

— *Bloodline Trilogy 2* —

POISON

A Novel

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Publications

Poison: A Novel

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Chapter 2

LEE GRABBED A FLASHLIGHT from his duty belt as his other hand un-snapped the leather retention strap that held his weapon in the holster, his palm now firm on the pistol grip. He thumbed the weapon's safety off but, without an obvious threat, didn't draw it.

Through the smoked glass, his flashlight revealed a woman slumped in the front passenger seat, her arms limp at her sides. He watched for movement. After several moments, there was a slight lift in her back. Lee stepped closer and placed his flashlight against the window to better penetrate the tinting, the light now bright against the body showed more detail.

Thick red fluid seeped through the left side of her shirt, trails of life flowing over the white leather seat onto the dark floor space.

A cool breeze evaporating the sweat through his military cropped hair caused his scalp to tingle. He inhaled and held his breath to ease the flow of adrenaline. Keelyn's worried gaze mirrored in the glass and burrowed into his back.

He brought his light up and tapped on the window.

"Ma'am, can you hear me?" The door was locked. Seeing no threats, Lee reset the safety on his weapon and snapped the retention strap back into place. No movement from the woman inside the vehicle. The child began to whimper in the backseat.

At least one of them was alive.

He glanced back at Keelyn. She held her position as he'd asked; a look of expectation crossed her hazel eyes.

Thunder boomed and she jumped.

He keyed his police radio.

"SWAT One, copy a medical emergency."

The dispatcher came back. "SWAT One, go ahead."

"SWAT One, I'm in the parking lot of Ruby's Diner. I have a citizen report of an adult female passed out in her vehicle."

“SWAT One, what is the primary medical concern, and do you have a vehicle description?”

“SWAT One, I’m with a white SUV in the northeast corner of the parking lot. I have an unresponsive adult female in the passenger’s seat who appears to be bleeding from an unknown source . . . Break.”

Training dictated short transmissions so fellow officers in potential danger could get through.

“SWAT One, continuing. I also have a toddler in the backseat, conscious and breathing, unknown further. I’m requesting fire and two ambulances to my location, emergent.”

“SWAT One, dispatch copies one adult female bleeding and unresponsive, plus one toddler condition unknown. Fire and medical are en route Code Three.”

The dispatcher’s stern voice echoed the urgency of Lee’s situation.

His resolve came quick.

Lee filled his right hand with the heavy, expandable baton he carried on his duty belt. He raised the device to shoulder level and brought his fist down to his outer thigh in a heavy, forward sweeping motion, with a snap of his wrist at the end. Three sections of the steel escaped the baton’s internal retention spring and popped into place. The sound of the steel ball at the end of the ASP baton against the front driver’s window was equivalent to a large rock hitting the windshield at highway speeds.

A small pit formed as tiny cracks raced to the edges of the frame.

One more hit and the safety glass shattered and fell like crystal beads onto the pavement and into the car.

Lee eased his grip on the baton and let the weight of it reverse its position in his hand. Dropping to one knee, he stabbed the steel ball into the pavement, the sound an echo of the thunder that came in increasing waves. Lee looked to the sky and watched for a moment as the sheets of black lines closed in from the horizon.

Lightning flashed.

In his peripheral vision he could see Keelyn with fisted hands over her ears. The wind tangled her long brown hair.

He stood up, reached in through the shattered window to release the electric locks on the Highlander, and opened it. Stepping onto the runner with his right foot, he ducked down and crawled onto the driver’s seat with his left knee and reached for the woman’s shoulder.

The cup holder collected her congealed blood.

“Ma’am, can you open your eyes? Can you hear me?”

She flopped as he shook. He glanced to the backseat. Dark brown eyes stared as lips quivered around a fully inserted thumb. The adult harness was loose around the child’s small body.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. You’re safe.”

He pushed the button to release the unconscious woman’s seat belt and eased it up over her body. Exiting the vehicle, he rounded to the passenger’s side and motioned to Keelyn for help. With the door open, he stepped up and grabbed the woman under her arms, pulled her from the vehicle, and eased her onto the pavement.

The woman’s skin was translucent. As he kneeled, Lee was mesmerized by the spiderweb of veins that laced her face and neck. A crowd of spectators gathered. Sirens whispered tunnel-like in the distance. From a weatherproof pouch on his belt, he pulled two pairs of purple nitrile gloves and gave a set to Keelyn.

“Put these on.”

The material was hard to pull over his moistened hands. He missed the powdered latex gloves. Once the barrier was in place, he pulled up the woman’s shirt and discovered three holes, two in her abdomen, one in her chest.

His teeth ached from being clenched.

Gunshot wounds?

All three oozed blood. At her neck, he slid two fingers into the shallow groove between the trachea and strap muscles and felt for a pulse. Her skin was cool.

Lee tucked his chin to his shoulder. “SWAT One, copy additional information.”

“SWAT One, go ahead.”

“SWAT One, I’ve made entry into the vehicle. Inform medical the adult female has what appears to be three gunshot wounds to her torso. No pulse. Starting CPR.”

“SWAT One, I copy. CPR in progress. I’ll notify medical. Be advised a patrol supervisor and a district car are en route to your location.”

“SWAT One copies. Thank you.”

He dropped his hand from the radio and pointed to Keelyn. “I need you to hold pressure on these holes.” He stacked his hands and centered them on the woman’s chest, pumping hard and fast.

Keelyn knelt beside him and pulled wadded tissues from her pocket, putting them on the wounds to stem the bleeding. Bloodied paper stuck to her gloved hands as she tried to smooth and arrange them in a stack.

“This isn’t working.” Her words were tight, her breath coming in ragged gasps.

He could hear it in her voice, the resigned despair as this life slipped from their fingers. “Use your hands. Rescue’s close. Can you hear the sirens? Babe, stay calm. You’re doing great. I’m so proud of you.”

Keelyn’s fingers stuttered through the tacky crimson layer until the heel of her hand rested on one of the wounds. Small circles of clear fluid diluted the dried red field.

Lee looked skyward. Rain?

A sharp inhalation drew his eyes back to his fiancée. “I can’t do this.”

No. It was Keelyn’s tears.

“Okay, I know.”

“I just keep seeing my mother . . .”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked.” He nodded toward the vehicle. “Get the child from the back.”

Keelyn rose but did not immediately go for the young girl. Muscles ached along Lee’s shoulders as he attempted to push the woman’s soul back into her cooling body. Sweat trickled into his eyes as he looked up at Keelyn, her gaze anchored on the dying woman’s face.

Sirens cut the stormy day. A fire truck and ambulance pulled into the lot and parked between the crowd gathered at the front of the diner and their position in the corner of the lot. Two police cars blocked the entrance to the highway to control both the scene and potential witnesses. Medics jumped from the EMS vehicles and grabbed bright orange trauma packs.

Why is she just standing there?

“Keelyn!”

She shook her head and started to sway. “I know this woman.”

“How?”

“She was my stepfather’s psychiatrist. Lucy Freeman.”