

One

The mouse.

Someone had moved it.

The position and orientation were off slightly.

Chase Riddell invariably placed the mouse facing due north on the exact same spot: on a prominent knot just left of center on the oak desktop. His office was otherwise undisturbed. The desk and a brown leather swivel chair were the only furniture in the small, windowless room. The tawny brick walls were bare, as was the desk—except for a 32-inch monitor and the errant mouse.

The precise placement was a function of his OCD. He also hated odd numbers, unless they were multiples of five. His kitchen cabinets were studies in neatness and

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order, the bottles, cans, and cartons arranged by size and type. His clothing was similarly organized. He checked his locks twice whenever he went out.

The building had a keyed entrance, and his apartment had two commercial-grade locks on the door: a Schlage lever handle and a double cylinder dead-bolt. The windows were new, twelve feet above ground on the exterior, and equally secure. Management had no access to the unit without advance notice. The outside walls were brick and limestone block. The apartment was more impregnable than most bank buildings. He had chosen this place in Rock River Mills—an old paper mill converted to condos and upscale flats—partly for that reason. Crime was one problem he hadn't expected to worry about.

He carefully examined the locks on the door, but there were no scratches or evidence of tampering. A quick survey of the apartment revealed that nothing else had been disturbed.

Not one thing.

Seemed the computer was the target of the illicit entry.

Was that possible? And why? Was he being unduly paranoid?

He couldn't imagine how someone had broken in, but the wayward mouse was proof someone had. That was a big problem.

Had they discovered the hidden files on his computer? Files filled with photos of deviant sexual acts. Images of domination. Rape. Murder. Just the thought of them brought a stiffening to his groin.

But if someone had, surely the police would be here,

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arresting him. Dragging him off to jail to face life in prison.

While it was unlikely a casual browser would find the incriminating files, he could assume nothing, since someone had breached his well-secured apartment, possibly hacked into the computer, and left zero evidence of his presence—other than the errant mouse.

What now?

He didn't know.

Chase only knew he had a problem on his hands.

Possibly a disaster.

Unless he found the asshole and killed him first.

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Two

Lili stopped mid-step and closed her eyes.
Concentrated, trying to visualize the invisible.
Yes! Right there.

A vibration, a subtle shimmer. A sense of someone—
or something—close by. On the other side of the wall
maybe.

A moment later, the feeling was gone. But it had been
tangible, her best connection yet.

Having lived in Rock River Mills for two months, she
had sensed spirits in various parts of the building. Each
had been subtle and ephemeral, unwilling to reveal
themselves. Maybe they were just shy. She couldn't tell.
Some ghosts were like that. But they were here, and she
would draw them out eventually. The strongest

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presence felt female, and Lili hoped it was Emma Kiekhafer, a girl who had died in an industrial accident in 1894.

Lili had spent the last three nights staking out the hallways around apartment 114 at the west end of the building. Over three thousand square feet in an open plan with twenty-five-foot ceilings, 114 was the largest unit in the Mills. High in one corner, a ten-ton industrial crane hung from a track. Sandblasted and painted, it was a striking element that graced the cover of the promotional brochure.

The entry door to 114 lay at the end of a softly lit corridor off the main hallway. A nearby exit door led to the courtyard, a lovely area shaded by oaks and maples with picnic areas and grills. A tiki bar served drinks during the summer months. Her apartment lay on the other side of the courtyard.

She walked back and forth in the hallway, sitting in various spots, meditating, trying to reconnect with the presence. When that failed, she lit two small candles and placed them near the wall—an invitation to the spirits.

Still nothing.

Pacing slowly but relentlessly, she rolled her ankle and bumped into the wall. Mrs. Kaplan peeked out, and Lili felt herself blush as she sat and pretended to fiddle with her shoe.

She didn't know the Kaplans, but had seen their photos in the lobby on a flyer for a charity auction. Lili had heard rumors Mrs. Kaplan was unhappy with the unit, something about the bedroom feeling creepy. It

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sounded like an ironic metaphor, but the story had piqued her interest. She suspected spirits at work.

A moment later, Mr. Kaplan looked out, locked eyes with Lili, and walked down to where she was sitting. He was tall, at least six feet, with dark hair and a short beard. He was good looking, fit, and carried himself with a vaguely military air.

Accusingly, he said, "Do I know you?"

"Lili Paltrinieri, 124. You might've seen me around."

He shrugged. "Is there a reason you're lurking in our hallway?"

"Probably not a good one."

"Try me."

Lili contemplated several lies before settling on the truth. Technically, she could loiter here. It wasn't their hallway, but if they took an interest, her efforts might be more effective inside the apartment. "I'm psychic and I think there's a spirit in this hallway or your apartment."

"Oh, Jesus." He rolled his eyes. "Not you too—"

"Your wife?"

He nodded, then eyed Lili suspiciously. "How do I know you're not casing the place?"

"One, I live in the building. Two, do I look like a thief?"

"No. But maybe your boyfriend is."

"I don't have a boyfriend." Now she was sure he was a cop or ex-military from his questions and demeanor. Exasperated, she pulled a business card from her back pocket and handed it to him.

He eyed it, then pulled an iPhone from his pocket and tapped furiously for a moment.

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“So you’re the owner of Revelations, a metaphysical store,” he said with a hint of derision. “Seems you’re legit. You might as well come in and meet my wife.”

Lili stepped in and scanned the room with an admiring eye.

It was stunning. The Kaplans had money. Real money.

A suit of medieval armor guarded the entrance to the large combined living room, dining area, and kitchen. The brick walls were decorated with an interesting selection of quality fine art from classic to modern, interspersed with sculptures on plinths, the atmosphere and lighting imparting the impression of a cozy art gallery. Two of the abstract canvases looked like Kandinsky originals. The furnishings were a careful mix of antique and contemporary. Expensive, modernist steel light fixtures hung from the high ceiling on long pendants. It looked like the hand of a professional decorator at work. The crane hanging in the far corner was an exquisite touch.

She now understood why they might worry about theft.

“I’m Raleigh Kaplan, and that’s my wife, Olivia. Your name again?”

“Lili—Lili Paltrinieri.”

Olivia Kaplan walked over from the kitchen area and extended a hand in greeting. A short, long-haired blonde, she was more cute than beautiful with an intelligent gaze. “So, Lili, why are you hanging out in our hallway?”

It wasn’t their hallway, but pointing that out wouldn’t

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be helpful. "I'm psychic and I think there's a spirit in the hallway or in your apartment."

"I knew it!" Olivia said, flashing a look of vindication at Raleigh. "Who is it?"

Lili briefly retold the story about Emma dying in the Mill in 1894, though she wasn't certain it was Emma she had sensed.

Olivia's eyes widened with the telling of the story, and she looked at the apartment as if seeing it for the first time. Finally, she said, "That's awful. Why didn't they tell us? I don't know if I would have wanted this apartment if I'd known—"

"Babe, you love this place and had to have it." Raleigh gave Lili the stink eye, clearly regretting letting her in. "Knowing the story, I still would've bought it. Somebody died here over a hundred years ago. It means nothing now."

"But I didn't know the story when we bought it." She looked to Lili. "Is there anything else?"

Lili shook her head.

"It's getting late," Raleigh said. "You should probably leave."

It wasn't a friendly request.

Lili scurried out the door. She didn't much care for Raleigh Kaplan and felt a twinge of pity for Olivia. She seemed nice and exuded a pleasant aura. What was she doing with that guy?

She then spent a fruitless hour wandering the mill hallways.

Returning to her condo just after 1 a.m., she felt tired but not ready for sleep. There was more than one way to

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explore the building.

After a small glass of wine, she stripped and slipped into bed.

Relaxing every muscle and joint, she wiggled her fingers, enjoying the soft texture of the high thread count cotton sheets. She gazed at the white ceiling without focusing, receptive to the slightest disturbance in the ether, to the vaguest feeling or presence in her apartment, a space she had grown to love.

Her apartment, a warren of brick rooms, overlooked the Rock River. The kitchen was modest but modern, with an adjoining low-ceilinged dining area that she had converted to a sitting room with a concealed flatscreen. The contractor had added a small second-floor office with a large skylight, accessible by a spiral staircase. Lili had turned it into a spare bedroom. Her bedroom sat in the left corner of the apartment. The window there, fifteen feet above the water's edge, let in the gentle sounds of the river, an ambient soundtrack more soothing than the apps people used to relax and sleep.

She had decorated the walls throughout with all manner of paraphernalia. Small antiques, clocks, old hand tools, gears, a camshaft, and other mechanical oddities. More esoteric items like runic symbols, crystals, zodiac signs, and framed Tarot cards—though she didn't read Tarot; she just loved the card designs. Interspersed were old black and white photos and enlarged images from the Hubble Telescope collection on canvas. She also had many bookshelves stacked with books. It looked a bit like a museum.

While she loved the apartment itself, there was a

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deeper significance in choosing unit 124. In numerology, the numbers one, two, and four equaled seven, a number that imparted reflective and introspective qualities to the space. A *seven* home was an ideal environment for someone with a spiritual nature like Lili.

Gradually, she reached a state of total relaxation, her inner eye a blank slate, the first step to embarking on astral travel, a spiritual discipline that allowed her consciousness to leave her body. To reach out and explore the world, a literal out-of-body experience. Settling into the first stage of sleep, a shallow semiconscious state called alpha phase, her mind drifted upward and floated near the ceiling. Separate from her body but still connected by the astral cord, awaiting instructions.

She could travel anywhere, but she drifted back to 114 for another look, to see if she could connect with the spirit or spirits there, even though astral travel was only vaguely useful for ghost hunting. She wouldn't see Olivia or Raleigh. In the astral plane, she moved on a different level than the living. She couldn't snoop or spy on people even if she wanted to.

The Kaplan apartment was silent and dark when she arrived. Lili burrowed into the fabric of the room, seeking the hidden energies lurking there.

At first, it was still.

Tranquil.

A slight disturbance rustled the drapes framing the windows and then the room and all its trappings disappeared. Lili stared, agog at the cavernous space of

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a different era: the stark image of a factory filled with vapors and large machines. A pungent smell permeated the air. Bleach maybe?

She had slipped into a vivid, harsh world she could scarcely comprehend. How had people worked in such a place?

A lurking shadow gave her a start.

Someone or something was watching. A vaporous presence more sinister than the female spirit she'd sensed earlier.

A ghost. A belligerent male spirit, like a dark cloud, eying her with a hostile gaze.

Lili felt trapped and vulnerable until she broke the connection and drifted home.

The sensation of his glare stayed with her the longest. Whoever it was, he seemed sinister and territorial.

As she returned to her body, the memory sent an icy shudder through her.

From the base of her skull to the tips of her toes.

Three

Emma Kiekhafer was dead.

Had been for years. After an industrial accident in 1894, she had crossed over and become a permanent resident of the mill.

Late last night, she had stumbled upon an ugly situation and now struggled with the implications of it. The man in apartment 139 was some sort of deviant or monster, possibly both. His computer contained horrid pictures of rape and murder, and they obviously aroused him. He had pleased himself at the computer in a disgusting and horrifying ritual.

How had he gotten the pictures? Was he a sick, perverted killer? Had he taken them himself? She feared that was the case, that the man was a dangerous

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individual, his proclivities a closely guarded secret. He was cautious, his doors secured with heavy locks. Given the furtive way he looked through the images, he knew his behavior was immoral, illegal.

Honestly, who constantly looks over their shoulder in an empty room?

Emma dwelt on the issue for hours before deciding she needed to do something about it.

Perhaps she could direct someone like the police to the computer.

Then she paused, confused by her runaway thoughts.

Why did she care?

Really, as awful as the man was, why did she feel compelled to do something? She wasn't certain; only knew the dreadful images upset her deeply. It wasn't an emotional reaction. She didn't experience feelings the way she had in life. It was something else. Besides, interfering with the living seemed unwise—though she had done so once before without suffering harm.

Emma paced through the hallways a few inches above the plush carpeting, thinking, digging down to the root of her angst.

It was a quality-of-life issue, she decided—ironic with her being dead and all.

A moral issue certainly, but also a matter of keeping the peace. That guy threatened the atmosphere in the mill. He would upset the balance. The worst-case scenario could be as bad as the chaos that followed Frank's murder. Or maybe she was just being a goody two-shoes. She tended that way. Still, her ambivalence regarding her personal comfort versus the moral issues

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caused her to question her supposed good intentions.

Adding to her discomfort, Emma sensed someone watching her, trying to summon her. While she enjoyed having living souls in the building after so many years of emptiness, the sense of prying was annoying, intrusive, and she wanted it to stop. She was familiar with the sensation. When the mill was abandoned, someone had hosted several ghost tours. Between the odd devices they brought and the incessant probing, it drove her crazy. They upended the atmospheric flux in the building for days.

Things were simpler in the old days. Back then, Emma amused herself by reading the magazines and newspapers lying around the cafeteria and staff rooms. Then the mill closed and she lost all contact with the world. It sat vacant for over twenty years, empty beyond the occasional adventurous teens and those annoying ghost tours. Emma grew listless and bored.

She rested for long periods of time. It wasn't sleep because she didn't dream. More like hibernation, she shut down and went away mentally. To where? She didn't know, but it was something vital, so maybe it was like sleep. Or maybe she needed to recharge, like a battery. She didn't really understand her state of being. Was she a blob of ether? A cloud of electrons? A figment of some perverse dream world? Who knew? It wasn't a subject covered in books.

When the Mill renovations began, she was horrified, certain she would hate it. The noise was no issue, but the construction and change in floor plans caused disruptions in the energy fields passing through the

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mill. The ripples squeezed and distorted her personal space, making her feel uncomfortable and out of sorts.

When the construction stopped and the living moved in, the disturbances ceased.

The renovations made life interesting again. With the living came positive energy flows and auras that made the place brighter, warmer. Emma found she liked it. No gloomy, eerie ambiance for her. It was a silly stereotype of the living that ghosts were mournful creatures who came out only at night. She liked the light, found it rejuvenating. If she wandered mostly at night, it was only because the building was quieter in the wee hours.

When people returned, they brought fewer magazines and newspapers. Something in the world had changed. But they brought books. Lots and lots of books. Emma loved to read and did so voraciously. Emma didn't need to open a book to read it. She literally dove into the book, reading page by page as she floated through the text. As a spirit, her hands weren't very useful, so the technique was the easiest. It was a comfortable way to read, even if comfort wasn't really an issue.

Overall, the renovations had been a good thing.

Emma remained young at heart and curious, so after the conversions took place, she snooped in the apartments looking for books. Observing, reading, she learned the world had become a very different place. Technology, machines, cars, computers. Fascinating stuff—though little of it affected her life in the mill. The newspapers she missed were apparently hidden inside computers now, but she had no way to access them. She

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had swooped into a computer once, but it wasn't like reading a book. Inside the box, she found nothing but a confusing jumble of wires and metal parts.

Observing people using tablets, phones, and laptops, she wanted to learn and understand how they worked. They represented a way to venture out into the world, even if she was otherwise a prisoner in the mill. So far, she had made little progress on that goal.

Emma also liked to lurk in various apartments and watch TV. She could keep up on the news without newspapers, and she *loved* watching movies.

In the past few weeks, she had sensed an increasingly negative energy flux on the east end of the building. Emma went snooping and discovered the sick, creepy pervert looking at nasty, violent pictures on his computer. She was convinced he was involved in criminal behavior.

After the man went to bed, she tried to find the images, hoping to answer that question, but couldn't figure out how the computer worked. She had watched him use a handheld device to look inside the computer. Emma had fiddled with it and moved it slightly, but couldn't make it do anything useful. Evidently, moving it wasn't enough. Some other action was involved.

Emma needed to learn how to use computers and now, she had a reason to delve into tech—though wasn't sure she could actually utilize such skills. Books had provided everything she needed and she wasn't adept at manipulating physical objects. Haunting rooms, rustling curtains, and slamming the occasional door was the extent of her ghostly repertoire.

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The guy in 202 had a wonderful library, including many books on computers. With an entire shelf devoted to the subject, she was drawn to *Computers for Dummies*. It sounded ideal.

Emma dove in and read about memory, hard drives, keyboards, and the handheld device, the mouse. Now she understood why passing through a computer revealed nothing. The knowledge was all written in code on hard drives and memory chips. The computer turned that code into words. Reading about the mouse, she realized she had been doing it wrong.

A fresh problem arose. Computers needed a password.

She could watch the man enter his but would it matter? Emma doubted she had the dexterity to handle the mouse or enter a password. Maybe it was wishful thinking that she could actually do something about the guy. Still, she had once written a message on a dirty mirror. Anything was possible with determination.

Emma spent most of the night reading until she felt she understood computers.

When dawn broke through the windows, she headed to her lair high in the building, the skylight outside apartment 222, directly above the walkway where she'd lost her life. The sunlight was glorious. She could feel neither warmth nor cold, but the light bolstered her spirits and made her feel alive. It was counter-intuitive. The sun and memories of life should make her blue, she felt, but the effect was quite the opposite. Just as well. She was dead. No point in dwelling gloomily on things that couldn't be changed.

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Emma sighed. It had been a busy and exhausting night.

She needed to recharge.

When she woke, she would formulate a plan to deal with the problem in 139.

She might be a ghost, but Emma knew how to make things happen.

Four

Three in the morning.

Lili walked the hallways of the mill like a wraith. Along every passage, front to back, side to side, she absorbed the energies of the structure, particularly well preserved in the thick stone and brick construction of the walls. She avoided the Kaplan apartment for a few days after Raleigh chased her away.

Built in 1880, the Rock River Paper Mill was a remnant of the golden age of paper making in Wisconsin, once one of the largest mills in the state. Lili had toured most of the apartments in the complex when they first went on the market and knew what lay beyond the hallway walls, even if she couldn't see the decor. Her memory was impeccable and photographic.

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As she wandered, she caught occasional glimpses of the past. Strange machinery, vats, huge rollers. Vague smells of the paper-making process.

Walking past 106, she felt a little tickle. A spirit lived in that apartment, though tonight, she had little sense of who or what they were.

She was searching for an impression of the accident back in 1894. The newspaper articles from the era had no useful information beyond the basic details. Lili easily recalled the article because of its prim, surreal wording.

Shocking Accident at a Paper Mill. Girl Torn to Pieces

Saturday morning, between 9 and 10 o'clock, the Rock River Paper Mill was the scene of a terrible accident, in which a young and interesting girl was hurried into eternity without a moment's warning. Emma Kiekhafer, an employee in the mill, was engaged in carrying rags on the third floor when she fell through a trapdoor onto the whirling machinery below and was instantly severed in twain. The spectacle of the mangled body, it was said, was a most horrid one. The body was almost cut in two just below the shoulders, and there were numerous other bruises and lacerations. The face, however, was not touched and presented an appearance of peaceful repose, as though she had fallen asleep.

Given the horrible manner of her death, Lili doubted the poor girl's face looked anything like peaceful repose.

Despite her constant wandering, she still had no idea

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where the accident occurred and couldn't picture the machinery. Maybe it was just as well. Some things weren't worth visualizing and best left unseen.

She wondered if any of the residents were aware of her nighttime strolls through the mill. They would surely consider her odd, which was fine. She had been different, even as a child, a loner with an uncanny sense of the thoughts and feelings of the people around her. She passed through high school in a cloud of smoke, mostly weed. Her brother went to college and medical school and had been his parents' pride and joy. That was fine. Lili didn't resent him and loved him dearly. She took a year-long apprenticeship with a spiritual medium in Madison near the University of Wisconsin, the closest she ever came to college.

With an SBA loan, she opened her shop on Franklin Street but struggled at first. Lili was good with her kind of people—those who embraced the paranormal. She delivered prescient reads on the lives of her clients. Her advice was useful more often than not. She wrote a quirky and humorous blog. Made enough money to bank some. Her parents never really approved of her path in life, but Mom gradually accepted it. Her father developed a grudging respect for her financial acumen, even if he thought she was crazy.

Lili preferred to think of herself as eccentric and happily embraced her inner weirdo. She was obsessed with the paranormal in every form. A practicing Wiccan, she rejected the Catholicism she grew up with and embraced aspects of Taoism and shamanism. She owned a small shop downtown where she sold

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metaphysical items and saw customers for palmistry, numerology, and séances.

Walking past 202, she sensed something inside, a presence. She stopped and leaned against the wall, clearing her mind, probing the slight disturbance.

A female spirit.

The strongest connection she had felt yet, but with an odd presentation. She seemed fixated on using a computer, entering passwords, and learning to handle the mouse. Prosaic and decidedly not ghostly.

Still, Lili felt certain it was Emma.

Or was that wishful thinking?

Was she trying to force a connection? Invent something that might not exist? The very nature of ghost hunting and spirit seeking encouraged false positives. In the quiet darkness, it was easy to imagine things. Lili lingered, but the presence slowly faded to black.

If it was Emma, she seemed shy, a quirk at odds with her earlier history in the mill. Newspaper accounts in the years after her accident recounted frequent sightings of the ghostly girl of the night shift.

Those stories had drawn her to Rock River Mill.

No matter. Lili would eventually draw her out of her shell.

Maybe she should concentrate on 114 for now.

It was late, but she continued wandering. As a rule, she needed only four or five hours of rest and could sleep in tomorrow. She never opened the store before noon.

Lili walked to the stairs at the west end of the building

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and down to the main corridor. Sitting, she leaned back against the north wall of 114 and closed her eyes. The Kaplans couldn't see her here. Their doorway was farther up, down a side hallway—though she was visible to the other tenants coming and going. She didn't care.

Clearing her mind, Lili opened herself to the auras emanating through the wall.

At first, she detected little more than static. The space was dark, no hint of the presence from the night before. Lili relaxed and grew drowsy. It wouldn't be the first time she dozed off in a hallway.

As she fell into an alpha sleep state, she smelled bleach, then glimpsed a shock of blond hair and a man falling from above, against the backdrop of vats and machinery.

Lili startled awake.

Holy shit!

The Kaplans had an otherworldly occupant. An unexpected presence. A dude. She had been right last night in sensing a male spirit there. While she hadn't found the machinery room where Emma died, she had stumbled on to something equally big. Lili wondered who the man was.

While they had moved some walls during the conversion of the building into apartments and condominiums, Lili knew the original floor plan. This apartment lay over the footprint of a room that once held vats of pulp. She had walked the hallways adjoining the unit many times and sensed little, vague flashes.

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Last night, she caught a stronger jolt.

Now she understood. Something bad had happened in that space unrelated to Emma's death and she had caught a vivid glimpse of it: a man falling, a flash of someone lying dead in one of the vats. It didn't feel like a mishap.

Was there a story she had missed?

Lili intended to find out. Researching the event moved to the top of her list.

Back in her apartment, Lili spent hours searching through local news stories on a newspaper archive, searching for an accident or some death she could connect to that apartment. When she found it, she wanted to kick herself and congratulate herself in equal measure. She had overlooked the story for two reasons. It fell outside of her sweet spot of research from 1880 to 1920, and the headlines referenced the name of the victim but not the mill.

She was right about one thing. It wasn't bad luck nor an accident. It was murder.

In 1936, they found Frank Zivkovic dead in a vat with a heavy weight tied around his neck. Suicide was the initial determination. But suspicion fell on four of his co-workers after an anonymous tip. During the installation of a new machine, some items had gone missing: two reels of copper wire and a toolbox.

Frank had evidently overheard four men talking about the stolen goods and reported them to a supervisor. He leaked the information back to the thieves.

The district attorney presented a simple case. The men confronted Frank, beat him, and tossed him into the vat.

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Lili shuddered, reading the story as she visualized the encounter in technicolor. Sometimes, her imagination was a curse.

The accused maintained their innocence but were convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Two of them died there. The other two were paroled in the late '70s. The supervisor received five years on a conspiracy charge.

Lili wondered why the story hadn't resurfaced when the plans were floated for the condo project. It seemed odd since the trial had generated a great deal of publicity. Maybe the owners had found a way to bury the story, though lesser stories had surfaced during the renovations. Like the story about Emma that had first piqued her interest in the building.

Of one thing she felt certain: the murder must have made a deep impression on the fabric of the mill. She would be more receptive to it now that she knew where to look. Frank's death certainly explained the weird vibe in the Kaplans' bedroom.

The only problem was Raleigh. He wasn't receptive to her ideas. Maybe she could strike up a friendship with Olivia.

One way or another, she was going to connect with Frank.

She wondered, though, recalling the male figure glaring at her last night.

Just how angry was Frank after all these years?

Five

Emma was a celebrity once, years ago.

As the ghostly girl who haunted the night shift, she became a star of local folklore.

But she wasn't the only spirit in the mill.

A creepy guy lurked under the floors. Already there when she crossed over, he had never shown himself. Emma didn't know his name but sensed a dark, repellent vibe from the cellar. Oddly, there were no doors or stairs leading down there, but if there were, she wouldn't go looking. If he was content to skulk about in the dark, she saw no need to snoop and upset whatever balance existed between them.

Still, his presence gave her the heebie-jeebies. It seemed ironic to be a ghost afraid of a ghost.

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Frank in 114 had been murdered in 1936. Tommy died in what was now 106. That sad soul got his head crushed between paper rollers in 1963. She hadn't met them either, but they were harmless, their presence mere blips in the building aura. Emma only knew their names, having witnessed their deaths. Oddly, she couldn't enter either of those rooms, some aspect of the mill she didn't understand. It was a strange state of affairs. In the time the four of them had lived there, their paths had never crossed.

Maybe only she had the ability to wander. Others had died here over the years, but their spirits hadn't lingered. She didn't understand that either. Perhaps they had lived better lives and gone straight to Heaven—if there was such a place. She wasn't particularly bad in her last life. Maybe God didn't agree. She guessed this was purgatory or limbo and that she just had to suffer through her sentence, though really, it didn't feel like suffering. It didn't feel like anything at all.

The stories—her celebrity—were the catalyst for the later ghost hunts and tours. Of the four ghosts, she seemed to be the most visible to the living.

It was always *Emma this* and *Emma that* in the articles. They never saw Frank or Tommy and she didn't know why, but enjoyed seeing her name in the papers. In a way, she lived on.

Maybe she was just that talented. She had the impression Frank and Tommy weren't very smart. She had quickly learned how to make herself visible to the living, mostly in her quest to haunt Mr. Bodman, the original mill owner. Though she had enjoyed playing

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the starring role, she grew tired of the attention and disruptions it brought. She no longer cared to be seen or sought after. The girl of the night shift had retired. She intended to live in peaceful anonymity ever after.

Except for a new wrinkle. The man in 139 was a probably a dangerous rapist and a murderer and she had decided to do something about it.

Emma drifted within a book, reading in unit 202, trying to wrap her mind around modern technology.

While learning about computers, she discovered they were connected to a thing called the internet. At first, it was almost beyond her comprehension. She had to read about electricity and surprised herself when she understood the subject after sufficient study.

Emma hadn't done well in school. She wasn't stupid, but girls had no reason to study. They were expected to marry, raise a family, and manage a household. It was understood that boys were smarter and would handle the serious thinking. Later, as she read more and more, Emma realized that wasn't true. Women had written some of the books she read. Women were scientists. Women could vote.

No longer tethered to traditional ideas about girls and women, she saw herself in a different light. That she could read and understand so many subjects was mind-boggling. It gave her a thrill as well. She almost wished she could go back to school and earn a degree.

But that was dumb. She was dead.

While it was easy to read books, it wasn't easy to handle things in the physical world. Manipulating something like a keyboard or a mouse required

dexterity that her current skill set didn't allow. She was working on it.

Quite by accident, she had discovered that a flat screen thingy called an iPad was easier to influence. By sliding herself across the glass screen, the device somehow tracked her motion. Problem was, she didn't fully understand the device, and her fingers alone seemed ineffective. She could manipulate the screen, but to what end? And the skill was of no use in handling a mouse.

She spent a few more hours honing her knowledge of computers and wandered over to 139, hoping to find the man at his computer. Usually, she lurked at the edges to avoid being near him. He gave her the creeps. But she needed his password.

Alas, he was gone.

She peeked through the door to the office; maybe the computer had been left on.

Emma startled, taken aback.

The computer was gone! He had either moved it or gotten rid of it.

Why? Did he suspect someone was on to him? Could he know that? Had he seen her?

She fretted. There were other explanations, but Emma sensed it to be true. He knew someone was watching him.

Now what?

She had to think. She wanted to direct people to the computer, to find the awful pictures within. Now, the evidence was gone, and she was at a loss for a cogent plan.

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Emma wandered aimlessly for a while before returning to her roost in the skylight, hoping to rest on it.

But it was futile. She couldn't rest.

Besides the creepy man in 139, the snooping person was still prying, further disrupting the tranquility of the mill. She had sensed them pause earlier, outside 202, while she was reading. Now they were somewhere lower in the building, the probing more intense, more concentrated. Emma floated through the building, searching for the source of the disturbance.

To Emma, the building looked just as it did a hundred years ago, except the renovations now overlaid the older structures, superimposed in three dimensions. Every alteration to the Mill was preserved here in this dimension. Or perhaps merely in her memory. She didn't know.

In some areas, the old and new aligned well. In others, they lay at odd angles, welded together like op art. The structures and changes weren't ephemeral—she liked that word and prided herself on her vocabulary. No, the changes appeared rock solid, but provided no impediment to her wanderings. She passed through any material: brick, stone, or steel. They might look solid, but she passed through them like a breeze across a meadow. Except the outside walls. She could enter them but not pass beyond them. Another aspect of her life here she failed to understand.

Her life?

Though technically dead, she had consciousness, awareness, but lacked substance. This was a life after

The Mill

death, she assumed. She had been raised to believe in God, but the mill was a mystery. It wasn't Heaven. It wasn't hell either.

She finally found the source of the disturbance: a woman lurking in the hallway outside 114.

Emma recognized her. She lived in 124. Tall with red hair, brown eyes, thin and waifish, not unlike Emma when she was alive, except that her hair had been blonde, her eyes blue. Good Anglo-Saxon stock, her father had declared frequently. She had come to realize her father was a racist. So much so, he had hated anyone born south of the Alps, even Italians. His dinner table talk was often a litany of rants against coloreds and foreigners. She and her mother never said a word. In her father's house, women were to be seen but never heard. He drank too much and often batted her mother around for transgressions, real or imagined. Once a month, he gave Emma an examination to confirm that she remained a good girl. It was a mortifying and humiliating experience. Emma couldn't wait to move out of that house and away from that awful man. She just hadn't imagined it happening the way it did.

Careful what you wish for.

Wasn't that what they said?

The woman seemed determined to stir up trouble. Emma drifted over to 124 and snooped around. She quickly learned that her name was Lili Paltrinieri, and she owned a metaphysical shop called Revelations.

Great, just what she needed. Some woman who fancied herself a psychic.

She was obviously trying to connect with Frank.

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Emma fumed for a moment. Why couldn't the living just leave well enough alone and stop bothering them? She was quite content here and didn't need some phony psychic stirring up trouble. Emma considered appearing and scaring her, but decided it wasn't worth the effort. Besides, it would only confirm the spirit presence the woman sought and might draw ghost tours back into the building.

A low profile was best, she decided. Better that Lili stayed here and pestered Frank than came looking for her. Unit 114 was off-limits to her anyway.

It had been the pulp room long ago and Frank's story and his fate there had been a big event. She had watched it all play out. Heard the whispers. The accusations. The confrontation and a man's death.

Four men had murdered Frank. Beat the poor guy and tossed him into a pulp vat.

A crime that might have gone unpunished.

If not for her.