

THE  
RELUCTANT  
VAMPIRE  
QUEEN



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JO SIMMONS

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*For my beautiful boys,  
George and Dylan*





# 1

Mo Merrydrew was cycling fast through her village of Lower Donny, her black hair streaming out behind her, her long legs a blur, her breath forming clouds in the chill evening air. One hand was on the handlebars, the other pressing her phone to her ear.

'Hey, Lou. It's me, Mo.'

'You sound excited,' said Lou. 'You've been to the library again, haven't you?'

'Yup,' Mo said, 'where, you'll be super happy to hear, I picked up a ton of extra reading for the science test we have coming up, including a new book about tapeworms that the librarian put aside for me.'

'Yay,' said Lou flatly.

'I also got a biography of the first female welder in Scotland and a book about the Amazon women.'

'The women who work at Amazon?' Lou said.

'No, the warrior women from Greek mythology.'

'What about the Mini Battenbergs?' Lou asked.

'Got them too,' said Mo. 'Whoops! Sheep! Just missed it.'





'Mo, are you cycling *and* on your phone, in the pitch black? Seriously? That's so dangerous.'

'It's totally fine,' Mo puffed. 'I can handle it. I am a clever, independent woman, who is an expert at biking and holding my phone and . . . Aarrggghhh!'

Lou heard bike brakes squealing, then a crunching, rustling sound.

'Mo? Mo?'

'Sorry, went into a hedge,' Mo explained. 'Now, open the door, will you?'

'Which door?'

'Yours! I'm outside.'

Lou ran downstairs and found Mo on the front step.

'So you rang me while cycling *to* my house?' Lou said. 'Even though you could have said everything you just said once you got here and also not fallen into a hedge. For someone intelligent, you're really stupid.'

'You are,' said Mo.

'No, you are,' said Lou. 'And you've got twigs in your hair.'

'It's cool to wear twigs in your hair,' said Mo.

'Like you'd know anything about being cool,' said Lou, hugging her friend and then heading upstairs. Mo followed Lou into her bedroom, dumped her backpack of books on the floor and collapsed backwards onto Lou's bed, in a star shape.

'Can we eat some Mini Battenbergs now, please?' she said. 'I can't stay long. I just wanted to drop off the







tapeworm book. Then I need to get on with science revision.'

'You need to take a break, that's what you need,' said Lou. 'You look tired. I'm taking Nipper to dog training this evening. *Nipper!*'

Nipper didn't appear.

'See, no recall,' said Lou. 'Come with me. Take the night off. It'll be fun.'

'You sound like my parents. Always on at me to study less.'

'You need people in your life,' Lou went on.

'There are people in books.'

'Real people like me.'

'I can't, Lou, I'm sorry. There's too much work to do,' said Mo, sitting up and looking into her friend's big blue eyes, which sat in a round face, like a manga hamster. She smoothed Lou's fringe and tucked a stray lock of her blonde hair behind her ear, affectionately. 'I also need to write up the minutes of today's debating-society meeting.'

'Did anyone go?' Lou asked.

'No, but I should write it up anyway. I'm president, after all. And founder.'

Lou opened the Mini Battenbergs and handed one to Mo, without looking at her.

'Don't be cross with me,' Mo said. 'We're still best mates – have been since we were three, remember? Our eyes met across the sand tray at nursery. You were fighting



with Marco Pettini over a plastic dinosaur. Pretty sure it was a diplodocus. Anyway, I got you both to share it.'

'That's when our friendship started,' said Lou, beginning to smile.

'That's probably when my interest in conflict resolution started too,' Mo added, taking a bite of cake.

'That's definitely when my interest in Marco Pettini started,' Lou said. 'I was so into him. Wonder what he looks like now. Bet he's good-looking.'

'I haven't thought about Marco Pettini since he left Lower Donny years ago,' said Mo.

'He had lovely dark eyes,' Lou went on. 'I love dark eyes in a boy, don't you?'

'I haven't thought about that either,' said Mo.

'Mo, you're like a robot,' Lou said, putting on a computerised voice. *'Scanning for feelings. Negative. Does. Not. Compute.'*

'I just take my education seriously,' Mo said. 'Knowledge is power. That's what I use my brain for. Not for thinking about Marco Pettini who, by the way, always had a snotty nose. Now, I really need to get going.'

Mo grabbed her backpack and the two of them went downstairs.

'See you tomorrow,' she said, and they hugged goodbye.

Lou nodded, opened the door and watched Mo climb onto her bike and pedal away.