

## Dead Or A Lie

### Chapter 1

The autumn evening still maintained the day's heat as Lee Teadora knelt quietly beside her father's headstone. The last rays of the sun flooded the sky with a wondrous pallet of colors—promising a beautiful tomorrow. Brilliant orange, deep pink, and purple paid homage to the day and its life's blood—sunlight, creating a scene that could never be explained by words, caught on film, or even painted by the hand of a grandmaster. And then it was gone, just like so many other things... and people in Lee's life.

A granite sculpture of the Angel Gabriel stood sentry with outstretched wings at the gate of Woodlawn Cemetery as darkness began to reclaim its world. The shadows of the few crooked trees and countless headstones now cast an ominous scene. Just seconds earlier, Gabriel had welcomed all to the solitude of this bastion of final rest but now his shadow, driven by the setting sun, began to race across the ground like a vulture's silhouette as it swooped down to claim the dead flesh of its prey.

Lee was not frightened by the darkness or the growing shadows. It was her life now. The sun was now her enemy, and she had learned to accept it—even enjoy the darkness. It was the medium in which she lived, and she bade it welcome—even though her mother had told her to beware of the creatures of the night.

*Creatures of the night*, Lee thought. *Mother, you were always too dramatic. What would you say now, knowing that I am one of those creatures of the night?*

A rustle in the crisp autumn leaves behind her brought her back to the present. In an instant, her training in martial arts took control. Her muscles tensed, and her hands took on the posture of lethal weapons.

Lee stood quickly and spun toward the sound. Nothing. “Oh, God, Mother, now you've got me listening for creatures of the night.” She started down the path to her car.

“In a hurry, my dear?” The voice behind her seemed cold and the question malevolent.

She spun to see a pale excuse of a man, his eyes dark and lifeless, his skin stretched over the boney structure of his face.

“Get lost freak. You don't want to be messing with me.” The first rule of self-defense flashed through her mind, *avoid confrontations in isolated areas*. She began to back away and when he didn't follow, she turned towards the safety of her car. She came face to face with another pale creature just inches from her.

Instantly the blade of her forearm was at his larynx, intent on crushing his windpipe. Then her knee rocketed to his crotch and without a second between motions, she turned to address the first would be attacker but he was already on her. He grabbed her wrist and pulled her towards him. The startling strength of his grip hurt and then the reality of the situation assaulted her mind and soul.

“Oh, shit,” she was in a fight for her life. Lee pulled out all stops using everything she had learned and even a few moves she made up on the spot. She drove the heel of her hand into his chin trying to break his hold and when that failed, she took aim at his larynx. Before she could launch the fatal blow, her arm was restrained.

She looked over her shoulder to find the one she thought she had dropped. He flashed her a fiendish smile, his canine teeth long and sharp. “I think we've had just about enough of this, don't you, my dear?”

Lee recoiled in disbelief. *Vampires? Impossible*. A chill shot up her spine.

“It's a shame we have to waste this beauty's blood but Master wants only her heart.”

“Just a sip? What difference would it make?” the one from behind coaxed.

“Fool! The Master will know we took her sweetness and will not be pleased. You've seen what he does to those who fail him.”

“I have,” vamp one responded after a short pause. “Then just take her heart and be done with it. We've wasted too much time chasing this one.” He grabbed her around the waist.

The attacker in front released her wrist and took a dagger from the sheath at his side. “It's a shame not to have your blood, but the Master will reward us with many others as young and beautiful as you, my—”

“Not if I can help it, you bastard.” She twisted sideward and sent a lateral kick towards his groin, but he stepped out of reach with astonishing speed.

He drew his dagger back. “Nice try, Deary, but let's stop this playing around. What do you—?” A

swooshing sound cut the last word from his foul mouth. He paused as if listening and then continued. "Like I was saying, my dear, the Master will reward us well. Now this may hurt a lot but as we say in the business, 'That's death'." His evil smile exposed his razor sharp fangs. They seemed to glow in the rising pale yellow moonlight.

The dagger began its downward plunge, but in a blur of incredible speed it was caught by the hand of yet another stranger. Lee saw his form for only a second before she was blinded by a blast of dirt thrown in her face. Then she heard an almost inaudible pronouncement, "Free."

"Not a drop of her blood will fall to this mortal path, but you will blend with this hallowed earth for Gabriel to watch over for an eternity."

She heard the whispered warning cut through the cold night air and suddenly the painful grip around her waist was released. Again, she heard the faintest, "Free."

Realizing she was free, Lee pulled back readying herself for another attack and blinked her eyes to clear them. For a split second, she glimpsed a shadow disappearing behind a mausoleum at the edge of the cemetery. She spun around, looking for the other assailant, but he was nowhere to be seen. For a moment, she relaxed her fighting posture, but her body's natural reactions took over, and a rush of adrenaline shot through her veins. She sprinted down the path to her car and cell phone. Her heart raced uncontrollably and anxiety flashed through her, making her mind race as quickly as her heart. A fine film of sweat instantly covered her body.

She desperately searched her pocket for her keys. When she had them in hand, she pressed the buttons until the headlights came on and the horn sounded.

Control yourself. Remember your training. Panic is your worst enemy. Feel your body but maintain control. She threw the door open, jumped inside, and hit the lock button.

She steadied her trembling fingers to press the tiny numbers of her cell phone.

"911. What's your emergency?"

"Hello, my name is Lee Teadora, and I've just been attacked in the Woodlawn Cemetery."

The questions and Lee's answers rolled out in rapid-fire succession.

"Are you injured?"

"No."

"Are you safe at this moment?"

"Yes."

"Are the assailants still at the scene?"

"No. I think they ran off."

"A patrol car is approaching the cemetery. Where are you?"

"I'm in the parking lot on East Avenue in a white Ford Taurus."

"Stay in your car until the patrol car arrives. I've dispatched them."

"I hear the sirens—"

"They're at the entrance." The 911 dispatcher reassured her.

"I see them." Lee's bones went weak with relief.

"They see your car." The 911 operator said in a well-trained calm voice.

"Okay, thank you." Lee took a deep breath, trying to stop her body from shaking.

Two officers were at her door and one displayed his badge. "Are you Lee Teadora?" He asked through the glass.

"Yes, Officer. I saw one disappear behind that mausoleum." Lee pointed back up into the cemetery.

"Okay, Ma'am." He turned to the other officer and barked out an order. "Ted, check out the mausoleum, and I'll take her statement."

Ted immediately took his revolver from its holster. With the gun in one hand and a flashlight in the other, he headed off towards the mausoleum.

"Ma'am, would you mind stepping out of the car please?"

"Can I see your badge again?"

"Yes, Ma'am." He held his ID close to the window, allowing Lee an unobstructed view. She studied the photo carefully, then his face and then back again before she spoke.

"All right then," she slowly opened the door. He stepped back allowing her plenty of space.

"Could I have your full name and see some identification, please?"

Lee obliged and continued to answer his questions until he covered the basics and then he asked about the assault.

"What brought you here this evening?"

"I was visiting my father... well, his grave that is. Just over there." She pointed in the direction of the gravesite.

"When did you first notice the attackers?"

"Just as I was beginning to leave. I heard something and when I turned around, there they were."

"Did you get a good look at them?"

"Yes."

"And what did they look like?"

"Well they... they..." Lee paused.

"Is there a problem? Did you recognize them?"

"Yes... No. I mean... I didn't know them but... I did recognize them." He'll think you're nuts, Teadora. Be careful.

"Well, which is it? Did you recognize them or not?"

*Don't go there girl*, a little voice inside her head screamed, but she finally blurted out, "Yes, kinda...sorta."

He gave her a hard stare. "Have you been drinking or using any illegal substances, Ma'am."

"No, I have not, and I take offense to your questions." She tried to act insulted but she understood why he had asked. Oh crap, she knew she sounded like a funny farm escapee to this guy. She gave him a sheepish smile.

"Okay," he gave her back a skeptical glance. "So can you give me a description then?"

Lee swallowed hard. "They looked like... like... vampires." Her voice sank and she avoided any eye contact. With a sigh her shoulders slumped, knowing how ludicrous she must have sounded.

"Vampires? You did say vampires, Ma'am?" His monotone voice cracked when he said vampires the second time.

She caught a little smile creep into his face. "Yes, you heard me, I said vampires. And I don't see anything funny in this at all."

"You're sure you haven't been drinking, Ma'am? I could test you, you know, and it's an offense to give a false report."

"No, I haven't been drinking." Her voice raised in real anger this time.

"And no drugs?" He persisted with his line of questioning.

"No! I am not drunk or stoned or anything like that. Now listen, officer. I'm not the guilty party here, and I'm telling you I was attacked by two men who appeared to look like vampires. They had sharp teeth and pale skin. They said they wanted to drink my blood and take my heart. Now what would you call creeps like that?"

"All right, now please, let's just try to relax. Okay? I know it's not funny, and I believe that you were attacked." The honesty in his voice helped persuade her he was being sincere. "May I continue?"

"All right, go on," she said reluctantly.

"There are an awful lot of freaks in this city, and they all seem to come out at night. Some even dress to look like vampires. Right down to the fangs they wear. Believe me because I know. When I walked a beat at night, I would run into a lot of the Vampires," he accentuated the word vampires and continued. "Believe it or not most of them were actually okay and not out to hurt anyone, but you'll find an evil element in everything and every group. Now, how many were there?"

"Well, at first there were just two. They're the ones who threatened me but later I think a third one got involved."

"Was he a vampire too?"

"I couldn't see his face. As soon as he arrived, they threw dirt in my eyes—I couldn't see anything for a while. Everything happened so quickly, it was like a blur."

"That's a common feeling expressed by victims. Everything seems to blur together."

"No, I mean it really was a blur. Their movements around me seemed incredibly fast. And they disappeared so quickly."

"Were you hurt?"

"No."

"Not even when they knocked you down?"

"They didn't knock me down."

"How did you get so dirty then? They couldn't have thrown that much dirt in your eyes."

Lee looked down at her clothing and saw the dirt he was talking about. It was all over her, from head to toe, a light dusting. "Well... Honestly, I don't know. Maybe it got scuffed up when we were struggling

there on the path.”

Again she pointed towards her father’s grave and the dirt path leading to it. “I don’t really know. Maybe it’s what they threw at me. All I know is that I saw the knife coming towards me, the third guy showed up, they threw dirt in my face, and suddenly I was free. They actually told me I was free twice and when my eyes cleared I saw one disappear past the mausoleum.”

“You should consider yourself lucky then, Miss Teadora.”

“I do, Officer.”

“Nothing there, Jason,” Officer Ted announced when he returned from searching around the mausoleum.

“Do you think you’ll have any luck catching them, Officer?” Lee inquired hopefully.

“Probably not. Not without a good description and if I say vampires, the Captain wouldn’t even send out any detectives in the morning.”

“Vampires?” Officer Ted questioned in an amused tone.

“Just some creepy look-a-likes playing in the cemetery, Ted. Forget it.” To Lee it sounded more like an order than a request.

“Got ya, Sarge.” Ted shot him a mock salute. Jason gave him the evil eye and shook his head, effectively wiping the smirk off Ted’s face. He then turned his attention back to Lee.

Lee mouthed a “Thank you” to Jason, especially when she saw the way Ted wiped the stupid smile off his face when Jason gave him the look.

Jason continued. “But without any other leads to go on, I doubt that we’ll turn anything up. We’ll let you know if we find anything.”

“Thank you officers and thank you for getting here so quickly.”

“Not a problem, Miss, but may I give you a little advice?”

“Sure, I’d appreciate it.”

“It’s not safe to be walking around alone at night. You should do stuff like this in broad daylight or at least bring a friend.”

“Yep, wish I could.” She muttered.

“Pardon?” Jason asked.

“Oh, nothing. Thank you. I’ll keep that in mind. May I go now?”

“Yes Ma’am. We know where to find you if we need to.”

Lee got back into her car and headed home.

Atop a hill in a distant corner of the cemetery, his back against a huge arched headstone that masked him in its shadow, he watched the woman who would be the savior of his kind—his people. They depended on him to protect the lineage until she, the Sacrosanct, was born. For over five hundred years, he’s waited only to lose her because of her unbelieving father. Thankfully, she didn’t know she had to hide her father’s death, and the obituary had led him and others, it appears, to her. Now that the promised coming of the Sacrosanct had manifested itself in Lee and he was again positioned close to her his test had finally come.

“Be careful, my Sacrosanct. That which has brought me to you has also brought great evil. Heed the warnings of your mother, ‘Beware of the creatures of the night.’ I will not fail you as I did her, my love... no...not my love, my duty.”

A slight smile of relief creased his face when Lee drove off. “And you, my brothers, be free. You are no longer bound to this world by the chains of hell.”

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Lee still had a few hours before work, the graveyard shift at the New York City Medical Center. There, for the past two years since graduating from Bronx Community College, she was the night security director for the hospital. And as is the case of most over achievers, she had earned two degrees, one in Criminal Justice and one in Computer Technology. She’d started as a uniformed security guard, or rent-a-cop as she jokingly referred to herself but was soon promoted to the Night Security Director’s position. As director, she was responsible for keeping the computer network running and secure against would be hackers. She also monitored the surveillance cameras scattered throughout the hospital and its exterior. She enjoyed her job but there were times when she wished something exciting would happen, instead of the everyday occurrences of dropped network connections and stray cats setting off the proximity alarm on the back loading dock.

She opened her apartment door, dropped her keys in the empty candy dish on a table next to the door,

and headed directly to the shower.

“Welcome home, Doll.”

“Thanks, Rocky. I’ll be right there but I gotta take a shower first.”

“Let’s eat.”

“In a minute. I’ve got to shower, I said.” She didn’t like speaking to him in that tone but today was not her average day, and her patience had grown thin. She pulled her shirt over her head before she made it to the bathroom, and as soon as she got there she reached in and turned the shower on to warm it up. By the time she finished undressing and stepped into the shower, the steam had already begun to fog over the mirror. She let the hot water pour over her. She watched as the powdery dirt washed down her body and swirl into the drain.

As the water cleansed her, she saw what promised to be a massive bruise on her right arm just above her wrist in the form of her assailant’s hand. She stood there for a minute fixed on the sight of the bruise and despite the temperature of the water, an uncontrollable chill raced through her body. She wrapped her arms around herself to keep warm and to control the violent shaking. She stood there in the steamy water until she stopped shivering and felt warm again.

“Dirty bastards,” she spat out. “Those freaks were more than just weird, they were spooky. Creepy vampire assholes!”

“Let’s eat.” She heard again from the other side of the door.

“All right, all right. I’ll be right there,” she yelled back. “God, give a girl a break, will ya,” she mumbled.

She set the table for two and served up both of their favorite meals. “Come and get it,” she called as she sat down in front of her PB& J and a tall glass of low fat chocolate milk. Rocky flew in from the living room and settled in front of his plate of suet rolled in birdseed.

“Let’s eat,” the cockatoo recited again.

“Oh, God, I need a life,” she groaned and took a long drink of her milk.