



*Order of Terminus*

*Blood Heat*

*By*

*Olivia Starke*

## **Blood Heat by Olivia Starke**

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### **Blood Heat**

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**Dedication**

To all my fellow Team Edward fans, this series is for you.

## Chapter One

Susan Wells pulled her minivan along the curb then put it into park. She hadn't been able to raise her close friend by phone for several days, and she was worried.

It wasn't like Jolene to not return her calls.

She strode up the short walkway, noting the newspapers strewn over the usually impeccable lawn. A sinking feeling hit her gut; something was definitely wrong. Her steps quickened, and she leapt onto the low porch, not bothering with the three, short steps. She pounded on the door. A neighbor's dog began barking madly, and then its mournful howl filled the morning air.

"Jolene! Are you home?"

No answer. She tried the doorknob. It was locked.

*Did she have a heart attack?*

Real worry flooded into her veins. Jolene was in her late fifties and a heavy smoker.

With shaky fingers, Susan dug the spare key for Jolene's house from her pocket. It rattled against the lock, and she dropped it. Cursing, she chased it with fumbling fingers across the small wooden deck, nearly knocking it between the slats of wood. Finally picking it up, she managed to slip it into the deadbolt. It clicked, and she pushed the door open.

"Jolene!" Susan called out again.

No answer. The living room stood empty and undisturbed. The smell hit her then. A putrid odor mixed with an underlying coppery tang,

and it sucked the breath from her lungs. Bile rose into the back of her throat.

Something was really wrong.

She backed out of the door, covering her nose and mouth, choking on the stench. She ran back to her minivan and, after grabbing her cell phone, dialed 9-1-1.

\* \* \* \* \*

An officer gagged next to her, and Josie Lewis barked, "Don't do that here." She pointed toward the door. "You'll contaminate evidence."

The rookie police officer darted outside, and moments later, she heard his retching. Josie shook her head in empathy as the smell boiled up into her nostrils, forcing her to take shallow breaths. The heavy curtains on the bedroom windows were drawn, leaving a fitting, somber ambience and obscuring what was surely an even more horrendous sight in broad daylight.

Jotting notes into a small notepad, she nodded toward the coroner who'd just arrived.

"Hey, Josie, how's little league going?" the coroner, Dr. Katherine Walsh, asked. She was a petite woman, barely five-foot-one, with a touch of grey laced in her curly black hair.

The coroner surveyed the bloody scene. Her soft, flowery perfume wafted to Josie, and she sucked in a greedy sniff of the jasmine bergamot mixture that momentarily overrode the smell of death.

"Pretty good," Josie said. "My nephew is first base this year. How's Caroline's new job?"

Dr. Walsh was kneeling next to the body looking it over, lifting it this way and that. "She loves it. She's worked so hard for her doctrine in psychology, the position at the children's hospital is a dream come true. I'd say this poor woman has been dead for three days." Dr. Walsh sighed and brushed a strand of curly hair from her forehead with the back of her hand. "Caroline and I are having a barbeque next week. You need to come over and see the new décor."

"Sounds great," Josie said. "Cause of death?"

"Looks like she bled out from the laceration on her neck. Odd though. I'd expect more blood than this." Dr. Walsh looked around the horrific scene. "I'll let Caroline know."

"More blood than this?" Josie cocked her brows.

Shrugging, the coroner stood and removed her latex gloves. "We'll see after an autopsy. Crime scene can come in now." She nodded toward several individuals standing just within the doorway, and they entered carrying large black cases.

Dr. Walsh wrinkled her nose. "If you ever get used to this smell, it's time to leave the business."

Standing outside the home, Josie ignored the flashes from cameras and news reporters who shouted for comments as she thought about the scene inside. Jolene Gomez had been a fifty-seven year old divorced mother of two. Her youngest had just married, and Jolene would have had her second grandchild in six months. The woman now lay face down on her bedroom floor with her throat torn out. Blood smeared the wall above the bed as if someone had run bloody hands over them.

*Who would do this?*

Franklin, Illinois was a moderate-sized city an hour and a half south of Chicago. They weren't used to crimes this horrific.

*What side of hell would you live in to be used to this?*

She lifted her gaze from the notepad as a fellow detective approached.

"Hey, Lewis," Detective Jones said, crossing thick arms over his chest. "What are we looking at here?"

"God only knows," she replied, tapping her pen against the pad of paper. "Go take a look."

Jones walked into the home. He soon reappeared, shaking his head and looking a little ashen.

"Holy hell," he said, eyeing the reporters who were like hungry dogs hot on a trail. They strained to hear the conversation, and Jones lowered his voice.

"Drugs? I saw some cases like this in St. Louis that involved Meth,"

Jones said. "Maybe not quite as bloody, though."

"The friend..." Josie glanced at her notepad. "...a Mrs. Susan Wells, said the victim lived a clean life."

Jones ran a beefy hand over his shaved head. A man in his mid forties, he was what some women would consider attractive with his deep-set green eyes and tall, solid build. Josie had never noticed him in that way. She could never be involved with a fellow cop, or any officer of the law for that matter. She typically went for the blond playboy jock types who knew how to love 'em and leave 'em. Having grown up in a home where male role models came and went depending on her mother's whims, she shied away from permanency.

Jones scribbled on a notepad of his own, a sloppy chicken scratch that left Josie curious if he'd be able to decipher it later. Her gaze roamed over the crowd that had assembled along the street. She studied each individual from behind her dark, aviator-style sunglasses, looking for anything that might catch her interest. Mostly middle-aged, middle-class neighbors, but one figure stood out to her. He was a tall man, late-thirtyish with a muscular, athletic build, sandy brown hair, and eyes hidden behind his own aviator shades. His skin looked tanned against the crisp, white polo shirt he wore.

*It's fifty degrees out here, and he's at ease in a short-sleeved shirt?*

Josie committed his physical description to memory. Jones asked a couple of questions, and Josie referred to her notes. When she looked back toward the milling assembly of people, the man had disappeared.

\* \* \* \* \*

Word had quickly gotten to Grant Stone, from a contact within the local P.D., about the body that had been found.

What a mess.

He didn't need to see the scene inside the small ranch house to know that a lot of blood was involved. The metallic odor carried to him; he could taste it in the back of his throat. His heart quickened, and he clamped his teeth together, willing self-control. The woman's neighbors



were gathered behind the yellow police tape, chattering about the lost soul inside.

If only they knew the killer they had in their midst.

He found his gaze drawn to the female detective that stood outside the house. A little above average in height and in her mid thirties, she had a lean build beneath her conservative, navy pantsuit. Dark sable hair that glistened in the sun was smoothed back and secured into a bun at the nape of her neck. She was cool and polished, despite having just viewed a vicious murder. Her voice carried to him over the din of the crowd gathered around him. Silky soft with the hint of a southern drawl. Not quite what he'd expected.

The woman detective surveyed the crowd before settling her gaze dead on him. Even though dark sunglasses hid her eyes, he knew she was sizing him up. Grant could feel her gaze moving over his body, and it left a trail of heat on his skin.

Her sharp eyes had picked up an anomaly in the environment.

*Him.*

As soon as another detective on the scene diverted her attention, he made his exit.

## Chapter Two

"What?" Josie's mind was muddled, her voice husky with sleep as she spoke into the phone.

"The Gomez home is on fire," a male voice repeated. "The call just came in."

*Gomez?* She shook her head in confusion. "Oh, crap." She sat up in bed. Her cat, Millie, gave a meow of protest before settling back into the sapphire blue comforter.

"What's going on? How?" she asked, sliding her legs over the side of the bed. She clicked on the bedside lamp, cringing against the sudden flood of light.

"Not sure yet," Detective Jones said, his own voice weighted with sleep.

"I'll be there as soon as I can." Josie was already making her way to her bathroom. It was just after 2 a.m., and Josie's eyes burned with lack of sleep. She yawned, wishing she'd slept more than two and a half hours.

She slipped out of her nightgown and into a black pantsuit, then pulled on her matching wool trench coat. With her hair secured into a tight bun, she was on her way to the Gomez home. The glow from the flames could be seen from several blocks away and, with a sinking feeling, she floored her dark sedan down the deserted side streets.

"Total loss," the fire chief said, rubbing the back of his neck, his helmet cradled in his other arm. "A neighbor saw the flames and called 9-1-1."

"This ain't no accident by a long shot," Detective Jones said more to himself than Josie. He paced back and forth, looking disheveled and irritated as the fire was doused. Smoke mixed with the thick April mist, and the odor of wet soot, burned wood and plastics hung in a cloud around them.

Josie accepted a cup of coffee from an officer on the scene. After thanking her, Josie turned her attention back to the black skeletal frame of the house still aglow with embers. She sucked her top lip between her teeth and sniffed. The cold night air was making her nose run, and her ears felt like ice. She sipped the bitter black brew, enjoying the warmth washing down her throat.

"Chief Andrews, do you have any ideas how the fire started?" she asked as Detective Jones spoke with the county's sheriff.

"Won't have an answer for you until the investigators look things over in the morning," he said his voice hoarse from the smoke. "'Tween you an' me, it was either a massive electrical short, or arson."

Josie snapped her head around to face the fire chief.

"How can you tell?"

"The intensity of the blaze, ma'am," he replied. "It burned too hot."

Josie rubbed her forehead, feeling a headache of massive proportions coming on. First a brutal murder, then a suspicious fire. What was next?

Detective Jones walked over to her, nursing his own cup of coffee, his face a mask of annoyance. "The SOB was covering his tracks."

"We won't know that for sure until the fire investigators get here," Josie said, though she couldn't deny that it looked that way.

"Oh, come on, Lewis. You're a bright girl," Jones said gruffly pressing on. "You know it as well as I do."

Josie stared down, tapping a foot against the frosty pavement. She blew out a breath. "I hope Crime Scene got what they needed yesterday, because there's no going back now."

Jones snorted. "No kidding."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was confirmed later that morning that there had been a short in the fuse box.

*Coincidence?*

Josie had the feeling that wasn't the case, and Detective Jones had insisted it wasn't. His father had been an electrician, and he had some knowledge of electrical wiring in a house. It *was* possible that someone with electrical expertise could cause a fire in such a manner, and that was all she and Detective Jones needed. Arson and murder were now in their caseload.

Unbidden, the image of the stranger at the scene the day before popped into her mind. He had stuck out like a sore thumb amongst the gathered crowd. There was something virile, overtly masculine about him that stirred Josie's blood. She shrugged off the feeling.

He could be their suspect.

"Why wait though?" Josie said around the bite of cheese Danish she'd just taken. "Why not start the fire right after the murder? What's to hide once the cops get to the scene?"

Jones shrugged and crammed the rest of a donut into his mouth. He washed it down with his fifth cup of coffee of the day.

"Maybe he got spooked and took off, then felt he needed to cover up what he could. Who knows what goes on in a psychopath's mind?"

"I don't like it, Jones. It's not lining up."

"The worst cases never do."

\* \* \* \* \*

Grant heard about the fire on the evening news and reached for his cell phone.

"It's being reported as an accident, Martin," Grant said to his contact.

"Great for us. Too bad we were four days too late. Any leads?"

"No, but my source at the police department is getting the autopsy reports along with any information he can get in regards to the

investigation.”

Martin grunted. “We can’t let this happen again.”

“No, we can’t,” Grant agreed.

He tossed the phone onto the nightstand in the motel room and clasped his hands behind his head as he leaned back against the headboard. He stared at the white, popcorn ceiling and considered his next move. He was a member of *Order of Terminus*, an elite special ops group that worked to separate the human world from that of the vampire. It was vital that his kind remained myth and legend. Humanity wouldn’t react well to the danger they represented.

Grant’s mind settled on the woman detective at the Gomez house.

What would it take to break through that austere exterior?

His body reacted to the thought, and his cock grew stiff. He stood and paced the small room like a caged leopard. It was best for vamps to stay away from dating a prey species.

*Would she be soft and willing beneath me, or throw me down and ride me hard?*

Uttering an oath, he grabbed his keys and headed out the door. It was nearly one-thirty in the morning, and he needed to feed. He’d already staked out the perfect place, and he’d be able to get his attention back to his job afterward.

### Chapter Three

Claire Montgomery wasn't expecting a visitor at two in the morning, but in her line of work, she never knew what she'd get. The knock had been barely audible on the front door. Obviously someone nervous about getting a score. Claire was good at dealing with that sort of thing. Maybe a man was at the door, and she could make a little extra cash.

She smiled and opened the door as the neighbor's dog across the street began barking ferociously. It let out a mournful howl.

She wasn't let down.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was the same scene in a different house. The woman's throat had been ripped open, and she lay on her bedroom floor. It looked as if bloody hands had been smeared over the wall above the bed.

"A Ms. Claire Montgomery. Known drug dealer and prostitute." Detective Jones was looking over the information he had collected as Josie took in the familiar, brutal scene. Dr. Walsh had just finished up and was leaving. Josie nodded at the somber looking coroner.

"I don't like it," Dr. Walsh said. "It's the same M.O. as before. We just happened to find the poor woman sooner this time."

"So, death occurred sometime in the night?" Josie asked.

"I'd say around two-thirty, according to liver temp."

“When she didn’t show up for a meeting with her parole officer, he called her in. P.D. showed up to find this.” Jones waved a hand toward the brutalized body.

Dr. Walsh nodded for Crime Scene to come into the bedroom, and Josie and Detective Jones followed her out of the small house. This time the crime scene was situated in the bad area of Franklin known as Meth Row. As before, a swarm of reporters, even more manic in their attention and activities than last time, was lined along the street behind the yellow tape.

“I hope to God that we don’t have a serial killer in our midst,” Dr. Walsh said in a hushed tone to Josie and Jones. Josie maintained her stoic appearance while Jones ran a meaty hand over his shaved head. The coroner made her exit, and after gathering what little bit of information they could from Crime Scene and tight-lipped neighbors, they made their way back to the department.

The autopsy report had come in for the Gomez murder. Josie read over the details, and one thing stood out; not all of Ms. Gomez’s blood could be accounted for.

Her brows knit together. In her four years in homicide, she’d not seen anything like this. Did they have a serial killer with a blood fetish? The idea made her stomach roll over.

Would the arsonist make an appearance at the Montgomery home?

A patrol car in the area was assigned to make frequent trips through the neighborhood to keep an eye on the house. Josie’s gut told her she should swing by the crime scene herself on her way home.

She cut her headlights and crept by the house, her eyes straining to pierce the darkness. There was the slightest shifting of shadows behind the home, and Josie stopped the car.

Were her eyes playing tricks on her?

Deciding to check things out, she put her car in Park and cut the engine. She eased the door open, making sure the overhead light was off beforehand. She stepped out. Somewhere down the street, someone was blasting heavy metal music, and crickets chirped despite the chilly night air. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, but Josie had a hand on her

service revolver just in case. She scanned back and forth, straining her ears for the slightest sound, a footstep or a snap of a twig. Stopping at the chain link fence around the backyard, she pulled out the small flashlight she'd brought along and clicked it on. A small beam of light danced around a few feet in front of her, but a heavy fog was rolling in, obscuring anything further out.

Josie considered calling for backup, but discarded the thought. Most likely her exhausted mind playing tricks with her. Besides, she was confident she could handle pretty much anything, and a patrol car would be driving by any minute.

She opened the side gate, praying it wouldn't squeak or grate, but to her relief it was silent. She stepped inside, searching the thick blanket of mist that was almost an icy drizzle of rain against her skin. Hair had come loose from her bun, and she felt the strands plastering to her forehead and neck.

She'd stepped into some type of B-movie horror flick. All she needed was a flash of lightening to outline wolf-man next to the home and a few old tombstones in the backyard. As if on cue, a dog let out a long, lonely howl in the distance, and goose flesh broke out over her already chilled skin. The scent of her damp wool coat filled her nostrils, mingling with the odor of cold, wet earth.

*Get a grip, Josie.*

She shook herself mentally just before a shadow jumped from the weighted mist. Josie didn't have a chance to scream.

\* \* \* \* \*

Grant scooped up the lifeless body of the detective who lay on the kitchen floor, blood pooling on the floor beneath her from the laceration on her neck. Misshapen designs had been smeared on the laminate flooring with her draining blood.

He clutched her body to him, the faint fluttery sound of her heartbeat signaling she somehow maintained a thread of life. He carried her out the backdoor as smoke filled the home.



There was no time to move her car or cover his tracks. The place would be swarming with cops within minutes.

Several acres of forest lay behind the neighborhood. Within seconds of leaping the four-foot chain link fence, he disappeared like a ghost into the heavy April mist, the detective cradled in his arms. After traveling a safe distance from the house, he laid the detective gently upon a pile of moist, dead leaves and considered his options.

## Chapter Four

The woman's life had all but faded completely, and the heavy coppery scent of her blood filled Grant's head, making his heart quicken. He ran his tongue over his lengthened canines, able to taste the odor on the back of his tongue. It was heady, and the craving swamped him, causing his whole body to quiver.

He wanted to taste her.

He shook his head.

Should he let her die?

It had been so long since a woman had stirred his blood, and except for an occasional liaison with a vampiress, he lived a private and lonely life.

Doubt flooded his mind even as he bit into his own wrist, flinching at the pungent, soured taste of his vampire blood, a natural deterrent to keep them from feeding on their own kind. He pressed his bleeding wrist against the detective's slightly parted, full lips. With his other hand, he stroked back her bloodied, knotted hair.

In the end, he might have to destroy his own creation, but he had to give this woman a second chance.

He ignored the fact that perhaps it was for his own selfish reasons.

\* \* \* \* \*

Josie's eyes drifted open, finding a strange aura of colors dancing

within her vision. She blinked several times then sucked in a ragged breath. Her body was sore and feverish, and a dull throb was settled deep within her left temple.

*What happened to me?*

Her mind was blank. Her last memory was of leaving the police department.

It had been dark, but she was sure it was daylight now.

The colorful aura was fading, and the daylight grew stronger. Josie moved her limbs, but they seemed made of lead, and she groaned under the effort.

“You’re okay,” a male voice said over the ringing in her ears. “Lay still a little longer. The change isn’t complete.”

Her lips were dry, and she tried to lick them, but her mouth was sticky. An odd, soured taste clung to her tongue. “I...” Nothing more would come from her hoarse, dry throat.

A hand stroked hair from her forehead, then gently caressed down her cheek. “You’ll be good as new in another hour or so.”

Josie tried to focus on his face, which hovered above her own. The rainbow of lights distorted her vision, and frustration welled inside of her. By nature a fighter, she tried to sit upright. Hands gripped her shoulders, and she thought he’d push her back down. Instead, he guided, then held her steady in a seated position. Vertigo hit her, and she swayed under the strong hands.

“What...” Josie said, her voice cracking.

She cleared her throat and made an effort to swallow. The taste in her mouth was absolutely awful, and she smacked, trying to place it. Her tongue hit a sharp spike in her mouth. Her brows knit together as her tongue searched over the peculiarity and found another, then a third and a fourth. With shaking fingers, she traced the oddities protruding from her gums.

Why did her teeth feel so weird? Had she been drugged?

“They were a shock to me, too,” the man said. “I spent the first few weeks biting my cheeks and tongue whenever they’d grow in.”

Josie felt her strength returning with each beat of her heart, and the

Technicolor aura was fading. She focused on thick, sandy brown hair, sharp masculine features, and dark brown eyes that peered at her in a mixture of concern and amusement. A gentle smile tugged the corners of his full mouth.

He looked familiar.

They were in a tent, the flap open, and a cold gust of wind stirred the strands of her long hair that hung freely down her back. The chilled air caressed her bare arms and for the first time, she noticed she was dressed in a large, red T-shirt and baggie black athletic shorts.

"What happened to my clothes?" she asked in a hoarse voice. Her amnesia remained, and worry began to thread its way through her.

"They were ruined," the man said. "I'm Grant, by the way."

"Ruined?" Nothing was making sense. "Why do you look familiar?"

The heavy fog. She'd been in a backyard.

The slip of a memory popped into her mind. She grasped onto it, trying to eek more information from it.

"Things are different for you now, Detective Lewis," Grant said gently.

Her tongue again tested the sharp points of her canines. How did she know him?

"I couldn't let you die."

His words sent an electric shock through her body.

*Something lunged from the heavy April mist, knocking her to the ground. Before she could utter a sound, it struck her across the temple. It was a dark, massive figure with a white gleam set into the shadowy outline of a face. A few moments later, she was in the kitchen, and though she wanted to cry out and fight, she found both her voice and body paralyzed. The white gleam hovered above her, and she realized she was staring at teeth. Teeth that had slashed into her throat as she'd lain helpless.*

"Oh my god," she said, uttering a gasp.

She gazed at the stranger, his sandy brown hair and square jaw line triggering recognition, and she raised her hand to her mouth.

He was the man from the crowd outside of the Gomez home!

## Blood Heat by Olivia Starke

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She crab-walked backward, putting as much distance as she could between Grant and herself. Her back came up against the side of the two-man tent, putting Grant between her and the door.

*Great.*

## **Chapter Five**

Grant knit his brows in concern, and he moved back from her, giving her what extra space he could in the confined space. The deep, blackened-red color that had filled her eyes had faded, and he could see her eyes were an intense shade of sapphire. They were wide, with fear and confusion glimmering in their depths.

Perhaps this would be too much, and he wouldn't be able to control her.

The thought made him shudder.

The detective hissed, exposing her lengthened canines. The sound obviously shocked her, and she cut off the sound.

"I know it's a lot to take in right away, Josilynn, but I swear it gets better," he said, reaching a tentative hand toward her. She stared at his hand as if it had grown teeth, and he pulled it back.

Her scent had been evolving since he'd shared his blood with her, and now her own softly feminine, human fragrance was laced with the spicy aroma of the vampire blood coursing within her veins. The virus had taken hold, and she was now a half-blood.

How was he to explain to a twenty-first century woman that she was now half vampire?

A friend and fellow coalmine worker had turned him at the beginning of the twentieth century after a cave-in. He hadn't known his friend, Mack, was a vampire, and was shocked to see his friend turn on him, teeth bared, like a caged animal. Grant's lower body had been

crushed under rubble, and he was helpless to defend himself against the assault.

Mack, apparently appalled by his actions, had passed his blood to Grant, thus saving his life. After Grant himself fed off a worker moments after the man had passed, they were able to use their combined strength to dig themselves out.

During that time period, being bitten and changed by a vampire wasn't such a stretch of the imagination.

"Why did you attack me?" she asked, her soft voice drawling out her A's in a distinctly southern fashion. "And that's Detective Lewis to you." She ran her fingertips over her canines again.

"I know how it looks, but you're safe with me. The canines will retract soon." He smiled at her puzzled expression.

She frowned and sucked her rosy top lip between her teeth. Her color was returning, its pallid, bluish shades replaced with her natural, creamy hue. Freckles were popping out over her nose and the peachy apples of her cheeks.

A healthy dose of male appreciation washed through him, catching him off guard. His mind wandered to her lean, athletic body hidden beneath his borrowed clothes. He'd done his best to avert his eyes while disrobing and cleaning her before redressing her in his clothes. He'd still caught a glimpse of soft round breasts and the dark hair that marked the juncture of her thighs.

Desire flooded into his veins, and his cock grew rock hard. He remained in a squatted position in hopes he covered his hard-on. He certainly did not want to frighten the woman any more.

"Let me go. I'll have every cop in the county searching for me," she said, her voice growing stronger. "I'm of no use to you."

"We can't be separated right now, Detective Lewis."

Her eyes widened then narrowed. "Do you really want assault *and* kidnapping on your back? If I leave now, I'm sure I could get you some leniency. Of course, you'll still have to answer to the two murders and the arson." She crossed her arms over her breasts and set her face into an unreadable mask.

"I'm not worried about those charges. You will be free to go as soon as I see that you've adapted to the...change," he said, deciding the word *virus* might cause her to panic.

Detective Lewis' gaze roamed over his body then hovered for just a moment too long on his crotch.

"In a few..."

His breath knocked from him in a whoosh as the detective lunged forward, her fist driving toward his groin. His reflexes were lightening quick, and he shifted in time so her punch landed into his inner thigh. Detective Lewis' increased strength and speed caught him off guard, and they both tumbled through the door of the tent. He wrapped an arm around her waist in a steely grip. She struggled, trying to drive an elbow into any part of his body she could.

"Let me go!" Josie shouted as she wrestled on the ground with her kidnapper. She tried every self-defense move she could remember from training, but he deftly pinned her on her back. His large, strong hands gripped her wrists over her head, his lower body pinning hers to the ground.

She stared defiantly into his face, thrusting her body against his in a fruitless attempt to dislodge his heavy body. Her nerve endings flared to life, and heat pooled in her belly. His scent flooded her nostrils, an overtly masculine odor that overwhelmed as it tantalized. There was something different too, a spicy scent that a part of her found intoxicating.

Josie couldn't deny the attraction she felt for him, despite the fact that he was a suspect for two murders, along with her assault and kidnapping. He overwhelmed her senses, and she began thrusting her pelvis in a rhythmic motion, her mind drifting from suspicion to something much more basic...

*And pleasurable.*

A look of surprise and confusion crossed over his face. Josie groaned at the feel of his hard body pressing into hers. Her breath caught in her throat at the feel of his hard dick pressing into her thigh. It was as if a switch had been flipped on, and she'd never wanted—never *needed*—something so much. She began to writhe. She was growing wet,



her pussy hot and aching, and she licked her lips.

Grant pushed away from her and stood. Her affect on him was still noticeable by the strain of his cock against the denim of his jeans, and her frustration peaked.

She hopped to her feet in a lithe movement and went to him, pressing her willing body against his. Her hand slipped down to cup his straining, trapped dick.

He pushed her to arms' length. "You're responding to the surge of vampire hormones," he said, his voice deep and husky.

"Vampire?" Josie asked, her mind not quite able to grasp onto his words.

"It's a natural cycle, and your body is adjusting in its own way, I suppose. Plus, your human side is affected by my vampiric attraction. That's the part of us that attracts our..." He paused, seeming to consider his words. "It attracts humans to us."

Josie's confusion grew. Her body felt energized, and there was only one way she wanted to use that energy. She wanted to fuck him stupid. In one deft movement, she discarded the oversized T-shirt. The shock of cold air against her bare skin was delicious, and her nipples hardened.

His gaze darted down then quickly back to her face.

Josie smiled. She was a competitive person and thrilled at the challenge he held for her. Never in her life had she ever felt so...

*Feral.*

She was a wild cat in heat.

"Look, once your body settles into its new state, this will all be a horrible memory, I assure you," he said, his deep voice a gravely plead. He held his hands out, trying to keep her at a distance.

Josie tilted her head before giving the already baggy shorts a slight tug. They dropped into a little black pool around her feet.

## Chapter Six

"Oh god," Grant groaned. His body hardened, tightened, and tingled all over. His stiff cock felt as if it were going to explode.

His gaze raked down her body of its own accord, traveling from her deep, cobalt eyes down her long neck. Delicate collarbones were set across narrow shoulders, which framed small, round breasts that begged to be cupped by his hands. Farther down, below the planes of her flat stomach, he found the dark hair that led a tantalizing trail to her pussy.

Josie watched him intently. She raised her hands to her full breasts and toyed with her rosy-beige nipples. Then one hand drifted down to find the little thatch of hair before delving further. Her head rolled back as she stroked the folds of her wet pussy.

His body quivered with restraint. It would be wrong for him to take advantage of a woman in her current state.

But the way she was looking at him, her eyes filled with lustful promises...

"Put your clothes back on, *Detective Lewis*," Grant said through his teeth that felt as if they'd shatter at any moment. He hoped the added emphasis to her name would snap some reality back into her.

She wavered, blinking several times, looked around at their wooded surroundings, then back at him with a frown creasing her brow as she peered down at her nude body. She let out a hard breath.

"I don't understand. What's wrong with me?" she asked in a small voice, still staring down at her nakedness. She shook her head as if coming

from a trance, and her face flushed to a vibrant red.

Grant turned his back to her. "Please, Detective Lewis, get dressed. We have a lot to do in the next few hours."

He heard the shuffling of fabric.

When he turned around, he was pleased to find she was indeed fully dressed. He'd made the decision to get another motel room in the neighboring town of Gladsworth. She couldn't go home right away, that was a certainty.

"Take me home. I have to feed Millie," she said.

"You can't go home right now, Detective," he said, not quite sure who Millie was.

"I can't very well let my cat starve. I have to go home."

She crossed her arms over her breasts, a stubborn gleam settling in her sapphire eyes.

Using his most reasonable tone, he said, "We can't let anyone see you. You'd be in the hospital with the blood loss you sustained."

That fired something within her.

"Blood loss?" She shook her head, knitting her brows. "What are you talking about?"

And they were back at the beginning. Grant sighed.

"You bled out from the wound on your neck, that you may or may not remember acquiring. I couldn't let you die, so I passed my blood to you, thus passing on a virus to you that results in vampirism." He decided to lay it all out on the table. "The virus is one that takes over the body when it's in a weakened state. You crave human blood because it is the quickest and most efficient way to get nutrients to feed the virus."

Detective Lewis simply looked at him with an unreadable expression on her face.

He took a deep breath. "The trade off is the heightened abilities." He cleared his throat before continuing. "In your current state, you are what we term a half-blood, and you can either deny your blood cravings, leaving the virus in a half dormant state, or you can feed, which will turn you full-blood."

She sucked her top lip between her teeth and moved her gaze to the

surrounding trees, then gave a sharp nod. “Regardless, I still have to feed my cat.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Josie had made the decision to at least consider Grant’s outrageous claims and go along with him for the time being. Her strange loss of control over her hormones, along with her long, sharp teeth, had her realizing she’d have to stick to Grant to get to the bottom of things, including the arson and killings.

She watched the scenery fly by the windows of Grant’s SUV.

*A vampire?*

Those types of things didn’t exist. She eyed him with her peripheral vision, and she blushed with the fuzzy memory of her sex-crazed actions earlier. Tall, solid, athletic, with strong masculine features, he was the type of man any woman would notice. His scent filled the cab of the vehicle, causing an almost dizzying rush in her head. Raw male musk mixed with that spicy, wild odor. Josie’s body tingled, and her pussy tightened. His thick, sandy brown hair was tousled, and his deep brown eyes remained decidedly fixed on the road ahead.

He glanced in her direction before giving the hand she had clenched on the center console a gentle squeeze, and he gave her a quick grin. He was unlike most of the men Josie knew. He was unafraid to give her reassuring touches or gentle smiles that reached his eyes. She imagined he’d be one of those wearing-his-heart-on-his-sleeve type of guys. She wasn’t sure why that made her so uncomfortable.

Probably because he attacked and kidnapped her, not to mention the murders, she reminded herself.

He had agreed in the end to sneak her back to her home during the night so she could feed Millie. She had rescued the cat as a kitten from a storm gutter, and she’d been Josie’s companion for eight years. She might be a hard-edged detective, but she couldn’t be cruel to an animal.

The motel room was a two-star establishment, but it’d do. Grant had a hand on her lower back as they walked inside, and she eyed the

single bed in the middle of the room.

"I don't sleep. You will as long as you're a half-blood," Grant said. "Feel free to use the shower."

A shower sounded heavenly, and she walked into the small bathroom, purposefully keeping her gaze from the mirror above the sink. She adjusted the water first to her usual preference and winced at the feel of the heat against her hand. Finally lowering the temperature to a cool enough setting, she locked the bathroom door, wondering stupidly if that'd really stop a vampire. She disrobed and stepped under the sharp spray of water. The mild scented soap had a strange chemical odor that she didn't particularly care for, but she scrubbed away at her skin anyway. She flinched at the scent of the shampoo as it lathered in her hair.

Apparently, a vampire had a superhuman sense of smell.

She pondered why she accepted the absurd idea that she was a vampire as she rinsed her hair with water that reeked of chlorination. She closed her eyes, letting the cool spray beat over her face. After applying conditioner to her hair, she analyzed the events of the past twenty-four hours. She hadn't seen the figure that had attacked her, and had only a vague recollection of lying on the kitchen floor of the Montgomery house. She remembered the white flash of teeth coming at her throat and the feeling of being paralyzed.

Then she was in the tent with Grant.

Was he the killer?

Something inside of her, a gut instinct she relied on, said to give him the benefit of the doubt.

She stepped from the shower and dried her skin with a big, fuzzy, white towel. After a short pep talk, she looked into the small mirror above the sink. Her complexion had its normal, peachy glow. She pulled her lips back, baring her teeth, and gasped at the long animal-looking canines jutting from her pink gums. She tried to wiggle them, but they were solid. There was a faint scar across her throat that hadn't been there previously.

Dressed in the borrowed clothing, she wrapped the towel around her hair and walked out of the bathroom.

Grant was finishing a conversation on his cell phone, a hard

expression shadowing his face. He tossed the phone on the dresser and gave her a broad smile, a dimple appearing in his left cheek. "I'll run out and grab something for you to eat, if you like," he said.

"Like what?" she asked hesitantly.

"I can get takeout at one of the chain restaurants in town. You'll want to stick with proteins for the most part, like rare steak and fish." He paused. "Or else you can accompany me when I go to feed tonight."

Her eyes widened, and her mouth fell open. "Feed?"

Was he going to go out and murder some poor soul and drink their blood? As an officer of the law, she couldn't allow that, even if he *was* a vampire as he claimed.

He smiled at her shocked expression. "We could drop by your place so you can feed your cat, then go have takeout of our own."

An odd glow lay within the dark brown depths of his eyes.

He was teasing her.

She hoped.

"Um, I need to get in touch with my office," she said.

Grant frowned. "You can't contact them right now. Give it a couple of days."

She returned his frown. "I still don't understand what happened, what this is all about."

"I found you lying in a pool of blood in the Montgomery house. You'd been attacked by a Dissenter, a feral vampire, that left you for dead. I passed my blood to you to give you a second chance at life. I'm a *Hunter* in the *Order of Terminus*. It is my job to track feral vampires and destroy them so our kind isn't exposed."

Why she was so accepting of all these crazy explanations, she didn't know. She ran a finger over the sharp points of her teeth and winced as one of them nipped the inside of her cheek. Blood flowed into her mouth, and her heart quickened. The pungent, soured taste she'd awoken with flooded her mouth, but there was something else there that made a shiver run through her. She sucked her cheek in and, as more blood seeped out, her nostrils flared and her eyes widened.

## **Chapter Seven**

It was a taste that caused a craving to crash through her, knocking the breath from her lungs. Colors danced before her eyes, that strange Technicolor aura from before. Her gaze moved to Grant, whose thick eyebrows had knit together.

“Are you ok?” he asked, his form outlined in the array of crazy colors.

His heartbeat echoed in her ears, his pungent, piquant scent filling her nostrils.

He wasn’t what she needed.

She closed her eyes against the colors swirling in her vision and listened. Next door a television was on, and a man was speaking. A woman laughed. An instinct triggered within her.

They were what she needed.

Grant had watched her flinch as she’d bitten her cheek. Then her beautiful sapphire blue eyes were swallowed as blackened-red flooded first the pupils, then the irises, and at last the whites of her eyes. The detective must have picked up on the taste of her human blood mixed in with that of vampire after she’d bitten the inside of her mouth. Her feeding instinct had kicked in, and the way she stood motionless, her eyes closed against distraction, he knew she was stalking. He trained his ears and realized a couple was next door talking and laughing.

What if he couldn’t control her?

He made a step toward her, and her eyes flew open. Her teeth

bared, and a hiss escaped her throat. Muscles tensed, ready to lunge.

Oh god, she was protecting her prey.

"Detective Lewis," he said, making his voice hard and authoritative. "I know what you're thinking, but you're not going to feed on those people."

"I'm not thinking any such thing," she said, her voice wavering. Her body quivered, giving her away. She was definitely considering it.

"Listen to them. They're on their honeymoon," he said, trying to humanize them for her. With his heightened hearing, he could hear the couple chattering about the maid of honor knocking their wedding cake onto the floor.

"You're crazy. I wouldn't kill such a young couple." Her voice was far away.

He knew she was fighting her urges, and he was fully aware how hard that could be, especially in the beginning.

He had to distract her.

He only knew of one urge that could compete with the instinct to feed. In a flash of speed, he took her in his arms. Her eyes opened wide as the towel tumbled from her head, leaving her heavy, wet, sable locks tumbling down her back. Before she could react, he pressed his mouth to hers in a savage kiss that took her breath away.

Josie sucked in a shocked breath as his mouth viciously attacked hers. He pulled her tightly to him in what would have been a bruising embrace if she were fully human. She wanted to object, but as she opened her mouth, Grant's tongue thrust inside, claiming the words she'd begun to utter. The taste of him was the same pungent flavor as his scent, and it wiped away the thoughts of the couple next door. It was intoxicating, and she melded her body to his. Aggressively meeting his kiss, she curled her hands into his errant sandy locks, pulling at the silky strands, causing a groan of pleasure to escape his throat. She swallowed the sound.

He backed her to the bed, stepping away long enough to tug the borrowed T-shirt over her head. She pushed the athletic shorts down her hips, and they dropped to the floor. His gaze was a dark tempest, leaving a searing trail over her skin as they roved hungrily down her body. With a



hesitant movement, he stepped further back from her, and his gaze shifted to her eyes.

What did he want?

"Detective Lewis..." he said, his raw, gravely voice trailing off.

"Josie," she said huskily, reaching a hand out to him. "It's ok. I want this. I want you, Grant."

His body shook as he laced his strong fingers with her long, delicate ones. She pulled him toward her, and this time his kiss was just a whisper of its former urgency. His lips brushed against hers as his fingertips lightly traced a trail of fire down her spine. Something shifted inside of her, something beyond the physical. She was accustomed to raw, mutual passion from the handful of previous lovers she'd had. The men she went for weren't the kind who stuck around for long. This was something she expected and had refused to believe that she craved anything else.

But as his kiss gentled and deepened, his fingertips soft as butterfly wings over the flesh of her back, she felt puzzling sensations swirling within her gut. In an effort to push them aside, she ran her hands beneath his T-shirt, thrilling at the feel of the coarse hair sprinkled over his chest. He swiftly removed the impeding article of clothing as she moved her hands to the button of his jeans. The rough feel of the denim sent a shiver over her heated flesh as she stroked his thick cock through the coarse material. A guttural hiss escaped his throat as he pushed his cock against her roaming palm. She peered up into his face, and a sound of shock escaped her own throat. His lips had pulled back, and long, sharp canines were exposed.

Catching her look of alarm, he stroked her damp hair from her forehead.

"It's ok, Josie, sweetheart. It comes with over-stimulation."

Josie hesitated a moment longer, then moved her fingers to the zipper of his jeans. The scratching sound of the metal teeth giving way filled the room like an erotic backdrop.

Grant watched in fascination as she pushed the fabric down his hips then placed a gentle kiss on the end of his throbbing cock. The tip of

her pink tongue flicked out to taste the pre-cum there, and he thought his knees would buckle. He wound his hands in her damp hair as she took him fully in her hot, moist mouth. She sucked hard as she toyed with his nuts.

He was coming unglued. He pulled her back up to his waiting mouth, his kiss devouring her honeyed lips. Beneath the detective's hard-edged exterior lay a woman whose chief concern wasn't that of the vampire virus in her blood or that she'd been viciously attacked. It was that she had to feed a cat.

A weight sat in his chest, making him want to slow down and create an experience with her, not just perform an act.

For too long he'd spent his nights alone. Except for a moment here and there in the company of vampiresses, he'd remained alone since the loss of his fiancée. She'd succumbed to pneumonia shortly after his mining accident, having refused to leave the scene until he'd been found. It had been late March in Colorado. Too terrified to pass on the virus he didn't as yet understand, he'd simply sat at her bedside and watched her die.

He pushed away the sorrow that tugged at the corners of his mind.

Grant gently guided Josie onto the floral polyester coverlet, the double bed groaning as he moved above her. Her eyes were liquid pools of the darkest shade of cerulean, the deadly red shade having faded away. He placed hot kisses behind gentle fingers that traced a trail down her neck, inhaling her soft, intoxicating feminine fragrance mixed with the spicy vampiric aroma. She massaged the muscles of his back, and he groaned under the effort of his restraint.

"Please, Grant..." Her words were a soft plea as his mouth found a pert nipple. He nipped and teased at it as his fingers found her moist slit and he glided a finger back and forth between her wet folds. He brought the finger to her lips, and she licked her juices from it as her eyes locked with his.

She pulled his mouth to her hungry lips and wrapped long legs around his waist. With a moan, he found her hot pussy ready for him, and he took his time as he slid his cock within her wet opening.

She gasped then moaned as her tight body enveloped him, her nails raking his back. She nipped his neck as he pulled back a breathless moment before thrusting in hard to the hilt. She screamed and arched, while he continued to tease and torture her with his cock until she panted and writhed in sheer, pleasurable madness.

He found a rhythm that rocked her to her very core, and she rode wave after wave of sensation, each getting higher and higher. Her orgasm crashed over her, and she screamed his name, her body shuddering under the release.

Grant pushed himself further and harder, pounding into her, and she mounted those maddening crests of pleasure once more until they overtook her again. Her entire body convulsed this time as the orgasm hit her, and the shock of its intensity strangled the cry that was in her throat. Unable to restrain himself, Grant shouted her name as he exploded within her. He collapsed on top of her, and they both drifted for several lost minutes within a blissful paradise.

Josie stroked along the contours of Grant's back, his body braced on his forearms to keep his full weight off of her. They remained joined, connected in more than just a physical way. She had known physical pleasure from men, but this was beyond anything she'd experienced before. Somehow, in their act of love, he'd broken down a solid barrier she'd kept between herself and the world. It was a wall that was necessary to protect herself from the horrors of her career, but it also extended into her personal life. Having grown up in a home, watching a string of father figures pass through her childhood, she had unconsciously rejected permanent ties to men.

In the process of giving her body to this man, she had also shared with him a part of her soul.

## Chapter Eight

Grant shifted his body and lengthened his long frame alongside Josie. With a sigh, she slung a leg over his thighs, laying her head on his chest. She toyed her slim fingers through his chest hair, and he traced lazy circles on the silky skin of her back.

"So, what time do you want to leave so I can check on Millie?"

Grant remained silent, and she rose up to peer into his face. She pursed her lips.

"Later," he said simply.

She put her hand to her mouth, stifling a yawn.

"Why don't you catch some sleep before we leave tonight?" Grant said after placing a kiss on the top of her head. "We've had a quite a work-out this afternoon." He gave her a grin filled with mischief as her face flushed bright red.

"No, I'm..." She yawned. "...okay. Really."

In another minute, she was out cold, her breaths coming in slow, even puffs. Careful, so as not to wake her, Grant slipped from beneath her, pausing as she mumbled in protest. After she'd settled, he rose from the bed. Knowing she'd probably be out for a good long time as her body still worked to assimilate her new existence, Grant made his evening plans.

He had work to do tonight.

\* \* \* \* \*

Josie awoke with a start. She moved her arms, dully wondering why her silk sheets felt so coarse against her body. Reality took hold, and she sat up.

"Grant?" she called out. Not a soul stirred in the darkened room. Next door, grunts and moans of pleasure signaled the consummation of the newlyweds' marriage.

Embarrassment washed over her. Had they heard her and Grant so plainly?

Where was he anyway? Was he feeding, and if so on what?

On the dresser was a large plastic bag, and the aroma of food drifted to her. Suddenly ravenous, she sprang from the bed and tore into the bag like a starving animal. She ignored the plastic silverware and picked up the cold, rare steak with her hands and sank her teeth into it.

How long had she been sleeping?

Chewing on the bite of huge T-bone steak, she scanned the room, noting how well her vision had adjusted to the dark motel room. It was much like watching an old black-and-white movie. She frowned. There wasn't a clock anywhere. She devoured the rest of the T-bone and moved on to an under cooked salmon steak, the soft flesh of the fish dispensed with much quicker than the steak. With her hunger partially abated, she sat on the edge of the messy bed. Grant's pungent scent of male musk and that peculiar spicy aroma still hung thick in the air. She could taste it on the back of her tongue.

"Well, I guess I'm on my own tonight," she said aloud to the empty room. "Poor Millie must be famished." She'd left out a small amount of dry food for her to snack on through the day, but her canned food was the staple of her diet. She rose and threw on her discarded, borrowed clothing, wishing she at least had a bra and underwear. The formal loafers she wore to work looked silly with the rest of her attire, but they were comfortable.

*How am I going to get to my house from here?*

She searched a little guiltily through Grant's bags and was elated when she found her wallet and badge that had been in the pocket of her coat. She found a phonebook and called a cab, dreading the charge she

would see on her credit card.

The ride was about ten minutes long to Franklin from Gladsworth along the interstate. Josie had the driver drop her off at the end of a street, several blocks from her own place. She felt somewhat like a criminal sneaking through the darkness, trying her best to stay within the shadows. If a patrol car saw her and picked her up, she wasn't sure she could answer all the questions they'd throw at her.

The night was cold, her breath a heavy fog in the air as she walked, but it felt good against her hot skin. The night air smelled of moist earth, pavement, and car exhaust.

Would it always be like this?

She hated the idea of spending her existence slipping through shadows, hiding herself from the world.

When could she return to work?

She hadn't heard the news but was sure she had figured heavily into their reports. A missing detective would have improved ratings considerably, especially one that'd been a victim of a serial killer. Josie had made up her mind that Grant wasn't the killer, simply an officer of the law, in a way. Of course, that meant she'd broken her own rule of never getting involved with a cop. Doing so meant facing the fact she might lose him each day he headed off to work.

Were they involved? Did Grant consider them involved?

Insecurity rushed into her. She broke into a jog, then a dead run, feeling a rush of power and speed she'd never before experienced. The world was a blur around her as she dashed the remaining block and a half to her street. Breaking stride, she found she wasn't the least bit winded.

She grinned. This would help immeasurably in foot pursuits.

Her home stood dark, almost ominous, as she walked to the side gate of the privacy-fenced backyard. It stood in a subdivision that had been established in the late 70's, and the home itself still carried much of the architecture of the time. Some might think her home was outdated, but it was all hers, and she loved it.

At the keypad by the sliding glass of the patio door, Josie lifted her finger to punch in the security code to disarm her home's alarm system.

She frowned, seeing the alarm had already been deactivated.

*Maybe I forgot to arm it when I left.*

Somewhere, a neighbor's dog howled, its mournful call filling the night air. The hairs on her arms and the back of her neck stood on end.

*Something's out of place.*

An odor carried in the air, something sharp and familiar that tickled her senses. She placed a hand on the sliding glass door and gave it a nudge. It slid a few centimeters.

*I know I didn't leave the place unlocked.*

Automatically reaching for her non-existent side arm, Josie considered her next move. Someone was in her home, and she was unarmed. Well perhaps not *completely* unarmed, she ran her tongue over her teeth only to find her sharp canine teeth were gone.

*Ok, completely unarmed. Crap.*

The patio door slid on the track with a slight hiss, and Josie held her breath, listening for movement. The spicy odor hung heavy in the air, along with something more familiar. A strong male musk that struck tantalizing cords within her. Josie stepped into her dining room.

*Why had Grant been here?*

Suddenly, fear crept within her. The memory of the other two murders, and the arson of the Gomez home.

Was he still here?

A whisper of movement from the kitchen caught her attention. Her night vision had adjusted, and everything stood in sharp black-and-white contrast, much like a grainy old photo. Slowly, she made her way to the serving window in the wall separating the kitchen and dining room. As she peered into the kitchen, her breath left her lungs in a whoosh.

*Millie.*

The cat was nudging her empty food bowl. She looked up at her person and yowled. Josie waved a hand in vane to hush the cat, but Millie began a noisy round of requests to be fed.

*"Josie?"*

The voice made Josie scream, and she whirled around.

## Chapter Nine

"Grant? What the hell are you doing here?"

"You said you needed to feed your cat. I figured I'd stop by and do it," he said, shrugging. He stared at the wall to her left.

He was lying.

Grant put hands on his narrow hips, his gaze casting to the floor. An odd sensation in her mouth had her exploring her teeth with her tongue. Her sharp canines had extended.

"I know this looks bad," Grant said, extending his hands palms up toward her.

She stepped back. "You're the killer, aren't you? You're the one who burned down the Gomez house."

"I can explain," he began, but Josie cut him off.

"Explain what? The murders of two women? What were you planning on doing with me?"

"Josie!" A shocked voice called from the patio door. She and Grant spun to find Detective Jones standing within the open sliding glass door. Jones had a look of complete disbelief on his face as he trained his service revolver on Grant. The beam of the flashlight Jones carried momentarily blinded her, and she blinked then rubbed her eyes.

"Get out of here, Josie," Grant said in a low voice.

Her eyes refocused, and she found he had moved his body between her and Jones.

"Oh my god, Josie," Detective Jones said, his revolver still trained



on Grant.

Did bullets work on their kind?

She didn't want to find out.

"He's here to burn the place down, Josie," Grant said, his voice low and menacing.

Jones stance never wavered, though his eyes widened a hair.

She shook her head.

"But you were here first," Josie said in confusion. "Why would Jones burn down my home?"

"It's part of his game," Grant said, taking a side step as she tried to move from behind him.

"Game?" None of this made sense. Ms. Gomez's body had been missing blood, and that had to mean a vampire. *Grant*, she reasoned.

But she'd given Detective Jones the security code to disarm the alarm when she'd gone out of town several months back so he could feed Millie.

"He's your killer," Grant said. "He's a Dissenter, a feral vampire. I believe he was recently changed. He's the reason I'm here." His body was tightly coiled, ready to pounce. "When I got here, I hid in the neighbor's yard and watched him leave your house, Josie. The electrical box in the basement has been tampered with."

"The man is crazy, Josie. How long have you known me?" Jones asked. "A *vampire*? The man is obviously crazy."

She stared wide eyed at first Grant, then Detective Jones.

"I figured he'd make an appearance here tonight, since he's burned down the Gomez and the Montgomery house. I'd been one step behind until now," Grant said as his fists clenched and unclenched.

"The Montgomery house wasn't burned," Josie said. "Was it?"

"Don't listen to him, Josie. Get over here," Jones said in a demanding voice.

"You were just having your fun, baiting the cops by changing your M.O. slightly here and there." Grant again took a side step as she moved over impatiently. She was a cop and a vampire for crying out loud. She didn't need to be protected.

“Jones isn’t a vampire. I’ve known him for years,” Josie said.

Who was telling the truth? Her head said her fellow officer Detective Jones. But her heart said Grant.

In a flash of movement, Grant lunged forward, catching Jones off guard. The gun went off, the bullet lodging in the ceiling. The two men tumbled to the floor, the flashlight flying through the air. Somehow, a long, sharp dagger appeared from nowhere, and Josie looked from man to man, fearing for first one then the other. They scuffled for the weapon, and it flew from their flailing hands, landing at her feet. She reached down and grabbed.

Grant had the advantage, straddling Detective Jones with his hand over the downed man’s throat.

Jones choked. “For god’s sake, Josie, stab him through the heart with the damn thing.”

Her gaze moved to Grant as indecision flooded her mind.

Who was telling the truth?

Grant looked her in the eyes.

She knew then.

In a movement that was lightning fast, she surged forward and, just before driving the blade home, she flashed her sharp canines as fury boiled in her blood. “You were going to burn my house down with my cat in it!”

As the blade descended, Detective’s Jones’ lips curled back over teeth long and deadly sharp, his sharp vampiric scent flooding her nostrils. A hiss escaped just as the blade drove deep into the demon’s heart.

Then it was over.

Grant stood and took Josie into his arms as hot, salty tears burned her eyes, then welled over, tracing trails down her cheeks. The detective’s eyes were glassy, still staring at her, and Grant moved between her and the detective’s body.

Somewhere in the neighborhood, the long mournful howl of the dog ceased.

## Chapter Ten

Authorities were reporting that the death of Detective Ivan Jones closed the investigation into the homicides of Jolene Gomez and Claire Montgomery. It also solved the mysterious disappearance of Detective Josilynn Lewis and the subsequent arson of her own home.

The news report brought a sigh of relief to Josie, who sat in a motel room in Franklin, a temporary home until she could find a permanent place of residence. She stroked Millie's soft, dark blue coat, and the cat stretched a lazy paw before curling deeper into Josie's lap.

*At least she doesn't seem to care I'm a scary vampire now.*

A half-blood anyway, since she couldn't bring herself to taste human blood, even the donor blood Grant fed on despite the constant craving.

She had told authorities that Jones had kidnapped her then taken her back to her own home to murder her. Josie had explained how she'd managed to wrestle away the weapon he'd used to murder his victims and stab him with it. She had then escaped in the nick of time after an electrical short set her home ablaze. It was all a lie, of course.

Luckily, the Montgomery home had caught on fire, hiding the evidence of her excessive blood loss, which would've been difficult to explain away. Her home had to also burn with the body of the detective inside to hide his true identity.

As a newly inducted member of the *Order of Terminus*, she had to cover all evidence of the truth. It helped that Detective Jones had kept

mementos from both the Gomez and Montgomery murders, including vials of the victims' blood and stolen personal affects family members identified.

"Hey, sweetheart." The door to the motel room opened, and Grant walked in, carrying takeout and a paper bag filled with canned and dry cat food.

"Hey yourself," Josie said, smiling up at the man she'd finally admitted to herself that she loved.

He dropped a kiss on her lips and scratched the top of Millie's sleeping head. Her white whiskers moved forward in a kitty smile, and she purred in pleasure.

He walked back out, then reappeared, carrying a large bouquet of roses. Josie's face lit up, and she gently set Millie from her lap. She took the offered flowers and removed the card. On it was a handwritten note.

*Sorry I had to let your house burn down. Love, Grant.*

She blushed and reread the last two words. Her gaze moved up to his eyes, and he was smiling with that darling dimple showing.

"I love you, too," Josie said, feeling salty hot pools forming behind her eyelids.

Grant laughed. "I bought those for Millie, you know."

"Shut up and kiss me."

He paused before touching his lips to hers. "I love you, Detective Lewis."

The End

**Author Bio**

Olivia Starke grew up doodling, daydreaming, and drafting prose. When not catering to the needs of her four dogs, two cats, and four horses, she's typing furiously on her keyboard. She considers herself a true child of nature and loves being outdoors. She believes every story should have a happy ending and enjoys sharing her steamy works of love everlasting.

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