

# [PDF] The Care And Feeding Of Stray Vampires

**Molly Harper, Amanda Ronconi - pdf download free book**

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**Books Details:**

Title: The Care and Feeding of Stray

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Released: 2013-09-24

Language:

Pages:

ISBN: 1480563293

ISBN13: 978-1480563292

ASIN: 1480563293



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## **Description:**

**About the Author** Raised in Mississippi and Kentucky, Molly Harper graduated from Western Kentucky University with a bachelor's degree in print journalism. Her reporting duties included covering courts, school board meetings, quilt shows, and once, the arrest of a Florida man who faked his suicide by shark attack and spent the next few months tossing pies at a local pizzeria. Molly lives in western Kentucky with her husband and daughter.

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The thing to remember about a “stray” vampire is that there is probably a good reason he is friendless, alone, and wounded. Approach with caution.

—*The Care and Feeding of Stray Vampires*

How did an internal debate regarding flavored sexual aids become part of my workday?

I was a good person. I went to church on the “big days.” I was a college graduate. Nice, God-fearing people with bachelor’s degrees in botany should not end up standing in the pharmacy aisle at Walmart debating which variety of flavored lube is best.

“Ugh, forget it, I’m going with Sensual Strawberry.” I sighed, throwing the obscenely pink box into the basket.

Diandra Starr—a poorly thought-out pole name if I’d ever heard one—had managed to snag the world’s only codependent vampire. My client, Mr. Rychek. When she made her quarterly visits to Half-Moon Hollow, I was turned into some bizarre hybrid of Cinderella and the Fairy Godmother, waking up at dawn to find voicemails and e-mails detailing the numerous needs that must be attended to *at once*. Mr. Rychek seemed convinced that Diandra would flounce away on her designer platform heels unless her every whim was anticipated. No demand for custom-blended bath salts was considered too extravagant. No organic, free-trade food requirement was too extreme. And the lady liked her sexual aids to taste of summer fruits.

I surveyed the contents of the cart against the list. Iron supplements? Check. Organic almond milk? Check. Flavored lube? Check.

I did not pretend to understand the dynamics of human-vampire relationships.

Shopping in the “special dietary needs” aisle was always an adventure. An unexpected side effect of the Great Coming Out in 1999 was the emergence of all-night industries, special products, and cottage businesses, like mine, that catered to the needs of “undead Americans.” Companies were tripping over one another to come up with products for a spanking-new marketing demographic: synthetic blood, protein additives, dental-care accessories, lifelike bronzers. The problem was that those companies still hadn’t figured out packaging for the undead and tended to jump on bizarre trending bandwagons, the most recent being a brand of plasma concentrate that came pouring out of what looked like a Kewpie doll. You had to flip back the head to open it.

It’s even more creepy than it sounds.

Between that and the sporty, aggressively neon tubes of Razor Wire Floss, the clear bubble-shaped pots of Solar Shield SPF-500 sunblock, and the black Gothic boxes of Forever Smooth moisturizing serum, the vampire aisle was ground zero for visual overstimulation.

I stopped in my tracks, pulling the cart to an abrupt halt in the middle of the pharmacy section as I recalled that Rychek’s girlfriend was a vegan. I started to review the label to determine whether the flavored lube was an animal by-product. But I found that I honestly didn’t care. It was 4:20, which meant that I had an hour to drop this stuff by Mr. Rychek’s house, drop the service contracts by a new client’s house in Deer Haven, and then get to Half-Moon Hollow High for the volleyball booster meeting. Such was the exotic and glamorous life of the Hollow’s only daytime vampire concierge.

My company, Beeline, was part special-event coordinator, part concierge service, part personal organizer. In addition to wedding planning, I took care of all the little details vampires didn’t have time for or just didn’t want to deal with themselves. Although it was appropriate, I tried to avoid the

term “daywalker” unless I was dealing with established clients. It turns out that if you put an ad for a daywalker service in the Yellow Pages, you get a lot of calls from people who expect you to scoop Fluffy’s sidewalk leavings. And I was allergic to dogs—and their leavings.

On my sprint to the checkout, I cast a longing glance at the candy aisle and its many forbidden sugary pleasures. With my compulsive sweet tooth, I did not discriminate against chocolate, gummies, taffy, lollipops, or even those weird so-sour-the-citric-acid-burns-off-your-tastebuds torture candies. But between my sister Gigi’s worries about the potential for adult-onset diabetes in our gene pool and my tendency toward what I prefer to call “curviness,” I only broke into the various candy caches I had stashed around the house under great personal stress. Or if it was a weekday.

Placating myself with a piece of sugarless gum, I whizzed through the express lane and loaded Mr. Rychek’s weekend supplies into what Gigi, in all her seventeen-year-old sarcastic glory, called the Dorkmobile. I agreed that an enormous yellow minivan was not exactly a sexy car. But until she could suggest another way to haul cases of synthetic blood, Gothic-themed wedding cakes, and, once, a pet crate large enough for a Bengal tiger, I’d told Gigi she had to suck it up and ride shotgun in the Dorkmobile. The next fall, she’d used her earnings from the Half-Moon Hollow Country Club and Catfish Farm snack bar to buy a secondhand VW Bug. Never underestimate a teenager’s work ethic if the end result is averted embarrassment.

I used my security pass to get past the gate into Deer Haven, a private, secure subdivision inhabited entirely by vampires and their human pets. It was always a little spooky driving through this perfectly maintained, cookie-cutter ghost suburb during the day. The streets and driveways were empty. The windows were shuttered tight against the sunlight. Sometimes I expected tumbleweeds to come bouncing past my car. Then again, I’d never seen the neighborhood awake and hopping after dark. I made it a policy to be well out of my clients’ homes before the sun set. With the exception of the clients whose newly legal weddings I helped plan, I rarely saw any of them face-to-face. (I allowed my wedding clients a little more leeway, because they were generally too distracted by their own issues to bother nibbling on me. And still, I only met with them in public places with a lot of witnesses present.)

Although it had been more than ten years since the Great Coming Out and vampire-human relations were vastly improved since the early pitchfork-and-torch days, some vampires were still a bit touchy about humans’ efforts to wipe out their species. They refused to let any human they hadn’t met in person near their homes while they were sleeping and vulnerable.

After years of working with them, I had no remaining romantic notions about vampires. They had the same capacity for good and evil that humans do. And despite what most TV evangelists preached, I believed they had souls. The problem was that the cruelest tendencies can emerge when a person is no longer restricted to the “no biting, no using people as food” rules that humans insist on. If you were a jerk in your original life, you’re probably going to be a bigger undead jerk. If you were a decent person, you’re probably not going to change much beyond your diet and skin-care regimen.

With vampires, you had to be able to operate from a distance, whether that distance was physical or emotional. My business was built on guarded, but optimistic, trust. And a can of vampire pepper spray that I kept in my purse.

I opened the back of my van and hitched the crate of supplies against my hip. I had pretty impressive upper-body strength for a petite gal, but it was at times like these, struggling to schlep the crate up Mr. Rychek’s front walk, that I wondered why I’d never hired an assistant.

Oh, right, because I couldn’t afford one.

Until my little business, Beeline, started showing a profit margin just above “lemonade stand,” I would have to continue toting my own barge and lifting my own bale. I looked forward to the day when heavy lifting wouldn’t determine my wardrobe or hairstyle. On days like this, I tended toward sensible flats, twin sets, and pencil skirts in dark, smudge-proof colors. I liked to throw in a pretty blouse every once in a while, but it depended on whether I could wash synthetic blood out of it. (No matter how careful you are, sometimes there are mishaps.)

And the hair. It was difficult for human companions, blood-bank staff, and storekeepers to take me seriously when I walked around with a crazy cloud of dark curls framing my head. Having Diana Ross’s ‘do didn’t exactly inspire confidence, so I twisted my hair into a thick coil at the nape of my neck. Gigi called it my “sexy schoolmarm” look, having little sympathy for me and my frizz. But since we shared the same unpredictable follicles, I was biding my time until she got her first serious job and realized how difficult it was to be considered a professional when your hair was practically sentient.

I used another keyless-entry code to let myself into Mr. Rychek’s tidy little town house. Some American vampires lived in groups of threes and fours in what vampire behaviorists called “nesting,” but most of my clients, like Mr. Rychek, were loners. They had little habits and quirks that would annoy anyone, human or immortal, after a few centuries. So they lived alone and relied on people like me to bring the outside world to them.

I put the almond milk in the fridge and discreetly tucked the other items into a kitchen cabinet. I checked the memo board for further requests and was relieved to find none. I only hoped I could get through Diandra’s visit without being called and ordered to find a twenty-four-hour emergency vet service for her hypoallergenic cat, Ginger. That stupid furball had some sort of weird fascination with prying open remote controls and swallowing the batteries. And somehow Diandra was always shocked when it happened.

As an afterthought, I moved Mr. Rychek’s remote from the coffee table to the top of th... --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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