



Ellen Schreiber

Vampire  
Kisse



**Ellen Schreiber**

**Vampire Kisses**

 HarperCollins e-books

“I want a relationship  
I can finally sink my teeth into.”

–Alexander Sterling

To my father, Gary Schreiber,  
with all my love;  
for giving me the wings to fly.

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## Little Monster

**I**t first happened when I was five.

I had just finished coloring in *My Kindergarten Book*. It was filled with Picasso-like drawings of my mom and dad, an Elmer's-glued, tissue-papered collage, and the answers to questions (favorite color, pets, best friend, etc.) written down by our hundred-year-old teacher, Mrs. Peevish.

My classmates and I were sitting in a semicircle on the floor in the reading area. "Bradley, what do you want to be when you grow up?" Mrs. Peevish asked after all the other questions had been answered.

"A fire fighter!" he shouted.

"Cindi?"

"Uh...a nurse," Cindi Warren whispered meekly.

Mrs. Peevish went through the rest of the class. Police officers. Astronauts. Football players. Finally it was my turn.

"Raven, what do you want to be when you grow up?" Mrs. Peevish asked, her green eyes staring through me.



I said nothing.

“An actress?”

I shook my head.

“A doctor?”

“Nuh, uh,” I said.

“A flight attendant?”

“Yuck!” I replied.

“Then what?” she asked, annoyed.

I thought for a moment. “I want to be...”

“Yes?”

“I want to be...a vampire!” I shouted, to the shock and amazement of Mrs. Peevish and my classmates. For a moment I thought she started to laugh; maybe she really did. The children sitting next to me inched away.

I spent most of my childhood watching others inch away.

I was conceived on my dad’s water bed—or on the rooftop of my mom’s college dorm under twinkling stars—depending on which one of my parents is telling the story. They were soul mates that couldn’t part with the seventies: true love mixed with drugs, some raspberry incense, and the music of the Grateful Dead. A beaded-jeweled, halter-topped, cutoff blue-jeaned, barefooted girl, intertwined with a long-haired, unshaven, Elton John–spectacled, suntanned, leather-vested, bell-bottomed-and-sandaled guy. I think they’re lucky I wasn’t more eccentric. I could have wanted to be a beaded-haired hippie werewolf! But somehow I became obsessed with vampires.

Sarah and Paul Madison became more responsible after my entrance into this world—or I’ll rephrase it and say my parents were “less glassy eyed.” They sold the Volkswagen flower power van that they were living in and actually started renting property. Our hippie apartment was decorated with 3-D glow-in-the-dark flower posters and orange tubes with a Play-Doh substance that moved on its own—lava lamps—that you could stare at forever. It was the best time ever. The three of us laughed and played Chutes and Ladders and squeezed Twinkies between our teeth. We stayed up late, watching Dracula movies, *Dark Shadows* with the infamous Barnabas Collins, and *Batman* on a black-and-white TV we’d received when we opened a bank account. I felt secure under the blanket of midnight, rubbing Mom’s growing belly, which made noises like the orange lava lamps. I figured she was going to give birth to more moving Play-Doh.

Everything changed when she gave birth to the playdough—only it wasn’t Play-Doh. She gave birth to Nerd Boy! How could she? How could she destroy all the Twinkie nights? Now she went to bed early, and that creation that my parents called “Billy” cried and fussed all night. I was suddenly alone. It was Dracula—the Dracula on TV—that kept me company while Mom slept, Nerd Boy wailed, and Dad changed smelly diapers in the darkness.

And if that wasn’t bad enough, suddenly they sent me to a place that wasn’t my apartment, that didn’t have wild 3-D flower posters on the walls, but boring collages of kids’ handprints. *Who decorates around here?* I wondered. It was overcrowded with Sears catalog girls in frilly dresses and Sears catalog boys in tapered pants and perfectly combed hair. Mom and Dad called it “kindergarten.”

“They’ll be your friends,” my mom reassured me, as I clung to her side for dear life. She waved good-bye and blew me kisses as I stood alone beside the matronly Mrs. Peevish, which was as alone as one can get. I watched my mom walk away with Nerd Boy on her hip as she took him back to the place filled with glow-in-the-dark posters, monster movies, and Twinkies.

Somehow I made it through the day. Cutting and gluing black paper on black paper, finger painting Barbie’s lips black, and telling

the assistant teacher ghost stories, while the Sears catalog kids ran around like they were all cousins at an all-American family picnic. I was even happy to see Nerd Boy when Mom finally came to pick me up.

That night she found me with my lips pressed against the TV screen, trying to kiss Christopher Lee in *Horror of Dracula*.

“Raven! What are you doing up so late? You have school tomorrow!”

“What?” I said. The Hostess cherry pie that I had been eating fell to the floor, and my heart fell with it.

“But I thought it was just the one time?” I said, panicked.

“Sweet Raven. You have to go every day!”

*Every day?* The words echoed inside my head. It was a life sentence!

That night Nerd Boy couldn't hope to compete with my dramatic wailing and crying. As I lay alone in my bed, I prayed for eternal darkness and a sun that never rose.

Unfortunately the next day I awoke to a blinding light and a monster headache.

I longed to be around at least one person that I could connect with. But I couldn't find any, at home or school. At home the lava lamps were replaced with Tiffany-style floor lamps, the glow-in-the-dark posters were covered with Laura Ashley wallpaper, and our grainy black-and-white TV was upgraded to a twenty-five-inch color model.

At school instead of singing the songs of *Mary Poppins*, I whistled the theme to *The Exorcist*.

Halfway through kindergarten I tried to become a vampire. Trevor Mitchell, a perfectly combed blond with weak blue eyes, was my nemesis from the moment I stared him down when he tried to cut in front of me on the slide. He hated me because I was the only kid who wasn't afraid of him. The kids and teachers kissed up to him because his father owned most of the land their houses sat on. Trevor was in a biting phase, not because he wanted to be a vampire like me, but just because he was mean. He had taken pieces of flesh out of everyone but me. And I was starting to get ticked off!

We were on the playground, standing by the basketball hoop, when I pinched the skin of his puny little arm so hard I thought blood would squirt out. His face turned beet red. I stood motionless and waited. Trevor's body trembled with anger, and his eyes swelled with vengeance as I mischievously smiled back. Then he left his dental impressions in my expectant hand. Mrs. Peevish was forced to sit him against the school wall, and I happily danced around the playground, waiting to transform into a vampire bat.

"That Raven is an odd one," I overheard Mrs. Peevish saying to another teacher as I skipped past the crying Trevor, who was now throwing a fit against the hard blacktop. I blew him a grateful kiss with my bitten hand.

I wore my wound proudly as I got on the school swing. I could fly now, right? But I'd need something to take me into warp speed. The seat went as high as the top of the fence, but I was aiming for the puffy clouds. The rusty swing started to buckle when I jumped off. I planned to fly across the playground—all the way to a startled Trevor. Instead I plummeted to the muddy earth, doing further damage to my tooth-marked hand. I cried more from the fact that I didn't possess supernatural powers like my heroes on TV than because of my throbbing flesh.

With my bite trapped under ice, Mrs. Peevish sat me against the wall to rest while the spoiled snot-nosed Trevor was now free to play. He blew me a teasing kiss and said, "Thank you." I stuck out my tongue and called him a name I had heard a mobster say in *The Godfather*. Mrs. Peevish immediately sent me inside. I was sent

inside a lot during my childhood recesses. I was destined to take a recess from recess.

## 2

### Dullsville

**T**he official welcome sign to my town should read, “Welcome to Dullsville—bigger than a cave, but small enough to feel claustrophobic!”

A population of 8,000 look-alikes, a weather forecast that’s perfectly miserable all year round—sunny—fenced in cookie-cutter houses, and sprawling farmland—that’s Dullsville. The 8:10 freight train that runs through town separates the wrong side of the tracks from the right side, the cornfields from the golf course, the tractors from the golf carts. I think the town has it backward. How can land that grows corn and wheat be worth less than land filled with sand traps?

The hundred-year-old courthouse sits on the town square. I haven’t gotten into enough trouble to be dragged there—yet. Boutiques, a travel agent, a computer store, a florist, and a second-run movie theater all sit happily around the square.

I wish our house could lie on the railroad tracks, on wheels, and carry us out of town, but we’re on the right side near the country club. Dullsville. The only exciting place is an abandoned mansion an exiled baroness built on top of Benson Hill, where she died in isolation.

I have only one friend in Dullsville—a farm girl, Becky Miller, who is more unpopular than I am. I was in third grade when I officially met her. Sitting on the school steps waiting for my mom to pick me up (late as usual) now that she was trying to be a Corporate Cathy, I noticed an impish girl cowering at the bottom of the steps, crying like a baby. She didn't have any friends, since she was shy and lived on the east side of the tracks. She was one of the few farm girls in our school and sat two rows behind me in class.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, feeling sorry for her. “My mom forgot me!” she hollered, her hands covering her pathetic, wet face.

“No, she didn’t,” I consoled.

“She’s never this late!” she cried.

“Maybe she’s stuck in traffic.”

“You think so?”

“Sure! Or maybe she got a call from one of those nosey sales people that always asks, ‘Is your mother home?’”

“Really?”

“Happens all the time. Or maybe she had to stop for snacks, and there was a long line at 7-Eleven.”

“Would she do that?”

“Why not, you have to eat, don’t you? So never fear. She’ll be here.”

And sure enough, a blue pickup drove up with one apologetic mother and a friendly, fluffy sheepdog.

“My mom says you can come over Saturday if it’s okay with your parents,” Becky said, running back to me.

No one had ever invited me to their house before. I wasn't shy like Becky but I was just as unpopular. I was always late for school because I overslept, I wore sunglasses in class, and I had opinions, all atypical in Dullsville.

Becky had a backyard as big as Transylvania—a great place to hide and play monsters and eat all the fresh apples a growling third-grade stomach could hold. I was the only kid in our class who didn't beat her up, exclude her, or call her names, and I even kicked anyone who tried. She was my three-dimensional shadow. I was her best friend and her bodyguard. And still am.

When I wasn't playing with Becky, I spent my time applying black lipstick and nail polish, scuffing my already-worn combat boots, and burying my head behind Anne Rice novels. I was eleven when our family went to New Orleans for vacation. Mom and Dad wanted to play blackjack on the Flamingo riverboat casino. Nerd Boy wanted to go to the aquarium. But I knew where I was going: I wanted to visit the house of Anne Rice's birth, the historical homes she had restored, and the mansion she now called home.

I stood mesmerized outside its iron gate, a Gothic mega-mansion, my mom (my uninvited chaperone) by my side. I could sense ravens flying overhead, even though there probably weren't any. It was a shame I hadn't come at night—it would have been that much more beautiful. Several girls who looked just like me stood across the street, taking pictures. I wanted to rush over and say, "Be my friends. We can tour the cemeteries together!" It was the first time in my life I felt like I belonged. I was in the city where they stack coffins on top of one another so you can see them, instead of burying them deep within the earth. There were college guys with two-toned spiky blond hair. Funky people were everywhere, except on Bourbon Street, where the tourists looked like they'd flown in from Dullsville. Suddenly a limousine pulled around the corner. The blackest limo I had ever seen. The driver, complete with black chauffeur's hat, opened the door, and she stepped out!



I freaked and watched motionless, like time was standing still. Right before my eyes was my idol of all living idols, Anne Rice!

She glowed like a movie star, a Gothic angel, a heavenly creature. Her long black hair flowed over her shoulders and glistened; she wore a golden headband, a long, flowing silky skirt, and a fabulous vampirish, dark cloak. I was speechless. I thought I might go into shock.

Fortunately my mom's never speechless.

"Could my daughter please have your autograph?"

"Sure," the queen of nocturnal adventures sweetly replied.

I walked toward her, as if my marshmallow legs would melt under the sun at any moment.

After she signed a yellow Post-it note my mom found in her purse, the Gothic starlet and I were standing beside each other, smiling, her arm around my waist.

Anne Rice had agreed to take a picture with me!

I had never smiled like that in my life. She probably smiled like she'd smiled a million times before. A moment she'll never remember, a moment I'll never forget.

Why didn't I tell her I loved her books? Why didn't I tell her how much she meant to me? That I thought she had a handle on things like no one else did?

I screamed with excitement for the rest of the day, reenacting the scene over and over for my dad and Nerd Boy at our antique-filled, pastel pink bed-and-breakfast. It was our first day in New Orleans, and I was ready to go home. Who cared about a stupid aquarium, the French Quarter, blues bands, and Mardi Gras beads when I'd just seen a vampire angel?

I waited all day to get the film developed, only to find that the picture of me and Anne Rice didn't come out. Sullen, I retreated back to the hotel with my mother. Despite the fact she and I had appeared in photographs separately, could it be possible that the combination of the two vampire-lovers couldn't be captured on film? Or rather it was just a reminder that she was a brilliant bestselling writer, and I was a screamy, dreamy child going through a dark phase. Or maybe it was that my mom was a lousy photographer.

## Monster Mash

**M**y Sweet Sixteenth birthday. Shouldn't all birthdays be sweet? Why should sixteen be any sweeter? It seemed like a lot of hype to me!

In Dullsville, they celebrate today, my sixteenth birthday, as any other day.

It all started with Nerd Boy's shouting at me. "Get up, Raven. You don't want to be late. It's time for school!"

How could two kids come from the same parents and be so different? Maybe there is something to that theory about the mailman. But in Nerd Boy's case my mother must have had an affair with the librarian.

I dragged myself out of bed and put on a black, cotton sleeveless dress and black hiking boots, and outlined my full lips with black lipstick.

Two white-flowered cakes, one in the shape of a 1 and the other in the shape of a 6, awaited me on the kitchen table.

I grazed the 6 cake with my index finger and licked the icing off.

“Happy birthday!” my mom said, kissing me. “That’s for tonight, but you can have this now,” she said handing me a package.

“Happy birthday, Rave,” my dad said, also giving me a kiss on the cheek.

“I bet you have no idea what you’re giving me,” I teased my dad as I held the package.

“No. But I’m sure it cost a lot.”

I shook the light package in my hand and heard a rattle. I stared at the Happy Birthday wrapping paper. It could be the keys to a car—my very own Batmobile! After all, it was my sixteenth birthday.

“I wanted to buy you something special,” my mom said, smiling.

I ripped the package open excitedly and lifted the jewelry box lid. A string of shiny white pearls stared back at me.

“Every girl should have a pearl necklace for special occasions.” My mom gleamed.

This was my mom’s corporate version of hippie love beads. I forced a crooked smile as I tried to hide my disappointment. “Thanks,” I said, hugging them both. I began to put the necklace back in the box, but my parents glared at me, so I reluctantly modeled it for them.

“It looks gorgeous on you.” My mom glowed.

“I’ll save them for something really special,” I replied, putting them back in the box.

The doorbell rang, and Becky came in with a small black gift bag.

“Happy birthday!” she shouted as we went into the living room.

“Thanks. You didn’t have to get me anything.”