Love at First Bite:
A Study of the Popularity and Conventions of Vampire Fiction
and
Vampire Night:
A Creative Interpretation of the Genre Formula

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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May 2011

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2011

Love at First Bite:
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the growing popularity of vampire fiction, particularly paranormal and vampire romances for teens. Vampire fiction began with *Carmilla* and *Dracula* as popular scary stories the 1800s, but in recent years has been transformed into a cultural phenomenon that represents love and acceptance. Traditional vampire mythology has been renewed and recreated for a younger modern audience. However, as with other popular genres, vampire fiction follows set narrative patterns. This thesis will explore the conventions of vampire literature and its transformation into its current form.
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Acknowledgements

First and most importantly, we want to thank Tara Tuttle, our thesis advisor, for being absolutely amazing. She believed our ability to do this project, and helped us throughout the process in every way. Her guidance and encouragement kept us on track and allowed us to create the best thesis project we could. We are incredibly thankful for her, and could not have asked for a better thesis advisor.

We would also like to thank Dr. Stedman in the Honors College for originally approving our thesis and encouraging us to pursue it. She also told us about the first source of research we found which paved the way for our subsequent research. She put us on track.

Additionally, we want to thank Margaret Ruling for reading our creative portion and being very particular with her comments to help us write the best story we could.

Finally, we want to thank our friends and families for supporting and encouraging us throughout this process. Without your love and support, we could not have done it.
Love at First Bite:

A Study of the Popularity and Conventions of Vampire Fiction

For centuries, the undead have fascinated and frightened readers—tales of the dead rising from the grave to haunt the living have terrified and entranced us. Well before the iconic Dracula, stories of vampires filled readers' nightmares in folktales and legends. While vampires have never truly disappeared from literature, they were forgotten for a time, regarded as merely scary stories not worthy of literary merit. Classic volumes of Dracula often sat collecting dust or resting in anthologies, and before the 1970s, who had even heard of Carmilla or "Good Lady Ducayne"? Recently, however, vampires have risen from their literary grave to stalk through the pages of popular fiction once again. Entire sections of vampire fiction now fill our bookstores. One cannot walk past a movie theater without seeing posters for the next vampire movie or installment of The Twilight Saga. But why the sudden resurrection? Anne Rice, beginning in the 1970s, revitalized the genre. Starting with Interview with the Vampire, the undead recaptured our imaginations. Now, Stephenie Meyer and others have transformed the vampire into something for the younger generation to fall in love with. Paranormal romances—the recent term bookstores have used to dub their aisles of teen romances involving vampires, werewolves, and the like—have become one of the most popular genres in recent years.

What Is Genre Fiction?

Whether it is a detective novel, an adventure story, or a Harlequin romance, popular fiction follows a formula. Individual books may be unique in their setting or their characters, but the elements that make up the book as a whole are essentially the same. Larry McCaffery uses the image in "The Library of Babel" by Jorge Luis Borges of a library composed of "five shelves
[that] correspond to each of the walls of each hexagon. Each shelf contains thirty-two books of a uniform format; each book is made up of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines; each line, of some eighty black letters” to describe one of the common views of popular fiction (21). The eighty letters are combined and recombined to create a multitude of lines, which are combined and recombined to create a multitude of pages, and so on. Throw the same elements into a blender, pull the first ten out, and you have a new story; they are same parts just in different combinations over and over again. John Cawelti uses the definition: “A formula is a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions with a more universal story form or archetype” (Adventure 6). For many, this leads to the assumption that formula fiction is not real fiction. It is not serious or of literary merit. It should not be canonized or studied. Cawelti himself states that the “two central aspects of formulaic structures have been generally condemned in the serious artistic thought of the last hundred years: their essential standardization and their primary relation to the needs of escape and relaxation” (8).

Yet it would be remiss to ignore the literary merit of popular fiction. For example, Gothic novels were virtually ignored by literary critics until Robert D. Hume in 1969 argued that these novels should be studied alongside other classic literary forms. In his article “Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel,” Hume “suggest[s] that the Gothic novel is more than a collection of ghost-story devices” (282). In analyzing “the characteristics and development of the Gothic novel,” defining the “essence” of the Gothic, and setting “the original Gothic novels in better historical perspective by defining their relation to the romantic literature of the same period,” Hume makes a case that even though these novels were popular when they were published, there is literary merit here (282). The same is true for other forms of popular fiction. While it may seem irrelevant that there are hundreds of books featuring virtually the
same characteristics, it in truth says something about the culture in which they are created, and, if the formula persists beyond a single culture or time period, it speaks to more than just a passing fad, but to something of definite value.

**Elements of Genre: The Formula**

Popular fiction, as previously noted, follows a formula. For example, every mystery or detective novel has specific elements that are universal, such as “[beginning] with an unsolved crime and [moving] toward the elucidation of its mystery” (Cawelti 80). There are variations, but the formula is essentially the same for all novels within that category. In order to fully study vampire romance as a genre, a formula must be defined. Elements that are consistent throughout vampire romances have to be identified in order to examine what makes specific works within the genre unique. However, formulas generally do not begin with one single book—they either stem from a previous genre or are not identified until the formula has already been established. A lot can be gained from studying previous genres and literary movements to explain the origins and conventions of a current popular genre.

**Gothic Influence**

While there are novels explicitly called Gothic romances, vampire romances—although borrowing substantially from Gothic romances—are different. Characterized by an “eerie mood” and “occult happenings,” Gothic romances take a cue from more traditional Gothic novels as far as setting and tone (Lowery 20). However, vampire romances draw far more heavily from Gothic literature than other Gothic romances. They maintain some of the mystery and eeriness of both Gothic literature and Gothic romances, but while Gothic romances have logical explanations of
seemingly supernatural occurrences, vampire romances take a page directly out of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or *Wuthering Heights*.

One of the most important elements of a Gothic novel is the atmosphere. In any Gothic novel, the setting is used to create the tone of mystery and suspense for the rest of the novel. A great deal of time is spent describing the location, as it is the backdrop for the coming ominous portents and shadowy happenings (Hume 284). For example, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson would not be the same without the dingy, fog-bound streets of London. The ghostly laughter in *Jane Eyre* would not have the same effect without the loneliness of the brooding forest surrounding the Rochester estate. Whether the characters are secluded in the moors of Wuthering Heights or in the freezing arctic in *Frankenstein*, the Gothic novel uses distance to seclude the events and add to the sensation of the unfamiliar.

In vampire romances, the stories take place in either the past, a foreign country, or very small-town, isolated America. Rarely does action occur in modern-day American metropolises. Beginning with the Anne Rice novels, vampires began to appear in American towns, but the stories themselves still took place in the past or told of events occurring in Europe. Today’s most popular vampire romances, *Twilight*, the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels*, and *The Vampire Diaries*, all take place in small towns in Washington, Louisiana, and Virginia, respectively. Forks, Washington is constantly dark, rainy, and foggy; and Bella and the vampires of *The Twilight Saga* are usually found in the woods that surround the town. Bon Temps, Louisiana of the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels* is an almost back-water town in which most of the action occurs at night due to Sookie’s job as a cocktail waitress and the nocturnal vampires. Additionally, Sookie lives alone in a house away from the main part of town at the end of a long gravel drive surrounded by woods which adds significantly to her own isolation. *The Vampire Diaries* seems the most
contemporary and lively, comparatively, but the characters are still in a small town and no one ever leaves. There is an old graveyard that characterizes many scenes with the vampires, and again, a lot of vampire-human interactions occur in the woods surrounding the town. These secluded, physically distant locations create the overall “Gothic” feel of the vampire romance.

But there is more to what constitutes a Gothic novel than a spooky setting. Two other major elements of Gothic novels are moral ambiguity and psychological responses to extreme circumstances (Hume). Moral ambiguity questions what is right or wrong, lacks a sense of satisfying closure, and generally creates less than righteous means of gaining an end. The Cullen clan in *Twilight* is “vegetarian,” drinking blood only from deer, mountain lions, and bears because they feel it is wrong to drink human blood. However, Edward still questions whether or not he has a soul and what being a vampire truly means. In *Dead Until Dark*, the first of the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels*, Bill, Sookie’s vampire boyfriend, murders Sookie’s sexually abusive great-uncle and two vampire drainers who beat her up. She is very upset by this because, while she feels it is wrong for Bill to murder these people, is it murder if he is a vampire? This situation bleeds directly into the psychological response Sookie has to these questions. She is shaken by what Bill has done for her, and her relationship with Bill becomes strained. Bella, on the other hand, does not exhibit quite the same emotions as Sookie. She is much more accepting of Edward’s vampirism, creating a less realistic response to being confronted with an extreme situation.

The last Gothic element that plays a huge role in vampire romances is the monster. Jeffrey Cohen states that Gothic monsters “quite literally [incorporate] fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy… giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture” (4). In short, monsters would not exist without a society to create them. If a society were afraid
of nothing, a monster would not be necessary to embody its fears. Frankenstein’s monster, Mr. Hyde, and especially Count Dracula all embody cultural fears of the time, and today’s monsters do the same. However, contemporary vampires are not like Count Dracula. They embody less and less fear and anxiety, and ever more fantasy and desire.

While the vampire is most often connected to Dracula, the idea of the vampire in literature came long before then. Two tales modern readers may not be familiar with are John Polidori’s The Vampyre and Sheridan Le Fanu’s Carmilla. Published in 1819 and 1872 respectively, these novels are the forerunners, and in Carmilla’s case, inspiration, for Dracula. With these first novels, the “prerequisites” of vampires were formed, everything from their actions to their physical features. Ronald Foust in his essay “Rite of Passage: The Vampire Tale as Cosmogonic Myth” highlights these features using The Vampyre:

Polidori’s novel both initiates the modern [1981] vampire story and adumbrates the major elements that will become the archetypal staples of the form. These include the vampire’s “evil eye” or hypnotic power, its tremendous strength, its pallor and association with the moon, its immortality, its identity as a self-absorbed egotist who brings ruin on individuals and societies, its thirst for blood..., and its associations with the grave..., with Satan, and with the love-crime [destroying the institution of marriage (74)] that Mario Praz feels is at the heart of the vampire story. (74-5)

Foust then shows that just one vampire novel later with Carmilla, there is already a standard for literary vampires to follow: “Carmilla is pale and languid, eats nothing and appears only late in the afternoon.... She has the gleaming eyes and passionate gaze that are attributes of the
Vampire romances continue the themes presented in the early novels, but with vampires as heroes rather than villains.

**Romance Influences**

In addition to capturing elements from Gothic literature and classic fantasy, vampire romance draws heavily from the traditional romance genre, or Harlequin romance. Marilyn Lowery defines the traditional romance formula:

1. A girl, our heroine, meets a man, our hero, who is above her socially and who is wealthy and worldly.
2. The hero excites the heroine but frightens her sexually.
3. She is usually alone in the world and vulnerable.
4. The hero dominates the heroine, but she is fiery and sensual, needing this powerful male.
5. Though appearing to scorn her, the hero is intrigued by her and pursues her sexually.
6. The heroine wants love, not merely sex, and sees his pursuit as self-gratification.
7. The two clash in verbal sparring
8. In holding to her own standards, the heroine appears to lose the hero. She does not know he respects her.
9. A moment of danger for either main character results in the realization on the part of the hero or heroine that the feeling between them is true love.
10. A last-minute plot twist threatens their relationship.
11. The two finally communicate and admit their true love, which will last forever. (17-8)

Vampire romance follows this formula almost exactly with a few variations and additions that are specific to the genre. For example, the vampire romance features a female, human protagonist who is intrigued by the male vampire, who in turn is fascinated by some unexplained characteristic of the female protagonist.

In *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer, Edward Cullen is inexplicably drawn to Bella Swan because of her scent and his inability to read her mind, while Bella is completely fascinated by...
Edward’s characteristics and charisma that she cannot explain. These characteristics end up
being his vampirism. In the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels* by Charlaine Harris, Sookie Stackhouse is
telepathic. However, she is unable to read vampire minds (just as Edward is unable to read
Bella’s), which causes her to find comfort in the silence that she cannot find with human
companions. To vampires, Sookie has a particularly alluring scent and taste, which is later
revealed to be due to her fairy ancestry. Similarly, in L.J. Smith’s *Vampire Diaries*, the male
vampire Stefan Salvatore is attracted to human Elena Gilbert because of her striking resemblance
to the vampire that created him and the unexplained connection between them. Like Bella to
Edward in *Twilight*, Elena is attracted to Stefan’s broodiness and the fact that he does not
worship her like everyone else in her school does. Each heroine has some attribute that makes
her especially desirable, while some equally appealing attribute makes the vampire irresistible.

As Lowery notes, in a romance novel the man is “above [the heroine] socially and [he] is
wealthy and worldly” (17). The same holds true for vampire romance. Whether the story is
aimed at teens or adults, the vampire is inevitably more experienced and cultured than the female
protagonist. As the vampire has lived for decades, if not centuries, longer, it is not entirely
unexpected that she finds him socially superior. They have had years to accumulate wealth,
social graces, and experience. Edward impresses Bella with his knowledge of literature, his
ability to play piano, his family’s wealth, and his ridiculously expensive array of cars. He’s
socially her superior as a member of the mysterious clique of incredibly attractive Cullens at the
high school, while she is the new student. Bill Compton of the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels*, on the
other hand, as a soldier from the Civil War has an ingrained politeness and Southern charm that
persuades nearly every human that vampires cannot be as horrible as they’ve heard. He buys her
expensive items, including her favorite department store, and showers her with gifts. Stefan,
correspondingly, lived during the Italian Renaissance and is infinitely more cultured than the average American high school student.

While their past makes them all the more intriguing, the difference in social standing adds to the inequality of power in the relationships. Not only are the vampires socially superior but they are also physically superior. No matter the other characteristics or powers ascribed to vampires, three main things are consistent. First, they are essentially immortal. Second, they drink blood to survive. Third, they are physically stronger than humans. In vampire romance, this inequality of power leads to the desire to protect their human companions. They feel obligated to shelter them from the dangers of vampire life. This generally appears most prevalently during their initial encounter and the formation of the relationship, but continues throughout.

After the first meeting of the two main characters, there is generally a period of discovery on the part of the heroine and a period of avoidance by the vampire. Depending on the mythology of each series or book, the protagonist does not know about the existence of vampires. The protagonist, intrigued by the hero, is determined to find out about him. Bella is constantly asking about the Cullen family—what they do, where they live, where they come from. Eventually, she turns to the internet to find explanations for Edward’s strange behavior and cold skin. Elena, on the other hand, is simply focused on capturing Stefan’s attention. She is confused by his indifference and curious as to why he ignores her.

This period of time, however, is characterized by strict avoidance on the part of the hero. The vampires in these romance novels are keenly aware of the danger they pose to their fragile human lovers. For Edward, Bella is a peculiar temptation, and he immediately chooses to spend as little time as possible in her presence. Bella interprets his actions as hatred, but he is merely attempting to protect her. Stefan, likewise, avoids Elena because he is worried about the danger
his affection might cause. Each vampire sees the heroine as in desperate need of protection who cannot possibly cope with the situations or knowledge that being in a relationship would bring. This period mimics the idea within a traditional romance when “appearing to scorn [the heroine], the hero is intrigued by her,” but with different motivations and generally with the attempt to not “pursue her,” unlike the traditional romance (17).

With any formula, there are exceptions. The period of discovery and avoidance is distinctly different for those stories in which the mythology includes the acknowledgment of vampires by human society. In Harris’s *Sookie Stackhouse Novels*, vampires have “come out of the coffin” (similar to the phrase “come out of the closet” used for when homosexual men and women tell others they are gay) and have announced their existence to the general human population. Similarly, the *House of Night series* by Kristin and P.C. Cast features vampires who have always been recognizable as different from humans. While neither series shows vampires as a completely accepted part of society, both depict knowledge about vampires. Nevertheless, even when vampires are known, there is an element of avoidance and need for protection. Sookie in the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels* chooses to shun the company of Bill Compton, her vampire boyfriend, after a terrifying experience with another group of vampires. Conversely, when they are reunited, Bill feels guilty about the possibility of peril surrounding Sookie because of her involvement with him and the vampire community. He believes he is responsible for protecting her and ensuring her safety. In both cases, whether or not vampires are known, the hero feels the need to separate himself from the heroine in order to protect her.

The misunderstanding of intentions is a common theme throughout romance novels. Ann Barr Snitow states, “[Harlequin romance] novels have no plot in the usual sense. All tension and problems arise from the fact that the Harlequin world is inhabited by two species incapable of
communicating with each other, male and female…. They find each other utterly mystifying" (190). The inability to communicate in vampire romance is further complicated by the fact they are in actuality two separate species. They have different cultural backgrounds, different physiological makeup and needs, and lifestyles. All of the differences between human and vampire culminate in a barely surmountable communication gap. For example, Bill is constantly offending Sookie because of his old-fashioned attitudes towards women; “Bill made as if to pick me up. ‘I am a grown woman,’ I snarled. ‘I can walk into the house on my own” (Harris, Dead Until Dark 191). He cannot understand how to treat modern human women as he has not truly interacted with them for centuries.

“In holding to her own standards, the heroine appears to lose the hero. She does not know he respects her” is one of Lowery’s criteria for a romance novel, but it is not a universal characteristic of vampire romance (17). The Sookie Stackhouse Novels, which tends to follow the romance formula more strictly than others in vampire romance, includes a scene in which Sookie is appalled by the amount of bloodshed Bill has caused and refuses to see him. However, this does not have corresponding scene or sequence in other vampire romance works. Instead, the heroine’s infatuation with her vampire lover is too great for her to be greatly perturbed by what he is. For example, while Edward argues he has no soul, Bella is continually trying to convince him otherwise as she believes him to be absolutely perfect. The entire Twilight Saga is filled with references to Edward’s beauty and perfection. Bella cannot find any flaw with him. Elena, likewise, believes Stefan when he denies accusations of being responsible for the “animal attacks” that are in truth perpetrated by his brother, Damon (who is also a vampire). Despite knowing that he is equally capable of the killings, she remains loyal to him. The heroines
consistently look past the fact that, as vampires, the heroes are monsters. It is only Sookie who
seems aware of the true horrors they can commit and have committed in the past.

“There seems little doubt that most modern romance formulas are essentially affirmations
of the ideals of monogamous marriage and feminine domesticity” (Cawelti 42). The goal of a
romance novel is the pursuit of a relationship that eventually leads to marriage. Snitow claims
that “the heroine is not involved in any overt adventure beyond trying to respond appropriately to
male energy without losing her virginity” (191). However, vampire romance changes that aspect
of the romance novel. While the main focus remains on the relationship between human
protagonist and vampire lover, there are added elements of danger, suspense, and adventure. For
example, Sookie is removed from her small town life to travel with the vampires as a sort of
consultant in their interactions with humans. She becomes enwrapped in intrigue and mystery
with kidnappings, murders, and assassination attempts. Although not quite as dramatic, Bella is
confronted by vampires who wish to hunt her, rampaging groups of newly made vampires, and
clan fights between vampires and, for all intents and purposes, werewolves. Vampires create a
new element for romance novels: instead of merely trying to maintain her virginity, the heroine
must maintain her mortal life while still juggling the new knowledge of the paranormal and a
relationship.

Teen Versus Adult Vampire Fiction

While the formula for plot in a vampire romance is fairly standardized, there is a
separation between adult vampire romance and teen vampire romance. The plots mirror one
another closely, but it is more than just age that separates teen from adult. Lowery describes
“young adult romance”: 
These romances are geared for readers from age twelve to fourteen with heroines of fifteen or sixteen and heroes of seventeen or eighteen. The heroines are from typical middle-class backgrounds and lead wholesome lives. The emphasis is on the first romantic relationship, and usually the first kiss is uppermost in the girl’s mind. The settings are those normal for a U.S. teenager, and minor characters are included in the form of friends, teachers, parents. These are not the lonely girls of the traditional romances. (22)

The focus in young adult romances is on wholesomeness. The heroine remains pure throughout, and sexual encounters do not occur. This is also the first main difference between teen and adult vampire romances. Bella and Edward do not consummate their relationship until after they are married in the fourth and final book of the series, and the scene is not explicitly described. The extent of their intimacy prior to this is a handful of very brief touches of the lips. Throughout the Sookie Stackhouse Novels, a series written for adults with adult themes, Sookie engages in a multitude of physical relationships with a variety of both vampires and shape-shifters. While the teen vampire romance novels focus on finding true love, the adult versions, though still interested in love, are more concerned with the physical aspects of a relationship. There is little that can be described as wholesome in many of the adult vampire romance novels.

Despite these differences, there are a few aspects that tend to stay the same in teen and adult vampire romances. For example, the idolization of the male figure is carried throughout teen and adult vampire romances. Due to the adult content of adult vampire romances, the novels necessarily describe the physical attributes of the hero in immense detail. Snitow comments:

In a sense the usual relationship is reversed: woman is subject, man, object. There are more descriptions of his body than of hers though her clothes are always
minutely observed. He is the unknowable other, a sexual icon whose magic is maleness. The books are permeated by phallic worship. Male is good, male is exciting, without further points of reference. (190)

As the romances are seen from the female point-of-view, most of the descriptions focus on the male character. Little time is given to the description of the protagonist unless it adds to the tone of a particular scene. Instead, the focus is on the male body. For example, in Dead Until Dark, Sookie describes Bill’s appearance in depth: “his lips were lovely, sharply sculpted, and he had arched dark brows. His nose swooped down right out of that arch, like a prince’s in a Byzantine mosaic” (Harris 2). Later in the novel, upon meeting Eric Northman (another vampire and eventual love-interest), Sookie describes him as “handsome, in fact, radiant; blond and blue-eyed, tall and broad shouldered. He was wearing boots, jeans, and a vest. Period. Kind of like the guys on the cover of romance books” (105). While teen romances may be unfailingly wholesome in the relationship between the heroine and her vampire love-interest, the heroine is still obsessively focused on the hero’s appearance and how it contributes to the protagonist’s attraction to him. Stefan, in The Vampire Diaries, is continually described as dark and handsome. Edward, on the other hand, is said to be beautiful or incredibly striking in nearly every scene in which he appears in the Twilight Saga—“His hair was dripping wet, disheveled—even so, he looked like he’d just finished shooting a commercial for hair gel. His dazzling face was friendly, open, a light smile on his flawless lips” (Meyer 43). The descriptions may fail to go as far as adult romances in sexualizing the appearance of the male hero, but the male is still objectified.

Likewise, the isolated heroine remains a consistent characteristic of both teen and adult vampire romances. The heroine in an adult romance is isolated from the outside world; if not by
location, than by some other aspect of her life. Sookie, for instance, is isolated as the town “crazy” as her telepathy makes normal conversation almost impossible. However, in teen romance, Lowery writes, “These are not the lone girls of the traditional romances,” but in vampire romances they are. Loving a vampire means a heroine cannot be the popular girl—sleep schedules are warped, mystery surrounds everything about the male which the female then seeps herself in it, and discovering the vampire out or being with him alienate the heroine from society. Bella is the perfect example. She moves from Arizona where she has no friends to a school in Washington where she is the “new kid.” This makes her popular because she is a commodity (and her father asked all the students to be welcoming and make her feel included). But Bella does not want to be popular. She instead devotes her time to understanding why Edward is withdrawn and why his family seems so mysterious. Elena’s case is slightly more problematic. Elena is the popular girl—she runs the school, she is the Homecoming Queen. When Stefan arrives, however, Elena shirks her Queen Bee duties and devotes herself to attaining Stefan. He does not give her the time of day and he is the only person in the school who does not. This intrigues Elena and she must figure him out, alienating all but her two closest friends in the process.

On the other hand, as teen vampire romances are aimed at a teenage female audience, not only are they wholesome, but they also focus on those things that an average teenage girl is most concerned about—boys, parents, and school. The novels take place during high school and mention classes and teachers and, of course, popularity. While the appearance of vampires alters the worldview of the protagonist somewhat, her main problems still pertain to boys (i.e. the vampire) and how to cope with the stress of high school and a relationship. Adult vampire romances, however, are able to expand the focus to matters such as society and politics as well as
more minor concerns such as finances and careers. While the relationship is vitally important in
both of these, the adult vampire romance has the ability to make broader statements about the
society in which they are produced. Yet, while *Twilight* and other teen vampire romances
generally do not reflect any themes that affect the average adult, they have still been able to
garner a wider audience than the teenage girl which they were written for. As the plethora of
news stories regarding the spread of the *Twilight* phenomenon indicate, the books are being read
by pre-teens, teens, and adult women alike. Whether the issues presented are about society at
large or high school drama, be they teen or adult, the thing they all share is the vampire.

**The Ever-Changing Vampire and Cultural Fears**

One of the quintessential aspects of vampire romance novels is of course, the vampire.
But what is a vampire? From Count Dracula to Edward Cullen, literature has been defining and
redefining the concept of “vampire.” A vampire, as the general republic regards it, is an undead
human who survives on drinking blood from living creatures. No matter what vampire mythos is
being examined, this is essentially the same. However, many aspects of the vampire iconography
have changed over time. In Cohen’s essay “Monster Culture” he lists seven Monster Theses.
Number two, “The Monster Always Escapes,” shows us that although the physical monster of
the story may die, the cultural fear lives on, changing for an ever-changing society. “No monster
tastes of death but once,” he writes. “The anxiety that condenses like green vapor into the form
of the vampire can be dispersed temporarily, but the revenant by definition returns. And so the
monster’s body is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift” (5). He goes
on to illustrate how vampires embody this thesis—“Each time the grave opens and the unquiet
slumberer strides forth..., the message proclaimed is transformed by the air that gives its speaker
new life. Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them” (5). This, therefore, is why the vampires change—social, cultural, and literary-historical relations and ideas are always changing with the times. Acting as monsters, vampires reflect a culture’s fears and desires, and whatever is unseemly about the culture is thrown off onto the vampire. In the 19th century, those fears and desires were easily recognizable with works like Dracula. Today however, those cultural abjections are less clear and are reflected in our society’s vampires who resemble humans much more than their Gothic counterparts.

In Gothic literature, the vampire often represented the cultural fear of violating gender norms and gender roles. As mentioned earlier, Foust claims that love-crimes are “necessary to the vampire motif” (75). In Carmilla, the crime is lesbianism (75). Carmilla preys on the young narrator Laura, draining her blood almost to the point of death. However, it was not only the vampirism that frightened readers at the time, but also the homosexual overtones that were implied. Carmilla proclaims to Laura, “In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine” (Le Fanu 104). Laura admits that these words and Carmilla’s tender actions are “like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering” (104). To further this, Carmilla “with glistening eyes drew [Laura] to her, and her hot lips travelled along [her] cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, ‘You are mine, you shall be mine, and you and I are one for ever’” (105). These fears of lesbianism for a 19th-century audience directly conflict with modern readers’ visions of a male vampire bent over the neck of a young woman.

As noted, in most modern vampire romance tales, the protagonist is female and she falls in love—or at least in lust—with a male vampire. In each of the novels, this remains fairly
consistent. However, beginning with Anne Rice who “has given the myth a modern rewriting in which homosexuality and vampirism have been conjoined, apotheosized... at a time [Interview with the Vampire was published in 1976] when gender as a construct has been scrutinized at almost every social register” (Cohen 5), the fear of violating gender norms and heterosexual relationships remains an aspect, if perhaps a less pronounced one, in vampire romance. In the Sookie Stackhouse Novels, vampires are said to have “come out of the coffin” and are actively fighting for political rights, including the right to marry humans. Their efforts are frequently met by the same opposition that currently faces the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) community. The vampires are despised by religious groups, while those humans that are accepting of the vampires are derided as “fang-bangers” and are subjected to multiple types of prejudice and persecution. In addition, multiple characters, both human and supernatural, are gay or lesbian in the series. Three of the main “ruling” vampires in the series are homosexual and there is even the portrayal of a wedding between two vampire kings, the King of Mississippi and the King of Texas. Similarly, the Queen of Louisiana is shown in a relationship with the Sookie’s female cousin, Hadley.

In Twilight and The Vampire Diaries, the fear is expressed in the distinct lack of homosexual themes or any violation of gender stereotypes. Simply, the girls act as girls and the boys act as boys. While every vampire in vampire romance novels feels protective of their human lover due to their lack of physical strength, the protective aspects of the male vampire is even more greatly pronounced in Twilight and The Vampire Diaries. Whereas Sookie is eventually allowed to fend for herself, it is not until Bella and Elena are each transformed into something beyond human that they begin to show independence. For example, in New Moon, the second book of the Twilight Saga, Bella’s entire world is centered on Edward to the point where
once he leaves her for an extended period of time, her entire life completely stops. Represented by a section of blank pages with only the name of months written upon them, Bella has no recollection of the passage of time without Edward. Gender norms are constantly reinforced through the behavior of the characters as Edward makes every decision regarding the relationship and what is best for Bella. While not as shocking as lesbianism in the 19th century, the breach of gender roles is still central to the *fears* that vampires can represent.

The character Dracula represented the incarnation of evil itself. Jules Zanger writes “In Stoker’s novel, Dracula is presented to the reader as the earthly embodiment of supernatural Evil, as the ‘arrow in the side of Him who died for man.’...Dracula, for Stoker and for Stoker’s readers, is the Anti-Christ” (18). Simply, Dracula has no hope of redemption or for acting for the good of anyone. He represented the fear of pure evil in a form that could briefly pass for human.

However, even at the time of *Dracula*, authors were beginning to explore the idea of evil coming from within ourselves rather than from some supernatural source. For instance, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* clearly shows the horror of evil coming from within not only one’s own country, but from within one’s self. Modern vampire tales take more of a cue from Stevenson than Stoker. Zanger continues:

The ‘new’ vampire possesses very little of that metaphysical, anti-Christian dimension, and his or her evil acts are expressions of individual personality and condition, not of any cosmic conflict between God and Satan. Consequently, the vampire’s absolutely evil nature as objectified in *Dracula* becomes increasingly compromised, permitting the existence of ‘good’ vampires as well as bad ones. (18-19)
In other words, vampires are no longer inherently evil, but rather their penchant for murder or violence stems from their individual senses of entitlement or from the fact that absolute power corrupts absolutely. This allows there to now be a romantic relationship between human and vampire without readers being horrified by the choices the heroine makes. The glittering vampires of *Twilight* bear little resemblance to the terrifying creatures of *Dracula*.

Among other shifts, Zanger lists changes in vampires “from solitary to multiple and communal, from metaphoric Anti-Christ to secular sinner, from magical to mundane” each of which serves to demythologize the vampire until “the new vampire has become, in our concerned awareness for multiculturalism, merely ethnic, a victim of heredity, like being Sicilian or Jewish. Or, alternatively, vampirism can be understood… as a kind of viral infection, possibly like AIDS, without any necessary moral weight” (19). While Zanger is referring to the vampire tales of the 1980s, the shifts in characterization remain static, although the vampire is not entirely demythologized as she suggests. The vampires of the current trend in vampire romances retain some aspects of magic and mythology even if they are no longer connected to Christianity or Satan. The vampires have no fear of crosses or holy water, but there are characteristics that cannot be explained and must be consigned to the realm of the supernatural. They may be infinitely more humanized than vampires of the long past, but they are still creatures of mystery, which is perhaps why readers are still so drawn to them.

As Nina Auerbach aptly titled her book *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, our vampires are ourselves. We created vampires two centuries ago to cope with cultural fears—we personified them with those fears and staked and beheaded them away. “Individual vampires may die; after almost a century, even Dracula may be feeling his mortality; but as a species vampires have been our companions for so long that it is hard to imagine living without them. They promise escape
from our dull lives and the pressure of our times, but they matter because when properly understood, they make us see that our lives are implicated in theirs and our times are inescapable" (Auerbach 9). Yet no matter how many vampires or fears we cycle through, we cannot kill the overarching concept of "vampire," and even when we have no more fears to project onto them, we transform them from fear personified to desire idolized.

From Dracula to Edward Cullen, from Carmilla to Eric Northman, and from popular scary stories to cultural romantic sensations, the vampire phenomenon has only truly shifted in what the vampire represents. It is no longer the thing of nightmares, but rather the thing of dreams. Young girls dream of meeting a tall, dark, handsome stranger to whisk them off into the night and women dream of the dangerous, but chivalrous Viking or Civil War soldier to call their own. These vampires reflect the escape we seek when faced with political turmoil, war, and economic crisis. Instead of imagining the supernatural terrors we will never face, we instead seek comfort in the monsters that formerly terrified as protectors and unchanging pillars of strength in a time when everything appears to be moving too quickly and changing too fast. Vampires will remain regardless of what changes around them. Edward Cullen will remain the statuesque figure he is today just as Dracula has remained the villain that he first was in 1897.
Works Cited


Authors' Statement:

“Vampire Night”: Our Take on the Vampire Romance

Knowing the above formula and the elements that constitute a vampire romance, we specifically altered or, conversely, preserved many elements of the formula to create our own story. There are many reasons why we changed some elements and kept others. To begin, we decided that the overarching formula of introduction, resistance, discovery, hardship, and reconciliation should remain the same. These are consistent in each vampire romance, and without them, it would not be a vampire romance. Julia and Ethan follow this to the letter: they meet, she attempts to resist him until giving in, he discovers what she is, their relationship is quite rocky, and then they reconcile. From this point, however, the plot deviates. Instead of Ethan becoming a vampire and the two living happily ever after into bloodsucking eternity, Ethan becomes crazed and Julia, Ettie, Will, and Sam kill him. We chose to do this because we did not want to write a straightforward, formulaic teen paranormal romance as for many the idea of finding true love so young and between such disparate beings (humans and vampires) seems unlikely. While keeping a romanticized view of vampires, we did not want to defang them entirely, but rather wanted a sympathetic character that kept all of her independence when confronted with a romantic relationship.

The first major change the reader will notice is the gender and species reversal of the main characters. In Twilight, The Vampire Diaries, and The Sookie Stackhouse Novels, the main female protagonist is a human female whose love interest is a male vampire. We reversed this. While the main protagonist is still a woman, she is the vampire and her human love interest is male. Stories told from vampire perspectives are generally male (Interview with the Vampire, etc.) or less mainstream (In the Forests of the Night by Amelia Atwater-Rhodes). No matter how
strong a female protagonist might be in a teen vampire romance, she is always made to seem or feel weaker next to her vampire counterpart. By making our female protagonist a vampire, she automatically becomes stronger, both physically and emotionally. Gender stereotypes can then be avoided and in some cases completely broken.

Another big change is the audience for which this story was written. It is not for teenagers—the main characters are not 16-18 years old and no one goes to high school—nor is it for adults—our characters’ lives do not revolve around working at a bar or a company and mortgages are not an issue, nor does it venture too far into the world of politics or social controversies. We chose the midway point of college students. Creative writers are always told to write what they know, and we chose to do that while subverting the genre with a story meant for an in-between readership. College students are certainly not teenagers, but they are also not full adults, so why should they not have their own paranormal romance? In setting “Vampire Night” in a college atmosphere, we made vampire fiction more accessible to college students and created a unique vampire community we have not previously seen.

Making this story more accessible to college students placed it more on the adult end of the paranormal romance spectrum, which means the story is more graphic than teen romances. Drinking, partying, sex, and violence are all described explicitly, and this not only submerges readers who are familiar with these activities more fully into the story, but it also has a greater sense of realism. These activities occur on most college campuses and humans freely participate in them, so who is to say vampires do not? Additionally, the vampires we have created drink human blood, they are hundreds if not thousands of years old, and in order to survive they would be subjected to violence. To leave that out would mean sweeping this under the literary rug and would not provide an accurate or detailed picture of the world we have created.
This leads us to Ethan’s death. It is violent and it completely contradicts the happily ever after that most romances create. Vampires are, as stated, bloodsucking creatures who, despite human emotions or sympathies, rely on instinct and violence to survive. And love is not always happily ever after. Literally it works out quite nicely—teens read their romance to escape into a world where everything is wholesome and works out for the best. Adults read their romance for the thrill and the hope that everything will work out, but understand that it cannot always work out. Despite the fact that this is a tale about vampires and it can only be so “real,” we wanted the story to have a sense of realism to it, that if this actually happened, it would not be all butterflies and sunshine (or twinkling stars and glowing moonlight). We felt, realistically, that someone who came into power like Ethan did would not be able to control it, nor would he want to. Our vampires are not the type to give multiple chances and when someone or something threatens their chance of survival, it must be eliminated. Therefore, Ethan had to die. Happily ever after has a different meaning to a vampire.
Vampire Night

By Madisen Ray and Karen Ruling

Prologue

There were only six patrons left in the speakeasy that night—Francine, me, and two other couples who just didn’t want to stop drinking. Tom was behind the bar putting the booze up, and Hank was plinking out one last tune on the piano at the other side of the room. And of course, Bobby and his boys were still here. Bobby was counting the night’s money, which seemed to be a lot by the grin on his face. The others were cleaning their guns and drinking their booze.

Francine and I were leaning against the bar sipping our whiskey and waiting patiently for the boys to beckon us over to their table. Bobby finally put down the cash and winked at me, and with a nudge from Francine, I turned to sounter over to his table.

The door leading up from the basement establishment hanged open to my left, and I stopped cold, as did the rest of the room. The piano music stopped, and not one icy tinkle was heard from the whiskey tumblers. Filing in from the doorway was Frankie Jones—Bobby’s biggest rival—and his gang. Each one had a tommy gun on his hip and a fedora low over his eyes. Before any of us could scream or raise a gun in defense, they pulled the triggers.

The five guns sprayed bullets across the entire room, and I felt searing hot pain in my left side. I fell to the ground clutching where I was shot and felt warm stickiness ooze from under the sequins of my dress. Bullets continued to fly and I heard more bodies crash to the floor. My vision grew blurry, and in the already dim room I could only make out the heel of a shoe or the silhouette of a torso. I craned my head around to the left to see if Francine was okay, but all I found were her staring, lifeless eyes and a line of blood slowly running from her lips.

I jerked my head away and a stab of pain ran through my body. Breathing was becoming harder and everything seemed far away. The guns had stopped firing and I could hear their owners leaving Bobby and his boys of their guns.
bullets, and cash. One man walked behind the bar and took a couple bottles of booze. I didn’t move and hoped they didn’t notice I was still alive, if only barely.

Finally, to the sounds of laughter and triumph, Frankie Jones and his cronies retreated the way they had come, leaving a scene of slaughter to be discovered by one of the speakeasy’s suppliers with a delivery tomorrow. I let out the breath I had been holding and my lungs burned. I whimpered because there was nothing else to do and felt my blood run between my fingers. I lay helpless, waiting to die.

Then, somewhere out of my line of vision I heard what sounded like a shoe scrape against the floor. I held my breath thinking that one of Frankie’s men was still looting bodies and prayed he hadn’t heard me. My feet felt numb, and I knew it wouldn’t be long before I was dead like Francine next to me. I fought back another whimper, but the person roving on the other side of the room must have heard me because quick footsteps came my way. He leaned down next to me and cupped one hand under my head and pressed the other against my wound.

“Jesus, Julio…” he said. He leaned me up so I was half sitting. I gasped in pain and my vision swam.

“It’s okay, Jula-Marie, you’re going to be okay,” and I realized that it was Billy. He was Bobby’s best gunman, and no matter how many fights, shoot-outs, or brawls he got into, Billy always came back unscathed.

I tried to speak but the only thing to come out was a gurgle, which made me cough, wracking my body with another spasm of pain. Billy set me back down on the ground with a calm shushing sound and removed the hand he had placed on my wound. Without his added pressure, the blood flowed again and I had no strength to stop it. My breathing became shallower and everything in my vision was a dark blur.

“Everything’s going to be okay now,” I heard Billy’s voice from far away. I thought I sensed a hand near my face, but one last shock of pain rioled through me, and my vision went black.

Chapter 1

The fraternity house was like a giant nightclub, each room functioning as a different dance room.

The basement was the designated beer pong room, and the kitchen was where the sober people escaped.

Ray & Ruling 2
from the drunks to make fun of everyone else. Different kinds of music poured out from open doorways while closed rooms were pointedly quiet. Julia walked down the short hallway of doors to find one that was dark and crowded—the perfect hunting ground.

She reached the end of the hallway and the room on the right seemed ideal. There was a makeshift bar inside the door where the self-appointed bartender/DJ made girls shots and pulled beers from the mini-fridge for his friends. Poppy dance hits were blaring from the speakers and people had to yell to be heard. At least a dozen people were crammed into the room, each with a red plastic cup or a can of beer in their hands. Julia took this scene in with one sweeping glance and found her prey. Against the far wall where it was darker, an underage boy with light brown hair was drinking a beer and bobbing his head with the music. His eyes were transfixed on a girl at the bar who clearly had no idea he existed. Julia whisked through the crowd without bumping into anyone or making her presence known to any of those around her. She more or less “appeared” beside her prey, but he was still staring at the girl at the bar so he didn’t notice Julia’s sudden appearance.

The boy was taller than Julia, so she bumped up against him with her shoulder to get his attention. He looked down at her and blinked a few times to get her into focus.

“Hi,” she shouted in as flirtatious a manner as the noise could afford.

“Hi,” he said back, surprised. A very strong scent of beer and licorice wafted towards her.

“Do you want to dance with me?” she battèd her eyelashes. The boy just nodded and Julia grabbed his hand and pulled him closer toward the crowd of dancers. They were still in the dark enough though that with a few shimmys they would be more or less alone.

As they bumped and swayed, Julia got a better feel of the room and her prey. He told her his name was Andy and that he was a freshman. He didn’t go to parties often and when he did he never got lucky. Tonight was the first night he’d actually danced with a girl at a party.
Julia snuggled up closer to him and raised her face to his. He paused, making sure this was really happening to him, and then lowered his face to meet hers. After almost 90 years as a vampire, this was the single best hunting technique Julia had ever used. It had been adapted over time to fit with the culture and the parties she attended, but all in all, making out with someone was the best way to feed. She also found it the most enjoyable method by far.

From this point it was nothing to maneuver Andy the few feet to the futon at the back of the room. It was dark here and no one near the bar or dancing was paying attention whatsoever. Her mouth moved from his lips to his ear, from his ear to his neck. Her fangs extended and grazed the skin over his vein. If her heart beat, it would have started beating faster with excitement. Feeding for vampires is not like feeding for humans. Perhaps when a human gets to eat a favorite cut of steak in a fancy restaurant or have a giant bowl of ice cream heaped with toppings there is excitement, but it’s fairly superficial. Vampires get excited in the same way that human children do when they see Cinderella’s Castle in Disney World for the first time, or a traveler steps off a plane in a new and exotic country. It’s the gleeful, intoxicating excitement of accomplishment.

Julia flicked her tongue across Andy’s neck to release a numbing agent and sunk her fangs into his flesh. He moaned with pleasure and she drank deeply. His heart was beating quickly so the blood flowed freely into her mouth. She drank until she felt Andy relaxing more and more until he finally passed out. She retracted her fangs and licked the wound to get any last drops. There were two small red puncture marks in his neck, but she popped the collar of the polo shirt so it couldn’t be seen. He would be unconscious for the next hour and would wake up with the fuzzy memory of someone who has had too much to drink, and the recollection of his luck with a beautiful girl.

She wiped her mouth before turning around and taking a step back toward the crowd. When she did, another boy walked up to her with a brilliant smile on his face.

“Hi,” he said.
Julia froze. What had this boy seen? Simply that she had made out with someone who had passed out in the middle of it, or something more?

“Hi,” she responded with a glowing smile.

“Looks like your friend there had a bit too much to drink,” he observed with a nod of his head. Julia released a mental sigh. She didn’t need to breathe so she hadn’t been holding her breath.

“Yes, unfortunately. But it is getting rather late for me and I need to head home,” Julia said. When the night was all you had, you didn’t spend it all at a party.

“Oh c’mon. It’s still early,” he smiled his brilliant white smile again.

Julia was taken aback. This boy was flirting with her. Human boys didn’t approach her. Vampires did, of course, but they knew what she was. She was certainly attractive enough with dark hair and startling green eyes. Small gold flecks surrounding the iris seemed to reflect light even in dimly lit frat parties and nightclubs. She was slender, but didn’t have the emaciated thinness of models. Even though she was attractive, humans didn’t try to pick her up. They found something forbidden about her, like that gorgeous girl at a bar but you glance down to her left hand and see her engagement ring. Only the foolhardy or extremely drunk cross that line, and as this boy was not more intoxicated than a couple beers, he could only be considered extremely foolhardy.

“Yes, you’re right, but I have other plans for the remainder of the night,” she responded.

“All right, I understand,” he said with no disappointment in his voice. “But before you go, can I get your number?”

Julia’s eyebrows shot up to her hairline. This boy was not only foolhardy, he was insane.

“I don’t come here too infrequently. I’m sure we’ll meet each other again,” she said as she stepped around him to get on the near side of the door. “But I’ll leave you with my name. It’s Julia.” She wasn’t sure what had possessed her to flirt with the boy, but it felt good, and she walked out of the room with a self-satisfied smile on her face.
She had almost reached the back door to the house when someone lightly grabbed her upper arm. She flung around ready to strike out of instinct before realizing it was the boy who had wanted her number.

"Since you won't give me your number, I figured I might as well give you mine. Just in case you change your mind." He winked, handed her a folded napkin, and walked back into the crowd of partiers. She unfolded the napkin that had the ten digits of his number and the name "Ethan" scrawled on it. If her heart beat, it would have skipped one.

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Julia left the fraternity house with the napkin burning a hole in her pocket. What was she supposed to do with it? The obvious answer was to ignore it, of course. Throw it away or pass it off to some girl at another party who could try her luck with the confident Ethan. That is what she should have done, but she didn't. There was something intriguing about Ethan, something alluring in a way that wasn't connected with the scent of his blood, which is what normally attracted Julia and other vampires to specific targets.

Every human's blood has a different scent and taste. Julia had become far too accustomed to tinny, fiery blood due to alcohol. Each type and brand of liquor, beer, or wine changed the flavor of blood, and sometimes, depending on how intoxicated the prey might be, vampires could sometimes feel slight effects of alcohol themselves. Drugs had similar effects on vampires depending on the type of drug and the way it was ingested. Vampires could acquire addictions and even go mad by feeding off too many heroin or cocaine addicts.

But Ethan... he was different. Julia had smelled his blood, but there was nothing special there. His overall scent was attractive, but not addicting or irresistible. He was an overconfident young human...

With piercing blue eyes... And shaggy blond hair that had fallen across his forehead with such a rakish swoop...

Julia shook her head slightly as if to clear her mind and shoved the napkin further into her pocket as she reached Phryia, the vampires' club.
Chapter 2

Vampires needed some sort of companionship, and Phyria was where they got it. Vampires of the surrounding area could come here and find easy meals by picking up intoxicated humans in the club or sip pre-drained blood from crystal wine glasses. The club had an agreement with a blood bank located in the wealthy northern suburbs of the city to supply them with blood on a weekly basis—the blood bankthought the club’s liaison represented a private health care provider. When it was artificially warmed from plastic bags, blood had quite a different flavor and effect. While tasting plasticy, it felt more like a snack than a meal, though it served the same purpose. But this blood was expensive, and feeding on humans was free.

Phyria itself paraded as a dark gothic club for college students and older adults who preferred to wear all black clothing and far too much makeup—both women and men. Many patrons even thought they themselves were vampires and drank each other’s blood, which usually made them sick, or fed off each other’s “life forces” as they called it. These people were often the vampires’ first choices of the night. It greatly amused them.

Julia approached the entrance to Phyria, eyeing the violently red sign burning above the door. The building and windows were black, and the only sign that the club was even open was the human bouncer standing at the door and the faint booming of the bass from inside. Julia walked right past the bouncer. He knew all the VIP patrons (the vampires) and therefore needed to check no ID or even look at them. He did not know they were vampires, nor did any of the other employees. They were paid not to ask questions.

Inside the front door was a coat check, and right beyond that, a flight of stairs descending into the club. Julia walked down them into a lively, flashing room. Depending on the night of the week, the club could be as it was then—the usual Friday and Saturday club of flashing lights, bodies pulsing together, and God only knows what else in the dark bathrooms—or a much calmer atmosphere during the week, more like a pub with people sitting and sipping drinks.
Julia slid through the crowd of sweaty human dancers and disappeared behind a heavy black curtain by the bar. The sign above it read "VIP," and another bouncer sat outside to make sure that no one entered but vampires or their guests. Inside the room it was much quieter, and about half a dozen vampires were spread throughout the room, sitting on dark burgundy couches or heavy armchairs and at small cocktail tables. There was a small bar with wine glasses on the wall behind it and blood underneath it, locked away. A vampire named Joseph stood behind it and played bartender. He was actually the owner of Phyria and liked to take care of his vampire patrons who owed him much for providing a haven for them. Julia walked across the room and sat at her favorite table and nodded her head to Joseph who brought her a glass of blood. She sat back and waited for the arrival of her roommate Ettie.

Julia had met Henrietta Montgomery, or Ettie as she insisted everyone call her, in the late 1950s while in San Francisco. Julia and her sire (the vampire that changed her) had just recently stopped living together. At that point, Julia no longer needed a mentor and her sire, Will—Billy as she had first known him—was yearning for independence after thirty years of companionship. Although Julia enjoyed the change and independence, she no longer had a vampire to talk to or hunt with. After several months of complete independence, Julia finally found a vampire "gang." The three vampires there were Ettie and two males, Xavier and Javier. The males were petty, conceited, and cruel. The amount of unsolved murders in central California was somewhat staggering if humans took the time to really think about them, which few did. So Xavier and Javier's feeding continued unabated.

When Julia met Ettie, Ettie was relieved to have a female companion who wasn't a ruthless murderer. Ettie was not a compassionate vampire and showed no qualms with killing her prey, but she appreciated Julia's reserve compared to the males' inouciance. The two females adapted their hunting to the changing times of the early 60s, and found college students to be some of the most intriguing dinners they had yet had.
Into the 1970s, Julia became more interested in the college lifestyle. Students were not yet adults, nor were they children, so they had a reckless freedom about them that was intriguing to her. Julia also realized she had not opened a book with the intent to glean anything deeper from it beyond entertainment or as something to pass the time in decades. She began attending night classes at small colleges in California. She did homework, wrote papers, and bought textbooks. Ettie laughed at her at first, saying Julia would get bored after a semester. When two years passed, Ettie merely rolled her eyes and ignored Julia’s odd fascination with human college culture and said nothing.

In the 80s, the two moved from California to the East Coast, and in the late 90s, decided to try the Midwest. Being from Chicago, Julia was curious to see how it and the surrounding states had changed. Ettie, who had only bounced back and forth between California and New York since being changed during the California gold rush, thought the Midwest could use a little shaking up under her influence. They chose a larger city with a good-sized vampire population (more than four, less than twenty-five), a couple different colleges to suit Julia, and settled in easily.

As she had at other colleges, Julia preyed on huge house parties and out of control fraternity parties—the targets were easy, oblivious, and too drunk to care either way. Granted, there were always off nights, especially around the holidays, but then Julia hunted downtown at clubs or bars, or just plucked victims off the street in the more run-down areas. She and Ettie would sometimes tag-team their prey, creating fantasies for their victims that became confused dreams or nightmares if they took it too far. Ettie had no qualms with killing humans; she just preferred to avoid too much negative attention surrounding her victims. Julia on the other hand disliked killing humans and felt regret when death fell at her hands... most of the time. Assholes, criminals, and just overall bad people were satisfying prey for her. She got the satisfaction of a full kill out of her system and she did the human community a favor. Ettie, as always, had her opinion of Julia’s habits. Despite her original appreciation of Julia’s reserve, Ettie argued it was a vampire’s instinct to kill, and to show too much mercy meant nothing because if vampires were exposed,
humans would stake all of them to death. Yet Julia disagreed. While it was "nutritionally" satisfying to drain a human dead, feeding from two or three humans in a night was just as satisfying, and Julia rarely felt the kill sensation. She never saw red when feeding, never had to wrench herself away from someone's throat. Perhaps Ettie felt those sensations, but Julia did not.

The curtain to the VIP room swept back in a flutter and Ettie gracefully stomped across the room to where Julia was seated. Joseph brought over a glass of blood before Ettie even glanced his way—she was in a mood, and it was easier for everyone if she was given her space. She wasn't the oldest vampire in the city, but she could be brutal if she wanted, both in words and actions. Ettie dropped herself into a chair, her long auburn hair flying over her shoulder.

"Rough night?" Julia asked serenely.

"Hmph," Ettie replied. "So I entice a strapping young male to accompany me to the alley behind Night Owls—you know, that place down on Dix—and before I can even get him fully out of the door, his girlfriend runs after us and causes a scene. She got security involved, mostly because she was screaming hysterically, and cost me my first meal of the night. To make up for it, I got a guy a few blocks away while he was pissing behind a trashcan. He'll be awfully confused when he wakes up later."

Julia rolled her eyes and listened as Ettie launched into a rant about today's alleyways. They were not as enticing or terrifying for humans as they once were. While Ettie reminisced, Julia watched as another vampire she was friendly with entered the VIP room and joined a table twenty feet away. His name was Sam, and he was one of the rowdiest vampires Julia had ever met. An all-American boy who served in World War II, he was killed in France and turned by an ancient French vampire. Sam learned the old ways of vampirism, but his nineteen-year-old American spirit couldn't be tamed, and while he learned his new life, he worked on teaching an old vamp new tricks. A couple decades later, he came back to the US and fit right in.
When Ettie and Julia first found Phryia, Sam introduced himself and told his story right away, wanting to hear theirs. Vampire birth stories could be touchy, and Sam had gotten into quite a few scuffles from prying into a vampire’s business. Some were open, others were very private, and Sam didn’t care one way or the other; he wanted to know. His muscular Army body, short-cropped brown hair, and keen, deep blue eyes were too genial and comforting for Ettie and Julia not to like him. After getting to know him, Ettie, Julia, Sam, and Sam’s roommate, a young black vampire named Desmond, would go out and do “human things” as Ettie called them—go to the movies or to arcades, mini-golf, shopping. The nights usually always ended at Phryia for “dinner,” but occasionally the group would split off after finding an intriguing target to pursue. Sam liked to push boundaries, and one night he and Julia stayed outside until daybreak, having to almost literally fly back to Julia and Ettie’s apartment so they weren’t caught in the excruciating pain of sunlight. Yes, rowdy was the perfect way to describe Sam.

“What did you do tonight, Jules?” Ettie asked using Julia’s long-time nickname that most of the vampires in the area used. (Very few of them knew her “real” name, Julia-Marie. She despised it.) She was pulled out of her reverie and her eyes snapped from Sam’s table back to Ettie as she remembered the napkin folded in her pocket.

“I went to a frat party. It was uninteresting and my prey smelled like an old tin can,” Julia lied. The best cover for vampires was lying—their faces didn’t move if they didn’t want them to, their hearts didn’t beat so there was no quickened heart rate, they didn’t sweat—it was easy to cover with a quick lie. Of course, vampires had more acute senses than humans so they could see through lies more easily, but Ettie had very few reasons to distrust Julia.

“That’s why I only go to frat parties when I know the cops are going to show up. That’s when the hunt gets fun,” Ettie grinned.

Julia laughed and shook her head. Ettie had always enjoyed the hunt over any other aspect of vampirism. Not that Julia didn’t from time to time.
Chapter 3

Julia was up early the next evening. It was Tuesday, the sun had just set, and Julia had to get to class. She was trying her hand at English Studies this year, and tonight was her American literature class. They were reading *The Great Gatsby*. Novels set in the 1920s and 1930s often haunted her, and she tried to avoid them as much as possible. She had even debated skipping that night’s session so as not to get into class discussion. Vampires were good at secrets and keeping their mouths shut, but Julia always saw the fringe and sequins of her flapper gowns clearly in her mind, and her bright green eyes betrayed her years.

As it turned out, the class discussion didn’t dwell long on the time period, but on other elements of the novel, and Julia simply listened to the discussion of gender and race stereotyping until the class ended. The small glass of cold blood she had downed before leaving for class was wearing off and her classmates were looking mighty tasty, so Julia left campus in search of dinner.

Julia was craving fresh blood, and instead of heading to the club, drove through downtown and into a lower class neighborhood. As bad as it sounded, the best place to find an inconspicuous dinner was in the rough section of town.

Julia parked her car in a dark parking lot and slid into the shadows of her hunting ground. Her tennis shoes made no sound on the broken concrete as she listened for the sound of prey. It was quiet this night; the sounds of muffled televisions reached her ears and the sour smell of marijuana prickled her nose. Finally she came upon the small backyard of a house that led to a small alley in which a man and woman were fighting.

“Get out of here you worthless sack of shit!” the woman’s voice carried to the alley.
Julia heard a chair scrape across linoleum before the back screen door of the house opened and the man stumbled down the steps. He trudged through the grass bemoaning his wife’s shortcomings, opened the gate to the alley and scuffled in the direction of a gas station. Julia followed him for a few feet before skipping forward two paces and grabbing the man’s arm.

“What the—” the man started, but Julia looked into his eyes and he was silenced. She leaned in to his neck, numbed and pierced his flesh, and drank until he was unconscious. When she finished, she lowered him slowly to the ground, leaned him up against a rusted out lawnmower, and glided back to her car.

* * *

Ettie was gone when Julia returned home, and Julia relished the silence. It was nice to have the apartment to herself where she could relax and just be for a few hours instead of listen to the boom-boom of the bass at the club. But tonight was Julia’s night, and she was going to spend it as she pleased. She read an essay for the following night’s class, brainstormed some ideas for an upcoming paper, and spent far too much time absorbed in various websites. Really, a vampire’s life could be very dull. Sam always livened things up, as did Ettie and Desmond, and the club was always there, but Julia’s routine was becoming stale. Generally, moving to a new town stirred things up, but Julia and Ettie hadn’t been in this city for more than a decade, and it was the middle of a semester. Practicality’s sake demanded stasis.

Julia walked out to the apartment’s balcony and hoisted herself up onto the roof by the gutter above her head. The three-story building gave a fairly decent view of the houses, trees, and streets around her. Everything was quiet—it was two o’clock on a Wednesday morning. Julia listened to the wind in the leaves and the animals below her. She watched the night, and she wondered what you were supposed to do when you were bored and had an eternity to look forward to.
Chapter 4

It was Friday. Julia’s melancholy thoughts from earlier in the week had not yet subsided, and as she curled her thick hair, her thoughts traveled to the crumpled napkin with the boy’s number scrawled on it. Julia glanced at her watch—9:15. Was it too late to call him? Should she call him? He was a human, she was a vampire. Those weren’t compatible. Yet Julia’s mental rut was getting deeper with each night that passed and the only thing that seemed to cheer her up was the thought of a shaggy-haired, blue-eyed human named Ethan.

She picked up her phone and dialed his number.

“Hello?” he answered on the third ring.

“Ethan?”

“Yeah?”

“Hi, this is Julia, the girl you met at that party last week.”

“Oh hey!” Julia heard his smile. “What are you up to tonight?”

“I was just getting ready to go out. Yourself?”

“On my way to a party, but I can ditch out if you wanted to meet up somewhere,” he said. She heard a voice in the background start to argue with Ethan but he shushed it.

“I think the best place to meet up would be a party. That is how we met after all,” she flirted. There would also probably be other parties in the area she could hit up beforehand, as she still needed dinner.

“All right. The address is 385 South Kessel Drive. I’ll be there in about half an hour.”

“I’ll see you then,” she smiled and hung up.

She was excited. A new kind of excitement—or old, if she thought about it. She hadn’t experienced this kind of anticipatory excitement since she was running around with Bobby in Chicago. She got excited when she hunted and when she fed, intoxicatingly so, but this was a butterflies-in-your-stomach
excitement, not that of sating her bloody appetite. But sating her appetite was what she needed to do before meeting up with Ethan.

Julia took her time getting ready and headed toward 385 Kessle Drive thirty minutes later. It was a warm early September night, and the sky was clear and bright with a full moon. On the way there, she stopped at a party and fed on a girl in the backyard with running mascara and hicups. The girl had just gotten in a fight with her roommate and Julia "comforted" her into unconsciousness. Feeling full, Julia found the address Ethan gave her and knocked on the front door. A stocky guy in a Chicago Bears jersey opened the door. Hip-hop music and the smell of cheap beer wafted over Julia and she smiled at the Bears fan.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"Psh, yeah, I don’t care," he replied and stepped aside.

Julia nodded at him and walked in. That was the general response from people when she asked to come in to parties. Everyone else always walked in, but she couldn’t—vampires were unable to enter a place of residence without first being invited by someone inside. It was a very old, inconvenient rule for vampires. They could not force themselves into homes; an invisible force physically barred them from entering. None knew why, though some speculated it was because vampires were "evil" and in league with Satan. Many no longer bought that excuse in this day and age, but regardless, they were still unable to enter. Fortunately, this young man let Julia in, and she was then free to search for Ethan.

In the kitchen was a game of beer pong, and in the living room was a series of card games. The house was incredibly crowded and loud, but Julia heard conversations from mingling groups of people perfectly. It was still early, so everyone was in house was still fairly lucid, but they were all trying to rectify this. Julia leaned up against the living room wall and scanned the room for Ethan. She saw several shaggy blond heads, but none that belonged to Ethan, so she entertained herself by watching a couple boys build a pyramid out of Busch Light cans.
Suddenly, Julia felt a hand on her elbow. She whirled around, arm poised to strike before realizing it was Ethan who had touched her.

"Whoa, sorry! Didn’t mean to scare you!" he said with an amused smile on his face.

"It’s okay," she laughed, "I wasn’t paying any attention." This was the second time he had sneaked up behind her to startle her.

"You’re fine. Want a drink?"

"Thanks, but I drove," she lied. She could drink and eat human food, all vampires could, but it wasn’t a pleasant experience, especially eating solid food. It came out in the form it went in—chewed. Drinks were better because they remained liquid when they came out, but the taste wasn’t satisfying in the least, nor did it feel pleasant.

"Oh c’mon, one won’t hurt you. Beer or liquor?" Ethan insisted.

Julia sighed and resigned. If she was going to hang out with a human, she might as well act the part.

They walked through the living room and into a hallway.

"Do you have any scotch?" she asked semi-jokingly. And if she was going drink alcohol, she might as well pretend that she would feel the side effects from something strong.

"Uh, no, not with me..." Ethan said a little stunned.

"Vodka is fine if you have any," she said with a smile.

"I do have vodka," he said as they reached a door at the end of the hallway. He opened it and they stepped into a bedroom where a few people were playing video games while some others watched. Ethan closed the door and the music from the main house was muffled significantly.

Julia sat down on a desk chair while Ethan poured vodka and Sprite from bottles he took out of an athletic drawstring bag. He handed her the red cup and she thanked him, then he popped the tab on a Keystone Light for himself.
Ethan introduced Julia to the people in the room. The girls nodded their heads coolly while the boys more or less stared. Her usual effect was taking place: stunned boys and jealous girls. Ethan, however, didn’t seem to notice. He sat down on the bed across from Julia and made small talk. They discussed their year in college (Ethan a senior, Julia non-traditional with her night classes), majors (Ethan was a Business Major and Economics Minor), hometowns (Ethan: a small Southern Indiana town, Julia: “up near Chicago”), and other subjects college students tend to use to get to know each other. Julia sipped her drink slowly while Ethan knocked back several beers. They were in their own world at the side of the room; the others ignored them.

It was reaching midnight and the party in the rest of the house was really picking up. Ethan was laughing louder and the gamers were becoming more boisterous with their insults. The fizzy Sprite was drying Julia’s mouth out terribly, and she really wanted to quench it with some warm blood.

“Hey, Ethan, I really should be heading out.”

“It’s not even midnight yet!” he said after checking his phone.

“I know, but I promised my roommate I would meet her.”

“This is the second time you’re dipping out early on me,” he said. Julia thought he genuinely looked hurt.

“I’m sorry. How about next Friday I devote the whole night to you?” she blurted out. The whole night? Was she really willing to do that? Could she do that?

“Promise?” he said, flashing his teeth in a hopeful smile.

“Yes, I promise. Now walk me out?”

They waded through the crowd to the door and he opened it for her. “I had a really good time tonight,” he said.

“Me too,” she agreed, and it was genuine. “I’ll see you Friday.”
“Friday.” He smiled again, and she left, letting the door close gently behind her. She felt just plain happy. Who knew humans could be so much fun to just talk to? Julia briefly wondered if this was just thrilling because she knew she could drain Ethan dry at a moment’s notice, that she was just playing with her food, but she quickly pushed that thought to the back of her mind. While in the musty bedroom at that party, not once did she think about drinking his blood. They talked and had a thoughtful conversation. He was nice and funny, and nothing in their conversation had anything to do with blood, or hunting, or life forty years ago. She felt her humanity shining through; she felt almost human.

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The following week passed with its usual routine—club, class, hunting. Julia wondered during the week whether or not the date she had promised Ethan would actually occur until he texted her asking where and what time he should pick her up Friday evening. Not wanting him anywhere near her apartment with its empty cabinets and refrigerator, or Ettie, Julia persuaded Ethan that she would meet him at a small pub near campus named Milla’s. Vampires rarely ever went there because of its intimate, subdued atmosphere. If someone were to “pass out” in a booth there, it would be noticed almost immediately. Julia knew this would be her best bet.

Before leaving, Julia downed a bag of Red Cross blood that she and Ettie kept stashed in the fridge for emergencies and wrapped another in a Ziploc bag, in foil, inside a makeup bag in her purse for later. She had promised herself to Ethan for the whole night and it would be rather awkward if she were to disappear into an alley for ten minutes.

Julia arrived promptly ten minutes later than she said she would meet him. He was sitting at a small booth towards the back, nervously fiddling with his phone. When he saw her, he dropped his phone and it clattered on the tabletop.

“Uh, ha, hi,” he said and stood up when Julia approached the table.

“Nice to see you again,” Julia replied as they both sat down.
"I contemplated ordering you a scotch, but I didn’t know if that was what you would actually want," Ethan said.

"Tempting, but I think I’ll have a martini tonight."

"Martinis it is."

The evening at Milla’s passed comfortably and quickly, if not exactly genuine on Julia’s part. Their conversations were about everything from campus life (which Julia had to feign at least provisional knowledge in) to football (Julia told him she had a “pretty good arm” which translated to “easily throwing it the length of a football field”). Milla’s closed earlier than other establishments in the area at 1 AM, and Ethan asked Julia if she wanted to go back to his place. Julia hesitated momentarily but agreed. She did visit the restroom before leaving, however, to purge her ineffective digestive system of the burning liquid she had forced into it, and as she was feeling peckish, ingested her backup blood.

Ethan had walked to the bar since it was so close to his apartment, so they padded down the street together, passing other college partiers stumbling to and away from parties. A cop car zoomed past with its light and sirens ablaze, and Ethan shook his head like he hadn’t been a delinquent before he was 21. Julia smirked and thought, If you only knew my delinquencies.

Ethan’s apartment was sparse and bright and there were so many types of electronics hooked up in the living room it was almost offensive to Julia’s sometimes old-fashioned nature. She remembered the first television she had ever watched. There was a big silver knob to turn it on and had three channels. Having watched the technology evolve over the decades made Julia appreciate the kinds of things humans could come up with. The 56" flat screen, four game consoles, and surround sound also reminded Julia just how young this boy was.


“No thank you, I have to drive later,” she lied.

“Well, I don’t. Do you mind?” he asked as he pulled a beer out of the fridge.
Julia shook her head and sat down on the couch. The scents of Axe and Doritos wafted around her.

Ethan sat down next to her, closer than they had been at the bar, and their conversation continued. Two and a half beers later, it was approaching 3 AM. The sun wouldn’t rise for at least three more hours, but Julia usually liked to head home at that time to relax.

“You’re really pretty,” Ethan spurted.

“I— thank you,” Julia responded.

Ethan leaned in towards her. His breath reeked of hops, but his eyes were bright and took the focus off his mouth. There was almost a twinkle in them. The corner of his right eye twitched up with the corner of his mouth, and before Julia had time for a reaction, Ethan’s lips were connected to hers.

It was odd. Not unpleasant by any means, but odd. Different. His lips were warm and soft. She could rip through them with her teeth at any moment. His warm breath lightly tickled her upper lip when he pulled away, a very unique sensation. She had much experience in kissing humans, but she was always the instigator, luring the victim into trusting the hunter. But this was not initiated by her, nor was it in the quest of a meal. It was tender, meaningful. She looked back into Ethan’s eyes, accompanied by his smile that she was slowly becoming infatuated with.

“I’m sorry. Kind of,” he confessed. “Sorry for not giving you any warning. I’m not sorry though because that was the best kiss I’ve ever had.”

Julia smiled. There was nothing she could say.

He leaned in again, testing. Julia didn’t know how to react so she did nothing, which signaled an invitation for Ethan to go for it again. This time, he leaned his whole body in closer and put his hand on her arm. Julia made sure to keep him back far enough that he couldn’t get too close to her chest with its still heart.
He kissed her more deeply and she responded in kind. She had to be gentle, yet she could feel his passion. Reciprocation had to be careful, calculated. Kissing Ethan was like a game—how far was she able to go, how far would he push her...

When Ethan next surfaced for air a few minutes later, Julia had come to one conclusion: kissing Ethan was fun, and she would like to do it again some other time.

“T really need to head home now,” she told him.

He nodded, saying nothing. He walked her to the door like he had at the party and said hopefully, “I’ll see you again soon?”

“Yes.”

Chapter 5

As the next several weeks passed, Julia would see Ethan once or twice a week, usually between Thursdays after class and Saturdays. She could only keep the bar routine going for so long as they weren’t exactly cheap and she was beginning to just look like a middle-class alcoholic. But Ethan kept going straight for the jugular with his date suggestions: dinner. Julia couldn’t stomach that yet, literally. She rarely got in altercations with vampires, meaning she rarely got physically injured, but forcing down steak or lettuce was just brutal in a way that vampires weren’t supposed to experience. She was able to talk him down to movies or dessert as she could easily refuse popcorn stating she hated it and ice cream was generally easy enough to stomach. However, Julia was making significant sacrifices in order to date Ethan.

Etie noticed her changes in habits right off the bat. Etie was usually out and about before Julia was, but Julia’s absences at the club had been noted.

“What are you going?” she asked one night she was still home when Julia was going to meet Ethan.

“And why are you carrying a purse?”

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