

The Law of the Hills

Grace M. Campbell

Illustrated by
Quindaro

fadedpage.com

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: The Law of the Hills

Date of first publication: 1930

Author: Grace Campbell (1895-1963)

Illustrator: Hugh Rankin (drawing as Quindaro) (1878-1956)

Date first posted: July 29, 2026

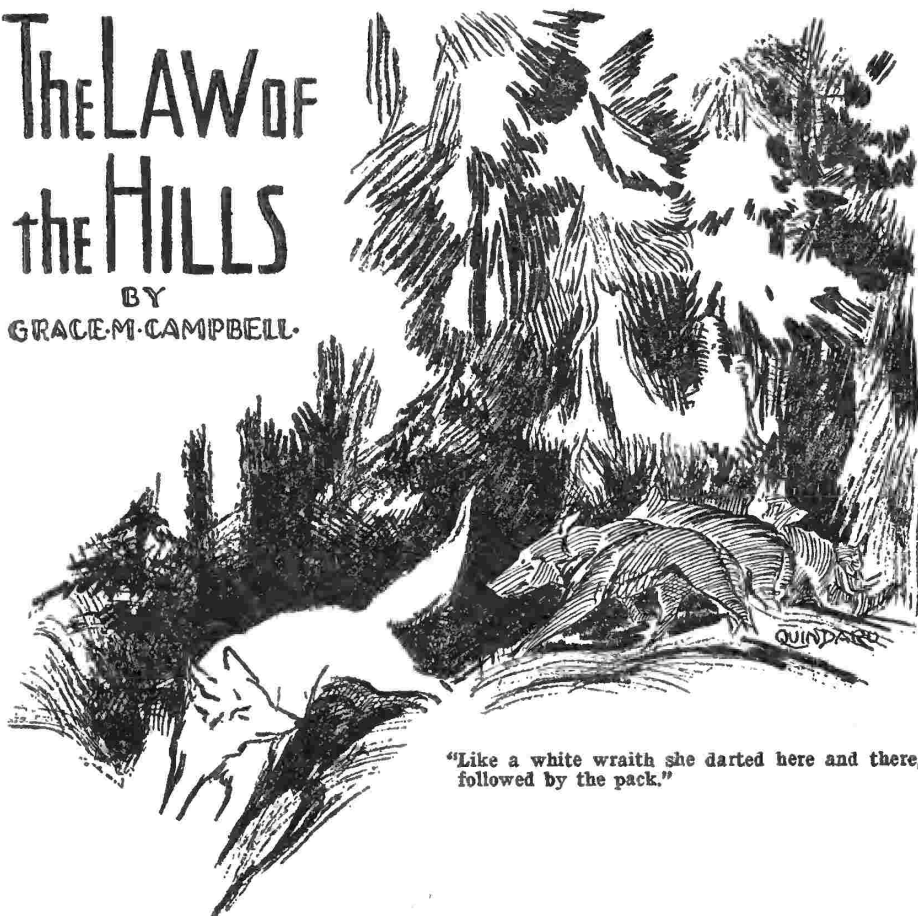
Date last updated: July 29, 2026

Faded Page eBook #20260767

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

THE LAW OF the HILLS

BY
GRACE M. CAMPBELL.



"Like a white wraith she darted here and there,
followed by the pack."

I have grown old and credulous.

Such a thing simply could not happen. Not in this country, and not in this day. But—believe me or not, as you please—I tell you I saw it.

Ever since Ken Graham first walked into my classroom, I have wished that I might have had such a son. And as the years went by, my fondness for him grew and I began to dream that some day he should take my place, and complete the collection of minerals which has brought me and this old school fame.

Why not? After graduating with honors, the boy had two years of study in the best schools abroad, and then a year of practical work in the field. What else did he need? Only that I should pull the strings my own

departmental Punch dances to, and have him designated assistant professor of mineralogy.

So I pulled the strings, and the appointment was made. But he answered with a strange, incoherent letter begging delay.

I could not understand it. Perhaps that chit of a girl he had married in Norway preferred a director of mines with five thousand a year to an assistant professor with half that salary. Idiot! Couldn't she see that I meant to make him head of the department?

I took out of my desk the picture they had sent from Norway, and all my suspicions vanished.

Surely there was no stupid selfishness of that sort in the mate Ken Graham had chosen. A sweet, unspoiled young face, with a fine delicacy of feature. And yet—such a strange suggestion of wildness! That fluffy aureole of whitish hair! Those keen, deep-set eyes! Those sharply outlined features! She looked like a beautiful wild thing.

Hush! A jealous old man's imaginings.

In the end I decided that I would go to them. I would seek them out, and bring them back. This old stone house was big enough for all of us to be happy in, if happiness was possible. Old men are arrogant sometimes—and I had set my mind on spending the rest of my days near the boy I had learned to love as a son.

When I got off the train, they told me where I should find him. It was late, but he would still be in his office, the expressman said.

"A bear for work, that Graham. He's never stopped since his wife died. Too bad about his wife. The wolves got her and Louis Barjon one night, just a few weeks ago. A great pity—a great pity."

Oh, my boy! My poor, poor boy!

I could see him, as I came up the walk, his head bent over his hands before the uncurtained window.

I tapped on the door, and walked in.

"You, Professor? You? What brought you here?"

"Rocks, my boy," I lied. "Rocks. Specimens. Clarke at Ten Mile has unearthed a curious fossil—some sort of pig, he says. He claims it's Jurassic Permian. He's set it far too early, of course, but I came along to look at it. But there's time for that tomorrow. I wanted to have a chat with you."

“And no one could be more welcome,” he returned. “Come inside. It’s late, and you have had a long, hard trip in.”

Of course I had—a damned hard trip in. I’m getting old, and thirty hours on a little, one-horse railroad is no joke to me. But I did not intend to be bundled off to bed until I had got to the bottom of this thing that was making my boy look like a man who had been through the Valley of Death.

“I’m sleeping here now,” he explained, as he took me into a little room off his office. “I had this place built some weeks ago, after — —”

He did not finish, but stooped, and set a match to the fire. The great pine knots flamed and roared in the open fireplace. He boiled water, and made tea, talking all the time of mines, and mine-management, and minerals.

We smoked in silence a long while after he had put the cups away. Then I leaned over and put my hand on his knee.

“Ken, my boy. Could you tell the old man?”

He started, and looked at me searchingly.

“You wouldn’t believe me, Professor.”

“I am not a scoffer, son,” I answered.

He rose, and threw another knot of pine on the fire. I watched the flames curl up and around it. The young man’s face was lost in shadow.

“Do you believe in lycanthropy?”

“Of course not. There is no such thing.”

“Of course not. There never was such a thing. And yet, I tell you, I have seen it happen.”

Was the boy insane? Why, that was old English superstition. It belonged to the days of witchcraft and burnings. Never since the Sixteenth Century had intelligent men of any country in the world, save Russia, talked of such things seriously. Absurd!

“My wife,” he went on, without looking up, “never knew much about her father. He was killed, it was said, in a hunting accident the second winter after his marriage. His wife died of shock the day the news reached her, and left a little daughter two hours old. That is all Hilde ever knew of her parents.

“She was brought up on the old estate, under the personal direction of her grandfather. He was passionately fond of her, but he watched with an eagle eye over all her study and her play. The old man was a constant contradiction to Hilde. He would never allow her living pets of any kind, for one thing. He took her to England, France, and Egypt, but never permitted her to holiday in the mountains of her own beloved Norway. Even when she went to Torghatten, her course of study was laid down by that inconsistent old man. He seemed to show his affection for her by suppressing all the instincts that were strongest.

“It was at Torghatten that I met her—and we loved each other.

“The old gentleman received me with great kindness, when I visited him. He had many questions to ask me about my parentage, and my work. I answered them all as I could, and did not wonder much at the seriousness with which he asked them, though I had the impression continually that there was something he wanted to say to me, something that preyed upon his mind. At times he seemed happy in our happiness, and planned with us the details of our marriage. Then, in the very midst of the planning, he would start up with fear in his face, and speak as if it all must stop.

“Once he started to say something about his son, Hilde’s father, but stopped short before he had well begun.

“To the very day we sailed from Norway, he was a constant puzzle to us.

“When this offer came from Meakins & Company, I hesitated to bring my bride into a rough camp like this. But Hilde insisted she would love it. All her life she wanted to live in the solitary places, to climb hills, and be free. She begged me to accept at once.

“We came north a few days later, as you know. I built her a little bungalow on the hill yonder, just across the river. Before I had the foundation laid, she had flowers growing all about the place, native flowers which she had never seen before, but which she transplanted and tended with passionate care.

“She turned our little cabin into a very bower of beauty, and there was not in the world anyone more exultantly happy than she.

“Often she took long walks alone, while I was at the mill. I have come home many times to find a note on the table to say that we would have tea on the Baldman. She would be waiting there with a picnic supper. And all through the long summer days we were happier by far than I had ever dreamed of being.

“Then came winter.

“All of a sudden it came. The cold set in overnight. A driving storm that lasted for three days buried the countryside in drifts. It was the northern winter at its worst.

“One night”—here the boy paused to breathe heavily, and his face was set—“one night we were sitting cozily by the fire reading, when suddenly a wolf howled quite near.

“Hilde went deathly white, and clutched my hand.

“I took her in my arms, and laughed at her, and told her there was no cause for alarm, and that his majesty would be bold indeed, and very hungry, before he would dare attack any human.

“But nothing that I could say really comforted her, and from that time on, she was in terror of being left alone, especially at night.

“**A** month or so later, I was kept late at the mill, and it was nearly eleven before I started home. Going up the hill, I heard the wolves again.

There is no mistaking the cry of the timber wolf, and I ran up the steps hoping that Hilde had not heard.

“There was no light in the house, and I tiptoed into her room, trying not to wake her till the sound had died away.

“The moon shone in the window, and there was my girl, crouched down on the floor, peering out into the night. She seemed in the grip of an agony of emotion dreadful to see, and did not know that I was there at all.

“I touched her on the shoulder. She turned like a flash, and looked at me for a moment with only fear in her face. Then she crumpled up in my arms, and sobbed hysterically until she fell asleep.”

Ken drew a gusty sigh and paused, his pipe forgotten in his hand.

“I could not understand it at all,” he went on. “She was not a coward. There’s a little lake up in the hills where we used to swim, and I have seen her dive into the water from twenty feet up the cliff. So it was more than fear that troubled her. It was some deeper dread of which she could not speak.

“She was never her old self after that night when she cried herself to sleep. At times she would lavish passionate, tearful love on me. At other times, she was absent-minded and lost in somber reflections of her own.

“One night, when I came early home, she was not there. I was searching frantically for her when she came quietly up the path, bareheaded and alone. There was such a look in her eyes as I have seen in the eyes of the dead, and I followed her in silence into the house, fear clutching at my heart.

“The wolves were frequently to be heard in those days. The heavy snow had made them very bold. Once they came so close to the house that I reached for my rifle determined to teach at least one of them a lesson in restraint. But Hilde caught my arm, and stopped me.

“I knew her tenderness for wild things, and put my .22 away in the shed.

“When I came back into the room, she was not there. Vaguely uneasy, I searched for her in the bedroom. She was not there. But the window was open, and I saw among the trees a lithe, gray-white form that flashed across the shadows and was gone.

“I won’t go into the details of that night. All sorts of horrors came to me—old folk-tales of Norway that the people of the hills believed in, stories of the taint that ran in certain families and of the dread deeds done at night ‘by the will of the Foul Fiend.’ I kept wondering, too, about the death of Hilde’s father, and asking over and over again whether I had gone out of my mind.

“Suddenly the door opened and there stood Hilde, her fair hair white with loose fluffs of snow. She looked tired and worn, and with only a furtive glance at me she hurried to her room and slept heavily till noon.

“She was frequently absent after that, and I never knew, when I came home at night, whether she would be there or not.”

Again the boy paused, staring at the fire. And again he went on.

“One day, there was an explosion at the northern mine, and I went up to try and get things moving again. No train came out that night, so I decided to tramp the eleven miles back rather than leave Hilde alone.

“Just a few miles from home, I realized that I was being followed by wolves. I was not armed, and there was nothing for it but to climb a tree. A broken-off oak stump stood near the track. It offered no protection from the wind, but I knew that from it I should be able to hail the log train in the morning if necessary. So I scrambled up in some haste.

“Within two minutes there were fourteen timber wolves squatting in a circle about that stump. You know their method—a short wait to see if you’re going to run for it, then a half turn to the left, and a steady circling march around their victim.

“I don’t know what the end of that death-march would have been, for just as I was bending all my will-power to fight the hypnotism of it, there dashed down the railway track a slender white wolf. Like a mad thing she darted here and there about that circle, then flashed away among the trees, with the whole pack behind her.

“I waited till their cry had died away in the distance, then climbed stiffly down, and hurried home. Hilde was waiting for me at the door. There was a curious brightness in her eyes, and she listened with some tension, I thought, to the explanation of my lateness. But I said nothing at all of my adventure with the wolves.

“A few nights later, Louis Barjon dropped in after supper. For once Hilde was almost herself. She was reading by the fire, while Louis and I smoked.

“‘Never saw the wolves so bold as this year,’ said Louis. ‘Have you seen the white one? White as a snow-drift, she is, and swift as the wind. She seems to come out of nowhere to join the pack, and they’re devils when she’s with them. She’s the most beautiful animal I’ve ever seen, but I bet she’s as keen on the kill as any of the dirty crew.’

“Hilde dropped her book. ‘The white wolf never kills,’ she said.

“Louis turned and looked at her in astonishment. Was it merely girlish sentiment for a lovely wild thing? Evidently Louis thought so, for he laughed tolerantly and went on, ‘Well, maybe. But folks is laying for her. It’s hardly safe to go out at night, so keep your rifle handy, boy.’

“I remembered the one night when I did take my rifle down. I glanced at Hilde. Her eyes were wide, and her nostrils dilated. What was the emotion that swayed her? My heart contracted.

“‘Did you ever see her?’ demanded Louis again. I thought of the gray-white form I had seen flitting among the trees, and of the beautiful white beast that had saved me from the pack only a few nights before. But I shook my head in denial.

“‘I’ve seen her twice,’ he went on. ‘The other night I took a flying shot at her, and I caught her on the right front paw. But it was just a scratch, I guess, for there was only a bit of blood on the snow.’

“In spite of myself, I glanced at Hilde’s right forearm. She had it tightly bandaged. I looked up at her face. Her eyes were fixed on the back of Louis’

head as he picked a coal out of the fire for his pipe.

“Was it only fancy, or did her lips draw back from her white teeth?

“My heart seemed to stop beating. That picture is engraved on my mind forever. Old Louis, bluff and weather-beaten, leaning down over the fire; Hilde watching him with a sort of sinister ferocity; and I dumb with terror.

“In silence I let him rise, and wind his long scarf about his neck, and go out into the night.

“I shut the door behind him, and turned hastily to Hilde. I was too late. She was gone. I went to her bedroom. She was not there, nor in any other room in the house.

“A sense of black tragedy engulfed me. I clung with all my might to my love for her, and I prayed to know the secret the old man in Norway would have told me before we came away.

“My whole soul revolted at the conclusions that were forcing themselves on me, and I waited in horror for what the morning would bring. I don’t think I thought much after a while. My mind seemed numbed. I just sat and waited, with a curious sense of waiting for more than her coming home.

“Toward morning it started to snow heavily. I built up the fire, and put the kettle on to boil.

“Then I heard a sound outside, a whining and a heavy scratching sound. I flung open the door.

“Call me mad, if you will—but there in the snow was the white wolf. She was staggering and covered with blood, and scarcely able to drag her hindquarters into the room. The beautiful animal crawled weakly to my feet, and rubbed her head against my knee like a dog.

“I took her head between my hands, and she looked up with those pleading eyes I knew, licked my hand once or twice, and sank on the floor—dead.

“I knew my girl would never come home again.

“I knew—God! that such things should be!—that the old law of the hills had held, that ancient, dreadful law that said there was no return for the werewolf that once had spilled the blood of human kind.

“I knew, too, what they would tell me that day—that old Louis was dead, that he had accounted for half the pack before they had got him, but that they had got him in the end.

“And then I told them that my wife had gone with Louis, that she had gone to spend a day with his wife, to help her with the quilting. They were deeply distressed and searched everywhere. But they found no trace or sign of her at all.

“I buried the white wolf that night, under the pine trees. And the wolves howled about the place till dawn.

“Since then I have waited, hoping against hope that some day I will wake and find that I have only been insane.

“I have not the courage to sleep at the cottage now, but I go there every day to see if perhaps she has come home. But I know, as there is a God in heaven, that all that is mortal of my girl lies buried there under the pine trees, where her garden was last year.”

For an hour he sat there, his head bowed in suffering, till from sheer weariness he slept in his chair.

I threw a coat around him, and built up the fire, and sat there thinking, thinking, thinking in amazement and dread.

The thing could not be, of course. Yet, I had lived near enough to Mother Earth to know that there are more things under heaven than science has ever dreamed of.

But the proof of it? I had to have some proof.

I sat there till daylight. Then I made strong coffee for the lad, and we had breakfast when he woke. I told him all that was going on around the old halls, confessed that I had lied to him about Clarke’s fossilized pig, and saw a hint of the old twinkle return to his eyes.

Then I slipped away.

Now I should test this thing. Within the hour I should know whether the lad had dreamed an ugly dream or had been the victim of devil’s work.

The cottage door was unlocked, waiting Hilde’s return. Things were just as she had left them, no doubt—her workbag in the corner, the book she had been reading open on the table. But I did not pause there. I went on through to the garden.

The grave was clearly marked by a blazed cross on the giant pine. Frantically I began to dig, and as I turned out the loose sand I prayed that I might prove that the boy had only dreamed.

I made my gruesome find. With my hands I scraped away the earth that covered the bare skull and the bony paws. With my fingers I pried the long row of teeth apart, and looked.

God! Was I too gone mad?

In the sharp canines were little pits of yellow, and one large molar had a solid cap of gold.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

The illustration was made by Hugh Rankin (pseudonym 'Quindaro'), 1878-1956.

The story was originally published in *Weird Tales*, August 1930.

A cover which is placed in the public domain was created for this ebook.

[The end of *The Law of the Hills* by Grace Campbell]