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# Weird Tales

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## THE WOLF-GIRL OF JOSSELIN

By ARLTON EADIE

THRILLS!  
MYSTERY!  
EXCITEMENT!



A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

# Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Wolf-Girl of Josselin

By ARLTON EADIE

*An engrossing story of the Ghoul Pack, the Barking Women of Josselin, and the struggle between a mother's love and an ancient curse*

"ART is long, but life is short—and I'm as hungry as the proverbial wolf. If you intend to remain much longer perched up there on that bleak hillside, I'd better see if I can get hold of a tent or something, so that we can camp here permanently!"

My sarcasm was entirely wasted, for it fell upon ears that were, for the time being, deaf. Alan Grantham did not even trouble to glance in my direction. He sat, a dim figure amid the bracken, crouched over his sketching-easel, oblivious of everything save the gorgeous hues of the lingering sunset which he was recording on the canvas before him with feverish but deft strokes of his brush.

Now, artistic enthusiasm is all very well in its way—I can be a bit of an enthusiast myself at a fitting time and place—but I'm afraid I'm not made of the right sort of stuff to indulge in scenic raptures at the end of a long and tiring day in the open air. Even a struggling landscape painter needs food occasionally, and I was hungry as well as tired. Alan and I had been on our way back to the little inn where we had taken up our quarters, when my chum had caught sight of the three conical-roofed towers of the distant Château de Josselin starkly outlined against the yellow and crimson of the dying sun. Nothing would satisfy him but that he should get out his traps and make a sketch of it right away.

Thinking that he merely intended to "rough in" a lightning impression with a few broad touches, I had consented. But

as the vivid hues of the sunset had become more intense, Alan had become more engrossed, the sketch had become more elaborated—and I had become more famished and impatient to discover what our good hostess had prepared for supper. Moreover, it was at least five kilometers back to the inn, and the muddy country lanes were none too pleasant to traverse in the dark.

My temper was very near the fraying-point as I knocked my pipe out against the stone on which I was seated, and rose to my feet.

"Are — you — coming — home?" I roared in a voice which awoke the echoes of the surrounding hills.

This time he condescended to look round.

"In a minute," he called back. "It's nearly finished."

"You don't say so!" I returned ironically. "But for heaven's sake don't rush your precious picture out of consideration for me. Why not wait another few minutes?—then you'll be able to dash in a moon and a few stars and call the thing a nocturne!"

My friend cut short any further badinage by wiping his palette and brushes and thrusting them into his paint-box. In a few seconds he had rejoined me on the narrow road, carrying the still wet canvas in his hand.

"You won't begrudge your wait when you see this picture," he laughed confidently as he held it up for my inspection.

"I'll admire your daub by daylight," I

told him shortly. "Not being a cat, or an owl, or a mole, I'm not proficient at seeing in the dark—which reminds me that we'll need all our powers of vision to find our way back to Josselin. The night threatens to be as black as a wolf's mouth when the last streak of your wonderful sunset has vanished. We had better put our best foot forward or we shall have Madame Boussac sending out search-parties, thinking we have been carried off by the *Ankou*, the divinity of death which is popularly supposed to wander around the hills and forests at night."

"Or been devoured by the ghoulish pack," Alan suggested with a smiling nod.

The name had a sinister sound, but I had never heard of it before. I asked Alan what it meant, but he shook his head.

"Oh, just one of the local superstitions," he shrugged. "The Breton peasantry is one of the most morbidly superstitious races of Europe, and the legend of the ghoulish pack is one of their cheery little bedtime stories. I heard some old peasants swapping yarns about it round the fire in the common room at the inn. I could only catch a word here and there, for they spoke in the Breton dialect. What I did manage to pick up sounded pretty ghastly—though it was all nonsense, of course. If the people hereabouts believe a tenth part of their own folklore—well, all I can say is that they must live in a constant state of terror after nightfall!"

"They are an honest and kindly folk," my sense of justice caused me to assert, "though their mentality is a bit on the primitive side."

"You're dead right there," Alan cried with hearty conviction. "For all their veneer of Christianity, the natives of Brittany are pagan to the backbone. They have their wayside shrines and Calvaries,

it is true, but they also have their prehistoric Druidical megaliths and dolmens, rude masses of unshaped stone around which queer rites are sometimes enacted on moonlight nights when the parish priest is comfortably snoring in bed. All their superstitions and practises are purely pagan, and some of them date back to the dawn of the very earliest form of civilization. Their firm belief in *loup-garous*, or werewolves, is but another form of the lycanthropy of the ancient Greeks. It's curious, by the way, how widespread this particular tradition is. One finds it occurring in Norway, Russia, France, Bavaria—all over Europe, in fact—and in addition we find variants of the legend in Asia, India, Africa and South America. Considering the universality of the belief that human beings are capable of assuming the forms of wild animals, one might be tempted to suspect that there may possibly be a grain of truth in——"

"WHAT'S that?" I cried, suddenly stopping dead and pointing.

At this point the road threaded its devious way through a dense forest of towering fir trees. High above our heads the interlacing branches and heavy foliage overhung on either side, shutting out the dim light which still lingered in the rapidly darkening sky, so that our path lay like a faint gray ribbon hemmed in by a sea of impenetrable shadows. In the wall of blackness which lay to the left of the road, at a distance of only a few yards from where we stood, I had caught a glimpse of two eyes which gleamed with the lambent reddish glow that could only emanate from the luminous gaze of some night-prowling beast of prey.

"Look—the eyes!" My voice was jerky with excitement as I grasped my companion's arm.

"Where?" he demanded, gazing everywhere but in the right direction.



"There!" But even as I spoke, the luminous points were abruptly obscured.

Alan Grantham turned and gave me a queer look.

"My dear boy, you're dreaming! I can't see a thing that bears the faintest resemblance to an eye. You've been thinking about your supper so much that you've gone light-headed," he chaffed gayly. "Are you sure it was eyes you saw, and not a couple of ghostly mince-pies?"

His skeptical laugh rang out, cheery and confident. But the next instant it was cut short with the abruptness of a switched radio transmission.

"Holy mackerel!" he muttered under his breath.

A dim gray shape had emerged from the tangled undergrowth which bordered the road and was slowly crossing it slantwise to the shadows on the farther side. So closely did the creature's neutral coloring blend with the surface of the ground that it was difficult to distinguish its actual shape in that faint light. We sensed, rather than actually saw, that it was long and lean, with a pointed muzzle and upstanding ears.

Neither of us spoke until the thing had crossed the road with silent, unhurried steps and disappeared in the bushes on the other side. Then:

"It's only a dog," Alan muttered with what sounded like a sigh of relief. "Whew! the brute gave me quite a scare."

I let his remark pass without comment, though I was more than a little dubious about its correctness. My fleeting glimpse of the creature had brought to my mind thoughts unpleasantly reminiscent of the frequency with which the wolf occurs in the folk-legends of the district.

"Yes, it was a large Alsatian dog," my friend repeated. "Must have strayed from some near-by farm."

I knew well enough that there was not a single house or cottage nearer than the

village of Josselin, some five kilometers distant, but I didn't feel in the humor to waste time in arguing the point.

"Let's be getting along," I said.

"Still thinking about your supper?" laughed Alan.

But he was wrong. The prospect of enjoying my own long-delayed meal had suddenly taken a secondary position in my thoughts in face of an uneasy apprehension that the creature skulking in the bushes might have hopes and designs of making its supper off me! I was prepared to wager everything I possessed that the thing I had seen was no dog. If it was a wolf—well, I had heard that wolves usually hunted their prey in packs, and if my supposition were correct we would soon have a very definite and convincing confirmation of the fact.

Until that night one of the greatest attractions of Brittany lay in the fact that the majority of its towns and villages are well off the beaten track of tourists. Josselin, for instance, the village which we had made our headquarters, did not even boast of a single-track railroad connection with the outer world, and it was rare indeed for a stranger to be seen traversing its cobbled streets. Just at that moment, however, I would not have minded if whole train-loads of Cook's globe-trotters had been flocking around. But, except for ourselves, the road was destitute of a living soul. And it seemed likely to remain so, for it led nowhere in particular, terminating as it did on the summit of a neighboring hill on which stood a gigantic megalith bearing the designation, the "Devil's Tombstone."

We had proceeded about a quarter of a mile toward the village, and I was just beginning to hope that my forebodings had been groundless, when the sound of a faint, long-drawn howl, coming apparently from the very depths of the forest, caused us to quicken our pace.

"Your bow-wow seems to have a pal handy!" I remarked, giving Alan a mirthless grin. "Several pals, in fact," I added, as the call was answered from various directions. "Perhaps he's calling in his canine brothers and sisters to come and be patted on the back by two benighted artists!"

"Don't talk like an ass!" he retorted, "Anyone would think that you don't believe that they *are* dogs."

"Frankly, I don't," I told him bluntly.

"Of course they're dogs," he answered impatiently. "Dogs howl occasionally, don't they?"

"Yes—occasionally. But wolves always do so—especially when they're calling the pack together for a hunt."

"And whom do you imagine they are going to hunt?" he jeered.

"Us!" I answered grimly. "I don't know what you intend to do, but I'm going to run for the village as fast as I can. What is more, I'm going to dump my easel and paint-box right here in the ditch, so that I can travel faster."

Alan gave a stubborn grunt, as he shook his head.

"What! — run from a few stray curs——"

**H**E GOT no further, for at that moment a pandemonium of snarling and howling broke out behind us. Round the bend of the road came a pack of a dozen or so unmistakable wolves. The hunt was up, and we were the quarry!

On they came, with muzzles held close to the track we had traversed. Their eyes gleamed redly as they caught the wan rays of the rising moon, and their long, lean bodies stretched in an easy lope which carried them over the ground at an amazing rate. My heart turned to lead as I watched their swift progress. We might as well have tried to outdistance an express train as hope to escape that tireless

four-footed horde by the fleetness of our own feet.

"No use running for it," I rapped out. "You'll only exhaust yourself needlessly. If we could find a tree——"

I gazed about me in the hope of finding one up which we could scramble. In vain I looked. The tall, straight trunks offered not the slightest foothold; their jutting branches were hopelessly out of reach.

Still, with our backs against something solid, we might put up some show of resistance against the ravening pack. A large tree trunk—a stone—or——

My eyes, sweeping the hillside in one last despairing search, caught sight of the outline of something which showed a pallid gray in the moonlight. It was the menhir which crowned the hilltop—the solitary mass of unhewn stone known as the Devil's Tombstone. If we could reach it and clamber up its rough surface, we might contrive to hold the creatures at bay until the dawn drove them back to their lairs in the depths of the woods.

"Up, up!" I pointed wildly as I began to mount the slope. "The Devil's Tombstone—it's our only chance of life!"

Then followed a nightmare scramble through briars and bracken, over slippery moss-grown stones and shifting gravel where every upward spring brought down a clattering avalanche of small stones. There was not the slightest semblance of a path, and at any moment we might have found our way blocked by an impassable wall of rock.

I dared not stop to glance behind me, but I heard the chorus of deep-throated growls and yelps which broke from the pack as we quitted the road and dashed up the hill.

Yet, although we must have been in full view by this time, the wolves did not make straight toward us by the nearest route. True to the instinct of countless

generations, their tactics were the tactics of the pack. Hunting by scent rather than by sight, they followed our trail to the very spot where we had left the road, before they commenced to gallop up the hill after us.

Well it was for us that they took the longer route. Had the wolf intelligence been capable of understanding the truth of the twelfth proposition of Euclid, that any two sides of a triangle are greater than the third, they would surely have cut off our retreat. Even as it was, the race seemed fated to end in disaster. A bare dozen yards separated us from the foremost of the pack as we leapt the last of the stunted bushes and began to tear across the clearing which surrounded the ancient pillar of stone.

With a sense of relief which almost amounted to elation I noted that the weatherworn sides of the monolith, though steep, showed signs of fissures which might afford sufficient foothold to enable us to reach its summit, where—for a time, at any rate—we should be safe.

"One more spurt!" I gasped out breathlessly. "Hurrah! We'll fool the greedy brutes of their supper yet——"

My triumphant shout ended in a groan of dismay. Another wolf—a creature of huge proportions—had emerged from the shadow of the Devil's Tombstone, and was advancing straight toward us!

Even in that moment of horrified surprise I was struck by the splendid aspect of the beast—though I would have appreciated its points better had a row of stout iron bars intervened between it and me. Although the animal was much larger than I had hitherto though any wolf could be, it was not its mere bulk that called forth my unwilling admiration. Its coat was sleek and glossy, its body plump and well-nourished, and in its eyes there was an expression of under-

standing almost human. In contrast to the mangy, lean-ribbed, half-famished pack at our heels, the enormous creature stood out like an immaculate dandy amid a concourse of tattered outcasts.

All this passed through my mind in a fraction of the time it takes to tell. I realized it was a time for quick action, though I was at a loss to understand what possible form of action I could take. The only article in my possession resembling a weapon was a short knife with a pliant steel blade, which I used for scraping the paint off my palette. Its point was so blunt and rounded that I usually carried it loose in my pocket; yet it was better than my bare hands in the encounter which now seemed inevitable.

I pulled the knife from my pocket as I ran, wrapping my scarf round my right hand as some protection from the fangs of the advancing beast. Then, with the courage born of despair, I charged straight down on the wolf which stood between us and our stony refuge.

To my utmost surprise the brute swerved aside and avoided us, leaving a clear path to the monolith!

On we raced with undiminished speed, scarcely daring to believe in our good fortune. A few moments later we had scrambled to the top of the ancient stone and lay, panting and exhausted, a good ten feet beyond the reach of the howling and yelping pack below.

Then ensued the most amazing episode of that eventful night. The lone gray wolf, instead of joining the others in their attempts to scale the rock, at once made a savage attack on the rest of the pack. Crouching back on its haunches, with hackles bristling and fangs bared, it suddenly straightened out its splendid body and, with a loud, menacing growl, hurled itself like a thunderbolt of living bone and sinew, straight into their midst.

I held my breath, expecting to see the

courageous creature torn to pieces before my eyes. It was one attacking twelve—odds desperate enough to daunt the bravest thing that breathed. Yet the very fury of its onslaught seemed to strike terror to the hearts of the attacked. For a few moments I had a confused vision of a maelstrom of writhing bodies and snapping jaws; then, with what sounded like a simultaneous howl of terror, the whole pack turned tail and raced madly for the shelter of the trees, closely pursued by the solitary but indomitable champion that had routed them.

**A**BREATHLESS cheer burst from our lips as pursued and pursuer vanished into the brushwood.

"Well, Brer Wolf has certainly done us a good turn this time," Alan remarked with a laugh that was slightly unsteady. "I suppose it really *was* a wolf?" he added, glancing at me dubiously.

"What else?" I shrugged.

"It seemed too intelligent, too civilized, if you understand what I mean. It seemed to understand our position and our danger at the first glance, and to do the best thing possible to help us. Now, if it had been a dog, I could understand such a display of friendly intelligence, but—good Lord! who's this?"

Following the direction of his startled gaze, I beheld a sight which filled my mind with wonder. From the very spot where the wolf pack had vanished into the forest a few minutes before, the figure of a tall, slender girl was emerging into the open.

I thought that the events of the night had well nigh exhausted my capacity for feeling emotion, but now I felt my scalp prickling with horror as I realized how narrowly that fair form and shapely limbs had escaped being torn and mangled.

"If the pack had scented her——" I began.

"She does not know her own peril!" Alan broke in as he began to lower himself to the ground. "We must warn her. Come along—you can talk the Breton *patois* better than I."

Very much against my inclinations and better judgment, I found myself climbing down the rock which I had ascended so thankfully a short time since. Alan laughed as he noted the reluctance of my movements.

"Don't funk it," he chaffed. "There's not a single wolf in sight, and I hope you're not going to let yourself be outdone in daring by a mere slip of a girl."

"What business has a mere slip of a girl to be wandering about the woods at this hour of the night?" I grumbled as I reached the ground.

"That's what I want you to ask her, you sap. Gad!" he muttered under his breath, "what a perfect model for a woodland nymph!"

Fancying that I could detect a note of something warmer than mere artistic appreciation in my chum's exclamation, I looked with greater interest at the approaching girl.

I felt my breath catch in my throat as we came face to face in the moonlight. The general standard of beauty among the natives of Brittany is high indeed, but in the girl who stood before me the very pinnacle of flawless perfection seemed to have been reached.

Her features—but how can I describe that which transcends all description? Mere words seem futile and meaningless when applied to that radiant creature who confronted us out of the mystery of the night. Her loveliness seemed more than human—and most assuredly none of it was due to the "art which conceals art" in the estimation of the feminine mind. Her blond hair waved in a profuse disorder of natural curls over her brow and neck. Her smooth skin was deeply tanned by



exposure to the wind and sun. Her cheap cotton frock would have seemed a mere rag but for the superb lines of the figure beneath. Her shapely legs were bare to the knees; her feet innocent of even the wooden *sabots* which the poorest of peasants usually wear. She seemed more like some dryad of the woods than a mundane peasant-girl.

For some reason—possibly it was the memory of my own recent fears—her very calmness irritated me.

"What are you doing here?" I cried as sharply as my halting Breton would allow. "Don't you know that there are wolves about?"

"To my surprise she answered in the purest French:

"Assuredly, *m'sieu*, there are wolves. Have I not just now"—she hesitated—"have I not heard them howling? And you — you did not climb the Devil's Tombstone just to admire the view, *hein?*"

Her self-assurance staggered me. I concluded that she must either be very brave or very stupid. Yet she seemed to have all her wits about her, even to the extent of enjoying some secret joke at my expense. I was in the act of formulating a retort which would convey a rebuke with the requisite amount of dignity, when Alan forestalled me.

"You speak French?" he cried with a boyish laugh. "That's great! I was fearing that I should be left right out of this conversation. Come now, confess. Weren't you horribly frightened when those wolves passed you in the wood yonder?"

She shook her head proudly, almost fiercely.

"I did not fear—for myself."

Alan Grantham smiled.

"But you were just a little nervous on our account? It was very good of you to take such an interest in our safety, but

don't you think that your attitude of mind was a little illogical? We were on the top of the high stone, you know, while you were on the ground, at the mercy of the brutes. There was one great wolf in particular, who fought the others and drove them away. Maybe you saw it—rather a fine-looking creature."

"You think so?" she gave a quick smile, almost as though she had misunderstood his meaning and applied the compliment to herself. "Yes, I know the animal you mean. But I am not afraid of it, *mais non!* It will not harm me—or you."

"You seem mighty well acquainted with the nature of the beast," I put in with a sour grin. "How can you possibly tell whom it will hurt and whom it will not?"

The girl lifted her shoulders in a little careless shrug.

"*Calmez-vous, m'sieu*. I know because I know. There are wolves and wolves"—her red lips rippled back in a smile, so that her white, even teeth gleamed in the moonlight—"just as there are men—and men. And," she added as if by an afterthought, "there are women and women, some dangerous, some not; some merciful to save, others eager to destroy." She broke off abruptly and turned on her heel. "Come, it grows very late. I will show you a near way through the woods back to Josselin."

"Through the woods!" Alan echoed in amazement. "The wolves——"

She swung round with a sudden gesture of impatience.

"Have I not said that they will not harm you?" she cried, fixing her dark eyes on my friend's face. "The pack is leagues away by now——"

"But the great gray wolf?" Alan asked softly.

The girl's gaze faltered and dropped.

She hastily swung round, so that her face was hidden.

"Are you coming, or not?" she flung the words over her shoulder.

"I'm certainly not going to allow you to go through those woods by yourself!" my chum declared stoutly.

"*Allons!* Let us go."

She slipped her arm through his with the same lack of self-consciousness that a cat exhibits when jumping on one's knee to be caressed, and together they started to walk across the open space toward the wood. I followed in no very enviable frame of mind.

The whole affair was much too mysterious for my liking. I smiled grimly to myself as I wondered if my light-hearted chum would have been as willing to trust himself to her guidance if the unknown girl had been a toothless hag with a face like a wrinkled walnut!

WE REACHED the village of Josselin without further incident. The wolves had vanished as completely as if such an animal had never existed on the face of the earth. The death-like silence of the great forest was broken only by the scrunching of our feet over the dead leaves and fir-cones which strewed the path.

Alan and the unknown girl led the way, talking gayly and incessantly. I have not the faintest idea of what was the subject of their conversation, but I guessed it wasn't politics. I didn't listen. I had other things to think about as I trudged in the rear, searching the shadows on either side for the first sign of those accursed wolves. I could scarcely persuade myself that we should get back to the inn without another encounter until I saw the turrets of the ancient Château de Josselin loomed near at hand.

Our mysterious guide left us at the entrance to the village, a fact for which I

was deeply thankful, for I was in no mood to try to explain to our gossipy hostess things which I had so far failed to comprehend myself. I noticed, however, that the girl's parting salutation was a gay "*Au revoir*" to Alan; to me she merely vouchsafed a cold "*Bon soir*."

"Maybe you'll be seeing the young demoiselle again soon?" I asked when we had gained our room without overmuch explanations.

Alan nodded, a somewhat guilty flush overspreading his rather handsome features.

"Tomorrow," he admitted; then: "I say, isn't she wonderful!"

"Oh, yes, she's wonderful all right," was my somewhat dry rejoinder. "But who is she?"

"Her name's Corinne and she lives here in the village."

"Very explanatory! But what on earth was she doing alone in the middle of that wood?"

Alan laughed.

"I don't know—and I don't care. I only thank my lucky stars that she did happen to be there."

"Otherwise you might be dead by now?" I queried.

"No," he shook his head with a smile which gave him away completely. "Otherwise I might never have met Corinne."

He uttered the name in such a tone as to convince me that there was nothing more to be said. Seeing that my young friend was suffering from a bad attack of love at first sight, I did the only thing possible. I turned over and went to sleep.

THE next morning I retrieved my painting-materials from where I had dumped them during our hurried flight, and resumed work on my picture. But Alan apparently had other fish to fry. He did some work, it is true, in a desultory sort of way, but most of his time was

taken up by the fascinating young lady who was not afraid of wolves.

It does not take much to set tongues wagging in an out-of-the-way, dead-and-alive place like Josselin; in a week the love affair of the handsome young English artist was the talk of the village. If ever a man was head over heels in love, that man was Alan Grantham. I was scarcely surprized, therefore, when, just ten days after our midnight adventure, he announced his forthcoming marriage and asked me to act as his best man.

You don't need to send out wedding invitations in Brittany. The notary draws up the marriage contract and spreads the good news, and the able-bodied inhabitants of the village rally round as a matter of course to wish the couple every joy and to mop up all the free eats and drinks that may be going. The number of guests who thus invite themselves is a fair criterion of the degree of esteem in which the bride and groom are held. I confess that I was rather curious to see how many would show up at this particular festivity, for I had somehow gathered the impression that the fair Corinne was not exactly popular in the village. The other young people seemed to shun her.

The Breton peasantry may be much the same as other folk in their own family circles, but to strangers—especially to foreigners like us—they are taciturn and suspicious. The most garrulous individual in the place was, strangely enough, the very man who one would think was likely to be able to keep a still tongue in his head. For he was a Government official, the public notary, the man who—with the possible exception of the village priest—was most conversant with the family history and affairs of those around him.

Nicolas Didier was, naturally, a man of some education, and even culture of a superficial sort. He had, he was careful

to inform me early in our acquaintance, studied law at Paris in his younger days, and from chance remarks which he let fall from time to time I gathered that he considered himself a cut above the simple-minded villagers—which was probably the reason why he sought the company of Alan and me whenever he could find an excuse for doing so. I came to the conclusion that he was a man of some ability, who had been side-tracked into a paltry but assured Government post amid surroundings which he found particularly irksome.

He called at the inn on the night before the wedding, to get some particulars about the bridegroom which were to be embodied in the marriage contract. Alan, as usual, was out, but I was able to supply the necessary information.

His business completed, the old man seemed in no hurry to take his departure. He sat talking about inconsequent subjects, his beady eyes straying from time to time to the sideboard on which stood the goodly array of bottles which Alan had laid in for the approaching festivity. I took the silent hint and drew the cork of one of the oldest vintages.

"Come," I said, "a glass of wine in which to pledge long life to the happy pair."

I poured out a generous measure and he drained it with relish, with a little neatly-turned oration which was evidently a stock speech that he had used on many previous similar occasions.

"I very seldom indulge in alcoholic liquor, *monsieur*," he wound up, "but on such an auspicious occasion——" He twiddled the stem of his glass between his lean fingers and gazed dreamily at the bottle.

Now, when a man starts emphasizing his extreme moderation, I have usually found him quite able and willing to drink his share, and maybe a bit over.

"It's a pity to cork such good liquor up again," I said, taking up the bottle. "Do me the honor of joining me in another glass."

"The honor is mine, *m'sieur*," he assured me, a flush coming into his parchment-like features as he sipped the rich amber liquid. "The village of Josselin is honored too, I am sure, that your esteemed friend should have chosen his consort from its daughters. But the excellent Monsieur Grantham is a stranger from across the sea. He does not know—has never heard of our peculiar legends and—er—traditions. It is not everyone who would choose his bride from the women of Josselin!"

His manner, no less than the words themselves, caused me to stare at him across the lamplit table. Moved by a sudden impulse, I pushed the bottle, still three-quarters full, toward him.

"Help yourself, *mon ami*." When he had obeyed with alacrity I continued in as casual a voice as I could assume: "Ah, so your village has its legends, *hein?*"

He paused to empty his glass before replying.

"Legends?" His voice had a sardonic ring that conveyed a world of meaning. "*Ma foi!* we have more than legends! Strange things have happened here—not in the remote past, but recently, mark you!—strange things, the meaning of which has been debated by learned societies in solemn conclave; things about which eminent professors have written books—weighty volumes—in their vain effort to solve their meaning. Tell me, *mon cher monsieur*, have you never heard of *The Barking Women of Josselin?*"

Dimly, very dimly, I was conscious of a faint inner stir in the recesses of my memory. I *had* heard or read those words before. But where? and in what connection? My brain was humming with a hun-

dred half-formed doubts and suspicions as I turned again to the old lawyer.

"Tell me more about these women who bark."

"You want the legend"—his shrewd eyes narrowed—"or the truth?"

"Let's have the legend first."

**M**AITRE DIDIER refilled his glass and settled himself more comfortably in his chair.

"Very well, *m'sieur*. Like most tales of its kind, it dates back a long way. I've traced it back two hundred years, but it probably originated much earlier. Once upon a time (you perceive, do you not, that it begins like the usual fairy-tale?) a beggar-woman passed through the village of Josselin. She was clothed in rags, hungry, weary and footsore, and in a fold of her tattered shawl she carried a little baby boy—her son."

"Who was she?" I asked, but the old man shrugged his narrow shoulders as he reached for the bottle.

"One version of the legend says that she was a witch, a powerful enchantress; another version credits her with being no less a personage than the Blessed Mother of God, and the babe her Divine Son. You can believe either—or neither—as you please. But both versions are in agreement as to what followed. The women of the village were down by the riverside, as you may see them any fine day even now, washing their family linen in the stream. The wandering stranger begged them to give her food and shelter, showing them her blistered and bleeding feet and endeavoring to evoke their compassion by holding up her starving child. But they drove her away with cruel and bitter words—some say they even loosed their dogs upon the helpless creature. Be that as it may, the woman and her child were hounded from the village. At first she went meek and uncomplaining, but

as she passed the door of the church she chanced to look into the face of her babe—and saw that she held a tiny corpse!

"Only then did she turn on the women who yet mocked her. Laying her dead infant in the church porch, she faced them, her eyes blazing with hatred through the bitter tears, her arms upraised in furious menace.

"'Women of Josselin!' she cried; 'over the dead body of my son I hurl my curse at you—aye, and at your daughters, and their daughters' daughters for ever! May the all-merciful and all-pitying Father on High show you no more pity or mercy than ye have shown to me and mine! May ye be accursed unto the tenth generation! Like ravening wolves have ye denied us food; like baying hounds have ye driven us from your doors. Henceforth, ye women of Josselin, ye shall be dogs and wolves in very truth!' And so saying, she died."

The old man paused and sat staring straight before him with lack-luster eyes, as though he were indeed visualizing the scene he had so vividly described.

"A sad story," I commented. "But that is not the end?"

"No. That night there were wild scenes in the streets of Josselin—horri-fying and dreadful sounds, and deeds scarcely to be described. Women and girls rushed from the houses, tearing off their garments with frenzied abandon—barking like dogs—howling like wolves! And such they were, not only in outward aspect, but also in their very nature. Back into the houses they rushed, their men-folk too paralyzed with terror and amazement to interfere, and when they emerged again each wolf-woman held in her reddened fangs a young child—her own or another's—which she had snatched from its cot or cradle with as little mercy or remorse as the beast into which she had been transformed! But—and note this

well—it was only the *male* children that were slain. The girls were spared that they might grow up to maturity and inherit the dreadful curse that had been called down upon them, and transmit it to their female descendants, as they do even to this day. That, *monsieur*, is the legend of the Barking Women."

"I thank you for your courtesy in relating it so graphically. And now for the *real* truth about the matter?"

There was an inscrutable smile on Didier's thin lips as he poured the last of the bottle's contents into his glass.

"The truth is not quite so easy to define," he returned with portentous gravity. "Certain it is that a proportion of the women-folk of this village—the descendants, let us assume, of the women who mocked and ill-treated the homeless out-cast—are at certain seasons afflicted with a mysterious complaint, or plague, or curse—call it what you will. Here we leave the realm of musty legend and come down to solid, incontrovertible facts. You will find references to the Barking Women of Josselin in innumerable scientific works. Distinguished savants have devoted years to the study of the phenomenon, though it is true that each has endeavored to find a solution which fits his own particular bent or mental outlook. Theologians, for instance, are convinced that it is a direct visitation of God. Physicians are equally certain that the howling and barking are caused by some obscure and hereditary disease which gives rise to spasmodic movements and contractions of the muscles of the throat. Psychologists advance the theory that it is due to some form of auto-suggestion, or mass hypnotism. Anthropologists profess to find a parallel, if not a solution, in the totemism of savages and primitive races, and point to the almost universal belief that certain human beings are able to transform themselves into animals. Sci-

ence, in short, in seeking to prove too much, proves nothing whatever. I have merely mentioned these conflicting theories to show you that the actuality of this horrible curse is sufficiently well attested to merit the serious consideration of savants who do not usually pursue shadows or investigate fables. As to a solution—well, as men of plain common sense we must take the facts as we find them and explain them as best we can."

My mind flew back to the huge gray wolf that had haunted the Devil's Tombstone—the creature that had disappeared into the forest at the very spot where Corinne Lemerre had emerged a few moments later, calm and unafraid. At that moment I required very little convincing that the old legend had a firm basis of truth in it.

**I** LEANT forward and laid my hand on the old notary's shoulder.

"Tell me, Maitre Didier," I said earnestly, "what is your own theory about the matter?"

I felt the shoulder on which my hand rested twitch in a tiny shrug.

"*Mère de Dieu!* If I told you my secret thoughts you would think I was sunk as deep in black superstition as are the ignorant peasants. I only know that this affliction—this curse, if you like to call it so—it still exists in our midst. But the people of Josselin do not publish their shame openly to the world. When the time of their periodical transfiguration approaches, the women lock themselves in their rooms, or hide in the depths of the forest, where no human eyes shall see the ghastly form they assume, where no innocent child shall tempt the hellish fury of their fangs."

In the depths of the woods! The words dinned through my brain with devilish insistence. Was it not in the depths of the wood that we had encountered Co-

rinne Lemerre? Was my unfortunate friend about to take to himself a beautiful vampire for a wife?

Amid the whirlpool of my thoughts I became dully aware that the old man was still speaking:

"*Certainement*, considering the way in which our dread secret has been hidden, it is small wonder that the learned savants could gather such slender data on which to base their theories," he was saying. "That is why I have spoken tonight, that you may in turn warn your friend."

"And persuade him to abandon Mademoiselle Lemerre on the very eve of her wedding-day?" I cried.

"*Doucement, doucement,*" remonstrated the old man. "Softly, my impetuous friend. I am the last man to counsel creating an open scandal by breaking off the match. Besides, there is no need to fear anything for the moment. Your friend himself stands in not the slightest danger, for the werewolves of Josselin do not attack and devour grown men. It will be later, when the little ones arrive, that the tragedy will commence. If you love your friend, warn him of the peril that will come. There is no need for you to repeat my words to him yet; not for many months—many years, maybe. But, as you value his happiness, his peace of mind, his very reason, relate to him the legend of the Women of Josselin on the day that his son and heir is born."

**A**FTER the old man had gone I sat for a long time by the dying embers of the fire, smoking incessantly and thinking deeply as I awaited Alan's return.

My mind was a seesaw of doubt and indecision. One moment I had determined to tell my chum everything the moment he arrived; the next, I had just as firmly decided that no word should pass my lips.

Would he believe me if I did speak?



Even if he were capable of crediting my fantastic story, would he have the hardihood and strength of mind to cast off his beautiful bride at the eleventh hour? And, above all, was I justified in blasting the reputation of a young girl on the mere unsubstantiated theory of a misanthropic notary whose tongue had been loosened by a bottle of wine?

Yet in my own heart I knew the legend was no chimera. Now that I possessed the clue I could recall a host of incidents, insignificant and meaningless in themselves, which confirmed it. Why, the villagers even had a special name for the afflicted women. *Aboyeuses*—"the barkers"—I had heard the strange term whispered furtively dozens of times, though at the time it had conveyed nothing to my mind. But now—

I rose to my feet and threw back the heavy window-curtains, pressing my burning forehead against the cool panes as I gazed out into the night.

The moon, now slightly past its full, rode high in the cloudless heavens, bathing the whole valley of the river in its soft silver glow. At the riverside end of the village the triple towers of the ancient château reared themselves sheer from the shining waters, an imposing monument of feudal power and tyranny. Just beyond were the shallows, lined with low grassy banks, the washing-place of the village from time immemorial. It was there that the homeless outcast had vainly begged for charity. In the square open space immediately before me was the church from whose porch she had launched the fatal curse. In my mind's eye I could picture the lean, famished figure standing at the head of the steps, facing the affrighted crowd like an avenging fury over the dead body of her child. . . .

For the first time I understood why

it is that no beggar now asks in vain for alms in the streets of Josselin.

A faint sound on the pavement immediately below my window abruptly switched my train of thought. Two persons were standing at the door of the inn, talking in low, intimate tones.

"*Au revoir, ma chérie,*" It was Alan's voice, vibrant with deep passion. "Till tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow then," came the answer, breathed so low that I could scarcely catch the words. "*Viens m'embrasser—*"

Her voice ended in the sound of a laughing struggle—a lingering kiss. . . .

I turned away from the window, sick at heart. How could I speak now? How could I rob them of their happiness?

That night I held my peace. The next morning they were married as fast as ring and Book could bind them.

THE warmest friendship grows dim and faint before the fiercer fires of love. I heard from Alan occasionally during his protracted honeymoon in Italy; then his letters became briefer, and came at longer intervals, until they finally ceased altogether.

I stayed on for a while at Josselin, putting the finishing touches to the pictures I had in hand. Then I wandered farther afield, through southern France, past the frontiers of Spain—just where my fancy and the appeal of the natural scenery led me. Fresh scenes, new interests, new hopes and ambitions gradually caused the memory of Alan Grantham and his mysterious bride to fade from my mind. Beneath the glorious sun-bathed skies of Castille I could almost smile at the former fears conjured up by the grisly legend of Josselin's beast-women.

It was two years later, while seated before a little wayside *posada* overlooking the swift-rushing waters of the Tagus, near Toledo, that the memory of the past

overtook and overwhelmed me like some invisible, soul-chilling sea.

A letter was handed to me by the greasy, unshaven *patróna*, a letter which bore an English postage-stamp and numerous pencilled superscriptions showing that it had followed me from place to place for weeks. Its message was brief but pregnant with dire possibilities:

For the sake of our former friendship, come at once. I need your advice and help as I have never needed them before. I dare not attempt to explain, in case you think that my mind has given way beneath the strain. Come—and come quickly!

Below was a hurriedly scrawled post-script that was actually longer than the body of the letter:

Corinne is in excellent health and sends her best regards. She bore the birth of our baby boy well, and is looking more beautiful than ever. The kiddie is a delightful little chap—you will love him. We have named him after you. I should be the happiest man alive, yet I am harassed by fears which are all the more terrifying because so utterly grotesque. Come quickly—for the sake of old acquaintance.

It was an appeal to which I could not remain deaf. I glanced at the post-mark. The letter had been posted nearly two weeks before.

It took me just five minutes to pack my few belongings and settle the bill. Crossing the river, I had the good luck to catch a train that was on the point of starting from the Toledo terminus. I had two hours' wait at Madrid, but the wasted time was more than made up by the swiftness of the Trans-Continental Express which bore me to Paris, where I entered the early morning boat-train for the coast.

Thirty hours after receiving the message I walked down the gangway of the cross-channel steamer—to meet the hearty handclasp and eager greeting of the man who had summoned me back to England.

"I GOT your cable from Paris," he said, as though in explanation of his unexpected presence on the landing-stage. "I can't describe how relieved I was to know that you were on your way."

I started to tell him about the way in which his letter had wandered about before reaching me, but he cut me short with what seemed unnecessary haste.

"Come on." He seized my grip and, ignoring the waiting train, made for the gate which led to the road. "I've got a car waiting. We can talk as I drive. My place is only in the next county—a few miles over the Sussex border. We can get there quicker by road than by the local trains."

The luxurious appointments of the waiting auto seemed to indicate that, whatever Alan's trouble might be, it certainly was not connected with his financial standing. I ventured a remark to that effect as the car started into motion, but he almost ignored it.

"Oh, yes. I've not been doing so badly. But I've been too worried lately to attempt much serious work. Do you know—don't think me crazy because of what I'm about to tell you—but, you remember that large gray wolf that we saw that night at the Devil's Tombstone?"

"Yes," I answered, tense with interest. "Well?"

"That damned brute has followed me over here!"

I managed to force a laugh, but, had my friend not been so engrossed in his driving, I fear my face must have betrayed my real feelings.

"Come, come," I said chaffingly. "Isn't that rather a tall yarn, old man? It's rather a long jump from Brittany to Sussex, and there's a slight obstacle known as the English Channel in between.

"I don't care how far it is, or what obstacles have to be crossed to get here. I would recognize the brute anywhere,

and I'm certain that the same animal has been haunting our house for weeks—in fact, ever since the baby was born.”

The baby! Here was another link of the old notary's tale that rang true.

“It's a boy, isn't it?” I asked, more for the sake of covering up a pause than anything else.

“Of course its a boy!” he answered testily. “Didn't I tell you in my letter that we'd named it after you?”

“And you think that this wolf means harm to the little fellow?”

“What else?” he demanded bruskiy. “The creature has tried half a dozen times to get into the nursery, but luckily it was seen and driven away before it could do any mischief. The strange part about it is that it never attempts to attack grown people. That ought to make our task all the easier.”

“Our task?” I echoed.

“Yes. You must help me track down this beast to its lair and send a bullet through its heart. Not until I see it stretched dead before my eyes shall I feel that Corinne and her child are safe.”

It took all my self-control to refrain from bursting into sardonic laughter. I mumbled some answer—heaven knows what!—and for the remainder of the drive sat silent, or spoke in heedless monosyllables. My own grim thoughts were quite sufficient to occupy all my attention. Once again I had become enmeshed in a tangle of mystery and lurking peril—but little did the man beside me guess the real nature of the task in which he had solicited my aid!

**T**HE fifty-odd miles of coast roads were soon covered; then we turned inland at a spot not far from the traditional site of the Battle of Hastings. Twenty minutes later the car swept through the gates of a long, tree-bordered

drive, and I got my first glimpse of the house.

“‘Lone Croft’ it was called, and the name seemed well chosen. The rambling old house stood on a hill, surrounded by well-wooded grounds, and though its position rendered it somewhat exposed to the fierce gales which occasionally sweep in from the sea, it commanded a superb view. Southward was the long sweep of coastline, from Beachy Head to Dungeness; every other point of the compass was bounded by the vast chalk downs, desolate and deserted for the most part, though here and there one could catch a distant glimpse of the roof of an isolated farmhouse nestling in a fold of its rolling contours.

Lone Croft, as its name implied, had originally been built as a farmstead of the more substantial kind—though that was in the days when Queen Bess held sway. It was a delightful example of the rural architecture of the period, with half-timbered gables and quaint nooks and corners in its oak-raftered rooms. Its long, rambling passages had so many queer little flights of stairs leading up and down, that it was sometimes a matter of difficulty to guess on which floor one was, without glancing out of the window. It was, in short, exactly the kind of house that any ghost with a respect for old-established traditions would choose for the scene of its midnight rambles.

I was on the point of making a laughing remark to that effect as I alighted from the car. But I caught a glimpse of Alan's set features, and refrained. At that moment he did not seem in the humor to appreciate a jest on any subject, occult or otherwise.

My friend entered the house without a word and led the way to the great, stone-flagged kitchen, now converted into a very comfortable dining-room. On the

threshold he paused with a low exclamation of surprize.

"Hullo! it seems that we have visitors."

Two men, both stout and red-faced, and dressed in tweeds and gaiters, had risen from their seats near the wide fireplace and were advancing to meet us.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Grantham," said the one who appeared to be the elder, a gray-bearded man of about sixty. "I think you know me, sir? I'm Enoch Varden, from Vale Farm, down yonder. My friend here be Farmer Sowerby, from——"

"Yes, yes, I know you both," Alan broke in somewhat impatiently. "I take it that you have been awaiting my return, and that you wish to see me about something?"

"We do that, sir," answered the man with the gray beard, in a tone that was a curious mixture of deference and half-suppressed anger. "We two be come here on most unpleasant business, Mr. Grantham." He paused and cast an inquiring glance in my direction. "Axing your pardon, sir, but be this gen'man a friend of yours?"

"Indeed he is," Alan replied warmly, "my oldest chum. You need not be afraid of saying what you have to say in his presence."

Farmer Varden seemed reluctant to take advantage of the invitation to state his errand. He stood before the fireplace, clearing his throat noisily at intervals and shifting uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Look'ee here, sir," he burst out at last. "I be a peaceable man, and one as likes to keep on as good terms as may be with my neighbors, and I hopes you will take what I'm going to say in the spirit that it's meant. Three nights ago seven sheep were killed and mangled at Sowerby's Farm, and this morning I found a

round dozen o' my own flock had been treated the same way."

"Indeed?" Alan's voice did not betray much surprize. "That's very unfortunate. I suppose you've come to warn me that some ferocious animal is at large in the district?"

Farmer Varden gave a quick shake of his head.

"We be come to warn you to keep your dogs chained up at night!" he said bluntly.

"Dogs!" Alan laughed loudly. "But, my dear good man, I don't keep any dogs. My wife can't bear to have one anywhere near her, and, naturally, there isn't such a thing about the place."

The two farmers stared at him with palpable incredulity.

"Nary a one?" asked Sowerby, speaking for the first time.

"Not a single hair of one!" was my friend's firm reply. "You must seek elsewhere for the animal that worried your sheep."

Enoch Varden raised his horny hand and scratched his head.

"Of course, if you say that, sir, we're bound to take your word——"

"You can do that with the greatest confidence," Alan said quietly.

"No offense, sir, no offense," Varden hastened to say. "But all the same I must say that things seem mighty queer. Old Miles—Mr. Sowerby's shepherd, sir—he tracked the beast's footprints on the morning after his sheep were killed. He's no wit-lacker, is Old Miles, and he says that the tracks were those of a big dog—the biggest he'd ever seen. I can bear him out in that, for I was up at four on the morning after the raid on my own fold, and I followed the footprints over the soft ground for miles."

"And where did they lead?" Alan asked.

"They led straight to this very house,

sir—and what's more, they didn't go any further! There they were, as plain as print on paper, right up your drive. There were even a few on the doorstep, going into your front door—but *there weren't none coming out again!*"

I saw Alan Grantham suddenly go pale. Well enough could I guess the tragic poignancy of his thoughts at that moment.

"It must be the large gray wolf that I've seen hovering about the house!" he exclaimed.

The farmer's eyes grew round as saucers at his words.

"Wolf!" cried Varden. "Who ever heard tell of such a critter on the Sussex Downs?"

"Well, there it is," shrugged Alan. "It may have escaped from somewhere—a circus, for instance. Anyway, the remedy is in your own hands. Of course you both possess guns?"

"Aye, sir," came in unison from the pair.

"Well, arm all the men you can, and lie in wait for the brute. That is what I and my friend intend to do. I hope we have the luck to get a good chance of a shot at it!"

**B**EFORE nightfall, ample proof was forthcoming that my friend's theory was correct. The identity of the mysterious four-footed marauder was established by the member of the Mobile Section of the County Constabulary who rode up on a motorcycle while dinner was in progress.

"Yes, sir, it's a wolf all right," the constable stated. "One of our patrols sighted the beast while he was on his rounds. Chap of the name of Morris. He's an old soldier who served with the Expeditionary Forces in Russia, and he's seen wolves where they grow natural. He got a near view of the creature as it trotted past him

on the road, making toward this house. He was unarmed, so that he could do nothing to stop it. But he got a good look at it, and he's prepared to swear it's a wolf and not a large dog. Moreover, it's a bitch-wolf and has recently had a litter of whelps."

"Whew!" whistled Alan. "That complicates matters—we shall have the countryside overrun if they are allowed to breed! Did the lady have her family with her?"

The policeman shook his head.

"No, but the creature's dugs were heavy with milk—Morris breeds dogs himself, and he knew the signs all right. He says that such a state usually makes such animals fiercer, more cunning—and more dangerous! Thought I'd call in to put you on your guard."

"I'm much obliged to you, officer," said Alan, as he did a little sleight-of-hand with something which rustled crisply.

"Thank you, sir," the man touched the peak of his cap. "Good night."

Listening to the conversation from the dining-room doorway, I felt my last doubts vanish in a wave of horrified conviction. The mystery wolf had recently littered—Corinne's baby was just a fortnight old! It was the last—the clearest—the most convincing link in the long chain of evidence which proved that the ancient legend of Josselin was no myth!

The time had come for me to speak. Whatever might be the consequences of the revelation, my conscience would not permit me to conceal it any longer. A tragedy must be risked if an even greater tragedy was to be averted.

The moment the door had closed on the policeman's departure I took my friend's arm and drew him into his study, which adjoined the dining-room we had recently quitted.

"Why, what's in the wind?" he said as he saw me close the door.

"Alan," I said gently, "I am about to take advantage of the privilege of an old friend. But believe me, it is my duty rather than my inclinations which prompt the words I am about to utter. Corinne, the girl you married, is"—my mind groped for fitting words to break the blow that was about to fall—"is—not like other girls——"

"Don't I know it!" he broke in enthusiastically, entirely failing to grasp my meaning. "She is a pearl beyond all price! I'll thank heaven till my dying day for the strange chance which threw her across my path, and enabled me to link my life with hers!"

The fervor of his declaration almost made me falter in my purpose. The thought that I, his dearest friend, was fated to be the instrument of his coming disillusionment was like an agonizing knife-thrust in my heart. But it was too late to stop now.

"It was not of her personal beauty, or of her mental qualities that I was speaking," I steeled myself to go on. "There is something else—something entirely beyond her own power to control. My poor boy, the girl you love so deeply is——"

"Not dead?" He caught me by the arm with a grip that made my muscles numb. "Don't tell me that Corinne has fallen a victim to that accursed wolf! Don't tell me that she is dead!"

"Would that she were!" I exclaimed almost involuntarily.

"What!" His grip tightened like a crushing vise. "In God's name—what do you mean?"

"Corinne Lemerre was, and still is a——"

Four crashing reports, fired in quick succession just outside the window, cut short my words like the stroke of a knife.

Glad of the respite, short-lived though

it might be, I dashed to the front door and threw it wide. On the steps was a burly blue-clad figure. It was the constable who had just left us, and in his hand he held a heavy automatic pistol.

"The wolf!" he gasped in hurried explanation. "As I passed through the shrubbery I saw it leap from one of the lower windows. It was carrying something in its mouth. Looked like a fair-sized bundle of clothes——"

"My God!" shrieked Alan. "The child! We must follow—wait here while I get the guns."

"Did you hit the thing?" I asked.

"I think so, but the light was bad." The man flashed his lantern on the gravelled path and gave a cry. "Yes, I hit it all right. Look at the blood on the stones!"

"Here, take this." Alan thrust a sporting-rifle into my reluctant hands as he pushed past and took the steps with a flying leap. "It's loaded, but don't risk a shot unless you can make sure of not hitting my boy. Which way did it go?" he asked as he caught up with the hurrying policeman.

"Couldn't say, sir. It just disappeared in the darkness. There's its trail, though!" He flashed his light at the wavering line of crimson splashes.

"Badly wounded—it can't go far," jerked Alan, almost snatching the lantern in his excitement and pressing forward.

The next moment he uttered a cry of disappointment. The sinister trail had swerved into the dense bushes, where it was utterly lost.

"We must separate," Alan whispered urgently, "and comb this plantation thoroughly. Shoot at sight—but for God's sake mind the boy."

**W**E OBEYED and did our best to pick up the trail. But it was a weary, nerve-racking business, hunting aimlessly in the dark. Presently the police-con-



stable and I gravitated toward each other and met in a little clearing not far from the house.

"Some hunt!" the man muttered grimly. "Like searching in a haystack for a needle that isn't there! Probably that wolf is miles away by now—and your friend can say good-bye to his kid."

His words gave me a sudden inspiration.

"That wolf may have returned to the house," I exclaimed.

"To the house?" He looked surprized, as well as he might be. "What's the idea?"

"Oh, just an idea. But I think it's worth following up. Will you come back there with me?"

"If you think it's worth while. Shall I call the gov'nor?" he asked, jerking his head toward where Alan was noisily beating the bushes.

"I think not," I advised. "If my suspicions are correct, he'll be better out of what is coming."

We gained the house unobserved, and I immediately led the way upstairs.

"You were right, sir!" cried the man, pointing to a red smear on the white paintwork of one of the doors.

I nodded without speaking and shifted the gun so that it would be ready for instant action. The blood-stained door was the one which gave access to Corinne's bedroom.

The room was in darkness as I flung open the door, but the low, menacing growl which greeted our entrance showed that it was far from being empty.

I pressed the switch—then stood staring at the unbelievable tableau which the light revealed.

It was not the sight of the huge wolf lying curled up on the bed that caused my breath to catch in my throat with a sound very much like a sob—I was pre-

pared to see that. No, the thing that staggered me and shook my nerve was the sight of the tiny baby nestling between the huge animal's legs, crooning contentedly as it gently kneaded the soft gray fur with its little dimpled fists.

The gun slipped unheeded from my hands and fell to the floor. My brain could scarcely credit what my eyes beheld. Then, like a ray of glorious light from heaven itself, understanding rushed upon me.

Mother-love, divine and all-conquering, had triumphed over the dread, age-old curse. The great, fierce she-wolf was actually suckling the babe it had been condemned to destroy!

This much I saw, but the policeman behind me had eyes only for the hunted beast. I caught the glint of polished steel as he threw his hand forward.

"Don't fire, you fool!" I shouted, and switched off the light to baffle his aim in case he had not understood.

But even as the light snapped off, the darkness was split by a tongue of flame and the crash of his automatic followed like a miniature thunderclap.

"Fool!" I cried again. "What have you done?"

"I guess I've put 'paid' to that——"

His boast died away to a meaningless mumble as I again pressed the light-switch.

The wolf had vanished. In its place, marble-white and still in death, was the body of Corinne Grantham—the girl who had for ever broken the curse which had for centuries lain like a hideous blight over the women of Josselin.

THAT police officer faced the music like a man at the subsequent inquest. The poor fellow came in for more than his fair share of the nasty remarks that were made about "the careless handling

of firearms." But he had the sense to hold his tongue about the wolf changing into the woman at the moment of its death.

Probably he guessed that such a story would not be believed, and had no desire to exhibit himself as a clumsy liar as well as a clumsy marksman. Thanks to Alan's open-handed and unquestioning generosity, I was able to ensure that the constable was no worse off for his reticence. Today he's probably the richest policeman in Sussex—if he hasn't retired from the force long since.

The coroner's verdict was "Death by

misadventure." And so the matter stands to this day.

Alan Grantham, his mind torn between grief at his wife's death and the joy of having his baby son so unexpectedly restored to him unharmed, never so much as suspected the real nature of the "misadventure" which had mercifully cut the Gordian knot of the sinister web of fate in which she was entangled.

Nor will he ever know the truth—unless it be on the day when, beyond the horizon of the grave, all secrets will be revealed.