

## Dreaming in Fiction

### The Bampire by Eva Schultz

Elizabeth gripped her iced coffee and braced a hand against the back of the seat in front of her as the night bus squealed to a stop. She hated sitting so close to the front – her chest prickled with fear when she couldn't see who was seated behind her. But the overhead light in the back of the bus had failed, and she couldn't bring herself to walk into the shadows for her ride home from work.

There was something evil on this bus.

She could hear them in her head already – her parents, teachers, psychiatrists – everyone who had told her, her whole life, that her psychic gifting wasn't real. That she wasn't sensing evil; it was all in her imagination. She tried to believe them – after all, she'd never actually seen a monster – but the feelings had never entirely gone away.

A woman and a little boy walked up the aisle to exit the bus. Elizabeth concentrated on the child – his curly hair, his narrow shoulders – and tried to draw comfort from his innocence.

As he followed his mother down the steps, he said, “Mama, dere's a bampire on da bus.”

A rush of cold flooded Elizabeth's chest and stomach. If the mother responded, her words were lost as the bus doors snapped shut. Elizabeth leaned her forehead against the glass and stared out at the boy, who had turned to look back at the bus as his mother fumbled with her purse.

His brown eyes locked onto Elizabeth's. For a moment, the city street blurred away, and there was nothing but Elizabeth and those eyes staring at her in the dark.

The bus rumbled forward. Elizabeth closed her eyes and sucked down gulps of her iced coffee. They made fun of her at work for how many coffees she went through in a day, but she couldn't take the risk of going without it, losing her alertness. She never slept any more than she had to; you can't protect yourself when you're asleep.

She glanced around the bus. The only other passenger was a guy seated across the aisle from her. He was pale and dark-haired, with tattoos crawling up both arms. Elizabeth clenched her coffee in both hands and stared hard at his mouth – were his lips too red? Was he pinching them closed so no one would see his teeth?

Her psychiatrist's voice echoed in her head: "You're fantasizing again, Elizabeth. There's no such thing as vampires."

She should believe that. Normal people don't believe in vampires. They don't sense when evil is nearby. She tried to push her mind onto something else – anything else – but her stomach roiled and all she could think of was fangs on her neck.

The bus lurched over a pothole, and Elizabeth bounced in her seat. She braced herself again and cast a glance toward the front of the bus. If he came at her, would she have time to get over the seat and up to the doors? She looked across the aisle.

He was watching her now.

The bus stopped and the doors opened. Elizabeth rose part way off her seat, eyes locked on him as he stood. She fumbled her cup and it hit the floor, spilling coffee and ice into the aisle.

The guy lurched back from the puddle and glared at her, but Elizabeth's eyes shifted to the tattoo peeking out of his V-neck – a cross. The one tattoo a vampire would never have.

He eased a foot over the spill, planting his heel in the aisle. As he stepped past her, she heard him mutter, "You shouldn't stare at people."

She watched, incredulous, as he walked up the aisle and exited the bus. It wasn't him. It couldn't have been him.

But she was the only passenger left.

Suddenly she remembered the child staring at her in the dark, his eyes locked on hers. Like he saw something. Like he knew something.

Could you be a vampire and not know it? She probed at her neck with her fingertips and tried to remember how long she'd slept last night, how long she'd been vulnerable. She hadn't been hungry over her lunch break today. The afternoon sun had seemed too bright.

She turned to the window and tilted her head back to examine her reflection in the glass.

Realization hit her – she still had a reflection. She wilted against the seat, gasping with silent laughter. Tension seeped out of her back and shoulders as she let reality flood her mind.

Of course she wasn't a vampire. Of course not. Suddenly it all seemed so silly.

She glanced out the window, smiling at her own relieved face. They were almost to her stop. She stood up and stepped over the spilled coffee.

The driver. She froze as she stared at the back of his head. Why hadn't she remembered the driver? Anxiety clenched her shoulders again, and her legs tingled.

The bus slowed as it approached her stop. Elizabeth stepped backward and felt cold coffee seep into her sneaker. She twisted back to look toward the emergency exit – it was her only chance. She started down the aisle.

“Ma’am? It’s the last stop,” the driver called.

Reflexively, Elizabeth glanced back. This time, she locked eyes with his reflection in the rearview mirror.

His reflection.

She laughed awkwardly. “Come on, dummy,” she told herself. “When are you going to learn? There’s no such thing as vampires.”

Something rustled in the unlit back of the bus. Elizabeth turned just in time to see a figure spring at her from the shadows.

Photo by cottonbro on Pexels.com

### **About the Author:**

Eva Schultz lives in Aurora, Illinois, where she is a business writer by day and a fiction writer by night. Her work has appeared most recently in Two Sisters, Shady Grove Literary, Havok, and Writer’s Digest. She lives with a big orange cat named Gus and enjoys drawing, painting, and collecting typewriters.

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