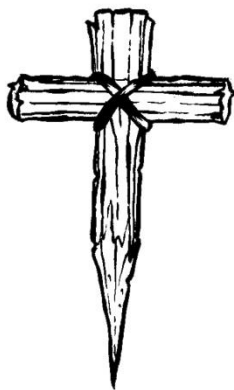


*Teddy Gyros*  
*Kid Vampire Slayer*



Book One

It Begins

By Michael Sortino



### **Chapter 3**

## **Old Ladies Don't Scare Me!**

After the invisible school goblins finally gave up trying to hold back time and keep us in their dungeon forever, the final bell *finally* rang. I hurled myself out the front gate, but didn't get too far before Chuck and Steve made their move.

“Hey, new kid!”

“Hey, Teddy Bear!”

I turned and faced them. “The name's Ted,” I said.

“Oh, sorry, sorry,” Chuck replied. “Ted. How's it goin' Ted?”

Steve laughed a little. I ignored the question.

“Well,” Chuck went on, “since you’re the new bear on the block— I mean, kid— we wanted to give you the easiest house for the fundraiser, Old Mrs. Withers’ house.”

We were all holding newly handed-out fundraiser packets for the school. The Cracker Club. Round, square, fancy or cheap, for soup or cheese, they were all available, don’t ask me why. Apparently, the citizens of Witowpatee really liked their saltines or something. Nevertheless, we were expected to sell at least ten orders within a month’s time.

“Yeah,” Steve chimed in, barely containing his laugh. “She’s so nice, she always buys a big order from the first kid who gets to her place!”

“They usually don’t need any other orders if they can get an Old Mrs. Withers order,” Chuck finished. “So, there you go. It’s all yours!”

I frowned at them. I was no fool. But, I decided to play along. “Great, thanks, guys!” I said. “You sure are nice!” I turned promptly, and walked on. I could hear them trying not to laugh too loudly behind me.

Why did I play along, you ask? Simple. I was determined to show them a thing or two about Ted Gyros. I

would get an order from Old Mrs. Withers, whoever she was, and show those two brainless baboons that I was no one to mess with.

I had just finished this proud string of thoughts, when a familiar voice said, “You can’t go there, Teddy.”

I turned and Shilah was just a little behind me, hurrying to catch up. “She’s the meanest woman in town,” was her explanation. “I mean, really, really mean. They’re trying to trick you.”

“I know, but how bad can she be? I’m from New York, remember? I’ve faced some serious attitude and much more, you don’t even know.”

“She lives alone, but there’s something, well, evil going on at her house,” the girl said, in a hushed tone, not wanting the passing kids to hear.

“Evil? What do you mean, evil?”

“You know— cold, graveyards at midnight, cats scratching on glass, dogs with red eyes and rabies-type evil— that’s what I mean,” she said.

I stopped and looked at her. I had a decision to make. Do I tell her what happened to me just months ago? I had a feeling she’d believe me, but I wasn’t sure how well

she'd keep a secret. It was not something I wanted the whole school or town knowing about.

“So?” I decided on saying. I wished I could tell her just how *Scooby-Do* her description sounded compared to the real horror I'd already witnessed in my life. “I'm not scared. I'll be fine.”

“Just— don't go today, okay?” she persisted.

“Why?”

“Because I have violin right now, and I can't go with you.”

I laughed a little. I didn't think I needed a girl with me for protection. Still, it was a nice offer and I tried not to mock her for it. “Thanks, Shilah,” I said. “I'll be cool. Now, where exactly does this woman live?”

\* \* \*

Ten minutes and ten blocks later, I found myself standing at the end of a rundown stretch of the Hillcrest neighborhood. Mrs. Withers' weathered, three-story home stood on a large lot with two abandoned homes on each side. They were boarded up and vacant, empty shells with blackened eyes glaring at me.

The Withers house, on the other hand, looked occupied. The yard was overgrown with gnarled trees, choking crabgrass and bushes. I stepped onto the wild lawn of tall grass and shuddered a little. There was definitely a strange vibe coming from her place. I could see it with my inner eyes.

It's hard to describe, but the only way I could explain it was that I had double vision. In one moment, I could see things that were normal and right in front of everyone's face. But, a second later, I would be looking at something that no one else could see. It first happened in New York when I saw people riding on the subway that no one else saw. They looked pretty normal except for their pale skin and sunken, dark eyes, and their teeth— whew, I got all cold thinking about it again.

With Mrs. Withers' house, though, it was like a pale, ominous glow surrounded the place. I clutched my fundraiser packet, now on guard. Shilah hadn't been kidding. Something strange *was* going on here.

Suddenly, something slithered across my foot. I jumped, catching a glimpse of the garden snake sliding through the grass. Wanting to avoid whatever else lived in

the shin-high jungle, I ran to the porch and climbed the steps.

A little out of breath, I faced the front door and knocked. Hard and loud. There was no other way. I would have to face her and try my best.

No one came to the door. I waited a few moments. Then, I knocked again.

Still, no one came. No sign at all of Old Mrs. Withers. There was a window to the right of the door with white curtains hanging down in front of it. They caught my attention because I thought I saw them move.

I stepped closer to the window, my tennis shoes squeaking on the worn, wooden porch. I stopped, a foot from it and held my breath. Someone was definitely behind the curtain. I could see the tall, silhouette of a person standing there.

Okay. Do I knock on the window? Do I turn and run? They obviously want nothing to do with me. Then, I heard a creaking sound, steady and strong— a repetitive groan, like an old wooden swing going back and forth. I turned slowly and saw an impossible sight.