

SWORN

(BOOK #1 OF THE VAMPIRE LEGENDS)

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Chapter One

Rachel Wood sat in the back of her family's 1997 station wagon, hating her life. To her right sat her annoying younger brother, Mark, and to her left was her older sister Sarah, who sat there loudly humming the pop song streaming through her iPod headphones. As Rachel's dad put on the turn signal and made the final turn off the highway, Rachel took a deep breath, held it, and let out a loud sigh. She couldn't believe her family was making her move now, of all times. Tenth grade.

Rachel couldn't help but let her mind drift to places that scared her. What if she didn't make any friends? What if people teased her? What if she didn't fit in, or her clothes were weird? She worried her sister would make fun of her in the halls and her brother would embarrass her: even more, Rachel worried that her overbearing, overzealous parents would mortify her.

Her dad turned left onto a long winding road.

Is this it? Rachel wondered to herself.

The car continued, making its way through the center of town. Out the window, Rachel saw a pizzeria, a movie rental store, a nail salon and a Hallmark store with balloons and cards in the window. She also noticed a coffee shop and a clothing store with "mom" clothes hanging in the window.

As the car rolled slowly through town, Rachel saw a few people: a lady walking on the sidewalk, pushing a stroller, a man and his two sons, wearing AYSO blue and black soccer

jerseys and soccer cleats. Rachel also saw a group of kids, one wearing a sweatshirt with a tiger on it that read “AHS.”

Rachel recognized the letters from the welcome letter she had received a few weeks back, welcoming her to Apache High School. She sighed and wondered if these could be her new friends.

Rachel looked the kids up and down and got a pit in her stomach. Seeing these kids made her feel even more nervous for her first day of school tomorrow.

She was embarrassed at how slowly her dad was driving through town. Doesn't he know how lame it is to crawl through town? Rachel thought. She buried her head between her legs until she felt the car pick up speed.

The family drove for another five minutes down a suburban street. She noticed each house as they drove by, and was surprised by what she saw. These houses were much different than the houses in her old town: they were large and opulent, had long circular driveways, and some even had pillars you had to drive through to enter their driveways.

Where are we?

As they neared the end of the road, Rachel's dad put on the breaks. Sarah took her ear buds out and looked up from her lap.

Mark pointed and asked, “Is this it?”

The pit in Rachel's stomach grew as she anticipated seeing her new house for the first time. She wondered what it would look like, she wondered if she would have to share a room with Sarah again, and wondered about her bedroom.

“42 Pine Road!” Rachel's dad announced eagerly.

Rachel's thoughts were abruptly interrupted as they pulled into their new driveway.

Home.

Rachel examines the house as they pulled in. This house was different than the others on her street: a white house with black shutters, it was a more modest house, with no entry pillars and no circular driveway. The house had a red front door, with a large brass knocker in the shape of a lion.

As Rachel got out of the car, she took another deep breath and grabbed her suitcase. She raced inside, along with Sarah and Mark, to see the bedrooms. Sarah elbowed Rachel out of the way as they flew through the front door.

“I get the bigger room!” Sarah shouted.

Sarah ran upstairs, through the hallway and slammed the door. Mark jolted past Rachel, knocking her suitcase from her hands, and dashed into one of the bedrooms and slammed his door.

As Rachel got to the top of the steps, she saw an open door, the only bedroom door open, and went in and put her suitcase down. Her room was small, but at least it was hers. She was just glad she didn’t have to put up with Sarah and her annoying musical obsessions.

A few seconds later, Rachel heard a knock on her door.

“Hurry, it’s heavy,” Rachel’s mom’s voice was muffled.

“Rachel!”

Rachel opened the door to find her mom holding a large cardboard box, which read *Rachel’s Stuff* in thick black Sharpie. Her mom plopped the box down in the center of the room, looked up at Rachel and said, “Don’t worry Hun, you will grow to like it here, I promise.”

Rachel gave her mom a shrug and grunted, “Whatever.”

Rachel had been upset with her parents since they’d announced she was moving a few weeks back. It came up one night while her family was on their summer vacation in Virginia

Beach. Her parents had been acting odd the whole trip, and Rachel had a sense that something was up. At first she thought maybe her mom was pregnant but she never could have imagined they would spring a move on her.

Rachel had lived in Pennsylvania her whole life, in the same town, in the same house, and in the same bedroom since she was a baby. She had never anticipated moving, especially during high school, of all times.

“We’ll see,” Rachel said back to her mom.

Rachel’s mom walked out of her room and pulled the door shut behind her.

BEEP BEEP BEEP.

Rachel looked out the window and saw a big white truck backing into their driveway, “AL’s Moving and Storage” printed on the side. The beeping stopped, and two men hopped out of the truck and flung open the back door.

Rachel saw box after box. She couldn’t help but feel that her whole life had been abruptly uprooted and put into boxes, all because her dad got transferred.

Rachel saw her mom and dad talking to the movers and labeling each box with colorful Post-It notes, so that the movers would know exactly which room to drop each box in.

Even though Rachel was mad, she was still anxious to see her new house. She walked quietly out of her room and down the steps. She didn’t want her family to see her curiosity, and to know she was excited to be peeking around.

As she got to the bottom of the steps, she turned left and walked into the family room. She saw a fireplace and two large windows. Rachel’s mind began to wander, thinking about celebrating Christmas in this room, and putting the tree up in the corner and decorating it. The room looked bare now, except for a few boxes stacked up along the wall.

Rachel continued through the family room, which joined onto another room. It was a bright room with a bay window, which looked onto the front lawn. Rachel figured this was the dining room, but wasn't sure. This room was painted an ugly brown color, which Rachel despised.

As Rachel walked out of the ugly brown room, she entered the kitchen. She flipped on the light and looked around. She felt depressed by the black Formica cabinets and the dark linoleum floors. There was a stale smell in the kitchen that made her miss her old house even more.

Rachel kept exploring the rooms and bathrooms and felt a kind of withdrawal she had never knew she could feel for a house. She never realized how attached she was to her old house in Pennsylvania.

Rachel heard the movers entering through the front door, her parents' voices directing them as they came through with boxes, furniture, chairs, picture frames, TV and computer. Rachel had seen enough, and went back upstairs without anyone noticing her.

She shut her bedroom door and sat on the floor next to her box of stuff. She fumbled through her navy blue Kipling backpack to find her keychain: she knew she had a small scissor attached to it. She cut open the tape on her box, weary about how she would find its contents.

Rachel remembered she had been furious when she had to pack up her room and had just thrown things in the box without any rhyme or reason. When she opened the cardboard flaps, she wasn't surprised at the mess that awaited her. It was as if her whole life, fit into one measly cardboard box.

On the top were some dusty pictures of her and her group of friends from Pennsylvania. She missed her friends and couldn't imagine ever being apart from them. She was not in the

popular crowd at her school, and never had been, but Rachel loved her friends anyway. Her friends were simple, no frills, no drama.

This specific picture was one of Rachel's favorites: it had been taken at the Dutch Fair this past spring, a carnival with rides and games, and people wore colonial clothing. It was a pretty wacky place, but Rachel looked forward to it every year.

Rachel picked up another picture and began to get choked up. It was her, and her best friend Dana, hugging and smiling. The two had been inseparable for years since they met in fifth grade. They were on the same volleyball, tennis and soccer teams at school and they were hoping to try out for varsity cheerleading together in the Fall. They had loved to go shopping together at the mall in Pennsylvania. Their favorite stores were JCPenney's, Aeropostale, Gap and American Eagle. They also loved shopping at Wal-Mart, and always managed to find cute accessories there.

A tear fell onto the picture. Rachel quickly wiped it off, but it left a stain right in the center of the photo.

Rachel put the picture down and began to cry. She hated this house, she missed her friends, she was mad at her parents, and she couldn't fathom that tomorrow would be her first day at AHS.

Rachel's thoughts were interrupted by a loud Britney Spears song blasting through her walls.

Ugh, I can't stand her.

Rachel stood up and walked over to a door in her bedroom, which she thought, was her closet, she opened it and saw Sarah standing there, singing and dancing loudly to the music. Rachel's heart dropped at the sight: they had an adjoining bathroom.

“Shame on me, to need release, un-uncontrollably... I I I wanna go o o all the way ay ay takin’ out my freak tonight.”

Rachel couldn’t believe it; did she really have a connecting bathroom? As if things couldn’t have gotten any worse.

Rachel slammed the door. Sarah was the antithesis of Rachel; Sarah was a girly-girl, popular and liked by everyone. She had a hot older boyfriend in college, and the two talked about getting married. Sarah was thin, had blond hair, blue eyes and always had perfectly polished nails. She loved pop music, dancing and singing, and wouldn’t dare play a contact sport. Sarah was pretty and poised, none of which defined Rachel.

No, Rachel was smart, had brown hair, average weight (not skinny but not heavy). She was decent looking, but had never considered herself to be beautiful. Rachel loved sports and being outside in nature. She was a good girl and always obeyed the rules. She had a handful of good friends, but was not in the popular crowd. She’d never had a boyfriend, although she had many crushes.

So to say the two didn’t understand each other would be an understatement. Rachel went over to her box of stuff and rummaged through it, in search of her diary. She had been writing in her diary every night since 7th grade, and didn’t want tonight to be any different.

Rachel found it stashed at the bottom of the box and blew the dust off. Her diary was her life. Purple velvet, with a skull on the front, it was thick and heavy with notes from friends, ticket stubs, and pictures taped inside. Rachel wore the silver key to her diary around her neck and never took it off. She was a very private girl, and would rather die than have anyone read her diary.

Rachel lifted her diary up close to her necklace, and then opened the heart-shaped lock. She had become a master at unlocking it while still keeping the key attached to her necklace.

She picked out her favorite pen from the box and leaned forward to write:

Dear Diary,

Today has been the worst day of my life. I am sitting here, in my new room, going through all my pictures of my friends, and I realize that I don't have any friends here in Westchester. Not one. School starts tomorrow and I'm scared. I bet nobody will talk to me. I spoke to Dana and they're all having a last night of summer party tonight while I'm sitting here in this empty, cold room. God, could things get any worse? I'll write more tomorrow to let you know how school goes – if I make it through.

XOXO,

Rachel

Rachel put down her diary and fell back onto her soft bed. She put her head onto her feather pillow and pulled her red and white striped blanket over her head. Rachel was too tired to cry, but too anxious to fall asleep. She lay awake, running different scenarios of how her first day would go over and over in her head. Each scenario was more daunting than the next.

Around one in the morning, Rachel fell asleep.

Chapter Two

Rachel bolted out of bed to jarring Latin dance music blasting from her alarm radio. She stumbled out of bed and fell over clothes, trinkets, pictures and papers she had scattered on the floor in an effort to organize her life. When she finally reached the switch, the alarm mysteriously stopped.

Now that Rachel had been so rudely awakened, she walked over to her bathroom door and reached for the handle: locked. Rachel knocked, as she heard the shower turn on and Sarah's voice, belting out a Demi Lovato song. She knocked louder, hoping Sarah would hear.

"What? Can't you hear I'm in the shower?" Sarah said.

"How much longer will you be? I have to get ready too, ya know!" Rachel said loudly putting her face to the crack in the door.

Rachel waited, but Sarah did not answer.

Rachel walked over to the mess of scattered clothes that lay on her floor. None of it was organized: mismatched socks, sweaters, tank tops, shorts, jeans and her favorite Rolling Stones Tee, all lying lifeless at her feet.

Rachel rolled up her blinds and opened her window about halfway, to gauge the temperature. It was September 8th, and already she could feel the cool breezes of Fall. The leaves rustled in the large trees outside her bedroom window and she took a deep breath of the crisp air. Out of her window, she saw a long front lawn with a few trees scattered near the edges. One of the trees had an old tire swing hanging from its limb, which Rachel assumed had been from the previous owners. The lawn

was a dull green color with patches of brown throughout. There was a small garden off to the left with overgrown flowers and weeds. Rachel stared at it for a moment, then shut the window with a bang.

What to wear? Rachel thought.

She suddenly remembered a trip to JCPenney's that she took with Dana about a month ago. Penney's always had their cutest Fall things out over the Summer, and Rachel and Dana had gone shopping early for the season. Rachel remembered buying a cute new pair of worn-in boyfriend jeans, with patches and small tears in the knees. She knew those would be the perfect match with her Stones tee.

Rachel lifted up bags and belts and peered into her large box of stuff. The jeans were nowhere to be found.

She opened her bedroom door and yelled down to her mom; "Mom, where did my new jeans go?"

She stood in her doorway and waited for her mom to respond.

"How should I know what you did with your clothes? Don't blame me if you can't find them. You're the one who packed in a huff last week, not I, Darling," her mom yelled back up, in a snarky tone.

Rachel grunted and slammed her door.

She spotted another pair of dark blue Levi's lying wrinkled on the floor. The ends, too long, were frayed and Rachel had never gotten around to hemming them. She tried them on, smoothing the wrinkles out with her hands. They felt a bit tighter than she'd remembered, so she squatted down a few times and then held the squat to stretch them out.

RIP. The crotch seam burst open.

At that moment the Latin dance music came back on her alarm radio, this time even louder. Rachel waddled in her jeans searching for the clock. She lifted up her white puffy North Face winter coat and found her radio. She slammed her hand down on the off button, and randomly turned the tuner.

Rachel unbuttoned her Levi's and pulled them off her legs. She didn't realize she'd put on a few pounds since last Spring, but apparently she had.

Rachel saw a pair of faded-black Target leggings rolled up in a ball on the floor. She put them on, not having any other options. (At least, none that were unpacked.) The good thing about leggings, Rachel thought, was that no matter how many ice cream cones she had they'd always fit.

Rachel reached for her Stones tee and put it on. She didn't have a mirror in her bedroom, but hoped the outfit looked all right.

Rachel picked up her black nylon toiletry bag and knocked on the bathroom door again. No answer. Rachel turned the doorknob; the door opened and clouds of soapy smelling steam hit her in the face.

Rachel made a fist and wiped off a large circle in the mirror so she could see her face. She peered into the mirror and saw a small zit beginning to form right in the center of her forehead. She quickly reached for her Proactiv, washed her face and put on a spot treatment. She hoped this zit would disappear by eight o'clock; she didn't want to be known as the new girl with the huge zit.

Thinking about time, Rachel looked down at her purple Swatch Watch and realized she only had twenty more minutes until she had to leave for school.

She let out a big sigh and quickly reached into her makeup bag. She opened up her Urban Decay blush and swiped it onto her cheeks. Then she opened the cap of her Cover Girl mascara and layered it on her lashes, one quick stroke at a time. She pulled out her Maybelline baby blue eye shadow and put one stroke on each lid and closed the case. She reached for her hairbrush and ran it

through her tangled and knotted mess of bed head hair. It was still a little frizzy and definitely not what she had hoped for her first day of school, but it would have to do.

Rachel grabbed her black high-top Converse and her Kipling backpack and headed downstairs for breakfast.

When she got to the bottom of the stairs, she could already hear Mark and Sarah bickering over who got to sit in the front seat of the car on the way to school.

“Give it a rest,” their dad said in a firm, loud tone.

Rachel walked briskly into the dark, smelly kitchen, which she disliked with a passion, and sat down at the kitchen table.

In front of her were two boxes of cereal, Golden Grahams and Cheerios. Rachel reached for the Golden Grahams, tilted the box, but nothing came out. Empty.

Rachel looked up at Mark and Sarah who were happily eating their bowls of Golden Grahams, which were heaping out of their bowls.

“Thanks a lot, guys,” Rachel said.

“Sucks to be you,” Mark replied with a huge mouthful of cereal.

Rachel forcefully reached for the box of Cheerios and poured some into her bowl. She hated plain cheerios. She picked up her spoon and put a small bite into her mouth and started chewing.

“So, you kids ready for your first day?” their dad asked.

“Yup,” said Mark. “9th grade – high school, here I come!”

Mark was fine with the move because he was just starting high school and didn’t have any qualms about leaving Pennsylvania. He always wanted to get out of that small town anyway, so this was a blessing for him. It was also not so hard for Mark, because he was entering in 9th grade and that was much better than starting in 10th. Everyone expects there to be new kids in 9th grade.

Sarah looked down at her Blackberry and smiled, “Gary says hello and wishes everyone a fab day.”

Sarah’s boyfriend, Gary, had just started college at Skidmore University, so that was lucky for Sarah because it was now only a short train ride away.

Rachel looked at Sarah and rolled her eyes. She couldn’t understand how her sister could be so perky and upbeat all the time.

Rachel’s mom came dashing into the kitchen. “Come on kids, you don’t want to be late on your first day. It’s time to go!” she said.

Rachel’s mom kissed her dad on the cheek and said, “I’ll see you when you get home from work. Have an excellent day. I love you.”

Rachel, Mark and Sarah all put on their shoes, grabbed their backpacks – well, Sarah grabbed her black patent leather shoulder bag – and headed out towards the car.

Sarah breezed by Rachel and hopped into the front seat, shut the door and started pressing the buttons on the radio. Their family had a rule, that whoever sat in the front could choose the radio station. So Rachel was in for a bubble gum pop music extravaganza on her way to school.

As the Jonas Brothers blared over the radio, Rachel’s nerves began to grow. She felt her body tense up and get cold and clammy. She only had a few more minutes before she walked into AHS for the first time.

The minutes felt like hours as her mom drove down the windy back roads of Bedford, New York. Rachel looked out the window and saw cars full of teenagers drive past her, smiling and laughing. Rachel got even more nervous, thinking about the prospect of making new friends.

For a moment she imagined herself riding along joyfully in a car with all her new friends, laughing and gossiping about boys.

Rachel’s warm thoughts were cut short by a buzzing coming from inside her backpack.

1 New Message:

Rachel flipped open her Motorola flip phone and saw a text from Dana.

Dana: Happy 1st day! We miss you XOXO.

Attached to this text was a picture Dana had taken with her camera phone of their entire crew of friends back home.

Rachel sent back a smiley face, even though that was anything but how she was feeling inside.

Rachel's mom turned on her blinker and made her final turn into the driveway of the school.

Rachel looked out the window and saw a large sign that said, *Welcome Back AHS Students*.

As the family car slowly reached the front of the school, Rachel could see groups of friends hugging and greeting each other in the school yard. The student parking lot was full of BMWs, Audi's, Mercedes' and Saab's. This was nothing like her old school parking lot.

As the car sat there in front of the school, Rachel's mom reached for her purse and fumbled around for her wallet. Rachel put her head down so nobody could see her face. Her mom slowly pulled out twelve crumpled dollar bills and handed each of them four dollars.

"Here's your lunch money. Have a great day and make lots of new friends," their mom said in an overly cheery voice.

Rachel felt even more out of place as her 1997 grey Station wagon pulled up to the front door of the school. She hopped out of the car fast so nobody would be able to remember which car she had stepped out of. She said a quick goodbye to her mom, shut the door, and entered the sea of new faces at AHS. She already wished this day was over.

{The entire book is available for sale on Amazon, BN, iTunes, Kobo and elsewhere}