

# WOLVES *End Mountain* FEUD

Trapped by  
Hunger-Mad Animals  
in a Ravine, Boy  
and Girl Escape  
Unharméd

By WILLIAM HORNE

SINCE the first Hartley killed the first Vaughn in 1869 at a whisky still on the Little Tennessee River in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina and started the bloody Vaughn-Hartley feud that has taken a toll of a dozen lives, there had been no let-up in the bitter hatred between the two clans until that dark night a few weeks ago when Fate took a hand in the form of a pack of hungry, bloodthirsty timber wolves in the fastness of the Smokies.

And, strangely enough, one of the principal characters in this stark drama bore the name of the first killer, while the other was the grandson of the first victim.

IT WAS near sundown when young Tom Vaughn tucked the squirrels he had killed into his belt and started down the narrow, winding trail that led into the gap to his home two miles south on the edge of Lake Santeelah.

The sun was down behind the western ridge of Pine Tooth Mountain when he reached the foot of the path far down in the gap. Already the shadows were lengthening and denizens of the forests about him had sought their beds for the long coming night.

It was a lonely, narrow trail that led through Mule Creek Run and up the steep ridge to Lake Santeelah, but Tom Vaughn whistled lightly as he picked his way as sure-footedly as a mountain goat down into the gloom of the ravine.

From somewhere to his right there came a sudden rustling in the thick undergrowth; he turned swiftly and saw a flash of red as a bushy-tailed fox crept for an instant into view against the blue-green of the squatting junipers.

Tom Vaughn jerked his rifle from his shoulder, but the reddish flash was gone, and only the faint crackling of dead twigs marked its direction.

The boy shouldered his rifle and went on down the narrow trail, his lips puckered again in that low, tuneless whistle.

The lateness of the hour did not worry him. He had been born and reared in the Smokies, he knew every ridge and gap and peak from Cherokee County far up and to Waterville Lake that nestled in the western shadows of Mount Guyot. Darkness would mean little or nothing to him, caught there within a mile or two of his home.

Suddenly from off in the darkness came the howl like that of a dog. Tom Vaughn stopped in the path. It came again, and this time it was answered by another dismal, wild call farther away. The listening man slid his right thumb to the hammer of his rifle and the thick darkness concealed a sudden tightening about his thin lips. For he recognized in that second call the howl of a stray timber wolf, and in the answering cry the nervous, dangerous yell of hunger.

Recently a large band of these gaunt, savage beasts had moved into the swamp from the Bildad section on the Tennessee border, and on one occasion had attacked a young boy who had been fishing for trout in a stream across the swamp.

The eerie cries came again, this time seemingly closer together. With these came a third cry—a cry so shrill and so



The wolves kept up their hellish cries and circled nearer and nearer, their yellow eyes gleaming through the darkness

piercing and so terror-filled that Tom Vaughn gasped and crouched low in the trail. For this third cry was the scream of a terrified woman, and it came from the darkness scarcely a hundred yards off to the right.

The listening man opened his mouth and gave a long, piercing yell that echoed hollowly back from the invisible cliffs behind him. He strained his ears, listening, and presently his call was answered.

For a moment stark fear clutched at Tom Vaughn's heart. Who could it be here in the swamp at this time of night? A woman, he was sure, but who?

And then again came the call of a wolf, and the answer was taken up by two in unison deeper in the swamp. Tom Vaughn cursed low in his throat, clamped his lips grimly and, with the muzzle of his rifle before him, made his way swiftly on down the trail as silently—as a stalking cat.

Presently he stopped and called again, and from the darkness scarcely a hundred feet from the trail at the very edge of the creek came the trembling cry in answer.

For a moment the man stood in the trail listening. A short distance away he could hear dry leaves crackling beneath the weight of some tripping animal. He strained his eyes to see through the cloak of darkness and thick trees, but could make out no moving form.

He called again, his voice lowered: "Where are y'?" The answer came from the dark: "Right by th' creek—who is it?"

But Tom Vaughn didn't answer. Instead he made his way through the thick underbrush and presently came into a small clearing on the creek edge. There was a dark form a few feet away against a tree. It moved as he slowly crossed toward it. He heard a gasp.

"Who—who is it?"

Then he stood looking down into the white face of a girl. In that thick blackness he could not tell her identity. So he leaned over and peered at the light patch in the darkness.

"It's me," he answered, trying to pierce

the dark with his eyes. "Tom Vaughn. Who air y'?"

There was no answer from the prone figure against the bole of the tree at Tom Vaughn's feet; merely a gasp of surprise.

"Who air y'?" He leaned down and peered at the white blob that was the girl's face. "Air y' hurt?"

"My ankle," came the final answer, now in a voice that was slightly husky and just a bit harsh. "Its broke, but I don't need no help o' yore's, Tom Vaughn—"

The boy gasped his surprise and slowly straightened up stiffly. "Marian—Hartley—" he whispered, hoarsely, anger welling up in his voice.

## Feud in the Blood

WITHOUT another word he dug in his jeans pants pocket for a match, raked the head of it down the barrel of his rifle and, when the tiny glare flamed up, he stooped over with a grim, hard face and held the match down to peer sharply at the girl's face.

For a moment the girl didn't answer, but suddenly there came from the darkness a growling bark. It was answered from just across the creek and Tom Vaughn felt the girl tremble beside him.

"I—I fell down from that rock," she said then, and her voice trembled.

"Jest when did y' do hit?" he asked.

"Long afore sundown," she answered, "but don't ye mind, Tom Vaughn. I don't need airy bit o' help from no Vaughn." Her voice was trembling with hate, and at these words the boy slowly stood up, his lips tight against the retort he was about to make.

Again there came the yapping from behind in the dark, and this time it was answered by half a dozen snarling voices across the creek and before them.

Once as he stood there he caught a sudden gleam of greenish eyes. Like a flash he whirled the muzzle of his rifle about and pulled the trigger. As the sharp report cut through the stillness the girl let out a startled scream, and they heard the prowling wolf lope off through the underbrush.

Out of This Escapade  
Comes a Delightful  
Romance of the  
Tennessee Mountains

Then he turned and looked down at the dim form against the tree bole. "Hartley er no Hartley," he said in a tight-lipped voice, "I got t' git ye out o' hyah, Marian Hartley. These varmints is gittin' plumb bad, an' ordess I kin strike up er fire, they'll shore git t' us 'fore daylight."

## Attacked by Wolves

THE night wore on, and the wolves kept up their hellish cries throughout the swamp. They grew more bold with every passing minute, and by midnight the boy's ammunition had dwindled to three or four shells.

Ordinarily, Tom Vaughn would have made every shot count against the horde of attackers, but on this night he was unnerved by the presence of the girl, a member of the hated Hartley clan, and his aim was quick and bad.

As midnight passed other wolves joined the sieging band, and their arrival seemed to make the firstcomers more courageous in their attacks, which now grew more frequent and ferocious.

Finally one of the boldest made a sudden lunge at Tom Vaughn.

He had been standing looking back over the low creek bank when it happened, and it was the girl's quick scream that brought him pivoting about to meet the charge. He swung his rifle as he turned and felt the barrel of it thud against the animal's head.

But it didn't stop that mad charge. It broke the spring in midair, but when the wolf fell to the ground at the boy's feet it lunged again for his throat to drag him down.

Just as it did Tom Vaughn blindly pulled the trigger of his rifle. The heavy bullet tore through the savage brain and the animal fell limp at his feet.

He swung wildly about and fired a shot at random toward two more that had ventured to within six feet. He heard a yelp in answer as the bullet struck, but both animals whirled and disappeared snarling into the darkness.

Tom Vaughn had always known that a hungry pack of wolves will turn cannibal when one of their number has been killed or mortally wounded, so he grasped the dead animal by both hind legs and flung it into the brush.

Presently he heard a low snarl in that direction. Then another and another, until finally the night was filled with growls and snarling yelps as the hungry pack fell to to devour the body of their dead comrade.

Finally, after hours that dragged like a hideous nightmare for the watching boy and the feverish, injured girl, dawn came to the swamp.

He gathered the girl in his arms and went on down the trail toward Lake Santeelah and his home.

"Ye live better'n five mile from hyah," he told the girl by way of explanation, "an' 'tain't but three mile from my house t' Tapoco. I reckon as how 'twon't be no harm t' take a Hartley woman t' a Vaughn house eff'n she's broke up lack'n ye air, till th' doctor c'n be had."

Tom Vaughn married Marian Hartley at the community church near Proctor, N. C. It was a short courtship, but it brought the two clans on friendly terms again and ended one of the bloodiest feuds that the Little Tennessee River section of the Great Smoky Mountains has ever known.