

SOME MYSTERIES ARE DEAD SERIOUS



SPIRITITE
and
DUST

ROSEMARY CLEMENT-MOORE

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Also by Rosemary Clement-Moore

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Speaking to the dead is nothing for Daisy Goodnight.

The living, on the other hand, can occasionally be a problem. Especially when they knock you out and kidnap you.

Willing or not, Daisy finds herself on a high-speed mission to track down a mob boss's precious daughter, but she's running out of time.

The dead are coming to take over.



ROSEMARY CLEMENT-MOORE

RHCP DIGITAL

I HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS WHO RIVAL THE
GOODNIGHTS IN LOYALTY, LOVE, AND ECCENTRICITY, IF NOT IN
NUMBER.

GIRLS, THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU.

1

THE LOCAL COPS kept staring at me. I couldn't decide if it was the plaid miniskirt in subarctic temperatures, or the fact that they'd never seen anyone talk to the dead before.

At the moment, I was mostly shivering, but that had more to do with the gray Minnesota afternoon than residual psychic energy, though there was that, too.

"What do you see?" asked Agent Taylor, my FBI handler and the reason—other than the dead man—that I was there.

I had to swallow before I could speak. I like to pretend I'm all *Daisy Goodnight, kick-ass teen psychic*, when really most of the time I'm all *Please don't let me puke in front of the FBI*.

The medical examiner had carted off the body of the man I was supposed to read, and a daylong drizzle had washed away any physical traces from the sidewalk. But an afterimage—one that only I could See—remained where he'd fallen, the vivid imprint of his violent death stamped into the intangible fabric of reality.

It wasn't a pretty sight. I mean, the guy hadn't been pretty even before someone had shot him in the head.

"One guy. Big, bruiser type." I gestured to the curb. "Shot here, in the back of the head with a small-caliber pistol, I think." Psychic traces of him smeared the sidewalk and grass beyond. Unlike bloodstains, they couldn't be rinsed away by the rain. "Bruiser definitely died here, but it looks like maybe he was dragged out of sight, around the back of this building."

Chief Logan, the local guy in charge, exchanged looks with Agent Taylor and his partner, Agent Gerard, but I

already knew I was right. Not because I was Daisy Goodnight, kick-ass psychic for the FBI, but because the death was so recent that the details were way more clear than I needed.

Standard procedure was to let me read a murder site cold, with no prior information. And boy, was I reading this one cold. Like, icicles-on-my-belly-ring cold.

Four hours earlier I'd been in Texas—freshman chemistry lab, to be precise, trying not to blow myself up before I'd even finished my first college semester—when I'd gotten a 911 text from my uncle Sam. By which I mean Uncle Sam in the person of Agent Taylor. I'd given a cover-story excuse to my professor—because the feds are a little weird about the whole psychic-consultant thing—then headed outside, where a big black sedan waited for me on the street.

“Hey, Agent Tasty,” I'd said, when I saw Agent Taylor waiting beside the car. I liked Taylor, and not just because he was young and really hot for a buttoned-up guy with a G-man haircut and a newly minted FBI badge. I sort of *like* liked him, but we worked together and I was still three months shy of legal age, so it stayed within the boundaries of “sort of.” None of which kept me from noticing that he did not skimp on the FBI physical training program.

“Watch it, Jailbait,” he replied, like he always did. Then he sized up my outfit, which was perfectly adequate for a sunny San Antonio autumn day. “I hope you brought a sweater.”

I hadn't. And his partner, Agent Gerard, stick even farther up his butt than normal, had refused to stop by my dorm for a jacket.

An hour later, the three of us—Taylor, Gerard, and I—were on a plane to the Midwestern tundra. Their haste made me uneasy, and not just because they'd whisked me off to hot chocolate country in my iced tea clothes. The feds like to exhaust all other avenues of investigation before they call in a psychic. Even me. Which made me wonder

why I was risking hypothermia while I looked for clues on the mean streets of Elk Butt, Minnesota.

The college town was picturesque—dead-guy psychic slide show notwithstanding. Its biggest claim to fame, other than two liberal arts colleges, was that Jesse James botched a bank robbery there.

Taylor had briefed me on that much before we'd pulled up in front of a redbrick building on the Charleston College campus, where bright yellow crime-scene tape held back students who were taking pictures with their phones. It was a girls' dorm, surrounded by lawn and overlooking a small lake in back. Not exactly the low-rent education district.

Bruiser did *not* look like a college student capped on the way to sociology class. He looked like a thug, his spirit traces felt vile, and worst of all, the freshness of his death had slammed me as soon as I'd climbed out of the car.

Agent Taylor and I had been called to a scene this fresh just that past summer, out in the desert, west of Sonora. One kid killed, another missing, the state troopers determined to find any clue, and fast. As soon as I'd gotten my feet on the ground, I'd known the little girl was dead, but it had taken me all afternoon and half of a heatstroke to find her body.

That had been a bad one.

"Hey, Daisy." Agent Taylor's voice yanked me out of memory. "What do you hear?"

He wasn't really asking what the dead were saying. Nothing in his tone—only our code question—gave any hint that he could tell I'd taken a mental step offside. He'd suggested the code when he'd figured out I wouldn't ask for help in front of other officers—especially Agent Gerard.

What do you hear? Was I that transparent, or was he thinking of the Texas desert, too?

"Nothing but the rain," I said, the proper response for "Don't worry, I still have both hands on the wheel." I mean,

what was a little ghost brains on the sidewalk?

Agent Gerard, hands on his hips, showing the butt of his sidearm in his shoulder holster, said, "Can we get this dog and pony show on the road before it ends up on the effing Tweet-book?"

He was right, which annoyed me. I had questions, but the whole reason I was there was to get answers the way only I could.

Ignoring the audience of students and cops, I blew into my icy hands, then crouched to lay my palm on the pavement where Bruiser had fallen. Over time, the imprint of his death would fade, but now it was a clear, sharp buzz of connection that raced up my arm like a hit to the funny bone.

Panic and prayer. Not much. Not long. Just *Oh God*. A millisecond of petition but no contrition. And then nothing.

"He didn't see it coming," I said, the image vivid on my closed eyelids. "I don't get any kind of anxiety or fear. It seems like he was just minding his own business—whatever that was—when *blammo*. Out of nowhere."

What *was* kind of weird was that for such a clear death imprint, there was barely a trace of Bruiser's actual spirit, something I would expect only from a much older site.

"Anything else?" asked Chief Logan.

The question confirmed my hunch that there was more going on than just a dead thug on a college campus, but I forced myself to focus and search deeper and wider for any other recent psychic events strong enough to stick.

"No one else was killed. At least, not here." I stood and shook imaginary cobwebs off my hand. I wished I could shake off my dread as easily, but the threads of suspicion had knit together too tightly. "There's someone missing, isn't there? A girl from this dorm?"

"We'll ask the questions," snapped Agent Gerard, making Taylor visibly grind his teeth. Before they could argue, Chief Logan overrode them both.

“The victim,” he said, nodding to the sidewalk, “was the driver for a girl named Alexis Maguire. Yes, she is a student here, and yes, she is missing.”

“Okay,” I said, but I was trying to convince myself. *It’s okay. She’s not definitely dead. It’s not like the little girl in Texas.*

Taylor had taken a small step closer, as if worried I was going to faint, which I was absolutely not going to do. I was Daisy “Talks to the Dead” Goodnight, and freaking out wouldn’t help anyone.

“Okay,” I said again, with more conviction. “Let’s go *hablo* dead guy.”

2

I'VE BEEN READING spirit remnants since I was a kid. "I see dead people." The whole shebang.

Because I was raised by a family of witches and psychics, I never thought I was crazy, though I did have some unpleasant moments on school field trips to battlegrounds of the Texas Revolution. I don't think they'll ever let me back into the Alamo.

My gift does tend to isolate me from the living. One, I suppose I seem a little weird—I mean, aside from my wardrobe choices. And two . . . Well, everyone wants to know if there's something left of us when we die, but most people are a little afraid of the answer.

I'd stepped off the pavement and was following the psychic smears on the grass—the trail of Bruiser's dragged body. I moved with purpose, Taylor scrambling to catch up, Gerard and Logan trailing behind as we rounded the building to the stretch leading to the small lake. There was crime-scene tape there, too, but the area must have been searched for trace evidence already, since no one stopped me from crossing it.

"Why are we headed back here?" asked Taylor, a logical question. I'd just said that I wanted to talk to the victim's shade, and usually I did that where someone died, or while holding something of theirs.

"Because he's not there," I said, jabbing a thumb back to where Bruiser had met his end. "There's the imprint of his death, but not enough of his spirit for me to talk to. The remnant must be where his body was hidden."

Only it wasn't. Which was weird. And when I say something is weird, it is *seriously* weird.

I stopped in the middle of the lawn between the dorm and the little lake. I could picture coeds sunning themselves there on a much warmer day. I didn't have to picture Bruiser's body, poorly hidden by a clump of bushes, because I could See him there with my extra senses. But with a death this new, I expected Bruiser's remnant to be standing there like something out of the Haunted Mansion, or at least a mist or shade I could draw out for a chat.

He couldn't have moved on already, because there were still shreds and tatters of his spirit wisping around the site.

Taylor had nearly run me over when I'd halted so quickly. "What's wrong?" he asked. "You're not going Basingstoke on me, are you?"

That was our code for "batten down the hatches," and it shook me out of my befuddlement.

"I haven't even *done* anything yet," I said, because Gerard and Logan hadn't caught up. "I'm not *that* big a wimp."

He glanced toward the older men and lowered his voice. "Well, I don't know what you're Seeing. It's not . . . You don't See *her*, do you?"

Then I felt like a total heel, because when he'd asked me if I was going Basingstoke, he must have been imagining the worst. I mean, he'd been in that Texas desert, too.

There was no sign of a murdered college girl, but before I let either of us be relieved about that, I said, "Give me a second so I can be sure."

With my eyes closed, the spirit traces of Bruiser were bright, vile yellow scraps of fog, eddying closer to me. I ignored them for the moment, ignored Gerard and Logan coming up to us, ignored the damp and cold seeping through my sneakers.

I perceive the spirit world through the five senses already wired into my brain, plus the emotions we all have. I've

learned to dial the volume up or down on the psychic impressions—the visit to the Alamo taught me the importance of *that* skill—but mostly it's like seeing in color. I just *do* it.

Harder to describe is how I interact with that layer of reality. I pictured my psychic self as a sort of ghost me living in my skin, part force field, part sensory array. When I sought out spirits, remnant traces of human souls, I imagined my psyche rushing with my blood out into the smallest capillaries of my skin to my pores, where it could mesh with the energies around me.

That was what I did in the wet grass behind the girls' dorm in Elk Butte, Minnesota, searching for any sign of a murdered girl.

Nothing. A relief, but not in any way an end to my worry.

I opened my eyes and looked at Taylor. Gerard and Logan had joined us. "What's the girl's name again?" I asked.

"Alexis Maguire," said Taylor. "She's a senior, in her last year."

"I don't get any hint that she was killed here," I told them. "But if you give me something of hers, I can tell you for sure if she's still alive."

Chief Logan nodded slowly. I didn't know what he really thought of the psychic stuff, but he seemed to like my professionalism. Which was why I worked so hard at it. "We can do that."

Then I gestured to the image half hidden in the bushes, even though they couldn't see it. "You said Bruiser over there is the driver for the missing girl? Is that some kind of code for 'bodyguard'? Because this guy looks more like a WWF wrestler than a chauffeur."

"Driver *and* bodyguard," said Logan. "Her father is a rich, powerful man."

Money and enemies. So, the girl came from a political or crime family. And going by my sense of Bruiser, I was thinking crime. I was thinking *enforcer*.

“How long was his body hidden?” I asked, trying to figure out the weirdness of his spirit traces—not to mention the timetable for the missing girl.

Logan was obliging with answers. “All night. We know that the driver was supposed to take the girl into the city to go clubbing. She never showed up, but her friends didn’t think anything about it until she didn’t come to class this morning. A search turned up the body shortly after that.”

So Alexis was the type of girl likely to ditch the club scene but rarely miss class. Not exactly the stereotype of a mafia princess.

“Okay,” I said, rubbing my hands together, getting blood and psyche flowing. “Let’s see what Bruiser has to say.”

I crossed the short distance to where his body had lain for twelve hours or so. The grass had been trampled by the crime techs, but the ground was soft from the misty rain. I squatted and dug my hand into the dirt where blood and brains had seeped from the hole in Bruiser’s skull. Since he’d been moved there after the fact, there wasn’t more than a trace, but gray matter always made the best connection.

It should have taken just a fraction of willpower to bring him into focus, like tuning in to the right radio station. But nothing about this remnant was behaving normally.

Normally the death imprint and the actual spirit of a person are closely linked this early in the game. The spirit moves on quickly; the remnant—what most people call a ghost—erodes and fades unless something keeps it here.

This spirit was in tatters, something that usually happened with time. But the shreds were strong with personality, which I only saw with the newly dead or remnants kept vivid by the memories of the living.

The wisps tangled around me, creeping over my skin, crawling up my sleeves and down my collar. I grabbed the threads and knit them together, exerting my will on the frayed—no, torn—edges until they started to mesh.

What could tear apart a ghost?

Suddenly it was done, and the shade of Bruiser stood in front of me—big and brawny, shadowed by his sins and screaming like the hounds of hell were after him.

My psyche was the bungee cord holding him together, and his terror earthquaked across that link with a discordant screech. Instinct said to let go, but I clamped down tighter, gripping the reins on Bruiser's visceral panic.

"Stop it!" I shouted over the scream in my head. The agents jumped; they couldn't see or hear Bruiser. I was just a long-legged, red-haired college freshman squatting in the soggy ground, yelling at the air.

"No one is going to hurt you," I said, my voice less shouty but still pitched high with effort. I didn't have to speak aloud, but *thinking* at him was too much work. My psyche, that invisible ghost of myself, staggered under the effort of keeping the shade knit together. If my attention slipped, he started to dissolve back into bilious fog and discordant screaming.

Seriously. Weird.

A tattered remnant should have been too weak to pull apart once I brought it together. And, yeah, with murder victims, panic was normal sometimes. But this was extreme. I didn't like to admit there was anything ghost-related I hadn't seen before. But this was something ghost-related I had never seen before.

Finally, the shade stopped yelling. He looked around, bug-eyed with terror, jerking with surprise when he saw me.

"Who are you?" Bruiser demanded. "What's happening?"

"I'm here to help you." It wasn't a lie. He could be the vilest vile thing on the planet, but it went against my principles to let a spirit suffer on this side of eternity.

Bruiser was dressed as he had been when he died, in a dark suit and white shirt, jacket bulging over his muscles and a pretty obvious shoulder holster. The shade's hand

jerked toward his weapon when he noticed Taylor beside me and Chief Logan and Agent Gerard behind him. "What about them? Cops? I didn't do anything."

"They don't care about you," I told him with authority. You have to let freaked-out spirits know you're in charge. "We just want to ask you some questions."

"What's he saying?" demanded Gerard, who clearly believed enough to boss me around while I was doing my job. "What happened to the girl?"

"Give her a chance," said Taylor. Then, to the confused Chief Logan, he explained, "We can't see or hear what Daisy sees and hears. Whether the ghosts see or hear us depends on the type. Also, she says murder victims are sometimes a little discomposed by the event."

"Scrambled in the head" was what I'd actually said.

Bruiser watched Taylor with a deepening scowl. "What's he talking about? What murder victim?"

"Focus on me," I told the shade as he started to blur and waver. "Tell me what happened when you arrived at the dorm to pick up Alexis."

His ugly face twisted in concentration. "It was my night to babysit the little princess. I texted her that I was waiting. When she came down, all tartyed up for the club, I got out to open the door."

With the returning memories came more of his personality, and it wasn't a nice one. Hollow eyes raked over me. "She used to give me the same stare you're giving me right now. I'm in big trouble if the little tease is dead, but I won't miss her and her snooty looks."

The agents were waiting expectantly, so I ignored that comment. For the others I said aloud, "So, you got out of the car to open the door for Alexis. What happened then?"

The shade's face went blank. His eyes darted, looking for clues or answers. "I don't know. How did I get here?"

Gerard ran out of patience. "Ask him who took Alexis Maguire. Was he in league with them?"

“No!” said Bruiser, who could hear the question perfectly well. “It’s my ass if anything happens to that little bitch. I’m not crossing Devlin Maguire for anything less than a private island and an army to protect it.”

“He says no,” I relayed.

“Could he be lying?” asked Chief Logan.

“No,” I said. “Spirits can’t lie.” They can misinterpret or misremember, but they can’t state an untruth.

“What do you mean, ‘spirits’?” demanded Bruiser, with way more insight than I’d have expected. “You mean *me*?”

Crap. Panic started to pull at him again, and I shook with the psychic strain of holding his shade together, my muscles burning as if they supported all his weight.

“Tell me what happened after you opened the door for Alexis,” I repeated, now that he was facing his end.

“Blackness,” said Bruiser, panting with fear, even though he had no lungs. “Snarling. And the black dog.”

“Dog?” I asked, totally confused. “What black dog?”

“What black dog?” echoed Taylor. Faintly I heard him ask Chief Logan, “There wasn’t any kind of dog bite on the victim?”

I lost the chief’s answer in the rising wail of Bruiser, the thug becoming one big terror-stricken tremor. “Ripping and tearing.” Then his gaze latched on to mine with a flare of hope. “You! You can send me where the dog can’t rip me up.”

His *certainty* about that rocked me as much as his desperation. I was already on my knees in the wet grass or my legs might have failed me. “How do you know?”

“I just do.”

He wasn’t lying. Somewhere in his scrambled mind, something told him I could help him, even if he didn’t know how.

Distantly, I registered the men talking behind me. “She doesn’t look so good,” said Chief Logan.

“She hasn’t given us anything useful yet,” snapped Gerard. “Why do I put up with this malarkey if it doesn’t get us anywhere?”

Then Taylor, crouched beside me, his voice reaching through the cold net of psyche that tied me to Bruiser. “Come on, Jailbait. It’s time to wrap this up.”

“Okay,” I said, through chattering teeth. When had my lips gone numb? I was barely upright. But I couldn’t leave the job unfinished.

Calling open the Veil wasn’t difficult. A whisper from me and it shivered into my view, ready to put things in their proper place. Our world was for the living. The dead belonged . . . somewhere else.

The threshold between here and eternity was only a waver in the air, like a curtain of liquid mercury. But Bruiser shrank away from it. “What is that?”

Whatever’s next, I told him silently. That was as much as I knew. I could See the Veil, but not what was beyond it. “It’s what you wanted. To get away from the black dog.”

Maybe. It was an empty promise when I didn’t know what he was talking about.

“I don’t want to go.” He swung around, pulling his gun from its holster and pointing it at me. “You can’t make me go.”

Probably not, but whatever lay beyond was happy to reach out and pull him in. I couldn’t See that, either, but Bruiser could, and his screams raked my bones.

I loosed my hold on him, my strength giving out. He dropped into the next world like a pebble into a pond. The Veil shimmered with a promised glimpse into a place outside the walls of time and space, lingered until the moment when my curiosity became a longing ache, then vanished.

It was always that way. I could almost hear a whisper. *There’s something stupendous here, but not for you. Not yet.*

But this time . . . *this* time, in the closing shudder in the surface tension between *there* and *here*, I thought I saw a shape. Something that might have been the inky silhouette of a lean, feral-looking dog.

That was all I got, a corner-of-the-eye impossibility. Then the recoil of all that effort to hold Bruiser together slammed a ball-peen hammer of a headache right between my eyes.

“Basingstoke,” I gasped.

But not in time for Taylor to catch me before I face-planted into the Minnesota mud.

3

“REALLY,” I TOLD Taylor for the fiftieth time, “I’m fine.”

I admit, I might have been more convincing if I weren’t sitting in Alexis Maguire’s desk chair with my head between my knees.

On the plus side, I’d known as soon as I stepped into her dorm room that she wasn’t dead. I was less certain *I* wasn’t dying a slow death by migraine.

Taylor twisted the top off a bottle of Coke and handed it to me. “It’s not usually this bad.”

I finished half the soda in three long gulps, then held the cold plastic to my pounding temple. It was my second bottle. He’d had the first waiting for me as soon as he’d picked me up from the mud behind the dorm.

“It’s not usually this hard.” I didn’t mind admitting that to Taylor, since Agent Gerard was on the other side of the room with Chief Logan and his two detectives. The older officers had their heads together, maybe debating whether to take my word that Alexis was still alive, maybe debating whether to take me to the funny farm.

My cousin Amy swears there is some Goodnight charm that protects us from men in white coats, so I wasn’t worried about the second possibility. But I would be monumentally pissed if I’d gotten this headache just to have the police dismiss the few clues I could give them.

Goodnights and law enforcement go way back. Supposedly, one of my ancestors consulted on the Jack the Ripper case, though maybe that’s not a ringing endorsement. My track record for solving cases was a lot better.

Not that you'd know it, from the way Gerard bitched about working with a psychic. When he came to San Antonio he got Taylor as a partner, which meant he got me. Until this trip, he'd talked to me as little as possible.

Of course, back when Agent Taylor and I first met, he hadn't known what to make of me, either. He was straight out of the academy, and he'd inherited me from his predecessor. *I'd* inherited the gig from my late aunt Diantha, and though I'd done a good bit of work for the local and state police, I was still earning my cred with the FBI.

Our very first case together, Taylor and I were stuck in the car on a ride to a crime scene in the Rio Grande valley. That was nearly a year ago, back when Aunt Pet still rode along with us. She'd been my legal guardian until a judge awarded me emancipation at seventeen so that I could do my civic duty without her having to take off from her job every time someone died or disappeared in the South Texas desert.

"So . . . forgive me if this is a rude question," Taylor had begun. There was no radio reception and the only sound in the car was the click of Aunt Pet's laptop keys as she worked in the backseat.

"Born this way," I answered. I didn't need to read minds—which I *can't* do—to know what rude question he wanted to ask. I'd only been surprised it had taken him so long.

"Just born psychic?" he'd asked. "Not hit by lightning or something?"

"Nope." I leaned forward to search for a radio station. *Any* radio station. "No brain fever, no head trauma, no near-death experience."

"No traumatic death of a loved one?"

I sat back and gave him the stink eye. He *had* to know about my parents. There was no way the details of their murder hadn't been passed along in office gossip.

“Look,” I said. “If we’re going to work together, let’s get a few things straight. I won’t do any of that TV-psychic flimflammy and you won’t ask me trick questions. Not about a read, not about my family, not about me. *Capisce?*”

He glanced my way for a moment, clearly reassessing me. “Okay. So what *about* your parents?”

I sighed and sank into the seat. “They died when I was three. I only remember them as ghosts.”

“And your aunt Diantha solved their murder.” He stated it as a fact, not a question.

“Well, mostly she nagged the police until they searched Farley Driscoll’s vacation house for evidence that he tampered with my parents’ car.” Driscoll had been my father’s business partner, and none of his high-priced lawyers could keep him out of jail once the evidence started mounting up. You do *not* mess with the Goodnights.

“So your whole family is psychic?” Taylor asked.

“Yep. Well, psychic or magic.”

“Huh,” he said in a noncommittal way.

Here’s what I’ve discovered in seventeen and three-quarters years as a Goodnight and a psychic: One, people can rationalize a helluva lot when it comes to explaining the inexplicable. And two, there’s not a hard line between believers and skeptics. People tend to pick and choose what they’ll swallow.

For whatever reason, Agent Taylor had only ever questioned *why* and *how*, never *if*. And after a few successes, he’d started bringing me in on more cases, and reopening cold ones, until we both started making a name for ourselves.

Which, I suppose, might be another reason that Agent Gerard, for all his bitching, had never refused to work with us.

It was the sight of Agent Gerard standing in the middle of all the girliness of Alexis’s room that brought me back to the present. He was frowning at a bulletin board filled with

party pics and ticket stubs, and behind him was a window overlooking the little lake.

“I wonder why the killer didn’t drag Bruiser’s body the rest of the way to the lake and throw him in,” I said. “It would have delayed discovery of the murder and washed away trace evidence.”

Taylor followed my gaze and my train of thought. “Maybe that was the plan, but he was interrupted and had to make do with the bushes.”

That made sense. I imagined grabbing a girl from in front of her dorm meant time constraints.

No one had said “kidnapped” yet, but it was what everyone was thinking. I didn’t need to read minds to know that. I just had to look around her room.

Her dorm was about twice the size of mine, and she had it all to herself. Most of it was standard issue—desk, chair, bed, bookcases, worn carpet, and industrial beige paint. Some of it was upgrade—a minifridge and a microwave and a pair of retro beanbag chairs.

The mess was not standard. The police had found it ransacked—books thrown from their shelves, drawers turned out of the desk and bureau, heaps of clothes and papers under snowdrifts of polystyrene from the gutted chairs.

I risked a cerebral explosion by bending over to pick up a textbook from beside my foot. It was literally Greek to me.

“What is Alexis studying?” I asked, turning the book right side up. It didn’t make a difference, except for the pictures.

I’d asked it loud enough to get the attention of Gerard and the detectives across the room. Chief Logan answered. “Classical languages, I think.”

I would have raised my eyebrows, but my head hurt too bad. “You mean, like Greek and Latin? That kind of classical? How’s that going to be useful in a crime family?”

“How did you know—” Gerard began, then cut himself off with an unvoiced curse. Taylor coughed to cover a laugh,

and I was very careful not to look smug.

“Bruiser didn’t look like he made a living driving Miss Daisy,” I said. Putting the heavy book on the desk, I saw something else. “Her laptop is missing.”

“We noticed that, too,” said the chief. Then he indicated the mess with a tilt of his head. “Can your, um, sight or whatever tell why someone trashed the place? The computer would have been easy to find, so that wasn’t what they were looking for.”

I shook my head carefully. “I only read remnants of the dead. All I can tell you is they weren’t zombies.” Chief Logan, a sober, trim man in his forties, gave a start of alarm, and I allowed myself a weak smile. “There’s no such thing,” I assured him. “The inside might hang around sometimes, but the outside is just dust.”

As for my limitations—which I was feeling keenly just then—I knew that Alexis was alive because of what I *didn’t* feel. I sat at her desk and rifled through her stuff without a whiff of reaction from the spirit world. Remnants really don’t like you messing with their stuff.

And someone had definitely messed with Alexis’s things. Too bad the dorm didn’t have a resident ghost, like the houses at Hogwarts. Then I could just ask *it* what the thieves were after.

Taylor voiced another question I’d been contemplating. “So, still no word on a ransom demand?”

Logan glanced at one of his detectives, who shook his head. “Her father says there hasn’t been any call.”

“Maybe he’s lying,” I offered. “You know, like they do in the movies, when the kidnapper says, ‘Don’t call the cops.’”

“This isn’t a movie, Peanut,” said Gerard, not bothering to hide his scorn. “It’s a serious criminal investigation. Why don’t you sit quietly until we have something else for you to Ouija or whatever it is you do?”

I didn't think it was possible for my head to hurt any worse, but a hot pulse of humiliated anger proved me wrong. "I don't *Ouija* things, Agent Gerard. I read the remnants of energy that linger after death. Especially violent and unexpected death."

"Not that it was any help here," he said. "What was all that black dog business? Was she kidnapped to be raised by wolves?"

"Spirits get confused. You might be confused, too, if your brains got scrambled by a bullet."

"That's enough, you two," snapped Taylor, and as awful as it was to have Gerard dismiss me like a kid, it was ten times worse having Taylor scold me like one.

"Daisy brought up a valid point," Taylor continued, not that I still didn't want to crawl into the deflated remains of the beanbag chair and die. "If anyone would think he could handle this solo, it's Devlin Maguire. He has reason not to want the police poking into his business."

"Maybe he knows the person behind this," said Gerard. "Criminal roads from all over the country run back to him, but no one has been able to sew up the connection. Maybe the girl's kidnapping is our chance."

An awkward silence rocked everyone back on their heels a moment. Then Taylor, with soft-voiced intensity, said, "There's a girl's life at stake. The important thing is finding her."

He did *not* say "It's not about your career, asshole." At least, not aloud. I'm not sure I'd have had that kind of willpower.

"Of course," said Gerard, with cover-my-ass bluster. He turned to Logan. "We'll leave your office to finish the investigation on the murder here, and Taylor and I will hook up with the Minneapolis field office on this kidnapping. Even if Maguire won't cooperate, we can talk to him, put a tap on his phone. . . ."

Taylor listened with his jaw twitching, but didn't contradict his partner, just added, "I think they've already requested a warrant for that."

"Then we should get a move on," said Gerard.

Finally, we agreed on something.

The clock was ticking, and not just for Alexis. My window of usefulness was closing. Sugar and caffeine had pushed back the nausea and the crimson haze of my headache, but I figured I had thirty, maybe forty minutes of coherence before the migraine stomped me flat.

4

WE EXITED THE dormitory and a camera flash drove a spike into my eye.

My knees buckled as the headache blossomed to full force. Taylor caught me under one arm and Gerard under the other, hustling me through a small crowd of reporters bristling with cameras, microrecorders, and questions.

“Are you the agents in charge?”

“Any leads on who killed Dev Maguire’s henchman?”

“Or the whereabouts of Miss Maguire or her body?”

“Does Mr. Maguire know you’ve hired a psychic to find his daughter?”

Taylor took up the rear guard, offering them nothing but “No comment at this time” while his partner shoved me into the backseat of the black SUV waiting by the curb.

“Effing reporters,” growled Gerard as he slammed my door. He might as well have been slamming it on my head.

“How the hell did they find out about her?” the agent demanded, once he and Taylor had climbed into the front and closed out the reporters.

“Pretty coed goes missing?” said Taylor, buckling his seat belt. “It was going to splash, even without a whale like Maguire involved.”

“No. I mean *her*.” Gerard stabbed his thumb toward me, sitting innocently in the backseat, trying not to be sick.

“Chill.” Taylor sounded like he’d reached the end of his patience about five snarky comments ago, and I was glad those hadn’t come from me. “It’s not her fault college students like to Tweet. Hell, she’s probably got a fan page on Facebook by now.”

Gerard chilled. He went positively frosty and flexed his hands on the steering wheel like he was picturing them around someone's neck. "I swear, rookie, if little Miss Ghostbuster blows this investigation for me, I'm going to make sure she—and *you*—are sidelined until monkeys fly out of my ass."

Taylor spoke low and grim, reminding me why I wanted to stay on his good side. "You know, Gerard, the Minneapolis field office didn't ask for us. They asked for Daisy. You wouldn't even be here if it weren't for her. Maybe you'd better think about what's best for the case instead of what's best for your career."

Just a guess, but this wasn't going to make Gerard like me any better. He slammed the SUV into gear and pulled out from in front of the dorm so fast my head bounced on the back of the seat. Fireworks exploded and my stomach flipped over.

I must have made a sound, because Taylor turned to look at me. "Hang tight, Daisy. We're headed to one of the precincts in Minneapolis. We'll base out of there, and you can get some rest in the ready room."

A swig from my latest bottle of Coke helped me sound half normal as I said, "You should take me with you if you're going to see Maguire."

"How do you propose we explain you?" sneered Gerard, eyes on the road. He wasn't even pretending to be nice now that we were in private. "Junior Miss Marple, goth edition?"

That might have been funny if he weren't such an ass. "He's going to know about me from the six o'clock news anyway. And crime boss or not, he's a dad. Parents will try anything to find their kids."

Taylor and I had searched for enough children to know. It only took one.

With his arm hooked over the seat back, Taylor studied me. From his skeptical frown, I figured I must look as bad

as I felt. “No offense, Daisy, but are you going to be good for anything? You look like you’re about to hurl.”

“Do *not* throw up in this car,” snapped Gerard. “We’ll be responsible for having it cleaned.”

Just when I thought I couldn’t hate him any more than I already did.

We arrived at a police station in Minneapolis, where we—meaning the agents—were liaising with the local PD and meeting someone from the FBI field office. I was hazy on the details, and Taylor didn’t introduce me to anyone before he strong-armed me into an office, sat me on a sagging sofa, and made sure there was an empty trash can within easy reach. I would have protested, but the fluorescent lights sent signals to the hammers inside my skull. A dark office was only sensible.

“An hour,” I told Taylor as I flopped over on the couch. It smelled like shoe polish, stale coffee, and cop eighteen hours into a twenty-four-hour shift. “That’s all I need. It will take that long, at least, to get the search warrant for Maguire’s house, right?”

“Longer,” he assured me, with a glance at his watch, “since they’ll have to drag a judge away from his dinner.”

The thought of dinner made me glad for the trash can. “I’m sorry,” I moaned, my cheek sticking to the pleather sofa.

“Why?” Taylor crouched to eye level, which would have helped if I could see straight. Just then he had four dark-blue eyes and two square jaws. Not quite as handsome as the usual number. The expression on his face made up for it. “The fact that you can’t locate Alexis is a good thing, right?”

“Yeah,” I said. It meant she was alive. “But all that stuff about the black dog. And Bruiser. It was so *weird*. And worse, it was useless.” I closed my eyes because they were