

1 The Sleepwalking Vampire

Steve's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Did you just say your niece is a...vampire?"

Matt swallowed his mouthful of chocolate shake in one gulp. "As in, sucks the blood out of people with super sharp fangs, vampire?"

The owner of the diner reclined his tall, dark body back into the chair he had pulled up to the booth, and sighed. "I said, she thinks she's a vampire."

Tyrone Washington was a good friend of the three twelve-year-olds. The kids had just returned to their homes in Beachdale from solving their last case, when they received his phone call saying his niece had a problem he thought the Decoders could help her with. The Decoders was the name of the secret detective team Steve, Matt, and Jenny had created when they started solving mysteries.

Jenny tied her long blonde hair into a bun. "So, why exactly does she think she's a vampire?"

Tyrone drew in a deep breath. "It all started about six months ago. My sister, Abby's mom, would wake up in the middle of the night and find Abby wandering down the hallway, completely asleep. She began taking her to a psychiatrist, hoping to cure her of her sleep walking." He reached over and took a sip from his soda. "For a while, it worked. But then, about three weeks ago, it started happening again. Abby would fall asleep in her bedroom and wake up somewhere else. Once, she woke up outside, lying on a lawn chair near the pool."

Jenny leaned over and stole a French fry off Matt's plate. "Okay, so she's got a sleepwalking problem. What does this have to do with her being a vampire?"

Tyrone leaned in. "Here's the deal. Two nights ago, Abby set up a video camera, you know, to catch herself in the act. The next morning she woke up asleep on the bathroom floor with the window open. The window in her bedroom was open, too."

"Did she get what happened on tape?" Steve asked, completely engrossed in the story.

Tyrone nodded and traced the rim of his cup with his index finger. "When she checked the video the next morning, that's when she saw it."

Matt took the top bun off the burger on his plate. "Saw what?" He reached for the ketchup bottle.

Tyrone looked around and lowered his voice. "She saw herself get up out of bed, open the bedroom window, then walk into the bathroom. A moment later, a bat flew out of the bathroom, fluttered in circles around the room, and then took off out the bedroom window."

Matt froze. "She turned into a bat?" A massive clump of ketchup splashed on his burger. He frowned and scooped some of it off with a French fry before taking a bite.

Tyrone nodded. "At least, that's what she believes happened."

Steve scrunched his forehead. "That doesn't explain why she woke up asleep in the bathroom."

"Abby thinks when she woke up at night and went into the bathroom, she opened the

window in there before her...transformation.”

Just then, a waitress waved to Tyrone for help.

He stood. “I’ll be right back.”

After he left, Steve shook his head. “This theory seems pretty flawed. Why would she need two windows open? Logically, one would be enough. She could easily fly in and out of just her bedroom window.”

Matt slurped the last bit of shake from the bottom of his glass. “Dude, the girl’s a vampire. I’m pretty sure she doesn’t exactly think logically. She’s probably got all kinds of crazy thoughts floating through her head.”

“Wow,” Jenny said as she took a fry off Matt’s plate, “sounds like the two of you have a lot in common.”

“Very funny.” Matt moved his food out of her reach. “But, seriously, this sounds like way out of our league. Maybe Tyrone should call a witchdoctor or something.”

Jenny waved her arms wildly in the air. “This is totally in our league.” She sounded excited. “Can you imagine if she really is a vampire? It would be like the greatest thing ever.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “How is finding a vampire like the greatest thing ever? What are you gonna do when she tries to turn you into one of the undead? I bet she—”

“First of all,” Steve interrupted before his two friends began arguing pointlessly, “there are no such things as real vampires. And second, this is Tyrone’s niece we’re talking about. It’s our obligation as his friend to get to the bottom of this and help him out.”

Tyrone returned and sat down. “Sorry about that.”

Steve sat up straight. “The Decoders would be happy to take your case. When do we start?”

The man looked relieved. “How about tomorrow? I told my sister I had some friends that might be able to help. She doesn’t know you’re detectives, she just hopes that having some kids Abby’s age around will help her with her sleepwalking problem. Abby doesn’t really have a lot of friends. They’ve moved three times in the last two years, so she has a hard time getting close to people.”

Matt pushed his brown hair out of his eyes. “Where do they live now?”

Tyrone took a sip of his drink. “In a small town called Timberwood, about half-way between us and Sacramento. By the way, her parents haven’t been told about the vampire thing. She only told me because she was hoping I would have some idea of what to do. She’s scared her parents are going to put her in a looney house.”

Steve turned to his friends. “Do either of you have any pressing matters in the next couple days?”

Matt pushed his empty plate forward and leaned back. “Nope. The only thing I had planned was a trip to the beach. I can put that off for a few days.”

Jenny checked the calendar on her cell phone. “I’m free. I just have to double check with my dad and make sure he doesn’t need me.” Her dad owned a repair shop, and Jenny, who was great at fixing things herself, often helped him out.

“Perfect,” Steve said. “Tyrone, we’ll make sure it’s okay with our parents, then we’ll give you a call. Hopefully, by this time tomorrow night, we’ll be with your niece, solving this mystery.”

The next day, at three-thirty in the afternoon, Steve and his friends walked up the steps to Abby’s house.

They rang the doorbell and a beautiful woman in her thirties opened the large, oak door. “Hi, Ty.” She reached over and hugged Tyrone. “Thank you so much for coming.”

“You know it.” He let her go and pointed to the young detectives. “These are the friends I was telling you about. Denise, let me introduce you to Steve Kemp, Matt Peterson, and Jenny Reed. Kids, this is my sister, Denise Samson.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, kids.” She smiled. “Please, come in.”

The group followed her into the house. Mrs. Samson escorted them into the large living room, then left to get Abby.

Steve looked around, admiring the beautiful decorations. The furniture was antique, complimented by sculptures, and portraits hung around the room. He noted that the family was, obviously, pretty well off.

Tyrone’s sister returned, leading a girl about a year younger than the three detectives into the room.

Jenny stepped forward. “You must be Abby. I’m Jenny.” She pointed behind her. “That’s Matt and that’s Steve.”

The two boys waved.

“Hi.” The girl smiled. “Um, would you guys like a tour?”

They nodded.

The eleven-year-old showed them all around the first floor, then motioned for the kids to follow her upstairs. She led them to the room the boys would be sharing, which had a regular bed and a pull-out couch. The group then followed Abby across the hall, into a room with an identical set up.

She pointed to the sofa. “Jenny’s gonna crash here with me. I hope that’s okay.”

Jenny threw herself on the sofa and sprawled out, giggling. “This is perfect.”

Abby looked around, as though making sure no one was listening. She lowered her voice. “I’m really glad you guys are here. I don’t know what to do.” Her voice sounded shaky. “Uncle Ty said you guys were really good at solving mysteries. You’ve got to help me stop turning into a vampire.”

Steve glanced toward the hallway. “We need to hear everything that has happened so we can take notes. But, not now. Later. I think Tyrone and your parents are waiting for us to join them. As we started up the stairs, I heard your mom mention something about an early dinner being ready soon.”

“Dinner?” Matt repeated. “Yes! I’m starving.”

Abby headed for the door. “We’re having meatloaf and mashed potatoes. I hope you like

it.”

Matt grinned. “Are you kidding? I love meatloaf.”

Jenny stood and followed the others as they made their way down the hallway. “Matt, you love all food. But, you better keep that appetite of yours under control. We don’t want to be kicked out of the house before it even starts getting dark outside.”

Abby turned back to face them. “No, it’s all right. My mom always makes enough food for like fifty people. She’s crazy. Sometimes, we end up with leftovers for a whole week.”

Jenny laughed. “I don’t think that’ll be a problem with Matt around.”

The boy patted his stomach. “What can I say? I’m a growing kid.”

Jenny’s blue eye’s twinkled. “Yeah, and if you don’t watch it, you’ll grow right out of those jeans.”

Laughing, the kids joined the adults in the dining room. Throughout the meal, Steve tried to take in as much as he could about Abby and her parents. Mrs. Samson was an athletic woman, who looked remarkably like her brother, Tyrone. And, like him, she knew everything and everybody in town. But her face seemed worried. Steve wondered if Abby’s sleepwalking was the cause, or if something else was going on.

Abby’s dad was tall, darker-skinned than his wife, more like Steve’s own color, with a shaved head, and reminded Steve of Mace Windu from Star Wars. He worked as an engineer and had a wide, cheerful smile.

Then there was Abby. Her hair hung in ringlets and she had her father’s dark brown eyes. From what Steve could see, the girl was quiet. She didn’t speak much during dinner, and seemed nervous. She played with the food on her plate more than actually eating it.

Matt, on the other hand, had three helpings of meatloaf and praised Mrs. Samson over and over for her amazing cooking skills. The woman beamed from his compliments. Steve smiled. If there was one thing Matt had always been good at, it was making a cook feel like the greatest chef in the world.

Once the meal was over, Tyrone announced he had to get back to the restaurant. He pulled Steve over to the side. “Keep me posted,” he said in a hushed voice.

The boy nodded. “I will.”

The tall man gave his sister a good-bye hug and left. After closing the door, Mrs. Samson turned to the kids and smiled.

“I’m glad you three will be spending the night. Marcus and I have a benefit to attend and I’m not sure how late we will be. It makes me feel better knowing that Abby won’t be alone for too long.”

“Mom,” Abby said, obviously embarrassed. “I’ll be okay.”

Mrs. Samson pressed her lips together, then sighed. “It’s just that with this sleepwalking thing, I...I just worry about you, Sweetie. Maybe I should call a sitter.”

Abby looked horrified. “Mom!”

Steve cleared his throat. “You won’t have to worry about her tonight, Mrs. Samson. We’re all going to be here with her.”

“Yeah,” Matt chimed in. “We brought about a hundred movies to watch, and popcorn, and M&M’s, and pretzels.”

Jenny nodded. “And, once we get tired and go to bed, I’ll be sleeping in the same room with her. She’ll be fine.”

The woman smiled. “Ty did say you three were the most responsible kids he knew.”

“May we be excused now?” Abby asked. “I wanna show them the library.”

Her mother smiled. “Of course. I’ll let you know when we’re leaving.”

Abby led the kids upstairs into a room lined with bookshelves. The young girl closed the door and motioned for the kids to sit on the various recliners scattered throughout the room.

Steve excused himself for a moment and returned with a notebook and pen. He chose a recliner facing Abby, kicked off his shoes, sat cross-legged, and prepared his notebook for notation. “Okay, Abby, now that we’re alone, start at the beginning and tell us everything that’s been happening.”

She took a deep breath. “One day, about six months ago, I woke up in the middle of the night, and I was lying on the floor in the kitchen. I had no idea how I got there, so I just got up and went back to bed.”

Steve scribbled on his paper. “Did something strange happen that day?”

Matt stretched his arms over his head and leaned back in his recliner. “I’d say waking up in the middle of the night in the kitchen counts as strange.”

“Really?” Jenny said, a smirk on her face. “I would think that’s pretty normal for you.”

Matt threw a pillow at her.

“What I meant,” Steve said, trying not to laugh, “was, did anything strange happen earlier in the day? Like, maybe at school?”

Abby shook her head. “Nope. Nothing. Then, about a week later, I woke up around midnight, and I was in the living room, lying on the sofa.”

“And nothing out of the ordinary happened that day either?”

The girl shook her head again. “When it happened again, about a week later, I finally told my mom.”

“What did she say?”

“She said she’d check on me that night. Sure enough, around two in the morning, she found me walking down the hall, completely asleep.”

Jenny twirled the tassel hanging from the pillow on her lap. “That’s crazy. Did she wake you up?”

“No. She had heard it was dangerous to wake up a sleepwalker, so she just followed me. Mom said it was super creepy, because my eyes were open, but I was totally asleep.”

“What happened next?” Steve prompted.

“I went to the dining room and curled down on the floor. Mom woke me up, and I couldn’t remember walking there, at all. She and Dad decided I needed to get some help before I hurt myself. That’s when they started taking me to Dr. Hollister. He’s a psychiatrist.”

Matt pulled the lever on his chair to raise the leg rest. “Did it help?”

She shrugged. "I thought so. For a while, the sleepwalking stopped. He came over to the house a few times to make sure I was cured. But the moment I finished our meetings, the problem began again, and worse than before. One time, I woke up outside on a lawn chair next to the pool. That really freaked my parents out. Dr. Hollister figured it was probably just my brain acting out because of the change in routine. He said he'd keep seeing me twice a week, then decrease my sessions slowly to give my body time to get used to the change."

"What are the sessions like?" Steve asked.

Abby bit her lip. "They're always different. Sometimes, we just talk, about random stuff like school or my friends. Sometimes, we do tests."

"Tests?" Matt's face wrinkled, looking like he had just eaten an extra sour Warhead candy. "Ugh. Note to self, no psychologists for me."

Jenny rolled her eyes and threw her pillow at him.

Steve frowned, "First of all, I don't think he's giving her school tests, like math or reading. He's most likely giving her mental tests to help evaluate her brain. And, secondly, it's psychiatrists not psychologists."

Matt shrugged and tossed the pillow up in the air. It landed on the floor next to Jenny. "Tests are tests. It doesn't matter why they're given, they're still tests. And what's the difference between psychiatrists and psychologists. Aren't they the same thing?"

Steve shook his head. "Not exactly. The biggest difference is that psychiatrists go to medical school and can prescribe medicine. The others can't. Has Dr. Hollister given you any medication?"

She nodded. "Yeah, but not to take all the time. He gave me some kind of pill to help me sleep if I get all riled up from sleepwalking. I've only used it a couple times so far, but," she paused for a moment, "after what happened a couple days ago, I'm thinking about using it every night."

"What happened a couple days ago?" Matt asked.

"That's when I found out I'm a vampire."

Matt gulped. "Sorry I asked."

Steve flipped to a new page in his notebook. "Tell us exactly what happened."

She motioned for them to follow her into her bedroom. She and Jenny sat on the bed and the two boys dropped down on the sofa.

"I think it's happened three times. I go to sleep, then wake up on the floor of my bathroom with the window open. After the second time, I decided to film myself so I could show Dr. Hollister what was going on."

She pointed to the dresser on the wall facing her bed. "I set up the video camera over there so I could get a good picture. I hit record and then went to sleep. The next morning, I woke up in the bathroom again. But, when I looked at the video, I...I couldn't believe what was on there."

"Can you describe to us what you saw?" Steve asked.

The girl stood. "I can do better than that. I can show you the tape." She walked over to

her dresser, pulled out a video camera from the top drawer, and connected it to the TV. After returning to her bed, she sat down and turned on the television with a remote.

The image on the screen showed her walking back from the dresser and crawling into bed. Abby pushed a button on the remote. "Let me fast-forward to the good part."

The kids watched the monitor. After a few moments, Abby slowed the picture down. "It's coming up."

Steve leaned forward in anticipation. In the video, Abby got up and opened the window next to her bed, then walked into the bathroom.

"Uh, was that it?" Matt asked.

"Just keep watching," Abby said.

The kids continued to stare at the television. Soon, they saw something fly out of the bathroom and circle around the room several times before flying outside through the bedroom window."

Matt jumped up. "Whoa! Was that what I think it was?"

"Can we watch it again?" Steve asked.

Abby rewound the video to the part just before she got out of bed.

Steve moved closer to the TV. There had to be something in there that made sense. Vampires did not exist.

They watched the video a second time. Steve frowned. It was unmistakable. The thing flying out of the bathroom was a bat. How could that be?

