

The GRAY WOLF'S FANGS

A Complete Novelet of Crime's Nemesis



He loosed a blast that brought



a shrill scream that ended in a whimper from the collapsing gunman!

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Follow this relentless manhunter as he takes the trail of murderous racketeers!

CHAPTER I

GARROTE DEATH

GRAY WOLF sipped the cordial served with the after-dinner coffee, glanced around the comfortable living room, and smiled slightly.

"If I didn't know you'd inherited your father's fortune, Tom, I'd suspect there was graft in Meridian's police department."

Detective Inspector Rawlings' reply had a snap to it.

"There's none in the Homicide Squad, you can bet on that. And if I didn't know a grateful tycoon had created a trust fund for you for saving his daughter's life, I'd 've thought you were an Indian bum when I found you in that dump of a hotel this afternoon."

"To get down to business—here's the permit to tote a rod and the application for a license as a private gum-shoe you asked for. There'll be no trouble, Wolf. The

commissioner's a Meridian alumnus, and he's seen you break through the line and smear opponents' plays in their own backfield. Now, let's hear your story."

Gray Wolf's voice was as controlled as his impassive bronzed features.

"Over two months ago a human wolverine came into our country, Tom, probably to hide. He hired a guide, bought provisions, and rented a cabin on an unfrequented lake. Occasionally he made trips to one of the Chippewa villages."

"About three weeks ago I had to go to Washington on Reservation business. When I returned the man was gone. Two days after he left the body of the thirteen-year-old sister of Silver Dawn was found near the man's cabin—murdered. A thin, red cord, drawn so tightly that it had sunk from sight in the flesh, had choked out her life. I arrived the day following the discovery. That was three days ago."

RAWLINGS rapped out a curse as he leaned toward the Indian.

"What was his name, and how do you know he's here?"

"The guide one day brought this man a letter from Meridian; it was addressed to 'Frank Killian.' When he boarded the train at Cedar Lake he had purchased a ticket to Meridian."

The inspector shook his head.

"Alias, probably. Got a description of him?"

Gray Wolf took a little box from his pocket. He concealed from his old college-mate two long, ivory-white canine teeth and a heavy thread of red silk; but drew out a small folded paper.

"I did not see Silver Dawn before I left, but I sent her word to write me here, general delivery. This letter just arrived. Here's the description she gives:

" 'Frosty gray-blue eyes, slight, thin-lipped, sallow, and quick, like the weasel,

in his movements. Being a wild animal, he fears pain; being imaginative, he suffers doubly at the prospect of pain; and being a sadist, he gets much pleasure from inflicting pain on others. His odor is not unlike that of the weasel—he smells of death.' "

Rawlings sat a little more erect in his chair.

"That description sounds like 'Frosty' Killian. However, it might fit a thousand rats. I'll send the word out and we'll gather in a few for questioning. If we get a definite line, we'll send for Silver Dawn to make identification."

Gray Wolf's eyes found and held those of his friend in an unwinking stare.

"I want no others looking for this man," he said firmly. "And I'll know him when I find him, without the questioning."

His keen glance locked with that of Gray Wolf, and Inspector Rawlings remained silent for a moment. Then:

"I'd hate to have you camping on my trail," he said. "But how're you going to identify him?"

"My senses."

Rawlings uttered a sharp exclamation. "I forgot about that. I remember how you used to overhear plays in the other teams' huddles, even when you were in our back-field. But how'll that help?"

"You forget the last part of the description, Killian's body odor."

The officer leaned back. "Good Lord!" he whispered, reaching for a cigarette.

He shoved the humidor toward his guest, but Gray Wolf shook his head.

"You forget again. Nature has endowed me with the eyes of *migizi* the bald eagle, the nose of *kitchi-mahingun* the timber wolf, and the ears of *wah-goosh* the fox. I have tried never to indulge a habit which might impair those gifts."

"Of course," the inspector agreed.

There was a moment of silence before

Gray Wolf spoke again.

"Also, I have an idea the letter Killian received contained orders to report in Meridian for some job that may put me on a fresh trail."

The phone rang. Rawlings walked over to the desk and answered it.

"What?" he rapped after listening for a moment. "Give me the details—yeah—yeah—Creighton's office? Yeah—with *what*? I'll be right over."

He faced his guest and there was a queer expression on his face.

"Are you a clairvoyant, Wolf? A girl by the name of Kit Murray, secretary to Dennis Creighton who's running for Safety Commissioner on the reform ticket, was murdered in his office this evening. The scrubwoman found her. She was choked to death by a piece of red silk cord that had sunk deep into the flesh."

Gray Wolf was on his feet before Rawlings finished, and there was a smoldering fire in his dark eyes. "Let's go," he said.

The offices of Dennis Creighton were on the second floor, facing the street. Two of the Homicide Squad were waiting when the inspector and Gray Wolf arrived. Dennis Creighton was striding impatiently up and down the office. He turned eagerly at their entrance.

The victim was slumped over the typewriter. One hand still clutched her throat, as though trying even in death to pick at the buried cord, whose texture and color could only be determined at the back where it was knotted and the free ends hung loose. The congested features were not pleasant to look upon.

The motive for the murder was evident. The drawers of her desk, of the big, flat-topped desk that was Creighton's, and of the filing cabinet beside it, were open and their contents shuffled and scattered.

"We haven't touched a thing, Chief," said one of the men. "The medical examiner, photographer and fingerprint man have been called."

Rawlings nodded. Gray Wolf stepped to the girl's body and shot quick, searching glances over her, then moved to a corner. The inspector turned to Creighton.

"She was doing some work for you tonight?"

The short, pink-cheeked, white-haired man, whose usual expression of benevolence was now twisted into a mixture of anger and sorrow, nodded.

"She was copying a campaign speech I had dictated this afternoon. It was to be given over the radio tomorrow morning."

"Were you here this evening?"

Creighton shot a surprised glance at the inspector. "You mean when this happened?"

"Either before, during, or after," Rawlings snapped.

"Certainly not during, and not afterward until I was notified of the crime. But I did drop in about eight o'clock to re-dictate a few paragraphs I wanted changed. Then I went home."

"Looks like the object was robbery. Did they get anything?"

"I don't know that yet, but they didn't get what I suspect they were after. Of that I am sure."

A NOTE of rising anger came into his voice. Gray Wolf, from his inconspicuous position in a corner of the room, watched Creighton closely. The man's face had flushed a little and his eyes had lighted.

"What was that, Mr. Creighton?" the inspector asked.

"I'm not at liberty to tell beyond the fact that it was some damning evidence about the men behind the rotten political

situation in Meridian—proof of the statements I have been making to arouse the people of our fair city, that they may understand my crusade is—”

“I get you. You’re not broadcasting now. Where do you keep this evidence?”

Creighton flushed a little, but his anger was instantly controlled. “In a safety deposit box where even my most ruthless enemies can’t touch it.”

“Ummm. Got any idea who might have done this?”

“Of course I have ideas, and damned accurate ones—about who was behind it. Who actually committed the murder I wouldn’t know. Some hired thug, I presume. But my ideas aren’t proof, and I’m not laying myself open by making definite accusations.”

RAWLINGS nodded and his voice became a trifle persuasive.

“Of course not. We’re not asking that, but if you can give us any indication, something on which to work, we’ll find the proof. Might I suggest that the *Star* would be very glad to get their hands on that evidence? They have been printing some pretty dangerous stories, full of damaging innuendo. I also understand that Ed Stonebridge, the publisher, is an old enemy of yours. That correct?”

Dennis Creighton began to pace up and down the office and for some moments did not answer. His face became more and more flushed as he walked. Finally he halted and swung to face the inspector. His hands, clenched into fists, were raised above his head in a passionate gesture.

“Of course it’s correct!” he yelled. “Everyone knows it, so why deny it? That unscrupulous, lying fox knows I have evidence which will put him where he belongs, and that rag of his where—” and then he paused, took a deep breath, and

continued more calmly. “Certainly he would have a motive in trying to get those papers, as would many against whose interest it is to have the leeches and parasites cleaned out of Meridian.”

Gray Wolf had eased quietly close to the raging Creighton during the height of his tirade. When he stepped back an expression which might have been admiration crossed his dark eyes.

“One point seems evident. Whoever came was not masked and Kit Murray got a good look at him. Therefore, she had to die,” Rawlings reflected.

“You forget the nature of the man who did the killing, Tom.”

At this murmured suggestion from Gray Wolf, Rawlings glanced at the Indian swiftly.

“Yes, of course. He’d choke her slowly for the fun of watching her squirm,” the inspector agreed.

Creighton swung around and took a good look at Gray Wolf for the first time. He saw a fine looking, bronze-skinned athlete attired in neat but inconspicuous every-day clothes.

“You know already who committed the crime?” he asked in astonishment.

Gray Wolf shook his head and pointed to the body of the girl.

“I’ve never seen him, but isn’t the method suggestive of his nature?”

“H’m, I suppose so,” Creighton agreed, still eyeing the Indian very shrewdly.

Gray Wolf turned to Rawlings. “I don’t think I’ll wait for the arrival of the examiner, Inspector. I’ve an idea or two I want to work out alone. If you should want me, I’m staying at the Lawrence Hotel, you know.”

Rawlings’ eyes narrowed the merest trifle, but he showed no further indication that the Indian’s words had surprised him. He merely gave a sign of agreement by a

wave of his hand.

"If you don't mind, Inspector, I believe I'll go on home, also," said Creighton. "This has upset me more than you may realize. Kit Murray was a loyal and efficient secretary."

Rawlings nodded, but cautioned the white-haired man that he might have more questions before morning. Gray Wolf had walked toward the front window, waiting for Creighton to leave first. Suddenly he stiffened slightly, and his eyes became piercingly intent as they focused on an old office building across the street.

On the second floor a man was looking out of an open window. His face appeared just above the level of the sill, and something small and dark, scarcely recognizable, rested in front of it.

To most people that face would have been indistinct. To the keen-eyed Indian the sallow, predatory features and narrowed, menacing eyes were sharply etched. And the small object in front of the face became, to Gray Wolf, the muzzle of a rifle.

CHAPTER II

DECOY



CREIGHTON appeared in the street below, hailed a taxi, and drove off. Gray Wolf charged out of the room on the run, raced down the stairs, across the street, and up the stairway to the second floor.

He was met by no one. He heard the grind of a starting motor somewhere out back, then the purr as the car was driven away. He tried the door leading to the front office. It swung open, revealing an empty room.

He entered, closed the door, and stood still, his eyes darting over the floor while

his nostrils suddenly distended to test what was to their acute sensitivity a cloying and distressing scent. Whoever had just left the room affected a particularly penetrating, cheap perfume.

The building was old and ill-kept. There was a film of dust on the floor, and in that dust were many faint outlines of narrow, pointed shoes. Gray Wolf studied these prints, followed one set to the window, and muttered his findings to himself.

"Small man, short steps, about five feet six tall. Rubber heels, new. Probably a neat dresser—sleek, like a snake."

There was a thicker layer of dust on the window sill, furnishing a clear impression of the gun-barrel. It was large, and he recalled the appearance of the gun's muzzle. Gray Wolf's brow wrinkled in thought. Then his eyes gleamed with satisfaction. "Silencer," he muttered to himself.

Descending to the street, he stopped in a drug store and used the phone book, then took a taxi to a big apartment building in the exclusive Ridgeview district. He inquired at the desk for Mr. Stonebridge, giving the name of "Charles Gray," and stating that his business was of a private nature.

A rasping voice barked, "Never heard of him," when the clerk made the announcement. Gray Wolf motioned for the phone and the clerk handed it to him.

"Mr. Stonebridge, I am an Indian, and a curious character from Meridian has recently been spending some time in my country. I have learned considerable which I think you, as publisher of the *Meridian Star*, should know. It might have a bearing on a situation which exists here."

"Come on up," the man at the other end snapped at once.

The elevator took Gray Wolf to the ninth floor. A servant opened a door and

beckoned. Gray Wolf followed him through hall and living room to a library at the front of the building. The door through which he entered was the only one in the room. A tall, thin, ascetic appearing man with an unruly mop of gray hair and bushy gray eyebrows arose.

"Mr. Stonebridge?"

"Right. Sit down. Slane, get out!" and the man seated himself again.

The servant withdrew. The publisher snapped, "Well?"

Gray Wolf, who had been regarding the man with an unwinking stare, told the story of the slain Indian girl. Stonebridge listened without moving a muscle. At the finish he barked:

"Interesting, but hardly amusing. Take it to a reporter. What th' hell do you come to me with that for, and what has it to do with politics in Meridian?"

"I don't recall mentioning politics when I spoke over the phone, but that's close to the truth. Tonight a girl by the name of Kit Murray, secretary to Mr. Dennis Creighton, was choked to death with a red, silk string in identically the same fashion."

The old man straightened slowly. Though not a muscle in his face changed, his leathery, wrinkled skin became almost ashen.

"Just who the hell are you, and what do you want?" he asked slowly.

"I want the man who killed Mary Musquash and Katherine Murray—and I think I'm going to get him."

"I—hope—you—do." The words were evenly spaced, each dropping with a distinct thud. Then the old man said with a snap: "I presume Slimy Creighton suggested I was behind it? Maybe you're one of his scum. Or maybe you're a new member of the police force. If not, maybe they'll be here any minute."

Gray Wolf shook his head. "I'm not

sent by Creighton, and I'm not a police officer, Mr. Stonebridge. As to what they will do, I wouldn't know. Now that you've pressed that button under your desk, you've assumed a responsibility. I intend to get out of here and anyone trying to stop me will get hurt."

BEFORE he had finished speaking he was out of his chair and across the room with a pantherish leap. His right hand flicked beneath his coat as his back touched the wall, and a .45 automatic was gripped in it. The gun muzzle swung to cover the publisher as the room's only exit was blocked by the servant. Stonebridge arose slowly.

"Hold it a moment, Slane," he ordered.

Gray Wolf's eyes flicked toward the door. Slane was covering him with a revolver.

"Now, Mr. Indian, you will toss your gun at my feet and resume your chair while I learn more about you," the publisher commanded with measured and menacing emphasis.

Gray Wolf shook his head slowly. His face had become an expressionless mask, but his dark eyes were lit by an unreadable glow.

"Consider, Mr. Stonebridge. The slack is all taken up on this trigger. Even if your man shoots me in the head, killing me instantly, reflex action will discharge my gun and the police will arrive to find two corpses here and Slane will be apprehended for at least one murder."

A sharp intake of breath sounded from the doorway. Gray Wolf continued calmly.

"Even if I should remain, you could force no further information from me. If you know anything about the heritage of my people, you will realize the truth of that statement. As for Slane, I am sure that he would not care to carry his loyalty to the extent of being hanged for an employer

who is dead, and—”

Without a change of inflection to give warning, Gray Wolf whirled and dove out and down in a clean, flying tackle at the servant. A gun went off over his head and he heard the lead thud into the wall behind him as Slane crashed to the floor. The Indian released his man and one hand shot out to grip and twist the thin hand that held the revolver. Slane squirmed away and made a try to retrieve the gun, but his fingers did not come within inches of it. He collapsed when the barrel of the .45 cracked against his skull.

Gray Wolf came to his feet and whirled on the tabloid publisher. Stonebridge was jerking open a table drawer.

“Don’t do it!”

The Indian’s quiet warning checked him before he could reach inside for the weapon.

“Good evening,” finished the red man. “If you are wise you won’t try to have me stopped on my way out.” And Gray Wolf backed out of the room, whirled and left the apartment swiftly.

An elevator had just let out a tenant. He took it to the second floor, got out and ran lightly to the rear stairs, descended and came out on an alley. Three minutes later he was in a taxi. He took a circuitous route until convinced that he was not followed. Then he went straight to his hotel.

At the desk he asked for a piece of paper and an envelope. He sat down at the one small, battered writing table and addressed the envelope. Then he took out the little box. He tied the two teeth together with the red, silk thread, and wrote on the sheet of hotel stationery:

Please give these to your killer and tell him they come from the Wolf, a friend of little Mary Musquash. They are the fangs he will feel and they are bound with the cord that strangled the little girl.

Wrapping the tokens in the note, he inserted both in the envelope and sealed it. He waited in the lobby after phoning for a messenger boy. The rat-faced clerk was leaning forward, watching, and listening with all his ears. He had failed to see the name on the envelope.

When the lad came, Gray Wolf handed him the message. On top of it was a folded bill. The boy grinned all over the place when he saw the figure in the corner of the bill.

“Take a taxi and deliver this at once to the man at that address, and only to that man. Get it? The rest of the bill is yours for a shut mouth and speed.”

“Yes, *sir!*” And the lad left on the run.

Gray Wolf ascended to his room.

Turning on the single light which hung unshaded from the ceiling by a grimy cord, he surveyed the chamber. At the rear was a window facing an area way. On each side of this window, in the side walls, were closed doors leading to the adjoining rooms. A table, scarred with the burns of cigarette butts, a dilapidated dresser with a crockery wash bowl and pitcher, two straight-backed chairs, and an aged iron bed comprised the furnishings.

Gray Wolf lay down on the bed, and the rheumatic springs creaked in protest at his weight. For some moments he stared at the ceiling in deep thought. Then he arose and moved silently to one of the side doors. A faint snore told him the occupant was inside. He shifted to the opposite door and caught the scent of fresh cigarette smoke. He returned and went swiftly to work.

The pillows and pitcher made the outline of a body beneath the blankets. The big wash bowl outlined the shoulders. He extinguished the light, examined his work in the faintly reflected glow of a high moon, and nodded slightly.

"An old trick, but still good," he murmured.

HE eased into the hall and tried the door directly across from his room. It was locked. He listened and, with faint inhalations, tested the air at the key-hole. No definite message. A Woolworth skeleton key unlocked the door, and he slipped into an unoccupied room, sat down on the floor with his back to the wall beside the door, and calmly went to sleep.

The faint squeak of a board far down the hall awakened him. He listened without moving. It was not repeated, but there were movements, little sounds which would have been undetected by any but wilderness trained ears, and they came closer. They ceased just outside his door. Then, from down the hall again, came footsteps that made no effort to conceal their sound. There were raps on the doors of the rooms adjoining his. A sharp voice answered one rap, a guttural grunt the other. Answers giving names replied and the doors were finally opened. From one doorway came a curse, from the other a whining protest. The sound of two blows that were not made with fists cut both voices off sharp. Then silence settled once more.

Gray Wolf came up to a crouch, one hand on the door knob when he heard the door to his own room being slowly and almost noiselessly opened. There was perhaps ten seconds of absolute silence.

And during those ten seconds a startling change came over the features of the crouching Gray Wolf. He was all Indian now, all primitive man. His dark eyes glowed with a fierce black fire; his generous mouth had become a thin, closed slit; his high cheek-bones, lean jaw, and aquiline nose seemed to have become more sharply angular.

CHAPTER III

GUNS IN THE DARK



AND then all hell broke loose across the hall. A blast of submachine gun fire and the thunderous reports of heavy automatics shook the thin walls. As suddenly as it broke out, the volley of shots ceased. But in those few seconds Gray Wolf's hand had flicked under his coat and come out with his .45; he had flung open the door and leaped across the hall to the doorway of his own room. In his concentration on what lay directly before him, he failed to detect a faint movement far down the hall, at the head of the rear stairs.

His glance boring through the film of powder smoke picked out the crouched form of a man at the connecting doorway to the left room. He held a submachine gun at his hip. From the doorway to the room on the right a man with an automatic was advancing toward the bed. His back to Gray Wolf, the third man was walking slowly ahead. Suddenly the man at the right, reaching the bed, let out a quick, falsetto curse.

"You boys looking for me?" Gray Wolf's words were an invitation.

The two with the pistols stiffened slightly with surprise before they broke. The deadly little weasel with the tommy gun reacted instantly, pivoting and swinging the muzzle of the gun. Gray Wolf fired two shots a split second before the submachine typewriter began to chatter. Lead plowed a pathway along the pine boards toward Gray Wolf and stopped at his feet as the gunner relaxed and fell.

Then the other two men were facing him. He took the closer one first, again firing twice. At the other end of the room

the man who had discovered the dummy cursed again in a childish treble and began to fire his gun wildly. His third bullet fanned Grey Wolf's cheek just before the Indian swung his .45 low and loosed a blast that brought a shrill scream that ended in a whimper from the collapsing gunman.

As the Indian straightened from his crouch two shots were fired down the hall, and the lead creased his shoulders. He dropped low and spun around. Too late! In the dim light of the yellow hall globe he caught a momentary glimpse of a man's head as it disappeared below the level of the top step. A thin, hard voice floated back to him.

"Come and get me—if you got the guts."

He ran forward as doors began to open behind him. Feet were ascending the front stairs. A big man stepped from his room, colliding with Gray Wolf. The Indian flung him against the wall as if he had been a child. From the alley came the sound of a car roaring away into the night. Gray Wolf reached the top of the back stairs. Even one with a less sensitive nose than his would have detected the cloyingly sweet perfume that still lingered in the air, the perfume that had polluted the air in the vacant room across the street from Creighton's office.

Gray Wolf whirled and raced back toward his room. The doors along the corridor were shutting again. After their first reaction to curiosity, the denizens of the Lawrence Hotel sought cover from the police investigation they knew would follow. The shifty night clerk met Gray Wolf at the top of the main stairway. Gray Wolf caught him by the lapels of his coat and stared into his sallow face. The sallow changed to the pale yellow of an unripe lemon.

"You reported this yet?"

The man shook his head.

"Then get back to your desk and get Detective Inspector Rawlings on the phone for me—and no one else. Keep trying till you locate him."

The clerk nodded, still without speaking. Looking into the black, burning wells in the hawklike face close to his, he seemed unable to speak. Gray Wolf spun him toward the stairs and ran on to his room. He shot a quick glance at the gunmen on the floor. Only one moved a little, and his pistol lay three feet from his hand. The Indian shut and locked the door, turned on the light, and knelt by the last man to go down.

He was scarcely more than a boy. His eyes, filled with pain and the fear of dying, were open. He watched the approach of the Indian much as a rabbit caught in a trap might watch the approach of a hunter. Gray Wolf knelt beside him, and a subtle change came over his features as he studied the dying youth. He saw that this was no congenital criminal, but merely a boy who had tried to be a man for the first time, who had wanted to show off, to be tough, and who had learned his lesson too soon—and too late.

As the hard expression of the Indian softened, he began to speak quietly, and the very tones of his voice were soothing, like the murmuring of a night breeze through the fronded tops of the pines in his own wilderness.

"You've been traveling with the wrong pack of coyotes, son. You're not their kind. It's too late to change now, but you can repair some of the damage. You're leaving someone behind who'll be a bit happier if you try to square accounts."

THE eyes of the pain-racked lad filled. He muttered, "Mother—" and choked on his own words.

"Exactly! Human coyotes must be

wiped out so other mothers won't weep. That's my job. You can still help, and so pass on to happier hunting grounds over the right trail. I'll carry on for you. Where does Killian hide out? Where are his headquarters?"

The dying youth stared up at him, seemed almost hypnotized by the fathomless black eyes. His voice came in a whisper that grew rapidly fainter.

"I don't know. I was—new. They didn't trust me— We'd meet at—Front Street Bridge. But I think—it was near—there—an old ware—" The voice ceased; the eyes lost their luster and the light of intelligence.

And the eyes of Gray Wolf, which had been boring into the youth as though to drag out the information before his life sped, likewise changed. The softness left his features and the suggestion of the lean, low-running, hunting wolf crept into them again. He was once more on the trail.

He jerked open his suitcase, reloaded his automatic with a fresh clip and slipped two others into his pocket, then ran swiftly down to the lobby. The clerk was on the telephone. He shook his head as Gray Wolf came up.

"Can't locate Rawlings," he reported.

"Then call me a taxi," Gray Wolf ordered.

He turned toward the pay phone in the lobby booth. He got the desk sergeant at Headquarters and asked for Inspector Rawlings. A moment later Rawlings' voice snapped, "Hello!"

"Gray Wolf, Tom. How long've you been there?"

"Half an hour. Got some people I'm questioning. Why? What's up?"

"Who you got?"

Rawlings gave the names. Gray Wolf caught a movement outside the booth and saw the clerk slide around the corner. His voice lowered until it barely carried over

the wire.

"Hold the second one if you have to lock him up. Now listen closely. Some of his pack tried to trap me. There are three dead in my room. One got away. You might come down when you can and look them over. Then wander over in the vicinity of the Front Street Bridge. I'm heading that way for the one who escaped. He's the lad who likes to use red silk string."

As the inspector began to shoot questions, Gray Wolf hung up and walked to the desk. The clerk had just replaced the receiver.

"Taxi comin' right over," he said, and then his face got a little paler. The look on the Indian's face wasn't helping his circulation any.

Gray Wolf suddenly shot a long arm across the counter and jerked the man forward. With his free hand he cuffed the clerk until the man yelled; then cuffed him till he shut up. When he released his hold the ashen features were beginning to turn purple. The Indian's hand was hard.

"Maybe next time you'll do what you're told."

A CAR halted outside, and Gray Wolf walked out. It was an independent taxi. The driver had a flattened nose, one cauliflower ear, and a perpetual sneer. Gray Wolf climbed in.

"Take me to Broad Street and Clifton," he stated.

The driver, without acknowledging the order, slammed the door shut and drove straight ahead. Gray Wolf waited until they had passed the first intersection, then he repeated his order. The tough-faced driver gave no indication that he had heard. He kept going straight ahead.

The Indian slipped out his gun and smashed the glass between them. Before the driver could turn around he felt a little

circle of steel boring into the base of his brain. He caught a glimpse of his passenger's face in the rear vision mirror.

"Okay! Okay! I didn't hear you," and he spun the steering wheel, taking the next corner with a skid that nearly faced them in the opposite direction.

He slowed in front of a Green Taxi stand and came to a stop. Gray Wolf leaned forward as the tossed a half dollar on the seat beside the driver.

"Tell that clerk I don't walk into traps easily. And if you want to know what it feels like to lie in the gutter with a couple of compound leg fractures made by forty-five lead, try following me."

The driver didn't reply audibly. His expression answered for him. Nevertheless, Gray Wolf did not give his final destination to the driver of the Green Taxi until he was certain no one was on his trail. He got out a block from the bridge.

Front Street Bridge was merely a viaduct over a series of railroad tracks. Shacks and shanties, warehouses and loading platforms, junk yards and abandoned factories, an all-night, hole-in-the-wall restaurant, and several dirty saloons made up the district. At this pre-dawn hour scarcely a light burned in any building. There were no street lights. A dead, silent wilderness, far less inviting and far more filthy than the black forests whence Gray Wolf had come.

Like the shadow of an owl's wing, the Indian disappeared into the depths of the man-made jungle. And, like the shadow of an owl's wing, he scoured the district and but one man saw or heard him. That man squatted in the recessed doorway of a vacant house across from an apparently deserted warehouse. All he saw of Gray Wolf was the suggestion of a movement that was without substance. He watched the spot, straining his eyes until they

watered, to catch a repetition of the movement, to learn its cause. He succeeded in neither purpose. By the time he credited his imagination with working overtime, the cause of the disturbance was three blocks away.

Like his ancestors, in their age-long war against the Sioux, Gray Wolf had become a hunting animal, doubly dangerous because endowed with intelligence. He had reverted to type; every instinct was alert, every keen sense keyed to its highest pitch. He detected the man in the doorway before the man had guessed anything alive was within sight. When, disappointed in his quest, he returned for a second observation, the man was standing up, was patently alert. His whole attitude advertised his purpose; a lookout trying to act the part of a homeless bum utilizing the nearest shelter for his night's rest.

Gray Wolf slid deeper into the shadows and reappeared in the alley a hundred yards away. This time he slunk along like an amateur. He hadn't gone thirty feet before the other saw him. He used the shadows, and paused frequently to scan furtively the buildings on each side. Once he stepped into the open, that the man might have a good look at him. His movements were still smooth, but he was not the flowing, absolutely noiseless, skilled scout he had been. Even though endeavoring partially to advertise his presence, he was still far more elusive than most white men could have been. He came into full view a second time, where it was a little lighter, where a distinct view could be had of his face.

He saw the other stare hard at him, then dart away from his shelter. The sound of his footsteps, though nearly noiseless, came clearly to the Indian. They crossed the passageway, and when Gray Wolf swung around the door of the vacant

warehouse was closing. Gray Wolf faded back to the shadows once more. As he did so the door slid back a trifle and remained invitingly open. A predatory grin appeared on the Indian's face. A little later he appeared beside the door.

But he did not walk into the probable trap. He eased away, began a circle of inspection. Around at the front of the large building, facing the street, was a small door which swung on hinges. He tried it. It was locked. He examined the lock and then tried his skeleton key. The bolt slipped back almost noiselessly. He opened the door a little, flattening himself alongside it, against the wall. Nothing happened. He slid inside, closed the door, and waited. Still nothing happened. He moved a little farther along the wall and paused while his senses recorded their findings.

IT WAS blacker than night, and silent. Gradually, as his pupils expanded, Gray Wolf could make out long lines of piled boxes, bales and casks. Cases of liquor, casks of wine, kegs of whiskey, bales of cloth. Farther away were stacks of lumber and piles of old iron. At another spot was a stack of slot and pinball machines. Aisles wound through the vast building, curving, twisting, intersecting and forming a confusing maze that was a trap to one who did not know them. Far away, at the end of a straight lane, there was a suggestion of motion, a whisper of sound.

At first Gray Wolf had only the uneasy feeling that this place was inhabited, that others, ominously silent, waited in hiding. Evil, like an unseen phantom, hovered in the dead air. The scent of torture and death pervaded the blackness. Sounds finally came to him; faint whisperings, slow and sliding movements as of someone cautiously easing himself to a more comfortable position. And there were

scents; faint odors of unwashed bodies, the smell of old wood, of wine, of dry dust, and the barest suggestion of cheap perfume.

Suddenly Gray Wolf realized he could see a trifle more clearly. Shadows had given place to substance, the dark aisles revealed more of their length. He glanced swiftly toward one of the dirt-caked windows. It was gray. Daylight was approaching and his greatest asset, his highly efficient senses, would be nullified by the ability of his enemies to see him. He went into action, moving swiftly and noiselessly down the lane at whose turning he had seen movement.

On either side of him were casks and kegs piled on their sides. A sudden curse from behind one of them announced that someone in the next alley had caught sight of him. He ducked, slid forward a pace and froze in position while his gaze sought the interstices between the kegs. His automatic was poised for action. Directly in front of him, in the next passageway he saw a deeper shadow pass the opening he was watching. He fired twice, and someone cursed, started to run and went down in a slow, sliding fall.

"He's in! Slide the door shut. Scatter!" rapped a savage voice from the other end of the building.

There came a clang as the open door that had invited him was slammed shut.

Gray Wolf made for the voice. He had heard it once before this night, from the head of the stairs at the back of the hotel, inviting him to follow. He eased around a turn in the corridor, and a spear-point of flame lanced at him. He replied, shifting from side to side, yet always moving forward. The spurt of flame came again, but this time it was pointed at the floor. Running lightly forward, he leaped over the body of the man and swung to the right at a cross lane.

Lead sought him out from two sides. Something tugged at his coat sleeve, burned along his thigh, clipped and stung an ear-lobe. And his own gun was hot in his hands. Its hammer clicked against an empty chamber. He ejected the empty clip, slipped in a full one, shot back the sleeve and let it slam a cartridge into the chamber.

There was a numbing blow against his upper left arm. After a second he scarcely noticed it. His .45 was jumping again. He leaped ahead, straight for the wall of the warehouse and the end of the passageway.

He reached it and crouched. On either side of him boxes were piled high. Here no one could take him from the rear or sides. Ahead was the cross-lane where he had nearly been trapped. He waited. Others were in that cross-lane, his ears told him, on both sides and closing in. He waited. Suddenly the opening was closed by two men. He didn't wait for them to fire first; he had seen the drums below the guns they held waist high.

He shot four times and dived forward on his face to lie flat on the floor. One man dropped and his weapon slid out from under him. The other pressed his trigger, and a stream of lead laced the air just above Gray Wolf. He tilted his pistol and emptied the clip. The last spurt of lead from the tommy gun tore holes in the roof. The Indian smiled grimly as he slid the empty clip out and inserted his last rounds of ammunition.

CHAPTER IV

SILENT NEMESIS



SILENCE settled. Gray Wolf eased forward, with many pauses to listen. There was movement somewhere, but he could not definitely establish

the direction. Then from ahead and to the right names were called sharply.

"Slit! Banty! Kirt! Lefty! Where the hell are you? You get him?"

There was no answer.

"Hell! What's loose in here?" and the high voice verged on hysteria.

There was still no answer.

Eyes gleaming with the light of savage battle, pulse quickened by race memory to the drum-beats of his warrior ancestors, mind and senses pitched to hair-trigger action, Gray Wolf moved like a silent Nemesis toward the sound of the voice. And he almost walked into another trap. A man's quickly indrawn breath was his only warning.

They came from in front and behind at the same moment, one from an intersecting corridor that had been empty when he passed it, the other from a niche in the storage piled along the aisle. Gray Wolf charged in a zigzag course toward the man ahead, his gun flaming his way clear. That man went down, but the other's lead whined past his head as it slammed at his back. He dove again, straight over the man who had fallen.

Striking on his right shoulder, he pivoted, squirmed back, and took what scanty shelter he could behind the body. He could feel it jerk as lead struck it. The man fired eight times. A ninth shot parted Gray Wolf's hair, and then he was on his feet, his own automatic jumping in his hand. The man was a big bruiser. He staggered, swayed as each cone of lead smashed into him, but he would not go down. His fingers fumbled with his gun, ejected the empty clip, and sought to shove in a full one. His knees bent, his body sagged, and the full clip shoved only part way home, he collapsed with a jarring thud. Once more silence settled over the eerie building.

Gray Wolf became conscious of pain

now. There were bullet burns along his neck and thighs, the ache in his head, where blood trickled down the back of his neck, and the throb in his left arm. He could feel a worm of blood crawling along his arm, dripping from the ends of his fingers. He moved the arm and was thankful to find it was not broken, though a lance of pain ran like forked lightning to his brain.

But his task was unfinished. There remained Frosty Killian. He waited, motionless and silent except for the faint sound of blood dripping to the floor. There were footsteps, soft, stealthy, near the center of the building, between him and the door by which he had entered. He did not move. The footsteps ceased. There followed a faint thud, as of a plank dropping a fraction of an inch, then quiet once more.

JUST how Gray Wolf knew he could never have told, but suddenly he became aware that he was alone in this vast warehouse with the dead. His quarry had fled. No faint draft of air, no brief lightening of the graying gloom along the walls had indicated a door or window had been opened, even for an instant. Yet he knew Killian was gone.

The dancing light of the high excitement and fierce joy left the black eyes. The steadier flame of implacable purpose replaced it. He slid ahead, toward the point where he had last heard movement. One corridor led to another, and always Gray Wolf chose the one that would take him closer to the center of the big room.

At last he came to a point where every passageway converged, entering an open circular space some twenty feet in diameter. Around this boxes and, bales were piled so high that even the light from the dirty windows could not reach the

spot. Gray Wolf halted.

Somewhere an iron door banged faintly, but it was not within the warehouse. It sounded as if it had come from above, but he knew that could not be. Suddenly comprehension dawned. A tight smile appeared as he got down on his knees.

With careful fingers, he traced the course of one of the boards until he came to its end, near the center of the circle. He traced the right-angled crack there and it did not stop with the board, but continued straight across the next board, and the next, for several more boards. He followed it around four right-angled turns until he came again to the starting point. At a spot opposite where he had started he had felt a slight depression. He went back to that spot and pressed. His fingers sank into a substance like heavy cup grease, and then he realized the substance concealed a small hand-hold. He tugged, and the trap door swung back on oiled and silent hinges.

Gray Wolf looked into a black well down which led narrow steps. His keen glance, probing the darkness, found the opening was no more than a shaft, but along the bottom and up the wall a pen-line of light announced the presence of a door that had not been tightly closed. He eased downward, holstering his empty automatic.

At the foot of the stairs he stepped close to the door and listened. He could hear rapid breathing inside, as though the man there was gripped with nervous excitement. There was the rustle of papers. The light coming through the crack flickered, waxed and waned. There was a crackling sound, and he could feel increasing heat. Again an iron door clanged shut.

Gray Wolf crouched a little, and his right hand slid under his shirt. When it

reappeared he was gripping a sheath knife with a thin, six-inch blade. He flexed the muscles of his paining left arm and found that in case of necessity he could use the member. He flung the door open.

He had an instantaneous impression of a twelve-foot room lighted indirectly from a ceiling bowl—a room fitted comfortably with armchairs, filing cabinets, a desk and a safe, an iron heating stove in the center and, at the opposite end, an open door leading into a dark tunnel. But the Indian's attention was centered on the man close to the wall, before the open safe, gathering papers and books and stuffing them into the stove, where roaring flames told of damning evidence being destroyed. The man swung around, his hands full, and stiffened when he saw the tall form of the Indian. Neither moved for a second. Gray Wolf saw a sallow-faced, dapper figure, with narrowed gray eyes that began to take on a greenish tinge, thin lips that began to twitch and twist into a sneer, a face that, as the seconds ticked off, took on more and more a look of desperation.

For Frosty Killian saw an apparition filling the opening, a man with dirty, torn, bloody clothing, with features that were sharp and hard as brown flint—and as implacable. He stared into eyes of black obsidian behind whose surface sheen he saw pictured for himself a long, slow, torture-twisted death and the fires of an everlasting hell.

He tore his glance away, and it encountered the bright blade in the Indian's right hand. His quick brain signaled his advantage, and his own right hand darted snakelike under his coat. A vicious little Mauser automatic came out. Gray Wolf's hand shot forward, and the blade became a streak of glittering light.

A wild, sharp cry came from Killian as his arm was pinned to the wall. He screamed again as, in his excitement, a

reflex jerk tore it loose. He tried, with all his concentration to swing the muzzle of the gun toward the man leaping at him. He was too late.

THEY crashed against the wall, went to the floor, and rolled. The gun slithered across the room. Killian writhed and struggled like a snake. Gray Wolf, for the first time in bodily contact with his prey, caught the peculiar body odor cutting through the nauseating perfume, and understood Silver Dawn's allusion to a weasel.

Suddenly as it had started the fight was over and Gray Wolf regained sanity. He found himself standing behind the seated Killian. The fingers of his left hand were twisted in the long, black, oily hair of his prey and Killian's head was jerked back. The smaller man's hands were clutching Gray Wolf's wrist in a futile effort to loosen that iron grip. The Indian's right hand was poised above the olive-tinted brow, the razor edge of the knife blade almost touching the skin.

Killian's eyes rolled upward and caught sight of the blade, ready for the quick circular stroke that would part the skin just before his scalp was peeled off. He screamed and his eyes rolled toward the back of his head. His wiry body went slack. Gray Wolf released his hold and stepped back. Killian flopped to the floor, his head banging against the cement with a crack he couldn't feel.

WHEN he came to, he found himself propped in a sitting position with the Indian squatting in front of him, staring at him steadily. In the face of that unwinking stare, Killian's nerve failed to return.

"You're ready to talk now—before you slide into hell?"

Killian's glance shifted, darted

frantically around the office, and longingly toward the dark tunnel. He was deathly afraid of Gray Wolf, but he was terrified at what betrayal of his chief would bring upon him.

"T' hell with you! Y' don't dare kill me. You don't dare—" he broke off in a squeal as the knife darted forward.

Ten minutes later conditions were reversed. There was blood in his shoes. He was still afraid of betrayal, but he was more terrified of this black-eyed devil who had worked on him methodically and without the slightest show of emotion. He talked fast, pointing to the files, to various papers scattered about the room, and to the books he had not yet removed from the safe.

From the warehouse above there came the tramping of feet. Voices, exclamations, calls of amazement drifted down. Gray Wolf sent a long call rolling up through the trapdoor. It was answered and feet drew nearer, moving with a ponderous official tread. They descended the stairs, and a moment later Inspector Rawlings and one of his men looked into the room. Rawlings swore in amazement. Then his glance sharpened as he saw Gray Wolf's prisoner.

"So it was Frosty," he observed. "What kind of a battle royal did you stage up above, anyway? My God, the place looks like the streets of Madrid."

Gray Wolf, seated in one of the chairs, with the Mauser in his hand, said sharply:

"Did you hold Creighton?"

Rawlings jerked. "Yes, and Lord help me if you haven't got proof."

Gray Wolf gestured toward Killian and the contents of the room.

"There's proof enough to send Creighton up for the rest of his life, and Killian to join his victims. The weasel talked, and he'll talk again before one of your stenographers. If he doesn't, give me

five minutes alone with him."

The inspector glanced at the spineless wreck on the floor. "Don't believe that'll be necessary, but if it is I'm betting about one minute will be enough."

He swung back to Gray Wolf. "Now, what's the answer?"

Gray Wolf spoke slowly.

"The answer is that Creighton has a highly efficient organization controlling ninety-nine percent of the graft, racketeering, illicit gambling, and other crime in Meridian, including bulk smuggling of liquor, wool and a dozen other high-duty commodities. The answer is that Stonebridge and his paper were after proof, that Kitty Murray was an undercover reporter who landed a job with Creighton. Creighton discovered what she really was and made up the excuse to keep her at the office to work overtime, dropped in to be sure she was there, and then had Killian do his stuff so as to make it appear the work of his political enemies.

"Creighton was too crafty for the girl to get much on him. This was his real headquarters here, and the tunnel there leads to a vacant house nearly a hundred yards away, an emergency exit and a secret entrance. Killian was his lieutenant, the head of his terror squad. You'll get some idea of the magnitude of his operations from those books."

Rawlings' eyes were gleaming long before Gray Wolf had finished, but there was a slight frown of perplexity on his forehead.

"I can almost believe in miracles now. Will you tell me, Gray Wolf, how the devil you got on the right trail so quickly?"

The Indian smiled.

"A trail in the city is not much harder to follow than one in the woods, sometimes much simpler. And often the same methods may be used. I suspected

Creighton first when he blew up in his office at mention of Stonebridge. He was close to me, and I moved closer. The human body exudes a different odor when a man is frightened, or enraged. Ask any dog. Creighton's body scent was normal. So he was putting on a superb act."

"A plan formed itself in my mind. I mentioned my address to you so that he would hear it. Then I caught sight of this rat across the street, but missed him. He was planted there with a gun fitted with a silencer, in case any slip-up occurred and Creighton was taken out of the building in custody. He would have blasted Creighton loose, and the big shot would have escaped in a car parked in the alley."

"But I had to be sure. I called on Stonebridge and had an interesting visit with a suspicious, nervy old man who knew his life was in danger, but who was putting up a mighty fight to clean up the city of Meridian. Then I sent a note to Creighton, to be delivered to the killer of Kit Murray. If Creighton were innocent

nothing would happen—he wouldn't be able to deliver the note. If he were guilty, he would do his best to have me put out of the way as soon as possible. He did his best, but it wasn't quite enough.

"And now, Tom, I find that the veneer of civilization is thicker on me than I had suspected. Killian, hiding out in my country until the hunt for the robber of a payroll messenger died down, committed one of his characteristic killings. My justice was to have been that of my ancestors, but I found that I couldn't quite go through with it. In the end the punishment will be the same, anyway. I am satisfied, and I've enjoyed the thrill of the hunt far more than I had anticipated."

Rawlings chuckled. "Which is more than we can say for those you were after. And that private sleuth license you asked for is going to be good for as long as you want to use it. You can bet on that."

Gray Wolf smiled again. "Who knows? Maybe need for excitement will call me back to Meridian sometime?"