

BITE MARKS

A Vampire Testament

TERENCE TAYLOR



St. Martin's Griffin



New York

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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For the women who made me the writer I am today; my seventh grade English teacher, Jewel Finley, who planted the seed; my mother, Hazel, who sheltered it; and most of all, my grandmother, Gladys, who nurtured and shaped its growth. I love you all and always will.

I

SUNSET

New York City

Wednesday, 24 December 1986

DO YOU BELIEVE IN VAMPIRES?

Book researchers seek true stories of encounters with psychic or supernatural vampires. Don't send proof until requested. Mail your story to POB 1408 Brooklyn, NY 11217.

—*Village Voice* Bulletin Board
December 1986

CHAPTER 1

10:26 P.M.

Times Square, 24 December 1986

Snow falls on the just and the unjust alike, Momma used to say. Young and old, rich or poor, the open sky treats us all the same. Nina hoped God felt the same way, that He was every bit as open-minded as his heavens when He looked down on Times Square. That in his eyes a hooker deserved the same happiness as a housewife and had the same right as any mother to spend the holiday at home with her baby.

Christopher was only five months old and always sick with one thing or another. He had a problem the doctors called—congenial? Congenital? They all said he wouldn't live this long but he was still here to spite them, and she'd keep him alive one way or another, damn them.

She stood on Eighth Avenue above Forty-second Street, across from XXXtasy Video Center and the Cameo theater, "3 Super Hot Adult Hits." She'd been there most of the night between tricks; huddled against the wind in a short rabbit-fur jacket, tube top, hot pants, and platform shoes. Her work clothes.

Brown bangs blew around moist gray eyes that followed a chubby man who passed and kept walking until he was half a block away. He turned and walked back. Nina watched him search the street. No one nearby but sight-seers, winos, hookers, and drug dealers—none of them could be cops, right? She nodded encouragement, watched him try to decide if she was a decoy.

"Hey, baby," she said, as he rushed past again.

Nina knew he wanted her. At seventeen, she was the youngest, prettiest

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white girl out here tonight and a real one to boot. All he had to do was make up his mind. It was too cold and too late for this shit. When he came back she stepped in front of him.

"Look, it's Christmas Eve. Time to go home and celebrate."

The guy looked down, embarrassed. "Yeah. Sure."

"Got a car?"

"No," he lied. "I hoped . . ."

He mumbled into the wind.

"What?"

The man raised his face, red as Nina's cherry-colored lips.

"I want to tuck you in. Be your daddy, not just . . ."

She rolled her eyes. "Jesus. That's extra, okay? There's a place down the block." Nina turned and walked down the icy sidewalk. The man didn't follow. She looked back and saw someone who didn't want witnesses.

"Anywhere else we can go?"

She tossed her head to one side, laughed.

"Your place or mine?"

"Yours, maybe?"

She spun away, headed down the street.

"Wait! I'll give you one fifty! Two!"

She stopped. *God, this is stupid*, she thought, *real stupid*. If it weren't Christmas Eve, if the rent weren't due, if baby weren't sick . . . "Four. Twenty minutes," she said.

"Half hour for two fifty? That's all I've got." He paused, sighed. "Three. I'll leave right after."

You've got that right. In her head she located the Bowie knife she kept hidden under the mattress for protection, bought on sale almost a year ago at the army surplus down the street.

"Let me see it."

He pulled out a wad of new bills, fresh from a cash machine, counted them out, then tucked them back in his coat. She nodded. They started toward her place.

"Asshole," said Nina. "Show some girls a roll like that, they'd take you out, here on the street."

The john smiled at her, cheeks flushed with more than the cold. He hurried to keep up with her.

"You're not like that," he said. "It's my job to know people."

"Oh, shit. You're not a priest, are you? Or a shrink?"

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He laughed. It was a nice sound. Maybe this wouldn't be all bad. Maybe this was God's way of getting her home early for his kid's birthday.

Maybe He did care.

By the time they got upstairs, Nina and her john joked like old friends. She opened the door to her apartment. Inside a nine-year-old girl watched MTV while finishing off a Twinkie and a joint.

"Yo, Carmen. He okay?"

The child nodded, sleepy, and held out her hand. Nina slapped a handful of bills into it.

"Here you go. *Gracias mucho*."

Carmen scampered out with a grin, whispered back season's greetings in Spanish as she giggled, and pulled the door shut behind her. The man stood by, out of place, while Nina locked the door, turned off the TV, and went to check on her baby. Christopher was still asleep, his thumb in his mouth. Nina smoothed the blanket and tucked it in. The heat wouldn't be up again tonight and he was still getting over his cold. She caught sight of their reflection in the cracked mirror over the bureau. She looked worn and pale next to her radiant boy.

"That the bed?" the man asked softly behind her.

"Don't worry. Clock starts when I say it does." Nina held out her hand. "Money first."

He pulled it out slow, like he still didn't trust her. She counted the bills and slipped them under the mattress in the baby's crib. Nina adjusted his blanket again and walked to her bed as she pulled off her jacket. She lifted an old *Village Voice* newspaper off the blanket, glanced again at the ad she'd circled in pink neon marker on the back page.

"DO YOU BELIEVE IN VAMPIRES?"

The apartment was cold, but that didn't explain the chill she felt or the goose bumps on her skin. She looked at the rest of the words, memorized from rereading, unable to believe they could be real. That anyone could ever believe her.

Nina tossed the paper on the floor. It was too late to save herself, but not Christopher. She'd answered the ad weeks ago, sent her diary home for safe-keeping in case Adam found out she was going to tell what he'd done, what he was. If she could sell her story, maybe she could get enough money to save her son. But that money was months away, at best.

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Nina unfastened the gold filigree crucifix hanging on a chain around her neck, a gift from her mother and another bleak reminder of the holiday. She dropped it on the night table and turned to look up at her john like the innocent little girl he wanted.

"I'm so sleepy, Daddy. Can you tuck me in?"

The man stepped closer, reached out and gently grazed her cheek with a fingertip. He moaned as he lifted Nina, carried her to the bed, and laid her down on the worn electric blanket. It hummed beneath them as he opened her skirt, her bra, slipped them off her freckled pink skin.

She looked away as he pulled off his jacket and shirt, climbed onto the bed, and kissed her softly, groaned. His rough, hairy chest scratched her bare nipples. His breath came in short, sharp gasps as he stroked her breasts, her ribs, her ass. . . .

Then, without a sound, someone else was there.

"Naughty Nina . . ."

A shadow fell across the john's face as he rolled away and saw an expensively dressed red-haired young man beside the bed.

"Hard at work, I see."

Nina sat up, stammered.

"Adam . . ."

He raised an eyebrow, cold.

"I hear you've a tale to tell." Adam looked at her with large, beautiful eyes, one gray, one blue. "A tale to sell."

"Please, don't . . ."

"Don't what?" he said. "Live up to my word? I told you what would happen if you ever told anyone."

"I didn't!"

The john reached toward his jacket.

"Look, buddy, whatever you want, it's yours."

He held out his wallet to no response. Adam ignored him as he dropped his black overcoat on an empty chair. He sat beside Nina, slipped an arm around her. She flinched.

The john slid to the edge of the bed and reached for his clothes. "Let me leave you two . . ."

"Don't interrupt."

Adam gripped him by the soft skin of his chest, gathered furred flesh in his fist like a rumpled shirtfront, and lifted him from the bed.

"Please," grunted the john. "Just lemme . . ."

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He stared into Adam's eyes. They were cold, dead. Adam gave the skin of the john's chest a painful twist. He screamed.

"What do you want? Anything . . ."

"Anything?" Adam relaxed his grip, as if he'd waited for just that. He pulled the john closer, kissed him lightly on the forehead as if in blessing, then whispered into his ear.

"Drop dead."

He slammed his head into the wall, hard.

The man's eyes popped as his breath was forced out; an arm whipped out and smashed the lamp by the bed. His body slid down the wall, blood and brain trailing down the wallpaper behind him.

"Jesus!" Nina shrieked. "Oh, my God, help me!"

"I am your God, Nina," answered Adam.

She rolled over as he bent down. Her hand whipped under the bed and came up knife blade first. Chrome flashed, slashed deep into his side, near the heart. Nina rammed it up and twisted, released a thick, clear fluid that seeped through his Armani jacket.

Adam plucked the blade out, his full lips twisted into a poor imitation of a smile. He flipped the knife far behind him to stick in a wall, then ran his tongue along her ear, her cheek, down her neck, sending shivers up her inner thighs.

"Oh, please," she gasped, "please," not sure if she begged for release or for rape. She tried to push him away as he pulled her closer, willed her to desire him. It was so easy for Adam to get what he wanted from her, from anyone. As afraid as she was of what he'd do next, part of her wanted him more than life itself. Her vision dimmed, swam out of focus as Adam's lips brushed her ear, soft as moth wings.

"You see?" he whispered. "When people find out, the killing starts, and doesn't stop until the breach is sealed and our secret's safe again." The room whirled around them. Nina's head was light, felt like she was floating up and out of her body. "You've made such a mess of things, Nina. Wouldn't death be better than this hell?"

When her vision cleared, they were on a massive red-eyed black stallion, wet with blood and sweat. Adam held Nina tight as they galloped through smoke, flew through fire to leap into the air, over a cliff to razor-sharp rocks below. . . .

"Wouldn't the grave be quieter?" soothed Adam.

Nina lay facedown on a wooden platform before an angry crowd, hands

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tied behind her, as a guillotine blade fell. Her head rolled into the basket below. She stared up from the bottom, still seeing. As the executioner leaned down, she glimpsed familiar eyes through slits in his hood, one gray, one blue. He lifted her head and turned it to face her body as it twitched to death below her. . . .

"End the pain," Adam breathed, stood on a city street, extended a hand, and looked at her with Japanese eyes, one gray, one blue. Light bloomed behind them as he smiled. The sky turned white, then to black ash as she watched his fingers and face flare up and fade away. His body burned to a shadow on a shattered wall as atoms devoured the city around them.

Nina screamed in fear and desire, watched her clothes melt and blow away on radioactive wind along with her skin, surrendered to the pain and pleasure Adam forced on her. She wrapped her legs around him, dead John beside her forgotten, as she died a hundred deaths. She burned with lust and the fires of the Inquisition, drowned in an icy lake as their passion drenched the sheets and mattress like night sweats.

"Release yourself to eternal rest . . ." Adam whispered. "Let go of your life."

"Yes," she said and gave in, any thought for her child or future forgotten, anything to stop this torment of death after death, without end. Anything to please him.

Nina threw back her head, spread her legs, and welcomed Adam as he bit deep and drank her blood for the first time. Razor-sharp teeth sliced open her tender throat as he took her mind and body with her consent. There was time for one last thought as savage snarls above her grew louder—that this death wouldn't be enough for her master, not nearly enough.

Her agony was just beginning.