

## The Innocence of Blood

He sits as he always does, crouched on his haunches; feet crushing the rat bones scattered around the floor. With a stolen comb, he brushes his hair in the reflection of the shards of glass stuck in the crumbling plaster. Stroke after stroke until it falls in a shining river down his back. It's light brown , but in the light of the moon it shines deep red.

Every thing about him is red. From his ruby-colored shirt to the pants that hang on his skinny legs, it looks like the whole of him had been dipped in a bowl of blood. It is appropriate. That was the only thing he lived for, what he thought about, what he hunted. Blood is his obsession and his sustenance.

Even his eyes are a deep garnet, glowing in the dark attic room. But they are not warm or intelligent. Just the glassy sparkle of a predator bent on the kill. Because tonight he is thirsty.

Edging open the cracked window, he climbs through and scuttles quickly down the wall like a spider. When his feet touch the grass , he begins to run, so fast that the houses blur together. Suddenly, he appears to stumble and fall on all fours. But then thick

black fur explodes from his back and vicious claws grow where his fingers had been. As a wolf, he continues into the realm of the suburbs.

In a small house, a woman prepares her two boys for bed. She closes the window to keep out the chill night air. But it will not be enough.

In the yard, a dog lifts its head to sample the night air. It smells the scent of an approaching dog. He does not stop it. The smell is familiar, like the leader of his pack. He settles his head back on his paws and the wolf passes unchallenged.

At the door, the vampire changes back into a man. He opens the door silently and is up the stairs before it can close. In the first room in the hall there is a delicious smell. The smell. The tiny tremors of the boy's beating heart travel through the floorboards to sing in his bones. He shivers and two fangs slide wetly from his gums.

Inside, the boy is sleeping. He does not wake as a long black tongue flicks out to taste the skin of his neck. He doesn't stir as the teeth slide into his neck and cut neatly from side to side. He never will.

The vampire does not spill a drop on the sheets. It is too

precious to waste. But even so, the thirst is not quenched and there are two more living hearts in the next room.

The mother tucks her eldest son in, drawing the sheets up around his chin. "Don't let the bedbugs bite," she says. The little boy shudders. She pats him on the head and walks downstairs to watch TV. She does not notice the shadow that creeps along the wall behind her.

She sits down and turns on the nightly news, but she cannot concentrate. A sound is bothering her. Click. Click. Almost like the sound of a deadbolt sliding home. Shaking her head, she gets up to put something in the fridge. While she is up, she tries the porch door. It is locked from the outside. There is a shuffling in the corner. She turns in time to see the vampire crawl down from the ceiling. The woman is smart. She does not scream, only runs for the door. But halfway there, he lunges and hits her like a lion to a gazelle. Together, they crash into the china cabinet. The sound of shattering china covers the sounds of him feeding.

The second boy is lying in bed worrying about bedbugs. The thought of them leeching off your blood in tiny doses bothers him immensely. When he hears the breaking pottery from downstairs, he

bolts up in bed. He draws the covers around himself, but the shivers are not from cold. Teeth clacking he sets one foot down on the floor.

It is grabbed by a hand from under the bed. "Bogeyman," he croaks, then faints dead away. The last thing he sees before his eyes roll back in his head is two glassy red eyes and two shining white fangs.

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The vampire sits in the attic room licking the blood from his fingers. As always, he does not remember how it got there. The blood colored 10 year old boy slowly rocks back and forth, slurping up every drop.

After a while there is a bang on the door. The recently widowed man bursts in with a wooden stake in his hand. He does not see a little boy, just the creature that killed his wife and children. Sated of his thirst, the vampire child stares dumbly until the stake pierces his heart. He falls over dead, stolen blood running from the wound. The man falls to his knees and puts his face in his hands. With the thirst for revenge gone, there is nothing left.

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In an empty house in the suburbs, two boys wake up from a long sleep. They open their mouths to reveal shiny white fangs, sharp enough to razor open skin. And like any new-born predator, they are hungry...