GEORGIA BOWERS

FOES & CONS



Fox & Ink Books

For my convention buddy, Hannah.
Wouldn't have this story without you.

Oh, and Nathan Fillion.

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CHAPTER ONE

VIGGO RASSMUSSEN

Call this a party? Where's the virgin's blood you promised?

Vampire Falls. Season one, episode three –
"Better Late Than Dead"

If I do a little squint, he kind of looks like Kit Connor.

I close one eye and peer at the blob in front of me, then try through the other eye. Yes, see? Boy shape, hair on top. Basically, Kit Connor from Heartstopper.

"Um, what are you doing?" Kit Connor asks.

"I'm looking at you through my beer goggles," I giggle, holding empty Corona bottles up to my eyes like a pair of binoculars. "Like, literally. Look!"

The bass of the party thuds through my skull and my ears ring from all the shouting and whooping. *So* much whooping. The party is literally bursting with whoopers. I wonder what the appeal is? Maybe I should try it.

"WHOOOP!"

Kit Connor looks alarmed but apart from that, wow, fun! Whooping is so much fun that I stumble back and steady myself against the fridge, like the whoop actually propelled

me backwards with its whoop energy. The power of the whoop, am I right? I put down my beer goggles, grab my red cup and drink, drink, drink.

Look, I know I'm drunk, OK? I never get drunk, so it's allowed (total lie, I get drunk oftentimes. Yeah. It's a word). I've had a several few more than I actually should because . . . well, there's a reason that I'm not entirely clear about now but it definitely warranted several thousand alcohol units in a very short space of time. But I'm having a good time, which is why I came. I think.

I look at my fellow party bros and hoes (ew, did I say that? It's because of the whooping, I'm sorry). I recognise most of them even though this isn't a party genre I've ever been to before. Oh, I've been to parties – just more interesting ones where we watch the season finale of *Vampire Falls*, but this isn't too bad. And yeah, I know, watching *Vampire Falls* with your bestie isn't technically a party but it's a party in my heart, OK? A hearty party. Ha!

These party people are Instagram clones, I'm telling you. Like, the girls get their hair and make-up and clothes done at the same place, and the boys do lifting to get amazing shoulders that . . . oh, wait. I see someone. Him. I remember now. That's it. He's it. He's why all the beer beverages.

Charlie Chamberlain swaggers past me into the long hallway, his followers (Awfuls, I call them) flocking round him like brain-dead flies on well-coiffed shit. He high fives them because, you know, bros, then leans against the banister and looks down the hallway, right at me. Honestly, I think he might have a wind machine app or something because

his hair looks like it's moving in a gentle summer breeze. Not that I care about his hair, but he obviously got ready in a hurry because that tuft behind his right ear is sticking up. Couldn't wait to make his grand entrance, I guess.

I tuck my own greasy curls behind my ear and watch him pretend he hasn't noticed all the *I-had-a-wet-dream-about-you-last-night* looks. He doesn't break eye contact with me, and I'm not looking away from him. Why should I? I was here first. In the kitchen, I mean. And no, I didn't have a wet dream about him last night.

I feel hands around my shoulders and look round. Oh yeah! I'd forgotten about Kit Connor. He pulls me up from my actually quite comfy leaning-on-the-fridge position. Once I'm upright again, I scan the kitchen for more of those lovely jelly shots. I mean, *just lovely*. You should try them. They make your tongue go all red.

"Now what are you doing?" Kit Connor asks.

"Huh?"

"Why are you sticking your tongue out like that?"

"Oh, ha!" I snort, looking cross-eyed at my tongue. "Look, it's all red!"

"OK . . ." he says, frowning and looking around. "Where did you say your friend was?"

My friend? Roxy! Oh, my goodness, I forgot Roxy was here! At the party. Here. With me. I love Roxy. I take another slurp of my drink.

"Where's Roxy?" I say, whirling around.

Someone bumps into me and makes me spill my drink on them. Rude.

"Yeah, that's what I was . . ." starts Kit Connor, but the best thing has just happened and I can't listen to him any more.

"Roxy! My Roxy!" I exclaim, as my very best personal friend comes through the back door.

I give her the best hug; you know like when there isn't enough hug for someone you love *so much* and you have to squeeze their breath out, so they know how much you truly love them? That kind of hug.

"There you are," she says. "Where did you go? Uh, you're *strangling* me. Who's this?"

"Roxy, this is Kit Connor. Kit, this is my Roxy."

"My name is actually Toby."

"Whatever," I say, letting go of Roxy and swallowing down a belch. "Kit's new so I'm looking after him, but also, guess where he's going?"

"I have no idea," Roxy says, shrugging.

"To the *Vampire Falls* convention! Where we're going, Roxy! Can you believe it? Another Faller at the party. *This* party."

"Cool," says Roxy, looking him up and down.

"But first, he wants to take me home with him. On his motorbike. A big one."

"No, I don't want to take you home. I was just . . ."

"*And* he's a DJ. Look! I have his card."

Roxy plucks the card from my fingers and frowns at it.

"*Graham Flanagan. Mobile Dicos*," she reads out, and pulls a face. "Major typo, Toby."

"It's not my card; it's my dad's business. I sometimes help on weekends. I'm not actually a . . ."

While Kit rabbits on, I look down the hallway and Charlie Chamberlain is still there, pointing his cheekbones at anyone stupid enough to look his way. *Vivian Erikksen* (yes, I said that in italics) sways up to him and flips her red hair over her shoulder then giggles at a joke he tells her. A joke *I* probably told *him*.

Do you know *Vivian*, *Queen of the Awfuls* was genetically engineered in a space test tube and sent here to make the rest of girlkind feel terrible about themselves? It's true. She fiddles with her phone, changing the song that's blaring through the speakers, and everyone whoops (not me; this music couldn't suck more). *Vivian* has control of what we listen to in the common room also. Sixth form is a dictatorship.

I grab Kit Connor's helmet (the bike kind, cheeky) and throw my arm around his neck.

"Eliza, really?" says Roxy, sticking Kit's card in my top pocket.

"*Eliza, really* what, Roxy?"

I frown at her, so she knows I'm listening really, really hard. Which I am.

"I literally went out to call my mum and I come back, and you're smashed. Remember we're driving to the convention tomorrow."

"Like I could possibly forget the best day of the year, Roxy?" I beam at her, then throw my head back. "One sleep till convention time!"

Roxy raises an eyebrow at me. She's so cool.

"You're so cool, Roxy."

"Hmmm," she says, offering me a glass of water, which

I refuse, for I am not thirsty, thank you. "You better not be an unbearable mess in the morning, babe."

"*Moi*?" I say, shocked at the accusation.

"Arguing about who's writing the sex scene in your fanfic, are we?" says one of the Awfuls as he grabs a beer from the sink.

He walks off, laughing to himself. I roll my eyes; Roxy and I have argued about that very thing before, so it's a terrible insult. Plus, although a chapter of my *Vampire Falls* fan fiction, *Never Leave,* could be found on Wattpad every Sunday night at eight o'clock for a while, I haven't actually written any in ages. Joke's on you, random Awful.

"You need to learn to hold your drink before we start at Bristol, babe," Roxy says. She looks down the hall where Charlie Chamberlain is still leaning, then looks back at me, her beautiful, pretty face sad, sad, sad. "Did the drunk happen because Charlie's here, babe?"

"PAH!!"

OK, that may have come out a little louder than I intended because the entire kitchen looks at me, plus Charlie Chamberlain and the Awfuls in the hallway.

"Pah," I whisper, hiding behind the helmet. "I didn't even know he was here. Is Charlie Chamberlain here? I didn't know that was him, Roxy, I didn't. We thought it was Archie Andrews. A brunette Archie Andrews. Didn't we, Kit?"

"Seriously, it's been nearly two years," says Roxy, sighing.

"But he left us, Roxy. He left us."

"You sound like the little girl from *Jurassic Park*," she says, pushing her long hair from her face.

"*Jurassic Park*!" I snort, throwing my arm around Kit Connor's neck. "You're so funny, Roxy. Isn't she funny, Kit?"

"You're kind of strangling *me* now," he says, also a joker it seems.

"Eliza, let go of Toby," Roxy says.

She sounds mad.

"You sound mad," I say over my shoulder as I pull Toby down the hallway. When I walk past Charlie Chamberlain, I absolutely don't even look at him, especially his face. "Don't be mad, Roxy. I'm having fun because you said to. You said let's go to the party and have fun. F-U-N. Fun."

We pile out of the front door and I trip down an outrageously uneven step, but my best friends, Kit Connor and Roxy, catch me by my elbows. Had I cracked my skull open, I could have reported this party for negligence.

"I didn't spell it out like that," Roxy says, making sure I'm vertical before she lets go of me.

"No, I know," I say, tapping her cheek as we walk down the path. "You're a terrible speller."

"If I could just get my helmet I'd like to go back inside, if that's OK? This is my first party," says Kit, rubbing his forehead.

"What's happening, nerds," says a voice that isn't mine or Roxy's or Kit's.

It's *his*. Uh. He's just *everywhere*. Why does he have to be here too?

"Not cool, Charlie," says Roxy.

"I'm just messing, Rox," he says.

I feel like someone's stuck their thumb over one of my

heart valves, one of the thick, important ones. How can he still call her that? That's what he *used* to call her.

"Where's your motorbike, Kit?" I say, refusing to look directly at Charlie Chamberlain and his conventional perfect lips and Edward Cullen hair (shut up, I know you've read it).

"My moped is there, but—"

"Sorry, Toby, there's no way she's going home with you," says Roxy.

"I don't *want* her to go home with me," groans Kit, playing hard to get. "My mum was right; I'm not ready for this yet."

"Come on," Roxy huffs. "Time for bed, Eliza."

She's so huffy tonight.

"You're so huffy tonight, Roxy."

I grab her hands and swing her round to cheer her up as she's obviously fed up with something, but then I have to stop the swinging quite abruptly. I let go of her and blink at all three of them and . . . wait. When did the three of them become six of them, and when did they sprout twins? Blurry, floating twins.

I take a long breath through my nose and look up. The man in the moon is pointing and laughing.

"What are you laughing at?" I shout. "I didn't even want to come to this party and now I've met Kit Connor and people and their cheekbones are all, like, *hey* . . ."

My mouth fills with saliva. Oh dear. That's not very promising, not at all.

"Eliza?" says Roxy, putting her hands out to me.

I take another deep breath. Good. That's good. Fresh air is good. Phew. I feel fine now. I would go as far as to say

I feel . . . effervescent. Screw Charlie Chamberlain, I'm going home with Kit Connor.

"*Vampire Falls* for ever!" I declare, then double over and hurl into Kit's helmet.

So, that lovely effervescence was actually the gallons of alcohol bubbling in my stomach, conspiring to erupt at the least ideal time possible. Another interesting sensation is a warm dampness on my legs; the visor on Kit's helmet is up so my vomit is funnelling onto my shoes, and I'm straining so hard with each *bleurgh* that my backside has decided to join in and toots every time I hurl.

From where I'm bent over, I watch Roxy's shoes rush over until her hands scoop back my hair, and even in this sorry display the love in my heart for my bestie triples. Kit's feet pace back and forth as he cries on the phone to his mum, and Charlie's feet turn away and walk back to the party.

Away from us.

Away from me.

Again.