

Somewhere, high above, the moon shines down, fat and full—but here, in Tarker’s Mills, a January blizzard has choked the sky with snow. The wind rams full force down a deserted Center Avenue; the orange town plows have given up long since.

Arnie Westrum, flagman on the GS&WM Railroad, has been caught in the small tool-and-signal shack nine miles out of town; with his small, gasoline-powered rail-rider blocked by drifts, he is waiting out the storm there, playing Last Man Out solitaire with a pack of greasy Bicycle cards. Outside the wind rises to a shrill scream. Westrum raises his head uneasily, and then looks back down at his game again. It is only the wind, after all . . .

But the wind doesn’t scratch at doors . . . and whine to be let in.

He gets up, a tall, lanky man in a wool jacket and railroad coveralls, a Camel cigarette jutting from one corner of his mouth, his seamed New England face lit in soft orange tones by the kerosene lantern which hangs on the wall.

The scratching comes again. Someone’s dog, he thinks, lost and wanting to be let in. That’s all it is . . . but still, he pauses. It would be inhuman to leave it out there in the cold, he thinks (not that it is much warmer in here; in spite of the battery-powered heater, he can see the cold cloud of his breath)—but still he hesitates. A cold finger of fear is probing just below his heart. This has been a bad season in Tarker’s Mills; there have been omens of evil on the land. Arnie has his father’s Welsh blood strong in his veins, and he doesn’t like the feel of things.

Before he can decide what to do about his visitor, the low-pitched whining rises to a snarl. There is a thud as something incredibly heavy hits the door . . . draws back . . . hits again. The door trembles in its frame, and a puff of snow billows in from the top.

Arnie Westrum stares around, looking for something to shore it up with, but before he can do more than reach for the flimsy chair he has been sitting in, the snarling thing strikes the door again with incredible force, splintering it from top to bottom.

It holds for a moment longer, bowed in on a vertical line, and lodged in it, kicking and lunging, its snout wrinkled back in a snarl, its yellow eyes blazing, is the biggest wolf Arnie has ever seen . . .

*And its snarls sound terribly like human words.*

The door splinters, groans, gives. In a moment the thing will be inside.

In the corner, amongst a welter of tools, a pick leans against the wall. Arnie lunges for it and seizes it as the wolf thrusts its way inside and crouches, its yellow eyes gleaming at the cornered man. Its ears are flattened back, furry triangles. Its tongue lolls. Behind it, snow gusts in through a door that has been shattered down the center.

It springs with a snarl, and Arnie Westrum swings the pick. Once.

Outside, the feeble lamplight shines raggedly on the snow through the splintered door.

The wind whoops and howls.

The screams begin.

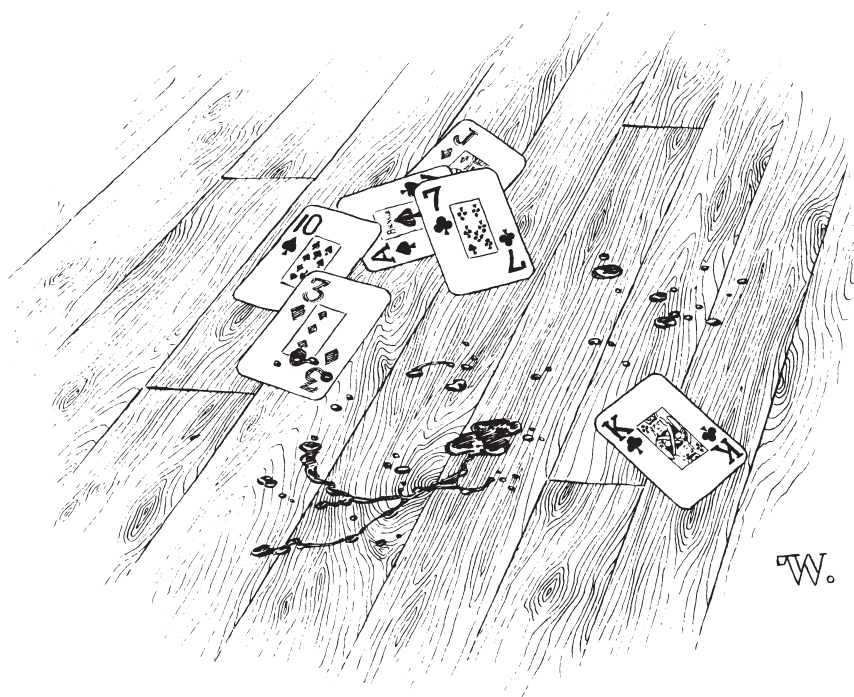
Something inhuman has come to Tarker's Mills, as unseen as the full moon riding the night sky high above. It is the Werewolf, and there is no more reason for its coming now than there would be for the arrival of cancer, or a psychotic with murder on his mind, or a killer tornado. Its time is now, its place is here, in this little Maine town where baked bean church suppers are a weekly event, where small boys and girls still bring apples to their teachers, where the Nature Outings of the Senior Citizens' Club are religiously reported in the weekly paper. Next week there will be news of a darker variety.





Outside, its tracks begin to fill up with snow, and the shriek of the wind seems savage with pleasure. There is nothing of God or Light in that heartless sound—it is all black winter and dark ice.

The cycle of the Werewolf has begun.



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