

All of My Ex-Girlfriends are Monsters

(A cautionary anecdote in five poems and a limerick)

It was a dark and stormy night when Reggie DeFatales came knocking at my door.

My parents were out having dinner and I was home alone, sitting on the couch watching television in the dimly lit den. The rain pouring down sounded like rocks clattering upon the roof; the wind howled and whined, scrambling the TV signal every now and then and making the house settle with eerie cracks and thumps.

The cheap thriller I was watching faded to an ad break when, suddenly, I heard a pounding at the front door. It sounded desperate; I got up and raced down the hall without hesitation. When I got there, I was about to grasp the doorknob when my hand froze in indecision.

"Who is it?" I asked shakily.

"Josh, it's me, Reggie! Let me in!" I heard a pained gasp from beyond the solid oak of the door.

I flipped the lock and pulled the door open. There, on my front step, stood Reggie, one hand on his knee and the other bracing him against the door frame, bent over and panting like he'd just run a marathon. His hair and clothes were dark and slick with the rain, which was now louder than ever and blowing inside with powerful gusts of wind.

He looked up at me with barely a turn of his head. "You've... got to help me. I didn't... know where else to go..." He took in a few more gulps of cold air, then dashed past me and crouched below the neighboring window like a soldier taking cover. "Close the door and lock it!" He whispered harshly. He looked outside and ducked back down.

Fearfully, I did as he said. "Reggie, what's going on?"

He peeked out the window again. "It's my ex-girlfriends," he said, his breathing starting to slow, "they're after me."

I just stood there, not even blinking. Then I started laughing, so much that I had to take a seat on the stairs. "Ha... That's... that's what this is all about?" I said, holding my side from the pain the giggling brought.

"Get out of where they can see you talking to me!" Reggie whispered again. "It's not funny!"

"You're serious, right? This isn't a joke, or something?"

"Yes, *this is serious!*"

Reluctantly, I stood back up and took a few steps away from the window's view. "Reggie, I think you're overreacting. I mean, what, do they all have guns, or something?"

"C'mon," he said abruptly, "it might be safer in the den." He ran down the hall and, if only because I was his friend, I followed. The TV was still on, and as I reached for the remote, Reggie stopped me. "Josh, wait—no, leave it on. Might throw them off."

"Alright," I sighed; I was just going with whatever he said at this point.

Reggie looked around in panic, then hurriedly drew the curtains on both windows. As he did, I plopped down on the couch, and he uneasily joined me.

"Reggie..." I started.

"You don't understand," he said, wide-eyed. "All of my ex-girlfriends are monsters."

I laughed again. "Reggie, we've all had bad relationships, but I still think you're making a mountain out of a molehill here."

Okay, that advice was technically not accurate, seeing as I've never had a girlfriend. Reggie, on the other hand, has had five, last I heard. It's not hard to see why; he's a fairly good-looking guy, and his parents are millionaires.

"No," said Reggie, "I mean, they're literally *monsters*."

I gave him a look of utter confusion. "Okay..." he started. The house settled with a low pop, and Reggie twitched and looked around like he'd been electrocuted. Then he continued, nervously relieved.

“Okay, you know how I told you I had five ex-girlfriends, right?”

“Yeah.”

“But—correct me if I'm wrong—I never introduced you, or any of our other friends, to any of them? Never talked about them?”

I paused. “Yeah...”

That *was* the thing; I never saw any of them. It wasn't that I thought Reggie would lie about getting girlfriends, but it still seemed bizarre that he'd talk about having a date every now and then, and yet I'd never see him “going out” with anybody. I eventually figured they all went to a different school.

“As you probably guessed, that's because none of them went to our school,” he continued. “But... that's not the main reason.”

All right, that settled *that*. “So... then what you're saying is, all your ex-girlfriends have, somehow, banded together, and are now 'after you'?”

“Yes,” replied Reggie, wincing.

“So I'm going to presume *you* broke up with all of *them*.”

“Correct.”

“And—and since I've never met any of them, I'm just going to, uh, take your word for it... they are actual, inhuman creatures?”

“Pretty much.”

“What, with, like, fangs and claws and stuff?”

“Some of them, yeah.”

I leaned back in my seat. “And you want me to do *what*?”

“*Hide me!*” Reggie cried, motioning toward me with begging hands. “I couldn't stay at home; they know where I live! My parents are at a charity auction, I was just sitting at the computer and I heard this noise outside and when I looked out the window, there they were, all five of them, trying to get into the house! I couldn't believe it was them at first, but sure enough... and I had to run downstairs and escape out the back door!”

I grabbed his shoulders. “Okay, calm down!” He did, a little bit, and slouched back like myself.

“Now, if I'm going to *try* to help you,” I said, “I need to know what we're—I mean, *you're*—dealing with here. Who was your first girlfriend?”

Reggie sat up again. “Elana Battonski.”

“Sounds Eastern European.”

“She was—I mean, *is*. Immigrated to the States a while back.”

Reggie got off the couch and stood in front of me. “Here, I'll tell you how it all went down...”

*At first, I was a lonely guy
Not one to get a date
I didn't mind, said, “That's just fine
“You know, hey, I can wait!”*

*Then fate gave me a chance,
I came to meet a splendid girl
At a party, I did catch her eye
And love, it soon unfurled*

*But as time passed, I came to note
Some quirks in her behavior:
A knife-like bite, dislike of light,
And hate of garlic flavor*

*So soon, I could deny no more
The evidence, and yes
She's pale, and at a cross can't hail
My girl's a vampiress!*

*I tried to cope, but drawbacks made
Relationships too weird
In mirrors, she couldn't trace her face
And thus, her makeup smeared*

*And then there was providing blood
Another food? She'd retch
To do me in was verboten
So rodents, birds I'd catch*

*And that would keep her sated
Yes, but only for a bit
And when she'd change, through powers strange
Into a bat, I quit!*

*I told her, "Dear, I love you so,
"And opposites attract
"But there's no way that I can stay
With an undead flying rat."*

"Whoa..." I said.

"Well, I didn't phrase it *exactly* like that, but it's safe to say we didn't split on the most cordial terms."

I shook my head in amazement. "*When* was this?"

"Two years ago, I think... yeah, two years. We went out for a couple of months. I still saw her around town for a while after that, though; vampires *can* be out during the day, you know, just not any more than they have to. In fact..." Reggie stopped and cocked his head.

"What, what is it?"

He shushed me. There was silence. "Do you hear that?"

I strained my ears; yes, I think I *did* hear "that": Scuffling and murmurs, coming from the front porch.

Reggie swore under his breath. "They're here," he whispered. "Lupanova must have my scent."

"Lupanova?"

"I'll tell you about her later—Quick, your basement has an alternate entrance, right?"

"If by 'alternate entrance', you mean one of those tornado shelter doors, then yes."

"So long as there's two ways out," he said as he headed for the basement door, between the kitchen and washroom. I snagged my shoes from by the couch and shoved my sock-clad feet into them, then brought up the rear as he opened the door and carefully ran down the stairs to the small space of floor and next door at the bottom. He struggled with the rusting knob before opening it into musty darkness.

"Here, I'll get the lights," I said. I squeezed past him and ran my hand over the smooth concrete of the wall to the left until I felt the switch. With a flick, a low hum filled the basement as the fluorescents came to life, casting yellowish light on cramped shelves of preserves, old furniture, and tools that wrapped around the room. Directly ahead: A short, steep staircase leading to the "alternate entrance". Down here, the rain was duller, almost soothing.

"They'll be inside in a few minutes," said Reggie. "Help me find something to brace the door."
I started looking, but then a thought occurred to me. "Do any of them have super-strength, or something?"

"Most of them," said Reggie as he scanned the area. "But if we block the door and escape, they'll think we're still here—hopefully."

"How about this?" I asked, noticing a pair of dusty filing cabinets my dad brought down a while back. Opening the drawers, I saw they were still full of papers.

Reggie rushed over. "Looks like it'll have to do." He grunted as he clasped both sides, lugged it across the room, and set it down against the door with a soft thud. Before I could even offer help, he was putting the second cabinet next to the first one.

"Wow, I didn't know you were that strong."

Reggie wiped his brow and took a seat on the last cabinet. "Fear makes the body produce adrenaline, which amplifies strength."

"...Or that smart."

Reggie laughed. "Let's save the burns for when my life's not at stake."

"So you really think they're not just playing around?"

He scoffed "These girls? No, no way."

I looked at my dirty surroundings, mentally shrugged, and sat cross-legged on the floor. I started tying my shoes. "You mind telling me about Girlfriend Number Two while we wait things out?"

"That would be Stephanie Romero."

"More specifically?"

Reggie hopped off the cabinet. "With pleasure."

*Now I'd had my first breakup, and felt plain run-down
With a hole void of joy or elation
So I grabbed both my folks and I said, "Let's leave town,
I'm in need of a major vacation!"*

*Now, my parents are rich ones (I'm sure you well know),
And they said, "Oh, of course, Reg—where to?"
And I sat and gave thought to the place we should go
Then it hit me: Caribbean Cruise!*

*Just like that, bought the tix, packed our bags, left the port
Hoping leisure and fun were to come
Sure enough, when we'd stop, at an island of sorts
There was plenty to do, and then some*

*Then one night, as I found my way back to my room
I bumped into a girl on the way
It was dark, and her face seemed to mix with the gloom
She was thin, and hunched-over a ways*

*So I turned on the charm (hey, you know how I go),
But she wouldn't talk much, if at all
Yet it seemed like she liked me—I figured her slow
Or perhaps just plain drunk off the wall*

Ah, the cruise finished greatly: I got a nice tan,

*While the girl, she avoided the heat
When she spoke to me, all she would say's "you're my man"
(That's, as compliments go, hard to beat)*

*But a funny thing happened, returning to home
Yes, for when I lay down in my bed
I received the sensation I wasn't alone...
There she was, staring straight at my head!*

*So she followed me back to the place where I live
And she barely will utter a word...
A girl who won't nag me, with that dedication?
Oh, consider us budding lovebirds!*

*Right away, though, I noticed some manners and factors:
She'd ogle at pictures of brains
And her perfume and makeup were thick as an actor's
She'd moan when she wasn't in pain*

*And where did she live when we weren't on a date?
Late at night, she would just roam the streets!
Most of all, though, I worried about her true fate
When I saw her loose fingers and feet*

*So in case you're as slow as dear Stephanie, note:
(How she knew her own name, I can't see)
She was dead well before she snuck onto that boat
My new girl? She's a newborn zombie!*

*Yet, be that as it may, I still rationalized
"Hey, at least you've found love—now, why block it?"
But with normal love, when your girl snuffles and cries
Do her eyes start to fall from their sockets?*

*I would hold her cold hand, 'till it almost came off
After that, things were never the same
Couldn't kiss her again—she'd hack bugs when she'd cough
"Steph," I said, "I just can't play this game!"*

*"Hey, I love it when girls are revealing
"And exotic, that's every guy's wish
"But no makeup can hide that your skin's peeling
"And you're starting to smell like dead fish."*

I raised my eyebrows. "Man!"

Reggie ran a hand through his bushy, dirty-blond hair. "I know, it was a little more complex the second time around."

"How long did *that* last?"

"Couldn't have been any more than a month. And when she went to pieces on me, she *literally*... you

get the idea. And the constant moaning? Not as hot as it sounds.”

“But you didn’t... tell her off like that, right? Like before?”

“No, that one was pretty much right on the money. She wasn’t the greatest listener, so I had to be direct.”

“Yeah... now, you said we should get out of here?”

As if on cue, I heard a click and ominous creaks from upstairs, then growls and murmuring.

“*Aaand* that would be them,” said Reggie with mock nonchalance. “Or at least some of them. Josh, go check the back door and make sure they haven’t circled the house!”

“*My* house, and how did they get in, anyway?”

“It’s complicated. The door!”

I grumbled, but still took two steps up the stairs and peeked through a crack in the wood. Seeing no one, I undid the latch and cautiously lifted one of the leaves to get a better look: The roof kept me relatively dry but, just ahead, the grass was splayed and shiny from the pounding rain. In one of a few breaks between the heavy stormclouds, a gleaming full moon was on the rise. A thunderclap sounded in the distance, where city lights glowed.

“Looks clear,” I called to Reggie. I ducked back down to see him making sure the filing cabinets were adequately placed, then sprinting in my direction, forcing me to clumsily make my way to the ground as he barreled up the steps.

“Sorry,” he said, delicately closing the open door leaf. We were now crouched outside my house, trying to be quiet while working to be heard over the rain. “This thing doesn’t lock, does it?”

“From the inside.”

“Shoot, that’ll make it even easier to tail us.”

“*Us?*” I jabbed a finger at him. “This is *your* problem, remember? I might as well just stay here!”

“And deal with them yourself? I’m honored but, as your friend, I must insist otherwise.”

I grumbled; I couldn’t hear anything inside anymore, but I figured if the situation was as bad as Reggie suggested, we *should* keep moving.

“Okay, fine... so now where do we go?”

Reggie held his chin in thought, and then I could almost see the lightbulb go on over his head as he snapped his fingers. “*The Regal House!*” he exclaimed, and sprung to his feet. He started running downtown and, sparing one last survey of the cellar door, I did, too.

The rain pelted me mercilessly, soaking the t-shirt and jeans I wore. It was *cold*; I took a glance at my arms as I ran and saw all the hairs standing up. The wind whistled in my ears, chills ran down my spine; in the distance, a flash of lightning and another thunderclap.

Did I know where we were going? Yes and no. The key to Reggie’s family’s wealth, excluding good looks and rich ancestors, is his parents are entrepreneurs. Among the many buildings they own is a ballroom/restaurant called *The Regal House* (possibly because *The DeFatales House* sounds even more pretentious, if not menacing). I’ve been there multiple times—and the food is excellent—but I was uncertain as to how Reggie planned on seeking sanctuary in the place.

Running as fast as we could (a speed which lowered as side-aches and burning lungs set in), Reggie and I finally made it to the shadowy facade of *The Regal House*. It was locked, but enormous windows revealed its dark and cavernous interior, illuminated only by businesses on the other side of the street. We took shelter by the ornate front double-door, under the eaves, breathing heavily.

“Now what?” I started to say, but then Reggie grabbed his keys out of his pocket, flicked through them frenetically until he found a particular one, and unlocked the door’s deadbolt. The key next to it, he put in a higher lock, using his free hand to pull the door open as he turned it.

“Go inside,” he panted. I did; he took the key out and followed.

We were in the restaurant that composed the bottom of the *House*, with dozens of tables dotting both sides of a carpeted aisle that led to a wide, arching staircase. While I couldn’t help but marvel at the dark and empty atmosphere, Reggie was even more familiar with it than I, and on his way. I picked up

the pace, subduing my footfalls on the stairs.

The stairs intersected a long hallway marked with doors and paintings, bathed with moonlight from a tall window at the end. Reggie took a left, and then another left, through one of two entryways to the dance floor. He ran across the expanse of varnished wood, beneath a soaring ceiling, to the trio of six-foot tall windows on the other side. As I came closer, I could see the dirty rooftops of buildings across the street and most of town, blurry and distorted through streaks of rain; in the distance, more thunder.

"Hey, Reggie, shouldn't we be away from the windows?" I stepped back and sat on a folding chair in the corner.

"Just checking," he said, leaning at a contorted angle as he looked out the left-most one. "Okay, looks like we're good for now."

He ran over to where I sat. "Does rain make it harder for you to be tracked?"

"You mean aside from the muddy footprints?"

Reggie groaned frustratedly and gazed heavenward.

"Sorry," I said. "Look... we'll probably be here for a while again, so why don't you just tell me about your third girlfriend?"

Reggie's mood seemed to brighten a little. He drew the curtains on the nearest window and stood in front of me, his face barely visible.

"Evelyn Frankenson..."

*So some time came and went since the last tragic truth
That had more or less scarred a great part of my youth
Love was last on my mind, but don't call me a jerk
For I needed distraction... my parents had work*

*Now, as entrepreneurs, they go driving a lot
Always searching for this or that trendy new spot
To establish a business of modest repute
(And it's worked great so far—that, I cannot refute)*

*So the day came I asked if I could tag along
And discern how to tell the right choices from wrong
They obliged, and we went to the outskirts of town
To observe what new real estate deals had gone down*

*There, we found a large house that was rightly "For Sale"
With the roof falling off and the paint going pale
Never one to debate things, I followed them in
And proceeded to snoop while they surveyed the den*

*In exploring, I found, quite surprising myself
An old door, hidden well behind someone's bookshelf
Moved the shelf, turned the knob, down the stairs, hit the lights
To a place where I knew that this house wasn't right*

*"It's a lab!" I did think, and indeed that was true:
There were tables and gadgets, books, vials of brew
But the focal point lay at the end of the room
A young girl who, it seemed, was soon nearing her doom*

*There she rested, inert, on a slab of cold stone
In this basement of science, all dark and alone
As I neared, she did twitch, and then swiftly came to
But she didn't attack me, just said, "I love you"*

*She'd been kept there alone, I the first one to find
That whoever had raised her had left her behind
And for that, she was grateful—A tall 6-foot-5,
And forever in debt that I'd saved her alive*

*I was flattered to no end, but soon had to leave
Still, she wore this white dress like you wouldn't believe
And she looked at me, longing with eyes of dark umber
So, with time left to spare, I just gave her my number*

*And as fortune would have it, my folks weren't too keen
On that house, or much anything else that they'd seen
So I waited a bit, and then told them the news:
That I'd met a new girl (who had nothing to lose)*

*So some weeknights, with what little time I could stow
I'd drive down to "her place", food 'n' clothing in tow
We'd go out on the weekends, for movies and walks
Or engage in romantically-charged, aimless talks*

*But once more, there were actions, and features quite weird:
When dismayed, she would holler and stomp—And I feared
For her safety; in stitches her body was covered,
Yet the most troubling thing that I slowly discovered...*

*...Was the bolts on her neck weren't some nu-metal fashion
Nor was shocking herself just a masochist's passion
The hand that created her wasn't divine
But a mad scientist's—she's a Miss Frankenstein!*

*As a whole, these would seem like some trivial traits
But her black and white hair, steel-soled boots... no debate:
Her apparel and style were—to me—just not "in"
(And this is not to mention the green of her skin)*

*And despite being hewn from spare parts of the dead
She could hold me aloft, and clear over her head
With that strength, I thought getting her peeved would be bad
But I knew there were much better girls to be had*

*"Evie, dear," I explained, "anyone could now see,
"From your mismatched construction; you weren't made for me!"
"Plus, your temperament's wild, I'm turned off by your pall
"And the last thing I need is a cute wrecking ball."*

"Its name wasn't 'Frankenstein'," I said.

"What?"

"In the book; a guy *named* Frankenstein makes it. The proper name is 'Frankenstein's Monster'."

Reggie rolled his eyes. "The point is, she was really loud and kept sticking her finger in electrical sockets. You have no idea how difficult that made it to do things in public. I know girls can be wildly emotional, but come on!"

"I guess so... what did she do after that?"

"After we broke up? Oh yeah, we had been going out for about three months, so she took it pretty hard—and by 'pretty hard', I mean I'm glad I didn't tell her at *my* place, or otherwise I'd still be paying for a couple pieces of furniture. Whatever that house she was 'living' in was worth, the property value definitely went down."

"That bad, huh?"

"Yeah."

Awkward silence, then Reggie went and pulled back the far side of the curtain just enough to look outside. "Still don't see any of them..."

"Maybe we *did* throw them off."

"Heh, I wish. It's just a matter of time."

I looked around for a clock and saw nothing. "You *have* any idea what time it is?"

"No watch, and I left my phone at home." A lightning strike lit up the room in haunting blue and Reggie let go of the curtain.

"Same here," I muttered. I wasn't tired but, if I had to guess, I'd say it was about ten o'clock. "So where do we go when they *do* show up? Should we leave early?"

"I'm working on that."

I shifted in the chair, a gray metal one that was cold to the touch. "You think you've got time to talk about Girlfriend the Fourth, then?"

Reggie resumed his stance in front of the curtain. "How appropriate of you to refer to her that way."

"Why?"

"She was a princess; Princess Amuna Shabti."

I grinned with morbid curiosity. "This sounds good already."

"And it's only going to get better."

*Since my last foreign girlfriends had filled me with fear
I then vowed to myself to make sure I date near
I had never before felt so mentally clear
And the pains in my soul were long-gone*

*With a brand-new outlook, there was much to expect
From the world, so I sought an increased intellect
And proceeded to analyze, learn, and dissect
All the things I could get my hands on*

*Then I one day caught wind of a brand-new showcase
A museum, precisely—I tracked down the place
It was miles away, not at all hard to trace
And the entry fee, it was a steal*

*The exhibits inside ranged from Indian boats
To an old cannonball, to a miniature goat*

*There was art on the walls and some statues of note
Truly, things with all kinds of appeal*

*But the best of them all was a sarcophagus
Of some royalty past that had long gathered dust
There were hieroglyphs carved near the top, and I trust
That, at this point, no-one was around*

*I decoded the symbols aloud, or I tried
But whatever I did, something rumbled and cried
And I took a step back as the mummy inside
Pushed the lid off, straight onto the ground*

*It arose, with a movement as stiff as can be
Then it spoke, and it seemed that the “it” was a “she”
My translation is rusty, but talking to me
I believe she was asking to marry!*

*So, from what I could tell, she had met a cursed fate
And her punishment thus was to sit and to wait
’Till a young man like me, who could read chiseled slate
Came along—and now, that’s just plain scary*

*Then she took off the cloth that had covered her face
And she (somehow) was lovely, without any trace
Of the decomposition that often takes place
When decaying lays waste to your frame*

*“This is crazy”, I thought, “but she’s really sensational
“Besides, at the least, this could be educational
“Just stop and imagine the firsthand information she’ll
“Share—it’s your ticket to fame!”*

*And besides, if I left her there, problems would start
So I gave her my hand—by extension, my heart
And she turned into sand and flew into a part
Of my bag, with remarkable stealth*

*So this time, I was well aware, right off the bat
That my girl wasn’t human—but pretty, at that
I could save time on coping and chewing the fat
And get down to enjoying myself*

*Oh, but what a surprise, as the weeks did proceed
I caught on to some habits and personal deeds
When we’d stroll in the park, she’d beat others with reeds
If they didn’t get out of our way*

And ignoring the fact she’d treat people like slaves

*There were still all these skills she'd picked up from the grave
She once summoned a whole bunch of bugs at a rave
And that ruined a lot of kids' days*

*Yet above all, I must air a final confession
Her inhuman strength was a touchy possession
She'd just about kill me in late make-out sessions
(And I still have a bruise on my thigh)*

*"Princess, honey," I said, "you've been too good, except
"That you're full of yourself—that, I just can't accept
"And what's more, you're all bandaged, and English-inept
"What's Egyptian for 'Take care, goodbye'?"*

"I remember that!"

Reggie looked surprised.

"No, not her, I mean I remember when you got really into reading all of a sudden. But you never actually learned anything new from her, did you?"

"Not really... well, now that you mention it, she did say something about the pyramids being white and shiny."

"That was on the History Channel last week."

"Okay, then, never mind. Anyway, we were together for two months or so before I just couldn't take it anymore. To be honest, I'm not sure where she went afterward. The museum? We put the lid back on the sarcophagus earlier, so I *guess* no-one noticed..."

Reggie peeked behind the curtain again, furrowed his brow, and then withdrew like he'd just seen a poisonous snake. "Time to start rolling," he said, trying—and failing—to maintain an air of calm as he speed-walked out of the ballroom.

"Hold on..." I rose, and pulled back the curtain to see what Reggie had:

On the sidewalk below, five stretched and distorted shadows approached. My angle and the awnings below obscured the bodies casting them, but I could see one taller than the rest, moving mechanically, another shambling forward as if dragging its own body, and one a step ahead of the others, crouched over.

That was all I needed to see! I caught up with Reggie as he ran to the left end of the adjoining hallway and pushed open a door marked with a picture of a stick-person on a zigzag—Emergency Exit. It revealed a concrete landing and two sets of stairs.

"Up or down?" I asked as the door slammed behind us.

"Up doesn't involve potentially jumping off the roof, so how about down?"

"Excellent logic, Reggie." The "down" stairs turned, and then turned, and then turned again, leading us into an industrial-looking anteroom. To the right was another door and Reggie immediately went for it, pushing it open and thrusting us into the rain. Behind us, by *The Regal House's* front, I heard voices:

"He's somewhere in there, and whoever's with—"

"Can't get far—"

"His scent—"

"Almost—"

"I hear them, too," said Reggie. "And if we don't get moving, chances are, they're going to hear *us*."

The voices trailed off—they were retracing Reggie's path exactly as he'd left it. I felt slightly relieved, and then I noticed Reggie squinting to the east. He took off, and we both knew he didn't have to say "follow me".

Reggie had a head start and showed no signs of slowing; I could only try to keep up as he blazed a

trail past hotels, apartments, and franchise stores, puddles splashing in his wake. Cars were little more than two rumbling headlights, those preparing to turn braking to a screeching halt as Reggie and I flew through crosswalk after crosswalk.

My lungs burned and my feet ached. Where were we going? How long had we been running? Why didn't anyone tell me there was a never-ending street in our neighborhood?

The rain began to ease up, the mountains on the horizon grew in definition, and the spaces between buildings increased as we neared the edge of town,. Then, without warning, Reggie took a hard left, cutting across the street with barely a regard to traffic.

"What the—?" I yelled uselessly.

"Shortcut!"

I sighed, stopped, looked both ways, and caught up as a car bore down in the furthest lane. I touched sidewalk mere seconds before it roared past, close enough to hit me with a draft of cold air. I looked up, and saw Reggie tearing across an empty lot into the woods.

"You've got to be..." I wheezed, "kidding me!"

The lot was nothing difficult, and then I hit the forest. Reggie cleared a path, but thick boughs above blotted out most of the moonlight; I could barely see anything. Spindly branches slapped my face while briars scratched at my legs; I stepped on something soft and almost twisted my ankle when that something hissed and moved.

Rocks and logs jabbed at my shoes, and I sputtered pathetically when a bug flew into my lips. Caws and growls emanated from all sides; we must have been weaving around trees in a straight line for only a few minutes, but it felt like a lifetime.

Just as I was ready to collapse, I saw slivers of light between the trees—a clearing! Mustering all the strength I had left, I pushed myself ahead to run alongside Reggie. The forest around us became brighter and brighter, until we passed the last few yards and burst out into the open. I immediately stopped, my heels digging into the soft earth, when I saw where we were.

The forest terminated on the gravelly shoulder of another road, but there was only one house in sight: Reggie's. On the other side of the road was an enormous, gradual hill with a flat expanse on top, and sitting in the middle of that expanse was the DeFatales mansion.

Yes, mansion: A hedge wall marked the border of Reggie's yard (the entire green, treeless hill) and an open iron gate guarded a driveway that curved up to the three-story manor. The house towered over us, its grandeur accentuated by our vantage point. The rain had stopped and the sky was clear; except for cricket chirps and our own pounding hearts and lungs, it was dead silent.

"Why... are we going *here*?"

"Where I started... last place... they'd expect. Worth a shot..." And with that, he was off again.

The hill was murder on my already sore legs—I had to actively stop myself from falling over by the time we reached the front door. No wonder Reggie was so exhausted when he found me, and he must have run down the hill *behind* his house! The motion-sensing light came on, and as I shielded my eyes from the sudden brightness, Reggie unlocked the door. He went in and a beeping started, then stopped.

"Okay, I got the security system."

As I entered and shut the door, I found myself fascinated by the house. Yes, since Reggie's my friend, I had visited many times, but it was always a jarring change from my humble suburban home: Here, in the spacious foyer, a majestic chandelier hung above dual staircases that swirled up to the second and third floors, supported by pillars. We stood on a massive woven rug, but the floor below was tiled stone. Windows rivaling those in *The Regal House's* ballroom invited the moonlight to display the entryway in shades of blue and merely hint at the rooms branching off on both sides. I didn't know what kind of money it took to live in a place like this, but the only thing missing was a butler, and Reggie said his parents had considered the option.

"My room."

Up the left staircase, down the same end of the luxuriously carpeted hall, and there it was. The door

was open, and as we went in I saw all the familiar touches: Computer desk to the left, wardrobe to the right, canopy double bed dead ahead, and posters of rock bands and actresses all over the walls. The eastern window had its shades drawn but the western one didn't—Reggie remedied that, while I closed the door and used the adjustable switch to bring low light to the room.

I cut to the chase. "Fifth girlfriend: Lupanova, right?"

"Lupanova MacFerrell, to be exact."

I sat on the bed. "Let's hear it."

Reggie cleared his throat...

"That's it!" I said

"I've had enough

"Of all this monster girlfriend stuff!

"No more!"

I took some time to think

And let the past sink in

And then

I decided to begin again

So I thought of girls I knew

Who were normal and yet very nice

But no dice

It's true

Out of luck, it seemed, but then

A new family moved in, not far from me

And their daughter looked

Quite beautiful, indeed

I went to offer help one day

And I'd say, we hit it off at once

She had long brown hair, a wonderful smile

Was neat and fair, and didn't seem odd at all

She was single—neat!

We'd meet when we had a chance

Go dance, or maybe sit and chat

She loved the sunrise, with cool blue eyes

And we went to dinner

When she would always eat light

We would wait

And watch the stars at night

I would tell her where I'd been

She would laugh at my jokes

And then, we'd kiss

(I'd never had it as good as this!)

*Every once in a while, though
She wouldn't be in the mood to go out
"It's that time of month," she'd say
Well, hey, I thought she meant... you know*

*But one evening, in her yard, she said to me,
"Reggie, can you keep a secret?"
"You bet," I said
She jumped ahead... and morphed into a wolf!*

*"Not again!" I was helpless to cry
Why, why didn't I see it coming?
But this was something minor, no?
(Her intriguing little doing)*

*So I figured I could deal
For real—it's voluntary, right?
Until she said, "I lose control
At night, if a full moon's out"*

*A werewolf, then! I sighed
But lied, and said "okay"
Yet from that day, I knew
That "I do", I couldn't say*

*When the sun is up, all's well
And it's only twelve times a year
But who will have to cover her
If pets and people disappear?*

*Besides, at times, an urge would strike:
She'd hike a leg up, itch her ear
I fear, she'd sniff more than people would
Or should—just... way too unnerving*

*It was a burden that I couldn't bear
And I shared the way I felt with she
"Lupa, my love, I just don't feel safe
"And furry girls just aren't for me."*

"Sorry," said Reggie. "I'm still a little short of breath."

"It's okay, I got what you were saying."

"Good." He spun his desk chair around and sat. "She moved from Scotland. What else is there to say, really? She was *great*, but I felt... I don't know, 'responsible' for her. It was too much."

He crossed his arms, seemingly satisfied. "So that was earlier this year. Since then, I've sworn off dating indefinitely."

I nodded acknowledgment. "You said she lived close to here?"

Reggie gestured to the western window. "Just a couple blocks down the street. Oh, *shoot*, that reminds me!" He leaped from his seat and looked behind the curtain.

"Are they here?"

Reggie didn't respond, or move. That's usually a bad sign.

I got up and lifted back the other side of the curtain. Just as I did, lightning struck nearby, and in the flash I saw it: Five silhouettes, walking shoulder-to-shoulder up the hill. I drew back, and saw Reggie had done the same.

"So where do we run to now?"

He slumped back into his chair. "No more running. It's got to end here."

What? This was unexpected. "Are you being brave, or are you just tired?"

He cracked a smile. "Maybe a little of both. Now, help me think of something to do!"

"I—uh, okay..." I began pacing the room. "Do you have any stakes?"

"There's a croquet set in the garage, but that's too far away."

"Silver bullets? Any guns at all?"

"My dad's got guns, but he locks the case."

"Um, uh... any magical charms or plants?"

"Yeah, I think I've got some wolfsbane and a sacred amulet in my underwear drawer... no, of course not! What, is that supposed to be funny?"

"You're the one asking me for help! I saved your butt in the first place, remember?"

"Yeah, well..." Reggie sighed and threw up his hands. "Okay, okay, sorry... This is just kind of a stressful situation."

"You can say that again."

Uncomfortable silence. "But seriously, what am I going to do?"

I opened my mouth to speak when the front door slamming loudly echoed from outside.

Reggie and I looked at each-other. "You know what?" he said. "On second thought, I think I'm perfectly up for some more running." He bolted out of his chair, but then froze in mid-step, staring at something beside me.

"What?"

"The window."

I turned and looked; the curtains were drawn, rippling in a light breeze.

"What about it?"

"It was closed when I left."

It took a few seconds for what he said to sink in. Then I got it.

I lunged forward to close the window, but as I did, something small and black blasted between the curtains with a screech. I recoiled, running to the other side of the room where Reggie stood, and spun around to see a bat flying in circles just below the high ceiling. It dove to the ground and, with the sound of hundreds of flapping wings, rapidly expanded into a girl.

She was thin yet well-figured, sickly pale with blood-red lips, violet eyeshadow, and long black hair running down behind her with a few strands hanging over her face. She wore a black cape and high-heeled boots, a dark gray skirt that ended at her knees, and some kind of laced, black leather bustier, outlined with maroon and exposing a generous amount of... let's say, "below-the-neck area".

"Hello, dearie." She flashed a too-happy smile, revealing razor-sharp fangs.

"Hey, Elana," said Reggie casually, or maybe numbly.

Elana stuck a hand on her hip and tilted her head inquisitively. "Did you miss me?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I did! I've got all these dead animals in my freezer and no-one to suck them dry. It's a shame, it really is."

Elana settled for a smirk this time. Then, she turned her dark emerald eyes to me. "And who is this?"

"Josh," I managed to say.

"Then you are very lucky, Josh! You are about to watch a bad boy get his just desserts."

Reggie appeared unmoved. "Fair enough. If it's all the same, though, I think I'd rather... get them to go."

With that, he made a break for the door, but then it practically exploded open, slamming against the wall so hard something cracked. Reggie stumbled backwards as a tall, muscular girl with greenish skin and a black-and-white bouffant strode into the room. She wore a tattered white dress that fit snugly to her modest proportions, and crude scars marked most of her exposed joints. It's probably worth mentioning that she also had huge bolts sticking out of her neck.

Reggie didn't miss a beat. "Evie! You always did know how to turn a casual date into a repair job."

"*You don't get to use pet names on me, Reginald!*" She yelled in a monotone voice. I backed up against the wall from the sheer suddenness of the announcement.

Reggie turned to me. "See what I was talking about, Josh?"

Vicious snarls and groans came from behind Evelyn, and Reggie and I shifted our focus to the doorway. Another girl crossed the threshold, this one almost as large as Evelyn and with disheveled brown hair that seemed unnaturally thick. She wore shorts and a pink babydoll shirt—both dangerously undersized, as if she had grown since putting them on—and was hunched-over, shaking, and making sounds like she was about to explode. Her nails were long and sharp, and as she looked at Reggie, I could see her eyes were those of a wild dog.

"Lupanova?" Said Reggie with surprise.

"Yes!" said Elana. "We've been after you for so long, Lupa here has had a hard time... holding it in. But after all, it took even longer to wait for a night to get you alone; we couldn't let it go to waste. The full moon is just the icing on the cake!"

More groans from out of sight as Lupanova staggered to Elana's side. "You can come in now," said Evelyn to the hallway, and something that was once an attractive girl shambled into the room, holding her arms out in front of her like she was blind. Then again, she may *have* been: One of her eye sockets was empty, while the other was bloodshot and leaky, and her face had chunks missing. She wore a tight blue shirt and jeans, which did little to counter the putrefied flesh of her limbs, and it was impossible to tell what color her filthy, ragged hair was, or even what race she had been. The odor of rotting meat filled the room, and I felt my stomach turn.

Reggie coughed. "Ah, Stephanie. You know, out of all the zombies I've ever met, you have the *best* fashion sense. 'Why don't they ever change the clothes they died in?', is what I want to know."

Stephanie grimaced at Reggie, spat something unintelligible, and lurched over to join Lupanova. Meanwhile, Evelyn closed the door and stood in front of it.

"I take it she hasn't been keeping as good as care of herself as she used to?" I half-whispered.

"Either that, or standards of beauty really *have* gone out the window."

Reggie paused. "Speaking of which..." He did an about-face and quickly opened the window, then started to climb out, when a serpentine stream of sand shot inside with a drawn-out hiss, sending us both back to the center of the room in shock. As Reggie collected himself, I watched the sand arc up to the ceiling and plunge down, gradually forming into the body of a girl, from head to toe. When the final grain had fallen, Reggie's last remaining ex-girlfriend stood before us, guarding the last remaining way out.

The girl had dark skin and hair similar to Elana's, and wore a simple crown with a small, golden snake rearing up on the front. She was dressed in an opulent, silver and white sleeveless gown and bronze sandals, but random sections of her body were wrapped in worn gauze, or had loose strips of it seemingly stuck to them.

"Good evening, Amuna. I hear doors are really catching on as a way to get into houses these days."

"Your highness, I presume?" I said.

The Princess narrowed her eyes at me and muttered something.

"What did she say, Reggie?"

"*Your fate shall be dealt out later, commoner.*"

"Sounds like a real go-to girl."

Elana began walking over to where Reggie stood, opposite me. "Now that everyone has assembled..."

I would explain this situation, but seeing as we have been chasing you all night, you must already know why we are here.”

“To peacefully acknowledge our differences and promise to keep in touch?”

Evelyn and Stephanie laughed, and Elana waited for them to finish before she continued.

“You would *wish* for as much, Reggie.” Elana stepped back neatly. “So, do you have anything to say for yourself? For how you treated all of us, over all those years?”

Reggie stood in thought for several moments, then turned to me. “Josh?”

“Yeah?”

“I think I can sum it all up pretty well...”

*There once was a handsome young dude
Who, through mishaps and motives quite lewd
Spurned five freaky lovers
They found one another
And now he is royally screwed.*

Elana smiled that sinister, toothy smile again. “Girls, take care of our uninvited audience, would you?”

Evelyn and Amuna each swiftly took one of my wrists and spun me around. “Hey!” I cried, trying to thrash free, but their vice-like grips weren't breaking. Evelyn opened the door and Stephanie lumbered on over, ushering me back with the threat of being touched by her.

“Reggie!”

“It's okay, Josh—I'm going to get what's coming to me!”

“Indeed,” said Elana, and with one hand, she grabbed him by the shirt and threw him on the bed.

Dazed, he sat up, and gestured to Lupanova. “You should be a little more involved, Lupa. You always *were* my favorite, after all.”

“S'too late for that, love,” she choked out... though I swore I could see her blush. And then Evelyn and Amuna tossed me tail-first into the hallway.

“*Out!*” Stephanie rasped, and Amuna slammed the door shut with a wave of her hand.

It took me a bit to recover from almost having the wind knocked out of me. Then, I eased myself up, rubbing my stinging wrists, and saw they had thrown me a couple yards from the door. I ran over and tried the handle—locked. Whatever was going on inside, I couldn't hear; as Reggie had proudly proclaimed before, his room was soundproof. What was I supposed to do now? I settled for standing by the bathroom door on the left side of the hall.

How long did I wait there, in the dark, empty, silent hallway? A minute? Five minutes? Ten?

I don't know. All I know is, though Reggie's room was mute to me, I snapped to attention when I suddenly felt a faint vibration, as if something had just happened of such intensity as to shake the foundation of the house. Then the door swung open, and I heard an ear-splitting, horrific combination of screaming, howling, and gnashing as the girls writhed and fought in a furious dogpile on the bed. Oh, and Reggie, fleeing at top speed.

“*RUN!*” He screamed, yanking my arm as he passed in a blur.

I took his advice as we reversed our path through the house, Reggie clearing the last half of the stairs with a flying leap and coming to a jarring landing on the floor. Then, he wrenched the front door open and we escaped to the damp lawn. I looked back, and saw dim light through a second floor window, where muffled cries and disgusting noises still continued. From there, we practically slid down the hill and out the gate.

“What did you *do*?” I asked incredulously, once we were safely behind the hedges.

Reggie caught his breath, then straightened up. “I'll tell you...”

There I lay! They had just locked you out, and Elana stood at the foot of the bed. “Now, ladies, just like we planned,” she said.

Lupa put one knee up on the bed and held down my left arm, Amuna took my right arm, Stephanie sat on my left leg, and Evie grabbed my right ankle. They had me spread-eagle, unable to move.

“Listen, girls,” I said, “Maybe we can talk this over, try to start some things again! Amuna, come on, you're the only woman I know who looks sexy covered in bandages. Elana, you've seen movies lately, right? The human-vampire romance thing, it's working out better than it used to!”

“That's nice,” She said, and climbed onto the bed and knelt down over me, her legs on either side of mine. From this angle, I couldn't help but admire her again. “You like what you see, Reggie?”

“Dressed for success, as always,” I replied.

She smiled devilishly. “Anything to get your blood running, dearie. 'Course, with all the running you've been doing, I'd chance I could've worn a winter coat and still get a decent drink out of you.”

I laughed. “I thought that's what you were going to do. That's not going to solve anything, though—turning me into a vampire won't get rid of me.”

“True,” she said, “and if Lupanova bites you, turning you into a werewolf won't solve anything. And if Stephanie bites you, turning you into a zombie won't solve anything. But if the lot of us get at you at once, even those without such... *contagious* personalities... well, who knows what will happen? Either you die, or you'll turn into something different from *all* of us, and then you will *truly* know how we feel the next time someone dumps *you*!”

She leaned forward sensuously, baring her fangs. My eyes darted from girl to girl; they all bore the same steely, spiteful glare.

I looked back to Elana, her eyes half-closed like a sleepwalker's and barely a foot from mine. “I was going to mention,” I said, “I didn't know you'd age.”

“There's a lot you didn't know about us,” she said. “And you never took the time to figure out.” She moved closer.

“I suppose it's only fair for you to do this first,” I replied. “After all...” I leaned my head closer and whispered in her ear. “You always *were* my favorite.”

She smiled dreamily, then brought her mouth down to my neck—or she was about to, but then Lupa barked angrily. “What?” Elana said, annoyed.

“You said *I* was your favorite,” Lupa growled at me.

“I did?” I said. “Oh, no, you must have misheard me—I was talking to Evelyn.”

“You said *my* name!”

“No, I'm pretty sure I was talking to Evelyn.”

“*Me*?” Said Evie innocently.

“Everyone, please,” said Elana, “let's stop this.” She brushed some hair out of her eyes. “Besides... he *whispered* it to me, so I'm sure we all know who his favorite *really* was.”

“Oh, as *if*!” Said Evie.

“He said it to me *first*!” Lupa retorted.

“Yes, I'm sure your sense of judgment is *perfectly* keen when you grew up in a basement or bathe yourself with your tongue, but—”

“*Hey, watch it!*” Evie hollered. Lupa snarled.

Amuna yelled something I didn't feel like translating. “You stay out of this, Cleopatra!” Evie snapped.

“This would be over by now if you hadn't kept getting hit by lightning because of those stupid nails in your neck!” said Elana.

“Oh, and like showing off your little magic act to go and unlock his window wasn't a waste of time?”

“You ungrateful... Don't forget who organized this!”

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!” Stephanie croaked, jumping up and down.

I could feel their grips loosening.

"He said it to *me*!" Lupa growled again.

"Nobody cares!" Evie yelled, and as she swung her hand dismissively, she smacked Stephanie in the head, bending it sideways with a crunch.

"Aaurgh!" Stephanie cried, and tried to dive at Evie, but her crooked head disoriented her, and she flung herself onto Elana instead.

Elana cried out. "Get off of me!" She grunted, and pried Stephanie off of her and threw her—straight at Amuna. The two collapsed onto the floor and started fighting.

"Come on!" Elana yelled, "I'm starving!"

"Starving!" Stephanie moaned, as she beat Amuna with her newly-severed arm.

"Okay, then," said Evie, "let's see if I can't *scrape* something together for you, you stuck-up little witch!" She grabbed Elana by the hair and started clawing at her back.

"Aaah! Hands off, you big dumb brat!" She flailed wildly with her arms, then contorted herself around and punched Evie in the stomach, who let go and doubled over in pain.

"Oh, what am I doing?" Elana screamed. "*You've* got blood!" She pointed at Lupa.

"*You've* got brains!" Stephanie shrieked.

"Blood!"

"Brains!"

"*Anything*!" Lupa roared, and she arched her back and howled as she burst out of her clothes and transformed into an gigantic gray wolf, which fell to all fours.

Elana and Lupa dove at each-other, Evie fell next to me, Stephanie gnawing at her hair, and Amuna yelled some sort of curse before jumping into the fray. I rocketed off the bed, not even remotely wanting to look behind me as I unlocked the door...

"...And that's when I got out."

I was speechless. "...Wow. Did you plan all that?"

"Kind of."

"Cool." I let out a big breath. "So, which one of them really *was* your favorite?"

"Oh, definitely Elana."

I shrugged. "I can see that."

"Yeah, I saw you checking her out!" Reggie slapped my shoulder.

I feigned disappointment. "Really? Darn!"

We shared the laughter for a short while, releasing with it all the exhaustion of the evening. Then, Reggie walked over to the gate and looked up at his house pensively. I did the same; the light was still on, but the horrible noises from Reggie's room seemed to have died down, which could have been either good or bad.

"Thanks for helping me out, at the beginning," Reggie said. "Sorry I got you dragged into this whole mess."

"No problem. At least I got some exercise. If you want some parting advice, though, I'd suggest you hose that bed off."

We laughed over that some more. "Listen," Reggie finally said, "I'm going to... lay low for a while. Those girls aren't going to make it out of there without a few scratches, but it'll take more than a catfight to stop them. They'll split when my parents show up, but until then... I'll think of something."

He firmly put his hands in his pockets. "And then I think I'm going to move. Out of the country. What about Japan? There's no monster girls there, right?"

"Oh, of course not."

"Great." Reggie held up his fist for a knuckle bump, and I obliged him. He turned and started walking down the street. "Catch you 'round, man," he said, waving "goodbye" over his shoulder. I waved back.

Standing on the side of the road in the middle of the night, thinking of what I'd been through with Reggie, I felt like there was some kind of lesson here. But what? Was it that, when two people care about each-other, they should learn to accept their differences and work out their problems instead of one pushing the other away? Was it that confession was good for the soul, the way Reggie became more confident the more he told me about his past? That humans should date humans? Above all else, though: Were my parents home, and how fast was I going to have to run to make it there before I got grounded if they weren't?

Once again, I didn't know. All I knew was the last thing I thought as I saw Reggie walking away, fading into darkness under the light of the moon: There goes my friend, Reggie DeFatales, the richest kid I've ever met who just couldn't find the perfect girlfriend.

I'm going to miss him.