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Ghosting

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Chapter One

The House on Turn Lane

Everyone said my mother had a gift. They said she could talk to the dead. And they said my sister, Sandy, had the gift too.

Mrs Mory wanted Sandy to talk to her dead husband for her. Mrs Mory was an old lady who lived in an older house at the far end of Turn Lane. Sandy and I went to the house on a cold Sunday afternoon in November.

“Come in, come in,” Mrs Mory said as she opened the door. “This way, leave the cold out there. That’s right. Everyone’s here. We’re all waiting.”

Sandy put her hand on my arm. “This is my brother Nat,” she said to Mrs Mory as we went in. “I hope it’s OK if he comes too? I like him to be with me.”

It was a bright day outside, but inside it was dim and dark. All of the curtains in the house had been closed. It took a second or two to see anything in the gloom.

Mrs Mory took us down a long narrow hall-way. Just by the front door was a small table with an old telephone on it, there were some droopy flowers in a jug too, and a short, fancy lamp with a big shade. Along one wall there were rows and rows of bookshelves, all packed full with dusty books. On the very top shelf was a stuffed fox that stared down at us with glassy eyes. The

wall on the other side of the hall-way had loads of photos hanging on it – all in frames. Some of the photos were colour, but most of them were black-and-white snapshots of people from a long time ago.

Sandy stopped to peer at them. “Is one of these a picture of your husband, Mrs Mory?” she asked.

“Yes, that’s right. That’s him there,” Mrs Mory said, and she pointed at a black-and-white picture of a young man in uniform. “He was a pilot, you know. And here’s a photo of him when we were on holiday in France.” She pointed at a colour photo. “And here he is with our grand-children. That one was taken the year before he died. He was nearly 80 then, but I’ll always remember him as the handsome pilot I first met all those years ago.”

Sandy smiled. “What a handsome man,” she said. She touched each photo in turn with her finger tips. “And his pictures give off a wonderful energy. Don’t you think so, Nat?” she asked me.

I nodded. I knew what she meant.

Mrs Mory smiled too. Then she went on down the hall-way. “This way please.”

She was a short woman with lots of grey hair. My sister was much taller than her. Sandy had a way of walking that made it look as if she was floating. The long, dark skirt she always wore brushed against the floor, and hid her feet. Her blonde hair fell all the way down her back. She was seventeen but people often thought she was older. I was fifteen and I looked fifteen. No one would think I was older -– I was far too spotty and clumsy.

We went into a dark dining room at the end of the hall-way. There were three people already sitting at the table. A bald man with a big white face like a moon and little round wire glasses sat next to a girl who wasn't much older than Sandy. She looked tense and upset. On her finger was a chunky gold ring and she kept fiddling with it, twisting it round and round.

"This is Mr Coil," Mrs Mory said. "We go to the same church. And this is my niece, Miss Fay."

Moon-faced Mr Coil nodded and said hello. Behind his glasses he had tiny, dark, piggy eyes. He was sweating and kept patting a handkerchief over his damp, shiny face.

Miss Fay gave a nervous smile. "I'm Emma," She said softly. She only looked at Sandy and me for a split second before she started to play with the ring on her finger again.

The third person sat across the table from Miss Fay and Mr Coil. She was a big woman in a horrible hat. Mrs Mory turned to her. "This is my good friend and neighbour Mrs Tucker," she said.

When Mrs Tucker smiled she showed all her teeth. They were yellow and stained by cigarettes. Her hat looked like there was a dead garden on her head. "I've been so very much looking forward to this afternoon," Mrs Tucker said. Her voice was the poshest I think I'd ever heard. "Oh yes," she went on, "hardly slept a wink last night. I've been so very, very excited."

Sandy thanked everyone for coming and sat down at the top of the table. She pulled her long skirt in around her chair. Mrs Mory sat next to Mrs

Tucker on one side, with Mr Coil and Emma Fay on the other. I stayed standing behind Sandy.

"We should begin as soon as we can," Sandy said. "I can already feel the dead pushing to get in. Can you feel it too?"

There was a candle-holder with three candles in the middle of the dining-table. Mrs Mory took out some matches to light them.

"I'd rather we used a light bulb," Sandy said. "Just a normal light bulb, if that's OK."

Mrs Mory was a little shocked. "A light bulb? Are you sure?"

"I often find they work best," Sandy said.

Mrs Mory still wasn't sure. She frowned and looked at Mrs Tucker. "I'm sure the young lady knows best," Mrs Tucker said. "She's done this a lot more than any of us."

Mrs Mory looked up at the light hanging from the ceiling. With a sigh she started to get up onto her chair to try and reach it.

"What about the bulb in the lamp by the front door?" I said. "In the hall-way? I can get it." I stepped quickly out of the dining-room to fetch it.

While I was in the hall-way I heard them asking Sandy lots of questions. She answered as many of them as she could. But she wanted to explain things in her own way.

“I know there are a lot of different names for what we hope will happen this afternoon,” she said. “But my mother always called it Ghosting. And my brother and I learned everything we know from my mother, so we call it Ghosting too.”

“That’s as good a name as any,” Mr Coil said. He said it in a jokey way. But no one laughed.

“I can’t promise that anything will happen,” Sandy said, “but I’ll try my best. And I’d better warn you that I can’t control the dead. If they do use me to talk to you, I can’t promise you’ll like what they have to say.”

I came back into the room then and put the bulb on the table in front of Sandy. I saw there was a gap in the curtains which let a line of sunlight sneak in. I pulled the curtains shut to block any hint of the world outside and keep the room as dark as possible.

I looked at the people sitting around the table. Mrs Mory and Mrs Tucker were excited, like kids on Christmas Eve. Mr Coil was sweating hard. His big moon-face looked like butter. Emma Fay was still very nervous. She gripped the edge of the table.

“You’ll be fine, Emma,” Mr Coil whispered, leaning in close to her. “Everything will be fine.” He put his big hand on top of hers. But she jerked her hand away.

“Let us begin,” Sandy said. “The energy in this house feels very strong. I can tell it has seen many lives. And many deaths.”