Fiermann. All would have yet been well, but the old hag insinuated that "Fiermann had a young and pretty daughter and that he himself was in town very often over night." And so the seeds of suspicion were planted in my wife's mind.

She said that she ordered the hag out, and helped her across the threshold with a foot in her back, and when the old witch picked herself out of the mud she screamed, "Look for yourself, at half an hour before midnight," and hobbled away cackling to herself.

The mischief was done. At first my wife resolved to think nothing about the matter, but it preyed on her mind and gnawed at her heart. So to ease her suspicions she worked away a knot in the partition; and that night when I had gone to bed she waited and watched.

She saw me fling back the clothes and step out of bed, fully dressed, then walk silently across the floor and open the window slowly and carefully, vanishing into the moonlit night. At first, she told me later, she was horrified and heartbroken to think me unfaithful; then she resolved to go away or kill herself, so she would not be a hindrance to me any longer. But finally her emotions changed and vanished until only hate was left. She resolved to watch and wait to see what might befall. She sat by the knothole until I came back just as the cock crew; then she went to bed herself, to toss about sleeplessly until morning.

Night after night she waited, sometimes fruitlessly, for it was not every night that the silent call summoned us to the rendezvous. But when in a period of three weeks I had stealthily stolen out eight times, and she had satisfied herself that Fiermann had also been away, by artfully questioning his girl, her suspicions were confirmed. He was with the pack, but

neither knew that. So she decided to confront me with the facts and tell me to choose between the two, "herself, the mother of my child, or this upstart chimney-sweep" (I use her own words).

All this time the master's mind was working upon hers to such effect, that although she thought she was choosing her own course of action, in reality she was following the plans which the master had made for her.

ONE night I heard the silent howl, which never failed, when I was in the man form, to send a chill down my back. I had been expecting this for several days, and had remained dressed each night until midnight, to be in readiness for the summons.

I stepped carefully to the window and released the catch that held it down, then lifted—. What was this? It stuck! I tugged harder with no better results.

Well, then, I should have to use the door. It was dangerous, but might be done. At all means, anything was preferable to going wild within the house. So I turned and was struck fairly in the eyes by a splinter of yellow light. Someone was on the other side of the partition door with a lighted candle, and the door was slowly opening!

Instantly I knew that I was discovered. I bounded toward the bed, intending to simulate sleep until she had gone away, but the door flew open with a crash, and my wife stood in the doorway with a scornful look on her face, and a candle held high, which cast its rays upon me. It was too late to hope for escape, so I attempted to brazen it out.

"Well, what is it?" I asked gently.

"What were you doing at the window?" she said.

"It is so hot in here that I was going to let some air in," I replied.

"To let air in, or yourself out?" came, though spoken in a low tone, as a thunderclap to me.

I was struck dumb, and then she told me the whole story as she knew it. The mass of lies with which old Molla must have started her mind in a ferment poured into my consciousness in a heap of jumbled words.

Again came the howling cry, that only I could hear, and I thought I detected a note of anger in it at my delay.

"At first," she said, "I did not believe, but when I saw with my own eyes—"

"Silence!" I roared with such vehemence that the window rattled.

"I will be heard!" she cried. "I have nailed down the window and you shall not pass through this door to-night!"

She slammed the door, and stood dauntlessly before it! My heart went out to her in this moment. That blessed, bright little figure, standing there so bravely, made me forget why I must go. I took a step toward her—and that long eery wail, which only re-echoed in my brain, sounded much more wrathfully—and nearer!

Torn between two desires, I stood still. My face must have been a mask of horror and anguish, for she looked at me in amazement, which softened to pity.

"What is it, dear?" she whispered. "Have I wronged you after all? Won't you tell me, darling?"

Then I felt the pangs of change beginning and knew that the transformation would follow quickly. I seized a heavy stool, and flung it through the window, following it as quickly myself. If I was to escape, not a second could be wasted.

With a swiftness I had never dreamed she possessed, she ran to me as I crouched in the window with my hands on the side, and one knee on the sill, drawing myself up and over.

She seized me by the hair and dragged my head back, crying meanwhile. "No! No! No! You shall not go. You are mine and I shall keep

you! That slut Stanoska will wait long tonight!"

Then she pulled so mightily that I fell upon my back. All was lost! It was too late, for I no longer had any desire to leave! Although I still maintained the outward appearance of a man, I thought as a beast.

I have often thought that the change first took place in the brain and later in the body. I shrieked demoniacally, and another cry arose outside the house, sounding loud through the broken window.

She paled at the sound and shrank back against the table, terrified at my wild and doubtless uncanny appearance. I sprang to my feet, tearing madly at my clothes, ripping them from my body in pieces. I had all the terror of a wild animal now for encumbering clothing or anything like a trap.

When completely stripped, I howled again loudly and fell upon all fours, a misshapen creature that should never have existed. I had become a wild beast! But it was not I, who slunk, bellying the floor, hair all a-bristle with hate, toward the horror-stricken figure by the table; it was not I—I swear before the God that soon will judge me—who crouched and sprang, tearing with sharp, white fangs that beautiful white throat I had caressed so often!

AT A sound outside, I turned, standing astride my victim, and ready to fight for my kill.

With forepaws on the window sill, through the broken pane a wolf's head peered. With hellish significance it glanced at the door of the next room wherein lay our little girl, asleep in her cradle, then turned its eyes upon me in a mute command.

It was I, the man spirit, who for a moment ruled the monstrous form into which my body had been transmuted. It was the man, myself, who curled those thin beastly lips into a

silent, menacing grin, who stalked forward, stiff-legged, hackles raised and eager for revenge!

As swiftly as the head had appeared it withdrew and suddenly came again, curiously changing in form. Its outlines grew less decided, everything seemed to swim before my eyes. I grew giddy, and there visibly the wolf's head changed into that inscrutable parchment mask of the master. Those youthful eyes glared balefully into mine, with a smoky flame behind them.

I felt weak; again the beast was in the ascendant, and I forgot my human heritage. Lost was all memory of love or revenge. I, the werewolf, slunk through the door, over to the cradle, gloatingly stood anticipating for a moment while blood dripped from my parted jaws on my little girl's clean shift. Then I clamped down my jaws on her dress, and heedless of her puny struggles, or her cries, I rose with a long clean leap through the broken window bearing my contribution to the ghoulish feast!

Then to my tortured memory comes one of those curious blank spots that sometimes afflicted me. I dimly remember snarls of fighting animals, and more faintly still, sounds of shots, but that must be the delirium of my wounds that speaks, for it could not be possible at that time of night that one might be wandering about armed with such an untrustworthy weapon.

Soon it was over. Over! I, the last of our line, took up the horrible hunt, blithe and rejoicing.

Down the valley roared the hell-pack, and at the head the master. Foam from my bloody jaws flecked the snow with pink as we galloped along, and mounted the hill like a wave breaking on the beach. We were racing along at full speed with the master still ahead and the rest of the pack strung out at varying distances behind, when suddenly he turned in midleap, and alighting, confronted us.

The one who was directly in front of me, and behind the master, dug his feet into the ground and slid in order to avoid collision. I was going so swiftly I could not stop, and piled up on my mate. The next instant we were at the bottom of a struggling, clawing, snapping heap. For a moment we milled and fought, while the master sat on his haunches, and lolled his tongue out of gaunt grinning jaws, breath panting out in white, moist puffs.

Then we scattered as if blown apart, and also settled into a resting position, a very sheepish-looking pack of marauders. At that moment I felt taking place within me the tearing, rending sensation that always preceded the transforming of our bodies from one form to another. My bones clicked into slightly different positions; I began to remember that I was human, and stood erect, a man again.

All of my companions had been transformed likewise, and were standing where they had stopped.

What a contrast! Six men, white men, each a giant in strength, bound till death and after (as the un-dead which walk but do not move with mortal life), bound to a thing which I cannot call a man. A black creature only four feet high, which physically the weakest of us might have crushed with one hand. But six men were slavishly obedient to his every order, and moved in mortal fear of him. The pity of it! Only two of us were still human enough to understand that we were damned forever and had no means of escape. To look at their faces made that plain, for deeply graven there were lines that brutalized them, marking our swift progress toward the beast.

I was changing also. I had been told frequently how bad I looked, and my friends thought I should rest more, for it was plain that I was overtaxing my energies; but I always changed the subject as soon as pos-

sible, for I knew the real reason of my appearance.

But now the master was advancing. An irresistible force urged me toward him, and as I moved the others closed in about me, so that he and I stood in the center of a small circle.

Then he raised his hand, paw, or talon (I cannot say which, for it resembled all three), and spoke shrilly in a piping feeble voice, for the second and last time in my acquaintance with him.

"Fellow comrades." He leered at me, and I grew hot with rage but said nothing. "I have gathered you here with me tonight to give you a warning that you may use for your own profit. Leave me to do as I see fit and all will be well, but try for one instant to change my course of action or to attack me and you will curse the day you were born."

Then he lost control of himself.

"Fools!" he shrielled; "cursed ignorant peasant fools, you who thought you could kill me, whom even the elements cannot harm! Idiots, clumsy dolts, who tried to plot against the accumulated intelligence of a thousand years, listen to me speak!"

Thunderstruck at this sudden outburst, we staggered and reeled under the revelation which came next.

"From the very first," he cried, "I saw through your stupid intrigue against me, and I laughed to myself. Every move you made, every word you spoke in the seeming privacy of your hovels, I knew long before you. This is nothing new to me. Eighty-four times has this been tried upon me, and eighty-four times have I met the problem in the same way. I have made an example of one of you to warn the rest, and there he stands!"

He whirled swiftly and thrust an ash-gray claw at my face. For some time I had been realizing now what he was about to say, and at this sudden blow I averted my eyes from his and sprang at his throat.

We went down together, and he would have died there and then, but they tore us apart. Poor, blind fools! Again he stood erect, rubbing his throat where I had clutched it, and again he croaked, never glancing at me, as I was held powerless by three men.

"All of you have children, wives, or parents dependent upon you, and defenseless. I saw to that before I chose you, having this very thing in mind. I can at any time change any one of you to a beast by the power of my will, wherever I may be. Tomorrow, if you still resist me I will change you, or you," darting his paw at each in quick succession.

From the circle rose cries of "No! No! Do not do that! I am your man," and "Master, you are our father; do with us as you like!"

Triumphant he laughed, there in the snowy plain beneath the starry sky, then bent his gaze upon me. Seizing my chin, he forced my eyes to meet his, and growled, "And you? What say you now?"

I could not resist those burning eyes.

"Master," I muttered, "I am your willing slave."

"Then get back to your den," he cried, giving me a push that sent me prone in the snow, "and wait there till I summon you again."

The pack changed from men back to brutes again, and raced off toward the forest, and though I tried to follow, I could not move until the sound of their cries had faded away into the distance. Finally I rose and went to my dreary home again.

I WILL pass over briefly what followed; I do not think I could repeat my thoughts as I stumbled along through the night, nearly freezing from lack of clothing and the exposure that resulted.

Dawn was just arriving when I came in sight of the four walls I had so recently called home. I staggered

in, and sank into a chair, too listless to build a fire.

After a while, mechanically, I dressed myself, started a blaze in the fireplace, and bethought myself of hiding the body, which lay in the other room, until I could flee. Plan after plan suggested itself to my mind, but all were soon cast aside as useless. Tired out, I buried my head on my arms, as I sat by the table, and must have dozed away some little time.

Suddenly I was aroused from the dull apathy into which I had fallen by a small timid knock on the door. My first thought was that I was discovered. A fit of trembling overcame me, which quickly passed, but left me too weak to rise.

Again sounded the rap, followed by the rasp of frosty gravel as footsteps haltingly passed down the clean-swept path.

Suddenly a plan had formulated itself in my poor distracted brain. I steeled my will to resolute action, hastened to the door, and threw it wide. No one was in sight.

Bewildered, I looked about, suspicious of more wizardry, and between two of the trees that fringed the road I spied a figure slowly traveling toward the village.

"Hai!" I shouted, cupping my hands at my mouth. "What do you want? Come back!"

As the figure turned and approached me, I recognized the half-witted creature who limpingly traveled from village to village during the summer months, working when compelled by necessity to do so, but more often begging his food and shelter from more fortunate people.

"Why do you knock at my door?" I asked, as kindly as I could, when he had come near to me.

"I came last evening," he said, "and the lady that lives here said that she was alone and would not let me in or give me anything, but if later I would come when her husband

had returned, she would let me have some old clothes, and something good to take with me. So I slept with the cows, and now I am come again."

I forced myself to speak composedly.

"You are a good lad, and if you will do something for me I will see that you receive new clothing and much money. Here is proof that I mean well," and I tossed a broad gold piece to his feet.

Wildly did he scramble in the dust of the path, but I had no mood to laugh, ridiculous as his action would have seemed at another time. He whimpered in his eagerness to be off, looked into my face, and cowered as does a dog that expects a blow.

Some of my agony of spirit must have been reflected in my face, for he shrank away, all his joy vanished, and he faltered fearfully, "What would you have me do, master?"

His pitiable aspect struck to my heart, and the words I had been about to speak died still-born on the end of my tongue. I shall never reveal to anyone what my intention had been, but something nobler and purer than I had ever known enlivened my soul. I drew myself to my full height, glared defiantly at the quivering wretch and cried, "Go you to Pokkert. Arouse the people and bring the soldiers from the barracks. I am a werewolf and I have just slain my wife!"

His eyes seemed starting from his head, his nerveless and palsied limbs carried him shakily down the path, the while he watched me over his shoulder as if he expected to see me turn into a wolf and ravenously pursue him. At the end of the path he bethought himself of flight, threw the gold piece down and started with a curious reeling run toward the village.

A little wind was now rising, blowing flurries of snow and leaves about, and the round evil eye of yellow metal lay and blinked at the morning sun

until a little whirlwind of dust collapsed on it and buried its gleam. But although I could not see it I knew it was there, the thing that all men slave, war, and die for, that all men desire, and obtaining are not satisfied, the struggle for which has maimed and damned more souls than any other one thing that has ever been. I went in, shut the door, and left it outside in the dirt, whence it came and where it belongs.

IT MIGHT have been a minute or a year that I sat at the table, with my head buried in my arms, for any memory that I have of it, but so I found myself when I was roused by a dull roar of many voices outside. Opening the door, I stepped out and waited, expecting nothing less than instant death.

A crowd of about fifty persons came surging up the road, and seeing me standing there, passively waiting, milled and huddled together, each anxious to be in at the death, but none caring to be in the forefront and first to meet the dreaded werewolf.

Much coaxing and urging was given certain of the crowd to send them to me, but none was eager for fame.

Finally stepped out one tanner, clad only in his leather apron, and carrying a huge fish-spear in his right hand.

"Come," he shouted; "who follows if I lead?"

Just then sounded the pounding of hoofs, far down the road.

"He who comes must hasten," thought I, "if he would see the finish."

The tanner harangued the steadily growing mob without avail, none desiring to be the first.

At last I was out of the common rut in which the rest of the village was sunken. What a moment! Even in my hopeless situation I could not help but exult. Seventy-five or one hundred against one, and not a man dare move!

At last the tanner despaired of assistance and slowly moved toward me, now and then casting a glance behind to be assured of an open lane of retreat if such was necessary.

I believe, in that moment, that had I leapt forward at them, the whole flock of sheep would have fled screaming down the road; but I did nothing of the kind. I did not move, or even make any resistance when the tanner seized me by the shoulder, his spear ready for the deadly stroke. Why should I? Life had no longer any interest for me!

Finding that I stood passively, the tanner released my shoulder, grasped the spear in both hands and towered above me, his mighty muscles standing out like ropes on his naked arms and chest. The whole assemblage held its breath, the silence was that of death, and a loud clatter of hoofs twitched every head around as if they all had been worked simultaneously by a single string. Straight into the crowd, which broke and scattered before it, came a huge black horse, ridden by a large man, in the uniform of the king's soldiery. As he came he smote right and left with the flat of his long straight sword.

Down came the spear, and down swept the sword full upon the tanner's head. He fell like a poleaxed steer, while the spear buried itself for half its length in the ground by the door.

"This man is mine!" he shouted. "Mine and the king's! He must go with me for trial and sentence; touch him at your peril."

The crowd murmured angrily, started for us, but disintegrated again before the rush of half a company of soldiers that had followed their captain.

4

"AND SO, sirs," I was concluding my narrative in the prison barracks at Ponkert, "you see to what ends have I been brought by the

machinations of this creature. I do not ask for life myself, for I shall be glad to die, and it is but just that I should; but give me revenge, and I will burn in hell for eternity most happily."

For a time I thought that the officer would deny me, for he ruminated long before he spoke.

"Can you," he said, "entrap this hideous band, if I and my men will give you help?"

I leapt from my chair and shouted, "Give me a dozen men, armed, and not one of those fiends will be alive tomorrow morning!"

Carried away by my enthusiasm, he cried, "You shall have fifty and I will lead them myself;" but then more gravely, "you realize that we cannot leave one alive? That all must die! All!"

I nodded, and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"I understand," I said. "When we have won, do with me as you will. I shall not resist, for I am very tired, and shall be glad to rest. But until then, I am your man!"

"You are brave," he said simply, "and I wish I need not do that which I must. Will you grip hands with me before we leave?" he asked almost diffidently.

I said nothing, but our hands met in a strong clasp, and as he turned away I thought I saw moisture fleck his cheek. He was a man, and I wish I had known him earlier. We could have been friends, perhaps; but enough of that.

Some distance from Ponkert there stands a wood, so dense that even at midday there in the center of the forest, only a dim twilight exists. Here sometimes laired the pack. At night we made it our meeting place, and now and again in the thickest recesses one or more of us would spend the day in seclusion. So, knowing this, I made my plans.

I tore my clothes, and dabbled them in blood, wound a bloody bandage

around my head, and the soldiers tied my hands securely behind me, also putting a cord about my neck.

Toward evening we set out, about eighty of us in all, including the rustics who trailed along behind, carrying improvised arms, such as hay-forks, clubs, and farm implements which were clumsy, but deadly.

Straight through the heart of the wood we passed, I traveling in the midst, reeling along with head down as if worn out, which indeed I was. Now and then the soldier who held the other end of the cord would jerk fiercely, almost causing me to stumble, and on one of these occasions I heard a sullen, stifled growl from a thicket which we were passing. No one else apparently heard; I cautiously lifted my head, and saw a form slink silently into the darker shadows. I had been observed, and the plan was succeeding!

We then passed from the forest and came into the sunlight once more. Between the wood and the hills flowed the river that before had served me so ill. Overlooking this there frowned a great castle that had once dominated the river and the trade routes which crossed the plain on the other side. But this was long ago, so long that the castle builders had passed away, their sons, and theirs also, if indeed there ever were such, leaving only the castle to prove they had ever lived.

As the years went on, various parties of brigands had held the great stone structure, and wars had been fought around and within. Slowly, time and the elements had worked their will unchecked, until the central tower squatted down one day and carried the rest of the castle with it.

Still there remained a strong stone wall, which had enclosed the castle once, but now formed a great square, thirty feet in height, around a shapeless mountain of masonry in the center. Under this imposing monument lay the last who had ever lived there, and some say that their ghosts

still haunt the ruins, but I never saw any, or met one who had. At each side of the square, in the walls there stood an iron gate. These were still well preserved, but very rusty, so rusty indeed, that it was impossible to open them, and we were obliged to find an easier mode of entrance.

Finally we discovered a large tree, which, uprooted by a heavy wind, had fallen with its top against the wall, and so remained, forming a bridge which connected the wall and the ground by a gentle incline.

To gain the courtyard it was necessary to follow the wall around to where it faced the plain. Here a large section had fallen inward, leaving the wall but twenty feet in height at that point. Here we went down, by the rope which had tormented me so, and prepared our trap.

It was very simple; I was the bait and we knew that when the time came for the change, they would follow my trail unless the master was warned, and once inside the walls could not leap out. We could then slay them at our leisure, for we were more than ten to one, although many of the farmers had refused to enter the haunted castle and returned to the village.

AT LAST it became near midnight, and faintly, far away, I heard the cries down below me in the wood.

"The time is near," I whispered to the captain as we stood in the enclosure. "I hear them gathering."

"Be ready," he warned the men. "Hide yourselves in the rocks. They come!"

Eagerly we waited, though none was visible now except the captain and two or three soldiers, standing by the pile of masonry.

As I waited near a large pile of stone blocks, I heard someone cry sharply, "Now!"

Shooting lights danced before my eyes, followed by black oblivion, and

I fell forward on my face. I had been clubbed from behind.

When I became conscious again the stars still gleamed brightly overhead, but they no longer interested me. My sole thought was to escape from these two-legged creatures that held me prisoner. Again I was the beast!

For the first time I had not been aware of the transition when it took place. Now I had no recollection of my past, and for all I knew I might never have been anything but a quadruped.

Came swiftly the realization that I was being called insistently. From the tail of my eye I saw a man standing beside me, but a little distance away. Perhaps I might escape!

I drew my legs up, and my muscles tightened for the spring. I would leap the wall, I would flee for my life, I would . . . and then a tremendous weight came crashing down on my hind quarters, breaking both my legs.

The pain was excruciating! I gave vent to a scream of curdled agony which was answered by howls of mingled encouragement and rage from beyond the wall. Then down from the wall came leaping, one at a time, five great gray brutes. They had followed my trail and come, as they thought, to save me, not dreaming they were being led into a trap.

The soldiers had been wiser than I, for they had foreseen what I had failed to see: that if my story was true, inevitably when my nature changed I would betray them to my comrades.

Between man and wild beast there can be no compromise, so they stunned me, and then toppled down a heavy stone, pinning me to the ground. Instead of warning the pack as I undoubtedly would have done had I but known earlier that they were present, I screamed for help, for the sudden pain drove any other emotion from my mind.

Now all was confusion. Howl of beast, and shout of man, mingled in chorus with clash of pike and fang. Now and again, but infrequently, a shot punctuated the uproar, but these new weapons are too slow to be of practical use, so it was a hand-to-paw, and cheek-to-jowl conflict.

The five were giving a far better account of themselves than I had dreamed possible. Springing in and out again, with lightning movements they could tear a man's throat out and be gone before he could defend himself. The confusion was so great, the press so thick, that a man might kill his comrade by accident. I saw this happen twice.

Now only four were visible, springing to and fro, fighting for their lives like cornered rats, and gradually forcing their way to the wall whence they had come. One must be down!

But no! I saw the missing one, old Mother Molla, rending with sharp white fangs at something which lay half hidden beneath her. A soldier stole silently behind her, and with a mighty display of strength thrust a pike completely through her body. But other eyes than mine had seen the cowardly stroke. The next instant he went down and was buried from sight in the center of the snarling pack. Now the pack was, for several seconds, in a tight knot of bodies, and while they thus remained the soldiers leapt in, pikes and clubs rising and falling. Before Mother Molla had reached the corner toward which she was slowly crawling, coughing out, meanwhile, her life in bloody bubbles, the remainder of the pack had avenged her and died themselves.

It was at this critical moment that a head peered over the wall and two bright little red eyes took in the scene. Why the master had thus delayed his arrival I cannot explain. But whatever his faults he was at least no coward, for the first inkling the men had of his presence was the sight of

the black wolf springing down and landing on the heap of dead bodies which had represented his former vassals.

With a bound he was in the midst of the soldiers, fighting with fang and claw. They scattered like sheep, but returned, forming now a close-packed circle around him, barring all egress. Now his only chance of life lay in motion so swift that it would be unsafe to aim a weapon at him for fear of injuring one of the men.

He saw now clearly that all was lost, and quite obviously perceived that flight was his only hope. He gave me a glance of encouragement as I lay there raving and frothing, snapping at, and breaking my teeth upon, the cold unyielding rock that held me down; and he rushed madly about the inside of the circle, searching for a weak spot in it. So in they pressed, striking now and then as he passed, but harming him not.

With hot red tongue hanging from his slaving jaws, he raced about the encircling cordon of foes. Soon was his plan of action made. He leapt in midstride straight at an ignorant yokel who wielded a hay-fork. The poor fool struck clumsily, instead of dodging, which mistake was his last, for he missed. Instantly the master had torn out his throat with a single snap and was streaking toward the castle wall.

Now the way was clear; puffs of snow rose behind, before him, and on either side, but apparently he bore a charmed life, for none of the missiles struck him. As he reached the wall he left the ground in the most magnificent leap I have ever seen, from either man or beast, hung by his forefeet twenty feet above the ground for the space of time in which a man might count ten; then, while bullets be-starred the ancient masonry all about him, he wildly scrambled with his hind feet to draw himself up, and was soon over the wall and gone!

They rushed to the rusted gates, but their very haste defeated their efforts, and by the time they reached the open plain was bare of life. But over the hill to the eastward floated a derisive mocking howl. The master's farewell! From that day to this he has never been seen in Pokkert. Thus ended the *wampyr's* rule!

So now is my ordeal ended, the master ousted, and the fear that held sway over the village is finished. I, out of all the pack that ravaged the land for many miles, alone am left alive. Somewhere perhaps the master still roams silently, stealthily, in the cool darkness of our nights, but I am certain that never again will he return to Pokkert, for here is my assurance.

When his power crumbled to dust in the courtyard of that ancient castle, and he was forced to flee for his life, his last look and cry to me intimated that he would return and rescue me from my captors. There must have been some spark of humanity in that savage heart, something that would not allow him to leave those who had sworn allegiance to him; for witness that magnificent leap from the courtyard wall to the very midst of his foes, to save the one surviving member of his band.

He did return!

While I lay in the barrack dungeon, recovering from my broken bones and other injuries (for I must be in good health before I am permitted to expiate my crime), one night about a week after the fight I heard the old familiar silent cry.

I recognized the master's call and responded. I thought of all things I should like to tell him and could not through two feet of stone wall. I went over in my mind the whole series of actions by means of which I had escaped from his horrible enslavement.

Beginning with the involuntary murder of my wife and child, I related without uttering a spoken word

that which I had done, and ended with the moment when I saw him leap the gap, a fugitive. I know he understood, for after a few seconds of silence, just outside the wall there arose the blood-chilling howl of a wolf. Higher and higher it rose, a long sobbing wail of hate, an undulating crescendo of sound; it thinned to a thread whose throaty murmur was drowned in the rushing trample of heavy feet overhead and the crash of exploding powder. Flash after flash tore the velvet night, mingling with the shouts of the soldiers who were firing from the windows, and at some time in the tumult the master turned his back on Ponkert for the last time, I trust.*

UTTERLY alone in the world, friendless and forlorn, I quit tomorrow this mortal form that has known such strange changes.

I go with no reluctance whatever, for I have nothing to live for, and the sooner gone, the sooner I shall expiate my sins, and at last win through to where I am expected. For I cannot believe that I shall suffer in torment forever.

Yet, I would even forego that bliss for the greater one of being a beast again and the master a man, so that I might feel my fangs sink into his black wrinkled throat, and feel the blood spurt warm into my mouth. Oh, to rip, to tear, to slash at that fiend, and have him utterly in my power! To feel his bones crunch beneath my powerful jaws, and to tear his flesh with them!

Yet—sometimes I think perhaps he was once as I, was tempted, fell, sinking lower and lower. Perhaps he, too, was not wholly to blame, but even as I, was weak and doomed from the beginning. Is it the fault of the pot that it is misshapen in the making?

* Here there was a marginal note on the old parchment in a differently colored ink, and apparently at a much later period of time, for it is this: "Never since that bygone day has this town been troubled by either vampire or werewolf."

They tell me that every pang I suffer now will shorten my punishment in the future. What my pains on earth shall be I know not. I may be broken on the wheel or stretched upon the rack, but I am resigned and fortified against my fate.

But there is one thing of which I am positive, for they have told me, to add pang upon pang, that I shall be flayed alive, my hide tanned like a beast's, and my dark and gloomy history written upon it for all to read who can!

I have never heard of these things being done before, but I have no doubt that they will be done to me. However, I care not. So much have I suffered in heart and thought that no bodily discomfort can surpass my other torments. I am resigned. May he who reads take warning. Farewell to all whom I know and have known. Farewell!

. . .

WHEN the manuscript was finished I sat thinking for a little time. So this book was written on a human hide, which when occupied had enclosed Pierre's ancestor.

"I thought," said I to the old man, "that you told me that the person described in the narrative was your *grandpère* many times removed. But here it relates that his only child was murdered by himself. How do you explain that?" I asked.

"You will remember perhaps that he told how, after the flight from the cottage, immediately succeeding the act was a blank, save for a vague remembrance of shots. What is more probable than that someone aroused by the howling in the night should fire blindly at the noise, not once but several times. Granted that, it is probable that, frightened by the unexpected noise, the beasts would leave their prey. Such is the legend that has accompanied the book for cen-

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The Werewolf of Ponkert

(Continued from page 30)

turies. Also it is said that this book has never been out of the possession of the Hungarian's descendants. Therefore, observing that I now possess the book, which was given to me by my father, as it was to him by his parent, I assume that in my veins courses the diluted strain of the werewolf."

"This may all be true," I said. "Surely in the weeks of his imprisonment he must have been informed that his little girl had not been devoured; yet he speaks consistently through the tale, as if he knew nothing about the rescue."

"Ah," he replied, "that puzzled me also when I first heard of this. But it is my sincere belief that this information was kept purposely from him to add mental torture to his physical punishment. Why should they trouble themselves to ease the spirit of a man that was responsible for so many crimes?" And such a cruel glitter lit his eyes, that I had nothing more to say.

After I had left I congratulated myself upon being so fortunate as to exist in the prosaic Twentieth Century, and not in the superstition-ridden ones which we have just barely left. For even superstitions must have a beginning, and who knows how much truth may lie, after all, in this weird tale?

I never went back to the inn after that. I often meant to, but other business was more important, and procrastination finally made the journey useless.

Pierre is dead now, leaving no relatives or friends but myself. I now possess the book and it lies before me, as I write the story it contains for the world to read, and to laugh at in scorn.