

THE BABY'S VENGEANCE

by W. S. Gilbert



Weary at heart and extremely ill
Was PALEY VOLLAIRE of Bromptonville,
In a dirty lodging, with fever down,
Close to the Polygon, Somers Town.

PALEY VOLLAIRE was an only son
(For why? His mother had had but one),
And PALEY herited gold and grounds
Worth several hundred thousand pounds.

But he, like many a rich young man,
Through this magnificent fortune ran,
And nothing was left for his daily needs
But duplicate copies of mortgage-deeds.

Shabby and sorry and sorely sick,
He slept, and dreamt that the clock's "tick, tick,"
Was one of the Fates, with a long sharp knife,
Snicking off bits of his shortened life.

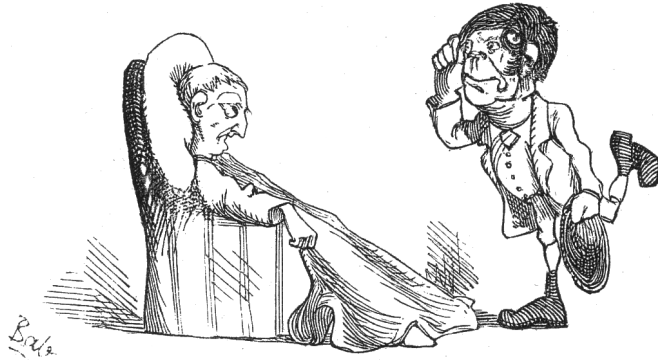
He woke and counted the pips on the walls,
The outdoor passengers' loud footfalls,
And reckoned all over, and reckoned again,
The little white tufts on his counterpane.

A medical man to his bedside came
(I can't remember that doctor's name),
And said, "You'll die in a very short while
If you don't set sail for Madeira's isle.

"Go to Madeira? goodness me!
I haven't the money to pay your fee!"
"Then, PALEY VOLLAIRE, said the leech, "good-bye;
I'll come no more, for you're sure to die."

He sighed and he groaned and smote his breast,
"Oh, send," said he, "for FREDERICK WEST,
Ere senses fade or my eyes grow dim:
I've a terrible tale to whisper him!

Poor was FREDERICK'S lot in life, –
A dustman he with a fair young wife,
A worthy man with a hard-earned store,
A hundred and seventy pounds – or more.



FREDERICK came, and he said, "Maybe
You'll say what you happen to want with me?"
"Wronged boy," said PALEY VOLLAIRE, "I will,
But don't you fidget yourself – sit still.

THE TERRIBLE TALE

"'Tis now some thirty-seven years ago
Since first began the plot that I'm revealing.
A fine young woman, wed ten years or so,
Lived with her husband down in Drum Lane, Ealing,
Herself by means of mangling reimbursing,
And now and then (at intervals) wet-nursing.

Two little babes dwelt in her humble cot:
One was her own – the other only lent to her:
Her own she slighted. Tempted by a lot
Of gold and silver regularly sent to her,
She ministered unto the little other
In the capacity of foster-mother.

"I was her own. Oh! how I lay and sobbed
In my poor cradle – deeply, deeply cursing
The rich man's pampered bantling, who had robbed
My only birthright –an attentive nursing!
Sometimes, in hatred of my foster-brother,
I gnashed my gums – which terrified my mother.



One darksome day (I should have mentioned that
We were alike in dress and baby feature)
I in MY cradle having placed the brat,
Crept into his – the pampered little creature!
It was imprudent--well, disgraceful maybe,
For, oh! I was a bad, black-hearted baby!

"So rare a luxury was food, I think
There was no wickedness I wouldn't try for it.
Now if I wanted anything to drink
At any time, I only had to cry for it!
Once, if I dared to weep, the bottle lacking,
My blubbering involved a serious smacking!

"We grew up in the usual way--my friend,
My foster-brother, daily growing thinner,
While gradually I began to mend,
And thrived amazingly on double dinner.
And every one, besides my foster-mother,
Believed that either of us was the other.

"I came into his wealth--I bore his name,
I bear it still--his property I squandered--
I mortgaged everything--and now (oh, shame!)
Into a Somers Town shake-down I've wandered!
I am no PALEY--no VOLLAIRE--it's true, my boy!
The only rightful PALEY V. is you, my boy!

"And all I have is yours--and yours is mine.
I still may place you in your true position:
Give me the pounds you've saved, and I'll resign
My noble name, my rank, and my condition.
So for my sin in fraudulently owning
Your vast wealth, I am at last atoning!"

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FREDERICK he was a simple soul,
He pulled from his pocket a bulky roll,
And gave to PALEY his hard-earned store,
A hundred and seventy pounds or more

PALEY VOLLAIRE, with many a groan,
Gave FREDERICK all that he'd called his own,--
Two shirts and a sock, and a vest of jean,
A Wellington boot and a bamboo cane.

And FRED (entitled to all things there)
He took the fever from MR. VOLLAIRE,
Which killed poor FREDERICK WEST. Meanwhile
VOLLAIRE sailed off to Madeira's isle.