

Chapter 1

“Hey! Wake up! We’ve got a ghost!”

A muffled snort was the response from my sleeping companion. I shoved the pile of costume sketches off Lucy’s head. She was drooling. She was also snoring. Put them together and they spell ‘snooling.’ Not an attractive combination and my pillow was now wet with dog slobber as well as tiny black hairs.

I poked her. “You sorry mutt. You should be whinin’, wailin’, and howlin’. Aren’t canines supposed to be sensitive to spooks? What’s your problem?” I nudged the dog again. “Lucy! Get the ghost, baby girl!”

Lucy yawned, flopped onto her back, batted the air with her front paws and remained serenely unimpressed.

“Sheesh. Fine ghost hunter you turned out to be. You’re fired.”

When the click sounded again, I stayed under the covers. Why bother to get up? No one would be at that door. No one was ever at that door. Nightly, for the three weeks since I moved in, I’d been hearing someone locking and relocking the front door. Nightly, for three weeks, I checked. No one was there. I tried tiptoeing to the door, then flinging it open. No one. I peered through the peephole ‘til my eyes hurt. No one.

I spent another three minutes under the quilt listening to clicks, then threw off the cover and slid out of bed, grabbing a sweatshirt to ward off the strange chill glazing the night.

Lucy woofed, oozed to the floor, then padded behind me as we crept down the hallway. A brave unit of two, we gingerly peeked around the art deco screen that hid my office from the den. Daily, I turned off that stupid desk lamp. Nightly, someone or some *thing* turned it on. Last night, in desperation, I’d yanked the plug from the socket.

The light blazed in cheerful defiance.

I exhaled. “Lights do not turn themselves on automatically. There’s gotta be a scientific explanation. Electrical whatzits. Energy surge whozits. I’ve got it! Con Ed malfeasance. They cause black-outs; why not light-ins?”

The bathroom light was also burning, admittedly through no fault of any outside entity. Sheer forgetfulness by me. I glimpsed my reflection under the raw fluorescent bulbs, and immediately wished I hadn’t. Bloodshot eyes. Dark circles under the eyes. Adding a touch of drama was a white streak slashing through my bushy red hair. On closer inspection that turned out to be a toothpaste stain stuck to the mirror. But still . . .

“Ouch. Not a pretty sight. I’m probably scarin’ the ghost. What happened to the tall foxy chick who arrived in New York four years ago rarin’ to tear up the town?”

Lucy’s tail swished enthusiastically in wild circles, tapping against the bathroom door. I nodded. “Yep. You got it. She’s gone. Poof.”

I tiptoed towards the front door, shuddering, partly from cold and partly from fear, then peeked through the keyhole. To no one’s surprise (particularly mine) there was no one there. Nothing. Nada. Zippo.

I sighed. “Mel Flynn. Do not make yourself nuts. Just ‘cause there’s an extra entity in the apartment doesn’t mean you’ve gone one seam short of a hemline. Ghosts live in every old New York apartment. I’ll bet spirit soldiers from the Revolutionary War are playin’ poker on a nightly basis in brownstones all over Greenwich Village. Beatin’ the Redcoats with every hand.”

I felt a draft. I could have sworn I shut the windows earlier. Apparently I’d missed one.

I hurried to the window and started to slam it shut, but instead leaned over the sill and inhaled the night air. And the rain. There’d been three weeks of cold, gray rain - in New York City in early June. Weird. The torrent had started the same time the locks started turning and the lights started turning on, which was the second night after I’d moved in. What was next? Chains rattling? Shadows shrieking?

A clap of thunder shook the window. I backed away then tripped over one of Lucy’s chew toys. I picked up the rubber barbell and gave it to my begging dog.

“Luce, this whole ghost sightin’ thingee is most likely latent insanity in the family. Hits all female Flynn’s at age twenty-six. A sure sign of incipient lunacy. Or is that insipid?”

I was saved from spouting forth further incipient, insipid ramblings by sounds of cursing coming from the street below. Lucy’s ears perked up. I stuck my head outside again, shrugging off a possible lightning strike.

Two boys who looked like they were about eleven were trying to break into a new Honda with a crowbar. I was tempted to run downstairs and demonstrate my skills in breaking and entering, lessons courtesy of my best friend Savanna’s five older brothers, but the car’s siren began emitting an ear-splitting scream. The kids took off, shattering existing sprint records.

Three men in black leather came into view. They were linked arm in arm, expertly skating down the street on rollerblades. The man in the middle held an oversized red umbrella high against the rain.

A late night jogger trotted by at a brisk pace, his baseball cap flashing a rusty orange under the street lamp. A soggy golden retriever, identical in color to the cap, galloped happily at the runner’s heels, reveling in the freedom of splashing through puddles. They seemed familiar. Maybe from Washington Square Park where Lucy and I had started running?

A sharp whistle sounded, then a male voice shouted, “Dee Gee. Come!” The dog stopped his less-than-graceful choreographed version of *Singing in the Rain* and obediently trotted towards his master. The pair disappeared around the corner. I continued to gaze out at the dark, rain-slick streets, now empty of activity, until a spate of cold water doused me full across my chest. I slammed the window shut.

Lucy yawned. I yawned. She had the right idea. Sleep.

After exchanging the soggy sweats for dry, I plopped back on the bed, Lucy joined me. I patted her soft furry head and stared at my ceiling.

I loved my new apartment. The décor was all mine, even if much of it smacked of that period called Early Great Aunt. Matisse and Erte prints hung securely above my new drafting table. Renaissance colors of ruby and jade complemented the antiques graciously donated by my personal Early Great Aunt, Teresa Flynn, painter and collector of fine *objects d’art*. Our den held the Baby Grand (another Aunt Teresa donation) which solidly occupied an entire corner. Huge windows in every room. Wood floors. Washington Square Park five blocks away. Not far from

my day job, which was designing patterns, but also right in the center of a lot of Village theatres and clubs. Chinese take-out three doors down.

I hadn't remembered a ghost clause included in the lease.

I tucked the soft comforter close around me. Lucy snuggled by my side.

The rain buffeted the air-conditioner. Suddenly, I could hear a voice along with the sounds of water tapping. A voice crying in the night: "*Briley. I'm here! Come quickly!*"