

## THE VAGRANT

by

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Cynthere opened his eyes and shivered in the early autumn morning. The sky overhead—the sky?—so he was outdoors. The sky was only beginning to glow with a pinkish cast, from what he could see between the walls. Turning his head to either side, he saw that he lay within an alley between the rattrap inn where he was staying and another alehouse. Involuntarily, he gagged, swallowed to stop the rising gorge, then coughed and tried holding his breath. The smell of an outhouse would have been an improvement over the reek of vomit and rotted meat in the alley. Was some of the spew his? At least, with the chill morning, the smell was not as bad as it could have been.

Why was he so cold? Cynthere pushed himself into a sitting position and felt the cool air against the cold muck on his back. But now he could see why the chill felt as if it bit into his skin—he was as naked as the day he was born. And he was covered in a red fluid that could have only been blood. Perhaps it was a trick of the mind, but, seeing it covering his body, Cynthere believed he could smell the strong odor of iron seeping among that of the vomit. He hastily checked himself and found that the blood was not his. When he shivered this time, it was not just from cold.

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This was not the first time Cynthere had awoken disoriented, covered in blood, with no memory of where he was or what had happened. He originally thought he must have indulged in spirits until he blacked out, so he began abstaining from drink. Did he indulge yesternight? No. Well, he was fairly certain he hadn't. The last thing he distinctly remembered was walking home in the evening from the docks, after work.

Now, he was cold, naked, and covered in blood and muck in an alley. He'd likely never learn whose blood it was. He had no choice—he'd have to move on again.

A quick search of the alley revealed a holey blanket covered in so many dried fluids and fresh sludge that Cynthere had to spit out the bile that threatened to gag him. His skin crawled at the touch of the blanket as if he were covered by scurrying insects—likely, the sensation was not wholly imagined.

Entering the inn from the rear, beyond the alley, Cynthere hurried down the hallway—thankfully lit by nothing more than several wall candles, so his appearance would not be as readily apparent to passersby—up a flight of stairs, then down another hallway to his room. Which, of course, was locked. Even with no memory of the previous night, Cynthere was fairly certain he would be aware of the key's presence if he had secreted in the one space he had available...