

A pretty young heiress, a charmingly impudent ghost and a handsome young Inspector from Scotland Yard form an unlikely alliance to unmask a thief and resolve a 200-year-old mystery surrounding a lost collection of fabulous Tudor Jewelry.

The Jewels of Trevaline

By Beverley Fowler

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BEVERLEY FOWLER

The Jewels *of* Treyvaline



“Brandon Trevaline at your service.” He tossed her a sly wink. “Brandy to my friends.”

Brett was not amused. “Is this some sort of sick joke?” she demanded. She snatched her hand away and leapt to her feet, backing away from him. “Did Andrew put you up to this? How stupid do you think I am? I admit, you’re the spitting image of him, but if you’re Brandon Trevaline, news flash! You’ve been dead for more than two hundred years!”

He tossed her an engaging grin. “Since I don’t know who Andrew is, I plead innocent of the charge. And has it really been only two hundred years?” He gave a short, mirthless chuckle. “Seems like more. Time may fly, as they say, when you’re having fun, but believe me, it drags on leaden feet when you’re dead. Avoid that fate as long as possible, my dear. Take it from me.”

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Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-586-1

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-64719-587-8

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Fowler, Beverley
The Jewels of Trevaline by Beverley Fowler
Library of Congress Control Number: 2021908505

Printed on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.
2021

Prologue

Trevaline Castle Ruins, May 1820

It was a miserable morning. The clouds hung low over the headland and a damp silky mist rose from the sea to shroud the old ruins in an eerie white. The dark coats of six of the seven men gathered there stood sharply out against the opaque sky. Their faces were grim, their eyes hard.

“Trevaline’s in the devil’s own temper,” one of them muttered sotto-voice to his companion. He jerked his chin at the young man lounging against the ruined wall, slightly apart from the rest. “Godsend he doesn’t kill the old fool.”

The young man referred to, was watching the proceedings with an extremely bored expression on his sun-bronzed, handsome face. It was, however, contradicted by the wicked glitter in his dark eyes. Beneath that fashionable pose of ennui, he seemed to be grimly amused by the whole thing.

Unlike the others present, a murder of crows in their funereal black, he wore an emerald green riding coat with huge silver buttons. Those buttons glowed like beacons in the silky mist, drawing the eye. A blatant slight to his opponent’s skill. Buff riding

breeches encased his muscular thighs and his boots gleamed in the pale light. His left hand flicked a riding crop against the mossy stones of the wall behind him. Upon one slim finger glowed a ruby ring, blood red against his skin. The slight breeze ruffled his dusky locks until he looked as wild and dangerous as a young, unmannered hound.

He straightened as two men approached him, took the silver-mounted pistol they handed him and held it in a deceptively casual grip. The purpose of the gathering became clear as he moved to stand opposite a grim, grey-haired gentleman gripping a similar pistol in his trembling hand.

“Well squire?” mocked the young man as the witnesses stepped aside and the surgeon turned his back. “You have your way. Here I am before you, ready and waiting.”

The old man ground his teeth. The others could hear it plainly in the silence that followed. “If you had any honor in you, Trevaline,” he growled after a tense moment, “you would—”

He broke off with a curse. His grip tightened on the pistol. The silver mountings flashed as the sun peeked through the clouds for one brief instant. “I am done exchanging words with you.” He flicked a curt

glance at one of the four Seconds bearing witness to the duel. "Let's get this over with, Wilton."

The tall, thin, pinch-faced man stepped forward and raised a white handkerchief high in the air. Its lacy edges ruffled in the constant wind.

Two wicked pistols lifted. Silver mountings flashed again.

For one long breathless moment, they stood poised. Frozen figures stark against the backdrop of a leaden sky and restless sea.

The handkerchief fluttered to the damp earth. Two shots rang out, one after the other.

The squire dropped his pistol. Sagged slowly to his knees. The wound, high on his left shoulder, spread a red stain across his black coat.

Trevaline stood tall, unharmed. There was a wry expression on his handsome face as his arm dropped to his side. "You have your satisfaction, old man. It is over. Despite the blood, you will find he is not badly wounded," he continued, turning to the surgeon. "I don't believe I've hit anything important."

His voice flowed through the shocked silence like rich dark honey. "And Squire, I will repeat what I have already told you. I was never your wife's lover. The person who says so is a damn liar and I have proven it on the field of honor."

The Squire gave a choked cry of rage, struggling to his feet despite the efforts of his friends and the surgeon to prevent him. Color drained out of the old man's face and he clutched at Wilton's shoulder for support. "Trevaline!" he roared.

But Trevaline had turned on his heel and was walking calmly towards his own waiting friends, paying the old man no more heed.

"Trevaline!" called the Squire again. "You go too far! You dishonor her twice! First in my own house! Then you have the damn cheek to call her a liar! She, at least, had the grace to admit her fault!"

The young man waved a languid, dismissive hand and continued his conversation with his friends.

With a choked cry of pure rage, the Squire's right hand dived into the pocket of his coat and brought forth a second pistol. Before anyone could stop him, he had raised it, aimed it and fired.

The bullet flew true.

Before the horrified eyes of the assembled gentlemen, Trevaline staggered. Blood flowed like spilled wine over the back of his emerald coat, stark and ugly in the growing morning light. His knees buckled.

He smiled faintly up at his Seconds, who caught him as he fell. "Tis al...alright," he gasped. Blood

bubbled on his lips. "Twas an...accident!" His dark eyes burned feverishly as he clutched his friend's arm. "Tell them...tell them it was fair. I...I goaded him too far."

The man cradling him in his arms, regardless of the blood that stained his own fine coat, snorted. "In the back? Never mind Brandy, you'll be right as a trivet, but the old man must pay. This was attempted murder, plain and simple."

A quiver of amusement touched Trevaline's bloody lips. "So vengeful, Sherry?" he whispered hoarsely. "The...world won't fret at my...passing—" He broke off on a weak cough. A spasm of pain contorted his face for an instant, then was gone.

"Save the Squire," he said after a moment. His friend had to bend close to hear him. His voice was a bare breath of sound. "For Helen's sake..."

Viscount Sheringham swore explosively. "The man's a mur—"

"Promise me, Sherry." The burning eyes turned to the other man crowding close. "Jasper. Promise..."

Sir Jasper Wildingham took the dying man's hand. "We swear it, Brandy!" he said soberly, cutting short the Viscount's muttered protest with a sharp glance. "How could we not? Now for God's sake, save your strength!" He turned and shouted curtly for the

surgeon. "Leave him be! My man needs your attention now!"

A ghost of a grin curved those bloody lips as Trevaline saw the surgeon scurrying towards him. "You are too late," he whispered. "I'm spared your butchery at least. Only..."

He broke off as another bout of coughing shook him. His friends held him fiercely, as if by their very grip they could keep his soul in his body. The spasm passed and Brandon Trevaline continued. "Only regret...I have no heir. None but Martin Collins...Dam' Cit!"

In spite of himself, Sir Jasper smiled. "Incorrigible to the end." But his smile faded quickly. His eyes were suspiciously bright. "You *will* be missed, Brandy."

Brandon forced a smile to his bloody lips. "Yes. What'll...what'll you find...to talk...about?" Then the brilliant dark eyes began to fade. His long, lean body relaxed and Captain Brandon Alexander Trevaline died in their arms with a jest on his lips.

A broken cry escaped young Sheringham. He buried his face in the dead man's silky dark hair.

Sir Jasper looked across at the Squire, his eyes grim and angry.

“Trevaline is dead,” he said. “You may thank your lucky stars for he forgave you at the end. For the sake of your wife. I do not know why she told you what she did, but they were never lovers. I can attest to that.” He smiled with grim irony. “Unequivocally.”

For a moment, the Squire stared at him, speechless. “It was you!” he gasped in sudden understanding.

Sir Jasper’s smile grew mocking. “And you have murdered an innocent man,” he answered coldly.

The Squire’s face paled even further. He cursed and spluttered incoherently, struggling against his friends’ calming hands. “Leave me be!” he bellowed, pushing the surgeon away. “You bear your own guilt in this Wildingham! Helen too, for lying to me! I had every reason to believe—”

Sir Jasper’s smile faded. “Spare us your excuses,” he retorted scornfully. “By rights, you should be in custody, headed for Tyburn Tree. But Trevaline forgave you with his dying breath. May God do the same.”

Then together, refusing all offers of assistance, he and Sheringham bore their fallen comrade’s body from the bloodstained field.

Chapter 1

Trevaline Manor, present day

Brett Saunders stared in amazement as the blue convertible swept up the graveled drive and stopped before the gleaming marble steps of an imposing manor house.

“It’s stunning!” she cried, turning to the driver beside her.

He grinned, fully appreciative of the green hazel of her eyes and the rosy curve of her lips. “Glad you like it,” he replied, flicking off the ignition with a fluid twist of his wrist. “But it’s not half as stunning as you.”

A faint blush stained her cheeks as she smiled back. “Don’t be silly!” she countered with a breathless laugh. “I disagree entirely!”

She turned to look at the girl in the back seat. There was a distinct family resemblance between that girl and the young man behind the wheel, despite the fact that the girl was dark, and he was blonde.

“Why didn’t you warn me about your brother, Suzette?” Brett quipped.

Suzette chuckled. “I thought you’d have figured that out by now,” she tossed back. “Just ignore him. He’s a hound. Now, if it’s all the same to you, can we

please get out? I desperately need to stretch my legs. Trust Andy to buy a car with a loathsomely small back seat."

"It does have a very big engine," Andrew offered, his blue eyes full of laughter. He slid from the car and pushed the seat forward to help his sister out, before straightening and stretching his long length like a cat. "It is rather a beast of a drive," he added apologetically to Brett. "I suppose we could have stopped more often."

"No worries." Brett smiled as she, too, slid out of the low-slung car. "The end was worth it." She stood a moment, looking up at the sparkling white front of the house. "You must be very proud of your home," she said, a wistful note in her voice. "I'll bet there's an awful lot of history behind those old walls. When was she built?"

"In the reign of Charles II," Andrew replied, taking her elbow and escorting her up the grand front steps. Suzette followed at their heels. "After Cromwell and his roundheads tore the original castle down."

"It's rather a hodge-podge really," Suzette chipped in. "The original family, the Trevalines, kept adding onto it with each successive generation, so that it was terribly mixed up when we Collinses finally got our hands on it."

"I think it's beautiful!" Brett told her.

Andrew pulled open the gleaming front door and bowed with a flourish. "Welcome to Trevaline Manor, Mademoiselle Saunders. I sincerely hope you enjoy your stay here with us."

Brett made a mock curtsy. "I thank you, Monsieur Collins, for your hospitable welcome. And may I say that I am very much looking forward to it!"

"Come on!" Suzette cried, grasping Brett's arm and pulling her inside. "Mummy and Daddy are dying to meet you! They're probably out on the terrace." She cast a twinkling glance over her shoulder as she headed across the hall past a grand staircase, pulling Brett along in her wake. "Do be a dear, Andrew, and carry our luggage up. Brett's in the room next to mine."

Without waiting for a reply, she hustled Brett through an elegant sitting room and out onto a long, flagstone terrace overlooking a vast, undulating lawn. Broad, shallow steps led off on the left to a grand old English garden. On the right, a fair-sized pool sparkled brightly in the sun, edged by gleaming white tile.

"Mummy! Daddy!" Suzette called gaily. "We're finally here!"

Mr. and Mrs. Collins were seated at a large glass patio table set near the pool. It was clear they had just finished their luncheon, for the table bore the remains of a light repast.

At their impetuous entrance, Mr. Collins rose to his feet and came forward to meet them. He was tall, like his son, with twinkling blue eyes and iron gray hair. A matching mustache drooped over his upper lip but beneath it, his smile was warm and sincere. He gave Suzette a quick hug before turning to her guest.

“You must be Brett,” he said, taking her hand in a warm firm clasp. “We’ve heard a lot about you. Your father is in banking, isn’t he?”

“Yes,” Brett replied. “Saunders Imperial.”

“I believe I met him once at some banquet or other,” Mr. Collins said thoughtfully. “Quite a handsome chap if he’s the one I’m thinking of. He had a film starlet hanging on his arm at the time.”

Brett smiled wryly. “That sounds like him, all right.”

Mr. Collins gave her another warm smile. “Come and meet my wife.” He slipped his hand beneath her elbow and guided her over to the table where Suzette and her mother waited.

Mrs. Collins rose as they approached and Brett found herself enfolded in a soft, scented embrace, with a powdered cheek presented for a kiss. “I feel I know you already, Brett,” she cooed. “I have heard so much about you from Suzette...and even more from Andrew,” she added coyly.

“So I have told her,” Mr. Collins cut in, saving Brett from having to reply to this rather broad hint.

Mrs. Collins shot her husband a laughing glance, then turned back to the girls. “Have you eaten?”

“Yes, Mummy,” Suzette replied. “Andrew would have us push through, but we did stop for lunch at the quaintest little roadside place. It must still be the same as it was two hundred years ago. I swear they even had the same curtains at the window.”

“Perhaps not quite that bad,” Brett objected with a smile. “And the food was good.”

“I’ll give you that,” Suzette agreed. “Well now that you’ve met the parents, I’m sure you’d like to freshen up a bit. C’mon. I’ll show you to your room and we can change and go for a swim. You did bring your swimsuit, didn’t you?”

“I did,” Brett nodded. “How could I not? You only reminded me about a thousand times.”

Suzette grinned at her. “Well, we haven’t had the pool for long and I’m not bored with it yet. And it’s so much nicer when you have someone to swim with that isn’t trying to drown you all the time.”

“Suzette!” Mrs. Collins cried, aghast, but Mr. Collins gave a bark of laughter that followed the girls as they went back into the house.

They met Andrew on the stairs. “Hey, where’re you going? I was just coming out to join you!”

“I’m showing Brett to her room,” Suzette told him. “We’re going to change, then we’re going swimming.”

“Care to join us there?” Brett added, taking pity on his obvious chagrin.

“Love to!” A grin curved Andrew’s lips and his blue eyes twinkled at her. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“We’ll meet you in the pool, then,” Suzette told him, dragging Brett up the stairs behind her.

“Don’t take too long!” Andrew called after them.

Brett’s room was larger than most hotel suites she’d ever seen; filled with gleaming antiques in perfect condition. The gigantic four poster bed had hangings of rich ruby velvet, the coverlet was a pristine white satin. As Brett kicked off her heels and padded in her stocking feet to the adjacent bathroom, her feet sank into the luxurious carpet and she wiggled her toes in sheer bliss.

The bathroom, itself, was a bewitching mixture of old and new, from the huge porcelain claw-footed tub with its antique taps to the very latest in bidets. A harmonic blend of historic elegance and modern convenience.

Brett had just finished pulling on her sleek black one-piece when Suzette burst into the room. The other girl had changed into a white bikini and was obviously itching to plunge without delay into the cool waters of the pool. “C’mon slowpoke!” she cried. “Last one in’s a rotten egg! I can’t wait to soothe the windburn on my face! No fun riding in the back of a convertible on the motorway!”

Brett laughed and paused only to grab her white lace cover-up and a towel before following her friend back to the terrace.

Andrew was already in the pool, floating lazily on the sparkling surface. He swam to the side as the girls approached, his eyes warm and admiring. “The two bathing beauties finally appear,” he called. “I was beginning to think you’d dumped me.”

“Watch your step, buster, or we will,” Suzette shot back before diving into the water.

Brett dropped her cover-up and towel and quickly followed. She swam a length underwater before coming up, gasping for air. Seconds later, Andrew’s sleek head appeared beside her, a devilish grin upon his lips. She barely had a chance to grab another quick breath before he was ducking her beneath the surface. She emerged choking and laughing, trying unsuccessfully to repay

him for the trick. With a gleeful whoop, Suzette came to her aid.

Mr. and Mrs. Collins watched indulgently from lounging chairs as the younger set laughed and played in the sparkling water for most of the afternoon. Finally, Mrs. Collins invited them out for some lemonade, stating that they'd been in there long enough.

"Perhaps too long," Brett agreed wryly as Andrew pulled her out of the water. "I feel as wrinkled as a prune!"

"You look good as a prune," Andrew replied, retaining his hold on her hand as they walked over to the parents' loungers to receive their lemonade.

They lazed on the terrace after that, letting the sun, warmer than usual for that early in the year, dry them off and add to the already gold overtones of their skin. They talked of this and that and Brett found herself warming to this family who welcomed her so wholeheartedly.

"And what do you think of Trevaline Manor?" Mr. Collins asked after a while.

"It's magnificent—or at least what I've seen of it so far," Brett replied. "I'd love to hear more about it. Andrew told me it was built after Cromwell tore down the original castle."

“Quite correct,” Mr. Collins nodded. “Somehow, the Trevalines managed to regain their lands with the restoration of the monarchy, apparently through some unknown service to Charles II during his exile. After that, it passed from father to son in an unbroken line for centuries.”

“Wow,” Brett said. “So how did you come to own it?”

“Through a very lucky break for us Collinses,” Andrew answered, resting his arm casually along the back of her chair. “The Trevaline line finally died out in...1820 wasn’t it, Dad?”

“That’s right. Just after the end of the Napoleonic wars. The last Trevaline was a bit of a rogue and a wastrel by all accounts. Died in a duel without a direct heir, and a cousin, my several great grandfather, succeeded him. There’s been a Collins here ever since.”

Mr. Collins paused, and his smile grew wry. “It *was* rather a lucky break for our family, for chances were very good that had Brandon Trevaline not died when he did, there would not have been anything left to inherit. In a few short years, he managed to go through a vast fortune, and left behind little more than the estate and a mountain of debt. Even the fabled Trevaline

jewels were gone, and they'd been in that family, by all repute, since the time of Elizabeth the First."

"The jewels, you see," Andrew explained, "disappeared shortly after Brandon Trevaline's death and have never turned up. There's an old story told hereabouts that he hid them somewhere to keep his cousin, whom he detested by all accounts, from possessing the greatest of Trevaline's treasures. As Dad says, he was a bit of a rogue, the last Trevaline. His portrait's in the gallery. Would you care to see it?"

"I'd love to!" Brett replied.

Andrew rose and pulled her to her feet. "Come on then. We'll be right back," he called over his shoulder as he led Brett inside the house.

The picture gallery lay on the other side of the hall on the second floor, overlooking an echoing ballroom. There, nestled among other priceless works of art, hung the portraits of generations of Trevaline and Collins.

Andrew stopped at the first painting, that of a medieval knight in full armor. It was obviously very old, its colors dark and faded, the lines rough and angular.

"These first five," he said, "came from the original castle. It was torn apart in Cromwell's time as I told you, but somehow, the paintings, the plate, and the

famous Trevaline jewels were recovered.” He grinned infectiously and shrugged. “Don’t ask me how.”

He moved on down the long gallery, throwing out a comment here and there about the paintings they passed. Entertaining her with juicy stories from his long family history. Brett, who could only trace her own history back a couple generations, listened raptly, and with a slight tinge of envy.

Finally, Andrew stopped a short ways down from the end of the line where his own family’s portrait hung.

“Behold!” he said with a flourish, “the Black Sheep of Trevaline and the last of that ancient line. Captain Brandon Alexander. 1791 to 1820. By all accounts, he fought at Waterloo under Wellington’s command and came through without a scratch. Reputed to have had proverbial luck in everything. Cards, women, horses...you name it!”

“He died in a duel after having lost most of his fortune. I’d hardly call that lucky,” Brett pointed out absently. Her fascinated gaze was fixed on the portrait.

It depicted a tall, broad shouldered young man in a brilliant green riding coat with large silver buttons. He was lounging against a very untidy desk, caught in the act of slapping his crop against a glossy black boot in a show of impatience. A ruby signet ring gleamed on one

of his long, slender fingers. Apart from a diamond pin in his snowy cravat, it was the only jewelry he wore.

His features were classical, his cheekbones finely sculpted, his nose a testament to his aristocratic heritage. But it was the vitality painted into the crook of his mouth, glinting in his sultry gaze, in the bounce of his curly dark locks that made the portrait so striking.

Those dark eyes in particular, were incredibly lifelike. They sparkled with amusement, as if at some private jest. Here was a man who appeared to have enjoyed his brief life to the fullest, relishing it all and laughing at both victory and defeat.

The painting was slightly disturbing. The eyes were inexplicably drawn to it, yet it felt rude to study it, as if one were staring at a living person. Brett half expected him to step down from the canvass at any moment. That those deep brown eyes, glinting wickedly from beneath incredibly long, thick lashes, were laughing at her fascination with him.

“A real work of art, isn’t it?” Andrew remarked, running a finger along the gilded frame. “No, I guess he wasn’t that lucky after all—luckily enough for us.” He grinned. “As a matter of fact, there are some hints about the duel going sideways—some talk about foul play, but the official records are silent on that. In any event, no one was ever brought to account for it.”

“How sad,” Brett murmured. “What was the duel about?”

Andrew shrugged. “A woman. What else?” He chuckled. “But the story doesn’t quite stop there.” His voice dropped to an eerie whisper. “Tis said that his ghost still haunts the ruins of the old fortress where he died, crying for vengeance!”

Brett shivered, then forced a laugh as she saw the twinkle in Andrew’s eyes. “You’re teasing me!” she accused.

He spread his hands in a pleading gesture. “No. I swear!”

“Yeah, right,” Brett said with a dry smile as her hazel eyes returned to the portrait.

“The painting is supposed to have been finished the day he died,” Andrew remarked. “Irony, isn’t it? He never even got to see it.”

“So who was the woman?” Brett asked curiously.

“The Squire’s wife, no less. According to the tale—and I don’t know how much of it is true—the Squire’s wife, who was a lot younger than her husband, fell to the temptation of Brandon’s fatal charm.”

“No doubt,” Brett said dryly.

“Purportedly, though again the official records don’t confirm it, the Squire lost his head and fired when young Trevaline’s back was turned. It came out later

that one of Brandon's friends was the real culprit. Rumor apparently had it wrong."

"How sad!" Brett exclaimed. "What happened to the Squire?"

Andrew cocked a knowing eyebrow. "According to local legend, he died the same day, supposedly from wounds also sustained in the duel." He paused dramatically, eyes twinkling down at her. "And no one ever discovered who had started the tale that had caused the death of two innocent men—and I use the term loosely you understand."

"A pretty tale," Brett said dryly.

"Worked out well for the family," Andrew reminded her. "As father told you, he would probably have lost it all had he lived any longer. And even if he hadn't, we wouldn't be standing here now if he'd had a chance to marry and sire an heir."

He reached out and flicked a long finger at the ruby signet gleaming in the portrait. "As it was, that ring and a couple of diamond pins were all the jewels Martin Collins ever saw of the fabled family collection when he came into his inheritance. The rest of the Trevaline rubies and all the emeralds had disappeared."

"They must have been something special," Brett murmured.

“Aye, they were,” Andrew replied. “Worth a small fortune, even then. See that haughty lady there? That’s Brandon’s mother and she’s supposedly wearing the lot except for the ruby seal, of course. But it’s there in the painting on his father’s hand.”

Andrew pointed to the portrait next to Brandon’s, of a couple dressed in the fashion of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. The woman was covered in rubies and emeralds set in heavy gold chains. The man wore the same ring as depicted on Brandon Trevaline’s hand.

“And no one ever found them?” Brett asked, her eyes drawn back to that hooded laughing gaze.

“No,” Andrew replied, still studying the jewels in the other painting. “They never turned up. And it’s not for want of trying.” He gave a rather bitter laugh. “The scoundrel never sold them honestly, for there was no bill of sale ever found among his papers. He’s believed to have hidden them somewhere in the house or on the grounds, and every generation since has held at least one serious treasure hunt, believe you me. I’ve looked for them, myself, and so has Suzette.”

He, too, looked back at Brandon’s portrait, but his gaze was far less admiring than Brett’s. “If he hid them, he hid them well. After two hundred years, it remains an unsolved mystery. The old devil must be laughing in his grave.”

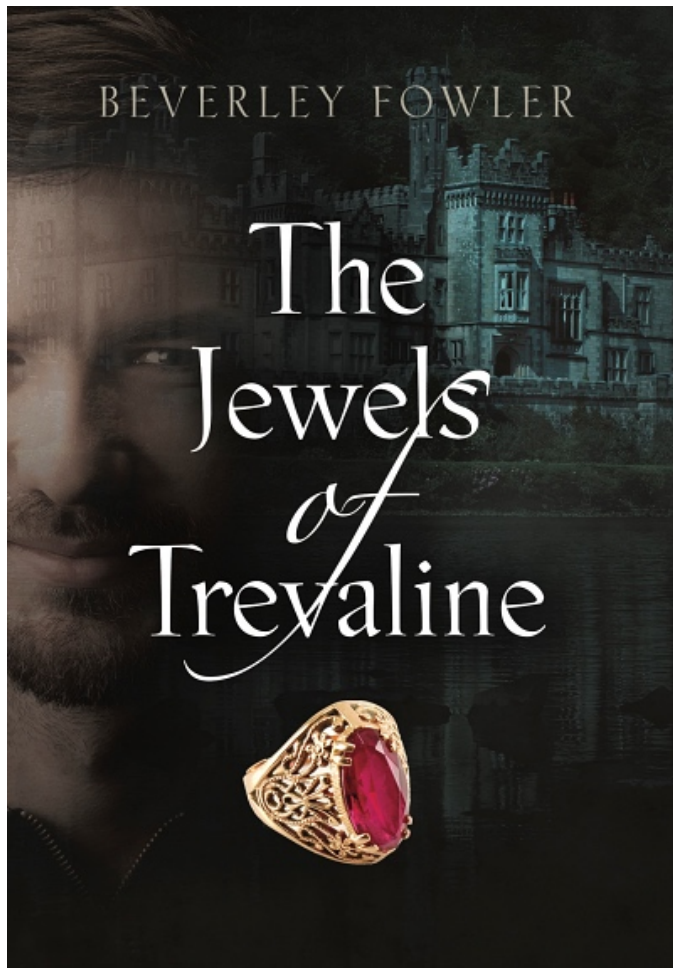
Brett shivered, looking up into those sparkling eyes. She could easily imagine it.

“Come on,” Andrew said, putting an arm around her lace-clad shoulders. “I didn’t mean to scare you. It’s just a story!”

“No, it’s alright. I’m not scared, really,” Brett assured him. “It’s just a bit cool in here, that’s all.”

Andrew chuckled. His arm tightened about her in a brief embrace before dropping once more to his side. “Let’s go back outside then. Mum and Dad’ll be wondering what we’re doing in here so long and jumping to all sorts of conclusions.”

He watched appreciatively as she blushed a rosy red, before taking her hand again and leading her back to the terrace, all thoughts of tragedy and death set aside.



A pretty young heiress, a charmingly impudent ghost and a handsome young Inspector from Scotland Yard form an unlikely alliance to unmask a thief and resolve a 200-year-old mystery surrounding a lost collection of fabulous Tudor Jewelry.

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