

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL



# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 24

CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER, 1934

Number 6

Cover Design . . . . .	M. Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "A Witch Shall Be Born"</i>		
A Witch Shall Be Born . . . . .	Robert E. Howard	658
<i>A tale of old—a vivid weird novelette of uncanny power</i>		
The Vengeance of Ti Fong . . . . .	Bassett Morgan	687
<i>A tale of the weird genius of a Chinese scientist who had mastered too many of Nature's laws</i>		
Black God's Shadow . . . . .	C. L. Moore	701
<i>Another fascinating story about Jivel of Joiry, who went down into darkness to release a soul from torment</i>		
The Graveyard Duchess . . . . .	John Flanders	719
<i>The story of a ghastly horror that stalked through a cemetery at night</i>		
Solitude . . . . .	Roderic Papineau	725
<i>Verse</i>		
Xeethra . . . . .	Clark Ashton Smith	726
<i>An exquisite tale of a goatberd who gained and lost a kingdom</i>		
The Trail of the Cloven Hoof (part 6) . . . . .	Arlton Eadie	739
<i>An astounding weird mystery novel by a British master of thrilling fiction</i>		
Fog . . . . .	Mary C. Shaw	759
<i>Verse</i>		
The Werewolf's Howl . . . . .	Brooke Byrne	760
<i>A short story of the eldritch doom that awaited the baron when his time came to die</i>		
A Matter of Faith . . . . .	August W. Derleth and Mark Schorer	765
<i>An African story of naive magic and the ghastly Blue Death</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
Pale Pink Porcelain . . . . .	Frank Owen	771
<i>An eerie Chinese tale by a favorite WEIRD TALES master of fantastic fiction</i>		
The Eyrie . . . . .		776
<i>An informal chat with the readers</i>		

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3.00 a year in the United States, \$4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 148 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1934, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

REGISTERED IN GREAT BRITAIN

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Werewolf's Howl

By BROOKE BYRNE

*'A short story of the weird doom that awaited the baron when his time should come to die*

THE doctor walked briskly through the chill night, his cloak wrapped closely about him. The white light of a full moon showed him his way clearly, for all that on either side the forest was black with shadow, and full of vague cracklings and reports like pistol shots as the frost gripped the pine branches. His way ran through the forest of Martheim, up the steep slope that led to Schloss Martheim, his goal. Within that gloomy pile the old Baron Martheim was dying.

The thought of the great, shadowy room where, in a canopied carven bed, the old man waited for death, made the doctor quicken his pace. Ever since the young doctor had come to the little village that snuggled close to the river below the bluff where Schloss Martheim clung perilously, he had played chess once a week with the frail master of the castle, and a genuine friendship had sprung up between the two. He felt a poignant regret that the delicate ivory chessmen would never reappear from their inlaid box, to be set up carefully by the baron's white, fastidious fingers. More deeply he regretted the cutting off of their conversations over vintage wine, when the game was played out and the fire had lapsed to a bed of ruddy coals. Whatever village gossip said of the baron's early escapades, the doctor had found him, in his old age, a pleasant companion, full of a wise, calm knowledge of men and things. The reserve he maintained concerning his past erected no barrier in

their friendship; his occasional fits of abstracted melancholy seldom marred their quiet evenings.

Musing thus upon the end of good things in a bitter world, the doctor came out of the forest and climbed a long flight of steps cut into solid rock. At the top he paused. He was on the terrace of Schloss Martheim; below him the river glittered in the moonlight, and a light or two showed the outskirts of the village. But all about him, barring all the approaches to the castle save the side which looked over the cliff, was the impenetrable black forest, seeming to crowd in upon the *schloss* eagerly, as if sensing an ultimate victory.

The doctor turned and struck the brazen bell that hung beside the oaken door. Before the clamorous echoes had died away, the lone servitor who tended the baron had opened the door to him. In one trembling hand he bore a lighted taper. His face, in the fitful gleam, was twisted with grief.

"Well, Hans? How is he?" questioned the doctor as he stripped off his cloak and gloves.

"He is very low, doctor. All day he has asked for you. He seems afraid. Come quickly; he does not like to be alone."

THEY hastened to the upper chamber where, in the light of a single candle and a leaping fire, the last Baron Martheim awaited death. The doctor, advancing swiftly to the bedside, read in

the transparent waxen face the imminence of dissolution; yet, when his practised fingers touched the blue-veined, fragile wrist, they felt a pulse beating spasmodically, almost tumultuously. As he bent to listen to the weary heart, the old man opened his eyes suddenly.

"Ah, God, is it time already? Have they come? No, not yet! Tell me they have not come!" Unreasoning terror burned in the shadowed, sunken eyes. The voice was a trembling wail.

"It is I, Doctor Gradnov," the doctor hastened to assure him. "No one has come. You must be quiet."

A long sigh lifted the breast beneath the cover. Slowly reason returned to the staring eyes. The baron spoke again.

"Ah, it is good you have come. I must share my secret now. I must tell you . . . you, my only friend." Something like peace came into the wasted features.

"You must not try to talk, Baron," the doctor soothed him. "I will give you a sedative."

He turned to his bag. Hans yet lingered in the background, murmuring prayers under his breath. The baron spoke clearly. "No, I must talk. It is better than thinking . . . waiting. . . . Listen to me, rather, and learn perhaps. I am very tired," he ended pathetically.

The doctor poured out a goblet of brandy from the decanter near by. He held the glass to the dying man's lips; after a few sips a faint tinge of color showed along the cheek-bones. When he spoke again a new strength and purpose were in his shrill voice.

"That is better. You will hear me, then. These forty years I have been haunted, and now the end is drawing near. At last I shall know . . . I shall be rid of dread. . . . Listen. I shall tell you a strange thing, and you will believe."

His thin hands closed over an ebony crucifix which lay on the covers. With an effort he took a deep breath and began.

"When I was young, I was sent to the university, as you were. Like you I was proud of my learning—I was very young. I spent much time boasting in taverns, and I liked the girls. My first year I fell in love with a little girl who waited on us in a café. In this I stupidly crossed another student, an older man whom I disliked because of his loud scorn of my fine theories. I gloated over him one night because Hilda preferred me. He stalked away, but not before I had seen his eyes. . . . He hated me. From that time on we never spoke, but whenever I was near him, I felt his eyes on me. Thus passed two years, and then the third came, and still Ivan remembered. It was in his eyes always."

The doctor administered more brandy. He saw in the sunken sockets eyes that burned with terror and delirium, and his own skin tingled inexplicably.

Revived by the strong liquor, the old man went on, his words coming out in jerks, as though the effort were almost too much. Yet some obscure force drove him on, hurrying his tale as if he were in fear of interruption.

"One night, in deep winter, I lingered in a wine-shop after my companions were gone. It was such a night as this outside, and I hesitated over my last drink. The innkeeper eyed me, for I was alone, and he wished to shut up his shop and go to bed. But as I was about to rise, the door was flung open and a student came in. The light fell across his features; I recognized Ivan.

"A flicker of hatred ran across his face when he saw me; yet he came to my table and asked permission to sit with me civilly enough. We ordered two drinks, and

until the keeper had withdrawn yawning, we said nothing. But then Ivan leaned across the table and said softly, 'Well met, little Konrad! This is well met.'

"Something in his voice sent a chill through me, but I answered him curtly.

" 'What do you mean?' I asked.

" 'For a long time I have wished to ask you something,' he returned, with a little chuckle. 'May I speak with you, little Konrad?'

" 'What is it?'

" 'Do you still deny the existence of the soul?' he demanded earnestly.

" 'Puzzled, I stared at him. 'Yes, of course,' I replied. 'I have not returned to superstition.'

" 'Ah, I was young then, and the fine theories were new. I was very proud. . . .

" 'Ivan nodded at me. 'Then you do not think that one can—sell one's soul?' he asked, more softly still.

" 'What nonsense is this?' I asked in return.

" 'Konrad, I have sold my soul,' he whispered. 'And in return I have learned many things. How you would gasp if you knew! I am wiser than any of you in the classes, for I have learned the secrets of the old ones, the dark secrets. I could show you. . . . Konrad, would you like to see ghosts?'

" 'You are mad,' I said, only half convinced that I spoke the truth. There was something in his eyes that held me listening.

" 'No, learned little Konrad! I tell you it is true, that which I speak. Dare you come with me, and prove it? I will show you the undead, Konrad! I will show you werewolves! Do you dare?' He leaned forward, and his breath was hot on my face.

" 'I tried to laugh, and could only shudder. He saw it, and laughed mockingly.

" 'Konrad is afraid,' he taunted. 'Kon-

rad knows that I speak truth, and he is afraid. Poor little Konrad!'

" 'He laughed in my face, but his eyes did not laugh. They held me, fascinated.

" 'No! I am not afraid,' I told him harshly.

" 'Then come with me, now, and laugh at me when you are proved right,' he invited, rising.

" 'I felt my whole being revolt with nameless dread, but I rose with him. As if he held me chained, I followed him into the street. The inn door shut behind us sharply.'

ONCE again the narrative broke off, and the room was silent save for the old man's gasping breath. The doctor moistened the dry lips with brandy again. Terror was a living flame in the eyes now, the only living thing in the wasted body, save the lips, which scarcely moved to allow the husky voice to go on. The chill presence of death, and something more horrible still, filled the room with vague, fantastic shapes of dream.

" 'For a long time we walked, so swiftly that I hardly managed to keep pace with Ivan. We followed an icy-rutted track into the forest that hedged the town, far into the dark deeps of it, where I had never penetrated before. Overhead the stars were bright as sparks, and the moonlight was white. Sometimes Ivan threw back his head and laughed up at the stars, silently, but he did not speak. As I hastened by his side and thought of flight, I sensed the presence of beasts near us. I heard little rustles in the brush, and a snapping of twigs, and even a muffled whine. A new fear seized me: the wolves were abroad in packs because of the deep cold. I dared not turn back. We went on, interminably.

" 'At last we reached a clearing, and I

saw in the moonlight the dark pile of such a castle as this. But it was deserted, as this will be; it was falling into ruin. Against the bare stone walls the icy vines clattered sharply, like clicking bones. I heard Ivan curse as his skin was torn on the cold metal of the lock. Then the door opened, and we were inside, in the musty dark.

"Ivan led me, groping and stumbling, down many corridors to a room which had one casement, a glimmering dimness across the room. I stood with my back to the door, trying to conquer the fear that tore at my vitals. I was glad when Ivan managed to light a candle and set it in a sconce on the wall. By its light I made out the furnishings—a great chest, a rough table, and over all the dead dust of years.

"Ivan did not pause. From the chest he took out a brazier, a bronze bowl, and some little boxes and vials. Also he laid on the table a great old pistol that gleamed in the light. Then from a pocket he drew a folded parchment. This also he laid upon the table before he turned to me.

"'So, now we are ready,' he smiled evilly. 'No, not quite; we have forgotten.' He picked up the pistol and put it in my hand. 'Listen, now,' he said. 'You know the legend of the werewolf. A human may take shape as a wolf during life, but at his death he becomes one of the undead. He may be slain for ever only by a silver bullet blessed and marked with a cross. This you know?'

"I nodded, dumbly.

"'Here!' he said, and I stretched out my hand. He dropped a bullet into it. It was of silver, and graven into it was a cross.

"'You do not believe in souls,' he mocked. 'Yet it will kill a human as quickly as any other bullet. Load the

pistol, little Konrad, and we shall begin. I would not take advantage of you. Yet remember—if you fire at a werewolf with such a bullet, and miss, your soul is forfeit to the undead! So it is written.' Abruptly he turned to the table and bent to his task.

"I do not remember all that he did; yet he mixed some powders and liquids from his store, and set the bowl of them over the brazier. The flame licked around the metal bluely; smoke began to rise thinly. As it thickened, Ivan took up the parchment and began to chant. A scent as of burning flesh filled the room. I could not move or speak; I was as if in the clutch of a hideous nightmare. The chant deepened and swelled; it was like some diabolic distortion of the Mass. And now a sinister accompaniment began to sound above and around the shuddering chant; I recognized it as the howl of a hungry wolf outside.

"With a swift movement Ivan flung open the casement; the candle guttered out in the draft. The room was full of stinging smoke. Ivan's chant ended in a deep quavering howl. The answer swelled from all the forest outside. For an interminable second I stood in the smoky dark, my nostrils choked with the vile odor, my eyes blinded, my limbs weak as water. And then I sensed that evil indescribable had entered the room, unearthly evil, perilous and near.

"I strove to pierce the gloom. Through the smoke I caught the gleam of green, baleful eyes. They came toward me slowly, crouching near the floor. I heard a snarl of hatred through the wild chorus outside. I knew, then. I was alone with a beast. . . .

"He sprang as I fired, and I felt his fangs in my flesh as the pistol kicked out of my hand in the recoil. . . . I do not remember anything else."

THE old man's forehead was cold and wet with the death-sweat, but his desperate, inexorable voice went on, faltering now and weak, yet relentlessly driving to an end.

"I came to myself in the dawn, wandering the streets with a shirt caked with blood from a wound in my chest. I crept to my lodgings, packed my bags, and fled the town by the first coach. I came here, and besought my mother for money. Though her heart broke at the sight of me, and my decision never to return to school, she gave me all she had, and promised to send enough for me to live on. Thus I wandered across the earth for years, seeking the tropics and the sea. . . . In time my father died. I came home, but too late to find my mother waiting. They were both in the old chapel, together and asleep.

"I wandered again, seeking to forget. Useless; never have I told any man the terror that has dogged my footsteps all these years, that has lain down with me and risen with me, that even in sleep has returned to gibber at me through the nights. God, how long has been my penance! And now it comes to an end. . . . an end! Ah, God, be merciful!"

He ended on a choked sob of fear. The doctor sought uselessly for words that might bring a decent peace to this fantastic deathbed.

"Here you are safe," he urged. "None can harm you. There are no werewolves, Baron. You are safe."

"Safe? God, that I might believe it!

But I can not know . . . I can not tell. Listen!" he cried out.

Rigid with stark terror, his hands clutching at the doctor's arm, he pulled himself half erect. A bloody foam stained his pallid lips. They listened. Even Hans, shivering and crouching by the door, ceased his muttered prayers. There was no sound anywhere, within or without.

"There is nothing. Lie quiet," the doctor begged. The old man clung to him with maniacal strength.

"You do not understand!" he shrieked. "They will come. . . . They are coming . . . black shapes in the moonlight, with lolling tongues . . . I see them. . . . I did not kill that night . . . I fired . . . Ivan lives! He has come for my soul. . . . Pray for me, my friend . . . pray——"

A paroxysm shook the frail body in the doctor's arms. The old man's face twisted into a staring mask of horror, and his hands clawed at the coverings, as though he would fight off some unseen shape. His breath ended in a rattle. It was over.

The doctor lowered the baron's body back to the bed. For a full minute there was utter stillness in the room, as though the watchers had been stricken breathless. And then, from the forest outside, a long bitter howl lifted and swelled, the howl of a hungry wolf, sobbing with inhuman despair. Three times it shivered to the startled stars, filling the night with echoes of pulsing horror. Within the *schloss*, after the last echo had died for ever, there was only the sound of old Hans, sobbing, and the voice of the doctor muttering in unaccustomed prayer.

