

## Love Gambit

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What do you get when you combine two rivals with attitude? Fireworks! Ginny Boswell thinks Ty McLeod wants to take over her brother-in-law's ghost buster company. When she's challenged to discover the truth about a haunted house or lose a \$500 bet, she'll go head-to-head with the gorgeous ghost hunter to discover whether the ghosts are real, or a figment of their imaginations.

Ginny Boswell pulled her blue Saturn coupe to a stop at a red light just as her cell phone let out an obnoxious ring. She started, her nerves on edge after one crazy, annoying day at Psi Group. She glared at the phone on the dash and ignored the noise.

Executive Assistant's Day had turned into Hell Week.

It all started when her absent-minded boss neglected to give her a card, flowers, or any other recognition, and her so-called boyfriend Fergus stood her up for lunch.

The phone rang again and she punched the button on the hands free unit cell phone. "Yeah?"

"Ginny, it's Dan. I've got a hot one." Her boss's tone held a note of imminent excitement. "You're not going to believe this."

"This late in the day?" Ginny didn't feel like dealing with another case of faked poltergeist activity or dubious psychic ability. "Where's Joseph? Can't he handle this one?"

"His mother is in town, remember? I really need you to check this one out. It sounds like the genuine article."

The light turned green and Ginny eased through the intersection. She sighed, eager to get home. "Uh-huh."

"Come on. You've got the smarts to figure out if this case is for real."

Leave it up to Dan to know how to butter her up. "I'd rather be home eating microwave pizza." *And escaping these panty hose, thank you very much.*

"Look, sweetie, I know it's been a few years since I started this organization and we've yet to see a real case of haunting. But Cleveland House appears to be the ticket."

Her boss could call her sweetie because of his relationship to her. Brother-in-law.

She tapped the power window button and savored the cool breeze flow over her face. "And you're stuck at the office finishing reports, I suppose."

*Stuck at home with my sister Benny and two rambunctious preteens.* Ginny didn't know whether to envy his home life or frightened of it. Since Psi Group was located at Dan and Benny's home, they had the added distraction of working around family situations throughout the day. It didn't make for a dull moment.

"And Jack has that band concert at the junior high tonight," Dan said.

She glanced at the Denver skyline. Black and blue thunderheads reached over the Rocky Mountains and threatened a nasty storm.

"This better be good, Dan. There's a helluva storm brewing over the mountains."

Dan chuckled. "If you do this favor for me, I promise you better than microwave pizza."

As traffic slowed to a crawl in front of her, exhaust fumes drifted inside. Wrinkling her nose, she rolled up the window. "Giovanni's Restaurant? Downtown?"

"Nope. Something much better."

Suspicion rose to the fore at the same time a headache started in her temples. "This haunting of a lifetime can't wait until morning? Do you think the ghosts will leave before we get there?"

"Well..."

Ginny knew that *well* anywhere. She'd heard it many times in the four years since she finished her psychology degree and signed on as an assistant...an executive assistant at Psi Group. Her sixth sense itched like a bramble on the back of her neck. So often in her life she bounced back and forth, knowing her intuition worked well when she gave it a chance. Her practical side too often tried to talk her out of listening to her inklings.

"Dan, what's so important about this particular house? I've never heard of it before."

He cleared his throat. "Um...I got a call about an hour ago from a man who swears the old house he just bought is haunted."

Ginny had heard it before. Weary, she brushed back a strand of her auburn hair and concentrated on the slow traffic. "Who's the man?"

"Albert Cleveland. He inherited this dump of a Victorian monstrosity last week. He's been there one week and he says the place is jumping with activity. Creaking doors, rattling chains, moaning, cold spots. You name it."

"Rattling chains. You're kidding, right? How cliché."

"This case is unique."

Her suspicion-o-meter reared its head. As traffic inched forward, she shifted in her seat. “How?”

“This Cleveland guy has photographs that defy explanation. Digital images that experts say are not faked.”

“In a week he’s had experts look at it?”

“You got it.”

Somewhere in traffic a car horn blared, and her headache escalated another notch. “What else? Fess up. There must be more for you to send me out there this evening.”

“Well...uh...”

“*Dan.*” She drew out the word. “If you’re holding out on me, I’ll tell Benny what you do with those bean sprout sandwiches she makes you.”

He groaned. “All right. Somehow Ty McLeod found out about the house and is already on his way there. He’s got the key. Apparently he told Cleveland he could do the job better than we could.”

*Wonderful. That explains everything.* “Dirty rat!”

“He’s just competitive. Besides, the owner says he’ll pay whoever discovers what is happening. If anyone can bring Ty down a notch, it’s you.”

Mr. Superior Ghost Hunter from Anonymous Investigations. Her favorite pain in the posterior. Memories of her last encounter with Tyler McLeod surged forward and snapped at her heels. She flushed, amazed at the traitorous arousal rushing through her body. No matter how much she disliked the man, she couldn’t seem to lasso her attraction to him. Not only that, he wanted to buy Psi Group. Despite money problems, Dan didn’t want to sell.

She shook her head in self-reproach. Ginny tried not to think about the pig-headed, arrogant man that had been Dan’s ghost hunting rival for years, but he managed to pop up like a bad summer rerun on television. In the four years she’d known Ty he teased her, challenged her, and often annoyed the ever livin’ stuffing out of her.

“On top of that, Ty bet us—me—five hundred dollars if we could discover the mystery of the haunting first.” Dan’s voice bubbled with exhilaration.

Anger made her grip the steering wheel like a lifeline. “Five hundred dollars? We don’t have that kind of money to toss around.”

“That’s why you need to get the answer to this puzzle first, Ginny.”

She gritted her teeth in frustration. Her jaw ached and she rubbed at her temple. “You know McLeod is just trying to get your goat. Why do you let him do that?”

She could almost see him shrug as he answered. “You know me. Never could resist a bet. Besides, you can’t fool me. You like tangling with McLeod every chance you get. I’ve seen the way you guys look at each other.”

Ginny’s insides warmed. *Don’t think about how McLeod’s intense, assessing looks make you feel. If you do you’ll go up in flames right here.* “Don’t go there, Dan.”

He cleared his throat. “Okay, okay. Look, if you can pull this off you’ll have an extra special Executive Assistant Day treat tomorrow. We’ll go out to lunch.”

“When did you remember that you forgot Executive Assistant’s Day?”

“Um...I didn’t. Benny reminded me.”

Ginny sighed. She drew in a steady breath, realizing she didn’t have the energy to argue anymore. “And what if the investigation takes longer than an evening to accomplish?”

“McLeod said he’s willing to go the distance. You can continue the investigation as long as it takes.”

“Being in the same house with that man day after day would fry my cookies.” When he remained silent she relented. “Fine. I’ll do it.”

Dan let out a whoop. “Good deal. Now you can get there by...”

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Fading sunlight dipped behind thunderheads as Ginny pulled into the circular drive of Cleveland House. Huge tree branches hung like sentinels over the Queen Anne style mansion. Peeling white paint and a weed filled front yard gave extra credence to the haunted house cliché.

As she turned off the car, she noted the battered house already had a visitor. The sleek, silver BMW shone like polished money. McLeod. So rich boy had arrived. Pain in the rear had entered the mansion and started the investigation. *Figures.*

She hadn’t traveled back across town to obtain equipment from the office. She had pad and pencil tucked into the oversized leather fanny pack at her waist. Maybe big shot McLeod brought the requisite equipment for hunting paranormal phenomena. A digital recorder to obtain EVPs, electronic voice phenomena, and countless other gadgets like the electromagnetic field

detector. You name it, McLeod owned the high-tech stuff needed to finish the job. He usually brought a whole team of helpers as well. She didn't see the van that usually brought his helpers along for the ride. *Hmm.*

Then again, how smart was she for investigating a so-called haunted space on her own? How smart was Dan for suggesting she do it alone? Crud. She should know better.

Ginny had been aggravated all day by more things than a space case boss and an absent boyfriend. She'd had an epiphany. Her life had slipped into a rut. She might have a degree in psychology, but she also had a job in a ghost hunter company that might fold soon if something didn't change. Dan hinted that although he didn't want to sell, he might have to if things got rougher. Behind that knowledge came uncertainty. Would a new owner want to keep her on, and did she want to stay?

Ginny never wallowed in her stew, but job problems didn't tell the whole story. Her sisters Benny and Olivia had great husbands, nice homes, and two children each. Ginny lived in a tiny apartment, had noisy neighbors, and not a good man in sight.

Again she recalled her last meeting with Ty. They'd met, by accident, during a trip to a dance club. Ginny had gone there with Dan and Benny. Ginny had run into Ty as she headed for the bar to pick up drinks.

Ty's musk scent mixed with the touch of his hands on her upper arms as he'd kept her from bouncing off his solid chest. Dark as sin eyes had met her startled gaze, latching onto her breath and holding it prisoner. While he'd led her to the dance floor for a slow number, his arms had slipped around her and drawn her close. He'd whispered to her, low and soft in her ear, that he wanted to know her better. She knew Ty's real reason for plying her with sweet words. Did he think he could influence her in his favor so when he bought the company she would be pliant? Right. The man could eat straw if he thought she'd fall for that tactic. Just when her heart solidified into stone, he'd given her a sweet, sexy grin.

Sweet? No way. Sexy? Yes.

Ginny slapped her hand on the steering wheel to send the memory away. She couldn't—wouldn't give in to rogue hormonal thoughts about him.

She exited the car as thunder rolled in the west. A chill rippled through her body and she buttoned the cardigan of her twin set. As last sunrays dabbled and sparkled on the leaves, Ginny started for the three-story structure. Rain began to slap the ground, so she dashed through the

weedy lawn to the porch. She used the gargoyle doorknocker, glancing up at the fanlight above the door.

A shadow passed over the fanlight.

Interesting. She saw lights on in a window to the left. When no one answered her summons, she dried the doorknob and found it unlocked. Almost predictably, the swung open with an ear-piercing squeak designed to wake the dead in two counties. Ginny winced. If Ty didn't hear that pronouncement he must be deaf.

As she stepped inside she called out. "Hello? McLeod?"

Filled with shadows, the wide and deep foyer remained silent as King Tut's tomb. Another breeze sailed through and the door slammed. She jumped, skin prickling in reaction as she swung around. Nobody there.

A dusty chandelier poured light into the area. An occasional table with a dirty oriental vase sat in one corner, while the other corner held a dark wood telephone table with a modern cordless phone. Double doors flanked her right and left. A staircase led to the second floor, the broad sweep branching into two wings at the top of the stairs. Everything looked dusty and a bit neglected. Nothing surprising there.

"Hey, McLeod, where are you?"

No answer but the sound of rain and the increasing wind as it howled around the eaves.

She noted a hallway that led down to a narrow, suspicious looking doorway at the end. Suspicious because it matched the basement door of every horror film she'd gobbled up as a kid. Ginny decided she would leave the basement for later.

Turning toward the double doors, she reached for the handles and tugged. The wood didn't move. She tried again. Nope. All right then, time to move onward. She trudged to the other side of the foyer and attempted to open those doors as well. No such luck.

"Damn it."

Okay, she could try upstairs. As soon as she thought of it she hesitated. Better to search the bottom floor first and make sure Ty didn't lurk in a hiding place. She looked through the kitchen, a relic from a bygone era. No sign of him. She moved on to the dining room, a dark, octagonal shaped room with dust encrusted green damask drapes and worn Victorian furniture.

*Man, this place could use a serious redecoration.* Not to rid it of old charm, but to give it that lived in, warm-hearted feeling that came from a well-loved abode. Unless, of course, it was

haunted out the whazoo. That might make a person hesitate. She snorted. *Haunted. Right.* She hadn't been in a place yet that could prove ghosts existed.

Moments later she heard a rattling sound issuing from somewhere above her. She headed for the stairs, realizing that if Ty believed the house haunted he might think a ghost had made the racket below. Another grin parted her lips. It might be nice to play a trick or two on Ty. *I'm a genius. I'll sneak up on him. He'll never know what hit him.*

As she ascended the creaky stairs, she thought she heard more sound coming from upstairs. A thump and a bump and perhaps a moan thrown in for taste. A pop and squeak issued from another stair step and she grimaced. Fat lot of good this was. At this rate she'd alert him before she could sneak up on his buns.

*His buns.* Ginny swallowed hard. No, she couldn't think of his world-class butt or she'd soon forget the mission. Soon she reached the top of the landing and branched to the right. She took each tread with the prowl of a panther, aware Ty could appear at any moment.

Twenty minutes later she discovered he wasn't hiding in any of the bedrooms in the house. She'd check them all. Worry niggled at the back of her mind. What if he'd found not a ghost, but a prowler? Could Ty be lying in this house injured? Knowing she'd come into the house but unable to answer her?

Nah. No reason to let imagination design scary scenarios. She'd find him sooner or later. Then it occurred to her where Ty might be hiding...or where he could be lying in need of help.

The basement.

Decision made, she headed down the hall with purposeful strides. Halfway there she stopped. She had to go in prepared. Pulling her keys from her fanny pack, she held them in her left hand like a knife. When she reached the door she grabbed the knob fast so she had no time to hesitate. When she twisted the doorknob it turned with ease. The door didn't creak or squeal.

*Fancy that.*

A musty, dusty smell wafted up the stairs. She wrinkled her nose. The wooden steps seemed to disappear into a dark abyss. The light was on, but it didn't illuminate much.

*Okay, Ginny, what are you going to do? Stand here like a ninny, or explore? You are a ghost hunter, remember?* She recalled that she hadn't made notes about the strange noises up stairs. Big deal. She had a bigger situation to worry about. Right now she stood on the verge of

committing a cardinal sin in common sense. Acting like a heroine in a bad horror film would be the icing on the cupcake to this bizarre day.

Rustling up courage, she stepped down. Her muscles tightened in her neck and down her back as tension rose. Her fingers trembled as she transferred her keys to her right hand.

After what seemed like an eternity, she reached the bottom and looked around. Her nerves prickled and tingled in anticipation, thinking Ty would pop out and say ‘boo’ soon enough. Her brow wrinkled as she frowned. He must be here somewhere. When she found the arrogant man she’d give him a piece of her mind. How dare he frighten her into thinking all sorts of horrid things?

*Humph.* Frightened? She wasn’t frightened. Twitchy, maybe. Hacked off for certain.

She discovered the basement consisted of one large room full of junk accumulated over a long time. Some of the items looked like valuable antiques, but who could tell under all the dust and mess? A draft, cold and soft, drifted over her shoulders. She shivered and looked around. Great. Just great. This place had all the special effects lined up with one exception. She hadn’t seen the apparition named Ty.

She then noted a huge doorway that looked like a metal vault at one end of the room.

Ginny’s heart almost stopped. Could Ty be locked inside? He could suffocate. Had he already—

*No.* She wouldn’t think it.

She approached the door like a turtle. “McLeod? McLeod are you in there?”

She planted one hand on the cold metal. Then she gripped the dial and turned, giving it a yank. Of course, it didn’t budge. She glared at the combination lock.

“What are you doing?”

Ginny let out a startled squeak and whirled around. “What the—”

Ty stood near the opposite wall, his flashlight dangling from one hand and other gear draped over his shoulder. Dirt marred his dark red short-sleeved T-shirt and his well-worn jeans. He also wore a curious, disgusting masculine grin. One that said he’d enjoyed scaring her into the next galaxy.

“Ty McLeod!” She emphasized each word, gritting them between her teeth. “You—”

“I started without you.” The deep timbre in his voice sent slivers of female reaction through her.



“No kidding. Trying to get the upper hand already, I see.”

He placed his equipment on a grimy desk. “What took you so long?”

She inhaled slow and deep as she remembered to count to ten. “It would have helped if you would have answered when I called you. I’ve been here almost forty minutes. When I didn’t find you I thought maybe something happened to you.”

Ginny clammed her mouth closed, mortified at what she’d revealed.

Ty’s grin formed again, unrepentant. “Worried about me?”

She shifted her shoulders back in defiance. “No.”

When his gaze glided over her in appreciative evaluation, a fission of unwanted excitement darted through her belly. She returned his stare, half challenged and half frightened. She couldn’t help looking at him in the same way.

His black hair reached the top of his shoulders in a wavy tangle that gave him a raw edge. His T-shirt molded hard pectorals and a flat, muscled stomach. His jeans curved against his hips and thighs in a way that made her throat go dry.

*Face it, Ginny. The man is walking sin.*

She cleared her throat and came out of her trance. “Why didn’t you answer when I called out?”

“I didn’t hear you. This basement is like a tomb. Solid walls.”

“Give me a break.” She planted her hands on her hips and stalked toward him, relief and anger bundling into a tight knot in her shoulder blades. “You must have heard me banging around. When I heard some noises upstairs I thought you were up there and I went to investigate.”

“Did you find anything?”

“Of course not. It must have been the storm.”

“Skeptical as always, I see.”

“And you’re not?”

“I’ve been down here most of the time exploring the back area.” He hitched a thumb back and pointed behind him. “You should see the stuff that’s back there.”

“Where? I didn’t see you at all when I got here.”

“Come on. I’ll show you.”

“I’m not going anywhere with you until you tell me what the deal is.”

His dark brows lowered as he frowned. She'd seen that formidable frown before, but this time it seemed edged with concern, or maybe discomfort. Uh-huh. The self-assured, always in control Ty McLeod tentative about something? What a concept.

The look lasted maybe ten seconds before it turned to search and destroy, and his predatory stance sent all the primal female longings within her into overdrive.

He moved a tad closer and stopped within about foot of her. She gazed up...way up. His six feet plus frame towered over her five feet six inches. Her gaze snagged on his wide, nicely carved mouth, and her breath hitched.

"What deal are you referring to, Ginny?"

He caressed her name, the huskiness in his tone tingling over her flesh. *Careful, Ginny. Pay attention to what's at stake. Dan's job. Your job. Money.*

"Your plan to finagle Dan and the company out of five hundred dollars and the client fee."

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't play all innocent with me. I've got your number."

His frown dissolved into a chuckle. "Then why don't you ever call me?"

"I'm not here to play games. Dan and Benny need the money, and I need the money. You've got all the cash you'll ever need. Why don't you back off and let me do this investigation? It won't hurt you to lose once in awhile."

To her surprise he didn't shoot back. In their encounters over four years he reacted two ways. Amusement and perturbation. This time his expressive brown eyes looked pensive as he crossed his arms. The movement caused his biceps to bulge, and her gaze snagged on the sight all that brawn. She realized she was gaping and snapped her mouth shut before she could step on her tongue.

"You think I really care about the money?" he asked softly.

"Yeah. And I believe you want to ruin Psi Group so you can force the selling price down. That way Dan will be forced to give up the company. That would eliminate competition."

"Ridiculous."

"No? Then why did you bet Dan five hundred dollars?"

He made a sound of disbelief. "I didn't. Dan called me to let me know about this place, the so-called haunting, and he bet me the five hundred dollars."

Her mouth dropped open again. She blinked. Unbelievable. Did he think he could snow her into believing he was the good guy in this situation? “I don’t believe you.”

Ty’s gaze turned stormy. “You know as well as I do that Dan can’t afford to give me five hundred dollars. But I *will* win the bet.”

His smug expression made her want to scream. “Oh no you won’t. I will.”

He glanced around the room. “With what? You didn’t bring equipment, did you?”

Acknowledging her inadequacy stung. “No. But there were ghost hunters long before new fangled equipment came on the scene. I’ll do it the old fashioned way.”

She could tell from his expression he didn’t believe a word of what she said. “Doing it in the old way doesn’t get evidence of paranormal phenomena.”

Riled and to prove a point, she stalked passed him and headed for the direction he’d pointed to earlier.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“You said you wanted to show me something. So show me.” She turned down a short corridor that led off to the right.

“Wait! Watch out for—”

The low ceiling came at her like an avenging angel and she ducked. Her shoe slipped and her feet went out from under her. She made a sound of defeat, her breath expelling with a whoosh as she hit the floor.

One word came to mind. “Ow.”

She heard Ty’s swift footsteps as he raced to her. “Ginny, you all right?” Crouching beside her, he reached down to cup the side of her face. His worried gaze took her by surprise.

“Yeah.” She grumbled the word and slipped from under his touch as she struggled to rise. Embarrassment scorched through her.

“Take it easy.” He hauled her upwards, his hands under her arms. She swayed and he caught her against him. “Whoa. You sure you’re all right?”

Softness in his voice contrasted with the hardness of his chest beneath her fingers. His arms slipped around her waist and he tucked her close. She gasped when his rock hard thighs touched her.

“Ginny?” he asked again.

“Uh, yeah. Um...could you let go?”

One corner of his mouth lifted in a playful smile. "I dunno. Maybe I want to keep you right here. I seem to recall the last time we met—"

"I remember. You were trying to butter me up so that you could get on my good side."

He laughed and his arms tightened. "What's wrong with that?"

"I'm not playing games. I'm not going to snuggle up to Dan's business rival—"

"Rivals? Are we really?" His voice whispered low, seductive and designed to drive her to within an inch of melt down. "I've never wanted that. From the first day I met you all I wanted was to get closer to you. Not to try and hurt Psi Group."

He lifted a hand and brushed his fingers over her cheek and down to her jaw. She shivered in reaction. He tilted her chin up.

Ginny didn't want to admit that his arms felt good. Heck, they felt wonderful. What woman could object to this powerful man's protection? But who would shelter her if she let his brand of potent sensuality overtake her hard won defenses?

"Did someone hurt you?" He slipped his fingers through her hair and cupped the back of her head. "Is that why you don't like me? You think if you let down your guard I'll stand you up like Fergus did today?"

Stiffening in his arms, she pushed against his chest. He released her immediately. "How did you know? I mean, that Fergus stood me up?"

"Dan told me. Right after he said he'd forgotten to get a card and flowers for Secretary's Day."

"Executive Assistant's Day."

"Is that what they're calling it now? Anyway, Fergus didn't call to explain why he was late, did he?"

Still grappling with the idea that Dan had spilled personal information to Ty, she sniffed and crossed her arms. "No. But he was probably held up at work."

Ty moved nearer again, closing the gap. "He couldn't have called later to apologize and explain? I suppose you called him instead."

Ginny shrugged, resenting his probing. "I got his answering machine. Besides, it isn't any of your business. I'm going to whollop Dan as soon as I finish this investigation."

"As soon as *we* finish investigating."

Not wanting to talk about her personal life, she switched gears. She started down the small hallway. “What’s behind this door? There sure are a lot nooks and crannies in this place.”

Ty had looped his infrared camera, digital recorder, and electromagnetic reader device around his neck. “Are you ready to work with me? Or against me?”

“I’ll work with you on one condition.”

“Name it.”

“That you stop trying to take over Dan’s company.”

“I haven’t been trying—”

“That’s my condition. Take or leave it.”

He jammed a hand through his hair. “Look, it’s complicated.”

“Then forget it. I’m outta here. I’ll start work upstairs by myself.” Moving past him she headed back down the hallway with him close behind.

She rushed up the stairs and when she reached the door and started to turn the knob, she discovered it wouldn’t budge. She tried again and it refused to open. “What the...”

“Here, let me try.” Ty gently nudged her aside, and she moved down a step to let him by.

When all his efforts to open the door amounted to nothing, Ginny felt a tiny panic well inside her. She was trapped. Trapped with a man who set her hormones on fire. *Danger, danger!* Her defenses went on full alert status.

She cursed, not caring what he thought. “I can’t believe this. Could the day get any worse?”

“Probably. I think it’s going to be a long night.” His twinkling eyes said he liked the idea.

Glaring at him, she waved her finger back in forth. “Oh no, Ty McLeod, I’m not spending the night with you in this dank, nasty, scary place.”

He shrugged. “Yeah, it’s nasty and dirty, but it’s not scary. I don’t even think the place is haunted. I’ve taken readings and nothing has registered.”

As she glanced down at the room below, she wondered why her heart thundered.

“What are you afraid of?” he asked. “The house, or me?”

Good question.

“Don’t worry. I won’t let anything happen to you,” he said.

Ty's assurances wrapped around her like a security blanket. With the steady, warm look in his eyes, she knew he meant it. The idea made her heady, and she decided she must create distance before she did something stupid.

Like kiss the stuffin' out of him.

*Kiss him? Oh, God. No, no. I don't want to kiss him, I don't want to kiss him.*

She pushed passed him and headed down the stairs. "Is there any other way out of here?"

"Not that I know of."

"We'll call out the marines, then. You got a cell phone? I left mine in the car."

She heard him mumble something under his breath, then the thud of his footsteps as he followed her. "Same here. Mine's in the car."

"Damn!" She turned the corner and when they reached the low spot in the ceiling, she made sure to avoid the small clearance. "What do we do now?"

"We've got all the time in the world before anyone realizes we're missing. But I think once we escape here, we should have dinner and talk about what is really bothering you."

Flabbergasted by his insistence, she stared at him. "I'm not having dinner with you. So let's get on with the investigation."

Again she saw good humor light his eyes. Amazing. "Okay. I'll show you this last room."

Before she could reach the door, a wail of abject grief, ending in a sob, echoed from behind the wooden barrier. Ginny stepped back into Ty's grip. "What was that?"

"Ghosts?" His voice whispered close to her ear.

"You were just in there. Did you hear that before?"

"Nope." He released her and pushed open the door.

A tingle of exploration excitement zinged through her as she followed him. The cold in the room nipped at her, reaching into her bones.

"It's just an old bedroom," he said.

He flicked the light switch and the sight that greeted her wasn't what she expected. The dim bulb illuminated the small room enough to give it an eerie glow. A small shiver traveled her body.

He flipped on the electromagnetic device. "Oh, boy."

"What?"

“Look at the counter. It’s gone way up. Into the red.” He handed the camera to her. “Here, get some shots of the room. Maybe we’ll get something while this counter is up. I’ll take some readings and see if it’s an electrical device that is causing this spike.”

She couldn’t deny the wisdom in his idea, and started taking snaps. Within a couple of minutes she had taken several photos of the twin bed, the dresser, the empty wardrobe and the small desk in the corner.

The light went out, plunging them into semi darkness.

Ginny let out a gasp. “Let’s get out of here.” She started for the door.

They raced through it and the door crashed closed behind them.

Looking at each other in stunned disbelief, they remained silent for several moments.

“I’m not sure how to digest this new development,” Ginny said, staring at the door as if it might open the same way it had closed. “I’ve just heard sounds and seen phenomena I’ve never experienced before.”

“Enough to make a believer out of you?”

“Maybe. I’d say let’s get out of Dodge, but there’s nowhere to go.” She gave a weak smile. “We could try the other rooms.”

“Already did. The doors won’t open.”

Ginny sighed and headed down the corridor to the main room. “Well, then, we’ll just have to see if we can get the door at the top of the stairs open so we can get out of here.”

“How do you propose we do that?”

She waited for a few seconds, then noted the impatient crease across his brow. “You could break it down.”

Incredulity crossed his face a second before he laughed. “I’ll break something all right, but it won’t be the door. That’s good old-fashioned wood. It’s not flimsy.”

She looked at the wood barring her way out of this creepy place, then admired his strapping form. “Hmmm. So what you’re telling me is that our investigation is done for the evening.”

Ty set his equipment on the table, then dusted his hands together. “Not exactly. Someone will realize, probably tomorrow morning, that we’re missing. Until that time, I think we can occupy our time.”

“Oh?” She sensed she wouldn’t like whatever he said next.

Leaning back against the table, he hooked his thumbs in his waistband. "We can do some personal exploration."

The way he said it, in that deep baritone, made her heart thump like mad. "What kind of exploration?"

"Of what is happening between us."

Exhilaration quivered through her, landing deep in her belly and taking root. "You never give up, do you?"

"Not when I think something is worth fighting for."

Ginny's heart did a flip, then a flop. "What are you talking about, McLeod?"

"Call me, Ty," he said huskily.

"Ty." The word slipped off her tongue smooth and liquid.

"I'm talking about why you've been running away from me for all these years."

*Oh, man. Oh, man.* Her throat dried up as she acknowledged the truth of his statement.

"Any woman in her right mind would run from a rich, arrogant man trying to take over her brother-in-law's company."

Ty's dark brows drew downward and his mouth tightened. "Sure, I inherited a lot of money, but I work for a living. I'm not content to just sit on my butt; I've got to do something with my life." He put his hands up. "So here I am. Sue me. That's one of the things I've always admired about you, Ginny. Your work ethic and how you stay heavily involved in your nieces and nephews' lives. You're a real family person and yet you don't take anything off of anyone."

"Admire?" Her heart softened as she listened to him.

"Yeah. Which is why it hurts to think you hate me so much."

He looked wounded, and she knew then she'd said the wrong thing. "No. I...I don't hate you."

"I know it isn't apathy. You wouldn't react so strongly whenever I'm near you. Whenever I talk to you." The passion in his gaze pinned her to the spot. He moved away from the desk, stepping closer until she could almost feel his body heat.

She saw the tension gather in him, and this time the fright came from inside her. She knew if he came any nearer she'd be hard pressed to keep from touching him. *Oh, oh. I'm losing it.*

Deep waves of attraction pulled her toward him and she took a step forward. "If I felt apathy I wouldn't be so darned mad at you most of the time."



“Why the attitude then? I’ve already told you I don’t want Psi Group. Sure, I latched onto Dan’s bet, but not for the reason you think.”

Afraid of his answer she asked, “What’s your reason?”

“I knew from the first day I met you that we are two of a kind. Stubborn, full of energy, ready to tackle the world. I knew I had to know you better. But you’ve thwarted me at every turn.”

The idea that this big, strong, complex man wanted her attention stunned her down to the quick. “Maybe because I don’t want to put up with this type of attraction again.”

He tilted his head to the side, curiosity in his eyes, but he said nothing.

She sighed. “Most of the men in my life have come on strong and fizzled out quick. Just like Fergus has done. Today isn’t the first time he’s cancelled a date by way of no communication. In the beginning he was just like you. Hot and heavy to know me. Well, I’ve had enough of that. I’ve learned not to trust feelings like...like this.”

A gentle grin edged his mouth. “What do you feel? Tell me.”

She turned away, avoiding the magnetism of his stare. “I feel something all right, but I’m not doing anything about it.”

His hands cupped her shoulders. “I’m not like those other men, Ginny, and I think you know it. You know it and that’s why you’re fighting it. That, and you thought you knew me. You were wrong.”

“Why didn’t you ask me out?”

“Would you have said yes?”

“No.”

He laughed and released her. “What am I going to do with you?”

An idea came to mind, one that required her full and complete participation.

Before she could speak the lights went out, sinking the room into pitch black.

“What’s happening?” Frustration edged her voice up a notch.

Ty slipped his arms around her and pressed a quick kiss to her forehead. “It’s all right. It’s probably the storm.”

“I’m not afraid, Ty. You don’t have to protect me.”

His soft laugh filled the night. “I know. I just like having my arms around you.”

His heat and solid strength surrounded her. Though she wasn't afraid, she'd never felt this cared for in her life, and she knew she could become way too comfortable with the feeling.

She snuggled deeper into his arms and clutched at his T-shirt.

"I don't want to fight anymore, Ginny. And I don't think you do either." He kissed her cheek. "Think we should leave this part out of the report? About us being in each other's arms?"

Ginny licked her lips and swallowed hard. "That might be wise."

Ty shifted, drawing her closer, until she felt nothing but rock hard man along her body. Her hands slipped up and tested the muscles in his shoulders. Instinct drove her to move against him.

She felt the heat of his lips at her temple and she shivered. He grunted. "Do that again, Ginny, and there'll be consequences."

"Oh, yeah?" She felt the heat of his lips against her cheek and shivered. "Ty, I'm sorry about the way I've acted. My whole life I've had problems with trust and when the guys I dated always broke that trust..."

"I understand. I've had that problem a couple of times myself. But I figure love is like ghost hunting."

She grinned. "How?"

"Nothing's for certain and the path can be rocky while you investigate. But in the end, if you're very lucky, you find the right one."

Ginny's heart took up acrobatics. "Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"I think I'd better do something before you remember we've got a flashlight."

She heard the grin in his voice and she looped her arms around the neck. "Yes, I think you'd better."

Warm, tender lips captured her mouth. She reveled in new sensations and a sweet desire she'd never experienced before, glorying in the knowledge she wanted to take a chance with him. She slipped her fingers into his hair. As his tongue moved against hers, she shuddered with awakened need. When their passion threatened to go thermonuclear, he pulled back.

Ty's chest heaved as he inhaled deep and slow. "Wow."

She tried to catch her breath. "I'll say."

After several more minutes of significant examination, Ty said, "I've got a confession to make."

Apprehension did a dance around her heart, making her stiffen in his arms. “Oh?”

“Don’t worry. It’s nothing too appalling.”

She heard the doubt in his voice. “Out with it.”

“I don’t want to wait until you find out from Dan tomorrow.”

Worry crept around the lightheartedness she’d felt seconds ago. She remained silent and he began. “Dan and I set this up.”

“What?” Her voice came out as a squeak.

“We set it up. Dan sold the company to me yesterday and he didn’t know how to tell you. You and I are partners now.”

She sputtered, unsure whether to smack him in the chops or stomp his foot or introduce his family jewels to her knee. Instead she whopped him on the arm. “You rat!”

He gathered her close, his palms sliding over her back in a soothing counterpoint. “Easy now, it isn’t what you think.”

“Then you’d better explain and explain fast, Ty McLeod.”

She heard him take a deep breath. “Dan wanted you to have an equal share in the company, but he knew that you would fight the idea of him selling to me. He wants *us* to run it for him.”

Stunned, she didn’t know whether to feel betrayed or laugh hysterically. “What?”

He drew her closer, kissing her forehead and then her nose. “He’s known from the very beginning how I feel about you. How you feel about me. He’s been trying to get us together and when he knew he couldn’t keep Psi Group afloat any longer, he cooked up this idea. When he told me about it, I wasn’t sure I could do it. I knew you might be hopping mad—”

“You’re darned right I’m hopping mad. I ought to grill both of you over a large fire.” She stopped, hanging between bopping him again and another provocative thought. “You did this all for me? Set up this silly escapade because you wanted to get me in your arms?”

“Yeah. But it’s more than that. I want to run the company with you. We’ll be a great team. But I don’t want it unless we can put aside our differences.” His mouth found hers and kissed her with gentle insistence. “And I think up until about three minutes ago we’d found a mutual agreement.”

Ginny laughed. “I hate both of you.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“No. I don’t mean it.” The idea of being his partner, in every way possible, sounded so good she couldn’t wait to start the experiment. “In fact, I think this is going to require a business plan.”

“Thank God,” he said, clear relief in his voice. “You’ve made me very happy, sweetheart.”

His endearment put the final touch on her heart. “In fact, I think this partnership deserves serious discussions on our strategy to make Psi Company a success again.”

“Anonymous Investigations.”

“Psi Company.”

“Anonymous—”

She kissed him to shut him up. When she was pretty certain he wouldn’t argue, she let him up for air.

“I’ve got a key so we can get out of here,” he said.

“You’re just full of little surprises, aren’t you? I’m going to have to keep my eye on you from now on.”

“How about fifty or more years of observation? It’ll be hard work.”

“I’m up to the task.”

“Want me to put some light on the subject?” he asked. “I think I can stumble my way over to the flashlight.”

“Did you set up the lights out scenario, too?”

“Nope. It’s either the storm or the ghosts.”

He started to pull away from her and she tugged him closer, running her hands up his chest. “Please stay.”

“With pleasure.” He kissed her again.

Twenty minutes later he managed to get a word in edgewise. “Ginny? There’s one last thing I forgot to tell you. I should have said it a long time ago.”

She sighed. “What now?”

“I love you.”

Happiness flooded her heart. “Oh, Ty. I love you, too.”

\* \* \*

*One Year Later, Secretary's Day...uh Executive Assistant's Day*

Ginny and Ty looked at the sign outside their new offices situated in the Victorian House they bought a month before. Psi Group Paranormal Investigations.

Ty slipped his arm around his wife. "So what do you think, Mrs. McLeod?"

Grinning, she turned in his arms and kissed him on the chin. "It's the perfect Executive Assistant's Day gift."

"You're not an Executive Assistant anymore, but since I think you're cute as hell, I'll let you get away with it."

"Good, because we've got a case we can start on tomorrow to christen the office."

"Great. Who is it?"

"Mr. Cleveland. You know those weird sounds and the strange pictures that we took at this house? Well, he says the ghosts are back with a vengeance."

Ty grabbed Ginny's hand and smiled as he pulled her into their office. "Well come on, let's getting cracking."

The End