

THRILLING MYSTERY

JULY

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RAZOR OF GASTON DUBROIS

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OF HELL

A Novelette of
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OF THE
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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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Title: I am the Wolf

Date of first publication: 1937

Author: Henry Kuttner (1914-1958)

Date first posted: Aug. 20, 2021

Date last updated: Aug. 20, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210842

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

I AM THE WOLF

Murder Comes with Dripping Jaws and Escapes into
Darkness—and the Fate of the Coyles
Hangs upon a Curse!

By
HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "Nightmare Woman," "My Brother, The Ghoul," etc.
First published *Thrilling Mystery*, July 1937.

Edgar Coyle braked his roadster to a halt in the well-kept driveway and curiously glanced up at the old house towering above him. It seemed scarcely to have changed in six years. A great, old-fashioned mansion, lonely in its height on the slope of Grey Mountain, far above the little village in the valley below. The driveway was carefully raked, and the little garden was well tended, but bushes still grew thickly on the slopes nearby.

Coyle, as a boy, had feared those bushes. They had been so dark, so menacing, as though they harbored in their shadowed depths all the ghastly figures that haunt a child's dreams. Often, peering down fearfully from his bedroom window, he had imagined that alien eyes were glaring at him from below; in the night, when dogs howled from the village, Edgar Coyle would awake shuddering with terror. For instilled in him by Lynch, the hunchbacked, superstitious butler, had been the tale of the Coyle curse—the werewolf legend.

But now, Coyle thought, he had outgrown such foolishness. He was coming home, for the first time since a night six years ago, when a bitter argument with old Everett Coyle, his grandfather, had ended with the younger man's stalking out of the house, declaring that from then on he would support himself.

That he had done. But with the years his old hatred of the taciturn, morose old man had changed, faded and dimmed. He himself, he knew now, had been at fault also; intolerant youth and opinionated age had clashed. In response to his grandfather's pleading letters, Edgar Coyle had come home. "To shake hands once more before I die," the old man had written.

Smiling somewhat sadly, Coyle swung out of the car and hurried up the path. As he rapped the old-fashioned bronze knocker he was wondering who would answer the door, whether old Lynch was still presiding over the household.

Yes. It was Lynch, framed in the doorway, his gigantic, humped torso monstrous above dwarfed legs. The swarthy, wrinkled face, stubbled with grey beard, was thrust forward. Sparkling, jet-black eyes peered into Coyle's own.

"Don't you know me?" Coyle asked, grinning. "Hello, Lynch!"

The man drew back, his face twisting into a mask of fear and hatred. His voice came raspily.

"Aye, I know you, Edgar. Your grandfather said you were coming. *You Fool!*"

Startled, Coyle stepped back. Was Lynch mad? What had happened to change him so?

"Lynch," Coyle protested, frowning. "What's the matter, man? Is anything wrong?"

The hunchback shut the door carefully behind him and stepped out on the porch. His hands swept out, caught Coyle's shoulders. Black eyes stared searchingly. And fear crept into them.

"Yes, man, something's wrong." Slowly Lynch nodded. "Have you forgot all the old tales I told you? Edgar, you're a Coyle. Does that mean nothing to you?"

Coyle stared in astonishment, repressing an impulse to laugh.

"You mean the curse? Lynch! Afraid of me? Why you've known me since I was a baby!"

"You're no child now." The hunchback's face was sombre. "You're twenty-three. The curse falls when a Coyle's of age. And you have the yellow Coyle eyes, wolf's eyes, that can see in the dark."

"Come on," Coyle said brusquely. A little surge of irritation mounted within him. "Tell my grandfather I'm here. At least he won't be afraid of me."

"The fool," Lynch whispered, his voice hoarse with passion. "The mad fool. No, he'll not fear you; he doesn't believe, either. But *I* fear, for I know! And I'll save you both. Go back to the city, Edgar. You must, you *must*."

For a moment Coyle considered arguing further with the old servant. But impatience won. Shrugging, he moved aside, intending to brush past Lynch. Again iron hands gripped his shoulders.

"You'll not, then? By God—" The great fingers dug remorselessly into Coyle's flesh. "You'll not come in this house. Not with the curse on you!"

Wincing with pain, Coyle tore free. Lynch blocked his path. He flung out a great arm, pointing to the roadster. But Coyle came forward, head bent, fists ready.

The hunchback crouched. His arms swung apelike. His hairy face was a twisted devil-mask.

"Lynch!" The cry came from nearby. A girl's voice, low and commanding. The hunchback looked around quickly, and Coyle followed his gaze.

A girl was standing at the corner of the house. She wore riding clothes, swung a crop carelessly against her leg. Level grey eyes, fringed by lashes golden as the girl's hair, watched the two men.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Oh—your eyes—" She broke off suddenly. Flushing, she covered her embarrassment. "I'm sorry. You're Edgar Coyle, of course."

"I'm not ashamed of 'em," Coyle grinned. "Yellow eyes are a family trait. Thanks for coming just now. Lynch and I—" He hesitated, not wishing to involve the old servant in trouble; but Lynch shrugged impatiently.

"He must go back to the city, Miss Denison. He *must*."

"What?" The girl stared "But why? Your grandfather has been talking for days about you. You'd planned to stay for a week, he said. Can't you—"

"I've no intention of leaving," Coyle broke in. "Lynch insists on it."

"Lynch! You've no right—"

"My right and my duty," growled the hunchback harshly. "You see his eyes? Wolf's eyes! He can see in the dark, as all the Coyles can. And d'you know why? Sure you know—it's no secret around here. The villagers know why every Coyle must live alone after he's of age!"

The girl's brows contracted. Her lips parted, but Lynch gave her no chance to speak.

"There's an old saying—"

‘One shall be spared, for he is the lock;
One shall be spared, for he is the key;
Two shall be doomed, be they Coyle clan,
By the blood of wolf in the veins of man.’

Alone the Coyles are safe. But when two Coyles meet, the gate is unlocked—the gate of hell!
And the werewolf runs with the pack again!”

“Stop it, Lynch!” How well Coyle knew that deep, powerful voice! Swiftly he turned. Everett Coyle, his grandfather. The old man had changed not at all. His snowy mane swept back from the wide forehead, and his bushy eyebrows were tangled above the yellow Coyle eyes, blazing now with anger.

“Stop it! You superstitious fool, get in the house! I should have expected something like this.” Muttering, the old man watched Lynch shamble out of sight. Then his face was no longer forbidding.

“Edgar, I’m glad—” The two wrung each other’s hand, and the younger man felt a deep thankfulness that he had heeded his grandfather’s call.

After a moment old Coyle turned away. His voice was unsteady as he spoke.

“I’ll get the others. I want you to meet them. Come in the house. You, too, Alma,” he said.

Comfortably esconced on an old-fashioned sofa, the girl smiled at Coyle.

“I guess we’re introduced. Alma Denison. Boarding with your uncle.”

Coyle looked surprised. “I didn’t know—surely he doesn’t—”

“Well, not a regular boarder. Didn’t you know about Nova Colony? Your grandfather started it, and his money’s backing it. Lucky he’s got plenty of dinero, for certainly it’s shown no profit!” She caught herself. “I mean, it’s an artistic colony, with only a few members. They all live here with your grandfather, who’s backing them—formed a corporation, in fact.”

Coyle grunted. He was not entirely pleased by this news, although he could not have said why.

“Are you in on this—Nova Colony?” he asked the girl.

“Oh, no. I’m really spending my vacation here. Mr. Coyle was an old friend of my father’s, and, well, father died, and a stenographer doesn’t make a fortune. Your grandfather asked me to spend my vacation here. It helps a lot.” She smiled confidently. Somehow Coyle was glad that this girl was not a member of Nova Colony.

He glanced up quickly. His grandfather was ushering three men into the room. Introductions were made. It was plain that Everett Coyle thought highly of these three.

Coyle catalogued them in his mind. Norman Arndt—author. A bronzed, pleasant-faced man who seemed curiously young despite the streaks of gray at his temples.

Clyde Di Mario—a slender, nervous man of indeterminate age, with a thin dark face and a needle-tipped black moustache. And Ralf Kain, who was a sculptor—very big, very blond.

Di Mario, a painter, had a number of packages under his arm.

“I’m going to the village,” he announced. “There is mail to go. And some canvases. Have any of you mail?”

“Not me,” the blond Kain said. “I’ve been expecting a letter though. Ask for it, eh?”

“See if my dictaphone records have come in yet, too, Di Mario. I ordered some two weeks ago, and they haven’t arrived,” Arndt said, shrugging semi-tragically. “I’ll be reduced to using

my typewriter soon, and I'm much too lazy. I do all my writing vocally," he grinned at Coyle. "Miss Denison is good enough to transcribe it for me."

Di Mario, with a glance at the darkening windows, hurried away. Everett Coyle looked after him, his shaggy eyebrows raised.

"He does not find our company stimulating, I fear," he observed in his deep bass.

"No," Arndt grunted. "He won't be home till eleven or twelve. Cards and drink—they'll keep him busy."

Later Coyle was to remember those words. The rest of the evening was a pleasant, confused haze—cocktails, a dinner served by the sullen Lynch, cigars and idle talk—and finally bed. As always at night, a strong wind blew noisily around the house; peering down at the bushes, Coyle chuckled to himself.

No wonder he had been frightened by them as a child. Certainly the black shadows took strange shapes, but they were merely wind-tossed shrubs. Still, he did not envy Di Mario his journey back from the village.

He was sleepy, very sleepy. Almost before his head touched the pillow the black abyss of oblivion swallowed him. Dreams came.

Strange dreams. Dreams of moonlit forests, and shadows, lean, furtive shadows that slipped noiselessly from tree to tree. Strangely in the dream he seemed to be running with the shadows, running on four legs!

The dream changed. There were vague, inchoate flashes, a vision of the moonlit slopes below the house, with bushes tossing wildly in the silver glow, and a small figure plodding along the road. A figure he recognized. Di Mario.

In the dream Coyle ran to meet the artist. Ran—on all fours! Ran, and leaped, and saw Di Mario's face, a grotesque horrible mask, drop beneath his onslaught, saw blood ribbon across swarthy skin! The rest of that ghastly dream—

Coyle did not care to remember! Shuddering, sweating with horror, he awoke to find sunlight slanting across his pillow. Someone was knocking loudly at his door.

Slowly Coyle got out of bed. There was a dull ache in his head, and he saw with a shock that his pajamas were stained with earth and torn in several places.

"Who's there?" he called weakly.

"It's Kain. Come out, man—Di Mario's been killed!"

Ice gripped Coyle. He sat down weakly on the edge of the bed.

"What? Di Mario—killed?" he gasped.

"Yes. Will you come down?"

"Right away," Coyle called. "I'll be right there." After a brief hesitation the sound of footsteps receded down the hall.

Coyle's eyes were shut against the throbbing ache in his skull. Slowly they opened. He peered at the hands resting on his knees.

Hands that were stained red! A sickening charnel odor of the abattoir crept into his nostrils, and he was suddenly sick and giddy.

"Good God," Coyle groaned. "What's happened to me? What—what have I done?"

A glance into the large mirror did not reassure him. The haggard, hollow-eyed image that faced him sent him hurrying to the bathroom to remove all trace of the ghastly red stains that befouled his hands and face. He made a hasty toilet, and presently descended the stairs.

There seemed to be no one in the house. A buzz of excited comment came faintly from outside. Coyle went to the door. His shaking hand found a cigarette, lit it.

A group of men was gathered about something in the road, something that lay sprawled in the shadow of a thicket. As though drawn by a lode-stone, Coyle moved forward. The thing was covered over by a blanket, but blood had seeped through in a great, shapeless stain.

“Di Mario,” Coyle said tonelessly. “What—what killed him?”

Faces were turned to him. One he did not recognize, lean, lantern-jawed, with sharp colorless eyes. An old man, but one with the whipcord body of youth.

“This is my grandson,” Everett Coyle said. His voice was emotionless, but his yellow eyes were unnaturally distended.

“Edgar, this is Sheriff Dakin.”

Dakin acknowledged the introduction with a grunt.

“Dunno what killed him,” he observed. “Animal, maybe. There’s plenty of tracks here. Looks like dog or coyote or wolf tracks.”

And now Coyle saw them in the dust. Impressions of pads, the claws extremely prominent. His stomach gave a little jump.

This was impossible—impossible, unless one granted the reality of ghastly legends of another age! Yet was it merely superstition? Was not a familiar medical term today lycanthropy, a form of mania in which the patient thinks himself a wild beast?

Shuddering, soul sick, Coyle moved aside, noticing the furtive glances the others gave him. Someone laid a hand on his arm. He looked up quickly.

“Alma,” he said. “I—you shouldn’t have seen this.”

“I found the—I found him,” she said. Her face was white, but composed. Her grey eyes searched his own. After a moment Coyle’s gaze fell.

Everett Coyle, his strange eyes dwelling on his grandson’s face, approached.

“Edgar,” he said slowly, gripping the younger man’s arm. “What kept you so long? Were you asleep?”

“I—yes. I was asleep.” Coyle found it difficult to meet the old man’s steady stare. Everett Coyle turned to the girl.

“Will you excuse us, Alma? I want to—”

Nodding understandingly, the girl went toward the house, and Everett Coyle led his companion in another direction. Screened by thick bushes, he turned to face his grandson.

“I was late getting up this morning. We all were. But I was the first one up, and I saw something under your window, Edgar.”

Coyle’s face was white. With an effort he said, “Under my window? Was someone trying to get in?”

“There were tracks under the window,” the old man said very softly. “Wolf tracks.”

“What do you mean?” Coyle whispered through dry lips. “In God’s name—*what do you mean?*”

“I’m no fool, Edgar. Nor am I superstitious. But I think a wolf, or something like a wolf, came to the house last night. That, alone, would not matter greatly; wolves can be killed. I—” The old man hesitated. His bearded lips were retracted in a grimace of pain.

“I found other tracks under your window,” he went on finally. “The tracks of bare feet. I noticed a little scar—triangular—on one heel. I remember when you got that scar, Edgar, as a boy. You stepped on a broken bottle.”

Coyle stood unmoving, mad thoughts racing through his brain. His lips formed a word which the other recognized.

“Lycanthropy. Yes, that’s what I feared. I destroyed your footprints, Edgar, but—” The patriarchal face was a tragic mask of agony and pain. “Edgar, don’t make me believe this. I thought all the tales were superstitions, because of the Coyle eyes. They seemed like the sort of legends that are the outgrowth of any peculiar inherited characteristic. But this terrible insanity—”

Coyle looked away. With dreadful distinctness he was recalling his dream, if a dream it had been. Somehow it seemed, now, less a dream than a memory. *Lycanthropy!* Frightful, mania in which the victim, believing himself a wolf, goes forth by night to slay, to slake his red thirst!

Now Coyle remembered medical histories he had read, cases of men who had crept through midnight shadows to wreak ghastly butchery, men who had ended their lives in insane asylums, dumb save for the bestial yells and snarls that came from their throats.

And in Coyle’s brain, like a cracked phonograph record, there whispered a mad little phrase. Over and over—

“I am the wolf. I am the wolf.”

Night came down slowly. A pall of silence seemed to hang over the house. All day it had existed, ever since Di Mario’s mangled corpse had been taken down to the village. Tomorrow men would set out with guns and dogs in pursuit of the man-killer.

“A timber wolf,” the sheriff had said wisely. “Once in a while we still get ’em around here. Prob’ly half starved, and Di Mario must have been drunk, or it’d never have happened.”

All day Coyle had been conscious of eyes watching him. Lynch’s eyes, wide with terror and something like hatred. His grandfather’s yellow eyes. Inscrutable eyes of blond Ralf Kain, the sculptor; speculative eyes of Arndt the writer.

And Alma Denison’s grey eyes, a little puzzled, a little worried. But not afraid. Somehow it would have hurt Coyle a great deal to have read fear in the girl’s cool gaze.

They ate in silence. Finally Coyle could no longer endure the furtive glances cast his way. He pushed back his chair silently and took his demitasse into the garden. The cool breeze was pleasant on his flushed face. He sipped the coffee slowly.

Presently a sound made him turn. Alma Denison was beside him.

“We’ll drink ours together, eh?” she smiled, making a grandiose gesture with her tiny cup. “If you—oh!”

A stone turned under her foot, and the girl nearly fell. Coyle caught her just in time. For a moment she lay in his arms unresisting, her cool eyes smiling into his. And because the man could not help it, he bent his head, pressed his lips on those scarlet, alluring ones.

Swiftly he drew back.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

But the girl was still smiling. “I—rather liked it, Ed,” she whispered. “However, it seems we get no coffee.”

Coyle scarcely glanced at the shattered cups. “I mean it, Alma. I shouldn’t have kissed you. Will you—forget it?”

The girl’s eyes fell. “Of course. If you wish,” she murmured.

Silently she turned back to the house, and as silently Coyle followed her.

An uncanny drowsiness seemed to have settled over all of them. Coyle had thought that he would not be able to sleep, but when the others, blinking sleepily, had retired to their rooms, he, too, felt a dull heaviness oppress his mind, a lethargic languor that made his movements an effort.

Buttoning his pajama coat, he moved to the window and stopped, staring. Then he lifted the shade, and saw the heavy shutters that barred the window. Shutters that were immovable! He slid open the window and tested them, but they scarcely creaked under the pressure of his hand. Somehow a little breath of relief touched Coyle. He turned away, and hesitated as a knock came on the door.

“Edgar?” It was his grandfather’s voice.

“Want me?” Coyle asked sleepily. “Come in.”

But there was no response. Only the click of a key turning, and the sounds of footsteps padding softly away. Grinning wryly, Coyle went to the door and tested it. Locked. Everett Coyle had taken steps to protect his grandson—and himself.

Sleep came to Coyle presently. It was not the lethargic slumber of the preceding night, but a broken, uneasy sleep. There came again to him the eerie visions he had already experienced, the moonlit forests where black shapes ran furtively.

A tiny thread of sound, elfin-thin, ran through his dreams, a vague whispering, faint and far away. It grew louder, and receded, and swelled again. And now Coyle seemed to see the sleeping form of his grandfather, bearded face pale in the moonlight. Coyle was moving closer, a dreadful hunger stirring within him.

Shrill, piercingly, a scream ripped through the mists shrouding Coyle’s mind, bringing him back to full consciousness. The room was dark, but unerringly Coyle’s hand went to the lamp at his bedside, switched it on. There was an odd sensation in his ears and a voice was murmuring something.

He sat bolt upright, staring at the thing his hands had brought down from his head. Earphones! From them a rubber tube ran to a black metal box beside the bed, on which a dark cylinder revolved slowly. It was a dictaphone.

The ghost-voice was quite audible now. Coyle’s eyes widened as he listened.

“—moonlit forest—black shadows are moving there, running swiftly—you are running with them—and now you are in Everett Coyle’s room, moving closer to him. You are watching his throat. A little gesture, and red blood will spurt out—”

With a horrified exclamation Coyle dropped the earphones. He understood, now. Something he had read, long ago, came back to him. A scientific experiment on education during sleep.

After the patients slept, Coyle remembered, an adapted dictaphone had given informative lectures, carried by earphones to the sleeping minds of the subjects. And on awakening they had remembered the lectures almost word for word!

A trick, Coyle realized that now, had been used to create in his mind a dream-memory of something that had never occurred. The whispering voice of the dictaphone had suggested to Coyle the weird visions, while someone had gone forth to slay, ruthlessly, bloodily.

Coyle’s mind worked swiftly, analyzing and fitting together the fragments of the puzzle. Someone who was familiar with the werewolf legend had killed Di Mario, and had attempted to frame Coyle, even to the extent of making him believe in his own guilt. Someone whose voice, distorted and unrecognizable, had whispered deadly suggestion from the dictaphone.

Again the cry came, faint, despairing. Coyle had almost forgotten what had awakened him, but now, hearing the terrified scream from below, he leaped from the bed, cursing. His bare feet made no sound as he crossed the room, tried the door. It was unlocked. Everett Coyle had left the key in the lock, and the murderer had easily opened the door when he had brought the dictaphone to Coyle's room.

Downstairs a door slammed. Swiftly Coyle raced down to the first floor. The hall was empty, dim in the moonlight. Stealthily he tried a door.

The room beyond was empty. The next two proved equally disappointing. But beyond them—

Quietly Coyle drew the door open, peering through the crack at a dimly-lighted cellar and old rickety stairs. The place was a maze of dust and cobwebs, and the accumulated rubbish of years littered the floor. A single electric bulb hung from the ceiling, its faint radiance gleaming on the nearly nude body of Alma Denison as she lay crumpled on the ground.

Hurriedly Coyle went down the stairs. The girl's filmy nightdress hung in shreds, and a dark bruise discolored her temple. But she seemed unhurt. Beside her, however, lay a rake, the tines discolored with clotted blood, to which shreds of flesh and hair clung. The weapon that had mutilated Di Mario!

As Coyle stared, Alma's eyes opened, and she cried out sharply, her horror-riveted gaze on him. Dropping the blood-stained rake he knelt beside her.

"It's all right, Alma," he told her. "What happened? Are you—"

She swayed toward him, faint with relief.

"I—I don't know, Ed. I woke up when I heard someone moving around in the hall, and when I opened the door he—he saw me."

"Who?"

"I don't know. His face—he had a woman's stocking over it, with just eyeholes cut in it. He caught me, Ed. I tried to get back in my room, but he was too quick. He dragged me down here, although I fought him all the way, and then he must have knocked me unconscious. My head—" Her fingers went up to the livid bruise.

Coyle's lips tightened grimly. He straightened as a sound came to his ears. His head turned swiftly.

The door at the top of the stairs was opening.

A black, hunched figure stood there. It was the hunchback, Lynch. His grotesque face was twisted with some unfathomable emotion.

He came down the steps slowly, his gaze never leaving Coyle. The wrinkled, red lids were drooping, but the hunchback's eyes were glittering and fixed.

"Lynch!" Coyle said sharply.

The man stopped at the foot of the stairs. Amazingly a tear rolled down his creased, black-stubbled cheek.

"Ah, God—Edgar!" he whispered hoarsely. "I couldn't believe—even though I knew the curse. But now—" His glance went to the half-nude girl. "You—you're a wild beast, Edgar!"

Sheer agony was in the hunchback's voice as he almost shouted. "I'm going to kill you! I must, like I'd kill a mad dog! You—"

He moved forward on his stumpy legs, great arms dangling. Before Coyle could move, the girl leaped to her feet, interposed her body between the two men.

"Stop it, Lynch! He's not—he didn't do this."

"Eh?" Lynch stopped, staring. "He didn't—"

Without warning it happened. Stark fear sprang into Alma's eyes; Coyle shouted a futile warning.

Something had emerged from the darkness beneath the stairway—a man, masked, swinging a hatchet in a short vicious arc. The murderous weapon crashed down on the hunchback's head.

Horribly the man's head was split almost in half under that terrible blow. With a brittle crunching of bone the hatchet's blade bit deep, and the body of Lynch stood for an intolerable, age-long moment, still and unmoving.

The hunchback toppled. Blood spattered on Alma and Coyle.

Coyle wrenched his gaze from the shambles at his feet. A sharp command from the killer made his tense muscles relax. An automatic was aimed unwaveringly at his heart.

"Back up," a cold voice requested with ironic politeness. "Against the wall. That's it. Now we're quite comfortable."

"You devil!" Coyle whispered. "You're responsible for this?"

"Of course," the other said. Coyle tried to pierce the stocking-mask, but the features beneath it were unrecognizable. "Of course I'm responsible. But don't blame me. You started it."

"I?—what d'you mean?" An amazing thought was growing in Coyle's mind. "I started it—by coming here?"

"That's it. It doesn't really matter now how much you know, for you'll both be dead in a few minutes. Or even sooner." He thrust the gun forward.

"You killed Di Mario?" Alma asked.

Coyle blessed her. From the corner of his eye he had seen an empty beer bottle lying on the head of a barrel scarcely a foot away. He shifted his weight imperceptibly.

"Yes," the masked man admitted. "I killed Di Mario. And tonight I'm going to kill a few others, just as I'd planned. In fact, more than I'd planned, for if you hadn't interfered, I'd not have found it necessary to dispose of Lynch, or either of you. Lynch and the girl would have been witnesses against Edgar Coyle. And you, Mr. Coyle, would have died in the chair or gone to an insane asylum."

"But why?" Coyle asked desperately. "I've never harmed you, as far as I know. What—"

"Harmed me?" There was bitter rage in the man's voice. "Not yet. But you would have. As long as your grandfather hated you, he wouldn't leave you a penny of his fortune. But you had to come back; the old man softened up and was planning to change his will. Change it in your favor!"

"But who—" Coyle stopped suddenly understanding. And Alma's voice confirmed his suspicions.

"So that's it. Ed, do you know what your grandfather's will says now?"

"Tell him," the killer mocked. "Tell him!"

"His fortune goes to the Nova Colony! Di Mario, Arndt, and Kain, for them to administer between themselves for the furthering of the colony."

"Exactly. But why should I share the money? I'll handle it myself—as the sole survivor. Nova Colony!" the masked man chuckled. "Fools! Once I get my hands on old Coyle's money—" Again the gun swung up.

"You can't expect to get away with this," Coyle interrupted hastily. "The others will hear the shot—"

The man laughed with genuine amusement. “Drugged, Edgar, drugged! Just as they were last night. The coffee—”

Realization came to Coyle. That explained why Alma and he were awake now. Their coffee had been spilled in the garden. And Lynch? Possibly the man’s iron constitution had enabled him to fight off the drug’s effect. The hunchback’s eyes had been heavy, Coyle remembered.

Swiftly he acted. The empty bottle was close now, for he had been edging stealthily in that direction ever since he had seen it. With one swift movement he flung himself aside, clutching the bottle by its neck. He flung it with desperate accuracy.

The killer’s gun blazed, and a bullet thudded into the wall. But Coyle’s aim had been good. The electric bulb popped and went out as glass shattered. Instantly the cellar was plunged into darkness.

Very silently, very swiftly, Coyle moved. The killer was quiet, obviously waiting for the others to betray their positions by sound.

A metallic clatter sounded, and a snarling oath. Then the rickety wooden stairway jarred ominously as two bodies fell against it.

There was a scuffle, a sudden expulsion of breath, and the thud of a body collapsing. Presently a match flared.

“Ed!” Alma ran forward, her face alight with relief. “You’re—you’re safe! I was afraid—”

“I’m okay,” Coyle grinned wryly. “A few bumps and bruises. But our friend here is out for the count.”

“Oh! Who is it, Ed? The mask—”

Coyle saw a candle on a shelf near by, and lit it.

“Don’t you know? I managed to make a pretty good guess. You see—either Arndt, the writer, or Kain, the sculptor, could have used a dictaphone. But—remember the wolf tracks found outside the house? There were the tracks of my own feet there too, although I hadn’t walked where they were.”

“But how, Ed?”

“Plaster casts, of course. The killer made casts of my feet while I was asleep, and used them. The wolf tracks—well, he either employed the same trick, or else moulded pads from clay, and then made the casts. And I remembered that Kain was a sculptor, and that would be right up his alley. See?” Swiftly he bent and stripped the mask from the murderer’s face.

The girl drew back, shuddering, into Coyle’s arms. “You’re—you’re right, Ed. It *is* Kain. And—he nearly won, too. If we hadn’t been lucky—”

“Lucky?” Coyle chuckled. “No luck about it! After the light went out, I simply picked up the rake, knocked the gun out of his hand, and piled into him.”

“But how—”

“The ancestral curse,” Coyle laughed, tightening his arm about Alma’s waist. “Kain forgot about that, or he wouldn’t have waited as he did. He forgot that the Coyles—the werewolf Coyles—can see in the dark!”

[The end of *I am the Wolf* by Henry Kuttner]