

1 *Madam Leombre's house for Wayward Spirits is pleased to announce an open invitation party for this year's graduates. All interested parties may attend the festivities beginning at sunset.*

“Is this some sort of joke?” I asked my girlfriend, Liz. She’d been into all that gothic occult stuff since before we started dating, but this was a new level of obsession.

“Relax,” she said, rolling her eyes. “Cera’s pretty sure this is just some dude’s idea for a haunted house. We’re not doing anything else tonight anyway, so I think we should go.”

I looked at the address, noting it was just a few streets over. Liz and Cera were best friends. Half the time I felt like a third wheel with them, but the rest of the time Liz gave me all sorts of personal attention, so I didn’t mind so much. Besides, she was kind of cute and I’d overheard them talking about polyamory a few days before.

“I dunno,” I said, pretending to think about it. “We were planning on starting another season of *American Horror Story* tonight.”

“Netflix can wait,” she said, pulling me close. “Besides, you know how *excited* a good haunted house gets me.” If the look in her eye wasn’t a clue as to what she was promising after, her hand in my back pocket pinching my butt certainly was. Like I said, aaaaalllll sorts of personal attention.

I smiled and gave her a peck, our private sign of agreement. “Well, when you put it that way...” I leaned in for some sugar.

She pushed off me. “Grab your shoes. Cera’s waiting downstairs.”

I snatched up my boots and rushed down the stairs. On the bottom step I sat to slide my boots on. Liz and Cera were chatting excitedly, gesturing at the flyer and making lots of

interesting bouncing motions. Liz was in black cargo pants and a tight tank, bracelets and her thick belt her main accessories. Cera was in a dark hoodie, short skirt, and fishnet stockings.

I could tell they liked me looking, so tying my shoes took a couple tries.

Liz and I grabbed our jackets and we left. I unlocked my Civic but they kept walking.

“It’s close,” Cera said. “Besides, most people have Halloween decorations up now.”

I shrugged. Less I’d have to pay for gas.

They were still chatting it up, so I walked behind them and enjoyed the view. Liz had red highlights in her dyed black hair that I enjoyed. Cera was blonde, but bleached it almost white and kept it cut shorter than me.

“...fake name, or—”

“— why a school?”

October was halfway over, which meant it was getting dark already. The houses in this neighborhood were older, which I thought made it awesome for Halloween. The trees were great for TPing and made everything much spookier.

“Well, did you?”

I started, unsure of what they were last talking about. Their stares didn’t give me any clues.

“Did you hear if anybody got a job at a new haunted house?” Liz asked.

“Uh, I don’t think so?” I said.

She rolled her eyes.

“So maybe they’re getting slave work out of their kids,” Cera said, sounding annoyed.

“Or they have it all automated.” Liz could see the best in situations when Cera was being a downer. That’s why she was my girlfriend and not Cera.

Cera shrugged. It did interesting things to her bigger-than-Liz's boobs. That's why she'd make a nice side piece. If things went that way.

After a few more minutes of walking and listening to their chatter we reached a house even older than the others. It was two stories high, but it had a tower which made it way more imposing. I'd seen it a few times, but it never felt creepy like it did right now.

"Do we knock?" I asked.

Before either of them could answer, the door opened and two chicks ran out. The fat one was sobbing and the super tall – like made-me-look-short tall – one looked like she was in shock. She nearly hit her head on the porch roof as she ran past us. I looked back and I noticed the fat one's clothes looked like she was ripping out of them hulk style.

Weird.

Liz started laughing. "That's a sign of a good time!"

Cera just grinned.

"Ah, are you here for the party?"

We turned to see a lady with gray hair standing in the doorway. She almost looked like a cartoon of a lady in one of those old dresses with frills. She obviously had stuffed a super big bra and had extra layers under her skirt to make her butt look big. I guess it was kinda hot, but her face was old so I wasn't super interested.

"Here for the haunted house," Liz said, striding past the lady.

"Wicked," Cera said, nodding with approval.

I gave her my best pretty-boy look. I even wiggled my eyebrows a bit. She gave me a knowing smile in return.

The front entrance hall had old furniture in it, but it wasn't dusty like a haunted house should be. There weren't even cobwebs. Instead, a little birthday banner said 'Congratulations'. What the heck had scared the other girls?

Liz and Cera were already looking around, so I followed them further in.

"Cocktails?" the lady, Madam Leombre I guessed, asked as she picked up a tray. On it were a number of margarita glasses with green liquid inside. We each grabbed one as she walked past. Cera downed hers while Liz sipped. I took a swig. Fruity, nice.

When she saw we all were drinking, she said, "I hope you read the contract."

Puzzled, we looked at each other. She pointed at the tray, so we stepped over and huddled around it. Under the glasses was a piece of paper. In loopy handwriting that took me a moment to read, it said, "*By drinking from one of these glasses you consent to being haunted.*"

I looked at Liz, frowning. She looked the old lady in the eye and said, "Well, we're here for a good time," before draining the rest of her glass.

The lady threw back her head and laughed. "I like your spark!"

Not to be outdone, I drained mine, too.

She stepped away from us then called up the stairs, "They agreed. Take your pick."

The air got cold really quickly. At first I thought it must be the AC, but I didn't feel any air blowing. Then the lights in all the fixtures faded, then winked out. Somebody dropped a glass. I stepped away from the shattered bits, trying to remember what shoes Liz and Cera were wearing. Digging out glass splinters can be a bitch.

I thought my eyes were adjusting to the gloom, but strange, shimmering blobs made me rethink that. Three of them started twirling around us. I could make out Cera stepping backward into the other room, looking mostly like she was enjoying the show but maybe a little scared, too.

Then one of the shapes touched her. “Oh my god!” she yelled and ran deeper into the house. The glowing thing shrank down, formed a ball, then followed her.

“This way,” Liz whispered as she grabbed my arm. She pulled us up the stairs and the two remaining *things* slowly followed.

We turned at the top and raced down the hall. The thick rug on the floor dampened the sound, but I doubted that would stop them from finding us. Liz pulled me into a room and shut the door behind us.

“Shit, I think those are real ghosts,” she said, breathing hard.

“Sure they weren’t just fancy holograms or something?” I asked, worried.

Liz shook her head. “Did you see the way Cera reacted? She *touched* it. She wouldn’t have done that if it were just lights.”

“And she’s never gotten you with a jump scare before?”

Before she could respond, the room got colder. We stepped away from the door, watching for it to – I don’t know, seep around the edges or go through it or something. Instead, it touched me from behind.

I jumped, but it pulled me back into the corner. I was yelling and Liz was yelling and something dark and clammy was beginning to cover me.

Liz watched with wide eyes before something like a light blue tornado started spinning up around her legs. She tried to run away, but her feet seemed frozen to the floor. I found myself stuck to the wall. The light around her legs swirled up to her belt, then recoiled.

“Yeah, that’s right,” she screamed. “Eat iron, Casper!”

It couldn’t seem to climb past her belt, so instead it seeped into her legs. I felt the shadow stuff seeping into my skin, too.

After a moment more of panic, we both fell down. I felt myself shaking while Liz shivered.

The lights turned back on. When nothing more happened, I stood up.

“Nice haunted house,” I said to the room at large. “You got us good.” I gave a little bow, trying to cheer Liz up.

Then my head fell off.

It hit the rug on the forehead, then rolled to a stop in front of Liz. I looked up at her and she looked down at me. We both started screaming.

She ran out of the room and I swear I heard ripping fabric before I closed my eyes and tried to convince myself it was all a dream. When I did, I felt like I was back in my body. I opened my eyes again and I was a head on the floor.

Trying not to panic, I closed my eyes again. I felt like I was back in my body, standing in the corner. I moved my hand, then felt where my head should be. It wasn't there.

Not knowing what else to do, I sank to my knees and began crawling forward. My hand found a hard, hairy round thing just as I felt something touch the back of my head.

I opened my eyes again. I was on the floor; no body, just my head. But I could feel something touching my hair.

I closed my eyes, once again returning to my body. I felt the thing on the floor. It felt like my head, but it wasn't where it was supposed to be. I turned it so the face was towards me, then opened my eyes.

I saw my shirt first. Then I looked up until I saw my shoulders. Where my neck should be was a misty, shadowy blob. Keeping one eye open, I gently picked up my head.

It wasn't as heavy as I thought it would be. My hands were shaking so much I couldn't focus on anything. I breathed in and out slowly, steadying myself. I wasn't sure how the air was getting from my mouth to my lungs, but it apparently was.

When my hands were steadier, I took another look at the shadow blob. It trailed off towards the floor. When I turned my head to look at it, it moved. It was a moment before I realized it was probably leading to where my neck connected with my head.

Emboldened by my success so far, I gently placed my head back on my shoulders and willed it to stay put. When it was in place, I closed and opened my eyes several times in succession. My body felt like it was where it was supposed to be and my head was looking from the right place.

I didn't trust my head to stay where it was, so I kept one hand on it as I walked downstairs.

Madam Leombre stood in the hall, a coy smile on her face. I didn't dare turn my back to her.

"Would you kindly go out the back door?" she asked. "My next guests will arrive soon."

"Sure," I managed to whisper. I didn't want to meet any new 'guests' or have anyone see my head fall off.

She pointed and I walked down the hall, never turning my back on her. I kept one hand on my head and one on the wall. "Did, um..."

"They'll meet you at the park," she said, somehow knowing what I was about to ask.

"And please do take care."

Only when I was safely around the corner did I turn and hurry away.

I rushed past the kitchen and out the door.

Outside the night was quiet. It was fully dark now. The moon was shining above the streetlamps, so it was fairly easy to see. I really didn't want my head rolling out in front of a car, so I forced myself to walk.

The only park nearby was about a block away. It wasn't very big, but we hung out there fairly often because the trees were thick enough that we had privacy. The swings were our favorite spot, so I went there first.

"Danny!"

I turned towards the shout, my head nearly slipping off.

Liz was peeking out from behind a bush. I started walking towards her, but she whispered, "Stop! How do I know it's you?"

"We first kissed behind the bleachers after P.E." I said. "You really like it when I spank you and –"

"Okay, it's you," she said, relieved.

"And how do I know it's you and not some demon possessing you?"

"I don't like your car even though I defend it whenever Cera says something nasty about it," she said. "Also, your favorite place to give hickeys is on my inner thighs."

It was her. I sighed and started walking towards her again.

"Wait," she said, afraid again.

I stood there, confused, while she fidgeted. "Don't freak out, okay?"

"Why would I freak out?" I asked.

"Um, well..." she said, looking at her toes. "Because of this."

Liz stepped out from behind the bush. Her hair, face, arms, hands, and chest were all the same as ever. Below her waist, however, she was huge. Directly below her belt her hips flared

out over a foot each way. Her pants had ripped along the seams and were exposing pale flesh. The wider figure continued down her thighs, with were at least twice as thick around as they had been. The tears ended just above her knees, which looked normal-ish. It might have been the lighting, but her once loose pants looked tight around her calves. It didn't look like her feet were different, but they looked tiny compared to her new legs.

I wouldn't have said so before then, but I was suddenly very, very sure I was an ass guy instead of a boob guy.

I realized I was staring and she was expecting a response.

“Wow.”

She seemed vaguely confused by my reaction. I stepped closer, following her every curve with my eyes. As I got closer, I noticed she had a shelf of butt behind her, also mostly visible through her destroyed cargo pants. It reached almost two feet from the small of her back.

I hugged her, hands caressing her butt and hips even while my arms held her tight and let her know she was safe with me. If my ragged breathing wasn't enough for her to understand my unreal level of attraction to her just then, my stiff wood definitely was.

“Oh, um, so... wow is a good thing?” she asked, chuckling.

I nodded vigorously. My head began to feel loose again, so I stopped.

I'm not sure how long we stood there, but Liz returned my hug and mine became more of a supportive hug instead of sensual. The shock was wearing off and we both needed to feel safe. She felt cold to me, but she wasn't shivering.

Just as I was starting to really relax, a noise behind us startled us both. I spun around to face the threat, but bumped into Liz's hip unexpectedly. Between the sudden spin and the bump

my head fell off again. This time I managed to catch it by the hair, which hurt less than hitting the ground nose first.

I put my head back on and saw a light coming from behind the trees. It looked a bit like two large, round lanterns bobbing at chest level. The darkness was thick everywhere else and only increased as the lanterns ponderously approached. They stopped several feet from us, bouncing a little before stopping. The light was reminiscent of the things that chased us in the house, but muted.

“Dudes, eyes up here.”

“Cera?” Liz asked.

The lanterns’ light faded, and we were able to see her, standing behind where the light was coming from. She wore a smirk, like she was in on a joke we didn’t understand.

I frowned, feeling something was off.

She stepped closer and it slowly became apparent what the lanterns were.

“Holy sh— how did that – wow!” Liz said.

Cera shrugged her shoulders, causing her pumpkin sized tits to jiggle, eventually settling to cover her bellybutton. She had them fully wrapped in what looked like bedsheets, but once I understood what they were it was difficult to look away.

I didn’t get caught staring only because Liz approached Cera to see if they were real and Cera’s eyes went wide at her friend’s new pear figure. Standing together, their halves of an exaggerated female figure were even more eye popping.

It occurred to me that Cera hadn’t seen my change yet. I figured this was a great opportunity to show off.

I grabbed my head by both sides and held it forward at arm's length. "Those are bigger than my head!"

Cera looked over at me and freaked out. In addition to screaming, she flailed her arms and managed to slap me. I lost my grip and as I tried to catch my head again I accidentally pushed it forward towards Cera. With all of her jumping around her make-shift top must have worked loose, because a moment later I landed against her collar bone and slipped down her cleavage canyon.

It was quite warm and soft between her breasts. The screaming was even muted. I would have enjoyed it if her boobs hadn't chosen that moment to light up like the sun and blind me.

I was stuck for only a moment before falling down between her breasts to the sheet. With all the movement I was sure I'd slip out of that to the ground, but it stopped in a moment and two hands reached down to pull my head back out.

As the light stopped trying to burn through my eyelids, I tentatively opened them. Liz was staring at me; first looking worried, then pissed.

"Was. That. On. Purpose?"

"Uh..." I said, still trying to process what just happened. "I wanted to scare her. The rest was an accident."

Liz glared daggers at me, then glanced at her now ridiculously endowed friend. I waited for her to toss my head in a bush, but eventually she tucked it under her arm.

"Let's head back," she said. "I don't want my ass hanging out longer than it has to."

With her hand not holding my head, she grabbed my hand and placed it on her rump.

"You can walk behind me so no one gets an eyeful."

As she led me away, I shrugged in the direction I thought Cera was. A moment later she started laughing and followed us.

* * *

2 We only saw a few cars on the way back. At one point we thought we heard some screaming back towards Madam Leombre's house, but none of us wanted to investigate. We were dealing with enough on our own.

Liz's parents were out and wouldn't check up on her when they came home late, so we went there. Just to be sure we weren't observed we went in through the back.

We all noticed my color was off when we turned on the lights. My hair was darker, by skin whiter, and even my clothes looked a bit muted. I was a bit alarmed, but the girls were definitely dealing with 'bigger' issues.

Liz excused herself to hopefully find something to fit her bottom half. Cera and I were left downstairs. I awkwardly looked anywhere but at her. To distract myself from the twin elephants in the room I'd recently become very intimate with, I started taking stock of my own situation.

So I could take my head off. Sometimes it was hard to keep on. As impossible as it sounded, I was able to breathe and speak with my head unattached. Not only that, I could still move my body. The only clues I had were the shadowy thing that ran from my shoulders to the base of my skull and my faded, shadowy color scheme.

Was I part shadow-man now? If it was some sort of shadow stuff in me that allowed that to work, what else could it do?

The first thing I tried was pulling my finger. When that didn't even make me fart, I made a scissor shape with my fingers and pretended to cut one off.

It dropped to the carpet.

I picked it up and looked closely at it and my hand. Where it was cut I could see the bone and muscle, but it wasn't bleeding. On top of it was a misty, shadowy substance. A thin line of shadow ran between my hand and the detached finger. I could still feel through the finger and move it.

"That is so disgusting," Cera said.

I gave her a dirty look, mostly able to look away from her boobs, before sticking my finger back on. It reattached without leaving a mark.

"How'd you manage that light show earlier?" I asked.

She shrugged, which did less to her physique while sitting than it had while standing. "I needed the light and it lit them up."

"It?"

"Yeah, the orb thing that came at me," she said. "It filled me. It's obviously still in there. Mostly I get the sense it's happy to have a home and wants to return the favor."

"And you're okay with it turning you into a blimp?" I asked.

Now she gave me a dirty look. "I'm the same size as ever except for my tits. Anyone gets handsy and I'll blind 'em. Besides, it beats having them fall off."

I flipped her off before standing to get a drink.

I was halfway to the kitchen before she said, "Danny, don't move."

Cera sounded scared enough for me to listen.

"Look down at your shadow."

I did. It was waving its arms at me.

"Huh," I said, waving back.

My shadow mimed clapping, congratulating me for figuring it out.

I signed <Nice to meet you.>

It signed back. <A pleasure. Thanks for volunteering at the graduation.>

“What are you doing?” Cera asked, sounding scared.

“Using something from school I didn’t think I’d ever use,” I said, not looking away from my shadow.

<Are you the one making my head fall off?> I asked it.

Sheepishly, it replied. <Never quite sure how a spirit will interact with a host.>

<So you’re a ghost?>

It nodded. <You agreed to it. Not sure how teacher managed it, but you agreed to help us graduate.>

“Um, so you know those drinks we had?” I asked Cera. “Apparently, that was us agreeing to be ghost hosts.”

“Are you shitting me?” she asked with heat. She looked at her chest. “Is that true? One for yes, two for no.”

Her boobs flashed once, bright enough to definitely be understood without being blinding.

I looked back down at my shadow. <So what do we do now?>

<Save good spirits. Hurt bad spirits. Be awesome.>

“I asked what we’re supposed to do and it said, ‘Save good spirits. Hurt bad spirits. Be awesome.’”

“We didn’t have issues being awesome before,” Liz said from the stairs.

I looked up to see she was wearing a pair of her dad's athletic shorts. They were barely containing her and looked more like a bikini bottom, but she wasn't at risk for indecent exposure. In fact, seeing her legs unobstructed for the first time tonight, I realized her legs didn't look fat. Well, maybe a little fat, but like most of what was underneath was muscle. Which to me meant they were probably the sexiest legs ever.

I chanced a look down at my shadow and it seemed to agree. I wasn't sure if an erection that size was humanly possible, but then again neither was sneezing your head off. I shuffled over to the kitchen so the shadow wasn't as obvious. I disguised the move by grabbing a drink.

"That's pretty much the same as what the note says," Liz said, sitting on the couch. What I mean by sitting on the couch was filling two cushions.

"What note?" Cera asked.

Liz tossed her a folded piece of paper. Cera boggled the catch, but her shelf of boob caught it anyway. She opened it and began to read.

"Congratulations on your new partnerships and introduction into the secret world! Now that you've agreed to be haunted' – I didn't agree to – agh! – 'you have access to the spiritual aspects of the universe. You may have been intuitive before, but with your new spiritual connection all secrets of ghost and haunt alike can be laid bare. Fret not about the logistics of your new life situation: preparations have been made.

"I'm sure you have questions for me. Some can be answered by your new guests. You'll find they're more active and aware at night. Others I will be happy to answer. I hold a group class on the Friday following the first quarter and third quarter moon beginning at sundown. You will not find me at my residence at other times.

“Though your new situations are rife with opportunity, there are of course risks. What you will be able to discern can now discern you. Please feel free to ask me questions and above all, trust your new partners. They are just as much at risk as you.”

“It’s signed ‘*Madam Leombre*,’” Cera said, handing me the note.

“What do you think she means by ‘spiritual aspects of the world’?” I asked, sitting down next to Liz. Rather, I sat against her hip but far enough from the rest of her that I couldn’t put my arm around her.

“That’s obvious,” Liz said. “It’s what I’m always telling you about. There’s things out there nobody will admit they’ve seen. There’s other stuff no one even knows about.”

“Ley lines,” Cera added. “Magic. Ghosts. Bigfoot. UFOs. People try to explain it away but it’s all out there.”

I could feel myself frowning as I read the note. We consented in only the most technical case. It wouldn’t hold up in court – but then, courts didn’t cover forced possession of a minor. Okay, Cera was the only one under 18, but still.

“I say we check out Crybaby Bridge,” Liz said. We’d been there before, but this time we’ll find out EXACTLY what’s out there!”

“Not if I can’t find a better top,” Cera replied. “I’m not going ghost hunting in a tablecloth.”

“Think that’s the sort of logistic she mentioned she’d prepared for?” Liz asked.

“I hope so,” I said, taking a sip. “I don’t want my head rolling out into traffic.”

Cera gave me the stink eye. “At least people won’t think you got a boob job for attention. Tape and a spray tan can fix your problem.”

“Yeah, I’m not going back to school like this,” Liz said, looking down at her legs.

I nodded. She probably wouldn't fit in a desk. Not like Cera would have room to write on hers, either. In fact, neither of them would meet the dress code.

“So we play hooky for a few days,” Cera suggested. “Fake being sick and take that time to figure out our next move.”

“And just hope we figure out what those preparations are?” I asked.

“Does your shadow know about that?” Cera asked.

I shrugged then stood. Liz frowned as I moved to a spot where the lights made my shadow longer. Thankfully, it didn't have an obvious erection anymore.

<The note says preparations have been made to accompany you guys. Know what those are?>

“Oh!” said Liz. “You can sign with your shadow! That's cool!”

I looked up and smiled at her. Yeah, it was pretty cool.

I looked back down and realized I'd missed something. <Sorry, could you repeat that?>

My shadow put his hands on his hips and tapped his foot in irritation before beginning again. <Teacher said she would send out a clothing catalogue and something called i-n-t-e-r-n-e-t school.> He spelled out internet, so I assumed he wasn't familiar with it. He'd be really excited when he found out what was online.

“Clothing catalogue and online school,” I said. Liz could sign – she'd dragged me into the course – but Cera couldn't. I'd sign with Liz occasionally to annoy her, but then they could share a conversation with one look, so we were both annoyed.

“Catalogue?” asked Cera. “What is it – 1950?”

“Please tell me it carries custom sizes,” Liz said.

I relayed the thought to my shadow.

<Magic catalogue. The clothes will fit the person who orders them. They also help your ghost to not be noticeable. Not sure how much it will help the busty one, but teacher said it would cut down on stares.>

When I looked up to relay the information, Liz gave me a subtle smile and shook her head. I guess we could have conversations in a glance, too.

“The catalogue is magic. The clothes will be in the right size. It might help with other things, but he was vague about that.”

Liz gave a subtle nod and wink as Cera said, “It better not be all granny styles. I saw what Madam Leombre was wearing.”

“We’ll see when it gets here,” Liz answered. Then she yawned. “In the meantime, how did you two figure out what your ghosts could do?”

“Danny’s shadow just started waving at him and mine lit up when I needed light,” Cera said. Her boobs flashed once. “That means yes, by the way.”

“So I just wait until I need it?” Liz didn’t look happy with that answer. Knowing Liz, that meant she was probably about to do something crazy.

“Why don’t we all just sleep on it?” I asked, trying to stop her from bringing more craziness down on us. “Maybe you’ll figure it out in the morning.”

“Easy for you to say,” she said. “Cera’s bazookas come with light powers and you can talk to your shadow and remove your head. All I have is a fat ass. I want a cool power, too.”

I almost didn’t notice my shadow waving at me again.

<Her’s is a poltergeist. Have her ask it to move something.>

“Uh, Liz?”

“Oh, because mimicking a flashlight with a feminist’s worst nightmare of a chest is suuuch a cool power,” Cera said. I’d seen fights start like this that ended in weeks of silent treatment.

“Oh please,” Liz yelled, standing. “Like you don’t use them to get extra credit from Mr. Gerver.”

“Liz?”

“You know full well I earn my grades!” Cera said, also standing. Her chest was giving off an angry red glow now.

“Really, guys –”

“Some of us would really like something to actually show off occasionally,” Liz continued, “but all you do is bitch and complain about how sore your back gets.”

“Please –”

“It does get sore!” Cera practically screamed. “And I hate being stared at like all I am is tits. This is the end of me ever having a chance at a real relationship!”

“Liz, please –”

“Have you ever tried not letting guys get to second base on the first date?” Liz said.

Cera looked like Liz slapped her. “You’re only saying that ‘cause your boy-toy can’t keep his eyes off me!”

Liz screamed in frustration and all the light bulbs in the room shattered.

We were all very quiet and still for a moment. The only light was Cera’s chest, which had switched from angry red to a frightened yellow.

“My shadow said your ghost is a poltergeist,” I whispered. “Apparently you can do poltergeist stuff now.”

They both glared at me, then Liz looked afraid. "I did that?"

I nodded.

"Shit," she said, frowning at her hip.

"I'm outta here," Cera said. Her bust glowed sort of an orange now. Angry and scared, or something else?

"Cera, wait," Liz said, knowing she'd gone too far with their argument.

"Good luck with your fat ass and flat chest," Cera said before storming out the front door.

The room was left dark. We both stood there, not knowing what to say.

I moved to hold her, but she pushed me away.

"We're all going to catch hell from our parents tomorrow," she said. "Might as well not give them the idea we're sleeping together."

Over the summer we'd upgraded from making out to having sex. Neither of our parents knew about that, but only because we'd been extra cautious. We never parked anywhere the cops would check and we didn't do it in our rooms unless our parents were out of town. So while what she said made sense, it hurt.

"I'll call you in the morning," I said, then headed to the front door.

I stopped there. "If I wanted her to be my girlfriend, she would be. She's not because I love you, okay?" It was maybe the third time I'd said the 'L' word. She'd said it once.

I couldn't see her in the dark, but after a second I could hear her walk away. I closed the front door softly behind me and went home.

* * *

3 I came home and crashed without my parent's questioning me, but my entire night was a blur of dreams I couldn't remember. I sat in bed for a bit, trying to piece together any of it, when

my mom walked in. My mom took one look at me and thought I'd painted myself. When I said I wasn't feeling well she took my temperature. I didn't feel cold, but the thermometer measured me at about 94°F.

That got my mom fretting, who called my dad, who asked me a bunch of questions over the phone. No, I wasn't doing drugs. No, it wasn't a fashion statement. No, it wasn't a gang initiation. I told them I went to a haunted house and came home, end of story. I admitted Liz and Cera didn't feel great afterward, either, but I didn't extrapolate on their symptoms. My mom called Liz's parents and left a message with Cera's dad. I wasn't in the same room for those conversations, so I'm not sure how much their parents were freaking out.

Eventually my mom forced me to take aspirin and wear several layers to keep warm. Then she left me in bed and went about her day. If I didn't get better we'd head to the doctor, but I wasn't complaining of pain so she was willing to wait a bit first.

I was able to call Liz just before noon. It went to voicemail, so I left a short, vague message. I texted Cera a similar message. It worried me they weren't getting in touch with me. Was all of it a dream? Did something happen to them?

With nothing else I could do, I tried talking to my shadow. I could occasionally make him do something, but it was almost like he was sleepy. It even took effort to take my head off, which surprised me not only because it had been so easy last night but also because in the light of day it was an absurdly weird thing to experience.

After having lunch I checked the mail, keeping my sweater's hood up. Besides a few bills, there was a catalogue I was unfamiliar with and a couple brochures about alternatives to public school. Impressed at how fast the ghost lady worked, I took it all inside and piled it in the usual spot.

It occurred to me that if she was this prepared to help them she probably had done this before. If that was the case, there were probably people talking about it on the internet.

I logged on and tried some searches. 'Ghost,' 'haunted,' and 'possession' were all too generic and didn't give me anything useful. However, when I tried 'Madam Leombre' I hit pay dirt.

There was an obscure chatroom about her. At least half of the people who posted treated her like creepy pasta, but a few experiences people shared were similar to what we were experiencing. One person claimed he couldn't speak in more than a whisper or he risked shattering windows with his voice. Someone else said they could now play with radios and computers without touching them. There were even a couple people who mentioned shadow and light manipulation.

I bookmarked the site for later reference. Liz and Cera needed to see it.

Neither of them had contacted me all day. I expected them to be giving each other the silent treatment, but I'd actually been dreading the venting I usually got from them when that happened. Now the silence just worried me.

I heard my mom pull into the driveway. Remembering I was supposed to be feeling sick, I turned off the computer and poured myself some orange juice. According to my mother, there wasn't much orange juice couldn't fix.

I slipped upstairs before she came in. I had a lot to think about and I didn't much feel like talking to someone who didn't understand.

* * *

It was the next Wednesday before we all got back together. From what Liz told me, both her parents and Cera's dad freaked out at their daughters' physical changes. They separately took

them to the walk-in clinic. Apparently the only reason it wasn't an emergency room situation was because neither of them was in pain. They met up in the waiting room and the two of them – grudgingly – spilled the beans on what happened. My mom called around that time and were able to confirm we visited a haunted house.

The next several days were spent visiting specialists, enduring tense discussions, looking into schooling options, and generally being stressed without actually doing much of anything. Our texts were all superficial, probably just not wanting to get into what we were all going through. I think we all experimented a bit at night, but I know my parents would have flipped if they knew so I had to keep it quiet.

I started calling my shadow Shad. He was curious about everything and we signed late into the night. He came up with the worst jokes which I couldn't help but laugh at. I was right about him liking the internet. I'd show him my favorite sites on my phone then leave YouTube on auto-play while I slept.

Despite trying, we couldn't get Shad to move anything yet. He could stretch into the rest of the house and eavesdrop, though he could only communicate general feelings without coming back to sign. I could leave my ear somewhere and do the same thing, but my ear was more conspicuous than a shadow so we did it his way.

I didn't have any issues scrubbing my back in the shower anymore. Hold your own detached arm and there isn't anything you can't reach.

My coloration didn't shift back, but neither did it get worse. I think I also could see better in the dark, but that may have been wishful thinking. Liz and Cera sounded like they were keeping steady, too.

It was Liz who first convinced her parents to let us all meet up. Her reason was something about social isolation contributing to increased stress and suicide rates or something. Anyway, her parents invited us over for a mid-week pizza party.

* * *

I knocked and the door opened. I walked in and noticed Liz – wow, she was hotter than I remembered with that huge butt – was on the far side of the room, prepping drinks. No one was behind the door. Nothing was tied to the knob.

“Come on in, Danny,” Liz said, smiling.

I whistled. “Been practicing?”

Her grin widened. “I’ve had some time to practice. Could you give me a hand?” She gestured to the table and turned back to setting out cups.

Not able to resist, I detached my hand and tossed it at her backside. No way I’d miss a target that big. It landed on top of her shelf of butt and I managed to snag her back pocket.

She turned and jumped when she saw how far away I still was. I gave her a little pinch and she threw back her head and laughed.

“You’ve been waiting to do that, haven’t you?”

I shrugged in mock bashfulness.

She laughed again as she looked back at my hand, holding onto her Thing style.

I closed in to hug her and she leaned into it. “God, I’ve needed a laugh.”

“Me, too,” I said, keeping her close.

We stayed close for a moment. Maybe there was something to her talk about social isolation.

She broke away first and handed my hand back. “To be honest I’ve been pinched and prodded enough back there for one week. Could you not for a bit?”

“Sure, of course,” I said, even though I wanted nothing more than to rip off her new pants and feel her up. I’d be patient, but if she sat on my detached hand later and I had to let her know what she was on by giving her a little pinch, that wouldn’t totally be my fault, right?

Instead I kept my hand at her waist – attached to the rest of me – and assisted her in making the pizza party for three close friends look as extravagant as possible. Sometimes I don’t get girls.

A bit later there was a knock. I felt Liz sort of flex and the door opened. There stood Cera ... looking completely normal.

Like no behemoth chest. No glowing. Exactly like she did a month ago.

“You got the glamor to work!” Liz yelled, running in to hug her friend. She ran into something a foot before it looked like she should.

Right, light powers. She could craft illusions now.

“Yeah, still working out how not to touch things with ‘em,” Cera said, hugging her friend back. The apparently empty space between their hug was awkward to see, but at least no one was looking at her ‘feminist’s nightmare’ boobs. I still didn’t see the issue. Mostly I was disappointed I couldn’t see huge boobs or touch my girlfriend’s butt right now.

Liz walked Cera in and – now that I knew to look for it – I saw her twitch her butt a little to close the door behind them. They started their rapid-fire chatting, so I grabbed a slice and a seat.

As I munched on my pizza in the corner, I heard about every third word as they talked about what else they could do with illusions like that. I glanced over at my shadow. He looked

frustrated. The more we interacted, the more I thought of Shad as my Id. He was so dang excitable. If traffic made me feel upset he'd be thrashing around and making rude gestures. If I saw a sexy lady he'd have his eyes pop out like a cartoon character, to say nothing of the massive erections he kept showing off.

Reflecting on it, I was a shadow of my former self – pun intended. I don't think I was ever super angry or weepy or happy, but I was definitely less so now. It wasn't like I didn't feel anything – my parents had asked all sorts of questions about me having depression. They were even considering sending me to a shrink.

No, I wasn't depressed. I was subdued. Perhaps a better way to say it would be –.

“Alright,” Liz said, standing. “Make my tits huge.”

Obviously, I should have been following that conversation more closely. Shad and I glued our eyes to my girlfriend.

Cera sat up straight, took a good look at Liz, then closed her eyes. Her fingers twitched a little and there was a little glow around her chest. Then suddenly my girlfriend had huge boobs.

Like bowling ball sized. Cera had changed her top, too. It was black, had a cutesy little poison symbol under the dipping cleavage, and was ripped off above her belly button. She hadn't seen fit to give Liz a bra. I could tell because the underboob she was showing off to me as I sat was absolutely fantastic.

Cera opened her eyes and nodded at her fine work. Liz turned toward me with that bedroom look and struck a pose. Her hips were as curvaceous as ever and were now matched by an unbelievable set of knockers.

Leaning forward and using her best dusky, sultry voice, Liz asked, “Like what you see?”

I was ready to grab her, drag her up to her bedroom caveman style, and make her feel like a woman. Instead, I pointed over to where I knew my shadow was doing something to show our absolute fucking approval.

Liz looked over at Shad, her mouth and eyes opened wide, then she threw back her head and laughed. I was curious as to what he was doing, but not curious enough to look away from the luscious spectacle standing before me. I could track the blood heading to regions south, but couldn't put together a coherent sentence to save my life.

"Wow," I said.

Liz stood there, looking sexy and in charge, and I could tell that perhaps for the first time since we were haunted that she felt beautiful.

Cera must have felt jealous at the attention, because she stood up and a moment later she was not only her newly busty self, but her hips were doing a Coke bottle impression.

Now I could only look between the two of them. Cera hadn't 'turned off' Liz's illusion, so they were both outrageously hourglass figured. Cera was the bustier of the two, but she hadn't given herself as much through the hips and thighs. I was sure there was a good reason for that, but thoughts were hard to come by at that particular moment.

Liz looked Cera over, then did that little reverse-nod thing. I'd seen them end arguments and fights with that little gesture. Something clicked between them right then. I'd predicted they'd fight for weeks after their last row, but I guess they'd worked through things quicker. Maybe they should sit in doctor's waiting rooms more often.

The way they both looked over at me, it felt like they were both ready to pounce. I wasn't sure I could trust my gut reaction. This was too much of a fantasy come true. I found myself looking between the two of them, thoughts becoming harder and harder to come by.

They both looked off to the side and started laughing, completing the moment. I looked over this time. Shad had his massive erection again and was doing hip thrusts. Somehow, he was waving a cowboy hat above his head and making lasso motions at the two of them. I thought it was corny, but apparently the girls thought it was hilarious.

“You got garlic chicken?” Cera asked, letting the illusions fade away.

“Of course,” Liz said, coming over to sit on my lap. I hadn’t really had the chance to check before, but apparently ghosts were filling but not at all heavy. She was firmer than her weight suggested she should be. She wasn’t flabby or hard, but instead was the firm, pillowy best of all worlds. She smiled at me as she felt my appreciation beneath her.

I hugged her upper half and smiled back.

“So, Liz,” Cera said, “do you find you’re hungry after doing a bunch of ghost stuff?”

“A bit,” she answered, settling in. “I haven’t really done much heavy lifting, but when I ‘poltergeist’ stuff for a while I do get peckish.”

“What about you, Danny?”

I shrugged. “A little. Not sure how much energy it takes to pull my head off, but I haven’t left it off for very long.”

“Is that the only thing you can do still?” Liz asked.

I rolled my eyes. “Well, Shad over there can do a bunch.”

They looked over at him again and I could tell they were suppressing giggles. Whatever he was doing now I didn’t want to know.

Partly to upstage him and partly because I’d wanted to do it for a while, I pulled my head off and set it in Liz’s lap, looking up at her. “It has a few uses, but none are as flashy as yours.”

With a chuckle she began running her fingers through my hair. “But it is rather handy.”

I dropped my hand in her lap. That earned another full bellied laugh.

Cera picked up the hand and took a few steps away. “I can’t understand why you keep leaving parts of yourself around. Anyone could pick it up and not give it back.”

She stood there, pizza in one hand and my hand dangling from her fingers by the wrist, mocking me with the challenge of keep-away. *What is this, middle school?* I looked up at Liz, who looked back at me with a little grin. “Well, what are you going to do about it?” She didn’t move from where she was sitting. They were serious about this.

I placed my head back on my shoulders. It was too disorienting still to move around without my head on. Then I wiggled my detached hand around a little. It did what I told it to do. At that point I started popping my knuckles. I can’t do them all one-handed, but Cera hates the sound.

“Ew,” she said, dropping my hand to the floor.

I moved to get up, but Liz settled in harder and I didn’t have the leverage to lift us both. So instead, I started crawling my hand toward where I was sitting.

Cera put her foot on top of it: not hard enough to hurt, but I wasn’t lifting her with the power in my fingers.

“You two are going to be like that, huh?” I asked.

“Like what?” Liz asked. She and Cera gave me the most angelic grins – unless you saw the devil peeking out of their eyes.

Fine.

I put on my game face. I raised my stump arm up and brandished it like a magic wand. When I waved it around a bit, I almost could feel the thin line of shadow stretching from wrist to hand. I jerked on it and my hand pulled some of the way out from under Cera’s foot.

I grinned, then imagined that line of shadow was a rubber band. My hand snapped back to my arm, reattaching seamlessly.

Liz gave a polite golf clap while Cera looked dumbfounded. I stuck my tongue out at her.

She gave me the evil eye back, then closed her eyes in concentration. A giant hand appeared in the air and flipped me off.

I looked over at Shad. <Are we going to just take that?>

<Nope,> he signed.

I made a fist, pointed my whole arm at Cera, then imagined a giant spring in my wrist.

“Pew.”

My fist shot off my arm. It didn’t go all that fast, but it still went in a straight line.

Right for the biggest target on Cera.

It bounced off the inside of one boob up into the air. She managed to catch it, shock written all over her face.

Liz gave me a sideways glance, but she was enjoying the show too much to voice objection. Or maybe she wanted this to happen, but didn’t want me dumping her for her best friend. I was dating Liz, but she shared so much with Cera it almost seemed possible they would share me, too.

“That’s it,” Cera said. “You’re going in timeout, mister.”

She followed that statement by shoving my hand down her shirt.

Not just into her cleavage. No, she pushed my hand *deep* into her top, sliding my hand across feet of skin until it was underneath her breast near her nipple, trapped by the mass of flesh and her taxed bra.

All I could do was stare. I could see a bump in the fabric of her shirt where my hand was and I could feel the soft skin and firm breast through my fingers, but I was also very aware of my girlfriend sitting on my lap. I still wasn't thinking perfectly, but I could tell things could either get very pleasant or very ugly at any moment.

I decided to try getting my hand back first. Thinking of the rubber band, I tried pulling my hand back like last time. It came toward me, but pulled Cera's bra and the rest of her along with it. She stumbled forward and ran chest first into me and Liz.

The three of us stayed very still for a moment. On my lap was my girlfriend, her thick thighs and luscious ass pressing down on my very excited crotch. On my right side was the rest of her, her normal-sized torso as lovely as ever and accentuating how incredibly flared her hips were. On my left was the biggest pair of breasts I'd ever seen, pressed into me firmly with my unattached hand now placed partly over her areola. Slightly above those was the face of a cute girl who'd been best friends with my girlfriend longer than I'd known either of them. I'd like to think we were friends now, too, but neither of us had ever significantly flirted with the other.

Beautiful busty girl on my left, amazing sexy girlfriend on my right, and me stuck in the middle. Well, I had two hands, didn't I?

I raised my right hand to Liz's breast and began to gently knead it. With my left hand I began stroking Cera's nipple. They both started breathing heavily. Liz began grinding into me lightly. Cera pushed her bust up into my face.

Some loud steps on the stairs made us all jump away.

When Liz's dad came through the door, Cera was grabbing another slice of pizza and Liz was standing and faking a stretch. I put my left arm down by my side and hope no one noticed my missing hand. It would be awkward to explain at the moment.

“I hope I’m not interrupting anything,” he said, heading for the pizza.

“No daddy, just a lull in conversation,” Liz said.

As he stacked a couple slices on his plate I could tell he was working hard to not look at Cera’s rack. Kind of a pervy move for an adult, but they were pretty hypnotic. I decided I could get away with some mischief. I pinched Cera’s boob.

She jumped a little and made the slightest of whines. Liz and her dad looked at Cera, wondering what was wrong.

She was already red in the face from our brief make-out session, but I swear she turned even redder. She turned away from Liz’s dad began munching on a slice of pizza. At least moaning because the pizza was good was semi-plausible.

I looked over and noticed Liz was looking at me funny. Not ha-ha-funny, but I-know-what-you-did-last-summer mixed with you’re-a-mad-genius kind of funny. Then she gave me the smallest of smiles.

Liz’s dad was just turning to leave when Cera gave another little yip. He turned and looked back at her again, mostly at her face, and asked, “Is everything okay?”

“Pretty sure she just has the hiccups,” Liz said, straight faced without a hint of mirth.

“If you’re sure,” he said, then left.

We all waited a moment to listen to him climb the last of the stairs. At that point, Liz and I started laughing while Cera yanked my hand out of her bra and threw it at me. I pulled it to my wrist without issue.

“Seriously?” she asked us. “You both trying to embarrass me to death?”

“Wait, what did you do?” I asked Liz.

She shrugged. “You had the top covered so I got the bottom.” The wicked glint in her eye told me it was it a particularly sensitive ‘bottom’ area, though I wasn’t sure if she meant front or back.

I stopped laughing when I saw Cera close her eyes in concentration.

A moment later I found myself naked except for my boxer shorts. I mean, we’ve all had that dream of showing up to school in your underwear, but I wasn’t ever all that body shy. Not sure how Cera knew so well what I looked like without clothes, but her illusion was pretty accurate.

I looked over at Liz and my jaw dropped. Not totally off, thankfully, but it nearly hit my chest.

She was standing there in nothing but an itsty-bitsy yellow polka dot bikini. Well, the top was itsy-bitsy, but the bottom was proportional, so it showed comparatively a lot. That said, there was probably more fabric on the back side than my boxers.

Over the summer we went swimming a couple times, but Liz always wore a one-piece swimsuit. She had fair skin and apparently it was more goth to wear a one-piece anyway, so this was the first time I’d seen her in something so skimpy.

She was a vision of heaven.

Her skin was soft and inviting. Her breasts were perky and full. Her waist and stomach were trim and pinched. Her thighs were shapely and long. Her hips just screamed ‘I’m ready for babies!’

Her first impulse was to cover up, but because that was obviously Cera’s desired reaction Liz instead struck a pose, one hand on her thrust out hip and the other in the air. She definitely

was blushing in embarrassment, but she wasn't going to let her friend upstage her in front of her boyfriend.

This is exactly why I'm for healthy levels of competition.

Cera looked between us, obviously not getting the payback she wanted and instead began blushing again.

"Dang this is making me hungry," she said, dropping the illusions.

"Then how about we finish the pizza and head to my bedroom?" Liz asked.

Yeah, this party was definitely curing my social isolation.

* * *

4 Two days after the pizza party of the century, we were all walking back to the old house where all our troubles started. Cera was the one to point out the first quarter moon was the night before we all got to second base with each other in Liz's room. We decided it was a good idea to attend the meeting just to see what they'd be like. We pitched it to our parents as a support group and they agreed.

As we rounded the last corner towards the house, we saw two other people head into the house. One figure was so tall it could only be the girl we saw leaving when we first arrived. The other person, much shorter but several times as thick, must be her friend. They'd also found clothes that fit. They headed in without seeing us.

"Think I'll be the only guy there?" I asked, feeling a little left out.

"Danny, let's just keep it to the three of us for now," Liz said, giving me a wink.

Cera snorted a bit, her smile not quite hidden. Yeah, we had a good thing going and I didn't want to ruin it.

"How do you know I didn't want to have some guy friends for once?"

“Because you’d end up being their punching bag,” Cera said.

Liz gave her a playful shove. “He can hold his own with the two of us, so he’s plenty manly in my book.”

I couldn’t help but puff out my chest a little at the compliment. True, before I’d started dating Liz I was given a few swirlies, but I’d grown a few inches since then. That and I could probably get them to shit their pants by taking off my head. Besides, keeping two girls pleased at once was considered manly, so however much I might suck at fighting I was still a stud.

We reached the door and it opened before we could knock. Madame Leombre stood there, looking years younger, now wearing an obnoxiously bright Hawaiian shirt and khaki shorts. After getting used to Cera, I was surprised I still thought her volleyball sized breasts were big.

“Welcome, welcome,” she said, waving us in. “There’s time for refreshments before the meeting starts and no – there’s no strings attached this time.”

Cera let their illusions drop at that moment, revealing they’re incredibly sexy selves as we all stepped inside. As we did, I swear Madame Leombre gave my shadow a nod. Apparently she knew her former students well.

We headed through the hall and to a large sitting room I hadn’t been in before. Folding chairs were set out in two rows of semicircles facing two armchairs. Including us, there were almost two dozen people. Most of the chairs were already full, but there were three in the front seemingly waiting for us.

Instead, Liz headed toward a table in the corner holding some hors d’oeuvres. Cera followed. I knew Liz – despite her stunning looks and open personality – was often nervous at

parties and liked to do something with her hands. Holding a plate of snacks probably counted. Cera would have just been hungry from maintaining our illusions.

Deciding I would trust there not being any strings attached, I followed. I gave the ‘Welcome Haunts’ banner a brief glance, then turned to watch the room.

The two girls we saw enter before us were sitting quietly in the front row. Dang, the tall girl was nearly my height while sitting. The muscled girl was trying to make herself seem as small as possible and was failing. Her biceps put our linebackers to shame, much less her shoulders and back. It was like a bull trying to hide behind a fence post.

The people filling the back row were mostly chatting like old friends. There was a lady in a white dress with icicles forming on her chair. Everyone seemed to keep their distance from her without giving her the cold shoulder. An absolutely emaciated woman would occasionally speak up through a mouthful of snacks, which she ate constantly. I watched as a heavy set dude began floating out of his chair before burping and settling back down. One guy’s hair kept changing colors and occasionally things he gestured at would light up like neon. A high school girl with moving hair was laughing at everything while an even younger kid sat with his eyes glued to his cell phone. I didn’t think anything of it until he presented it to the group and talked *through* it. They all laughed at the funny voice he used.

Another guy, a little older than the rest, hung back and just watched everyone else. He sat with a notebook and pen on his lap and occasionally jotted something down. He gave a bit of a stalker vibe to me, but nobody seemed to care.

When I stopped looking at the oddities of the individuals and looked at the group as a whole, I realized they were acting like anyone else. Those with physical changes from their hauntings and those with uncomfortable side effects all talked and laughed like any other group

of happy people I'd ever seen. There was no judging anyone else for being a freak: we all were, so we were in good company.

That realization made me smile.

Liz bumped me with her hip then handed me a plate of treats. Cera led the way to the front with the three chairs grouped together. I followed, munching on a brownie.

We hadn't been sitting long when Madam Leombre strode to the front of the group and waved for silence.

"Welcome back, Haunts," she said. "I know many of you haven't seen each other for a spell, but there are also several new faces here and I have some announcements before we get to the socializing." She only had to wait a moment for the talking to subside.

"We're a month past the equinox, so be prepared for an increase in activity. Halloween is less than two weeks away. Those of you who don't know what that means need to STAY HOME and not invite anything or anyone inside from sunset to sunrise. The rest of you, as always graveyard duty is voluntary, but we could use extra hands this year."

The icicle lady raised her hand and asked, "Are we expecting the Hunt again?"

Madam Leombre shook her head. "No, not on a third quarter moon, but I expect some of the usual suspects will step in to fill the void."

The man with the notebook raised his hand. She gestured to him, but instead of speaking he held his notebook up to the floating fat guy.

"Tim says, 'Will we be covering just Willowbrook or Saint Mary's, too?'"

"Both, unfortunately," Leombre said. "Seward is dealing with some things out of town, so I need a few people there."

A few people raised their hands and muttered about being available.

“Tim, Avery, and Tate can handle Saint Mary’s,” she said. “I’ll be able to come by if anything comes up, but he has those spirits fairly demure.”

The buff girl raised her hand.

“Yes, Katie?”

“What happens on Halloween?”

Madam Leombre sighed, then said, “Halloween is the spiritual beginning of Winter, when the land and heavens are darkest and the majority of spirits are most active. All sorts of beings – ranging from the merely mischievous to the truly malignant – treat it as ‘opening night’ for the season. You’re all part of the occult community now, so with your newfound power is also risk during such turbulent times.

“You’re under no obligation to help. I’ll give you ways to protect your home and you’ll be safe there. As new as you are, that’s the best course of action. For those with more experience, I’m asking that you take *some* risk to help protect other people.”

Liz raised her hand. “What if we were already involved in the occult community?”

Madame Leombre gave her a half smile. “I heard you’ve been into a few bookshops, but that’s a far cry from proficiency with your spirit partner.”

“We’ve been practicing quite a bit,” Cera added. “We might surprise you with what we can do.”

Madame Leombre stepped to the side and gestured to the front. “We usually have newcomers introduce themselves at meetings, so why don’t we move to that part of the meeting?”

Cera shrugged in a very distracting way and stood up. Liz followed suit, so I rose as well.

Usually, I get stage fright when I'm called to present class projects, much less demonstrate occult abilities in front of strangers. However, I wasn't nearly as nervous as I would have normally been. The dulled emotions I kept experiencing had a silver lining.

Liz opened her mouth to go first, but Cera's boobs lit up before she could. She quickly turned the brightness up until I had to look away. When it finally died down, I looked back and saw a stranger standing where Cera had. The stranger was about the same height, but was black and lean as a long distance runner. She was wearing a leopard print dress and had dreadlocks pulled back into a loose bun.

The stranger spoke with Cera's voice. "I'm Cera. I'm working on a few other things, but that's probably my flashiest trick." She let the illusion fade and bowed to some polite applause.

Liz stepped forward at that point. She thrust her hip sideways and pushed Cera out of the way a little. Then she looked past the group and squinted. A plate of cookies lifted off the treat table and sped towards her. Liz paused it briefly to let the constantly snacking girl grab a few before levitating it next to herself. She said, "I'm Liz," before one flew up to her mouth and she took a bite.

The group clapped some more and Liz tried an awkward curtsy. As she did, the plate wobbled and started falling. I reached out without thinking, even though I was definitely too far away to reach it. My hand shot out and snagged it before I hit the floor.

More applause erupted then. I smiled and pulled my hand back. I went too fast and got pelted with cookies when my hand reattached to my wrist. That earned a laugh as I sheepishly grinned. Everyone started clapping again and I could sense Shad doing something to earn that. I didn't look at him, but I saw Liz and Cera smiling at his antics. "I'm Danny, by the way."

I was surprised to see Madame Leombre giving us a hand along with everyone else. Her expression seemed to grant approval. She nodded to each of us in turn before gesturing at our seats.

As we sat down, she said, “So that’s three of the five new Haunts present. You have a solid start with your new powers, so I won’t forbid you from helping at the graveyard.” Cera pumped her fist. “I will warn you that having your first graveyard duty on Halloween is truly akin to learning to swim in the deep end. I’d still caution against it.

“While we’re showing off a little, why don’t you two show us what you know.”

The buff girl and tall girl glanced nervously at each other, then stood and walked to the front. The tall one had to duck her head to avoid brushing the ceiling. As I watched, she reached out an arm toward the fallen cookies. It was a long arm, but I swore it stretched as it went. She gathered up a few of the cookies. Then she reached across the room, at least thirty feet, to dump them in the trash. I clapped along with the rest and she smiled a little from behind her long hair.

When she didn’t say anything, her friend chirped up. “This is Karley. I’m Katie.” Then she stepped over towards the piano. She knelt next to it then lifted the side of it a foot off the ground with one finger. I’m pretty sure she didn’t even flex. Heck, she looked like she could bench press my car, so this probably was that easy for her. We clapped along for her, too.

They sat and Madame Leombre stood in front of them. “I won’t forbid you either, but the same warning applies.”

She turned back to the room at large. “With Saint Mary’s covered and the rest of the volunteers at Willowbrook, I suppose all the important information is announced. Go ahead and mingle.”

Chatter broke out all around us. The super-thin girl began introducing herself to Cera while the fat guy introduced himself to Katie, the buff girl. Liz and I looked at each other, both happy with how things were going. Then the silent creeper-vibe guy tapped her on the shoulder.

He held up his pad of paper. *Welcome to the Haunts.*

“Thanks,” Liz said. “I’m sorry to ask, but why are you writing things down? Is something wrong with your voice?”

He flipped toward the back of the pad. *I’m haunted by a banshee, so even when I whisper it hurts people’s ears.*

“Do you sign?” I asked, using sign language while I spoke.

His face lit up in a grin and he tucked the pad under his arm. <I do! No one else here does, though, so I just have to use the paper.>

<Not anymore,> Liz signed. <Me, Danny, and his shadow Shad can all sign.>

<I started learning as soon as this happened,> he said. <I don’t get to use it often.>

Liz started saying something back, but a tap on my shoulder distracted me.

“Hey, I’m Skye,” the guy with the color-changing hair said. “That’s some sick shadow you have.”

“Thanks, he’s got a mind of his own.”

“Yeah, they’re all like that. Some are more independent than others.” He coughed in his hand like he was nervous. “So, I gotta ask; I saw you come in with two girls and I was wondering if that means you’re all just friends or dating.”

I gave him a confused look and he continued. “I mean, you all look like best buds but you can’t really tell these days. As you might expect, there’s limited dating opportunities once you’re

haunted. How do you explain why you always have to wear a beanie even inside? Better to keep in the community, know what I'm saying?"

"Yeah, that occurred to me," I said before he kept on talking.

"Exactly! So, I was wondering if it might be my lucky day. Not only are there new people, but someone's haunt complements my own really well and I was just hoping..."

When he clammed up I answered. "I'm not sure what she'd say, but if you don't ogle her boobs Cera might--"

"No, silly," he said, punching my shoulder. "Light and light is like a jelly and jelly sandwich. I was talking about you."

I stopped there with my mouth open, not knowing what to say. People had assumed I was gay before, but no guy had ever come up and hit on me. It was just so unexpected.

He paused, cocked his head, and asked, "So, you aren't--"

"Nope."

"And they aren't--"

"Not last I checked."

Then he gestured at my face. "What's with the make-up?"

I shrugged. "The eyeliner's a goth thing. The rest is from my haunt."

"Really?"

"Yeah, Liz is my girlfriend," I said.

He looked a bit crestfallen. Poor guy: I'd put myself out there a couple times before hooking up with Liz so I knew a bit of what he was feeling. That didn't mean I knew what to say to make him feel better.

"Well, uhm, if anyone asks, could you not talk about this?"

“Are you still in the closet?” I asked.

“No, I’m out, but they’ll take away my gay card if they knew I’d mistakenly thought you were gay.”

“Lips are sealed,” I said, miming zipping them shut. “Should I send them your way if someone makes that mistake again?”

He laughed a little. It sounded forced. “No, but go ahead and tell me. I like to make the first move.”

“You got it, Skye.”

He patted my shoulder again and went off to the refreshment table to stick something besides his foot in his mouth.

I turned back when I heard Liz laughing. I frowned. It would not be the cool kind of ironic if someone stole my girlfriend while a guy was hitting on me. I put my hand on her thigh and she squeezed my hand briefly. Reassured, I relaxed a bit. Tim was probably just excited to be able to talk with someone for once. Liz wouldn’t admit it, but she felt bad for the awkward types and, honestly, that probably played into how we began dating.

That realization made me jealous again.

Deciding I was – probably – being unreasonable, I stood and walked over to the kid with the phone.

“Hi, I’m Danny.”

He held his phone up while looking at his feet. “Hello. I’m Jim,” the phone said. He made it sound like that AI from the Marvel movies. He might still be in Jr. High, but he had a good sense of taste.

“Cool trick,” I said. “Can you do that with any phone?”

My phone beeped, announcing I had a text. That was odd, because I kept it on silent. I pulled it out and checked.

Yes, it said, but it helps if I'm familiar with the software.

I looked up at him and said, "I bet you're fantastic at video games."

His smile was huge and he looked up about as high as my chest before looking back at his feet.

"Making a new friend?" someone asked.

I turned to see who I thought was his sister. Her hair was currently braiding itself into a long tail. My first assumption of her being in high school seemed correct, though now I placed her as an underclassman.

"Yeah, Jim was just showing me what he can do," I said.

"Do you play Duty Calls?" Jim's phone asked.

"Fair warning, he's been obsessed with that game," she said. "I'm Megan, by the way."

"I'm Danny, but then you already heard me introduce myself." Her hair was red and really shiny. I felt myself drawn to look at that as much as Jim's gaze was drawn to the floor.

"Yeah, that was really cool what you did with your hand."

"That's nothing," I said before pulling off my head.

There were a couple of satisfying gasps from around the room, so I made a face to let them know everything was good. Megan giggled and Jim had a huge smile.

I put my head back in place just as Liz walked up beside me.

"Hi, I'm Liz," she said. I felt a little ill at ease, but I wasn't sure why.

"I'm Megan, this is Jim," Megan said back, still all smiles.

After a short, awkward pause I said, “My Duty Calls character has to be way lower than yours, but if you don’t mind having a noob on your team hit me up. You already proved you can contact me.”

Jim gave me a thumbs up and I felt my phone get another text.

I waved a little as Liz pulled me one way and they went off another. She guided me back towards Cera, who was watching us with a little grin.

“Give an inch, take a mile, huh?” she asked.

“Seriously, if I’d known you’d want to bring someone else in so soon I never would have suggested adding Cera,” Liz said, her words venom.

I looked between them, confusion giving way to understanding. “You thought I was flirting with her?”

Their frowns confirmed my question.

I’d been in similar situations before, mostly just with Liz, where there was a perfectly harmless explanation for something that looked wrong but wasn’t. More than once I’d just dug myself in deeper because I don’t generally speak well under pressure.

Options raced through my head: she’d think my conversation with Jim was just a front to flirt with his sister, and no doubt pulling off my head was interpreted as flirting. Liz had been all bubbly while signing with that older guy, but she’d just ignore that. The harder I argued the more she was sure to dig in her heels to believe I was considering cheating on her. To argue the point was futile and to ignore it was tacit confirmation in her eyes. The only thing I’d ever thought of to get out of this kind of mess was somehow getting her to talk about things later when her blood wasn’t boiling and her mind wasn’t made up. The problem was finding something stronger than her current anger to distract her until she was thinking more clearly.

When the solution occurred to me, I had to stop myself from smiling.

“So the dude with the color changing hair thought I was gay.”

They both looked stunned, so I continued. “Apparently I look like I have make-up on. Besides some eyeliner I don’t, but he thought I did because of my new complexion. So he started hitting on me. Also, he thinks you two are dating.”

They looked at each other. I couldn’t say for certain, but their shared look made me think they’d at least thought about it. I was also a little hurt they didn’t immediately assure me I don’t look gay, but asserting my manhood wasn’t my priority at the moment.

Things were going well so far, so I decided to continue. “I let him down as easy as possible, then I went to talk with the kid that talks through his cell phone. We started talking about gaming – which I’m sure he’s incredible at because of his haunting – and then his sister interrupted.”

“And you began showing off for her,” Liz said crossly.

“I was showing off for Jim!” I whispered back. “Do you know how hard it is to get on a decent server when you’re as bad as I am at FPS games?”

She looked at me nonplused, then glanced over at Cera. Cera shrugged.

Liz sighed. “So you definitely weren’t showing off for another girl when your girlfriend just brought someone else into the relationship?”

“Definitely doing no such thing.”

“And you never will, right?” Cera asked.

I crossed my heart.

Cera snorted in response. “Let’s get out of here.”

Liz and I followed her towards the front door. Madam Leombre met us there.

“Nice group you have here,” Liz said, trying to walk past her. Neither of their girths made that easy.

“I just want to repeat my warning about Halloween,” she said. “I strongly caution you to just stay home that night.”

“Yeah, well, if it was so dangerous you shouldn’t have gotten us haunted,” Cera said.

The way Madame Leombre looked at us then made me feel like she could rip us to pieces. I decided then and there that if it ever came down to it, I’d risk the combined wrath of Liz and Cera before crossing that woman.

We all wilted a little under her stare. She eventually continued at a quiet, even pace. “Your demonstrations today showed me you have a modicum of control of your still *very* limited power. Out in the world there are things far more powerful, infinitely skilled, and older than you can comprehend. Halloween is a time they *will* be looking to make mischief. That I would accept your presence with me at Willowbrook is a show of trust in you. That said, even your homes aren’t perfectly safe. There’s a world of wonderful things you can’t yet imagine. The unfortunate truth is that there are nearly as many terrifying nightmares. Heed my warnings and I’ll show you how to protect yourselves while opening your eyes to the spectacular.”

We stood there for a few seconds after she finished. I couldn’t look her in the eyes. Liz was fidgeting and Cera was shifting her weight between her feet every few seconds. There was a history teacher at school, Mr. Therson, who had a stare that could make you squirm right out of your skin. I was starting to suspect he’d learned it from her, because Madam Leombre put him to shame.

“Have a pleasant evening,” she said. “Safe travels.”

* * *

5 “Turn left up here.”

I signaled and turned onto another two-lane road. It had been years since I'd been out to Crybaby Bridge, so Liz was navigating for me. It was the night after the meeting. While I think we all felt relieved we weren't alone as freaks, Liz and Cera seemed on edge about Halloween. They loved haunted houses and everything spooky, but there was an understanding that all the fake stuff was mostly safe. Even the reportedly real supernatural phenomena they'd looked into had mostly been harmless creepypasta.

With Madam Leombre's warning, we didn't have that assurance anymore. Ghosts were definitely real and hauntings were life changing. If she said Halloween was actually dangerous, then it probably was.

Mostly that left me vaguely scared. Cera was angry, or at least hiding her fear with anger at Madam Leombre's 'high and mighty bullshit'. Liz was torn between trepidation and a stubborn streak that didn't like being told she couldn't do something. That said, none of us had a clue what being in a graveyard on All Hallow's Eve as a Haunt would be like. Between the three of us, we'd decided to learn more about it. Liz wanted to network with Tim and some of the others, but Cera didn't want to look weak after putting us out there at the meeting. I suggested we could give ourselves a smaller test. Somebody mentioned Crybaby Bridge and all three of us agreed it was probably safer than the graveyard, so that's where we were heading.

The interstate ran parallel to the highway with the old bridge, so most people took that. Disrepair and a couple tight turns made the highway much slower. It wasn't abandoned, but we hadn't seen anyone else on the road for a few minutes.

“How can it be haunted by a woman if it's called 'Crybaby Bridge'?” I asked.

Liz rolled her eyes. She and Cera had had this discussion before. “The story says that after she tossed her baby in the creek, she regretted her decision and ran around to rescue the baby. She couldn’t find it, but kept hearing its cries. She’s haunting it, but what gets projected is her guilt and grief as represented by the crying baby she can’t find.”

I nodded. I still thought that since it was the baby that died there, it must be the baby that was haunting the spot. Liz’s explanation seemed too convoluted. It wasn’t like they even knew who the lady was or when this happened.

Or if it happened at all.

She instructed me to pull off the road. I did so gingerly as my suspension had seen better days. Once I turned the car off the silence set in. The weather was mild for autumn. The sky was fading from violet to black and stars were twinkling in the stillness. All three of us kept quiet for a moment. All the banter, all the bravado, all the clinical examination of the phenomena at the bridge seemed hollow as we sat in darkness and silence. To me, at least, it seemed like a warning.

Cera’s bra creaked and the moment was broken.

“You got the backpack?” Liz asked.

“Yup,” Cera replied.

I took off my seatbelt while they exited the car. Voicing doubts when they were this enthusiastic about something was futile. Usually, it ended up turning out well. Hopefully this time wouldn’t be an exception.

While I grabbed the camera, the two of them started off towards the bridge. It was Liz’s parent’s camera, an old film one I barely knew how to use. We had our phones, but she thought it was good to cover our bases with different media and I couldn’t think of a counter argument.

I checked Shad before closing the door. Our empathic link was stronger in total darkness, but for clear communication I needed a little light to see him sign. He seemed nervous, holding himself with his arms and looking back and forth like he thought he was being followed. I could feel he was nervous about this. I couldn't tell if it was because he knew something or because of some extra sense that I didn't have was warning him. When I asked what was up, he either didn't notice or ignored me. That got me a little spooked.

Liz and Cera were way ahead at this point. I went ahead and snapped a photo, partially for the investigation and partly because they both looked fantastic in motion, before hurrying to catch up.

“Did you feel that?” Liz asked.

Cera just looked around like she was trying to spot the source of a sound. I noticed they'd just crossed a change in the concrete, a line marking the end of the road and the beginning of the bridge. Was the bridge really the only thing haunted? To test it out, I decided not to cross just yet.

They continued looking around, hardly paying me any attention. I snapped a couple more photos, trying to look busy instead of looking like I was waiting for a ghost to attack the girls. Cera in particular looked agitated, but Liz was quickly pointing her flashlight at every little sound she heard. I couldn't hear or feel anything peculiar, so I readied myself and crossed onto the bridge.

The change was immediately noticeable. For starters, it was easily ten degrees colder. The wind felt stronger than it had a second before. More unnerving was the faint sound of laughter coming every which way. It was a woman's laugh, straight out of an asylum. Occasionally the laughter would turn to sobs, which somehow sounded less insane.

When the three of us reached the middle of the bridge, the wind died down. We stopped there, standing close together. Between the glow of Cera's breasts – a mildly fearful yellow – and Liz's flashlight beam my night vision wasn't clear. Even through my emotional fog I could feel some outside force imposing fear and despair on us.

The laughter and sobs stopped. We stood there, wondering what happened next, when suddenly there was a woman standing at the far end of the bridge. I snapped a quick photo. Liz pointed her flashlight at her and when the light touched the figure she disappeared. We all looked around, unsure where she went.

I was facing away from her when Liz screamed.

When I turned, I saw the crazed, spectral woman choking her from behind. She'd dropped her flashlight, but Liz telekinetically picked it up and threw it at the ghost. It passed right through her, but the light seemed to hurt. She hissed, shifted her grip, and continued to choke Liz.

Cera ran up at that point and turned her boobs up to eleven. I had to look away, but Liz's coughing made me think the ghost let go.

When the light faded enough to see again, the specter was behind Cera, keeping behind her so her boob-light couldn't shine on her. Instead of using her hands, a length of white cloth was wrapped around her neck. Cera looked panicked.

The light had stunned Shad and me, but as Cera's light faded we jumped into action. Shad darted behind the ghost and wrapped her up. It still had Cera, but I could hear her gasp a

little. I ran to the fallen flashlight and picked it up. Light bothered it, maybe even hurt it, so that's what I was going to use.

I ran back to Cera and let the ghost have it. It hissed again, but with Shad grappling her she didn't disappear. It did let go of Cera finally, who turned and lit up again. As much as it hurt the ghost, I could tell it bothered Shad too. It was going to get away if I didn't help him.

"Liz, catch," I said, tossing the flashlight into the air.

Before I knew if she had it or not, I jumped at the shadow covered ghost. Even though Liz and Cera hadn't been able to touch her, she felt tangible to me. I figured Shad was helping me there, like soap bonding water and oil.

My dad forced me to do a season of wrestling, so I knew a couple moves. I hooked her leg and pushed her down with me on top. I had her beneath me and I felt if I could hold her long enough the light might finish her off.

That's when she bit me.

Her teeth held onto me between my shoulder and my neck. It hurt, especially because it burned like ice. I screamed a manly, high-pitched scream and I tried to pull free.

When I stood, she came with me. I expected her to weigh at least a little, so I overdid it. I would have caught my balance if I hadn't bumped into the guard rail. I tipped over it and would have fallen, but Liz grabbed me by the leg and pulled me back. Cera kept shining away, but the ghost had moved behind me. To shine light on it, Cera moved to one side and Liz moved the flashlight to the other. It screeched in my ear, making me wince in pain, but Shad had it so it couldn't get away.

I think she tried pulling my head between herself and Cera's shining bosom, but she ended up pulling my head right off. Liz must have been too stunned to react and Shad was busy holding onto our assailant, so my head tumbled down into the water below.

Down there in the cold and the dark the ghost had me. We'd definitely hurt it, but it didn't flee. It assaulted my eyes and ears and mouth, filling me with cold and despair. The river pulled my head downstream and I could feel my body getting further away. I focused on my body, pooling all the strength Shad and I had to reconnect myself.

With a mighty pull my head shot out of the water. It zoomed back under the bridge then up to my body. The ghost tried hiding in my mouth as we came back into Cera's light. My head reattached and the ghost went down my throat with a frigid gulp.

I sat there, leaning against the guardrail, blinded by boobs and a flashlight, with a chilling ghost inside me, and everything went dark.

* * *

The feeling of my terrible suspension trying to keep us riding smoothly on a rough road was the first sensation I was aware of. The second was Cera complaining about how she'd be driving much better if she could reach the wheel properly.

The events on the bridge came back to me slowly. At first, I remembered seeing the figure across the bridge, but then I had to fight a feeling like I'd started choking someone. I remembered the bright light and the pain, then grappling, then falling into the water.

I opened my eyes. Someone had moved me to the backseat but hadn't bothered to buckle me in. Something else felt off, but I couldn't put my finger on it. I sat up and Liz gasped.

Cera nearly crashed, which would have been extra bad for me without a seatbelt on. Eventually we stopped on the side of the road, Liz trying to turn around with her rear wedged firmly in place. I could tell they were both talking, but the meaning of the words felt far away. With a groan, I shifted so I could put on my seatbelt.

"Danny?"

"What?" I asked, English suddenly making sense again.

"Are you okay?"

I took stock. My knee was skinned, my head had a serious brain freeze, and the rest of me felt tingly. I also felt angry, but distantly. Like my left foot was really angry, but the rest of me was calm. "I think I'm okay."

Liz frowned at me. Cera said, "Why are you talking different?" and I realized my voice was about an octave too high. I looked down at myself. My clothes were thick and baggy, but it seemed like my chest was sticking out further than it should. I patted it and felt something round. The round thing was part of me and it felt kind of nice being touched. I used my other hand and felt another round thing on the other side.

I knew what they felt like, but it didn't compute.

Liz gasped and Cera started laughing. I frowned, still not quite understanding.

"Dude, you're a chick!"

When Cera said that it clicked. My hands raced down to my pants and sure enough I was missing my dangly bits.

“Is this one of your illusions?” Liz asked Cera.

“I don’t do feel, and he’s definitely feeling things,” Cera replied.

“Danny, is Shad doing this?”

I shook my head, sure that he wasn’t capable of changing me beyond detaching parts. That might explain my missing junk, but not the breasts or higher voice. My mind raced, trying to understand.

“Let’s get home and figure it out from there,” Liz said, putting her hand on Cera’s shoulder.

Cera stifled her laughter. “Sure, let’s get you and your girlfriend a room.”

I sat there, numb and wanting this to be a dream. I reached out mentally to Shad. He was near, but ... preoccupied. With a start I realized that anger I was feeling was the ghost from the bridge. It was inside me! As my heart started to race, I realized I couldn’t feel her directly. Shad was between us, wrapping her up to protect me.

If that’s what he was doing, what changed my body?

* * *

We pulled up to Cera’s house to drop her off. As she got out, I went around front to drive Liz home. As I did, Cera pointed down at my feet. “Where’s your shadow?”

Despite the bright streetlight, I didn’t cast a shadow. It was surreal, especially after having such an active shadow for the last couple weeks. Looking down, I also noticed the ground looked a little closer. Not much, but I was definitely an inch or two shorter. I pulled my hoodie

tighter and noticed my waist pinched in more than I was used to. My hips were also proportionally wider than before. If they weren't, my pants would definitely have fallen off.

"Yeah, you're definitely a chick now," she snickered before walking to the porch. I didn't wait to see if she made it inside before I hopped in the driver's seat and shifted into reverse. Normally I waited until she and Liz were safely inside before I drove away in an effort to be chivalrous. That anger was flaring up and driving off was the least destructive thing I could do.

I felt Liz watching me as I drove. She didn't say anything until I pulled into her driveway.

"Want to talk?"

I didn't say anything, but I turned off the car. Yes, I wanted to talk, but I didn't know what to say. We sat there in silence for a bit before Liz started the conversation for us.

"You're still my boyfriend," she said.

"Don't you mean girlfriend?" I asked.

"Look, even if this isn't temporary you can't erase 18 years of being a male. Danny, you are you and I love you."

"Every change so far seems pretty permanent. Why would this be temporary?"

Liz sighed. "I don't know. Sorry to pull you into this."

I considered lashing out, but that felt like giving into that anger Shad and I were holding at bay. Instead, I put my hand on her thigh. In turn, she leaned over to hug me, but couldn't quite

reach me due to how tightly she was crammed into her seat. It reminded me of how much all of us were dealing with. I leaned over to bridge the distance. The hug felt good.

Maybe too good, as I started to tear up. I blame the estrogen.

When we pulled away, she said, "I'll get some old clothes together for you. I'll ask Cera to bring some over, too, just in case you're closer to her size."

"Thanks," I replied, fidgeting with my pants. I'd expect them to be loose everywhere, but in a couple places they seemed tighter than I was used to.

Liz got out after a short struggle and I watched her walk up to the front door. She turned back and made a heart shape over her heart. It was uncharacteristically touchy-feely, so I just waved back. Then she unlocked her door and walked inside.

I drove home, trying to imagine how to explain my new appearance to my parents. Hopefully they weren't up so I could get a full night's sleep before having to explain my second haunting-related change in appearance this month. I'd probably have to wait for them to have coffee, too, if I wanted them not to blow up at me.

The kitchen light was on when I pulled up. I looked down at myself. The changes seemed obvious to me, but I was wearing pretty baggy clothes. There was a chance that I could walk by without them taking a close look. I pulled my hood up and headed inside.

My parents were busy with a puzzle, but they both looked up as I walked through the door. I held up a hand like I was stifling a yawn. I waved with my other hand and headed up the stairs.

Normally they would have stopped to interrogate me, but since I became a Haunt they'd started giving me a little more space. I made it upstairs without comment.

Safely in my room, I pulled off my clothes with dread. I knew more or less what I'd find, but I needed to see it anyway. I started with my top, pulling of my hoodie and shirt all at once. The two lumps on my chest looked smaller than I would have thought, but that might have been a perspective thing. The nipples hardened in the cool air.

Looking past them, I saw my normally trim stomach was just as flat, but pinched in sideways more than normal. Or was it that my hips flared out more? Probably a bit of both. I kicked off my shoes and undid my belt. My pants fell off. My boxers almost went with them. Pausing before pulling them down, I asked myself if my dick was really important to my self-image. I pulled them off and with what I saw I decided yes, yes it was.

I threw on some pajamas without looking at myself anymore. Seeing myself that way was just as awkward as seeing a feminine body and not getting an erection. The two together? Too much.

I checked where my shadow should be quickly before turning off the light. I wondered briefly where Shad was before I threw myself into bed. I needed sleep before I could deal with this new level of freaky.

* * *

6 Despite the late night, I woke up with the sun. I felt almost triggered to wake up, like the sun had a message just for me. With how unpleasant my dreams were, I was glad to be up and at 'em.

I checked my computer. Normally I'd grab breakfast first, but I wanted to postpone revealing my new figure to my parents or anyone else for as long as possible. Also, I figured there might be something about my predicament in the chatrooms I'd found for Haunts. Turns out, it had happened a couple times to people. At least one time wasn't permanent, which was slightly encouraging.

Armed with possibly good news, I scrounged around for a hoodie and some sweatpants to wear over my pajama shorts. Even being a little shorter than I was before, I was showing off a lot more leg than I wanted anyone to see. While I started pulling things out of my closet to check, there was a knock on my door.

I tensed up. This was it. I was going to have to bite the bullet at some point. I'd rather have pants on, but at least the hoodie hid my boobs.

"Danny?" It was Liz. Well, that was better than having my parents walk in, but having anyone see me in the light of day wasn't something I wanted.

"Just a sec," I replied, wanting to find those sweats before the door opened. I finally found a gray pair with a huge hole in one knee – good enough for the present. I slipped them on and went to open the door.

Liz had a laundry basket resting on each hip, making her look even wider than normal. "Cera and I thought you might need some clothes, so we brought by some of the ones that don't fit us anymore."

I gestured to myself. "I'm good."

She cocked her head and frowned. “We don’t know how long this might last, so you should have something besides sweats. Besides, you’ll want underwear that fits properly.”

I rolled my eyes and stood aside for her to come into my room. She shifted to come in sideways, keeping the baskets right where they were. I checked out her butt as she passed. I was tempted to slap or squeeze it, but I pulled back. I might still be me, but she might not appreciate the attention coming from another woman.

She set the baskets on my bed. The first thing she pulled out was a bra.

“Ah, no, I’m not –”

“You’re big enough to need it,” Liz interrupted. “Not only will it be more comfortable than going without, but it will stop your nipples flipping on the high beams.”

I looked down at myself, suddenly even more self-conscious. I couldn’t see them through the sweatshirt, but then I wasn’t very cold at the moment. Stepping outside might change that.

As I slumped in defeat, Liz stepped toward me. “I’ll show you how to put it on.”

I stepped away. She stopped, frowning.

“Just tell me,” I said. “Better yet, show me on you.”

She rolled her eyes, then started sorting through the clothes. “Just put in on backwards so it’s easier to join the clasps, then spin it around and put your arms through the shoulder straps.” Several items went in a pile with the bra placed on top. “Put these on to begin with.”

As she passed me on the way to the door, I was tempted to reach out again, but it was all still too surreal. Before she closed the door, she glanced back. “You’ll get through this. I’ve got your back.”

After she closed the door, I looked at the pile of clothes she left me to put on. They weren’t frilly or anything, but just knowing they were made with the feminine figure in mind made me hesitant to wear them. It felt final to start dressing in women’s clothing, like nailing the coffin lid of my manhood. I might not be some jock, but to think of myself as other than male was alien to me, and not in a good way.

I stalled by going to the restroom.

This wasn’t something I was looking forward to. It meant focusing on my new genitals, which was weird and, I’m forced to admit, a bit scary. That said, my bladder needed to be emptied so I couldn’t hold out forever.

I ended up looking at the ceiling during the entire process. Aiming was certainly easier, but I had no idea how to get rid of that last drip. I ended up shrugging and just pulling all three layers up at once.

As I went back to my bedroom, I heard snippets of a conversation happening downstairs.

“...permanent or not.”

“Considering...taking it pretty well.”

“...wasn’t exactly happy about...”

“Maybe we should...therapist, or...”

I don't like therapists. Trusting a stranger not to misuse your innermost thoughts and desires has always seemed extremely dangerous to me. I've been to the school counselor before, and he's a licensed therapist. I don't like that he won't show me what he writes on his notepad, like it's a secret weapon. My parents knew about my distrust, so they generally tried to find other solutions when they thought I needed help. If they were considering it now, then I probably should probably do some responsible adult shit to show I didn't need a shrink.

At the moment, girly underwear seemed like the most responsible thing. How my life had changed recently.

I shut my door quietly behind me, then stared down the offending clothes. They just sat there, all innocent looking. With a steadying breath, I pulled off my top layers and crossed the room to the bra.

Looking up at the ceiling wasn't going to be a feasible option this time. I looked down at the two fleshy funbags on my chest. They didn't look so big from this angle, but Liz said I was big enough to need a bra. I shimmied them back and forth a little. They certainly moved like moderately large breasts. When I bounced a couple times I could feel them pull on my shoulders. I probably did need the boulder holder.

It wasn't immediately obvious which way was inside out. I eventually spotted the brand insignia and figured that faced out. Getting it hooked took me a couple tries, but once I did the rest was easy. The shoulder straps felt a little long, so I tried shortening those up. Before I knew it, it was on and adjusted. I was wearing a bra. No going back now. I threw a t-shirt on as if it made them less noticeable.

Making sure the door was firmly shut, I stripped off my pants and underwear and quickly grabbed the panties and threw those on. Of course, in doing so I accidentally put them on backwards and had to repeat the whole ordeal. I nearly fell over putting them on the second time. Once they were on – and it was still surreal not seeing my familiar bulge even through clothing – I pulled on the jeans she picked. They fit differently than I was used to, especially around the crotch and upper thighs, but so far as I could tell they fit as intended.

I threw the hoodie on because the bra straps were too conspicuous. Then I put my chin up and walked downstairs to let my parents know their son now had boobs, at least temporarily.

They were waiting for me in the entryway along with Liz and Cera. Liz nodded to me, conveying solidarity with her posture. Cera just looked like she was enjoying one of her prank internet videos. My mom looked like she was trying not to cry. My dad looked at me confused, like he barely recognized me. I was glad my parents were warned before seeing me.

I stood there for a second, letting it sink in for them. Then I said, “I did some research, and apparently it might not be permanent.”

My dad nodded. “That’s good.”

“We love you no matter what,” my mom added.

“What can we do about it?” my dad asked.

I shrugged. “We need to talk to an expert. Other than that, I’d like some breakfast.”

My mom blew me a kiss and walked off toward the kitchen.

Liz smiled at me. “I already sent Tim a message asking how to get in touch with Madam Leombre. We’ll see what he says.”

It shouldn’t have been surprising that she reached out to Tim first, but it was. I tried not to feel jealous. He was one of the senior Haunts and she’d bonded with him because she could sign, but she really looked interested in him when they were together. Then again, she’d reassured me I was her boyfriend only a few hours ago, so I shouldn’t be afraid of her dumping me, right?

My dad looked as awkward as I felt, so I addressed Liz instead. “So, the clothes fit.”

“Not like I can tell with the hoodie on,” she replied, reaching out to take my hand. I pulled back, which she didn’t seem to like, but accepted.

Cera, who’d headed toward the kitchen, said, “You can tell the jeans fit.”

I frowned at her. She looked up at me and smiled. “Nice ass.”

She turned before she could see me flip the bird and went to see what my mom was cooking.

The three of us just stood there at the bottom of the stairs until my dad said, “I’ll just check on the paper.” He headed out and I moved so I wasn’t visible from the street. In doing so, I pressed up against Liz. When the door closed, I went to move away, but Liz held me close.

“You’re still you,” she said. “And I’m still your girlfriend. Don’t worry about me running.”

I hesitated, then hugged her back. Within seconds I was struggling to hold back tears. I wasn't going to make a sound in case Cera heard me, but I let Liz feel my silent sobs.

After a minute, I had melted into her. I jerked away as my dad walked back in. Thankfully his nose was already in the business section, so he didn't see me wipe away my tears. Liz gave me a reassuring smile before we all walked into the kitchen.

While Liz and I tried to help my mom and Cera cook breakfast, it became clear the kitchen was much too crowded with both Cera and Liz – and their expanded assets – so the two of us just went to sit at the table with my dad. We all sort of sat there silently. After a bit, Liz checked her phone and saw Tim responded. She tapped my shoulder and showed me the text.

That's definitely something she'd help with. I can get in touch with her. Don't quote me, but I'm pretty sure that's reversible.

I sighed. Not only was help on the way, but he didn't sound flirtatious. Both bits of news cheered me up.

Liz noticed my smile and nudged me. "See, it'll work out."

Some shouting in the kitchen made me stand up and run over. Liz took a bit longer while my dad just looked up from his paper. By the time I arrived, my mom was slapping Cera's chest with a towel. Between that, the smoke, and the spilled pan of eggs, it looked like Cera got too close to the stove and caught her shirt on fire.

"Are you all right?" my mom asked her. "Do you need to go to the ER?"

Cera waved her off, looking more annoyed than alarmed. "Third time that's happened since these blew up. Thanks for the assist."

I didn't bother stifling my chuckle. She flipped me off and turned so I couldn't see the scorched bits of her shirt. When I turned, I saw Liz hiding a smile of her own. She looked at me and said, "The new assets really do take some getting used to." I gave her a quick kiss. After a split second of surprise, her smile split her face in the best way. Yeah, things were going to be just fine.

* * *

Breakfast was pretty typical after that. My parents gave us some space, which Liz and Cera insisted we use to let me model some clothes. I wasn't thrilled by it, but they convinced me it was an opportunity few guys get and that I should take advantage of it while it lasted. I agreed on the condition that my face not be included in any photos, and those would not be posted under any circumstances. They agreed, though Cera seemed irritated that I mentioned photos at all. She was probably hoping she could snap a few pictures on the sly. Liz promised to keep her honest.

I modeled jeans and t-shirts first, which they said I looked really good in. My view in the mirror wasn't very good, so I had to take their word for it. At that point I felt a little bolder and put on a dress. God, it was comfortable in the worst way, like I wasn't wearing anything on my legs. Twirling was more fun than I expected it to be. My brain must have been still a little bit male, because the bit of cleavage I had was just as mesmerizing as if it belonged to Liz.

I even tried a couple tops they brought that showed off more of my chest. It was embarrassing and thrilling at the same time. Looking in the mirror, I decided I was closer to Cera's old size than Liz's. So yeah, I definitely needed to keep wearing bras.

Eventually they wanted to apply some make-up. I was hesitant, but I already tried heels and a dress. In for a penny and all that.

After entirely too long fussing over my face and hair, they had me look in the mirror. I didn't recognize myself. I never was a hulking ode to the masculine form, but I had enough of an eyebrow ridge and stubble on my chin to not be confused with anything other than a teenage boy. Now I was oozing femininity. My face was even softer and more delicate looking than before. That moment was tough for me, so I asked them for some privacy as I inspected myself.

It wasn't my face, but at the same time it was. It was unrecognizable, yet undeniably me. As the strangeness continued to try to overwhelm me, the thought that it wouldn't be permanent kept me anchored.

Several minutes of indecision went by. Ultimately, I kept my hair the same, but washed my face. The changes in my features were something out of my control at the moment. Wearing clothes that fit properly was a practical thing. Dolling myself up, though ... I didn't want to run that much from who I was. I applied my normal goth eyeliner and left the bathroom.

Liz and Cera didn't comment, but Cera looked like she wanted to. We spent most of the rest of the morning watching 'real' ghost stories on YouTube. Most of those were trash, but we got a kick out of people's reactions. We'd been there and done that, faced off with ghosts and came off conqueror, so watching the noob fails was great.

There was one moment during a commercial when a baby was crying on screen that I felt the anger from last night claw its way out of the back of my mind, but once the next video started it subsided. It was disconcerting, but I figured I could just avoid babies for a while.

Tim got back to us after lunch. The soonest she could meet with us was Monday evening, so I was stuck as a girl for at least another day.

I was starting to get semi-comfortable with my new body. My new height and center of balance was surprising me less and less. Crossing my legs was more comfortable. I was even beginning to wonder what having my breasts played with felt like when Cera began complaining about her shoulders.

“Every day they’re killing me by the afternoon.”

“I thought they were lighter than normal boobs,” I said.

“Yeah, they only weigh as much as boobs half their size, which is still as much as the two of you combined.”

Liz rolled her eyes. “Either do something about it or shut up.”

Cera shrugged. “I’m told hydrotherapy really helps.”

I wasn’t familiar with the term, but Liz rolled her eyes in understanding. “Yeah, my dad would probably be fine with it, but I’m guessing you’d want us to join you.”

I looked back and forth between them. Hydro was water, but I’m wasn’t sure how a shrink would use water and how that would help Cera’s back. Unless it was the other kind of therapist, then – oh. She was suggesting we use Liz’s hot tub.

“That’s really not a goth thing to do,” I said.

“That depends entirely on the swimsuit,” Cera countered. “Besides, the therapeutic value trumps style. And it would be mentally therapeutic to have company.”

Liz looked at me. I couldn't tell if she'd object or not. I wasn't sure how I felt about wearing a woman's swimsuit, but I did know I was looking forward to seeing these two wearing them. Before she could say anything, I decided to go on the offensive with Cera.

"If you guys wear the most revealing swimsuits you have, I'll put on a one-piece and join you."

"Wait," said Liz, "are you sure –"

"Deal," Cera interrupted.

A mix of cold dread and a hot, thrilling excitement engulfed me. If nothing else, this would be interesting.

* * *

7 I stood in the bathroom, double checking that I put the damn thing on right.

Unlike the street clothes I could mix and match for the best fit, the one-piece swimsuits they had weren't fitting well. They had three they gave me to try. Liz's first suit was from years ago and was much too small. Her second one was the backless swimsuit she'd worn this last summer. The suit Cera provided was tight on the bottom half and loose on the top. Cera was boobs on a stick while Liz was a pear with a late-blooming bust. My current body was an hourglass, somewhere between them. I was starting to feel some sympathy for women shopping for clothes – there were more female body types and each one needed clothes to fit more specifically than men.

While the hemline, back, and waist showed much more than I'd have liked, the backless swimsuit was the best choice. I could barely see side boob and it didn't ride up into my ass.

Loud knocking interrupted my inspection.

“I’m keeping my end of the deal,” Cera said. “Get out here and strut your stuff for us.”

I sighed. A deal was a deal and so long as I focused on how they looked I’d probably be fine. Besides, the hot tub had bubbles that would hide a lot of me.

Trying my best not to look self-conscious, I opened the door. I immediately stopped short when I saw Cera. The black top she had on barely covered her areola. The bikini’s strings cut into her boob-flesh. It offered no support, so her massive breasts sagged some. From my perspective I couldn’t see above her mid-thigh, though that was partly from how far the pert behemoths extended forward.

I must have spent a moment gawking, because I jumped when she snapped her fingers.

“Earth to Danny,” she said.

“Not exactly covering everything,” I said, gesturing vaguely at her.

She huffed. “We agreed I’d wear my most revealing swimsuit.”

I shrugged, looking back down at her melons. Sometimes it was hard to appreciate how big the twins were when they were covered.

Looking back to her face, I said, “This barely counts as a one-piece, so I guess we’re all showing off.”

Cera grinned. “Yeah you are.”

I felt myself blush. My emotions had been running away with me since facing the ghost last night. Shad must not have been dampening them anymore. I filled that thought away to mull over when there weren't girls to ogle.

She led me out to the back yard, where Liz was getting everything set up. Though Cera's relatively scrawny behind was nice enough, I was anticipating a better show. I knew what to expect – I'd seen an illusion of Liz in a bikini only a few days ago – but that hardly prepared me for the heavenly sight.

She was facing away from me, so I got to see the entirety of each of her massive, glorious cheeks. They were full and not the least bit saggy. The pleasant girth continued down to her shapely, powerful thighs. There wasn't a blemish, stretch mark, or trace of cellulite anywhere. Evidence of a dark blue thong rose from that deep canyon and wrapped high up on her hips. Above that was her pinched waist and supple back covered only by two strings. She turned at that point, presenting me with a profile of her impossibly shapely legs and svelte torso. Her top was the same size as Cera's, though it covered proportionally more. While not massive, her bust was eye catching and comely.

When she saw me, she smiled and my heart melted a little.

She walked over and I got to see her from the front. From every angle she was a spectacle. I had less of an opportunity to ogle her when she wanted me to look her in the eyes, which was frustrating, but there'd be more time to see her in the water.

"I thought that one might fit best," she said. "I'm still a little surprised you put it on."

I gestured toward her mostly nude body. "Ditto, but you still look ... amazing."

She smiled and blushed. "I'm trusting you on that."

"Same here," Cera said, "but you're a little less believable without a dick."

I rolled my eyes. "Let's get wet."

Liz took my hand and squeezed it before turning toward the hot tub. She pulled me with her. I let my hand rest on her glorious ass and felt it flex and shift beautifully as she walked. I'm surprised I could think of anything – probably because all my blood wasn't pooling into an erection – but a question occurred to me.

"Why do two hardcore goths have bikinis?"

"Not even the magic catalogue had one-piece swimsuits that would fit," Cera said.

"And you two were planning a trip to the beach?"

"More like for hot tubbing," Liz said.

Made sense, seeing as they recently gained access to this one. I hadn't bothered getting a new suit, but I guess that was more of a girl thing to do. Maybe that was something I should consider now.

As we stepped up next to the hot tub and I saw the churning water, a jolt of fear struck me. It stopped me dead in my tracks. I couldn't look anywhere else. The little bottled knot of anger was suddenly loose, the stopper opened and the noxious feeling began filling me.

A memory, its clarity matched only by its foreign unfamiliarity, played itself through my mind.

The air was cold; the wind harsh. He just left me. He made it clear he'd never come back. I wasn't someone he cared about – I was a fling to keep him company while he traveled; a diversion from the monotony of the road. He certainly wasn't going to stick around because I said the child was his.

I was standing by the bridge, watching through tears as he drove away. The hurt began turning to anger then. How dare he leave us. How dare he leave ME!

I took several steps across the bridge. He was going to just abandon me on the side of the road like a soggy bag of fries. Tossed aside.

Well, he wasn't the only one who could toss something aside.

My arms acted nearly of their own accord. The screaming child sailed over the edge.

The moment he disappeared from view I was suddenly sane again. Our child! My baby!

I leapt over the side after it. The water rushed up to meet me. I remembered it being cold, but now it felt strangely warm.

Hands grabbed me, dragging me out of the hot tub. I sputtered, water pouring from my eyes and mouth and nose. I coughed repeatedly, trying to expel the memory of water from my lungs.

It felt so real.

“What the hell, man?!”

“Danny! What happened?”

“Do you have a death wish?”

“Danny!”

I waved them off, unable to speak yet. They moved to give me a little space. The anger was pulling back, poured back into the bottle. I breathed slowly, relishing each breath as my heart slowed its racing.

“It happened like you said,” I told them.

“What happened?” Liz asked.

Cera was swearing at me under her breath, but I ignored her. “Crybaby bridge. He left her and the baby. She was so angry.” I looked up at her. “She threw the kid away because he threw her away.”

I shivered at the memory while Liz covered her mouth in shock. Even Cera quieted down. I wiped my face again, ostensibly to get my hair out of my eyes, but mostly for the tears mixing with the water dripping from my scalp. Damn hormones.

Liz helped me to my feet. I couldn’t bring myself to look at the hot tub again. “Sorry about that.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Liz said.

I waved her off again. “Go ahead and enjoy. I’m just gonna go dry off.”

Despite not meeting her eyes, I could tell they were looking intently at me. Not sure if I was imagining it or it was related to being a Haunt or what, but I was much more acutely aware of how they felt. Right now, Liz was really, really worried and trying not to show it. Cera was

scared I would do something crazy to her or Liz. Both of them were taking their cues from me, the emotionally volatile teenage guy-in-a-girl's-body, and I was sending out some crazy, scary signals. I didn't want to hurt either of them, emotionally or otherwise. The only way I could think of to change that, however, was to do the one thing that was currently the scariest thing I could think of.

Screw it. I had to get back on the bull before I could develop a complex.

“No,” I said, “I’m not. I came out here to hot tub with two smoking hot girls I like. I’m not going to be scared off by a memory.”

They stood there as I walked back to the hot tub. I expected another episode, but the water didn't trigger one this time. My breathing was quick and shallow as I climbed the stairs, then stepped in. The water didn't trigger anything. In fact, it felt nice.

I felt myself grin. They were both standing there, tense with anticipation.

“Well, do you need an invitation?”

Liz moved first. She followed me up and into the tub. I'm pretty sure she bent over more than she needed to to show off her supple cleavage. The water level rose significantly when she sat her expanded ass down right next to me. Cera chuckled as some splashed out onto the lawn. I slipped my arm around Liz's waist and gave her a little squeeze. It was obvious we were both glad I got in.

Cera stood on tiptoe and let her bust rest on the side of the tub. I thought maybe the strings of her top (or the strings she must have added to wrap around those behemoths) would snap, but no such luck. Instead, she stared at us through her canyon of cleavage.

“You’re not going to try drowning us, are you?”

I rolled my eyes. “Keep your cracks about my new look to a minimum and I’ll restrain myself.”

I think she shrugged, but it was a little hard to tell with her funbags in the way. “Yes ma’am.”

I splashed some water at her. I think a little got past her mounds. She faked a yawn as she flipped me off and walked toward the stairs. Liz and I shared a look. We might start off just enjoying the water, but shenanigans were brewing. The looming question was going to be where they were aimed. With my body situation and meltdown earlier, I guessed I had about a 70% chance to team up with Liz against Cera. That said, I didn’t see many scenarios involving this much skin on display I wouldn’t enjoy.

Liz looked down at the water, squinting her face the way she did when concentrating on her telekinesis. As I watched, a globe of water rose up from the hot tub. I looked over at Cera, who was too busy looking around her prodigious bust to see the steps below her to notice. The water ball floated up above our heads, undulating in a hypnotic pattern. If I was seeing it right, Liz was placing it directly over where Cera would soon be sitting.

I decided to get in on the action, too. With more effort than it’s ever taken me, I detached my hand. I had a momentary surge of irrational anger, but it quickly faded. Confident I wouldn’t go all Lizzie Borden on anyone, I pushed my hand across the tub under the water level. With each of the girls concentrating elsewhere, I didn’t think they noticed.

As Cera sat, I pulled my hand along the edge of the hot tub, positioning it behind her. Another thought struck me, and I detached my other hand and sent it behind Liz. I kept my arm stubs in the water to disguise what I was doing.

Once Cera was situated, she looked over her engorged chest at Liz smugly. "Looks like I don't displace half the tub."

Liz grinned back. "You sure that's why the water level isn't higher?"

Cera's expression turned to puzzlement. She looked down at the water level, which was almost exactly as high as when Liz sat down. When she looked back at us, Liz directed her gaze to the floating mass of water. As Cera looked up, her expression changed to surprise and her chest lit up yellow in fear.

I chose that moment to pull on the knots of their bikini tops.

Liz let the water splash directly on top of Cera, drenching her friend. We were splashed as the water bounced off her head and breasts and spilled over the side. Both of their tops were pulled loose. Liz barely had a nip slip, but Cera's was nearly swept out of the hot tub with the rushing water. She only barely snagged the bikini by the end of the string.

Both of them looked over at me with shock and anger. I squirmed a little as they readjusted their swimsuits, thinking I *might* have gone too far. We sat there silently for a moment after Cera finished covering herself again.

"So, that was a-"

A jet of water shot into my face. As I sputtered and wiped water out of my eyes, I happened to look down and see my bare chest. I could still feel the swimsuit on my body, so I

knew it must be an illusion. The illusion Cera crafted was on lopsided, pimply, saggy boobs, which was kind of a low blow.

I'd taken a calculated risk, but apparently I'm terrible at math.

I covered my chest with my arms. "Look, I shouldn't have done that."

"Ya think?!?" Cera said as she continued to situate her top over her enormous mounds.

"Danny, we're outside," Liz said. "Anyone could see."

That fact hadn't crossed my mind. I looked around. No one was peeking over the fence, but a curtain moved on the second story of a neighbor's house.

"Oh."

I looked down at my own chest, still covered in Cera's illusion.

"*Oh.*"

"I guess there's just as little going on in your head as before," Cera said. "Blood pooling in your other head must have just been an excuse."

"It was too far," Liz confirmed.

Cera dropped the illusion. "Not sure why we keep you around."

"Little harsh," Liz said.

The look Cera shot her was one of the angriest I'd ever seen from her. She turned back to me and said, "Dry off and leave."

I went to do as she said. Liz interjected. “Now you’re taking it too far. He’s not going to do that again.”

Cera looked at her best friend for a long moment. I stayed still, not sure what to do.

“Actually, you can both leave.”

The anger in Cera’s features was now stone cold. Liz looked back with a hurt sadness that was painful for me to see.

The two of us got out, dried off, and left. No one said another word.

* * *

8 I spent the next day in near absolute isolation. Liz was torn between loyalties to her best friend and her ‘boy’ friend, exacerbated by both of our bad behavior. I didn’t push her to side with me partly because I didn’t think she would and partly because I didn’t think she should. Having your top pulled off against your will with people watching – it’s a guy’s fantasy and a girl’s nightmare. My mortification was intensified because I knew I’d have been thrilled just a day before.

Girl emotions are complicated and they suck.

Because even Shad wasn’t around, I killed time on my computer until I could meet with Madam Leombre. She needed to fix me as soon as possible.

Around sunset – because of course – someone rang the doorbell. I’m not sure if it was a ghost thing, a girl thing, or because the cliché was too perfect, but I knew it was her. I was at the top of the stairs when my mom opened the door. This time she was dressed in a pink and white

sweater and dark slacks. It was less intimidating than the old-fashioned dress and less flashy than the Hawaiian shirt and Bermuda shorts. If she didn't have such an outrageous hourglass figure, she'd have fit into suburbia perfectly.

“Madam Leombre, here to see Danny,” she said.

She extended her hand and my mother shook it. It seemed more like a reflex than actual friendliness. I couldn't be sure from my vantage point, but it seemed like my mom was gaping at the enormous chest in front of her.

When my mother failed to respond, Madam Leombre looked up the stairs past her to me. “If you'd like to take a moment to make yourself presentable, now's the time. The night may be young, but we have much to do.”

I looked down at myself. I was wearing sweats and a hoodie. Neither was very clean. Underneath I was wearing a t-shirt and basketball shorts, also not very clean. Under that was panties and two very free swaying breasts.

I nodded at her and went back to my room.

The laundry hamper Liz brought with all their old clothes was shoved in the corner. First, I made sure the door was firmly shut with some dirty clothes in the way before stripping. I threw on one of the better fitting bras, then found a dark top and jeans. I went with my socks and tennis shoes – thankfully my feet were about the same size. One of my jackets finished the ensemble, though it was now too wide in the shoulders.

I didn't think I'd really need anything else, so I moved the clothes pile away from the door and headed back downstairs.

When I reached the stairs, my dad had joined the conversation at the door.

“...resent what you did to him, you know.”

“From what I understand,” Madam Leombre replied, “much of parenting consists of setting up controlled environments for children to fail. That way, you’re there to help them when they fall.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“The three of them would have been targeted by spirits,” she replied. “Now, instead of their first encounter being against something malevolent, it was gaining an ally.”

She chose that moment to turn her full attention toward me. “If you’re ready, we should head out.”

I nodded, not sure what else to say. My dad was saying what I was thinking – I did resent this massive change in my life. As fun as parts of being a Haunt might be, the whole thing was getting in the way of me going to school or even out of the house. I only consented to all of this on the flimsiest of technicalities. It was a massive intrusion and I didn’t much care for any of it.

At the same time, she had a point. I wasn’t as sure about it for myself, but Liz and Cera would definitely have run into some malevolent ghost sooner or later. If it was as powerful as ours were – or if we were tricked into giving permission in some way – then that encounter would have been disastrous. I didn’t like thinking that Madam Leombre had done us a favor by pairing us up with our own personal ghost companions, but I’d learned firsthand that dangerous spirits were out there. Without Shad and the girl’s ghosts, our misadventure on Crybaby Bridge would have been tragic instead of unpleasant.

I nodded at my parents as I left. Both of them looked worried, but neither tried to stop me. That more than anything told me I needed to face this situation head-on. Part of me wished I was still a kid and someone else would handle the big stuff, but that was a fruitless line of thought.

The car in the driveway stopped me short. It was a black town car, like what you see diplomats ride around in with the little flags on the hood. This one didn't have flags, but I bet it was fully tricked out on the inside. It probably had bulletproof windows.

"I'd appreciate it if you sat on the driver's side," Madam Leombre said.

I frowned, wondering if she wanted me to drive, when the driver's door opened and an honest-to-God chauffeur stepped out. He had a uniform and hat and everything. His face was covered by a mask and I couldn't see his eyes behind his dark glasses. In fact, with the gloves and long sleeves I couldn't see an inch of skin.

He opened the back door and Madam Leombre stepped inside. I followed. It was fairly spacious inside despite the glass partition. I had plenty of leg room and my head was a good ways from the ceiling. The black leather seats were softer than any seat I'd ever sat on. I barely noticed the driver shut the door as I looked over the interior. Liz and Cera could have fit back here comfortably!

I looked over at Madam Leombre, who shrugged. With her proportions, it made sense that she'd invest in a vehicle like this. Yet she seemed so casual about the obvious luxury. Between the old mansion and this car, I was getting the feeling she was wealthier than anyone I knew.

The chauffeur started the vehicle – which had an almost silent engine – and we were off. I had a dozen questions for her, but between the revelation of her wealth and my current condition, I wasn't eager to speak up. She waited until we were a block from my house to speak.

“There's a relatively uncommon ability among Haunts and Mediums,” she said, “that allows one to ‘reform’ malignant spirits instead of driving them off or destroying them. I have it. It allows me to absorb them for a time and replace destructive impulses with protective instincts. You and most of the Haunts you met at the meeting are paired with spirits I reformed.”

I was a little lost as to why she was talking about this. What did that have to do with changing me back into a guy? I kept my mouth shut anyway.

“Your paired spirit, Shad as you call him, is a notably independent spirit. He's flexible in his thinking, possesses wide ranging emotions, and interacts in unexpected ways with other spirits. I've suspected he has this ability, though it was impossible to test before he was paired with a mortal host.”

“What does any of this have to do with changing me back?” I finally asked.

“I think your change is connected to how you use your ability. It's an empathic ability by nature. It also manifests uniquely in every instance I know of.

“Tonight, I'd like confirm that you have this ability. In doing so, I believe you'll find your problem resolved.”

“Then let's do it,” I emphatically said.

She smiled back at me. It was hard to judge exactly how old she was, but in that moment, it was difficult not to feel attracted.

“There’s a minor spirit I’d like to demonstrate with before we extricate your passenger spirit. You’ll need to observe not only with your eyes, but extend your spiritual senses. From what I can tell, your companion spirit is somewhat occupied, so the majority of the work will fall to you.”

I nodded, unsure if I even had spiritual senses, much less how to use them.

“For now, I would suggest meditating – clearing your mind of all thought and letting the world before you wash over your senses. The drive should prove sufficiently long, provided you don’t continue gawking at my figure.”

I shut my eyes, realizing too late that I’d let my eyes wander to her sweater puppies. Why was I so mesmerized by boobs when my system was flooded with estrogen? Old habits did in fact die hard, it seemed.

“Sorry about that.”

“Just try clearing your mind for now,” she said, not sounding offended or angry at me in any way. “I have some meditating of my own to do.”

* * *

The first half hour of our drive was me hashing over all the mistakes I’d made with Liz and Cera. Once I came to the conclusion that if the three of us didn’t work out, I’d choose Liz, I was able to set those thoughts aside and empty my mind.

I was surprised by how clear my mind could get. Cera would have said something about not having much to clear out, but Liz would have said it was because I’m not some self-absorbed jock. In either case, I felt calm, collected, and aware of myself by the time we stopped.

We'd arrived at a seedier looking hotel in a city I didn't recognize. While the buildings across the street looked sketchier than the hotel, the hotel *felt* worse. I'm not sure how to quantify that, but I felt confident that's where we were heading.

"Jeffrey, go ahead and park in the back," Madam Leombre said. "The neighborhood is rough and I don't expect we'll need a quick getaway."

He nodded in response before driving around the building. I watched him go, wondering idly if there was a person under that mask or if it was pure spirit. Madam Leombre waved me forward and I focused again on the task at hand as I followed her inside. The swaying of her hips might have also caught my attention. Hey, it was my first time meditating, give me a break.

She approached the night clerk and handed him a card. "I'm told I was expected."

The freckled young man read the card, then nodded at her, clearly having as much trouble looking her in the eyes as I did. "Right this way," he said, grabbing some keys and heading toward the elevator.

Though the ride up was uneventful and there were no outward signs of anything unusual, I felt more and more that something was definitely wrong here. The feeling peaked as we stepped out onto our floor. It wasn't quite the same as at the bridge, but similar enough to raise the hair on my neck.

After we walked past several rooms, Madam Leombre turned back to me. "When did you start feeling it?"

"Outside, I think."

She nodded. "When were you sure?"

I paused before answering. “When we came out of the elevator.”

She nodded again, this time with a smile. “That’s good.”

We continued down the hall. The clerk brought us to room 413. I had to roll my eyes. This night was a string of clichés. Then again, in my research on ghosts and hauntings I’d run into the concept of belief-driven actualization. Basically, the theory says spiritual matters tend to play out the way people expect them to. Discrepancies from that rule are explained by expectations varying between cultures and individuals, making a kind of red-headed step-child phenomenon that resembles neither parent belief.

Clearly a tad nervous, the clerk handed her the key. She smiled at him. “If you need to return to your post, we can take it from here.”

He nodded, smiled a relieved smile, and scampered off. Part of me judged him for being scared of ghosts. Another part of me wondered if he had good reason to flee the area. After all, I could feel this presence from further away than I could feel the ghost from the bridge.

“I want you to stay in the hall,” she said. “This spirit feels more powerful than I was led to believe. Observe from here with all your senses.”

“Okay,” I said, fighting the urge to step back.

She nodded once, then unlocked the door.

The malevolent energy, which had felt active until now, stilled as she opened the door. It felt like a cat that had just spotted something to pounce on. I was sure Madam Leombre felt it, but she walked in anyway. She stepped slowly into the middle of the room, then turned in place with her eyes half closed.

There was no sound when the spirit struck, no furniture tossed at her, and no light show. The attack was purely mental. It didn't feel evil, exactly, but it was predatory and hungry. I took an involuntary step away from the room out of shock, but I didn't move farther than that. Partly because I was eager to learn how to change myself back into a guy, but partly because I sensed this would be more like a boxing match than an animal attack.

It turned out I was right. She shook a little at the initial impact, but otherwise held her ground. Even through the chaos of the spirit's malevolence, I could feel peace radiating from her. It was the kind of feeling you had as a kid, but forgot about when you grew up. It promised safety and kindness and comfort. She radiated the feeling of coming home.

The spirit continued its assault of dark emotions for several seconds before faltering. As its attacks became weaker, I noticed Madam Leombre change. I wasn't sure at first, but as the last attempts to hurt her faded into silence, I could see the bottom of her sweater push outward. When she placed her hand on her stomach, it swelled out even more. When everything was still to my spiritual senses, with only the calm feeling permeating the room, she turned and waddled back out to the hallway.

I stared in shock. She entered the room with an hourglass figure and was leaving with a pronounced maternal figure. Her unnaturally prominent curves made sense now. Adding a baby bump made her look natural. Natural and, somehow, even more hot.

When she reached me, she smiled. "Want to feel it?"

I looked back at her in shock. She rolled her eyes. "For training purposes."

Oh, right, I was learning about rehabilitating spirits. I stood up a little straighter, tried to still my mind, and reached out with my hand and senses.

Her belly wasn't cold, but it wasn't as warm as I expected. I could feel the cozy emotion she was emitting more acutely, but I also felt the writhing presence of the spirit within. It didn't want to give up its hunger, but its anger was lessened by her peace.

"In a few days it will be quite docile," she said. "I'll release it into the mansion, where it will be able to socialize with other spirits. Soon enough, it will be ready to bind with a person to become a Haunt. It's a better outcome than a simple exorcism, wouldn't you say?"

I nodded, still feeling her belly. She stepped away and I blurted out a question.

"Why do some people swell up with spirits and others don't?"

She gestured that we should head to the elevator. "Ecto-allergies. It isn't dangerous, but some people react on a physical level to spiritual contact. All Haunts have signs of being in an interdependent relationship with their spirit, but some hosts carry a buildup of ectoplasm. The particular attributes and temperaments of the spirit and host make it difficult to guess who will and who won't react that way."

At that point, the elevator arrived. As we headed down to the main floor, I snuck another glance at her cartoonish figure. She had allergies almost as bad as Liz and Cera, and in just the right places, too. Was I going to swell like that? My change had been a bit more ... comprehensive ... when I absorbed the ghost from the bridge, so perhaps that made up the difference?

We stopped by the front desk to let the freckled guy know the job was done, then we headed out the back door to the car. As we walked, I basked in the comfortable feeling of home and tried to extend it to Shad and the bridge ghost. Shad liked it, but the other ghost was reluctant to give up her anger. Besides, she still had to find her baby.

“Are you always able to make the ghost into a Haunt ghost?”

She shook her head. “Many of them want to move on after they’re pacified. Others resist the change and have to be dealt with using force. I still try to extend the opportunity to as many as I can. Sometimes the most violent spirits are the ones that crave peace the most.”

As we settled in for our drive back, I thought about what to do with the bridge ghost. After she threw her baby off the bridge, she’d felt shock and remorse. She’d marinated in her self loathing for decades and was twisted into what she was now. Despite the violent way she’d attacked us, I thought I felt a redeemable core. More importantly, I felt a little kinship. I hadn’t thrown a baby into an icy river, but I had soured my relationship with the bikini top stunt. It felt unforgivable and I’d definitely spent the last day beating myself up over my stupidity.

As I thought about that incident and the forgiveness I craved, the bridge spirit stirred. Yes, forgiveness. She’d thought that wasn’t possible, not for her crime. Of course, I didn’t see Liz or Cera forgiving me anytime soon either. The feelings were very similar, in type if not in scale.

In my mind, I saw myself apologizing to Liz and Cera, letting them know I acted stupidly and I was committed to doing better. Reflected back to me was an image of the ghostly mother from the bridge pulling her baby out of the water, hushing it and cooing softly.

And just like that, I knew what to do.

“Can we stop by Crybaby Bridge on our way home?”

* * *

Madam Leombre accompanied me to the river’s edge. She was surprisingly mobile and sure-footed despite her added mass and inability to see her feet. Not that I was watching her or anything.

When we stood under the bridge, I focused inward. Shad still had a firm grip on our guest, but she wasn’t struggling anymore. She was, however, frightened of what came next. None of us were really sure what actually *did* come next, but I focused on the comforting feeling of home Madam Leombre was still giving off. That calmed all of our nerves.

When the spirit hesitated, I whispered, “Learn from what you did, forgive yourself, and do better next time.”

Shad let go of her then, and she slipped out into the water. I caught a brief glimpse of her, the wrath I’d seen the last time absent from her features. She let herself be carried away by the current and in a moment was gone.

I sighed, but it turned into a shiver. As I began to fall, Madam Leombre grabbed me and eased me to the ground. As my head touched the bank, I blacked out.

* * *

9 It seemed like just a moment later that I came to. I opened my eyes and saw what I at first thought was several bundles of pink cotton candy. A second later, I realized it was Madam

Leombre's pink sweater valiantly holding all her curves in. My reaction below my belt let me know I was no longer a chick.

"Good, just out for a few seconds," she said. "I expect after doing this a few more times you won't even lose your footing."

She backed away to let me stand. As the three distracting sweater bumps pulled away, I was struck with how constricting all my clothes suddenly felt. My panties were not giving my rod and tackle enough room, my bra was constricting my breathing, and my jeans were stopping my legs from bending all the way.

All in all, good problems to have, because by God I was a MAN again!

When we reached the car, I checked on Shad. He was stretching his limbs like he had pins and needles coursing through them.

<Nice to see you again.>

<Yeah, nice to be able to stretch.> He followed that statement up by pointing at Madam Leombre and growing an erection to make a horse proud.

I looked up to make sure she wasn't looking at me. She wasn't, but I got the feeling she still knew what was going on. While I didn't think she had eyes on the back of her head, after the past couple weeks I wasn't confident enough to bet on it.

The drive home was uneventful. I nodded off for some of it despite my uncomfortable attire.

"Should I expect the three of you to join us on Halloween?"

I paused, one foot still in the car.

“We’re not really talking to each other right now,” I said, “but I’ll let you know if that changes.”

She nodded, possibly because she was used to working with teenagers and possibly because my parents had mentioned it to her while I was changing earlier. “If you come alone or as a group, you’ll be welcome to join us. You proved yourself capable tonight.”

That made me smile. I stood up a little straighter when I waved and shut the door. The masked driver waited until I opened the front door to drive away.

My parents were asleep on the living room couch. I tried closing the front door quietly, but my dad still jerked awake. His movement woke my mom.

I gave them a moment to clear out the cobwebs before stepping over and showing them I’d changed back, albeit to my monochrome self.

They smiled and hugged me. I was happy to hug back for the first time in a while.

“How’d you change back?” my mom asked.

“I’ll tell you in the morning,” I said. “I have to get out of these clothes first, but then I’m sleeping ‘til noon.”

“Teenagers,” my dad replied, giving my shoulder a squeeze.

We trooped up the stairs and headed to our respective rooms. I closed my door and immediately stripped out of my constricting clothing. After checking that my junk was all accounted for, I threw on boxers and a t-shirt and flopped into bed.

My last thought before drifting off was wondering how Liz would react to having her boyfriend's penis available again.

* * *

I was starving and erect when I finally woke up. My bed felt like the right size, my clothes fit in a familiar way, and Shad waved at me from the ceiling. It was good to be me again.

I scarfed down some breakfast – lunch, whatever - and texted Liz that I was male again. I didn't expect her to respond anytime soon, but it was hard not to feel optimistic about everything right then.

My dad came home for lunch and we all had a bit of a discussion, which was way more positive than anything we'd had since I got haunted. I was doing well at this whole ghost thing and they were happy to see me excel. We all had a good laugh about my time as a girl, thankful that wasn't permanent.

All my optimism prompted me to do something I hadn't done in a while: work out. It wasn't anything crazy, just some pushups and sit-ups, but it felt good to exert myself. I wasn't going to take it to the crazy extremes the wrestling team did. They were crazy masochists in my opinion. But working up a light sweat? That was the right kind of hurting good.

The doorbell rang and I went to get it. I was expecting someone for my parents, possibly Liz, but instead I opened the door to reveal a normalfied Cera.

I stood there dumbstruck. I expected her to be angry at me for the rest of time, but here she was, standing self-consciously on my parent's doorstep.

She gave me a scowl. "You going to let me in?"

I opened the door wider and stepped aside. She kept her distance, reminding me that she only looked skinny. I shut the door and followed her dumbly into the living room. She looked down the hallway, presumably checking for my parents, nodding when she saw we were alone for the moment.

“I’m sorry for the other night,” I said before she could say anything.

“You’re a stupid sack of shit,” she said. “On the other hand, I wore that stupid top outside where the neighbors could see while knowing you’re a stupid sack of shit, so it’s partly on me.”

From Cera, that was almost like being forgiven.

When I didn’t say anything, she continued. “What I’m really pissed about is this thing the three of us have. You like Liz, but you’re just using me – shut up,” she said, stopping me before I could get a sound out. “You like her, but you just like my tits. I deserve better than that – I’m worth more than being a side chick.

“What I see as the tricky thing here is Liz sees something in you. You’re like some lame puppy she’s fallen for. If I tell her you’re using me, she’ll probably get all pissed at you and dump your ass – no, let me finish.”

She stood there for a moment, breathing deeply, then dropped her illusion. In addition to her enormous chest, I noticed she’d been hiding her disheveled hair and lack of make-up. Had she been crying?

“I want you to get a brain, which she can help you with. I want her to be happy, which she kind of is with you. But I –” she wiped her eye, “I want someone who wants me. I have to believe that’s not too much to ask.”

That was, I, wow. Cera had a heart?

“Say something, asshole!”

“I’m sorry, you’re right, I’m sorry.”

She looked at me, angry and in pain, then wiped her eyes again. “I’ll talk to her about me dropping out of this. I’ll tell her she should stay in. Just – just be good to her, ‘kay?”

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak. We headed to the door, which I held open for her.

“Thank you,” I whispered, not sure if she heard me.

She had her illusion back up, but she looked back and gave me a curt nod. I watched her walk away quickly before eventually closing the door, feeling lower than I had since becoming a guy again. It was all pretty confusing. I didn’t set out to objectify her, but then I hadn’t been trying to hide how much more I liked Liz. Cera had her charm, but when forced to choose there wasn’t a question who I’d pick.

I went to work out some more, but my heart wasn’t in it, so I showered. While I won’t comment on any particular actions beyond scrubbing and shampooing, I will admit I was feeling pretty...excited...while I did.

Man, having my junk back was wonderful.

I returned to my room to write down some thoughts about the previous night. I still didn’t understand everything that happened, but writing had helped in the past. My journal was a patchy thing, with several posts in a week followed by months of nothing, but it provided a refuge as a place to sort my thoughts. Three quarters of the pages were bent from writing. The rest were almost like new.

My pen seemed reluctant to move and I only haltingly wrote what I was thinking. Maybe it was because I was out of practice, but I couldn't articulate what the last few days had done to me. All of it was surreal; being a girl, experiencing a specter's memories, dishing out and experiencing objectification, being in a hot three-way relationship to not being sure if I still had a girlfriend, witnessing Madam Leombre struggle with and tame an angry spirit, putting a soul to peace myself, seeing Cera cry. It was all too much.

Once I had the bare bones of my experience down, I shut my journal and set it aside. I couldn't sit still much longer.

After letting my mom know I was going out for a walk, I headed over to Liz's place. Cera probably visited her after leaving my house, but likely wasn't there anymore. Sure enough, Liz answered the door alone.

She invited me in before I could say anything, leading me up to her room. I tried not to look too much into that, as her expression was more 'we need to talk' than 'shut up and kiss me'.

Once we were inside and she closed the door behind us, she turned to me and asked, "How did you change back?"

"I went back to the bridge and told her to forgive herself."

Liz cocked her head. "How did you figure out that would work?"

I shrugged. "Because I, uh, I made a mistake and ... I'm sorry."

We stood there for a moment before I continued. "I made a mistake, people I care about were hurt, and I can't change that. I can continue beating myself up over it, or I can forgive

myself and change for the better. She didn't have the opportunity to fix things either – mostly because she died. But she could still forgive herself and move on.”

“What does moving on look like for you?”

My heart caught in my throat. I wanted to move forward with her, but from her tone and with what I did, I wasn't sure that was possible. What should I say? I cared about her, but if me being close was too painful for her then I should stay away, right? But what if I tried doing the noble thing and she wanted me to still be her boyfriend? Scary as it was, I should be the one to put my neck on the line. I owed her that much.

“I'd like to move forward with you,” I said, “If you don't want to see me again that's fine and I'll go, but-”

She moved in to kiss me.

After a long, intense embrace, she pulled away. “What I want is for you to take off all my clothes.”

Well, I could do that.

* * *

10 Halloween. We'd been looking forward to it for a few weeks now. Looking with dread, looking with excitement, looking with morbid fascination: everything since they drank those drinks at what they thought was a haunted house attraction was building to this.

Cera talked to Madam Leombre and got assigned to Saint Mary's along with what I assumed was the A-Team of Tim, Avery, and Tate. Karley and Katie, the other new Haunts, decided to stay

home along with the youngest Haunt, Jim. I wasn't certain Liz and I were ready, but we'd be in the main group, so at least we'd have experienced backup.

My foray into ghost hunting with Madam Leombre was apparently the typical experience; find and encounter an unidentified spirit, but there were usually clues about what to expect if you knew what to look for. Big events like Halloween in a graveyard were different. I'm told there was often a guiding spirit more powerful than the others, sometimes called a General, that influenced how the night went. Several people talked about the Hunt, which was a collective of spirits bent on – you guessed it – hunting down whatever crossed their path. We didn't know what to expect this year, but speculation abounded.

Liz and I were stationed together on the perimeter with instructions not to go out of sight of the core of our formation, where Madam Leombre stood ready to assist anyone who got in over their head. We were both armed with a half dozen flashlights, little bags of salt to throw, flammable perfume bags and matches, hawthorn sticks, a whistle, and an iron pendant. It seemed like a random assortment of objects to arm oneself with, but everyone had stories to tell of when each of those items had come in handy. The best part was our spirits would be less affected by those countermeasures, as they were embodied with us.

It was cloudy, which kept it fairly warm, but extra dark. Liz was having trouble seeing, but Shad and I could see just fine. It gave Liz an excuse to keep her hands on me, which I enjoyed.

We didn't see any action until after eleven. Megan shouted a warning before she whacked it with her stick. We both turned and saw her hair, maybe twenty feet long, holding her implements and whacking whichever spirits came in range. Skye lit up a few headstones, highlighting where the spirits were congregated. Liz tossed some of her salt bags back and forth, poofing spirits

wherever she made contact. I shot my hands out, one holding a flashlight and the other my pendant, and helped them out. Shad reached out and grappled with one. Jill ran up to a rather large, mist shrouded spirit and simply slurped it up.

It was an exciting few seconds of action. The few surviving spirits fled back into the night.

“Hell yeah!” Liz cheered. I pulled her close and kissed her in celebration. That was easier than I thought it would be.

“Don’t celebrate just yet,” Madam Leombre hissed from a couple rows away.

“*Why not?*” The disembodied voice seemed to come from all around. “*You clearly are the superior force. I think we shall simply surrender.*”

All of us became as silent and still as the graves surrounding us. The voice felt oily and while I couldn’t place the accent, I could catch the sense of aristocracy about it.

“And if we accept your surrender?” Madam Leombre asked.

“*Then you will house us as your prisoners.*”

We all kept quiet. That sounded too good to be true, but then we were pretty awesome. I shared a look with Liz. She gave me a suggestive look. I suppose if we didn’t have to worry about spirits for the rest of the night we’d have to find some other way to occupy our time. Making out in a graveyard might not be on anyone else’s list, but it sounded pretty good to me.

“I accept your surrender,” Madam Leombre said. “To whom do I have to privilege of addressing?”

The spirit chuckled. “*We are known as the Replicator.*”

I heard muffled cursing from our leader. Maybe we were less awesome than we thought.

A white mist, not glowing but somehow more visible than the rest of the night, began rising in a ring twenty yards wide. It arched over us into a dome. As it pulled in closer to us, I could distinguish distinct forms in the white mass. Rather, I could see the same form repeated throughout the mist, like a pattern on a quilt. The Replicator had, well, replicated.

“Remember your training and keep your sense of self,” Madam Leombre said. “Don’t get lost in its mind and you’ll stay safe.”

“*Perhaps,*” it replied. “*Perhaps not. There is rather a lot of me to get lost in, Leombre.*”

A few of us gasped. Spirits, as a rule, didn’t have the presence of mind to acknowledge other people. Even spirits that could remember their own name, or an assumed title like this thing, were rare and powerful. One that knew our teacher and singled her out? That couldn’t be good.

The mist crashed inward in silence. Shad and I thrashed at it, but for some reason we couldn’t interact with it. What was it doing?

“Madam Leombre!”

I turned toward the sound and my eyes almost popped out of my head. Madam Leombre was dressed in a black turtleneck and matching slacks tonight, so she was plenty visible on the white backdrop. She still sported the baby bump from our encounter the other night. However, it had grown considerably since I last saw her and was only getting bigger.

As I tried to make sense of what I was seeing, I thought back to what the spirit had said. It had seemed like a straightforward surrender to me, but didn’t it say something about housing it? She

regularly housed spirits to reform them, but the Replicator was a big pile of spirit. Could she hold all of it?

Her belly surged forward, now three times bigger than a moment before. Then four times bigger. Then five. Shit, this was too much. There didn't seem to be an end to the Replicator and Madam Leombre was getting big by even Haunt standards. I watched as her stomach, now bigger than the rest of her, got wedged between two headstones. She wore a worried grimace on her face.

I looked around. The rest of us were unaffected. We'd all accepted its surrender, right?

Apparently, only she'd entered the deal to house the spirit. Only she was subject to the spirit's attention. Could she handle it on her own? If it did overwhelm her, then the surrender might not stop it from harming us. It might have trouble overwhelming all of us at once, though. I tried not to think about what would happen if things didn't work out when I said, "I accept your surrender."

Immediately the rushing white mist assaulted me. It seeped in through my skin, immediately turning me all white instead of grayscale. Shad enveloped me and I felt myself start to black out. I stumbled into a headstone and the feeling passed, though immediately I could tell I was missing some boy parts again.

Was I going to turn into a girl every time I reformed a spirit? Fuck, that sucked. Shad was a shadow and shadows mimicked what they shadowed. The first spirit we incorporated to reform was a young mother. It made sense I would become a woman in a weird, occult way, but damn! Why couldn't I have reformed a body builder my first time?

I didn't have much time to pout as I felt my belly surge outward. Was I shadowing how Madam Leombre reformed spirits or was this just where the Replicator wanted to go?

"I accept your surrender!" Liz said. As she said that, her legs straightened and her jeans strained to hold her.

"I accept your surrender!" I turned to see Megan have her head yanked back as her hair began growing at an alarming rate.

"I accept your surrender!" Tombstones all around Skye lit up, followed by his clothes.

"I accept your surrender!" A whirlpool of white mist formed around Jill's mouth and she began to fill out.

Great, our odds together had to be better than just our teacher alone. I looked back at her. She was larger than she'd been a moment ago, but she wasn't growing as quickly. She locked eyes with me for a moment. There was concern there, but she gave me a quick nod and smile. I'd made the right move.

A ripping sound next to me made me turn. Liz's jeans were giving up. All along the outer seam poured out flesh. Sexy, unblemished flesh. I caught a peak of more tears along the inside of her pants before a flashlight nearly hit me in the face. A bag of salt bounced off my belly and I realized she was using her telekinetic powers to hopefully burn off some of the Replicator's energy.

I examined my growing middle and considered how I might be able to copy her. Unlike Liz and Cera, I never really had active powers. I doubted pulling my hands off would help me. My belly didn't hurt, but there was a phantom pressure building. I unbuckled my belt. I'd purchased

enough new clothes recently that I felt protective of the ones I was wearing. I felt no heavier, thought as I pressed a hand into my belly it felt like I should be heavier. It was almost like being an astronaut on the moon with the same mass as ever but with reduced weight.

Something slid past my ankle and I jumped. It was a strand of Megan's hair. I looked up and saw her frantically trying to braid her Rapunzel locks. The night was getting brighter as Skye kept lighting more and more objects. Rocks and twigs and leaves joined the hunting implements in racing through the air. Madam Leombre's massive middle was now taller than the closest mausoleum. Jill was gaining more and more body fat, though her belly was by far the largest part of her. I was getting pretty big myself. There was increasingly less room between headstones to maneuver.

As the minutes passed, each of our growth or other containment methods slowed. Madam Leombre finally broke some headstones, which gave her more space for her van sized womb. Liz's legs fully ripped out of her jeans despite the venerable tornado of items spinning around her. Her panties were strained to breaking, but thankfully she'd worn stretchy ones. Jill looked like she'd eaten the last two contestants on *My 800-Pound Life*. Skye was making half the cemetery impersonate the Vegas Strip, though Megan's hair was covering most of it up. My belly was bigger than the rest of me, which likely made me the smallest person (not counting Skye), though my change in coloration probably counted for something.

As the white mist slowly disappeared into us, my attention turned to Shad, who was stretched out into the night. It felt like he was wrestling something. I tried to pay attention to what he was doing, but Liz's glorious ass was making that difficult.

At long last, after the night was black again and we'd all stopped growing, Shad dragged over what I could only assume was the Replicator Prime. It might have just been because it was covered in Shad's shadowy substance, but it looked more solid than the clones. As tightly entangled as they were, I wasn't sure Shad could pass this one off to anyone else. I took a moment to examine myself. My butt and thighs were swollen, though not currently threatening to rip through my pants. My breasts were bigger than Madam Leombre's usually were. Even my arms felt a little poofy. My gut was tight, but I was merely uncomfortable rather than in pain.

Looking around, it seemed I was the best off. Liz was breathing rapidly while rubbing her thighs together and directing the dozens of items in orbit around her. Skye's hands were flailing all over in a way that reminded me of seizure patients. Megan couldn't lift her head with the massive bunch of hair she weaved together. Jill looked stuffed to the gills and ready to vomit. All I could see of Madam Leombre was her enormous belly, which was writhing and churning.

Realizing it was all up to me, I helped Shad pull the last one in. It resisted mightily. I aimed to swallow it, but it squirmed away. As I went to chase it, I stumbled then overbalanced backwards, landing on my fat ass. Shad used me as an anchor and pulled it closer. I couldn't see much, but it felt like it suddenly launched itself at me, entering me through my new feminine opening.

Uh-oh.

There's apparently a lot of symbolism with spirits. Eating a spirit meant incorporating it into you the same way you are what you eat. Breathing one in was more like accepting their words, or something. We'd been letting the spirits enter through our skin tonight, which was the least personal method. Letting it enter through your eye lets it enter the deepest parts of your soul.

That was probably the worst way to let a spirit enter you, but letting a spirit that multiplied itself enter your love gate and take residence in your baby oven probably was a close second.

I pressed my hands to my belly, worried about what was going to happen. Images flashed into my mind. A machine pressing ink covered block type onto a sheet of paper. A microphone transporting speech to speakers, amplifying the sound to reach a crowd. A bacteria culture growing exponentially. A tweet going viral. The Replicator was all of these. Its purpose was to grow and spread.

I clumsily rolled myself over, hoping in vain to squash my belly under me. Instead, I found myself rising further and further from the ground. It was weakened from multiplying so much already tonight, but it was renewed by being placed in a spot designed to help things grow. My belly sped up its growth and I could feel the Replicator shake with anticipation.

Fuck. I didn't want to be pregnant with Replicator babies, but I especially didn't want more Replicators to deal with. I crossed my ankles together and leveraged my vagina shut. This ended here. If this was going to exit me, it wasn't going to do it with the symbolism of birth.

“Danny, what’s happening?”

I reared up to look over my swelling form to see Liz. She wasn't working as hard to keep the clones from swelling her up more, so maybe it was all focused on me now.

“Plug me up Liz! Don't let it out!”

“Which hole?”

I hesitated. “My, uh, new one.”

Liz just looked up at me for a long moment before laughing. “Ha! One dildo dam coming up!”

I squinted my eyes shut. I didn’t want to see what she’d use to wall it in. But with my eyes shut, I could pay more attention to what was happening to my body, which was just as scary. My legs were swelling, making it more difficult to keep them shut. My breasts began swelling, filling more of the room between my gut and my face. The skin of my back was arching out even while my spine was arching backward. My arms were starting to get stiff.

My eyes snapped open and I yelped when Liz thrust what felt like part of a tombstone into me. It stretched my opening and penetrated several inches. I couldn’t keep my legs together anymore. As I let them pull apart, the spirit inside me pushed against the blockage, nearly displacing it, before Liz smashed it back in. It went back and forth, a push-of-war with my pussy as the battleground, and *that’s what it felt like for a woman?!?* I shuddered at the violent yet not entirely unpleasant sensation.

Hey, when did I get so high?

I looked down and watched some of my tattered clothing slide off my ballooning middle. I could still feel the ground beneath me, so I must have actually been filling everything between the ground and my view from fifteen feet in the air. There was no way the human body should be able to stretch like that. It occurred to me that I would probably find out what my ghostly limits were tonight.

At least I wouldn’t be dying a virgin. Hell, if Liz grinding that stone inside me counted then I’d have my male and female V-cards stamped before kicking the bucket.

The Replicator churned inside me, signaling a change in tactics.

“Liz, I might need more plugs!”

“Way ahead of you.”

My ass swelled behind me as it concentrated its efforts there. I clenched, but stretched out like this there wasn't much else I could do. Suddenly, another very cold slab entered my back door. Oookay, that was even more stimulation!

I felt something slither up along my sides towards the plugs. Unable to turn my head much, I could barely see what looked like roots reach up towards the action. It must have been Megan's hair. She could probably hold those plugs in better if she tied them in place. Thank God, there would be less of that sliding back and forth, riling all these feelings up inside me. I did want those secure, right?

Strands pressing into me like fishnet stockings tightened into place around my back half. I could feel my flesh press against them, straining to grow larger. The independently thrusting blocks, scintillating my mind like a kaleidoscope of bodily pleasures, stopped moving quite so much. I wasn't sure if it was the hair or the spirits causing this, but when they stopped thrusting they started twisting a little. My body trembled with the new sensations.

My vision was partially obstructed, but I looked like I was house sized now. I looked through my canyon of cleavage down towards the ground and saw I was taller than Madam Leombre's belly. Damn, how much bigger was I going to get?

Something shot up through between my breasts. I tried flinching away, but my head was pretty much stuck in place now. It was a couple of the iron pendants we'd been equipped with. They plopped gently around my neck. Liz must have figured out stuffing my face holes to stop the

Replicator would have prevented me from breathing. Just like her belt did the night we became haunted, the pendants held the spirit back from my head.

“Thanks,” I shouted to whoever might be listening. “I really didn’t want to suck on a graveyard dildo tonight.”

The sound of some nervous laughter made its way up from the ground. I tried waving, but I couldn’t move my shoulders or elbows anymore. They kept talking without me, hopefully forming a plan.

With the little I’d learned over the last few weeks, I figured if I lasted until dawn I’d be in the clear. That was hours away still, which made me doubt I could keep growing until then. They had to do something to help me not explode. The pressure, the overwhelming *pressure*, was starting to get to me. I realized that on this of all nights I was more subject to spirit physics than normal physics, but my body was squeaking and taunt and shiny and I wasn’t sure how much longer I could take it. There was some pain, but mostly this aching pleasure.

Just like before, Shad kept me from the worst of the mental trauma, but I could feel the Replicator trying to assimilate us along with reproducing. I was happy to not have to deal with the mental battle, but honestly that left me with nothing but my physical changes to focus on, leaving me feeling helpless.

There was some shouting down below, followed by a stretch of silence. Oh, they probably wanted a reply. “I can’t hear you.” More indecipherable shouting. “Whatever you said, sure, do your thing.”

After a moment, my skin began crawling with colorful patterns. Something wet was placed over each nipple. The two plugs began vibrating independently. What felt like two giant hands began kneading my enormous breasts. Oh yeah, oooooOOOOOHHh yeah! Oh God above YES!!!

I wasn't sure what they were trying to achieve, but they were definitely producing some phenomenal side effects.

The stimulation from my outsides began to be matched on my insides. The many copies inside me began to churn and move. Amid the ravaging sexual impulses, I also felt the Replicator trying to fight off whatever the colors were doing. It took me several long, pleasurable moments to figure out what the plan was.

Each swirl of color was latching onto an individual clone. As each clone became unique, Replicator Prime lost control. Instead of using unified tactics, the activity became a mindless jumble of writhing and churning. I was still growing, but now the sharpest increase in pressure was right behind my aching nipples. My breasts surged in size, then in a mighty gush bright rainbows of fractured spirits squirted out of me like waterfalls of unicorn milk. I could only assume holy water or salt or some other substance anathema to ghosts was placed over my nipples to destroy the clones.

The 'O' was legendary.

Even while I watched myself grow smaller, the pressure increased. It was like I was a massive tube of toothpaste. It should have been painful, but the sexual stimulation just transformed all the feelings into bliss.

Is that what girls feel during sex all the time? Maybe I shouldn't be so quick to get by dick back this time.

When I shrank back to the size of my car, nothing else would come out. I was pretty out of it, but it seemed like everyone else was celebrating. After a while, Liz came over and kissed me. That brought me back down to earth.

"I'm so glad that worked," she said. "Are you okay? Did we hurt you?"

I smiled. "I'm *fantastic!*"

Everyone laughed. I really should have been embarrassed, but I felt too good at that moment to care. My laughter was the kind of genuine belly laugh that kids get at lame jokes. It felt good.

At least, it felt good until I stopped laughing and realized my belly was still rumbling. Shit, I was growing again. Well, at least the cure was better than the disease.

* * *

I went through another five cycles of growth before dawn. Though none of them matched that first titanic growth, the final time before dawn was still quite large. The group from Saint Mary's came over in time to see it, having had a relatively uneventful evening. Cera was particularly vocal when it came to the embarrassing bits. I was more aware that time around, but in my euphoria I decided to take the high road. I'd put her through some tough shit lately, so she could have her fun.

Madam Leombre ordered me unplugged right before the sun came up. Every last clone spilled out of me on their own and faded away in the light. I was left stark naked, female, and visibly pregnant. The rest of our group had varying degrees of wardrobe malfunctions, but I was

the only one physically changed from the night. Even Madam Leombre was down to her previous pregnancy size.

Sometimes life doesn't seem fair, but maybe that's the price we pay for our highs.

Liz held up some blankets while I changed into some of our teacher's spare clothes. They were too loose through the bust and hips, but less so than I would have expected. I'm not sure why I expected her spare clothes to be mundane after the eclectic things I'd seen her wear, but I was surprised she had a mini skirt and a halter top in her trunk with matching heels.

We went and had the traditional Hallow's Day Breakfast at a local diner. Everyone was upbeat despite our collective exhaustion. Each group talked over the other trying to describe all the things that happened. The Willowbrook group emphasized how great we all felt fighting off the first wave and having them surrender, the fear as we realized our mistake, our courage we summoned to individually accept some of the Replicator's clones, and the absurdity of what it did to us. When they weren't making sex jokes, I actually received some compliments on how strong I was as a Haunt. I felt like I just stood there and managed not to explode, but they seemed to find me heroic.

The Saint Mary's people described these shambling ghosts that responded to Avery's cold by putting on skis and poofy ear muffs. Tim shouted them back to their graves (Liz translated as he described what he did). Tate and Cera tried something pretty cool after most of the action was over and they got bored. Apparently Tate is possessed by a zephyr, a gentle wind spirit that allows him to float. They tied Cera to him and had her blast the whole area with light. The remaining spirits left after that show of force.

Liz nudged me during their explanation.

<Do they look like they're flirting to you?>

I did a double take. They were sitting awfully close together. As I watched, she placed a hand on his shoulder and let it linger while she laughed at one of his jokes.

I smiled and nodded. <Think they'll be a good couple? Doesn't she find fat people gross or something?>

Liz rolled her eyes. <Not always, just the lazy ones. Besides, Tate used to be a basketball player before being haunted.>

Really? Looking at the hefty guy, I wouldn't have guessed it. I pulled Liz in for a side hug, less freaked out about her touching me when I was like this than I was a week ago. After breaking things off with Cera, I'd felt bad for her despite knowing Liz and I would be better off being an exclusive couple again. It made me happy seeing something blossom for her.

I looked down past my boobs. I could feel the Replicator in my lap filling gut, exhausted for the moment but still malevolent. That would get sorted out. Shad and I had a good teacher and supportive friends. My parents might freak a little – at least until they found out they wouldn't be changing any little diapers for this one, but on the whole they were there for me, too. We could handle this.

Haunted life was weird, but I could get used to it.