

Chapter One

Mr. Jackaby's cluttered office spun around me. Leaning heavily on the desk, I caught my breath in shuddering gulps. My head was throbbing, as though a shard of ice had pierced through one temple and out the other, but the sensation was gradually subsiding. I opened my eyes. The stack of case files I had spent all morning sorting lay strewn across the carpet, and the house's resident duck was cowering behind the legs of my employer's dusty chalkboard, shuffling anxiously from one webbed foot to the other.

One lonely file remained on the desk at my fingertips—a mess of fading newsprint and gritty photographs. My pulse hammered against the inside of my skull, and I concentrated, trying to slow my heartbeat as I propped myself up on the desk. Before me lay the police report, which

described the grisly murder of an innocent woman and the mysterious disappearance of her fiancé. Beneath it was tucked the lithograph of a house, a three-story building in a quiet New England port town—the same house in which I now stood, only ten years younger—it looked simpler and sadder back in 1882. Then there were my employer’s collected notes, and beside them the photograph of a pale man, his lips curled in a wicked smirk. Strange men stood behind him wearing long leather aprons and dark goggles. My eyes halted, as they always did, on one final photograph. A woman.

I felt sick. My vision blurred again for a moment and I forced myself to focus. Deep breath. The woman in the picture wore an elegant, sleeveless dress as she lay on a bare floor, one arm outstretched and the other resting at the torn collar of her gown. A necklace with a little pewter pendant hung around her neck, and a dark stain shaded her chest and collected around her body in an ink-black pool. Jenny Cavanaugh. My friend. Dead ten years, and a ghost the whole time I had known her.

The air in the room shimmered like a mirage, and I pulled my gaze away from the macabre picture. Keeping one hand on the desk to steady myself, I raised my chin and straightened my blouse as a spectral figure coalesced before me. My pulse was still pounding in my ears. I wondered if Jenny could hear it, too.

“It’s fine. I’m fine,” I lied. *I am not fine*, every fiber within

me shouted. "I'm ready this time." *I am anything but ready.* I took a deep breath. The phantom did not look convinced. "Please," I said. "Try it again." *This is a bad idea. This is a terrible idea. This is—*

And then the office vanished in a blinding haze of mist and ice and pain.

Jenny Cavanaugh was dead, and she wasn't happy about it. Another week would mark the passing of ten years since death had come prowling into her home. It would mark ten years since it had dropped her on her back in the middle of her bedroom, her blood spilling across the polished floor. Her fiancé, Howard Carson, had vanished the same night, and with him any clues as to the purpose or perpetrator of the gruesome crime.

Perhaps it was due to the approach of such a morbid anniversary, but in all the months I had known her, Jenny had never been so consumed by her memories as she had become in the past week. Her carefree attitude and easy laugh had given way to tense silence. She made an effort to maintain her usual mask of confidence, smiling and assuring me that all was well. Her eyes betrayed the turmoil inside her, though—and there were times when the mask fell away completely. What lay beneath was not a pleasant sight.

R. F. Jackaby, my employer and a specialist in all things strange and supernatural, called those moments *echoes*. I

cannot begin to fathom the depths of Jenny's trauma, but I glimpsed into that icy darkness every time I witnessed an echo. Everything Jenny was fell away in an instant—the woman she had once been and the spirit she had become—until all that was left was a broken reflection of her last living seconds. Fury and fear overwhelmed her as she relived the scene, and all around her spun a storm of ice and wind. The unfathomable forces that held a soul intact had come untethered in Jenny, and what remained was something less than living and something more than human. The first time I watched her fall into that cold place had been bad enough, but it was far from the last. The further we pursued her case, the more frequently and violently the echoes overcame her.

Jenny regarded these moments with frustrated embarrassment after she regained her composure, as might a sleepwalker upon waking to find herself on the roof. She became increasingly determined to hone her spiritual control so that she might find answers to the questions that had haunted her since her death, and I became increasingly determined to help.

“Tread lightly, Miss Rook,” warned Mr. Jackaby one evening, although he was usually the last person to exercise caution. “It would not do to push Miss Cavanaugh too far or too fast.”

“I'm sure she's capable of much more than we know, sir,” I told him. “If I may . . .”

“You may not, Miss Rook,” he said. “I’ve done my research: Mendel’s treatise on the demi-deceased; Haversham’s *Gaelic Ghosts*. Lord Alexander Reisfar wrote volumes on the frailty of the undead psyche, and his findings are not for the faint of heart. We are churning up water we ought not stir too roughly, Miss Rook. For her sake and for ours.”

“With all due respect, sir, Jenny isn’t one of stuffy Lord Reisfar’s findings. She’s your friend.”

“You’re right. She isn’t one of Lord Reisfar’s findings, because Lord Reisfar’s findings involved pushing spectral subjects to their limits just to see what would happen to them—and that is not something I intend to do.”

I hesitated. “What would happen to his subjects?”

“*What would happen,*” answered Jackaby, “is the reason Lord Reisfar is not around to tell you in person.”

“They killed him?”

“A bit. Not exactly. It’s complicated. His nerves gave out, so he abandoned necropsychology in favor of a less enervating discipline, and was shortly thereafter eaten by a colleague’s manticore. He might or might not still haunt a small rhubarb patch in Brussels. Cryptozoology is an unpredictable discipline. But my point stands!”

“Sir—”

“The matter is settled. Jenny Cavanaugh is in an unstable condition at the best of times, and finding painful answers before she is ready might send her over an internal threshold from which there can be no return.”

I don't think my employer realized that Jenny had crossed an internal threshold already. Until recently, she had always been reticent about investigating her own death, shying away from solid answers as one who has been burned shies away from the flame. When Jackaby had first moved his practice into her former property, into the home in which she had lived and died, Jenny had not been ready. The truth had been too much for her soul to seek. She had made a decision, however, when she finally enlisted our services to solve her case—and, once made, that decision had become her driving force. She had waited long enough.

Now it was Jackaby who seemed to be dragging his heels to help, but his unavailing attitude only made Jenny more determined to help herself. To her dismay, determination alone could not give her a body, and without one she could do frustratingly little to expedite the case. Which was why she had come to me.

Our first spiritual exercises had been fairly benign, but Jenny still felt more comfortable practicing when Mr. Jackaby was away. We had known each other only six short months, but she had quickly become like a sister to me. She was self-conscious about losing control, and Jackaby only made matters worse by growing increasingly overprotective. We began by attempting to move simple objects one afternoon while he was out.

Jenny remained unable to make physical contact with anything that had not belonged to her in life, but on rare

occasions she had managed to break that rule. The key, we found, was not concentration or sheer force of will, but rather perspective.

“I can’t,” she said after we had been at it for an hour. “I can’t move it.”

“Can’t move what?” I asked.

“Your handkerchief.” She waved her hand through the flimsy, crumpled thing on the table. It did not so much as ripple in the breeze.

“No,” I answered. “Not *my* anything. You can’t move *your* handkerchief. I gave it to you.”

“*My* handkerchief, then,” she said. “A lot of good *my* handkerchief is going to do me when I can’t even stuff it in a pocket!” She gave it a frustrated swat with the back of her hand, and it flopped open on the table.

We both stared at the cloth. Slowly her eyes rose to meet mine, and we were both grinning. It had been the flimsiest of motions, but it was the spark that lit the fire. We scarcely missed a chance to practice after that.

Not every session was as productive as the first, but we made progress over time. Several fragile dishes met their demise in the following weeks, and the frustration of her failures pushed her into spiritual echoes more than once. With each small setback, however, came greater success.

We expanded our tests to leaving the premises, which Jenny had not done since the day she died. This proved an even more daunting task. On our best round, she managed

to plant but a single foot on the sidewalk—and it took her most of the afternoon to rematerialize afterward.

When moving outward failed to yield the results we had hoped for, I began to explore moving inward. I knew that this could be even more dangerous territory to tread, but the following day I asked Jenny to think back and tell me what she remembered about that night.

“Oh, Abigail, I’d really rather not . . .” she began.

“Only as much as you feel comfortable,” I said. “The smallest, most inconsequential details. Don’t even think about the big stuff.”

Jenny breathed deeply. Well, she never really breathed; it was more a gesture of comfort, I think. “I was getting dressed,” she said. “Howard was going to take me to the theater.”

“That sounds nice,” I said.

“There was a sound downstairs. The door.”

“Yes?”

“You shouldn’t be here,” said Jenny.

The shiver rippled up my spine even before I felt the temperature drop. I had come to recognize those words. They came from that dark place inside Jenny.

“I know who you are.” Her gown was elegant and pristine, but at the same time it was suddenly torn at the neck and growing darker. She was already fracturing. Jenny’s echoes were like a horrid version of the party favors my mother used to buy—little cards with a bird on one side and

an empty cage on the other with a stick running down the middle. When you twirled the stick, the bird was caught. A trick of the eye. As Jenny fluttered in front of me, graceful and grotesque, the two versions of her became one, but some part of my brain knew they did not belong together. Her brow strained and her eyes grew wild with anger and confusion.

“Jenny,” I said, “it’s me. It’s Abigail. You’re safe. There’s no one—”

“You work with my fiancé.”

“Jenny, come back to me. It’s all right now. You’re safe.”

“No!”

“You’re safe.”

“NO!”

By the time she reappeared, I had tidied up all the broken glass and righted all the furniture. She always returned, but it took Jenny time to recover from an echo. I kept myself from fretting by keeping busy with my chores. I sorted through old receipts and dusty case files compiled by my predecessor, Douglas. Douglas was an odd duck. He had had excellent handwriting when he had been Jackaby’s assistant. Of course, that was when he had still had hands—not that he seemed to miss them now that they were wings.

When I say Douglas was an odd duck, I mean it quite literally. His transformation into water fowl had taken place during his last official case. Working for R. F. Jackaby came with unique occupational hazards.

Douglas perched on the bookshelf now to watch me while I worked, issuing an occasional disapproving quack or ruffling his feathers when I filed something incorrectly. He seemed to enjoy life as a bird, but it made him no less insufferably fastidious than he had been as a human. Jenny materialized slowly; she was just a hint of shimmering light in the corner when I first realized she was there. I gave her time.

“Abigail,” she said at last. She was still translucent, only just visible in the soft light. “Are you all right?”

“Of course I am.” I set down the stack of case files on the corner of the desk. Jenny’s own file lay open beside them. “Are you?”

She nodded faintly, but heavy thoughts hung over her brow like rain clouds.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I shouldn’t have . . . I’ll stop pushing you.”

“No.” She solidified a little. “No, I want to keep practicing.” She bit her lip. “I’ve been thinking.”

“Yes?”

“I’m not as strong as you are, Abigail.”

“Oh, nonsense—”

“It’s true. You’re strong, and I’m grateful for your strength. You’ve already given me more of it than I have any right to ask, only . . .”

“Only what?”

“Only, I wonder if I could ask for a little more.”

Possession. She wanted to attempt possession, and in my foolish eagerness I agreed. I managed to convince myself that I was braced to handle Jenny Cavanaugh's spirit entering my mind and sharing my body—but nothing could have been further from the truth; there could be no bracing against the sensations to come. She was tentative and gentle, but the experience proved to be like inviting a swirling maelstrom of pain and cold directly into my skull. My vision went white and I felt as though my eyes had been replaced with lumps of ice. If I cried out, I could not hear my own voice. I could not hear anything at all. There was only pain.

Our first attempt was over as soon as it had begun. I was reeling, my head throbbing and my vision blurry. The files I had sorted were strewn across the floor—all of them but Jenny's. Her photograph, the photograph from her police record, lay atop the pile on Jackaby's desk. Jenny was in front of me before I could gather my wits about me. She looked mortified and concerned.

"It's fine. I'm fine," I lied, doing my best to make it true as I leaned on the desk and tried not to pitch forward and retch on the carpet. "I'm ready this time. Please. Try it again."

I was not ready. Neither was she.

Jenny hesitated for a moment and then drifted closer, smooth and graceful as always. Her hair trailed behind her like smoke in the wind. She reached a delicate hand toward

my face, and—if only for an instant—I could have sworn I felt her fingers brush my cheek. It was a sweet caress, like my mother’s when she used to tuck me into bed at night. And then the biting cold returned. My nerves screamed. *This is a bad idea. This is a terrible idea. This is—*

The office faded into a blinding haze of whiteness, and together we tumbled into a world of mist and ice and pain . . .
. . . and out the other side.

Chapter Two

It seemed like only yesterday I had been back home in England, packing for my first term at university. Had someone told me then that I would throw it all away and run off to America to commune with ghosts and answer to ducks and help mad detectives solve impossible murders, I would have said they were either lying or insane. I would have sorted them on the same shelf in my mental library as those who believe in Ouija boards or sea serpents or honest politicians. That sort of foolishness was not for me. I adhered to facts and science; the impossible was for other people.

A lot can change in a few short months.

The pain had ebbed to numbness and the blinding light had faded away. I did not remember moving into the foyer, but it was suddenly all around me. I blinked. How long had I been out? I stood in the front room of Jackaby's offices at 926 Augur Lane—of that there was no doubt—but the room

was barely recognizable. In place of the battered wooden bench sat a soft divan. The paintings of mythical figures had been replaced by tasteful landscapes, and the cluttered shelves full of bizarre masks and occult artifacts stood completely barren—even Ogden’s terrarium was missing. When I had been gassed out of the house by the flatulent little frog on my first day, I would not have expected to be so bothered by his absence, but now I found it most disquieting. The desk stood in its usual place, but it was uncharacteristically clean and empty. Behind it stood a pile of boxes and paper bundles bound in twine. Had Jackaby packed? Were we moving?

The front door swung suddenly open and there stood R. F. Jackaby in his typical motley attire. His coat bulged from its myriad pockets, and his ludicrously long scarf dragged across the threshold as he stepped inside. Atop his head sat his favorite knit mess, a floppy hat of conflicting colors and uneven stitches. I had been secretly pleased to see that particular piece of his wardrobe completely incinerated by an ungodly blaze during our previous caper. I shook my head. It had been destroyed, hadn’t it?

“Mr. Jackaby?”

“Yes. This will serve my purposes nicely,” said Jackaby, walking toward me.

I opened my mouth, but before I could speak, my employer stepped right through me as though I weren’t there. I looked down to find, most distressingly, that I wasn’t.

“I’ll need to make a few modifications, of course.”

I spun and saw that he was talking to Jenny. She hovered by the window, regarding Jackaby with cautious interest. Her translucent hair drifted weightlessly behind her. Her dress was moon-white, its hem rippling gently along the ground beneath her. Her skin was nearly as pale, pearl-escient and as immaterial as a sunbeam. “Nothing too drastic, I hope? I understand, of course. You must make the place your own. I had the kitchen remodeled the year I moved in—but it’s so darling as it is.”

“I’m sure you’ll barely notice the changes.” He opened the door to the crooked little hallway and paused. “I *will* be making this place my own, Miss Cavanaugh,” he said, turning back. “But don’t think that makes it any less yours. You will still have your space. You have my word.”

Jenny smiled, looking bemused and grateful. “You are a singular man, Mr. Jackaby. What have I done to deserve you?”

“I’ve been considering that. There is something you could do.”

She raised an eyebrow. The room was beginning to fill with mist, but neither of them seemed to notice. “What?” she asked.

“Promise me,” said Jackaby, his voice growing faint, “that you will never . . .”

And then, in a rush, the mist was gone and I was in the office again. I was lying on my back and Douglas was

standing on my chest craning his head this way and that to regard me with his glossy black eyes. I shooed him off and sat up. My whole body felt tired and numb, with a prickling heat creeping into my extremities. I was back in the present, but I felt like I had spent all day in the snow and then climbed into a warm bath.

Jenny appeared above me. “That was sensational! It worked! Oh, Abigail, are you all right?”

I wiggled my fingers and toes experimentally and felt my face. Aside from the fading numbness, everything seemed to be in working order. “I’m fine. What just happened?”

“Legs! I haven’t had honest to goodness legs to stand on in years! And you’re so warm, Abigail—I had forgotten how blood feels. It’s like being wrapped up in a cozy blanket from the inside.” She spun and sighed happily, drifting up toward the ceiling. I had not seen her so content in weeks.

“It worked?” I pushed myself up, leaning on the desk to steady my swimming head. “You mean I was possessed? You were walking me around and everything?”

“Well, not walking, exactly. I kept us from falling down for the better part of a minute, though. You couldn’t see it?”

“I saw . . . something else,” I said. “I saw you and Jackaby. It must have been the day he moved in. He promised you that you would always have your space in the house.”

“He did say that,” Jenny said, sinking back to my level.

She regarded me thoughtfully. “You saw my memories? What else did you see?”

“Nothing much. He asked you to promise him something in return—only then I slipped back here. What was it he never wanted you to do?”

“A promise?” Jenny thought for a moment. “I don’t remember.” She crinkled her brow. “Do you think you could see further if we tried again?”

“I suppose so.” Jenny looked completely in control, invigorated, even—but I could not forget Jackaby’s cautions about pushing her too far or too fast. “It isn’t upsetting to know that I was inside your memories?”

“What’s upsetting is knowing that I might have secrets hidden inside me and I can’t get them out.” Jenny looked at me pleadingly. “Abigail, this could be the answer.”

It really could, I had to admit. With practice, possession could grant her the means to leave the house and pursue secrets that had been hidden from her for so long—and at the same time, it could grant me the means to uncover the secrets hiding within.

“All right,” I said. Douglas was bobbing back and forth, looking more disapproving than a duck has any business to look. I ignored him. “Let’s try again.”

This time I was ready for the pain. I leaned into it, and it passed over me more quickly. The blinding whiteness returned, and when the mist cleared, I found myself not in

the foyer of 926 Augur Lane but in a drawing room I did not recognize. The sky outside was black, and the room was dim. I had entered a different memory.

“No. That’s no good. The output will be half what they asked for,” said a man’s voice.

“It’ll be twice what it should be. There’s no way to stabilize at these levels.”

Two figures stood directly ahead of me, their attention fixed on a stack of schematics spread over a wide desk. Something about them was familiar. The first was an energetic, handsome man. I felt uncomfortably drawn to him, although I could not say why. And then he smiled and I knew. This was Howard Carson. This was Jenny’s fiancé—the man who had loved her—the man who had left.

Across from him stood a man with white-blond hair. He wore a scowl and a three-piece suit, tailored impeccably to his slim figure. “They’re not going to be happy about this,” said the slender man.

“They’ll be a lot less happy if the whole thing blows up in their faces,” countered Howard Carson. The thin man grimaced as Carson rattled on about conductivity and tensile strength.

In a chair behind them sat a third man, heavysset with a chubby face and a mustache waxed into thick curls. He said nothing as he fidgeted an unlit cigar from one hand to the other, watching the men work. Beside him stood a prim woman with ink-black hair holding a clipboard and a

pen. “Are you getting all of this down?” the big man asked quietly.

“Yes, Mr. Poplin, every word.” She remained expressionless, her pen scratching away.

“Good girl.”

“Don’t forget, boys,” came a soft voice from behind me. Before I could turn to see her face, a woman with brunette locks stepped through me toward the desk. I shuddered, or I would have if I had a body to shudder; I would never get used to the sensation of not physically existing. “The copper fittings in the prototype lost conductivity as they tarnished. Silver will cost more, but it will also increase the output over time.”

The thin man grimaced. “What do you know about it?” he said.

“She knows quite a lot, actually,” interjected Carson. “I told you already that my fiancée has been assisting me with my work. She’s as sharp as they come.”

Jenny Cavanaugh stepped behind the desk and turned to face the room. Had I been in possession of my own jaw at the time, it would have dropped. The Jenny I knew was a beautiful ghost—but the woman before me, with real weight to her steps and a flush in her cheeks, looked like another person entirely, so vibrant and alive. Her hair framed her face rather than hovering in weightless silver waves. She wore a honey yellow dress, practical and pretty, and around her neck hung a little pewter locket.

“She’s quite keen, you know,” Carson was saying. “And she’s right about the fittings.”

“Thank you, Howard.” Jenny Cavanaugh and Howard Carson looked at each other for only a moment, but their affection was obvious.

“We discussed this already,” said the blond man flatly. “We will move forward with copper.” I did not like him. It was more than his sanctimonious sneer. Something within Jenny disliked the man, so I disliked the man.

“If you insist,” Howard said, taking a deep breath. “Copper will do.”

Jenny was not satisfied. “It would save us all a great deal of time and effort if we knew the exact purpose of our efforts.”

The man glared at Jenny. “Our benefactors have provided us with very clear objectives.”

“Objectives are not an ultimate purpose. What exactly are your benefactors building?”

“Jenny—” Howard said.

“The future!” declared a new voice, and all eyes turned to the door. “We’re building the future, young lady. One shiny cog at a time.” The man who stood in the doorway was stout and unshaven. He had coal-black hair and wore a shabby black coat over a black waistcoat. His skin was deathly pale, save for a bluish shadow across his chin and under his eyes.

I knew that face. That was the face we had fruitlessly

hunted across the countryside and back into the shadows of New Fiddleham. That was the last face our client poor Mrs. Beaumont had ever seen before she died. I watched as that face spread its pallid lips into a crooked grin. “Doesn’t that sound exciting?”

Chapter Three

You knew him?" I gasped as the dark drawing room faded away and Jackaby's office reappeared, the mid-day sun streaming in through the windows. I stood up abruptly from the leather armchair and immediately regretted my decision. My vision reeled and I sat back down.

Jenny—my Jenny—hung pale and translucent in the air ahead of me. She had been beaming, but the smile was rapidly melting away. "Knew whom?"

I breathed, holding on to the armrests to keep from falling out of the chair. Slowly the world stopped spinning and the feeling returned to my skin. "How did I get—Jenny, did you possess me all the way into the armchair?"

She nodded, but the pride had left her face. "I knew *whom*, Abigail?"

“That man. The one in the photograph.”

Rising more gradually this time, I stepped over to Jenny’s open file. My temples were throbbing and the room felt as though it were slowly spinning to a stop. Jenny stood beside me as I tried to pull my mind together. When the world was finally stable again, I looked up to find that she had already fixated on a picture. Her translucent hand brushed the image of her body, sprawled across her bedroom floor.

“Jenny . . .”

“Howard gave me that locket,” she said. “It’s not in the house any longer. I’ve looked and looked. It had a note inside. ‘From Howard with love.’ It’s just a little pewter thing, but it’s the little things you miss.”

“Jenny, stay with me,” I said cautiously. “Please? This is important.”

She pulled her eyes away from the picture. “I’m with you, Abigail.”

I plucked the photograph of the pale man off the top of the pile and held it up for her to see. It was grainy with a sepia tint, but the face was unmistakable. I had seen him watching my window from the street corner, and then again, lurking outside the train station. Now I had seen him up close through Jenny’s memories, and not a hair on his head had changed in those ten years.

The pale man stood in the foreground of the picture, a smug smile on his face. He was not alone. In the background of the picture, five men stood around a worktable

in what appeared to be an industrial factory. Bright lamp-light illuminated their faces and left hard shadows on the wall behind them. The men wore dark work aprons, thick gloves, and tinted goggles pushed up on their heads. The one in the center was Howard Carson.

There were no other pictures of Howard in the house—none hanging in Jenny’s room nor propped up on her nightstand. She spoke of him fondly but rarely, and always with trepidation, as if feeling gingerly around a bruise.

Along the bottom of the picture had been inscribed five words in tight cursive: *For posterity. From humble beginnings . . .*

“He worked with my fiancé.” Jenny’s voice was quiet.

I tensed, the hairs on the back of my neck prickling up. “Jenny? Are you still with me?”

She pursed her lips, nodding. “I remember now.” I held my tongue, not daring to tip the balance. When she spoke her voice was scarcely more than a breath. “He was called Pavel.”

The photograph had been in her case file for years, but Jenny had never been able to identify the pale man before, nor anyone in the file save Howard Carson. There had been something about the image she responded to—an uneasy remnant of a feeling—but like Jenny herself, the memory remained frustratingly intangible. Looking at any of the photographs in her file for too long put her in a fragile state, but still she tried. When I had recognized the pale man as the same wretch whose trail of havoc we had followed

across the valley, she had tried even harder, wrestling with the demons in her mind for anything—a detail—a name—but the effort had only triggered her to echo every time. Until now.

“Is he . . . ?” I whispered. “Is he the one who . . . ?” Jenny’s eyes narrowed in concentration, and a cold breeze crept under my collar. My trip into her thoughts might have brought a flickering light to Jenny’s memories, but those corridors were still shrouded in something darker than shadow. “Perhaps we should take a rest,” I said.

“He was here. Why was he here?” Jenny’s silver hair whipped in a sudden breeze, though the windows were latched tight. “I don’t like him. I don’t trust him.”

“Neither do I, Jenny. I think we ought to stop.”

“He came to the house. He’s at the door. He knows that Howard is here.”

“Jenny, stop.”

“I don’t like him.” She blinked, her eyes drifting in and out of focus, and then her stare turned icy. “I know who you are. You work with my fiancé.”

I stuffed all of the photographs and the loose clippings and notes back into the file and slammed it shut as a bitingly cold gust of wind pressed into my back. When I looked around Jenny was already gone.

“Jenny?” I called to the silence. The silence deepened.

“Give her time.”

I jumped at the sound of a man’s voice. “Mr. Jackaby!”

I gasped, clutching my heart. “I didn’t hear you come in. How long have you . . . ?”

“I just got back. I won’t be staying long. I wasn’t expecting to find myself stepping into an icebox.” He dropped his satchel with a thump and picked up Jenny’s file as he walked around the desk. “Be careful, Miss Rook. Our un-departed friend has a thorn buried deep in her metaphorical paw, and we find ourselves in the lion’s den.” He tucked the file into his desk and shut the drawer with a click. “I assure you, we will do everything in our power to remove the injury—but I have no intention of making it worse and getting torn to ribbons for our efforts. Patience and diligence are paramount.”

“With all due respect, sir, ten years stretches the definition of patient. She is already a decade into her afterlife.”

He stared at the old papers and receipts spread across his office floor. “Still, we must consider the possibility that the thorn and the lion are one.”

“Sir?”

He met my gaze and sighed. “Ghosts are beings of discontent, Miss Rook. The undead remain bound to this earth by their unfinished business. Either we will not succeed because we cannot succeed—because her soul will never be content—”

“Or we will succeed,” I said, realizing his implication. “And her business will be finished.”

“And she will depart from us at long last.” Jackaby

nodded. “That is her decision, though. She says she’s ready. We will provide her with what few answers and what little peace we can, but there’s no benefit in rushing the job.” He slid into the chair and leaned heavily on his desk, his gray eyes gloomy.

“Sir?”

“I dislike the idea of being without Miss Cavanaugh.”

“Have you told her that?”

“She has her own concerns to attend to right now.”

“She really can handle more than you think, sir. She’s making considerable progress.”

“The state of my office says otherwise. I noticed the glass in the wastebasket, by the way. I take it this is not her first echo today. How long was she incorporeal for the last one?”

I hesitated. “Only an hour. Maybe two. It was just a little one.” His gaze drifted to my cheek, and I could feel his eyes catching on the slender scar on my cheekbone. The mark was a trivial thing—already it had faded to a soft pink line—but it was a souvenir of a nearly catastrophic brush I’d had with a Stymphalian bird, another supernatural force I had woefully underestimated. Getting Jackaby to stop treating me like a fragile thing was difficult enough without having reminders of past close calls etched on my face. It didn’t help that the injury in question had been inflicted by nothing more than the creature’s feather. I redirected the conversation. “She had a revelation.”

“A revelation.” Jackaby nodded with a deep breath. “Splendid. Because nothing bad ever happens in Revelation.”

“The pale man. His name is Pavel. She remembered him.”

Jackaby’s eyes darted up, but he quickly hid his interest. “Pavel? A given name only. Likely an alias.”

“She can do more.”

“But she should not. It’s too dangerous, Miss Rook. In light of recent developments, I think it best we suspend Miss Cavanaugh’s direct involvement altogether.”

“What? That’s absurd! This is her case!”

“Precisely my point! She is far too emotionally invested to handle the minutia of this investigation. With each new twist and turn we risk pushing her over the edge, and we cannot foresee what might lie beyond the next curve. Walking this path was hard enough on her when the trail was cold.”

“She’s stronger than ever!” In my frustration, I nearly told him about our secret practices, about our remarkable success with possession—but I bit my tongue. The secret was not mine alone to tell, and Jackaby was being especially bullheaded right now. A cog clicked in my mind. Something had happened. “Wait a moment. What recent developments?” I asked.

“See for yourself.” Jackaby flipped open his satchel and passed a handful of papers across the desk to me. They were torn at the top, as though ripped out of a booklet.

“Lieutenant Dupin of the New Fiddleham Police Department very kindly lent me his notes on the matter.”

“Does Lieutenant Dupin know that he very kindly lent you his notes?”

Jackaby shrugged. “I’m confident he’ll piece it together sooner or later. Marlowe keeps him around for something.”

I shook my head, but turned my attention to the notes.

The body of Mrs. Alice McCaffery was found early this morning by one Rosa Gaines, age 32, a maid in the McCaffery household. Mrs. McCaffery had been at my desk in the station house only the day before to file a missing persons report for her husband, Julian McCaffery. En route to investigate now.

I arrived at the McCaffery home just prior to 8 o’clock in the A.M. The scene within is as Mrs. Gaines described it. Alice McCaffery lies on the floor of her chamber. Her dress is torn at the neck and signs of a struggle are evident. Cause of death is a single deep laceration to the chest. Blood has dried in a wide pool around the body. My word, but there is a lot of blood.

I stared numbly. I could see why Jackaby was hesitant to share the news. The missing person, the bedroom struggle, the body, the blood. I might as well have just read the

police report in the file sitting beside me. It was Jenny's murder to the last detail.

"What do you make of it?" Jackaby asked.

"Eerily familiar, sir."

"More than you know," said Jackaby. "Julian McCaffery was a research scientist, not unlike Jenny's fiancé, Howard Carson. Carson and McCaffery both studied under Professor Lawrence Hoole at Glanville University, although years apart."

I swallowed. "That's an awful lot of coincidences. Hoole went missing, too, didn't he? Yes, I remember. It was in the *Chronicle* weeks ago."

Jackaby nodded. "He makes an appearance in the lieutenant's next entry, as well." He gestured to the papers in my hands. I flipped to the next page and read aloud:

It is not yet midday and I have been presented with my second corpse of the day. The discovery was made by Daniel & Benjamin Mudlark. The brothers, ages 7 and 9, disclosed the information in exchange for compensation. They agreed to 5¢ payment and escorted me to the scene.

The body appears to have washed up with sewage runoff on the northern bank of the Inky. Based on physical description and documents found on the body, the deceased is Lawrence Hoole, age 56, a professor at Glanville University. The corpse is waterlogged, but given the minimal state of

decay, I estimate he is not more than two days deceased. The only visible injury is a puncture wound at the base of his neck, surrounded by a circular bruise.

The professor is survived by his wife, Cordelia. Glamville Police Department has responded to my inquiries, but inform me that the widow Hoole is . . .

I turned the page over, but that was the last of it. “The widow Hoole is what?”

“Bereaved?” suggested Jackaby. “Disconsolate? Something mournful, I imagine. Probably ‘sad.’ Lieutenant Dupin is nothing if not frugal with his adjectives.”

“Those poor people,” I said. “A single puncture wound and a rounded bruise—that’s Pavel’s dirty work and no mistake. There can be no question that this whole mess is connected, then.”

“What about Cordelia Hoole?” Jenny’s soft voice caught both of us by surprise. I spun to find that she had rematerialized by the window, the sunlight slipping in sparkling beams through her translucent figure.

“Jenny,” I said. “How long have you—”

“I’m sorry, Miss Cavanaugh,” Jackaby cut in. “We really ought to follow up on these leads more thoroughly before we trouble you with the details. I don’t wish to—”

“Jackaby, ten years ago my fiancé vanished and I was murdered. Yesterday that McCaffery man vanished and

Alice McCaffery was murdered. Their mentor, Hoole, vanished, and now we know he was murdered as well, and you're—what? Waiting for the pattern to complete itself? You're ten years too late to save me, detective. You're a day too late for Alice McCaffery. The question is, what about Cordelia Hoole?"

Chapter Four

The afternoon air was thick and hot as Jackaby and I left Augur Lane and made our way into the center of town. I had been introduced to a snow-swept New Fiddleham earlier that year, a New Fiddleham where baroque buildings glistened with frost and chilly winds whispered through the alleyways. With the summer sun now beating down on the cobblestones, the city did not whisper so much as it panted heavily, its breath humid and cloying.

Jackaby, still draped in his bulky coat, swam through the mugginess with his usual alacrity, stubbornly unaffected by the swelter.

“Sir,” I said. “With all due respect, I don’t think that Lieutenant Dupin is likely to be very forthcoming about this

case, our having stolen what little we already know from his blotter.”

“Borrowed,” corrected Jackaby. “We borrowed what little we know. But I agree. I doubt that Lieutenant Dupin will be of much further use to our side of this investigation. Dupin is merely an artery.”

“He’s a what?”

“An artery,” said Jackaby. “And a good one. But he isn’t the heart. No, we need to speak directly to Commissioner Marlowe. If anything unseemly has landed on the streets of this city, Marlowe will know of it.”

It was still hard to believe that this was my life—murder and mystery in the gritty underbelly of New Fiddleham. Not all of it was as beguiling as it sounds on the page. Truthfully, for all of its intrigue and excitement, adventuring was a most unglamorous career. I grew up on the other side of the Atlantic, a proper English girl. By the time I was ten, I could tell with pinpoint accuracy where I was by the accents around me. I was beginning to develop a similar sensory map of New Fiddleham based on odor. It was not a map I enjoyed filling out.

The industrial districts to the west smelled of coal fires and wood pulp, and the docks to the east of salt spray and fish. In between lay the sprawling, pulsing heart of New Fiddleham, along with every aroma its inhabitants could

make. Savory spices of frying, baking, and boiling food would mingle with the whiff of pig slop and chicken coops, only to be shoved aside by the thick, nearly tangible stench of outhouses and steaming sewer drains. A bucket of foul wash-water would evaporate in minutes on the hot paving stones, but its essence would linger for days, wandering the rows of the tenements like a stray cat.

Jackaby and I skirted past a street sweeper whose horse and cart took up most of the narrow alleyway. The man barked a few words at us that I don't care to record and made a rude gesture.

I loved New Fiddleham. I still do. New Fiddleham had been very kind to me since my arrival—it had only tried to kill me once—but there are two New Fiddlehams: one that knows the light and another that keeps to the shadows. Some corners of the city, I was coming to find, were always dark, as if to spite the sun. At the bottom of a steep hill, I saw a clothesline hung with wash that looked as though its ground-in stains might be the only things holding the tattered fabric together. Between the rags hung a little bur-lap dress sized for an infant. It was stitched with care, but the words “Gadston Golds” and a picture of a potato were still visible on the side of the skirt. The fabric looked itchy. A pang of sympathy ran through me. I had been raised in privilege, always looking up a little wistfully at the aristocracy, hardly aware that there were people lower down on

the social ladder who did not know the bother of having a maid put too much starch on a day dress. I had never thought about the children born in the dark.

Jackaby pressed forward up the hill. He rarely took the same route twice, but I had come to know the landscape well enough to tell we were not bound for the police station.

“Sir,” I called after him. “I thought you said we were going to talk to the commissioner.”

“We are, though we will not find him behind his desk this afternoon. Commissioner Marlowe has scheduled an impromptu meeting with Mayor Spade. He has postponed all other matters and explicitly forbidden any of his subordinates to interrupt, so I gather their conference is of a sensitive and urgent nature.”

“I don’t suppose we’re going to wait patiently for that meeting to conclude?”

“Given the news Lieutenant Dupin delivered him this morning, the news which I relieved the good lieutenant of before leaving the station, I think it is safe to assume we know the topic at hand. Our business is one and the same, so they will have to pardon the intrusion.”

“I suppose it won’t be the first time you’ve needed a pardon from the mayor.”

“Some cases go more smoothly than others,” he confirmed with a wink. “Not everyone appreciates my methods.”

As we climbed the hill, the housing improved visibly

with each block. We came to neighborhoods whose properties were spaced more and more comfortably apart, until it became a bit of a misnomer to call them neighborhoods at all. Proud white houses—houses that looked as though they might prefer to be called *manors*—were bordered not by their neighbors' walls, but by sprawling, elegantly manicured gardens. Here we found the mayor's home, a stately colonial building. Marble pilasters framed his broad front door, and the whole structure was a testament to right angles and symmetry. It could not have been less like our abode on Augur Lane.

Jackaby rapped the knocker soundly. A long-faced man in a starched collar and black necktie opened the door. "Oh dear," the man moaned.

"Bertram!" Jackaby patted him on the arm affably as he hustled past him into the front hall. "It's been ages, how are the kids?"

"I remain unmarried, Mr. Jackaby, and I'm afraid you can't be seen just now."

"Nonsense. Miss Rook, can you see me?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, there you have it. You must have your eyes checked, Bertram. Now then, is our meeting in the drawing room? I hope I'm not late, I would hate to keep the commissioner waiting." Without giving the butler time to reply, Jackaby strode past him into the house.

Bertram hurried after, urgently trying to get ahead of Jackaby, but my employer spun gaily. I followed close on their heels.

“No, he is not, Mr. Jackaby. And you are not expected today. Please!”

“Ah, the study, then—of course. No need to bother yourself, I remember the way.”

“Mr. Jackaby! This is a private estate, not the mayor’s public offices. My lady, Mrs. Spade, is very particular about the sort of person she admits into her home.”

“Come now, Bertram. I’m sure I’m just the sort of person your lady Spade would be happy to admit.”

“Actually, you are the only person she has mentioned by name to refuse.”

“Then she does remember me, after all these years—how sweet! And we were never even properly introduced. I guess I do tend to leave an impression.”

“More of a smoldering crater,” Bertram grumbled.

Jackaby quickstepped through a hall with a high arched ceiling and came to a mahogany door. “Please, Mr. Jackaby!” Bertram implored.

“Very well. If you insist,” Jackaby said, throwing open the door. “I will. Thank you for the escort, Bertram. You’ve been too kind.”

Bertram was red in the face. He looked as though he were about to object again when his master called from inside the room. “Don’t bother, Bertram. It’s fine.” The man huffed and

turned, giving me a disgruntled look as he trudged away. I shrugged apologetically and hurried after my employer.

The room was accented with rich woods and carpeted in tones of deep red and chocolate brown. The shelves were decorated with a collection of leather-bound books, all of which looked expensive and none of which looked as if they had ever been read. Mayor Spade and Commissioner Marlowe sat in high-backed chairs on opposite sides of a cherrywood desk whose ornate legs curved into elegant clawed feet. A third chair sat empty.

Marlowe wore his usual double-breasted uniform, with a silver eagle pinned to his lapel. He looked, as usual, tired but resolute.

“Jackaby,” said Marlowe.

“Marlowe,” said Jackaby. “Good morning, Mayor Spade.”

Spade had doffed his jacket. It was draped over the back of his chair, and a coffee brown bow tie hung undone over his beige waistcoat. He had a full beard and a perfectly bald dome, and he wore a thick pair of spectacles. Spade was not an intimidating figure at his best, and today he looked like he was several rounds into a boxing match he had no aspirations of winning. He had seemed more vibrant the first time we met, and that had been at a funeral.

“I haven’t been up here in years,” continued Jackaby. “You’ve done something with the front garden, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” said Spade. “We’ve let it grow back. Mary still hasn’t forgiven you.”

“Is that why she’s been avoiding me? Your eyebrows have filled in nicely, by the way, and you can tell your wife the roses look healthier than ever. I’m sure being rid of that nest of pesky brownies did wonders for the roots. I understand a little ash is good for the soil, too.”

“I never saw any brownies, but there was certainly plenty of ash to go around,” Spade mumbled. “That fire spread so quickly we’re lucky we managed to snuff it out at all.”

“You should try blowing up a dragon some time,” I said. “No, scratch that. That went terribly. I don’t recommend it.”

“Impressive blast radius, though,” Jackaby confirmed.

Mayor Spade looked from me to my employer and rubbed the bridge of his nose with one hand. “Good lord, one of you was quite enough. You had to recruit?”

“You know that I love wistful anecdotes about the destruction of property and endangerment of the public as much as the next man,” Marlowe interjected, “but we’re busy here.”

“Then let us get to business.” Jackaby slid into the remaining chair on Marlowe’s side of the desk. I glanced around, finding myself standing awkwardly just outside the group.

“I’m afraid the commissioner and I have been discussing very sensitive matters, detective,” Spade began. “We really are not at liberty to—”

“Yes, yes, yes. The McCafferys—the mister is missing and the missus is murdered. Lawrence Hoole also washed up, minus a heartbeat and plus one hole in the neck. We know

all about that. We also know that these are not isolated instances, but part of a much larger and more nefarious plot. It is all connected. It goes back at least a decade, and we are keen to see that it does not continue for another one. Tell me, gentlemen, what do you know about Cordelia Hoole?"

Marlowe leaned back in his chair, watching Jackaby. Mayor Spade answered instead. "Cordelia is gone."

"Kidnapped? Another one?"

"Not kidnapped. No. The housekeeper saw her pack a suitcase. Nobody knows where she went."

"Then perhaps that's where we should begin," said Jackaby. "We're here to assist."

"The last time you assisted on this case," Marlowe said at last, "you spent a week investigating one body in the valley and managed to bring the tally up to five dead, one severed limb, and two leveled buildings. What you failed to do was bring back any viable leads whatsoever."

"It wasn't the entire limb," Jackaby replied. "It was just the hand. Hudson looks very smart in a hook, by the way. It suits him. And we did come back with a solid lead."

"Right. 'A man.' That was very helpful. Have you thought of anything to add to that? Let me guess—not human?"

"Well, I can't be certain of that until I've seen him in person, but I can give you his name and a precise description," Jackaby said. "He is called Petrov or some such, and he has an anathematic aura with distinctly lavender accents."

Marlowe scowled. Jackaby was not your average detective.

He was also a seer. I had come to find that he was not actually all that adept at making the sort of connections that Commissioner Marlowe could make, and frankly he missed a lot of clues that leapt out to even an untrained eye like my own. But Jackaby saw something else that no one else could. He saw auras and energies—the reality behind the mask, he called it. He saw the truth, no matter how improbable. Making sense of any of that truth to anyone else was another matter entirely.

“He’s called Pavel, actually,” I chimed in, leaning forward from behind my employer’s chair. “Or at least he was ten years ago.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Jackaby confirmed. “Pavel.”

“He’s not a tall man,” I added. “He’s close to my height, I would say, with thinning black hair and very pale skin. He looks about forty, forty-five years old at the most, but he looked the same age a decade ago. He tends to dress all in black. Does any of that help?”

Spade and Marlowe exchanged glances. Marlowe looked at me. “It’s certainly a start, Miss Rook. You should lead with her next time, Jackaby. She’s better at this than you are.”

“Pavel is back,” Jackaby said, ignoring him, “and what’s more, he has been at his bloody business for a very long time. The McCaffery murder is not unique. You should know that there was a strikingly similar case, ten years ago. The woman’s name was—”

“Jennifer Cavanaugh,” Marlowe finished. “Unsolved.”

“That’s right!” I said. “You’ve read her file, then?”

“I helped write some of it,” Marlowe grunted. “I was a probationary detective in eighty-two. My mentor sergeant was assigned to the Cavanaugh murder. I probably did more legwork on the case than he did. Safe money around the station had the fiancé for the killer. Howard Carson had just accepted a major payment before skipping town, and his colleagues all turned up dead or didn’t turn up at all.”

“No, Carson’s wrong for it,” said Jackaby. “The pale man, Pavel—”

“Has a very unique signature, I know. Single puncture wound to the neck. Exsanguination. Very clean. No witnesses. Cavanaugh’s murder was nothing like it. It was a mess. Bloody. Neighbors reported screams. Alice McCaffery’s case looks very much the same. Whoever killed Cavanaugh and McCaffery, he had a very different approach than your pale man.”

“But you can’t possibly think that the murders are unrelated!” I said.

“We do not, Miss Rook,” Marlowe said, heavily. “There are patterns playing out with eerie familiarity here. The method of their deaths, their occupations and relationships, their preceding circumstances.”

“Preceding circumstances?” I asked.

Again, the mayor and commissioner exchanged glances.

“Twelve years ago,” Mayor Spade began, “my predecessor, Oslo Poplin, organized a council for the advancement

of technology in New Fiddleham. The New Fiddleham Technological Center was going to be Mayor Poplin's legacy. He hired a team of experts to drive the construction and launch New Fiddleham into the forefront of innovation and industry."

"The future," I breathed. "They were building the future."

Jackaby nodded. "Not an unworthy goal."

"No, but it was an unpopular one," Spade continued. "For two years it diverted funds from every other facet of public works. Poplin let the parks become neglected and overgrown. Major roads were riddled with potholes. The future was everything to him, at great cost to the present. It might have all been worth it, except that the closer the project came to completion, the more things went wrong." Spade removed his glasses and polished them clumsily with one loose end of his bow tie. "In the spring of eighteen eighty-two, the lead architect and two chief engineers disappeared. Then a few scientists and inventors who had declined involvement went missing as well. There was a major investigation. For a time, Poplin managed to keep the newspapers quiet about it. The project was still inching forward, and his entire reelection platform was based on its success."

"But then there was Jenny," said Jackaby, soberly.

Spade nodded. "People liked Jenny. When the lovely Miss Cavanaugh was found dead and her fiancé was not

found at all, word got out. No bribe was large enough to silence the journalists. There was public outrage. The whole project was rocked by scandal, spinning off the rails. And then it blew up entirely.”

“What happened?” I asked.

“It blew up, quite literally. There was an explosion. The Technological Center was decimated. The observatory collapsed, walls came tumbling down. Years of work and thousands of dollars vanished. Poplin’s bold new plan to change the world was suddenly a pile of scrap metal and cinders. I’m told the blast bent metal girders in half and melted the glass right out of the windows.”

“Don’t look at me,” Jackaby said. “I didn’t move in until eighty-seven.”

“Don’t think I didn’t check,” Marlowe said.

“Two of the bodies they uncovered were identified as scientists who had gone missing, Shea and Grawrock,” Spade continued. “There were other remains, but they were too far gone. Carson was notably not identified among them.”

“Then he might still be alive?” I said.

“And long gone by now if he is. He took his money and disappeared. Poplin was indicted, accused of everything the court could throw at him, from sabotaging his own project to kidnapping and killing his architects. None of it stuck, of course, because nothing could be proven. If anyone knew what really happened, they were either long gone or buried

in the wreckage. Poplin's political career was over, obviously. He was completely ruined."

"I see," said Jackaby. "And now, ten years later, men of science are disappearing again, their loved ones slaughtered in their homes. The parallels are hard to ignore. It's a good thing you haven't rebuilt the Technological Center as well, or we should be watching the skyline for fireworks."

Mayor Spade swallowed hard.

"You haven't . . ." I said.

"Not exactly." The mayor took a deep breath. "Poplin mismanaged his affairs, but he wasn't wrong. We do need to keep above the current or we will flounder beneath it, so in the past few years I've made another push toward modernity in New Fiddleham. The city of Crowley is already phasing out gas lamps. The university district down in Glanville looks like something out of a Jules Verne novel. We've fallen behind. The people are ready. With all of the hubbub about the World's Fair coming to Chicago next year, the public is clamoring for innovation. The city council was unanimous. We installed electric lights in Seeley's Square, remodeled the Cavendish district, everything was going smoothly. But it's like some invisible force doesn't want New Fiddleham to move forward. I fear it's all happening again."

"Wait a moment," I said. "Cordelia and Professor Hoole lived in Glanville. It's a tragedy to be sure, and a most urgent case—but not a mark against New Fiddleham."

“Except that Lawrence Hoole was my chief architect.” Spade sank in his chair. “I enlisted his help for the New Fiddleham project. He was a central part of my elite team. Together we were going to achieve what Poplin never could. But now . . .”

“Your team?”

Spade nodded, his complexion wan and his eyes unfocused. Marlowe spoke for him. “Professor Hoole was not the only member of the intellectual community whose expertise the mayor solicited, nor is he the only one to go missing.”

Spade nodded his head in confirmation and pointed to a picture on the shelf behind him. It showed Mayor Spade beaming at the camera as he shook hands with a man I recognized from the newspapers as Professor Hoole. A third man stood proudly at their side. “Julian McCaffery,” Spade said sadly, “—missing. Lawrence Hoole—dead. I brought them both into this, and now I’m the only one in that photograph whose corpse the police aren’t either looking at or looking for. Lawrence was a good man. He told me last month that he was having misgivings about the project, that something felt wrong. I should have listened. Poor Cordelia wasn’t even a part of this.”

I stared at the picture. Lawrence Hoole was smiling in that way my father always had before an expedition. It was an eager smile, a smile of grossly misplaced optimism. I looked away and found my eyes drifting across the other

portraits on his shelf. A beautiful woman with brunette curls stood beside Spade in several of them.

Spade must have followed my gaze. “Her name is Mary,” he said softly. “My wife. I think the two of you would get along very well, Miss Rook—so involved and inquisitive.” He took a deep breath. “Please, gentlemen, Miss Rook. Whoever is behind this didn’t stop at Carson or McCaffery. The wretch went after their families. He killed Jennifer Cavanaugh and Alice McCaffery. Lord knows what’s become of the widow Hoole. I’ll put my own neck on the line for this town—but not Mary’s. I would give anything to keep Mary out of this.” Spade’s jaw was set and his expression hard, but his eyes glistened in the warm light of the study.

“Don’t worry, Mayor—” I began, but Jackaby cut in.

“Worry. It is worrisome indeed, and you’re at the core. This all started up again precisely when you picked up where your predecessor left off. Is it possible our culprit is an economic vigilante who doesn’t want another mayor playing in the public coffers?”

“I guess it’s possible,” Spade said. “But we’ve avoided making the same mistakes that Poplin made with the city’s money. The whole project has been negotiated quietly and kept separate from public works. We held private fund-raising dinners and petitioned sponsors through the post. It was a very successful campaign. We found stable

benefactors interested in supporting our work at a very early stage.”

“I am so sorry,” said Jackaby earnestly. “Your occupation sounds tedious. I mean, really, woefully dull. Politicking must be the most unstimulating job in existence. No wonder Poplin blew it all up.”

“Hold on,” I said. “Benefactors?” My mind lurched to the man in Jenny’s memory with white-blond hair. *Our benefactors have provided us with very clear objectives*, the man had said. “What sort of benefactors?”

Marlowe smiled appreciatively. “You really are better at this than your boss. That was my first question, too. I’ve already got a few officers cross-referencing the donors to see if anything out of the ordinary turns up. If there’s anything to find at the end of the money trail, we’ll find it. For now it seems like that’s about the only trail we’ve got. I’m getting very tired of my missing persons leading to nothing but dead ends and dead bodies.”

“Well then. Perhaps it’s best if you enlist our services after all, Commissioner,” I said. “At least we can pursue the one missing person we know was still alive when she disappeared.”

“Cordelia Hoole.” Marlowe considered. His eye twitched involuntarily as he regarded Jackaby, but even he couldn’t deny that, for better or worse, the detective had a way of making unexpected findings come out of the woodwork.

Jackaby flashed his best reassuring smile, which was never as reassuring as he thought it was. The commissioner heaved a heavy sigh, but nodded. “Send your expenses to my office, Miss Rook. You two are on the case.”

Chapter Five

The train ride to Glanville was smooth, if a bit winding. The trolley was serving something that resembled tea, although I have come to realize that Americans are all too quick to bestow that title on any warm beverage that isn't coffee. My unfinished cup of brownish liquid had gone lukewarm by the time the train hissed to a stop, and our reception was equally tepid.

"R. F. Jackaby and companion?" A uniformed officer confronted my employer on the platform.

"That's me," Jackaby confirmed. "And this is Abigail Rook."

I offered my hand. "Pleased to make your acquaintance, Officer . . ."

“Moore,” grunted Officer Moore, not returning the gesture. “I take it you’re the specialists New Fiddleham sent because your commissioner doesn’t think we can do our jobs.” He sniffed. “You won’t find anything we didn’t.”

“We’ve managed to make ourselves useful in the past,” said Jackaby.

Yeah, we’ll see.” The officer gave a halfhearted shrug toward the exit. “Got a patrol wagon waiting. I guess I’m taking you to the professor’s place.” Without any further courtesy, he trudged through the gate, and we followed.

The Hoole house was an imperial-looking building, three stories tall with long, narrow windows and a prim mansard roof. Moore tied off his horse’s reins and stalked up the front walk. A tall woman in a wide straw bonnet watched him from the neighboring garden, her watering can gradually drifting to water the paving stones instead of the foliage.

“Have you caught her yet, officer?” she called to him when he was nearly at the door.

“Please go about your business, ma’am.” He gave a tug on the bellpull and leaned unceremoniously against an ornamental urn on the front porch to wait.

“Caught who, madam?” Jackaby asked the neighbor.

“That Cordelia woman,” she said. “I knew she was bad news. I told Mr. Hoole—rest his soul—I told him that she was no good from the beginning.”

“Cordelia was an unpleasant neighbor?”

“Oh, no. Not at all—she was nothing but sunshine and smiles.” She narrowed her eyes. “That’s how you can tell.”

“Because she was nice to you?”

“All the time. It was very unsettling.”

“I see. And how was she with Professor Hoole?”

“Oh, she doted on that man. She was always flattering and supportive. The perfect wife. Nobody’s the perfect wife. She was the one that told him he should go and take that job in New Fiddleham, even though it meant he would be traveling all the time. Told him it was his chance to make a name for himself.”

“How do you know she said that?”

“Well, she said it with the window open. Not really my fault, is it? Anyway, she said that after the science thing up north was done he could retire and spend time with the family. You see what I mean?”

“Not remotely. I infer you felt she was disingenuous and dangerous, though. Do you think she might have been a rusalka? Possibly a succubus? A siren? Did she ever seem to be all or part avian to you?”

“What?” said the woman

“What?” said Jackaby.

“Go about your business, ma’am,” said Officer Moore. “This is an ongoing investigation. Go on. Thank you.”

The woman eyed all of us with suspicion, but she took her watering can and shuffled off.

Moore gave the bellpull another tug.

“Pardon me, sir,” I asked, “but with the professor and Mrs. Hoole both gone, who are we waiting for?”

“They’ve got a housekeeper,” Moore grunted. “Live-in.” He pounded on the door several times. “Hurry it up, Miss Wick! Police business!”

The door clicked open at last and a small woman with wide, round eyes gestured for us to come in.

“Good afternoon,” I said.

“Show them around like you showed me,” said Moore. Miss Wick looked out of sorts. “The house, woman.” He gestured at the walls around us. “Show them the house.”

She nodded but said nothing as she walked us through each room and up and down stairs. There were small scale replicas of steam engines and half-finished clockwork projects tucked all over, as well as schematics and sketches littering the professor’s office. Aside from these myriad marvelous designs, it could have been any family home. There were no obvious skeletons in the Hoole closets, only linen sheets and neatly folded towels. There was something else, though—some detail that tripped into the back of my mind and hid. The silent tour was finished by the time I had fully worked out what it was.

“Pavel has been here,” Jackaby whispered to me as we returned to the foyer. “I’m sure of it—although his aura has long faded. Some of the professor’s projects are quite keen, but otherwise I’ve not seen anything extraordinary. The

general atmosphere of the place is a mix of innocence and secrets, though. Not sure what to make of it. Did you notice anything?"

"Only that someone else seems to be missing," I said. He raised a meaningful eyebrow. "Diapers are folded neatly in the closet, little wooden blocks have fallen under the sofa . . ."

"Oh!" He nodded. "Yes, I see."

"Pardon me, officer," I said, "but did the Hooles have any children?"

"Nope," Moore answered flatly.

"Curious," I said.

"Not really. Only married about a year—which you would know if this were your investigation and not ours. All right. That's it. You've seen the whole house. Can I take you back to the train station now, or do you feel like wasting more of my time?"

"Just a moment," Jackaby said. He turned to Miss Wick. "Before we go, we would like to discuss with you the embarkation of your employer, if you don't mind."

Miss Wick nodded uncertainly.

"Could you expound upon the circumstances of the lady's departure?"

She nodded politely again, but her eyes bespoke total confusion. She did not reply.

"Miss Cordelia's departure?"

“Ah. Mrs. Cordelia, yes. Mrs. Cordelia is gone.” Miss Wick nodded again.

“She doesn’t speak much English,” Moore said. “Do you, Miss Wick?”

The woman shook her head. “Not much English, no.”

“Polish,” said Moore.

“Hm.” Jackaby looked to me. “How is your Polish, Miss Rook?”

“Nonexistent,” I answered.

Jackaby turned back to the housekeeper. “There was a baby? A child?” He motioned holding an infant, rocking his arms back and forth. “Where is the baby?”

“*Przepraszam*,” the woman said, looking helplessly to Officer Moore. “*Nie rozumiem*. I—I don’t understand.”

Jackaby scowled and leaned in very close, gazing into the woman’s eyes. Miss Wick staggered back a step.

“Mrs. Cordelia is gone,” Miss Wick repeated.

“Well, this is no help,” he said, and then brightened. “Just a moment.” Jackaby crossed the hall to the window, which stood ajar to let in the summer breeze. “Hello! Yes—you there. I can see your straw hat just beneath the hedge. What can you tell us about the child?”

Officer Moore and I hurried to join Jackaby at the window, outside which the nosy neighbor had been conveniently trimming an already immaculate bush. She swallowed and glanced around her garden.

“I’m sure it’s none of my business to meddle—” she hedged.

“Please do, madam. You meddling would be greatly appreciated.”

“Well”—she dropped the shears and leaned in—“the baby isn’t Cordelia’s. It came in with that maid, the foreign one. Anybody’s guess who the father is. She is a woman of ill repute, make no mistake. The Hooles hired her on shortly after they got back from their honeymoon. I have no idea why poor Lawrence—rest his soul—why he let that woman into his house. Cordelia was always fraternizing with her, too. Talking—and laughing, even! It’s not how you’re supposed to interact with the help, let alone such a disreputable sort.”

“If the baby is Miss Wick’s, then where is it off to now?” I said. “We’ve been through every room in the house.” I turned back to regard the Hooles’ unassuming housekeeper, but Miss Wick was suddenly nowhere to be seen. “Miss Wick?” I said. Moore and Jackaby joined me in scanning the room. “Miss Wick?”

Officer Moore helped us search the house from top to bottom, but Miss Wick had vanished. “Her aura is stifflingly unremarkable and it’s everywhere in this house,” Jackaby griped as he hunted for a trail. “It’s like searching for hay in a haystack.” Eventually he caught a recent thread of panic and distress in the air, but it led out the back door and off into the bustling Glanville streets. “She’s gone,” he announced.

“Huh,” grunted a baffled Officer Moore. “Miss Wick’s

been around for every stage of the investigation. She never gave us any trouble. Her running off like that . . .” He took off his uniform cap and shook his head as he peered up and down the busy lane. “That’s odd.”

“Yes,” said Jackaby. His gray eyes sparkled and his lip began to pull into an involuntary smile in spite of the sudden turn the day had taken. “Yes, it is.”

Chapter Six

I really don't see what you're smiling about, sir," I said as the evening express to New Fiddleham chuffed to life beneath us. "We haven't come any closer to finding our killers or finding truth and justice for Jenny. We've found nothing but more questions." Glanville ambled lazily past our window, and the setting sun painted the marbled buildings outside our train car in shades of gentle reds and oranges.

"Questions are good," Jackaby said. "Questions are to the clever mind as coal is to the stoker. I will worry more when we run out of them."

"Be that as it may, I would be happier if we had at least a few satisfying answers to go with them when we report back to Commissioner Marlowe."

“Detective work is neither a happy nor a satisfying business, Miss Rook,” said Jackaby, settling in as the amber buildings sailed past our window. “Marlowe will understand.”

“I don’t understand at all.” Commissioner Marlowe kept his voice low and even as we sat across from him the following morning.

“What I mean to say,” Jackaby explained, “is that our excursion yesterday was very instructive indeed.”

“You found your missing woman?”

“Not exactly. Not remotely. No. We did manage to find a woman who was not missing.” Jackaby’s optimistic humor found little purchase on Marlowe’s granite countenance. “And then we misplaced her,” Jackaby admitted. “So now there are two missing women. Also there is a baby.”

“What? A baby? Where did you find a baby?”

“We did not find a baby. The baby is also missing.”

The commissioner’s eye twitched as he set both palms on the table and took a deep breath.

“We’re still looking into the matter, sir,” I cut in. “We will be certain to keep you abreast of any developments, but in the meantime, my report should detail more clearly the results of our inquiry in Glanville.” I passed the pages I had typed up that morning across the desk and Marlowe accepted them with a curt nod—high praise from the stoic commissioner.

“Hm,” he said as he looked over the report.

“Strange and unsatisfying seem to be the tone of this case, sir, I know,” I said.

“It’s been no more satisfying on our end,” Marlowe grunted. “My boys followed the money trail for Spade’s project, like I told you. It seems his fund-raisers got a few donations from legitimate businesses, but the lion’s share came from a corporation called Buhmann’s Consolidated Interests. Turns out the exact same company bankrolled major portions of Poplin’s project a decade ago.”

“Buhmann?” Jackaby shook his head. “Not the most creative façade.”

Marlowe rolled his eyes. “I know. German for *bogeyman*. I looked it up. The group is more than just children’s stories and nursery rhymes, though. They own some legitimate real estate downtown, including an impressive-looking building in the Inking District.”

The bogeyman. Jackaby nodded sagely as though it were perfectly ordinary to hear that the bogeyman has been inconspicuously funding major municipal science projects. I shook my head. Every new clue just seemed to stir up the mud in the already murky waters of this case.

“It’s a start,” said Jackaby. “Chasing fresh leads has left us empty-handed. I would say it’s definitely worth our while to pursue a much older one. We’ll have to go and say hello to the mayor’s mysterious benefactors.”

“Good luck with that.” Marlowe tucked my report into his desk and shut the drawer. “On paper the Buhmann

building is their head of operations and the beating heart of another fine example of American industry. In reality—much less so.”

“Empty?” Jackaby said.

Marlowe nodded. “The place is a dried-out husk. It’s like a set from a vaudeville production about depressing old factories. There’s nothing there.”

“Sounds like somewhere we might find a few more questions,” I said.

Jackaby grinned.

“Seriously,” said Marlowe. “It’s cobwebs and rats.”

“We’ll have a look around anyway,” Jackaby declared, rising to his feet. “Miss Rook loves cobwebs and rats.”

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