



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LII – The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire

First published in:

The Strand Magazine and *Hearst's International Magazine*, both in January 1924 .

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

November 19 (stated), 1901 (highly likely)

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Sharing quarters at 221B

Opening scene:

Holmes received a note in the last post from an attorneys' firm, referring a client to Holmes, concerning vampires.

Client:

Mr. Robert Ferguson, of Ferguson and Muirhead, tea brokers, of Mincing Lane. Once known as "Big Bob", he had played Rugby for Richmond, while Watson played for Blackheath. Ferguson had been the finest three-quarter Richmond ever had, and was always a good-natured chap.



Crime or concern:

Ferguson's wife, a beautiful Peruvian, was caught in the act of assaulting Jacky, Ferguson's son by a previous marriage. She struck him once with a stick and left a great weal on his arm, and once very savagely with her hands.

Then she was seen by the nurse leaning over the baby and apparently biting his neck. There was a small wound from which a stream of blood had escaped. The nurse was horrified and she wished to call the husband, but the lady implored her not to do so. No explanation was ever given, and the matter was passed over. Then in a second incident, Ferguson himself saw his wife rise from a kneeling position beside the infant's cot and saw blood upon the child's exposed neck and upon the sheet. He then turned to his wife's face and saw blood all round her lips. It was she — she beyond all question — who had drunk the poor baby's blood.

Villain:

Jacky, the 15-year old crippled son of Ferguson by a former marriage. He had a curious, shambling gait which indicated he was suffering from a weak spine. He had pricked the child with one of those arrows dipped in curare or some other devilish drug, after experimenting on the dog.

Motive:

Jealousy and hatred. A distorted love, a maniacal exaggerated love for the natural father, and possibly for his dead mother. Jacky's very soul was consumed with hatred for the splendid child of the new union, whose health and beauty were a contrast to his own weakness.

Logic used to solve:

The idea of a vampire was to Holmes absurd, but he knew that a bleeding wound could be sucked for some other purpose than to draw the blood from it. Eleanor of Castile, wife of Edward I and mother of Edward II, in the 13th century, saved the King's life by this very act, sucking out the poison from a poisoned arrow.

In a South American household Holmes' instinct felt the presence of those weapons before he ever saw them. When he saw that little empty quiver beside the small birdbow, it was just what he expected. If the child were pricked with one of those arrows dipped a poison, it would mean death if the venom were not sucked out. And the dog. If one were to use such a poison, would one not try it first in order to see that it had not lost its power? Holmes did not foresee the dog, but at least he understood the clue.

Policemen:

None involved

Holmes' fees:

No mention.

Transport:

Holmes & Watson took an excellent train at 2:00 from Victoria down to Lamberly, in Sussex.

Food:

Delores carried tea up to her mistress' room.

Drink & Vices:

None mentioned.

Other cases mentioned:

Holmes' successful action in the case of Matilda Briggs. Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman; it was a ship which is associated with the giant rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared. (This seems to be one of the more intriguing of the unpublished cases.) Also mentioned: Voyage of the Gloria Scott, Victor Lynch the forger, Vittoria the circus belle, Vanderbilt and the Yeggman, Vigor the Hammersmith wonder, and the case of the Venomous Lizard.

Notable Quotables:

Holmes on vampires: "Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy."

Holmes said it was a delicate case, "but I have not been struck up to now with its complexity. It has been a case for intellectual deduction, but when this original intellectual deduction is confirmed point by point by quite a number of independent incidents, then the subjective becomes objective and we can say confidently that we have reached our goal. I had, in fact, reached it before we left Baker Street, and the rest has merely been observation and confirmation."

Other interestings:

Holmes refers twice to his business as an “agency”. “This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground, and there it must remain.” “We must not let him think that this agency is a home for the weak-minded.” These two references are the only times Holmes ever referred to his detective business as an “agency”.

When all was said and done:

Holmes’ prescription for Master Jacky was a year at sea.

Holmes wrote to the attorneys’ firm thanking them for their recommendation, and assuring them that the matter had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

McMurdo’s Camp