

Ray the Vampire

Mercedes M. Yardley

THE THING ABOUT RAY WAS HIS INSATIABLE THIRST FOR blood. He has read every self-help book out there, including the Bible (“It doesn’t burn like I thought it would”), and even got hypnotized—though he tried to bite the hypnotist. But his obsession got annoying. “You know what this popcorn needs? Blood.” “Let’s go get a soda and a little blood.” “Blood blood blood blood blood.” We all kept our pets away from Ray.

His friends were the most anemic kids you ever saw. I wore a ribbon around my neck to hide the punctures, and Josh dropped out of football because he kept fainting on the field. Ray came to the hospital with two thick steaks and his fervent apologies. Josh told him between bites that it was okay, he didn’t mind, really, as he now got to play the drums in the pep band. Win/win, he said.

But it couldn’t go on. During our Biology exam, I noticed Ray eyeing my throat. “Ray, no!” I commanded, and was immediately sent to detention.

That night as Ray and I sat in my room, I took his hand. “You know I care about you, Ray. And Josh does too,” I said. “Where *is* Josh?”

“Back in the ER,” Ray fairly chirped. His color had improved. “He passed out during Sousa’s march in band.” He unconsciously ran his tongue over his teeth.

“You’re freaking me out, Ray,” I said, and he snapped alert.

“Freaking you out?”

I blew my hair out of my eyes. “You sneak into my room at night and bite me. You walk me home from school and bite me. You invite me to a movie, and then you bite me! Don’t you think that’s unusual behavior?”

Ray glowered, and his dark eyes shone red like they do sometimes.

Flash
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a kind of flirty, red chiffon number
that made me look
like I knew how to salsa,
which I didn't.
But with the blood-red dress
and my hair pulled off my neck,
I felt like bait.*

“I don’t sneak in to bite you,” he said, stalking to the door. “I watch you sleep.” A moment later I heard a squeak, and my two-year-old brother staggered in with his hand clapped to his neck. I sighed and reached for the antiseptic by my bed. Somehow his last comment refused to make me feel any better.

I didn’t see Ray for a week, though I know he’d stopped by because I awoke one morning to a bouquet of endearingly scraggly flowers and a large broccoli floret. The gift of iron rates highly in Ray’s book. Although I missed him, a Ray-free week healed my neck enough to let me take off the ribbon and actually put my hair up for the island’s annual dance. I was going with a kid two towns over, mostly because nobody else had asked me. Ray was MIA and Josh was going with the little piccolo in his band who had nursed him back to health after each spin in the ER. “Her braces are beautiful,” he murmured as I helped him tie his tie that night. “When she marches, I can’t tell where her mouth ends and her piccolo begins.” I handed him the corsage and watched him totter moon-eyed out the door.

Two hours later I wanted the night to end. My date hyperventilated twice and had scuttled away to attend to a nosebleed that would have horrified even Ray. I escaped to the pier while the going was good.

I was standing under the stars watching the water when I heard footsteps. I whirled around, and there was Ray. He was wearing a tux with a fairly good fit, and tennis shoes, which kept him from looking too much like the vampire he was, and more like himself. He’d managed to tame most of his hair, and when he smiled his fangs glittered in the moonlight. It was good to see him.

“Ray!” I stepped forward, but then I stopped. He was whiter than usual, if that was possible.

*The gift of iron
rates highly
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“I haven’t eaten in a week,” he said.

I was torn between wanting to hug him and making the sign of the cross.

“Nice dress,” he said.

He was right, it was nice, a kind of flirty, red chiffon number that made me look like I knew how to salsa, which I didn’t. But with the blood-red dress and my hair pulled off my neck, I felt like bait.

And apparently looked like it. “Out of everybody’s blood,” Ray said, “I like yours best in the whole world.”

I gave up. “Come on, Ray,” I said, turning my neck to him. “Come have a little nibble, but not too much, okay? I have to have some energy left to run away from Mr. Romance when he gets back.” I closed my eyes and tried to look delicious.

Ray shook his head. “Nuh uh. I’m through, man. Done. I’m a changed vampire.”

I must have looked at him like he was nuts, because he said, “Stop looking at me like I’m nuts! I mean it. I don’t want to freak you out, or leap out of the darkness with fangs bared. And I’m tired of visiting Josh in the hospital...I think one of the nurses has a crush on me.”

He looked so dejected that I said, “Ray, nobody has a crush on you. You’re undead.” He perked up. I turned back to the water and he strolled up and put his arm around me.

“I can hear your date coming,” he said. “He walks on the balls of his feet like my sister.” Ray’s extraordinary hearing picked up the littlest detail. I looked at him in horror. He looked at me, then leaned in, and...

He bit me.

“Oh, Ray,” I said in disappointment as my legs gave out. I felt my eyes roll back in my head. Ray caught me and lowered me gently to the ground instead of letting me slap

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concrete. He sat there for a second, tapping his left fang angrily before pulling my hair down over the bite marks.

Then he shoved his hands deep in his pockets, hunched his shoulders, and scuffed away. 🚫

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*This story was published as
FLASH 2008/11 #1 on Flash Fiction Online
(flashfictiononline.com).*