

The Vampire Bat Girls' Club

by
Anne Schraff

HAWKER BROWNLOW
E D U C A T I O N

1 KIM CHAU HA stared up at the big Victorian house.

Maybe at one time the huge, three-story house had been pretty. But now its blank windows seemed to watch as you passed. And the trees and bushes clawed the sides of the house with ugly little screeches.

Those weren't the scariest things about the house either. Kim Chau had heard that nobody had lived in the house for a long time. It certainly looked that way. There were no curtains in the windows. The grass and weeds grew quite tall. And the paint had almost totally peeled off.

But sometimes Kim Chau thought she saw a light moving through the house. It was like someone was carrying a lantern from room to room.

When she saw that, Kim Chau would hurry faster on her way to Coolidge Middle School. It was scary enough starting in a brand new school in a new city without a single friend. She didn't need to get any closer to that strange, ghostly house.

After two weeks in sixth grade, Kim Chau still didn't feel comfortable. Yesterday at school Kim Chau overheard some of her classmates talking about her. What they'd said had hurt her deeply.

"She's so weird! She's always eating rice and those strange vegetables for lunch!" a girl had said.

"And the way she talks! Man, she's got the weirdest accent!" another laughed.

"She's like from another planet," a boy added.

Kim Chau felt her face get warm. She had hurried away so she wouldn't hear any more.

How hard it was to fit in here! It didn't seem fair after all Kim Chau's family had done to move here. Her father had started the journey by leaving Vietnam and coming to Los Angeles. He worked as a fisherman and began saving money so his family could join him.

But getting out of Vietnam didn't prove easy for Kim Chau and her mother. First they had to go to a refugee camp in Thailand. Finally they'd made it to

Los Angeles.

Just when the family thought they were settled, more problems cropped up. Kim Chau's father lost his job.

So the family packed up and moved here. Now the family was trying to get settled once again—in a tiny apartment near Kim Chau's school.

Some Vietnamese families and a social agency had tried to help them fit in. But Kim Chau still felt afraid and lonely.

All she wanted at school was to do well in her studies and make just one good friend. Two friends would be wonderful, but one friend would do.

She didn't care if the friend was from Vietnam or anywhere else. At Coolidge, the students were black, brown, white, and many colors in between. Kim Chau just wanted a friend who would accept her.

The school loomed up ahead. Kim Chau gazed nervously at the many students milling around, all strangers. It seemed there were more students at Coolidge than there were people in the village

where she'd been born.

Kim Chau suddenly noticed a girl who looked a little like herself. She'd seen the girl before in history class.

As she watched the girl, Kim Chau remembered what her mother had said. "If you want a friend, you must not be so shy. That is not the way in America."

Kim Chau hurried towards the girl, forcing a smile to her face. "Hello," she said. Even such a simple greeting was hard for Kim Chau. "I am Kim Chau Ha. I think you are in my history class."

"Yes, I've noticed you too," the girl said. "My name is Chi Trinh."

Chi Trinh studied Kim Chau closely. "I don't think I've seen you around before this year."

"No," Kim Chau said. "My family has lived here for five weeks. We came from Vietnam two years ago."

"You speak English pretty well," Chi Trinh remarked. She wasn't really complimenting Kim Chau. She just seemed surprised.

"My father knew English. He taught

both my mother and me.”

“Oh,” Chi Trinh replied. She seemed bored by the explanation. “Well, I was born in the United States. My parents came here fifteen years ago. Now my father is a big businessman.”

The girl’s eyes glowed with pride. “Pretty soon we can move to a nicer neighborhood.”

“That’s good,” Kim Chau said. Kim Chau’s own father was having a hard time. He had had an important job in Vietnam. But when the communists took over South Vietnam, he was sent to a labor camp. He was in the camp for three years. After he was released, the new government made life very hard for him. He finally decided to escape from the country, leaving his family behind.

Now he worked as a janitor in a large downtown office building. Kim Chau’s mother was a hairdresser. Her hours were long, but she made a little more money than Kim Chau’s father.

“What does your father do?” Chi Trinh asked.