

Reality Bites

by [Armando Simón](#) (February 2025)



Love and Pain (Edvard Munch, 1895)

The “vampires” would be gathering soon, in about an hour or so. Melissa adjusted her makeup, the dark eye shadow, the heavy lipstick. She had a spiked collar on and was dressed in black, which complemented her black hair. The scent of chamomile hovered over her. Her modest apartment was decorated in the funereal Goth style similar to her clothes.

She was looking forward to the gathering, as she did every Saturday night. Almost all of her friends were either Goth, or into the "vampire" lifestyle. To those not in the know, every Saturday a group of people in their teens and twenties met together, unusually dressed in black, or in cloaks, or even in historical costumes, to play out a role-playing game where the participants were "vampires" from different eras gathering together in a coven. There were different cliques within the coven with a never-ending vicious power struggle for supposed domination of both the coven and the ordinary mortal world. The participants essentially were actors acting roles with each other; they themselves were the audience. A lot of imagination was required.

It was fun.

And it was free.

The game had indirectly emerged out of a series of vampire books written by a fag hag whose fictional characters were homosexual vampires filled with ennui; the series had been very popular.

Oftentimes, the alter ego created by the player became more appealing than the mundane life that the participants actually led and, combined with the camaraderie that emerges in any group over a prolonged period of time, some of the individuals' lives became obsessively involved with the "vampire lifestyle;" a (very) few neurotics half believed the recreational pretense and would not wear a necklace having a cross outside of the game. Melissa was not that far gone, but she had embraced the Goth lifestyle way before being drawn to the game itself.

Melissa drove to the modest hotel where the "vampires" met every Saturday night. The hotel was a horizontal affair slightly off the road, away from the arc lights and, thus, somewhat darkened at night, which dovetailed nicely with the

supposed morbid theme of the game. The group rented one of the ballrooms there and players could also stroll along the pool, or the halls. It had taken a long time to find an establishment whose employees did not freak out over the participants' costumes, or stupidly attribute satanic motivations to their game. Here, the staff viewed them with mild amusement and, besides, the regular rental of the otherwise vacant ballroom was welcomed.

She parked and strolled over to where Dieter stood by the side door.

"Hi, Dieter," she said.

"Hello, Ursula," he responded and they hugged. They used their characters' names.

"Any word from Ladislaus? Or Lady Clara?"

"No, we're supposed to meet by the pool before the meeting starts."

They talked some more about intrigues planned, maneuvers carried out, E-mail messages, characters promoted, or demoted, or who had even been killed by being staked through the heart (if a player's character was killed, a new character with a new personality or history would be created by the player, though he/she may have been very attached to the previous one, and a history for the new character had to be put together from scratch).

Melissa had slept with Dieter. The handsome, charismatic Dieter had slept with probably every girl in the group. It was even rumored that he had slept with a couple of the guys, but that was just a rumor. This promiscuity had caused some real-life friction, but it was managed to be kept outside the group's activities.

"Lady Clara's going to pull the rug out from Pietro's feet;

she dug up some dirt on him involving the jewels that were stolen from the Prince. He might even be staked!"

"Rocking!" Melissa said with glee. Death was of interest to Goths, and vampires were supposed to be the living dead, so she always enjoyed hearing of anyone dying, preferably a close friend of her character.

"If the Prince goes after Pietro and his cohorts, then maybe they'll do enough damage to each other then we can then step in and take over control of the city."

"Rocking!"

"Hey, hey, here's Pauline," he nodded and Melissa turned to see a girl wearing a cloak walk up and join them. Though friends, Pauline did not belong to Melissa and Dieter's clique and so the conversation dwelt in generalities and details of the players' actual lives. After a while, Dieter broke off.

"I gotta go. I gotta go and see Lady Clara about what we talked about earlier," he said to Melissa, winking.

"OK," she said, and he went inside.

The girls continued talking about what they had been doing during the week until, finally, they decided to go inside to the ballroom to see who was there already, talking as they went in. As they neared the ballroom, they heard loud voices, as usual, then three loud "Pop!"-like sounds.

One of the usual players, Howard, who was overweight and sported a beard, walked briskly out of the room as they reached the doorway and continued along the corridor towards the exit. He was holding a fake gun in one hand. The girls looked at him with amused confusion.

A girl's genuine scream from inside the room and rapid shuffling of feet told them something was out of the ordinary and they quickly went in. One guy was excitedly talking on the

telephone. The girl who had screamed had her mouth covered with both palms and was crying while she was looking across the room at two figures. One of the figures was Dieter sprawled on the tile floor, eyes staring vacantly upward, his body's twitching ending silently. A pool of blood was spreading next to him. It seemed real. The other figure was kneeling next to Dieter, wide eyed, feeling for a pulse. Melissa and Pauline stared at the scene, immobilized.

The chap kneeling by Dieter looked up and saw the pair standing at the doorway. His face was ashen. More out of a desire to put some distance between himself and the corpse than anything else, he went to their side.

"Howard accused Dieter of sleeping with his wife! Dieter didn't even bother to deny it! He just laughed about it and then Howard shot him! Just now!" They stared at each other, stupefied. They had just talked to Dieter not ten minutes ago.

Melissa slowly walked over to where Dieter lay. She stared down at the body for a couple of minutes, mesmerized. She wanted to touch the corpse to make sure that it was real and bent down and did it, noticing as she did so that her shoe had stepped on some of Dieter's dark blood. She had the urge to taste the blood and she touched it with two fingers, then, in a smooth motion and without thinking, almost automatically, Melissa brought the fingers to her lips and tasted Dieter's blood. She suddenly felt nauseous and bolted out of the room and outside the hotel. Howard was nowhere in sight, had apparently left the premises.

Bending over some short, decorative nandina bushes she retched. She vomited, spectacularly, repeatedly, until her stomach was completely empty. Her stomach empty, she nevertheless continued to retch with the dry heaves as her whole body was racked with spasms.

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