

# THE WOLF WOMAN

By Arthur James Hayes

Illustrated by Dorothy Dulin



A great wolf padded by a figure white, whose long black hair and mocking laugh were those of a woman.



I HAVE seen queer things, M'sieu. No man roams the woods and wild places without being at some time or another a witness to strange happenings. To come into the glare

of electric lights and tell them is to invite a significant tapping of heads and an exchange of covert grins. Even when I visited you, M'sieu, in your grand home, I dared not tell, because the silverware and mahogany at the feast that you spread for your old trapper friend, with the grand femmes and the conversation of learned men, seemed to make me doubt that I myself had thought or seen such things as linger now in my mind after all these years.

Once, indeed, when the subject turned to the mysteries of the great unknown, I felt a stirring in my heart, as if I would speak. But I glanced about where so many cultured people were laughing and talking, and I thought that it was no place for old Pierre, with his halting tongue and ill-fitting store clothes, to speak.

But tonight, M'sieu, across the camp fire, with the pines whispering overhead, and the old owl calling from the ridge, the old thoughts return upon me, and I am neither ashamed nor afraid to speak. For there is that about the wilderness that equalizes. Tonight I am not ashamed that my clothes do not fit as do the clothes of city men. It seems perfectly natural that I should hold my opinion against even you, who talk with the tongue of education, and know many things that we of the North have never heard. For I would tell you of something that I have cherished in secret these thirty years.

The northern lights flame tonight as they did on that other night when happened that which I will tell. There was then, too, a still cold that crackled in the silent pines and birches and cedars. And the moon rose in the sky with a silver grandeur like this, when we huddle about the embers of a moose hunter's camp.

You were talking of women, M'sieu. I believe you have said that the mystery of the other sex is the nonsensical prattle of poets and dreamers. Yet I, Pierre Lerue, who know no poetry, and never dream in daylight hours, say that I have seen things that a man scoffs at in daylight but believes at night with the frost fingers of the great fear clutching at his heart.

I have seen with my own eyes things that you, anywhere but out here on desolate Shashewa Point, would call the tale of an old woman. But here, perhaps,

M'sieu, you will listen, and maybe so, believe.

I was a young man then, and I hunted game for the Diamond Hill camps thirty-three miles from Big Bemidge. There was then no game warden to make the grand fuss over the matter of a few moose more or less. And for the work, which was easy and, to one of my nature, pleasant, I was well paid. I was never handsome, M'sieu, even when a young man, and that is the reason, maybe, that the woman in white never smiled upon me. Or maybe she bestowed her smiles elsewhere because my speech was not as hers and I had not the pleasing manners that young Harvey Gale or Richard Connelly had.

There was a camp over on Eagle Island, where for years no one had stayed. It was a good enough cabin, built by several men from the town, who hoped to have there a hunting lodge. They did not stay there long after they had finished, M'sieu. The reasons given were many and different. Most people believed it was the tragedy, the accidental shooting of old Dr. Galloway and the drowning of Mathews, the young lawyer whom the town folk said had much promise.

But old Joe Tesreaux, who was their guide, told me when he had been a month away from the whisky that it was not the mere deaths that drove away the others. He said it was the woman in white. He told me, M'sieu, as I tell you, across the glow of the camp fire, far out on an island in the Rainey, where his words did not seem so strange, and where I believed.

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She was not a ghost woman, or one of those creatures with trailing white robes that vanish into the walls. Tesreaux said she was both young and most extraordinary beautiful. Where she came from Tesreaux did not know. One evening he went to the spring for water, and there he first saw her. She was talking to Dr. Galloway, and they were looking into each other's eyes and smiling.

Joe got the water, but he said that for all his fifty-eight years his heart seemed to stop a moment, when the woman looked right at him. When the old doctor returned to camp he made so bold as to ask him who was the beautiful mam'selle with whom he talked. But the old doctor only looked at him strangely and told him that the etiquette was not to ask a young lady

on the first occasion all about herself, and so, he said, he did not know.

And that evening when the moon was high he took his rifle and said that he would stroll off for himself up on the hill to see if perchance something might afford him a shot. They in the camp heard the shot about an hour later, and the old doctor was not back at midnight. They found him the next day. He was lying face downward on an old runway, and though it snowed slightly late in the night, old Joe swore that there was there the faint tracks of a woman's little shoes. A bullet from his own rifle had pierced his heart.

It is not so strange, perhaps, that even an old sportsman like Dr. Galloway should have an accident. But to us of the great woods it did seem strange that it should have happened where there were no logs to stumble over and no brush to entangle one's weapon in.

Tesreaux had not told the others of the woman dressed all in white, but the next night he strolled down to the shore of the lake, that he might think of many things, and there he saw young Benny Mathews talking to the woman. The tote team had not yet arrived for the body, and so camp had not broken up.

Tesreaux said that for reasons he could never utter he did not go nearer that strange woman. But he heard her laughter, and that of young Mathews.

There was a thin film of ice over the lake on that clear cold late November night, and after a while the two of them started to walk out upon it. They were walking toward Eagle Island, where had been just completed the camp that the club intended to use. Old Joe watched them in silent fear. The ice crackled under foot, and Mathews seemed to pause and hang back. But the woman in white grasped his hand, laughing, and drew him forward.

And then with an awful crackling the ice gave way under the man's feet. He seemed to disappear beneath the surface almost at once, and if he ever rose it was somewhere under the ice, where Tesreaux could not see him. And the woman ran lightly over the ice and disappeared without a backward glance, in the thick evergreens of Eagle Island.

The patter of her feet on the ringing ice was distinct, and seemed almost like

the sound of distant bells. Tesreaux at his fright and the distance made it even him very uncertain, but he thought heard in the night air faint murmurs and echoes, like the sound of a woman laughing. And when the tote team returned town it bore two bodies, and the new camp on Eagle Island was never occupied by its builders.

Three years later, M'sieu, the old Diamond Hill outfit moved over that way make their last cut, and for \$30 a month and found I hunted that winter about Eagle Lake. I tracked a wounded cow moose one afternoon across the ice on Eagle Island. The big cow I found lying down only a few yards from the shore and with one shot I finished my work. But remembering poor old Joe Tesreaux now gone to his accounting, a great curiosity seized upon me just to view the dilapidated old cabin, with its iron beds and great cooking range, that had been intended for the club from town, and long since, no doubt, fallen into rust flakes.

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I was well up the steep path—for Eagle Island towers high above the lake, and covered from shore to summit with the densest evergreen growth—when I heard footsteps approaching. The next moment some one rounded the bend in the trail. Mon Dieu! It was a beautiful young girl, M'sieu, and she was dressed from head to foot in white. White sweater and jacket, white skirt and moccasins, white gloves and toque.

I thought in the instant of old Dr. Galloway and young Mathews, and I felt M'sieu, that strange stirring of the secret that careless men call having the best stand on end. It is not for my tongue to describe that girl. She stood the trail before me, silent, but smiling with her lips, which were red, and her eyes which were the largest and blackest I have ever seen. Her hair, where it escaped in little curls beneath the toque, was a jet black, and her cheeks, so far from being chalky like those of a ghost or specter, maybe, were the brightest pink that could well desire.

Her face, M'sieu, perhaps because framed in so much snowy whiteness, was the most vividly beautiful thing that my eyes have rested upon. I have seen, of course, enough, those—what is it you say?—calendars that they give away in