

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MAY, 1941

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(In two parts—part I)

*The Finest and Most Thrilling Novel Ever Written by the
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"It comes alone at night, a big gray brute with fiery eyes."



The *Phantom* Pistol

By CARL JACOBI

They say that only a silver bullet can slay the werewolf—a strange tale by the author of "Revelations in Black"

AS I look back, my friendship with Hugh Trevellan seems to have been inevitable. Our ages were near, we were both bachelors, and our avocational interests were much the same. Instilled deeply in both of us was that fascination for art and craftsmanship that has

been mellowed and made attractive by time.

I had gone in for books, and my shelves were filled with rare volumes, the result of years of collecting and considerable expense. But Trevellan had done his browsing along a different line. I remember the

night Major Lodge brought us together.

"Idiot, meet idiot," he had introduced jokingly. "You two must know each other."

"The antique bug has got you both. McKay here knows all there is to know about books, and Trevellan's case of pistols would make a gunsmith turn green with envy."

"Pistols?" I had repeated, shaking the thin hand and scrutinizing the gaunt form before me.

And Hugh Trevellan had smiled. His pale blue eyes twinkled pleasantly. "Yes," he replied, "revolvers of all kinds: wheel-locks, flint-locks, muzzle-loaders, and even those absurd modern automatics. Would you care to see them?"

IT IS strange how inborn in every man is the collecting instinct. I have heard that even a savage will hoard colored pebbles, and I know that as a boy my greatest disappointment came when I lost my book of foreign stamps. Trevellan's pistols were his life. He stood before their heavy mahogany case and admired them at least once every day. He dusted them. He polished their scrollwork. And he searched constantly for more.

They were, in truth, a masterly assortment. Ranging from the earliest mid-Fourteenth Century hand-cannon on the top shelf to a modern long-barreled Luger automatic on the bottom, the case displayed all the gradual developments conceived by man in the making of light firearms.

"This one I picked up only yesterday at the Meldrow sales," said Trevellan, taking out one of the weapons. "It's an Italian Snaphaunce pistol, and I'm not sure yet whether it's a forgery, though I paid a price for it. Here are a pair of flint-locks by Lazarino Comminazzo. Note the double-necked hammers. This is an old arquebus, and this a French wheel-lock

with the royal shield in gilt and damascened with gold."

Even my books on which I had prided myself for so long seemed to fade and lose some of their glamor as I stared down upon these beautiful relics. I said as much to Trevellan, and he smiled graciously.

"I should like to see your books," he replied. "I have a few volumes on munitions that are rather old, but from a standpoint of binding or edition I'm afraid they are of little importance. Unfortunately I'm leaving for the country tomorrow, so I'll have to postpone the visit."

"How long are you going to stay?"

He shrugged. "Rented a secluded place down Arronshire way, and I may stay all summer. Doctor's orders, you know. Says I'm all on edge and need solitude. It'll be a miserable nuisance, but still I don't mind. I can finish a paper on Scotch pistols I started a month ago. But say . . . why not motor down and stay a fortnight or so? We could have a royal time."

Early in July, when my business permitted, I had "motored down," but I had cut my stay short and actually breathed a sigh of relief when I was back in Bloomsbury. Why? The reason is hardly a tangible one. And yet now, seen retrospectively, it seems a psychic warning of what was to follow.

I FOUND Arronshire a district quite distinct and separate from its neighbors, both from a philologist's and a cartographer's point of view. The people were a rough, burly type, and the characteristic voice inflection was harsh and unpleasant. The country was extremely wild and rugged. And a general air of neglect seemed to pervade everywhere. The hedges had grown rank and untrimmed. Road markings had fallen to decay, bridges rattled ominously as my car rolled over them, and the villages seemed to shrink back despondently as I passed.

For a solid two miles the lane which led to the manor was lined with gnarled old apple trees. But it was the sign on the post-box that drew me up short. "Blueker House," it read. "Ludwig Blueker, Undertaker."

The house was one of those monstrosities of the Victorian age, ornate and sadly in want of paint. The lawn before it was overrun with weeds, and a general air of neglect was over all.

"How do you like it?" Trevellan hailed from the veranda.

"Why on earth don't you take away that undertaker's sign?" I replied in question. "This place is about as cheerful as a graveyard."

He had moved into the house furnished, bringing with him a single trunk and, of course, his beloved pistols. The weapon case he had placed by the big bay window, opening on the front lawn. The huge mahogany cabinet seemed strangely out of place there, and so did Trevellan himself. As I sat across from him, his delicate face glowed in the lamplight like tinted wax, and I could not help thinking of an old painting, a portrait of a French courtier that hung in my rooms.

But while I could not point my finger at any one feature of the house that was in itself distasteful, there was something utterly somber and depressing about the architecture that crushed all buoyancy of feeling and left me in a state of deep melancholia. I stayed only two days, then headed back for London.

The rest of the summer passed with only an occasional letter from Trevellan. He had grown accustomed to the solitude, he said, and was really enjoying his convalescence. August dragged into September, and his letters grew fewer, and finally stopped altogether.

Then one day in Charing Cross I stumbled upon a book that brought Trevellan back to mind. It was an old volume, once

finely bound, with the title, *Historie of Certayne Small Fire Arms*, stenciled deeply in a brass plate on the cover. It contained some exquisite colored drawings of old pistols. I knew how eagerly my friend would welcome the sight of such a work.

Accordingly, the next day I headed toward Arronshire and Hugh Trevellan. A week before, the countryside had been a maelstrom of autumn color, but now, as I drove along, I found only a graveyard of naked trees and drab bracken. The strong winds which had whipped in from the south during the past few days had removed every leaf, the advance warning of an early winter.

BY NIGHTFALL I was nearing the manor. Again, as in early summer, I felt an increasing heaviness of spirit as I entered the district. Black storm clouds were pouring into the sky when I reached the village of Darset. Dust and old leaves swirled into the car, and a drop of rain spattered on the windshield. But my attention was drawn to the state of general excitement which had seized the townfolk.

Knots of them stood in the light of shop windows, talking earnestly. Several rickety cars tore by, loaded with men armed with hunting-rifles. And in the doorway of one house several persons were trying to console a woman who was crying bitterly.

"What's wrong?" I asked the garage man, as he began filling my car with petrol.

"Wolves," he replied, and looked frightened as he said it.

"Wolves," I told him rather coldly, "have been extinct in England since the Fifteenth Century."

He looked at me queerly and spilled a quart of petrol on the mudguards. "Have they, sir?" he said. "Then it's a wild dog it must be, or something worse."

"Did it attack somebody?"

The man's hand shook as he took the money. "That's what it did, sir. Carried

off the widow Chase's youngest, the sweetest girl you've ever seen."

I stared. "You mean a wild dog actually killed a child?"

"And she's not the first, sir. Only a fortnight ago, Johnny, the cobbler's son, was taken from almost under his mother's eyes. It comes at night, alone, a big, gray brute, with fiery eyes, they say. Jeff Twillger took a shot at him from his bedroom window. Jeff can hit a shilling every time from here to that tree, but he missed. A reward be posted too: fifty pounds for the man who brings in his pelt. I'll be bringin' down my gun, I think. It's nice earnin's."

I took note of the threatening heavens now, and with the garage man's help, put up the tonneau top of the car. The distant rolling of thunder was in my ears as I headed down the winding road, and the headlights showed the rain coming down in earnest. In a quarter of an hour the road was in bad condition, and I was forced to reduce speed.

I came to Blueker House lane at last and the next moment was shaking hands with Hugh Trevellan.

The house looked even gloomier than before, but when my friend offered me a glass of Liebfraumilch, I was almost glad I had come.

"It is good wine," agreed Trevellan. "It was left here by the old Austrian who formerly owned the place. He died, you know, and the house was offered completely furnished. I saw the ad and leased it before even seeing it. Not so bad, eh?"

I smiled and set down my glass. "I've got something to show you," I said, reaching for my grip-sack.

He was up and out of his chair at that with the exuberance of a child suddenly reminded of a toy. "And I've got something to show you."

He stepped quickly to his pistol case and returned with an oblong box of tarnished

silver. Placing it on the table before me, he opened it and stood back proudly. "The masterpiece of them all," he said. "And where do you think I found it? In Darset, of all places."

Resting on its cushion of dark velvet, gleaming in the lamplight, was a beautiful long-barreled pistol. The butt was made of ivory, yellowed now like an ancient cameo, and adorned with an intricate network of silver filigree. Mosaic inlays formed queer designs above the trigger, and the barrel, which was trim and graceful as a poised lance, glittered with engraved gold spirals. A small gold cross was upraised at one end. But it was the hammer that attracted my attention. Of blackened steel, it had been fashioned into a perfect death's-head.

"Isn't it a beauty?" Trevellan said, leaning over my shoulder.

"And you bought it in Darset?" I said, unbelievingly.

He smiled in delight. "By a sheer piece of luck. It belonged to one of the villagers, and when he found I was interested in old weapons, he offered to sell it to me. I gave him twice what he asked."

I took the pistol from its case and fondled it. "Italian?"

TREVELLAN frowned. "You've got me there. I really don't know what it is. I don't believe it's Italian, and nothing about it suggests the Germanic. The man said it had been in his family for years."

We lit our pipes after that, and Trevellan went into a lengthy dissertation on the artistry of ancient weapons in general. At length I brought out the book which had really been the incentive for my visit. Trevellan thumbed through its pages carefully and looked a long time at the illustrations.

"It's an excellent work," he said. "I—"

His voice trailed off; his eyes suddenly riveted themselves on the book. With a

low exclamation he pushed the table lamp nearer the printed page.

"Look here, McKay," he cried hoarsely. "Read this."

The volume was turned to the chapter, *Early Eighteenth Century*, and in the center of the page I read the following paragraph.

"The moste skillfull worke of the master craftsmane, Johann Stifter of Prague, was a holstre pistol made for a subject of England, Sir William Kingston, in the yeare of our Lord, 1712. This weapon was fashioned in certayne unusual ways, being made to fire a silver bullet, being blessed by seven priests with holy water, and having the crucifix carved upon the barrel. Sir William, it was said, was wont to travel often in the southerne countrys, and while on one of his journeys was attacked by werewolves and other dæmons. The witch-wolves, who were really human creatures in league with Satan, carried off his little daughter, Julie, and left Sir William sore herte. Whereupon the Englishmanne swore vengeance upon all like fiends of hell and ordered the pistol made, combining all knowne methods by which they could be killcd."

And following these startling words came an illustration and a detailed description of none other than the ivory pistol Trevellan had shown me only a short while before.

THREE was no mistaking the fact. No pistol of similar craftsmanship could have been created. But there was one way to prove absolutely its authenticity. The description mentioned five words carved upon the weapon by the gunsmith: *Tod dem Wahrwolf schwöre Ich* [Death to the Werewolf I swear].

"Have you a magnifying glass?" I asked Trevellan. And then I stared as I saw my friend's consternation. The man was almost beside himself. His hands were opening and closing convulsively; his face had grown white, and a strange frightened look had stolen into his eyes. He got up, swaying.

"There's one here some place. I'll—I'll see if I can find it."

A moment later we were scrutinizing

the pistol through the glass. Tiny lettering appeared on the barrel.

"There it is!" I cried. "It's the same pistol."

There was no answer. I turned and stared at Trevellan. He was leaning heavily against the table, lips twitching. Abruptly he seized the pistol from my hands, thrust it back in its box and replaced it in the mahogany case.

"Are you ill?" I said.

"Yes," he replied jerkily. "I—I feel a bit faint. That long walk I took today must have done me up. If you don't mind, I think I'll go off to bed."

I nodded and regarded him curiously as he left the room. What on earth had come over the man? He had been perfectly normal until reading that paragraph about the pistol. I lit my pipe and sat there, musing over his strange actions. And as the tobacco smoke drifted ceilingward, I suddenly became aware of the storm again.

The rain was swishing against the big bay window now. Thunder boomed steadily overhead as if some giant rolling-pin were being moved back and forth across the roof.

For a time I was content to sit there, listening to the wild night so near, yet so far. But as my mind began a train of thought suggested by that queer paragraph, a decided sense of unease came over me.

Werewolves! What strange horrors man will mentally create for himself. It was a queer belief, this idea that a man will adopt a taste for human blood and will change into a lower animal, a wolf, to obtain it. Stranger still the legend that holy water, the sight of the crucifix, or a silver bullet will kill such a demon. And yet I knew such superstitions were still current in south Europe.

Suddenly my pipe slipped from my teeth, and I sat bolt upright. The words of the garage man in Darset suddenly flashed back to me. He had spoken of a

wolf or wild dog that had entered the town and made off with a child on two separate occasions.

I tried vainly to ward off the absurd question that was stealing into my brain. Might not this big gray brute be a were-wolf? I forced a laugh. But the thought persisted, and more details arose to defeat my better judgment.

Was it not true that wolves had been extinct in England since the Fifteenth Century? Yes, of course; but the beast might have been a wild dog. But if it were a wild dog, would there not be some record of its once being tame? I frowned. Not necessarily. The animal might have come from a distance, left there by its owner when he had vacated. But still a wild dog would make for the poultry coops. No matter how long it had been wild, human flesh would be repugnant to it, would it not? I stared into the bowl of my pipe. To this question I could offer no answer at all.

A shelf of books on the other side of the room caught my eyes, and thinking perhaps to steer my mind into more pleasant channels I crossed over and let my gaze pass along the titles. I saw with astonishment that all of the two dozen volumes dealt with lycanthropy, sorcery, black art, and the occult. Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, strange names of long-dead authors, rare works whose publication had been banned by God-fearing people lay there on the shelf before me. There was LeLoyer's *Book of Spectres*, the sixth edition of DePræstigies *Daemonum et Incantationibus*, printed at Basle, and that hellish writing of Milo Calument, *I Am a Werewolf*, all copies of which I remembered were supposed to have been cast in Hoxton marsh.

IT WAS odd that Trevellan had not mentioned these books to me when he knew nothing could have delighted me

more. And it was odd, I suddenly thought, that Trevellan should be reading them himself. One would find nothing in the line of pistols in these pages.

But when I looked at one of the volumes I found the reason. They were not Trevellan's property. They belonged to Ludwig Blueker, the former resident of the house, as attested by the name scrawled on the flyleaf. Yet the books had not passed Trevellan's notice. Throughout the pages I found queer notations in his writing. There was no mistaking his peculiar scrawl.

One particular group of sentences caught my eye. It read:

"July 31. I followed all the rituals tonight and found that I have the power. I can hardly realize it, but it's true. Something seemed to draw me toward the village, but I dared not venture from the grounds. One must grow accustomed to such a terrific change."

Far back in my brain a lurking suspicion was beginning to grow, and I thumbed through the pages for more notations. But beyond a few meaningless jumbles of words, the rest was in Latin, which I did not understand.

Puzzled, I made my way up the stairs to my bedroom, undressed and went to bed.

Sleep has always come readily in my life, yet now with the rain surging at the windows, and the lightning flares drawing drunken shadows along the wall, I lay awake, listening to the slow ticking of the hall clock.

Midnight came with the slow striking of the clock chimes. And then I heard the door of Trevellan's bedroom creak open and footsteps pass softly down the hall. I sat up. I slipped to the door, opened it a crevice and peered out.

A dim nightlight burned at the far end of the hall. In its feeble glow I saw Trevellan, fully dressed, moving toward the staircase. But his actions were not those of

a man in his own home. He was skulking forward, stopping every few steps to listen carefully. As he reached the first stair I caught a glimpse of his face.

A wild, insane look contorted his features. The eyes bulged in their sockets; the mouth sagged downward in an empty grin. For an instant he stared unseeingly toward my door; then he began to descend.

For a moment I knelt there, staring into empty darkness, my mind whirling madly. Had the man been sleep walking? But there was nothing of the somnambulist in Trevellan's actions. Where then was he going, stealing out of his house like a hunted criminal?

On impulse I darted down the stairs, ripped open the door. A sheet of rain slapped my face. The grounds loomed dark before me. Then a fork of lightning streaked down from the heavens, and I saw it. Bounding along the path, heading toward the road was a great gray dog-shaped wolf! It turned in that instant of electrical flash, and the sight of those fiendish, fiery eyes was something I would never forget.

Then darkness returned, and for many moments I stood there, motionless. Chilled, I slowly returned to my room, sank into a chair by the window and watched the rain trickle down the glass. Questions unanswerable pounded at my brain.

Hours dragged by, and gradually I lapsed into a fitful slumber.

When I awoke the gray dawn was stealing into my room. The wind had gone, and outside the water puddles lay motionless, like strips of iron under the leaden sky. All was strangely still. Through the open casement came the smell of wet earth and moldering leaves.

I listened. From far off in the direction of the village came a long mournful howl. Again it sounded, louder, more distinct. Years before I had heard such a cry when I had ridden through Royal-

woods in pursuit of the fox. But it was not the baying of hounds I heard now. It was the cry of a wolf, and it was approaching the manor at lightning speed.

Fists clenched, I waited. And then a moment later it bounded into sight directly beneath my window. A feeling of loathing swept over me as my gaze fell on that gray shaggy body. The wolf looked around with a snarl, then moved out of my sight toward the other side of the house.

An interval of silence, and then I heard the door unlatch softly. Footsteps sounded on the carpeted stairs. I strode across the room, opened the door.

Hugh Trevellan was entering the hall. No longer was he skulking as though afraid of being seen. He was erect now, and he turned and cast a last look over his shoulder before entering his room.

Suddenly a giddy sensation rose within me. A scream gurgled unsounded to my lips. I had seen the mouth, the lips of Trevellan in that instant before he entered his room, and God help me, they were slobbered with thick red blood!

THOSE intervening hours until I stumbled down to breakfast were a living hell. When I sat down at the table my hands were trembling perceptibly.

"Good morning, McKay," Trevellan said. "Hope you had a good night's sleep in spite of the storm."

The silky satisfaction of the man sent a wave of nausea through me. But he did not seem to notice the fact that I made no reply. Keeping up a steady conversation, he laughed and joked, and I could not help thinking his actions were those of a man living the after effect of a powerful drug.

I studied him closely as he sipped his tea. His cheeks glowed with a brightness of almost super-health. And yet he seemed to have changed. Not greatly. The features were the same and the pale, blue eyes still gave him that look of doll-like fragility.

But about his head there were certain alterations that destroyed the classic moulding I had always admired. The ears were more prominent, longer and pointed in shape. The nose, I'm sure, was larger, with dilated nostrils.

"Trevellan," I said when breakfast was over, "who was Ludwig Blueker?"

He frowned. "The former owner of the manor," he replied. "Shall we go for a walk down the road a bit?"

"I know he was the former owner," I said as we went out the door, "but was he a farmer or an undertaker?"

"Both, I believe," Trevellan answered. "He eked out a mean existence from the soil, and he made a few pounds now and then by doing the occasional funeral work for the people of Darset."

It was plain that Trevellan did not care to discuss the matter with me further.

"I was looking at some of his books last night," I said, "and what a collection! Blueker must have been a superstitious fool!"

Trevellan turned on me almost with a snarl.

"He was a great man," he cried. "Those villagers laughed at him because he preferred to stay in solitude and study things which they could not understand. Blueker took years to gather those books."

We were nearing the end of the lane now, weaving our way in and out among the pools of water. Emerging on the post road, we drew up as two men on horseback clattered up beside us.

"Good mornin'," said the nearest, a tall fellow I remembered seeing in the village.

"But a wet, chilly one."

He nodded. "You haven't been seeing a wolf or wild dog about, have ye?" The voice was stern and filled with determination.

I could feel myself swaying slightly. "It didn't attack someone in Darset again?"

He shifted in his saddle. "It did. Broke

into a house last night. It's getting more courage every time. The mothers be watching their children like hawks today, and there's ten parties out hunting the brute."

"How many last night?" I waited his reply with an inner terror.

"Two. The Jepson twins. It's 'orrible, sir."

"If he comes around here," I said, "he'll leave his pelt."

The man smiled grimly. "There'll be a hundred pounds in it if ye do, sir. And the personal thanks of every mother in Darset."

He dug his knees into the horse's flank, and the two of them rode off at a fast trot.

Trevellan stared at me dumbly. The jovial mood had left him, and in its place was a look of unmistakable fear.

"I—I think we'd better be getting back," he said. "I've got some writing to do."

IN Blueker House once again Trevellan excused himself and went to his room. Left alone, I wandered into the library.

The moment I entered that chamber I felt the presence of some unseen power! Like a great lodestone I felt myself drawn toward Trevellan's pistol case. As I stood there, gazing through the glass doors, a single object centered into my vision: the silver box that contained Trevellan's latest ivory pistol.

Impulsively I opened the case and took out the weapon. The sight of that relic there affected me like old wine. I turned it over and over, but I offer no explanation for what I did a moment later. In slots on the velvet-lined box lay the weapon's charge, three silver bullets, and loading equipment. Hesitating a moment I picked up one of the silver balls, inserted it in the gun and poured in powder from the little horn. I rammed the charge home. Then with an effort I replaced the weapon in the magohany case.

Not until it was quite dark outside did Trevellan come downstairs.

"I'm sorry, McKay," he said, "but I've got to go to the village. You'll find some cold food in the kitchen. I may be back late, so don't wait up for me."

The door slammed, and his footsteps died away on the gravel.

And then a slow feeling of dread rose up within me. I fell to pacing the room madly. Outside a flotilla of velvet clouds was creeping across the sky, but off to the east a darker blot glowed with a soft radiance where the moon was trying to break through.

More hours snailed past; the ticking of the pendulum cloud pounded through the rooms like the blows of a mallet. Stranger than before came that strange psychic urge to open again Trevellan's gun case and take into my hands that ivory pistol.

Then suddenly there floated to my ears a far-off ringing sound. I listened. It came from the direction of the village, swept forward by a wind, a deep bong, bong that penetrated every corner of the manor like a tocsin. The blood rushed to my head. It was a tocsin! They were ringing the steeple bell in Darset, ringing it to awaken the village. The horror had begun!

And as I listened, another sound rose over the bell—the long wailing cry of a wolf.

I stood by the big bay window, staring out into the grounds. The moon rode in and out through thick clouds. Giant disproportionate shadows staggered across the lawn.

Abruptly the clouds parted, and I saw the beast in the full light of the moon. It was the wolf, and its mouth was smeared crimson.

A scream rose to my lips. I felt myself turn like a puppet on a wire. My gaze cen-

tered on the weapon case, and its magnetic lure increased a hundredfold. An inner power, a psychic will drew me toward it.

My hand moved forward. I opened the glass door.

"Trevellan!" I cried. "Trevellan! Go back!"

The wolf stopped short and peered upward. Like lightning my hand leaped to the case. My fingers closed over the ivory pistol, snatched it from its velvet mounting.

My thumb reached for the death's-head hammer, pulled it to full cock. My forefinger tightened on the trigger.

"Trevellan!" I cried. "Good God, I can't help myself!"

There was a crashing report. Glass shattered and fell to the floor. From out on the lawn below me came a hoarse cry of pain.

Then I was released. Turning, I flung the pistol to a far corner, raced out into the grounds. I found him there, sprawled on the grass, his shirt marked with a growing circle of red. He rose up as I lifted his head in my arms.

"Thanks, McKay," he said, his voice a whisper. "It was—it was the only way."

He fell back with a sigh, and I was alone with the corpse of Hugh Trevellan.

ON OCTOBER second, the evening edition of the *London Chronicle* published the following item:

"Reports of an unfortunate tragedy in north Arronshire, near the village of Darset, were made known today by police of the district. The body of Mr. Hugh Trevellan, noted antiquarian and authority on ancient firearms, was found in his summer home by a close friend, Mr. Martin McKay of Russel Square, Bloomsbury, who had come from London to visit him. After examining the body, the district doctor expressed the opinion that death had come accidentally when a weapon Mr. Trevellan was cleaning was discharged. The bullet, curiously, was found to be made of silver."