

A Cat Among the Pigeons

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A vampire story about a vampire in a boarding school.

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The teacher calls me to the front; it's my first day at the Mason's Comprehensive School. She smiles at me.

'Thank you, class. Be quiet. Vivienne,' Mrs Pennie turns to face me, smiling widely, 'Tell the class a bit about yourself, and then they shall ask you some questions.' She pats me gently on the back and walks over to her desk, sitting on its edge, watching me intently. I begin, talking to no-one in particular.

'My full name is Vivienne Noir, but I prefer to be called Vivie. I am sixteen years old and I like listening to music and hanging out with friends late at night. I am very, very good at arguing, so picking a fight with me is not a good idea either; I am extremely strong. I came here from Romania. I hate jewellery, necklaces in particular. I have excellent hearing and sight, so creeping and whispering behind me is pointless. That's about it.' I finish, and I smile. The teacher stands up again.

'Thanks, Vivienne. Class: any questions?' Many hands shoot up at this point. Mrs Pennie points at a nearby girl. 'Yes, Jessica?' The girl stands up, as if it was custom. Her blonde pigtails swing as she smiles and turns to face me.

'Why are your eyes so weird? I mean, I have never seen a person with yellow, pupil-less eyes before.' She says, and sits back down. I had expected this, and I have an excuse ready and waiting. I look down at the floor, as if it is a painful subject.

'I have...a problem...it made my eyes this way...It's genetic, so I got it from my parents. They're dead because of it. The average lifetime for a person with my problem is about thirty-five to forty years old.' I make my eyes water slightly by keeping them open for too long. Pennie looks at me sympathetically, and then selects another teenager from the class.

'Yes, Dann?' The boy stands; he is remarkably handsome, with bright blue eyes and brown hair. Something strikes me though: his eyes have no pupils, like mine. He grins at me and I am sure I see him wink.

'You have the same problem as me. My name,' He adds, grinning again, 'is Dann O'Brian.' He grins once more as he sits down. The teacher smiles at him.

'Thank you, Dann. Now then, any more questions?' she asks, holding her arms out to her sides. More hands shoot up into the air. 'Yes, ok, Beth, ask your question.' A girl with long, curly ginger hair stands up, smiling.

'Do you have any weird habits that we should know about? I mean, if you have a disease then...' I smile and she smiles back.

'Yes. I get a bit...crazy...sometimes, and I can switch at any second. I am likely to...hurt you...if you argue with me, and I cannot stay in sunlight too long, as my condition makes my skin rather...sensitive. That's about it.' I finish. Beth looks frightened for a moment. It doesn't look very real, so I think she might be faking. She then sits down again.

'That will have to do for now. Vivie, I don't know if your guardians told you but this is a boarding school. Now, Beth doesn't have a roommate, so you can go in with her. Is that alright?' I nod numbly. Stupid guardians, I think.

After a boring class about what happened when the school was founded, Beth meets me out-side.

'Hi again. Um...we have a free hour now. Shall we get you sorted out? Your bag will already have been taken up.' She leads me away after I nod. I notice this school is like a rabbit run; we go left, left, right, up some stairs, left, right, right, left, left and left again. We finally arrive at a door with the sign 'Beth Jayne and?' My name must go where the question mark is. Walking in, I am immediately taken with the room.

The curtains are black and the carpet is red, my favourite colour. The two beds that reside in this room are made of jet black steel. One of them, which already has toys and things on it, is cloaked in deep purple bedclothes. The other bed, my bed, is covered in deep red. I look around me, and then up at the ceiling; a chandelier is hanging just above me. It looks like it is made, not of diamonds, but of rubies. It really is a beautiful room.

Beth turns to me. She smiles as she sees my face. I grin back at her. 'I take it you like the room.' She says, grinning again.

'Hell yes!' She laughs at my remark.

'Come on, I'll help you unpack.' She said laughingly. We pull my fat grey suitcase from where it was put under my bed, and transfer it onto the bed itself. Beth goes to open it, but I stop her. She has to know this.

'Beth. You have to know. You are in danger around me.'

'What?' She looks confused. I sit on my bed and look at the floor.

'That suitcase,' I point at the lumpy thing behind me, 'is full of little bottles. They contain a liquid that I cannot live without, and without one every so often, I can go crazy, or lose all strength in my muscles.' Beth just looks at me, and then opens her mouth, closes it, and then asks me a question.

'What liquid is it? Medicine?' This is always what people say when I tell them about my bottles.

'No. It is something that can be described, I think, by three, and only three, words.'

'And they are?' Beth is getting annoyed, losing any fear. Oh well, I think, she will be afraid in a minute.

'I'm a vampire.' For a second I think Beth might run out the door in terror, faint or scream, but she does none of these things, nor does she show any wish to. On the contrary, she looks shocked, and then she grins at me, apparently ecstatic.

'Brilliant!' Somehow, Beth's exclamation does not seem to fit.

'What? You should be screaming or something, not looking like all your Christmases have come at once!' I say, looking at her wonderingly. She grins, and I notice for the first time. Her teeth are massive.

'You're a vampire too?' She nods happily.

'I was a vampire from birth. My parents are both vampires.' With this, she strides over to her bed and pulls out her suitcase from under the bed. Opening it, she shows me the several little bottles of red liquid that fill them. She grins up at me as she pushes it back under the bed. I grin back, and she walks over to help me sort out my things.

After many games of monopoly with Beth, someone knocks on our door and shouts for us to get in bed. We get into our pyjamas. Mine are deep red satin, whereas Beth's are black and purple satin. We jump into bed, get a bottle of blood out of our cases and put it on the bedside cabinet, ready for the morning. We grin at each other for a last time, fangs glinting in the moonlight through the nearby window. We shut our lights out, and go to sleep.

In the morning, I awake hungry. Looking across the room, I see Beth stirring, but I take no notice. At the moment, the only thing I care about is the bottle on my bedside cabinet, full to the brim with the liquid all vampires need: human blood. We never kill, and we just look like ordinary people, except for our eyes and teeth; this is how we have survived for so long. Then again, some vampires have adapted, so they can hide their long teeth and change their eyes to the norm. Either way, we all need blood. Pulling the cork from my bottle, I see Beth reaching to do the same. Taking no notice, I tip the bottle over my mouth, gulping the blood in. It goes all over my mouth, on my chin and chest, but I do not care. Still drinking, I gulp and swallow until the bottle is quite empty. I throw it away carelessly, licking my lips and trying to reach what is left on my chin. Finally calming down, I get up and cross to the en-suite bathroom to get cleaned up.

Beth soon comes in after me, her face and chest also covered in the red stuff. Grinning, she takes a

sponge from the sink and starts to wash, like I am doing. Throwing our pyjamas into the nearby wash basket, we get changed and Beth helps me with my hair. She then leads me down to the breakfast hall. It is quite a nice hall. The walls are dark blue, with clean windows. The tables are all wooden and shining. Beth grins at me, and then leads the way to a table with two girls and two boys sitting at it. As we approach, they all greet Beth heartily. Beth sits down and motions me to do the same. She starts making introductions.

'Ok. We'll start with the boys. One on the left is Mark, Mark Johns; one on the right, Hans Amoundo. The girls, next: on the right, Laurel Dimna; on the right, Nadia Welmien. Everyone, this,' she points at me, smiling, 'is Vivie Noir.' I smile around and they all nod their heads or smile. Friend count: six. I grin and start helping myself to the food in the middle of the table, copying Beth, who does the same. Stuffed to the brim with food, Beth and I go out into the school grounds. Beth leads me around a corner and we are suddenly surrounded by trees. Beth leads me to the nearest tree. There is a small tree house up in its branches. She helps me climb up, and pulls me into the tree house. It is large, with curtains and beanbag chairs. Beth walks over to a nice blue rug on the floor. I think she is going to sit down, but instead she pulls the rug away. There is a trapdoor there, with an iron ring and a keyhole. Pulling a small key from her pocket, she begins to explain. 'The school built the tree houses. The children here and I made the underground tunnels. They're many and massive. Come on.' She starts climbing through the now open trapdoor, down a plank ladder. I follow.

We enter an underground corridor, which has many other corridors leading off away from it. As we pass I see other children running down the corridors. Beth, however, continues down our corridor. We suddenly enter a large 'room' and we see several children crouched on old potato boxes and old stools stolen from the school. Beth introduces me. One kid who calls herself Iris shuffles over on her box and lets me sit down next to her. Beth goes and sits on a boy's lap.

'So, what lessons do we do here?' I ask.

'Well, we do the general. Nearly everything we do is the same as with a normal school.'

'Oh.' I can't pretend I'm not a little disappointed.

'Aren't you hungry, anyway?' Beth asks me a little while later.

'Yes, a bit, shall we go back up to school?'

'Nah.' Beth says, and to my great surprise, she turns to the boy whose lap she is on, grins, he nods, and she sinks her teeth straight into his neck. I look at the other children, wondering whether they will stop her, but they sit watching as if it was custom. I sit in horror while I watch her gulping and drinking until she pulls away, her face covered in blood.

'What?' She asks at the look on my face.

'Won't he be a vampire now?' I ask; I had never bitten anybody, just taken their blood by syringe.

'No!' She laughs. 'You've never bitten anyone before, have you?'

'No.' I reply, a bit ashamed. That to a vampire is wrong, somehow.

'Well,' she says, laughing again, 'they don't become a vampire unless you drink all their blood. That is how we contaminate others; if we take too much, they die, and reawaken as if they had been knocked out. They just feel a lust for blood, just as we do. We just have to be careful of how much we take.'

At this, a boy stands. He looks to be rather strong. He is wearing an odd, blue jacket. He walks up to me. I can hear his heartbeat. I suddenly feel very hungry.

'Try it.' He says, like it is normality. I try to control myself, but as he sinks down onto his knees beside me, I can't hold it. I fall upon him.

Biting his skin at first, it feels horrible, but the moment I puncture his neck and the warm blood gushes out my disgust vanishes as he obediently sits and waits for me to finish drinking.

Somebody suddenly pulls me away. It is Beth.

'What?' I ask. I am annoyed.

'You've got to stop. You nearly took too much.' She points at the boy, who is shaking and is chalk-white. I fall off the box beside him, terrified I have made him one of us.

'Oh my god, are you ok?' I ask frantically. He nods. 'Are you sure?' I ask. He nods again.

'Are you ok?' he asks. I am amazed.

'Bloody hell, don't you care that I nearly turned you into a vampire?' I ask, shocked.

'No. It does not matter at all to me. Are you ok?' he repeats. I nod weakly. Beth stands up, walks over to him and licks his wound. The boy shudders. His wound heals.

'What's your name?' I say, staring as he lifts himself and perches shakily on the box.

'Matthew. Matthew Dome.' He says, looking at me curiously now. 'And you?' he adds.

'Vivie, Vivie Noir.' I say. I jump to my feet and hug him, saying 'I'm so sorry!' over and over again.

'It doesn't matter.' He repeats.

'We should get back to school.' Beth says. She begins to lead the way out. Iris walks past, looking at me as if disgusted. She must be a human. I smile sarcastically, then turn and take Matthew's hand. I pull him up and walk down the corridor after Beth and the others.

The blackboard screeches under the chalk. Mrs Pennie writes down the Christian views on euthanasia and stuff like that while Beth sits doodling on her book, gazing into space. I sigh. I feel terrible. Dann looks at me from across the table.

'What's up? You're pale.' He whispers.

'I'm bored and hungry.' I say. My first bite, as Beth calls it, was about three hours ago so I am now famished.

Dann reaches down and pulls a small bottle out of his bag, similar to those of mine. It also, like mine, contains a quantity of dark red liquid. I take it, mutter my thanks, and down it instantly. As I lower the bottle, I see Iris staring at me from across the room. She looks from my now normal-coloured face to the empty bottle in my hand. She makes a look of disgust and turns away from me.

I walk out of class and towards the dormitory block. Dann runs up towards me, looking worried.

'Are you alright? Is Iris annoying you?' He asks, taking my hand and squeezing it. I flush.

'Yes.'

'Yes as in...?' He asks.

'Both of them. I'm ok, but Iris gives me such scalding looks every time I drink.' I say. I feel so embarrassed that I am bothered by this.

'Ignore her. She was like that when she met me.' He sighs.

'I see.' I say. There is nothing more to it. I walk away, up the stairs, towards my dormitory. He follows. When we reach my dormitory door, he grins at me, I smile back. I know what he's thinking, but in case I'm wrong, I'm not going to say anything. He moves towards me as if to whisper something to me...

I walk into the dorm, in very high spirits, and a little dazed. Beth is sat on her bed, grinning.

'You look very happy about something.' She says. I can tell she knows. When she cocks her head, as if to ask me a question we both know, I nod. She lets out a peal of laughter. 'Well, you've got to be happy about that. Was it Dann?' She asks. I nod. 'And you've only been here two days. Lucky cow.' She adds, laughing. 'Oh well, at least you can say you have a boyfriend.' She says, looking at me closely to see my reaction.

'Yes.' I say, finally finding my voice. It's so weird, being here all of two days, and having a boyfriend.

And not just any boy; the cutest one there is in my year. I jump into bed, very pleased. I put a bottle of blood on the bedside cabinet, pull the covers around me, and sleep like a log.

The next morning, I wake up, and grab the bottle off the bedside cabinet again. Again I walk into the bathroom, clean myself up, and get dressed. I then remember what happened yesterday. Feeling

bouncy all of a sudden, I run across the room and fling the window open. Yes, vampires can withstand daylight fine, to a certain extent.

The day is beautiful, but I know I'll be in trouble if I run outside like the other kids. To complete the picture, there, standing on the green, green grass, is Dann. He is standing next to a bush, with his back to me. I resist the temptation to call out to him; my instinct tells me that would be a bad idea. I watch him for a minute, and then I see him run off round a corner. Beth taps me on the shoulder.

'Come on, we'll be late!' She says.

We enter the English classroom. I see Dann walk in. For some reason, he has one hand behind his back. He walks up to me, still not moving his hand. He grins at me. He then, in complete silence, takes his hand out from behind his back. He passes me a massive red rose, saying:

'For the first day of something beautiful, like you.' He stoops, gives me a quick kiss on the cheek (I am stunned) and then runs off to his seat. I see Iris give me a scorching look. I turn to Beth, anger boiling inside me.

'What have I done now?' I whisper furiously; Mrs Hanson, our teacher, has just entered.

'It is,' Beth replies in an equal whisper, 'common knowledge that Iris fancies the socks off Dann.' She sees my face boil up. I turn around. Iris is still staring at me lividly. I stick my tongue out at her. She looks like she would like nothing better than to take my tongue and strangle me with it. I turn away, satisfied. I clutch the beautiful rose like a talisman of happiness that I must never let go of. Mrs Hanson starts her droning.

I leave for break. Beth leads me down to the grounds yet again. We walk around the corner again. Climbing up a tree into a, well, tiny tree house, we climb down a trapdoor and into a passage. Again, we head in the same direction as others. I see the large chamber up ahead. I follow Beth happily. I hope to see Matthew again. I want to make sure he's not ill or anything.

Suddenly, somebody walks out of a corridor on my left.

It is Dann.

He gestures for Beth to go on. He leads me off down a different corridor. He looks grave.

'What?' I ask, concerned.

'It's over.' He says gruffly. I feel my already dead heart snap. He walks out, giving me no reason why, what had happened. I pull the rose from my pocket, and rip it to pieces. I begin to cry. I run down a corridor and a corridor, not knowing where I am going at all. I bump into someone. His jacket looks familiar...

'Vivie?!' He asks.

'Oh, my God, Matthew!' I cry, and I just sink to the floor, sobbing uncontrollably. People run past us, not taking any notice.

He pulls me up, and we go into a different, quieter corridor and settle on the ground.

'What? Dann?' He asks. I see him flush in anger as I nod. 'Please,' I beg; he has just got up as if to go and punch Dann. 'Please, don't leave me!' He stops, turns and sinks down to the floor again, where I have curled up. We stay there for what seems like an age. He pulls me to my feet. We walk back to the school, him supporting me; I just can't be bothered any more. How stupid I was...

I walk up to my dorm. At the door, I start to say goodbye to Matthew; he has to go to Science. He stops me.

'You're weak. May I come in?' He asks. I nod, seeing determination in his eyes. He strides in after me.

'What is it, Matthew? You need to go to science.' He moves over to my bed. I follow and stand in his way. He pushes me onto the bed. It is not a rough shove, but forceful enough. He leaps onto the bed behind me and kneels, my back against his legs. He lifts a wrist over my head and puts it in front of my face. I feel my instincts come into action, but I still protest.

'What if I take too much?' I ask, terrified.

'You won't. Once you have drunk for the first time, you'll never take too much, not even close to too much.' He says. Matthew pushes his arm against my lips, and my resistance gives way. I bite down, and the feeling of unpleasantness vanishes for a second time as his blood floods into my waiting mouth. Suddenly, unwillingly, I stop drinking. Matthew looks down at me. He looks fine; he is not pale this time and any trace of shaking is non-existent. He smiles down at me. 'Can you...um...heal me?' He asks. I look down at his bloody wrist and copy Beth. I lick the wound. Before you can blink, the wound is gone. He wipes the blood off his wrist onto a handkerchief. I tell him to go, that he's already missed science, but he protests again. 'No.'

'Why?'

'Well,' he says, looking embarrassed, 'Never mind, I'll go.' At the door, I smile up at him, my chin still wet with his blood. He wipes it off with his thumb and holds it up for me to lick.

'Thank you.' I say, smiling up at him. He smiles down at me in return.

'Well...bye.' Matthew starts to walk away, but stops mid-step. He turns to face me, and a moment later, he is running away down the corridor and out of sight.

I can't believe it.

Matthew just kissed me!

Beth walks into the dorm. She looks very happy. I am sat on my bed, watching her closely. Without a word, she walks over to her bed and pulls a bottle of blood from her suitcase.

'Well?' I ask.

""Well" what?'

'Well, what has made you so happy?'

'Well...' she gives me a shifty look. I know instantly what.

'Dann.' I growl. She nods. I can tell she doesn't give a damn that he hurt me earlier.

'So?' she asks, though I see she is worried.

'You decided to take advantage of my pain! You two are going out now, I suppose?' She gives a guilty nod. I swear loudly. 'Oh well,' I say, smiling. 'I'm not worried, because I think somebody better likes me.' I say, and grin at her.

'No, no-one in our year is better looking than Dann.' She says defiantly.

'Did I say that?' I ask. 'I meant better, as in better to me, not better looking.'

'If you say so.' She says, but I can tell she doesn't believe me. I reach down under my bed and put another bottle out ready.

Stuff her, I think.

She hasn't got Matthew.

I wake in the morning and slake my thirst for blood with the bottle. I am starting to run out. I stash one in my bag for later.

My first lesson is Science. I walk in, and then realise that Dann has taken my seat next to Beth, who had risen early. Beth doesn't see me. I wipe the shock off my face with a slim smile, and then I go and sit next to Matthew.

'Hi.'

'Hi, how are you?' Matthew asks.

'I'm ok, what about you?'

'I'm good. Little back trouble coz of my bed, but otherwise, I'm great.' I smile at him. He smiles back, takes my hand from the table and squeezes it between us. He then gets a small piece of folded paper out. I start to open it. He tries to stop me, but I pat his hand gently, and he lets me carry on.

It says:

Vivie, I am sorry about Dann. I went to him straight after leaving your dorm to give him a piece of my mind. He said he couldn't care less what I said, and that he had got with Beth almost immediately after dumping you. So I now want to ask you something; have since you came here, but every time I open my mouth the words won't come out. So here it goes:

I have been told you like me.

I like you too.

Please, Vivie, if you are not too devastated by Dann's mistake, well...

Vivie, will you go out with me?

The note stops there. I feel as if I am in shock. Matthew is watching me closely. I want to tell him, but not here; too many people. I decide for a little pranking. I whisper Matthew my plans to get out of lesson. He looks worried about it, but still goes along with it.

This lesson is two hours long. The bottle I took for the second half of this lesson remains unopened in my bag. We start to do an experiment on chemicals. I work with Matthew.

'Vivie, I'm not sure...'

'Just be ready, it'll be any minute now...' I am shaking terribly. I'm just thankful I'm losing strength and not going mental, the only other option there was.

The test tube I am holding falls from my loosened hand.

The world tilts and I fall.

I see the ground jump at my face...but someone has caught me. I am not unconscious; I have, as I had predicted, lost all use of my muscles from weakness.

'Matthew, lad, you had better take her to the nurse's office. Take her things.' The teacher says.

Matthew takes my bag and coat, hooks my shoulder bag over his neck and awkwardly slips me into the coat. He then picks me up, and tips me so that my head is facing past his arm. I see Beth calculating what had happened, and her eyes narrow. Dann holds her shoulder, and Matthew carries me out.

When well out of sight, Matthew finds a deserted corridor. There is a school table there and the class chatters away unknowingly in the nearby classroom. Laying me on the table, he rummages in my bag and takes out the bottle of blood. Slowly, caringly, he pours the blood into my mouth, as if he was feeding a baby. My instincts come into action, and though I cannot move, my throat manages to gulp it all down. Slowly I regain movement. Ten minutes pass.

Finally, I sit up on my own.

'Matthew...'

'Yes?'

'Thank you.'

'What, for helping you?'

'Yes.' I say, pausing.

'That's ok.'

'Yes.'

'What?'

'Yes, Matthew, I'll go out with you.' He grins, helps me off the table, and go up to my dorm to hang out.

*

I walk into the busy classroom. Beth is sat next to Daniel again. She notices me come in and decides to gloat.

'Hey, Vivie, like my new boyfriend?' She practically shouts.

I sit down next to Matthew again.

'Hey, Beth, like my new boyfriend?' Beth pales and the room goes quiet.

'You two? A human and a vampire? Oh, so perfect!' She jeers.

'Yes, and it is perfect! He helps me, you saw in science yesterday.'

'Yes, well, people who take advantage of their vampirism are thick and need a life.'

'Sorry, but my life ended years ago. Just like yours.'

Beth glares at me, and then turns to Dann. I smile at Matthew and look up at the board. Mr. Simmons comes in and puts a load of maths sums on the board and instructed us to get on with them immediately. Matthew helps me where I need it and I help him where he needs it. Eventually we leave the classroom. Having worked our socks off and going to Language, I pull out my last bottle and try to drink it sparingly. Over reacting, I drink it all. We still have two lessons before dinner, with a break after Language.

'Matthew...I have no bottles left...'

'What do you do? Write home for some?'

'No...I, well...I blood let people to get it.'

'Will you be ok until break?'

'Yes.'

'Ok, I'll fill some bottles for you at break.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes.'

I smile, and he kisses me.

Most of my bottles are full now, so I pull the feeder tube from Matthew's arm and heal him, licking what little had missed the feeder off his arm.

'Thanks.'

'It's alright.' Matthew smiles and puts a stopper in the last bottle. I smile back and walk into the bathroom to clean the feeder. As I do so I hear Matthew put the bottles in my suitcase and push it under the bed. I then hear him put one ready on the bedside cabinet.

Having only taken about ten minutes, Matthew and I walk out of the dormitory block and round the corner to the woods. We climb into the nearest tree and through the trapdoor. I know my way reasonably well now. Again, we come to one of the entrances to the main room. Beth is sat there with Dann. She is feeding off some human boy. Vampires can't feed off each other; otherwise she would have been drinking Dann's blood, not the lad's knelt on the floor. Dann looks rather jealous that she can't drink

his blood, and has a face like he's just been slapped with a wet fish.

Matthew sits down on a horizontal tyre seat, suspended from a root above by skipping ropes. I join him, sitting on his lap. I give him a kiss and ask him about some maths things that have been causing me bother in the homework.

Across the room, Dann taps Beth and she stops drinking. She spots me and I know instantly that there will be conflict.

'Well, well. Hello, Vivie. Matthew. How are you two?' There is sing song sarcasm in her voice that makes it obvious she doesn't want to be friends at all. She also has a smile that screams 'mega dog' to all that see it.

'We're fine. And you and Dann?' I say, also being sarcastic.

'Fine. Look, I think you are ridiculous Vivie, I gotta say it, sorry, but there it is. You're a pathetic excuse for a vampire, you were since I met you, and I can't believe I have to room up with you.' Sure, this hurts me, but I pass it off.

'Big "woo". You were a pathetic excuse for a friend since the day I met you. Wow. Nobody cares, Beth.' I laugh and Matthew joins in.

Beth jumps up and comes towards us. 'Shut it or your human gets a wide slit in his throat.' I get up too.

'Try it and I bet you'd fail. Miserably.' Matthew laughs again, slouched in the seat.

'No-one interfere.' That's all Beth says in answer to that. So I was right.

'Oo, fun.' I say, and growl. Everybody leaps off their chairs and moves to the walls. Beth growls back. I leap at her, and the fight begins.