

Enter here, all ye that dare, the ~~terrifying~~
~~dreaded~~
~~anxious~~
~~titillating~~
~~amusing~~
damn funny
vampire underground of Bloomsburg, Illinois.

The Vampire Kitty-cat Chronicles



Ray Rhamey



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Designed by Ray Rhamey



For Sarah, Abby, Molly, Becky, Dan, Louie, Julia,
and the cats we have loved.

Bob
Alex
Sally
Isaac
Olive
Casey
Oscar
Rocky
Rugby
Fraidy
Gracie
Peanut
Xerxes
Floppy
Frisbee
Mittens
Wrigley
Lancelot
Sylvester
Alabama
Guinevere
Strawberry

1

**The end. Sort of.**

Just after dark, death grabbed me by the tail. The moon was full, and the earthy scent of fall flavored a cool September breeze. My mind on a svelte little Siamese who was coming into heat, I trotted over a mound of fresh dirt, not an uncommon thing in a graveyard—and a hand shot up and grabbed my rear extremity.

I twisted and went for it with my claws, but another hand burst out and seized the scruff of my neck—I went limp, just like when I was a kitten and my mom picked me up. The hands snapped my body straight, and then a woman’s face poked out of the ground. She sat up, holding me in front of her. I figured I was about to kiss my furry butt goodbye, and I was right.

Sort of.

The woman looked to be twenty-something. Dirty blond hair—with dirt, that is. Her bulging eyes were scary, but I forgot all about them when she put her mouth on my throat and bit. She got

her teeth into my skin and I felt a warm rush of blood on my neck. She sucked and slurped. Strength and will drained out of me, along with the sweet sauce of life.

I didn't even have enough energy for regrets. Not that I had any—except maybe for having peed on my associate's bed when she switched cat food without asking. A petty thing to do to Amy, I admit.

Soon I was pretty spacey, just floating. The woman stopped her noshing and laid me on the dirt in front of her. Her eyes weren't scary any more. I couldn't see real well at this point—things were dim and it was hard to focus—but her expression seemed sorrowful. Then she turned her head and, *patooiie*, spat out fur.

Served her right.

She turned sad eyes on me and said, "I'm sorry, kitty-cat. But the pain hurt so bad . . ." She trailed off and licked my blood from her fingers like she'd just had some Kentucky Fried Chicken. I could only lie there like a sack of cat meat.

As though handling something precious, she shifted me to the grass and then climbed out of her hole. After brushing dirt from her clothes, she lowered me into the hole and stroked my back—I could hardly feel it, but I sensed my body moving under her hand.

She said, "Oh, I hate this so much." Then she pushed dirt over me.

Too weak to move, I waited to die.

My heart slowed and slowed, and then stopped. Amazing how utter the silence was, lying there in total darkness. I'd never been aware of my heart beating, but once it quit its constant lub-dubbing I missed it.

I thought, “Well, that’s it.”

I was sorry I couldn’t give Amy a parting purr. I’d been with her since kittenhood, maybe four years, but cats don’t keep track of things like that. We’d sit in front of a fireplace in the wintertime, me curled in her lap, her with a philosophy book in one hand and the other petting my favorite spots. I enjoyed the times her college students came over. When one kid tried to argue that I was just a concept, I countered with reality by climbing up his leg.

Ah, the intellectual life.

And then I thought, “I’m still thinking.”

I focused on my innards. No heartbeat. And I wasn’t breathing. Probably a good thing with a snootful of dirt.

I pushed up with a front paw and it broke through. I crawled out of the hole, tried to stand, and fell on my stomach. I was alive.

And I wasn’t.

An ache started in my belly. Then it flashed into a fire that spread through my body. I’ve never, never, never felt such agony, not even the time a kid doused my hind end with kerosene. I struggled to my feet and I could think of only one thing.

Blood.

The pain pulsed hotter and hotter.

Blood-blood-blood-blood-blood.

I heard the scuttle of rat paws just on the other side of a gravestone. I took off in a run . . . then my legs buckled and I hit the ground with my chin. But I had some luck; the rat didn’t run away. I listened as well as I could, considering my unbearable suffering and all. He was digging. I crept until I could peek around the stone. His back was to me.

The pain was so consuming I could hardly think, but I managed to get into a crouch and spring. Instead of grabbing the rat with my claws, I belly-flopped right on it. I was a little off, but hey, I'd just had most of my blood drained from my body.

I pushed myself up, hoping the rat wouldn't run off—I'd never catch it. But it just laid there, face in the grass. Its head wobbled when I flipped it onto its back; I'd broken its neck, and ratso was dead. Unlike me. Sort of.

Now, I never liked rat. Gave me indigestion. And rats stunk. Also, I was accustomed to a steady diet of premium cat food. No queasiness about rats that night, though, mostly because of the pain raging though me that screamed for BLOOD!

I couldn't have stopped if I'd wanted to. My mind said ewwww when rat stink hit my nostrils, but my body steamrolled over that. Steamrolled? More like a tsunami, a fifty-foot wave of irresistible gotta-have-it driven by escalating pain. I'd have gone through a brick wall to get that BLOOD.

I'm embarrassed to say that I went into a frenzy. Utter loss of control, totally uncatlike. Luckily, it turned out I didn't want to eat the filthy thing. I ripped open its throat with my canines (why aren't they called "felines"—our carnivore teeth are much better developed than what dogs have) and I lapped up the blood that spilled out.

The relief was instant. My heart began beating and a feeling like the best scratch-behind-the-ears I'd ever gotten spread through my body. I just sat there and purred, in a daze of well-being. Which, it struck me, was an odd thing for a dead kitty-cat to be feeling.

My heart stopped and the euphoria wore off. I'd have sighed if I'd been breathing. Home was all I could think of, so I made my

way back to Amy's townhouse. I was weak, though, and I thought I'd never make it up the front steps and through the pet door.

I found her in the living room. She didn't notice me because, as usual, she was absorbed in a book. I had my usual answer for that—a leap into her lap, which always resulted in a warm greeting and a good scratch behind my ears. The question was, would I be able to make it into her lap?

Blood. Blood-blood. The need came back. The closer I got to Amy, the more . . . *delicious* she smelled. The pain I'd felt in the graveyard started. Blood-blood.

The tidal wave in me grew. I wanted to race to her and bury my fangs in her leg and lap up BLOOD!

I couldn't do it. I turned away, but just barely. My control was losing ground like a dog chasing a Corvette. Heading toward the door, her scent grew fainter, but still I wanted her BLOOD.

Blood-blood-blood.

No-no-no.

Her voice came. "Spot?"

Amy thought calling me Spot was funny. There are some things you just have to live with.

"Here, kitty-kitty."

Keeping going was one of the hardest things I'd ever done. I wanted her to hold me. I also wanted her BLOOD!

No.

I pushed out of the pet door and then fell down the steps. I knew I was too weak to make the climb again, so Amy was safe from me. The door opened and she looked out. I crawled to the side of the stoop so she couldn't see me. "Spot?" she called. "Come

here, sweetie.”

I'd have meowed right then and there for her to come get me, but that took breathing, which was no longer part of my operating system.

I heard the door shut. I sat for a while.

It hit me that my life with Amy was over.

I missed her already.

Damn the woman who had ripped me from the arms of my associate, who had become my friend as well as the provider of never-ending servings of gourmet dining. The cat thing to do was revenge—although peeing on my killer's bed, if she had one, seemed like inadequate retaliation for what she'd done to me.

One unlucky mouse later, I had the strength to go back to the graveyard to see if I could track her. I'd think of suitable payback when I found her.

I sniffed the hole. Dirt Woman's scent included the normal people reek of animal and chemical, plus dirt-smell and a coppery undertone, like blood. What the hell was she doing, buried under dirt and sucking blood? That was what vampires . . . Naw-w-w . . . but what else could she have been? Come to think of it, for the last few months I'd been seeing more and more creepy people lurking in the night.

I'd track Dirt Woman down and then . . . well, it was too bad a wooden stake was out of the question, my paws lacking opposable digits, but I'd come up with something.

It was good to have a mission; I didn't want to think about what being dead would do to my life.

While I followed Dirt Woman's scent, I was forced to entertain

the wacky notion that I was now—it sounded silly—a vampire. What did I know about them? The story went that they had fangs. I explored my mouth with my tongue. I had fangs. But I'd always had fangs.

Although my attacker had acted like a vampire, she hadn't had fangs. Just regular old blunt human teeth with those pitiful excuses for canines. She'd managed to do damage, all right, but it hadn't been properly vampiric. So was she not a regulation vampire? Fang challenged?

What else was there about the undead? No daylight or you're cooked. That one shouldn't be a problem. I could see in the dark, so the up-all-night thing was cool. And nobody'd look twice at a cat sleeping all day, while human vampires had to hide. Maybe that was what Dirt Woman had been doing. How disgusting was that? Imagine the mess when it rained. Ugh. And when winter hit you'd be a corpsicle. Come to think of it, cats were a whole lot better equipped to be vampires than people were.

I came to 15th street and spotted her on the other side, just outside the 7-Eleven. Now that I wasn't being terrorized, I saw that she wore a dark blazer over a cream blouse and tan slacks. Would have looked very professional if it hadn't been for the dirt smudges. I trotted across the street, thinking that leaping and burying my claws in her leg might be a good start on retribution.

She peered at her reflection in the store window and rubbed at her chin, no doubt trying to get rid of my blood. I started to go down the vampires-can't-see-themselves-in-mirrors road, but realized that they were supposed to have fangs, too. Who knew what the myths had wrong? Lucky me, I was going to find out.

Taking a brush from a shoulder purse, she gave her dirty hair a few good strokes. She cleaned up nice. I sprang into a shaky run and closed on her, but she opened the door and stepped inside before I could spring. My momentum carried me through the door and inside. Fine, I'd wait until she left and get some satisfaction when she wasn't looking. We cats are all about the element of surprise when it comes to attacking. You know how the cavalry in the old West sounded charge with a bugle when they attacked? Dumb.

There were no customers in the store. I secreted myself next to a rack of potato chips to wait for my chance. The odor of dust nagged at me. Well, yeah, I had just been buried alive. I felt an urge to lick. I hadn't had a good lick for hours. But the minute I sat I sagged, my strength sapped. I hadn't gotten nearly as much from those rodents as Dirt Woman had taken from me.

She went to the guy behind the counter and took a deep breath. "Excuse me, are you the manager?"

The clerk was a big one. A head like a pumpkin above narrow shoulders that spread to a fat waist overhanging his belt, and then he tapered back down to big feet. It was hard for me to tell the age of fat people; this guy could have been twenty or forty. He inhaled and then said, "That's me. George."

Dirt Woman looked around as if she'd like to escape, but then squared her shoulders and gave George a smile that I could tell she didn't mean. She took a breath. "Hi. My name's Meg. I'd like to apply for a job."

She sure was a heavy breather. Then I thought about it. I focused on my chest and imagined me taking a deep breath. My chest expanded and air came in. I breathed it out with a soft little "Mrrr."

If I'd known this, would I have called out to Amy? And then gone into a feeding frenzy? To be honest, the pain had been so bad that I don't think I could have resisted.

I tried to start my heart, but that had never been available for conscious control, so nothing happened.

George shrugged, then inhaled and said, "Sure, you can apply for a job if you want to. But there ain't any openings 'cause I'm it at night. Could check out the day shift." He eyed her and took another breath. "You don't look like the 7-Eleven type, though."

Her smile sagged and she looked a little scared. "It has to be, er, at night. Please, isn't there anything?"

George leaned forward, his eyes narrowed like he was studying her. "Most folks prefer to work days."

"I'm . . . I can't go out in daylight. I have photophobia."

"Big word."

"Big problem. It cost me my job at the ad agency. But I'm a good worker."

I wondered why a mostly dead person would need a job. All she had to do was dine out on some innocent person—or cat—and be able to dig a hole.

"I . . ." She looked around as if searching for a good answer. She slumped and said, "I haven't been able to get back to my apartment. During the day I've had to sleep . . ." she glanced out the plate glass storefront ". . . outside." It was as if she saw a monster lurking out there.

Her gaze swung across me on the way back to George. She paused, and her eyebrows lifted in an expression of surprise—that's a thing cats envy people, the ability to create expressions with your

face. That and the opposable thumbs. Then she smiled like she was glad to see me. Aww. I was starting to lose my resentment and even feel a little sorry for her.

She brushed at a splotch of dirt on her purse and turned back to George. “I’m so embarrassed. I’m homeless, and I don’t know what to do. All the public aid places are only open in the daytime.”

George smiled. What an ass, taking pleasure in her distress. Meg looked at him like he’d just bonked her on top of the head with one of his ham hands. Then he said, “Welcome to the Night Shift.”

Her sudden smile was like the sun she couldn’t tolerate. “I can have a job?”

He shook his head. “‘Night Shift’ is just a handle for people like us.”

Us?

2**Vampires underground (where else?)**

While I chewed on what George meant by “us,” he reached out and touched a red spot on Meg’s neck. She flinched away. He said, “Got a little bit of breakfast there.”

Meg backed toward the door. I was a little freaked by George, too. She said, “I don’t know . . . I think . . .”

George put his palms out in appeal. “Hey, wait up. I’m one too. You’re new, and I’m sure you’re scared, but you just got lucky.”

She shook her head. “Dead people don’t have luck.”

George ambled out from behind the counter. Meg retreated a couple of steps. He stopped and smiled at her. He didn’t have fangs either. “Hey, it’s *undead*. There’s no death certificate for you, right?”

She nodded.

“No funeral, no mourning. You can call up people you know and they’d think you were the same as ever, right?”

He had a point. She wasn’t exactly a corpse. Neither was I, for

that matter.

“If you’d been able to keep your job, you’d still be paying taxes, right?”

“You mean that, even though I’m not alive, I have a life?”

He snorted a laugh. “You could put it that-a-way. We still need a place to sleep during the day, and that takes money, so we gotta work.” George waved at the store. “Trouble is, lotta night jobs are pretty crummy.”

Meg sagged at the knees, and, I have to admit, mine were rubbery too. Well, they’re not precisely knees, but you know what I mean. George took her arm, led her around the counter, and sat her on a stool. Then he pulled a cell phone from his pants pocket and hit a button.

“Hey, Sammy, George here. Got a newbie. The usual, lookin’ for a night job.” He paused, then gave Meg a glance. “By the look of her, the local cemetery.”

Her gaze dropped to the floor. I suspected she’d have blushed if she hadn’t been dead.

He listened, then said, “Worked for a ad agency . . .”

Meg perked up a little. “That’s *an* ad agency. I’m a writer. At Dewey, Fakem, and How.”

“Writer.” More listening. He grinned. “Yeah?” He looked to Meg. “Sammy’ll be over in a minute. He’s with the A.V.A.” He pocketed the phone.

The place was crawling with vampires. Shouldn’t be a problem, though. They wouldn’t suck on one of their own.

George glanced my way and then did a double take. “Hey!” He reached under the counter, came up with a baseball bat, and

charged.

I spun to run, but my paws slipped on the floor. Leave it to me to be chased by a vampire in the one convenience store in the universe with a freshly waxed floor. Running in place, I glanced back and there was George, coming down on me, bat raised high—

“Stop!” Meg came running.

George pulled up. “It’s a cat. In my store.”

I stopped, happy to sit down again.

Meg grabbed the end of the bat. “It’s my cat.”

George bent low and sniffed me. “I’ll be darned.” He straightened. She let go of the bat and he lowered it. “So what’s its name? Breakfast?”

Funny guy. She looked embarrassed for a moment, and then said, “I’ve never given him a name. But maybe I will, just so I can introduce you.”

What a waste of breath. Cats don’t do names. Wouldn’t be much use, seeing as how we don’t talk. As far as I’m concerned, I’m Me.

Meg looked me over. I wondered if she knew she was looking at a rare creature. Not that calico cats are rare—you can see my mixture of orange, black, and white all over town—but we guys are. For every one of me there are about three thousand calico pussycats. That wasn’t a bad thing. And the fact that we guys are sterile was something the neighborhood pussies appreciated. It was a dead-end genetic profile, which was now extremely ironic.

But she just had to give me a moniker. “Let’s see . . . patches of colors . . . how about ‘Patchie?’”

Ewww. I stuck my tongue out. Maybe Meg was sharper than the

average vampire because she said, “Naw, too cutesy for a big guy like you.”

Hmm. I sat up a little straighter, and I might have pushed my chest out a little.

Meg said, “How about Patch?”

Not bad. At least it had something to do with me. I decided to let her know my opinion, so I walked to her and rubbed my side against her leg. Just once, though. I’m not a gushy cat.

Then I looked up at her and did the eye-contact thing. She grinned. “Patch it is.”

George said, “It don’t matter he’s got a name, still no animals allowed in the store. And I can’t lose this job.”

A car pulled up outside. George said, “It’s Sammy. C’mon.”

He went out the front door and Meg scooped me up. I was too weak to protest, and besides, I kinda liked her—what the heck, she’d put a stop to me being bashed with a baseball bat. She knew how to hold a cat, too, with an arm under my hindquarters so I could sit, none of that one end or the other left hanging.

That close to her, I noticed the same undertone of copper I’d found when I was tracking her. Was that what George had gotten from me that made him figure I’d been Meg’s latest meal? The smell of blood—the scent of vampires?

Outside, a scrawny, sunken-chested little guy with squinty eyes stood by a banged-up, old-style Volkswagen Bug. He sported a handlebar mustache that covered his mouth. His eyes widened when he saw Meg. He smiled—I couldn’t tell if his mustache was covering up fangs—and a bass voice that seemed impossible for such a pip-squeak said, “Welcome to the A.V.A.”

His gaze dropped to me. “Now that’s curious. Cats usually hate to be around us.”

He had that right. This whole scene was definitely creepy. But what choice did I have? And Meg was pretty cool.

George chuckled. “Yeah, but this cat *is* us.”

Meg stepped forward and stuck out a hand to shake, still cradling me quite comfortably in her other arm. “My name’s Meg, and this is Patch.”

Bright headlights swung across us and then an old hearse, long and black with fishtail fins on the rear fenders, pulled up next to the Bug. Sammy said, “Crap. It’s Lester.”

Lester climbed out of the hearse. Unfolded, actually—he had to be seven feet tall. Black was his thing, with one exception—when he rounded the front of the hearse his black cape flared and revealed a crimson lining.

He smiled. Big fangs. Sharp ones, touching his bottom lip.

He glommed onto Meg right away. “My dear, let me welcome you to the underworld. My name is Lestat.”

Sammy said to Meg, “Lester is into Ann Rice these days.”

Lester/Lestat glared down at Sammy. “You’re such an insect. You and the rest of your breather wannabes.” He spread his arms wide, managing to make his cape flare and show off the red lining, and smiled down at Meg and me. Actually, I didn’t think he’d noticed me.

“I live the legend of the vampire, free, a law unto myself.” He raised a fist into the air. “I am Lestat, the beast that feasts in night’s darkest deeps.”

Where did this guy get his dialogue? Maybe he spent his days at

bad movies.

Sammy said, “So, Meg, George told me you’re looking for work.”

Lester stepped between Sammy and Meg and me. “Work? Why? If you need to feed . . .” he waved a really long arm at the night “. . . your dining pleasure awaits you, ready for the taking.”

Stepping to the side so he was visible again, Sammy said, “Yeah, if you don’t get caught. There are police out there. And some breathers don’t like being chewed on. You can get hurt.”

Hurt? How do you hurt dead people?

Lester puffed up. “Hah! Maybe you mice fear breathers, but not those true to the Dark Path.”

So now he was Darth Lester?

Meg said, “I don’t think it’s right to attack innocent people. That’s what happened to me.” She put a hand to her neck, and her voice got harder. “Thanks to that bitch, I have no job and no life. And I’m sleeping in the dirt, for God’s sake.”

Lester struck a pose, chest out, hands on his hips, legs spread. I half-expected him to break into “Yo ho ho, fifteen men on a dead man’s chest.”

“You’re mistaken, little woman.”

I felt Meg stiffen at that.

Lester said, “She set you free, just as a munificent monster once did me. And you don’t have to sleep in the dirt.” He pointed at his hearse. “I have all I need here. When the sun comes, I just park, draw the curtains, relax in my coffin, and doze. I have a little TV, too.”

He gripped Meg’s arm and pulled her to him, squishing me be-

tween them, his belt buckle poking me in the eye.

“Come with me, Megan. I know where to get a coffin just your size. There’s plenty of room in my ride, and together we can enjoy the life eternal.”

Sammy laughed. “The life of a petty criminal, you mean. With no job and no money, how do you think he feeds that gas hog of his?”

Meg pushed at Lester’s chest with her free arm and got a little space between us. It was a relief to get that belt buckle out of my eye. It was still inches away, and I could see that it was shaped like a bat. Not just any bat, but a Batman bat.

I looked up, and I didn’t like Lester’s smirk. With the fangs and all, he looked a little on the evil side to me.

Lester said, “I have money, all I need. My dinners gladly donate their worldly goods.” He leered. “Well, perhaps not gladly.”

He yanked on Meg’s arm to pull her back to him, and crunched me again. That pissed me off, and I whipped out my claws and sank them into the back of his hand. He jerked it away and I felt my claws tug as they ripped through his skin. What a nice feeling.

Lester jumped back a couple of feet. “Foul beast!” He held his hand out so the light from the neon sign showed the damage. Four nicely done furrows crossed the top of his hand. In the greenish light they looked black against his pale skin, and they didn’t bleed.

George said, “Uh-oh.”

Lester stabbed out with one of those four-foot arms, wrapped his fingers around my middle, and tore me away from Meg. He lifted me high above his head and turned toward the brick wall of the store. I twisted and slashed, but all my claws caught was air.

Dead or not, I didn't think that wall would do me any good if Lester smashed me against it. He drew his arm back like a pitcher about to deliver a fastball—

Then Sammy was in front of Lester, his arm extended, his hand gripping a big switchblade knife. The blade flashed open with a snicking sound. He tiptoed and held it against Lester's neck. "Let the cat down easy or you're going to have a nice, permanent hole from one side of your nasty neck to the other."

Lester grabbed Sammy's wrist with his other hand and wrenched the knife away from his neck. The knife fell and clattered on the sidewalk. Then Lester wrapped his fingers around the little guy's neck and lifted him off the ground. "You do not cross Lestat, vermin."

Meg jumped for me, but Lester laughed, swung the arm that held me and caught her in the head with his elbow, knocking her against Sammy's Volkswagen.

He looked at me, and then at Sammy, who still dangled by his neck, although he was in no danger of choking to death. "Which will it be? You first, Samuel, and a broken neck that will never heal?" He glared at me. "Or you, unnatural animal, with every bone smashed." He showed his fangs. "I like the sound of that."

George shuffled around in front of Lester. "Hey, uh, Les, could you take this somewhere else?" He looked left and right, worry all over his fat face. "Night jobs ain't easy to get these days, and I can't afford no trouble."

I was dealing with having my bones smashed and George was worried about his crummy job? If I'd ever had any respect for him I'd have lost it right then, but I didn't even have that satisfaction.

Lester laughed, then said, “Move aside, numb-nuts, unless you want a faceful of cat.”

George nodded like a bobble-head doll. “Yessir. Right. Got it.” He stepped to the side. “Uh, could’ja make it quick, then? Maybe nobody’ll see.”

I hoped there was a special place in hell for George. If he ever got there.

I saw Meg crawling toward the switchblade Sammy had dropped. I figured it would be a good idea to distract the vampire Lester. Luckily, I’d worked up a good hairball before joining the undead. I activated the process for barfing it up, which included sucking in some air. I hacked a couple of times and then hurled the mess straight at Lester’s face.

Caught him right between the eyes. Woo-hoo!

He flung little Sammy into George, and they went down in a tangle. Lester screamed into my face, “Abominable creature!” Then his voice got silky which, along with the fangs and the sinister smile that appeared, turned my woo-hoo into an uh-oh.

“First, I will break all of your legs into many pieces so you can’t move. Then I will run over you with my hearse so your body is little more than a bag of ruptured organs and bone splinters.”

Oh, the pain, the horror.

He said, “It’s unfortunate that you won’t feel any pain . . .”

Oh, yeah. Dead. Still, there was the horror.

“. . . but then morning will come and sunshine will hit your flattened carcass. I wish I could see what’s left of you writhe when the pain of the undead hits.” He paused. “Maybe I could steal a camcorder and tape you. It would be fun to replay over and over.”

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