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opening extract from

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Tamsyn Murray

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Chapter One

I knew it was time to move on when a tramp peed on my Uggs.

OK, he didn't do it on purpose – it may even have been my fault for not looking where I was going – but it was still the single most disgusting thing to happen to me that week.

'Eeeuw! Gross!' I let out a howl of dismay and stepped backwards through the urinal. 'Do you have any idea how much these cost?'

Utterly unconcerned, the tramp finished his business and headed for the stairs. Sourly, I watched him leave. 'Next time, wee on your own feet,' I called after him. Although, judging from the trail of soggy footprints, he already had. And, like pretty much all my visitors, he didn't stop to wash his hands. I suppose he had an excuse. If you

smell like the inside of a rubbish bin, hygiene probably isn't your top priority.

It wasn't the first time I'd found myself ankle-deep in wee. When you haunt a public toilet, an over-familiarity with the more basic human functions goes with the territory. In the early days, I often found myself sinking into the floor or through whatever I happened to be sitting on, but it didn't take me long to adjust to having less substance than candy-floss. Once the novelty of walking through walls and defying gravity had worn off, I spent most of my time hiding in the cleaner's stock cupboard, with its shelves of loo roll and fascinating bottles of cleaning fluid, bored out of my mind. The difference that day was Jeremy – he'd given me hope that I wasn't destined to hang around the men's toilets on the corner of Carnaby Street for the rest of my days.

You've probably guessed by now that I'm not your average fifteen-year-old girl. Before my death I was pretty normal. My favourite part of myself was my hair – dark and silky, it looked awesome when I bothered to straighten it. Freya, my best mate and partner in crime, used to go on about my eyes, which she described as 'exotically emerald'. I lost count of the times we found ourselves in detention for slathering on forbidden eyeliner and mascara. The target of our efforts was the gorgeous Jamie Bickerstaffe. Accept no substitutes, Jamie was the official babe-magnet of St Augustine's Secondary. I had been determined that one day he'd know who I was, and I guess eventually he did. Just not in the way that I'd hoped.

Apart from the pointless rules and casual bullying,

school was mostly bearable. I wasn't the coolest kid, but I wasn't a geek either. To this day, I thank my lucky stars I didn't die in school uniform, or I'd have been stuck in a poo-coloured blazer for all eternity. Who knows, there may be a God after all.

Jeremy was no different to anyone else the evening he first walked in. I was going through a phase of grading my visitors according to their toilet habits. You wouldn't believe what some people do when they're alone in the loo. Then again, maybe you would.

He was a hummer. In fact, it was his tuneless rendition of the Jackson Five's 'Blame it on the Boogie' that tempted me out of my cupboard to give him the once over.

Critically, I studied his battered biker jacket and grey jeans. From behind, he looked like a geography teacher trying to be down with the kids. That lost him points. He made up for it with his musical taste, though. As my dad always said, anyone who was a fan of early Michael Jackson couldn't be all bad.

His image in the mirror showed me he wasn't as ancient as I'd imagined at first. In spite of his thinning blond hair, I guessed he was in his mid-twenties. Overall, he wasn't scoring badly on the disdain-ometer. In fact, if he didn't fart and washed his hands, he was in with a shot at the top ten most pleasant guests that week.

And then everything changed. He looked up.

'Aaaargh!'

Stumbling backwards, he tugged at his zip, face flooding

with horrified embarrassment. 'How long have you been there?'

I resisted the temptation to glance behind me. 'Are you talking to me?'

'Who else is here?' Turning, he glared at me. 'This is the *men's* toilets. You should be in the ladies' next door.'

My mind fizzed furiously. He could see me. He could actually *see* me! I could have hugged him. Well, I couldn't, but you know what I mean.

'Let me get this straight. You can see and hear me?'

His expression changed. He was starting to look like he regretted engaging me in conversation.

'Are you here on your own?' he said with an exaggerated slowness, like I was four years old. That put my back up,.

I rolled my eyes. 'Nah, I'm here with my mates for an illegal rave. Of course I'm on my own.'

He smiled, in what I suppose he thought was a reassuring way. It made him look like a deranged kids' TV presenter. 'Right, I'm going to find some help. You stay here.'

Without taking his eyes off me, he crossed to the bottom of the stairs. Almost as an afterthought, he stopped to rinse his hands under the tap. I watched him go with a mixture of curiosity and irritation. Six months I'd been dead and, despite some heavy duty arm-waving and shouting, no one had ever seen me before. It was just my luck that the one person who had was drippier than the log flume at Alton Towers.

Five minutes later he was back, with a member of

London's finest in tow. I groaned. Before I died, I'd held the police in reasonably high esteem. I'd seen them on TV. They spent their days chasing criminals and didn't rest until they had their man. The complete dog's dinner they'd made of the investigation into my death had changed my views. These days, I couldn't shake the impression that most of them would struggle to find their arse with both hands.

'There she is, officer.'

The policeman peered around the apparently empty room. A smile tugged at my lips; this was going to be more entertaining than I'd thought.

'Where?'

Jeremy threw him a hard look and pointed directly at me. 'There.'

Following the line of his finger, the policeman frowned. 'I don't see anyone.'

'She's right in front of you!' Jeremy said, annoyance beginning to creep into his voice. 'Standing by the sinks and making a very rude gesture, I might add.'

With a suspicious sideways look, the policeman said, 'Have you been drinking, sir?'

'No, I flipping well haven't,' Jeremy exploded. 'I came down here to use the facilities and found this . . . this . . . Peeping Tomasina watching me. Between you and me, I don't think she's all there.'

'Hello?' I waved a sarcastic hand. 'I can hear you, you moron. I'm dead, not deaf.'

Jeremy frowned, as though he didn't quite believe what

he'd heard. 'Are you going to do anything about her or not?'

PC Plod pulled himself up to his full height. 'Don't take that tone with me, sir. There's no one in this room besides us, and if anyone's a few spanners short of a socket set, it's you.' His bushy eyebrows beetled together forbiddingly. 'You do realise that wasting police time is a criminal offence?'

'I'm sorry I started this.' Jeremy crossed his arms and sighed. 'Let's cut to the chase. You cannot see or hear a teenage girl doing a terrible monkey impression in front of you right this minute?'

The policeman didn't even look. 'No, sir.'

Jeremy stared first at him, then at me. 'Fine. I haven't been drinking, but maybe I should. In fact, I'm going to start now.'

He turned and stomped his way across the tiled floor.

'Bye!' I called sweetly, wiggling my fingers at his retreating back. 'Do drop in again!'

His shoulders stiffened as he went up the stairs and then he was gone. Shaking his head, the police officer followed, leaving me alone. My grin slowly evaporated. The bloke might have been a prize plonker, but at least he'd known I was there. Now I was on my own again. A lump began to form in my throat. Maybe the chimp impression had been a mistake.

Chapter Two

The loneliness hit me almost before their footsteps had died away. Over the previous months I'd grown used to being ignored, walked through and occasionally weed on and, apart from the peeing, I'd learned to put up with it all. I took a small crumb of comfort from the fact that I'd been seen at all. Hopefully, there were others who would liven up my dull existence. A gorgeous Hollywood A-lister would be good. Or the lead singer of TNT, who had the entire female population fainting with lust. He'd do.

After twenty minutes of trying to kid myself I wasn't watching the stairs, I went back to my cupboard and stared at the mop bucket. It didn't smell fresh, probably because the cleaners never gave it more than a quick rinse before stuffing it into the bucket and locking the door at the end of their

shift. The pong brought back memories of school; Simon Henderson smelled exactly like this. Had his parents been toilet attendants? Automatically, my brain skittered away from the thought. I was in danger of breaking my Number One Rule: Never Think About My Old Existence. In the early days, the ache for my friends and family had torn me up inside, but I'd quickly learned that thinking of them only led to agonising tears, and blubbing made my ghostly face go just as blotchy as it had when I was alive. I'd been surprised at first that ghostly status didn't make you see-through – I looked every bit as real as I'd always done. To me, anyway.

'Hello?'

The voice echoed around the deserted cubicles. I didn't move. A few months ago I'd investigated a similar call and had been faced with one middle-aged man passionately embracing another. I spent the next quarter of an hour with my fingers jammed firmly in my ears and my eyes shut, singing at the top of my voice. It brought a whole new meaning to coming out of the closet.

'I know you're here, Teenage Monkey Girl.'

I straightened and poked my head through the door. It was him: Mr Trying-Too-Hard Geography Teacher.

'What do you want?'

The sight of my disembodied head hovering in mid-air clearly shocked him because the colour drained from his face. 'Oh God, I'm hallucinating.'

Rolling my eyes, I rose and stepped into the brightly lit room. 'Don't be such a drama queen. What's the matter –

never seen a ghost before?'

His mouth hung open for a few more seconds before he made a supreme effort to get himself together. 'A g-ghost?' His voice shook as he passed a hand across his drawn face. 'No, strangely enough. Maybe I shouldn't have had that last pint.'

'I don't know why you can see me either, but I don't think you can blame the fact that you've had a skin full.'

Even in his terrified state, he was automatically on the defensive. 'I'm not drunk. I may be losing my mind and scared witless, but I'm hardly steaming. Anyway, you don't look like a ghost. Aren't you supposed to be see-through?'

My patience was wearing thinner than a pole-dancer's thong. 'Look, take my word for it. I really am a ghost. Now either deal with it or go away.'

He eyed me doubtfully. Raising his chin, he reached up and squeezed a section of his cheek between his fingers. 'I expect I'll wake up in a minute.'

'You can pinch yourself as much as you like. It won't make me disappear.' I waved my arms over my head and floated a metre or so off the ground, a trick I'd only recently got the hang of. Gravity still rules supreme, even for ghosts. 'Does this help you believe in me? Woo-ooh!'

To his credit, he didn't run screaming for the door. It appeared to be a definite option, though.

I took pity on him. If the situation had been reversed I'd have been out of there at the first sign of weirdness. He deserved some credit for sticking around.

'Honestly, I don't bite,' I offered, trying to sound friendly. Perhaps a bit of humour would lighten things up. 'The worst I can do is diss your terrible dress sense. Are you wearing that jacket for a bet? You look like a Hell's Angel who does charity work in his spare time.'

He stared at me, white-faced, for several long seconds before his struggling brain seemed to give up the fight and accept what his eyes and ears were telling it. Whatever else I might have been, I wasn't a threat to him. His breath gushed out with a loud whoosh.

'Excellent. My first ghostly encounter and I get a comedian.' With a dubious shake of his head, he stuck out a trembling hand. 'I can't quite believe I'm saying this, but why don't we start again? My name is Jeremy.'

Reminding myself that this was the first human contact I'd had in ages, I toned down my natural sarcasm. 'I'm Lucy. Shaking hands isn't big in the spirit world, by the way.'

Still looking like he was hoping I was part of a really bad dream, he nodded and let his arm fall back to his side. An uncomfortable silence stretched between us.

'So,' he said eventually. 'At the risk of sounding like an idiot, what are you doing here? The men's toilet is hardly a suitable place to – er – hang out.'

Note to self: do not swear. Conversation was great, but why did he have to be such a moron?

'Duh. I haven't got a lot of choice. This is where I was killed. I can't leave. Believe me, I've tried.'

Jeremy went still. 'You were murdered?' His eyes softened

as he realised what that meant. 'You must be the girl who was stabbed down here on New Year's Eve.'

Give the man a banana. 'Yep.'

He eyed me wordlessly. It didn't matter. I could practically hear what he was thinking.

'Yes, it was horrible. No, I don't know who my killer was. Yes, it totally sucks haunting a toilet and no, I didn't look at your willy when you were peeing earlier.'

Jeremy puffed out his cheeks and blinked. 'Well, that's the basics covered then.' A tentative smile crept over his face. 'Thanks for not looking.'

I wrinkled my nose. 'No problem. Boy bits are disgusting, anyway.'

He laughed. It was a pleasant sound and one I hadn't heard for a while, if I didn't count the madman who popped in every few days and cackled away to himself in the end cubicle whilst stuffing packets of biscuits down the toilet.

'Can I do anything to help? It must be boring, being stuck down here.'

My impassioned groan echoed off walls. 'You have no idea. Do you know there are exactly four thousand, three hundred and twenty-seven tiles in here? Or that it takes a vandal three-and-a-half toilet rolls to completely block a toilet?' I thrust my hand into my pocket and hauled out my phone. 'Or that a ghostly mobile is about as much use as a jelly space-hopper.'

One eyebrow raised, he looked interested. 'Can you get a signal?'

A loud tut escaped me. 'No. Who would I be texting, anyway? I don't know any other ghosts.'

'Good point,' he agreed. 'So how can I help?'

'Tell me what's happening in the world. Have I missed anything?'

He ran a hand through his hair. 'Well, let's see. The Prime Minister resigned and his main rival took over. No one expects him to last more than a few months, though, and it could mean a general election.'

Shaking my head, I said, 'Boring. Haven't you got any news worth hearing? What's the latest with the WAGs? How's life in Albert Square? Ooh, has Declan found out about his mum and his best mate yet?'

Jeremy looked blank. 'WAGs? Do you mean *Crufts*?'

I sighed heavily. 'Of all the people in London, the only person who can see me knows nothing.'

'That's not true,' Jeremy objected. 'I know a lot of things.'

'*Interesting,* I was about to add. Knows nothing interesting. Don't you even have a paper I can read?'

He shook his head, then brightened. 'Hang on, though. I know where I can get one.'

Minutes later he was back, free newspaper in hand.

An ungrateful pout snuck over my face. 'It's hardly *Glamour*.'

'It's all I could get. Here you go.' He thrust the paper towards me. It fell to the floor with a pathetic splat.

I glared at him. 'Ha ha. I'm a ghost. We're not great at holding material things.'

'Oh.' Deflated, he gazed at the fallen paper. 'I could open it for you? Turn the pages?'

It was the first useful suggestion he'd made. 'OK, spread it out on the floor and I'll sit down to read it.'

We both looked at the grubby tiles. Even in my formless state, I didn't fancy sitting in a puddle of wee, and hovering above it was too much like hard work.

'How about if I lay it across one of the sinks?'

And that was how it began. As unlikely as it seemed, Jeremy and I hit it off and he agreed to come back. More importantly, he swore he'd bring better news and – fan-flipping-tastic – a TV magazine so I could catch up on the soaps. I discovered Jeremy was twenty-seven, lived in Notting Hill and wasn't a geography teacher. He worked as a lighting engineer in one of the West End theatres, which I had to admit sounded like a pretty cool job. I had mixed feelings about him, though. His presence made my existence almost bearable and at least I had someone to talk to, but I couldn't help wishing he was ten years younger. Still, he made things a thousand times better than they had been. OK, I was still dead and stuck in a place which smelled like a sewer, but not being acquainted with a body snatcher and a mad scientist, there wasn't a lot I could do to change that.

That's pretty much where you came in. Once or twice a week, Jeremy stopped by for an hour or so after his evening shift finished, and I found myself sleeping off the boredom less now that I had something to stay up for. I didn't need

the rest, but unconsciousness beat counting tiles hands down. To stop me complaining about the mind-numbing dullness when he wasn't around, we tried an experiment where he taped the magazine pages to one of the walls so I could read them after he'd gone, but one of the cleaners took them down, muttering darkly about weirdo vandals and stake-outs. Not wanting to be arrested, Jeremy refused to do it again.

On his next visit, I couldn't help noticing he looked pretty pleased with himself.

'OK. Out with it,' I gave in finally. 'What's with the smugness?'

'I have news.'

'I know, I'm reading it. Turn the page, please.'

He leaned against the wall. 'I've made a friend.'

I clasped my hands together. 'Lucky you. How many does that make? Two?'

Ignoring my sarcasm, he went on. 'I got talking to her at the theatre. Her name's Elvira. She's a researcher for some supernatural TV programme that wants to film there, but more importantly, she claims she's psychic.'

He had my attention. 'In what way? Is she properly psychic, or does she just think she is?'

Jeremy shrugged. 'I haven't a clue. Some of the stuff she came out with was a bit peculiar. It was only when she mentioned the spiritualist church that I paid attention.'

I knew next to nothing about spiritualism, but anyone who told someone they'd just met that they spoke to the

dead was plain weird in my opinion.

'You didn't tell her about me, did you?'

'Of course. I came right out with it – "There's this girl I see who no one else does, and I turn the pages for her because she can't hold a newspaper".' He fixed me with a level stare. 'Believe it or not, I'm not totally comfortable with this myself yet.'

I bit back a smile. At least we agreed on one thing.

'What happens at these churches, then?'

'People go along to speak to their dead family and friends. Apparently, it's teeming with the souls of the departed all looking for ways to "pass across".' He did that rubbishy thing adults do with their fingers to indicate speech marks. 'I wondered if you wanted me to go along and see what I can find out.'

'You'd do that for me?' I was genuinely taken aback. There were people I'd known my whole life who wouldn't put themselves out as much. 'Why?'

Jeremy looked pointedly into cubicle one, where the friendly neighbourhood vandals had stuffed so much toilet roll into the bowl that it was overflowing. 'Since I seem to be the only one who can see you, I feel responsible for you, and much as I enjoy spending my evenings in a public toilet, I think it might be a good idea to find a way to get you out of here.'

He wouldn't get any complaints from me. Even so, it meant a lot that he'd go to such an effort when he could easily walk away and never see me again.

'Well, thanks.' In case he thought I was getting all mushy on him, I added, 'Don't go thinking that means we're proper mates or anything.'

Satisfied we understood each other, I turned my attention to the gossip columns. Surely that Hollywood couple weren't adopting another baby?

'Do you know why I really came back?' Jeremy's voice was soft.

Sensing he was about to reveal something, I glanced up. 'My charming personality?'

A brief smile flickered over his face. 'When you were watching me in the mirror, your expression reminded me of someone else. A few years ago, I was at Camden tube station one night when the woman next to me threw herself in front of the train. In the split second before she jumped her eyes met mine.' Swallowing hard, he shook his head. 'You looked like her, pleading for someone to understand how you felt. No one deserves to be so alone.'

Tears swam into my eyes. I blinked them away. 'It's all right once you get used to it. Sitting through double science was worse.'

The spell broke. 'I almost believe you. Why don't I fill you in on last night's *EastEnders*?'

Grateful for the change of subject, I listened and didn't correct him when he got the characters mixed up. He was an adult and deeply uncool, but somehow it didn't matter. He cared enough to keep coming back to me. Right at that moment, it was all I had.