

PHAZE FLARE

FREE FICTION



APPARITION

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Apparition

By Dahlia Rose

She walks like the whisper of the wind. Her feet never touch the ground, not is she seen by day. But still she watches as the children play in the park. Their joyful laughter peals out at they ride the carousel in Central Park. At night the massive lawns are empty. In the winter the benches are clod and lonely. But it is only at night when all is silent except the distant sirens or who will brave the park at nigh that she can be free.

As much freedom as an apparition can have. She cannot touch, connect eat, only feel and be there in that time. Such is the existence of Josephine to live this way day in and day out, year after solitary year. She cannot even remember her last name or the circumstances that brought her to where she is now. She has been stuck in limbo that long. Some see her, while running in the park or taking a stroll through the small piece of paradise in a big concrete city. They will catch a smell of her light perfume or see the wisps of her misty blue dress. If they try to follow she disappears quickly. Sometimes it is out of fear or just a game to pass the time. What else is there to do when you are in between worlds?

But then there are the ones, the ones that she can sense will help. Then she shows herself, beckoning them with an outstretched hand and a plea in her soft brown eyes. No one has ever stayed long enough to find out what she needs. What keeps her on this earthy plain? What stops a lonely apparition from moving on? They run or choose not to believe what has appeared in front of them. So she walks the hiking paths and lonely roads of Central Park. Waiting for the day someone will help her escape. Waiting for the day that this person will be brave enough to help her answer the questions, she has long forgotten.

“Damn it!” Jared muttered to himself. Where was that damn limo? It was supposed to be there fifteen minutes ago. Jared didn’t want to have to deal with one of his father’s lectures about punctuality, but as he was late he knew he would hear it. Being the son of Dominic and Natalie Cross had its pitfalls. At thirty he was one of the most eligible bachelors in NY. Living on the east side of Manhattan in a loft wasn’t so bad to say the least. But Jared did not need his father’s money to survive, he needed it for his two projects to survive. He ran two shelters for teenage runaways living on the streets in the city. Instead of sleeping on corners and being forced into prostitution and drug habits. Jared gave them a warm bed, food, a roof over their heads and offered other opportunities for the forgotten of the world. So if he had to listen to his father’s lectures to ensure a handsome donation to his shelter’s he sat and buttoned his lips.

Shit! The word was spit out of him. He decided then and there it would be better to go through Central Park to get to his parents. They lived not too far from one of the many exits of the park. He’d just hop in a cab on the other side and zip to their place. Dressed in a dark tuxedo that accentuated his large frame Jared crossed the street and headed into the park. He liked this idea better anyway of walking anyway. That way if he ran into any kids looking for a safe place to sleep, he could give them a card and directions to the shelter. Jared walked in front of the traffic that was almost to a complete stop, he moved quickly. He smiled knowing that in New York when the traffic is ready to move, you had better be not standing in front of it.

Shadows were already beginning to form from the setting sun. The trees made a canopy of shade and Jared walked through the park unafraid. He was six two and with long brown hair falling down his back he looked more like a sexy biker than the son of a shipping baron. It was just after Labor Day and the city still had a little humidity from the summer left. In a tux it was hell on wheels and Jared could feel droplets of sweat starting to run down his back. Sitting on a bench were two teens as he passed. He could tell by the wariness in their eyes that they were homeless. Jared knew

the routine sit in the park like if you are just relaxing until it was safe from cops chasing them away. The twosome would try to find a place to sleep for the night. The next day the process would begin all over again. Jared hated to see it. But in New York kids like these were looked over. His aim was to do something about it.

“Hey guys, you looking for a roof and a meal? He stopped and asked.

“Listen asshole, we don’t do shit like that. Shove off!” the boy stood up with his fist balled just in case he had to defend him and his companion.

“Whoa calm down kid. I run a shelter. You and your girlfriend could stay there.” Jared replied. His hands were up to show the kid he meant no harm.

“She is not my girlfriend, she is my sister.” The girl did not even look up. She seemed withdrawn and scared. Her body language, her silence was the classic signs of brutality.

Making a mental note about getting counseling for her, he reached in his pocket and pulled out a card. “Look, go to the “Safe Harbor Shelter. It’s off Columbus Circle. That’s my place, ask for Max and tell him I sent you.”

“This ain’t no bullshit right?” The boy asked warily.

“No you guys will be safe there and as long as you follow the rules you can stay as long as you like.” Jared assured him.

The boy took the card and helped his sister from the bench and Jared watched them walk off. He called Max later to see if they got there and to send up someone to talk to the girl. He looked at his watch again, he was over an hour late. “Damn it!” He said to himself and walked quickly lost in his own thoughts. Jared noticed his surroundings a few minutes later. He had been walking and not paying attention to where he was going, He was sure he made a wrong turn somewhere because this was not where he needed to be. Cursing softly to himself he turned on the smaller path to head back in the direction he came from. How in the hell did he end up in one of the bike trails? The part of the park the lanes were smaller and carried more dense bushes. Out of the corner of his eye Jared swore he saw a wisp of blue. The hair on the back of his

neck stood on end and he turned quickly to confront who ever was behind him. There she stood dressed in a blue with bare feet. Her black straight hair blue gently but there was no breeze, everything seemed to go still. She could be no more than nineteen, her eyes were sad and Jared felt an instant amount of concern that over rid the wariness.

He took slow careful steps towards the small woman and reached out his hand talking softly to her. "Hi, are ok? Do you need help?"

Her response was to turn and run deeper into the wooded path. "Hey!" Jared called after her and followed. She moved quickly for a woman with no shoes on. She stooped suddenly and faced him once again.

Jared skidded to a halt. "Lady why did you run? If you need help, let me take you to the police or a hospital."

The woman in blue stared at him with the sad brown eyes. This time it was her who reached out her hand to him. Jared stepped forward to take it but she steeped back .

"Help me." She whispered. "Find me."

"Find you?" Jared asked. "You're right here, I found you al....."

Jared words stopped as he watched the woman fade from his sight, her out stretched hand was the last thing to disappear. With his mouth gaping open Jared stared at the spot where she stood a few seconds before. *What the fuck! This was not possible* he thought wildly. *She could not just disappear!* Jared looked around expecting to see her standing somewhere else, but there was nothing she was gone. Jared walked away slowly looking back over and over again to where she last stood. His mind was having trouble comprehending hut he knew he had just saw and talked to a ghost.

"Jesus Christ this had been an odd day." He muttered. He found his usual path thought Central park and got to his parents building over an hour and a half later that he was supposed to be there. He kissed his mother's check dutifully and even managed to smiles as she winked thought his father's lecture about him

wasting his life. But his mind was somewhere else. It was on the park and what he saw. She needed help, she needed someone to find her. Find her what her body, her killer? Jared didn't know but by the end of the night, he knew he was going to find out.

Jared had spent the rest of the night thinking about his encounter. The party broke up around one thirty in the morning and Jared considered walking back through the park. He wanted to go back to the spot where she disappeared to see if she would be there once again. But one am in the morning in Central park, common sense eventually ruled out his curiosity. He definitely did not want to become a mugging victim or the city's newest unknown murder. Then they both would be in the same boat, dead in the park.

Now Jared sat behind his desk at the shelter, the dawn of a new day. He watched as his friend Max wiped the tears from his eyes after Jared recounted exactly what he had seen.

"You finished?" Jared asked as Max's laughter faded into a sigh.

"For now unless you are ready to tell me you saw the Easter bunny in the park as well." Max's voice was filled with mirth.

Maxwell Moore, Max for short. Anyone one else who called him otherwise would get a fist in the mouth. He and Jared had been friends since childhood and even then anyone who dared called the big man Maxwell was in for a beating. When Jared had came to him with the idea of opening the shelters and asked him for help. Max agreed without a second thought. He lived on the other side of the tracks. Unlike Jared Max had to learn the streets to survive from one day to the next. Now as he sat across from his long time friend, he thought Jared was finally cracking up.

"I'm serious Max, I saw the girl. She needs help and I have to help her." Jared replied.

“What could she possibly need help for Jared? Now if you saw her which I am skeptical to believe. She seems pretty much out of existence.” Max concluded.

“Maybe she needs help to find her killer.” Jared shot the theory out into the room and Max raised his eyebrow at his friend.

Jared sighed. “Listen Max you know I am a rational man and I don’t believe in a lot of stuff. But this I did see. Now I need for you to get on that computer you are always on and find me a missing person’s report matching her.”

“Fine, but how am I supposed to find her between all the people that go missing in this city every year?” Max asked. “For all we know she has been in the park for years. If I believe you saw a ghost. I’m leaning towards heat stroke induced by wearing a tux and walking.”

“Her dress is one of these new styled things with the halter top.” Jared replied.

“You need a date bad buddy if you are sizing up a ghost.” Max laughed.

“Max.” Jared said in a warning tone. “Just get me some pictures to look at on the computer and we’ll go from there.”

“Gotcha.” Max said. He started to click away on the laptop on the desk. “Oh by the way those kids you sent in are downstairs.”

“Good they came in.” Jared said approvingly. He was afraid they would not have gone to the shelter. “They settle in ok?”

“Yeah, the boy is pretty protective of his sister. I got Claudia to talk with her. She is thinking rape or molestation. But she is going to take it slow with her.” Max explained. “Here I got some missing person’s files from the database going back tow years. If your ghost is not in there, then we’ll go back further.”

“Great thanks.” Jared turned the computer to him enthusiastically. Hoping the face of his ghost was on the first page. “And make sure you keep an eye on the girl and her bother. They might need a little more help than some of the others.”

“I will, but I am not leaving this office until I prove your crazy.” Max said he leaned back in the chair to put his foot up on the desk.

“You won’t have to wait long buddy because there she is.” Jared stated it smugly. He turned the computer to face Max. “That’s the girl I saw.”

“You’re kidding! Max was amazed that he actually found the face. “Her name is Josephine Coulter. She has been missing for a year and a half. Twenty-two and last seen in Central Park. Well pinch my tits.”

Jared laughed. “I would but you are not my type.”

“What are you going to do now Jared?”

“First I’m going back to the park tonight and see if she appears again. If she does, I’ll know I’m not crazy and work from there.” Jared told Max his plan.

“Need me to go with?” Max asked.

“Nope, but thanks.” Jared replied. He knew this was his little private mission for now.

He was on pins and needles all day and in the evening. Jared wanted to get back to the park and concentrating on anything else was a very hard thing to do. By eight o’ clock that night he was stepping out of his apartment and crossing the street into Central Park. Dressed in a pair of jeans and blue t-shirt, the weather felt ten times better than the night before in a tux. Jared walked quickly to the spot where he had last saw his ghost. *When had he started to refer to her as his* he thought to himself? He stood in the exact spot and looked around. The air seem still in this area and it was eerily quiet.

“Hey, um are you here?” Jared felt a little stupid talking to no one. Especially when two runners passed and looked him as if he was a banana short of a bunch.

“Come on,” he coaxed. “I won’t hurt you, just show yourself please. I’m here to help.” Jared was about to give up when a breeze passed him and whipped up the leaves on the ground. He turned and there she stood, no shoes and the same said eyes.

“Find me, help me please.” She said her vice like a whisper.

“I have, at least I think I have.” He led out a hand to her. “Are you Josephine, is that you name?”

She looked at him for a moment and then it seemed as if she was thinking. Her face brightened and to Jared it was as if the sun had came out on the darkened path.

This time instead of stepping away the ghost pleading for help stepped forward. "Yes, yes! I think I am Josephine! That is my name! Can you help me?"

Jared smiled, a smile that was both relief and happiness. "Josephine I'll do my damn best to help you."

Josephine smiled a radiant smile. "Help me to remember?"

"I will, I definitely will." Jared replied. His hand was still reaching out to her and she put her hand in his. Even though there was no flesh and bone to touch Jared still felt the connection. The quest to find Josephine had begun.

Walking with an apparition. Jared shook his head and smiled, with his hands folded under his head he replayed the night's event in his head. Walking though the park as the night's shadows took their hold. With a woman who could be seen only when she wanted to be seen. Jared laughed aloud at how many times people passed him and swore he was talking to himself. When he looked over he could see her but they could not.

"Do you know how long I have been here?" Josephine had asked him.

"We think almost two years." He had told her.

"We?" she asked.

"My friend Max helped me find you in the missing person's data base." Jared explained. "He thinks I am crazy because I thought I saw a ghost."

"So I am dead? They found my body?" Josephine asked sadly.

"No I haven't found your body....Wait you don't know if you are dead?"

Josephine replied. "No I can't tell if I am or not. I never have seen any bright light or anything. I'm just here. I feel connected to something. I just don't what."

“I thought you would know how you....Why don’t you have shoes?” Jared asked.

“I do remember that.” Josephine laughed. It was a pretty sound almost magical Jared thought as he heard it flow from her lips. “I loved to walk across the grass in this park bare foot.”

“Ok you do know about crack pipes and needles right?” Jared said.

“That was when I had a body Jared. Now it really doesn’t matter does it?”

“I guess not. Have you ever tried to remember what happened to you?” He asked her quietly. If it was something traumatic he wanted to bring it up gently.

“I have but all I feel is like my head hurts. It hurts so badly then I see darkness. There is nothing but pitch black.”

“Maybe it happened here in the park?” Jared suggested.

“No I came here...No one could see me, no one could hear me and at first I was so confused and no matter how much I tried no one could help me. I came to the park because it was the only place I remembered being happy.” As Josephine explained his heart went out to the woman who was so alone.

“How old are you Jared?” Josephine asked. “Do you know how old I am?”

“I’m thirty and when you went missing you were twenty two. So you are almost twenty four now.” Jared had looked at his watch then and saw it was well after eleven. “Its late I have to go Josephine. But I will be back tomorrow, I promise. Hopefully I will know some more.”

“Ok Jared.” He voice was sad as she turned to walk back in to the park.

“Hey, don’t worry, I’ll be back.” He assured her.

“I know. Good night Jared.” With a wisp of a breeze she was gone.

Jared had slowly walked back to the entrance of the park that led to his street. Now he lay in bed with his eyes close thinking of Josephine. He had figured out that she was lonely. That he was basically the first conversation she had with any one in a long time.

He should have stayed with her longer so she would not feel so alone. Shit! He cursed himself for his stupidity. There was a small breeze that blew the drapes in his bed room. Jared lazily opened his eyes and saw her standing by his window.

“What the...!” he almost fell out of bed in his surprise. “How did you get in here? What am I asking? You are a ghost, you can get in any where. I thought you couldn’t leave the park.”

“I never said that.” She teased. “I said that I went there because it was the only place I remembered being happy. I followed you here.”

“Great a ghost with a sense of humor.” Jared muttered. “You could have told me.”

“Can I stay here with you? The park is nice but I miss being around people.” Josephine explained.

“Uh... sure I guess so, I mean you won’t be eating all my food.” Jared joked.

“I miss food to!” she said excitedly and sat on his bed. “I see people eating hot dogs and pretzels. And I wish I could have one. Can I sleep here with you?”

Jared looked at where she was setting, he knew she was there but her body did not even make a dent in the soft mattress. The timid question and Jared’s eyes flew to her face. Without a second thought he pulled back the covers in invitation.

“Sure, you can sleep here with me.” He replied. She needed a connection and he would not refuse her that.

“Her smile was shy as she slipped between the covers. “Thank you. I get so cold in the park.”

Jared was amazed that her body made a form under the blanket and he could feel her against him as she curved her body next to his. She was not solid by know means but it was like an energy that he could feel. There or not, he could smell the light scent of her, he felt desire curl inside his belly. *Jesus now he was attracted to a ghost* he thought. They fell asleep that way, with her curved against his body. All the things he thought he knew about ghost was being proved wrong. She slept and even murmured in her sleep.

In the morning she woke up and roamed his apartment. Looking at everything as if it was new to her, chattering a mile a minute as he made breakfast. She sat next to him and asked him how his juice, eggs and toast tasted. She wanted details and closed her eyes as if she could taste them herself as he explained. There was a knock on the door and Max strode in without waiting for an invitation to enter from the other side of the door. He saw Jared sitting eating breakfast on the sofa with the TV blaring GMA.

“Hey buddy, I bought some donuts to go along with those eggs.” Max said jovially as he walked in. “Got any coffee? I think I got some more info on your Josephine.”

Jared turned looked as if someone was next to him and nodded. Then he looked at Max once again.

“What are you looking at buddy? Max asked curiously. “Why are you nodding like a bobble head?”

“Tell me what the donuts taste like.” Max right?” The voice came from behind him and Max turned and dropped the bag that held the sweet pastries.

“Jesus H Macy!” Max yelped and staggered back towards the center of the room.

“Max meet Josephine our ghost from the park.” Jared said, he was laughing and wiping his mouth.

“Get the hell out of here! She is real! She is god damn real!” Max exclaimed.

“Yup, now if I am crazy, you are to Maxwell.” Jared smirked.

“Hey,” Max warned pointing at him. “You want a beating.”

“Maxwell is a lovely name.” Josephine soothed. She walked over to stand next to Jared.

“And that came from a ghost.” Jared said approvingly.

“That is the information I had for you Jared.” Max said. He was slowly getting over the initial shock of seeing the apparition known as Josephine in Jared’s apartment. “She may not be a ghost. There is no Jane Doe’s matching her description in the police files. Not in the last two years.”

“What do you mean?” Jared said in confusion.

“I might not be dead?” Josephine asked. Did she dare hope for this miracle?

“Nope,” Max said smugly. “What we have here might just be a case of her spirit being out of her body. I am thinking that she got hurt and had a near death experience. She got lost and forgot where her body is. She is probably lying somewhere in a coma. Find the body and the spirit can go back.”

Max words left them reeling. Find the body and she could go back. Could it be really that easy?

After sitting down to breakfast with his best friend and an apparition Max left for the shelter. He was still reeling from seeing Josephine, an actual ghost. They could not call her that now hr assumed. If she was really lost from her body, she was not really dead. Over breakfast they had discussed what the best course of action to take to find her body would be. This was New York after all, they were hundreds of hospitals across the tri- state area alone. That did not include long term care facilities, hospices and what if she was at home and some one was taking care of here there? It was a staggering reality to how big their task was. Jared and Max decided to start the search in Manhattan. If they did not find her they would work over to Brooklyn then Queens and so forth. Hopefully they would find her in one of these boroughs. Then they was the matter of getting her back into the body. No one knew how it would work so Max volunteered to do research on that. He had gone from not only a counselor at a shelter but now to a paranormal phenomenon researcher. Max shook his head and he left the building. *Life in New York, when you think nothing else will surprise you, you get surprised* he thought. He was soon swallowed up by the throngs of New Yorkers as he walked down the block to hail a cab.

Upstairs in Jared’s apartment Josephine paced excitedly. *Well she glided more than walked* Jared thought at he watched her.

“I had resigned myself to being dead now I may not be dead. Oh gosh I hope I am not dead. I can eat and walk in the park and feel the grass again. Oh! I can go to coffee shops and book stores and shopping. I miss shopping! I can dance again. I loved to dance did I mention that?” Josephine twirled as she spoke.

Jared listened to her go on and on with a small smile on his face. When she twirled, his breath caught, she looked like one a glass ballerina from a music box. “I didn’t know you danced?”

She stopped and looked at him. “I didn’t know that either until a moment ago. Things are coming back to me in little bits and pieces.”

“What else do you remember?” Jared said. “Do you know where you lived or where your family lived? That could help us find you quickly. It could give us a place to start.”

“I don’t remember exactly, it hurts when I try to. But when I get the flashes it’s like a light bulb going off in my head.”

“Ok let’s try this, Come over here and sit down” Jared suggested.

Josephine walked over and sat next to Jared on the couch. She looked at him shyly. “Ok I am sitting now what do you want me to do.”

A sliver of excitement ran through Jared with her words but he pushed it aside quickly. “Lean our head back against the cushions and close your eyes. Relax and breathe. Pretend that you are in Central Park in the grass and the sun is on your face. You can smell cotton candy and hear the carousel.”

His voice was gentle as he spoke to her. Josephine could feel the gravelly timber of his voice relaxing her as he spoke to her.

“Now I need you to think back for me Josephine. Not to any specific place, let your mind wander.” Jared continued to talk. He looked and saw he had covered her hand with his own. He wished he could feel her skin. “Tell me what you see Josephine?”

“I see a dark street, there is only one street light burning and I am walking...” Josephine made a sound of distress in her throat. She didn’t want to see what was going to happen but Jared voice soothed her and she continued. “I am looking for my keys in my

purse, I have one of the over sized purses and I can't find them. I stop to dig inside and some...someone knocks me down from behind. I try to scream but he cover's my mouth with his hand, his gloves smell like oil. He wants my money and I give him the bag but he drags me...me back into the alley. I start to fight him, I won't let him, take what he wants. I scream and I fight and I bite him and he bangs my head against the cement. Its hurts so much I see lights behind my eyes. But I keep screaming and he bangs my head again. I can here someone yelling at him barely and he finally moves off me. I touch the back of my head and there's blood so much of it on my hands and then everything fades away." Josephine stopped talking and there is silence in the room.

Jared watched her distress as she spoke and he saw the tears trickle from her closed eye lids. He felt a fury was over him, it was all directed to the person who tried to mug and rape the defenseless girl she was two years ago. It was new information but it was not a lot to go one. The crime would have been reported yes. But if the guy ran with her purse she would have had no ID when they took her to the hospital. Unless she could remember where it happened they could not do an effective search with the police.

"Do you remember where this took place honey?" Jared asked softly.

"No...No I don't I can't remember! She cried out standing up. Why did that happen to me!? I gave him my purse! He hit my head so hard! Why hasn't anyone found me!? Don't I have family that wondered where I was!? I don't have anyone that cares! That's why I was alone for so long! She was sobbing uncontrollably.

Jared jumped up. "You have me Josephine!"

"No, no I don't Jared! You are real, flesh and blood! I can't even touch you or feel you arms around me. I can't even feel a kiss, when I slept next to you I could not feel your skin! And I wanted to! If I never get found you'll be real and I'll always be a ghost!" Josephine had tears streaming down her face and her arms wrapped around her self.

Jared took a step towards her but she stepped back shaking her head in refusal. Josephine faded away from his sight and from his

apartment. He could sense immediately when her presence was gone.

“Josephine!” he called out. “Josephine come back!” But she was gone lost in her own despair. Jared sat on the sofa once again and dropped his head in his hands. He didn’t know what to do right now because everything she was feeling he was as well. He was going to go find her when the evening came in and the park was empty. She was not alone and he was going to be there for her no matter what. She had him now.

Jared did not have to go and find Josephine. She came back later that evening. Jared had spent the rest of the day trying to catch up on business that he had been putting off for the last few days. It was the only thing to do to keep his mind off Josephine. He was working on the shelters finances. His father’s generous donation was divided up between the two teen shelters. It went towards bills and food. He was able to get more blankets and cots there was even enough left over to buy a new TV and video game system for each shelter. Jared made sure all of his workers were well paid and even had a few doctors that knew his family volunteer time and services. He was on the phone trying to get free prenatal care for a pregnant teen at the shelter. He had already found her and the baby a home and got there expense paid until she could work. When that happened he would find safe daycare for the baby. She wanted to be a mother and responsible Jared was going to give her and her child every opportunity. Josephine presence was announced by her usual breeze in a still room. It ruffled the papers on his desk. Jared looked around to see her standing by his window looking out towards the park. He finished up his call and hung up the phone. He slowly walked over until he stood behind her waiting until she spoke.

“I’m sorry for today.” She said softly.

“Why? You can have emotions too. This has been hell on you for the past two years.”

“I should not have taken it out on you. You are trying to help me.” Josephine explained. “I am so tired of being stuck in this limbo, let me be alive or dead but let me be something.”

“You are not dead, you hear me?” He said roughly. “I am not going to find you to just lose you like that.”

“You would be sad if you lost me?” she asked looking up at him.

“Yes I would be.” His answer was simple. “Wait one minute.”

He moved away from her and picked up a remote. Soon the apartment was filled with music. He turned the lights down low and walked back over to her.

“Dance with me?” Jared said holding out his hand to her.

Josephine nodded and placed her hand in his. She wrapped her arms around his neck. Jared could feel her in his heart and that was all he needed at that point. Her energy surrounded him as they began to move to the rhythm of the music.

Jared looked at her as they dance. “At least you don’t have feet for me to step on.” He joked.

“I wouldn’t care if you did.” She replied.

“I wish I could kiss you.” Jared said “But I don’t know how we could”

“Close your eyes and just feel me.” Josephine whispered.

Jared closed his eyes and Josephine did as well. Their lips touched as they continued to move. Jared flesh and blood, Josephine something of a dream and only there in spirit. But for a moment just for a single space in time Jared could feel her. He felt his lips tingle and it spread through out his body hitting him in a place that had not been touched in his life. Standing there dancing with what people would call a figment of the imagination. Jared fell in love with his apparition Josephine.

Night turn into day in New York and Jared slowly woke up to see Josephine looking at him intently.

“You know looking at me while I sleep is a little creepy.” He said sitting up.

“And lying in bed with a spirit isn’t? She countered.

Jared grinned. “Good point.”

After their dance last night Jared and Josephine talked until the wee hours of the morning. He knew he would have more in common with a woman who could walk through walls, than with women he dated in the past. They both shared a love of books and great music, jazz particularly. Josephine told him about her love of Etta James songs and when she sang a few bars of her music. He found out that she had a voice that could melt a man when she sang smooth husky and sensual. Today she would go with him to the shelter and they would start looking for more information on where her body could be.

“Are you going to tell me why you were staring at me?” he asked.

“I was wondering what will happen if you and Max can’t find my body. I will be like a ghost trapped forever until my body dies.” Josephine replied softly. “I’ll have to go back to the park and just wait until I can move on.

“That’s not going to happen we are going to find you and if the worst happen you are going to stay here with me.” Jared said firmly.

“I couldn’t do that Jared, you have a life to lead. You will get married and have children. Imagine having to explain to a girlfriend slash perspective wife “Hey honey this is my ghost she lives with me.”

“Funny girl,” Jared said with a smile. “How about this, before we make any decisions we try to find you first?”

“Ok, we’ll do that,” she said with a small smile.

The phone rang and Jared rolled and grabbed it from the bedside table and said hello. It was Max on the other line.

“Hey Max what’s up?”

“Trouble man, the kids you sent here a few weeks ago. The father found them last night. He kicked out the night counselor and beat up the kid pretty badly and took the girl.”

“Shit! I’m on my way anyone called the police?” Jared asked he rolled out of bed and pulled clothes out quickly to get dressed.

“Yup, but they said expect it at a shelter for runaways, you know how they are. The kid John told them his father sexually

abuses his sister Jenny that why they ran away. After that they were ready to look. The night counselor is fine, but John is in the hospital. He gave me an address of where his dad likes to hole up.”

Jared listened intently to what Max was saying his face had turned to stone when he heard of the father mistreatment of his daughter. No child should be used that way. “Gimme the address and I’ll meet you over there.” Jared wrote quickly and hung up.

“What’s going on Jared?

He explained to her what had happened as he pulled on his sock and then a pair of beat up sneakers.

“Let me come with you? Josephine said

“No it could be dangerous.” He replied looking for his keys and snatching them up.

“Jared, I’m a spirit, but thanks for caring. It’s more dangerous for you, if you go in and he is armed you could get hurt, or Max or the girl. Remember I can walk through walls.”

He looked at her contemplating and said “Come on.”

“I’ll be downstairs.” Josephine disappeared and Jared went out the door shaking his head. He would never get used to her doing that. Appearing and disappearing at will, hopefully they could find her and he would not have to.

He hailed a cab and was heading to the address that Max gave him a few minutes later. The cab driver looked at him as he sat in the back seat carrying on a conversation. with what seemed to be himself. The cab driver shook his head sadly New Yorkers were crazy.

The ride seemed to take forever to Jared. From the east side to Hells Kitchen took forever especially in morning traffic. Finally the yellow cab pulled up in front of a building Jared would call squalor and filth. The city leaders never wanted to see this part of New York where people lived in places that were beyond poor and children grew up laying next to drug dealers. Max got there soon after, he leaned over and pad his cab and stood next to Jared.

“Hey man,” he greeted Jared. “So how do we do this, go in blazing?”

“No we send in a little bird to have a peek.”

“What bird? What are you...”

“Hey Max.” Josephine said next to his ear.

Max jumped and whirled around. “Jesus! You have to stop doing that. So we are sending her in to see where he is holding Jenny?”

“Yes, she can get in without being seen, if he sees us coming he might hurt her.” Jared explained.

“Ok guys I’m going to go see, stay outside the apartment until you hear me call for you.” Josephine said.

Both Jared and Max nodded and started up the steps of the dilapidated building and Josephine faded from view.

“That ‘s amazing how she does that.” Max commented.

“Yes it is.” Jared agreed.

The building smelled of old urine and rotten garbage. The hallway lights flickered on and off. Other than that lowly light the hallway was dim, peeling paint on the walls and the doors of the apartments looked rotted and broken. They went up the stairs to apartment number two B and waited outside for Josephine voice.

Josephine was already in the room and she looked around. Cockroaches crawled around the little apartment. The sofa was filled with cigarette burns and on it laid a foul looking man. His clothes were dirty and his snores filled the air. On the old coffee table in him sat a spoon and lighter, probably the remnants of his last fix. Still invisible she crossed over to the door way that led to what she only could assume was the bedroom. There on a saggy old bed pushed into a corner laid a small girl covered in a blanket. Her body shook as she tried to conceal her sobs. She was curled into a tight ball beneath the thin blanket. Josephine felt her heart break for this little girl and then such rage at the man that did this to her. He took this little girls child hood and shattered it.

“Jenny,” Josephine whispered.

The little girl sat straight up in the bed, reveal that she swore just a little thin dress in a tiny body. “Whose there?...The voice

was small and barely a whisper her dark eyes darted around the room.

Josephine made sure she was sitting on the bed in front of the child before she appeared. "Hi Jenny," she said with a gentle smile.

"Oh gosh, how did you do that? Are you an angel?" Jenny asked. She heard a sound as her father moved in the other room and her eyes darted to the door.

"You don't have to be afraid anymore Jenny, I'm here to help you." She caressed the little girl's head. The energy that came from her made the little girl's hair stand on edge.

"I knew God would send me an angel, that what you are right!" She whispered excitedly.

"I'm kinda like that, I'm here with a few friends and we've come to take you to your brother."

"Where are your friends?" Jenny asked looking around. "Are they invisible to?"

"No they are outside waiting for me to call them."

"Who the hell are you!" A voice thundered from at the door.

Jenny scrambled back in to the corner in fear and Josephine stood to face the big man. "I'm here to take Jenny."

"Bitch I'd like to see you try, I'll treat you the same way I treat her." The little girl's father lumbered forward and tried to grab Josephine who faded from his eyes.

She reappeared behind him, the wind picked up blowing her hair as she spoke her voice had become bold and loud. The wind crackled with the energy she created and her eyes glowed in anger. "You will not touch her! How dare you treat your child like this! You will never get to do this to anyone again!". Josephine looked at him and he could not break away his gaze from her glowing eyes. His screams began and he still could not stop looking at her.

Jared and Max heard her voice from behind the thin door and looked at each other. With no hesitation Jared kicked it in shattering the flimsy door frame into splinters. The two men rushed in to see Josephine standing in the doorway completely aglow. They could see the energy whip around her and heard the screams of a man in the room.

“Josephine!” Jared yell and her head whipped around to face him.

It was like she was coming out of a trance, she shook her head and her vision cleared. “Jared? What happened?”

“Uh you tell me, what was all that about?” Jared asked waving his hands around.

“I don’t know, it has never happened before, he rushed at me and I wanted him to pay for what he did to this little girl and this happened.” Josephine replied. What had happened she thought to herself. One minute she was comforting Jenny the next she was in the mist of an energy storm.

Jared and Max walked over to the doorway and saw the man lying on the floor curled into the fetal position and whimpering. They both looked at Josephine with questions in there eyes but said nothing. Max walked over to Jenny slowly. She remembered him from the shelter and flew into his arms.

“Come on little girl let’s get you back to your brother.” Max said softly cradling the little girl.

Jenny looked over her shoulder as Max passed and asked. “She is an angel isn’t she? What’s her name?”

“Max replied to the girl with a smile. “She’s something and her name is Josephine. But you can’t tell anyone she was here ok sweet pea?”

Jenny nodded solemnly. Jared and Josephine trailed behind Max carrying the little girl.

“We are going to have to talk about what happened in there with her father you know.” Jared said softly.

“We will as soon as I figure it out myself.” Josephine was scared, she felt so much power when she was in the mist of the energy she created. There was something else to but she could not tell Jared not yet. All she wanted was to be alone for awhile to try to understand what was happening to her.

“Talk to me Josephine.” He said simply

For some reason She felt trapped all of a sudden and she looked at Jared with an apology in her eyes. “I-I have to go Jared, I can’t talk now, I just have to go for a while”

Before he could respond she disappeared.

Outside the building Max still held little Jenny in his arms. I called the police and an ambulance. Where did she go?" He asked looking around.

"I don't know but something is up with her" Jared murmured.

"Did you see him on the floor? What did she do to him?" Max asked.

"That another thing we need to find out."

While the two men contemplated what happened when they were not in the room. Josephine went back to the place she called sanctuary, the park she roamed day and night. For now their all their question would have to wait....

This was the second time she kept him waiting at his apartment Jared thought as he paced the length of his living room. He looked out his window that faced the street as if expecting to see her coming to his apartment walking up the block. He made a sound of frustration in his throat wishing that he could keep track of her. He was going to have to talk to her about is disappearing act as soon as she got upset. Until they found her body, he needed to know she was ok. How could he do that if she just faded away when something made her unhappy?

After she faded away they had reunited Jenny with her brother at the hospital. Little Jenny was examined and found she was just bruised from a beating but he had not had the chance to molest her once again. Her father had been charged and led away blubbing and crying. Talking wildly about an avenging angel trying to kill him and screaming for his daughter's forgiveness. As Jared watched him being driven away in the back of a police car still yelling as he passed, he wondered about Josephine and what power she possessed to do that to a grown man.

A faint breeze blew his curtain and Jared whirled around hoping to see her, disappointment was written on his face when she was not standing in front of him barefoot and wearing her blue

dress. He couldn't take the waiting any longer he strode to the door grabbing his coat on the way and letting it slam behind him. He crossed traffic amidst angry blaring horns when he stepped into a busy vehicles path. Some one yelled a rude comment about people jaywalking towards him as he stepped on the side walk on the other side of the street. Jared's response was the universal finger that spoke volumes. He was in no mood to deal with idiots in cars. His frustration was growing as he walked deeper into the park knowing exactly where to find Josephine.

Reached the familiar spot where she first appeared to him and yelled her name. "Josephine!"

When there was no response he yelled again. "Josephine you get your spirit butt out here right this instant!"

"Why are you yelling Jared, you look like a crazy person yelling into the air." Her quiet voice came from behind him and he whirled to see her standing there.

"Crazier than I have been for the past few of these weeks? Why do you keep running off like that?"

"I need to think Jared, I was trying to understand what happened today." Josephine explained.

Jared made a frustrated sound in his throat. "Why couldn't you figure it out at the apartment with me?"

Josephine opened her mouth to speak but Jared held up his hand. "Ah...my turn to talk. You appeared in my life and it had been upside down ever since, I enlisted my best friend who thought I was crazy by the way to enlist in finding out who you are. You can't just run every time you get upset. I worry and you have to understand that its not you alone anymore it's all of us.

Josephine kept silent until he was finished. "I'm sorry Jared, I didn't think. I am so accustomed to handling things alone, well as much things as a spirit has to handle."

Jared heard the lack of mirth in her voice and stepped closer to her. He longed to be able to hold her and to reassure her, until that time came he could only say the words and hope she saw it in his eyes. "You don't have to anymore Josephine, don't you understand you have me now!"

“I know Jared.”

“Now tell me what happened today honey. When we saw you were lit up like a Christmas tree and almost translucent. The energy in the room was so thick it made my hair stand on end.”

Josephine sighed and turned away. “I don’t know one minute I was comforting Jenny and then he came to the door and tried to tackle me. It was like anger infused me and I was like a battery that was filled to the brim. The energy had to be released and- and that happened!”

“Ok,” Jared said slowly trying to understand. “And why was he screaming and crying like that what did you do? Hit him with a whammy energy bolt?”

“Gosh no! I don’t know how I did it, but I think I projected all the fear and hurt he inflicted on Jenny into his head but ten fold. I could sense his thoughts too it was weird being in his head.”

“Hmmm we’ll figure it out Josephine, don’t worry and look at the bright side you save Jenny.”

“Good point, I just didn’t understand it at the time and it scared me.” Josephine said.

Just then Jared cell phone rung in his pocket and he answered the familiar number. “Hey Max what’s wrong?” He asked assuming the worse.

“Hey where are you man, I got some news” Max said.

“I’m in the park, what’s up?”

“I’m on my way, find Josephine and meet me by the entrance near you house. I think I found her body dude!”

“Really, that’s freaking great! We’ll be there pick me and we’ll take the cab you are in. where are we heading?” Jared asked excitedly.

“No cab man I’m in the shelter van and we are heading upstate to Rochester. She is in a long term care facility there called Angel’s of Mercy.” Max said.

“Freaking excellent! We’ll be waiting.” Jared said and flipped his phone shut.

Josephine looked at him curiously. “What? What did Max say?”

“He thinks he found you!” Jared said with a big grin on his face.

Josephine squealed in pleasure and rushed into his arms forgetting that she was only energy. For a moment their bodies merged and Jared eyes closed as her energy rushed through him. He gasped out her name as she felt all her emotions running along every nerve ending of his body. He felt her fear, hope anger, attraction for him, pleasure and love. She loved him! She came out on the other side of his body and he could only drop to his knees in the grass. It lasted only a few seconds but it left him breathless.

“Oh gosh Jared! Are you ok? I am so sorry, I forgot!” she said concern filled her voice.

“I’m fine- I’m fine,” that was unbelievable, incredible! He managed to say as he slowly got to his feet. “I could feel you, everything that makes you!” You love me?”

Josephine looked down shyly to the grass at her felt and could only nod in response. She loved him.

“Hey, he said softly. “I love you too.”

Her eyes flew to his face and the radiant smile that filled his heart with joy spread across her face. “Really?”

“Yes really, now come on we have to meet Max and go upstate NY, you are there in a coma.”

They pair crossed the park quickly, one seen and one unseen but both filled with hope and love. If max had found her, her ordeal would be soon over and they could be together. Maybe just maybe there was a happy ending waiting for Jared and the apparition he loved...Josephine.

to upstate New York seemed to take forever for Josephine, she guessed she could have tried to appear there like she did around the city but she never tried to shimmer that far. Ghost or not she did have a short leash to where she could and could not appear. Max had pulled up in the SUV owned by the shelter, Jared climbed into

the passenger. Max smiled into the rear view mirror when he saw Josephine shimmer into the back seat.

You ready to go find yourself?" Max asked.

"I am past ready, thank you so much max for all that you have done."

"Hey how many times will I get to save a ghost?" he replied.

Now on the highway the trio could feel the excitement building. How would this go? Would this even work? What would happen if she could not get back into her body?

So many questions that none of them had the answers to. Finally Max pulled the large van into the driveway of a small hospital. The facility had gardens surrounding the building for the patients who could still get outside. Josephine looked at the building through the window of the truck. The excitement was being replaced by apprehension and dread. They walked into the two stories building together and up to the front desk.

Jared spoke to the nurse at the desk who looked up as they walked in. To her there were only two very handsome men coming in through the door. "Good evening ma'am could we have the room number for Miss Josephine Coulter?"

Cute or not the nurse was instantly suspicious. "Miss Coulter has been a resident here for over a year and I have never seen anyone come visit except her sister. Who are you?"

"Tell her you are my cousins from Connecticut, Mark and Curtis." She would not know what they look like." Josephine whispered in Jared's ear. Max heard her as well but both men kept their faces passive as she spoke.

"Uh we are her cousins from Connecticut; we just came into town and wanted to see her." Jared relayed the message.

"You know she is in a coma right?" the nurse asked.

"Yes ma'am we just want to sit with her for a bit and talk to her. Isn't true that she could hear us and it could help to talk to her?" Max piped in.

The nurse smiled at Max. "We believe so. You have to sign in before you go up."

Jared and Max signed the sheet and the nurse told them. “She is room twenty-B take the elevator to the second floor and turn right.”

“Whew that was close.” Josephine blew out a breath. When they were in the elevator.

Both men looked at her incredulously. “You are invisible unless you are people to see you! How was that close for you?” Jared asked in amazement. “We were the ones sweating out there.”

“I was nervous ok.” Josephine said with a smile.

The elevator dinged signaling that their one on the second floor. The door slid open. For some reason Josephine’s steps slowed as she approached her room. She didn’t know if she was ready for this.

Jared turned to look at her, her steps had gone to complete stop. “Hey I am with you every step of the way.”

Josephine nodded and began wailing again. Max pushed the door slowly open and the trio walked in. In the middle of the room a lone figure laid in the bed solitary and not moving. The beeps of the machine that kept time with her pulse and the almost imperceptible rise and fall of her chest as she breathed, it was Josephine that was lying in the bed. A small gasp of despair escaped her lips while standing and looking down at her self. She was so pale and still what if it was too late?

“How does this work now?” Jared asked softly, the room was so still it felt like anything above a whisper was wrong.

“I don’t know.” Max replied.

“Do you feel anything Josephine?” Jared looked at her hoping that something was happening.

“No nothing.” She didn’t feel a thing and that scared her more than anything.

The door to the room open and a woman that was a little taller but resembled Josephine entered, she was digging in her purse as she spoke. “The nurse told me that my two handsome cousins were here.” She looked up and almost dropped her purse. “You are not my cousins! Who are you before I call the cops!” She rushed forward to press the call button next to the bed.

“No wait! Wait!” Jared said rushing forward to stop her. “We are her friends!”

“No you are not she would have told me, Why are you in her room!”

“Cynthia don’t be afraid,” Josephine said softly.

Her sister whirled and this time her purse hit against the floor. “Oh Jesus! Oh my god! Josey, is that you? You’re dead aren’t you?” Her sister’s voice began to break with tears. “I thought you would come back but—but...”

“No! Cynthia I’m not dead well not really.” Josephine stepped forward to touch her sister and she gaped as she felt Josephine’s energy against her shoulder. “Could you explain Jared... Max...please.”

“You’d better sit down,” Max said and Cynthia sat in a chair next to the bed. And he began to explain how they thought Josephine would get back in to her body. Jared interrupted a few times to explain how he met her. By the time they all had related the story Cynthia was shaking her head in disbelief and amazement.

“So all this time you were in the park and could not remember who you were?” she asked looking at Josephine. “Oh Josey I am so sorry.”

“How were you to know Cynthia? You have been taking such good care of me here.” She replied. “But I think something is wrong, I can’t get into my body. We don’t know why.”

“I have been reading up on when people are in comatose states.” Cynthia jumped to her feet and began to pace the room, something that she did when she was thinking. Josephine remembered now as she watched her sister move across the room and smiled, Cynthia kept on talking as if she was musing to herself. “Maybe when I was talking to you, you were to far away! Sometimes when I talked to you, you would move your hand or twitch.”

So you are saying that maybe if we talk to her now she would be close enough to find her way into her body?” Max asked.

“Exactly!” Cynthia said excitedly. “Josey sit down here on the edge of the bed! Close your eyes and we’ll see if this works!”

Josephine looked at Jared who nodded his approval, she sat down on the edge of the bed and closed her eyes. Cynthia started talking about when they were growing up and all the fun things they did. She reminded Josephine how close they had to be after their parents died and how much she needed her to come back to her. Max went next, he let Josephine know that he hadn’t known her long but she needed to come back so he could get to know her better. He considered a friend even though she was not in her body.

It was Jared’s turn and for a while he stood silent, he reached over and took her hand that lay at her side and began to speak. “I thought I was crazy when I first saw you in the park pleading for help, but from the time I saw you I could not get you out of my head. I knew I had to find you and save you some how. I don’t know when it happened if it was out walks in the park when we talked or when you first asked to stay with me instead of being alone in the park.”

Jared stopped and took a breath. “But I fell in love with you, your mind and your soul, I could feel you even though you were not there in body. Josephine wake up for me please. Let me show you that I can love you as a human and well as a ghost. Please come home baby I need you.” He implored.

Josephine felt a pull as if she was tied and was being reeled in, something was changing, she opened her eyes. “Jared! She cried out in fear she did not know what would happen and reached for him. He reached his hand out to her but Josephine disappeared.

“Where did she go!” He looked around the room and she was not there. He could tell she was gone but where?

Jared, Max and Cynthia looked at her lying in the bed hoping to see her eyes open but she was still, unmoving as she was when they first came in. Hours ticked by that led into days. Cynthia and Max came and went but Jared stayed night and day. When max

came her brought Jared a change of clothes and the nurse began feeding him. Whoever came in found Jared the same place sitting next to her bed and talking to her.

He was alone, it was six days since he saw her last and he was beginning to lose hope he pleaded "Please Josephine please don't leave like this. I need you so much."

He laid his head against the bed and closed his eyes. This was supposed to work! Why didn't it work! His eyes flew open as he felt something stroke his hair, he felt it again and was too afraid to move in case it was just dream. He felt the caress of fingers that trailed from his hair to his stubbled cheek.

"You're scratchy." A hoarse voice whispered.

He looked up, it was soft and weak but it was the voice he knew and loved so well. "Josephine?"

"I can feel you, I can touch you." She said softly.

"Oh baby! Jared leaned his forehead against her and kissed her softly. "You came back to me."

"I heard you calling me Jared, it seemed so far away but I came towards your voice." Josephine said softly. "I thought it was dream, all of it but I heard everything you sad and everything my sister and Max said."

"It's been six days my love and I was so worried. I love you and as soon as we get you healthy and walking out of here, I'm going introduce you to my parents, marry you and love you the rest of our lives."

"All that huh?" Josephine smiled. "I love you Jared, you brought me home."

Jared kissed her again and held her to him. That is how Max and Cynthia found them a few minutes later. Between the joy and happiness was an intense love that formed between a man and an apparition. Love had made her whole once again.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dahlia Rose, best selling author of contemporary erotica, suspense and paranormal romance. She was born and raised on a Caribbean island and now currently lives in Charlotte, NC with her four kids who she affectionately nicknamed "The children of the corn and her biggest supporter/long time love. She has a love of erotica, dark fantasy, Sci-fi and the things that go bump in the night. Books and writing are her biggest passion and she hopes to open your imagination to the unknown between the pages of her books.

Her motto is "Live life in love and love the life you live."

Look out for her book "When Love Commands" coming Jan 2009 at Phaze Publishing.



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