



OCTOBER'S

TRICKS

Scott Donnelly

# OCTOBER ' SUNREST

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# T H E N E W B L O O D

Carol Lindon – She is stalked and then brutally murdered because of whom she is related to. Her death, late in the month of October, ignites a mysterious bloodbath.

Deputy Jamie Dart – After the gruesome dispatching of Stewart Hollow's Sheriff, Deputy Jamie Dart is the man for the job, but refuses to take the title out of respect to his former colleague. He finds himself once again in the middle of a horrific October.

Agent Mark Boyd – The Portland FBI hub has sent Agent Boyd to keep an eye on things. His job is to stay hidden while assisting in any possible murder case, and to not panic the town by his presence.

Bud Lockwood – Now with blood on his hands, Bud is afraid of what he might have brought upon Stewart Hollow. But when someone throws a snag into the prophecy he was promised, he begins to doubt everything he believed in.

Tom Parsons – Tom works as a lumberjack, and is in a new relationship with Renee Black. He finds that his new relationship proves to be different than his previous ones, and comes with its' own form of baggage.

Renee Black – She works at the Oregon Trails diner as a waitress, and is trying to support her ten-year old son on her own. She's really into her new relationship, but she still seems to side with her past over Tom.

Eric Hughes – Tom's friend, and fellow lumberjack, isn't so sure about his friends' new relationship. He feels it's forced and moving too fast. Is he jealous, or just looking out for Tom?

Paul Hilton – An ex-lover of Renee, and father of her child, he's come to Stewart Hollow to claim what's rightfully his as well. But his initial interactions with Renee would be enough to keep an eye on him.

Jessica Morgan – She's the young news reporter out of Seattle who was assigned a job in Stewart Hollow with her cameraman, Sean. She seems eager to get a good story out of the town.

Sean Nettle – Jessica's shady cameraman from Seattle knows Stewart Hollow well; his family is from there, but he seems like he doesn't want to go on the assignment at first.

Vivian Lowder – Another resident of Stewart Hollow who has a distant connection to the town's past. She plays a crucial role in someone's disturbing agenda.

Sharon Ferguson – Afraid that she is a target, authorities place Sharon in protective custody almost immediately. But in doing this, it seems the distressed mind of the mysterious psycho becomes more unbalanced.

Officer Dawn Coldwell – She's a fairly new officer who is dedicated to serving Stewart Hollow. She proves to be more than helpful to Deputy Jamie Dart, who seems to be in over his head.

Brian Burnside – When a rainstorm threatens his work site, Tom and Eric's boss decides to shut down and let his crew go for the remainder of the week. But it seems to be good timing when all hell breaks loose.

Dana – She's the new, young receptionist at the Sheriff's Department. Replacing the now deceased Harper Cole. She is worried about the prophecy, and believes that no man is actually capable of pulling off the recent string of occurrences.

Mayor Bernard Hopkins – The mayor's age is catching up with him as he serves his last term as the town's leader. He once again tries to calm his town down, and asks his people for assistance in catching the killer.

Darnell Thompson – The assignment editor out of Seattle is the one who really wants the scoop in Stewart Hollow. He trusts Sean and Jessica to get the story, but insists on checking in with them from time to time.

Ronald Nettle – Sean's seventy-something year old father is quiet and reserved. With his wife, he kind of just goes with the flow.

Mary Nettle – Sean's mother is feisty and jumps at the chance to give the news crew the scoop – turns out she knows more than the police do about Stewart Hollow's past.

**OCTOBER 'SUNREST**

The old Mustang raced across the town's boarder and into Glen Falls. It sped up the winding road, splashing through all the puddles that continued to form in the pouring rain, and into downtown. The car came to a screeching halt outside of Glen Falls Police Station. Dart hopped out from the drivers seat and scurried around to the passenger side. He reached in through the shattered window and unlocked the door, pulling the frantic Jessica Morgan out from the car. She was frazzled, soaked to the bone, and covered in cuts and scrapes.

Dart pulled her up the steps to the Police Station and they barged in, capturing the attention of everyone inside. A man in a suit and tie dropped the stack of folders that were in his hands and rushed to Dart and Jessica.

"What's going on here?" The man questioned loudly, noticing how distraught the two of them were. He noticed the bloody cuts all over Jessica, as well as the puzzling muddy handprints around her neck.

"Who's in charge?" Dart shouted.

"I am," the man said. "I'm Chief Roberts."

"I'm Deputy Jamie Dart from Stewart Hollow," Dart said, trying to catch his breath.

"What's wrong?" Chief Roberts questioned, just as concerned as the rest of the office, who were slowly gathering around.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you..." Dart huffed.

October 28<sup>th</sup> – 6:58 AM - Monday

Seattle, Washington

Two Days Earlier...

The newsroom at KSWB, Channel 10 News was busy. There were stories breaking all over the place and so much to catch up on. The weather report needed tweaked, the sports scores were being input into the ticker, and the morning news anchors were preparing for their imminent screen-time.

Darnell Thompson sat in his office with a young reporter, Jessica Morgan, sitting in a chair in front of him. They were waiting for one more person, given the empty chair next to Jessica. Darnell checked his watch again.

“Okay, now he’s over a half an hour late.” Darnell spoke deeply and irritated.

“He can’t be trusted, Darnell. There are plenty of other photographers that can go with me.” Jessica was a fresh face for their news station. She was right out of college, appealing to the eye, and had just the right amount of spunkiness to keep the viewers attention.

“Well, Sean’s experienced, Jess – five years on the job already, plus he knows Stewart Hollow better than anyone else here; his family is from there.” Darnell explained, just as the door to his office opened.

Sean Nettle walked in, seemingly out of breath. He had his camera bag in one hand and he sat it down next to the empty chair before taking a seat himself. Darnell stared at the scruffy-looking thirty-something.

“You’re late.” Darnell sternly stated the obvious.

“I know, I’m sorry. I overslept. Long weekend.” Sean said with an inappropriate smirk on his face. “So, what’s up?”

Darnell shook off his irritation, and tried to focus. “I’m sending you two to Stewart Hollow, Oregon for a few days.”

“Stewart Hollow, Oregon, home of the Harvest Slasher; home of ghosts, goblins and witches. The only thing missing is Bigfoot.” Sean rambled on with a smile.

Darnell stared at him. “What’s your deal, Sean?”

“Nothing. I just don’t know why you want us there. This year is different. It’s been a pretty quiet October down there. I think it’s safe to say that any murders or prophesized witchcraft would have happened by now. It’s a waste of our time and your money.”

“No it’s not. I want you two there for interviews and such. Get the residents opinions on the town, the Blood Coven, and everything else. People all around the country are going to be



wondering about Stewart Hollow this Halloween, and we're going to be there to give them the scoop; or least give the greater Seattle area the scoop."

Sean didn't respond.

"Plus," Darnell continued, "If anything *were* to happen, we'd be the only Seattle news station on scene."

"Are you hoping for something to happen?" Jessica asked, stunned by Darnell's last comment.

"Of course not. I'm just saying we'd be there for—"

"Ratings." Sean said.

Darnell folded his hands on his desk. "If you leave in the next hour, you'll be there before noon. If you don't want to go, Sean, I can find someone more qualified."

"More qualified? I've been here for five years!"

Darnell shrugged.

"Fine," Sean said annoyed. He stood up and grabbed his camera bag and walked out the door, "I'd like to see my family anyway. They always have interesting things to say."

Jessica looked at Darnell with a smile.

"Be careful, Jess." Darnell said.

Jessica stood up and left the office.

8:00 AM

Stewart Hollow, Oregon

The Oregon Trail diner was packed full of the normal Monday breakfast crowd. Tom Parsons sat alone in a booth in the front of the diner, sipping his coffee. He kept glancing over at one of the waitresses behind the counter. He couldn't keep his eyes off of her. She was as tall as he was, blonde, and had the gentlest eyes. Anyone would be lucky to have her. Good thing she was his. Tom smiled at the thought of it.

Eric Hughes plopped down at the booth startling Tom.

"Jesus, Eric, you about gave me a heart attack." Tom said, setting his coffee cup down.

"Sorry, bro." Eric said. "Did you order yet?"

"Of course not, I was waiting for you."

"Sorry I'm late. Mr. Burnside called. He wants us in at 8:30 – this will have to be a quick bite."

"Alright," Tom said, looking up for a waitress.

"Is Renee working?" Eric asked

"Yeah, but she's working the counter."

Eric looked and saw Renee pouring a fresh cup of coffee for someone sitting at the counter. The man she was pouring it for was a good-looking, muscular man who seemed to be putting on the charm with her. She smiled and laughed back at what ever he was saying.

“Looks like Mr. Muscles over there is flirting with Renee, man.” Eric said in defense of his friend.

Tom had noticed, but tried to ignore it. “It’s alright. She’s a waitress, man. She’s looking for tips.”

“I’m sure that guy isn’t seeing it that way.”

Tom shrugged.

“All I’m saying, bro, that if my girl was in the middle of a flirting match with some random guy for whatever reason, I’d want to rip the guys eyes right out of his face.”

Renee walked away from the guy and set the coffee pot down on the warmer. She looked over in the boys’ direction and waved, smiling at Tom. He waved and smiled back.

“See,” Tom said, “Everything’s fine.”

Eric rolled his eyes.

The Stewart Hollow Police Department was fairly quiet. The holding cells were empty, and only a handful of officers were on duty.

Deputy Jamie Dart walked down the hall and into the old Sheriff’s office where Sheriff Carter’s name had been removed from the door. There wasn’t much of anything in the office anymore; just a desk, file cabinets and a few other essentials. All of Carter’s personal belongings had been removed almost a year ago. Stewart Hollow had lost a good man.

Deputy Dart sat down at the desk and logged onto the computer. He began to pull up old files. Even though most of the case from a year earlier had been closed, Dart couldn’t help but feel a constant sense of dread. He scoured the files, making sure every part of the case had been looked at. The Harvest Slasher, closed. Charlotte Sheldon, closed and locked away. The murders to bring about the Blood Coven – there remained the only mystery.

*Knock, Knock.*

Dart looked up from the computer screen to see of one his young female officers standing in the doorway. “What is it, Dawn?” he asked.

“There’s someone here to see you. He said he’s with the FBI.” Officer Dawn Coldwell spoke in her normal soft tone.

Dart nodded and turned off the computer monitor. “Send him in.”

Dawn walked away and in came a tall man dressed in a casual suit and tie. He had a short buzz cut and wore a light-colored goatee on his face. Dart stood up and shook the Agent’s hand before they both had a seat at the desk.

“I’m Agent Mark Boyd with the Portland Division of the FBI.” He spoke firmly and direct.

“Deputy Jamie Dart.”

“I see your town hasn’t named you the new Sheriff?”

“It’s out of respect. Sheriff Carter was a good man. I didn’t want this town to forget his name or who he was.”

Agent Boyd nodded with a smile. “The Bureau sent me to stay in town for a few days. Just as a precautionary measure.”

“I think were okay, Agent Boyd. October’s almost over and we haven’t had anything worse than a couple parking tickets to hand out. I think were in the clear this year.” Dart spoke, trying to convince himself that everything was going to be different this year. But he wasn’t so sure; no one was. He was just as nervous and scared as the next person.

“Like I said, it’s just a precautionary measure. I’ll stop in once a day for the next few days just to make sure everything is all right and running as it should be. Other than that, you won’t even know I’m here. It’s best not to let the town see an FBI presence this close to Halloween.”

“I would agree. Did you just arrive?” Dart inquired.

“I drove down last night. I’m staying at a small inn right outside of town.”

“Okay. Well, as far as I can tell, everything is fine right now, so if you want to head back to your room until tomorrow, that’d be great.” Dart spoke with a sarcastic tone.

“Deputy, I know you don’t want me here. It’s obvious in your voice. Like I said, it’s only for-“

“Precautionary measures, I know. That’d make it the third time you’ve said that.” Dart stood up just as the phone on the desk started to ring. “If you don’t mind Agent Boyd, I have work to do. You can leave your contact info at the front desk with Dana, and we’ll call you if we need you.”

Agent Boyd stood up. The phone continued to ring and Dart picked it up while giving Boyd an obvious look to leave the office. “Sheriff’s office.” he answered.

Dart listened warily to the other line as he once again felt an all too familiar sense of alarm. Agent Boyd stopped before leaving the room, noticing Dart’s unnerving silence.

“Okay. I’ll be right there.” Dart hung up the phone. He started to feel warm and unsettled.

“Everything okay, Deputy?” Boyd asked.

Dart shook his head. “Come with me.”

Dart and Boyd arrived at 115 Marion Street minutes later. They pulled up in one of the new police cruisers and stepped out. A short, old man stood out on the sidewalk.

“Are you the man who called?” Dart asked, walking up to the old man.

“Yes, yes I am,” he stuttered. “Bob Bowers.”

“Bob, what exactly did you hear last night?” Dart asked.

"It was a little after ten, and I was in bed watching the news. I thought I heard a woman scream, and thought it came from next door, but I wasn't sure. I had the TV on pretty loud." Bob said, pointing to 115 Marion Street. "It made me feel uneasy, ya know, given all the Halloween stuff that goes on here. I looked out the window but didn't see anything until maybe 20 minutes later. Someone walked out of her house."

"Whose house?" Dart asked.

"Ms. Lindon. Carol Lindon. She lives here."

The gears in Agent Boyd's head started to turn. That name sounded familiar to him.

"Why didn't you call us last night?" Dart asked.

"Well, like I said, I wasn't sure if I heard it right to begin with. The TV was loud and I sometimes have a hard time hearing. I figured I'd just check on her this morning, but she didn't answer the door. Now there's a weird smell coming from the house."

Agent Boyd stepped forward, "You said someone left her house last night?"

"Yes, sir. About 20 minutes after I looked out the window. I think it was a man, but I'm not sure. It was dark. He got into a car that was parked across the street and took off back into town."

"Did you see what kind of car?" Boyd asked.

"No, sir. It was dark."

"Okay, Bob, stay here for a minute."

Dart put his hand on his gun and walked up the sidewalk to the house. Boyd followed close. Dart knocked on the door three times, and there was no answer.

"Deputy, isn't Carol Lindon one of the-" Boyd began before Dart interrupted:

"Hold that thought, Agent." Dart put his ear to the door. It was quiet. "Carol?" he called out.

"It smells like something's burnt," Boyd said.

Dart stepped back and rammed the front door a couple times before loosening it up just enough to push it open. A strong odor instantly emerged from the residence and Dart and Boyd both covered their mouths and noses.

They proceeded into the living room where the tan shag carpet had been stained a dark red. With their eyes, they followed the bloodstains to the back corner of the living room where the charred body of Carol Lindon had been hung from the ceiling fan. Against the back wall was a message written in blood and ash: *Burn Witch, Burn.*

10:00 AM

Marion Street was an active crime scene. The yard to the Lindon household was taped off, holding back a slew of reporters and news crews from all over. Carol Lindon's body had been removed about an hour earlier, but there was so much more than just that to investigate.

Deputy Dart walked out of the house, removing his latex gloves. Agent Boyd followed him, doing the same thing.

"Deputy, I've done my research," Boyd began. "If Carol Lindon was a descendent of the Lores family, that leaves two more; Vivian Lowder and Sharon Ferguson. I think it's safe to say they are intended targets as well. They should be removed immediately from their homes and taken into protective custody."

Dart stopped at the bottom of the porch. "You're right." He looked around and spotted Officer Dawn Coldwell chatting it up with a handsome paramedic. "Dawn!"

Hearing her name, and seeing who called it, Dawn immediately rushed to Dart and Boyd's side. "What going on?" she asked.

"I need you to go to Vivian Lowder and Sharon Ferguson's residences', and take them to the station as calmly and quietly as possible."

"Is everything alright?" Dawn asked.

"I'm considering them possible targets. I just need you to get them safely to the station for now. I'll be back there later to deal with them. Got it?"

"Yes, sir!" Dawn said with a wink and a smile before she headed for her cruiser.

"So you were saying that you thought this year would be different, Deputy?" Boyd smirked.

Dart stared at him, aggravated. "You seemed to show up at just the right time, Agent. Didn't you?"

Dart walked away, leaving Agent Boyd standing at the bottom of the porch alone, holding his bloody latex gloves.

Tom Parsons and Eric Hughes were in the woods with their crew of fifteen lumberjacks. They had a camp set up in the foothills of Stewart Hollow. The heavy machinery and constant trucks coming in and out of the area was a very loud and continuous headache.

Eric, carrying an axe on his shoulder, walked over to Tom who was sitting on a freshly cut tree stump, texting. Eric removed his ear plugs and shouted:

"Texting on the job, Tom? C'mon!"

Not hearing Eric over the noise, but sensing him, Tom looked up and set his phone down on his lap. "Huh?"

"Who are you texting?" Eric yelled over the wood chipper behind them.

“Renee,” Tom shouted back. “She cancelled our date tonight.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. She said something came up.”

“Yeah, Mr. Muscles came up.”

Tom shook his head. “No, not Renee.”

“All I’m saying is that your relationship with her is still new. You have a lot to learn about each other. Just watch this kind of stuff, bro. I’m just looking out for you.”

Tom nodded. “I was thinking about asking her if I could take Milo to the movies sometime soon. You know, just the two of us for some bonding.”

The wood chipper shut off, and the noise volume subsided considerably. Eric set the axe down on the ground and knelt down next to his friend. “Just you and her son? You’re about, what, three weeks into the relationship?”

“Yeah.”

“I’d give that more time. It’s too soon to be taking her kid places. That show’s commitment, and it’s too early for that.”

“That’s your opinion. Being with Renee is different than I’m use to. We connect and get along so well - she’s crazy about me.” Tom smiled.

Eric looked at his desperate friend, knowing that he wasn’t going to get his point across. “You know better than anyone. It’s your call.”

Tom nodded. “It *is* my call and I’m going ask her.” He turned his attention back to the phone and started to text Renee again.

Eric grabbed his axe and shook his head as he walked away.

Officer Dawn Coldwell arrived at Vivian Lowder’s apartment and knocked on the door.

“Mrs. Lowder, are you home? This is police. We need to talk to you.”

The door opened, and it was an older man standing on the other side. He looked at Dawn with puppy dog eyes. “Did you find my wife? My beautiful wife?”

“Find her? Are you Vivian’s husband?” Dawn asked.

The old man nodded and looked as if he could cry.

“Where’s your wife, sir?” Dawn asked concerned.

“She said she was going for a walk this morning, and she hasn’t come back yet. I feared the worst, but I was going to give her a little more time before I called you guys. She can get chatty out there with the neighbors and such, so I didn’t think too much of it at first. But now I’m really worried.”

“What time did she go for her walk?” Dawn asked.

“Seven.”

Dawn looked at her watch – it was 10:30. “We’ll be in touch sir.”

Dawn left the Lowder residence and called Deputy Dart on her way out of the neighborhood.

“Dawn, what is it?” Dart answered on the other line, obviously busy at the moment.

“We have a problem,” Dawn began rather frantically. “Vivian Lowder is missing.”

There was silence from Dart’s end of the call.

“I’m heading to Sharon Ferguson’s house now,” Dawn continued.

“Call me as soon as you get her,” Dart said and then hung up.

A blue SUV, with a large KSW5 News logo plastered on either side of it, crossed the city limits and into Stewart Hollow. It pulled into an isolated roadside gas station, kicking up dirt and dust as it came to a stop in front of the pump.

Sean Nettle climbed out from the driver’s seat and began to fuel the vehicle. Jessica got out as well, yawned and stretched her legs. She reached into a bag that was on the front seat floor, and pulled out a voice recorder. She made her way around the vehicle to Sean’s side.

“First things first, I want to stop and see my parents.” Sean said as Jessica passed by him. He watched as she headed for the small building where the attendant sat behind a glass window. “Where are you going?”

“I just want a quote or two from this guy. Then we’ll go see your parents.” Jessica responded without looking back.

She approached the window and smiled at the man behind it. “Good morning, sir. I’m Jessica Morgan with KSW5 News out of Seattle, and we’re here to do a story on your town’s little horror show.” She smiled, held out the recorder and pressed down on the button, igniting the red ‘on’ light. “I was wondering if I could get a quote or two from you.”

“Sure!” the man said, seemingly excited to be part of the story.

“First off all, what is your name?”

“Rodney Holmes.”

“Rodney, because of the threats and murders last year, do you fear that the Blood Coven will return this Halloween? Or are you a skeptic who doesn’t believe in the supernatural?”

“Um, well, anyone who lives around here will tell you that the Blood Coven isn’t supernatural. It was a real group of people who practiced witchcraft back in the day. But, as for them coming back, I don’t think so. Actually, there are a few people who live here today who share the same bloodline with some of the Coven members. You actually came at the perfect time though, because one of them was murdered this morning.”

Jessica froze, not sure if she heard Rodney correctly. “I’m sorry, what did you say?”

“One of the people who share the same bloodline as members of the Coven was killed this morning. It’s all over the radio here.”

“Where did this happen?” Jessica asked, frantically putting away her recorder and grabbing a pen and notepad from her pocket.

“Somewhere on the east side, on Marion Street I think.”

“Thank you, Rodney Holmes!” Jessica said, scratching down the street name. She ran back to the SUV.

“What’s wrong, Jess?” Sean asked, screwing on the cap to the gas tank.

“Hurry up, we’ll see your parents some other time. There was a murder this morning,” Jessica shouted, climbing back into the car.

Hollow’s End Cemetery was quiet. The dying trees scattered about the land were letting go of the rest of their leaves; some dried, some a dark orange – they blew gently across the ground, and weaved in and out of the gravestones where the dead lay just beneath the surface.

A lone shack sat on one of the hills in Hollows End. It was old, and the wooden walls were starting to splinter and chip away. Inside the shack, Bud Lockwood sat in an old ripped and musty chair, staring at his small black and white TV propped up on a bucket in front of him. The local news was on, and the murder of Carol Lindon was the talk of the hour.

Bud sat there with his bloodshot eyes opened as wide as possible, taking in every piece of information he heard. He was nervous; he was terrified. The horrible deeds he had committed a year earlier were to bring about the Coven, not get them killed.

The deceased old woman whom he had cared for, his sinister mother, told him that if he had dispatched of the towns’ eldest, and then a condemned man, a path would be created for the Lores family – The Blood Coven – to return to Stewart Hollow and continue their reign of terror. It was all he knew – his mother had convinced him.

*Did I do it right? Was I wrong with the ones I chose?*

Impossible. He was right. Jack and Theresa McDowell were the towns oldest residents; there was no mistake about it. Sheriff Carter had been fired, let go - *condemned*. He did it right.

Something was wrong.



# T H R E E

A cold wind blew across the valley from the west, and directly into Stewart Hollow. The wind chimes rung in the breeze and some of the residents walking up and down Main Street held tightly onto their hats. It was a very cold October.

The clouds to the west were becoming dark and ominous – a storm was approaching.

Tom Parsons grabbed his coat from his pick-up truck and put it on. He rubbed his hands together, trying to generate warmth for his body.

“Hey, Tom!” a voice called out from a bulldozer near the edge of the tree line. Tom glanced over at Brian Burnside – his boss – climbing down from the 17-ton vehicle.

“What’s up, Mr. Burnside?” Tom asked.

“I just got a call from headquarters. We’re in for a huge storm. I’m going to try to wrap everything up here at the site and send the boys home. We’re expecting heavy rains for the next few days. We’ll pick up on Friday or Saturday. Can you help me clear these men out?” Brian, a forty-something with a dark gray beard said before taking off his hard hat.

“I’m sure I can assist with that.” Tom said, smirking at the thought of having some unexpected time off.

“Thank you, sir!” Brian said enthusiastically before walking off, yelling at his crew to pack it up.

2:15 PM

Officer Dawn Coldwell sat in an interrogation room at the station with Sharon Ferguson, a rough-looking woman in her mid-forties. It was fairly quiet between them.

“How much longer is he going to be?” Sharon asked, starting to get impatient.

“It’s been a busy day here, Mrs. Ferguson. The Deputy will be here as soon as he can,” Dawn said, understanding of her frustration. Dawn wasn’t allowed to tell her anything about why she was there.

There was a quick knock on the door before Deputy Dart opened it. “Sorry I’m late. Dawn, I can take it from here. Thank you.”

Dawn stood up and left the room, closing the door behind her. Dart sat down across from Sharon.

“Deputy, have I done something wrong here?” Sharon asked.

“Not a single thing, Mrs. Ferguson. You’re here for your own protection. I’m sure you’ve heard, but late last night, a woman was murdered – Carol Lindon. Then, this morning, a woman by the name of Vivian Lowder went missing. Now, these two women have something in common with you.”

“The Blood Coven, I know,” Sharon said.

Dart stared at her. "If one's dead and one's missing, that means whoever is responsible may come for you next. We wanted to make sure you were safe." Dart shuffled through a couple papers on his desk. "You have a husband, Jeff, and two little girls, is that correct?"

"Yes."

"We're going to place your family in protective custody for the rest of the week, or until we find whoever is responsible."

"Where are you taking us?"

"I cannot disclose that information right now. It'll be somewhere outside of Stewart Hollow, that's all I can tell you."

"I can't believe something like this is happening," Sharon said, shaking her head.

"We're going to do everything we can to keep you and your family safe. If you share a family connection to the Blood Coven, that means your daughters do to. We want you all to be safe and accounted for," Dart said.

A tear trickled down Sharon's face. "Where's my family now?"

"They're being briefed just like you are. I just wanted to talk to you separately since you would have been the initial target."

"Thank you, Deputy."

Dart smiled. "I'll have Officer Coldwell escort you and your family back to your house. You'll collect the essentials that you'll want to bring and then I have someone who will take you to the safe house."

"Okay."

"You're going to be fine," Dart said, standing up. He left the room, and sent Dawn back in.

Dart walked down the hallway to his office. Agent Boyd was there.

"What do you have for me, agent?" Dart asked.

"The initial tests proved that the burns to Carol Lindon were made postmortem, and possibly with a blow torch. Her neck was slashed too – that's what killed her."

"Let me guess, no fingerprints or any other witnesses."

Boyd shook his head. "Nope. The house is clean, and Bob Bowers is the only witness we have. I talked to all of the neighbors and no one else heard or saw anything."

"Perfect," Dart sighed, feeling tentatively defeated, and sat down at his desk. "Still no word on Vivian Lowder?"

"No. We have some officers going door to door in the area, but so far nothing."

"Let me know the second you find something. We need to put a stop to all of this before it gets worse," Dart said. He looked into Boyd's eyes, "and it *will* get worse."

Dusk loomed over Stewart Hollow, and with it brought a cold steady drizzle of rain and sporadic rumbles of thunder. The dead oak trees outside of Renee Black's home on the edge of town hovered over the land like long skeletal fingers.

A truck pulled up in front of her house and Tom Parsons climbed out, pulling his coat over his head as he dashed for the front door. He knocked and Renee opened the door.

"Come in, Tom. You're soaked!" Renee laughed. She was dressed for a nice occasion; a short black dress with a white shawl draped over her shoulders.

Tom closed the door behind him. "You look nice."

"Thank you," she said, giving him a kiss. "I'm sorry I had to cancel again, Tom. My cousin is only going to be in town for a couple nights, and this is the only night we could get together."

"It's no problem. I'm just glad you're going to let me watch Milo. I've been looking forward to it."

"Milo! Tom's here!" Renee called. Milo, Renee's ten-year-old boy, came bouncing down the stairs in torn blue jeans, a hooded sweatshirt and a sideways flat-rimmed skaters hat.

"Cool hat, man!" Tom said, looking for any kind of connection.

"Thanks." Milo said slightly shy. "Where are we going?"

"Well, there's an arcade just outside of town that I use to go to when I was your age. I'm thinking we'll start there."

Milo smiled, "Okay."

"Tom, I have to finish putting on my make-up. If my cousin comes, can you let him in?" Renee asked.

"Sure."

Renee smiled and headed back upstairs. Tom walked into the living room with Milo close behind him. He looked at all of the pictures of Renee and her son together and could really picture himself in them.

"So you're a construction worker?" Milo asked.

"Sort of. I do a lot of odd jobs. Right now, I'm working as a lumberjack. We're clearing out some of the woods up north for a shopping center that they want to build next year."

"Oh, cool," Milo said, showing Tom's desired interest. A second later, there was a knock at the front door.

Tom walked over and opened it with a friendly smile. There was a man standing there. He was in his mid-thirties, had a scruffy looking face, long black hair and dressed like a biker. The man's appearance threw Tom off, given Renee's current appearance.

"Hi," Tom said hesitantly. "You must be Renee's cousin. What's your name?" Tom extended his hand.

The man looked at Tom, and ignored his friendly gesture. "I'm not shaking your hand. Who are you, and why are you in the same house as my son?"

Tom looked back at Milo, and then back at the man. "You're Milo's dad?"

"Uh, yeah, I just said that," the man said, trying to walk into the house. Tom stood boldly in front of the entrance, blocking the man.

"Let me in. I have to talk to Renee."

"Maybe you should just stay outside," Tom said.

"In the rain? LET ME IN!" the man yelled, becoming enraged.

Renee came running down the stairs and saw Milo backing away from the situation. "Paul?"

"Renee, honey! Tell this jerk to let me in," Paul said.

"What are you doing here?" Renee asked, moving herself in front of Tom. Tom stepped aside, but kept a close eye on things.

"I'm here to take what's mine. I have rights to that kid too you know!" Paul angrily yelled.

"This is not the way to do this, Paul. You need to talk to your lawyer. We can settle this some other time, in the right place."

"Oh, shut up and let me see my son - my Milo." Paul said, shoving Renee out of the way. She grunted as she was bumped back into the door.

"Hey!" Tom shouted, grabbing Paul by the arm. Paul swung around and slammed his fist into Tom's face. Tom stumbled backwards, regained his composure and launched himself at Paul, tackling him to the ground. They wrestled on the floor, tossing each other around, and each of them landing punches.

Milo ran to the phone and picked it up. He dialed 911 and waited for an answer. "There's a fight at my house and my mom was hurt!" he yelled into the receiver. "My address is 78 Willow Crest."

Renee walked into the living room where Tom and Paul were suffering bloody noses, but still swinging their fists like madmen.

"Stop it! Stop it now!" she yelled.

The two men stood up and Tom forcefully shoved Paul in the chest. He flew backwards and crashed into a bookshelf, knocking everything over and shattering decorative glass candles. Paul lay in the rubble, dazed.

Tom turned around and wiped the blood from his nose. He walked up to Renee. "Are you okay?"

Renee slapped him across the face. She was crying and angry. "Why did you do that? Why did you act so crazy?"

Tom was stunned. "I was protecting you. He pushed you!"

"I could have handled him. I know how to handle Paul," Renee said, rushing to Milo's side. She hugged her son. Sirens could be heard over the pounding rain outside, and within a few seconds, a police cruiser pulled up in front of the house. Officer Dawn Coldwell got out with another officer, and they entered the house.

"What's going on?" Dawn asked, looking at Tom. He figured Renee would want to take care of this - she made that perfectly clear. He pointed in her direction, and Dawn followed the hint.

"Miss, what's going on? Were you hurt?"

"My ex-boyfriend came over, uninvited, and started making a scene. He pushed me and then Tom, my boyfriend, came to my aid and tried to stop Paul from hurting anyone else," Renee explained.

Dawn instructed the other officer to detain Paul. As the officer did so, another car pulled up in front of the house. Another man, in his twenties came into the house, stunned.

"Renee?" he said. He was dressed in a pair of dress pants and a blue button-up shirt.

Dawn stopped him at the door. "Who are you?"

"I'm Dale - Renee's cousin. What's going on here?"

Dale rushed to Renee and Milo's side. Dawn looked back at Tom. "I'm going to need a statement from you. Then I think it'd be a good idea if you go home for the night."

Bummed out, Tom looked at Renee. She nodded, agreeing with Officer Coldwell.

The rain had picked up, and the thunder began to rumble more often. A flash of lightning lit up the cloudy night sky in Stewart Hollow.

The edge of the woods was a creepy place to be - it would make for good establishing shots for the KSWB story about the haunted town. Jessica and Sean Nettle sat in their SUV on the side of the road.

"Get out and get the shots, Sean." Jessica said.

"It's raining hard."

"So? This is good stuff. We want the video to be just as creepy as the stories the townsfolk are going to tell. It's all about the atmosphere - you should know that."

"Fine," Sean said with a sigh. He grabbed his camera, strapped on its' protective rain gear and climbed out of the car.

Jessica sat in the heated vehicle while Sean walked up the road a bit. He put the camera over his shoulder and began recording various shots of the sinister looking woods, and of the rain hitting the ground, forming puddles on the side of the road. The camera was rolling for a loud crash of thunder, and it made him smile. This was going to be good stuff. There could even be an Emmy in it for them.

Sean panned from one side of the road to another. Something through the lens caught his eye. There was a bright spot just inside the tree line. He zoomed into try and see what it was,

but it was bright enough to blur the video. He lowered his camera and looked into the trees with his own eyes. It was a fire.

Officer Dawn Coldwell removed the handcuffs from Paul Hilton as she locked him in the holding cell. He sat down on a bench inside of it, holding his busted and bloodied nose.

It was the graveyard shift at the station. Very few officers were on duty. Deputy Dart came into the front of the station from the hallway and looked at Paul sitting miserably in the cell, and then over at Dawn.

“Good work,” Dart said to her.

“Thanks. We’ll hold him overnight, let him sober up and release him in the morning.”

“Sounds like you have everything under control.”

“I try,” Dawn joked.

With a loud crack of thunder, the lights flickered on and off in the station. Dart looked out the window and saw the rain coming down in buckets.

“It’s really coming down out there,” Dart said.

“This storm’s suppose to last through Thursday,” Dawn added.

The phone at the desk rang. Dart walked over and picked it up. “Sheriff’s office.” Dart listened to the caller. “Where?” Dart got slightly nervous. “Okay, I’ll be right over. Stay where you are.” Dart hung up.

“What is it, Deputy?” Dawn asked.

“That was a news crew from Seattle who’re in town. They said there’s something burning in the woods off of Beaker Rd. Can you watch over things here while I head out and investigate?”

“Sure. Call me if you need me though.”

The front doors to the Sheriff’s office busted open, ringing the string of bells hanging from them. Dart and Dawn turned and watched as a soaked-to-the-bone Bud Lockwood busted in, wielding a large knife – the rain pounding on the sidewalk behind him.

“Whoa!” Dart yelled as he and Dawn pulled out their guns and aimed them at Bud. “Drop the knife, Bud!”

“This isn’t how it was suppose to be!” Bud shouted, disoriented and in a frenzy.

“Drop the knife!” Dart reinforced.

“It was I, Deputy. I killed them last year. I killed Sheriff Carter with this knife!” Bud yelled, seemingly deranged.

“Bud, don’t make me shoot you!” Dart exclaimed.

“It’s all wrong! She told me everything, and it was all wrong! What have I done?” Bud said, starting to cry. He lowered the knife and dropped it to the floor. Dart and Dawn were quick to

apprehend him and get him to his knees.

“Where’s Agent Boyd?” Dart asked.

“He went back to his room for the night,” Dawn explained.

“Call him. Tell him to get here ASAP and start looking into Bud’s claims. I have to get to Beaker Road.”

The night was turning out to be eventful and unsettling. Dart raced his cruiser through the pounding storm, his cars’ sirens screaming into the night. He arrived at the parked SUV off to the side on Beaker Road. He hopped out and dashed up the street to where Sean and Jessica were standing.

“Where?” Dart shouted through the rain. Sean and Jessica pointed across the street into the woods, and Dart jogged over to it, igniting his flashlight. He saw the flames shooting up from an isolated spot just within the tree line. He pushed hanging branches and wet weeds out of his way and made it to a small clearing. He stopped when he saw the eerie sight.

In the middle of a circle of large stones, was a wooden cross with a human body hanging on it, engulfed in flames.

# FOUR

October 29<sup>th</sup> – 9 AM – Tuesday

“He confessed to the whole thing. The McDowell murders, Sheriff Carter – he said he was instructed by his mother to bring about the Blood Coven,” Agent Boyd explained to Deputy Dart in his office.

Dart shook his head, angered by the memories of walking in on his slain Sheriff and his fiancé. “Bud Lockwood should be the one burning at the stake.”

“And onto that topic – the early reports are saying that it was in fact Vivian Lowder’s body,” Boyd added. “That makes two of the three blood relatives of the Lores family dead. Sharon Ferguson and her family are in a safe house – are we one hundred percent positive they are unreachable?”

“I’m positive,” Dart said.

Boyd nodded. “What do we do now?”

“Well, if it is the bloodline the killer was after, he should be at a standstill now. There’s nothing else he can do with Sharon Ferguson and her family gone. Let him stew in this for a bit, and he’ll probably give up and make a mistake. Maybe even turn himself in.”

Boyd stood up and headed for the door.

“Agent,” Dart said, standing at his desk. Boyd turned back and looked at him. Dart continued, “Let’s catch this guy before the 31<sup>st</sup> – you don’t know how desperately this town needs a normal, quiet Halloween.”

Boyd smiled, “I know.” Boyd left the office.

The rain was still coming down over Stewart Hollow. Both sides of Main Street were flooding faster than the water could go down the sewage drains.

The Oregon Trails Diner was fairly deserted. Renee Black stood behind the counter sipping her coffee and waiting for her next customer. The front doors opened and Paul Hilton walked in and sat at the counter; his nose bandaged up. He looked at his ex.

“Can I get a coffee please – black,” he said.

Renee stared at him momentarily before she grabbed a coffee mug and sloppily poured him a cup. He sipped it.

“It’s not that hot. Can you make me some fresh stuff?”

Renee forcefully grabbed the mug back and dumped it into the sink behind the counter. “What is your problem, Paul?”

“What on Earth do you mean?” he smirked.



"You come back out of nowhere and demand custody of Milo? I think it's quite obvious you're not fit to be any kind of parent."

"He's mine too, Renee."

"Well, we'll let the courts decide that. And your not helping your chances by being arrested either," she said, starting to brew a fresh pot. "I didn't expect them to let you out so soon."

Paul smiled, "They said they were only going to keep me until I sobered up."

"Drunk, of course."

"Not as much as they thought." Paul grabbed a menu and looked through it. "What's good here?"

Renee didn't answer. The front doors opened again and Eric Hughes walked in, removing his raincoat. Renee was happy to see a friendly face. She smiled at him. "Hey, Eric."

"Hey," Eric responded, noticing Paul sitting at the counter conversing with her. He wasn't sure, but this had to be the guy Tom told him about. Eric chose to sit in a booth against the back wall.

"The coffee is brewing," Renee told Paul. "I'll be back."

She grabbed a menu and brought it over to Eric's booth. "You're up early for not having work today."

"Yeah," Eric said, most of his focus still on Paul. "Is that the guy from last night?"

"Tom told you?"

"Tom tells me everything. It's not fair for you to push him aside for trying to protect you."

"Everything happened so fast last night, Eric. I didn't expect Paul, and I didn't expect my living room to become a boxing ring."

"He cares about you. A lot more than I thought he would at this point. He's really bummed out, and I think you should talk to him," Eric said, handing her back the menu. "I'm not staying, I just thought you should know that your boyfriend is hurt."

Eric stood up, put his raincoat back on and left the diner. Renee went back behind the counter and poured a fresh cup of coffee for Paul. "Call your lawyer, Paul. Then we'll talk."

Paul maliciously smiled as he sipped his coffee.

The rain had calmed to a steady and light drizzle. Sean and Jessica were set up at the park. Sean stood behind his camera set up on a tripod and Jessica stood off camera talking to a female jogger.

Jessica positioned the jogger in front of the camera, and instructed her as to what was going to happen. She'd ask her questions about Stewart Hollow, the Blood Coven, the Harvest Slasher, and she'd have to answer to the best of her knowledge, or give her opinion on the subjects.

Jessica gave Sean the go ahead, and he started rolling.

“What is the atmosphere like these days in Stewart Hollow?” Jessica asked, looking to establish a mood before anything else. The female jogger thought for a moment, and then answered with a nervous stutter in her voice:

“Um, it’s always eerie. It’s kind of like a curse around here anymore. It’s hard to trust people, and you just never know who you’re talking to. They could be your friend or neighbor, but with the way the past couple years have been, they could also be hiding some dark emotions.”

“Did you have any connection to anyone who has died here because of the slashings?” Jessica asked.

“No, but my grandfather, Abe, is a retired mailman. He delivered the letter to the Sheriff’s station a couple years ago that started all of this. He’s felt somewhat guilty for a while now, even though he didn’t do anything wrong.”

Sean’s cell phone started to ring in the middle of the interview. “Ugh, hold on.” He said, shutting the camera off. He saw it was Darnell calling, so he answered.

“Darnell, what’s up?”

“Hey, I heard the news. There’re more killings going on there?” Darnell spoke on the other line.

“Yeah. Two women have been killed.”

“I am so glad I sent you two. What are you doing now?”

“We’re getting interviews with some of the residents.”

“You’re not getting any information on the killings?” Darnell acted surprised.

“Well, the police wouldn’t tell us anything.” Sean said. Jessica looked on, wondering what Darnell was getting at.

“Look, Sean. We need to get the goods. Scrap the original story. Since there’s activity now, cover every single piece of that that you can. Shoot the murder locations, be persistent with the police, talk to local media – maybe anyone who has a connection to the victims. Get me all of it.”

“Okay.”

“Turn on your scanner and listen to the police chatter – we might get lucky and get a good lead or something. Do they have any suspects yet?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Okay. Well, stay on it,” Darnell said.

“You got it, boss.” Sean hung up.

“We need to start asking *who* would want these women dead,” Dart pondered out loud. Mayor Bernard Hopkins sat in his office with him, looking at pictures from the crime scenes. He wasn’t aging gracefully, and spoke with a slight tremble in this voice.

“Someone who might have had a grudge against the coven. Maybe they’re tied to the family somehow?” the mayor suggested.

“Maybe. Was the original coven in any type of feud with other families?” Dart asked.

“Not to my knowledge.”

“The coven was supposed to come back this year and wreak havoc, right?” Dart asked.

“According to the legend, yes.”

“What if it’s someone who’s scared of what the outcome would be?”

Mayor Hopkins was listening.

“I know the whole town has been dreading this October, maybe some more than others,” Dart said. “You take someone who is already off in the head, add the pending possibility of the town being taken over by a supernatural force – it might be too much for them to handle.”

“And they see the only way to prevent any prophecy is to just get rid of it?”

“Exactly. I’ve talked to dozens of people here in town over the past year, and that’s all they ever asked about. Everyone was frightened.”

“It’s a real possibility. But to solve the problem with murder?”

“Like I said, if someone who was already a little off was deeply concerned and terrified, there’s no saying what they might do. Some people can’t handle stress and fear the right way. Fear can make you do some pretty ruthless things.”

The phone at the desk rang and Dart picked it up. “Sheriff’s office.” There was silence on the other line. “Hello? This is Deputy Jamie Dart, can I help you?” Dart asked one more time before he would hang up.

A man yelled on the other line in an angry growl, “Tell me where they are!”

Dart was startled. “Slow down. Where who are?”

“I’m at the Ferguson house. No one is home. Where are the woman and her daughters?” The ominous voice calmed slightly.

Dart knew who it was now – the killer. “You can’t get to her. She’s safe. Tell me who you are and we can end this.”

“It won’t end until they’re dead. You know that. Everyone knows that. They are a threat to our town, and something is wrong with me. I can feel it.”

“Listen,” Dart said, trying to be reasonable, “if you cooperate now, it’s definitely going to benefit you in the long run. Trust me.”

There was silence on the other line.

“It’s over,” Dart added.

“It won’t be over until I see their flesh melt before my eyes. They *need* to burn...”

Mayor Hopkins was stunned. He could make out most of what was being said. Dart thought for a moment, and then continued:

“Tell me who you are. You need help. You’re not the only one who’s scared.”

“If you don’t tell me where Sharon Ferguson and her daughters are, I’ll kill more people until you do. That’s a promise. Happy Halloween, Deputy.”

The man hung up, as did Dart. Dart quickly grabbed the CB radio next to the desk and called for Dawn Coldwell. “Dawn, where are you?”

Her response was almost immediate. “I’m across town patrolling near the park,” her voice crackled over the radio.

“How far out from the Ferguson house are you?” Dart was hurried. He stood up and put his jacket on and grabbed his keys.

“Two minutes.”

“Go there now. I’ll meet you there in five. The killer’s there.”

“Yes sir!”

Dart hung up the radio and dashed for the door.

“Be careful, Deputy. I have a bad feeling about this,” Mayor Hopkins said as he stood up.

“I will. I’ll keep you updated, Mayor.” Dart was gone in a flash.

Dart raced his cruiser through the streets of Stewart Hollow. This would be the best chance at stopping the killer. Even if he had left the Ferguson house, he’d still be in the area. Maybe someone even saw him.

Dart flew up Chester Street and onto the street where Sharon Ferguson and her family lived. But something was wrong. The street was filling with smoke. Dart skidded to a stop in front of the house where Dawn Coldwell’s cruiser sat with its’ lights still flashing. Dart jumped out of his car and looked up at the Ferguson house. It was on fire. Flames poured out from every window and roared up all sides of the home.

“Dawn! Where are you!?” Dart called out into the dark smoke. Neighbors from all over were starting to panic, screaming into their yards and clogging up the street.

“Dawn!” Dart called again. Sirens began to ring out in the distance; one of the neighbors must have called the fire department.

Suddenly, a blood-curdling scream erupted from the burning house. Dart ran up into the yard and stopped when he saw someone coming out of the front door screaming. It was Dawn, and she was dripping in flames.

“Dawn!” Dart dashed up the sidewalk and onto the porch where Dawn dropped to her knees, screaming like hell. The flames were too much and Dart dropped back down the porch steps. He stood there, his eyes watering from the smoke, and watched as his fellow officer burned to death right in front of him.

Noon

“We definitely have a serial killer on our hands,” Mayor Hopkins announced from a podium in front of a massive crowd of media. “So far, three innocent people have lost their lives to this maniac, and the threat for more carnage is still there. The first two victims were distant relatives to the Lores family. The third victim was one of our officers, Dawn Coldwell. As we work to catch this killer, I ask you all to report any suspicious activity you see. If you see someone you know acting strange, report them. If you hear someone talking excessively about the Blood Coven, report them. Every lead will be followed up on.

“We are in this together, as we have been for the past few years. We’ve made it through this before, and we’ll make it through again.”

The press conference was being held at the Sheriff’s Department, and was being aired on all of the local news stations. Tom Parsons sat in the living room of his one bedroom apartment, and turned off the TV, which was airing the breaking news, seemingly numb to the announcement.

His cell phone started to ring, and he saw it was Eric calling. He hit ignore just as there was a knock at his door. He walked over to it and looked through the peephole. Seeing Renee on the other side calmed him, and he opened the door.

“Renee, what’s going on?” Tom asked.

“I was hoping we could talk for a bit,” she said.

“Come in.”

Renee walked in, and took off her jacket.

“Is it still raining out there?” Tom asked.

“Yeah, but not too hard right now.”

They sat down on the couch next to one another and Tom’s cell phone rang again. He pulled it out of his pocket and Renee saw that it was Eric calling again. He hit ignore and set the phone down on the coffee table.

“You’re not going to answer that?” She asked.

“I’ll call him back later.” Tom sat back in the couch and waiting for Renee to initiate the conversation. She didn’t disappoint:

“I want to apologize for the way I acted towards you. I know you were only trying to protect me. I was just completely overwhelmed in the moment and my frustration got the best of me. I’m sorry, Tom.”

Tom nodded. "I was looking out for you and Milo. Believe it or not, over these past few weeks, you guys have really grown on me. I hope we can arrange for me to hang out with Milo again soon."

Renee smiled, "I'd like that." She then squinted as she caught a whiff of something in the air. She sniffed and tried to make it out. "What's that smell?"

Tom smelled the air too, but didn't catch anything odd. "I don't know. What's it smell like?"

"Smoke," Renee said.

"I burned my toast this morning. Maybe that's it," Tom said.

Renee hesitatingly agreed with him. Tom stood up and walked into the kitchen. "Can I get you something to drink, Renee?"

She couldn't help but notice that when he walked away, the odor of smoke disappeared as well.

Jamie Dart sat in his office with his elbow on the desk and his head resting in the palm of his hand. He was staring at his computer screen.

A knock at his door jerked him out of his daydream. He saw Dana, his young receptionist, standing in the doorway holding a thick, black covered book.

"Deputy," she said in a quiet, feminine voice.

"Dana, what is it?"

"First of all, I'm sorry about Dawn. She was a great officer."

"She'll be missed, that's for sure," Dart sighed. "What can I do for you?"

"Well," Dana began, focusing her attention on the book she was carrying, "I was reading about the Blood Coven, and I'm starting to get a little worried."

"About what?"

"Well, according to this book, the Blood Coven returns every fifty years to torture the town."

"They're all just stories, Dana. The coven is long gone, and obviously you know what's happened to the distant relatives."

"I know, but it says here that fifty years ago, there were a rash of unsolved fires. A barn just outside of town was burned to the ground, and several people spotting random fires in the woods nearby. Also, I looked into the archives just out of curiosity, and there are three unsolved missing persons cases from then."

"What are you getting at?"

"What if the stories are real? What if whoever is doing this was around fifty years ago?" Dana said, genuinely concerned.

"They're not real," Dart chuckled. "Someone just wants us to believe the legend. Someone in town is killing people again. Carol Lindon had her throat slashed and was burned directly with

a blowtorch – the coroner confirmed it. Vivian Lowder was intentionally crucified to the cross in the woods and set on fire. And as far as the Ferguson house goes, we got a call from someone – a man – claiming to be at the house moments before it was set on fire. He made his motive perfectly clear.”

Dart sat there for a moment and waited for a response from Dana. She was quiet.

“Also, if someone was around fifty years ago to start those fires, they’d be too old now to physically move bodies or hang them from a ceiling fan.”

“Maybe he had help. Maybe it’s like his son or something helping him?” Dana added, Dart just shook his head.

“Dana,” Dart grabbed her attention. “I appreciate the concern, but you just have to realize that there are really sick people out there.”

Dana stood there and let Dart’s words sink in. Feeling uneasy, she left his office.

No sooner than Dana left, Agent Mark Boyd trotted into the office with paperwork in one hand and a smile on his face.

“Good news, Deputy.” Boyd was unusually cheerful.

Dart grabbed the paperwork from the Agent and studied it. He saw black and white scans of fingerprints. “What’s this?”

“Believe it or not, even with the rain, we found partial fingerprints on one of the rocks that circled the burning cross and full fingerprints on a blow torch that was found at the Ferguson house.” Boyd was eager. “They’re running the prints now – we should know in about ten minutes who left them there.”

“This is great news!” Dart had a smile on his face for the first time in days.

Sean and Jessica stood outside of an old colonial style house on the south side of Stewart Hollow. Sean knocked on the door and waited for his parents to answer.

Jessica held her jacket over her head, protecting her hair from the steady drizzle. “We can’t be any longer than an hour, Sean. Darnell was pretty insistent on what he wants.”

“I know. I just want to see my mom and dad while I’m in town. They’ll understand if we can’t stay,” Sean explained.

The door opened up and Sean’s seventy-year old parents stood before them, excited to see their son.

“Come in!” his mother cried out with a tear. His father had a big smile on his face too, and hugged Sean as he and Jessica walked into their home.

A few minutes later, they were all sitting around the living room. Sean’s mother had made hot chocolate, and everyone was enjoying it.

“You must be Jessica,” Sean’s mother said. “I’m Mary and this is my husband, Ronald.”

“It’s nice to meet you both,” Jessica said. “How long have you lived in Stewart Hollow?”

“All of our lives,” Ronald said, wheezing as he spoke. “Born here, retired here, and we’ll die here. Stewart Hollow is all we know.”

Jessica smiled and sipped her hot chocolate.

“It’s good to see you guys,” Sean said. “I was excited when they wanted to send us here.”

Jessica rolled her eyes, but kept a polite smile on her face.

“I take it these murders have made it to the national news, if you guys are here,” Ronald said.

“Well, they actually sent us here before the murders happened to try and get a follow-up piece on your town. My boss wanted interviews with people, their theories, fears, etc,” Jessica said.

“Well, everyone is scared, that’s for sure,” Mary said. “Including me.”

“There’s nothing to be scared of, honey,” Ronald said, trying to comfort his wife. “The guy was only trying to kill the blood relatives of the coven. I’m pretty sure everyone else is safe.”

Mary looked at her husband. “Yeah, but which blood line?”

Sean and Jessica’s interest was sparked. What did she mean, *which* bloodline? “What are you talking about?” Jessica asked.

Mary turned back to the young reporter. “There were three families involved in the original Blood Coven. There were the Lores, which were a horrible, horrible family. They were the one’s guilty of all the deadly witchcraft; fires, murder, torture...Then there were two other families, the Kohns and the Farmers. Even though the other two families were still guilty of some horrific things, they ended up in a feud with the Lores, and most of them were killed.”

“I had no idea. Could we possibly interview you guys about this? It would make a great story,” Jessica asked, eagerly putting her mug on the coffee table.

“Jess...” Sean said, shaking his head. “These are my parents.”

“Oh we don’t mind, darling,” Mary said to her son, fluffing up her hair with her hand. “Do we, Ron?”

“I guess not.”

Sean shrugged his shoulders and headed out to the SUV to get his camera gear.

“You know, sweetie,” Mary addressed Jessica, “It wouldn’t surprise me one bit if there were still blood relatives of all of the families out there.”



## SIX

Dart and Boyd sat in the old Sheriff's office, impatiently awaiting the results of the fingerprints. They both had their fingers crossed for a match.

Eddie Wong, a forensics expert, walked into the office with a folder in his hand. He laid the folder down in front of the two men and opened it up. "We have an exact match," Wong said, slamming his finger down onto the paper inside the folder.

Dart and Boyd leaned in and studied the results. There was a picture of a young man on the paper with his name and information typed next to it. Wong explained:

"His name is Tom Parsons. He was picked up for drunk driving about five years ago, so we had his prints on file. He lives right here in Stewart Hollow, and has a mild history of anxiety disorders. He lives alone in an apartment building just down the street."

"We got him!" Boyd shouted.

"Let's go!" Dart said, jumping up from his desk and putting his jacket on.

Dart's police cruiser flew up Main Street with its sirens blaring. There were multiple other cruisers following close behind. Dart was prepared for the worst.

In the passenger seat, Agent Boyd checked his pistol to make sure it was loaded and that he was ready for anything that might come their way.

All of the cars came to a screeching halt in front of a tall apartment building at the corner of Main and Franklin. All of the officers leapt out of their vehicles, guns in hand, and made their way towards the building.

"You guys stay here and be ready!" Dart order a group of officers. "You and you," he yelled at two others, "follow behind me. Agent, you come with me too."

In a strategic manner, Dart dashed for the front doors to the apartment building with Boyd and two of his officers following closely behind.

"Stay close," Dart instructed.

"Look out!" An officer out in the street shouted. He pointed up at the building and everyone looked, Dart and Boyd included. A bright flash was seen in a window on the fifth floor and then the glass shattered as a burning figure fell from it, slamming down hard into the top of a parked car. The burning figure let out a blood-curdling scream as she slammed down to her death.

"Go there!" Dart yelled at his two officers. He ran into the building with Boyd right behind him. "Stay here in case he comes down!" Dart told Boyd, pointing at the elevator. Dart opened the door next to the entrance and ran up the stairs.

Dart busted open the door to the fifth floor and ran down the hall, looking for apartment 5-F, Tom's residence. He stopped in front of it, and with one forceful kick to the door, it flew open.

Dart aimed his gun in and saw Tom Parsons standing in the living room with a knife held to his own neck. "Drop the knife, Tom!"

"I can't stop!" Tom shouted in a maniacal tone.

"Drop it!" Dart yelled again at the top of his lungs. Tom stood there, trembling with the blade slowly starting to push into his neck.

"Deputy, you have to stop it," Tom said, pouting.

"Stop what? Who just fell from your window?"

"Renee." Tom was starting to cry uncontrollably. "She smelled the smoke on my jacket from the house."

"The Ferguson house? You were the one who called?" Dart asked.

Tom nodded, and with her free hand wiped the tears from his face. "I'm sorry, Deputy. I just can't stop doing it. I told you something was wrong with me."

"Tom, drop the knife and come with me. We'll get you all the help you need."

"That can't be done. I've made a mess, and I couldn't help myself. I just couldn't..." Tom pulled the knife quickly across his neck and blood began to spray out. He gurgled and dropped the knife, then dropped face first into the floor.

Dart lowered his gun, aghast by what he'd just witnessed. He watched as Tom bled out onto the carpet, motionless.

The thunder had returned to Stewart Hollow, and with it brought a dangerous display of lightning strikes. The rain continued to dump down from the dark sky, making the latest crime scene messier than it already was.

Inside Tom Parsons' apartment, the police were gathering up every piece of evidence they could get their hands on. Forensic officers dusted for prints, flashed photographs and tried to get an accurate portrayal of the crime.

Dart put on his latex gloves and opened up a drawer on one of the end tables near the couch. He fingered through the miscellaneous items but didn't see anything that struck him as odd. He turned around and grabbed one of the forensic officers.

"Have you found the murder weapon yet? Anything that could have caused Renee Black to be set on fire?" Dart asked.

"Not yet. No matches, blow torches, lighters...nothing. We're still looking though," the officer said.

Dart nodded and let the officer go. He then heard a commotion coming from down the hall. He walked out of the apartment and saw Eric Hughes trying to fight his way through the mob of officers and paramedics.

"Let me through! Where's Tom?" Eric cried out.

Dart walked down the hall, taking off his gloves. "Who are you?"

"My name is Eric Hughes. I work with Tom; we're friends. What's going on?"

Dart pulled Eric aside and they stood at the end of the hallway away from everyone.

"What's going on, Deputy?" Eric asked fearfully.

"Tom killed himself. He was the one setting people on fire. Did anything about him strike you as odd lately?"

Eric, in shock, tried to wrap his head around what Dart just told him. "No, he's usually a pretty chill guy. He did snap though yesterday at Renee's house. Her ex-boyfriend came by unexpectedly and it caused an issue. The police came and everything."

"So, acting out like that is not a usual custom of his?"

"Not one bit. He's always pretty calm. He was really hurt after the incident because Renee didn't agree with him trying to protect her."

"What's her ex-boyfriend's name?"

"Paul, I think. Paul Hilton."

"Okay, we'll have to try and track him down and question him."

"So, Tom is..."

"I'm sorry for the loss of your friend," Dart said, putting a comforting hand on his shoulder. "But this is all over now. We'll get this mess cleared up by tomorrow, and maybe for once this town can enjoy Halloween."

Eric didn't know what to think. His friend just killed himself. And even more baffling, his friend was guilty of the murders.

8:00 PM

Agent Boyd walked into the police station. Dana sat at the front desk, and greeted him.

"Good evening, Agent," she said with a smile of relief on her face.

He smiled back, "You can call me Mark."

"The Deputy is in his office with the Mayor, Mark. Go on back."

"Thanks, darling," Boyd said as he removed his coat. He walked himself down the hallway and to the right where the door to the Sheriff's office was closed. He knocked and let himself in. Dart was sitting at the desk, and Mayor Hopkins sat in a chair against the wall. They were in the middle of a conversation.

"I'm going to be heading back to Portland in the morning," Boyd said, "I just wanted to stop in one more time to see what the latest was."

"I was just explaining to the Mayor that we have enough evidence to prove that Tom Parsons was guilty of the murders of Carol, Renee, Vivian and Dawn. With all of the people we've interviewed today, we simply can't get an alibi for him during any of the murders. His fingerprints were found at the scene in the woods, and he was obviously present when Renee

was killed. Plus, his words up in the apartment – although odd – said it all. He claimed he ‘couldn’t stop’, and he ‘couldn’t help himself’.”

“The boys’ fear got the best of him,” Mayor Hopkins added.

The men sat in silence for a moment, reflecting on the days’ horrific events, and then the Mayor stood up:

“The bloodline killer is history, and I can already feel a calmness coming over the town. Maybe we can have a nice last couple of days in October for once.”

The Mayor extended a hand to Boyd and shook his. “Agent, it’s been a pleasure. Dart, I’ll be in touch.”

“Have a good one, Bernard,” Dart said. Mayor Hopkins left the office slowly.

“Anything else?” Boyd said.

“Nope,” Dart sighed big in relief. “I just have a couple things to wrap up and write my report. We interviewed Paul Hilton, and it turns out he’s the legal father of Renee’s son, Milo. So were letting Paul take his son. And just in case you wanted to come, Dawn’s family informed me that they’re having her showing and funeral on Saturday.”

“I’ll be there,” Boyd assured the Deputy. “I’ll be in touch.”

“Have a good night and a safe trip back in the morning. I’m going to call my officer down in Lake County and have him bring Sharon Ferguson back in the morning.”

“That’s like three hours away.”

“I had to make sure she was safe.”

“You’re a good cop, Jamie. Take care.”

Agent Boyd left the Deputy alone in the office. Dart picked up the phone and dialed a number. He let it ring a few times and then it went to a voicemail:

“This is Donald Rains, please leave a message,” the voicemail said, and then beeped.

“Rains, it’s Dart. Not sure if you saw the news, but everything here in Stewart Hollow is over. You can bring Sharon Ferguson and her family back in the morning. Call me as soon as you get this to confirm.” Dart felt relieved. “It’s all over.”

He hung up the phone and stood to his feet. After stretching, he walked out of the office and down the hall towards the lobby. He saw Dana sitting there, reading a book.

“Do we have coffee?” he asked.

“I can brew some,” she said, leaving the comforts of her desk.

Dart glanced back at the book on her desk. “What are you reading?”

“I’m still glancing through the Blood Coven stuff,” she said, filling the coffee pot with water.

“You’re still not convinced, huh?”

“No, I do believe that Tom Parsons was guilty. But his reasoning didn’t make sense.”

“How?”

“Well, he thought by killing the blood relatives, he could prevent the Coven from returning. According to Bud Lockwood, when he was ranting and raving in the cell last night before they escorted him out of here, he said what’s done is done; there’s no way to reverse what he’d done. You should talk to Bud.”

“Dana, its all folklore; supernatural tales passed on from one generation to the next. At the end of the day, it’s people who are evil. We’ve dealt with evil people for three straight years now, claiming to be something superior to what they really are. People are evil; that’s the bottom line.”

Dana reluctantly nodded and continued to make the coffee.

The rain was coming down hard, and the thunder continued to roll in the black clouds in the night sky. Boyd was driving through the winding roads in the woods to the north, heading back to his motel.

He flipped his windshield wipers on high and sat forward, trying to see through the hazardous weather. Something up ahead of him caught his eye. Flashing red lights to the left side of the road. It was a car, possibly broke down. He pulled up beside is and tried to look into it to see if someone was in need of help. He rolled down his window to see better – there was no one in the car.

“Hello?” Boyd called out into the rainy night. He looked around and didn’t see anyone. He pulled his vehicle up in front of the idle one and got out, putting the hood from his raincoat over his head.

A loud crack of thunder shook the Earth and startled him. He walked up to the mysterious vehicle and looked in the windows. No one was in there.

“Who’s there?” a man’s voice cried out from behind Boyd. He turned around and in perfect timing, lightening lit up the sky and the woods off the side of the road. He saw a man coming from the tree line towards him.

“I’m Agent Mark Boyd from the FBI? Is this your car, sir?” he asked.

“It is. What are you doing here?” the man yelled over the hammering rain. The man got close enough for Boyd to make him out. He noticed his gray beard first.

“I saw your car sitting here and didn’t know if you were in need of help. What’s your name?”

“Brian. Brian Burnside. I’m running a work site up here; we’re clearing some of the land for a shopping center due next year. I was up here checking out the site to see if this rain had messed with any of our work.”

“Oh, okay.”

“But then I saw something weird,” Brian added surprisingly.

“What?”

“There was a figure standing in the middle of the road in the rain. I couldn’t make them out, but it almost looked like they had on a large jacket, or some kind of hooded cloak. I pulled off to the side of the road and got out of my car, and they were nowhere to be found. I thought I heard some branches cracking off in the woods there, so I walked in a bit to see what it was, but then it all got quiet – then I saw you pull up.”

“Did you see this figure leave?”

“No. It was almost like they just vanished. I didn’t remove my eyes from it for maybe more than two seconds. That’s not enough time for someone to just disappear – especially since my headlights were on it.”

Boyd glanced around. “Maybe you should just head on home. I’ll call the Deputy and see if he wants to send someone up here to investigate.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Brian said as another boom of thunder vibrated the ground. “It’s getting creepy out here anyway.”

“Have a good night, sir,” Boyd said, and walked back towards his car.

Without warning, a sudden, heavy gust of wind buzzed just over top of Boyd’s head, causing him to duck, and made a splashing thud on the pavement behind him. “Whoa!” he cried, startled. “What was that?”

He stood back up and looked at Brian. Brian was pointing behind Boyd, his eyes wide in terror. He tried to say something, but a frightening tension prevented him from even speaking. He shook his arm violently, emphasizing that there was something behind Boyd.

Agent Boyd swung around quickly and a look of horror froze on his face. His eyes widened; he’d never seen anything like it in his life. Without warning, a burst of flames shot up Boyd’s legs and engulfed his entire body within seconds. He screamed and ran out into the road.

Brian turned and started to run back towards the woods, but was instantly caught ablaze. He collapsed in a muddy ditch on the side of the road and burned to death. Boyd ran in circles, screaming loudly, before falling to the ground. As the fire burned him from the inside out, he could have sworn he heard maniacal, inhuman laughter cackle in the stormy night.

# SEVEN

October 30<sup>th</sup> – 7AM – Wednesday

Deputy Jamie Dart buttoned up his tan uniform and pinned on his silver badge. He straightened himself up in the mirror and then took a sip of his coffee before setting it back down on the bathroom sink.

He walked from the bathroom, down the hall and into his living room where the TV was on. The news was reporting that Tom Parsons had committed suicide after confessing to killing four people.

The news anchor mentioned something about Halloween, and the story cut to an interview with Mayor Hopkins announcing that for the first time in two years, he would allow the public to go trick or treating if the weather permitted it. He explained this with a huge smile on his face and relief in his voice.

Dart couldn't help but share his smile. The town had sat in an eerie darkness for the past three years that it wasn't accustomed to. They needed this; the kids needed this - Halloween could be fun again.

The cell phone sitting on the coffee table began to ring, and Dart picked it up quickly. "Hello?"

Dana was on the other line, speaking with a slight shiver in her voice. "Deputy, are you on your way in?"

"I'll be leaving in a just a minute. What's up, Dana?"

"Someone just called in and said they saw two dead bodies on Flanker Road – burned to death."

Any relief that Dart had quickly dissipated. *How could that be? Tom Parsons was dead!*

"I'll head right over," he said. "Have you been there all night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go home, Dana. I'll have someone cover you for the morning. Get some rest."

"Thank you, Deputy."

Dana hung up, as did Dart. He stood in his living room; the happy news report in the background became nothing but a blunt ringing in his ears. *How could there be more bodies?*

Dart hopped in his cruiser and flew uptown, ignoring all of the traffic signs and lights. The rain had stopped, but the overcast still left the air damp and cool. He needed to see what was going on. Flanker Road had already been blocked by police tape by the time he arrived. Dart pulled up as close as he could then jumped out and entered the crime scene.

"Who can tell me what's going on?" Dart shouted.

“Over here, Deputy!” a man’s voice called out. It was Eddie Wong, the stations’ top forensics officer.

“Eddie, what’s going on here?” Dart asked, approaching the man.

“Two cars, two dead bodies. We have a blue Kia off to the side of the road with its’ hazards on. Then we have a black Buick in front of it. One body, burnt to a crisp in the ditch over there,” Wong pointed, “and another body in the middle of the road, once again, completely burned.”

“That’s Agent Boyd’s car,” Dart said, pointing at the Buick. He moved closer to the body in the road and studied it momentarily. “That’s Mark Boyd.”

“We know,” Wong said. “We looked at the registrations in the glove boxes. The other man is Brian Burnside.”

“Can you tell how they were burned?” Dart asked. “Was it a blowtorch?”

“Unlikely. A blowtorch would have a point of origin – a darker spot where the initial burning started. I can’t seem to find any origin spot on either body. They actually appear to have been burned from the inside out,” Wong explained.

“How does that happen?”

Eddie Wong shrugged his shoulders. “I really don’t know.”

Dart stepped back, completely astonished. He looked at the bodies again, and then looked at his surroundings. It was an isolated road, surrounded by woods. He turned to a group of officers:

“Hey! I want these woods checked for any sign of someone. Footprints, personal belongings – look for anything, got it?”

The officers nodded and broke away, splitting up into the woods.

The front door to Dana’s one bedroom apartment opened and she walked in, tired. She removed her jacket just as her brown-colored miniature schnauzer trotted through the living room and to her feet.

“Buffy!” Dana said with a smile. She knelt down and pet her dog as he rolled over onto his back. “It’s good to see you!”

Buffy barked and ran back into the kitchen where he began to eat from his bowl. Dana walked in, plopped down on the couch and turned the TV on. The annual horror movie marathon was on and they were airing a cheap low-budget science fiction movie, “Invasion of the Creatures.”

Dana kept it on for a minute and laughed at the ridiculous premise. An abrupt crashing sound grabbed her attention and she turned around to face the kitchen. “Buffy?”

She hopped up and jogged into the kitchen. “Buffy, are you okay, baby?” She walked in the kitchen and Buffy wasn’t there. “Buffy?” she called out. She looked around the kitchen but



couldn't find the source of the crash. She opened a couple of cabinets but everything was still stacked and organized like normal.

Dana turned back and walked into the living room. "Buffy, where are you?" A loud thud came from the bedroom down the hall. She walked slowly down the hall towards her bedroom. The door was closed as it normally was. She turned the knob slowly and opened the door a crack. "If anyone's in here, I'm calling the cops!"

There was no answer from the bedroom. She held the door open a crack for just a second longer and then pulled it shut again. She backed down the hallway just as the electricity went out with a quick surge. She gasped and jumped back around. She crept her way back into the living room, keeping her eyes open and her mind alert. She stopped in the middle of the room and looked around. The silence was overwhelming and a tear began to run down her cheek.

Right then, an ice cold wind blew on the back of her neck and paralyzed her; she could feel each and every goose bump rise from her skin. She stood in the middle of the room, unable to move a muscle, and started to squeal and whine.

"What's happening?" she softly pouted to herself. Dana remained stiff and stared straight ahead just as a dark, cloudy figure materialized in front of her. Dana's eyes were wide and the terror she was feeling was unlike any she'd ever felt before. The figure took its' full form and Dana screamed at the top of her lungs.

Dart arrived at the station an hour later, completely puzzled. He sat down in his office and felt a little fuzzy. He scratched his head, and then pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. He dialed Officer Donald Rains again. It went straight to voicemail.

"Rains, it's Dart again. I never heard back from you last night. Please call me immediately – we have a problem, and I'm going to need to you keep Sharon Ferguson and her family there a little longer. Please call me back."

Dart hung up and heard a young woman's voice down the hall from his office.

"Hello?" the woman called. Dart looked down the hall and saw a Jessica Morgan and Sean Nettle standing in the lobby looking for assistance.

"Can I help you guys?" Dart asked, walking into the lobby.

"Deputy," Jessica began, "remember us? We were the ones who called in–"

"The burning cross. Yeah I remember," Dart said. "What do you need now? I'm extremely busy."

Jessica turned to Sean, and he spoke up. "Well, we have some information on the Blood Coven that not a lot of people know. We think you need to hear it."

"I don't have time for this."

"You should make time." Sean insisted.

Dart hesitated for a moment and then gave in. "What?"

“We were given a tip of information, and then went to the library yesterday to research it more before we’d actually come to you. We got some solid facts out of the research, and we think they facts are extremely important to what’s going on here.”

“I’m listening,” Dart said, becoming slightly impatient.

“Tom Parsons was killing the blood relatives of the original coven. Well, as it turns out, there were three families in the Blood Coven. The Lores, the Farmers, and the Kohns. So, which bloodline was he trying to get rid of?” Sean said, before continuing:

“Our research shows that the Lores were the truly evil ones – demonic in every possible way. They’d skin people alive, possess innocent people with thoughts of murder and malevolent spirits, burn down homes and pretty much set fire to anyone that wasn’t part of their family. Now, the Farmers and the Kohns were part of the coven too, but not nearly as dangerous. They’d practice witchcraft, sacrifice animals, preach their beliefs, and only on extremely rare occasions would they actually commit a crime.”

Dart was listening intently as Sean pulled out a notepad from his coat pocket. He opened it up and showed Dart a page full of names and notes. He explained more:

“We went back through the family trees and discovered that Carol Lindon was a direct descendant of the Kohns family. Vivian Lowder was a descendant of the Farmers family. Now here’s where it gets good,” Sean said, flipping the page to reveal two more names scratched down. “There are two names associated with the actual Lores family. Pamela Lockwood and Sharon Ferguson.”

Dart was in shock. “Pamela Lockwood was Bud Lockwood’s mother – she died last year. And Sharon Ferguson...”

“She’s in protective custody, right?” Jessica asked, already knowing the answer.

“I can’t get a hold of my officer who’s watching after her,” Dart said. “Sharon Ferguson?” He couldn’t seem to wrap his head around it.

Jessica took a deep breath. “Deputy, the Blood Coven returning to Stewart Hollow may not be as impossible as you thought.”

# EIGHT

Noon

Milo Black sat in the motel room with Paul. He stared out the window and watched as the rain started to fall again just outside of Stewart Hollow.

Paul Hilton sat on the edge of the only bed in the room. He looked at his son, "So do you think you'd want to move with me to California?"

Milo shook his head. His mother had just been killed and he was sitting in the motel room with a father who he'd only met on a handful of occasions.

"I'm sorry about your mom," Paul said. Milo didn't respond. "We need to figure something out, Milo, because I have to be out of this room by tomorrow. Do you want to run back into town and get some of your things?"

"Why did this have to happen?" Milo asked, mostly rhetorical.

Paul didn't have an answer for his son. There was a knock at the door and Milo quickly looked at it.

"Who is it?" Paul asked Milo, who was still by the window.

"I don't know," the ten-year old responded.

"Well, didn't you see someone walk by the window to the door?" Paul asked, standing up and reaching for the knob. He opened the door and a gust of heavy wind blew in hard and knocked Paul to the ground. Milo backed into the corner of the room and he watched as three black-hooded figures entered the room. One was tall, roughly six foot, and the others were significantly smaller, standing on either side of the taller one. The three figures seemed to hauntingly hover just above the floor.

The two smaller ones slowly approached Milo and reached out for him. Milo squirmed as he tried to make out faces under the hoods, but he couldn't; under the hoods were too dark.

Paul stood to his feet and faced the tall figure. "What do you want?" Paul squealed.

The tall figure raised one of its arms and held its hand in a tightly clenched fist. The fist began to shake and then one finger shot out and pointed directed at Paul's face, and with that, Paul head burst into flames. He grabbed his head and stumbled backwards into the dresser where he collapsed, screaming like hell.

With one swift move, the two smaller cloaked figures snatched Milo as he screamed and vanished into a twisting puff of black smoke. The taller figure vanished as well, leaving Paul Hilton laying on the floor, burning.

Dart hung the phone up hard at his desk after another call to Officer Donald Rains' went straight to voicemail. Dart sat at the desk angrily for a moment. He was having a hard time

accepting what might be going on in Stewart Hollow; it seemed impossible – surreal and impossible.

The phone then started to ring, and he picked it up. “Sheriff’s Department. This is Deputy Jamie Dart.”

“Hi Deputy,” a man’s voice said on the other line. “My name is Chief Ray Harris from the Lake County Police Department.”

Dart was listening. “How can I help you, Chief Harris?”

“We have a huge problem here. The house that our records tell us was a safe house for a family from your town has burned down. Two people are dead and three people are missing.”

Dart was stunned, but his gut told him not to be surprised. Chief Harris continued:

“The deceased have been identified as an officer from your department, Donald Rains, and a man in his forties, Jeffrey Ferguson. We understand it was the Ferguson family who were in protective custody. The woman, Sharon, and her two daughters are missing.”

The search was on. Dart raced all over town, looking for anything out of the ordinary. He now believed Sharon Ferguson and her daughters were in Stewart Hollow, and in that case, the Lores family had indeed returned. His worry now – what were they capable of, and what exactly could he expect to happen? More bodies? More fires?

Dart returned to the Police Department around 5:00 PM. He turned his engine off and entered the building. The darkness and the silence immediately caught his attention. He stood in the lobby – it was empty and the lights were out. He flipped the switch by Dana’s desk – nothing. The power seemed to have been cut.

He noticed a faint, flickering light coming from down the hall. He slowly made his way down it and to the Sheriff’s office. The door was open and he glanced in, seeing the source of the flickering light.

The office had become a sort of shrine; carved and lit pumpkins sat everywhere, lighting up what was otherwise a dark room. The desk had been shoved off to the side and in the center of the room was a chair, which sat Eddie Wong – the forensic expert. He was strapped to the chair by duct tape, and his mouth was taped shut as well. He had a cut to the top of his head, which was bleed profusely, and the look in his eyes was one of sheer terror. Standing behind Eddie Wong was the main attraction...

Dana, with her eyes glazed in a haunting stare, stood behind the chair, holding a fire axe. Dart immediately drew his gun and aimed it at Dana.

“What are you doing?” he asked calmly but nervously.

Dana took a minute to respond, and when she did, she spoke in a slow, monotone voice. “They’ve returned.”

“Who?”

“The one’s this town should have always been afraid of. The founding family of the Blood Coven...the Lores.”

“Dana, put the axe down. You’re not right.”

“It’s a simple message they want me to send, Deputy.”

Dart could tell Dana wasn’t herself. It was almost like her mind had been taken over, making her act in a way that was unlike her - like she was possessed. Could Tom Parson’s have been possessed? He claimed something was wrong with him, and that he couldn’t help himself.

“Dana, is Sharon Ferguson making you do this?”

Dana didn’t respond. She stood still and stared straight ahead, gripping tighter and tighter onto the fire axe.

“Dana...”

“It’s a simple message. She wants you to know that everyone will die, and the Lores will finally be done. Everyone will burn...”

Dart took a step forward, and Dana raised the axe in response to it. “Dana, drop it or I’ll shoot!”

He noticed her eyes turned bloodshot in an instant. She spoke, with the axe raised high above her head: “A child will be sacrificed tonight, and this town will not see another Halloween.”

Eddie Wong grunted under the duct tape. Dart saw the fear in his eyes.

Dana smiled maliciously. “Happy Halloween...”

Dana slammed the axe down hard, slipping Eddie Wong’s head wide open. Blood poured out onto the floor and Dart fired shot after shot into Dana until she hit the wall behind her and collapsed to the ground.

Dart looked away from the gory sight and tried to regain his composure. A loud shriek from a woman outside caught his attention and he raced back down the hallway and outside into the pouring rain.

A block away from the station, Dart saw a small crowd of people standing outside of an old church. They were all looking up and screaming. Dart ran through the puddles and to the crowd of onlookers. He looked up to the roof of the church, at the bell tower.

Three hooded figures stood there, two smaller than the one in the middle. The tall one in the middle held on tightly to a young boy. Dart immediately recognized the boy – Milo Black. He was crying and screaming. Dart aimed his gun up to the roof.

“Let the boy go!” he shouted.

The three figures ominously stood there motionless, their draping black cloaks blowing in the gusting and rainy winds.

Dart tried to wipe the rain from his face and eyes to get a better look at what he was dealing with. The crowd below the church was growing uneasy and scared. Dart frantically looked around. He saw Jessica and Sean rush up from down the street and join him.

“What’s going on?” Jessica screamed through the storm.

Dart pointed up to the roof. “I just don’t know what to do,” he cried, defeated. “None of this should be happening. None of it!”

The crowd gasped as the taller figure reached up and removed its’ hood. Dart shook his head as he saw it was indeed Sharon Ferguson. She looked older - her eyes glowing a dull yellow.

“This town...” she spoke loudly over the rain, “this town was our creation; our foundation. It is *our* town; our family’s town only!”

As the crowd below the church started to grow with curious and terrified residents of Stewart Hollow, Dart lowered his weapon. What was he suppose to do? Everything seemed to be out of his hands.

“We will indeed take this town back and start all over,” Sharon Ferguson shouted. With that, the other two figures removed their hoods, revealing two young girls; Sharon’s daughters.

“Consider this boy’s fate, the town’s future,” Sharon said. With a quick and unexpected shove of Milo, he was launched off of the roof. The crowd screamed; some racing to try and catch him. Milo, in mid-air, burst into flames and hit the pavement hard – he didn’t move.

Dart raced to the burning child, shoving away the gathering people. “Move! Move!” he shouted. He looked down and watched as Milo was burning. Dart looked back up to the bell tower and aimed his gun. Sharon and her daughters were gone.

“The church is on fire!” someone shouted. Dart looked down to the front doors of the church and saw a fire burning inside. The stained glass windows busted out and showered the crowd with sharp shards of glass. The fire quickly climbed up the building and took over everything.

Dart frantically turned around and saw Sean and Jessica standing before him.

“What do we do?” Jessica screamed.

“We have to get help. We have to leave town!” Dart shouted. “Follow me.”

Sean and Jessica followed Dart as he raced back towards the police station.

Dart blasted into the police station with Sean and Jessica right behind him. He grabbed his flashlight from his belt and turned it on as he raced down the hallway.

“What are we doing?” Jessica cried out.

“Grabbing more ammo,” Dart boldly stated. They passed the old Sheriff’s office, and the flickering lights from the pumpkins caught Sean and Jessica’s attention. They stopped and looked in.

Eddie Wong sat in the chair with a fire axe sticking out of his head, and behind him, Dana sat dead on the floor, propped up against the bloody wall behind her.

Jessica covered her mouth, trying not to gag or scream.

“Holy...” Sean said, startled by the gory sight. He looked down the hall and saw Dart coming out of a room, holding a shotgun and stuffing shells into his pockets.

Sean grabbed the Deputy by the arm as he charged by. Dart stopped and looked at him. “What?”

“What exactly is the plan?”

“The power is out. We can’t call for help, so were heading to Glen Falls – it’s five miles up the road. We need help.”

“What will they be able to do?” Sean asked.

“I don’t know!” Dart snapped, catching Jessica’s attention as well. “There’s never really been a situation like this before. Like, ever!”

Dart tore away from Sean’s grip and marched down the hall and back towards the lobby. “I keep feeling like at any moment, I’m just going to wake up from this nightmare.”

Dart stopped in the lobby and turned around to see Sean and Jessica still standing in the hall. He shone his flashlight on them. “Are you coming or not?”

Sean and Jessica followed Dart back out of the station and into the rainy streets. The three of them looked around in shock as now numerous buildings were engulfed in flames.

Screams in the rainy night caught their attention and they watched as innocent people ran through the streets in a mass panic. Some of them were on fire...

Dart lead the way to his cruiser and hopped in. Sean and Jessica hopped in the back and Dart peeled out, heading east down Main Street.

Dart turned on his CB radio, but it was all static. Frustrated, he turned it completely off. Dart was driving about twenty miles per hour over the speed limit.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” Jessica cried into Sean’s arms in the back seat.

“Look, when we get to Glen Falls,” Dart began, “I’m going to leave you two at their police station. You’ll have to find a way to back to Seattle.”

“What? No way,” Sean said. “I have to get my parents out of Stewart Hollow.”

Dart stayed quiet and shook his head.

“What?” Sean asked ferociously.

“No one’s getting out of Stewart Hollow...” Dart said, mostly to himself. Right then, the steering wheel locked up and Dart couldn’t turn it. He started to panic.

“What’s wrong?” Jessica said, sitting up and looking into the front seat.

“The wheels all jammed or something!” Dart yelled. He then felt the gas peddle give out from under his foot and the car’s speed began to escalate fast.

“Slow down!” Sean shouted.

“I can’t! It’s doing this on its own!” Dart yelled back angrily.

“What’s that?” Jessica said, pointing ahead. They all looked out the front windshield and noticed they were driving into a thick and haunting fog.

“Hold on!” Dart shouted. They all gripped onto something as they raced at full speed into the deep fog.

They couldn’t see anything. The car had reached almost ninety miles an hour, and it continued to climb. They all braced themselves for the worst just as the car hit a pothole and bounced off the ground. The three of them screamed as the car, at full speed, flipped onto its side and rolled over and over before settling upside down off the road. Glass shattered all around them, cutting them in various places.

When the crash calmed, Dart shook the glass out of his hair and turned around in his seat to see if Sean and Jessica were okay. Sean hung upside down by his seatbelt – blood was running down his body and dripping from his head onto the roof of the car.

Dart focused on Jessica, who was hung upside down by her seatbelt as well. She coughed a few times and finally opened her eyes. She looked at Dart and then over to Sean, where she started to squirm and scream in her seat.

“Calm down, Jessica.” Dart said, unlatching his seatbelt. He dropped to the roof of the car and leaned into the back and helped Jessica down. He kicked her side door three or four times and finally it creaked open. Dart crawled out first, and then helped Jessica to her feet.

They brushed themselves off and noticed the fog had diminished to a lighter haze. Dart looked around to see where they had ended up. An eerie chill came over him as he noticed they had crashed right through the metal gates, and into Hollows End Cemetery.

“Oh God,” Dart said quietly. He looked at Jessica. “Are you okay? “

Jessica didn’t answer. She just stood there in the drizzle and fog, shivering uncontrollably in terror. Her eyes were wide and she looked around the cemetery. Shadows of the dead oak



trees branched out in every direction, and then she noticed the gravestones. They were cracked, and continuing to crack before her eyes. She pointed to them, and Dart looked.

One by one, the gravestones around them crumbled into piles of rubble. There were more sounds that accompanied the shattered headstones – a crunching sound. Dart looked closely near each of the rubbles, and saw the damp soil start to pulsate. He kept his eye on one of the spots in particular. He watched as the ground bumped up, and then retracted, forming a muddy puddle. Then, something started to rise up from the mud – it was a corpse.

Dart's eyes widen and he frantically looked around and noticed that corpses were rising from all of the graves, moaning and grunting as they did so.

“Jess...” Dart said, backing up to her. She had already seen them, and was frozen in fear. She didn't move. It was all too much for her to handle.

Screeching tires on the road caught Dart's attention and he watched as a car, an old Mustang, came to a complete stop out on the road. He took a few steps towards it and saw it shaking violently back and forth. The front door opened and a man jumped out, holding his chest.

The man screamed and dropped to his knees before exploding into flames. Dart looked back down the road in the direction of downtown Stewart Hollow. A bright orange hue lit up the sky. Everything, and everyone was burning.

“Jess, come on!” Dart said, grabbing her and dragging her to the man's car. He helped her into the passenger seat and then he ran around to the drivers' side, trying to avoid the burning carcass.

He hopped in just as the passenger's window shattered. Dart looked over and noticed one of the undead corpses reaching in and grabbing Jessica by the neck. She screamed, while kicking and punching at nothing.

“Jess!” Dart shouted as he hit the gas hard. The car spun out and shot up the road towards the town's boarder. Jessica could still feel the creatures' muddy hands touching her neck, and she squirmed in her seat, crying hysterically.

The old Mustang raced across the town's boarder and into Glen Falls. It sped up the winding road, splashing through all the puddles that continued to form in the pouring rain, and into downtown. The car came to a screeching halt outside of Glen Falls Police Station. Dart hopped out from the drivers seat and scurried around to the passenger side. He reached in through the shattered window and unlocked the door, pulling the frantic Jessica Morgan out from the car. She was frazzled, soaked to the bone, and covered in cuts and scrapes.

Dart pulled her up the sets to the Police Station and they barged in, capturing the attention of everyone inside. A man in a suit and tie dropped the stack of folders that were in his hands and rushed to Dart and Jessica.

“What's going on here?” The man questioned loudly, noticing how distraught the two of them were. He noticed the bloody cuts all over Jessica, as well as the puzzling muddy handprints around her neck.

“Who's in charge?” Dart shouted.

“I am,” the man said. “I’m Chief Roberts.”

“I’m Deputy Jamie Dart from Stewart Hollow,” Dart said, trying to catch his breath.

“What’s wrong?” Chief Roberts questioned, just as concerned as the rest of the office, who were slowly gathering around.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you...” Dart huffed.

## HALLOWEEN

The sun broke the mountainous horizon to the east and spread its light across the valley – the area of land where Stewart Hollow had sat the day before. It was gone – all of it. Stewart Hollow would not see another Halloween.

The buildings up and down Main Street, and the houses around town, were now nothing but smoking piles of charred ruins.

Bodies were scattered around town – some bloodied, some burnt, but all were dead.

FEMA vehicles charged into the final resting place of Stewart Hollow like a motorcade. There was no easy place to start. Especially since people just wouldn't understand what had actually happened.

The legend of the Blood Coven had been true all along, and their ultimate goal was fulfilled. The light of Stewart Hollow had flickered out, and the town had run its course, at the hands of the Lores.

A town that once celebrated its rich Halloween history had fallen victim to evil – serial killers and witches. It was truly a horror show, year after year.

Stewart Hollow is now a legend in itself. People around the country, around the world, talk about it and the mysterious supernatural forces that supposedly took the town. The only two people who knew exactly what happened was Deputy Jamie Dart and a news reporter from Seattle, Washington, Jessica Morgan. Both of whom are scared for life.

There was never anything discovered in the aftermath of the Stewart Hollow burning that confirmed Sharon Ferguson and her daughters were still alive. However, from the bell tower of the church that fateful night, they had promised to 'start all over'.

Maybe it was coincidence, or maybe it was something more, but weeks after the death of Stewart Hollow, black roses began to rise from the ashes, and mysterious cackles could be heard in the wind.