



# *The* Werewolf Snarls

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*A brief story, with a breath of icy horror in it*

“I WANT you to meet Mr. Craw,” I prattled Lola Wurther to me. “He claims to be a werewolf.”

And she turned—fluttery hands, fluttery white shoulders, fluttery blond curls, fluttery skirts of green silk—to lose herself in the crowd of noisy guests at the bar. Mr. Craw and I took two or three

steps together, as though we both sought quiet.

“Sit down,” I suggested, and we dropped upon a divan in the half-gloom behind Lola Wurther’s big grand piano. Then we looked at each other.

He was a huge, high-shouldered creature in rather seedy dress clothes, with

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coarse black hair grown low on his forehead and around his flat-lying, pointed ears. His long anvil of a chin lay snugly between the wings of his collar, his long poniard of a nose lay upon his chin, and his mouth caught between was as tight and lipless as a slit in leather. The pallor of his face accentuated the wet-licorice black of his eyes. He made me feel my own physical frailty as a little, rheumatic old man half his volume.

"Well," he invited huskily, "do I look it?"

"You mean like a werewolf?" I suggested, and waited smiling for the witty retort. But he shook his head.

"It happens to be quite true," he assured me with the absolute solemnity of the very drunken or the very insane.

I jumped at that, although I was used to meeting bizarre figures in the Wurther parlor. Not knowing what to say, I kept my own nervous mouth shut. After a musing moment, Craw went on.

"I came here tonight looking for help in my desperate problem. Wurther and his wife are supposed to be experts in occultism."

"Mr. Craw," I could not help saying, "the Wuthers are unmitigated fakes."

"I was thinking that," he nodded glumly. "Apparently their only reason for letting me come was to make sport for their friends." A pause, awkward for me at least. "Well, then, shall I tell you?"

"Please do," I urged, feeling strangely foolish.

Craw hunched his shoulders, sank his head, and let his clasped hands slide down, down between his knees until the thick knuckles almost rested on the floor. There was something animal-like in the attitude: his body and limbs seemed measured and joined according to an ab-

normal pattern. His licorice eyes sought mine, and at the moment they did not look exactly human, either. Too much gloomy iris for one thing, and too little rim of white for another. In their depths lurked a green light, feeble but hard.

"It began," said Craw, "when I experimented with the witch-ointments."

"Witch-ointments?"

"Yes. Supposed to be rubbed on for changes into animal forms—made and used by magicians according to Satanic formulas. They sound fantastic, I know, but I was a medical student, working on a paper about pre-Renaissance medicine. There were several recipes."

"Recipes?" I repeated. "Not really?"

"Yes, a dozen at least. The 1896 bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital printed one, in an article by Doctor Robert Fletcher. Several other modern scientists have offered others, wholly or in part. And let me tell you that there's more sound pharmacy in them than you'd think."

I thought, indeed hoped, that he was merely spoofing. But there was no bantering smile upon his thin lips, and his eyes looked drawn and haggard about the corners.

"Belladonna, for instance," he amplified. "It's a common ingredient. Makes you see visions, as you probably know. And monkshood, full of deadly aconitine. Henbane, that Shakespeare called 'the insane root'; and hemlock. These and other things, made into a salve with the fat of an unbaptized child—"

"I say," I broke in again, not very politely, "you don't ask me to believe that you—"

"But I did." Again that melancholy nod of assurance. "There was a baby's body fetched to the dissecting-room at school." He paused and his eyes nar-

rowed, as though to gaze down a fearsome groove into the past. "Well, I mixed the stuff up. For a lark." His mouth slashed open in a rueful grin, revealing oversize, uneven teeth.

"You rubbed it on?" I prompted. Once more he nodded, and I pursued: "What happened?"

"Nothing." Craw sat up straight again and spoke more clearly. "I don't know what I expected to happen, or if in truth I expected anything. But I do remember feeling like a fool, and an unclean fool to boot. I started to clean the grease off, but it had absorbed into me somehow, like a vanishing cosmetic."

He shuddered slightly, briefly.

"As I say, nothing happened all that day, or that night, or the next day. But the next night," and his voice dropped suddenly to a breathy mutter, "was the night of the full moon."

On the instant I remembered a host of stories with which my childhood nurse had regaled me, stories about the full moon and its effect on the human soul and fate. Few of them had been pleasant. Craw was plunging ahead:

"Moonlight meant romance to me then, and nothing more. Collegian-like, I went on a riverside walk with a girl—a Liberal Arts sophomore. There was a sort of sandy jut out into the water, and we loitered there. Something I said made her laugh, with her face turned up to me in the moonlight. Then she stopped laughing, and her mouth twisted like a snake when you step on it."

"Whatever for?" I almost gasped.

"Her eyes—on my face—were frightened."

**C**RRAW leaned suddenly toward me. I caught, or fancied I caught, a whiff of musky odor as from an animal cage.

In spite of myself I slid back and away from him on the cushions. I had just remembered that there was a full moon tonight.

Again Craw's tense voice: "She tried to scream and, frightened myself, I grasped her by the shoulder to calm her. When I touched her flesh, a new mood suddenly took possession of me. Of its own will my hand switched to her throat. Shaking her, I snarled at her to be silent. And she sagged down, in a faint. My thoughts and senses churned all up, as if in a new feeling of exultation at conquest. Then——"

He spread his great, spatulate fingers.

"In the morning they found her gnawed body. In the afternoon, while I was still telling myself that it was a dream, the police came to my dormitory. They found blood on my clothing and under my nails."

"You were *that* Craw!" I exclaimed.

His smile was bitter and tight-lipped this time. "Oh, so you read the papers? 'Undergraduate beast-man' the headlines called me, and 'medico monster'. What I told the police—the solemn truth—was too much for them to believe. They called in alienists. So I was sent to the asylum, not to the electric chair."

"Look here," I ventured, in a voice that threatened to close up in my throat with every word, "I think you'd better talk about something else. You shouldn't have let yourself talk about this business in the first place."

But he shook his head so emphatically that the coarse locks stirred at his narrow temples. I'm not crazy, old chap. You see, just two weeks ago I was officially certified normal." He sniffed. "How could they know the frenzy, the throttling rage and the blood-thirst, that closed over me like water in my locked room—

every month, on the night when the moon was full?"

His clenched hands lifted. I saw his nails, pointed and thick and opaque, like pieces of mussel-shell.

"I used to howl and shriek, so that the attendants came to pacify me. They got bitten for their pains; so there were barred cells and straitjackets. It was two years before a cunning sneaked in with the moon-madness, a cunning that whispered I must suffer in silence if ever I wanted to go free."

"And you were silent?"

"I was. At length the doctors had me up for another examination. They hammered at my knees for reflexes, asked a bunch of clever questions, and finally discharged me as cured." Once again a pause. "But I wasn't cured, of course."

"Surely," I mouthed in the most stupid fashion imaginable, "surely you wanted to be cured."

"Of course." Craw snapped his big teeth together after the two words, as though they needed emphasis. "So I turned to the Wurthers, as I said at the beginning. I'd heard somewhere that they knew devil and all about occultism and the night-side of the soul. A week ago I hunted James Wurther out at his club and told him the whole cursed business."

"Told him what you've just told me?"

"Exactly. And he heard me out, then said nothing for a full five minutes. Finally he smiled and said, 'I'll help you. On the night of the full moon I'll be entertaining. Come to my place then, and we'll make everything all right.'"

He leaned against the cushions, as if his story was done. I wriggled nervously, wondering whether he was very clever, even cleverer than most of the bizarre Wurther guests, or whether he was dan-

gerous. I weighed the chances of getting up and walking away without seeming too furtive. . . .

"Oh, there you are, Mr. Craw!" squealed Lola Wurther behind our shoulders. "Some new people have come—girls—and they're dying to meet——"

She swooped down upon him and bore him away toward three young women with vapid, painted smiles.

It was my chance to leave, and I took it. I crossed the room to the chairs where the hats and coats were piled. Glancing back, I saw Craw yet again, from behind.

His shoulders seemed strangely narrow, and humped in a fashion somehow hyena-like. His hair—perhaps it was not carefully combed at the back of his low skull—was shaggy. A first I had thought his ears flat, but I saw now that they inclined forward, as though involuntarily pricked up.

"He claims to be a werewolf," Lola Wurther was finishing her introduction, and a tinkle of laughter ascended all around.

I got my things and left without being noticed.

**T**HAT was last night. Before me lies the morning paper, with an arresting headline:

#### 4 TORN CORPSES FOUND IN PARLOR

Police Baffled Over Murder  
of James Wurther and  
Guests

#### SEEK "BEAST MAN"

I have not yet forced myself to read the rest.