

You Can't Go Home

I wait in the shadows outside my parent's house. My house. They're still at their weekly dinner at the club. That's probably why I chose tonight. To try and put off the inevitable.

Jacob said this was the way things were done. Cutting away the dead wood. Only it was more like cutting away the live wood and leaving the undead wood (me) to rot unencumbered.

I met Jacob in Prague during my European gap year. I was at a club with friends, he was charming. One thing led to another, and I was drained of blood, left to rise again in the oversized bathtub of his penthouse apartment.

My parent's commodore wagon pulls into the driveway and they get out. My brother is with them. They had him later in life. He's eight now. I was ten when he was born. I helped with nappies and bottles. I bathed him and walked him to school. The back of my neck burns.

Jacob said it would be easier if I didn't eat beforehand. So that my bloodlust is so great that I'll fly into a frenzy and not even remember what happens next. He isn't wrong. There's a tug in my stomach straining towards the pumping of their veins. Even from across the street I can hear it sloshing about inside them. Like a bottle of merlot.

Mum stops at the door, fumbling to find the right key in the dimness of the streetlamps. Dad takes it from her, struggles as well, then slips it in. I step out of the shadows as he's about to step in.

Andrew, my brother, turns and sees me walking across the road. The tips of my fangs prick the inside of my bottom lip. "Cassie!" he yells, and my parent's heads snap round to look. They do not grin like Andrew, perhaps unsure if this pallid shadow is their daughter. They're right to question it. I've questioned it too. Every day. But Andrew is guileless. The

adoring little sibling. He runs and throws his arms around me. The hot hunger roars at his touch but there is something else as well. Slowly my parents join him. We used to call it a family hug. Everyone would rush to join in.

A different kind of warmth spreads through me. One that wonders if, maybe, I can still come home.