

**Sucks to Be Moi:
More All-True Confessions of Mina Hamilton Smith, Teen Vampire (Prelude)**

Published by Kimberly Pauley
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If you enjoyed this story, please visit my website at www.kimberlypauley.com to learn more about the first two books in this series (*Sucks to Be Me* and *Still Sucks to Be Me* and this ongoing serialized continuation: *Sucks to Be Moi*). Thank you for your support.

Sucks to Be Moi

Prelude

Myth: Vampires keep to themselves.

Truth: Hey, we're as friendly as the next fanged bloodsucker.

I hate airports. Actually, I hate airport security. I especially hate that point where you have to empty your pockets of everything, step through some weird time-machine looking contraption, and smile politely or risk being frisked by total strangers. But mostly I hate the part where everyone takes off his or her shoes.

Having a vampire-ized supersniffer really, really, really sucks sometimes.

“Whew!” wheezes Uncle Mortie in my ear. “Do I sense a touch of brie there? Or some Camembert?” He elbows me and wiggles his eyebrows at a guy standing in front of us in purple and blue argyle socks with a hole in the heel.

“You’ve just got France on the brain,” I whisper back a lot more quietly. It’s not like it’s the guy’s fault we can smell his feet so clearly. “Besides, smells more like Fritos to me.”

“Oh, I don’t know. I think I detect a whiff of something cheesy,” says George, bumping me with his hip. I grin at him and tilt my head up for a quick kiss.

“Yeah, the two of you,” says Uncle Mortie, holding his nose. “Total cheese, as you would say, Mina.”

“You’re just jealous,” I say, grinning at him. There’s no way Uncle Mortie is going to spoil my day. After all, I’m on the way to Paris, France, city of love—with my boyfriend. Okay, *and* my family too and ye olde vampire historian, Dr. Jonas, aka Dr. Musty. But I’ll take what I can get.

On a scale of one to ten, Paris was so freaking far above Cartville, Louisiana (our last Vampire Relocation Agency (VRA) selected location) that I couldn’t even imagine a number high enough. Like a bazillionty times better. Squared. Quadrupled.

And I actually had dad’s crusty old boss to thank.

Dr. Jonas had been invited by the International High Council to continue his research (or, more likely, his hunt for John and Wayne Carter, the leaders of the evil human-hating Black Talons) in France, since that was where the Talons had their roots. Or John and Wayne did. Whatever. I didn’t really care. I was going to Paris!

“Miss, you can step through now,” says a uniformed security guy. By the look on his face, it wasn’t the first time he’d said it. Well, hey, it was Paris. A girl was entitled to daydream a little, wasn’t she? I’d triple-checked our tickets and everything. There was no way the VRA was going to mess up my life this time.

“Sorry,” I say, stepping through and almost running into a girl with some slightly retro black framed glasses and shoulder length brown hair in front of me. “I’m going to Paris!”

The guy doesn’t even crack a hint of a grin. Obviously he’s taking the continuous orange security level thing a little too seriously. He motions me forward and then waves for Uncle Mortie to come through behind me.

“You’re going to Paris too?” The girl smiles at me. “Me too! I’m going to study abroad this semester!”

I smile back. Take that, touchy security dude. Some people understand the allure of Paris. “That sounds awesome!”

“Yeah, my friend Alexander is already there with our host family. We’ve been planning this for years! I can’t wait!”

My smile slips a little bit. The girl reminds me a lot of my best friend Serena. She's about the same height and has an identical sparkle in her eye, just like Serena gets whenever she's super excited about something. Serena and I even used to dream about studying abroad, or maybe taking a gap year to travel Europe together.

But that was before my parents (okay, technically the Vampire Council) had made me choose whether or not to become a vampire. Before I'd turned and been relocated to the middle of nowhere Louisiana. Before Serena had followed me and then decided she wasn't ready to turn herself (all the crazy Carter Clan and Black Talon stuff being a big factor in her decision, not like I could blame her for not wanting to be sliced and diced). Before she'd gone back home to her bitterly divorcing parents and nutty little sister and had her mind (hopefully not completely) wiped by some vampire goons.

It had only been a couple of months since I'd last seen her, but I had yet to receive a single email from her. Before she'd left for California, I'd used my newfound vampire mind control powers to implant a suggestion so that she was supposed to email me even if (please, please, please let it not be) the mind wipe got everything and she really did think I was dead and gone and not just undead and gone. But absolutely no word from her. Did my mind control skills suck after all?

"You coming, Mina?" asks George.

I nod and grab my shoes and bag from the conveyer belt. By the time I wiggle my feet back into my tennis shoes, the girl is gone. I hadn't even gotten her name.

###

I'd thought we might get first class seats since we were traveling with a famous vampire historian, but apparently the Council had only decided to spring for three good seats. Mom, Dad, and Dr. Musty were in the high rent section and Uncle Mortie, George and I were languishing back in coach.

"How'd you get stuck back here with us?" I ask Uncle Mortie as he settles into the window seat, even though it was technically my seat according to my ticket.

“Same reason I get stuck at the kid’s table every Thanksgiving,” says Uncle Mortie, winking. “I’m young at heart.” He pulls out the Sky Mall catalog and starts browsing. “Besides, I had to buy my own ticket.”

Oh. Yeah. That made sense. George and Dad were going to Paris to actually, you know, *work*. Mom and I were along for the ride. Uncle Mortie had decided to tag along because he’d always want to go to France (and it gave him a free place to stay, since we were going to be living with Dr. Musty in some chalet or something he owned there). Also, Uncle Mortie had a thing for French women.

Actually, he had a thing for women. Period. The French accent would just be a bonus. Not to mention the food. It would be a miracle if Uncle Mortie didn’t decide to stay permanently. My mom had already confided her fear of that happening to me.

“Hey! This is my flight too!” It’s the same girl from security again. She sits down next to me, sticking her book bag under the seat in front of her.

“I’m Mina,” I say. “Mina Smith.” It still feels weird to say “Smith” instead of “Hamilton” but I’m getting used to it. I only screw it up every other time now.

“Astrid Villareal,” she says. She has maybe a hint of a Spanish accent. “Nice to meet you.” She leans over and pulls a few things out of her bag: a battered copy of the first *Blue Bloods* book (oh geez, a vampire fan), an iPod, and a notebook.

“This is my boyfriend, George,” I say. George leans across me to shake hands with her. She giggles a little and her cheeks flush the slightest bit. I don’t blame her. Becoming a vampire turned George into a seriously good-looking guy, especially his eyes. Today they were the luminous clear blue of deep water. Not that he wasn’t attractive before or anything. He’s just cuter now.

He’s lucky I think he’s adorable even when he’s reading one his boring old history books, since that’s what he picks up as soon as it’s polite to do so. He takes all the research stuff so seriously, like my Dad. I guess I should look on the bright side that my boyfriend and my Dad get along really well, but sometimes I swear they get on too well. It’s kind of weird. Shouldn’t my dad be, like, cleaning a shotgun whenever George comes around or something?

“Are you studying abroad too? Or just going on vacation?” asks Astrid.

I'm not really sure how to answer that. I honestly don't know what I'm going to be doing about school. I only made it through to Homecoming at Cartville High. We'd stayed in New Orleans with Uncle Mortie through Christmas break after we'd pretty much half-emptied Cartville of the Carter Clan. Was Mom going to stick to her word and make me finish my senior year of high school even though it was really kind of unnecessary? I mean, the VRA could always whip me up a diploma if I needed one.

"My dad's job," I finally say. That's true, anyway.

"Oh, wow," she says. "So you're actually moving to France! That's so cool."

We chat through our crappy airplane dinner (spongy yet strangely greasy chicken, teeny salad, and a stale brownie that I only eat enough of to not be suspicious) and I learn that:

a) she wants to travel the world and France has been her dream destination ever since she was a little girl, and

b) she has two brothers (who are both seriously jealous of her going) and a little sister (who was looking forward to ransacking her room when she was gone), and

c) besides French, she also speaks Spanish (duh, she's from Mexico originally) and some Japanese.

Astrid isn't actually that much younger than me, but all of a sudden I feel kind of ancient. And monolingual. I'd taken French for a couple of years in school, but I still totally suck at it. It's pretty much English or nothing for me.

But mostly I feel kind of weird. Vampire-weird. As she's telling me about all the things she's planning on doing in France (the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, Sacre Couer, walking the Seine) and all the stuff about her family (who all sound really nice and normal), I couldn't help but think about my family and what we were planning on doing. You know, "researching" a couple of bloodthirsty evil vampire brothers and a shady organization of human-hating vampires.

Sure, I was planning on doing some sightseeing too, but I knew Mom had already looked into some continuing education shape shifting classes for us to sign up for. I was pretty sure *that* wasn't on Astrid's class schedule.

After talking about her friend Alexander and her French host family for a while, Astrid settles down to sleep. I close my eyes and pretend to sleep too until I'm sure she's

out. Uncle Mortie is watching a movie and George is still reading, even with the lights off. Score one for vampire eyesight. Astrid had let me borrow her iPod and notebook (she'd written out a cheat sheet of handy French phrases...she was so much more prepared than I was), so I plug in and listen to her favorite bands, the Black Eyed Peas and Linkin Park, while everyone on the plane dozes around us.

###

Astrid wakes up when the breakfast cart comes around about an hour before we are supposed to land in Paris.

"Did you sleep okay?" she asks.

"Sure," I say. "Slept like a baby." Take that, Grandma Wolfington (my old vampire indoctrinator), I *can* lie convincingly.

"I'm going to freshen up," says Astrid. "I feel like my teeth have fuzz." She squeezes out of our row and goes to the back of the plane.

"So, are you excited?" I ask George. He had been so engrossed in his book that we'd only talked a tiny bit during the trip. Apparently, Dr. Musty's travels through Outer Mongolia were more interesting than me, his girlfriend.

"Of course," says George. "Did you know that the Parisian Council has one of the most extensive vampire libraries in the world? I can't wait to go!"

That was totally not what I was talking about. "I meant about Paris, bookbrain." I punched him in the arm, perhaps a little harder than I meant to. "You know, berets and baguettes and the Eiffel Tower."

"Oh, yeah, Paris too." George grins at me, a 6.8 on the grin-o-meter, one side of his mouth slightly higher than the other so he looks positively devilish. But in a cute way.

"Don't worry, I've got some fun stuff planned for us too, Mina."

Hmmmm, that sounds promising.

"Oh. My. God." says Astrid, practically hyperventilating. She flops into her seat after stepping on my foot as she squeezes through. "You would not believe what just happened to me!"

“What?” I ask, still wondering what George might be planning. Midnight walks along the Seine? Dinner at the Eiffel Tower? I’ve heard they have a restaurant right in the thing.

“Some really hot guy in the back of the plane was totally flirting with me!” She takes off her glasses and runs her fingers through her hair. “Can you believe it? With me looking like this?”

She looks fine to me. Okay, maybe like she’s been on a plane for hours, but hey, so have we all. I smile at her. “Maybe he’s got good taste,” I say. She so reminds me of Serena, especially before Serena got together with Nathan.

Astrid laughs. “My mom would definitely not approve,” she says. “He’s got a piercing in his eyebrow and he’s got a crazy tattoo on his arm. I don’t even normally go for that type exactly, but this guy is just—” she practically melts into her seat “—amazing. And he’s French.”

“Well,” I say, “when in France...” I mean, after all, Paris is the city of love, right? What better time to explore your options? Not that I had a lot of experience with crazy hot French guys flirting with me, but hey. It’s what I’d tell Serena if she were here. Well, if she weren’t dating Nathan. “As long as you don’t have a boyfriend, why not?”

“Yeah,” she smiles dreamily. “Maybe...”

“The plane is going to land pretty soon,” says George, who has apparently been eavesdropping the whole time.

I shoot him a look when Astrid flushes a little. He should know better than to butt into girl talk. “So,” I tell her, “if you wanna do something about it, now is the time.” I hand her the iPod and her notebook after I scribble our Parisian address and my cell phone number in it. “Is there an empty seat by him?”

“Like a whole row,” she says, taking her stuff and picking up her book bag.

“So go!” I say. “And remember to call me later to tell me what happened!” Mom would be so proud of me. Not for encouraging Astrid to flirt with some tattooed stranger on a plane, but for actually making a friend. She keeps telling me I need to get Serena off my mind. She just doesn’t understand how impossible that is. Serena will always be my best friend, no matter what. But Astrid seems pretty nice.

Astrid smiles a dazzling smile at me and takes off for the back of the plane without another word. Man, that guy must be really cute. Maybe even as cute as my guy.

I smile at George, but he's already engrossed in the same old book again. Or maybe it was a new one. It was hard to tell. All of Dr. Musty's books were old, bound in leather, and smelled as dusty has he did.

###

"There wasn't a single decent movie on this flight," says Uncle Mortie as he's getting his bag out of the overhead compartment.

"So why did you watch them all?" I ask. He'd been glued to the little bitty screen the entire flight.

"What else was I to do?" asks Uncle Mortie. "All the stewardesses were married."

George and I groan. How my balding, pot-bellied Uncle Mortie ever gets a date is beyond me. We grab our bags too and follow Uncle Mortie off of the plane. I look a few times, but I don't see Astrid or her hot guy anywhere. He must have been seated at the very back of the plane.

We make it through the interminable line in Customs, still with no sign of Astrid. I'm really glad I'm not traveling on my own like she is. The Charles de Gaulle airport is pretty crazy and I have no idea where I'm supposed to go. All the signs are in French and the only one I recognize is the toilet one and knowing my luck, I'd probably mistake the guy's bathroom for the girl's. We finally make it to the baggage claim.

"How was your flight, Mina?" asks Mom, as George scans the baggage carousel for our bags. Dad and Dr. Musty are off to the side discussing something intently.

"Good," I say. "I made a new friend."

"Oh?" she says with a huge smile. See, I knew she'd like that. Not that Astrid or anyone else could ever replace Serena.

I'm telling Mom all about Astrid when I finally spot my new friend all the way across baggage claim, completely in the wrong area. "Oh, there she is, Mom," I say, pointing in Astrid's direction. "Hey, Astrid!" I yell. "Our flight's baggage claim is over here!"

Astrid doesn't even turn in my direction, though half the people milling around in the airport do, including the guy standing right by her. He's obviously the dude she was talking about. With my vampire-enhanced eyesight, I can see he is seriously attractive, in a dangerous kind of way. He has longish dark hair pulled loosely back from his face and very ice blue intense eyes (especially the one with the hoop earring through his eyebrow). His cheekbones could practically cut paper, they are so defined, and his lips, while rather full and red, have a sardonic twist to them completely unlike George's devilish grin.

Total pirate.

He stares right at me and his grin spreads across his face in a downright challenging way. Sexy, yeah, but completely dangerous. If I'd seen him first, I don't think I would have encouraged Astrid to talk to him. He looks rock star intense and that, in my limited experience, is never good. Then he casually pulls up his shirtsleeve to reveal the tattoo Astrid had mentioned, staring me right in the eyes the whole time. Can he even really see me from all the way over there? I tear my eyes away from his and glance down at this arm.

She had most definitely *not* mentioned what he had a tattoo of.

A skeletal bird's talon grasping a human heart. I can even make out the drips of blood coming off of the talons. Five drips. That meant five unauthorized turnings.

"A Black Talon!" I yelp and take off running towards them, leaving my bag behind at Mom's feet. I can hear George following after me. I dodge around suitcases and travelers, leaping over a giant duffle bag and nearly taking out a couple of tourists. But when I get there, Astrid and the guy are gone. All that's left is her book bag. Sitting on top of it is her notebook, opened to the page I had written down my contact information. That part of the page had been torn out and scribbled across what was left were the words "Welcome to Paris, Mina" and, strangely enough, a smiley face. With fangs.

Why It Still Sucks to Be Me (Even Though I'm in Paris)

1. I actually make a new friend and she gets kidnapped (hopefully nothing worse) by a Black Talon.

2. Who apparently knew exactly who we (especially me) were. And not just who we were, but what plane we were going to be on.
3. Which apparently also means that there's a leak or a traitor or whatever you want to call it somewhere within the Council(s), either in the U.S. or here in France. Or maybe within the VRA.
4. Not to mention, Dr. Musty's "chateau" in Montmartre (the 18th arrondissement, which is kind of like a district or, I guess, a neighborhood) is less than palatial. Not as bad as our house in Cartville was, but with only four rooms total and six people, privacy is obviously going to be hard to come by.
5. Not to mention it's a fifth floor walkup. Or, actually, that's like a sixth floor walkup since they count floors differently here. Okay, yeah, I've got, like, vampire stamina and all that, but still. That's a lot of stairs.

THE END (or, rather, THE BEGINNING)

A Note from the Author: This short story is the beginning of the continuation of the Sucks to Be Me series. The character Astrid is based on the real-life Astrid Villareal, who won a contest and a chance to appear in a story with Mina. Whether you are a new reader or an old fan, I hope you enjoyed it. You can find out more about the first two books (which have been released in paperback, ebook and audio formats, as well as in foreign language editions) and continuing plans for it at my website, www.kimberlypauley.com