



THE
DISALLOWED

THE HUMOROUS TALE OF A CONTEMPORARY
VAMPIRE FAMILY



OWEN JONES



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The Humorous Tale of a Contemporary Vampire Family by

Owen Jones

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my friends Lord David Prosser and Murray Bromley, who helped me and my Thai family more than they will ever realise in 2013.

Karma will repay everyone in just kind.

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1 MR. LEE'S PREDICAMENT

Mr. Lee, or Old Man Lee, as he was known locally had been feeling strange for weeks and, because the local community was so small and isolated, everybody else in the vicinity knew about it too. He had been to seek the advice of a local doctor, one of the old kind, not a modern medical doctor and she had told him that his body's temperature was out of balance, because something was affecting his blood.

The woman, the local Shaman, Mr. Lee's aunty, in fact, was still not quite sure of the cause, but she had promised that she would know in about twenty-four hours, if he left a couple of samples for her to study and came back when she sent for him. The Shaman handed Mr. Lee a clump of moss and a stone.

He knew what to do, because he had done it before, so he urinated on the moss and spat on the stone after hawking deeply. He handed them solemnly back to her, and, being careful not to touch them with her bare hands lest she contaminated them, she wrapped them separately in pieces of banana leaf to preserve their moisture for as long as possible.

“Give them a day to rot down and dry out, then I'll have a good look and see what's the matter with you.”

“Thank you, Aunty Da, I mean, Shaman Da. I will await your summons and return immediately when you call me.”

“You wait there, my lad, I'm not finished with you yet.”

Da reached around behind herself and took an earthenware jar from the shelf. She uncorked it, took two mouthfuls and then spat the last one all over

Old Man Lee. As Da was incanting a prayer to her gods, Mr. Lee was thinking that she had forgotten about the ‘cleansing’ – he hated being spat on by anyone, but especial y old ladies with rotten teeth.

“That alcohol spray and the prayer wil tide you over until we can sort you out properly,” she assured him.

Shaman Da stood up from her ful -lotus position on the earthen floor of her medical sanctuary, put her arm around her nephew’s shoulder and walked with him outside, rol ing a cigarette as they went.

Once outside, she lit it up, took a deep draw and felt the smoke fil her lungs. “How’s that wife of yours and your lovely children?”

“Oh, they are well, Aunty Da, but a little concerned about my health.

I’ve been feeling a bit dicky for a while now and I’ve never been sick in my whole life, as you know.”

“No, we Lees are a strong lot. Your father, my dear brother, would stil be fit now, if he hadn’t died of the flu. Strong as a buffalo he was.

You take after him, but he never got shot. I think that’s what has caught up with you, that Yankee bul et.”

Mr. Lee had been through this several hundred times before, but he couldn’t win the argument so he just nodded, handed his aunt a fifty Baht note and set off home to his farm, which was just a few hundred yards outside the vil age.

He was feeling better already, so he put on a jaunty pace to try to prove it to everyone.

Old Man Lee trusted his ancient aunty Da completely, as did everyone else in their community, which consisted of a smal village of about a five hundred houses and a few dozen out-lying farms. His aunty Da had taken over as vil age Shaman when he was a boy, and there weren’t more than a

dozen or so who could remember the one before her. They had never had a university-qualified medical doctor of their own.

That was not to say that the vil agers did not have access to a physician, but they were few and far between – the nearest permanent doctor was ‘in town’, seventy-five kilometres away and there were no buses, taxis or trains in the mountains where they lived in the very top north-eastern corner of Thailand. Besides that, doctors were expensive and prescribed expensive drugs, from which everyone assumed they earned high commissions. There was also a clinic a few vil ages away, but it was staffed by a full-time nurse and a part-time circular doctor who worked there one day a fortnight.

Vil agers like Mr. Lee thought that they were probably all right for rich city-dwellers, but not much use to the likes of them. How could a farmer take a whole day off work and hire someone else with a car to do the same to go to visit a city doctor? If you could find someone with a car that was, although there were a few old tractors about within ten kilometres.

No, he thought, his old aunty was good enough for everyone else and she was good enough for him and besides, she hadn’t let anyone die whose time wasn’t up and she certainly hadn’t killed anyone, everyone would swear to that.

Everyone.

Mr. Lee was very proud of his aunty, and anyway, there was no alternative for miles around and certainly no-one with all her experience –

all ...? Well, no-one knew how old she was really, not even she herself, but probably ninety if a day.

Mr. Lee reached his front yard with these thoughts in mind. He wanted to discuss the matter with his wife, because although he appeared to the outside world to be the boss in his family, as was the same with

every other family, that was only show, because in reality, every decision was made by the family as a whole, or at least all the adults.

This was going to be a momentous day, because the Lees had never had a 'crisis' before and their two children, who were no longer children either, would have to be allowed to have their say as well. History was about to be made and Mr. Lee was well aware of it.

"Mud!" he called out, his affectionate name for his wife since their first-born had not been able to say 'Mother'. "Mud, are you there?"

"Yes, I'm out the back."

Lee waited a few moments for her to come in from the toilet, but it was hot and stuffy indoors, so he went back out to the front yard and sat on their large family table with its grass roof where the whole family ate and was wont to sit if they had any free time.

Mrs. Lee's real name was Wan, although her husband affectionately called her Mud, since their eldest child had called her that and the name had stuck with Mr. Lee but not with either of the children. She came from the village, Baan Noi, as did Lee himself, but her family knew nowhere else, whereas Mr. Lee's family had come from China two generations before, although that home town was not that far away either.

She was fairly typical of the women of the area. In her day, she had been a very pretty girl, but girls were not given much opportunity back then and nor were they encouraged to be ambitious, not that things had changed much for her daughter even twenty years later. Mrs. Lee had been content to look for a husband on leaving school, so when Heng Lee had asked for her hand and shown her parents the compensation money he had in the bank, she had thought that he was as good a catch as any other local boy she was likely to get. Neither did she have any desires to wander away from her friends and relations to a big city to increase her scope.

She had even come to love Heng Lee in her own way, although the fire had long gone out in her short love life and she was more of a business partner now than a wife in the family firm dedicated to their mutual survival and that of their two children.

Wan had never sought a lover, although she had been propositioned both before and after her marriage. At the time, she had been outraged, but now she looked back on those moments with a degree of tenderness.

Lee was her first and only, and now would surely be her last, but she had no regrets about that.

Her only dream was to see and take care of the grandchildren that her kids would surely want in the fullness of time, although she didn't want them, especially her daughter, to rush into marriage like she had. She knew that her children would have children as sure as eggs were eggs, if

they were able, because it was the only way to provide some financial security for themselves in their old age and have a chance of developing the family's status.

Mrs. Lee cared about family, status and honour, but she did not want any more material things than she already had. She had learned to do without for so long that it didn't matter to her any more.

She already had a mobile phone and a television, but the signals were poor to say the least, and there was nothing she could do about that but wait for the government to get around to upgrading the local transmitters, which would surely happen one day, if not any time soon. She didn't want a car because she didn't want to go anywhere and besides the roads weren't very good anyway.

However, it was not only that, people of her age and station had thought a car so out of reach for so long that they had ceased to desire them decades ago. In other words, she was content with the bicycle and old motorcycle that formed the family's fleet of transport.

Neither did Mrs. Lee hanker after gold or fancy clothes any more, as the realities of raising two kids on a farmer's wage had knocked that out of her many years ago too. Despite all that, Mrs. Lee was a happy woman who loved her family and was resigned to staying as she was and where she was, until Buddha called her to go home again one day.

Mr. Lee watched his wife walking towards him, she was adjusting something under her sarong, but from the outside – something wasn't sitting right, he supposed, but would never ask. She sat on the edge of the table and swung her legs up to sit like a mermaid on a Danish rock.

“OK, what did that old crone have to say?”

“Oh, come on, Mud, she's not that bad! OK, you and she have never hit it off, but that's just the way it goes sometimes, isn't it? She never speaks a bad word about you, why, just thirty minutes ago she was asking after your health... and the kids'.”

“You can be such a fool sometimes too, Heng. She speaks nicely to me and about me when people are around to hear, but whenever we're alone, she treats me like dirt and always has done. She hates me, but she's too devious to let you see that, because she knows that you would take my side and not hers. You men think you are worldly-wise but you can't see what's going on under your own noses.

“She has accused me of all sorts of things over the years and many times too... like not keeping a clean home, not washing the children and once she even said that my food smelled like I'd used goat droppings for flavouring!

“Bah, you don't know the half of it, but you don't believe me either,

do you, your own wife? Yes, you can smile, but it has not been very funny for me these last thirty years, let me tell you. Anyway, what did she have to say?”

“Nothing, really, that was just a check-up, so it was the same old routine. You know, pee on some moss, spit on a stone and then let her spray you with alcohol from that toothy old mouth. It makes me shudder to think of it. She said she'd get word to me tomorrow, when she could let me know the outcome.

“Where are the children? Shouldn't they be here to take part in this family discussion?”

“I don’t think so, not really. After all, we don’t know anything yet, do we? Or have you got any ideas?”

“No, not really. I thought I might have a massage off that Chinese girl... that might help, if I ask her to go easy on me. She learned her skill in northern Thailand and she can be a bit rough, can’t she... so they say.

You know, especially with my insides being like they are. Perhaps, they’ll benefit from a gentle rubbing though... what do you think, my dear?”

“Yes, I know what you mean by gentle rubbing. If that’s the case, why don’t you ask your uncle to do it? Why choose a young woman?”

“You know why, I don’t like having men’s hands on me, I’ve explained that before, but all right, if it upsets you, I won’t have a massage.”

“Look, I am not saying that you can’t go! Heavens, I couldn’t stop you if you wanted to go anyway! However, as you say, they say she is a bit rough, and she may do more harm than good. I think that it would be wiser not to, until we’ve heard from your aunty, that’s all.”

“Yes, OK, you’re probably right. You never said where the kids are.”

“I’m not sure really, I thought they’d be back by now... They went off together to see about some birthday party or other on the weekend.”

The Lees had two children, one of each, and they counted themselves lucky for them, because they had been trying to have children for ten years before their boy was conceived. They were twenty and sixteen now, so Mr. and Mrs. Lee had long given up hoping for any more.

They had stopped trying long ago too.

However, they were good, respectful and obedient children and they made their parents proud, or at least, what their parents knew about them made them proud, because they were just like any decent kids: ninety percent good, but could get up to mischief too and had secret thoughts that they knew their parents would not approve of.

Master Lee, the son, Den, or Young Lee, had just turned twenty and was nearly two years out of school. He, like his sister, had a happy childhood, but the fact was beginning to dawn on him that his father had

a very hard life planned for him, not that he hadn't worked all his life both before and after school anyway. However, there had been time for football and table tennis and the girls at the school dances back then.

That had all finished now and so had his prospects of a sex life, not that there had ever been much to boast about – just the rare kiss and even rarer fumble, but now he had had nothing for nearly two years. Den would have left for a city at the drop of a hat, if he had any sort of clue what to do when he got there, but he had no ambition either, except to have sex often.

His hormones were playing havoc with him to such an extent that some of the girls were looking very attractive to him, which worried him no end.

Not very deep down, he realised that he would have to get married, if he wanted to have a regular relationship with a woman.

Marriage, even if it came at the cost of having to have children, was starting to look decidedly attractive.

Miss Lee, better known as Din, was a very pretty girl of sixteen, who had left school in the summer, having studied two years fewer than her brother, which was quite normal in their area. Not because she was less bright, but because both parents and the girls themselves assumed that the earlier they started their families, the better it was. It was also easier to get a husband when a girl was younger than twenty than even a few years older. Din accepted this traditional 'wisdom' without question, despite her mother's misgivings.

She had also worked before and after school all her life and probably harder than her brother, although he would never have been able to see that, as girls were virtual slave labour everywhere roundabouts.

Din, however, did have fantasies. She dreamed of romantic entanglements, in which her lover would whisk her away to Bangkok, where he would

become a doctor and she would spend all day shopping with her girlfriends. Her hormones were also troubling her, but their local culture forbade her from admitting to them, even to herself. Her father, brother and even mother too, probably, would give her a hiding, if they caught her even smiling at a boy from outside the family.

She knew that and accepted it without question too.

It was her plan to start looking for a husband straight away, a task that her mother had already offered to help in, because both the ladies Lee knew that it was best accomplished as soon as possible, in order to prevent any risk of shame befalling the family.

All in all, the Lees were a typical family for the locality and they were happy to be so. They got on with their lives within the constraints of local

mores and thought that right and proper, even if the two children did harbour dreams of escaping to the big city. The problem was that the lack of ambition that had been bred into the hill folk for centuries held them back, which was a good thing for the government otherwise all the young people would long ago have disappeared from the countryside into Bangkok and from there to foreign countries like Taiwan and Oman where the wages were better. However, the freedom from rigid peer pressure was alluring.

Many young girls had taken the trip to Bangkok though. Some of them had found decent jobs, but many had ended up working in the sex industries of the larger cities and from there, a few had travelled even further abroad and even outside Asia. There were many horror stories about to dissuade young girls from taking that route and they had worked on Din and her mother alike.

Mr. Lee liked his life and loved his family, although it was not the done thing to admit that outside the confines of the home and he didn't want to lose them to some sickness that might have started building up in him when he was still only a lad.

Old Mr. Lee (although he knew that some of the less respectful youngsters in the village called him Old Goat Lee) had been an idealist in his youth and

had signed up to fight for North Vietnam as soon as he had left school. They lived right on the border with Laos, so North Vietnam was not far away, and he knew of the bombs that the Americans had dropped there and on Laos and he had wanted to do his bit to have it stopped.

He had joined the communist cause and gone to Vietnam for combat training as soon as they would have him. Many of the people he was training with were just like him, part Chinese, but fed up with foreign powers meddling in his countrymen's future. He could not understand why Americans living thousands of miles away cared who was in power in his little part of the world. He had never worried which president they had elected.

However, as fate would have it, he never had the chance to fire a shot in anger because he was hit by shrapnel from an American bomb as he was being transported from the training camp to the field of battle on his very first day out of boot camp. His wounds had been very painful, but not life-threatening, although they were sufficient to get him invalided out of the army, after he was fit enough to leave hospital. He had been hit in the upper left leg by the biggest piece, but a few smaller bits had peppered his abdomen, which he now thought may be the source of his discomfort.

That had also been the source of the rumour that he had been shot.

He had returned home with a bad limp and enough compensation to buy a small farm, but since his leg was bad, he had bought a farm and a flock of goats and bred and sold them instead. Within a year of his return, his leg was as good as it would ever get and he was married to a pretty local girl that he had known and fancied all his life. She was also from a farming background, and they settled down to a happy, but meagre existence.

Every day of the week ever since, except Sunday, Mr. Lee had taken his flock into the uplands to graze and in the summer, he would often stay overnight in one of the bivouacs he had here and there, which he had learned to make in the army. He looked back on that time with nostalgia, as happy days, although he would not have called them that at the time.

There were no predators in the mountains any longer, except men, because all the tigers had been killed long ago for use in the Chinese medicine industry. Mr. Lee had mixed feelings about that. On the one hand he knew that it was a shame, but on the other he had no desire to have to defend his goats from marauding tigers every night. When the illness had struck him only a week or so ago, he had been a goatherd for almost thirty years, so he knew the mountains as well as most people knew their local park.

He knew which areas to avoid because of landmines and strychnine packets dropped by the Americans in the Seventies and he knew which areas had been cleared, although the sappers had missed one or two as one of his goats had discovered only a month previously. It had been a shame about her, although her dead body had not gone to waste and the end had come quickly when a dislodged stone had triggered a mine and been blown skyward, taking her head clean off with it.

It had been too far to carry her carcass home, so Mr. Lee had spent a few days in the mountains gorging himself while his family were worried sick about him back on the farm.

Mr. Lee was a contented man. He enjoyed his work and the outdoor life, and he was long reconciled to the fact that he would never be rich or go abroad again. For this reason, he and his wife were now happy to have only had two children. He loved them both equally and wanted the best for them, but he was also glad that they had left school so they could work full time on the farm, where his wife grew herbs and vegetables and kept three pigs and a few dozen chickens.

Mr. Lee was thinking of how much he could expand his farm with the extra help. Maybe they could manage another dozen chickens, a few extra pigs and a field of sweet corn perhaps.

He awoke from his reverie, “What if it’s serious, Mud? I haven’t

mentioned this before, but I fainted twice this week and came near to it two or three times more.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“Well, you know, I didn’t want you to worry and you couldn’t have done anything about it, could you?”

“No, not personally, but I would have got you to your aunty earlier and maybe tried to get you to see a medical doctor.”

“Ach, you know me, Mud. I’d have said, ‘Let’s wait to see what aunty has to say before spending all that money’. I must admit to feeling mighty queer sometimes though and I am a bit scared of what aunty will say tomorrow.”

“Yes, so am I. Do you really feel that bad?”

“Sometimes, but I just don’t have any energy at all. I used to be able to run and jump with the goats, but now I get tired just watching them!

“Something’s up, I’m sure of it.”

“Look, Paw,” which was her unimaginative pet name for him since it meant ‘Dad’ in Thai, “the children are at the gate. Do you want to bring them in on this now?”

“No, you’re right, why worry them now, but I think that aunty will send for me late tomorrow afternoon, so tell them we’ll be having a family meeting at teatime and they have to be there.

“I think I’ll go to bed now, I feel tired again. Aunty’s spittle livened me up for a while, but it has worn off. Tell them I’m all right, but ask Den to take the goats out for me tomorrow, will you? He doesn’t have to take them far, just down by the stream so they can eat some river weed and get a drink... It won’t hurt them for one or two days.

“When you get ten minutes, could you make me some of your special tea, please? The one with ginger, anise and the rest... that should buck me up a little... Oh, and a few melon or sunflower seeds... perhaps you could ask Din to crack them for me?”

“How about a mug of soup? It’s your favourite...”

“Yes, OK, but if I’m asleep, just put it on the table and I’ll have it cold later.

“Hello, children, I’m going to bed early tonight, but I don’t want you to worry, I’m al right. Your mother can fil you in with the details. I’ve just got some sort of infection, I think. Good night al .”

“Good night, Paw,” they al replied. Din looked especial y concerned as they looked anxiously first at Mr. Lee’s retreating back and then at one another.

As Mr. Lee lay there in the quiet darkness, he felt his sides throbbing even more, just as a decayed tooth always seems to be more troublesome

in bed at night, but he was so worn out that he was fast asleep before his tea, soup and seeds were brought in to him.

Outside, on the big table in the half-light, the rest of the smal family discussed Mr. Lee’s predicament in hushed voices, despite the fact that no-one would have been able to hear them if they had spoken out loud.

“Is Paw going to die, Mum?” asked Din almost in tears.

“No, dear, of course not,” she replied, “at least... I don’t think so.”

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2 THE LEE FAMILY’S QUANDARY

In typical country style, everyone slept together in the only room inside the house: Mum and Dad had a double mattress, the children had a single one each and the three beds were protected by their own mosquito nets, so when they got up at daybreak, everyone tip-toed about so as not to wake Heng.

They knew that something was wrong, because he was usually the first one up and out even on the coldest morning. They peered through the mosquito net at his deathly pale face and looked worried, until Mum shooed them outside.

“Din, do us a favour, dear. I don’t like the look of your father, so quickly, have a shower and go see if aunty has anything to tell us, wil you?”

There's a good girl. If she's not ready yet, and we are rather early, I know that, ask her if she could make a special effort for her favourite nephew, would you, before it's too late?"

Din started crying and ran for the shower. "Sorry, love, I didn't mean to upset you!" she shouted to her daughter's back.

When she arrived at her great-aunt's house fifteen minutes later, the old Shaman was up and dressed, sitting on the big table in front of the house, eating rice soup.

"Good morning to you, Din, it's lovely to see you, do you want a bowl of soup? It's delicious." Da doted on her grand-nieces and on Din in particular, but when she heard what she had to ask, she could not resist saying that her mother was asking a lot for a proper diagnosis of this kind within twenty-four hours.

"That mother of yours! OK, we'll see what we can do... Your Paw looks bad, does he?"

"Yes, Aunty Da, he's as white as a corpse, but we don't think he's dead

yet... Mum was going to stick a pin in him when I left to see if he reacted, but I didn't wait to find out. I don't want Paw to die, Aunty Da, please save him."

"I'll do all I can, child, but when Buddha calls, there's no-one in the world who can say 'No', but we'll see what we can do. Come with me."

Da led the way into her sanctuary, lit a candle and closed the door behind them. She was hoping that Din would show an interest in the 'old ways' while she was still young enough to teach her, because she knew that she would need a successor some day, if the job were to stay in the Lee family.

She pointed to the Inquirer's mat on the floor and Din sat down, then she walked around the hut mumbling prayers and incantations and lighting a few more candles, before sitting opposite Din, who was staring down at her cupped hands in her lap.

Da looked at her niece, felt a slight tremor run through her body, gazed into her own cupped hands for a few seconds and then she looked up at Din again.

“You have come to seek advice concerning another? Please ask your question?” said Da, but in a deep, dark, rumbling voice that no-one had ever heard outside that hut.

The transformation startled Din, as it always did when her aunty went into a trance and allowed another entity to take control of her body. It wasn't so much that her face changed, although it did, her whole body changed subtly, in a similar way that an actor or an impersonator can change his outlook to suit the character he is playing, but it was more than that. It was as if Da's insides had been replaced with someone else's, which made her not only look different but sound different as well.

Din looked at the old Shaman who was no longer her aunty.

“Shaman, my father is very sick. I need to know what the problem is and what we can do about it.”

“Yes, your father, the one you call ‘Paw’.”

The person, her aunty sounded like a man at the moment, put a hand on each of the bundles that Heng had left the previous day and closed her aunty's eyes. There was what seemed to Din a long pause and a silence that was so deep, that she would have said she could hear the ants walking on the hard mud floor.

Din had been to a dozen such sessions before, although never for something as serious as this. She had asked about a stomach complaint once, and about her periods a few years ago and most recently she had asked whether she would get married soon. She was not afraid of the setting, only the outcome, but she knew that she could only sit and wait

and observe, for she did find it fascinating.

The Shaman slowly unwrapped the first parcel containing the stone, examined it carefully, sniffed it and put it back on its banana leaf, then picked up the leaf containing the moss and sniffed that, before replacing that on the mat before her.

The Shaman looked at Din solemnly and, after a few minutes, spoke.

“The one you are concerned about is very ill. In fact he was very near to death when he produced these samples, but he is not dead yet... Some of his internal organs, particularly those concerning the cleaning of the blood are in a very poor state... The ones you call, I think, the kidneys in Thai, have stopped working altogether and the liver is failing rapidly.

“This means that death is imminent. There is no known medical cure.”

The Shaman shuddered again and shape-shifted back to old Aunty Da, who blinked a few times and wriggled a bit as if putting on an old tight dress and rubbed her eyes.

“It wasn’t good news, was it child? You know that when I am under possession, I can’t always hear everything, but I caught bits of it and I can see by your face that it is going bad for your father.”

“The Spirit said that Paw will surely die soon, as there is no medical cure for failed kidneys and liver...”

“I am sorry, Din, you know that I am very fond of your father...”

Look, I’ll tell you what, I’ve picked up a few tricks myself over the years apart from possession. Let’s have a look now... Yes, the stone... see where your father spat on it? No marks! That means no salts in his spittle, no salts, no minerals, no vitamins, no nothing, only water.

“Now, the moss,” she sniffed it from a distance and then brought it closer to her nose. “The same! Smell this!” She held it out for Din to sniff, but Din was reluctant to smell her father’s urine. “Go on, it won’t bite you!” Da said. Din did as she was bid.

“No, smell, just a mossy smell”.

“Exactly! Men’s urine smells like cat’s piss if you keep it wrapped up, but your Dad’s doesn’t. Therefore, there is no meat in it to go rotten.

Therefore, your Dad’s blood is water too.

“You can’t live long with water for blood can you? Stands to reason, doesn’t it? Your blood takes all the goodness around the body, but your dad ain’t got any, and that is why he’s so weak all the time!

“You get off home now, find out if we’re too late, and if he’s still with us come back and get me on that scooter of yours. Go on now and hurry!”

Din fairly flew out of the door and ran back home.

While Din was away checking on her father, Da prepared herself to leave, for she knew in her heart that her Heng was not yet dead, not completely, anyway. She selected some herbs and put them in a bag, splashed water over her face and tied her hair down with a headscarf because of the slipstream of the forthcoming motorcycle ride. Then she went outside to wait for her niece.

Din arrived a few minutes later in a cloud of dust.

“Quickly Aunty, Mum says to come quickly, because he is about to pass on.”

Da mounted the scooter side-saddle, as befitted a lady and they took off with Din’s long hair whipping her wrinkled old face painfully and her trying to dodge it. As soon as they arrived, Da hopped off, for she was nimble for one so old, and was ushered into the house.

“Thank you for coming so promptly, Aunty Da, he’s up in the bedroom.”

“Yes, I guessed he would be in bed and not in with his beloved goats!” She lifted the mosquito net and sat on the wooden floor next to his head. First she looked at his skin, then his hair and lips and finally she opened his eyes and peered into them.

“Mmm, I see... show me his feet!” Wan hurried to uncover her husband’s feet, then Da leaned over to squeeze them and get a closer look.

“Mmm, I have never seen such a serious case of lack of meat in the blood as this before. Do you give me permission to tell your children what to do for a while? Good I will return soon, prop your husband’s head up on a few pillows, I will send Din in to help you while Den helps me outside.”

“Yes, Aunty, of course. Anything to help my dear Heng.”

“All right, let’s see what we can do, shall we?” and with that she got up and descended to ground level.

“Din go and help your mother, Den come with me, we must all act swiftly and precisely.”

Din was quick off the mark and Den asked what he could do to help.

“Go and get me the strongest cockerel you have! Quickly, lad!”

When he returned with the bird under his arm, Da took it from him.

“Now tether your strongest Billy goat to a stake so tightly that it can’t move an inch – sitting or standing is all the same to me.”

While Den rushed off, Da perched on the edge of the table, slit the cockerel’s throat, drained its blood into a bowl, tossed its lifeless body into the vegetable basket on the table and then hurried upstairs.

“Din,” she said on arrival, do you have any goat’s milk, or any sort of milk in the fridge? If not, take a jug and get some fresh, please, girl.”

She did not need to be told to hurry, she was gone.

“OK, Wan, is he awake?”

“Not really, Aunty, half-and-half.”

“Al right, you pinch his nose closed and I’ll pour this blood down his throat.” She squeezed his closed jaw with her thumb and middle finger to open it, pushed his head back and poured a few mouthfuls of chicken blood down his throat. Da guessed from the way that Heng spluttered like a petrol car on diesel that about half of it was going down the right way.

Heng opened his eyes slightly.

“What are you two old witches doing to me?” he whispered, “That was horrible!”

“Ah, I thought so,” said Da, pouring more in, “too rich, he needs to be weaned on to it.”

When Din arrived she said, “Fresh milk, stil warm from Flower, our best goat.”

Da took it, mixed it 50-50 with the remaining blood and poured it down Heng’s throat as before with the same result, but a little more resistance.

“See that!” she exclaimed, “he’s getting stronger already! Heng is trying to fight us, he’s resisting. Maybe he’s not completely lost yet!

“Al right! Wan, you carry on with the milk, but keep half of what is left. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

She went down and called to Den.

“Is that goat ready yet?”

“Yes, Aunty, he’s over there.”

“Good, come with me.”

Da put a nick in the goat’s jugular with her razor-sharp penknife and siphoned off a few hundred mil ilitres

“See how I did that, boy? Try to remember, because I think that you’ll have to do it every day from now on.”

They both went upstairs where they were surprised to see Heng talking with his wife and daughter as a hospital patient might after a general anaesthetic – groggy, weak and hesitant, but coherent.

Da mixed the goat's blood half-and-half with the remaining milk, but gave him the neat stuff to try first.

“Oh, Aunty, that is disgusting! Oh, dear...”

“Try this then,” she said, handing him a glass of pink liquid.

“Yes... that's quite nice... What is it? I can feel it doing me good already.”

Heng drank it eagerly.

“It is, er, a milkshake with herbs... Good is it?”

“Yes, Aunty, very good... very refreshing. Is there any more?”

Wan looked at the old Shaman who nodded. Wan poured another glass and helped her husband drink it.

“Oh, I am glad, Heng,” said Da, “I think that in this milkshake we have found the solution to your predicament, although I am sure that we can refine it a little more yet. Perhaps we can find other ingredients to alter the taste from time to time, so that it doesn't become boring, you know.”

“Yes, Aunty, I knew that you would come through for me.”

“Anything for my family, it was my pleasure to be able to help,” she replied and gave him a genuine, if rare, warm smile.

She mixed the rest of the blood and milk with some herbs into about a pint of milkshake and then said:

“Heng, I think that you ought to rest now. Look, here is more milkshake for later and I will show your family how to make it for you downstairs now, OK? You take it easy. Call me if you need me. Bye for now and get well soon.”

Once everyone was seated comfortably on the big garden table, and Wan had handed out refreshments of fresh fruit and cold water, Da took control of the family meeting.

“As I said before, I have never seen such an extreme case as this, but it seems that my experience and the Spirit Guides have led me to prescribe the correct solution.

“However, so far, we have only used what you might call ‘emergency resources’. Let’s face it, we have given Heng the blood of animals that do not eat the same things as we humans do, so he will still be missing certain vital ingredients.

“What we really need to do is get him a regular and constant supply of blood from animals that eat what humans eat. The better the match, the better it is for Heng.

“Now, we all know that not everybody eats exactly what its body requires every day, so we might assume that Heng will not require that either, but if we only give him chicken blood, he will miss out on a lot and only that part of him that is ‘chicken’ will thrive and survive well.

“The same if he only drinks goats’ blood, because grass cannot be sufficient for humans in the long term.”

“So, what are you saying, Aunty Da?” asked Den, “That we need to find him monkey blood?”

“Well, that is in the direction of what I am saying, yes, Den, but monkeys don’t eat exactly what we eat either, do they?”

She let the import of what she was saying sink in. Din got it first.

“You mean, Aunty, that Dad will need a regular supply of human blood?”

“Yes, Din, that would be the easiest way to go and maybe the only one in the long term. If you cannot find a regular supply of human blood, you will need to give him large quantities of blood from many different kinds of

animals to make up the human diet. For example, pigs eat a lot of what we eat, but they don't eat much fruit and they don't eat pork.

"I suppose you could keep a few 'donor pigs' just for Heng and feed them food especially to make the right blood and supplement that with the blood from other animals, but again, it would be a lot of effort. You could make a cocktail of chicken, goat, pig, dog and cat blood and keep it in the fridge, but no-one has done that before to my knowledge... the results would be unpredictable at best.

"The solution is really as plain as the noses on your faces and it is human blood.

"We checked your father's samples at least seven hours early and yet the evidence was clear.

"Your father has no blood!

"None at all !

"Not even a drop!

"I'll show you." Da reached into her shoulder bag and took out the moss wrapped in a banana leaf. "This is your father's urine sample.

Watch." She set fire to it. "The fire is spluttering a bit due to its dampness, but see, no colours in the flames, so no vitamins, no salts, so nothing in the blood. He only has water in his veins, even if it is still reddish.

"We could bleed him a bit later and check on that, if you like. If he had real blood, the moss would have dried out by now and would show colours as it burned.

"Same with the stone, look! Heng spat here, but no ring of salts, nothing, so again, just water. Your father has no blood in him.

"Not a drop!"

"Is that bad, Aunty Shaman?" asked Den.

“Bad? Bad? Boy, a person cannot live without blood!

“I love you very much, Den, but you can be so stupid at times! Sex on the brain, I suppose, like al boys of your age!

“And it is just ‘aunty’ outside the sanctuary.

“Your father has turned into a vampire... has he been biting any of you lately?”

“No, Aunty, but maybe he’s been biting the goats, we wouldn’t know about that,” replied Den.

“Oh, this is very serious, very serious indeed. I have heard of cases like this, but never seen one in al my ... my... er, vast experience.”

“Wow,” said Den, “Dad has turned into a Pee Pob, a vampire? Wait till I tell my friends! Heng - Pee Pob! That’s fantastic!”

“Wil he die soon?” asked Din.

“We are trying to save him, Din, we’l do al we can, but that means that you cannot tell anyone. Den! Do you understand? No-one, no-one at al , you stupid boy!

“Are you sure that boy is a Lee, Wan?” She flicked an accusatory glance at Wan, who was scowling back at her with as much disrespect as she could muster towards an old woman who had just saved her dying husband’s life.

“So, there it is. Those are your options. Ultimately, it is your decision –

al four of you - since you are going to have to procure the ‘remedy’ and Heng is going to have to take it al his remaining life for there is no cure for this condition.”

Da al owed herself to slump back against one of the roof supports and closed her eyes as if she were closing a book and had ended the session. The family looked at her and then at each other wondering how they were going to get out of this one.

While Aunty Da appeared to be in a trance or even asleep, the other three debated what they should do next.

“Well,” said Wan, “we can’t really get much blood from the locals, can we? Most of them wouldn’t give you the skin off a cold rice pudding, leave alone a pint of their blood and we can’t afford to buy it from them.”

“We could capture tourists and drain their blood into bottles and then store it in the fridge...” said Den.

“We don’t actually get many tourists up here, do we, Den?” said his mother with a click of her tongue.

“We could try the cocktail of different animals’ blood and we could all donate a pint of blood each per month,” chipped in Din.

“Mmm, I don’t know how much blood a person can give in a year, but twelve pints sounds a lot to me – nice thought though, dear.”

“Perhaps some members of the extended family would be prepared to donate some blood from time to time, your father is pretty well-liked around here...”

“We could offer to buy all the blood from people who die,” offered Den.

“You have to get the blood out of a body before it dies, I think, love, otherwise the heart has stopped and there is nothing to pump it out.”

“We could hang them up by their feet and put a tap in their throat ...

or their heart ... or both?”

“I see, so when someone’s dear old mama dies and everyone is crying about that, you propose to rush around there before she’s cold and ask if we can tie her up by the feet and drain her blood into a bucket for your father to drink later, eh?”

“How well do you think that would go down?”

“We could offer to take some before...”

“Don’t even suggest such a vile, stupid thing!”

“How about babies... Maybe not, eh?” said Den and then fell silent, all his suggestions having been rejected so far.

“In summary, then, so far we have first, collect blood from members of the family and second, make a cocktail of animal blood, neither of which we are sure will work.

“Anything else?”

“We could ... no, maybe not...” said Den.

“Come on, out with it, stupid or not,” said his mother, “we are desperate and have to consider every option.”

“Well, I could become a Moslem... then I could take four wives and that would provide four more blood donors... and if they have, say, four kids each, then that’s another sixteen donors and...”

“Yes, OK, Den, thanks for that! I wish I hadn’t asked now... Next thing, you’ll be suggesting that your sister goes on the game and charges two pints a go!”

Din blushed deeply at the very thought and was shocked that her mother had even said it, but Den was nodding in thought until Wan kicked him.

“As far as I see it, we have two more problems that we haven’t even considered yet,” said Din. “Aunty Da said that really, Dad has to approve our plan because he has to drink the stuff and we need something for tomorrow.”

“Perhaps we can use goats’ blood milkshake for tomorrow, since your Dad seemed to prefer it to chicken flavour, but yes, you’re right, we do have to do something more permanent soon. We can ask Aunty about that later. As for your Dad, he’ll just have to eat what we give him and be thankful for it,

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