

Age 22

## BLOOD DONOR

Grey walls closed in on the nauseating echo of billboards screaming blood: whispering it, threatening it, insinuating him into the reclining chair. When he would have jumped up and broken free, the needle grabbed his arm, and held itself steady, while a bright thick line coloured the plastic snake that writhed out from the needle in rich red...a vampire ecstasy.

He felt his fear grow as exquisite pain dulled and gripped him fully. The curling, living tube fell over the arm of his chair, below his line of vision, pooling the flow. A set of anonymous hands secured his fear with a quick piece of tape. He watched his arm solemnly, curiously, wondering.

His mind travelled away. He imagined the bag falling loose and blood pooling mercilessly on the floor. His whole lifespell was sliding insidiously down the thin tube. He would be found, perfect and pale, and would be taken to a large field, bounded by quiet trees, and laid among tall, weaving grasses and wild flowers.

His sister would come. She would not want to, but her sense of fitness would leave her horrified at the idea of not going. Her security would be gathered in the appropriate number of mourners she could collect to come with her. Together, they would march a solemn stretch, through the high grasses. She would cry when she found him. She would cry huge wild tears, her harsh voice pleading, "Why?" Stick arms would beat towards a distant sun, as they had done once, not so long before.

She would pull at her hair and watch from the corner of her eye to see the effect it was having on others. People would watch him morbidly, would turn with relief to do their comforting duty. He would be lying there, as if asleep, his arms resting calmly at his sides - watching above the scene, as if he was a cloud placed properly immobile. The sky would be clear, surrounding him.

His sister's face would grow blotchy-red. She would care then - that he was dead - but only when others could see and hear. They would listen (they always did) and throw their arms around her in sodden comfort, easy tears falling out of all eyes. Her drab hair would be matted by sweating hands - her dress would hang loosely upon her as if too afraid to hold close.

He imagined deep thistles in the grass, crowning him, surrounding him - a thick mattress piercing his body. He would not feel them in his death - but her bare feet would be stinging and pricked with blood so that she would cry harder. She would be afraid to stop, in case the others thought she didn't care, and she would be afraid of him, so white at her feet.

She would gather her arms more tightly to her meagre bosom, then throw them wide - falling upon him, sobbing even louder, and would love him in his death like she could

never do in life. She would hold him hard - so hard it would hurt, except he would be unfeeling. He would be unresponsive and still (as he was in the beginning and ever would be, world without end, amen) watching from that single cloud in the untroubled sky.

He would laugh at her, his laugh would become a wind, blowing hard, tearing at her dress, stinging her eyeballs, drying the heavy tears. Then he would laugh louder, catching starlings from uneasy flight - watching them dart down and away in fear of her scarecrow figure.

Finally, as he watched, people would tire of her ceaseless bereavement and vanish, leaving her alone with his corpse. In her solitude with death, she would become frightened, as she always was when alone - but more deeply, permanently afraid. She would rip herself from him - shivering and still crying. Without pretence and with deeply rooted terror she would run - run wild through the field where grasses would grow thicker and taller and throw dark, menacing shadows at her feet.

Running, she would find the wooded edge of the field and in the trees would be strangled by the black grasp. She would forget him, as her mind overpowered time and place, until she could no longer think. Nightmares would be alive in the half-light. In her craziness, he would be forgotten forever, except as Death. Then he would be free of her - a cloud dreaming through the day - guarding his frail body - gloating in his unrestricted movements.

Then...

He was interrupted by the quick removal of a needle, a neat bandage, and a rehearsed mutter of thanks. The nurse offered a final mechanical smile, and left.

He almost hated her.