

Becoming One

By Sean Boyle

I'd been tased once before, and the sensation was all too memorably unpleasant. The first shot wasn't too bad; my jacket took most of the shock. But the second one... it was excruciating, agonizing, disorienting, like shoving my entire body into an electric outlet. It didn't exactly hurt, but it is still what I'd call pain. It overloaded every sense, muscle and nerve in my body. I smelled burning in my nostrils, tasted acid on my tongue, and saw stars and then blackness.

And in that blackness was ice. A cold touch, like a stiff breeze blowing from inside me, carrying away with it the very essence of my life. I wasn't conscious, but I could feel his hands holding me down, his nails digging into my flesh, his teeth piercing my neck, his slimy tongue lapping at my jugular, his lips sucking out both my life's blood and my spirit's essence. I wasn't able to think, but I still had a vague awareness. He was feeding. *Feeding. On me.* My body hummed with the shock, twitched, but couldn't resist. I couldn't move, couldn't cry out, all I could do was sense my life force ebbing away. Where was Talulah? Why was it taking her so long?

I don't know how long I was there. It felt like an eternity, my own labored breath, not even under my own conscious control, seeming to slow. I could count my heartbeats, each fading a bit more than the last. It was cold. So cold, that wind, that stream of life draining away from me. And in its place, I saw, *felt* dark images, evil, nasty things, all teeth and claws and dark but glowing eyes, creeping in on me from every direction. They hissed and screeched and whispered, hinting at secrets and images of the darkest nightmares from the deepest recesses of the human psyche. They were fear and shadow and un-life, a driving hunger I could empathically feel, knowing full well it was to be my own. Knowing that, I wanted it to end, my very life. I didn't want to be this monster. If this is what it was like, to feel a hunger, a *need* to consume the life of others, to make them feel this very fear, this sensation of loss. To end a life, drive it to become something truly terrible.

But I had no choice. I couldn't end it any more than I could cry out or fight back. This man, this *vampire*, he had every advantage. He'd won. He and his team, his *runners*, they'd bested me. We killed but one of them, and he was getting his revenge on me.

The cold wind, the life force fading, the hunger growling in my soul. It was ending.

It was over.

And that is how I died.

One can't live without a life force. Without a soul. Without *essence*. And that is what I am now, an empty husk. No longer human, not what I once was. I was a man, a man of principles, of pride; pride in who I was, pride in what I did. I protected the Company so it could maintain the Economy. So it could provide a Service to all the People who needed it.

But now, I'm nothing more than a monster. At least, that's what I'm becoming. I don't know much about these things. I just know that a vampire is a vampire.

The pain I feel would be unbearable, were it not for a persistent sensation of *emptiness*. My essence is gone, and with it the ability to *be*. I can barely feel, barely think. I have no soul. Just a husk.

A husk.

I gaze down at the pool of blood on the floor, the pool in which I now hunch on hands and knees, retching up my insides, purging all I once was. My life is gone, my body empty in both the spirit and the physical. I taste blood, but it feels distant. I see what looks like my digestive tract lying there, throbbing and twitching in its own lonely death throes, on the floor mere inches away, but it feels somehow detached, literally and figuratively. It's not mine. Was it ever? I cough and choke, and feel a rubbery, slimy *something* slide up my withering esophagus and out of my mouth. Is that a kidney? Do I really no longer need that? It makes a damp sprinkling sound as it rains down from my mouth to the tile floor in a spattering of blood and other fluids. But it still doesn't seem real.

What am I to become? Can I bear to inflict myself on this world? I'm a monster, but I already understand this hunger. I must feed to live. I must feed on blood, on life, on *essence*. To exist, I must take what was taken from me, from those who want to keep it for themselves; for those who need it simply to *stay* themselves.

Can I bear it? To do this to others? To turn them into what I am? To impose upon them the terrors I've experienced, the agony and pain, the fear? I could end it, I suppose. If a bullet could kill me, if a tiny piece of metal can put an end to this beast I now am. Perhaps at the right point, in the head, blast my brains out, to join my other organs on the floor, right here, right now, and it will all be over.

But no. Along with this hunger for life essence is a hunger for life itself. My mind tells me I should be dead, but my body, my *soul*, if that's what it still is, won't let me. It tells me, *forces* me, to live on. I must feed. I must take what was once mine. Forget the innocent. Forget the helpless.

Or... perhaps...

Use this hunger as a weapon. A weapon against those who did this to me, those who would upset the balance, destroy the Companies that make the world continue to exist. I can use it against the runners. They will be my food.

They will sate my hunger.

And I will not stop until the hunger subsides.

I have become one now. One of *them*. A creature of the night, devourer of souls, drinker of blood, What Goes Bump in the Night. And I know the Hunger never subsides.