

GraveTies .

Chapter 1

The graveyard gates stood high and proud in the cloak of darkness. Their ancient pattern, curled in swirls of iron, was faded and scarred from centuries of guarding the dead.

I was late. I planned on arriving just before dusk, but the train had been held up for an hour. It was worth it though. Seeing the front gates in full darkness was super creepy.

I held my beaten up suitcase in one hand and a news clipping in the other. The suitcase, holding everything I owned, scraped lightly on the ground, owing to my small height. My shoulders were broad, my arms long and lanky, but my legs decided to be stubborn. The dirty brown of my hair was pulled back off my face, sharpening my cheekbones and brightening my green eyes. The news clipping I held had big bold lettering across the top that could barely be seen in the moonlight.

GRAVE DIGGER/CARETAKER WANTED.

Liveable cabin on site for use.

I walked steadily forward lugging my suitcase up the sloping hill towards the warmth of light spilling out of a tiny cabin.

I stepped up onto the porch and with some trepidations tapped on the wooden door.

A grunt came from within, followed by the creaking of floorboards. The door inched open to reveal an old wiry man standing before me. A scowl appeared on his face as he spotted the suitcase in my hand. His eyes went from the suitcase to my eyes and he gave another grunt.

“What do you want?” he grumbled.

“Uh, my name’s Jaymes ‘Jay’ Harrow, I’m here about the job opportunity and the uh... house.” I said, biting my lip.

“Why aren’t you in some school?”

I gritted my teeth. “I didn’t... exactly get good grades.”

He scowled at me again. “A young girl like yourself should try harder with your education, ‘cause otherwise you end up like me. Come on in. I’m Ray.” He said, opening the door wider and stepping aside.

I nodded graciously as I walked by him into a small crowded living room. Ray shuffled around me and off into a dimly lit room, beckoning me to follow. I set my suitcase down by the sofa and followed him into yet another crowded room. It took me a few moments to recognise it as an office. The desk was covered in about three layers of paper and old fast food packaging. I felt my OCD kick in slightly as I cringed at the smell.

“Take a seat.” He mumbled as he pushed aside papers, searching for one in particular. “Just how old are you?”

“Sixteen turning seventeen soon.”

He grunted, “Kids.” And turned back to searching. His face lit up as he found a sheet of paper under his old coffee cup. “Rent for the place is just taken out of your pay. Sign.”

I smiled politely and signed the paper in front of me. Once I finished the final loop of my name, he snatched it up and stuffed it into an ancient filing cabinet in the corner.

“Aren’t you even going to interview me?”

“Darl, if anybody needed interviewing for this job I would have a field day.” He gave a gruff chuckle. “Now, rules.” He said turning back to me. “The keys for everything are by the front door, the handbook for digging is on the table under it. Quinn will call you up on the house phone when you get a job. Tools are in the shed. There’s a service tomorrow, just show the funeral guys where

the hole is then disappear. The hole is in the front corner of the grounds, there's a map in the guide. And what else..." He mumbled thoughtfully. "Oh, and have you heard any stories about this place?"

I shook my head.

"They're mostly true." He said grinning. I suddenly felt my mouth go dry. He laughed.

"Nothing too much to be worried about."

Gathering up a couple of loose sheets of paper he shuffled out of the office and up the stairs leading to the second floor. I followed him out and sat myself down on the sofa, looking around. This place was mine. I grinned as I felt a tug of pride.

Ray came back, hefting a large suitcase of his own down the stairs. I rose.

"Are you going?" I asked.

"This place is yours now. I already got a new place and a lady friend waiting." He grinned again and headed for the door.

"But I-" The door shut in my face with a smack and I was left in silence with only the murmur of the TV to comfort me. "Okay."

Since this place was mine, I guess it was time I settled in.

By the time I lay down in the master bedroom at ten past eleven, I had only just finished putting my things away, changed the sheets on the bed and sprayed disinfectant around the room twice. I was dirty, sore and dead tired. My last thought for the night was that tomorrow, I was going to start cleaning that office...

I recognised the dream as a dream. But I couldn't stop sliding in to this one.

There she was, sitting on the couch, in her old robe looking like the angel I always thought she was, but now she isn't. Smiling at me, false kindness shining from those green eyes and her hands clasped around the bottle with a blurred label.

"It's going to be all right, Jay." She slurred. "Everything is going to be okay, I'll be back soon."

I tried to speak but I could only choke on my own words.

The image blurred, morphing into a new scene. Elena was at the door now looking back at me. She turned away and shut the door, leaving me on my knees staring desperately at it begging for it to open again, for her to walk back through and take me in her arms. I couldn't feel the tears but I knew they were there.

I woke clutching at the sheets. I pressed the heels of my palms to my eyelids, reminding myself I should be used to the nightmares. A woman like my mother is very hard to forget.

A dream, just a dream, I reminded myself.

I took a quick shower, brushed my hair, changed into my sweat-it-out clothes and grumbled down the stairs, into the kitchen in search of a coffee machine.

Searching around in the cupboards I found a small near empty jar of coffee, just enough to make one cup. Shit, I'm going to need to go shopping.

Chucking on some decent jeans I walked into town.

The graveyard was right beside a little high school, and it looked like all the kids were in class. I smiled and kept walking. It was not long before I was in what appeared to be the main street. It was a small town, one that looked like it was prone to tourists and their campervans. There was a little florist and bakery, a café, second hand store, appliance store, and a little supermarket.

I smirked when I walked in, I was going to need a big trolley.

Chapter 2

Twenty minutes later, I came out with two heavy bags that dug into my palms, loaded with coffee beans, chocolate and junk food. Going shopping while hungry was the worst idea ever.

My next stop was the appliance store. As I walked into the electrical section I spotted a pair of intensely chatting women in their fifties. Edging closer, I strained to hear their conversation.

“... and apparently he let her in, just like that. I heard from Martha, that she saw the girl stomping around the house this morning. And Ray just walked out and left it all in her hands.”

It took me a few seconds to realise they were talking about me. I gritted my teeth and moved closer. “She’s so young too. I heard in the market that she’s a runaway from home. No wonder he let her in, he felt sorry for her.”

With steam about to pour out my ears, I grabbed the closest coffee machine and juggling my shopping bags, carried it to the checkout. The conversation stopped as they watched me fume and spit as the trembling boy behind the counter accepted my money. With one last glare at the ladies, I left the store in a wave of silence, burdened with my purchases.

I stormed out turning sharply into the street and right into the path of a fast approaching scooter.

“Ooff!” A sharp pain went up my arm as I collapsed onto the footpath dropping my bags and coffee machine. My head bounced off the pavement as a heavy body fell on top of me, squashing me flat. I groaned as I lay awkwardly trying to clutch my arm.

“Oh my god, I am so sorry!” I heard the body say. I could only groan in reply as it rolled off me. “Are you okay? Do you need to go to hospital?”

I looked up into a pair of chocolate brown eyes and a mop of brown hair, a small cute nose and a full mouth chatting at warp speed.

He helped me sit up against a brick wall, gathering my purchases off the sidewalk. An sharp pain shot up my arm and I cried out.

“Sorry!”

“Stop apologising! I’m fine.” I growled hissing in discomfort as I finally looked down at my arm. It was streaked with blood from a slice across the back of my hand; I gripped it tightly trying to stem the bleeding.

“No, you’re not. It looks like a nasty cut. I can’t believe I didn’t see you.” He pulled my arm from my chest and rested my hand in his lap, and I hissed. “Sorry.”

“If you don’t stop apologising, I’m going to cut your hand open too.”

“Hey, what’s your name?”

“Jay. Jaymes Harrow.”

“Well, Jay, Jaymes Harrow. I’m Sev, Sev Clavin.”

“So Jay, where were you in such a rush to?”

“Nowhere.” I said defensively.

“Sorry. But you just came out of 'nowhere', so how could you be in such a rush to go back?”

I smirked at his pun as he helped me to my feet.

I turned to pick up my stuff off the ground and I hissed as lifting a bag put pressure on my cut.

Sev grabbed me and lifted me off the ground. He brought his arm under my knees and lifted me to his chest.

“What are you doing?” I screamed clutching at his neck with my free arm. “Put me down!”

“Not a chance, sweetcakes.” He said reaching down to scoop up my coffee machine then grabbing my bags.

“Oh come on!” I exclaimed “One, how can you carry those and me by yourself? And two, it doesn’t mean I can’t walk by myself! I cut my hand not my legs off, you dingbat!”

People stared as he staggered down the street in the direction I had been aiming, completely ignoring my question. “Where do you live?”

I just grumbled. “It’s not like you’re superman, I don’t need a hero to save me.”

Sev stayed silent, stumbling on.

One woman watched horrified as we passed. I gave her a grim smile and a finger wave.

“Put me down at once! People are staring!” I exclaimed. This time he listened and placed me gently on a park bench. I glared up at him, squinting in the sun. “Why are you still here? You don’t owe me anything. You can go.”

Sev chuckled, setting my groceries on the ground and sitting down beside me. “I was the one that ran into you, so I do. You’re also very stubborn, besides I have no idea where I was going to walk you anyway.”

I huffed in frustration. Standing to grab my bags and machine, while Sev continued to watch.

I started to turn back to say thanks, not realising he had stood up and I turned into his embrace. His arms wrapped around me softly, his musky scent comforting. I froze standing stiffly against him. I wasn’t use to the close comfort of anyone, let alone someone I had just met. Feeling the need to say something I got out a mumbled, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Next time, don’t hit me.”

He let go and looked me up and down, smiling. I gave an edgy smile and I felt him slip something into my back pocket.

“Give me a call. Maybe we can catch up sometime.”

“You just give out your number to random girls passing in the street?”

He laughed as he started to walk away, “Only the ones that interest me!”

I struggled back to the graveyard under the weight of my purchases and throbbing hand, I was so locked up in my own thoughts I almost ran into someone else as they came out of the front gates.

“I’m so sorry I didn’t see you!” I exclaimed, looking up at the man in front of me. Oh boy, not again, I swear running into people must be my one talent.

“It’s okay it was entirely my fault.” He looked around thirty, maybe mid-thirties, with light eerie blue eyes that gave his raven hair a darker depth. He eyed my cut hand. “May I help you with your bags?”

“Oh, no I just live up there.” I said gesturing up into the graveyard.

“You’re the digger?” he asked curiously.

“Uh, um, yeah. I’m Jay.” I said nervously.

“Quinn Turner, I work for the funeral home.”

Shit, Ray said they would be coming today.

“Is it okay if I just dump these on the porch and I can show you where the hole is?”

“That’s fine, I can wait. Here, let me help you.” He grabbed my coffee machine and a bag and followed me up the path to the cabin.

I quickly unlocked it with my new key and swung the door open.

“So I’m guessing you don’t know where everything is?” He looked amused as he followed me inside.

“Not exactly. I haven’t read the manual yet, but Ray gave me a half-assed run down.”

He placed the coffee machine on the bench and watched as I put away the groceries.

“I have a rough idea of where the hole will be, I’ve been in the family business since I was fifteen. If you know the general direction, I’ll find it.”

“Thank you, I need a day of just getting my shit together.” I gave a sigh and blew hair out of my eyes. “The hole is in the front corner of the grounds. Holler if you need me.” I turned away and focused on setting up the new machine. I heard him place something on the table and walk out.

“Call me if you need me. Or if you just need someone to talk too.” And he was gone.

I picked up his business card gingerly and stuffed it in my pocket along with Sev’s number; I was starting a bit of a collection. I watched as he walked away from the cabin, with his hands tucked in his pockets, whistling as he went.

Chapter 3

I woke the next morning blinking twice to clear my sleep hazed vision, a buzzing echoed in my ears. It took me a moment to realise it wasn’t in my head.

I looked around trying to figure out where it was coming from. A curse came from downstairs. I froze. Intruders.

I was light on my feet as I sprung up from the bed, stepping quietly as I went to the door. I looked down the dimly lit stairs and hesitantly started to descend. The noises grew louder as I reached the bottom. Scanning the living room, I looked for a weapon. There was only an old pair of Ray's gumboots sitting under the base of the stairs.

Now cursing myself for not being prepared I picked up the gumboots and held them defensively in front of me, prepared to throw.

I snuck to the door and took a deep breath before swinging around the corner, letting loose.

"WHAT THE SHIT!" Someone squealed as I threw the gumboots.

"Get out you thieves!" I screamed. There was three of them and all of them immediately ducked behind the island counter.

"Whoever you are we'll call the police!" One of them shouted over the counter at me.

"The police?" I asked gobsmacked picking up an onion sitting on the bench and pegging it over the island. "This is my house you mongrels! You get out before I call the police!"

"What?" A voice said.

"Get out!" I screamed. Throwing another onion.

A head of brown popped up from behind the counter and I froze.

"Jay?" He asked.

"Sev?" I stared. "What the hell are you doing in my house?"

"This is your house?" He asked, eye brows raised.

"What's going on up there?" Someone asked behind the counter.

"You mean, 'what's going on down there?'" I said picking up a spatula off the bench.

“Wow whoa wait!” Sev exclaimed standing up fully now, hands up in surrender. “We can explain.”

“You better. What are you doing in here, Sev?”

Sev kicked at something unseen behind the island and looked down. “Get up you idiots. She’s harmless.”

I raised my arm with the spatula again, as if to throw. “You can say that again.”

Two boys came up from behind the counter, arms raised in the air. They were both my age and wide eyed at the spatula in my hand. One was a little taller with cropped blond hair. The other was Sev’s height with pale brown hair and a smirk that looked to be permanently painted onto his smug face.

“She the one you were drooling about yesterday?” The brown haired one asked, not looking away from me. I glared in return.

“Yup.” Was all Sev replied.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, attempting to sound menacing.

“Ray lets us in.” Sev said. “He lets us come in here sometimes and hang, as long as we help out occasionally.”

“He didn’t tell you that he was leaving?” I gripped the spatula tight not wavering from my position.

“We had no idea.” The blonde said.

“I almost believe you.” I replied sarcastically.

“You didn’t say that you lived here.” Sev said attempting to smile at me.

“Like I’m going to give away where I live to a complete stranger.” I said, sarcasm making him wince.

“How’s the hand?” He tried.

Ignoring him, I gesture to the two guys beside him. “Who are these clowns?”

“Oi!” The brown haired one whined.

“Fin and Coby. They’re cool.” Sev said pointing to the blonde than the brown haired.

“Like ice ice baby.” Coby said winking at me. I rolled my eyes.

“Great. It’s the dumb and dumber troop.” I dropped the spatula on the bench, and folded my arms.

“We’ll get out of your hair.” Fin said, grabbing Sev’s arm tugging him.

Sev still didn’t look away from me, “Can I maybe come round later?”

“Dude! Not flirting with the enemy!” Coby hissed.

I paused, smirking at Sev. “We’ll see.”

I watched the three boys slide out the door. Once it shut and the loud chatter was no longer brightening the house, I slid on to the couch and stared at the door. How many others had Ray let come and go in the house?

Groaning, I rested my head in my hands. I was going to have to spend more precious money, this time on new locks.

Chapter 4

I watched from a distance the funeral service of an old man. It was all tears and solemn words about how he was such a warm loving person.

I scoffed. Yeah right, probably drank his life away, brooding over his dead wife.

I kept watching the mysterious Quinn too. He stood off to one side, offering his condolences when necessary. It was quite a depressing job. I sat on the hill above the service, watching silently. Ray's handbook lay beside me, the old creased pages were faded and yellow. It wasn't very thick, so I sat it on my lap and started to read.

Dig HandBook.

- i. The equipment for the digs are in the garden shed. Use the red spray paint and the tape measure to make a straight 1x2.5 metre rectangle. Dig the hole approximately 2 metres deep. The Funeral home smucks will come in the day before every service. The hole must be dug beforehand. Record each position details on the register and file the death records in the cabinet.
- ii. Quinn will ring you three days before the service to dig a hole. You must dig in line with all the tombstones. Dig only in free spaces with a connecting marker. (Well no duh.)
- iii. Do not interfere with a service in progress for the sake of the mourners.
- iv. Feed the dog.
- v. **WARNING:** the House is potentially haunted.

"Haunted, huh?" A voice behind me scoffed. I jumped so hard the book closed with a snap. Quinn plopped down beside me and peered at the closed book. "Never occurred to me graveyards are haunted."

“Did it ever occur to you that scaring people just might frighten them to death?” I muttered.

“It is actually scientifically proven that you can’t die from a fright.” He grinned and ruffled my hair like I was a ten year old.

I froze. He froze too and pulled his hand away.

“Sorry I forgot.”

“You have kids?” I asked.

“No. I never really had a friendship with a teenager.” He laughed softly but there was a sadness in his eyes. I shrugged.

“You don’t look like the fatherly type.” I replied.

“There’s a type?” He said, flabbergasted. I scoffed.

“I never knew my father.” I said.

“Oh.”

“It’s okay.” I sat silently, listening to Quinn’s breathing.

“What about your mother?”

I cringed. “Tough subject.”

“Want to talk about it?”

“What would I tell you? I don’t even know you.”

He nodded. “It’s good to talk about it sometimes.”

This time I nodded. I waited a moment. Oh god, here it comes, word vomit.

“I was three.” I blurted. “He died from a drive-by shooting gone bad. My mother was devastated.” Quinn placed a hand on my shoulder and I shrugged it off.

Silence drew between us.

Quinn sighed after a few moments. "It must have been seven years ago now, I actually did have a wife and a kid on the way." I looked up at the sorrow in his voice, and saw the pain in his eyes. "I loved Layla so much, she was the one. We just clicked. She died."

"Oh." I hesitated. "Exchange information?"

Quinn looked at me in confusion. I took in a breath before continuing. "Elena turned to alcohol. I was good at school, I loved it. But it all went tails up. Day after day, year after year, she would come home drunk as a skunk, spending all our money on her drug of choice. Then she would pass out on the sofa or hike it to some strange guy's house."

Quinn paused as well before he contributed. "I was at the office, when I got a call from her, saying she was on the way to the hospital in an ambulance. She was in labour." A small smile flitter on his face then faded. "They were flying down the highway when some drunk came roaring down the wrong side of the road. Flipped the ambulance like it was a matchbox car. Layla died three hours later. My son died with her."

I gasped. "That's horrible. I'm so sorry."

Quinn just shrugged. "I think about it every day."

I sniffed, his words curled at my heart. "My life was just plain trouble. I got used to it; eat little to nothing every day, skirt out of situations that involved any sort of money, help her into bed at night, do it all again the next day. One night she just left again to stay with a guy, no apology, no explanation. Walked out right in front of me. Said she would be back in a week. She lied." I took a deep breath and looked at Quinn from the corner of my eye, he nodded urging me to continue.

"What did you do?" He asked.

“The landlords came by soon enough so I just left. Ran away and spent a few nights on the street before scraping some money together from odd jobs, my exit strategy I would think. I haven’t seen her for nearly three months.” He was quiet and I laughed. “I’ve known you for how many hours and I just told you my life story. Not that it’s a secret but...”

“Thank you for telling me.” He said quietly.

“No problem, thanks for telling me yours.” My lips curved at my next thought. “And I guess I never really had a proper relationship with an adult either.”

“If you need anyone to help you, I’m here.”

I nodded quietly and brought my knees up to my chest watching the last of the mourners trudge out the gate. The day was warm for a March afternoon, then I felt a wave of freezing air coming from nowhere. “You cold?” I asked.

“No.” Quinn had taken his jacket off and had his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and here I was sitting shivering my ass off.

“What is that?” I felt my cold forehead.

Then it was gone, just as fast as it came. Ghosts? No, they’re not real, I told myself.

“I have to go back in, I still have to clean some stuff up.” I said standing, trying to shake the excess cold wave from me. Quinn stood with me.

I stared down at the ground on the walk to the cabin. I hadn’t realised he was following until he opened the front door for me. “Look at us. It’s so easy to dump on strangers, isn’t it? And it looks like we’re both screw ups.” I looked at him for a moment catching his eye, then a sudden burst of laughter escaped. Quinn chuckled along with me.

It took me a moment to compose myself. “I’m sorry.”

“No need. It’s must be fate to meet someone as screwed up as I am.” He said.

“Fate? You believe in that hocus?”

“Sometimes.” He was quiet for a moment. “Bad things happen, but you just have to push on.” I walked inside and turned back to him.

“Do you want coffee?”

“No, I’m fine. I have a date in an hour.”

“Just don’t tell her any hocus.” I said.

He grinned as he left closing the door behind him.

I laughed and turned towards the office. I liked him, and it wasn’t a challenge. Shame. But I needed to get this office wreck over and done with. I wouldn’t be surprised if something was living in here.

With the office cleaned, three garbage bags full, and all the loose papers filed in the filing cabinet. I was exhausted.

It turned out there wasn’t anything living under all the crap, but I did find a box of fries at least three weeks old. Ray was definitely a serial slob. Admiring my handy work I sat in the old office chair and observed my clean desk. I had found the cordless phone under a pile of junk and placed it off to the corner with a pad and pen beside it. It was starting to feel a little like home.

A scratching at the door made me jump. I muted the TV and listened. The sound came again. I tiptoed to the window and looked into the pitch black. I opened the door in confusion and a big ball of fur head-butted my knees, making me yelp. Its black head looked up at me in a doggy smile saying, ‘Who are you? I love you.’

I bent down and scratched its ears.

“Hey, boy.” His tail shook, whacking either side of the door frame in double time. The handbook said he would come. And I had to feed him but I hadn't been back to the shops yet. Patting my leg I motioned him to follow me into the kitchen.

“You owe me for this, dog.” I filled a bowl with water and a plate with the ham, placing them on the floor. He gobbled them up, like a starving man and sat looking up at me. “I don't have anymore, I'm sorry.” He had no collar, and his fur was all black, sleek and strong. “What's your name dog? You're gorgeous.” His ears pricked up and he trotted off leaving me watching him as he strode out the door. “Well, *bye* buddy.” I said after him. “Unbelievable.”

I frowned. Not weird at all.

Chapter 5

I woke in yet another sweat shower. Echoes from my already fading dream still on my mind. I'm going to need a hell of a lot of coffee.

It was just breaking first light over the mountains, a warm soft gooey orange. It was beautiful. It gave the darkened sky a glow that only lasted seconds before disappearing. My lips curved as I staggered down the stairs and into the kitchen. Using my hazy memory I felt my way to the coffee machine.

“You're out of sugar.”

I squealed and swung around. Quinn was grinning down at me like a lunatic on steroids.

“You bastard. What the hell are you doing here? And how did you get in my house?”

Quinn sat at the table and sipped from the mug in his hand. “You have a really lousy lock, and I didn't want to wake you.”

“You didn't answer my first question. This is no charity house!” I said, glaring at him.

“You have a dig today. Plus, the date I had last night turned out to be pretty hot.”

“Ew! Okay, never mind I don’t want to know, old man.” I said, turning back to the coffee machine.

“I am not old. Just... middle old? I don’t know, but my mother is currently living with me.”

I let out a snort of laughter. “Sucks to be you.”

“Tell me about it.” He grumbled.

“You just can’t stay away from me can you?”

“Hooked on your love. Not that there is any. Not even a slice of sympathy.”

I grinned. “You want sympathy, see a therapist. So, who is she? What’s she like? Not sexually, I meant personality wise. Ugh.” I disgust me.

“She’s not bad. Name’s Natasha. She was in my grade ten math class however many years ago.”

“Let me guess. Dumb blonde?”

“Creative red-head.”

“Oh. So Black Widow.” He frowned, confused. “Avengers?” I chuckled. “So, how did she hook you?”

“Met her in the bakery a few weeks ago, we got talking and... yeah.”

With my own mug in hand I sat across from him. “What does your mum think you’re doing?”

“That I was stuck at work late and went out before she woke. She is supportive of me and all, but doesn’t want to know anything about my sex life. Sorry to come in on you like this. You were the only person I knew that had coffee on hand.”

“Just next time, knock on the door or even ring first.”

He laughed. "I think I will, if you allow me to bargain you for coffee?"

"What do I get?"

He leaned forward in a whisper. "Dead corpses."

"Boo! I already got plenty of those!" I whined.

"I'll pay for a better lock for your door." He said in a final offer tone.

"Deal, and you help me with the dig you just gave me." I smirked. See how 'Mr Business' can handle dirt.

"You're on." Quinn got up and filled his mug again with the excess coffee.

We stood together in front of the site for the new hole. Quinn stood beside me with a measuring tape and spray can in hand. Fortunately I didn't have to venture into the shed to find the shovels that stood leaning against the outside wall, and thank goodness Ray had left the spray and tape sitting next to the manual in his office, if the house was any reflection on the state I would find the shed in, I would need to clean it up before I could start a dig.

"Have you ever dug a hole in your life?" I asked leaning on my shovel for support.

"Yeah, when I was seven." His lips twitched but didn't make it into a full smile.

"It needs to be one metre by two point five. Got this?" I asked and he just nodded.

Once we had a rectangle shape on the grass, I got to work with the shovel digging at one end, even with my injured hand I got into the rhythm of digging with one hand and used my fore arm to leverage the shovel up. Quinn helped, getting into the rectangle with me and shovelling the dirt to one side for the mourners to cover their loss with. I exhaled, I was already getting puffed. Maybe I should have paid more attention in PE.

“Do you have any family other than your mother?” He asked suddenly. I hesitated, and froze for only a second.

“I had an aunty at some point, she liked to travel a lot. I met her like, once, and haven’t really heard from her since.”

“What was your mother like?”

“What? Other than the drinking and the abandonment and the reason for screwing up my life. Yeah she was great.” I said gritting my teeth. “She was also a huge drama queen.”

“When was the last time you heard anything about her?” He was genuinely curious, and it surprised me.

“Uh, three months ago. That was when she ran.” I stopped digging and looked up at him.

“Did you have any friends like boyfriends or gossip groups in high school?”

“What’s high school?” I said sarcastically.

Quinn’s jaw dropped. “You haven’t even tried to enrol?”

“I didn’t say I didn’t go. I just never keep a straight attendance for more than a week. I probably skipped almost half the year. I just ended up pulling out after grade nine.” I smiled. “I had plenty of boyfriends. Good times.”

“What? So, you never graduated, never learnt any selective subjects?”

“Did you miss the part about me and my boyfriends? That was educational. I’m sixteen, anything I need for life I already know. Did you always want to work with dead people?”

He shrugged “No.”

“Then what did you want to be?”

“A psychologist.”

“No wonder you have no problem getting information out of me” I tossed my shovel out of the pit I was standing in and held up a grubby hand. He grasped my wrist and helped lift me out. Sweat streaking down his face. I fell onto the cool morning grass and lay there staring at the sky.

“No joke, you are getting old and rusty.” I said under my breath. Quinn sat down beside me and stared up at the sky too.

“The funeral home is a family business, so I was kind of expected to work there.”

“Don’t you get bored? Or annoyed you never had the life you wanted?” I paused and a faint smile spread across my face. “Ha! It’s ironic that I had a horrid child hood and the man that steals my coffee and works practically here most of the time wants to be a therapist.” I gave a weak laugh.

“Before we got side tracked. There was the problem with your education.”

“Now you sound like a dad.” I grinned.

Quinn frowned. “I don’t see how living in a graveyard, and digging holes for a living is living.”

I sighed, “I feel like I just need my own space you know?”

“It gets like that sometimes.” Quinn looked down and pulled his phone out of his pocket.

“Sorry to leave so early but I got to get back.”

“All good, just remember to knock next time.”

He strode off laughing and left me lying in the grass staring after him.

Chapter 6

I should have said no to Quinn. It was a stupid parting suggestion from him. What was I doing? I wasn’t social.

I stood rigid in front of the squat building, and stared at the sign that was plastered over the doorway.

Turners Funeral Parlour. May They Rest in Peace with Dignity.

With dignity? What a load of bull. I smirked at the thought of pestering Quinn about the by-line. I didn't need to be here, I just wanted to be nice.

The first thing I noticed when I stepped in was the smell. Pungent, over-powering smell of flowers, masking the faint stench of despair. It took every ounce of will power not to step back out.

There was a row of chairs along one corner of the room with a silently weeping woman bent over in one of them, hands clasping her face as her shoulders shuddered with sobs.

The receptionist barely looked up as I approached.

"Do you have an appointment?" She drawled intent on her typing.

"Uh, no. I just came to see Quinn?"

The lady looked up. "I'll give Quinn a buzz. Take a seat."

I nodded in reply and went and sat in a seat opposite the sobbing woman. Watching her, I spotted the small picture grasped in her hand. The urge to go and comfort her was overwhelming.

I stood and changed my seat to the one next to her. She looked up as I sat.

"I'm sorry I was just, uh-" I stuttered.

The woman lifted a hand to silence me, a faded smile masking over the tears. "It's fine. Lately I've been uncomfortable to be around."

Her polite smile dropped and she turned back, fiddling with the photo I couldn't quite see.

"Dealing with loss is hard." I said. "Everyone is scarred by a loss." I hesitated, not sure how to go on. "I understand pain, everyone understands pain, so you're not alone."

The woman nodded at my comment. "It's just too much."

An image of my mum leaving and closing the door behind her flashed in my mind. It was painful. "You get on, but it does dulls with time. Your loved one wouldn't want to see you in this pain. I am one hundred per cent certain they would rather you move on than mourn the memories of them."

The woman looked up at me and nodded again, her red eyes bright. "You're right." She looked down at the photo again and hiccupped, but no longer cried.

The sound of a throat clearing made me look up to see Quinn, standing by a door in the corner. I patted the lady's arm and stood. He smiled at me, and the same pain I saw in the woman's eyes was reflected in his own.

"I was going to stay and look around but... uh, I think I'm just going to go. I'm sure you're busy and I'm tired." I said backing away. I wanted to say something about the pain in his eyes but held my tongue. I turned around and left.

I sat in my office with my morning coffee looking over random documents that littered the filing cabinets. I flipped through the pages, reading Ray's messy notes. I circled some important stuff for future reference, but all the numbers were starting to blend together. Then I felt the cold.

It started like a small wave then hit like a tidal surf. It wasn't normal. The window wasn't open, the door was shut. What the hell?

I caught a movement out of the corner of my eye and turned. A scream got caught in my throat when a faded vision of my mother appeared in front of me. Her hair was a dirtier blonde than the last time I saw her, her orange dress was torn and smudged with mud, but her eyes bore into my own, fear and pain embedded in them.

“Help.” She whispered, barely audible. Then Elena’s image dissolved.

I realised I was holding my breath, and let it out in shudders.

A scratching at the door made me let out the scream I had swallowed. I almost sobbed as I opened it with a shaky hand. The big black dog tumbled past me and came to a stop where my mother’s image had been. He looked at me with his brown eyes as I fell to my knees, what the hell?

He nudged my shoulder and I reached up and scratched him under one ear.

“Good boy.” And with that I broke. Collapsing in fits of tears I lay in a heap, weeping. The dog curled up beside me and stayed by my side as I mourned for my mother.

Chapter 7

“I don’t believe in ghosts. But she was there, right in front of me. And she spoke to me.” I sat on the couch in front of the old fire place as Quinn sat listening beside me.

“Do you even know if she’s dead?”

I cringed. “No. But what other explanation is there?” Quinn rubbed my shoulder. “I don’t know why I feel anything for her, she was the one who left.”

“You love her.”

“No.” I shook my head in denial. “That wasn’t love.”

“Where does the dog come into it?”

I didn’t realise I was still absently stroking his silky fur, it felt so warm and comforting.

“I’m not sure. He just turned up and stayed with me.”

“Do you reckon he felt her?”

“Pfft!” I scoffed. “Dogs can’t feel ghosts.”

“Well, this one just happened to try and come to your rescue just when your ghostly mother turned up.”

I thought for a moment. “He came the other day, too.” Then it came to me. “When we were sitting on the hill, the day of the service, I felt cold and you had your jacket off. I was so cold, then it just vanished. Then dog turned up that night too. Could it be a coincidence?”

“A psychic ghost reading dog. Always wanted one of those.” He said checking his watch. “Damn it. My break was finished ten minutes ago. Hey do you want to come over for tea? Mum makes a great roast pork.”

“Sure.” I replied as he strode off.

I decided to distract myself and let off a little steam by getting neck deep into another dig. This time it took twice as long without Quinn. I wasn’t going to lie, I sucked at it. How did Ray even put up with this?

I trudged back to the cabin to clean up for Quinn's mother.

Chapter 8

The smell was goodly and rich, rushing straight to my rumbling stomach. My mouth watered as Mrs Turner placed the biggest leg of pork I had ever seen in the centre of the table. I haven’t had a dinner like this since forever, for the past few months I had been living completely off takeout, microwaved meals and toasted sandwiches.

I listened to dishes clattering in the kitchen and the sound of Quinn stabbing potatoes beside me and didn't even realise I was staring through Elena until she put her hand through my face.

"Ugh!" I flinched back. She was waist deep in Mrs Turner's roast pork making me cringe. I could smell her mustiness and the stench of death. Her maxi dress was ragged and torn, like before, but something I hadn't noticed was the patch of blood that bloomed at her side. My eyes widened in horror and I felt the colour run from my face. Her green eyes were filled with sorrow, but they were clear.

"Help me, Jaymes. Find me, and lock the bastard up." And with that she faded as Mrs Turner came back in.

"We have apple pie for dessert, so leave some room in your tummy."

"Uh, Mum? Can you excuse us for a minute?" Without waiting for a reply Quinn grabbed my arm and dragged me into a small office off the hall. "What was that?"

"It was her. She was standing in the middle of the table except this time she was different. She was bleeding from her side. She said 'Help me. Find me, lock the bastard up.' And then she disappeared."

"Twice in one day."

"How did you know I saw her?"

"You were fine one minute and then you just went white. I heard her."

My eyes widened. "You heard her?"

I frowned and paced the small cramped office, finally sitting down on a chair. "How could you hear her but not see her? And what the hell does she want me to do? It's not like I owe her any favours."

"She said 'find me.' We're assuming she's dead, right? They say that the only reason spirits don't leave this world is because something isn't letting them."

"You believe in that crap?" I smirked.

"You're the one seeing a ghost!"

I bit my lip. "You have a point."

"Maybe we need to find her body. Then she said 'lock the bastard up.' She's referring to her killer." Quinn ran a hand over his face and to his neck. "Look I don't want to believe this either, but what if it's true? What if you have a chance to help her and you just leave her? How long will she keep turning up? Don't you want to at least look into it?"

I spun away from him and lash out at the chair. I couldn't think straight. "No."

"Look, I can't convince you to do anything, but I can help. If you want to leave it alone and put up with 'visions', fine with me. If you want to do something about it, I'm here."

I looked at him and had to struggle with my temper. "I'm going to have to go back."

"Hell no. We're going to have to go back. I am not letting a minor go off on her own," he said.

"You can't. This doesn't involve you." I stood up in his face and glared. He only smirked.

"I think it does. Why would I hear her then? And I'm not letting you go alone." His tone was final.

"Fine. But it's my life, my rules."

"Deal." He held out a hand and I took it firmly, shaking once.

"What about the graveyard?"

"We could get Ray back if you like?" Quinn suggested but I shook my head.

“He’s busy, I couldn’t do that to him.” I paused, my thoughts went to Sev. “I think I have it covered.”

We made our way back to the dining room to find Mrs Turner patting the black dog. I froze and Quinn stared as Mrs Turner looked up and smiled.

“Look at this poor dog. He’s so thin and looks so – Oh!” The dog barged past her and sat at my feet looking up at me. I gave it a stiff pat and nudged it towards the door. It followed me out onto the porch, I could hear Quinn reasoning with his mother as I sat on the front steps and patted the dog reassuringly.

“It’s okay. Just a little visit from mother. No big.” I looked at him as he sniffed my arm and licked it. “I’m okay. Go. I’m fine.”

I stood up and brushed myself off. The dog gave me one last look before trotting off into the darkness. I headed back inside to find Quinn and Mrs Turner sitting at the table.

“So, dinner?”

Despite the ghostbusters event starting dinner, it didn’t actually turn out that bad. Mrs Turner was kind and even let me take home the leftover pie that we didn’t finish.

Now I sat on my kitchen bench scooping mouthfuls of pie straight out of the tin for breakfast. My eyes were glued to the cordless house phone that sat on the bench beside me, willing for it to ring.

When it finally did I jumped, smacking my hip against the top of the bench. Groaning with both my external pain and internal shock, I picked the phone up and smacked it to my ear.

“Jay’s house of pain.” I grumbled rubbing at my bruised hip.

“Sounds exciting, do you do discounts?” Sev’s voice melted through the ear piece.

“Only to those who weep in my presence.” I laughed. “You at the front gates?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Chuckling the pie on the table top, I hopped off the bench and stumbled my way to the front door. Flinging it open, I grinned as Sev came up the path towards the cabin, phone still glued to his ear.

“I’m terribly sorry, but I think I am lost?” He said looking straight at me.

“Oh really? I hear the lady in the cabin ahead of you is a serial killer, I wouldn’t trust her.” I say.

“Duly noted.” Sev slowly walked up the two steps to the porch. He didn’t break eye contact as he came to a stop barely a foot in front of me. Now I had to look up as his lips curved in a smirk. “I hear she owns a house of pain?” He said his voice echoing.

My throat was dry and I desperately needed to turn away and laugh off the awkwardness. Only I was frozen.

Sev blinked, like he was fighting out of a haze, and stepped back. It was Sev who was the first to awkwardly chuckle and run a hand through his hair. He shoved his phone into his pocket. I couldn’t help but make a barely audible, unintelligible noise as the stab of rejection shot through me.

“Nice one, Jay.” He said and stepped past me into the house.

I trudged in after him and muttered to myself to pull my act together.

I found him in the kitchen, sticking his finger in my pie and taste testing it. His eyes lit up as the filling touched his tongue and he tried some more.

“Thanks for coming out on such short notice,” I started wiping my hands nervously on my jeans.

Sev waved off my comment. "No problem. I wanted to tell you something too."

"Oh, okay, well in a few days, I'm going back to the Gold Coast and I need someone to help look after the graveyard for me?" I said.

Sev laughed. "I guess I should say what I wanted to now."

I frowned. He wasn't even going to answer my question? "Okay." I said hesitantly.

"Day after tomorrow, I'm going back home to the Gold Coast to spend a few days with mum before I go back to school" He smiled.

"You don't even live here?"

"It's school holidays, Jay. School's back in a week. I've been staying with my Aunt and now she is threatening to send me back in pieces if I don't go now."

My mind was beginning to clog with all the new information, my head was spinning. "Can you get Fin and Coby to look after this place then?"

"Sure, if you want the graveyard to be a wreck by the time you get back." He chuckled. "I can persuade them to do it for you, just don't expect everything to be pristine when you return."

"It should only be a few days." I paused for a moment and bit my lip. "Do you need a ride? Quinn's driving."

"Yeah I suppose." He looked down at the nearly empty tin in his hands and offered it to me. "Did you want your pie back?"

I rolled my eyes. "Can you call up Fin and Coby and ask if it's all good with them?"

"Absolutely."

"And wish them luck with the digs, don't break their backs."

"Why?"

I looked at him incredulously and crossed my arms over my chest. "With the digs, I almost threw out my back trying to shovel out this rock in one spot."

"You shovel them?" He scoffed. "You do know about Casey don't you?"

"Who's Casey?"

Chapter 9

"You've got to be kidding me." I grumbled staring dumb-founded at the digger. The faded sunshine yellow machine was parked tightly against the back of the shed. Along the side, the 'Case' logo was peeling off and someone had drawn a 'y' on the end of it in permanent marker.

"The 'y' was Fin's work." Sev leaned in and said to me.

"This has been here the whole time?"

"Yup. I'm pretty surprised Ray didn't tell you about it."

I brought one hand up to my head angrily pushing my fringe off my face. "I have worked my ass off with a little old shovel when this monster was right in front of my eyes? I cannot believe it!" I growled. Muttering curses at myself and Ray as we made our way back.

As we came to a stop outside the house, I turned to Sev and sighed. "So can we pick you up Monday morning? First thing?"

"Yeah, my Aunt lives just off main-street near the hospital. Blue house, can't miss it." Sev grinned at me. I waved him off and watched him walk down the path towards the old rusting gates.

I stood for a moment not entirely sure I was ready to face my past again, but this was no longer about me and I wasn't sure how I felt about Sev not being a permanent fixture around here.

Turning, I marched inside to start packing.

Sev was right. It was definitely a blue house, and you couldn't miss it. Big and blue with urine yellow trimmings. It was beyond ugly. Like serial-killer-with-braces ugly.

Quinn sat stunned beside me in the driver's seat, staring at the ugly home.

Sev hadn't come out yet and I was starting to have third doubts about this trip. Or maybe I'm up to four?

"I think I might be sick." I heard Quinn faintly whisper.

"More like brain bleed." I replied, as Sev finally burst out of the front door.

The door behind me opened and slammed shut. "Let's get out of here. Fast please." Sev says, catching his breath.

Quinn quickly pulled out of the driveway and squealed off down the road past the sign that announced the entrance and exit to Boonah and as soon as it faded into the distance of the side mirror, I began to feel the weight of what we were doing churn in my gut.

My fists curled in my lap. Leaving my newly found refuge, just to go back to what haunted me. I rolled my eyes at my over-dramatics. My mother issues were screwed up and I knew it.

I could see Quinn watching me out of the corner of his eye. "I know what you're doing." I say.

"What's he doing?" Sev asked.

"Trying to see if I am having a mental breakdown. Honestly, Quinn. I'm fine." I turn away and watch everything go past in a blur.

"I am just not sure this is a good idea. This is a big deal, Jay. Have you seen her since my place?" Quinn asked.

"Occasionally." I look down into my lap and fidget with the hem of my t-shirt.

"Saw who? I am not caught up on the latest gossip." Sev questioned popping his head between our seats.

Quinn glanced at me. "Do you want me to tell him?"

I shook my head violently, but I stopped myself and sighed. He should know. I was just being a wimp. "I am seeing my mother as a ghost. And she's haunting me."

Sev burst out laughing. Quinn and I stayed silent. "Awesome, guys. Very funny. Now what's up?"

We still stayed quiet.

"You're joking?" He asked. "You're *not* joking?"

I heard a thump of his head against the headrest then, "So it's all real and this is some *Supernatural* shit then?"

I paused then turn around to him. "You watch that show?"

"Who doesn't? It's genius."

"Sev, this is serious. I know it may sound like bull but the evidence is building." Quinn said keeping his eyes on the road.

"So she's like not at rest or something?"

"We think so." I answered.

"Is it because of the legend?"

"The what?" I ask.

Quinn interrupts before Sev could say anything, laughing. "Really Sev?"

"No, what is it?" I asked.

"It's just stupid stories and gossip so drop it, OK." Quinn's grip on the wheel tightened. "How come you're going home before the holidays end, Sev?"

Sev muttered something behind me then began imitating his Aunt's voice. "'Go back to your mum for the rest of the holidays, Sev. Go back to all your private school friends Sev. It will be great Sev' she says. What a load of horse-"

"You're a private school boy?" I ask.

"First year. I used to go to the school beside the graveyard when my mum still lived in Boonah but then she got her new fancy job and we moved out to the Gold Coast. I hate it."

"Why would you hate it?" I ask, then under my breath so only I could hear it. "You should be grateful."

"I like being in a small place, not some overcrowded school that marks you on how much money you pay." He went silent.

I decided not to press him anymore and I turned to Quinn. "Did you find anyone who can help us about mum?"

"A guy I used to know in high school has some information on your mother, but he won't say anything over the phone. I tried to find us a place to stay and there was only one that looked alright, but I haven't booked it yet."

"You guys need a place to stay?" Sev asked. "We have plenty of rooms if you want to crash with us?"

Quinn looked to me. "What do you think? It would be best to save money for more important things."

“Only if it’s okay with your mum.” I say over my shoulder to Sev.

“Absolutely.”

Chapter 10

Sev was asleep in the back, lightly snoring. I smiled at his slumped form reflected in the side mirror. But looking at him reminded me I needed to know what the hell was the legend he was talking about?

We were getting close to the outskirts of the Gold Coast and I was getting both nervous and excited at the approaching adventure.

Suddenly, the country trees and crystal skies thinned to reveal a sea of skyscrapers and traffic. I watched as the city drew closer, growing larger and broader.

As the car travelled through to the centre of the city the buildings grew from short stubby apartments, to tall elegant skyscrapers almost tall enough to brush the sky itself.

Quinn cleared his throat and I took out my earbuds. “Sev?” Sev snorted awake and I stifled a laugh.

“Yeah I’m up.”

“Where are we going?”

“Go towards Surfer’s Paradise and take the road going up the beach strip, I’ll point out the exit.” We drove closer to the beach and I caught a glimpse of the waves through the buildings.

“Take this street on the left. Second house on the right.” Sev piped up. As Quinn pulled up into the street and I spotted the ‘house’, my jaw dropped.

It was freaking gorgeous. It stood three stories and looked like a mansion, with pristine white paint and a wide double door entrance with a balcony at every window.

I was stunned, but not wanting to look stupid, I opened the door and got out.

The heat hit me first like a sucker punch to the face. The noise hit me next, the chatter of broken mufflers and sirens squawking like old ladies. I forgot how 'pleasant' it was here.

I squinted and shuffled under the shade of the mansion. Quinn hopped out too and we followed Sev to the front doors.

"SEV!" A screeching came from in front of him and something catapulted into his arms. Sev laughed and gestured with his head for us to come in. The woman in his arms was in her mid-forties with barely a grey hair on her golden head of hair, grasping Sev tightly. "I have missed you so much!"

Turning to Quinn and I, she walked straight up to me and pulled me into a hug just as hard as she had Sev. "I'm Pat and you must be Jay. Sev has told me so much about you."

All I can do was nod at her boldness. Pat turned to Quinn and stuck her hand out. "And Quinn I presume?"

Quinn shakes her hand and nods stiffly as well. "Pleasure."

I couldn't help but smirk. "You have a lovely place, Pat."

She waved off my comment. "I just fix them up and sell them again, I don't particularly like this place anyway. It's my job. Come in and bring in your bags, Sev will show you your rooms." She said and floated off down the hallway.

I turned to Sev and rose my eye brow at him. "Wow."

Sev chuckled. "She kind of bowls you over, huh?"

"Understatement." Quinn mumbled.

Gathered our bags from the car we went inside. Sev led us to the back of the house to a large living area. I practically tripped over my jaw. The entire wall facing east was glass, showing a stunning view of the ocean.

Sev explained. "Let's the sun shine in, in the mornings without the heat. Mum's idea."

Quinn finally spoke up. "It's stunning."

In my whole life I had never seen something so luxurious. The beach reached the back porch and you could walk straight out onto it and into the water.

"What does your mother do?" Quinn asked.

"Interior design."

"That explains a lot." I reply.

"This way." Sev said gesturing to a staircase to the left and began to climb. We followed suit and came into a hallway. "First and second doors are yours, my room is down the hall." He said shoving his hands in his pockets.

"Well. I will let you get to it." Quinn said and made a beeline to the first door, sending a quick suggestive smirk over his shoulder at me looking obviously at Sev. Smart ass.

He shut the door and left Sev and I in silence. I turned to him and gave him my awkward smile. "Thanks for doing this for us." I said.

"No problems." He said giving me his signature lop-sided grin.

"We'll probably go out later to go find this friend of Quinn's. Do you want to come?"

"Maybe not." He said running his hand through his hair. "This is your quest to find your mum and I shouldn't intrude on that."

"Oh, you wouldn't-"

“Yeah I would be.” He lightly brushed my shoulder with his hand and the flutter in my belly returned. “Just give me a yell when you need me.”

He shot me a grin before disappearing into a door.

I walked to my door and cautiously open it, dragging my bag in with me. It took me a moment to adjust to the light before I observed the room. The east wall was again completely glass, and opened to a small balcony. The bed was a queen and layered with a light blue swirling pattern that matched the sea colour. The north wall was painted the same colour with a framed picture of Sev and Pat hugging on the beach, it looked fairly recent.

Where is his dad? I frowned.

I dumped my bag at the base of the bed and walked to the glass. I had to physically stop myself from touching and dirtying the pane, so I sat cross legged on the white carpeted floor just watching the sea churn.

The view was so intoxicating that when I closed my eyes I could feel the sand beneath my feet. It wasn't helping that my imagination was plagued with Sev, it was easy to imagine him sitting close beside me.

Chapter 11

He was coming straight for us. The man was dressed in a full police uniform, including the hat and ugly shoes. His hair was a straight sandy blonde, his skin tanned from hours under the rays of the sun. He was coming for us.

I started to panic. This was it. I had finally pissed the cops off so much they had decided I was worth putting away. I held my breath as he stopped dead in front of me. Quinn stood by my side, my only comfort against the panic building in my chest. Could they arrest someone for running away?

People were staring. They were all going to have their phones out to record a girl getting arrested on the street. Shit, double shit.

“Where is your ID, Ms?” He spoke with a stern voice that almost made me swallow my tongue.

“I-ID?” Why couldn’t I breathe?

His stern face broke out into a grin and he boomed with laughter.

“This is what you picked up in the dead people’s home? Nice.” He turned to Quinn and gave him a manly hug, grinning like a lunatic. “It’s been forever, bro.”

The breath I was holding tightly finally released as Quinn grinned.

Quinn turned to me. “This is Jay. She works at the graveyard back home.” He lowered his voice so only Cal and I could hear. “And Elena Harrow’s daughter.”

Cal’s eyes widened as he studied my face more closely. “You look like her too.”

I looked over at Quinn and he shrugged. “How’s he going to help?”

“Oh,” Cal said grinning again. “I’m Cal Deance. I’m the lead detective on your mother’s missing person’s case.”

“Missing?” I queried. *What? But isn’t she dead?*

“Okay.” Quinn said stepping between us. “Maybe here isn’t the place to discuss this.”

Cal nodded in agreement and gestured to the building behind him. “In here.”

We followed him into the building and it was only after I stepped inside did I realise that this was cop central, doughnuts and all. Cal navigated our way to a desk in the far corner of the room and sat down gesturing to the two chairs opposite.

“So how can I answer your questions?” He said looking at me.

“Why didn’t you contact me?” I demanded, I wasn’t in the mood for messing round.

Cal straighten at the question and shook the mouse connected to the computer.

Cal's eyes flicked to his computer screen and back to me. "We couldn't find you. You disappeared off our grid." He scanned the screen again. "The boyfriend was found, and was in the possession of a kitchen knife, a small speck of DNA of Elena's blood was on the bottom of the handle." He saw my questioning look and spoke up again. "There is no body and limited evidence, so we cannot charge him with anything at this point of time. At this moment, it is still an open investigation and not a lot of the evidence is coming in. We have cops checking out the boyfriend's last movements but nobody has located anything of significance yet."

"Who reported her missing?" I grilled.

"I can't disclose any more information on the ongoing case, I have already said more than what's appropriate but if you have any information about your mother that could help in any way, you could really help the investigation."

"I haven't spoken to her in three months. I wouldn't know," I hissed. "She was never anything to me. She left me and all I knew about her was she abandons everyone. Including her blood." I could feel myself beginning to hyperventilate.

"Jay." Quinn warned softly.

"I'm fine. Just give me some space." I stood up, shaking off Quinn's arm and walked out.

I stormed out onto the street and away from law and order. I just needed some quiet time.

A woman stepped out in front of me and it took me half a second to comprehend Elena's face.

"Go away." I growled. I strode straight through her chest, giving me the chills. My feet slapping the pavement as I turned into a little alley and rested against the wall.

A noise in front of me caused me to look up in alarm. The black dog moved out from behind a dumpster, approaching me cautiously.

I almost screamed at the sight of him. “How the bloody hell are you here?!” I exclaimed.

It gave me a sloppy grin and sat down at my feet. I was tempted to kick him just to see if he was real.

“How?” I whispered and gave him a hesitant stroke over his furry head. He closed his eyes and lifted his head to bump against my hand.

There was something about the dog that had the ability to calm me. I sank onto the ground and scratched him behind the ear.

Someone sprinted past the alley I was in, and stopped backtracking to look at me.

“What the hell is this?” Quinn exclaimed. I looked up at him.

“I don’t have a freaking clue. He just turned up out of thin air.”

Quinn grumbled under his breath. “Bloody magic dogs and ghosts. Can’t catch a break.”

“You didn’t bring him?”

“You would certainly realise it if I had smuggled a dog in my car!” He raised one eyebrow at me.

“Sorry.” I said.

Quinn walked over and stood silently a few feet away.

I was calm, and breathing evenly when I finally looked up to his face. “I’m fine.”

“No you’re not.” He said plainly.

I frowned and turned back to the dog rubbing his belly.

“Despite what you may think, I was a teenager once.” He said coming closer and crouching down next to me.

I scoff. "Oh, really old man? I thought you were always that old."

He laughed and reached out to pat the dog lightly on the head. I swear he muttered 'Magic dogs.' Then he said. "I told Cal you just needed time and we will contact him later or him us if he has any leads."

I nodded. "Thank you, again. For bringing me here and having blind faith in me."

"I didn't have blind faith in you, Jay."

I frowned. "No?"

"No. I came because I saw something in you." He sat down beside me in the dirty alley and we both absently patted the dog together.

"There's nothing special about me. The only reason I let you come is because you were tasked with being the reasonable one and you had a car." I said.

"I came because of the day you visited the parlour." He said.

I frowned and thought back to that day. "I didn't do anything except run away from you."

"Don't you remember the woman?"

"The crying woman? What does she have to do with me?"

"Jay, what you said to her that day stuck with me. You're sixteen and you're giving wise advice to a woman who just lost her child. That is pretty amazing and mature."

I stopped patting the dog and turned to face him. "I was just comforting her-"

"It wasn't just that." He stopped and rubbed at the back of his neck. "What you said, that your loved one would rather you move on than mourn the memories of them? That was something straight out of a self-help book. What I would have given to have someone like you say that to me seven years ago." He leant his head back against the bricks behind us, closing his eyes. "That's why

I'm here. Because you know just the right things to say when someone else needs help. It is time someone gave it back. Besides you owe me for a week off work."

"Yeah right, old man. Get in line." I laughed.

We both got to our feet and only then did I notice something missing. "Where did the dog go?"

He was completely gone. Again. "Slinky magic sly thing." Quinn mutters. "Come on. We better get back to Sev's."

Chapter 12

We drove back in silence.

As we pulled in, I spotted Pat on her knees in the garden, wrist deep in dirt. As we got out of Quinn's car she looked up and grinned at us.

"Hi guys! Good timing. Dinner is in half an hour," she said getting to her feet and dusting off the dirt that caked her gloves. "Do you guys want anything to drink before dinner?"

"Oh, no, we couldn't impose." Quinn said waving in the direction of the garden.

"Definitely not!" Pat said still as lively as ever. "Besides I have had enough dirt for one day!"

She turned to the door and opened it for us. "Come on in. I hope you guys are hungry?"

Dinner passed uneventfully. A beautiful meal with Quinn, Sev, and Pat all chatting happily.

I just picked at my food and kept my head down. Moments and pieces of the day swirled around in my head and I was getting distracted.

I rose from my seat and all eyes turned to me. "I'm going to crash." I said.

Chapter 13

Quinn rumbled into the kitchen as I sat on one of the bar stools flipping through a magazine, his hair was still messed from sleep and eyes still half shut.

“Coffee.” He sneered in my direction.

A sly smirk spread over my face. “No coffee here coffee monster, Pat is on a caffeine free diet apparently.”

Now his eyes opened fully and swung at me. “No.” His face was a perfect image of despair.

“Oh, yes.”

Quinn froze for a moment before he dropped his head and covered his face with his hands.

“This is Natasha all over again.”

“Oi!” I exclaimed pointing a finger at him. “If I can get through this, surely an old man can too.”

Quinn muttered incoherently as he came and sat beside me. It took him a moment to stop having a hissy fit before he turned to me. “I’m meeting up with Cal today, just catching up, do you want to come?”

I scrunched up my nose and absently flipped through the magazine again. “I don’t think so.”

He nodded and rubbed his eyes. “Then I might get going. If he has anything for us I will come back and get you,” he said as he walked out of the kitchen.

I flipped to the back of the magazine and found a map of this strip of the Gold Coast. Coincidence or not, there is a 7-Eleven one block over. Coffee! I swear I felt my face spilt as I grinned.

I shoved my hands into my pockets and strolled out onto the street. People were walking around, with their surf boards and skate boards, enjoying the sun. Tourists were easy to spot in a

place like this. Locals strolled, laid back with all the time in the world. Tourists rushed, trying to see everything at once.

I tried slipping into the local roll. Slow steps taking in everything, the smell and feel of the ocean scents. It was nice to be back, no matter how much it hurt.

Pushing all thoughts aside I stepped into the cool of the 7-Eleven. My mouth watered as I stared at the doughnuts and slushies and the biggest coffee machine ever. I didn't even register my legs propelling me in that direction. There was a woman to my left as I grabbed a large cup ready for my turn at the automatic coffee machine, when she turned at my presence I froze.

Her face was stretched and tired, the bags under her eyes dark and huge. The blue of her eyes pale and deathly, her stringy blonde hair pulled back into a limp ponytail. She, was mother's drinking buddy.

She flinched with surprise as she recognised me. "Jay?"

"Kary." I spoke with firmness as she stepped closer. She stank of marijuana and day old booze stains covered her blouse.

"I can't believe it, Jay. Months of not being around and all we had to do was to knock off your bitch." She smirked, her lips crinkled and pale. I growled, baring my teeth. "She would be pissed at you, you know. Leaving her like that. Alone and in need of her only child."

"She didn't need her child." I growled. "She never treated me like one, and she left first."

"You should just be glad she didn't decide to go to that pot hole of a town you ended up in and drag you back." She gave a throaty laugh. I thought for a second.

"How did she know I was in Boonah?"

Kary sneered. "She didn't listen to me when I told her to leave you alone. After that deadbeat guy she was with left, she kept tabs on you. Ears everywhere in a small town."

She didn't come for me. Elena knew where I was and didn't come find me. The tear in my heart seemed to go deeper.

"You said she is dead, but I heard from the cops she's missing?"

This time it was Kary's turn to freeze. "She still is. But everyone knows she's dead. Frank was found holding a knife with her blood on it. But Frank won't tell anyone where the body is. And they can't charge him if there's no body, they can't prove she's dead."

"Wait, hold up. Who's Frank?"

"Elena's latest fling, got with him when deadbeat pissed off. He was meant to take her to that new bar in Brissie that night. What's the name... anyways, weird place." Kary's head bobbed to the sound of the coffee machine grinding. I still held my empty cup, stunned by this news. Why hadn't Cal told us any of this?

"Do you know where he is?" I asked.

"Oh, he's not hiding. He lives down on Cate Street." Kary stuck the lid on her coffee and turned to me. "Well, I'm not going to say it was pleasant to talk to you, cause it really wasn't. So, seeya!" She walked to the counter, paid and strolled out.

I was still slightly in shock. Did Quinn know any of this? I filled up my cup and paid the guy behind the counter in a sleep walk like state, almost tripping and spilling my coffee walking back.

The beach house came into view and Quinn sat on the steps, his head in his hands, eyes closed. He sat to attention when I stomped past him and to the door.

"What happened?" He asked as I fumbled for the door latch.

"What happened? What happened was my mum's 'drinking buddy' was at the 7-Eleven and happy to tell me that my mum is dead!" I stormed into the foyer, heading for the kitchen. Coffee

slopping over the rim of my cup and running down my hand. I stood staring down at myself and chewed on my lip.

Quinn stepped cautiously towards me. "Tell me what she said."

It all came spilling out like word vomit. I rambled on and on while Quinn sat quietly and listened, not saying a word. Once I had finished, Quinn picked up the phone once again and moved into another room. I wished I had just stayed home at the graveyard, happily digging and relaxing. Of course, nothing's that simple.

Quinn trudged back in, phone and keys in hand. "Let's go."

"Where? The station?" I asked.

"No. We're going to make a visit to a Mr Frank Weller."

I choked. "What?"

We drove into the city flowing with traffic until we turned into a quieter street and pulled up at the cleanest looking building on the block, which would look like a dump if it weren't beside all of these other wrecks.

I got out and hurried into the lobby with Quinn close behind. We made our way up the floors; they ranged from dusty to smelly. Some of the noises coming from the apartments weren't very clean either.

Quinn stopped me on the fifth floor. He stepped up to 5B and knocked brusquely. After a moment I heard shuffling and then the door opened, stopping at the security chain.

"What?" The man said. He was in his late forties, with a rough beard and grey eyes that had seen better days. His jaw was sharp and I suppose if he took a shower and cleaned his brown hair, he would look fairly handsome.

Quinn cleared his throat. "Hello. I'm--"

"Not interested." He said.

Now it was Quinn's turn to say, "What?"

"I'm not buying anythin'"

"Do I look like a sales man?" Quinn replied, slightly annoyed.

"I dunno. Kind of." He said.

Quinn let out a huff of breath and was about to open his mouth but I cut in.

"Sorry, I don't know if you would recognise me but I'm Elena's daughter." I said.

His grey eyes widened. "I'm sorry. I don't know Elena. Are you cops?"

"Sure you know Elena. You stabbed a knife into her side."

He gaped. "How do you--"

"I just know this shit, okay. Where did you dump her?" I demanded.

"I--"

"Don't you dare say you don't know."

"Get lost bitch." He slammed the door shut and I could hear the lock on the door click into place.

"Nice try." Quinn grumbled. I kicked the wall, trying to let out my frustration.

"That SOB is as guilty as the devil himself." I growl.

"We need a new plan, Jay."

I sighed and flicked my hair out of my face. "Can you call Cal? Maybe we can find where Elena was staying before this jerk killed her?"

Quinn nodded and pulled out his phone. As Quinn talked to Cal, we both walked together down the stairs and I stayed quiet. Until Quinn's curse shot through me.

"Are you kidding?" He exclaimed into the phone.

"What? What tell me?" I asked. We both stopped as he listens intently.

"We won't... Sure... We owe you man." He hangs up and turns to me, his lips curved. "Do you want to know where Elena ended up?"

I crossed my arms over my chest. "Of course I do."

He grinned and turned abruptly back up the stairs taking them two at a time. I hesitated for a moment as his actions sunk in.

No. She wouldn't.

I ran up after him and we were both puffing as we came, yet again to the fifth landing. Instead of going to Frank's apartment, Quinn turned to 5a and rattled the door handle.

"She lived across the hall!" I cursed. "How dumb was she?"

"Do you know how to pick a lock?" He asked.

Was he stupid? I rolled my eyes and pulled a bobby pin out of the back of my hair. "You're lucky I can hold my own, and always keep this on me."

I hunkered down in front of the lock and stuck in the bobby pin, wiggling it around until I found the latch at the back.

The door clicked and I grinned. I pushed it open and nearly threw up in my mouth.

I heard Quinn's muffled gag noise behind me, but I was too busy trying to cover my own face from the smell. It wasn't a dead body smell luckily, but a fungi infested something not human hibernating in there smell.

I had my nose stuck into my elbow as I made my way forward and into the abyss.

“Stinks like vomit and weed.” Quinn says.

I couldn't even reply. I looked around, spotting a couch littered with beer cans and Bourbon bottles. The carpet was an unrecognisable colour under a layer of dust.

There was still smudged grey powder over some surfaces from the forensic team but most of the dust was natural and looked to have been there for longer than the finger print dust had.

“I'll be in the car.” Quinn coughed and left.

I moved into the centre of the room and did a slow circle. A door was open off the living room and curiosity got the better of me.

The bedroom was dull grey and utterly depressing. Some experts say that your bedroom can express your personality or your mind set, this looked like a ghost had lived here. How low had my Mother got?

The bed was stripped and the only other thing in the room was a miniature bedside table. I shuffled over to it and opened the first drawer. It was stuffed to the brim with medication.

Panadol, aspirin, antibiotics, thyroid tablets; and about every other painkiller available. I didn't even know she had a thyroid problem. I shoved through them all, but when I hit something solid down the bottom I froze.

I pulled out a very battered copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, with its disintegrating spine and plastic peeling off the cover, it looked like it had been read thoroughly over and over again. It had been, when I was young.

Elena would struggle with the tricky words and names but would always oblige when I begged her to read more.

I couldn't hold in the tears as I carefully opened it and read the opening line I knew so well.

“Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much...”

I only stopped reading when a tear dropped onto the next word, smudging the ink into the faded yellow paper. Why would she keep it?

I closed the book and tried to contain my sobs. It must have been in her bag that night when she left, why else would she have it with her? When I fled from the landlords and our apartment, the book was the one thing I couldn't find. The one thing that hurt so much to leave behind.

Shutting the drawer, but keeping the book close to my chest I rose to my feet.

I turned around and jolted to a stop.

“Mother.” I whispered. Mum stood as pale as ever before me with a soft smile decorated her cheeks. Blood was still trickling out of her side.

“Why? What was the real reason you left? Why did you keep this?” My voice catching, I held the book.

She didn't make a noise as she reached up to me and tried to stroke my cheek, but all I felt was cold. Elena frowned and disappeared before my eyes.

A choke caught in my throat and I blinked away the tears. To admit to myself that she left because of her weakness to everything else but me was hard hitting. I looked down at the book clasped in my hands and sniffed noisily, had she thought of me enough to keep the book? But not enough to overcome her addiction.

I quickly made my way out of the apartment and shut the door harshly behind me.

Chapter 14

It was dark and hot. I was hiding down behind the couch. My tiny hands gathered my knees to my chest.

She was coming. Hide.

I held my breath as the footsteps approached. They were slow and heavy, joined by the sloshing of liquid in glass. I clamped my eyes shut, wishing. Wishing that it would all go away. My Harry Potter book was clutched tightly in my little arms.

A head appeared above me, those green eyes shining.

“Peek-a-boo!”

I awoke with a jolt. Not again.

I pushed aside all thoughts and clambered out of bed and across to the wide window. The sun was streaming in once more. It wasn't dark, and she wasn't here.

Feeling some serious hunger pains I got dressed, opened the door and paused. Quiet music was coming from the end of the hallway, from behind a semi closed door.

Too curious for my own good, I padded down to the door and gently pushed it open to peer in.

Sev was lying on the bed, eyes open and hands behind his head.

I moved to the bed and sit gingerly on the edge.

“Any news on your mum?” He asks.

I bite my lip. “Well, the police haven't found her body and her boyfriend isn't cooperating so we have nada.”

“You still seeing her?” I exhaled roughly and nodded. “You have heard of the legend right?”

I blinked. I had completely forgotten about it. “You never told me what it was.”

“There used to be stories when I was still at the high school, that the graveyard was a beacon for ghosts.”

I frowned. “That sounds loony, you know that?”

He only grinned and sat up. “Even if only the caretaker of the graveyard could see the ghosts?”

My jaw dropped. “No!”

“Yes.”

“That’s why only I could see my mum, even when Quinn was sitting right beside me?”

Sev shrugged. “I have to admit something though.” I nodded. “That’s why Coby, Fin and I help out.”

“You only help out so you can see ghosts? Are you freaking nuts?” I exclaimed.

Sev laughed. “Yup. We all thought if we volunteered helping out, then maybe we could see them too. Turns out it doesn’t work that way.”

I shook my head trying to process. “Why didn’t Ray say anything? Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I was going too! It was just a stupid story, but after you said you were seeing your mother as a ghost I started doing some research. Turns out, when the graveyard was first established, so was the school. These kids went into one of the crypts and did a séance to talk to the dead. The myth was that they were successful and the ghost burned down the crypt. They escaped but only barely.” He looked up at me and grinned.

I frowned. “Still sounds loony.”

I ran my fingers through my fringe, getting frustrated. “Was there only one ghost?”

“Apparently.”

“If it’s a beacon, as you put it, how does that work?”

Sev scanned the page of notes again. “Maybe it opened a doorway or a portal that attracted the ghosts, like your mum?” He exclaimed.

I dropped my head in my hands and grumbled. “I cannot believe we are having this conversation.”

“Be open minded, Jay. This is so cool.”

I glanced up and glared. “And who is the one who has to put up with them?”

Sev dropped the book and raised his hands in surrender. I shook my head again. *Why didn’t Ray tell me?*

A few minutes later, Quinn, Sev and I were gathered for a team meeting in the kitchen. Quinn was sitting on a bar stool, with Sev and I opposite him after filling him in on the new information.

Quinn looked from Sev to me to the note book that was lying open on the bench. He scowled at me. “And you believe this bull?”

“Well it’s not much more of a stretch from the whole seeing ghosts thing anyway. So why not?” I cross my arms over my chest and scowl back. “There’s no lead on Elena, and that dog hasn’t been helping much at all.” I paused and turned to Sev. “Is there anything about a black dog in those legends?”

Sev shrugs and shakes his head. I sigh. “This whole trip has been a bust so far.”

“Speaking of which...” Quinn muttered.

“What do you mean?” I asked, eyeing him suspiciously.

“Well... it’s been almost a week, and I really need to get back to the funeral home soon...”

“Oh.” I bit my lip. Crap, I hadn’t even thought about Quinn’s job. He was doing this massive favour for me and we had squat.

“Jay, I know you need to find your mum, but you have to consider that we both have a jobs back in Boonah. You can’t drop that. I’ll give you a little bit to consider.” He walked out of the room and out of the kitchen, closing the door behind him.

I ran my hand through my hair and over my eyes. Ugh, I need air.

I left Sev and wound my way through the house to the back door that led out onto the beach. I was only in my denim shorts and singlet top but I headed straight for the surf and didn’t stop until it reached the bottom of my thighs.

I didn’t try to stop the first tear as it travelled slowly down my nose, I blinked uncertainly into the sun until my vision cleared and the one thing I needed stood before me.

Sev’s jeans were soaked and yet he still radiated warmth as he reached up to brush his fingers over my cheek wiping the tears away.

“Are you okay?” He whispered.

My voice was caught in my throat so I could only shake my head. I tried to look down and step away but his hands caught my face and I watched him under my lashes.

He opened his mouth to say something but stopped himself, then laughed. “If you punch me for this, I hope it’s worth it.”

Sev brought his lips down to mine and my heart exploded into a symphony of butterflies and my knees weakened. His lips were soft as he moved them over mine and wrapped one arm around my waist bringing me closer. I moved with him and hooked my hands around his neck.

I would have been happy to stay in this moment forever but he pulled slowly back. Resting his forehead on mine, he chuckled.

“There’s no fist in my face so I’m guessing you liked that just as much as I did?”

I bit my lip and giggled. *My god, what did he do to me?* “I probably enjoyed it more.”

When we got out of the surf we were laughing and walking back up to the house again, hand in hand. I was content, for a few minutes all my darkness and worry had vanished. But as we approached the door, the weight seemed to grow again. Sev noticed the change in my mood and squeezed my hand reassuringly.

“You should probably go and talk to Quinn.” He said.

“Aren’t you even going to ask me about my answer?” I watched as he backed away towards the stairs.

“I know you will make the right one, Jay.” And he was gone.

With unnecessary slowness, I padded my way to the stairs Sev had disappeared up and made my way to Quinn’s room. I hesitated at his door before I knocked.

A gruff mumble came from within and I took that as my cue. Opening the door I saw Quinn sitting on his bed staring out at the water.

I froze. *Did he just see...? Crap.*

“So you’re staying?” He asked without looking at me.

“No, we’re going back.” I said. He turned to me, confusion written across his face.

“But, you and Sev...”

I shrugged, but I couldn’t ignore my heart shattering. “Was a goodbye of sorts.”

Quinn nodded, eyes cast down. “We can leave tomorrow if you like, but that’s it.”

“Sure. Can we check in with Cal before we go?”

Quinn stood and pulled out his phone. “On it.”

He left the room and me in it. I took Quinn’s place on the bed and tried his hobby of staring out at the ocean. It only took a few minutes before Quinn came bursting back in.

“You would not believe what Cal just found.”

Chapter 15

Here we were again. In the mass of cops, with a stench of stale coffee and stress sweat. Sitting opposite Cal and his computer, waiting agitatedly for his oh-so-important news.

He glanced up at us and cocked his head. “You really want to see this?”

I think it is past overdue to send Cal another ‘Jay glare’. “I’m not faint hearted if that’s what you’re saying.”

Cal sighed and gesture for Quinn and I to stand up and look at his monitor. Once we both crowded around him, he clicked on a video and an image of a service station expanded on the screen.

A large green Ute pulled up to one of the pumps and Frank got out of the driver’s side. I could feel my fingers tightening into a ball as he casually began filling up the tank. Then, the passenger side door opened.

Mum.

Elena exited the car, seeming a little tipsy in her four inch heels and orange maxi dress as she unsteadily made her way into the convenience store.

“This is the last known footage of Elena we could find.” Cal said fast forwarding to when Elena got into the car and they drove off. He shut the video off and turned to us. “The attendant claimed

that an hour later Frank came back and parked down a side alley across the street and he saw him stashing some rags in a dumpster. We went and picked them up and are waiting for a DNA analysis as we speak.” He rubbed his eyes and looked back up. “If it comes back Elena’s then this is enough to bring him in. We are in the process now of getting a warrant to search his apartment.”

I exhaled and tried to clear my head from the over flow of clutter. “So really, you’re not any closer to actually finding her?”

Cal was silent for a moment before shaking his head. Quinn placed a hand on my arm. “Thanks Cal, we’re going to leave tomorrow so thanks for giving Jay some clarification.” He said.

I could only follow as Quinn led me outside. I felt as if I should be feeling relief or thankful that progress was happening at last but I was still filled with an echo of emptiness.

The next morning, it was early, much earlier than I would normally wake but the need to pack my bags and watch the surf from my gorgeous window one last time was foremost in my mind. So here I sit, cross legged once again, watching the shine and glitter of the sun rise over the crest of the water when a knock at my door broke the silence. I turned towards it, confused at who the hell would – if I was still asleep – wake me from my sleep?

“Yes?”

The door cracked open and a face peered through the door way. Sev grinned at me. “Wow, look who’s awake this early in the morning. Watch out you’ll burn up in the sun, vampire.”

I cocked my head at him and smirked. “That was so funny my laughter just couldn’t get any louder than my silence.”

Sev shrugged and laughed. “Anyway, since this is your last hurrah here, you want to celebrate?”

“With what?”

“Coffee of course.”

I could feel my eyes light up and the grin stretch out over my cheeks. “You’re on.

Coffee in hand, we strolled out of the 7-Eleven chatting. I laughed at Sev when he attempted an impersonation of Quinn without his morning coffee and I was so busy laughing I didn’t even see the man coming towards me.

His shoulder collided with mine and I cried out in a mixture of annoyance and relief my coffee didn’t spill out of my take away cup.

“Oi!” The man said and we both turned to each other. My breath gurgled in my throat and the man’s nostrils flared at the sight of me. Frank Weller stood before us in sweats and a crinkled polo shirt.

“You’re her little bitch.” He snarled his grey eyes almost pin pricks in the sunlight. Drugs, I had to step carefully, but I couldn’t stop the anger rising up in me. This jerk had killed my mum.

“Not the first time I’ve been called that.” I say stiffly. I could feel Sev’s body tense and inch up closer behind me protectively.

“What are you still doing here?” He growled.

The words were on the tip of my tongue that I was here to catch-his-murdering-ass but I bit my lip painfully and my next few words I spoke carefully. “Finding peace.”

Ha! That would give him something to chew on.

His glare deepened. “You better get out of town. Otherwise the only peace you will find is in one of those six foot graves of yours.” He smirked, proud of his comment but it only fuelled my fire.

“How do you know about that?” I exclaimed stepping forward into his face. Sev’s hand grabbed my arm and held me still.

Frank kept on smirking. “Pillow talk.”

I growled and cursed in his face. “I’m going to rip your throat out!”

He just laughed as he turned his back and walked into the 7-Eleven.

I finally pulled myself out of Sev’s grasp and plonked myself down on a bench, glaring into the café window. I could see him, chatting away to someone behind the counter. All I could feel was the anger burning in my gut.

Sev sat down beside me and tried to place a gentle hand on my arm but I shrugged him off. “I want to go in there and tell him I know everything.” I spat.

“Okey dokey, calm down.” Sev said laughing nervously. “The police are getting a warrant for his arrest, they are going to get him any time now.”

“I want to do something! Hit something! Anything.” I dug my nails in my palms and gnawed on my bottom lip. The person who murdered my mum was so close, yet so far out of reach.

Sev gave a small sigh and I looked at him. He shrugged and said, “I have an idea.”

I could feel my eyes widen. “Yes?”

“It’s not legal.”

I stared at him for a moment. “So? Does that matter?”

He fought back a smile and began to tell me his plan, both of us keeping one eye on Frank in the café.

“Okay, for the record. This is a terrible idea after all.” Sev says as we both stare up at the building in front of us, I was watching a window on the fifth floor intently.

“Five up.” I pointed. “In and out.”

He stayed silent until we reached the fifth floor. We stood side by side staring at mum’s old apartment door and Franks door, the full force of doubt was beginning to set in.

“Maybe this wasn’t a good idea,” I mumbled.

“You think? I am so stupid for even opening my mouth!”

I was about to agree with him when a woman opened Frank's door and my jaw dropped. She was pale and thin, and when she saw us both staring she froze with the door still half open.

“Are you two all right?” She asked.

“We were just wondering if you knew Mr Weller?” Sev said jumping into action and approaching her. It took me a moment to gather what he was doing, and my brain was still blurred as I followed him up to her.

“Yes, I’m his girlfriend.” She said. *Who –*

“Great.” Sev said, a smile stretching his lips. “My friend here wanted to ask you some questions about Frank and... stuff.” He smiled tightly again at me and subtly jerked his head in her direction.

“Uh...” *Throw me under the bus, why don’t you?* “What are your intentions with Frank?”

What! Where is my filter?

The woman froze and had a moment or two of incoherent words. Sev was attempting to keep his laughter under wraps as he moved towards her blind side and the door jam.

“How does this concern you? Are you related to Frank?” She asked.

“Not quite. I just wanted to tell you he has some medical problems with uh...” I looked down and back up to her eyes. “I hope you get the gist.”

Her eyes were literally saucers and her pale skin was completely white now. Maybe that was going a little too far... *Can't learn to shut your gob can you Jay?*

“I don't believe you – he wouldn't go with trash like you.” She spat.

She slammed the door behind her and turned back to me. Sev was back to standing beside me, his shoulders shaking from the torture of containing his mirth.

“I really hope you are wrong, girl.” She said and began to move past me. “For both our sakes.” She growled and scurried off down the staircase.

Sev chuckled. “That was funny.” He turned around and reached for the doorknob. I was about to point out that it was locked, when it swung open without any trouble.

“Huh?” I went over as he stepped back and gestured to the jam. Inside the hole on the jamb that the lock would normally sit in was a piece of rapidly chewed gum, stuck there still gooey from the saliva. “Sometimes I underestimate your abilities.”

Sev grinned and did a little bow of his head. “Ladies first.”

I cautiously moved forward and came to a stop in the centre of Frank's living room. There was nothing personal about the place. No pictures on the walls, no notes or calendar on the fridge.

Sev took the gum out of the door and shut it, he joined me in looking around the apartment but even he couldn't keep the sneer off his face. “Don't touch anything you don't need to.”

My legs took me on a round trip of the rooms. The bathroom consisted of junk and in the bedroom the sheets were askew and women's underwear was lying on the floor. I quickly shut the door again. That was a bad idea.

I made my way back to the living room, Sev was snooping in Frank's desk. He looked up as I came in and shook his head. I bit my lip and sighed. I wonder what Frank did for a living?

A noise outside the door made me jump and I would have screamed if it weren't for Sev's quick thinking, slapping a hand over my mouth.

Our eyes met and his gaze slide from the window back to me. I followed his eyes and spotted the railing of the fire escape just visible on the other side of the glass. A jingling was audible from outside the door and I made a dash to the window. With Sev right beside me, we both silently slid the window up and Sev practically shoved me through onto the platform.

"Quiet." He hissed as another voice began a one sided argument.

"... She has no clue. Can't even spell death let alone understand the concept of it." I heard a ring of keys drop into a bowl of some kind and Frank's heavy footsteps moving towards the kitchen. Closer to us. "It's fine, jeez. Elena was a silly fling anyways. If Crystal tries to question me about it then I can solve it just like I did Elena."

"I'm leaving tomorrow, I'm going to head out to the pot hole of a town and wait at that graveyard for the little shit. She's starting to stir trouble, it's time to put a stop to it." I froze and my eyes widened. "Yeah I can head out to Sydney as soon as the deeds done. Yup. Thanks I owe you man. No way, she did what?"

Frank kept chatting away as Sev and I lay there beneath his window in stunned silence. He was going to kill me. I'm screwed.

Keeping my voice low I whispered up to Sev. "What are we going to do?"

"We could call the cops?" He murmured.

"And say what? We were snooping in his apartment and then spied on him? That will go down well." I rolled my eyes.

Sev shrugged. "I don't kn--"

A rush of cars pulling up into the parking lot below cut him off and we both peered over the edge of the platform to see who it was.

"No shit." He said amazed. I stared at the multiple cop cars and heard a flurry of orders and chatter from below. Cal was one of them, he jumped out of one of the cars and began to point and give directions.

I looked up from the commotion and into Frank's window; he was still on the phone and not paying any attention to anything outside. "Now would be a good time to run."

We didn't stop until we were around the side of the apartment building away from prying eyes. I couldn't help myself from bending over from the waist with nervous laughter.

We both stood there for a few minutes just calming down from our adrenaline rush, until a bout of loud talking came from the direction of the cop cars. I peered around the corner and stood there speechless as I caught the last glimpse of Frank being shoved into the back seat of a police van.

"He's really gone." I uttered.

"You won't be dying any time soon." Sev said beside me. The spark of warmth when his arm came around me made me smile.

By late that afternoon, Quinn's bags and mine were packed and waiting by the door. My Harry Potter book was tucked safely in the bottom of my bag.

Quinn and Sev did a strange man hug and Quinn muttered his goodbye as he picked up our bags and took them to the car leaving me with Sev.

“I’m glad you’re going back.” Sev said. “I mean, someone’s going to have to keep Fin and Coby in line.”

I laughed and nodded. “I will.” I looked down nervously at my feet and then back up to him. “Thank you for this morning, it was surprisingly fun.”

He laughed, digging his hands in his pockets. “You still have my number?”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t lose it.”

A grin spread over my face. “Never.”

He matched my grin and leaned down, giving me a soft goodbye kiss. “Ever, please?”

I laughed and walked to the car hopping in beside Quinn. My eyes never left Sev’s until he was well out of sight. Quinn stayed quiet.

I felt slightly torn, I was sad to leave Sev but I was happy to be truly leaving behind my old life in the city.

The road back to Boonah was a highway that seemed to stretch for miles. I stared blankly out the window, watching trees go past, until a mass of black ran out in front of the car.

“Shit!” Quinn slammed on the brakes. There in front of the bumper bar, grinning cockily up at us was the dog.

“No freaking way...” I whispered.

Dog suddenly trotted off in front of us, earning car horns and shouting public. “Quinn, follow the dog.” I said.

Quinn hesitantly eased the car after the dog, who was now running down the exit into an avenue of thick bush on either side of a winding road. It ran and ran, after two or three minutes of driving, it suddenly stopped.

Quinn quickly pulled up the handbrake and I flung open the door and sprinted to where the dog sat.

A drop off was directly next to the road making my head spin. Dog was looking up as Elena appeared and gestured to the drop off before starting to slowly fading away, the last thing to leave were her eyes. My eyes.

Looking out over the cliff edge. I saw a slash of orange rag, searching the terrain desperately with my eyes I finally made out the shape of a person.

Seeing the mangled broken body at the bottom of the twenty-metre drop, I knew it could only be her. The orange maxi dress she wore was bloody and dirt ridden but unique in the mass of green.

Quinn gathered me into his arms and I buried my face against his shirt and prayed that I had the strength to get through this.

Chapter 16

One week later...

I was back at the graveyard now, standing at the foot of my mother's grave staring at the hole that I had dug. My mother wrapped in a white sheet had been lowered into the ground earlier by Quinn, and myself, and I had made a small wooden cross bearing her name. Since I didn't have the money to pay for a coffin and headstone, Elena would just have to put up with that. Quinn offered to pay for it, again and again, but I declined.

I felt alone, and empty for some reason. I shouldn't. She meant nothing to me and I was better off without her but emotions conflicted inside me.

Quinn had left an hour ago, heading back to the Gold Coast to tie up loose ends he said. The day after we found Elena, it was confirmed by the coroner that the knife the cops had found on Frank's person was indeed the murder weapon. He is now sitting in a cold bleak jail cell, for good.

I picked up my shovel and started to shove the loose dirt back into the hole.

When done, I walked back to the cabin, but without rush. I tried to absorb the sadness and replace it with peace. I had found my mum and revealed her killer. It had definitely been an eventful few weeks.

As I approached the cabin, the black dog trotted out from behind the house and sat patiently on the front deck. I smiled and sat quietly beside him, patting his silky fur.

"Thank you, Dog." I whisper, leaning against him and together we sat, watching the setting sun.

Again, I was here at Ray's front door, hesitating before I knocked. The mystery of the graveyard was still present in my mind and the need for answers an itch I needed to scratch.

My knuckles rapped quickly on the door. I could hear muffled talking before it opened to reveal Ray.

"Hi." I said. Ray leant against the doorframe and scowled.

"Why are you here?"

"I wanted to ask you some questions about the ghosts." I said.

Ray's eyes widened. He looked quickly over his shoulder, and shut the door coming out on to the porch next to me. "Keep your voice down, my woman is in there. What do you want to know?"

I crossed my arms over my chest. "What's the legend? How can I see the ghosts?"

Ray sighed, scratching his head. "There's been a story that's been passed down to each caretaker that nearly one hundred and thirty something years ago, the graveyard was established and so was that school next door. Went something like, some bunch of kids lit fire to the first crypt and the caretaker got caught in the blaze. He died and every caretaker since has had the ability to see the ghosts." He shrugged. "And that's it."

"How have you managed them over the years?" I ask.

He shrugged again. "Most of them just want someone to smack their loved one over the head and deliver a message. How many have you seen?"

"Just the one." It probably was not a good idea to say it was my mother.

He grinned. "Once you help your first customer, more will come sniffing around."

"What is up with the dog and its ESP thing?"

Ray shook his head. "Never could figure that one out. I just reckoned it had some heightened sense or something."

He trudged back to the door and before he opened it, he glanced back at me. "The ghost in the pantry is a tough bugger. Good luck." And I was left in silence. Again.

Damn, he's good at the dramatic exits.

Chapter 17

Quinn arrived back later the next day, and now stood guilty at my front door.

“I may have smuggled something back.” He said as soon as I opened the door. I stared at him, befuddled as to what the hell was going on. “Now before you die of a heart attack, he is here under his own will and I definitely had no input in the matter. None. Zilch.”

“Yeah right old man, you approached me.” A voice said from around the corner. Out stepped a figure in jeans and flannel with a heart-shattering grin.

“Sev!” I launched myself into his arms and smothered him in a hug. Then, pulling away, I eyed him suspiciously. “Quinn didn’t kidnap you did he?”

“Hey!” Quinn whined.

“I was joking. Jeez, you’re like a twelve year old.” I rolled my eyes and Sev laughed. “What brings you to Boonah?”

“Quinn came knocking on my door last night, and rambling on about something like you found your mum.”

“Mum got Quinn to talk about how you were going and about Boonah and she finally admitted to being home sick. So here we are!”

I frowned. “But your beautiful house?”

“Well, Mum wasn’t exactly happy there, it’s just a house. She apparently has wanted to move back out here. Do her interior design job from home.”

“You want to move out here?”

“Pretty much yeah. Which also means no more uptight school.” He said grinning.

“That is so cool!” I grinned back.

“Yeah, yeah. Is your coffee machine plugged in?” Quinn butted in.

“Only for you, come on in.” I pulled the door open wider and let the guys inside. Quinn made a bee line for the kitchen.

Sev grinned down at me, and I couldn’t resist pecking him quickly on the lips. “I’m glad you guys are coming back.”

Sev laughed and hooked his arm around my shoulders and brought me in for a hug. “I’ll protect you from the big bad nasty ghosts.”

I jumped back and looked up excitedly at him. “Guess what I found out?”

“What?” Quinn asked coming back in the room, cradling his mug of coffee.

“Ray says that the caretaker version of the graveyard legend goes that...” I filled them in on Ray’s story.

“So you reckon the kids were doing a séance and when the caretaker came in, they lit the place up?” Quinn asked incredulously.

“Partly. I think the séance was successful. And with all the events lining up, with the caretaker dying, the fire and the doorway open for the dead. It all got created like a big bang type of theory.” I explain.

Sev nodded. “It does sound like a whole load of chaos and supernatural.”

I grinned. “He also said that the ghost fun house is only just beginning too.”

Quinn groaned and sat awkwardly on the couch. “No more trips. If you have to go somewhere, you’re getting someone else to drive.”

“I can’t wait.” Sev said rubbing his hands together.

I grabbed his hand and smiled. “I’m glad you’re staying.”

Sev collapsed onto the couch, pulling me down next to him. “Same.”

He snatched up the TV remote. I snuggled down into the couch under Sev's arm, and we all sat quietly watching the news, ironically it was about Elena. An update on when Frank's trial was going to be. Sev placed a whisper of a kiss on my temple and my lips curved.

I thought of the new bookcase in my room. With my Harry Potter book on the first shelf waiting to be joined with more. I thought of the digs I had lined up during the week and the dirt under my fingernails that felt so natural. I thought of the house that we sat in and the dog that was most likely going to turn up yet again. It all felt like home.

For the first time in years, I felt truly content. I will be ready for any ghost onslaught, if the people right here, can surround me just as they are now.

The End...?