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The Little Vampie

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A Surprise in a Cobweb

Mrs Lizzie ´s birth certificate said she was sixty-seven years old. But she didn ´t feel sixty-seven. „Except in my joints,“ she sometimes said. „I feel ninety-seven in my joints. Particularly when the weather ´s on the change. But not otherwise, and the time between two birthdays is much too short anyway. How is anyone supposed to get used to the idea of being another year older so quickly?“

It was because of her joints that Mrs Lizzie had gone away to stay at a health resort.

Now she was walking upstairs. She had her travelling bag in one hand

and a small case in the other.

„These stairs haven ´t got any lower,“ she sighed. She opened the door of her flat, put her bags down, and opened the window.

Then she looked around her. There was dust everywhere. Three weeks ´ worth of dust.

Mrs Lizzie rolled up her sleeves and began cleaning the flat. While she worked she sang:

„In dark ravines and ancient ruined halls
The night-owls fly, hooting tu-whit, tu-who.
Shiver, my friend within those haunted walls.
In search of blood, the vampire ´s after you.

Fair Adelaide was only seventeen.

She went by night into the woods alone.

Her love had left her, there among the green

Of nature she had gone to sigh and moan.

Then suddenly she heard a heartfelt plea:

‘So sad and solitary, maiden fair?

Ah, would your tender heart but beat for me!

You ´ll be my queen if you my words will hear.

I ´d give you clothes of silk and velvet fine,

And never, never more would we two part.

You shall eat cake and drink the choicest wine.

If you will be the lady of my heart.

Poor girl, she stopped to listened to his wooing.

Oh Adelaide , why is your mouth is so red?

Alas, alas, what is the vampire doing?

Before the sun sinks you ´ll lie pale and dead.“

Mrs Lizzie liked to sing while she worked.

She had songs for hot days and songs for cold days. This was a song for hot days because it always gave her a cold shiver down her back.

„There we are, done!“ said Mrs Lizzie. „And now I ´ll make myself a nice cup of coffee. The coffee at the health

resort was the purest dishwater.“

Mrs Lizzie often talked to herself. She had lived alone ever since her mother died fifteen years before.

While she put water in the coffee machine her eyes wandered around the kitchen. Then she saw the cobweb on the ceiling.

„Dear me, this won't do!“ she said. „Not in my kitchen! It certainly is a particularly handsome cobweb, but it has no business here.“

She wrapped her floor-cloth round her broom and brushed the cobweb down. As she was about to shake out the floor-cloth she stopped in surprise. „No!“ she said. „I don't believe it. This doesn't exist because it can't be true. And something that can't be true doesn't exist.“

She mopped the perspiration off her forehead. She cleaned her glasses and put them on again.

It really was there after all.

In the middle of the cobweb on her floor-cloth lay a tiny vampire, fast asleep.

Mrs Lizzie took the floor-cloth between two fingers and put it top of her coal-box.

The vampire went on sleeping.

There was a knock at the door of the flat.

Outside stood Mrs Anna, and behind her came her fox terrier Fido.

„Good evening, Mrs Lizzie,“ said Mrs Anna. „How nice to see you home again. What was the resort like? Did it do you good?“

Fido's nostrils widened. He pushed his way past Mrs Anna, put his tail between his legs, and started howling.

Mrs Lizzie stammered, „R-resort? What resort? Oh, the health resort ...“

Fido was howling so loudly that Mrs Anna couldn't hear a word anyway. She bent down, patted him, and said, „Fido, Fidokins, how can you be so silly? This is Mrs Lizzie who always gives you such lovely bones! You know Mrs Lizzie, Fido!“

Fido only howled even louder. Mrs Anna was annoyed and then angry. „Stop it at once, will you, you wretched animal!“

When even that did no good, she raised a threatening hand. „You stupid dog! You just wait ...“

„No!“ said Mrs Lizzie. „Don't hit him! Fido isn't stupid. In fact Fido is a very clever dog.“

She went over to the coal-box.

„There, Mrs Anna, see for yourself!“ And Mrs Lizzie folded back the corners of the floor-cloth.

Mrs Anna screamed.

Fido pawed frantically at the front door of the flat, howling, barking and whining.

„Well, I must say ...“ cried Mrs Anna.

„Let's get Fido out of here before you say anything!“ cried Mrs Lizzie. „Otherwise the noise will drive everyone in this building crazy!“

Mrs Anna shut Fido up in her own flat. Then she came back and stood in the doorway with her arms folded.

„That's a vampire!“ she said sternly.

„I thought so myself,“ said Mrs Lizzie.

„So now what are we going to do?“

„I've no idea yet!“

The little vampire sucked his vampire thumb.

Mrs Anna shook herself. „Let's put it down the lavatory! And flush hard!“ She was going to pick up the cloth.

Mrs Lizzie caught her arm. „No, don't do that! He's still so tiny.“

Mrs Anna looked Mrs Lizzie up and down. Then she shook her head.

„Well, throw him away in the bin if you have such a soft heart. But hurry up, because the dustmen's truck will



be coming to collect the rubbish any moment now. And I wouldn't throw him away when the bin's empty. You never know. He might climb out again."

"No," said Mrs Lizzie. "That wouldn't be right. How can a vampire help being a vampire? I was scared myself at first. But just look at his tiny hands!"

Mrs Anna didn't want to look at his tiny hands or anything else about him. "I ask you, Mrs Lizzie! A vampire in our building! It's unthinkable. Just imagine: there you are asleep and he comes along and sucks your blood – down to the very last drop. By the time you wake up you'll have been dead for hours!"

The more Mrs Anna tried to talk her round, the more determined Mrs Lizzie was not to throw the little vampire away, either in the rubbish bin or down the loo. She was sorry she'd said anything at all. All she was thinking of was how to get rid of her neighbour.

"I'll do it for you," Mrs Anna offered. "I always have to put spiders out because my husband is so scared of them. You can't square this with your conscience. If you're not thinking of yourself, then think of the other tenants! What's more, you're so popular in the whole block of flats. We'd all miss you. And wreaths are terribly expensive at this time of year."

Mrs Lizzie glanced at the little vampire. He wrinkled his nose in his sleep. It looked almost as if he were smiling.

"If you will excuse me now, Mrs Anna," she said, "I'm tired after my journey. The doctor said it was essential for me to lie down when I feel tired."

Shaking her head, Mrs Anna went away.

She was convinced that Mrs Lizzie couldn't be right in the head any more. She fetched Fido, who was still whining, and took him for a walk. Then she came to a decision. She knocked at the door of the flat where her other neighbour, Mrs Mayes, lived.

Meanwhile Mrs Lizzie had been thinking hard. The vampire is still tiny, she had thought. He doesn't know what blood tastes like yet. If I bring him up on milk he'll never get a taste for blood at all. As you sow, so shall you reap, that's what my late granny always said.

Mrs Lizzie covered the little vampire up with a handkerchief, went downstairs and bought a bottle of milk. Then she went to the toyshop and bought a doll's feeding bottle.

Once she was home, she warmed the milk with a little sugar and poured it into the doll's bottle.

The little vampire was just waking up. His pointy little mouth screwed up. He squeaked softly.

Carefully, Mrs Lizzie took him in her left hand. She put the teat of the bottle in his mouth with her right hand. The little vampire gulped and smiled and gulped and smiled. Whenever he gulped he kicked his thin, hairy little legs. That tickled Mrs Lizzie's hand.

When the bottle was empty, the little vampire burped. Then he rolled up in Mrs Lizzie's hand and went to sleep again.

She wondered how she could make him a little bed.

She took her silver necklace out of its jewel box and put the little vampire inside on the sky-blue cotton-wool. Then she covered him up with the handkerchief and put him on the living-room window-sill where the sun fell in.

English translation by Anthea Bell.