

# **LOCAL MONSTERS**

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The cops tracked them down in a trailer out in the county. It was one of those old rust-colored rectangles where someone had added a tiny porch in both the front and the back to make it “homey.” With the tornados in Western Kentucky, it seemed like a miracle that the trailer was still standing. But there it was.

One of the kids they were looking for had a cousin who went to church with a cop, and eventually the location of the fugitive crew trickled down the chain to Lindy, who had been pulled in on the case.

They were kids. Not in a folksy way, but an underage way. Lindy didn’t care what anyone said about teens being more mature, more sexual, more intelligent, more whatever; to her anyone under the age of 18 was a dumbass. They would remain dumbasses even after they turned 18 until proven otherwise. But at that point, the law said they were legally consenting to their own dumbassery. Anything before that birthdate was part of their natural, idiotic, process of figuring themselves out.

But these kids did the most idiotic thing possible, and that was to go out and kill some people, which is why Lindy was wearing a bulletproof vest and a shield outside of a trailer in Newburn County.

She’d been pulled off her current cases. Her Lieutenant told her she didn’t have a choice — and to not be an asshole about it. The reason: no one else wanted it. It wasn’t their jurisdiction, which meant letting some Florida cops come in and boss them around.

The Florida guys were Detectives Lowe and Armstrong. They wore lightweight silk suits and carried leather portfolios with iPads tucked inside. When they pulled Lindy into the interview room, one of them typed on a tiny keyboard while the other grilled her about a routine stop some years before.

Armstrong was the one who did all the typing. "When you saw them that night, did they look strange to you?"

"Strange? How are we defining strange these days?"

"You know. Strange." Lowe was the standing one. And he did that thing that she'd been told not to do at a seminar the year before: he planted his foot on a chair like he was stretching and placed his hand on his hip to show his weapon. It was just so much posturing. "Long stringy hair? Black clothes? Silver jewelry?"

She pegged them both as idiots. "Do you mean, did they look like they shopped at Hot Topic in the nineties?"

Armstrong was able to talk while he typed, which was throwing her off. He asked, "Why didn't you take them in?"

"I had no reason to take them in. They were a group of teenagers walking home after dark."

Armstrong asked, "Is it often that teens walk around in this town after dark?"

"Yeah. It's a college town. We're overrun with aimless teens who have no concept of functioning business hours, and they all walk in packs."

"It didn't seem suspicious enough for a pat down?"

"I saw no indication that they were armed."

Lowe asked, "Weren't they wearing long trench coats?"

"Who told you that? It was summer. Did you even read my report?"

"This report indicates that you came upon a pack of youths and didn't even do a standard search for weapons, which makes me wonder what you're covering up."

"Oh my God!" Somehow, she'd added a "w" to the word, making it sound like "Gawd." She didn't allow it to trip her up. "What I saw was a group of potential trespassers, who were not trespassing when we came upon them. They showed no signs of inebriation or signs of anything other than trying to walk home. In the middle of the stop, we were called out to an armed robbery, so they were given a warning and told to go home."

The detectives exchanged a series of obnoxious knowing looks. She was sick of them already. They showed her a photo of a young blond male with curly blonde hair and a sneer. It was Mike DeBrunner. He asked, "Was he one of them?"

"Yeah," she said. "He did all the talking." Mike had introduced himself when she spotted him and his crew wandering through the old, abandoned graveyard that night. He was charming and comfortable talking to cops, like he'd had to explain himself his whole life. A nearby family had complained about "them devil-worshiping kids" roaming around their family cemetery.

Lowe showed Lindy another photo. "What about her?"

Her hair was shorter than Lindy remembered, and the photo showed she had Manic Panic red streaks in it now. It was a selfie, probably posted on her socials. "Yeah. She was there that night."

"Was she with anyone or off to the side?"

When Lindy confirmed that the last time she'd seen that girl, she'd been tucked under the arm of DeBrunner, she asked, "So, what is this? What are y'all thinking?"

"We think she's here. What we don't know is if she's here willingly."

They showed her the evidence. The crime scene photos. The bloody Converse shoe print in the kitchen where the mother had been stabbed. The father's neck had been slit in his bed. It was a quiet kill. They pointed out hesitation marks on the wound, which might have been what woke the mother. Either they ran and the mother chased them, but more likely the mother ran, and they caught her in the kitchen.

"One assailant?" Lindy asked.

"Can't say for sure. We have one footprint. But we have footage from a Sunoco that shows a blue Ford Aerostar —"

"An Aerostar? Where did they dig that up? Could an Aerostar even make it from here to Clearwater?"

"I don't know, but apparently this one did," Lowe said. "It

was full of teens stopping for gas before the murders. It had Kentucky plates on it. That's what led us here."

"Who did the plates belong to?"

"A Rex Matthews," Armstrong said. "Who told us his license plate was stolen off his truck in the Walmart parking lot. He'd reported it, but as long as the car didn't get pulled over, no one was going to notice."

"You're thinking this pack of teens drove down to Clearwater to kill this girls' parents and run off with her."

"That's what it's looking like." They pulled an evidence bag out of a box. "We found these when we searched her room." Through the plastic on the bag, she could see folklore books and references on vampires. They all had Newburn County High School typed above a bar code. Another bag had a marble-covered notebook in it. They slid photocopies of entries from the journal across the desk. Lowe said, "Dark stuff."

It was the teenaged ramblings of a girl who was angry with her parents for moving her to Florida. She hated her new school, the stupid muggy weather, and all her lame classmates. She missed Mike and their crew of friends. Then it got dark. She spoke about blood, death, sires, souls colliding, and a bunch of other teen crap. *We ritualized under the blood moon.*

"Okay." Lindy slid the pages back to the detectives. "So what?"

"We've been calling around, and a lot of people around here think this DeBrunner kid is building himself an army, a commune, a cult or something."

"A lot of people around here watch too much TV. So, what? You got anything more than a Black Sabbath sticker and some gothic poetry?"

"Did you look at this?" Lowe slid the plastic-wrapped journal closer to her. "The parents are murdered in the night, the daughter disappears, and these assholes are on tape with stolen license plates. It doesn't look good."

“No.” Lindy picked up the photo from the Sunoco station and studied it. “It doesn’t. So now what?”

Armstrong stopped typing. “We find these little assholes and haul them in.”