

**A Werewolf of the Campagna (1912)**  
*from Reminiscences of a Diplomatist's Wife*  
**By Mary Crawford Fraser<sup>1</sup> (Italy, England)**



Mary Crawford Fraser  
1851-1922

Santiago<sup>2</sup> is rich in gruesome things, but the most terrifying that I ever saw there was when I was leaning out of the drawing-room window one night, just before I went to bed. It was late, and there was a bright moon that threw out the whole of the Alameda<sup>3</sup> into vivid relief. I had been absorbed in my thoughts for some time, trying to dream myself back into Italy, and see, in the stucco palatios, the real palaces of Rome,<sup>4</sup>-- wondering what all the dear people there were doing-- one has to snatch at the tricks of childhood sometimes in the ends of the earth, to help quiet the Heimweh<sup>5</sup>-- when, suddenly, from far up the street, I heard the howl of a wolf. There was no mistaking it. It was not a dog. No dog had ever lived that could imitate it. Staring down in the direction from which it came, I saw the figure of a man lurch out of the trees into the full light of the moon-- a man, dressed in evening clothes<sup>6</sup>-- I could see the white shirt front clearly. On he came, staggering from side to side, and bumping

his head crazily against the trees as though trying to break them down,-- and not by accident, for I saw him, three or four times, lower his head and run at them. And all the time he howled-- that awful howl of the wolf!

The street was quite deserted, not even a policeman being in sight, and I had a full view of him as he passed beneath the window. His eyes were shut-- his lips were drawn back in a grin that showed his teeth, and his mouth was wide open. I could not leave the window though my teeth were

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Crawford Fraser was the wife of Hugh Fraser (1837-1894), a British diplomat who served in Peking, Vienna, Rome, Santiago, and Tokyo. The selection is taken from her account of her years living abroad.

<sup>2</sup> Santiago, Chile

<sup>3</sup> a street or path lined with trees

<sup>4</sup> i.e., to imagine the palaces of Rome while looking at the equivalent palatios (an Italian word that simply means "palaces") in Chile

<sup>5</sup> German: homesickness; Mary Crawford Fraser was partially raised in Italy

<sup>6</sup> formal attire, such as a tuxedo

chattering like castanets and I was trembling all over. Down the street I watched him go, weaving from side to side in the moonlight and rushing head-on against the trees, howling, until at last he disappeared in the distance. But the screeching came back to me for two or three minutes after he had vanished himself.



castanets, a percussion instrument used to produce clicks for rhythmic accents

What was it? The good God who made him only knows. He was not drunk, for no drunken man could have thrown himself at the trees in that fashion-- and no sober man, either, that I have ever seen or heard of. The howl, at least, was not that of any human being, whatever the body might have been. It was that of a famished wolf and not anything else. Does that sound like superstition? Well, superstition it may be. But which is the worst offender, he who, having seen much and experienced many strange adventures, prefers to think all things possible in the creation of an omnipotent<sup>7</sup> God, or he who fastens down that word "superstition" over the entrance to every avenue of knowledge that pertains to the Twilight Kingdom?

I am reminded of an article I read some time ago on the subject of miracles by a divine of one of the Free Churches,<sup>8</sup> whose name I forget. Having set forth his belief in an Almighty and All-powerful Providence<sup>9</sup> the writer set himself to the task of attempting to prove that miracles could not happen in our day-- and this is how he went about it. Compelled by the incontrovertible evidence of the Gospels, he acknowledged that our Lord performed many in his time and that his followers performed many more. But, he went on to say, such things, then, were obviously needed to convert the heathen<sup>10</sup> and give the Church a start. Leaving it to be understood that no such necessity existed nowadays, there being, presumably, no more heathen to convert, he let fall the astounding observation that should an All-just, All-seeing, All-understanding God, in His infinite wisdom, do such a thing in our time-- and fly in the face of the writer's personal opinions on the subject-- He would cease (Cease! the Eternal would cease, that was his word) to be a just God, thereby, of course, ceasing to be God at all! Put into plainer words, the Almighty might continue to sit on His throne as long as He behaved Himself in accordance with the reverend gentleman's idea of how a God should behave-- but not a moment longer. And the writer was-- will you believe it?-- a Professor of Theology at a Nonconformist Seminary.<sup>11</sup>

It is a strange attitude of mind that acknowledges Omnipotence in one breath and sets rigid limits to it in the next.

But, to go back to the man-wolf. One of our old Italian servants used to tell a fearful story-- and she spoke of it as though it were of common

---

<sup>7</sup> all powerful

<sup>8</sup> a Christian Church that has dissented or seceded from an established Church

<sup>9</sup> the care and guidance of God over the creatures of the earth

<sup>10</sup> non-Christian; the word has a distantly negative connotation

<sup>11</sup> a school to educate students in theology, usually to prepare them for in the church



knowledge. It was about a certain hunter who lived far out in the Campagna<sup>12</sup> by himself, in a small stone house. One evening, just as he was preparing to go to bed, he heard some one knocking at the door and, opening it, saw a man and a woman of the better class standing outside. They were well-dressed, although the woman was dusty and tired, and they begged him to let them stay the night, the man saying that they had gone for a walk earlier in the day, taking some food with them, and intending to return to Rome in the evening. After eating, he had taken a little nap and, when he woke up, found that his wife had disappeared. She had wandered away to pick some flowers, from her own account, and had lost herself-- a simple enough thing to do thereabouts. They were ready to pay handsomely, they said, for the night's lodging, and he, glad enough to earn money so easily, let them in and, having given them something to eat and drink, led them upstairs and left them there. The next morning, as he was leaving the house, the husband called out to him that he would

be very glad to buy from him any game<sup>13</sup> that he might get, and added that he was going back to bed again-- for he was singularly sleepy.

The man started off-- cheerfully, as one may understand, and the other went back to bed where he slept until the early afternoon. On awakening, he saw that his wife was sitting by one of the windows, wrapped up in a shawl. She was cold, she said, and anxious to start for home again as soon as possible. He assured her that he would not keep her waiting for long, dressed himself, and went downstairs, leaving her by the window.

Having refreshed himself, he sat down by the door, borrowing his host's pipe and tobacco, and waited for the latter's return. After some time had sped, he left the house and walked a little way in the direction which the hunter had taken in the morning, but he had not proceeded far before he met him. The man was evidently labouring under some great excitement, and he also seemed to be very dizzy, for he staggered as he came up, and sat down abruptly. His game-bag was empty, but the other noticed a smear of blood on his coat, and thinking him to have met with some accident, stooped down. But the hunter waved him back. He could not speak for a minute or two, and only after he had recovered himself somewhat he told his story. A mile or so from the house, he had sat down to rest and look about for the signs of any game. The day was very still and he had been listening and watching intently, when, without an instant's warning, a heavy body leaped on him from behind, threw him over, and held him in a pair of mighty jaws by the coat collar, face downward. So stunned was he with fright and astonishment that, at first, he lay still. But presently,

---

<sup>12</sup> a region in Southern Italy

<sup>13</sup> wild mammals or birds hunted for sport or food



as the teeth began to work upwards towards his neck he wriggled his head around and saw, a few inches away, the paw of an enormous wolf. Wolves there were, as he said, and wolves, but nothing like this one had he ever heard of. In proof of which he showed the barrel of his gun which had been slung on his back, bitten almost in two. His hands had been free and he had managed to get out his knife, hardly knowing what to do with it till his eyes fell once more on the great paw by his head. In

desperation, he slashed at it, and the long, razor-edged blade went through bone and flesh; when, with a howl, the wolf jumped away from him and he fainted.

How long he lay there he had no idea, but when he came to himself and got to his feet, the paw was beside him. So saying, he produced it-- and it bore out his story, for it was larger than a man's hand. Together they returned to the house, where, after making sure that the hunter was none the worse for his experience, the visitor asked if he might look at the paw again. In the hasty glance he had had of it by the side of the road, he had not had time to satisfy his curiosity. Such a thing was not to be seen twice in a lifetime. The hunter agreed with him and put his hand into his leather game-bag-- only to withdraw it with a scream. "Do not go near it!" he begged, as the other approached. "As you value your soul, do not touch it!"

But the visitor was made of sterner stuff and, despite his host's pleadings dived into the game-bag and brought out-- a human hand!

Dropping it on the floor, he sprang away, but his eyes were drawn back to the gruesome thing in spite of him, and he saw the glitter of a ring. There was something diabolically familiar about the hand. He looked again and closer. There was something familiar about the ring, too. He had seen it elsewhere and very lately. He left his host in the chair where he had collapsed, ran upstairs and burst in on his wife. She was still sitting by the window and when she heard his voice she turned and looked at him. Her face was changed almost out of recognition and the hate of the other world was in her eyes, but he seized the shawl she had wrapped around her, though she bit and struggled. At last he tore it off and a glance showed him the rough bandages over one arm where the hand should have been. It was her hand that he had taken out of the game-bag! The end of the story (which I can only tell as it was told to me) is that the woman was burnt as a witch.