

## *Chapter One:*

### *The Graveyard Shift*

Forty-two years have passed since the infamous dinner playhouse burnt down in New Orleans. Many rumors and myths have escalated since then, bringing forth legends and speculations of a haunting, sorcery, and the personification of pure evil that might show its face again. Extraordinary mysteries surfaced of death, fear, and uncertainty of what took place that fateful night of the big fire, and they have circulated for decades.

The property remained rubble for many years. The owner, Lillian Reynolds, refused to let the city clear it out. People say that her son vanished while working at the dinner playhouse that evening. His mother truly believed that someday he would resurface. The thought of what could have come of him was too unfathomable for her to comprehend. After Lillian Reynolds died, the land remained a tourist attraction for all who wanted to see the mysterious property with their own eyes.

No one knows what happened to the family that encountered the fire's evil wrath; they also vanished. Legend has it that they moved away after a devastating hurricane. There were hidden secrets buried somewhere in the area of the graveyard, across the street from the burned playhouse. No one knows what or why that was.

Lillian's relatives finally came to the conclusion that it would be best to finish excavating the remaining debris and to sell the property. Eventually, a huge fourteen-story office building was built. The newspapers reported that during construction, the workers refused to return only days after starting, which resulted in project delays and missed deadlines.

Stories of many unforeseen events surfaced. The foreman had an awful accident. From his hospital bed, he said that it felt as if he had been pushed from a ladder and bombarded by paint and shingles on his way down. He remembered seeing shadows and felt a wind come from nowhere on that sunny day. Sadly, he eventually died from his injuries.

Other workers reported feeling sudden wind as well that made their ladders sway and thought they heard whispers. People shuddered at the unpleasant stories of the workers' experiences and the hideous tragedy of

the foreman. As time went on it got even worse; the horrors in those walls were so surreal that it was extremely hard to believe that any of it could possibly be true.

Construction on the inside of the building was halted, but because of a contract that was in place, they had to keep working. The new foreman decided that most of the interior work was to take place after the sun went down, in order to deter curious spectators from disrupting the building's completion.

The media was a huge distraction, always looking for an interview from anyone who would talk about what was taking place on the site. To the reporters' dismay, none of the workers wanted to be the one to sound insane, so they remained silent. The men became extremely nervous about continuing the project, but a few just shrugged it off as nonsense superstition. Finally, the building was completed and companies were expected to rent office space. However, after months of advertisements, only one company came forward to acquire an office.

It was a twenty-four hour answering service that stayed open three hundred sixty-five days a year. Many businesses throughout the United States transferred their phone lines to this service after hours. It wasn't long before buzzing rumors and whispering bets surfaced about the land's past history and who would have the courage to work in the building during the third shift, the graveyard shift. After all, not only was it supposed to still be haunted, but it was on the outskirts of New Orleans, which was a bit more dangerous since crime had increased over the years.

The unknown spirits of time gone by still haunted the neighboring residents' dreams. The never-ending question was what could happen if the evil that walked the dinner playhouse was re-awakened.

Weeks passed and the answering service was ready to open. A few applied out of sheer curiosity, although everyone asked for the day shift. But they needed someone to work alone, during the graveyard shift.

The only one who applied was Chelsea Langley. She was born in New Orleans. But when she was eight her parents moved to Germany. As she grew, she became lonely and missed her friends and decided to return. Chelsea was ready to move on and make a new life. She enjoyed the nighttime. However, she was slightly nervous at the prospect of working in the extremely tall building with hundreds of windows because she was afraid of heights and was quite claustrophobic. But strangely enough, she found herself drawn to the building like a force of nature calling to her.

Events that occurred in Chelsea's past haunted her; she felt removed from just about everyone. There were many times in her life her

perspective was twisted and her outlook different from others. She didn't trust easily. There were just a few she let in, and she still kept her guard up with them. She wanted to succeed, and to do that, she knew it meant taking risks, amending her dreams, and erasing the nightmares that came into her sleep much too often.

There were curious reports from the employees that worked the day shift that footsteps and shadows walked the halls near dusk and into the evening. A few of the day-shift employees had to work the dreaded graveyard shift until they were able to fill the position. They were not happy about it.

Security did not come easily either. They were able to retain a couple of security officers to oversee the final construction. However, thoughts did venture into their psyches about what lurked behind the walls; just the possibility that something or someone was waiting to strike them down made them fearful. The anxiety became so intense that some previous construction workers had to get therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder.

Chelsea got news that she was hired and was told to start in three weeks. One early evening before full darkness was upon her, she decided to go for a drive. Before she realized what was happening, she found herself in the vicinity of the office building. She was curious and wanted to observe the area and examine the merit of the rumors.

She stepped out of her car and listened intensely. She didn't hear a whisper or even a breeze. It was still and calm, and oh so quiet. Maybe too quiet, she thought for just for a moment. Her mind wandered, and she felt as if she was being watched, which made her a bit anxious.

Chelsea was amazed at how tall the building actually was; she walked towards the front. There was still the smell of sawdust and newness all around her. She was surprised that she seemed unafraid but very apprehensive. Was it just ghost stories that people built up in their imaginations?

As she drove home, she played all possible doubts like a small movie in her mind's eye and remembered that an enjoyable part of New Orleans culture is not just the mystery but the history. It is full of romantic stories of couples strolling along the riverwalk in the moonlight. The city can be quite magical.

There is also a dark side to the "Big Easy." The haunted history tours, voodoo tours and museums, shops, and psychic readers of Jackson Square, the city has it all. Among the rumors and fear of the spirits in the city, there are the well-known restaurants, which, as reputation has it, serve the best food in the area.

The land where the dinner playhouse stood had a history all its own. Many businesses attempted to become successful at that location, but for some unforeseen reason, it was not to be. Many locals say that the businesses were run off or that fire destroyed them in the same way as the dinner playhouse.

Chelsea would be lying to herself if she didn't admit she was a bit scared to accept the position. But the benefits were fantastic, and the pay was good.

Being a multi-tasker really served Chelsea well for this position. Her rapid speech also came in handy. Her extremely vivid imagination might cause her stress, though. She wondered if the strange history of the place might affect her. She usually had no problem working under duress or severe fast-paced stress; she actually seemed to thrive on it. Chelsea always said that time passed faster when she was busy.

Concentrating on all the what-ifs that might happen made her neck tense. She realized that starting this new job was affecting her more than she thought. After about one hour and two aspirins, she started feeling better, so she decided to call her friend Shelby Scott and arranged to meet her for lunch at their favorite restaurant. Shelby and Frank were her friends in school when she lived in New Orleans. Chelsea was taken out of school and was home schooled from the fourth grade on.

Chelsea walked in the door and spotted Shelby sitting in a booth facing the window. After greeting each other, they noticed their buddy Frank walk in. He was such a character, always getting into trouble of one sort or the other lately, but he wasn't aggressive and wouldn't hurt anyone. He was just confused, hurt and a bit angry.

Part of the reason that he acted out more now was the fact that his father was the foreman that died at the construction site. He was having a hard time dealing with it. He truly didn't believe it was his dad's carelessness or that any of his workers pushed him. The police had many suggestions of how it happened, as well as the newspapers, but the true cause of the accident had never been determined.

It seemed that the media and state officials were just ignoring what transpired. They weren't checking out every lead or at least trying to find one. They just repeatedly implied that it was no one's fault but the foreman himself. This infuriated Frank.

He turned towards Chelsea and said, "Hey."

"Hi," she replied.

"Would you like to join us for lunch?" Shelby asked.

“Not today,” he said nervously. “I heard you’re going to work at that building. Is this true, Chelsea?”

“Yes, it is. I know you don’t like that place, and I don’t blame you, but...”

Before she could finish, he blurted out, “I have things to do...uh... I’ll talk to you later.” He hurried out as if he was avoiding someone, or he had suddenly seen a ghost. He looked behind him and from side to side as he rushed off.

“How strange was that?” Chelsea said.

“Not any stranger than he usually is these days,” giggled Shelby.

Chelsea said, “Shelby, I’m afraid that since the accident, Frank is becoming paranoid. Did you notice how he keeps looking around as if someone is after him as well?”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed. But do you blame him? Look what happened.”

“I know,” Chelsea sighed. “I know...”

They put Frank out of their minds and proceeded to finish lunch. As Chelsea drank the rest of her soft drink, Shelby jumped up and declared, “Well... I hate to eat and run but...” she hesitated. “I have to go meet my cousin. She needs help with her school project.”

She too just scurried off. There was definitely something in the air that didn’t feel quite right. Chelsea thought that maybe Shelby was going after Frank. They were very close, and she spent most of their friendship worrying about him.

Chelsea dismissed it as she usually did when Frank and Shelby acted bizarre. Her thoughts switched gears back to work. She couldn’t help stressing about the fact that the office was on the tenth floor; elevators and her simply did not get along, and the thought of heights gave her chills. She knew that she had always been fearful about it. She figured it grew out of her childhood, but she couldn’t remember why.

As far back as she could remember, Chelsea’s family told stories about how they preferred the dark of the night over the light of day. As a child, she would swear that she heard noises or saw shadows in her room on the walls or by the door. The images would seem so real that her thoughts caused her to jump up and turn the light on. Normal realms of time and space had always been full of the unknown; even as a child her imagination was quite vivid.

The next few weeks were full of anticipation, worry, and excitement. She knew that she had to ignore the negatives to get through each night.