

THE ANTI-VAMPIRE TALE

Bestselling Author of *FACES IN TIME* and *COLD STREAK*

LEWIS ALEMAN

THE

ANTI-VAMPIRE

TALE

ALSO BY LEWIS ALEMAN

COLD STREAK

FACES IN TIME

THE
ANTI-VAMPIRE
TALE

LEWIS ALEMAN



MEGALODON ENTERTAINMENT, LLC.

Published by Megalodon Entertainment, LLC. (USA)
www.MegalodonEntertainment.com

First Printing: December 2010

Copyright © 2010 Lewis Aleman. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright conventions. No part of this publication may be reproduced, or transmitted by any means in any form (electronic, photocopying, mechanical, recording, or any other method), without the specific written permission of the author. Please, direct questions to info@megalodonentertainment.com.

Visit **LEWIS ALEMAN** and the world of **THE ANTI-VAMPIRE TALE** on the web at:

WWW.LEWISALEMAN.COM

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-61589-026-2

ISBN-10: 1-61589-026-2

THE ANTI-VAMPIRE TALE is a work of fiction; all of its characters are inventions of the author. Any resemblance to the living or the dead is entirely coincidental.

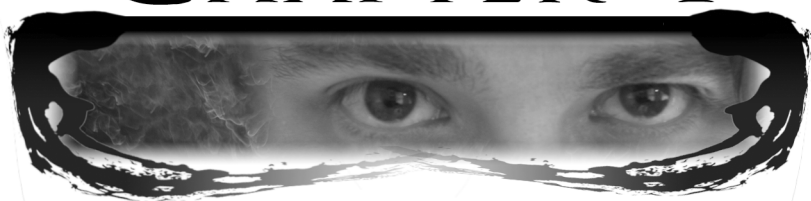
BULK INQUERIES:

Quantity discounts are available on bulk orders of this novel for educational, fund-raising, promotional, and special sales purposes. For details, please contact www.MegalodonEntertainment.com

There are such beings as vampires, some of us have evidence that they exist. Even had we not the proof of our own unhappy experience, the teachings and the records of the past give proof enough for sane peoples.

-BRAM STOKER, *DRACULA*, 1897

CHAPTER I



REGARDING VAMPIRES

I sit at the bar pondering the lust to rip flesh apart but not the heart to dive into it. I've deprived myself of its incomparable sweetness for the better part of five decades, but my body grows weary and my resolve is reduced to mere gossamer. The temptation consumes like nothing else.

The last time I lost control, it resulted in the death of the most beautiful face ever prematurely veiled. Either I've denied myself for so long to spare any other tender girl the same fate, or perhaps I haven't been looking out for anyone but myself and simply haven't seen another face that can compare to her memory, a face that could make me believe I'm more than I am, a beast full of never-ending bloodlust.

The reason why I've kept my yearning fangs out of young, taut female necks matters little. The end result is the same—I am tired of fighting and feel deader than those that are allowed to rest in afterlife. If I can't have peace, then I'll embrace the distraction of temptation—to give in and plant the sharp kiss

that my body aches for into some pretty thing.

I sit in a mostly empty bar on Decatur, a place for people avoiding the Quarter crowd. The wooden planks on the walls are aged, and much like me, they no longer have the strength they once had. Nearby it's very different. The clamor just down the street beckons me. The pounding of the hot, crowded dancing pulses through me. All that I've avoided and craved drinks, dances, and flirts within my reach. I can almost taste it in the air floating down this infamous street to me.

Adding to my frustrations, the world misunderstands us vampires. Few believe we exist. Those that do believe have such strange notions of what we are.

The most absurd notion is that a bitten human will turn into a vampire. It's biologically ridiculous. You are a human because you have human DNA. Vamps have their own cursed genes. A vamp can no easier change your DNA into that of a bloodsucker than your dog could bite your ankles and make you chase cars, roll over, and become fixated with sniffing other canine rumps. A bite can only transfer saliva and blood. Drinking a giraffe's blood or saliva can't mystically make you 15 feet tall with a long, spotted neck. Neither can vamp blood turn you into one of us. There is no magic substance to make you into another being.

The only thing you'll turn into from a vampire biting your neck is, if he or she indulges for a moment too long, a dead human.

Secondly, vampires are not regal and elegant. Blood junkies are dirty addicts. When was the last time you saw a junkie who spoke like a prince and was as well-groomed as a movie star? I'm not talking about one who dabbles with a bad habit, but one who is a complete slave to it. A vamp's whole life is directed toward getting that next fix of blood—manners are not important. Vamps no more wear puffy, ruffled poet's shirts, speak with British accents, or use fancy erudite words than would

a homeless addict living under a bridge.

Thirdly, you *can* kill a vampire.

A stake through the heart or a silver bullet is going to hurt a vamp, but neither will kill it. However, doing those things to a vampire will likely guarantee that the enraged blood freak will not sleep or rest until he can return the painful favor to you.

Likewise, sunlight is only going to annoy a creature who has been prowling all night and is probably hung-over. No different than a human who has been out all night partying. Despite the myth, there is no logical way for the sun to make a vamp burst into flames.

The reason why vamps are hard to kill is they can heal. Beyond anything humans have ever seen, vamps can heal from nearly any wound.

While making us horribly sick for a short while, disease and infections are eradicated by our super-driven immune system. There is no single disease ever known to kill a vampire. I think the demands of our hyperactive immune systems and healing abilities are what drive us to drink fresh blood to sustain them. These processes are exhausting on the body, and require unnatural fuel to keep them going. No one knows if it's why we crave blood, but it makes sense to me.

A vampire can be killed if the healing factor is cut off. Burning a vamp won't kill him, although it would be excruciating. We seem to feel pain as much as humans, but it doesn't kill us. However, burning a vampire to nothing but ashes will terminate him forever.

There is a legend, centuries old, of a vamp being reborn after his head was cut clean off. The story claims the head was placed back on the body for burial, and while in the ground, it slowly came back to life, clawed its way out of its coffin, and attacked the townspeople with relentless hatred. No one is old enough to have witnessed it to prove it's true, but most believe if the head had been destroyed, there would have been no chance at

recovery.

Basically, if blood is left around the injury, it will heal. Drain or burn up the blood, and you've drained the vamp's life.

In the case of beheading, it seems to me that without a head there is nothing to control the healed body, and it will eventually die.

No one I know has seen a beheading, at least not a vampire beheading. We've learned to only expose ourselves to unreliable witnesses. That's why we cling to places like New Orleans and its lively Quarter. No one believes the testimony of someone who drinks themselves into a stupor and then claims the next day to have encountered a vampire. Most times they don't even believe their own memory of it, blaming the alcohol or whatever else they consumed the night before.

We stick to the clubs and bars. There are artsy neighborhoods with bohemian residents who would also make easy prey and are not likely to be noticed by many if they go missing. But their dislike of regular baths makes them quite untasty targets. And their particular mix of unwashed stink and patchouli is highly unpleasant to our heightened senses. However, the polished party people are usually clean, delightfully hot from dancing, and easily willing to be lured away by an attractive vamp.

Speaking of the desirables, the sounds of their partying reach my eardrums, and my body rages.

I step outside the bar, walking toward the sounds of the revelry, and the night air rushes into me, awakening feelings that I've kept buried for so long. The wind breezes over my body, lifting my black hair off my shoulders. I'd swear the wind hasn't blown like this in half a century, but I know I just chose not to feel it, thinking it was wrong for me to enjoy it without her. Now the wind feels charged, tickling my bare arms, as if the earth were sending all of its energy right here, right now for something important to begin.

The sky seems as electric as I feel—the moon a lit reminder of the unchained wildness of the evening. Some deem the moonlight to be romantic, but this city of masks, drinks, and desires has no idea what infection is now spreading through its veins.

CHAPTER II



REGARDING WALLFLOWERS

Light breaks through the openings in the tall bell tower, entering my tired eyes and falling flat on my tired mind, taunting me that I should feel something. Been so long since I felt anything.

As I sit in the grass in the middle of the quad on such a magnificent day, I know I should be feeling some sensation.

Class ends, and people pour in and out of old, imposing, brick buildings, each with a different emotion on their face. Horrified at the test they just failed, relieved with being dismissed for the day, elated with having learned something new. Some of them from out of town smiling at the quaintness of catching the streetcar down St. Charles to Carrolton to get some lunch.

I'm not a jaded hometown girl, but definitely a dulled one. The boys around here drink too much, spend too much time making their hair seem perfectly unbrushed, and too much money on I-listen-to-Dave-Matthews-so-I-must-be-hip sandals. Don't get me wrong—there's nothing wrong with any of that, and it

seems every other girl here goes gaga over it. I've even tried it for myself, and all it's done is leave me sitting in the hot late summer grass feeling as out of place as the church bell tower on this college campus dominated by vocal atheists.

Maybe I was just meant to exist in a century past, when the tower was in its prime and courtship was not embedded in superfluous social games played by 20-somethings having a second teenage decade with adult privileges.

But, they all seem happy...

Am I that much of a mutant that I can't be what they are, or have they never paused long enough to stroll through the same lonely, pensive hallways as me? Can't say I'd wish it upon any of them. Let them be happy.

Even my name—Ruby—doesn't fit me with my brown hair that doesn't resemble any gem I've ever seen.

People walk in many directions all around me—cutting across the grass to get to their next class, walking along the paved sidewalk in front of me, or wandering around looking for a nice place to sit.

A girl approaches wearing a shirt that reads "No Fur" while holding a mobile phone wrapped in a leather case. A boy passes me with the chain from his wallet jingling at his knees, wearing a shirt that says "Independent"—just like 15 other guys on the quad right now who all apparently share the same closet. A group of boys form a hacky sack circle just to the left of me.

All of them seem to shine in the sunlight and move around me in a dance I don't know. I feel like a black hole in a sky full of identical stars.

Here comes something different. '80s-style sunglasses that consist of one thin blade covering her eyes—making her look like a machine; nose ring; black and white striped stockings in 91-degree, sticky, New Orleans weather with a blue Pippy-Longstockings-style ponytail on both sides of her head. Amidst the blue hair are traces of red highlights, more like streaks.

That's my crazy friend, Ambrosia. I'd call her eccentric, but she works very hard to get people to call her crazy. In fact, she already has people calling her Ambrosia when the name on her official schedule is Amber.

"What's up, chica?" she asks as she plops down on the grass beside me.

It's so hard for me to talk to her with her sunglasses on—makes me feel like I'm talking to the shades and not her.

"Just hanging out. Still have about an hour before I need to be at Riverview High."

"What are we doing tonight?" she quickly asks another question, although I'm not sure she listened to my answer to the first one.

"I wasn't planning on anything. Maybe a movie."

"B-o-r-ing."

"Hey, I'm just not a party girl. Not everybody has to *Wang Chung* tonight to have a good time."

Lifting up her sunglasses to reveal her yellow color contacts on bloodshot eyes, "*Everybody needs to Wang Chung to have a good time.*"

I can't keep from cracking a smile.

"Come on, Ruby, you have to go out—it's your 19th birthday for Pete's sake. What else are you gonna do—sit in the grass alone getting all philosophical-like?"

Laughing nervously, I say, "Yeah right, I'm not that big of a loser yet."

The truth stings a little more when it comes from your own lips. Self-realization may be healthy, but sometimes it sucks.

Ambrosia smiles wickedly, and I know she's brewing some mayhem for tonight that'll make me wish I was at home clinging to my lonely nerdism. Dropping her blade-sunglasses back over her eyes, she says, "Then, '80s Night it is."

"Oh, Lord."

CHAPTER III



DESCENT FROM DECENCY

“Come on, keep up!” are the words she leaves trailing over her shoulder to me as she plunges into the hive.

Weaving between shoulders and hands grasping plastic cups that drip alcohol, I follow my blue-haired friend into the center of the vortex.

She moves and bops from one side to the other with the smack of the snare drum that so defines ‘80s music. She effortlessly becomes a part of the crowd like a drop of water added to a pool. I feel like a rock clumsily plunked in, making an unwanted wake.

Thank God—she reaches the exact epicenter of the dancing, turns, and extends her hands out for me to join her, giving me some visible reason for being out here on the dance floor with the graceful and the cool.

The song ends, and I nervously hold my breath, waiting to hear what’s coming next that I’m supposed to dance to. The

sound of a keyboard playing the intro to “I Just Died in Your Arms Tonight” brings out a cheer from the crowd and raises hands in the air. I love the song, but I’m petrified, cold fear spreading through my body.

Ambrosia spins herself around, spattering the people around her with tiny droplets of her colorful drink. I sip my Coke, stalling having to dance for another moment. Surprisingly, no one minds that she’s sprinkled them—they all smile at her like she’s ‘80s Girl, saving them from the evil clutches of an ordinary night and dousing them with her magical ‘80s juice, sharing her supernatural cool with them.

She turns her bright, yellow eyes away from her admirers to glance at me quickly.

Swiftly grabbing my free arm at the wrist, she yanks me forcefully toward her, causing a tiny bit of my Coke to run down my other hand. She pulls my wrist back and forth, forcing my body to move with the rhythm of the song.

This is why Ambrosia is a wonderful friend. She’s forgotten to meet me places when we’ve made plans—dated guys I thought I liked, but she wouldn’t let me stay home on my birthday and now won’t let me drown of humiliation in this pool of coolness. She’s going to hold my wrist until I learn to swim—or at least tread water.

Lets go of my hand...body keeps moving...still breathing.



Two drinks plop down on the bar in front of me. I’ve switched from Coke to the hard stuff—energy drinks. The other cup is full of Ambrosia’s too-sweet-smelling, bright-colored concoction she’s been downing all night.

She keeps begging me to try her drink like it's some all-powerful elixir that'll wash all the dorkiness inside me right out of my bladder. That's just not me—I'm a sober gal. Can't let go of control of myself—barely have a decent grip as it is. Besides, if I drank like Ambrosia, I'd only be an epically bad, clumsy version of her.

A chiseled arm in a tight-fitting metal-gray t-shirt rests its elbow down on the bar next to my drinks, followed by the most arousing male scent to ever tickle my nostrils. Two female bartenders smile and wave as soon as they notice him. He waves in one fast, straight motion. One of the bartenders blows him a kiss; the other makes a jealous face at her.

A hand lands on my back just as the last note of "Space Age Love Song" rings out the speakers.

Ambrosia must have known the song so well that she started walking to come get me with just enough time before the next song started.

Thinking of taut muscle wrapped in thin, gray, short sleeves, I say to her, "Hang on, I think I might get something else."

When I return my focus to masculine beauty, I see long, red-tipped female interlopers running down the back of his shirt and up to his shoulders.

Interrupting my dislike of the long-nailed intrusion on my hunk is the beginning of "99 Red Balloons" and an excited Ambrosia voice shouting, "No! Go! Now-now-now!"

She pulls me behind her into the fray, clearing us a path with her hips. You wouldn't think hips as average as hers could part the sea of inebriated dancers, but she puts a lot of energy behind their swaying.

Once we've reached a spot she deems acceptable, she raises her free hand straight up in the air and begins twisting her body to and fro.

I start dancing without any worry. Once the first few

songs were over, I relaxed and have actually been having a pretty great time.

There is something so sweet and childlike about how much Ambrosia loves each and every one of these songs. She's smiled, cheered, and waved her free hand in the air at the start of every tune so far. Her wildness does clash with the innocence, like a little girl in a white dress and polished Sunday shoes chugging Tequila. Maybe she's just wild because she's wounded, and she's childlike trying to have a youth now that she missed back then. Maybe. Maybe not. But, she's happy now, and it's as contagious as a plague of joy.

Her face turns oddly serious as she stops dancing, grasps my shoulder, and talks into my ear.

I can smell and feel the hot alcohol on her breath as she speaks.

“He's here.”

I wonder how she could have noticed my attraction to the guy with the gray shirt at the bar, but I grin anyway, his image still fresh in my mind.

She nudges her head in a direction behind me, and my vision helplessly follows her. I see him—my smile vanishes.

It's Lyle, and there's nothing “gray” about him. Damn it—what the hell is he doing here? Oh. Dang it. I mentioned in the faculty room that I was coming here tonight when they asked where I was going for my birthday.

Lyle walks closer to me, smiling so hard that I think his mouth may rip open at the corners. My stomach sinks in a pool of awkwardness.

Lyle's actually not that bad of a person—he's a dedicated, anal-retentive geometry teacher who pushes his students hard, but they learn a lot. He's smart and basically a nice guy. And as he makes his way over here now, he's not a bad dancer. Definitely not bad for a schoolteacher with an unhealthy obsession with the teachings of Euclid.

He's just bad for me.

Just old enough to have his hair starting to thin and recede, recently divorced which has left him insecure and desperate—making him awkward *and* persistent, quite an unattractive combination. I'm only at Riverview High for one student teaching class a day—and I've only been there for a little over a month, but he's tried to sell me his undesirable combination every day I've been there. Looks like he's going to be making another sales pitch in 5...4...*would it be rude if I screamed?*...3 *how much would a hitman cost?*...2 *ahhh! just aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh!*...1 *and the nightmare begins...*

"Ruby, Happy Birthday!" he says raising his cup for a toast.

I tap my cup against his as gently as possible.

He moves closer raising his free arm as if he is going in for a hug. My stomach threatens to revolt if my brain can't save me from this onslaught. Mind is frozen like it's stuck in an alien tractor beam. Stomach grows more belligerent. Hell is upon me, and my wits are nowhere to be seen.

Blue flashes in front of my face as Ambrosia rushes between us and pulls me along with her for a quick 180-spin, placing me a little further away from Lyle when we stop.

He dances as if nothing's happened. No embarrassment. No signs of rejection. Denial runs strong in this one.

The walls behind him are textured in a rich and exciting maroon color; people in flashy outfits dance all around him; *16 Candles* is projected silently on the giant screen behind the stage—everything seems magical around him—everything's downright fantastical except him—a colorless minnow in a tropical sea. Sounds like me. But not *the me* I want to be.

Not even the wisdom of Molly Ringwald, the eternally cool teenager, and Long Duk Dong up on the screen can penetrate the wall of buzzkill that is Lyle.

Desperately needing something to shine some light inside

the dark pit into which I am rapidly sinking, I look for gray shirt. As if my desperation has summoned him, he steps down the two steps from the bar area to the dance floor.

Before now, I've only seen him from the waist-up at close range at the bar. I didn't get to see his tight, black leather pants, and might I say, *Yowza!*

His smooth, pale, white skin tucked inside the gray shirt and black pants truly is a light piercing the darkness that surrounds me.

Buzzkill steps in front of the view of my Adonis.

"Ruby, I should get you a birthday drink. What're you drinking?"

"No, it's okay. I still have plenty left."

"Oh, come on—it's your birthday."

"No, really, I'm fine."

"A shot? Sex on the beach?"

"No, thanks."

"Gotta tell me what you're drinking, or I'm just gonna pick something for you."

"I'm drinking an energy drink."

"Oh, energy drink and vodka. You're a girl after my own heart," he says downing the last of the liquid in his cup.

"No, Lyle, just an energy drink."

His eyebrows furrow, "Oh, but you've gotta try it. Nothing like it for a party!"

"I don't think so."

"I'll just go get you one," he says as he takes a step toward the bar.

"Lyle!"

"What-chu-need-sweetie?"

"Just an energy drink. That's it."

"All right. All right," he says shaking his head, "It's your birthday—anything you want."

He turns and heads toward the bar. Suddenly I feel bad for

the expression that must have been on my face. Lyle's annoying, and he's shamelessly trying to weasel his way in with me—but maybe I was a little harsh. Think I saw a hint of hurt on his face, but his unrelenting persistence should help him forget all about it in a minute or so. He's certainly ignored every *not-interested* signal I've ever sent to him, and there have been plenty. Would be nice if he remembered my anger until one second after tonight's over. Don't want him hurt for long, or at all really, but I'd love for him to stay away for the rest of the night. Would be nice for me anyway. I was having a *fantastic* time dancing in public. What are the odds that'll ever happen again? Heck, the odds are staggering that it even happened once.

Now, where is Gray? Scan the dance floor. Group of girls. Drunk guy stumbling. Drunk girl unknowingly flashing everyone a clear view of her underwear while she tries to climb up on the stage—not sure if anyone's supposed to go up there. Well, at least she's not wearing a thong. On second thought, in this place, thank God she's wearing underwear at all. Bouncer rushes to her area—guess no one is supposed to go up there.

There is a pack of girls who are all dressed up '80s style with lots of rouge and blue eye shadow—clips and bows in their hair. They look authentic. Almost wish Ambrosia and I would've dressed up too, but then again she's always dressed as her own character.

And there she is. Looks like she's made friends and is dancing with a group of people. She likes Lyle less than I do—didn't even tell him hello. No wonder she's set up camp elsewhere.

Not much dance floor left. My heart starts to sink—maybe he's gone.

A heavy guy, who's been leaning on the stage all night watching girls dance, makes his way back to his usual spot. As he moves along, revealing people he was blocking from my view, Gray appears.

Perfect skin clings tightly down the steep slope of his imposing cheekbones. Lips so beckoning that the air around them fights in jealousy to slide over them. Piercing eyes. Blue and lit up like a fire. They're on me. Oh my God, *they're on me*.

Three girls dance around him, but he looks over their heads to me. Can't look away.

He steps forward, girls sliding to the side as he passes them. Weaves through the crowd rapidly, despite his broad, muscular frame.

Eyes on him—his on me, paying no mind to the people he passes, even a girl who slides her fingers across his chest. His hair floats with his steps, just touching his shoulders, flowing like a black sea parted in two directions, a mane like a crown, untamed and setting him apart.

A few feet separate us now. Too embarrassed to speak. Too hooked to look away.

Inches. Inches away from touching me, he steps in synch with my dancing.

Quick glance down his body—slim waist, steel-tipped cowboy boots. My God, how does he move so well in them? Like some sexy ninja.

I step back and then forward toward him. See if he follows or lets me slip away. Does he want me, or is he just making his way around the floor?

Boy's on my every move. About two inches from me no matter what I throw at him—swear he knows what I'm doing before I do it. Throw my arm out like a snake—he follows. Move my head back—moves his forward. Reflexes like an animal. Smooth, fast, beautiful...scary, almost.

So close, his tight gray shirt drapes over his rippling shoulders and chest like a sheet of water rolling over a cliff.

He starts leaning down. Blue eyes feel like they're entering my green ones. Teal sounds like a delicious mix. Precious lips getting closer to mine.

What is happening to me? *My God, I don't even know his name.* Don't think I'll pull away.

An elbow pokes at his left arm—he turns sideways, instantly bringing his dancing body upright, snarling, and fists clenched.

Excitement faces Buzzkill.

“Hey, buddy, she's with me,” grumbles Lyle with a tremble in his speech.

Gray's voice slides out his throat, “She didn't say anything, friend.” Powerful, but smooth, with a hint of rasp. If it were a color, it'd match his shirt.

“I'm saying it for her. *She's...with...me.*”

Shooting out of my mouth, “No, I am not!”

Gray looks at me and smiles.

“Hey, big man, this conversation's between you and me. Not the girl.”

Still locked in on me, Gray pays him no mind. Neither do I. Lyle taps Gray's shoulder roughly.

Looking back to Lyle, anger flaring in his face for a moment—Gray's teeth flash before he pushes the emotion away, “Hey, friend, no reason to get ugly in here tonight—lots of girls in here. This one's got a right to dance with whoever she wants, but so can all the others. Maybe you'll find someone else you like.”

Dropping one of the drinks from his hands, energy drink spilling and spreading, cup bouncing on the floor, Lyle says, “Maybe, I should just beat the hell out of you.”

“Say that you could beat the hell out of me—then the night'd end with both of us in a jail cell together.”

Ambrosia pulls one of her new friends by the wrist, a blonde with a single ponytail, plenty of curve, and little of it covered by her low-cut exercise t-shirt and stretch pants with giant, pink leg warmers. They dance around Lyle. When he continues to stare at Gray, Ambrosia's friend bends over very far

and dances in that position right next to Buzzkill. Lyle's eyes drop down and take in the shape of her butt. A smile sneaks over him.

Gray continues speaking to Lyle, his voice sending a tingle through me, "Wouldn't you rather end up with someone prettier than me? Someplace better than a jail cell? God knows I do."

Lyle looks at me. Then at the strange girl's butt. Back to me. Strange butt. Then to Gray and says, "Look, I already told you..."

Ambrosia grabs Lyle's hand and places it on the strange girl's waist. Now standing, the girl moves in close and slides her arms around his neck. She pushes her body to him, rubbing against him, slowly leading him away from us. Lyle doesn't look back.

Ambrosia bows at us, then resumes bouncing her body to the music.

Gray moves closer to me. We start dancing again. Still in synch.

"Sorr-" the first words out my mouth to him are interrupted.

Another man taps Gray's shoulder. Long blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail, pointed nose, almost the same size as Gray.

Gray doesn't look pleased, but shakes the man's extended hand.

Ambrosia blindsides me with a girl huddle, and whispers urgently, "Bathroom break."

Is the whole world conspiring to keep Gray away from me?

Start to shake my head no.

"Now!" she demands.

Before I can respond, she pulls me away.

Gray stares at his friend who is talking to him. Don't

think Gray likes him much.

My head turns away from them to watch where Ambrosia is dragging me. Everything is gloomy and mean and coated in despair. Not because anything I see deserves it, but because it's all a part of pulling me away from him. How odd that everything pales in comparison to a guy with such pale skin.

Nothing registers but a longing to be back on the dance floor with Gray until she pulls me into the bathroom, spinning around to face me once we're inside.

"Ruby, that guy is a *psycho!*"

Suddenly feeling offended and hostile—how dare she say this about my wonderful Gray, I ask, "What are you talking about—you haven't even talked to him?"

"We hooked up a few weeks ago here. He's crazy."

My heart sinks, and I feel my smile float away to the land of sadness.

"Oh, no," Ambrosia laughs, "Not your guy—gray shirt. I'm talking about his friend with the blonde ponytail. His name's Roderick. Complete psychopath—we gotta leave."

My heart jumps at her last word, "Brosia, you say that about every guy you date after you break up. They're all psychos or freaks. You wind up dating half of them again. And sometimes, again and again and again."

Shaking her head and not smiling at my little joke, "Look what he did to my neck!" she says pulling her collar to the side.

At the base of her neck are two fiery dots.

"Psycho bit into me like I was freakin' Buffy or something."

"Oh, my God!"

"Yeah. And that was weeks ago—the marks are still there. Let's sneak right out the front door—now."

"What about your tab?"

"I'll get my card from them tomorrow. I've forgotten to close out a few times before. No big deal—they all know me

here.”

“But, the guy...”

“Told you he’s psycho.”

“No—”

“Oh, gray shirt!”

“Yes!”

“Don’t want to leave?”

Shake my head.

“Ruby, I don’t like this.”

Never heard her say that about anything but studying.

“Ambrosia, I *really* like this guy.”

“Really?”

“Completely.”

She rolls her lips tightly inside her mouth, thinking.

“Okay, you go get your man, chica, but don’t get so focused on Gray that you forget to look out for your crazy Blue friend too. This Roderick guy’s sketchy.”

“You got it, girl.”

Walk toward the door.

I ask, “Hey, how did you get that blonde girl to go for Lyle?”

“Well, I told her he’s a trust fund kid, and...”

“And what?”

“Let’s just say we owe her free drinks for...well, forever.”

The walk back to the dance floor is nothing but a meaningless maze of people and objects. The only person to make me feel like my skin pulses with electricity is on the dance floor, and anything between here and there is a cruel torture that could never measure up to the Gray one whose name I don’t even know.

My God, I’m losing my mind, and I’m loving it.

I don’t see that Roderick guy, but I don’t see Gray either. Hope they haven’t already left—my feelings hurt just at the

thought of it. Don't even know him. Just know how I feel around him. Those arms. Those eyes...so different for me.

Lyle's head is buried in the blonde's neck. Same sights on the dance floor. Ambrosia starts to dance. My knees move with the beat, but with little energy and no enthusiasm.

Song ends and "Right Round" starts playing. It's hard to imagine feeling dead on the dance floor with this song playing, but I don't feel very alive right now—definitely nothing like how I felt dancing with him.

I feel movement close behind me. Step forward to get out of the passerby's way. The movement follows me. Step forward again. Still feel someone there. Anger races through me—no Gray and some jackass trying to rub up against me.

"What's wrong, Bright Eyes?" whispers the voice over my shoulder.

Like a leaf in the breeze, he spins around me. Facing me, Gray doesn't smile—his face rigid and serious, but his eyes welcome.

My heart awakens at the sight of him, so quickly shifting from deflated and angry to elated. Completely elated.

"What was bothering you?" he asks, his breath tickling my ear.

"Kinda thought you were gone."

"Well, I'm right here right now. What else do you need?"

Struggling to say something that doesn't make me sound so pathetic, "Little Red Corvette."

"You wanna hear it?"

"Sure."

"Let me borrow your phone."

"What?"

"Just for a moment."

Take it out my tiny purse and hand it to him.

"Hang on," he says.

After pressing send, he looks to the DJ booth on the

balcony that runs along the length of dance floor. We can see something light up, but the DJ takes no notice, talking to a girl who sits on the table next to his equipment and is dressed as Borderline-era Madonna—stockings, short skirt, and hairstyle.

Gray sends the message again. Lights up. Still no notice.

Taking a few quick steps toward the balcony, Gray flings my phone at the DJ, which smacks him in the back and lands on his mixer. The DJ picks up the phone and looks down at the dance floor furiously. He spots Gray looking up at him. DJ smiles, reads message, nods head, and tosses phone back down to Gray.

Before he can get all the way back to me, the song stops abruptly, and the crowd roars in disapproval. Apparently they like “Right Round” as much as I do. I hope no one notices the guilty look on my face.

Cheers rise as the lights dim and “Little Red Corvette” begins—the natives weren’t restless for long, and I think I’m safe from their pitchforks and torches for the moment.

Gray moves perfectly, starting slow with the intro, speeding up a little when the snare kicks in, and building to a peak at the chorus.

His hand reaches out a little closer and closer with his movements. I swear I can feel the heat coming off his hand into the space between us. Closer. Warmer.

His fingers reach my waist with a smooth slide. Don’t know if my skin has ever felt so much, even through the shirt.

He keeps it there, swaying me in our rhythm, slowly working his body a little closer. Feel sweat break at my brow. Crowded and sweaty—been that way all night, but it feels so much warmer now. Didn’t even notice the heat earlier. Maybe I only notice it now because the hot air matches my sizzling emotion, when before it had no connection to me.

Or, the heat’s really intensified with the heavenly body holding my waist and filling my senses with visions of lovely

things that I thought would never be for me.

Never believed in auras. Always nonsense to me. But I swear the air around him is like nothing I've ever known. I can feel it my chest—it tingles over my skin, almost tastes in my mouth.

Song ends and the first piercing note of “How Soon Is Now” cuts through the air. Even a song of painful loneliness seems to be about the beautiful feeling of him dancing so close to me—everything tinted in his electric energy. Still just his hand on my side.

He raises one corner of his mouth in the sexiest sneer, inviting me to experience more of him. My smile isn't a thought or a choice, but an inevitability. He sees it, and I know he likes it—his eyes profess it.

Hand slides to the small of my back and waits. I'm not about to pull away. Watching my reaction, it's his turn to smile, showing me those shiny, white teeth.

Pulls me to him. His torso touches me. Slide my arms up the delicious contours of his arms and to his neck. Strange territory for me, but it feels as natural as if I've lived here my entire life.

Song ends and gives birth to “Dancing with Myself.” The faster tempo gets the crowd bouncing. Sadly, we pull apart a few inches—the quicker beat makes dancing so closely difficult.

His hand still at my side, the air charged, my emotion redlined. Never been better...Ever.

I catch smiles cracking through the tight, pale marble of his face. A vista of male beauty. Blue eyes shining.

We start stepping back away from each other and then forward into the close, blazing warmth of the last few inches between us.

Long, red fingernails dive up Gray's short sleeve and squeeze his bicep. Beginning to dislike everything red.

“Hey, gorgeous,” says the girl from the bar earlier,

tickling his upper arm with those striking nails and rolling the “r” in gorgeous, purring so smoothly that she makes me feel like I’m missing something feminine that she has an abundance of. “Wanna split this thing one more way?” she asks while stretching her neck, placing her face close to his.

“Sorry, Maxine, I’ve never been good with fractions.”

“Well, what about sharing resources? You’re an athletic boy.”

“Not tonight.”

Her face flashes into something still enviously pretty but enraged like a screeching feline. A tall one, she looks down at me, wrinkle-nosed, and says, “A week ago you bit me so hard you made my neck bleed, and now you’re blowing me off for freakin’ Little Miss Mainstream?”

Okay. So she wants to play cute, little word games and mock me—mean, hateful words as angry red as her fingernails. I’ve got a riddle or two for her in my boiling, red thoughts.

Feel a girl’s hand at my elbow. Must be my blue-flaxened friend. Turn to see. Wrong. Strange.

A tall, redhead sways her head with the weight of one drink too many and talks into my ear way too loudly.

“I have a gorgeous friend who thinks you’re hot.”

“What?” I respond—too much on my mind for this nonsense to make any sense.

“His name is Jake,” she says pointing near the stage at a boy with spiky, thick, gelled, black hair that points in many directions, “He’s hot—thinks you’re hot and wants to dance with you.”

The boy raises his head in the air, pointing his nose at me like a wolf to the moon as if he can hear what we’re saying. He dances with a brunette and a blonde in front of him.

The redhead says in a quick slur, “That’s just our friends—they’re not his girlfriends.”

Don’t care if they’re his wives. Nothing wrong with the

boy, except for two rubber bands bouncing atop each of his shoes around his ankles. Any other girl would go to him—he's already dancing with a blonde and a brunette and has a redhead matchmaking for him—he's surrounded by a Neapolitan girl entourage, but not me. He might as well be a smelly animal, some furry werewolf or something, for all my heart cares. I've seen the beginning of love, felt it shoot through me, and it doesn't look like him.

My eyes have already chosen what my love looks like.

Song ends. The ceasing of music makes me panic that it's not all that's ending.

Mumble no thanks or something that sounds like that to the redhead and turn away quickly.

Gray stands with his hands at his sides, not dancing, so much energy, so beautiful, and standing like a statue, warmth frozen over, waiting for me.

Glance at Jake, then to Lyle, and back to my Gray. Gray is to men what men are to children. They're all male humans but are so far apart in development that they require different names.

He waits. For me. Could jump right into his arms, but I grasp his hand and put it against my waist.

His eyes flash awake. Energy floods back into him. Through him it tingles into me.

His voice seems to run down my spine, "The whole world tries to tear us apart."

The truth of his words sparks a wave of fear that makes my lips twitch. Lyle. Jake. Ponytail boy. The redhead girl. Fingernails girl. Even Ambrosia. Right—they all pulled us apart. Only boy I've ever wanted this way. So unfair.

"They won't win."

His words warm me, melting all worry, lighting me up from the inside.

Closely-shorn sideburns run from underneath his shoulder-length hair; giving way to angular, sculpted cheekbones;

smooth skin clinging to them even tighter than his gray shirt stretches over his pecs and down toward his small waist. He's a beautifully torn edge, equally full of the savage and the tantalizing. He could send a wolf pack reeling away in fear or bring any woman to her knees with the same confidence-soaked right-side sneer of his upper lip, and right now it's focused on me.

His smile-sneer raises a little higher as he dances, and I wonder not if I'll run from him or step even closer to him, but I only ponder if he is aware he is doing it or if it is beyond his control. I think I'd tingle even more if I knew his unique smile was uncontrollable around me.

My head barely reaches his shoulder, but I leave it there. Cheek pressed against him. My eyes close. Face overtaken by smile.

Such a wild place. Never thought I'd be happy here. So odd that I found him in this strange environment. I feel like I let Ambrosia lead me into hell only to find someone who doesn't belong here any more than I.

Open my eyes, and for the first time while we've been dancing, he looks away from me. Toward the stage. Ambrosia. Dancing.

Lots of guys watch her dance, but his face grows disgusted.

I ask, "What is it?"

Shakes his head.

I squeeze his forearm. He looks in my eyes—still silent. I say, "Tell me."

"Your friend really shouldn't be drinking."

"Why not? This is a bar, isn't it?"

"Na-nevermind," he says, looks away from me, and shakes his head to wipe the topic clear, but he still looks very annoyed.

Did I say something wrong? Heaven a moment ago—so

perfect. Now he's angry. What's his problem all of a sudden? Wish I knew. Then I could decide if I'm irritated or if I just want to help him solve it.

God, let it be the latter.

He looks at me—intent eyes and strong lines of his cheekbones offer no clues to his thoughts.

“You're gorgeous.”

My bottom lip quickly finds its way behind my top teeth, feeling like it'll burst.

His hand reaches my chin. I release my lip—hold back blushing—lift my head. Pulls me in. His lips come together. For me. So close.

Colorful drink splatters all over a face near the stage.

Furious, Ambrosia shouts at Roderick who drips with her sweet drink. Roderick's nails dig into her forearm.

“Help her!”

Before the words are gone from my lips, he's on his way.

A wicked smile comes over Roderick's face as Gray approaches. Still grasping her forearm, he tugs Ambrosia roughly to the side.

Gray stops directly in front of him, stares him in the eye, and in a flash squeezes Roderick's forearm that holds Ambrosia. Veins in Gray's arm throb like raging rivers. Ambrosia's hand slips out.

Blood runs from the nail marks left behind. Roderick snarls at Gray as her hand slaps him on the bridge of his nose, leaving a smear of her blood on his face.

I can read Gray's lips as he tells Ambrosia, “Walk away.”

She obeys and turns toward me.

Roderick licks at the corner of his mouth. The two keep staring. Never budging.

Gray flings Roderick's forearm back at him, pushing his body back a step.

Roderick sneers and puts both his open hands in the air.

Gray turns back toward us, his steps very fast, reaching us in no time.

He touches my elbow, but looks directly at Ambrosia.

Fifteen feet behind him, Roderick climbs on the stage.

Gray says in a desperate voice to my scared friend, “You know what he *is*—get the hell out of town and *don’t* come back!”

She nods, eyes watery.

Two tall guys push their way past the DJ table to the end of the balcony and drop down on the stage with two loud thumps. The three of them stand in the center, casting their shadows on the movie screen. The two hired dancers on the pedestals on each side of the screen quickly flee the stage into the crowd.

Gray sees it all, looks to me with a whirlwind in his eyes, and turns away toward the bar. He pushes Lyle and the blonde who were leaning on the bar kissing out of his way. With one motion he jumps to the top of the bar, toppling drinks, spilling their liquid across the old, stained surface. Grabbing two wooden barmaid stools from the other side, he places them atop the bar a few feet apart.

It looks as though the bartender, who earlier blew him a kiss, now asks him what the hell he is doing. Gray says something to her, his face hard as stone. She nods and throws two towels on the bar, beginning to clean up the mess and console the irate customers.

Gray jumps down and starts walking back to me. Lyle follows, shouting after him. Gray ignores him.

In front of us, Gray looks sternly at Ambrosia and says, “Wait for it.”

He turns from her toward the stage.

She calls after him, “For what?”

He doesn’t turn around. His eyes don’t glance at me, but his hand quickly brushes over my wrist as he passes.

Lyle comes barreling up to us, “What the hell—”

Ambrosia holds up her forearm bearing the bloody nail

marks and cuts him off loudly, “The guy on the stage did this to me. He’s going after them.”

Lyle stares at her arm. Then looking at Roderick and the two goons on the stage, his face becomes angry. He starts after Gray.

“Lyle, no!” I shout, following behind him with Ambrosia in tow.

Gray motions to the DJ. He makes a fist and flings his hand out as if imitating an explosion. The DJ nods. In a blur, Gray jumps on the stage.

Roderick meets Gray, stopping an inch from him, face to face, just two inches shorter than my hunk, his two friends an inch or two shorter than that, one on each side of him—all three staring harshly at Gray.

Lyle grabs the stage and awkwardly tries to pull himself up, banging his shin on the edge. Without even looking in his direction, Gray reaches down and pulls Lyle to his unsteady feet.

I can hear bits of their conversation as we stand about a foot from the stage, some words buried in the noise of dance, music, and party. People have cleared back a few feet from the stage or left the dance floor altogether.

“You can ta— her trampy friend home with y— and do what you w— to her, but Ambrosia stays.”

Red-faced, Lyle shouts, “She’s no tramp, you son-of-a—she’s a schoolteacher at Riverview High for God’s Sa—”

Still not looking at Lyle, Gray’s hand slaps tightly over Lyle’s mouth—forcing it shut.

“A f—— schoolteacher?” blasts Roderick, laughing without smiling—his lackeys chuckling on cue, “Nice choice, Sim——.”

Gray says something slowly, his face stern. Lifting his hand from Lyle’s mouth, Gray puts both of them together and holds them right in front of Roderick’s face as if praying. The wicked expression that the gesture brings to Roderick’s face is

something terrible that I wish I couldn't see.

Gray says something else I can't make out, nodding his head yes.

Give about anything to get the bits I can't hear.

Finally something reaches my aching ears—Roderick saying, "Two minutes."

He puts his hand right at the bridge of Gray's nose with two fingers extended.

Lyle still rubs over his mouth as he's done since Gray released him. Gray grabs him by his shoulders, lifts, and drops him down to the floor.

The bitter-sweet "Voices Carry" begins playing through the speakers.

Gray jumps to the floor, looks at Lyle, and points to the front door. Gray spins Ambrosia around and pushes her toward the bar. He grabs my hand, pulls me in front of him, places his hands on my shoulders and guides me in the same direction. Lyle regains his balance and starts walking.

As we approach the bar, without turning his head all the way around, Gray glances back to the stage. The three remain huddled together, Roderick watching us, the other two with their backs to us, facing Roderick.

Before I realize he's taken his hands off me, Gray leaps to the bar, grabs the stools, spins round and flings one zinging through the twenty-five feet from bar to the stage, crashing into the back of the man at Roderick's left, the other stool right behind crashing into the other goon's head and neck, sending shattered bits of wood into the crowd around the stage. Both goons fall to the ground.

The remaining people rush toward the bar and the front door.

Not looking at his friends who've fallen at his feet, Roderick stares at Gray who has leapt back to the floor—standing between me and the stage. Roderick stares with both hatred and a

look of crazed amusement at the chaos that has just begun.

The look of amusement flees his face, his upper lip rises like a curtain unveiling hell, fangs shining—he rushes forward, stepping on the back of one of his friends. Sparks and flame shoot the length of the front of the stage, trapping Roderick. The DJ—the last person on the balcony—sprints for the exit, panic screaming across his face.

The flames make a wall of orange and yellow, casting a glow on Gray as he turns to look at me.

Fire rages in the background, but I don't care if the whole world burns. His azure irises swirl—coursing with emotion. His kiss takes me. Sparks run through my lips. His tongue so intense, desperately trying to tell me the things he no longer has time to say.

Eternity in a moment. Together whole. The same energy racing through both of us.

Damn this world that makes him release me.

I look into his eyes, waiting for the word that will sustain me or break my heart.

His blue eyes quake, yearning to say *I'll come for you*, but he pushes his lips tightly shut, holding back the promise. Suddenly, the word falls from his lips.

“Run.”

“Voices Carry” fades away. No sound. Just the hissing of the pyro flickering at the stage.

A hand reaches through the flames, an accusing finger points, flesh burns and singes, and a tense, charred fist forms.

Feeling like I'm fading away with each of his steps, I watch my Gray dream turn from me, possibly for the last time, walking into the fire so I can escape its wrath.

CHECK OUT MORE GREAT RELEASES FROM
MEGALODON ENTERTAINMENT LLC

FROM **LEWIS ALEMAN**,
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF **COLD STREAK**
A 20-YEAR RACE THROUGH TIME...

***IF YOU COULD GO
BACK IN TIME,
WHO WOULD YOU
SAVE?***

"There is craftsmanship in Aleman's details; elaborate use of adjectival simile and metaphor ... stimulates ... memorable ... space-time research well done"

Dionne Charlet
Where Y'At Magazine
Feb 2010

"*Faces in Time* was an adventurous, fast paced, time traveling novel...loved the twists and turns...Lewis writes beautifully, his work is filled with great detailed descriptions...a great adventure. I haven't seen anything out like it."

La Femme Readers
December 12, 2009



www.LEWISALEMAN.COM

FACEBOOK.COM/LEWISALEMAN

YOUTUBE.COM/LEWISALEMAN

CHECK OUT MORE GREAT RELEASES FROM MEGALODON ENTERTAINMENT LLC

An Amazon Bestseller
#1 in Myspace Books
A Kindle Bestseller

COLD STREAK LEWIS ALEMAN

“An enthralling story of vengeance, ‘Cold Streak’ is deftly written and a must for thriller fans...”

Midwest Book Review

“Lewis's hold-your-breath style of descriptive writing will keep you swimming in his creative vocabulary for hours...multi-layered metaphors...elaborate prose...” *Alex Hutchinson,*

Blogcritics



Enter Laura's World...

Her family is brutally murdered, and she finds herself on her knees praying for things she never could have imagined. Her dark journey of revenge takes off as she hunts her family's killers, while being chased down by a troubled detective, his lovelorn partner, and an inner voice that grants her no peace. Her quest lures her through an explosive music scene, down unlit alleyways, to the edge of a towering church rooftop, and into the nightmarish landscape of her own mind. Will she get her justice before time runs out? Will her own lust for vengeance consume all that is left of her in the process?

WWW.LEWISALEMAN.COM



LEWIS ALEMAN is the author of the dark literary thriller, *Cold Streak*, and *Faces in Time*, a time travel thriller. Aleman's books have been Amazon Bestsellers, Kindle Bestsellers, and #1 in Myspace Books.

Aleman graduated from Louisiana State University with a degree in Creative Writing, and resides just outside of New Orleans. Currently, he is fast at work on the first book in a realistic fantasy series, entitled *A BROTHER, A DRUNKARD, AND SOMETHING ODD*.

All upcoming works, events, and news are updated on the website listed below. Also on the site are excerpts from other works, press/reviews, and free stuff.

He can be contacted through his website:

[www.LEWISALEMAN.COM](http://www.LewisAleman.com)

Facebook: facebook.com/LewisAleman