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### The Case of the Sussex Vampire (Part 2)

It wasn't until the evening of the next day that Holmes and I finally reached Ferguson's ancient farmhouse. Ferguson led us into a large room with enormous oak beams and a huge, old-fashioned fireplace with a blazing log fire.



As we entered a small dog got up from a basket near the fire and came slowly toward us, walking with difficulty. Its hind legs moved stiffly, and its tail dragged on the ground.



"I say, what's this?" cried Holmes. "The dog. What's the matter with it?"

"It has the vet puzzled," Ferguson explained. "A sort of temporary paralysis, he thinks. But it's passing. He'll be all right soon; won't you, Carlo?"

The dog licked Ferguson's hand and tried to wag his drooping tail as his mournful eyes passed from one of us to the other.

"Did this come on suddenly?"

"Yes, quite suddenly. It came on overnight, just about four months ago."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"What do you mean, Mr. Holmes? What do you see? This may be just a mental puzzle for you, sir, but it's life-and-death to me! If you know something, tell me."

Holmes put his hand soothingly upon Ferguson's arm. "I fear there is pain for you, Mr. Ferguson, whatever the solution may be. I cannot say more right now, but I hope to have something definite to tell you before I leave."

"Oh, if only you would. Now, if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I'll go upstairs and check on my wife."

Ferguson was away for some time, during which Holmes walked around the room, peering closely at everything. On the wall above the fireplace hung a curious collection of fine old South American weapons. To these my friend

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paid particular attention, gently taking each object in his hands, and examining it carefully.

When our host returned, he brought with him a tall, slim, girl, whom he introduced to us as his wife's maid, Delores.

"My mistress is very ill," cried the girl. "She needs a doctor."

"I'd be glad to help if I can," I offered. "Do you think she'll see me?"

"No need to ask," replied the girl. "Come quickly. I am so afraid for her."

I followed the frightened girl upstairs to Mrs. Ferguson's room. On the bed a woman was lying. As I entered, she looked up at me with anxious eyes. I stepped up to her with a few reassuring words, and she lay still while I took her pulse and temperature. Both were high, and yet it seemed to me that this was due to mental strain and nervous excitement rather than to any actual illness.

"I am a doctor; can I help you in any way?" I asked.



"No. No one can help. All is destroyed."

"Madam, your husband loves you dearly. He is worried and saddened by what's happened."

"He loves me. Yes. But what of my love for him? I sacrifice myself rather than break his dear heart. That is how much I love him And yet he can think of me so."

"He is full of grief, and he cannot understand. Will you not see him?" I suggested.

"No, he cannot understand. But he should trust. I cannot forget those terrible words nor the look on his face. No, no, I will not see him. Tell him I want my child; I have a right to my child. Go now. There's nothing you can do for me."

I returned to the room downstairs, where Ferguson and Holmes still sat by the fire. Ferguson listened sorrowfully while I repeated what his wife had said. "How can I send her the child?" he asked. "Can I forget the blood upon her lips? No, I cannot. Anthony is safe with Mrs. Mason, and there he must remain."

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Just then the door opened, and a young boy entered the room. He was a pale, fair-haired lad with light blue eyes which blazed with joy as they rested on his father. He rushed over to Ferguson and threw his arms around his neck. "Oh, daddy," he cried, "I'm so glad you're home."

"Dear old chap," said his father, patting the flaxen head with a very tender hand. "I came early because my friends, Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson, have come down to spend the evening with us."



The youth looked at us with a very penetrating and, as it seemed to me, unfriendly gaze.

"What about your other child, Mr. Ferguson?" asked Holmes. "May we meet him as well?"

"Yes, of course. Ask Mrs. Mason to bring Anthony down," Ferguson told his son.

The lad went off and soon returned, followed by a nurse carrying a beautiful baby in her arms. Ferguson took the child into his arms and kissed it most tenderly.

At that very moment, I chanced to glance at Holmes and saw his eyes fixed intently on the window on the opposite side of the room. Then he smiled, and his eyes came back to the baby. Without speaking, he went over and carefully examined the small wound on the infant's neck. Finally, he took one of the child's dimpled fists which waved in front of him. "Good-bye, little man," he said. "You have made a strange start in life."

Holmes then led Mrs. Mason aside, and the two of them spoke privately for a few minutes. When their conversation was over, the nurse left the room, taking the baby with her.

Holmes turned around suddenly and faced the boy, "Tell me, Jack, do you like Mrs. Mason?" Jack's face shadowed over, and he shook his head.

"Jacky has very strong likes and dislikes," explained Ferguson, putting his arm round the boy. "Run along now, little Jack," he said to his son, and he watched with loving eyes until the boy disappeared.

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"Now, Mr. Holmes," he continued when the boy was gone, "I'm afraid that you find this a most delicate and puzzling affair."

"It is certainly delicate," said my friend with an amused smile, "but I have not found it terribly puzzling. I think that I can say confidently that the puzzle is solved. I had, in fact, guessed at the truth before leaving Baker Street, but I needed to come here to confirm my suspicions. "

"For Heaven's sake, Holmes," Ferguson said hoarsely; "if know the truth, do not keep me in suspense. How do I stand? What shall I do?"

"Certainly, I owe you an explanation, and you shall have it. But permit me to handle the matter in my own way? Is the lady capable of seeing us, Watson?"

"She is feverish, but she is quite rational."

"Very good. This must be cleared up in her presence. Let us go up to her."

"She will not see me," cried Ferguson.

"Yes, she will," said Holmes. He scribbled a few lines upon a sheet of paper. "My dear Watson, pray be good enough to give this note to Mrs. Ferguson's maid. I believe that her mistress will receive all three of us."

I returned to Mrs. Ferguson's room and passed the note to Dolores. A moment or two later, I heard a cry of surprise and joy from within the room, and Delores looked out. "She will see you all," she told me.

"Now, Mr. Ferguson," began Holmes as we entered the room. "Let me begin by saying that your wife is a very good, a very loving, and a very ill-used woman."

Ferguson let out a cry of joy. "If you can only prove that, Mr. Holmes, I shall be in your debt forever."

"I shall, but first I must break some unpleasant news to you."

"I care nothing so long as you clear my wife. Nothing is as important to me as that."



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"Let me tell you, then, what passed through my mind in Baker Street. The idea of a vampire was to me absurd. And yet you had seen your wife rise from beside the child's crib with the blood upon her lips."

"I did, indeed."

"Did it not occur to you that a bleeding wound may be sucked for some other purpose than to drink the blood from it? Might it not be sucked to draw poison from it?"

"Poison? But how? But who?"

"The wound on your son's neck was not made by teeth, Mr. Ferguson, and it was not made by your wife. It was made by something small and sharp, most probably one of the tiny arrow darts from the weapons collection over the fireplace downstairs. If those darts had been dipped in some devilish poison, a prick with one of them would cripple or kill your baby son if the venom were not sucked out. Your wife was trying to save your little boy, Ferguson, not harm him."



Of course, anyone planning to use such a poison, would want to try it out first. Think of your little dog, Mr. Ferguson. The poor animal is an example the poison's terrible effect. Your wife realized what had happened to the dog and was afraid of a similar attack on her baby. When it occurred, she shrank from telling you because she knew how much you loved the older boy and feared the truth would break your heart. Now do you understand?"

"Jacky? No, Mr. Holmes, not my Jacky."

"You have to face it, Mr. Ferguson. I watched him as you held the child just now. His face was clearly reflected in the glass of the window in the wall opposite to where he was standing. I saw such jealousy and hatred, as I have seldom seen."

"Jacky! It is incredible."

"Am I correct, madame?"

The lady was sobbing, with her face buried in the pillows. Now she turned to her husband. "How could I tell you, Bob? I felt the blow it would be too much for you. It was better that I should wait and that it should come from

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someone other than me. Mr. Holmes has relieved me of the terrible burden of telling you the truth."

"I think a year or two away at the right school might help Master Jacky," said Holmes, rising from his chair. "And this, I fancy, is the time for our exit, Watson," he whispered to me. "There, now," he added as he closed the door behind us, "I think we may safely leave them to settle the rest among themselves."

THE END.

