

# Shadow's Lament

Victoria Novak: Paranormal Division

Loren Weaver

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## **Other Books By Loren Weaver**

### **Victoria Novak: Paranormal Division**

Havoc's Cry

Archangel's Salvation

Shadow's Lament

Tiger's Peace

### **Circle of Six**

Seeing The Invisible

*For Fallon*

*My friend, my soldier, my Sissy*

*Who taught me to never, ever give in without a fight*

*But also to forgive completely when it's over*

"The shadow of my sorrow! ha! let's see:  
'Tis very true, my grief lies all within;  
And these external manners of laments  
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief  
That swells with silence in the tortured soul;  
There lies the substance: and I thank thee, king,  
For thy great bounty, that not only givest  
Me cause to wail but teachest me the way  
How to lament the cause."

—KING RICHARD II BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

## OVERWHELMED

She laughed at him. Her pretty blue eyes lit up like sapphires in the sunlight. His mother laughed often; she said it was the best remedy to any illness. People would come to her whenever they were sick or hurting, and she would help them; and she always tried to make them laugh. Her cures were well known in the village for their effectiveness, but she would always say it was the laughter that did the healing.

Not until he was much older did he realize the truth about his mother. Her secret was more than laughter. She could cause the laughter, even in those that did not want to laugh. She could manipulate emotions, both good and bad.

His father told him about his mother, not until after his death. He'd died last night, but he'd known his father would bring him back. After four years as his father's human pet, now he was old enough to join his father in eternity. Last night he'd taken his father's blood, and he'd died. Tonight, he had woken up.

And he was thirsty. So thirsty. His insides were empty. They burned with the Thirst.

"Come now, son," said his father with a satisfied smile. "Let us quench the thirst."

He did not answer, could not. He just needed to fill the emptiness inside. So he followed his father out into the night. They had chosen a spot quite close to the center of town, to make the hunting easier.

The small woman with the large bag was just trying to get home in the dark. Under normal circumstances, she would never travel alone after dark. The streets at night completely scared her, but she had to stay late to take care of her sick father. She looked both ways before she crossed the street, and even then she hurried as fast as she could without running. But no speed would help her tonight.

He was faster. Using his new speed, he suddenly appeared in front of her. She had never even seen him coming, not that she had really been looking.

"P-p-pardon m-m-me," she stammered, trying to quickly move around him. He took a sharp step to the side, staying in front of her. She glanced nervously at his face, but she did not want to make him upset so she did not look for long. She just wanted to go home.

He reached for her. His hand went over her mouth, silencing any scream she might have uttered. He leaned down slowly to put his mouth near her neck. She called to him, to the emptiness inside him. He could hear the blood pumping in her veins. His lips found her slender neck. He knew how this worked. He had seen his father do it so many times. So he gently kissed her throat.

Emotions flooded his system. Her fear, mostly. The emotions warmed his insides. The emptiness inside him receded. That was not supposed to happen. He opened his mouth to release his fangs. Without more thought, he struck into the side of her neck. Blood welled around his marks and he sucked, letting instinct rule him.

The blood filled his mouth and he nearly choked. The liquid was hot and thick. His father had always described the taste as sweet, delicious. To him, it was cloying and revolting. He drew back, spitting out the nasty liquid.

But the girl was still trying to scream through his hand, her fear was thick on the air. He looked into her face and the emotions called to him. Without thought, he leaned towards her face and pressed his lips to her forehead. The fear flowed from her as her body went slack against him. Warmth flooded his insides, filling him completely. As he kept pulling the sweet warmth from her body, he found other emotions. Love, happiness, sadness, regret. They all came to him easily.

He did not want her blood. He wanted her emotions.

He thrust her away from him. She fell to the floor, her eyes wide. Her skin was cool now, devoid of the warmth he had stolen from her. He had killed her. Sucked her dry of all the warmth in her body. Sucked the life right out of her.

He fell to his knees on the worn dirt path. She was dead, and it was his fault. Because he was not a normal vampire. He was something else. Something terrible.

## **EXHIBITED**

I watched as my students-to-be filed into the largest conference room in the whole Atlanta police station. I was sitting in front of the blank white projector screen with my feet up on the small table left on the stage for my use. The table was one of those small but sturdy wooden numbers with more functionality than beauty. My black boots were a sharp contrast to the pale brown fake-wood of the table. The overall stage was pretty small, so the table fit right in.

With my arms crossed over my chest, I didn't look dangerous. Maybe a little cocky, but I had that right. The real reason I sat like this was that it was way more practical. I could reach either of my two wrist knives by moving my fingers a matter of inches. My so-there posture mixed with the bored yet intensely aware stare and mostly black clothing ensemble were making my audience a little nervous.

But that was the point.

Behind me, the white screen flickered and became black. In bold white letters, the crowd could now read:

**The Paranormal  
Agents Firetop, Spike, Havoc, & Archangel  
Federal Paranormal Division**

Although my team members' names were on the slide, I was the only one on stage. The others had their parts to play in this little melodrama. And I had mine. So, I waited. The clock at the back of the huge conference room read three minutes 'til nine. Three more long minutes to make the natives restless. A few stranglers wandered into the room as I let the clock tick.

I heard brief murmuring from the different members of my audience, but everyone kept their voices low enough that the sound was just a low murmur to my ears. The room was lined with several dozen rows and columns of chairs with a center aisle. No one lingered in that aisle long, preferring to find a seat quickly and mostly in silence.

At exactly nine o'clock, the door slammed closed. My audience jumped, turning to see what had caused the commotion. No one stood near the door. With a sharp ripping sound, the screens over the windows snapped down one right after another. Within seconds, all three windows were covered and no natural light came in. No one moved a hair. The silence was absolute.

Behind me, the PowerPoint screen flicked again and our audience got a new message. This time, a question.

## **Are you afraid of the dark?**

They got about ten seconds to process this new information before the lights flicked off. A gasp went up from the crowd.

For a whole minute, nothing happened. Just the complete darkness and that one simple question. I knew the white letters illuminated just enough to give my face an eerie quality, so I didn't move. I was a sinister statue in the dark. I just stared out over the crowd until our full minute was up.

*Now, Trey*, I called through our mental link.

A howl split the room. The resounding vibrations of a wolf's hunting cry sent chills up my spine. Several people in my audience screamed, shrieked or otherwise cried out in fear. Really, they had nothing to be afraid of. But the point was that they didn't know that.

Just as suddenly, the lights flicked on.

Gabriel, in all black from his wavy locks to his frothy lace shirt to his tight jeans to his leather boots, stood on the edge of the stage. All black. He was smiling evilly, and showing quite a lot of fang. At just over six feet, he was imposing in his monochromatic dress partially because his skin was so white in comparison. But creepier even than the hint of fangs dimpling his lower lip was the tattoo covering his face. He wore black angel's wings across his cheeks. The tops of the painted wings reached his high cheekbones while the lowest feathered edge brushed his jawbone. His dark eyes sparkled in the new light.

On the opposite side of the stage, Trey stood in half man/half wolf form. He stood almost seven feet tall in this form. His fur was a sandy blonde and covered his entire body. Wicked claws at least two inches long extended from each finger and toe. A long muzzle dominated his face, but mixed in a half-graceful, half-horrible way. He wore cotton gym shorts that survived his Change, but that was it. The only thing still human about him were his midnight blue eyes.

On the floor, Hayden leaned back against the center of the stage wall. He also was in black, but his was all leather. Leather boots, leather pants, cotton T-shirt covered by a leather vest. Of course, the black wasn't the scary part about Hayden. He wore a choker collar with a dozen or so inch long silver spikes jetting out from his neck. A similar belt and bracelets made the whole outfit match.

I'd stood up to one side of the projector screen, letting the crowd take in the very creepy sight for a moment. When I thought I heard teeth start to chatter, I moved to center stage. All eyes locked on me for a moment. Some stayed on me, some darted anxious glances back at the men.

Besides them, I looked normal. Black knee high leather boots, black pants, gray tank top, black long sleeve over shirt. No fancy jewelry. They couldn't see my fun toys from only a glance. The only remarkable things about me are my blood red hair and my jade green eyes. Both are startling, but neither as eye catching as a man covered in blonde fur or angel's wing tattoos or silver spikes.

The screen behind me flicked again:

**You should be.**

"Good evening," I said into the silence so thick I could have cut it with one of my many blades. Several people in the audience actually jumped to hear my completely normal, somewhat quiet voice. The thunderous silence continued as I paused. I let them get just a little more freaked.

"I'm Agent Firetop from the Federal Paranormal Division." The screen behind me flicked back to the first screen that showed the title of our lesson and our names. "You are probably here for one of three reasons."

"You're morbidly curious," Trey growled. His voice was deeper than normal, but still held his signature humor. He smiled; but with his wolf's teeth, the expression was more scary than reassuring. The sound of his wolf's cry echoed in their memories even as he all but growled at them now.

"Your boss ordered you to attend." Gabriel's light tenor voice was so smooth and pleasant to be a shock after Trey's harsh tone. Everything about Gabriel was classy. He'd been a vampire for almost four hundred years, but he'd only recently joined our little band of misfits. But his scare factor fit right in.

"Or, you have a gift." Hayden didn't move from his place just in front of the stage, but his smile was more reassuring than Trey's. He, at least, was human with normal sized teeth even if the spikes were off-putting.

"If the first," I continued, "then you will learn why they say curiosity killed the cat. If the second, you may not want to speak to him for the next week. And if the third, you may actually have what it takes to do what we do."

Silence reigned for another long moment. Then, Hayden began to walk down the center aisle toward the back of the room. He'd changed the slides via telepathy the first few times, the same way he'd closed the door and blinds. Hayden fell into the third category, as he had a gift. He could move things with his mind, classic Hollywood telekinesis. Hence the dangerous spikes, which were all detachable. Instant killing weapons worn as a fashion statement. But now, he'd go back and sit in the booth to use his hands because that was still easier.

Trey and Gabriel moved to follow him. Several of the people sitting on the aisle shrank away from their passage. The movement was very slight, but it was still there. Neither of the guys seemed to notice, although I knew they had. Both preferred people not to be afraid of them, but a little fear of the paranormal was necessary for survival in our business. That's why we'd done the melodrama opening.

"Today, I'm going to show you a little of what we do at the FPD," I continued. "You're probably gonna have nightmares. If so, then you can rest assured that you are not a sociopath and are instead perfectly normal."

Hayden reached the back booth and slid into his seat behind his laptop to control the presentation on the screen behind me. Trey and Gabriel slid into seats beside him, but I caught several of my audience giving them nervous eye flicks every once in a while. Trey wouldn't be any use back there in his wolfman form, but he didn't really like to Change in front of an audience.

"But I must first tell you that I don't believe all vampires or lycanthropes are monsters." As I spoke, a murmur of disbelief went up from the crowd. I let it swell momentarily, and then held up a hand. Quiet returned.

The PowerPoint flicked behind me, resting on each picture for about fifteen seconds before moving to the next. Each was a terrible image, full of blood and gore. Humans ripped apart, knifed, or smashed to pieces in car wrecks. A total of thirty images flashed past.

"Each of these is a human atrocity." Five more pictures flicked across the screen. Five dead humans, with various vampire bites and lycanthrope claws marks. One, from the serial killer case I'd worked a few months back, was worse than the human ones. The body was twisted into an approximation of a letter and almost every inch of it was chewed. One was a picture of a dead girl from the rouge vampire case we'd worked only six weeks ago. That one wasn't nearly as bad as the human gore. The guy in the last picture looked almost asleep, passed out in an alley.

"These are vampire or lycanthrope kills. Some of them are gruesome, bloody, and horrible. Some of them are not. I'm here to make sure you can tell the difference between a human kill and a paranormal one. I'm here to teach you to spot a paranormal crime so you'll know when to call us. Some of you are looking to join the FPD. For you, this will be a test of your endurance. Many of you want nothing to do with the paranormal. If you can spot their crimes and

call us, you'll have minimum contact. But the paranormal is a part of our world now, and you *have* to know what it looks like."

I gave them another long minute to process. No one spoke as I let them think through what I just said. They'd be so busy with information today, that processing would be hard, especially with my harsh style of bloody visuals. But they'd be thinking it over for the next week.

"If you don't have the stomach for this, I'd suggest some Pepto-Bismol." No one laughed at my joke. "This is the real deal, folks." Another pause. "Now, I'm going to teach you how to identify a vampire kill."

The screen behind me flicked again, and I taught.

## SEPARATED

Three days later, I was back at the Bat Cave and seeing the blue flashing lights that called my whole team to McCall's office. The lights were a great idea, but I still sighed when they went off. I knew another case was open on the General's desk right now, which meant dead bodies on the ground. Warily, I pushed away from the desk in my tiny bedroom where I'd been checking my emails on my laptop. The amount of spam I get is simply incredible. I'm very glad the inventor of the keyboard added the delete button.

On my way out of my room, I almost ran face first into a werewolf. Of course, this werewolf looked like a human at the moment. A very muscular, extremely gorgeous, blue-eyed blonde human. Trey wasn't wearing a shirt, so the muscular part was very evident. He had a six pack any surfer would kill for and any cheerleader would swoon over. The cute grin and midnight blue eyes only added to the splendor.

"Working out?" I asked.

"About to." A lot of werewolves preferred less clothing, but Trey was usually pretty good about conforming to human norms. After a century and a half, he'd learned how to fit in very well. But he still liked to work out without a shirt on. Of course, a lot of human guys did so too, so it wasn't really outside of human norms. And... he had a good reason to show off.

"Too bad." The summons from McCall would probably be bad news and he'd probably not get his workout any time soon. I sighed again.

"Wait up, I'll get a shirt."

"Aww." I wasn't interested in him that way, but I'm not blind. He was serious eye candy. Of course, he knew that, so sometimes he was a little cocky about it. Like now, as he grinned at me over his shoulder as he disappeared into his room.

He was back in seconds. Werewolf speed is simply supernatural, and not repeatable by us mere humans. If I can actually be called a human. So we started down the hallway together towards the General's office.

"What do you think it is this time?" Trey asked me as he held open the door to the dorm hall, and we started for the office wing. I didn't really like the dorm hall, as it was too cramped. But I couldn't go back to my old apartment after the serial killer murdered a girl and framed me for it. And trying to find a new place just seemed like a lot of work. Not that I hadn't looked into it a little. Maybe it was time for a house. I'd never lived in a house, and I kind of wanted one.

"How should I know? It's not like we've got an industry standard around here."

"But we kind of do..." He had a point.

"Okay, so I think it's a dead guy. Happy now?"

"No, somebody's dead and we gotta go look at his probably bloody remains," Trey said with his own deep sigh. "I'd rather go work out."

"True that." I'd rather go with him, because I always did better when he was around. I was faster, stronger, and just better when I could pull power from him. Through some accident of magic, Trey was my familiar, in the witchy sense of the word. I'd tried to heal him using my magic after he'd been shot with silver bullets, which actually are deadly to werewolves. He'd been in the hospital, and they were threatening to lock him in a special lycanthrope ward 'for his own protection.' Which was a load of crap. It was a sanitized jail from which he'd never escape. So I'd thrust pure power into him while letting him feed on my blood. I don't know if it was the magic or the blood or some combination of both, but he was mine now.

We reached the head honcho's office and, true to form, I barged in without knocking. Blue lights were a summons, so he better not be indecent or in the middle of a private conversation. Or that was my philosophy. Since McCall knew it, all was good.

"Hey, boss man." I went to my usual spot on his desk and jumped up with my feet hanging over the side. He hated having me on his desk, which is precisely why I loved doing it. Of course, he always kept this particular corner free of file folders or papers or anything else important. I'd knocked over his stuff when I'd first claimed my perch.

Trey leaned against the wall near the door, crossing his arms over his muscular chest. Hayden was already stationed to his left in a similar, yet somehow more threatening pose. Probably had to do with the spikes.

Cole Hooper, our resident clairvoyant, sat in one of the leather chairs across from the General. His arms were crossed and he was glaring at our boss man. My guess was he already knew some of what was about to happen. Perks of seeing the future. Our Dead-Eye's light brown hair was slicked back with water like he'd just come from the shower. The grumpiness was either from just waking up or from whatever he'd seen. Here's to hoping the first.

In the other chair, Fletcher Ross sat ramrod straight. His short buzzed hair and sharp face made him seem harsh, and he was. Once I'd gotten to know him, he'd mellowed a little. But not much. Our Arrow had a history in the paranormal world that was tragic beyond the norm. He was a sensitive, so he could tell when a paranormal around was around. Yet he'd missed the vampire that killed his fiancé. He still blamed himself. I never had gotten the whole story out of him.

Speaking of vampires, in walked our resident bloodsucker. Fletcher tensed when Gabriel walked in, but he was mostly used to the vampire by now. Gabriel was mine through some mystical blood magic crap that vampires are known for. Of all the people in the room, Gabriel was least able to betray our secrets simply because he was mine. But he'd proven his loyalty to me in saving my life on more than one occasion, so I'd never needed to use our bond to force him into compliance. I didn't want to ever have to either.

Last, Drake and Gage sauntered through the doorway together. The two had obviously just come from a workout because both were in gym shorts and still sweaty. They stayed by the door, and I was thankful. My nose might not be as good as a shifter's, but it was plenty good enough for sweaty boys.

"Boss-man, you really need some more furniture in here," I told him. "Else we need to move the company powwows to a bigger room."

"We'll discuss that later, Victoria," McCall interrupted, and I knew it was serious. McCall never let his feathers get ruffled, and a snarky comment from me shouldn't have been able to do it. "I have a more important question for you right now. What do you know of the Council?"

"What?!" I demanded, sitting up straight. "You mean the vampire-lycanthrope Council? The one with the six biggest-baddest paranormals in the country as members? The Council you don't ever, ever want to cross because your life may seriously depend on it? That Council?"

"Yes, Victoria, that Council."

"This is bad," Trey muttered as he moved from his place at the door to come sit at my feet. With Trey, it was a wolf thing not a subservient thing. The floor just didn't hold bad connotations for him. "Very bad."

"Whatever they want, the answer is no," I slapped my hand against the desk for emphasis. "No deals. No bargains. No gifts. If they sent you something, you're overnighting it right back."

"They have a dead body on the ground and called the police." McCall was calm. Too calm. This was a moment for panic, not calm. "I can't say no."

"If there's a body, they put it there. They employ their own assassins, for crying out loud."

"As that may be. We are the law, Victoria. We are oath bound to do whatever is in our power to bring justice to the dead. You have to go." Sadly, the General had a point.

"No." Gabriel, Trey, and I protested at the same time. Flat out refusal. Just no.

"No way," I said. "I've spent the last twenty-five years avoiding the Council. I'm not walking in there now. I'd never come out."

"They can't hold you against your will, Firetop," Drake said calmly. Calmly? How could he be calm at a time like this? We were talking about eternal servitude. And not the kind teenagers tease about on a dare from their current crush. We were talking about honest-to-goodness I'm-never-ever-leaving slavery. My slavery. Forever.

"If they were human, I'd agree with you." Calm. I could be calm. "But they're not. They're thousand year old paranormals with an agenda. I'm a sorceress, a rarity, one they want to control. There's no way they'll let me leave. Ever."

"Then don't go." McCall kept his voice even. "But I am sending a team, Victoria. I thought you'd want to be on it."

"That's blackmail." I closed my eyes, as if I could block out this problem if I just concentrated hard enough. Leroy, my first Coven Master, had kept me a secret for twelve years before the Council found out about me. And they had wanted me ever since. I'd been running all my life from vampires, especially these vampires.

"Tor, I think he's right," Trey murmured. I looked down at the wolf at my feet. His midnight blue eyes looked up at me, honesty written across his face. "Think about it. They can't kidnap a federal agent. All hell would rain down on them. They need the support of the government to keep their businesses and belongings."

"The legal ones, maybe," I argued.

"The wolf is correct, Mistress." Gabriel took a step farther into the room, closer to me. "I do not like the idea of you going to see the Council any more than he does, but I do not think they will try to detain you. And the others, they cannot go without you to lead them. They will die."

"No, no, they can't," I admitted. My team had come far in the last months. They knew a lot about paranormals, but not enough to deal with the Council. The Council would eat them alive. Maybe literally. No, they couldn't go without me.

"There's one catch," McCall said. I glared at him. As if the Council wasn't enough of a crap-fest. "That's not the only call I got this week."

"What else?" Fletcher asked innocently.

"There has been some concern with our ability to keep and train new recruits," the General answered. Oh, right, yeah. We kind of lost six of the last seven recruits sent to us. Part of that was my fault. I didn't do well with incompetence.

"It's a tough knock life," I said. Trey snorted.

"True, however, I've been saying that too long," McCall said with a nod. "The other branches of the FBI in other cities are anxious for their own Paranormal Division. I can't keep putting them off."

"So what are they going to do about it?" Cole asked.

"We are putting together a three month training program based on what Victoria has taught Gage, usual FBI training methods, and the results of the conferences you have given."

"What, Boot Camp, FPD style?" Drake asked grinning like a mad man. Of course, paranormal boot camp would appeal to him.

"In a manner of speaking," McCall answered.

"Who's giving the training?" I asked. "If we're going to New York to see the Council?"

"You're not all needed in New York, Victoria." McCall's eyes met mine, serious. In it, I could already see the answers I didn't want to hear.

"What? You're splitting us up?" My voice cracked on the last word, refusing to say anymore. But I'd gotten the point across. This was a terrible idea.

"Yes." Still with the calm. "Fletcher will lead the team I'm sending to Los Angeles to facilitate the training program. The FBI is sending some of its trainers as well to help in weapons and physical training. Cole will accompany him, as his military background makes him ideal for this type of project. Also, Drake has been specifically requested by the ranking FBI agent on site."

"You mean my dad's in charge?" Drake demanded.

"Yes, can you think of anyone else they'd put in charge of this? He's an ideal candidate with his background, especially with a son on the team."

"Great." Drake leaned back and crossed his arms grumpily. Apparently, this wasn't good news. I didn't know much about his family life. I'd never asked and he'd never volunteered. Maybe someday he'd tell me. Or, if he moved to LA and I didn't, maybe not. Maybe this was goodbye?

"And I'm leading the team to New York," I said. "What about the others?"

"I don't feel it is wise at this point to send Trey or Gabriel to Los Angeles until I get a better feel for the situation there," McCall admitted. "I'm not sure how the ranking officers will deal with paranormals on the team."

"Tell them to get over themselves," I stated with conviction. "Paranormals are better equipped for this job than any human, witch or not."

"I understand how you feel about it, Victoria." Of course he did. We'd had this conversation before. Several times. "But I also feel you will need their expertise in New York, so both will go with you."

"What about us?" Gage asked.

"You have not been cleared as a full field agent yet," McCall said. "We are in the process of doing the paperwork, but it will have to wait until you get back."

"Wait, you're graduating me?" Gage asked in astonishment. But he wasn't looking at the General. He was staring at me. I shrugged. It was true, but we hadn't told him. Not my job to promote him, so I'd left it to McCall to break the good news.

"You've got more to learn. But you're not the paranormal baby you were when you got here."

"Wow, thanks," he shook his head as if trying to clear it of the shock.

"I think it wise to wait, under the circumstances," McCall said. "It makes you ineligible for the job in LA and gives Victoria more back up with the Council."

"I'll go to New York," Gage said immediately. "I'm not afraid of the Council."

"Idiot," Trey muttered. Gage glared at him, but said nothing. See, he was getting smarter.

"That leaves me," Hayden announced. "Where am I going?"

"That will depend on you, Hayden," McCall continued. "The way it stands now, you can go whichever way you choose."

"New York," Hayden said without pause. "There's nothing I can teach the rookies that Fletcher, Drake, and Cole can't. Tori will need the backup more than they will."

"Then it's settled," the General said with a slight nod. I got the distinct feeling that he already knew that was what Hayden would choose. "Everyone leaves tonight."

I left the office and headed back to my room with a heavy heart. Three months wasn't really a long time, but I could see where this was going. The chances of my team coming back together again were diminishing with each successful mission we did apart. The upper brass would see that we could be effective apart and they'd split us up permanently. I could see it happening, but there wasn't anything I could do about it.

These guys had become my second chance at a family. They'd taken me in when I had nowhere else to go, built up my self-confidence again, and had given me a purpose. They'd given me a home and a purpose. And now they were getting ripped away from me.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Loren Weaver is an engineer for an oil company as her day job. She loves crazy sports and has her black belt in Tae Kwon Do, master SCUBA diver certificate, and motorcycle license. Although engineering pays the rent, she writes because she loves to hear and to tell a good story.

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