Halloween hijinks

My being the resident parent in the elementary girls' house at a boarding school since last summer has created a—unique—environment.

Our household has developed all sorts of habits and traditions. On Saturdays we eat waffles. On Sundays we like breakfast burritos.

One girl gets into bed every night and shrieks "Socksies!" and I pull off her socks before she goes to sleep. We listen (and dance) to loads of Elvis, interspersed with Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber.

If they're taking their dear sweet time walking home, I can always persuade them to move a little faster by pretending to be a zombie, and some nights, they all want to be carried to their rooms like a sack of potatoes.

One of the strangest things in our house, however, is a figure known as Lady Brandt. Like most legends, it's hard to say exactly how the story of Lady Brandt was born. Last Christmas I became the proud owner of a pair of freakishly realistic vampire fangs.

I suppose one day I had a hankering to show them off, so I donned the teeth and crept down the hallway where the girls were playing. When I peeked around the corner and bared a bloodthirsty grin, my students just about lost their minds.

After a bit of exaggerated screaming and running away, their curiosity won out, and they sought out the strange being, looking for answers.

They wanted to know everything, so I did my best to spin up a quick story for them.

Lady Brandt is a vampire who is friends with Miss Brandt. In fact, they are roommates. She's pretty shy, and the sun burns her skin, so she doesn't come out much, which might explain why you have never seen her before.

Yes, Lady Brandt does look quite similar to Miss Brandt. We get that a lot. But there is a simple explanation: we do much of our shopping together and often go out to get our hair and nails done.

When asked if Lady Brandt eats people, I spoke in desperation. I had been trying so very hard to get the girls to obey one simple rule that they have to wear socks or slippers in the house. Horror stories of stepping on scorpions had done nothing to persuade them not to run around barefoot.

Without thinking, I blurted out that Lady Brandt hates bare feet, and if she ever sees them, she will bite them and suck their blood. They ran to their rooms, pushing and shoving, to get something on their feet, and Lady Brandt disappeared back into our apartment.

In the months since then, Lady Brandt has made many appearances, each time with a more elaborate costume. By now, she has short black hair and often wears dark eyeliner and a black trench coat.

As far as I can tell, most of the girls hover in a place between believing Lady Brandt is real and knowing that she's not. For one of my students, who is too bright for her own good, my extra attention to the detail of changing socks when I switched between characters was enough to convince her.

Last week, as Halloween approached, someone threw out the idea that Oct. 31 is Lady Brandt's birthday, and it stuck.

They begged me to have Lady Brandt wake them up Halloween morning, and I couldn't resist such an opportunity. In full costume, with the lights still off, I crept into the first room and greeted the girls in the scariest voice I could muster.

The screaming started, and those kids were out of bed faster than I even thought was possible. For those who were already acquainted with my alter ego, the fright was all in good fun. For the newer girls who had yet to meet our undead housemate, I saw legitimate terror in their eyes.

One of them couldn't take her eyes off me as she yelled for someone to go get Miss Brandt. I couldn't bring myself to be scary after seeing the look on her face, and I tried to convince her I was a nice, friendly vampire.

My attempt to converse scared her even more, and she called out again for Miss Brandt. Still trying to show her I was nice, I told her I would go get Miss Brandt right away. I ran back to my room, took off the wig, fangs and trench coat and proceeded to get the girls ready for school as usual.

Lady Brandt lived on for the remainder of her birthday, even playing a game of hide and seek in the dark and joining the girls for the evening devotions. The truth had to come out in the end for the sake of allaying fears and getting them to bed that night, but it sure was fun being Lady Brandt while it lasted.

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