

# Ballad: The Baby's Vengeance

In the evocative ballad "The Baby's Vengeance" from "The Bab Ballads," we are introduced to the grievous tale of Paley Voltaire of Bromptonville, who lies feverishly ill in a dirty lodging near the Polygon, Somers Town. The poem unfurls the life of Paley, an only child who has squandered an immense inheritance to the point of destitution, haunted by his bad decisions and nearing death. Recommended by a doctor to seek recovery in Madeira, a suggestion Paley cannot afford to follow, he instead requests the presence of a man named Frederick West, a humble dustman with a modest savings, to share a burdensome secret.

Paley recounts a dark backstory dating some thirty-seven years prior, revolving around a young woman in Drum Lane, Ealing, who, to augment her earnings, acted as a wet-nurse alongside her own child-rearing. Driven by monetary incentives, she neglected her child (Paley) in favor of a foster child, triggering a deep-rooted resentment in him. In a mix of hatred and envy, Paley confessed to having displaced the foster child from his crib, an act of early betrayal that set a precedent for his future.

As both Paley and the foster child grew, fortunes reversed; with Paley unwittingly assuming the identity and affluence of the foster child due to the mother's deception, ultimately leading to Paley's downfall as he mismanaged the wealth he believed was rightfully his. The climax of the ballad reveals Paley's realization and admission to Frederick that he, Frederick, is the true Paley Voltaire, the rightful heir to the squandered estate.

Paley proposes a trade of identities, offering to restore Frederick to his rightful status in exchange for Frederick's savings, marking an attempt to atone for his life's deceptions by repositioning Frederick to his entitled inheritance. "The Baby's Vengeance" thus winds down as a gripping narrative of mistaken identity, guilt, and a desperate plea for redemption, all encapsulated within the rhythmic and captivating verses of the ballad.