

MOTHER MAY I

DREW ZACHARY



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Mother May I

TOP SHELF

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Mother May I, an Eye Spy novel
By Drew Zachary

Chapter One

Black Investigations was in the, well, black.

Thanks to DB's growing reputation for all things strange, his increased credibility with the cops courtesy of Joe Donners -- and he owed the man a lunch, maybe two or three, for that -- and his caseload including more actually alive paying customers, he was solvent once more.

He was collecting a regular paycheck, paying the bills on time, and now had enough to hire a secretary again. The money he'd save in store-bought coffee versus take-out coffee alone should go a long way to keeping said secretary on the payroll.

Of course, first he had to find someone for the job. His ad in the paper had garnered a ton of responses, but so far everyone he'd interviewed either wanted too much money or had little to no experience. DB was beginning to think he was going to have to go with little experience and just be happy to have a warm body there to answer the phone during business hours, keep the coffee fresh and, if he was very lucky, take over the billing.

He grabbed the next resume and went to the door into the reception area. "Alex Barnaby?"

A lanky kid with dirty blond hair stood up, his jeans fraying around his sneakers. "That's me," he said with a

quick grin. He was at least wearing a shirt with buttons and an actual necktie, but if he was any older than twenty DB would be shocked.

"I'm DB. Come on in." DB held the door open for the kid and indicated the chair in front of his desk.

"Thanks." Alex sat down, started to slouch and then righted himself. He looked around the office while DB circled his desk to get to his own chair and said, "It's bigger than I expected."

"Oh? What were you expecting?"

"Uh, small and dingy. You ever see that movie, the one with the bird? Bogart. Philip Marlow. Or Mike Shayne movies on TV? Like that."

"So, I take it you don't have any experience, then?" Frankly, DB had already written the guy off, but he was trying to be fair.

Alex gave him another quick grin. "I can answer phones, and I know the alphabet. I'm awesome as a lookout, you know?" He slid his hands together through the air. "I blend in, man. I'm like... smoke. Yeah."

"He wants my job," Jesse said from his chair.

DB couldn't hold back his snort at Jesse's comment; if Jesse could answer the phone, he probably wouldn't need a secretary. "Lookout? You have experience with that, do you?"

"Oh, sure," Alex said breezily. "I can keep an eye on things while you go in and do your thing, you know? I got good eyes."

"DB." Jesse sounded like he was going to start laughing. "What exactly did you put in your ad?"

DB glared at Jesse in his chair in the corner.

"How do you feel about guns?"

"Guns are cool." Alex sat up a little straighter, looking eager. "Does one come with the job? I mean, I've never used one, but I can learn."

"Oh, boy." The commentary from the ghost was getting closer to being laughter.

DB stood up and held his hand out to Alex. "Well, I'd like to thank you for coming. If you don't hear from me by the end of the day, it means you didn't get the job."

Alex stood up and shook. His hand was damp. "You got my number, right? On my resume. Cool. Thanks, dude." He grinned brightly and headed out of the DB's office, be-bopping along.

Jesse said nothing. He was too busy laughing.

DB glared at him again, and then sat and lit a cigarette. God damn it. This was hard enough without the damn peanut gallery. "I just want someone who can do the job, you know? Is that really too much to ask?" The secretary

he'd had to let go due to lack of funds couldn't come back -- she was now working somewhere else.

He blew smoke rings to relax.

Jesse regained control of himself. "Okay, how about this? You go out there and demand that the people who can type, file, make coffee, and respect the resident ghost stand up. Then you pick the smartest looking one and give it a week."

"Oh, yes, because telling them I work with a ghost is going to have anyone aside from the real loonies stay."

Jesse approached the desk, smirking. "Babydoll, whoever is hired needs to know about me, no bullshit. You know why." He pointed to the sign over his chair. "I'm a selling point. Right?"

"I am not your 'babydoll'." DB glared at Jesse and then down at the twenty-odd resumes he still had to go through. Groaning, he stood up and went to the door. He picked one of the resumes at random. "Jill Benson?"

Jill was a short brunette who leaped to her feet and zoomed right past him, already talking. "I've read all about you, Mr. Black, and I can't even begin to tell you how exciting it is to be interviewing for this job. All those cases you've solved, the things you find out, and the all the rumors! Tell me, is it really true? For honest? Can you really get through a second story window without a tree or anything to climb?" She looked at him with huge eyes from over by his desk. "Really for real?"

"Of course I can't. I'm not Spiderman in disguise, Ms. Benson." He glanced at her resume. "How about you? Can you type? Make coffee? File? Answer the phones in a professional manner? And do you believe in ghosts?"

"Oh, *yes*," she gushed. "I type ninety-seven words a minute, I can file however you want, I'm *great* on the phone and-- ghosts." She blinked twice and then recovered. "Sure, ghosts. I can handle ghosts."

Jesse snorted. "I want to see something," he said firmly. He moved close to DB, put one hand right on DB's groin, and smirked. "Let's see if she can handle *weird* ghosts."

DB leapt out of his chair. "Don't do that!"

Jesse waved a hand at him. "Whatever. Check her out."

Jill Benson was staring at him, her wide eyes even wider. "Do what?"

"I wasn't talking to you," DB answered grumpily. "Thank you for coming in; if you haven't heard from me by the end of the day, I've hired someone else."

"If you weren't talking to me..." She closed her mouth fast and stared at him, then looked around the room. "Um. Okay. I'll..." She moved toward the door, a lot less excited about being there than she had been. "Bye, Mr. Black." She fled.

"Sorry." Jesse didn't sound sorry, though he didn't sound too happy, either.

"Don't be doing that again, or I will banish you from this whole process and then you won't get *any* say in who I hire."

He waited for Jesse's agreement.

"Don't try to hire someone without clearing the ghost thing or you won't get *any* say in when you get laid again."

DB glared. "Well, just make sure you keep your hands to yourself while we do this and it won't be an issue." He waved a finger at Jesse and then went to the door. Opening it, he leaned against the frame. "All right, anyone who can't make coffee can leave now."

A few looked around and one sighed deeply, hauled himself up out of his chair, and left. The rest looked at him expectantly.

"If you can't answer the phone politely and take appointments, fob off creditors and figure out which calls need to get to me even if I'm not in the office -- there's the door."

That cleared off another two, one of whom looked like a biker parolee, and the other like she would rather be anything than a receptionist, if the number of facial piercing and tattoos was anything to go by. Which it probably wasn't, but DB wasn't sure he wanted to watch four lip rings moving all day, so that was all right.

Okay, this might take a while, but it sure was faster than actually interviewing them. Thing was, some of this stuff should have been evident from the ad he'd placed. He *knew* he'd asked for phone, filing, and typing skills. Any of those three shouldn't have sent *anyone* home.

"Typing next. If you can't type, get out." He was maybe getting a little grumpy.

Four.

Okay, make that a lot grumpy.

"Good lord." Jesse stood next to him and shook his head. "The economy must really suck if people are hoping to charm their way past the basics."

"Uh-huh. Okay, for argument's sake, let's say I want at least fifty words a minute." It wasn't like there was a ton of typing with the job and he didn't want to preclude people just because they couldn't type ninety words a minute.

That left him with the four last hopeful faces looking at him. One of which was possibly fourteen years old.

"Okay, now we're getting somewhere. If you don't have basic filing concepts or can't work in the office by yourself, I won't hire you."

The kid raised her hand. "Uh, do you really have to be sixteen to have a job? 'Cause that's what my brother told me, but he's full of crap, usually."

"Oh, God." Jesse shook his head.

"Yes, you really do." And he wasn't hiring anyone under twenty-five if he could help it.

"Crap." And that took care of the teenager, who slouched out looking unhappy.

"Why wasn't she in school?" asked one of the remaining ladies, apparently to the room at large.

"Uh." The last man stood up. "I just have to show my PO that I'm looking for work. Can you sign this?"

"Jesus Christ!" DB threw the resumes up in the air. "Give me the fucking thing." He grabbed the slip out of the man's hands, signed it and thrust it back at him.

Once he was gone, it was just DB and two ladies. He gave them the glare he usually reserved for Jesse. "I'm going to be up front with you. We have a ghost in this office, and I'm not kidding here. If that makes you want to walk out before you waste anymore of my time, do it."

The two women looked at each other and one of them shrugged. "What do you think?"

"I think he's a bit crabby, but still better than the dentist I work for now."

"Good point. But the ghost thing. Weird or no?"

"Definitely weird, but worth a drink or two with the girls."

"Also a good point. Do you have kids to feed?"

"No, but I don't know if working for a detective is that safe for a mom, you know?"

The first woman grinned, pulled out a pen and wrote something on the back of one of DB's business cards that he'd scattered around the place. "Call me and let me know how it works out." She gave the second lady the card, nodded at DB and left.

Well.

He figured if the two of them could manage *that*, then they were both pretty good candidates and he'd take the one he still had. "You're hired."

"Cool." She stood up and offered her hand. She was tall, probably only two or three inches shy of six feet, and looked fit and strong. Her hair was shoulder length, neat, and a light brown. She didn't have a single facial piercing. "I'm Sandra Cross. Is the ghost nice?"

"I'm delightful," Jesse said.

"He can be temperamental, but I'm sure he'll be nice to you. Just make sure you don't sit on the chair in my office that says 'reserved for ghost' and he'll be fine." He shook her hand. "It's nice to meet you, Sandra. Everyone calls me DB, so you might as well, too. I don't suppose you can start now?"

"I need ten minutes to quit the dentist." She looked around the outer office. "And then I think I'll need to shop. We need office supplies, better tissues, coffee filters, air fresheners... does the building have an evening cleaning crew for the floors?"

"Oh, I like her."

"I have no idea." He rummaged through his pockets and pulled out a couple of twenties. "Will this be enough to cover the supplies? I don't have a petty cash set up at the moment. Oh, and maybe I should get you to sign the paperwork and stuff first, huh?" He could be handing forty bucks over to someone who was just going to walk out with it and never come back.

Of course, if she did, he'd just sic Jesse on her. A good haunting wasn't easy to ignore.

"Sure." She nodded. "I'm assuming this is a salary position and not a wage? And I'm betting there's not much by way of benefits." She suddenly smiled at him. "This had better be exciting, if I'm paying my own medical, DB."

"Yes, salary." DB gave her the number he could currently afford. "And no, there's no benefits, but if you want to look into that and see if you can find us a deal, I'm more than willing to consider it. I'm also planning on bonuses or a raise if business picks up. At the moment, that's what I can afford to pay."

There was no point in lying about the business' income, especially if she was going to be taking over the billables and accounts payable.

"Okay." She shrugged and nodded at the same time. "If I run into trouble I'll let you know and see what we can work out. Is there anything I need to know up front, aside from the ghost thing? Which, frankly, I'm pretty curious about."

"Tell her you love me." Jesse grinned at him, egging him on.

"There's a ghost -- I'm not kidding about that, though I'm sure most folks think it's a gimmick. His name is Jesse, he's a lousy chess player, but he's a huge help on cases -- he can get into places I can't." He was *not* going to tell this nice lady the ghost was his boyfriend. He didn't want her to quit before she'd even really started.

She appeared to think about that for a moment. "Cool. Is he here now? Like, will I see him or feel him? I don't want to get caught picking my teeth or anything embarrassing."

"He usually hangs around me, so yeah, if I'm here, he's here." DB nodded toward the other side of the doorway where Jesse'd taken up residence while he'd cleared out the room.

"He's... in there?" Sandra tilted her head. "Okay, this is silly, but would it be odd if I asked to be formally introduced? I'll probably just pretend he doesn't exist

after that, unless there's reason for me to talk about him. He won't mess with my desk, will he?"

"Oh, I think you're making all the right moves to ensure that you're his favorite person in the office." DB gave her a grin. "Okay, hold out your hand. You might feel a tingle when he shakes. Jesse, this is our new secretary Sandra. And Sandra, this is Jesse. He has bad eighties hair, but he's one of the good ones."

"Hey, don't diss my hair, man. I was stylin'." Jesse took Sandra's hand and DB could tell the instant she felt it by the way her eyes went wide. "Tell her she's already way, way up on my list, and that her pencils are safe."

"He says you're at the top of his list, and your pencils are safe."

"Oh!" Sandra looked mildly stunned. She examined her hand and then beamed at where Jesse was, more or less. "How cool is that? Neat. Man, give me ten minutes to quit my other job and I'm all yours, boss."

Jesse snorted. "Boss. She's never allowed to quit, is she?"

"Never." DB beamed at Sandra. "Sorry, I was replying to Jesse. I might do that now and then, talk to him, I mean, so if what I'm saying to you doesn't make sense, that'll probably be why. I'll have the paperwork ready for you when you come back. Welcome to Black Investigations. It's great to have you aboard."

She laughed, apparently more intrigued than worried about the peculiarities of the office, and headed off to do her quitting. "So neat," he heard her say as the door closed.

"Well, that went well. Do we have time to mess around before she gets back?" Jesse was right there, close. "Celebration, you know."

"No, we do not!" DB rolled his eyes and picked up one of the resumes off the floor. He wadded it up and threw it through Jesse. "You heard me; I have to get her paperwork done so she can sign it when she gets back." He grinned, though, and started to whistle, feeling great. "We can celebrate tonight."

Chapter Two

Jesse sat at the table as DB finished up his supper, still talking about how great Sandra was. He nodded, totally agreeing. "I had no idea that the office could smell that good," he told DB. "I don't even know what she did. She just did it."

"And her coffee! Oh, man, I wish you could taste it. Amazing. I mean even better than from the coffee places." DB licked his lips before eating his last chicken ball and clearing up the garbage.

"Well, it smells good. Oh!" Jesse watched DB move about the kitchen. "She said goodnight to me when she left! I mean, totally the wrong direction, but she said my name and waved and everything! I think we need to keep her."

"I'm down with that. Let's see how she is with the clients, huh?"

"I bet she's awesome. And really, even if she's only passable it'll still be a voice on the phone while we're out running around." Jesse got up and headed to the living room. "Want to play some chess? Watch TV? Celebrate?" He knew which one *he* wanted, but DB could be weird sometimes. It was better to ask.

DB laughed at him, wandering toward the couch. "We can put the TV on for background noise."

"While we play chess?" Jesse was already unbuttoning his shirt.

"Check mate." DB sat back on the couch, slouching in the way he did.

"That was a very fast game." Jesse kept unbuttoning, watching DB. "Let's hope the rest of this lasts longer."

"You want a longer game?" DB still hadn't undone any of his clothes yet, but his eyes were on Jesse.

"Maybe a different kind of game." Jesse let his shirt fall to the floor and toed off his shoes, one hand on his belt. "One with fewer rules than chess."

"So tell me the rules and maybe I'll play."

Jesse undid his belt and then the button on his trousers. "First rule is that if you want to touch, go right ahead. Second rule is that all requests will be listened to and considered."

"All requests?" DB looked like he had a few ideas.

"Considered." Jesse lowered his zipper and nodded encouragingly.

"I want a show."

Jesse grinned. He loved it when DB asked for stuff.

"What kind of a show?" God, he hoped DB didn't want a dance with the strip tease. The eighties hadn't been kind to dance.

"I want to watch you jerk off." DB rubbed his crotch through his pants.

Oh, that Jesse could do. For sure. He'd had lots and lots of practice, even. "Can I sit down?" he asked, pointing to the easy chair. "So I don't fall over, 'cause that's not really hot, so much."

DB laughed and nodded. "Yeah, that'd be cool. As long as I can see."

Jesse grinned and sauntered over to the chair, taking his time. He knew his audience wasn't going anywhere. "A show. Nice." He sat down, years of practicing helping him not sink into the chair, the little bit of concentration it took now second nature. "I like it when you watch," he told DB, sliding down in the chair and letting his legs fall apart.

"I like watching." DB was still rubbing himself through his pants. Jesse knew eventually DB would fish his cock out. In the meantime, the game of showing and watching let them forget that they weren't exactly a normal couple.

"Then it's good for both of us, yeah?" Jesse watched DB and slid his own hand up one thigh and along the line of his cock, parting his fly.

DB swallowed. "Yeah."

Jesse smiled and slid his hand into his boxers. "Yeah," he echoed. His hand curled around his cock; he pumped slowly. "We can make it really, really good."

"I want to see," DB reminded him.

"You are seeing," Jesse teased. He added in an almost involuntary moan and jerked a tiny bit faster. "Oh, all right." Slowly, he pushed the waistband of his boxers down with his free hand. "Better?"

DB moaned. "Oh, yeah. So pretty."

That made Jesse smile. He fondled his cock in long, measured strokes and eased his clothes down lower so he could free his balls, too. "See enough yet?"

"No. Not even close." DB hadn't even undone his top button.

"Oh, good." Jesses kept on playing, kept on touching himself. "Let me know if there's anything specific you'd like." He rubbed at the head of his cock with his thumb, gasping a little bit when it gave up a tiny bit of fluid all of a sudden.

"You can keep making noises like that." DB's voice was husky now, a good sign that he really was turned on by what he was seeing.

"I really, really can." Jesse nodded and palmed his balls. "Man." He closed his eyes and rubbed his cock a bit harder, not holding back any sounds.

He could hear sounds coming from DB, too. The zipper on DB's pants came down and DB moaned softly.

That made Jesse look, and fast. His balls throbbed and he had to tug them down, hard; Jesse loved watching DB jerk off. Loved it. With a low groan, Jesse managed to kick off his pants completely, and he slid down to the edge of the chair, his hand flying on his cock.

DB had his prick in hand and began to follow Jesse's rhythm and speed. Jesse could hear it every time DB's hand snapped up along the hard length, flesh on flesh.

"Oh, God." Gaze fixed on DB, Jesse stroked, his hips lifting to fuck his hand. "Yeah, like that. Just like that." With his other hand, Jesse reached down and rubbed the soft skin behind his balls. "DB. Fuck."

"Love it when you do that."

Yeah, he knew; he had DB whimpering now. Groaning, breathing hard and feeling (weirdly) his heartbeat racing, Jesse quickly wet his fingers with spit and started rubbing over his hole. He couldn't keep back his cries even if he'd wanted to, and his balls started to ache.

"Yes! Yes! Do yourself with your fingers. Please."

Jesse wasn't about to refuse such a request. He didn't even pause, just eased two fingers in and started riding, gasping and swearing as his body jerked.

"Yes! Jesse!" DB's fingers flew over his cock, his hips doing a dance now, too.

It didn't take long after that. Jesse watched and felt and listened, and when his balls got hot he let it all go,

coming hard enough that he squeezed tight around his fingers, his cock throbbing as he shot all over himself. He did, however, yell DB's name when he did it.

"Jesse..." DB's cry was more of a fading whisper and then he groaned and come sprayed out of his cock.

Jesse's eyes rolled back in his head and he went limp, breathing hard. "Good God." He whimpered again, realized he'd slipped into the chair, and fought his way back out. "Man. Good one."

"Yeah. I do love watching you do that."

"Mmm." Jesse slithered his way over to DB on the couch and flopped next to him, not quite touching. It was always a rude awakening when they just couldn't. "I love watching you watching."

DB laughed softly and searched for the remote. "We're a good team." Before he turned on the TV, DB looked over at him. "On the job and in the not-quite sack."

"Couch and chair work." Jesse waved a hand and sighed happily. "I'll take my good moments where I can get them." Truth be told, all of the good was with DB. Most of the bad, too, since there wasn't really anything but DB in his life, but Jesse didn't dwell on that. He felt too good to let pesky things like not being alive bring the mood down. "What's on?"

DB shrugged and started flipping channels. "Shout if you see something you like."

He would and DB might even stop where Jesse wanted him to. If he was lucky.

As days went, this one was pretty damn good.

Chapter Three

DB took a sip of his hazelnut cream flavored coffee and sighed happily. Having a secretary rocked. No, he took that back. Having Sandra as his secretary rocked. She was amazing.

It had only been a few days, but already his filing system was in order, he'd saved about a million dollars on coffees bought from the various coffee houses in the area, his billables were up to date and mailed off, and, to top it all off, his office didn't smell like smoke, but also didn't smell like some frou-frou cover up crap that only put a layer of yucky perfume on top of the smoke.

He was never going back to not having a secretary again. He'd give up his own salary first -- he could always live in the office if he couldn't make the rent, right?

It wasn't going to be an issue, though, not if things went like they were going now. He had a meeting with a potential new client in a few minutes, and then he was off on two different domestic cases that looked like they might wrap up quickly.

Jesse had already confirmed the cheating spouses were indeed cheating -- in one case the middle-aged wife with some young stud, in the other the middle-aged husband with some young stud (not the same one) -- all DB needed to do was get the pictures capturing them in the act.

Life was indeed good.

He checked his watch. He still had a few more minutes until his two o'clock appointment. He lit up a cigarette and put his feet on his desk.

"One of these days Sandra is going to tell you that you can't smoke in here," Jesse said from his chair. "After she gets used to you and all, when she feels secure. Then what will you do?"

"I'll tell her to keep using whatever magic she's currently using to make the place smell good and to just suck it up." He blew a smoke ring at Jesse, knowing it drove his ghost crazy.

"You don't think it's really magic, do you?" Jesse asked, looking around nervously. "And stop that. You know it drives me crazy."

DB raised an eyebrow at Jesse. "Of course it's not *really* magic. It's secretary magic -- not the same thing at all." He blew another smoke ring and then quickly blew another, smaller this time, but faster moving, so it went through the first one. He'd spent a *lot* of stake-out time perfecting that.

"Show off." Jesse looked at the smoke rings longingly. "If you were really good you'd make 'em square. Like Gandolf."

He snorted. "Gandolf was a wizard; I'm just a lowly private investigator."

"Ah, but you're amazing." Jesse fluttered his eyelashes and laughed. "So, what's the scoop on this next client?"

DB grabbed the file Sandra had prepared for him and looked through it. "Huh. A haunting. This guy claims his mother is haunting him, running off the girlfriends she doesn't like, that kind of thing." They didn't get very many paying cases that used his... gifts in the ghost department. Most of those came from ghosts who couldn't pay.

"Oh, man, are you serious?" Jesse went to the desk and looked over DB's shoulder. "Moms scare me."

DB shuddered and nodded. "Yeah. Poor guy."

"We gotta help him." Jesse shuddered, too. "Jeeze, he'll never get laid if his mom is hanging around."

"Yeah, moms have a way of killing the mood." It looked like the guy had plenty of money, too, so they could charge him well to figure out why his mom was sticking around and even more to get rid of her. At last, his ability was going pay off in actual cold, hard cash.

"Does the file say how long ago she died?" Jesse had gone to the window, his hip slipping through the edge of DB's desk. "Oh, wait, this might be him now. And her. Oh, boy."

"No, it doesn't. And oh, boy what?" DB didn't like the sound of that. He got up and rushed to the window to see -- it would help him if he could get his full look now and not be staring at her when she got here -- she didn't need to know that he could see her. Not yet.

"See the guy on the cell phone right there? By the fire hydrant? Doesn't the older woman next to him look a little... like she hasn't been dead long enough to learn how to keep her feet out of the sidewalk?" Sure enough, a woman of about seventy or so was apparently standing on her ankles. "To me, I'd guess she's pretty fresh. Maybe six months or so."

"Huh. I'd expected her to be gone longer for this to be a chronic problem. I guess he cares more about getting laid than that she died."

'DB'd honestly expected the woman to have been dead for ages for this to have been dragging on and on. Still, he supposed it was pretty freaky to have your mother haunting you. Especially if you couldn't see her, just knew she was there and the one responsible for weird things happening around you.

If she couldn't even keep her feet out of the sidewalk, though, then she had to be doing whatever she was doing on pure strength of emotion. It had taken Jesse a while to be able to figure out how to actually move stuff, and it had all started by accident when he was really pissed off.

He'd bet Momma was doing the pissed off thing, which would make it really random and probably even more scary for darling son and the girlfriends. Of course, that was all just speculation and he was probably better off not forming any preconceived notions before they even got to his office.

Jesse shrugged. "Maybe longer. What do I know? Ghosts avoid each other, after all. But we do tend to figure out how to move pretty quickly. Do you want me to stick around for this, or should I head out to keep Sandra company?"

"Why don't you go get her story? I'll get the son's and then we can compare notes."

"What, snag her down there?" Jesse looked intrigued. "Yeah, okay." He glanced out the window again. "See you in a bit, then."

"Yeah." He gave Jesse an absent wave before stubbing out his cigarette and finishing his coffee. Damn, it was good.

A moment or three later Sandra tapped on his door frame. "Mr. McGibbon to see you, Mr. Black."

"Thank you, Sandra, show him in. Oh, and see if he'd like some coffee -- if he does, I'll have another cup myself, please."

Sandra winked at him. "Yes, sir. I'll bring it anyway. Mr. McGibbon? It's very good coffee."

"Uh, no. Thanks." McGibbon walked past her into the office. "None for me."

DB nodded at her. "Thanks, Sandra, I'll take mine after we're done here, then." He stood and went around his desk to shake McGibbon's hand. Now that the man was close-up, he could see McGibbon was probably in his

late thirties, handsome enough, though he looked tired, haunted even. DB had to work not to snicker at that thought. "I'm DB."

"Shel. Sheldon." He shook his head ruefully. "My friends call me Duke."

"That's an interesting nickname. And please -- have a seat." DB pointed to the chair in front of his desk.

Duke sat and glanced around. "I have this problem, and I've been told you're the go to guy with something like this."

DB nodded. "Sandra said a ghost problem." He pointed to the chair next to the one Duke had sat in with its "this chair reserved for the ghost" sign. "I know a thing or two about that."

"Yeah, I heard--" Duke did a double take at the sign. "For real? You don't think I'm crazy?"

"No, sir. I do not think you are crazy. I'm not going to take your money and throw around some holy water and salt just to rip you off. I'm going to find out why your ghost is sticking around and legitimately try to get rid of it for you." He leaned back and smiled his most reassuring smile. "I'm going to charge you whether we get rid of your ghost or not -- I won't guarantee success, but I am the real deal."

"I actually like that promise of you demanding money." Duke rolled his eyes. "Makes you seem honest, at least." He looked at the door as Sandra came in with his coffee

-- DB sort of loved that she'd ignored his assertion that he'd wait until he was done with Duke -- and smiled at her. When she'd left again Duke said, "It's my mother."

DB nodded. He knew that much. "Yes?"

"She's... still here. I can't make her go, and I've tried. I've moved, I've talked to her, I've asked her nicely, I've moved back, even into her house in case that's what was eating her -- I even tried to have her exorcised."

DB's eyes narrowed. "That sounds pretty nasty."

"Well, she's not dripping blood from the walls or anything," Duke qualified. He looked pretty miserable as he sipped his coffee. "Yet, anyway. Maybe she's working up to it; I just don't know. She was fine when she was alive, a little crabby but nothing like this."

"So, tell me what's been going on." DB spread his hands. "I can't help you if you don't give me all the details."

"You don't beat around the bush or make small talk, huh? Okay." Duke leaned back in his chair. "Mother has taken to chasing off anyone I bring home. She even had a go at the maids until I told her that I wasn't going to be scrubbing the john myself so she better cut it out. She does things like knock drinks into their laps or dump out their purses. Women really don't like that."

DB chuckled. "No, they're funny that way, aren't they?"

"You'd think she'd been stealing the way women go apeshit over having their lipsticks and cell phones land

on the floor." Duke rolled his eyes. "Now, I totally get how pissed they get when Mom dumps wine on them. That's not cool at all, and it costs me a lot in dry cleaning. I just want it to stop, DB. I want to be able to date. Mom's not keeping it at home, either. She's started acting up at restaurants."

"You say she wasn't like this when she was alive? What happened when you brought dates home before she died? I'm assuming you lived with her before she died?" Though why a mature man like Duke would still be living with his mother, DB didn't know.

"Hell, no." Duke looked horrified. "Mom lived a couple of miles away; I saw her on Sundays. She died about a year and a half ago, and I think she just moved in with me instead of moving on, you know? She wasn't a huge part of my life when she was alive, but I did see her every week and we'd talk on the phone about mid-week. Now I can't shake her. It's like I'm fourteen or something and she doesn't want me to have anyone else."

DB frowned. There was usually a good reason why a ghost lingered. Not always, but most of the time. "Do you have any idea why she seems to have an agenda to keep you single?"

"Nothing that I can think of. I mean, she didn't like my ex-wife much, but I didn't either after the first couple of years."

"Did the ex-wife show up at the funeral?"

"Well, sure. It was only polite. Mind you, she didn't speak to anyone and she left right away, but she was there." Duke gave him a curious look. "Why?"

DB shrugged. "I'm just trying to explore all the angles, figure out why she's decided you should remain celibate."

Duke gave him a long look. "I'm on about month nine, man. This can't go on for much longer."

Man, this guy was a whiner. DB'd had dry spells that lasted a lot longer than nine months. He went on doggedly, though, because if Duke had money for maids, the man could afford to pay him. "So do you want her to just stop chasing off the girls, or do you want her gone?"

"Can you do that second one? I mean, what if she decides I should be vegetarian or something? What if she starts making herself visible or talking to me? A guy's gotta have his privacy and she's *dead*. She needs to stop messing with my life."

No matter how much of a dick Duke might be, he had a point there. "I can do my best, Sheldon. But like I said, no promises. I charge per day I'm on the case, any expenses, and it's extra for hauntings. Ghosts can be tricky."

Duke looked around. "Where's yours? Why haven't you gotten rid of it?"

"Mine isn't here right now, and I haven't gotten rid of him because he's very helpful. Especially with ghost-jobs. Not all ghosts hang around to cause trouble."

"Really." Duke didn't look like he believed that completely. "Okay. What do you need? Money up front? Information? Do you think we can wrap this up by Friday? I got my eye on a sweet barista."

"I have no idea how long it's going to take, but yes, a week's retainer up front would be a good start. I'll need access to your house, of course."

"My house? Oh. Right, okay. Looking for ectoplasm and stuff. Right." He fished out his keys and slipped one off the ring. "That's for the front door. How much for the week?" His wallet was fat and it looked like it was going to be a cash operation.

Ectoplasm. Right, for that one, DB was upping his daily retainer. "Five hundred a day." When Duke only opened the wallet and started pulling out a wad of cash, DB added, "It'll be extra for any expenses incurred during the course of the investigation."

"Jesus." Duke looked at him. "And no promise you can actually do anything? That Donners guy better not have steered me wrong."

That Donners guy. Joe knew Duke? Huh.

"I'm going to spend a week doing my best, man. If after that I don't think I'll be able to get the job done, I'll tell you so."

"All right." Duke looked at him, apparently resigned. "It's not like I've gotten anywhere on my own. Mom's a pretty determined lady. Very used to getting her way."

"I'm used to stubborn ghosts. If you'd like to pay my secretary on the way out, she'll give you a receipt. You can leave your address with her as well, and I'll come by today and check the place out, see if we can't just reason with your mother." He stood and offered Duke his hand.

"Good luck with that." Duke shook his hand. "Seriously, though, if you can get her to at least lay off spilling wine, that'll be a step forward. Gone is good, but fewer dry cleaning bills wouldn't be horrible." He headed out to pay Sandra, his wallet still in his hand.

DB resisted the urge to go ask Sandra to spray his hand with some disinfectant. He wasn't sure what it was exactly, but Duke rubbed him seriously the wrong way.

Sandra, however, efficiently and politely took Duke's money and opened a file for him, then brought DB more coffee. It wasn't until she was heading back out of his office that she said, "He's a bit of a jerk, isn't he?"

"Yeah. Yeah, he was. He gave you a full week's down payment, right?" He wasn't quite in the black enough to be turning away clients who could afford to pay through the nose. He was interested in hearing what Jesse had to say about the mother.

"He sure did." Sandra nodded, one hand on the door. "Is Jesse around?"

"Good. And no -- he's off talking to the mother, seeing what the story is from her side." He took a sip of his coffee. "This is the best coffee in the world, Sandra."

She smiled at him. "Thanks, boss. I'll be out here if you need me."

"Thanks, Sandra." He smiled back and lit a cigarette, putting his feet on the desk. Having a secretary rocked.

"You look relaxed." Jesse didn't. He looked slightly frazzled.

"I have a great secretary who makes awesome coffee." He sat up and nodded at Jesse's chair next to the one Duke had been sitting in. "The son's a jerk. What have you got on the mother?"

"She's a loon." Jesse sat on his chair and rolled his eyes. "I can't figure out if she doesn't know she's dead or just doesn't care. She kept talking about harlots and how her boy could do so much better. And money, how he's wasting it."

"Yeah? He claims she wasn't like that when she was alive." Maybe Duke deserved her.

"Huh." Jesse looked thoughtful. "Maybe dying was really traumatic and her personality got a little mixed up? Like, post-traumatic stress?"

"Yeah, could be. Did she happen to mention how she died? I guess not if you're not sure that she even knows she's gone."

Jesse shook his head. "Nope. She just kept going on about how these women kept trying to get a hold of her son and how they must all be gold diggers because they wore red lipstick. She's a nut, DB. I asked her if she'd consider just moving along and letting him live his life, but she said that a mother's job is never done. That's a little scary."

"Hell, yeah. Okay, let's check out the public records and find out how she died, then go check out the house."

"I'm not so good with the records, but I'll come with you and read over your shoulder." Jesse grinned at him.

"Make sure you don't miss anything."

"I was thinking I could probably find what I needed on the Internet." Sometimes Jesse could be so old-fashioned. It always surprised him when it showed up in stuff like this.

"Oh." Jesse looked momentarily confused. "Right, right. No more microfiche. Although, you know, that's still the safest way to store archives. I saw that on Discovery channel or something."

"You watch way too much TV." He grinned at Jesse and fired up his browser. He had public records bookmarked.

"Well, what else am I going to do, right?" Jesse stood up and walked around the desk to lean over DB's shoulder, getting a little too close. The tingles were a dead giveaway.

"Back off, Jesse. Sandra's just one flimsy door away." That was one thing that having a secretary curtailed. No more office quickies. At least during the day.

"She's nice, maybe she won't mind." Jesse laughed softly and moved. He really seemed to like Sandra, too, and the fear of losing her was strong. "Okay, so we're looking for cause of death? The son didn't say? And is his name really 'Sheldon'?"

"He prefers 'Duke'," DB answered dryly. "And no, he didn't say. I mean, I didn't think to ask, but when people tell you their loved ones die, they usually tell you how, don't they?" Maybe Duke had something to hide.

"Yeah, they do." Jesse sounded thoughtful. "Her full name is Mary Margaret McGibbon, but she told me that she'd wanted to use her maiden name as well. She went on about that for a while, actually. It was Richard -- a nice strong name that she wouldn't have had to spell for everyone."

DB typed the name in, including the 'nee Richard', and hit search.

"You know, she had opinions on just about everything. Did you know that my hair means I'm light in the loafers?"

DB bit his lip, trying *very* hard not to laugh out loud at that. He couldn't not laugh, though.

"I know. Seriously. It's eighties hair. My hair means that *everyone* was light in the loafers. And I had *actual* loafers, even. God." Jesse rolled his eyes and smacked DB's shoulder, which only resulted in a warm area of tingles. "Stop laughing."

It was the tingles that did it, that sent him over the edge, and DB started laughing. He started and couldn't stop, really. "But you *are* light in the loafers," he finally managed to spurt out.

"That's what I'm saying!"

From the door, Sandra asked, "Uh, DB? Everything okay?"

He nodded and tried to choke back the laughter. "Sorry, sorry. Jesse's amusing the hell out of me."

"Oh." She looked vaguely startled but recovered quickly. "Oh, okay. You guys... talk? It's more than just impressions and stuff, then? That's pretty cool."

"Tell her what we do, DB," Jesse teased. "Go on. Dare you."

"Shut up." He smiled at Sandra. "Sorry, that was aimed at my very annoying ghost. Yes, we talk. I can see him. It's cool, but it can also be annoying."

"I'm not annoying, I'm *fun*," Jesse insisted.

"How is it annoying?" Sandra asked.

"Well, for instance, right now -- I'm carrying on two conversations at once. And it's okay with you, but sometimes I forget that nobody else can see him and I'll be out in public talking away to him and then I catch the looks."

No way was he risking Sandra leaving by telling her that Jesse gave him the tingles and distracted him, turned him on... made him come. He gave her his best smile. "He just is. Sometimes."

"You say that now," Jesse sing-songed in his ear. DB noticed, however, that Jesse was only being vocally annoying; he wasn't doing anything to actually risk either pissing DB off or making Sandra leave.

Which was probably about the same thing.

"Okay," Sandra said slowly. "I think it's going to take me a while to get used to you talking in here, but I'll do my best." She grinned and headed back to her desk.

"You see that? Is kind of embarrassing, you know."

"The other option sucks more," Jesse pointed out. "It's going to be strange, though, trying to remember not to be gabby when there's a client around, if we get used to it with Sandra."

"Like you're going to get used to it." DB snorted. He'd forever be blowing smoke rings, and Jesse would

forever be running his usual commentary. It was inevitable. He glanced at the computer screen -- while they'd been talking, his search had come up.

Jesse noticed it too and leaned forward to read. "Let's see. Seventy-six, family history of heart disease, passed in her sleep. Oh, autopsy. Click! I hope there are no photos. They don't put autopsy photos online, do they? Ew."

"Surely you've seen plenty of gross stuff over the years that an autopsy photo doesn't freak you out?" DB clicked on the link. There weren't any photos.

"Gross stuff isn't on the same level as autopsy photos," Jesse informed him. "Okay, lot of babble, keep scrolling. Slow down. No, lower. God, I wish I could drive this thing."

"Stop backseat internetting!"

"Jeeze, sorry." Jesse didn't sound sorry. "Oh, hey, there! Stop." DB stopped and Jesse muttered quietly for a few minutes while he read the page over. "Well. That's not very helpful. Inconclusive cause of death because there was multiple organ failure, but it all seemed to be stemming from cardiac arrest. She had a massive heart attack, basically."

"Which makes sense given her age and family history. Of course that could be easily induced if you wanted to off her." DB shook his head. "I didn't get 'I killed my mother' vibes off him. Just 'I'm a creepy jerk' vibes."

"Yeah, she didn't sound pissed off at him, so much -- just the gold digger girls." Jesse looked at him. "What was the inheritance like? Can you find out?"

"Well, he's got money, I can tell you that much. We're going to have to go to newspaper articles, though, to find out stuff like that. Finances are not a matter of public record."

"Microfiche!" Jesse punched the air.

DB shook his head and went to Google, putting in Mrs. McGibbon's name. "No, we're still using the internet."

Jesse really was a weirdo sometimes.

"Seriously? Man." Jesse went to his chair and flopped. "Okay, you can tell me all the juicy details on that, then. So, Sheldon is a jerk?"

"Yeah. He seemed it. I wasn't sure if I was reading him wrong or not, but Sandra confirmed it independently."

DB scrolled through the articles that came up connected to Mrs. McGibbon's name. He whistled. "Appearances can be deceiving, but it really looks like they were pretty damn rich, given all the charities she was a member of." Not to mention the soirees and balls and sheer number of mentions.

"Huh. She didn't seem... polished enough for that." Jesse tilted his head. "Does it say anything about where she came from? Like, did she come from money or did she marry in?"

DB went through a few more articles. "Aha. You're right. She married into it." He caught a glimpse of something that had him scrolling back. "Oh, wow. She was married late, like in her forties, and had already had Sheldon. So he's inherited the lot and not done a damn thing to earn it."

"Not even having the right father. Interesting." Jesse sat up straighter. "Not that I have a clue what it means, mind you. Maybe Madam Yanya will have a thought or two."

DB made a face. "You really think we need to get her involved?" Madam Yanya had helped with other cases, sure, but the gaudy medium gave DB headaches. She also was always telling him off about Jesse.

Which was probably why Jesse liked her so much.

"Steve's cool." Jesse laughed to himself and shook his head. "Don't tell her I used that name. And maybe she can't help, not really. Want me to stop by there later and kind of feel her out? She might have experience with stubborn ghosts who just won't leave." He was teasing again. He had to be.

"Ha. Sure. The last time she had one like that she called *me*. So I think we'll wait and see if we can't solve this one on our own before we call in any kind of reinforcements. Let's head over to the house and see what we can see." He got up and headed for the reception area to get the address from Sandra.

Jesse floated along behind, his hands in his pockets.
"Race you to the car," he suggested.

DB snorted, thanked Sandra and headed out. He waited until they were in the hall before answering. "You cheat."

"But not on you, lover." Jesse fluttered his eyelashes outrageously. "So, sedate pace down the stairs?"

"That's what I'm doing -- you can take the route of your choice."

"I'll watch your butt." Jesse was very cheerful. A new case seemed to agree with him.

DB rolled his eyes and tried not to be self-conscious about the way he was walking. He tried to concentrate on the case instead. There wasn't much to go on yet, though, so it wasn't much of a distraction.

Still, it was a case, a paying one that also involved his "special skills", and that combination didn't come along every day. So he guessed having a new case agreed with him, too.

Chapter Four

"Maybe part of Sheldon's trouble is that he hasn't sold this place yet," Jesse said as they drove. He looked out the window and admired yet another perfect lawn. "Not that I blame him. I mean, if I'd come into money and could afford to live here, I would. Maybe he should just get his mom to leave him alone in hotels and take his women there."

"And what if he marries one? What then? Besides, he said he'd tried moving."

"Oh. Right." Jesse shrugged. "All right, then. We throw momma from the train." He was easy, he could go either way. It was all money in DB's pocket, and Sandra would stay if she got paid. "Hey, want to go to a movie tonight?" Jesse loved movies.

"I'm not saying throw her from the train, but come on -- she's had her life. If Duke didn't kill her, then he deserves his chance, too."

Jesse nodded. "I'm with ya. I am. Even if I'm on the dead but still have a life end of the sliding scale. Unless she's got a good reason for sticking around, I vote we move her along."

"Hell, from what you said, she isn't enjoying her afterlife anyway."

"True." Jesse couldn't deny that. "Some people just live to complain, man. Or you know, stick around to complain. She really, really doesn't like her boy dating,

though. You say she wasn't like that when she was alive?"

"According to him."

"Maybe he wasn't paying attention. I never listened to my mom." He snorted and held up his hands. "And clearly that didn't work out so well for me. Still, maybe it's just gotten the point where he can't ignore it anymore, since she can follow him around."

"Yeah." DB shuddered a little. "Can you imagine?"

"I'd rather not." But then, there it was. An image of his mom following him and DB around, interfering in their already strange relationship. "Yowza."

"Yeah. Really."

"Okay, so we help the living." Nodding, Jesse looked around, desperate for anything to banish the thought of his mother. "Are we almost at the house? It's been a while since she died -- what are you hoping to find?"

DB shrugged. "I have no idea." Then he pointed. "It's that one up at the top of the hill."

"Cripes." Jesse stared. "I'm surprised it doesn't have a moat." It didn't look to be much bigger than the already massive homes around them, but perched like that, above the rest, it has an air of condescension that Jesse couldn't miss. "No wonder he's a jerk if he grew up looking down at everyone."

"Yeah, that." DB went around the drive and pulled up in front of the house. "Well, here goes nothing -- I wonder if there's other spirits hanging around."

Jesse looked. "Nothing so far. Actually, there's *nothing* so far. Where are all the people? There's no one in the gardens, no one walking along the sidewalk." It was creepy.

"They're all out spending their ill gotten gain." DB gave him a wink.

Jesse snorted. "You're weird. This whole place is weird. Is there a maid or a cook or something in there? I don't want to come around a corner and scare some little girl." He ignored the fact that no one could see him, and that it would likely be *him* yelling in fright.

DB gave him a look. "You tell *me* if there's anyone in there."

Jesse sighed. "God, fine, all right." He sat up and sighed. "Stay here; I'll go scope it out. You have a key, though, right?"

"Yes, Jesse. I have the key. I'll even ring the bell first in case there're maids or someone inside. You go check things out, though, please." DB rolled his eyes.

"Stop that." Jesse didn't quite stamp his foot, since he was sitting down. "I'm just making sure. Jeeze. Meet you at the front door, then; I'm not coming back here." Then, without waiting for a reply, he put himself inside the house.

After he moved a few inches forward to get himself out of a wall, he congratulated himself on not letting DB see that.

"Okay, then." He spoke out loud because he could.
"Anyone home?" As expected there was no reply.
"Good enough." He started walking, going from room to room in search of ghosts, living people, or whatever else he could find.

Mostly he was just glad that Duke's mom was following Duke and not hanging out at home. He thought maybe she'd object to him being there.

The house was really big. He didn't count bedrooms, but there were five bathrooms including the little one off the laundry room, and that was four more than Jesse had ever had. There was also a serious amount of art on the walls.

He nearly jumped out of his skin -- or at least would have if he'd had skin -- when the doorbell rang.

Jesse made his way back toward the front door, got lost and took a short cut through a couple of walls. When he got there he stuck his head through the door and glared at DB. "Coming in?"

"Nobody home, then?" DB was already unlocking the door, as he'd obviously already worked that out for himself.

"Just us. Wanna jump on the beds? There's a bunch of them."

"Don't be such a kid." DB wandered around the large hall, looking into rooms, but not going anywhere. "So nothing unusual? No other ghosts, no weird voodoo dolls sitting out?" DB started up the broad staircase toward the second floor with its myriad bedrooms.

"I'm not a kid, I'm middle-aged, remember? And no, no voodoo dolls. Just a skull with a candle jammed in it and a few chicken feathers lying on the ground." Jesse rolled his eyes and followed DB, pretending not to stare at the shapely butt his detective had.

"Haha. Have you determined which room is Duke's and which room used to be his mother's?"

"Nope, they all look like museum pieces. I'm pretty sure that his isn't the one with the lace canopy, though. Did he move in here soon after she died, or was it empty a while, do you know?" Jesse was betting the dude moved in right after the funeral. He would have.

"Don't know the exact details, but he said he'd moved in, moved out, then moved back in again." DB went into the master suite. "Looks like he moved into her bedroom -- after a renovation because no woman would live in a room like this -- which is kind of creepy." DB made a face. "Which fits him to a T, so..."

"So there we are." Jesse nodded and made a mental note to check this guy out for himself as soon as he could. "All right, so Mom dies, he drops a pile on a renovation,

moves in. Then Mom comes back when he starts bringing women around?" He moved around the room and peeked into the walk in closet. "This is creepy. Does he know we're looking in his room?"

DB shrugged. "She was around before that -- he told me he moved back in case she wanted him to, but holy crap. Looking around here I'm not buying it. I can't see that guy avoiding living in a mansion, you know?" He poked around for a bit and then sprawled in the big easy chair in the corner. "I don't even know what I'm looking for."

"Voodoo, apparently." Jesse sighed and went to look out the window. "We need more information. We need to know about her, what was important to her. And we need to check out some of these women, maybe. Maybe Mom has a point?" He turned and looked at DB. "You should have a chair like that."

"Yeah, that'd be cool, wouldn't it? Too bad they cost a fortune." DB sighed and stood up. "Come on, let's go wait for Duke to show up. We can ask him all our questions when he gets home."

"And explore while we wait." Jesse was sure there had to be a pool table hiding in there somewhere. "How come he called you, anyway? Did Yanya send him?"

"No, Joe. And that's what I should do while I wait. Call Joe up and see how they're connected." DB pulled his cell phone out of his pocket.

"Joe?" Jesse blinked. "Donners?" Jesse still wasn't sure if he liked Joe much, although Joe'd at least stopped trying to steal DB.

"Yeah." DB hit the autodial. Damn it, why did DB have to have Joe on autodial?

Jesse stayed where he was, pretending not to be bothered. He wasn't sure how good he was at it.

DB made a face. "Hey, Joe, it's DB. I'm just calling about a new client. Sheldon McGibbon. He said you suggested he see me. What's the story with this guy? Call me back."

"Voice mail?" Jesse asked and then wanted to bite his tongue. Obviously it was voice mail.

"Yep." DB stretched and wandered in the direction of the kitchen. "This place is cold, isn't it? Like I can't get a read on what kind of home it is. Which I was hoping to."

"I doubt if he uses it all. It's pretty big for just one guy. So, have you talked to Joe at all lately?" Jesse was merely curious. Not jealous.

"Not since that case with the ghost in the tavern."

"Oh." Well, that was good. They'd done a lot of drinking on that case, though. "Is he seeing anyone yet?"

"What am I? His secretary?"

Jesse flushed. He did that a lot for a guy with no circulation, but since he was also able to get erections he'd decided long ago not to bitch about it. "No, I'm just asking. Never mind."

"You are obsessed with him, aren't you? If I didn't know better, I'd have to be jealous of him."

"What?" Jesse stared. "Me? What? You! Him! Not me! No!"

DB laughed hard. "Well, come on. You're always going on about him, asking about his dating life. It's Joe this and Joe that. What's a guy to think?"

"I just want him to stay away from *you*." Jesse was still blushing, he just knew it. "Mine."

The smirk DB gave him told him DB knew damn well why he was always going on about Joe. DB looked in the fridge and grabbed a pop.

"Oh, shut up. And hey, that's the client's pop!"

"You think he'll notice or mind if he does? Come on, let's go sit out in the car and wait for him to come home." DB looked around as they headed back toward the front door. "This place doesn't feel homey or welcoming at all. You'd think any girl who got past the front door would have already passed some sort of test."

"What kind of test? Having a pulse?" Jesse went with DB, amused at his own joke about living people.

"Seriously, we should take a look at the kind of lady Duke's trying to score."

"Yeah, okay, but to do that we have to talk to the man. And I want a go at his mother, too, see if she's more than just crazy from being dead."

"Okay, sure." Jesse nodded. "Did Duke say when he was going to head home? I got the impression from Mom that she pretty much goes where he does, just to keep an eye on things."

"I had thought he'd be along soon." DB looked at his watch. "We can hang out here 'til four and then call it a day and go eat. It'll let us see if anything weird goes on here that might have had an effect on his mother after she died."

"Okay, cool." Jesse followed DB right to the car and slid on in. He wasn't fond of going through things, but he sure was used to it. "Want to mess around?" He knew the answer, but thought he'd ask anyway.

DB gave him a look that said his lover thought he was out of his mind.

Jesse smiled at him. "Just checking. Wow, you're a lot more fun when you're not on stake out. Did you bring the travel chess set?"

"It's the middle of the day, Jesse. And we're outside. In the fanciest neighborhood ever. I am not making out with you. And yes, we have chess. But I'm not in the mood."

Jesse sighed and sat and watched the house. Idly, he wondered if he could blame Joe Donners for the lack of orgasms, but even Jesse had to admit that there was no way DB would have gone for it anyway. "Not in the mood for chess? What if I bring you flowers and candy next time?"

"Shut up." DB glowered for a moment and then wriggled, rolling his head from side to side. "Sorry. Something about this case is rubbing me the wrong way. There's something really off here."

"Uh-huh." Jesse agreed. Something was off, and it wasn't just the lack of orgasms. DB was right. They were missing something.

Now not only did they have to work the case, they had to solve the mystery of what was wrong with the case, too.

Somehow, things never worked out to being simple when ghosts were involved.

He should know.

Chapter Five

DB waited until nearly eight o'clock before he gave up waiting for Duke.

He was cranky from needing to eat and from having had to wait for a client who'd never shown. Okay, so it wasn't like he'd made an appointment with the man, but he'd expected Duke to show at some point in the afternoon, let alone when it started to get dark.

Growling louder than the engine, he started up the car.

"Take out and home?" Jesse asked, sounding hopeful. "Calling it a day?" For a person with an eternity of time ahead of him, Jesse sure got bored easily.

"Yeah." If anything important had come up at the office, Sandra would have called. Just another good thing about having a secretary. "What do you want?" he asked, teasing Jesse.

"Lobster. Do they have that at a take-out window?"

DB snorted and headed down the road, out of the ritzy neighborhood.

"You mock. Try going a couple of decades without lobster and you'll be ready for even the fast food kind." Jesse had his nose in the air, but he didn't sound particularly irritated. Plus, DB doubted that Jesse had ever in his actual living life ever had lobster.

"I need to be able to afford to eat the rest of this week, which I won't be able to do if I blow it all on lobster tonight. How does McDonald's sound?" It sounded crappy, actually, but it was on the way home, and he was tired and cranky and just wanted to get home. He wasn't even sure he wanted to try sex tonight. Slouching out in front of the tube sounded about right.

Jesse sighed. "Whatever you want, DB. You're the one who eats it." After a moment he added, "You know what's odd? How did Duke even get in touch with Joe to get in touch with you? And how come Joe didn't give you a heads up?"

"Yeah. And that's not the only odd thing, either." He'd give Joe another call in the morning.

"There's a lot of weirdness." Jesse nodded agreeably. "Are you going to eat and fall asleep tonight?"

"Eight o'clock is too early to fall asleep." Though if the TV offerings were boring enough, he probably would.

"I agree, but you look frustrated and cranky, and if I hit on you again I think you'll snarl." Jesse shrugged and looked out the front window of the car as they approached the golden arches. "Which, you know, hasn't ever stopped me before."

"I am frustrated and cranky, not to mention tired. Let's just watch the tube tonight, okay?" He sighed as he realized he'd been about to say cuddle. While they were having more and more success with the actual touching

while making love thing, cuddling was right out. It just didn't happen.

"Sure. Maybe there'll be something cool on -- forensics, maybe." Jesse turned slightly in his seat and then shifted back as his knee moved through the edge of the seat. "I wonder if Duke and his mom are out trying to date again tonight. He really should lay off that kind of thing and let us work."

"I agree. I've got a... well it's not a bad feeling, but a weird feeling about this thing."

Jesse gave him a long look and finally nodded. "I trust your gut. Want me to do some spying? His mother will see me, though, and kick up a huge fuss."

DB shook his head. "Let's wait and see what Joe has to say in the morning. We can do a bit more research as well, look into the family background."

"Okay." Jesse nodded then pointed to the restaurant. "Get me a double cheeseburger, will you? I'll even let you eat it. I just want to smell it."

DB laughed, but he ordered two double cheeseburgers with fries and a Coke. He even got two apple pies.

"Jeeze, you're trying to make me fat." Jesse grinned, apparently delighted. "We have to share the Coke? I might get your germs."

He snorted. "Suffer. I got the super-sized." He didn't order stuff he wasn't going to eat.

"You've got everything super-sized." Jesse leered at him.

That brought out a genuine laugh. "I love you too, Jesse."

Jesse snorted but looked exceedingly pleased. "Take me home," he said, fluttering his eyelashes outrageously.

Shaking his head, DB drove home, stomach growling at the smell of the food.

When they got there and were parked in the lot, Jesse looked at the bag. "I'd offer to carry it, but I'm still practicing and it would suck if I finally managed to pick something up only to drop our supper."

"My supper. You just get to watch."

"And smell. Possibly drool a little."

He grabbed the bag and locked the car behind him. "Meet you there."

"What, you don't like my drool?" Jesse laughed and vanish, the sound cut off in mid-giggle. Weirdo.

Jesse was there when DB let himself in, already on the couch, watching the blank TV. "Weirdo," DB accused as he dumped the bag on the coffee table.

"You know what would be cool?" Jesse said, as if DB hadn't spoken. "Leaving the TV on for the dead guy. That'd be cool."

"You want me to leave it on twenty-four seven? That's like, unecological or something."

"Maybe we can find a solar powered TV. And since when do you care about the environment?" Jesse was eyeing the bag of food. DB didn't look for drool.

"I don't. Not really." Grinning, he grabbed the remote and turned on the TV, started flipping before sitting and opening the food.

Jesse couldn't look both places at once, though he seemed to be trying. Finally, though, he just sat as close to DB as he could without being so close they overlapped, and watched the channels fly by. "Whoa, stop. There. Ghost hunting show, I love those. So freaking lame."

DB rolled his eyes, but went back to it. They settled in, Jesse mocking the show while DB half paid attention and scarfed down his supper.

Jesse's heckles grew more and more vitriolic, not to mention louder and louder, until finally Jesse threw himself back on the couch with enough force to sink in a few inches. "Whoops! Hey, take your time with that pie; I missed most of the first burger."

Rolling his eyes, DB waited on the pie and started flipping channels again.

"Are you feeling better yet?" Jesse asked, eyeing the pie.

"You mean am I less cranky, don't you?" He put a large bite into his mouth.

"Yes. That. Better."

He started moaning and carrying on like it was the best food in the world. He shoved another huge bite in.

"You're gross." Jesse moved away, his mouth twitching like he was trying hard not to laugh.

"I'm eating and almost full." It didn't quite come out like that as his mouth was full.

"You're *twelve*." Jesse stood up and looked down at him, his hands on his hips. "I'll be in the bedroom, if you're interested. If I get bored, I'll come back and annoy you by walking out of the television. Over and over."

"I'm relaxing, Jesse. No ruining my relaxation."

As if on cue, the phone rang.

He glared at Jesse. "You didn't do that, did you?"

"Right, because I've suddenly learned to pick up a phone and dial it while I'm actually standing right here in front of you. Have you seen the inside of a modern phone? There's computer shit in there, man. I wouldn't even know where to begin trying to make it ring, assuming I could get stuff to move."

"You can when you're motivated enough." He grinned -- sometimes it was so easy to get Jesse worked up. He picked up the phone. "Lo?"

Jesse didn't care that he was on the phone. Jesse never cared. "So motivate me," he invited.

"DB, hey. It's Joe."

"Hey, hi Joe. We were talking about you earlier."

Jesse made a slight face, poorly hidden, and stopped teasing.

"You were?" Joe sounded like he wasn't sure if he should be pleased or cautious.

"Yeah, I got a new case today." He didn't expand, waiting to see if Joe would figure it out.

"Oh, crap." Joe sighed. "Sorry about that. I was going to call this morning and let you know, but I got called to a scene at six a.m. and have barely had time to breathe since then. So, Sheldon went round to see you, huh?"

"Yeah, he did. Mentioned you gave him my name."

Jesse smirked. "Someone's in trouble..."

"Well, yeah. He's got a ghost problem. And money. I thought, maybe, you could help out and charge him a lot."

DB laughed. "Yeah, that's the plan. What's his story, though, man?"

"God, he's such a jerk." Joe sighed in his ear. "Okay, so his mother dies about a year and a half ago, no big deal. It got flagged by her life insurance company just because she was rich and had a big policy, but she was older and had a medical history. No problem, really, and the police were sure as heck never involved. Then, about a month after the funeral and before the insurance company ponied up with their dough, Duke there is out spending money like it's water. Also not illegal, except he's playing with the big boys. You ever heard of Wayne Rath? Big gambler from out west?"

Okay, this was adding to the weird. DB sat up and grabbed a piece of paper, started jotting notes. "I've seen his name in the paper. Maybe."

"I'll bet you have. There's a detail assigned to Rath all the time, pretty much just open tails and keeping an eye on him, watching who he's talking to. Rath knows -- two years ago he sent a Christmas card to the team lead. It was sort of funny, in a creepy way." Joe snickered and went on. "Anyway, Duke hit the radar and just kind of hovered there for a while. He was gambling, throwing parties, going through a lot of girls. And stories started leaking out."

"Yeah? What kind of stories?"

"The flying objects and spilled drinks stories. Seemed the boy had trouble keeping his girls neat and tidy. Weird, huh? Made people laugh at him."

"Uh-huh. Someone was pissed off he was going through all that cash so quickly, huh?"

"Well, no one but you or me would think that, and I didn't for a long time. But yeah, that's what it looked like when I finally read through enough of the surveillance notes to put it together. You gotta understand, the guy is a footnote. The bits where his date got a glass of wine tossed on her and she stormed off were comic relief."

"So how did you get involved with sending him to me?"

Joe sighed again. "Someone took a potshot at Wayne Rath, and I wound up doing the investigation. I had to talk to the people who'd been there, and one of them was Duke. So, me and Duke are sitting in his living room two days later and I'm taking notes about where he was, what he saw, trying to match it up with what he said at the scene, see if he remembered anything more. I asked about his date, 'cause her number came back as a disconnect. And a vase of flowers tips over."

"So you put two and two together. You tell him what was up, or you just suggest me?"

"I made the mistake of not freaking out, then opening my mouth and saying, 'Ghost or gremlin?' in a tone that was actually interested. Conversation happened after that."

Jesse was giving DB the stink-eye and trying to read the scribbled notes. It was becoming annoying. He shooed

Jesse away and turned his pad over. "What kind of vibe did you get off the guy?"

Jesse gave him a scathing look and went to sulk in the easy chair.

"Class A jerk, in over his head. Rath is using him, but I don't know what for yet. Duke's primary concern in getting laid again. And maybe loosing his shirt at poker. He's completely clueless."

"Okay. So he's more or less clean, but stupid, and if he's part of anything he doesn't even know it."

"Right. But he's got money and a ghost, so if you want to kind of deal with that, and maybe let me know if you notice anything else going on..." Joe trailed off hopefully.

"Oh, I see how it is. This wasn't a favor for me so much as for you -- I'm not going to forget this, you know. You owe me. Big time."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm a real bastard, sending you work. So. Deal?"

"Sending me work with strings, man. And yeah, it's a deal." Who else would he go tell? Joe was the only cop who believed how he came by his info, the only one who knew he had nothing to do at all with any of the crimes he had information on.

"Cool." Joe sounded pleased. "You've got all my numbers. Say hi to Jesse for me; I'm going to crash. It's been a long day."

Long day -- he got that.

"Thanks, Joe. We should get together for coffee sometime." That was for Jesse's benefit -- make sure his ghost was listening.

He was. "Oh, yes, we really *must*!" Jesse said in a perky tone. "It'll be *grand* fun!"

"You know it. Take care, keep in touch." Joe hung up, sounding utterly weary.

He hung up the phone and grinned over at Jesse. "I knew you liked going out on dates with me and Joe."

"Stop winding me up." Jesse sniffed at him. "Now I have all hurt feelings and stuff and need to be soothed."

"You'll use anything as an excuse for sex." It was one of his favorite qualities, actually.

Jesse smirked at him and then put his "hurt feelings" face back on. "Soothe me."

"Hey, I'm not trying to have sex with anyone but you, and you know it."

"I know. But you're not currently trying to have sex with me, either. This must be corrected. Do you need some help?"

"Jesse..." He held out his arm, inviting Jesse to come sit next to him.

Jesse was never too slow to accept an invitation. He zoomed over to the couch and settled himself in, sending DB's nerve endings to twitching all up and down his side. "Hi."

DB blew him a kiss. "Hi. I really am tired, okay? Honestly, I just want to go to bed and, well, frankly, snuggle."

Jesse sighed and nodded. "All right. Let's give it a shot then, shall we? Maybe we'll get lucky. Leave the TV on Discovery for me."

He rolled his eyes, but put the TV on Discovery and turned it down so he couldn't hear it in the bedroom. "Meet you in bed. I'll be the naked live one."

"I'm coming with you -- I just can't lie there all night. I don't like to leave, though, and after you've counted all the ceiling tiles there really isn't much for a ghost to do all night."

"I need my sleep, Jesse." He felt bad sometimes, knowing how Jesse couldn't really do anything but hang around.

"I know. But the TV won't keep you up, down that low, will it? I'll just come out here after you're asleep, is all."

"Yeah, yeah. That's fine. Come on." He headed for the bedroom.

Jesse followed along instead of doing that weird thing where he left one place and just appeared in another. "Are you going to set your alarm for the morning?" he asked as they went in. Jesse started stripping, taking his time.

DB sat on the bed to take off his shoes and wound up watching instead. "Yeah."

"You don't have to, you know." Jesse glanced up at him and smiled, his belt coming off with a tug. "I can wake you up, if you tell me what time." His shirt was almost entirely unbuttoned, just one keeping it closed while Jesse undid his trousers and pushed them down.

DB was distracted enough he'd stalled out on his own undressing. "I don't mind the alarm."

"I can be much nicer." Jesse stepped out of his pants and shed his boxers and socks as well, his fingers toying with his last shirt button. "Much, much nicer."

"Take off the shirt, Jesse."

Jesse took off the shirt and stood there, naked and not shy at all.

"I, uh, think I'd be late if you woke me up like that." Jesse was a good-looking man. Ghost. Whatever. Jesse was his lover and this is what they had and lucky for

him, Jesse was good-looking, given looking was such a big part of their physical relationship.

"I can start fifteen minutes early. Get you to work on time, and in a really good mood." Jesse smiled at him, and gave DB a look through lowered lashes. "I think you'd like it."

DB rolled his eyes. He didn't have any appointments first thing tomorrow, so if he was a little late, he supposed it wouldn't be horrible. "Fine. Tomorrow. As a test run only. I'm late, we don't do it again."

Jesse snickered. "Sure, boss. Because Sandra will be so upset if you're late due to blow jobs." He got onto the bed and stretched out. "Coming to bed, dear?"

"I will *not* be telling her why I'm late!" God. He could just imagine it. She was being really good about the him having a ghost as a partner thing. Telling her about his weird sex life was so not happening.

"Maybe I'll work real hard on that ghost writing thing I've heard about, so I can tell her myself." Jesse was grinning at him and petting his own belly. "Are you going to get undressed at all?"

"Huh? Oh!" He shook his head and stopped looking at Jesse. "Yeah, yeah." He went back to pulling off his clothes.

Jesse's grin grew broader, knowing. "I distracted you," he said, as if impressed with himself. The hand on his

belly moved lower and he cupped his balls for a moment. "Oh, nice."

"Enjoying yourself?" He didn't want to respond to the part where Jesse'd figured out he'd been distracted and why. There was no need to give Jesse the ammunition.

"Getting there." Jesse's legs parted a little and his other hand joined in, slowly stroking his cock. "But you want to sleep, so I can stop." He didn't, though.

"Yeah, I want to sleep, but there's nothing like jacking off to help get there." He finally finished stripping and climbed into bed. He lay on his side, facing Jesse, watching those hands move.

"And my jacking off is going to help you sleep?" Jesse asked. He sounded amused, but when the pad of his thumb touched the sweet spot under the head of his cock, Jesse's voice hitched in a low gasp.

Oh, that was sexy. "Your jacking off is going to help my jacking off, which is going to help me sleep. Stick with me here."

"I'd love to stick with you," Jesse said, his eyes closing. "I'd love to stick it to you, get stuck, make up your own crude euphemism." His strokes grew a little tighter, but didn't speed up; DB could see Jesse's toes curl now and then, too.

"Horn dog." He hadn't touched himself yet, he was enjoying being hard and watching Jesse. He'd get his hands on himself soon enough.

"You love that about me." Jesse's eyes stayed closed and his strokes stayed the same, but his thighs parted a bit more. "Oh, man." As his palm slid over the crown of his erection, Jesse shuddered a little.

"Nice..." He did like that about Jesse, it was true. He also loved that Jesse had an exhibitionist streak. Watching was good -- Jesse put on a good show for him. DB touched his own cock now, fingers moving lightly over it.

"Could be very nice." Jesse opened his eyes just in time for DB to watch them roll back when Jesse's hand squeezed harder. He moaned again, one leg bending at the knee so Jesse could touch a lot more areas.

DB leaned up and put his head on his hand so he could see better. "Tug on your balls."

Jesse did as he was told, gasping again and his back arching slightly.

Groaning softly, DB grabbed his own balls. He rolled them, tugged them, as he bit his lower lip.

"Yes." Jesse nodded, watching DB's hands. "Like that?" DB could see Jesse's index finger stroke behind his balls, rubbing firmly. "God, I'm hard." He really was.

"So do something about it. You know I love watching you come." He grabbed his cock and began to stroke. He kept his touch light still, not wanting to go off too quickly.

"No need to rush," Jesse said with a laugh, but his stroking hand was faster, tighter, and DB could see the way Jesse's hips were shifting restlessly.

"Yeah, no rush. Just not all night, huh?" Jesse'd done that one night, spent hours teasing him, teasing them both.

"Poor working stiff needs his sleep." Jesse winked at DB, showing he was teasing, and then his eyes went wide. "Oh. Oh, there."

DB laughed and stroked his... stiffie. He'd bet Jesse didn't even realize the pun he'd made.

"DB." Jesse's eyes stayed wide as he pumped his cock faster and harder. "God. Help me. Anything."

"You're doing fine, Jesse. Just rub your fingers across the tip. You like that." They both did, so DB did it himself, his fingers pushing against the tip as they flew by on the upstroke.

Jesse did it, too, and his body curved into a tight angle as he jacked off furiously. "Oh, God. Yes. DB." He fell back on the bed, his hand curled tight around the base of his cock while he started to come, white jetting up Jesse's body to land on his chest.

DB licked his lips. He could imagine what Jesse might taste like. He'd never know, but he could imagine it. Salty, with a hint of sweet, and maybe hot. Yeah. That's how Jesse would taste.

Groaning, he jacked himself harder -- he was close.

"Oh, fuck," Jesse whispered. "Some day..." He trailed off, but DB knew what he meant. Some day, they'd get there. It would happen. They were getting closer, sometimes. "God, you're beautiful." Jesse was barely finished coming, his voice still shaky, but he was moving, a combination of tingles and solid, manifested flesh sliding along DB's thighs. "Want you to fuck my mouth."

"Oh, God, Jesse!" That was all he needed. Between the tingles and the intermittent actual touches, and Jesse's words, he was gone, shooting up over his hand.

Jesse made encouraging noises, the touches keeping up as Jesse alternately petted and kissed DB through his orgasm, sometimes tingling, sometimes not, until DB stopped shuddering and Jesse lay next to him, looking a little smug. "Nice."

DB felt too good to let anything bug him, so he just grinned back and said "You, too." He stretched and yawned and tugged the covers up.

"So. No alarm clock?" Jesse didn't move, not even when the covers did. DB ignored that.

"Nope. No alarm clock. I'm trusting you to get me up in time to get to work."

Jesse nodded and looked just a trifle smug. "Cool. Go to sleep." He paused, then added, "Love you."

DB smiled and nodded. "Me, too." Then he closed his eyes and let the good, floaty, post-orgasms feelings drag him into sleep.

Chapter Six

Jesse made a mental note to remember that the next time he requested the television to be left on all night, he pick a better channel. He'd had no idea there were that many infomercials in the middle of the night. It made him glad that the sound had been down really low, and that he wasn't bound to the apartment.

The old lady upstairs watched far better stuff at four a.m., and her ghost fishies didn't seem to mind that Jesse stopped in to watch for a while.

The sun was barely starting to come up when Jesse checked the time and began to get ready for his wake up call duty. True, getting ready merely entailed undressing, but there were actual movements to that. Thus, it was getting ready. He then double-checked the time with the clock in the kitchen, just in case; he had a feeling that DB would be just as cranky about too early as he would be about late for work.

Naked, pretty sure it was the right time, Jesse looked DB over for a moment and smiled to himself. DB looked so calm and gentle when he was asleep. It was kind of amazing, really. Still smiling, Jesse settled himself on the bed, not even having to move the blankets before he could start petting DB's hip and thigh, encouraging him to roll onto his back.

DB grunted and mumbled something indistinct, and, instead of rolling over, DB curled in on himself.

"Not helpful," Jesse said out loud, rolling his eyes. He allowed himself to press closer, lining up his body with DB's as best he could, probably setting DB's entire side alight with tingles.

"Mmm..." Oh yeah, DB was feeling that, even if he wasn't really awake yet.

Encouraged, Jesse ignored the presence of the mattress and did some fancy bending, getting one hand around and down, hooking up until he could stroke over DB's balls. It was awkward, but if DB didn't mind that Jesse's arm was partially in DB's thigh, Jesse didn't either.

"Go 'way, Jesse. Sleeping." DB's mouth was saying go away, but his body was telling a whole different story.

"Mmmhmm. You keep on sleeping, and I'll just keep on doing what I'm doing," Jesse told him, starting to grin. DB wouldn't fight him for long, he suspected.

"Doing? Feels... good." DB's mutters were starting to sound more and more awake.

"I know." Jesse had seen enough evidence in the past few months to know that it had to feel good. "Roll over, let me make it feel better." He really didn't want to have to get inside the mattress just to get at DB's cock.

This time DB grunted and rolled over onto his back. "Jesse? What time 's it?"

"About fifteen minutes before you have to get up." Jesse straddled DB's thighs and put one hand over DB's cock, pressing lightly.

"Oh!" DB bucked slightly, and shivered.

"Mmmhmm." Jesse wiggled and grinned. He moved his hand, too, and did his best to make sure the tingles were well spread, over DB's cock and balls and the insides of his thighs. "Did you have good dreams?"

"If this is one, then yes." DB opened his eyes and smiled up at Jesse. "Don't stop."

"As if I would." Playing with DB's cock was far too much fun to stop. Jesse leaned forward and pressed a kiss to the center of DB's chest. "Good morning."

"I gotta admit it is a better morning than most."

Jesse set about making it the best on record. He pressed another kiss to DB's skin, starting a downward path toward DB's groin, his hands still playing.

DB's eyes drifted shut again, his hips rolling, pushing up toward Jesse. Making an offer.

"That's what I like," Jesse said, mostly to himself. He watched DB move, continued on his chosen way until he could rub his cheek (more or less) on DB's prick. DB smelled *good*, all sleep-warmed and musky.

"Me too." DB's hands slid down and patted his head, his shoulder with a mostly solid touch.

Jesse smiled, feeling that, and didn't say anything about it. It seemed best to simply allow those touches to be what they were and not to chase them too hard. "I like *you*," he said instead, then licked DB's cock with just the tip of his tongue.

"Yeah? Thought you loved me." DB managed the words after a low groan and something close to a whimper.

"I love you so much sometimes it's almost a tangible thing." And sometimes DB made him so crazy annoyed that Jesse wanted to deck him. It wasn't really the time to mention *that*, though. Jesse licked again, this time with the flat of his tongue, then he sucked lightly on the head of DB's erection.

"Oh, fuck, I can feel that." DB arched and whimpered again, his whole body beginning to tighten up.

"Good. Shh." Jesse did it again, taking more of DB into his mouth the second time.

"God. Yes." DB bucked this time, heels digging into the mattress. "More. More. Please, Jesse."

Jesse shifted, adjusting his angle, and then let DB move how he wanted. He had to try really hard not to lose his shit entirely when he could *feel* DB's cock sliding over his tongue, when he could taste it and feel the skin, when his lips were stretched wide. It was intense and freaky and so *wonderful* that all Jesse could do was allow it to happen and hope it lasted until the end.

DB began to chant "Oh, God," and "Jesse, yes," over and over again. Hips finding a rhythm, they pushed the cock into his mouth over and over.

Jesse moaned, unable to hold it back, and then grunted when DB's prick hit the back of his throat. That little jolt of discomfort, of "oh wow, sexy" made Jesse's balls ache sweetly, and he dropped a hand down to get himself where he was going, rubbing hard on DB's leg and feeling it.

"So close, Jesse. God! I can feel you."

Swallowing around DB, Jesse looked up, trying to see DB's face. He didn't want to hope too hard, didn't want to lose what they'd managed to create; with a long rolling shudder, though, Jesse started to come, his orgasm startling and unexpected. He hadn't been paying close enough attention to himself, totally caught up in DB and how he felt.

DB gasped, hips snapping as he came. The hot liquid flooded into Jesse's mouth, nearly choking him.

"Oh, God." Jesse swallowed and licked and tried his best not to freak out or laugh or do anything ridiculous.

"Wow. Oh, *wow*."

"God, Jesse. That was good. That was *so* fucking good."

"Good morning," Jesse said again. He would admit to feeling smug. Also to feeling loose jointed, satiated, pleased, and elated. "That was amazing." He licked his lips, catching the very last bits of DB that he could.

"It was. It felt like..." DB looked down at his body.
"Like it was real." He blinked and looked at Jesse.
"There's no come on me."

"Nope. Not one little bit." Jesse dragged himself up the bed and flopped onto a pillow. "All in me." Smug was definitely winning out over everything.

"No shit?" DB laughed. "Pretty cool, Jesse."

"Pretty cool, for sure." Jesse grinned at the ceiling.
"Man, we're totally getting there. And if you're not going to be late, you better get yourself into the shower."

"Shit!" DB sprang up, heading for the shower.

"Heh." Jesse watched him go. "Nice ass," he called after DB. "One of these days I'll be able to smack it."

"I didn't know you were that kinky!" DB called back.

"Please." Jesse snorted and got up off the bed. He didn't need to shower -- probably couldn't, even if he wanted to -- but he liked watching DB move around when he was naked. "I've had a lot of spare time the last couple of decades to think about all the stuff I'd like to try."

DB laughed and bent to start the shower, ass displayed nicely. "I'll just bet you have, giving what a horn dog you are, I'm surprised you never spontaneously combusted from it."

"There's a lot of wanking in my past," Jesse admitted, unashamed. He propped himself against the bathroom counter and kept on admiring DB's butt. "You know, stairs are a really, really good thing in your life."

DB stood and looked back at him with a frown. "Huh?"

Jesse smiled. "You go up stairs to your office and to your apartment. You run up and down stairs chasing crooks and being sneaky. I'm just sayin'... steps have made your ass *stellar*."

DB shook his head. "You're a nut, Jesse."

"Crazy." Jesse nodded and grinned. "Crazy for you."

Laughing now, looking lazy and happy and in a much better mood than he ever was in the mornings, DB stepped into the shower and pulled the curtain closed behind him.

Jesse frowned. He couldn't see anymore. "I'll just get dressed, shall I?" he asked.

"I don't have time to try it in the shower, Jesse." DB's head popped around the shower curtain. "Do you think we could do it in the shower? No, all the water going through you would be way too weird. Never mind."

Jesse blinked and started to laugh. "That's totally going on the list of stuff to try once we master this thing, though." He stood up straight and blew DB a kiss. "First, that kitchen table thing. Then the shower. I'll go get dressed; you're gonna be late."

"So stop distracting me already -- I don't want to lose this buzz."

"Going!" Jesse felt far too good to keep teasing. Why poke the bear when he was already up and moving and smiling? Ignoring walls, Jesse moved in a direct line to where he'd left his clothes. His face was starting to hurt from smiling.

DB didn't linger in the shower, in fact Jesse'd barely gotten his clothes on when DB came striding back into the bedroom. Naked, DB went right over to the closet and pulled out a pair of pants and a shirt.

"Nice." Jesse paused and leered. "Is there any way you can do your job in the nude? My life would just be so much brighter."

DB snorted and put on his pants. With no underwear. "Then the cops really would have a reason to arrest me."

"Joe wouldn't arrest you." In fact, Joe would like it if DB worked naked. Jesse rethought the idea. "Wear your winter coat. And a sweater. Many layers."

DB's forehead wrinkled. "It'll be that cold soon enough - I am not tempting fate to bring in winter any quicker than it's going to."

"Well, okay, if you say so. Just stay away from anyone not me." He beamed at DB and gestured to the door. "Ready to greet the day?"

"The world, you mean? Because I already greeted the day, and it was sweet."

He definitely needed to keep waking DB up in the mornings, because this mood was so much nicer to be around. "As you wish." Jesse was floating. Literally. It took concentration to get his feet back on the floor. "Come on, we can grab breakfast on the way, and I'll bet Sandra has the coffee brewing."

"Yeah. I want an egg and bacon sandwich and a coffee in the worst way. I should definitely wait 'til we get to the office for that, though. Or Sandra might bitch. Hey! I know what you can do. Go check and make sure she has it on. I'll buy some on the way if she doesn't."

They headed out, DB locking the door behind him.

"How will I know where to find you?" Jesse tilted his head. "Oh, you mean right now? I'll meet you at the car, sure." It wasn't like it would take any more than a moment or two to go and check.

"Yes, I mean now. Go on, before I get moving." DB climbed into the car, making little shooing motions at him.

"Watch it, buddy." Jesse didn't wait for a reply, just put himself at the office. "Good morning, Sandra," he called out, already sniffing the air. He'd mostly gotten himself in the right room, too. It was really a banner day.

Sandra was singing softly -- she was a morning person, which made a nice contrast to DB's usual morning

grumps -- putting the filter on the coffee pot, and filling it with scoop after scoop of dark grounds.

"Right, see you soon," he added, popping back to the car. "Office still standing, Sandra there, coffee going on right now. She sings. Can we keep her?"

"We'd better. Now that I know what it can be like with a really great secretary -- or receptionist or office assistant or whatever is PC right now -- on board, I don't want to go back." DB pulled out into the street and headed in the general direction of both work and a drive-through.

"She's a nice one," Jesse agreed. "And she doesn't ever pick her nose or anything." He had no idea if that was true, but it was fun to wind DB up. "Hey, thanks for the cheeseburger last night."

"Eww, Jesse don't do that. Now I have visions of her picking her nose."

Jesse grinned and looked out the window. "Nice sunshiny day. After breakfast and coffee, what's our first step? Public records? Spying? Checking to see if Duke's a big gambler or just stupid?"

"I want to see what we can find out about Wayne Rath first. Then we'll look into Duke's connection with the man. Once we have a little more ammunition, I'll call Duke and arrange a meeting."

They pulled into the drive-through and DB ordered his sandwich.

"Okay." Jesse thought about that for a moment.

"Computer stuff, huh? No microfiche?"

DB chuckled, and then had to tell the disembodied voice that no, DB hadn't been speaking to her. DB advanced to the first window to pay for his breakfast. "I'm going to drag you into the twenty-first century if I have to do it with you kicking and screaming the entire way."

"Back in my day we were thrilled if the TV remote didn't have a wire attached to it. I bet you don't even remember rotary phones!" Jesse pulled up short of talking about how, back before he died, taking music with you meant a big ass boom box on your shoulder and a huge number of D cell batteries.

"Yep, progress is a beautiful thing." DB gave him a wink and turned onto the street the office was on. They were in luck; there was a spot, right by the door.

"Progress means clicking buttons and I think my clicker got all used up sucking you off this morning." Jesse smiled again. It was impossible not to smile, thinking about that.

"Hush, you." DB was smiling, though, a great big fat grin.

"You're glowing. Sandra's gonna know you got laid." That idea appealed to Jesse, too. He waited for DB to get out of the car and headed inside, right through the door.

DB pointedly ignored him, but didn't deny it. He also took the stairs two at a time, growling something that sounded distinctly like "I know you're watching my ass."

"Watching, stalking. Whatever." Jesse reached out and gave it a pat.

"Hey!" DB nearly missed the top step, and he turned to frown at Jesse. "Was that you?"

"No, it was the other invisible person on the stairs. Of course it was me." Jesse looked at his palm. "Huh."

"I *felt* that." DB was glaring, but it didn't reach his eyes. His eyes looked pleased as punch. "No smacking my ass when we're with other people."

"Okay. Can I spank you when we're alone?" Jesse was mostly teasing -- he was too surprised to really give it his full wit, though.

"No. I could spank you, though. If you can keep it solid long enough, that is."

DB went down the hall and shot him a look that he was pretty sure meant "don't make me talk to you in front of people", and then went into the office. "Hey, Sandra."

"Good morning, DB." Sandra smiled at him from her desk. "And Jesse?"

Jesse beamed. "Keeping her."

"Yep. He pretty much goes where I go, so you won't go wrong saying good morning to him, too. Is that coffee I smell?"

"Only a few minutes old," she said with a nod. "There's a file on your desk, too, with the overnight messages from the machine. Nothing pressing at all, and only two wrong numbers. Oh, but who is Madam Yanya?"

Jesse snickered. Trying to explain Yanya was a chore.

"Believe it or not, she's a medium. She's got a little shop, communicates with the dead for people, sells spells and potions, witchy type stuff. We help each other out now and then."

"Oh?" Sandra looked curious and she leaned forward across the desk. "Can she see Jesse?"

"She can. And other ghosts. So this particular medium isn't a charlatan. She is something else, though." DB shook his head. "I take it she called?"

"Um, yes." Sandra looked even more curious. "She was the last message on the machine; she'd like a call back, ASAP."

Jesse snorted. "She always does. Are you gonna tell Sandra that Yanya is a cross-dresser named Steve?"

DB didn't answer him. "Okay, I'll call her. Maybe I'll ask her to drop by sometime and introduce herself. She's... something else."

"Ooh, the old show not tell approach," Jesse said. "I thought we were liking Sandra."

"I look forward to it," Sandra said, sipping her own coffee.

DB poured himself a mug full of the really good smelling dark liquid. Jesse wished he could do more than smell it, he really did.

"I'll warn you before she shows up. Have I got any appointments set up yet today?"

"Not yet, no." She shook her head. "There was someone wanting to stop by to talk to you about setting up a security system, but when I figured out he meant to set one up here in the office at our expense I sent him packing." She rolled her eyes, apparently disgusted.

Jesse moved closer to the coffee maker and inhaled, deeply.

"Good call." DB headed for his office. "Oh, if you could call Sheldon McGibbon and have him come in later this afternoon, I'd appreciate it."

"You got it, boss." She was already turning back to her screen and reaching for the phone.

"That is *good* coffee," Jesse said to the room at large while he followed DB into his office. "She didn't say anything about your perma-grin. I'm disappointed."

"That's because she's a classy lady." DB settled behind his desk and turned on the computer.

"Which means we'll lose her to someone eventually." Jesse sat in his chair and sighed. "But not Yanya, anyway. I wonder what she could possibly want."

"I suppose I should call her back. Or you could pop in and see?" DB gave him a hopeful look.

"I did my popping for the day, bright eyes."

"Don't call me bright eyes." DB leaned over and put the phone on speaker before dialing Yanya's number.

"Why not?" Jesse leaned back and grinned more.

"Because that's something you call a dog."

The phone started ringing on Yanya's end.

"A dog? You're silly." Jesse rolled his eyes. "How about we go right to sweetheart and darling?"

Madam Yanya's voice came from the phone. "Oh, let's not."

DB shot him a glare. "Hey, Steve, how's it hanging?"

"Oh, you didn't just go there this early in the morning." Yanya did not sound happy. "And I don't even want to talk to you. Well, I do. But not yet. Jesse, come on over. Uh, please."

Jesse's eyebrows shot up. "Me?"

"I may have something that'll help you get solid. Maybe. But this is a no mortals event, not even me. Someone here wants to talk to you."

Jesse stared at DB.

DB frowned. "Now wait just a minute there. Jesse needs a little more to go on before he comes running."

Yanya sighed. "Are you going to be difficult about this? There's... some other world stuff going on and the moon and the calendar and some kind of psychic merging things. I don't know, child, I just pass along messages. Some old lady says that if Jesse is in a certain place at a certain time he can learn something to his benefit. What else does he need benefiting?"

Jesse's eyebrows stayed up. "What old lady?"

"She didn't leave her name. Ghost, about seventy."

"Duke's mom, maybe?" Jesse said to DB. "I haven't got a clue."

"Did she say why she'd showed up? Why she's helping out like this?" DB was chewing his bottom lip and he didn't look overly happy.

Yanya said, "Who's Duke? And no, she didn't say anything. Just showed up, looked a bit surprised when I said hello, and rambled a little bit. She said Jesse's

name, though, so I asked if she knew him and she described his clothes."

Jesse frowned. That was creepy.

DB wasn't looking any happier. "Anything else?"

"Um." Yanya sounded like she was thinking. "Said Jesse would learn something, that there wasn't a way for the living to be present, mystical nonsense, talked about tarot cards, babbled about the age of Aquarius... that's about it. She said she'd come and collect him around noon. I'm just passing the message, DB."

"All right. If you come up with anything else about her or what she might be on about, give us a call. I don't want anything happening to Jesse."

"Are you going to be in the office all morning?"

"I will. Got research to do this morning. Besides, you can always leave a message with Sandra. She's the new secretary. You should come by and meet her."

"You got an actual secretary?" Yanya sounded a little suspicious. "I thought you called back awfully fast. If the old lady shows up or I figure anything out, I'll call. Jesse, you going to come by at noon?"

"I suppose so," Jesse said. He wasn't too happy about it. "If not, DB will call you and let you know."

"Sandra, you said? Maybe I'll make a point of calling her up. She knows about ghosts?"

"She knows about Jesse and that you can see ghosts, too, yes. She's good -- pretty unflappable, too, although that's no reason to try and test her."

"Would I do that?"

Jesse snorted so hard he almost choked.

DB grinned over at him. "Yes, you would. I'll talk to you later, okay?"

"I look forward to it." Yanya hung up before Jesse could snort again.

"Well." Jesse looked at his fingernails and wondered if it was normal to feel queasy. "That was unexpected."

"I don't like it." Any afterglow on DB's face was gone, and he was frowning hard. "What's the old bat up to? I don't like that she wants you there by yourself." DB shook his head. "I don't like it at all."

"I don't like that she found Yanya. Hell, I didn't even think she knew she was dead. She's playing a game, DB. We need to find out what it is." Jesse's day was definitely taking a down turn. He looked across the desk and sighed at his lover, then shrugged. "Time to get to work."

"Yeah. A game and I don't like it. You be careful when you go to see her, you hear me?" There was real concern in DB's voice. "And if for a second you feel like

something's not right, you get out of there pronto, got it?"

"Yeah." Jesse nodded. "I think... I think this kinda sucks a lot."

DB nodded. "Maybe we'll come up with some clues in our research." DB turned his attention to the computer, the little frown between his eyes kind of cute.

And creepy as it was, it was kind of nice to have DB so concerned about him.

Jesse took his silver linings where he could.

Chapter Seven

DB spent the morning researching Wayne Rath and worrying about Jesse's upcoming meeting with Duke's not so dearly departed ghost mom.

Wayne Rath was a bad guy -- he seemed to have his hands in a lot of different quasi-legal pies. He was potentially tied to the mob, but from what DB could see, no one had ever been able to make that stick. He definitely wasn't a guy you wanted to cross and Duke was an idiot to get involved with the man. He might have money, but if he was gambling it wasn't going to last and that was when being involved with Rath was going to be a problem.

DB couldn't figure out if Mrs. McGibbons' ire had started with the girls or with Duke's involvement with Rath. Either way, she was, in all likelihood, a crazy old bat and DB didn't really want Jesse lured into anything. Who knew, maybe he was worrying for nothing; maybe she'd taken a shine to Jesse and legitimately wanted to help him.

Or maybe she thought DB and Jesse were somehow going to harm Duke, and she was working on getting them out of the picture.

He just didn't know.

And he didn't like not knowing. He grew more and more restless as the morning progressed.

"You're making me nervous." Jesse was walking around the office, occasionally patting out a beat on his thigh. "Maybe you should drink less coffee, or something."

"I just don't like it, is all -- coffee has nothing to do with it." It was crazy. Here he was, worrying about his ghost. "I suppose it's silly. I mean, what's she going to do -- kill you? You're already dead."

"Why, so I am." Jesse rolled his eyes but didn't seem overly upset by the statement. It was totally true and Jesse wasn't sensitive about his condition. "I think it'll be okay, that way. I mean, we ghosts can't do anything to each other at all. Hell, only one ghost has been able to touch me, ever, and she was just a little girl. I'll be safe. But I don't like not knowing what's going on any more than you do."

"I hate not being able to protect you," DB admitted.

"That should totally piss me off and make me point out I'm a big strong man and don't need protecting. Oddly, it just gives me fluttery feelings in my stomach." Jesse looked only mildly mortified.

DB laughed. God, Jesse did usually manage to put him in a better mood.

"So." Jesse finally sat, though his leg was bouncing. "What are you going to do while I'm off meeting the scary mom?"

"Call Duke and see if he's got anything else to say. Oh, hey, while you're talking to her, book an appointment

for her to come see us this afternoon. Maybe we can convince her that Duke's not worth her wasting her afterlife on."

"You want me to get a ghost to book an appointment?" Jesse quirked an eyebrow at him. "So you can tell a mom that her boy isn't worth sticking around for? You know, stuff like this makes me wonder about *your* mom. There are deep issues, aren't there?"

"Leave my mother out of this. Don't you think Mrs. McGibbon should be able to go on and enjoy her afterlife instead of making herself crazy? It's not like Duke is listening to her anyway."

Jesse grinned. "I totally think she should move on, yes. And I also think Duke is a flake who should cut his losses and run, but he won't. Also, and further, let's talk about your mom." The grin was a full on beam. "It's making me less nervous."

"We don't need to talk about my mom. We don't need to talk about anyone's mom." He was not going to talk about his mother just to distract Jesse from being nervous about meeting Duke's batshit mother.

"Ohh, big issues. Okay." Jesse nodded and settled himself deeper in his chair. "You're an only child, right?"

DB didn't bother to grace that with an answer. In fact he didn't even look over at Jesse to glare.

Jesse made thinking sounds. They were different from his usual sounds in that they were far more annoying. "Right, right. And was your mom a single parent by any chance?"

"I think I need another cup of coffee." DB grabbed his mug and headed out into the reception area. "Hi, Sandra."

"Hi, boss." She glanced up from where she'd been busily doing something at her computer. "Oh, oh. I haven't been here a week and I already know that look."

"The I need coffee look? You've probably seen it a lot."

"Oh, is that what we call it?" She smiled at him, her mouth almost a smirk. "I thought it was the 'I need a cup of coffee and away from the ghost' look." She winked at him. "You talk louder when he's being difficult."

"Oh." He was not going to blush. He *wasn't*.

She looked back at her computer screen, still smiling. "I had no idea a ghost would have so much to argue about."

"He's very opinionated."

"I know how that goes." She rolled her eyes. "There are reasons I'm single, you know."

Jesse stuck his head out of the wall. "Are you talking about me?"

He ignored Jesse and poured himself a cup of very good coffee and grabbed a cinnamon roll. "These are really good, Sandra. You can bring them in again."

"Sure thing. And you can find me the phone bills for the last year, so I can wrangle a better payment plan out of them. Honestly, there's no need for a long distance package for this office."

Jesse made a face. "Tin cans are good enough for long distance."

"The top drawer on the filing cabinet in my office has all the paid bills from the last... well, probably ever." He shot her an apologetic look.

"Mmm. You know what? I'm not even going to stay late to do this. This--" She pointed to her computer and showed him what he assumed to be a spreadsheet, "--is going to be my big project for the month. Do we have a shredder, by any chance?"

Jesse came all the way out of the wall. "I love shredders. Can I get a shredder?"

"Yeah. It's the dusty thing on the floor beside the filing cabinet in my office." He went over and leaned against Sandra's desk. "I wasn't horribly organized, but some things clients don't want getting out." Like pictures of cheating spouses. Though DB kept all his photos on a hard drive, he was happy to shred any printed photos if the client wanted.

Jesse went to sniff the coffee pot and Sandra nodded. "Of course. Well, I'll use it to weed out old utility bills and invoices you don't need any more. Oh, have you thought about doing up a proper website?"

At that, Jesse snorted.

"No, it never really occurred to me. You think it would draw in business? Or just kooks?" If he wasn't careful, he was going to have to give Sandra a big raise.

Sandra's look was frankly incredulous. "People can't find you if you're not online, boss. Plus, with a website you can be as cryptic or as up front as you want to be about things -- the kind of cases you do, Jesse, anything. It's a must."

"Yeah? You think you can put something together for me?"

"I can do some basic stuff and get you online, sure. If you want it really fancy, though, we might want to go outside the office. Let's start small, though, okay?" She pulled her paper planner to her and started filling in blocks of time. "I'll have something to show you next week, unless I get bogged down or we get some really great cases. That all right with you?"

"I can help!" Jesse said. "Really, I can. I can pick colors."

DB snorted. "Jesse wants to help. I'm not sure how he's going to manage that, though." He was not in the mood

to spend God knew how long playing interpreter for them.

Sandra laughed. "That would be awesome. Jesse, as soon as you can find a way to leave me notes, I'd be delighted."

"She loves me." Jesse rocked back on his heels, looking happy. "Oh, crap, I need to go."

DB frowned and decided it was more important to talk to Jesse than it was to not appear like a total nut. "Okay, but you be careful. And if it feels wrong, come back right away."

Sandra looked momentarily confused but recovered quickly. She didn't say anything, clearly giving them space for a conversation, but she looked like she was listening as hard as she could.

"I promise." Jesse nodded and took a few steps to get closer to DB. "Stick here until I get back, okay? I don't want to have to hunt you down."

"I won't go anywhere. Be careful. I don't trust that old lady and I don't have a great feeling about this."

"I know." Jesse laid his hand on DB's arm for a moment, imprinting the tingling sensation. "See you soon." And then he was gone.

Sandra was looking at him intently.

He fought his blush again and gave her a smile. "Jesse's off to a meeting with our client's dead mother."

Nothing strange about that. Nothing at all.

She blinked slowly. Twice. "I see." Sandra's head tilted to the side. "And you don't like it."

He sighed. "She insisted that she see him alone. I don't know; it just doesn't feel right."

"Do ghosts do that a lot?"

"No. This is the first time it's happened. I mean, he runs into ghosts all the time on our cases, but nobody's ever sought him out like this. Then there's the fact that she's a nutcase."

"Oh. Nutcases are bad." She nodded at DB and added, "Let me know when he comes back, okay?"

"Yeah, I will." He smiled at her; he really did like her a lot. "Thanks."

"Just let me know." She waved her hand at him, shooing him away from her desk. "Go work. I have utilities to get cheaper rates for."

"You're just bucking for a raise," he teased.

"You know it." She grinned cheerfully at him. "I want to try the seven dollar bottles of wine next."

He chuckled and topped up his coffee cup. "I'll see what I can do when you find me cheaper utilities."

"Yes, sir. Get out of my office, sir." She turned pointedly away from him and started typing, still smiling happily.

Chuckling, he headed for his office for God knew how long of trying not to worry about Jesse.

Chapter Eight

Jesse's aim was getting better. This time when he tried to put himself at Madam Yanya's place he wanted to be in the storefront and not in her private residence, at the back and up the stairs. He managed it pretty well, though he did come out more or less in one of her shelving units.

Being face to face with a jar of what claimed to be dried lizard parts wasn't Jesse's favorite thing. However, being face to any body part of Yanya was worse, so Jesse quietly removed himself from the shelf and looked around to see if anyone had seen his less than perfect arrival.

Yanya, of course, was looking right at him and appeared to be totally disgusted. "Child, aren't you getting any better at that?"

"Sure, I am." Jesse shrugged nonchalantly. "I'm not in you, am I?" They both shuddered. Jesse looked around, his neck craning. "Is she here?"

Yanya sighed and hauled her girth off the stool behind her counter. The shawls seemed more numerous than they'd been in a while, and she had strings and strings of beads around her neck. "She wandered into the back room. I don't think she's entirely... cognizant." Yanya moved toward the small room just off her shop. "This way."

Jesse knew the way. He knew that little room and its TV fairly well. "Did she say anything more about how to make me solid?" he asked.

"Not really. When I ask she gets very mysterious and sly." Yanya stopped and looked at Jesse, her voice dropping low. "Jesse, if she tells you things to do, it'd be a good idea to research first. Okay?"

Jesse snickered. "Like DB will let me do anything without knowing exactly what's going to happen." God, DB would have a fit if Jesse started working magic on his own. Or at all.

"Yes, well. Grouchy might have a very good point." She moved again, calling out, "Ma'am? Where did you go? Jesse's here, now, come on out."

"I'm right here," snapped the old lady, moving into the light.

"Well, so you are." Yanya's smile was thin and possibly deadly. "Jesse, you remember what I said. I'll be in the shop -- yell if you need me."

Jesse nodded. "Thanks." He was looking at Duke's mother, seeing the same details as the first time. Duke really should have tried to find a better outfit for her. Or possibly she'd picked it herself; he hadn't been buried in what he was wearing. "Hi there," he said after Yanya left. "You wanted to see me?"

"There you are! That shawled freak hasn't been any help at all and you're the only other person who'll give me the time of day."

"She's... well, she's a friend." Jesse felt obliged to stand up for Yanya. "She just needs a little honey, is all."

The old lady snorted and then hugged herself. "I'm fresh out of honey. How come you're the only one who talks to me?"

"Because aside from Yanya, I'm the only one who can even see you." Well, and DB, but she didn't need to know that yet. Jesse sat down on Yanya's couch and made himself a little more comfortable looking. "And my partner and I, we're trying to help your son, so I had to talk to you."

"That little wuss? He's going to lose all my money. He won't listen to me at all and he's stealing all my money."

Jesse considered her with distaste. "You seemed concerned about him and his girlfriends, yesterday. Said he could do better. However, let's talk about what you know about making me solid. After that, I might be willing to see about saving your money."

She put her nose high in the air and sniffed. "I don't think so, young man. I might be old, but I'm not stupid."

"Neither am I," Jesse assured her. "So, unless you give me a little something, I'm out of here. I'm totally cool with your son going through your money, since you're dead and don't need it anymore."

"Dead?" She screeched the word and then flew at him.
"You little bastard!"

Jesse braced himself, hoping that she wasn't like Gwennie, the child ghost who could touch him, and that Mrs. McGibbon would pass right through him. "You walk through walls. What did you think?" he asked, just as she reached him.

She was still screaming like a banshee and she did pass through him, though it wasn't exactly smooth. He could *feel* her do it like she was half corporeal, half ghost.

"Oh, that felt *gross*," he complained as he turned around to face her. "I hope to hell that's not what DB feels. Ew."

At least her screaming had stopped, but now she was putting her hand in and out of the wall, a horrified look on her face. "I'm dead. I'm dead!" She started wailing.

"Oh, for God's sake." Jesse sighed and went looking for Madam Yanya. They met in the doorway, Yanya with wide eyes that were quickly narrowing.

"What did you do to her, child?"

"She didn't know she was dead. She's not delighted." Jesse tried to stand straight, but Yanya could be pretty intimidating when she was unhappy with him. She was really tall and her shawls added a lot of bulk.

"You broke it to her really gently, I see." She was scathing. "Lord above." Her eyes rolled to the ceiling

and then she set to work. "Ma'am? Ma'am, calm down a moment. Let's see if we can help, all right? All this ruckus isn't going to do a lick of good."

"You stay away from me! Both of you! Freaks! Murderers!" The old lady backed up, winding up half in a wall and that started her wailing again.

Mercifully the sound cut out as she disappeared into the wall entirely.

"Great." Jesse looked blankly at Yanya. "Just great. I haven't been accused of being a murderer before. DB is going to just love that. I don't suppose you'll keep that part quiet?"

Yanya's grin was huge.

Jesse sighed. "The ones who don't know they're dead just confuse me. Talk about being unaware."

Shaking her head, Yanya said, "Self-absorbed. They just keeping doing what they're doing, child. You wanted more."

"I wanted revenge, at first." Now he mostly just wanted to be solid with his man. "I guess I should stick around a while? Maybe? In case she comes back."

"Up to you." Yanya didn't seem to care either way. "You could always go and ask your Mr. Black what he wants you to do."

"Or you could phone him," Jesse pointed out hopefully. "Popping in and out of the office is startling for him. Which is usually fun, but he's a little on edge about it, since we have Sandra."

"She's a good one?" Yanya asked. Her eyes were narrow again. "And you don't want to lose her."

"Right." Absolutely. For sure. Sandra was pretty awesome. And really, Jesse didn't think she'd care at all if DB jumped a few times or swore when startled -- she might even like it -- but he wasn't ready to take the chance quite yet. "So, could you phone and tell him what happened? Please?"

Yanya sighed dramatically and walked away from him, toward her counter and the phone. "Just this once." She scooped up the phone and pushed a button.

"You have us on speed dial?" Jesse grinned and stood near the counter, watching her.

"Oh, shut up." She turned around and then said, "Ah, you must be Sandra. Hello, dear, my name is Madam Yanya." She paused for a moment and then nodded. "The one and the same. I have Jesse here, and I need to speak with Mr. Black, if he's there."

Jesse nodded to himself, echoing her movements.

Yanya turned slightly. "Oh, I see. All right, I'll tell him. Thank you. Until we meet, my dear." She hung up and fully faced Jesse. "He went out."

Jesse blinked. "Where?"

"She didn't say, which probably means she doesn't know. You know, she's very good on the phone. I think I'll have to stop by the office to see this Sandra of yours."

"Sure, any time." But Jesse didn't stick around to make a date; he went looking for DB.

Chapter Nine

DB tried to be patient and just wait for Jesse to come back, but after a few minutes of chain smoking, he decided he'd go get something to eat. "I won't be long," he told Sandra as he left and headed for his car.

Of course by the time he was on the road, he realized he wasn't going in the direction of drive-through alley. He was headed straight for Yanya's.

DB rolled his eyes at himself. He was pathetic.

He didn't change direction, though, did he? He pulled up in front of Yanya's, parked and headed in.

"Oh, boy." Yanya smiled at him, but it sure didn't meet her eyes. "I'll just call the lovely Sandra, shall I?"

He frowned. "What do you mean you'll call Sandra? Where's Jesse?"

"Gone looking for you. There was a problem with that crazy lady, so we called you for advice. You weren't there, he got worried and *poof*. There I was, all alone. Maybe he'll come back on his own."

Damn it. "What kind of problem?"

Yanya looked mildly disgusted, or perhaps just annoyed. "The old bat didn't know she was dead. So anything she babbled at me about knowing how to make Jesse solid was just that -- babble that hit a point of interest. I'm sorry about that."

"Did she hurt Jesse?"

"No, not at all." Yanya raised an eyebrow at him.
"Freaked him out a little, I think, but he was fine."

"Good, good. And what's your problem?"

"My problem?" Yanya looked around her shop. "I'm ghost-free. No problem here. I'll lay an even twenty on more of them coming back to annoy me, though."

"No, you had a funny look on your face when I asked if she hurt Jesse. Why?"

"He said not to tell you that she accused him of being a murderer." Yanya smiled, slow and broad. "It was just a general insult, but he didn't like it much. She's a crazy, nasty woman, DB. I bet her son is well rid of her."

"I think they might have deserved each other. She really called him a murderer? Damn it, I have to find him."

"Hey, she called me a murderer, too!" Yanya raised both hands. "I'm telling you, it was funny, man. She was wailing and screaming and cried it out and ran away. Jesse thought you'd laugh."

"Yeah? He's okay? He's not freaking out about it?"

"No, child." Yanya laughed. "He freaked out, worried about you. You weren't at the office and Sandra didn't know where you were. He'd gone lover hunting. You two are a matched set. It's sweet, really."

DB rolled his eyes. "I'm going back to the office. If he shows back up here let him know, okay?" He should have just stayed there to start with instead of coming here. He really was pathetic.

"Yanya?" Jesse's voice came from the TV room at the back, followed by a muttered, "God damn it."

"His aim sucks," Yanya said gravely.

Jesse walked through the door. "Can you call Sandra for -- DB!" A huge smile lit up Jesse's face. "Hi!"

DB tried not to grin too hard. "Hey, Jesse. I hear you went looking for me."

"Matched set," Yanya murmured, backing away.

"Yeah, I did. You left the office and I thought maybe you went off to do something fun without me." Jesse walked up really close, still smiling. "But here you are."

"I got impatient and decided to come down and see for myself what Duke's mother had to say. But I hear she just wanted to accuse you of murder."

Jesse turned on Yanya who was mysteriously busy behind her counter and didn't seem to notice. "Mmm. She's a little... uh, horrible."

"Great. I don't suppose you managed to bring up her leaving her son to his life while she head off to her afterlife, did you?"

"She took off. But the next time I see her, I'll get right on that." Jesse shrugged. "She's not going to leave him alone. She wants to protect her money, not her son. Death isn't going to get in the way of that woman's greed."

"That's pretty sad, but typical. Come on, let's go. I might have to tell Duke we're not going to be able to help him. I don't like the guy, but I don't feel right taking his money if we know we aren't going to be able to help." He waved to Yanya and made for the door.

"Let's not be hasty. We might still be able to get rid of his mother for him," Jesse said as they walked. "We might just kind of have to get him uninvolved with Wayne Rath to do it."

"That wouldn't hurt his chances in living or not going to jail, too. I just don't know if I like the guy. Of course if his mother is so concerned with her money she didn't even realize she was actually dead, well, maybe I need to cut him some slack." He sure wouldn't have wanted a mother like that. Mothers never were easy, though.

"You wouldn't believe how vile this woman is, DB." Jesse shook his head. "She was calling him names, even. What kind of Momma does that about her boy?"

"One who doesn't really love her son." He got into the car, ignoring the way Jesse slid through the door on the passenger side.

"That's just sad." Jesse sighed. "I had to stop checking in on my mom, you know. She was pretty messed up when I died."

DB reached over and patted the seat next to him, ignoring the fact that his hand went right through Jesse, the same way he'd ignored the whole getting into the car thing.

"I wonder if I should go and see her." Jesse mused. "It's been a while. Hey, what about your mom?"

"We're not talking about my mom." He loved his mom, he did. She was just... nosy and pushy and easier to love from a different city.

"Aw, you keep saying that. It's going to make me even more curious, you know. What's your mom's name? Tell me that much. How come you never call her, huh? Is she mean? Crazy? Does she have twenty-two cats or sell make-up or something?"

He shot Jesse a glare. "She's just a mom, okay? Just... she can get really involved."

"Oh, one of those. A million questions, wants to know about your diet, and when you're getting married?"

"Pretty much."

"Does she know you're gay?"

"Yep. Joined PFLAG and everything." DB thought she was actually the leader of her local group. It had been

the most embarrassing thing ever when he'd been sixteen.

"Huh." Jesse managed to sound both impressed and thoughtful. "Does she try to set you up with doctors and lawyers and stuff?"

"What, have you met her?"

Jesse snorted. "No, but moms like her, sure. I bet she talks to all her friends about you and wishes you'd call a lot more than you do."

DB shrugged. He didn't know about that. "I guess. I call on all the days I'm supposed to."

"You do?" Jesse sounded surprised. "I've never heard you call. When do you manage that?"

"We're not together *all* the time." He usually called her when he was on his own. Jesse didn't need to hear him warbling "Happy Birthday" to his mom, right?

"Well, no. But we're together a lot." Jesse grinned. "Does she know you're dating?"

He just looked at Jesse. Lucky for him they were at a red light so he could really do it, not just glance.

"Ah, baby. Sweetheart. Muffin. I'm crushed." Jesse moved out of striking range, which was silly given the lack of solid. "You don't need to tell her I'm a ghost."

"You don't know her."

"Not yet." Jesse waggled his eyebrows. "Hey, maybe this 'see the ghosts' thing runs in families. We could have a family dinner. That'd be cool."

"Oh, my God." He parked the car on the street in his usual spot and turned to glare at Jesse properly. "We are not having family dinners with my mother. Believe me, no good will come of it. If she can see you she's going to think we're both crazy." DB shook his head. "No. No, I am not telling my mother I'm dating a ghost. And if I tell her I'm dating at all, she's going to want a picture -- she's going to want to know every little detail about you. God, it would be a nightmare." He shuddered.

"Are you scared of your momma?" Jesse asked suspiciously.

"Of course I'm not scared of her! Just... she's my *mom*. She changed my diapers for Pete's sake."

"Well, duh. That's what moms *do*. You're past that stage now, and so is she. I'm just saying... a relationship with your mother doesn't need to be about you feeling like a child. I bet she's pretty cool."

"I'm not saying she's a monster or anything, she's just nosy and pushy and my mom, which makes it that much harder to just step back and tell her to back off. Let's just drop this, okay, please? God."

"Okay, if you say so." Jesse surrendered. Quickly, which never happened. DB suspected that the topic of his mom

might come up again soon. "So, want to mess around before we go back to work?"

"In the car? In the middle of the day?" DB shook his head and got out, heading for the building's entrance. "Besides, I cannot talk about my mom with one breath and getting busy with the next. It's just not right."

"You have so many rules," Jesse lamented, following along. "Not in the car, not in the daytime in the car, not when we're talking about mothers, not when there's a good game on. It's a wonder we manage to get laid on a daily basis."

He stopped and stared at Jesse. "If we do it in the car, especially in the daytime, someone's going to walk by and see me with my cock out and I'm going to get arrested, so yes. I have rules, thank you very much."

Jesse blinked at him and then grinned. Then he started to laugh, so hard he was almost doubled over. "Maybe... maybe Joe could fix it for you or something," he said between chuckles.

"Don't be an ass." He went in, shaking his head. And maybe trying not to laugh a little, too.

"You *like* my ass," Jesse pointed out, still laughing.

"There he is now," Sandra said, over Jesse's voice.

And from the couch, his mother said, "Hello, dear."

Oh, God.

Chapter Ten

Jesse stopped walking and looked at the woman on the couch. She wasn't old by any means, but she was certainly older than them. Older even than Jesse would have been if he'd stayed alive. She had graying hair that was done up in a loose twist, and she was dressed in a casual pant suit. "Who's that?" he asked DB, but even as he spoke he knew. "Oh, *cool!*"

"Mom..." DB looked like he'd been hit upside the head with a shovel or something. "I... you... Hi."

She stood up, smiling and with her hands out, arms wide. "Surprise! It's so good to see you, dear. You wouldn't believe how annoyed I was to get here and find that you were out of the office and that your secretary didn't know where you were. You could turn on your cell phone, you know."

"Your mom!" Jesse cried. Then he clapped his hands and looked at Sandra. "His *mom!*"

Sandra merely sat and smiled. Thinly.

"Hey, Mom." DB went over and gave his mom a hug, getting one that looked extra squeezy in return. "You should have let me know you were coming and I'd have been sure to be here."

"It would hardly be a surprise, then, would it?" She beamed at him. "Now, Sandra here has told me that you're working on a case, so I won't keep you too long. We'll just say a quick hello and then I'll see you after

business hours, all right? I'll make us a nice supper and we can catch up while we eat."

"His *mom*," Jesse whispered to Sandra. He perched himself on a corner of her desk. "Hey, DB. Tell her you were just talking about her!"

DB choked a little. "Make me supper? Are you staying at a hotel with an efficiency kitchen?" DB winced as soon as he said it. Man, he should have thought about how that sounded before he opened his mouth. "It's just my place is a mess."

"I don't care about that," his mom said with a wave of her hand. Of course. Heck, she might even clean for him. "Give me a kiss and your keys and I'll take care of everything. Well, after you show me your office, of course."

Jesse would swear he heard DB groan, but then DB held out his arm for his mother to take and waved the other hand around. "This is the reception area. You've already met Sandra."

Sandra waved her fingers and kept right on smiling.

"Oh, yes! Sandra and I had a nice long talk," DB's mom said cheerfully.

Jesse grinned and waved at DB.

DB shot Sandra an apologetic look and then took his mom into the other room. "And this is my office. There really isn't much to see."

Jesse scrambled off the desk and followed, just in time to see DB's mom turn a slow circle, apparently drinking it all in. He knew it was going to happen seconds before it did, and he put himself in his chair just before she saw the sign. Then he beamed at DB again.

"A ghost?" She laughed, seemingly amused. "That's an interesting twist, dear. Odd, but interesting."

This time he definitely heard a groan from DB. "I get a lot of clients because of that."

"Do they pay?" she asked. This time the laugh was a little disbelieving. "Oh, or maybe it's the ghosts that pay?"

"Ghosts can't pay, mom. The clients do, though." DB took her hand and tugged her back toward the reception area. "Are you sure you want to stay at my place? There's only one bed and the sheets need changing. You'd be a lot more comfortable at a hotel, I'm sure. I'd be happy to take you out for supper..."

"Don't be silly, dear." She held out a hand and Jesse could see her curl her fingers in a "gimme" gesture. "It's time you had some good cooking from Mom, and I don't mind changing sheets. Give me the keys and I'll take care of everything."

"We have to sleep on the couch?" Jesse asked. "Oh, man."

"Are you *sure*? What if I have dirty magazines under the bed I don't want you finding?"

"Oh, please. Do you think I've never seen a dirty magazine before? I've *bought* them. Your mother may be old, but I'm hip. Keys!" She blushed when she said it, though.

"Mom!" DB actually squeaked and shoved the keys into her hand.

"I know what boys are like," she insisted as she gathered her purse and coat. "I promise not to look in your drawers."

"Gee, thanks, Mom."

"It would be nice, however, to discover a pair of toothbrushes in the bathroom," she added as she walked out the door, the keys jingling in her fingers.

Sandra let out a breath. "Oh, man. I thought my mom was overly attached."

"I don't need a toothbrush," Jesse mused. "Huh."

DB put his face in his hands and groaned. "Oh, God."

"Want me to go and watch her look through all your stuff?" Jesse offered brightly. "She seems really nice."

"She's really... wow, when was the last time you went to visit her, boss? That's one needy mom."

"It's been a while. And that's exactly why. She's always been... very present in my life." DB laughed, but he didn't sound like he thought it was very funny. "Why do you think I moved to a different state?"

"Did she really try to get you to date your partner when you were on the police force?" Sandra's eyes were huge.

Jesse stared at DB. "God, say no. That's *bad*."

"Oh, God, she did not tell you that. I wasn't gone *that* long!"

"She talks really fast. Like, 'Hello, who are you, let me tell you all about my son'." Sandra, Jesse finally noticed, was sitting exactly as she had been when they got there.

"DB. Give her the rest of the day off. Look at her."

DB nodded. "Yeah, she's... a force of nature. Look, why don't you take the rest of the day off?"

Sandra slowly stood up. "We haven't discussed hazard pay yet, have we? I might give you a pass on the ghosts but write in something about mothers. Just so you know."

"Yeah, I don't blame you for that one. I'll try and keep her away from the office, but I don't know how long she's staying or what she has planned. And you saw how good I was at making her do anything but what she wants."

"It's not too early for cocktails, is it?" Sandra already had her purse over her shoulder and was heading to the door. "Ignore my computer, it'll go into standby. Check your voicemail later in the day, though, if you go out. See you tomorrow. Maybe sic Jesse on her, if you think he'd like that sort of thing. Bye!"

"Don't. Please." Jesse had thought it would be fun to meet DB's mom. Now he was a trifle terrified. "I'm almost glad I'm invisible."

"See! I *told* you."

Sandra nodded and left, apparently getting used to the occasional random remark DB tossed out.

"I hear you," Jesse said, nodding. "She's... a determined lady, huh? But, wow, does she seem to want to spend time with you."

"Yeah." DB ran his hand over his face. "I don't know, I guess it's been a while, but she usually at least warns me before she shows up."

Jesse frowned. "Maybe there's something going on?" He didn't want to suggest that maybe DB's mom was ill, but it was the first thing that leaped to his mind.

"What do you mean, going on?" He looked over at the door where both Sandra and his mother had disappeared. "What could be going on?"

"Um." Jesse shook his head. "Maybe she's moving here? Maybe she wants you to move home? Maybe she's about

to go to Europe on vacation and wants to give you all her worldly possessions to take care of?" Okay, the last one wasn't terribly likely.

"I don't know. I suppose I can just ask her while we're having supper." DB didn't look too fond of that idea.

Jesse nodded. He had no idea what to say; his whole fabricated image of DB's mom, as nebulous as it had been, was shattered. "Um. Can she cook? Is dinner going to be good, I mean?"

"Yeah. Not fancy, but good. If she goes and shops, 'cause I've got what in the fridge? A couple of takeout leftovers?"

Jesse winced. "Yeah, she'll need to shop. And probably do laundry; you're hard on sheets. Do we seriously have to sleep on the couch? By which I mean, you sleep and I sit around all night?" A horrible thought occurred to him. "You have rules about sex near your mom, don't you?"

The look on DB's face was answer enough.

Jesse sighed. "Come on, then. We might as well get some work done." It wasn't turning out to be the best day in his afterlife. At least the client hadn't called to yell at them yet.

As if on cue, the phone rang.

DB picked it up and rubbed at his face again. "Duke. Hi. Let me pull up your file and give you an update."

Chapter Eleven

DB sighed as he stared at his computer screen pretending to do research.

If he admitted he was done for the day, he'd have to go home and face the music: in other words, his mother.

When had everything become so messed up?

The case was going nowhere fast. Hell, Duke's mother hadn't even realized she was dead, which made her even more batshit crazy than they'd first thought. Duke himself was wrapped up with a suspected mobster and now DB's mother was at home cleaning his apartment, making him supper and no doubt expecting a heart to heart over said meal.

It all conspired to make him very grumpy.

"So, how long are we going to hide here?" Jesse didn't sound particularly ready to leave, merely curious about the duration of their avoiding.

DB glanced at the clock. Just past five-thirty. "I can probably get away with another half hour before she calls looking for me." He shot a glare at Jesse. "*You* can hide out here as long as you like."

"I thought about that," Jesse said earnestly. "But then I wondered what kind of boyfriend I'd be if I didn't at least have dinner with your mom. I have to admit, though, that I'm mostly upset about the sleeping on the couch thing. That's going to be... unpleasant."

DB snorted. "Again -- *you* don't have to sleep on the couch. You don't even sleep, anyway!"

"Yeah, I know." Jesse nodded at him and sighed, appearing to be completely morose. "But if you're sleeping on the couch I don't get to watch TV, and there's no sex at all. See? There is no upside to this."

That actually had DB laughing as he closed his web browser and stood. "Come on. Let's go. She's not a monster, just... um, loves me an awful lot."

Jesse sighed and stood up, too. "I suppose a fast hand job or something first is out of the question?" He might have been joking.

"We're going to see my *mother*. Bad enough she had to change my sheets, I am not showing up reeking of sex!"

"You're just no fun." Jesse sighed again and then grinned. "Just kidding. I don't think I could even get it up, at this point. All right. Let's go. Moms *love* me. Really, they do."

"When they can see you." DB grabbed his coat and slipped it on. He locked up as he left.

Jesse was in the hall with him, but hadn't bothered with using the door. "True. But if Duke's momma can cause such a fuss, I bet I can work up something. Maybe. I'll use this visit as re-con, okay? Get to know your mom a little. Then, next time, after I can be solid and stuff, I'll work on charming her."

"Oh, if she doesn't die of a heart attack from meeting my ghost of a lover, I'm sure you'll be able to charm her."

Jesse went down the stairs with him, nodding and looking a little tight around the eyes. "She's probably not going to like that part."

Outside, DB slid into the car and started it up. "It's not something we have to worry about right now."

"We just have to worry about... what?" Jesse peered at him from the passenger seat. "How long she's going to stay? If she's going to redo your wardrobe?"

"I think how long she's going to stay is the biggest thing. No, actually, her setting me up with eligible bachelors." He shook his head and pulled into traffic, made sure he took the right turn toward home.

Jesse's mouth hung open. "Eligible..." He didn't seem able to react, other than to sputter. "Oh, *hell* no. There will be no setting up. No. Let her talk to Joe about how ineligible you are. God."

"Relax, Jesse. I didn't say I'd *let* her. Just that she'd try." He sighed. "Because she will try."

Jesse didn't say anything at all for several blocks. He looked out the window and drummed his fingers on his thigh instead, and the tightness around his eyes got tighter. DB was pretty sure ghosts didn't get wrinkles, but Jesse sure was working hard at it.

"How important is it for me to stay the whole time?" Jesse finally asked. "Like, are you going to be pissed off if I kind of vanish if she does that?"

"I'm not going to be pissed off if you disappear for the whole visit, but I told you -- I'm not going on any dates, okay?"

"I know that," Jesse said quietly. "I'm just not sure how much I can take of hearing her encouraging you to go out and meet someone, since I can't really defend myself or our relationship. And I really, really don't expect you to say anything to her about it -- I know you can't. I get it, I promise. But I don't know if I can hang out while it all goes down, you know?"

"You do what you have to do. I'm worried if I tell her the truth she's going to think I'm crazy, you know?" DB pulled up into his parking spot across the street from his building.

"Yeah, I know." Jesse sighed and shifted around, clearly getting ready to leave the car. "I just don't want you to be mad at me if I leave. If I do, know I'll be back, later."

"Got it." He undid his seat belt. "Come on. Let's face the music."

Jesse slid through the passenger door and waited for him, more or less. He was walking slowly toward the building, his shoulders curling forward.

"Hey, come on. Maybe she'll surprise us, huh? Leave off the setting me up thing."

"And maybe she's only staying a day or two." Jesse nodded, cheering up a little. "Okay. You do the mother and son thing. I'll... be as quiet as a ghost."

DB laughed as he went in the lobby doors and headed for the stairs. It didn't take nearly long enough to climb the stairs and then there he was at his front door.

And it *was* his front door. Why did he feel like he should knock?

"Want me to go in and do some re-con?" Jesse asked. He was staring at the door, too.

"Tempting as that is, I should just suck it up and go in."

"Uh-huh." They stood there for a moment. "So. You should do that."

"Yep. This is me. Doing that." He shook himself, put his hand on the handle and went in. "Mom? I'm home."

"Oh, thank goodness. I was beginning to wonder if I was in the wrong apartment, but then I looked around and knew it had to be right." DB's mom came into view, her arms out for a hug. "No one but you could live in a place like this, dear."

Jesse made a noise that might have been a snort.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh, you know." She waved her hand vaguely around his place. "You have a unique sense of style."

"Why do I think you don't mean good unique?" He took off his coat and threw it over the back of the easy-chair.

"Don't be so sensitive, dear." She breezed past him into the kitchen. "It's good that you don't spend a lot of money on things that don't really matter."

"If I'd known you were coming, I would have cleaned up," he pointed out, following her into the kitchen.

She went to the stove and started stirring something in a pot. "Oh. I suppose, if you don't entertain here very often, it's understandable that things could fall into a state." She nodded and held the spoon out to him. "Taste."

He went over and took a bite and had to admit it was pretty darn good. "S good. What is it?"

"Tofu and an organic tomato sauce. You barely had any food in the house at all that wasn't from delivery places."

Jesse laughed. "Oh, man. Tofu. I'm glad I'm dead."

"Tofu and organic tomato sauce? Come on, Mom, I know I haven't called as often as I should, but that doesn't mean you have to punish me."

"It's good for you," she said with a smile. "Go wash up, I'll put this on the table and you can tell me all about this case and that girl Sandra and all about everything."

"I don't know if I should be talking to you about my cases, Mom. That's confidential information."

He went to the bathroom and washed his hands. Taking the opportunity, he splashed water on his face, too, and avoided his reflection in the mirror. He didn't need to see his face to know he still looked horrified about the tofu.

Reluctantly, he headed back to the kitchen.

She was sitting at the table with two plates in front of her. Jesse was lounging about by the counter, looking amused.

"Come on, dear," she said calmly. "Even if you can't tell me about the cases -- and you can, if you leave out names, I'm sure -- we have lots of things to discuss."

"We do?" He sat down across from her and tried out a smile. What did they have to discuss?

"Of course! Like when you're coming home to visit, for one." She started to eat, smiling at him the whole time. "You really do need a haircut. Now, tell me all about work. Sandra seems very nice, if a little slow to answer questions."

"Mom, it's not her job to answer questions."

"Of course it is. She's the receptionist slash secretary."

"Well, yeah, general questions about what kind of private investigator I am, if I'm free for an appointment next Tuesday at three, that kind of thing. Is that the kind of questions you were asking?" He was pretty sure he knew the answer to that.

"But I'm your mother. I told her."

Jesse rolled his eyes. "Like anyone her age couldn't say the same thing."

"If you were a crook, don't you think that would be a great ploy to try to get information out of my secretary for nefarious purposes?" DB shook his head. "It's a check mark in the plus column that she didn't divulge anything she shouldn't have."

Besides, it wasn't like he'd have wanted Sandra to spill details about anything, even if she'd known for sure that this was his mother.

His mom looked momentarily startled. "Oh." She almost visibly switched tracks. "Eat your supper, dear. Do you remember my friend Marion?"

"Um... no?"

"Of course you do. She's in my book club. She had the flower shop down on Birch Street? Well, anyway, it doesn't matter. It's just that she has a son, a lovely boy named Robert. He's thinking about moving here and I hoped you could make yourself available to show him around."

He shot his mother a look. "Mom, don't do this."

"Do what?" she asked, all innocent eyes and confusion.

"Does this lovely boy named Robert just happen to be gay?"

"I... have no idea?" She smiled. "He might be. I know he lived with a man for a few years. See? He knows how to commit."

"Okay, Mom. Stop it right there. If this guy is moving here, I'd be happy to show him the city, show him the best places to pick up guys, and whatnot -- but I do not want to be set up by my mother, okay?"

She rolled her eyes, amazingly like Jesse had done.

"Honestly, what's a mother to do? A little introduction never hurt anyone. Eat your tofu."

"I'm happy where I am right now, Mom, okay? I'm not lonely or pining away or anything. I'll eat my tofu if you promise to stay out of my love life."

She frowned at him, and the nod she gave didn't feel like she was really going to back off. She did, however, let the subject drop. "So, tell me about what kind of work you're doing these days. Is it mostly cheating spouses and deadbeats, or is that only in the movies?"

Jesse moved restlessly. "I'm cool, DB," he said. "But I'm going to go and see if she left the TV on."

DB had to bite back his snort. He doubted his mother had been watching TV at all, let alone left on.

"There's a lot of cheating spouses and deadbeats. I work on some cases where people have been murdered, too."

Jesse walked away, and DB's mom shivered. "That sounds dangerous. I wish you worked with someone, you know. I only hear from you after you've been shot at and you're worried it'll be on the news."

"Most cases, even the ones involving murderers are really fairly boring. Lots of leg work and research. Anyway, I'm sort of half working with this one cop," he told her, deciding to throw her a bone. "When things get sticky, I call him."

"Oh?" She pounced. "What's his name? Is he an officer or a detective? Is he good?"

He rolled his eyes. He should have known. "His name is Joe Donners, he's a detective, and he's very good at his job -- after all, he knew enough to agree to work with me, didn't he?" DB held up his hands. "And we're friends. Just friends. That's it. That's all."

"Really?" She stared hard at him. "Is he gay?"

"I think he is, yeah."

"Is he in a relationship?" She wasn't even eating any more.

"I have no idea." He tilted his head and nodded to her bowl. "If even you won't eat it, I'm not going to."

Her eyes narrowed. "I have been eating it. What's wrong with him, this Joe Donners. Is he ugly? Old? Young?"

"Mother!" He put his spoon down and glared. "I asked you to stop that. That's all I asked. I love you, I honestly do, but it's this kind of behavior that keeps me from calling you more often, or coming to visit. We've been together alone for five minutes and you're giving me the third degree and that's *after* you promised not to. So just... just stop."

She stared at him for a long moment and then her gaze dropped to the top of the table. "All right," she said quietly. "I see. I just... Fine, David. What shall we talk about then? The things that are important to me clearly aren't to you, so you pick something, then."

God, now he felt like a heel. "I don't see why my love life is so important to you, mom. I told you I was happy, I wasn't lonely; I'd like you to just believe me on that. Why don't you tell me what's new with you?"

"It's important because you're my son, and I want you to be happy *with* someone special. There is very little new with me. The same book club, the same hobbies, the same people in my life, day after day." She sighed. "It's horribly boring, really."

"No more boring than my life, although I do admit, I have the occasional bad guy shooting at me to keep things more exciting than I'd like." He worked hard on

cleaning up his bowl for her. The food wasn't bad -- not what he'd have chosen to eat had he been giving a choice, but not horrific, not like it sounded.

"I prefer it if there's no shooting at all, for you or for me," she said with a slight smile. "It's good that you can afford the inestimable Sandra, though. I assume that means business is good?"

"Yeah. She's a new addition -- makes amazing coffee and keeps the files in good order. She's a great secretary. Things are definitely looking up." He felt much better talking about this kind of thing with her.

"Well, that's good. Mind you, you really do need to get some groceries in here. It's hard for a mother to make a home-cooked meal out of take out leftovers." She didn't sound quite as critical as before. "I do, however, now know your favorite Thai place, and where to find the best spring rolls in town."

He chuckled. "I usually just don't have the time, you know? Plus, I'm not a good cook like you are." Maybe if he buttered her up she'd make him her lasagna tomorrow.

"One needs ingredients to cook," she pointed out yet again. "But I can take care of that tomorrow while you work. Now that I know how bad it is in there, I'll stock your pantry properly. I don't suppose you have access to a deep freezer? I could make you frozen meals."

"No, I don't and you don't have to do that, mom. Seriously. You're having a vacation, right? That means you're supposed to relax."

She waved a hand. "I'll make sure to do vacation things when I'm sure my son isn't going to starve. It's hard to enjoy a show when your child is dying of rickets or something equally horrible."

He snorted. "Rickets, Mom? Do I not look healthy? I'm *fine*. I swear to God."

She put her hand to her mouth and mimed zipping her lips shut. Then she stood and took their dishes to the sink. "There's no dessert, sorry. I forgot to buy ice cream and didn't have time to bake. Tomorrow, though, I promise."

"I could hop out and go through a drive-through, pick up a baked apple pie or something." He bit back his smile, giving her his best serious look.

"David Black. Don't even dare to suggest such a thing." She looked horrified. "That's not even real food."

He burst out laughing, the expression on her face too good not to.

"Honestly." She looked like a hen with her feathers all ruffled. "Just for that, you're taking me out for a glass of wine and some cheesecake."

"I can do that -- you see, I might not be able to cook, but I can use my credit card like a pro."

"Your mother taught you well." She beamed at him and pointed to the dishes in the sink. "You take care of those and I'll go freshen up." She marched out of the kitchen like a queen.

Wow.

DB shook his head and went to do as he was told. He loved her dearly, but his mother always managed to make him feel like he was a kid again.

Jesse appeared next to him, looking a little freaked. "She's in the bedroom. Changing."

"Uh-huh. I'm taking her out for wine and cheesecake."

"Oh." Jesse blinked. "Can you leave the TV on for me?"

"I'll try. Or you could come with us." He was making short work of the dishes.

"Is she going to try to get you a date with the waiter?"

"She'd better not." He was hoping he'd put a spike in that particular wheel. At least for the rest of the day.

"Mmm." Jesse nodded. "Yeah, okay. I'll go with you. Am I dressed okay?" He had to be kidding.

"No, go put on a tux. Of course you're dressed okay!"

Jesse grinned. "I'm telling you. Eighties fashions are coming back. I'll be hip in no time."

He could hear his mother moving in the living room.
"Are you talking to me, dear? You'll have to speak up."

"Uh, no, just talking to myself." He put the last dish in the rack and dried his hands before heading out to the living room. "Are you ready to go?"

She had her purse in her hand, her lipstick was fresh, and she was passing him his own coat. "All set. Show me that credit card swipe you've worked so hard at."

"Ah," Jesse said at DB's side. "Cooking your way. I get it."

He laughed, both at Jesse and at his mother and he thought just maybe this could be a pleasant visit after all.

He could hope, anyway.

Chapter Twelve

Jesse thought that perhaps he owed DB a fairly large apology when DB finally arrived at the office. Jesse had been there, in his chair, long before the sun came up. He just hadn't been able to take it, watching DB sleep on the couch. There wasn't any room for Jesse there, and sitting in the easy chair all night bored to tears was too much for a ghost to take.

He didn't like to wander all night any more, and even the elderly lady who lived above them wouldn't have had her TV on all night, so Jesse had put himself at the office and entertained himself by trying to turn on the computer. The best he'd managed was to poke the button on the monitor, but that had resulted in turning the monitor off, not turning anything on, so he'd stopped.

He'd managed to plan his next move on the chess board, though.

Sandra had come in just before nine and started the coffee and was working away at her desk. She couldn't see him, though, so it wasn't like that was company, not really.

Finally, around nine-thirty, DB came in.

His mother in tow.

"Really, Mom, you didn't have to come in with me."

"Oh, hush. It's not like I'm going to stay all day, after all. I'll go shopping in a while, and then I'll get food; I'll

need to be home in plenty of time to make you supper." She and Sandra exchanged good mornings, and Jesse thought that perhaps they both sounded a tiny bit strained.

He grinned broadly and leaned back in his chair.

"Really, though, it's *boring*, you know. Lots of sitting around and stuff. Hi, Sandra. Is that coffee, I smell?"

"Of course, boss. I'll put on another pot, too, if your mother would like a cup." Sandra's chair was already rolling back as she stood up.

"No, no, dear," DB's mom protested. "Too much caffeine will make us all jittery." To DB she added, "It can't all be boring -- you wouldn't do it if you were bored all the time."

Jesse nodded to himself. That was true. But he doubted DB wanted his mom to see the exciting parts of private investigations. "Hey, DB," he called. "Is she ever going to give us some alone time? I miss seeing you naked."

DB made a strangled noise. "Sandra, I normally wouldn't ask, but there's a call I have to make. Would you mind bringing in my coffee, please?" The door to DB's office opened, his lover's gaze finding him immediately, DB glaring. Or maybe that was desperation in his eyes.

"Just be happy *I'm* dressed," Jesse said. "What the hell is she doing here?"

In the outer office he could hear Sandra valiantly making small talk with DB's mother.

DB ran his hand through his hair and sighed. "She wants to 'see me in action'."

"I wanna see you in action." Jesse didn't even bother trying not to leer. "Lock the door." As if.

DB snorted. "My mother is right out there. At this rate, I may never have sex again."

Jesse sighed. "That's what I'm afraid of. God." He slumped back in his chair. "She's not going with you to interview Duke, is she? He's a creep."

"No, I don't want her meeting people like him. I also don't want her going on stakeouts to watch assholes cheating, which I need to do as soon as I can, too. This isn't a job you want to bring your mother to!" DB was clearly trying to keep his voice down, but it kept rising up.

"I know that," Jesse said with a firm nod. "Trouble is, your mom doesn't seem to get it. She needs a distraction." He froze in place on his seat and gave DB a long, slow smile. "She needs to meet someone utterly fascinating who can stand right up to her."

DB frowned. "You sound like you have someone in mind."

"Yanya." Jesse almost wiggled, he was so pleased with the idea. "Call her up, get her over here! She wants to

meet Sandra, anyway. Or we can just deliver your mom to her shop and run away, I suppose." That idea had merit -- it would save Sandra's sanity, for one thing.

"Oh, God." DB started laughing.

A knock sounded at the door, Sandra popping her head around. "You okay, boss?" She had DB's coffee in her hand.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm good. Thank you."

"It's a *great* idea," Jesse enthused. Sandra was glancing around and for a moment it looked like she was peering right at him. "Hi, Sandra!" he called, just to be friendly.

"Boss?" Sandra whispered. "Does she know about Jesse?"

DB shook his head. "No."

"Who's Jesse?" asked DB's mom as she pushed in past Sandra. "And what are you doing sitting in here and laughing all on your own?"

DB groaned.

Sandra backed out of the office, wincing. "Sorry."

"Oh, boy." Jesse stood up and tried to look presentable. "What the hell am I doing?"

"Mom. I just... look, Jesse's the ghost, okay?" DB pointed to the sign that his mom had seen yesterday,

over his chair. "There's no point having a ghost if you don't give him a name, right?"

"Oh, David." She looked profoundly disappointed in him. "And you told that poor girl such a story?"

Jesse wasn't sure, but he thought he might be insulted. "Hey."

"Mom! It brings in a lot of business, okay? That story is a big part of why I could hire Sandra."

She rolled her eyes. Then she walked toward Jesse's chair and would have gone right through him if Jesse hadn't hauled himself out of the way. As she sat down she said, "It's still silly. And she believes it!" She tsked her tongue at her son.

"Yanya," Jesse said firmly. "As soon as you drink your coffee."

"Mom, how would you like to go and meet one of the people I often work with?" DB took a large gulp of his coffee and wound up gasping. "Fuck! That's hot!"

"Language!" His mother didn't look overly shocked. "Who would that be?"

"You don't need to drink it all," Jesse told him. "Just enough to make Sandra happy."

"Madam Yanya. We throw business each other's way. She's been very helpful and I have a hunch she'd love to meet you."

Jesse was grinning again. "Oh, hell, yes. Even more than Sandra."

"A madam?" This time she looked shocked.

"Oh, God. Not that kind of Madam, Mother." DB looked like he'd rather be somewhere else. Anywhere else.

"That we know of." Jesse could hardly wait. This was going to be great -- they could leave DB's mom with Yanya and a pot of tea and maybe sneak some togetherness time in after work.

"What other kind is there? Oh! She's French?" His mom looked politely interested. "Yanya isn't a French name, though."

"No, Mom. She's runs an occult shop. She's..." He flapped his hands. "You'll see. Come on, let's go."

Jesse bounced to the door, sliding through part of the wall. "I'll sit in back!" he called, knowing he couldn't exactly call shotgun.

"An occult..." Looking slightly startled and unsure if she was supposed to approve of such a thing, DB's mother gathered herself up. "All right, I suppose that would be okay."

Jesse snorted. "Tell her it's the action she was looking for."

Sandra, at her desk, said nothing but watched DB closely.

"I'll be back in about a half hour," DB told Sandra, giving her a weak smile.

"Okay." Sandra nodded and glanced at her computer. "I'll be here. You have your phone with you?"

"Yep. Pray for me." DB said it quietly and gave Sandra a wink.

"You bet." She winked back. "So, office all to myself?"

DB's mom rolled her eyes. Jesse was almost tempted to stay with Sandra.

"Yep. Have fun." Grinning, DB escorted his mom out.

Jesse waved to Sandra -- it was just fun -- and followed them out. "Hey, do you think I should go warn Yanya?" He shook his head before he'd even stopped speaking. "Never mind, more fun if we surprise her."

As DB's mother preceded them down the hall, DB mouthed at him, "We're being mean, but I don't know to which one..."

Jesse laughed. "This is going to be awesome." By the time they were all in the car, he was wiggling again. "Man, the shop better be open. She opens at nine, I think. If she's not, I'll go in and pry her out of her kitchen."

DB's mom wasn't saying much, just smiling tolerantly as they drove and looking out the window at the sights.

"You might want to move your offices when you can," she said as they started toward Yanya's area of town. "Something a little closer to mid-town, maybe."

"What? What's wrong with where my office is? I can afford the rent where I am."

"Well, yes, of course." She nodded and then reached over to pat his thigh. Jesse stifled a snicker. "That's what I mean. When you can afford better, get better."

"Maybe." DB was going a little fast.

"Don't be unsafe," Jesse and DB's mom said at that same time. Jesse followed it up with a groan.

"Yes, Mom." DB cut his speed, but they were already almost there.

"The open sign is up," Jesse said, leaning over the seat. Through the seat. He leaned back. "I'll go in as soon as you park." Okay, so that was partially to get away from DB's mom.

"Here we are, Mom," he heard DB saying as they pulled up and Jesse hightailed it into Yanya's place.

Yanya was stocking shelves, her shawls draped over her arms and shoulders in layers. There was even a lovely yellow ribbon tied in tiers around her waist, over her skirts. She was in full get up, though none of it hid that she was actually a very tall and broad man. "Good

morning, child," she said, glancing at Jesse. "You're up and about early."

"Uh-huh." Jesse beamed at her and went to stand in a corner. "Ignore me. You can't see me. Got it?"

Yanya snorted. "Of course I can."

Jesse shook his head. "Trust me. I don't exist to you from this moment on."

Yanya, hands on her wide hips, turned to face Jesse just as the door opened and made the bell over it tinkle.

DB came in, his mother right behind him. "Ah, Yanya. I've brought someone to meet you."

Yanya spun back around, her layers swirling out and her arms fluid like a gypsy dancer. "And who might that be?" she asked, her question starting abruptly and ending nice and smooth like a good shopkeeper's should.

Jesse clasped his hands in anticipation.

"Yanya this is my mother, Barbara. Mom, this is Madam Yanya."

Jesse waited breathlessly. Well, even more breathlessly than usual. Yanya and DB's mom were staring at each other in mute shock. As Jesse has expected, Yanya broke first.

"How on earth did such a lovely creature as this bring someone as uncouth as you into this world?" She moved

forward, both of her hands out to take both of DB's mom's hands. "Please, come in! I'll put on some tea." Her eyes were glittering. "We can share stories about your son."

DB's mom blinked twice and stammered out a polite, "Tea would be lovely, thank you," then went where she was dragged. She looked shell shocked.

"Oh, God, I hadn't thought about them sharing stories about *me*." DB groaned.

"That might have been the flaw in my plan," Jesse admitted. "Still. If we're fast we can get the hell out of here before she recovers enough to come after you."

"Yeah, getting away sounds about right." DB raised his voice. "Call a cab to take you home when you're done here, Mom. Bye!"

Jesse flew out of there like his ass was on fire, and he only knew DB had gotten away because his mother didn't race out after him and join them in the car.

"Drive!" Jesse demanded as soon as DB's butt hit the seat.

Laughing, DB did just that. Just like they were two crooks fleeing the scene of a crime.

Chapter Thirteen

DB headed back toward the office and tried not too feel too guilty about foisting his mother on Yanya. Or was that vice-versa? "So, what do we do now?" He wasn't sure exactly what to do with this unexpected bit of freedom. Well, technically, he wasn't free, it was still a working day and all, but he felt lighter having found something for his mother to do that didn't involve his work.

Or following him around.

"Sex?" Now there was a shocking suggestion.

"It's the middle of the work day," DB pointed out.

Jesse gave him a curious look. "So?"

"We can't just go home to boink."

"Why not?" Jesse's look of curiosity was giving way to narrowed eyes and a pouty lower lip.

"To start with -- my mom is sleeping in my bed."

Jesse snorted. "And you've never had sex anywhere but in a bed? Come on."

"You don't think she'd smell it the minute she got in?" He shook his head. His mother and sex just did not go together, no matter how much she and Jesse seemed to be trying to make him think about them in the same sentence.

"Fine." Jesse sighed. Heavily. "Okay, so we need to work, then. Our primary job is still just getting Duke's momma to leave him alone, right?"

"Yeah. Any brilliant ideas on that one? She just doesn't want to leave him and not because she loves him, so it's not like we can appeal to her motherly side." He pulled up into his usual spot in front of the office.

"Well, it's about money, right?" Jesse put himself outside the car by simply standing up and walking, which wasn't as creepy as it should have been. "We've ruled out her trying to find him his one true love?"

DB nodded. "Seems to be. That's all she seems to really care about -- making sure he doesn't spend it all and making even more sure that none of the women he tries to date get their hands on it." He headed up, taking the stairs as usual.

"Okay, so logically we should be able to get rid of her if we find a way to make her see that the money is okay." Jesse didn't sound terribly hopeful.

"Well, yeah, but she's dead and she didn't even realize it. I don't know if logic is going to have very much to do with this case. At all." He went through the door to the office. "Hey, Sandra."

"Hi, boss. Where's your mom?" Sandra looked over his shoulder tentatively.

Jesse waved to Sandra and wandered on through the inner office. "Okay, so logic is out. Maybe an exorcism? Which, I gotta say, isn't something I'm really happy considering. What if your aim is bad and you zap me instead?"

He ignored Jesse in favor of giving the living a smile. "She's having tea with Yanya. I'm hoping when she's done she decides to go shopping or back to the apartment or something."

"Yanya." Sandra nodded slowly. "Intriguing." She glanced at her computer and then back at DB. "No calls while you were out. I've almost done this expense report. You could keep your receipts a little better, you know."

"But then you'd have nothing to do."

"Good point. Hey, how's Jesse dealing with your mom being here? Is he taking a bit of a vacation?" She grinned at him.

He couldn't help but grin back at her. "No, he's just bitching. A lot."

"Oh, lucky you." The grin turned into a laugh and she turned to her computer, fingers already tapping away as she filled in numbers on a spreadsheet.

"Yeah, lucky me." He grinned, too, and headed into the office, stopping to grab himself a cup of coffee he could actually drink this time.

The thing was, he *was* lucky. His might not be a conventional relationship, but he had someone to love, who loved him back.

He was humming as he went into his office.

Jesse was standing in his way, his arms folded across his chest and wearing a pointed look. "No exorcism. I changed my mind completely. Clear?"

DB tilted his head and pretended to think about it. "I don't know..."

"Yanya wouldn't do it anyway."

Chuckling, he sat at his desk and sipped his coffee. "She's not evil, she just... I think dying probably messed her up pretty badly."

"I don't think she was very nice to start with." Jesse rolled his eyes. "Okay," he said, going to his chair. "So, we can't logic her away and we can't banish her. What are our options?"

"Tell Duke we can't keep taking his money because we're pretty sure we can't help him. Keep trying to find some other way to convince her or banish her. Or get Duke to stop gambling and spending like he's made of money."

"That last one will be impossible if he's an addict," Jesse said. "And if Wayne Rath has his claws in deep, Duke might not be able to stop without becoming a ghost himself."

"Well, the gambling seems to be relatively new. Like post-mommy-dying new." DB ran his hands through his hair. "I'm starting to wish we'd never taken this case."

"Mmm." Jesse looked like he agreed. "But you did and really, who else is there? We do the ghost cases. We just need to get a way into this one."

"You're right. And besides, Duke is richer than God thanks to his mother and who are we to refuse a piece of that pie, right?" It wasn't like he'd done plenty of cases for free -- ghosts had such terrible credit.

"Uh-huh." Jesse smirked at him. "You're hot when you talk about money."

DB rolled his eyes. "You think I'm hot talking about doing the laundry."

"Yeah. Take off your pants."

"Stop that."

Jesse grinned at him and winked. "Okay, okay. So, we need an in. Which means... what? Gambling? Banking? Muscle?" His brow furrowed. "Can you gamble? Are you a card player or just chess?"

"I know the rules -- I mean I can actually play, but I'm hardly a player, if you know what I mean. And what exactly are we trying to get into? Duke's games with Wayne Rath?" DB wasn't sure that was wise. Rath was bad news from what he'd seen.

"I don't think Duke would go for it, anyway. He's not bright enough to see it as a way to get rid of his mom, he'd just think you were after his money, too." Jesse growled. "Okay. So. Joe?"

DB raised both his eyebrows in surprise. "You want me to call Joe again?" That wasn't like Jesse at all.

"No." It was a small word, in a small voice. "I just don't have any more ideas and you refuse to get naked."

"So my options, in your opinion, are getting naked or calling Joe?"

"Definitely an 'or' in there, right?"

"I'm *not* interested in Joe. You *know* that. I'm fully committed to this... weird human ghost relationship thing we've got going on, okay?"

"Hey, I'm a human!" Jesse blinked at him and then shrugged. "And I know you are. I do. But I'm seriously not sure how to work this case, man."

"So, let's find out where Duke is, go see if his mother's still on his case, maybe tail him for a bit." He grinned at Jesse. "Earn our outrageous daily retainer."

"Stake out?" Jesse looked less than thrilled.

"Maybe. We'll see." DB grabbed the case file and found Duke's cell phone number. He gave it a call.

Jesse was still looking resigned and displeased when Duke answered with a sharp, "Yeah?"

"Yo, Duke. It's DB." He sat at his desk and pulled out a cigarette.

Jesse mouthed "yo" at him and rolled his eyes.

"DB. Oh, hey, yeah. You get rid of her for me?" Duke sounded slightly more interested and a lot less distracted.

"Uh, no. I haven't. She's just not interested in going, man." He lowered his voice, like he was sharing a secret. "But I'm pretty sure I know what you could do to help her on her way."

He doubted Duke was going to slow down on the money-spending, much less stop, but it was worth a shot.

"I'll switch to brunettes, but the women are staying," Duke said firmly.

DB tried to chuckle. Duke really was a dog. "Actually, I think your mother's more concerned about their interest in the family money than their hair color."

Duke gave a huff that sounded exasperated. "No one spends the money but me, and the gifts aren't as expensive as they look. Mostly. Wait, are you telling me the old bat is just pissed that I'm taking ladies *out*, not that I'm taking *ladies* out?"

"Yeah, pretty much. She might even forgive the ladies if you stopped losing at the tables for a while." There. It didn't get much clearer than that.

"Phfft." Duke sounded less than impressed. "She's *dead*. She can't tell me what to do with the money! Look, Black, make her go away. I'm the living one. It's my money now."

"I know that, but the easiest way to make her go away is to make her think you're being careful with the money, that you aren't spending it all on wine, women, and gambling. She hasn't responded at all to the 'gee you're dead why don't you just go away' gambit."

Would it really be such a hardship for Duke to pretend to give up his money-spending ways for a few weeks to put his mother's mind at rest enough that she could move on?

"Crazy old bat," Duke muttered. "Look, just... contain her or something. There's a big stakes game this weekend and I really don't need her spilling drinks on anyone while I'm trying to win the pot. And she can't come to the party in the suite after, either. Do you know how long it's been since I got laid?"

"Duke, man. You're not listening to me. The best way to get rid of her is to back off of that shit for a bit. You don't just 'contain' ghosts. Besides, she was your mother. You should treat her better." Frankly, DB thought Duke and his mom deserved each other.

"That would work if I had a choice. I don't. I need to be at that table." Duke's voice had gone flat and hard.

"Saturday night, game starts at ten. That's your deadline, I guess. Keep her away from me, if you can't get her to leave. Distract her or something."

"That'll cost you extra." Starting at ten on a Saturday night. Did Duke think he didn't have a life? Okay, maybe he didn't, but still, Duke didn't know that.

"Whatever. Sure."

Jesse was leaning forward, looking at him intently.

"What? What are you getting us into?"

"All right, I'll see what I can do." He rolled his eyes at Jesse.

Jesse rolled his eyes right back. Duke hung up on him.

"God, I don't like that guy. At all."

"Right." Jesse nodded. "Too bad he's paying the bills. So, what are we doing that's going to cost extra?"

"He's got some big game on Saturday night and he wants her either gone or us sitting on her to keep her away." He wasn't even sure why he was helping Duke out, anymore. Oh, right. Bills and a strong desire to keep Sandra.

"A big game." Jesse looked thoughtful. "You know what? If he loses, he's going to lose big. And I bet Rath is counting on that. We better find his mother and try

again or that jerk is going to lose our fee. Sandra banked the retainer already, right?"

"Hell, yes." He made some calculations in his head.

"We're covered through to Monday next week on regular stuff. I'll ask for the dough up front if this thing isn't solved come Saturday."

"Okay." Jesse nodded. "All right, then. Let's go find his mom and try again. Maybe she's calmed down."

"We can hope." DB didn't see why she would have, though. Nothing had changed, really.

"We can hope. *I* can hope." Jesse rolled his eyes dramatically. He could be such a diva. "Since I'm the one who has to listen to her. Although she can apparently spill drinks on you." His face took on his thoughtful look, the one DB was learning to be wary of. "You know, if I can get her to do that I might be able to figure out how she can do it. Become solid enough to do that, I mean. That might be helpful."

DB shot Jesse a look. "Hey, I have to listen to her too, you know. And how are we going to explain the spilled drinks to my mom? I think it's a terrible idea."

"She hasn't hollered at you like she has at me." Jesse appeared ready to pout again. "Where should we go looking for her? Back at the house, maybe? Doesn't feel right."

"I don't see the point of me wandering all over the city. You go find her, and come and get me once you know

where I need to be. Hell, bring her back here if you can. You can probably start with wherever Duke is." He finally lit his cigarette and took a long drag from it.

Jesse gave him a flat look. "I beg your pardon?"

"What? You can just poof in here and there and see if you can find her. It'll take forever if I go. Not to mention be a waste of gas." It was a perfectly reasonable suggestion.

"How about... Oh, I don't know. Asking me." Jesse's eyes were as chilly as his voice.

"That's what I just did!" God, Jesse could be such a pain in the ass sometimes.

"You did not." Jesse stood up. "You told me to do it, and that's not the same thing at all. No sex, your mother, and now I get to spend the day blipping all over like a search engine on your damn computer. Nice. Jesse the resource, that's me."

"What the hell crawled up your ass? It is not going to take you all day to find her and I thought you *were* a resource. You're the one who wanted to be my partner!"

Jesse gave him a very long, very pissed off look. "How do you know it isn't going to take me all day? Do you know where she is? And I'd just love to see you ordering Sandra around without even a please to sweeten the deal. Oh, but that would interfere with the coffee supply, wouldn't it? And I can't actually do anything helpful *except* blip all over the place, can I?"

"What the hell? Excuse me for not saying 'please'." He glared at Jesse. "Would you *please* go out and find the old bat to save us a huge shitload of time?"

"Where, DB? Where?" Jesse's face was pinched, his lips a fine, thin line. "I'm dead, not psychic."

"Try Duke's place, Duke's haunts, her fucking graveside. I'm not psychic either you know!"

Jesse gave him a withering look, turned on his heel and walked away, vanishing between one step and the next.

"Uh." Sandra was at the door, looking at him with wide eyes.

DB felt his cheeks heat up. "Um... sorry?"

"He's... really not happy about your mom?"

Was that all this was about? DB scratched his head.

"Yeah, and he's even less happy about the client's mom at the moment."

"Mothers," Sandra said succinctly. "Always messing stuff up with their good intentions. There's a reason we all move out when we're old enough."

He laughed at that, and nodded. "That's right. Sorry about the yelling."

"It was interesting, hearing one side of that discussion."
She smiled and leaned one shoulder on the door frame.
"It's strange. I wish I could hear him."

"He does, too. It would make him feel... more real."

She tilted her head at him. "He doesn't feel real?"

DB considered. "Um... well, not entirely. I mean most people can't see or hear him, he can't touch anything or affect anything, not really."

Sandra looked faintly troubled. "That sounds rough. And frustrating."

"Yeah. It can't be easy." They were doing the best they could, though.

"I suppose not. But I assume he doesn't have a choice? He can't... move on?"

"Actually, he could if he wanted to." Although DB supposed he didn't know if that was still true.

What if not moving on when you could meant you'd made your choice and you were stuck forever? Was Jesse jeopardizing his eternity someplace better just to stick around with DB?

He didn't like the thought of that at all.

"He could?" Sandra looked a little startled. "Why does he stay?"

Oh, God. He hadn't told Sandra he was involved with Jesse. He'd forgotten about that. The only person who really knew about Jesse was Yanya and she knew the whole kit and caboodle, more or less. He was used to either not talking about it, or basically having full disclosure.

DB scratched his head. "For me, I guess." God, she was going to call him on this, and he was going to have to tell her and she was going to quit. It was one thing to believe in your boss' ghost partner, quite another to believe that he had relations with that partner.

Her look grew sympathetic. "Did you know him before he died?" she asked gently.

"No. He kind of came with the office." He might not want to tell her the whole story, but he wasn't going to lie to her. "It's complicated."

Extremely.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "I would assume having a ghost in the office wasn't a big reason to rent the place. You didn't know he was here until later?" Her eyes got huge. "He didn't die *here*, did he?"

DB shook his head. "No, no. Nothing like that. This was a PI's office before I moved in and he was trying to get help from the guy, but there aren't many people who can communicate with ghosts. He was just lucky I came along, I guess."

"Oh." Sandra's gaze darted around the room for a moment and then she relaxed. "So he helped you out instead, and now you're friends?"

"Yeah." He gave her a smile. "Took me a while to give into the concept of using the ghost thing as a selling point, but once I did." DB shrugged. Business had picked up -- the paying kind as well as the ghost kind.

"Mmm." She turned to head back toward her own desk. "Must be nice. Having a friendship so close that one of you won't let go even though he's dead."

"It is." Even if it wasn't always easy. And now he was worried that Jesse could be ruining his... well, afterlife, by sticking around. DB lit up a cigarette and sighed. He regretted the argument now. Jesse deserved an apology for him being an ass and make-up sex.

Too bad that was going to have to wait until his mother left.

Chapter Fourteen

On Jesse's list of the top five things he missed about being alive, neatly tucked between smoking and pizza, was the one thing he wanted more than anything right then. Well, he would have gone for a cigarette, too, but mostly he really, really wanted to slam a door. Hard.

"I should know better," he muttered out loud as he put himself at Duke's house. "I just should. When he's working, he's working, period." Jesse looked around the kitchen and scowled. He'd been aiming for the living room. "Still. A 'please' would be cool."

He walked through the house, mostly so he could stomp around and have a direction to do it in. As he'd expected, there wasn't anyone there, not even the ghost of a mouse. If there were any new clues to find he missed them, since he couldn't do so much as turn over a piece of paper.

Scowling even harder at the thought, he kicked the edge of Duke's desk, which was in the room he was clearly using as an office. The kick was reasonably gentle, just in case this was one of those times that Jesse was suddenly corporeal. He was mad; he wasn't dumb.

The kick, however, sailed on through the desk and that made Jesse even madder. What the hell did Duke even have an office for, anyway? He didn't need one. He needed a card table more than anything else. Well, and a bed, if his talk about women was to be entirely believed.

Jesse went down to the main level again, looking for a game room. He poked around, walked through a few walls, but within ten minutes he'd covered the house and hadn't found even a folding card table hidden away.

"That's weird." Jesse turned a slow circle in the kitchen, again, looking for even a hint of Duke's lifestyle. Wine, party snacks in the glass fronted cupboards, a deck of cards or poker chips left out on the counter. There wasn't even a coffee maker in sight. "Curiouser and curiouser."

Jesse debated going to tell DB that he thought Duke was staying somewhere else, even temporarily, but decided not to. He was annoyed, and it wasn't pressing. DB could wait until the end of the day to find out.

Number six on the list of things Jesse missed about being alive was the ability to make notes.

With no sign of Duke's mother around, Jesse went looking for Duke himself. The old lady was pissed enough that she was likely haunting up a storm around him. Maybe there would be a trail of spilled drinks at Duke's fancy card club.

Surprisingly, given the time of day and the fact that it was a week day as well, there were a lot of people there. There didn't seem to be too many actual games going on, but there were small groups of people scattered all over the place, having drinks and talking mostly quietly. Maybe there was actual business being conducted; Jesse had no idea. He was looking for Duke or a mad ghost.

He heard her before he saw her. Duke's mother was leaning over Duke, who was busy chatting up a chick in a very skimpy outfit, screaming at him. She was pure fury, launching curses and admonitions at him.

Too bad Jesse was the only one who could hear her.

Duke was totally oblivious, having only eyes for the girl in front of him -- or at least her breasts -- and his indifference seemed to be making his mother completely irate.

"Please don't throw a drink at him," Jesse said, trying to sound like he didn't care either way.

She whirled around, eyes wild, clearly startled. "You!"

"Me." Jesse nodded. "Still mad, huh?" He looked around them at the clusters of people. "Want to have a race? We can run right through tables, you know. And walls, and all kinds of things. It can be fun, if you like that sort of thing." He hoped that if he kept her off-balance she'd settle down enough that they could talk.

"What? Are you insane?" She was drifting slightly away from Duke.

"Not as far as I'm aware." Jesse took a step or two toward one of the many poker tables, leading her away. "Just dead."

She suddenly looked lost, like a little old lady who didn't quite know how she'd come to be where she was. "How come you're the only one who can see me?"

There were no doubt plenty of other ghosts who could see her, too, hell, there were several other ghosts *here*, but as crazy as she was, they were probably keeping mum about being able to see and hear her.

"I'm not," he said instead of pointing that out. "My business partner can see you too, and he's alive. Oh, and Madam Yanya, too. It's a weird thing about being a ghost. Not many living people can see us."

She shook her head, backing away from him and started shrieking. "I'm not! Don't you dare say that, you little punk!"

Jesse sighed. "Follow me," he invited. He followed a waiter toward double swinging doors, hoping it was the kitchen. With any luck at all she'd miss the swing of a door and have to admit that she was at least able to pass through matter. She couldn't be in that much denial. He hoped.

"Why should I go with you? I'm a lady, and you're just vermin!" She was still screeching, but she was following him.

"Did you know that rabbits are rodents?" He kept walking, kept chattering. "And just so you know, I'm a very nice guy."

"What? Who are you?" She'd caught up to him now, glaring hard, but there was more sanity in her eyes than he'd seen yet.

"My name is Jesse." He would have offered his hand, but she didn't seem ready shake, and he wasn't about to touch her, yet, assuming he could in the first place. "I'd like to help you out a little."

Her eyes narrowed with suspicion. "Why?"

He shrugged and walked through to the kitchen. "Money." She'd understand that as a motive.

She followed and partway through, the swinging door closed, hitting her. Or at least it would have hit her, if it hadn't just gone around her incorporeal form.

She screamed.

Jesse winced. He decided to just act like it was a totally cool thing and not something that'd set a person's entire existence on its ear. "Feels kind of strange the first couple of times, but you get used to it. And then you can start the fun stuff."

She looked at him in horror, and then her face crumpled.

Well, crap. "Oh. Oh, hey! Don't do that," he begged. He gestured for her to follow him a few steps to the right, where they were out of the line of traffic. "Don't cry, okay? I never know what to do when a lady cries."

"I don't understand," she wailed.

"Shh." Christ, how did DB manage to be soothing? "It'll be okay, honest. It's just something to get used to. I can help." He was both glad no one could see him make an

old lady cry and desperately wishing someone would step up and help him out.

"What did you do to me?"

"Nothing!" He suddenly was okay with making her cry.

"You just got sick and died, lady. That's all."

She sank down against the wall, sinking partway into it as she went back to crying. "So I'm dead."

"Uh-huh. Me, too. It's not so bad. And hey, it takes off a lot of pressure, huh?" Man, maybe he could just talk her into moving on. DB would be delighted. Maybe they'd even have sex again some day.

"So, I'm dead, and that ungrateful wretch of a son gets to gamble all my money away! It isn't fair!"

Or maybe not.

"You know, I might be able to help out with that, specifically." God, he wished she'd stop carrying on. It was hard to think.

That got her attention. "Really?"

"Sure." He nodded at her. "That partner of mine I mentioned. He's alive and he might be able to get Duke to take better care of what you left him. But you'll need to do something in return."

"Uh-huh. Payment. Let's hear it."

Jesse narrowed his eyes. "If we can get your son to stop wasting the money you left him, you need to move on. Like, head on to Heaven. And you can't follow me around yelling at me all the time. And until we get Duke to behave you need to leave him alone, too. No more throwing drinks at his lady friends."

"Those whores don't deserve any better." She looked more with it, though. There was a shrewd look in her eyes now.

"Possibly not, although I don't know any of them enough to know for sure." He looked at her and squared his shoulders. "You stop carrying on like a brat, and I'll see what I can do to make him be a good boy. Then you leave. Deal?"

"I don't go unless I know he's not throwing my money away. But if you can make him see reason, then I suppose I can see about the leaving thing." She looked suddenly vulnerable again. "There is somewhere to go?"

Jesse thought back to watching Gwennie walking away from him and fading away, smiling. "Yeah," he said. "There's somewhere to go. Somewhere nice."

"Okay, then. I guess you'd better start making my idiot son behave."

"And you're not going to hang around him, right? You come see me for updates." It suddenly struck Jesse that he had to keep her away from Duke for at least a few days; he had a feeling that it would take an act of God to keep Duke out of that big card game.

"Where did you want me to go?"

"One of the cool thing about being ghosts is that we can go anywhere." He grinned at her. "Free movies. Peeking behind closed doors to see what people are watching on TV or what they're reading. The free movies thing is cool."

She made a face, all but turning her nose up at him. "Free opera?"

"If that's your gig, for sure. You can watch whatever you want, really. And get good seats." Hopefully there would be enough opera playing that they would get a couple of days to work on Duke.

She sniffed. "Well. I suppose I can see what there is to do that isn't too tedious." She shot him another shrewd look. "You're going to watch my boy, right?"

"Yes, ma'am. When you want to check in with me, go to see Madam Yanya again. She'll phone my partner, and I'll come right on by to tell you what's going on." He gave her a stern look. "Be polite to Yanya, please. She's a good person."

That had her snorting again. "*He's* a freak." Man, she was judgmental.

"She's a *nice* freak. If you're mean to her the deal is off." Yanya had better appreciate the effort he was putting out.

"You're pushing it, punk."

"And Duke is having a fantastic time, partying it up with your money. I'm down with that, so if you don't want my help just say so." Now there was a gamble. He hoped to hell he had a decent poker face.

"You drive a very hard bargain."

"I've had a lot of years to practice." And plus he was just that stubborn. Of course, with DB for a partner he'd learned to be both stubborn and resourceful.

"All right. I'll give you a week. And then, by God, I will figure out how to haunt Sheldon until the day he dies."

Somehow, he didn't think she'd have any trouble with that. "All right. So, stop by Yanya's if you need me. She can find me pretty quick. Enjoy the opera."

"Ah, the opera... I guess these old rags will have to do..." With that, she disappeared.

Jesse blinked. She'd sure gotten the hang of that okay. He wondered for a moment just how many ghosts would be kicking around the theater and then decided not to ponder it too much. He had bigger issues to worry about.

Like telling DB that he'd only sort of solved their problem while creating a new one. How the hell were they going to get Duke to smarten up, even only for long enough to convince his mother he was a new man?

Chapter Fifteen

The afternoon came and went and by the time Sandra poked her head in to say goodbye for the day, Jesse still hadn't come back.

DB sighed as the front office door closed behind Sandra. He was obviously in the doghouse.

Usually he'd just have gone home when Sandra left, but with his mother there, he wouldn't get a chance to talk to Jesse when he finally showed up, and that would be awkward as hell. He'd been hoping Jesse wouldn't hold onto his anger.

It was a little worrying that neither his mother nor Madam Yanya had phoned, too, but he was trying not to think about that very much.

Jesse walked through the closed door from the outer office as if nothing was going on at all. "Sandra left already?"

DB raised an eyebrow at Jesse. "It's almost six."

"Oh, is it?" Jesse's act gained a lot of nonchalance. "I didn't realize."

"Uh-huh. So, have you forgiven me or are you still pissed?" There was no reason to beat around the bush.

Jesse gave him a long look and then sighed. "Whatever. Just try not to be such a boss when you're being boss. Or at least treat me as good as you treat Sandra."

"Okay. Sit." DB nodded at Jesse's chair. "I mean, please sit, I have something I want to talk to you about."

Thankfully Jesse didn't argue, just put himself in his chair and nodded. "I have stuff, too. You go first."

"Are you..." He stopped. How exactly did he phrase this? "You could move on. If you wanted to, right?"

Jesse gave him a blank look. "Move on?"

"You know, go to the other side, follow the light. Leave this plane of existence. Whatever." He waved his hand in a "move along" gesture.

Jesse actually grew a little transparent, which might have been the ghost equivalent of going pale. Or maybe he just thought that moving on was a great idea and he'd better get started. "Do you want me to?" Jesse asked in an even tone.

"I didn't say that." Damn it, why did Jesse have to assume the worst? "I just want to know if you could if you wanted to."

For a long moment Jesse didn't move or say anything at all and then he shrugged one shoulder. "I suppose so." He came back to full Technicolor and leaned back in his chair. "Probably. Why?"

DB lit a cigarette and took a long drag. "What happens if a ghost can go on and doesn't? Not because he's trapped or anything or has unfinished business, but because he

chooses not to." He met Jesse's gaze. "Does that... door to wherever close?"

"I don't see why it would." Jesse frowned. "No, I don't think so. I mean, ghosts stick around a while, some of them for decades. But I don't see any caveman ghosts or ghosts from ancient times, so I think they have to eventually just move along. I've got a few centuries in me, at a guess."

"Are you sure?" If Jesse staying here with him would cut Jesse off from the good stuff... He cared too much about Jesse to let that happen.

"Dude, what the hell is going on?"

DB found himself blushing. "Nothing. Never mind."

"Sure. I come in here after working all day on our case, and you want to talk about the afterlife. And nothing is going on." Jesse peered at him and slowly started to smile. "You're going pink. Tell me."

DB rolled his eyes. "It's nothing, okay? Sandra was just asking about why you stayed and could you move on and I told her of course you could and then I realized I didn't know if you could. I didn't know if there was a time limit on things. If after you get your issues resolved -- like your murder solved -- was there an expiration date on moving on or something." God, he was babbling. He needed to shut the fuck up.

Jesse's smile faded into something even worse. He was looking serious and intent and entirely like he was too

likely to say something earth shattering. "DB." He stood up and moved around the desk, not looking away from DB's face. "DB, I'm waiting for you. I thought you knew that."

"I know." He did; he'd figured that part out. It was hard to go on, especially with Jesse right there in his face. "But what if waiting for me ruins your chance at the good forever place? I don't want you to lose that."

"I won't," Jesse said firmly. "We'll go together, when it's time. Until then, you're stuck with me. Okay?"

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure." Jesse leaned forward and kissed him, a faint feeling of lips and a soft tingle to go with it. "I love you."

"Me, too. And that's why it's not okay if you're giving up forever to stay with me." He couldn't help but smile, though. Jesse's kisses were feeling more real every day.

Jesse rolled his eyes. "I'm not giving up forever, okay? I'm just... delaying it a few decades. You better make sure it's decades, Buster. Kiss me again."

Feeling better about the issue, DB held onto the edge of his desk as he closed his eyes and moved his mouth against Jesse's. He followed the tingles, using those as his guide as his fingers curled on the wood.

The back of his head got a dose, too, as if Jesse's fingers were stroking through his hair, and one shoulder, then a

slick tongue pushed between DB's lips as Jesse took shape.

He didn't think about it -- that always messed things up -
- he just concentrated on how good it felt, on how Jesse didn't taste of anything exactly, but that there was definitely a flavor in his mouth when they kissed.

The sound of the front office door closing and his mother's voice calling out his name startled him badly, and DB jerked hard in his chair, managing to send it back. It landed on the ground, him still in it, his legs pointing up in the air, his arms still flailing ineffectually.

"For the love of God." Jesse started cursing, one stuttering word after another. He was so mad he sounded like he was having a fit. DB couldn't tell for sure, since he was still on the floor.

"DB, are you still here?" She was coming closer.

He sighed and tried to right himself, but the fucking arms of the chair sort of had him trapped. He felt like a bug that had been turned over onto its back by some cruel little boy. "Yes, Mother. I just... give me a second."

There was a horrible long pause. "Are you.... you are decent, aren't you?"

Jesse barked laughter. "Only because *you're* here!"

"Oh, my God! Mom!" DB managed to do a back somersault of sorts, which got him out of the way of his

chair, although he crashed into the back wall of his office, and then popped up. "You startled me and I fell! That's all!" Jesus. The last thing he needed was for his mother to be thinking of him jacking off. God! He shook his head.

No, he couldn't go there, because then it would be burned into his brain and he wouldn't be able to jack off for months, maybe even longer.

Jesse was still muttering and cursing like a hissing cat. He'd added pacing to his repertoire, too, which wasn't helping matters at all.

"You fell?" His mother immediately sounded worried. "David. Open the door."

He rolled his eyes and went to get the door. "It wasn't locked. I wasn't. God." This time he rolled his eyes right at her.

She marched past him and looked around. Jesse smirked and waved at her. He looked particularly nasty, which was something DB wanted to head off.

"Did you have a good day?" she asked, finally looking at him. "I heard a lot of stories about you."

"Oh, God." He'd been afraid of that. "I hope you didn't believe most of them."

She smiled at him.

"I wonder if Yanya told her about the part where we can't have sex." Jesse was definitely getting snarky.

He tried very hard not to sigh. Jesse might start whining about the lack of sex before he did, but he was starting to feel it, too. Actually, he was mostly feeling bitchy about not being able to just spend some time with his lover and not worry about who might be watching and thinking he was crazy. "You ready to go home, Mom?"

"Absolutely." She beamed at him. "I'm going to cook for you, a nice real meal. Yanya was kind enough to go marketing with me before she dropped me off."

Jesse walked forward. "Hate to tell you, but you and I need to talk tonight, Mr. Private Eye. I have to report."

DB nodded. "Okay, Mom. I have a stakeout to do this evening, though. After supper." If she asked to go along, he was going to scream. Plus, he really did have to get photos of those two cheating spouses so he could close the cases and get paid.

He gave her his best I'm-your-darling-son smile.

"Oh my. A stake out. Really? Will you be very late?"

"Only if there's sex," Jesse put in.

DB had to bite the inside of his cheek and he raised an eyebrow at Jesse. "I don't think so, Mom. Just a couple of hours."

Jesse beamed. Apparently he didn't think they needed that long to talk.

"I'll make you something to take with you, then." She nodded firmly and turned to walk out of the office.

"Maybe coffee and dessert."

"You don't have to do that, Mom." Not that it didn't sound really good. DB followed her out after shooting Jesse a smile.

"Oh, take the coffee," Jesse encouraged. "It'll help you get your strength back. I'll just wait here and we can talk before going to sit in the cold car."

DB's mom had left a pile of grocery bags in the outer office. "Don't be silly, dear. It's no trouble at all. Get that heavy one, will you?"

He picked it up dutifully, took a couple more from her and followed her out. He wondered when he could politely ask her when she was leaving again.

Chapter Sixteen

Jesse paced the office, from one end to another. When he got bored with walking past DB's desk he changed direction and walked through it, on his way to the east wall. It wasn't a great improvement over pacing the other way, though, so he stopped.

The office was quiet, of course, and there wasn't any telling how long DB would be gone. How long did it take to eat a home-cooked meal with his mother? Add in drive time, time to run up the stairs (Jesse was an optimist. In his view DB should be running, since they were, after all, about to be alone without any Mom-interference), and time to unlock the door, and there was no real way to accurately estimate when DB would arrive.

Jesse just hoped they'd sneak in the sex part of the evening before DB remembered that Jesse had been working all day and could possibly have information to share. Once Jesse started talking, DB would be either inspired to work or annoyed that Jesse had potentially gotten them in worse trouble.

Sex first, by all means necessary.

"Maybe I should be naked when he gets here," Jesse mused out loud. Then he started stripping. It couldn't hurt.

"What the hell are you doing?" DB stood in the doorway, frowning at him.

"Saving us time." Jesse beamed at him and kept taking off his clothes, hoping that DB didn't notice the startled jump he'd done. He wasn't used to DB sneaking up on him; that was Jesse's forte.

"You're going to give me your report naked?"

Jesse paused long enough to shuck his pants. "No," he said patiently. "We are going to have sex. Right now. Right here. And *then* I will report. Because if we don't, I'm leaving and you can work this case ghost-free. I mean it, DB." Jesse was almost vibrating. Hell, he *was* vibrating, if quivering with nerves and need counted as vibrating.

DB stared at him for a long moment and then closed the door and locked it. "I don't think she's ever leaving. She ignored every last hint I dropped." DB undid buttons.

"She'll leave." Jesse would have torn his clothes getting the last of them off, but ghost clothes didn't seem to ever tear. "She'll leave even if I have to haunt her to get her out." He watched DB struggle with a stubborn button and pounced. He didn't care anymore if they were naked or not.

DB made a happy sounding noise, arms going half around, half through him. DB didn't seem to care about that any more than their lack of complete nakedness.

"Oh, God." Jesse closed his eyes and went with it, touching and moving against whatever he could feel. "Too long." Okay, it had been a couple of days. Still. Far

too long. "Want." He wasn't even remotely embarrassed to be down to single syllable words already.

Maybe it was because it had been a while, maybe it was because they were both so horny, but things got mostly solid pretty quickly and he could feel the heat of DB's cock, even through the material of his pants, as it rubbed against him.

"God. Jesse. Kiss me."

With a harsh, hungry sound, Jesse's mouth found DB's. Everything was moving so fast, hot and frantic; Jesse felt alive. He shoved a hand between them and rubbed at DB's cock, then started working on the button and zipper.

"God." DB kept repeating the word, hands moving over him, lips mashed against his.

With DB's cock finally free -- or at least in his hand, if not free -- Jesse shoved his tongue into DB's mouth in a mockery of fucking and started stroking him off, squeezing perhaps a little too hard. He couldn't bring himself to let go, though, not when he finally had DB where he wanted him.

DB humped his hand, fingers opening and closing on his arms.

Jesse pulled away from DB's kisses and looked down to watch. The thick, ruddy prick slid along his palm, the head appearing and vanishing from his fist. "Fuck," Jesse whispered, staring. "Yes. Look at you."

DB shook his head, eyes squeezed tight shut. "Can feel you. I *can*." Groaning, DB's hand flailed and then connected with Jesse's cock and wrapped around it.

"Oh!" Jesse lost his rhythm and then picked it up again, his eyes wide as joy and base lust rocketed through him. He tried to say something, anything, but words had become too hard to form. Instead he followed his instincts and did what his body wanted: stroked and jerked and thrust, without a lot of finesse.

DB wasn't following his rhythm, such as it was, at all, but his lover was yanking on his dick like there was no tomorrow. Breathing hard, his cock rigid and starting to leak, Jesse buried his face in DB's neck and hung on. He would have bitten, but he had no idea if he'd leave a mark or not, and it probably wasn't a good time to find out, what with DB's mom around. Panting, he could feel his orgasm climbing. "Come on," he whispered, pushing his palm over the head of DB erection. "On me. Come on me."

"Jesse!" DB jerked, hand squeezing him impossibly tight as come shot out of DB's cock to coat his hand and belly.

"Fuck!" Jesse tensed, his whole body going taut as he was coated. He cursed again as his spine curled and his balls lifted. He could smell DB's release, could feel it, and that sent him right over the top. He thrust into DB's hand once more and came, yelling loud enough to scare the neighbors, if they'd been able to hear him.

DB's arms went around him and for a few seconds he was solid and real before DB went through him, stumbling toward his desk. "Damn. Jesse, that was *good*."

Jesse nodded, panting and wobbling on his feet. "Uh-huh. That was... *really* good." He staggered to his chair and sat. "God."

DB pulled up his pants and sat on the edge of his desk. Digging in his pocket, he finally came up with a battered pack of cigarettes and lit one, taking a deep drag.

Oh, man. That looked good. Jesse watched DB smoke, his fingers twitching. "Next time we get like that, we should aim for prone, maybe. Or over the desk."

"It seems to work better when we don't plan it."

"True." Jesse nodded. "Okay, next time, just fuck me. I won't mind, honest."

DB chuckled, the sound husky. "That was pretty damn good, just as it was. God. I could touch you, feel you around my dick." DB shared a happy smile with him, eyes bright, even if they were at half-mast.

Jesse's cock gave a little lurch. "Yeah." He smiled back, warm and pleased, all of his bones happy. "You felt awesome."

DB nodded and kept smoking. "I want to nap now, though."

Chuckling, Jesse got up and gathered his clothes. "Can't," he said, starting to dress. "Now it's time for work. You can finish your smoke first, though."

DB stuck out his tongue.

"Stop that, or I'll smack it." Jesse did up the buttons on his shirt, grinning.

DB just snorted and stubbed out the cigarette before moving around to his chair. "Okay, if you insist on getting back to work, it's report time. I have to do a real stakeout before I go home."

"I'll go with you." Jesse put his shoes on and sat down. "Well, I found his mom," he said cheerfully. "And I got her to understand that she's dead."

"Well, that's progress. Is she going to move on or what?"

"Um." Jesse tried to appear cautiously optimistic. "She's agreed to be... uh, not here. If certain conditions are met." This was the tricky part.

DB's eyebrows went up. "And exactly what are those conditions?"

"Well, she's not real happy about his womanizing, but as we already know that's rooted in how much money he's throwing around with these girls. So she gets mad and throws drinks at them -- which, incidentally, was also fueled by her frustration that no one would talk to her or acknowledge her. Now that she knows she's dead, she

kind of gets that. But, like I said, it's all about the money for her."

"Nice lady. No wonder Duke's living it up if this any indication of what she was like when she was alive."

Nodding, Jesse leaned back. "For sure. The tricky part, though, is that he wants her gone and she won't go until he stops tossing the money around -- although she does sort of understand that it's his money now, it doesn't seem to really make a lot of difference to her. So, we kind of need to get him away from gambling, or at least away from Rath."

DB sighed and shook his head. "He's got this big thing coming up and he's not going anywhere until then. I think I've convinced him to lay off the women and gambling for a bit after that, to get her off his back. As long as she leaves him be for this thing on Saturday."

Jesse made a face. "Yeah. I thought about that. I think that's going to be my chore -- keeping her away. It would be real good if we can untangle him from Rath, though."

"I'm not sure that's even up to Duke anymore. Not if Rath is everything we think he is -- once he's got his hooks into you... well, let's just say I don't think he's going to want to give up a guy like Duke easily."

Jesse's glow was fading fast. "The guy's a jerk. Like, class A jerk. How come I feel bad about him being taken under by Rath?"

"Because there's class A jerk and then there's criminal." DB shrugged and lit another cigarette. "I'm not sure I'm surprised how he turned out, given his mother. Sounds to me like they deserve each other."

"Yeah." Jesse sighed and then grinned. "However, you're getting paid to get them apart. So we need a plan. I keep her off his back until after the big game? And you try to force him onto the straight and narrow. Should be a walk in the park."

"As soon as this big game of his is done, I'll really stay on him." DB gave him an evil grin. "In the meantime, you're on duty with mommy dearest." The grin faded. "I suppose that gives me plenty of time to hang out with *my* mother..."

Jesse felt himself sigh and tried to look on the bright side. When he couldn't find the bright side he said, "Remember when I was nattering at you about family and how you never talked to your mom and maybe you should be closer to her? I take it back."

DB laughed and then blew some smoke rings. "Be careful what you wish for, huh?"

"Something like that, yeah. Holy cow, I had no idea that it would be so intense, having another person in your space. I mean, Sandra is cool, but she's at work, you know? Not in our apartment." Hell, Jesse couldn't even watch TV at night anymore. He was feeling a little lost without late night infomercials.

"Yeah. And I love my mom and all, but..." DB gave him a half-smile. "You know."

"No nookie." This time Jesse felt the sigh all the way down to his toes. "That part is pretty awkward and horrible. I'm dead. I know from horrible."

"I'm going to see if I can't convince her to head home on Monday. I don't know, sometimes I think I should just tell her about you. Though I imagine she'd decide I'm going crazy from loneliness and redouble her efforts to set me up and not take no for an answer."

Jesse stared at him. "That would be... oh, wow. I don't even want to think about it." That level of anger and jealousy would be enough to drive a ghost well past cranky and into the territory of Duke's mom. Still. It would be nice if she knew and understood. Jesse, though, wasn't quite crazy enough to think that would ever happen.

DB added, "I also don't want to risk the loony bin. I think it's better if she just continues to think that I'm just using the ghost thing a la Madame Yanya to drum up business."

"She's going to go with that, uh-huh." Jesse looked at him, feeling a little uncomfortable. "But she's also going to try to set you up. Maybe not this trip, but next year? Oh, yeah."

"I'll just have to keep telling her no. I'm a grown man; she can't *make* me go out with anyone, Jesse."

"I know." Jesse looked away. "But then she'll nag and you'll get snippy and then she'll be hurt and you'll feel guilty and there'll be a fight and then she'll be here again for a month." He could see it all unfolding.

"Stop that. We don't know what's going to happen. And next time she wants to visit, I'm going to pay for her to stay at a hotel. I'm too old to be sleeping on the couch in my living room."

"Really?" Hope bloomed in Jesse's heart. "That would be great!"

"Yeah, really. Seriously, I'm a grown man; I need to stop being intimidated by my mother." DB stubbed out his cigarette and snorted. "Which probably means I should stop hiding out here and go back home. Right after I hit that Motel 6 to get pictures of this guy cheating on his wife. That'll wrap the Bergiss case up."

"It's the Hilton." Jesse rolled his eyes and then got up, and trying not to pout. He was a grown man, too. "Feel better, though?"

"Yeah, I think we've got a good plan on all fronts. Tell me, why do I always complain when all we have are cheating spouse cases? They bring in the dough, few problems..."

"Boring as hell, kinda sleazy, tears, gunfights, and me being sent to spy on sex..." Jesse wasn't fond of those cases, either.

DB laughed, the sound wry. "Yeah... I guess I'm not even sure what the perfect case would be, though I am pretty sure it would have nothing to do with mothers!"

"Dead or alive." Jesse nodded. "I hear ya." He moved around the desk, carefully not to slide through it at all and kissed DB's mouth insubstantially. "I'll come home later. Unless you want me there for the evening?"

"No, it'll just drive us both nuts. You're better off finding something interesting to do elsewhere."

"Maybe I'll go and see Yanya after you get your pictures. See what your mom did all day."

DB snorted. "Apparently they talked about me and about ghosts and Mom thinks Yanya's a little light in sanity department as well as the loafers."

Jesse grinned. "At least she caught that last part. Except Steve's straight, I think. Just likes dressing up."

"I don't know if he is or not -- I've never asked. But it would be amusing if she got the wrong end of that, too."

"Maybe she can start setting Yanya up." Jesse laughed at the thought. "But not with you."

"God, no -- I'm not sure which of us would be more horrified." DB cackled. "Yanya, I think."

"Plus, I would totally haunt the shop and make life horrible." Jesse could get into that. "I'd make you both miserable."

"Like you don't already." DB's tone was teasing, and he winked.

Jesse raised one eyebrow high and put his hand on DB's crotch. "Say that again," he invited, smirking.

DB's eyes went wide with surprise. "Are we going for round two?"

"Unless you need to run home to mommy." Jesse smirked more and massaged DB, spreading the tingles.

DB groaned for him, eyes half-closing as he spread his legs wide. "Don't say the m-word."

"What word should I say?" Jesse kept touching as he sank down to his knees. "Want? Is that a good one?"

"Just don't mention my m... birthperson and we'll be good."

"Oh, I'm aiming for way better than good." Jesse ran his hands up and down the inside of DB's thighs.

"I like the sound of that." DB looked down at him, not at his hands, but at his face, and smiled.

Jesse smiled back, warmth filling him up. "I like the sound of you." Oh, oh. They were heading to sappy.

DB laughed and put his head back, eyes closing. "When I forget you're a ghost I can feel you better," he murmured, hands curled around the arms of the chair.

"Forget," Jesse encouraged, his voice low. "Just... think about me. Just me. Jesse." He kept touching, his hands moving slower now. He closed his eyes, too, to see if it made a difference.

One of DB's hands slid over his head, the touch was sloppy, but it was solid, there.

Jesse shuddered and leaned forward, pressing against one solid thigh. His fingertips were still meeting nothing, but his palms were pushing against warm denim. Nice.

"Let me..." Words broke off into a soft moan and were followed up by the sound of DB's zipper coming down.

With a moan Jesse reached forward, his hands closing around DB's and their fingers tangling up for a moment until DB got his cock out. "There," Jesse said, starting to stroke, leaning forward to rub his cheek along the silky length.

"Jesse. Feel you." DB laughed a little, hands sliding through his hair.

"Taste *you*," Jesse said, just before he did. His mouth opened and slid down, DB's flavor flooding across his tongue.

"Jesse!" DB bucked, sending his cock sliding along Jesse's tongue and into his throat.

Jesse's eyes flew open as he sucked. This was too good not to watch, and even though it was probably bad cock-sucking etiquette, he undid his pants and shoved them down, out of the way. He had needs, too, and his need was hard and stiff and wanting access.

DB's cock was thick and dark, swollen large and shiny with spit as it slid between his lips. The sight of it made Jesse's lift in response, and the next time DB filled Jesse's mouth, Jesse stroked in time. He groaned, squeezing his dick hard. DB felt amazing, stretching his lips wide.

DB panted, whispering his name. Every now and then he'd make this strained, needy little sound.

Jesse sucked until his jaw ached and then he climbed right up DB's body, rubbing as he went, hands all over them both, but mostly on hot and slick erections. "Touch me," he demanded, straddling DB's lap. "Oh, God. DB. Good." So good he was aching, greedy for more.

DB's hand slid around his own and Jesse's erections, holding them together. Gasping, DB began to stroke with hard, quick pulls.

"Oh, fuck." Jesse rocked with him, his balls heavy. "Yes. Yes, now. Jesus, yes." Babbling, not caring at all, Jesse humped into DB's hand and mashed himself into DB's lap. "Right now."

"Yes! Now!" DB shouted and squeezed hard, come spurting up out of his cock.

Jesse was right there with him. For the second time that night, as soon as DB's jizz hit him, he was shooting, too, though this time there was a little less yelling. The orgasm was just as intense, though, and it left him twitching and gasping for air, his head on DB's shoulder for one long, sweet moment. "Love you," he whispered, bits and pieces of him already insubstantial. Coming seemed to wreck his ability to maintain form.

DB's hands were back on the arms of the chair, but his eyes were open now and he was smiling goofily. "Yeah, me, too." He laughed softly. "That was great. Twice."

"Maybe there is something to this abstinence thing." Jesse clapped his hands over his mouth. What was he saying?

DB threw his head back and just laughed.

"Forget I said that. My brains are addled, clearly." Jesse busied himself with his clothing and hoped he wasn't blushing.

"I don't think I *can* forget that you said it." No, DB was no doubt going to throw it back at him on a regular basis.

Jesse shook his head to himself and grinned, his fingers doing up buttons he didn't remember undoing in the first place. "Isn't it time you got home to your mother?" he teased. "Though you might want to have a few more cigarettes first to cover the smell of sex." There, that should shock DB into silence. Maybe.

"Oh, fuck." DB lit another cigarette and sniffed madly for a moment. "Do I really reek of sex?"

"What do you think?" Jesse raised an eyebrow at him. "You just came all over yourself, twice. You're lucky my stuff doesn't stick around, really."

"Damn it, now I have to wait until she's asleep so I can slip in and get these into the laundry basket before she notices." DB sighed and grabbed a couple of files from his inbox, then tossed them back. He could see his camera on top of the filing cabinet. "I guess I should get going on that stake out."

"Oh, I can help with that!"

DB shot him a look. "Are you going to be good?"

Jesse beamed at him. "I'm always good."

That earned him a patented DB snort, but DB got up and made sure he was tidy, then grabbed the camera.

It looked like they were going to get some work done tonight after all.

Chapter Seventeen

DB woke to the smells of breakfast and the sight of his mother's suitcases by the door.

He blinked a few times and sat up, the blanket pooling around his waist. "Mom? You're going?" Not that he wasn't happy about it, but she hadn't said anything when they'd had dinner last night; he hoped he hadn't said anything to push her out. Yeah, he wanted her to go, but he wanted it to be her idea; he wanted her to understand he loved seeing her but that when she stayed at his place it was an imposition.

With any luck, she'd let him put her up in a hotel the next time she came.

"Come eat your breakfast, dear," she told him, completely ignoring his question. "It will get cold, and after working half the night you need your energy."

"It wasn't that late... PIs have weird hours." He did his best detecting work after dark; it was the nature of the job and the things he investigated. He did as she asked, though, hitching up his sweat pants and wandering into the kitchen.

"The coffee is fresh." She was wearing a light blue sweater set, and she had her lipstick on already. She looked like she was ready to go and take on the day, even if she was busily filling a plate for him.

"Thanks, Mom." He poured himself a mug and sat.
"Wow. This looks amazing." Bacon and eggs and toast

and hash browns. There was no way she'd found the ingredients for this in his fridge.

"You know, I'd worry a lot less if you had real food in your cupboards." She smiled at him, though, and sat down across from him. "Even just the occasional vegetable."

"I do a lot of take-out -- there's vegetables in that. Especially the Chinese stuff." He started eating, unable to keep himself from all but shoveling it in. She knew exactly how he liked his eggs and his bacon; no surprise there -- she had been the one to cook it for him the first twenty years or so of his life.

She ate quietly, sitting there in his kitchen. She wasn't even giving him the idle chatter or slightly nagging conversation they'd had for the past couple of days. It was a little weird, but the food was good.

He sat back with a satisfied sigh when he was done and grabbed his coffee mug. "That was great. Thanks."

"You're welcome, dear." She smiled at him and finished her toast. "I'd like it if you would come home for a visit in a few months. Maybe for the holidays?"

"It'll depend on what's going on with work." On whether or not Jesse could come with him. God, he'd have to tell her if Jesse couldn't. They'd never tried to get out of town, for all he knew it wasn't a problem. "But I'll see what I can do." A couple days to make her happy couldn't hurt, right?

She smiled and sipped her coffee. "Good. Well, then. I guess I've done what I set out to do, aside from the matter of finding you a boyfriend, but we don't talk about that. It makes you so grumpy."

"What exactly had you set out to do when you came here, aside from the boyfriend thing?" His mother had come with an agenda? Well, of course she had.

"Well, I had to reassure myself, of course." She gave him a long look with steel behind it. "A mother needs to know that her son is both happy and fulfilled. I saw your office, I met your secretary, and your friend. As odd as Madam Yanya is, she seems to be a sincere sort of person, and she spoke relatively well of you. Honestly, anyway. If you're hard working enough to both help her and be a pain in her butt, you're doing okay, I suppose."

He chuckled. "Yanya's as much a pain in my butt as I'm a pain in hers." He took a few mouthfuls of coffee. "You didn't have to come all this way just to see me, though. I keep telling you I'm fine. Every time you call."

"That's hardly the same." She actually rolled her eyes at him. "Now, if you would only get a laptop so we could do video chats, that might convince me. Some things need to be seen. Also, a mother likes to hug her boy once every few years." That last was a little sharp, her voice making the words precise.

He reached out and squeezed her hand. "I'm sorry, Mom. I don't mean to be a lousy son."

"Tsk." She gave his hand a pat. "Don't be so dramatic. You're a fine son -- who will be at home for Christmas." She nodded firmly and stood up. "I'm going to leave you with the dishes, I'm afraid. There should be a cab downstairs for me any minute."

It was just like her, to go as abruptly as she'd shown up in the first place. He stood and went over to hug her hard. "I love you, Mom."

"I know, dear." She hugged him back and offered her cheek for a kiss. "I love you, too. Make sure to eat a real meal at least four times a week, okay? Get the door for me; there's a good boy."

"I will, Mom." He didn't offer the opinion that his idea of a real meal and hers were probably not the same thing. "You want me to bring down your bag?"

"No, no." She wrinkled her nose and pulled her suitcase toward the door. "You really need to shower before you go to the office. Bye!" She vanished into the hall with that parting shot, and was gone.

He sniffed -- he didn't smell that bad. Shaking his head, he closed the door, feeling a little bemused, like he'd been caught in the wind or something.

Then it occurred to him that she was gone. His apartment was once again mom-free. "Hey, Jesse? Did you hear?"

"Hear what?" There was a voice, but there wasn't a ghost to match it. Just a voice, possibly coming from the couch.

He headed for the couch, frowning. "Where are you?"

Jesse sat up, struggling out of the guts of the couch. He looked a little confused. "What's going on?"

"My mother's gone." DB grinned and waited for Jesse to wake up properly and figure it out. Had Jesse been there overnight? Lying in the couch under him? Actually sleeping?

Jesse looked around, his eyes narrowed. "Define 'gone'. She didn't die did she? I can't take another one. She'd stick like glue, man. How awkward would that be?"

"Don't even think that, man! She's left -- gone home. Jeesh." He shivered at the thought, both of her death and of her haunting them.

Jesse's eyes widened and he stood up, then moved a step forward so bits of him weren't in the couch any more.

"Really? How come? When? She couldn't leave a day earlier so we could have sex at home instead of sneaking around like kids?"

"I don't know, the sneaking around like kids worked out pretty good." He grinned and stretched, his sweatpants slipping a little.

Jesse's gaze was suddenly riveted on DB's abs and hips. "Yeah, it did. There's a lot to be said about having an apartment all to ourselves, though. Don't you think?"

"There is. And Sandra's not expecting me before noon..."

Jesse blinked twice at him and stared around, his eyes moving quickly. "Bed? Couch? Kitchen table?"

Oh, God, his lover was predictable. DB loved it. "Bed, Jesse. We haven't been able to since, well, it's been a while."

"Uh-huh, yeah." Nodding, Jesse tugged at his belt, then vanished. "Hurry up!" his voice called from the bedroom.

Laughing, DB didn't dawdle. He'd only just thought about not wanting to do it on the sheets his mother had slept on when he reached the bedroom and realized that she'd not only made the bed, she'd changed the sheets first.

Jesse was looking at the bed, too, though he was still undressing. "At least it's inviting, huh?"

"Uh-huh. Now we just need to forget that my mother was ever here."

"I think sex should help with that." Grinning, naked, Jesse sprawled on the bed and touched himself, looking pretty solid and real.

"Oh, yeah. Just you and me and the bed." DB started shucking his clothing, watching Jesse touch himself.

"Things were pretty rushed last night." One of Jesse's hands rubbed over DB's tummy, then cupped his balls. "Hot, sexy, fun. But rushed."

The tingles started in his balls where Jesse touched him, but working their way out over his whole body. "It was good."

"But we can take our time now, huh?" Jesse's voice dropped low and both hands touched, insubstantial and charged with whatever it was that made Jesse feel like Jesse. "At least until you lose control and throw yourself at me."

"Oh, I think it's far more likely you'll lose control and throw yourself at me."

The tingles all went away as Jesse lay back and reached his hands up to touch the headboard. "Try me," he said, laughing. "Drive me crazy."

He'd known Jesse would take it as a challenge. DB slowed down his undressing. "I do believe I shall."

"Oh, look at you with the good grammar." Jesse was wiggling on the bed. "Tease me, then."

"I am." He shrugged off the T-shirt he'd slept in and hooked a thumb under his waistband.

Jesse watched and wiggled again. "Tease me with more naked. Okay? Okay."

DB dropped his hands to his sides. "Who's in charge of this teasing?"

"Me?"

He snorted. "Try again."

"Uh, you? You're still dressed, though. You should fix that." Jesse smiled up at him and looked hopeful.

"I'll get there. And as long as you remember that I'm in charge, we'll be just fine. The harder you coach, the slower I'll go." He gave Jesse a wicked grin.

Jesse's mouth snapped shut and his cock lifted high like a little salute.

Laughing again, DB slid his thumbs along the waistband of his sweats, teasing the right side down a bit.

"Oh, hip. I like hip." Jesse nodded, apparently to himself, and licked his lower lip. "Hip is good."

"You like this one better?" He pulled the right side slightly lower down, and then let it go back up, and pulled down the left side. "Or this side?"

"I like whichever side I get to lick."

"You don't get to do anything but watch yet." He turned around and slid the sweatpants down far enough to expose the top of his crack.

It was funny. Before Jesse, he'd have never teased like this, making a show of undressing. But with Jesse being a ghost and them not always being able to touch, he had to do things different ways.

"Someday I'm gonna lick there, too." Jesse voice held a promise.

"Uh-huh." DB bent, pushing his ass back toward Jesse a little and brought the sweats down a little farther, not exposing his hole -- not yet -- but giving Jesse a taste of what was coming.

"More, DB. Or come closer, or something."

"It's called teasing for a reason, Jesse." He pulled the sweats back up and turned, hands on his hips, trying to contain his smile.

"Hey!" Jesse looked indignant.

Chuckling, he pulled the left side of his sweats down again, and then a little farther, showing a lot of pubic hair, but still keeping his cock and balls hidden for now.

"That's better." Seemingly mollified, Jesse settled back again and leered at DB's groin. "Yum."

That had him snapping the waistband back up. "You're supposed to remember that you're not in charge here."

"That's a lot harder to do than you seem to think," Jesse said seriously. He did shut up, though, and fluttered his eyelashes.

"No, I'm pretty sure I know how hard this is for you. That's half the fun, you know?" He turned again, this time exposing his whole ass, hooking the waistband down beneath it. In front, his hard cock was stuck beneath the waistband, the sensation almost painful.

Jesse whimpered. "Can I touch yet?"

"Nope. We're not touching, I'm teasing."

"DB." Jesse sounded like he was one shaky breath away from begging. "Come on."

He turned around and pointed at his trapped prick. "I got stuck."

"I'd love to help you with that, but I'm not allowed to touch." Jesse's hands were still on the headboard, though his own cock was straining for the ceiling. His knuckles, interestingly enough, were white where they curled around the wood. Apparently Jesse was pretty solid.

Eager to test that theory, but also loving the hell out of making him wait, DB carefully unstuck his cock and then slowly pulled his sweats down to just beneath his balls. His own cock was pointing at the ceiling, his balls full and aching as he wriggled, making everything jiggle.

Jesse whimpered, his eyes wide and pupils dilated. His tongue darted out to lick at his lower lip, and when he spoke his voice was tight and rough. "Keep going. Please."

"This way?" DB started pulling the sweats back up, though he didn't cover the tip of his cock -- he was not getting it stuck like that again, especially given how sensitive it had become.

"No!" Jesse didn't so much freeze in place as he did thrust forward with his whole body until he was arched on the bed, body as stiff as his erection. He stayed there for a moment, breathing hard, then sank back to the bed. "Want you."

"I know. I want you, too." DB pushed his sweats down his thighs and then wriggled some more until they slid right around his ankles and he could step out of them. Beads of need formed at the tip of his cock, making the head wet.

Jesse let go of the headboard and flexed his fingers. He wasn't holding himself still any longer; his legs were restless as they moved on the sheets, and he didn't seem to know where to put his hands. "Come here? Please?"

"Yeah, I think I made my point." Although, honestly, he wasn't exactly sure what that point was anymore.

"Sure, sure." Jesse was nodding, but DB doubted if he had any idea, either. One of Jesse's hands wrapped tight around DB's wrists and he pulled, hard, dragging DB

down to the mattress. Yep, Jesse was solid. He was getting better at that, almost daily it seemed.

DB didn't even have his eyes shut and it was working. He was on top of Jesse and they were rubbing together and God, kisses were good when there was more than just tingles to them.

Jesse kissed him back almost frantically, licking through his mouth and moaning. One ankle was hooked around DB's calf, and Jesse was moving against him, leaving wet streaks where his cock rubbed.

DB slid his hand down and wrapped it around both of them. He started tugging, squeezing and jacking them both. God, Jesse was hot. Solid in his hand.

Hands grabbed at his ass, Jesse exploring and kneading. "Please, DB. More." Finger tips brushed over DB's hole, maybe by accident, maybe by design.

"You wanna ride me?" He didn't wait for an answer, rolling them to put Jesse on top.

"God." Jesse shuddered on top of him, then straddled DB's hips and looked down at him. "Bed is better. Yeah." He leaned forward, his hips angling.

"Uh-huh. You need lube?" DB was reaching for it, body stretching, back arching. He took his time retrieving it.

"I have no idea. I haven't been fucked since 1985. It wouldn't hurt."

"Given how solid you are, yeah." He grinned up at Jesse. They were solid enough to do this. Shit, don't think about it, don't think about it. He needed to just go with it, thinking was always a mistake.

Jesse had to be thinking the same way, because he lifted one foot to plant it on the bed beside DB's ribs, opening himself wide. He reached back at the same time and curled a hand around DB's cock, stroking him slowly. "Slick me up, DB. I want this in me."

"You got it." He slicked up his fingers and reached behind Jesse's balls. He kept his eyes on Jesse's face, wanting to see the expression that the sensations evoked.

Jesse looked back, the hand on DB's cock faltering as DB's finger tips began to move over him, dipping in and spreading lube. "Oh," Jesse whispered, his voice sounding slightly stunned. "Oh, God."

"No, that's the hand of DB, not the hand of..." His words faded into a groan as he pushed two fingers deep. Jesse was tight and so unbelievably hot.

"*God*," Jesse insisted. "Oh, *God*." His eyes were still open wide, but he probably wasn't seeing much.

DB moved his fingers in and out, spread them apart to stretch and Jesse lost the ability to speak, but he made noise anyway. A deep, loud groan filled the bedroom and Jesse fell forward to brace himself on his hands, his arms locked straight and his legs spread wide. The angle was all wrong, but Jesse didn't seem to care. DB got

another finger in there, doing his best to make Jesse even wilder.

"*Fuck*." Jesse found his voice and a new word. He wasn't breathing evenly, but it didn't matter. He wasn't doing anything evenly. His hips twitched and pushed, apparently at random moments, and he gasped out little moans between panted breaths.

Okay, DB was going to come just from watching, so he yanked his fingers out. "Get on me."

The whimper that time was a whine, but Jesse moved back, his ass swaying as he tried to get to where he needed to be. He groped back for DB's dick, found it, and aimed. "Push," he ordered, already sinking back.

He could do that. Moaning, DB dug his heels into the mattress and pushed up. Jesse came down on him, tight and slick, and the sound of air whooshing out of Jesse's lungs in a long exhale rushed past DB's ears. Once seated, though, Jesse didn't move. He didn't inhale, either, which was weird but not worrying, since Jesse didn't actually need to breathe anyway.

"Gotta move, babe." He had to.

"Okay," Jesse whispered. "Okay. Just... let me--" He moved his hands, putting one on DB's chest to brace himself. "Okay." Jesse nodded, his eyes a little glassy and out of focus. The muscles around DB's cock started to flutter.

"God. God." He started repeating Jesse's litany as he began to move, dragging out of Jesse and then pushing back in again.

Jesse threw back his head and started moving with DB, using his hand as much as his hips to get some force behind his thrusts. Jesse fucked like he had nothing to lose. His free hand was curled around his cock, squeezing but not stroking. DB added his hand to Jesse's, squeezing the hot cock as he rocked up and up.

Jesse gasped and swore, and on the next deep thrust of DB's cock Jesse sat back and rocked, circling his hips in tight rings. "Oh, fuck, yes. Yes. There." His cock throbbed under DB's hand.

"Yeah." He could tell, the way Jesse's body tightened rhythmically around his cock. Everything started moving faster after that.

Jesse's hand was fast, his hips were fast, the panting turned into grunts, and Jesse was coming apart around him, on top of him. Jesse's cock was slick and his ass was tight, and just when DB was sure that one of them was going to yell bloody murder, Jesse started to come.

Already tight around his cock, that made Jesse even tighter, and DB bucked and bucked as he came hard.

"DB!" Jesse was still coming, his juice flowing as he shook and jerked. His arm bent and he rested on top of DB, slick with come and sweat, panting hard and trembling. "Oh, my God."

"No, it's still me." He laughed, feeling silly, feeling good all the way through.

Jesse snorted a laugh and twitched again. "You'd make a horrible god. Too many bad habits. Cheating at chess, smoking, cussing."

"I dunno, aren't most gods pretty much just really powerful teenagers?"

"You watch too many movies." Jesse shifted slightly and mumbled something about reading more books. He was still breathing heavily.

"Hey! I have read books -- Zeus was *always* in trouble for banging women." He sighed as Jesse started to sink into him, and rolled over slightly, because that was just weird.

"I'm not a woman," Jesse pointed out. He rolled, too, but didn't say anything about why. "As you well know." He lay on his side next to DB and grinned at him. "We did it. Ahead of schedule, too. Mind you, it wasn't over the kitchen table..."

"There you go, you still have something for your birthday." He rolled onto his side to look at Jesse. "And I know you're not a woman, trust me. I just meant that Zeus was a bad boy."

"Well, you've got that part down." Jesse's grin grew even wider. "Good boys don't fuck like that."

He stuck out his tongue. "When I'm good, I'm good, but when I'm bad, I'm better."

"And smug, too." Jesse rolled to his back and stretched. "Ow. Nice." If he kept grinning like that his cheeks would hurt.

"My junk is still inside you, eh? That's a little... I don't know." It was strange to think about. How didn't even begin to make any sense.

"Weird, huh? Don't think about it." Jesse waved a hand in the air. "Nice way to spend a morning."

"Okay, no thinking. I can do that." He was good at that.

"Too bad we have to go to work. Call in sick to Sandra. Tell her you're staying in bed all day."

"I can stay 'til noon, and then we need to get to work." It was tempting, but now that his mom was gone, he and Jesse had all the time in the world.

"I'm going to go with you. And sit on Sandra's desk and tell her all about it. She won't hear, but I need to tell someone, so she's it. You can just sit and look smug at your desk and make her wonder. By the way, did you ever get more information from Joe about this big game? Like, if any big guns from out of town are going to be there? With actual guns? We don't want our client getting killed while he's losing his mother's money." Jesse, apparently, babbled after getting well and truly laid.

"Jesse. Shut up and go to sleep or something like everyone does after sex, because I am not calling Joe right at this moment."

"Good Lord." Jesse looked a little horrified at the thought of DB calling Joe while naked. "Smoke for us, will you?"

Laughing, he reached over, but his cigarettes weren't there. He groaned. "My mother must have moved them. We can just pretend for now, 'k?" Because he was cozy and comfy and didn't want to get up to go looking for his pack.

"Mmmkay." Jesse yawned and curled up a little. "Little nap, then work." He closed his eyes. "Short nap."

"Uh-huh. I'm sure you'll wake me before too long."

He closed his own eyes, body feeling heavy and sated as he drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Eighteen

Jesse had been told not to pace, so he wasn't. Apparently it made DB feel weird to know that Jesse was pacing back and forth in front of Sandra when she couldn't see him. Jesse didn't get why that was creepy, but DB asked him not to do it, so Jesse stopped.

Jesse was compliant when recently fucked, something that made both him and DB grin a lot.

He thought maybe Sandra knew that *something* was up, but she had really good manners and didn't ask any questions. She just went about her day, calling in the client to pick up the proof of cheating spouse and doing something complicated on the computer.

The meeting with the client had eaten up a lot of the afternoon, between the anger over the cheating -- which was already known, but apparently the anger was still an issue -- and then the shock of seeing it in photos. DB had finally had Sandra run out to get doughnuts. Jesse didn't think it would work, but it had.

The client had finally left, clutching the envelope and pausing only long enough to settle the account before calling a lawyer without even clearing the door.

Finally, though, they were back on track with the actual big money case.

"All right," Jesse said from where he was perched on his chair. "I'm going to find and keep Duke's mom away from the club. You're going to go to the club to keep an

eye on the game, right?" As a plan it was easy. Full of flaws, but easy to recite, anyway.

"Yep. Sit at the bar and try not to get too toasted and make sure nobody knifes Duke in the back or anything."

Jesse nodded. "Or you. No one gets to knife you, either. Now, if I can't find his mother I'll make sure to check in with you frequently, just in case." He was going to go bonkers, popping and out of places, but if Duke's mother took to hiding from him things could get interesting.

"No one's going to knife the guy at the bar boozing it up and ogling the waitresses." DB said things like that on purpose, Jesse was sure of it.

"I might." Jesse made a show of glaring at him. "Okay," he said as he stood up. "I'm off to hunt for Mrs. McGibbon. When are you heading to the club?"

DB glanced at his watch. "I guess I'll head over soon-ish. I'd rather get there before Duke, get myself established as a barstool boozier before the game starts. It's hours away, but I have a feeling that there's going to be lots of card games going on before the big one."

"You don't think he's going to care if you're there, right?" Jesse frowned. "After all, you're working for him. He won't care as long as he gets to play his cards."

"*He* won't care. Hell, he might not even notice me. I don't want any of Rath's goons noticing me either, though. You know?"

"Oh, I know." Jesse nodded firmly. "No dying. Dying bad. Got that?"

"I'm planning to make you hang around in limbo for a long, long time, Jesse."

"Awesome." Jesse rounded the desk and brushed his mouth over DB's. "See you there, later on."

DB licked his lips and nodded. "Don't let the old bat make you crazy."

Jesse refrained from pointing out that he was already a little crazy from her and merely nodded. Then he left, putting himself out on the sidewalk and pausing only long enough to congratulate himself for not materializing in a fire hydrant.

Reasonably sure that Duke's mother wasn't going to be hanging out on the streets, he started moving around town, combining walking and simply putting himself in other places. It was always a little disorienting to just pop into a new location, and Jesse had learned from experience that if he did it too much he got something not unlike a hangover. He could move quickly though, racing around from place to place much faster than the living could walk.

He swung by Duke's house, thinking that it would be a reasonable place to start, but she wasn't there. The house seemed to be just as it was the last time, without any signs of great distress, thrown drinks or big battles. It also looked like the maid had been through, the carpet

lined with vacuum tracks. Duke sure as hell hadn't done that.

Jesse then took a wander through the shopping district, taking a guess at what kind of stores and boutiques she might have liked. He avoided the young fashions and headed right for the jewelry stores and high-end clothes that his grandmother had favored, suddenly struck by how long it had been since he'd thought of her. She hadn't stuck around after she'd died, and he was glad.

Mrs. McGibbon wasn't shopping, though Jesse did spot a couple of other ghosts, one of whom kept trying to steal the same pair of earrings over and over, screaming in frustration when she couldn't pick them up. He debated having the whole "sorry, you're dead" talk with her, but figured DB would probably have a fit if he brought home another stray, and left instead.

Yanya's store was packed with customers and Jesse only got a wave before Yanya had to return to answering questions and taking money. When he looked in the back room there wasn't anyone or anything there, and his shouted call to Yanya was met with a shake of the head and a dirty look. Duke's mom wasn't there, and Yanya wasn't looking to change that. Jesse nodded and fled.

He walked through the park, thinking hard. Where else would she go? She wasn't home, shopping, or annoying the living who could see her. She didn't trust anyone, and she wasn't happy.

Jesse groaned and turned around so fast that he walked through a young mother pushing a stroller. Chances were pretty good that Duke's mom would have lived up to her end of the bargain if things had happened right then, in the moments after they'd made their deal. But she'd had time to think, to calm down and to get stubborn again. She didn't trust Jesse and she sure as hell didn't trust her son.

Jesse hoped that DB wasn't having too bad of a time at the club and put himself there, fast. Maybe there was still time to capture her attention and keep her away from the game.

DB was at the bar, looking like he was about to explode.

Duke's crazy mother was at the table behind Duke, cursing and shouting at him.

Jesse winced, gave DB half a wave and headed over to the table. Duke, at least, seemed to be currently oblivious to his mother, all of his attention on the cards in front of him. "Um. Hey, there." Okay, so it wasn't a suave opening, but what else was he supposed to do?

Her eyes flashed to him and she looked startled for a moment. "You."

"Me." Jesse nodded. "So. We have a problem, huh?"

"He's a stupid, stupid man. He's going to lose all my money!"

Jesse sighed. "One, you're dead and can't use it anyway. And two, maybe he won't. Maybe he's a lot better at this than you think."

She snorted.

Jesse pretty much agreed with her, but Duke was the client, after all. And DB was looking to him to save the day. "Give him a chance," he coaxed. "Come with me. Sit by the window; we'll watch. Just for a while, okay? Then we can talk a bit more."

"What on earth makes you think I'm interested in talking to *you*?" God, she was snotty.

"Well, who else are you going to talk to? It's not like anyone you know can hear you. Do you want to spend eternity babbling at yourself?" He shrugged and stepped back. "Whatever. I'll be over here, watching your son play cards." It was a gamble of his own, but he'd had just about enough of her, and it wasn't like her son was any better.

She looked back at Duke and then to Jesse then slowly followed him over to the stools next to DB, which were currently unoccupied by the living.

Jesse gave DB a small smile. "How's he doing?" he asked hopefully. Now that the yelling had stopped, Jesse was starting to pick up on the tension in the room.

"So-so. I'm worried they're letting him win a few before going for the jugular. At least his mother's not leaning over him anymore."

"Of course they are." Jesse looked around, wishing he could drink. He needed one. "Where's all the girls?" Usually there were a lot more ladies hanging around, hoping for fortune and fame. This game seemed to be a lot more serious, though.

"Just a couple of waitresses tonight." DB held his glass in front of his face and talked softly. "I think some of the players over there are criminals."

Jesse snickered. "Dude, they all are. Except for our client, of course." Duke's mother looked like she was about to start screaming again. "And that guy over there in the corner. He's a cop." Jesse'd seen him before, years ago, back before he'd met DB. A shiver ran down Jesse's spine. "When was the last time you talked to Joe?" he asked casually.

"I think I should call him. Not here, though. I'm going to go take a leak." DB got up and feigned unsteadiness as he headed for the can. At least Jesse hoped it was feigned.

"He'll be right back," Jesse told Duke's mom. "Why don't we move over to the wall a bit? I hate when people try to sit through me." He did, but he really wanted to do was find out if the cop was wearing an ear piece. Surveillance of a big game was one thing, but if they were going to be stuck in the middle of a raid he wanted a heads up, if he could get it.

She just stayed where she was and blinked at him. "What's going on? Who's that man you were talking to?"

"He's a guy I know." Jesse shrugged and walk slowly toward where the cop was sitting, hoping she'd just drift along with him. "He follows card games. I was hoping he'd know how your boy is playing, so I could set your mind at ease." It was a really good thing his grandma had moved on, really. She'd whup his ass for all the lying he was doing.

"He wasn't even watching the game. No wait, he was pretending not to. Why was he pretending not to watch the game?"

"So the other guys won't notice him paying attention?" Jesse tried to look like he was scoffing. "He seems to think it gives him an edge if he can study the players without them knowing. Did you know that people place bets on poker games? Honest to God. Gambling on gambling." He tsked like he didn't know what the world was coming to.

She pshawed, the sound almost a snort. "It's a waste of good money. It's a waste of *my* money. I'm going to make him stop before there isn't any left."

Oh, great. Jesse sighed to himself and tried to come up with a way to stop her from getting wound up again. He stopped moving, still unable to see if the cop in the corner was wired or had one of those ear things in, and looked at her. "Okay, let me ask you this. You're dead. He's alive. How do you want him to spend your money? I mean, if he was a good son, what would he be doing? Do you even care or are you still pissy 'cause you're

dead and he's got the money? You could have changed your will, you know."

"I would have, if I'd known it was going to be all about booze and women and gambling! He's supposed to be taking care of my estate -- making it grow."

At least the conversation was distracting her from the game.

Jesse nodded thoughtfully and glanced at the hallway DB had retreated down. No sign of him yet. The card game was apparently progressing as card games do; no one had a knife out, anyway. "So, he should be investing, buying stocks and that kind of thing?"

"Yes! Finally, someone with some sense."

"Does he know how to do that?" Jesse asked her, his head tilted to the side. "A man can lose an entire fortune by clicking the wrong deal, if he doesn't know what he's doing."

"That's what brokers are for -- you don't know anything about having money, do you?" She was much shorter than him, but was somehow still managing to look down her nose at him.

"Lady, I was the epitome of the eighties generation. I was all about investing." He looked right back at her, trying to look as if he'd invested in anything other than suspect party drugs. "So, does he know a broker? These days everyone's online, doing it for themselves. Or you

know. Playing the odds at a card table for a faster, bigger pay off."

"You see? He's wasting my money on the off-chance he'll get lucky!" She threw up her hands. "And I'm supposed to just walk away and let him? Let him lose everything and have whatever's left stolen by some hussy?"

"Well, what else are you going to do with it? You're *dead*." Jesse could almost feel his patience giving way. "You should be happy he's having such a great time!"

"Why should he get to have a good time with it when I never did? It's not like he earned it!" She was beginning to get shrill again.

"And whose fault is it that you didn't have fun? Huh?" Jesse's temper snapped. "Give it up, you old bat. Maybe if you'd been a nice person when you were alive he'd be a better person, too. Takes one to raise one. Do us all a favor and move yourself right along to the afterlife." He deliberately turned his back to her and went to find DB.

He could hear her gasping behind him, but she didn't say anything.

Jesse ignored her and went down the hall. "DB? Where are you? Did you find out anything?" He stuck his head through a door and saw only a busy kitchen. No DB in there. When he pulled his head out and started farther down the hall, he found DB, striding back toward him. "Anything from Joe?" he asked, hoping that the main

room would stay nice and quiet. He didn't want to tell DB how he'd just pissed off the client's mother.

"He says they're staking the place out, but nobody's looking to take anyone down tonight. This game is just the tip of the iceberg with Rath. They're trying to get someone on the inside and using the game." DB made a face. "Now I'm going to spend the rest of the night trying to figure out which guy at the table is the plant." DB looked around. "Where's mommy-dearest?"

"Uh, out there." Jesse hoped he looked innocent and pleasant instead of crazed and panicked. "Shall we go watch and hope Duke doesn't get shanked?"

"Christ. I guess we have to." DB rolled his head on his neck and headed back toward the main room and the game.

Jesse went with him, relieved that they weren't about to get caught in a sting, but a little wary of ghost activity. He was already regretting his loss of temper, though it had felt good to tell her off. He was also sure he'd told the truth, but that probably wasn't very helpful to Duke.

"I can't ditch the feeling that something's going on." DB sat on his stool and motioned for another drink.

Jesse nodded and looked around. "It feels weird." Tense and ugly is what it felt like. No women around, no music. Serious gambling, a cop in the corner, and one at the table. "Is it possible that Rath knows that he's being watched up close and personal by Vice?"

On the plus side, though, Duke's mother was nowhere to be seen.

DB shrugged and held his drink casually, hiding his mouth. "No idea."

Jesse's feeling of discomfort grew stronger. He wandered over to the table to see if he could hear anything helpful, though he didn't hold out much hope. None of the five men sitting there seemed to be big talkers. Maybe that was why Jesse felt so uneasy; they were all so silent, their faces blank. He hadn't had any idea that poker could be so menacing.

DB asked for another drink and for an order of potato skins, smiling and flirting with the hostess as she stopped at the bar for an order of drinks. Their voices seemed really loud in the tense room.

What the hell was going on?

Jesse walked a circle around the table, looking at what cards he could see; several of the players kept their cards face down, only lifting the corners to see what they held, and Jesse wasn't good enough at ghost tricks to see through table tops.

Plus, he had no idea how to play poker, so aside from "all face cards is probably good", he was lost.

Duke was sitting straight in his chair, though, and Jesse could see tension in his face and in the set of Duke's shoulders. No one was speaking, waiting for one of the players to make a decision.

"Hey, DB," Jesse called as he rounded the edge of the table furthest from the bar. "I'm pretty sure Duke is the only one without a gun. Don't get yourself shot."

DB twitched, which Jesse figured meant he'd heard.

The weird tension hadn't dissipated at all by the time DB had finished his food. It definitely felt like something was up or was going down or however you wanted to put it.

It meant trouble and Duke probably shouldn't have been there because he was going to get stuck in the middle of it, if he wasn't careful. Maybe even if he was.

Jesse paced while the game resumed and went on, the pauses growing more frequent as the players took their time. The soft voices joined with the click and clatter of poker chips being moved around, and by the size of the pot in the middle of the table they were playing for high stakes. Very high.

Two of the players dropped out, and it was just Duke, Rath, and a large man who looked like Jesse had always imagined a mob boss to look -- which meant, of course, he was probably the cop. Certainly the cop in the corner was paying closer attention, his muscles tight like compressed springs.

"Um, you might want to leave," Jesse said to DB. "I have a very bad feeling."

DB sighed and waited until he'd paced back next to him at the bar. "Any idea on how we could get Duke to drop out and come with us?"

"He's not moving." Jesse shrugged one shoulder. "He's in this all the way, and..." He sighed to go along with the shrug. "I think he's put everything he's got on the table. All of it."

DB shot him a look, mouth hanging open. "Fuck."

"I really, really think you should get out of here." Jesse pointed to the door. "I love you and I don't want you here." There. That was clear and to the point. It might even work.

"I'm not leaving, Jesse. I know how to stay out of the way if the cops decide to crash this party."

Rats. Jesse tried looking masterful and in charge, pulling himself up to his full height. DB had just begun to smile at him, clearly amused, when a loud, horrible scream filled the room, making Jesse curl into himself instead, his hands going to his ears. He spun around, looking for the source, and watched in horror as Duke's mother flew out of the middle of the poker table, the pile of chips suddenly looking more like a volcano.

There was a mad scramble as chairs scraped back, no one knowing what was going on. Chaos -- in the form of one mightily pissed off ghost -- took over as chips and cards flew around, being flung by the fistful as she screeched at Duke.

"Idiot!" she screamed, throwing another handful of chips at him. She'd already cleared out the deck of cards, some of which were still fluttering to the floor. "*Useless* idiot!"

For his part, Duke was as stunned as the rest of them, though he wasn't brandishing a gun. He did, however, seem to see that he was the only one unarmed, and tried to get under the table to hide.

DB grabbed his drink and moved to the end of the bar, up against the wall, eyes on the action. In his hand was his phone, flipped open, though he hadn't dialed yet.

Jesse stared around with wide eyes. The cop in the corner was talking fast, his voice low; clearly he had been wired, after all. One of the poker players was heading to the door, Duke's momma was raging and picking up even more chips to throw around, and Duke was almost in a fetal position. Rath was barking out orders, one waiter was going pale and crossing himself, and Jesse was pretty sure there would be gunfire within moments.

"What the hell is going on here?" Rath yelled, ducking as an ashtray sailed through the air, followed by his cards. "Someone get the cash!"

"Oh, boy." Jesse waded in, trying to stop some of the flying debris by going right to the source. "Okay, you can stop now," he yelled. "You made your point."

She didn't listen or maybe didn't hear. The table itself began to shudder.

It was about then that the cops burst in, half a dozen men, guns drawn, yelling for everyone to "Freeze!"

That didn't faze Momma at all, her tirade continuing.

It didn't stop one of the guys with a gun, either, and as cards flew at him he yelled, his arm coming up to protect his face. He had a gun in that hand, though, and Rath, maybe seeing what a bad move *that* was, tackled him. Together they plowed into the shaking table, almost landing on Duke and going right through Duke's mother.

Jesse started to laugh. He couldn't help it. They'd utterly lost control of the case, if they'd ever had it.

DB chuckled, looking unconcerned and working on his drink.

The police were moving quickly, looking baffled and wary as things continued to be tossed about, cards and chips appearing to spontaneously erupt from flat surfaces. They rounded up the poker players, helped by the cop from the corner who was just as confused as they were.

Jesse wished Yanya was there to enjoy the show.

Duke, on the other hand, wasn't amused, nor was he confused. "Mother!" he yelled while he was extracted from under the table. "Mother you stop this right now!"

"Whoops," Jesse said to DB. "I see a psych eval in his future."

"Might keep him away from Rath, though, if Rath thinks Duke's a nutter."

"True. And he didn't get to lose his mom's money, so we might still get paid. Maybe." Jesse was watching her wind down. "Maybe not. I don't think she's going to happily just move on to whatever's next, you know?"

"Yeah. He's a bit of a jerk, but he doesn't deserve this. I'll have him come in on Monday, talk about what all his options are and tell him we don't want to keep taking his money without giving him results."

Jesse nodded. "I'll see what I can do with her, but between you and me I doubt I'll get very far. Yanya might have some ideas other than forcing her on."

The police were having an easier time now that the poker chips were mostly staying down, but they were still looking wild around the eyes and Duke was still pleading with the mother none of them could see.

"See if you can get her the fuck out of here. I'll see what I can do to help Duke once things start clearing out."

Jesse nodded and moved forward. "I'll find you later." He had no idea how, exactly, he was going to get her out of there, but he'd try. "Are you done yet?" he asked politely, watching her scowl at Duke.

"Not even close -- he's an idiot! A terrible son! How dare he gamble away *all* my money?" She screamed at him, the look in her eyes pure crazy.

"Well, you stopped him," Jesse pointed out. "And you scared the hell out of him. I don't think he'll try to do that again. Plus, look at the way everyone's looking at him. He won't find *anyone* to play cards with after this."

Her mouth snapped closed and for a long moment she continued to glare at him. Then she looked around, face calming some as she took in the scene. "He does look like he's gone off his rocker, doesn't he?" The smirk that painted her face looked rather ugly.

"Congratulations. You drove your own son crazy." Jesse loathed her with every bit of his being, right then.

"Mother of the year."

"I saved my money, though. It was always worth more than he was." She looked him up and down like he was pond scum. "I can't imagine you brought your mother much pride."

Jesse stared at her. "My mother loved me. She actually missed me when I died, and didn't have to hire someone to make sure I was not only dead but dead and gone." He shook his head; there wasn't any point in arguing with her. "Please. Let's leave so the police can close up the gambling ring without being hit by flying ashtrays. You did what you set out to do."

"I'm certainly not eager to stay in this den of iniquity." With one last look at her son, curled up on the floor and

begging her to stop, she turned up her nose and disappeared.

Jesse blinked. He hadn't expected her to just vanish like that, though it sure sounded like she wasn't going to come back in the immediate future. He turned to look at DB. "I don't suppose you're going to be able to just walk out of here, huh?"

"Nope. I'll just sit out of the way 'til they come talk to me. You can keep me company or whatever. Either way, it's going to be a long night."

Chapter Nineteen

DB waited and watched, wondering if he was going to need to call Joe in to vouch for him. This was just the kind of thing some cops would love to link him up to in an, "aha, we knew you were no good and now we have you consorting with known mobsters" kind of way.

At least Duke's mother had disappeared, although he'd have liked to have seen the cops try to figure out what was going on if she'd stayed and continued to wreak invisible havoc.

DB was going to have to remember to tell Jesse about that thought; he'd be amused.

Jesse was giving him a slightly sour look. "You're smiling like you heard a joke. I wish you were able to share; I could do with a laugh about now. How much longer are they going to keep you here?" It was his bored voice.

DB had no clue, and he was damn bored himself. Of course, that was all part and parcel of being a private eye. There was a lot of hurry up and wait time. He'd already given his statement, and nobody'd been overly interested in him after that. He had a half a mind to go talk to Duke, but that would definitely make the detective leading the investigation wonder exactly what his business here was. He offered Jesse a half smile, so Jesse'd know he wasn't being ignored.

"Wanna sneak into the bathroom and mess around?" Jesse's default mood of "when bored have sex" seemed to be working just fine.

DB just rolled his eyes. He could see it, him ducking into the bathroom, someone coming in and finding him having very enthusiastic sex all by himself. Yeah, that would work.

Jesse grinned at him. "Yeah, that's what I thought. Oh, hey. Duke's stopped talking about his mother. Is that good or bad? Also, what do you think they did with all the money and stuff? I mean, they can't actually keep it, can they?" Jesse wandered away, not quite pacing but asking a lot of questions that DB couldn't answer. Sometimes it was like Jesse took advantage of the times DB couldn't talk to get in all his own talking at once. The man could babble, given the opportunity.

DB caught the attention of a passing officer. "Excuse me. Do you know how much longer I'm going to have to stay? I've already given my statement and information to the detective."

"Let me check to make sure all the contact information is gathered up." The officer nodded and crossed to the detective who appeared to be in charge, gesturing back to DB. The detective didn't seem happy, but that might not have had anything to do with DB at all. DB had noticed over the years that detectives at crime scenes were rarely full of sunshine.

With a curt nod, the detective turned away and the officer waved to DB, setting him free.

"Hallelujah." He headed for the door, sparing a glance at poor Duke, who was still being questioned. They hadn't arrested him, though, so DB figured that was a good sign. He'd call in the morning and check in. He could vouch for Duke not being involved in any mobster activities. The guy was greedy, and a bit of an idiot, but so far as DB knew, that wasn't criminal.

"Oh, yay." Jesse was at his side, close enough that there was a short moment of tingling as their arms brushed. "Home? Office? I vote for home, okay? There's TV there and the news might have some kind of information about what the heck just happened."

He snorted and waited until they were in the elevator to reply. "You vote for home because there's a chance I'll try to nail your incorporeal ass to the mattress there."

"Well, yes." Jesse beamed at him. "How's it looking? Am I in?"

He stretched and faked a yawn. "I don't know, I'm pretty wiped out..."

"I think I can keep you awake." Jesse smirked and leered. "I'll do my best, anyway."

"Hands off until we're home!" He had visions of going off the road as Jesse tried to blow him or something while he was driving.

"Party pooper." But Jesse was smiling to himself, looking like he'd just won a prize. "Are you going to stop for food?"

"Are you kidding? You did see me graze my way through a half dozen plates of food, right? I think that last batch of potato skins isn't sitting too well."

The elevator stopped at P2, and DB headed for the car.

"Oh, don't you dare go getting sick." Jesse hurried along beside him. "You're kidding, right? Got some of that pink stuff?" It was like he was sure that if they didn't get busy that night it wouldn't happen again. It would have been flattering if it wasn't just Jesse being Jesse.

And he did love to play with the man. Ghost. Whatever. "I don't know... And we ran out of the pink stuff a few weeks ago."

"Well, get some!" Jesse practically yelled. "It's like bandages -- always, always have some on hand. Didn't your mom tell you that?"

"I think my mother would rather I didn't eat all that junk in the first place..." He slid into the car and started up the engine, more than ready to get home.

"My junk or that junk?" Jesse laughed at his own juvenile humor and settled himself in the seat next to DB. "Home, and let's not discuss mothers for a while. I'm done with the whole lot of them." He shuddered, probably only half for dramatic effect.

"I'm with you there. Besides, you brought her up."

"Only by accident." Jesse rolled his eyes and looked out the window. "Duke's mom implied I was a disappointment to my mother. Did you hear that?"

"Oh, come on, she was trying to get your goat. She's never met your mother, and she doesn't know who you are."

"I know." Jesse nodded but didn't look at him. "My mom loved me. She might have been worried about the crowd I was running with -- uh, rightly so, it turns out -- but she loved me. I would have gotten my head on straight if I'd lived."

"You got it straight, well, so to speak, even though you didn't live," DB pointed out.

"I know." Jesse did look at him then, with a slightly sad smile. "But she doesn't."

"She loved you, Jesse. That's all that matters."

Jesse nodded. "Okay." He nodded again, more emphatically. "Yes. You're right. So. No more mother talk for a while? We can get back to normal?"

He nodded. "Please." Talking about mothers was a total turn off.

"Let's talk about how I'm going to haunt Joe for being so out of the loop, instead." Jesse's smile was grim and a little scary.

"Racketeering isn't really his bag, Jesse. Besides, I'd have thought you'd be happy he hasn't been around."

"He can be not near you at all times and still give you decent intel. He almost got my boyfriend smushed and shot!"

"I wasn't in any danger tonight, Jesse. Not for a second."

"Armed gangsters and out of control ghosts are a walk in the park?" Jesse gave him a look that was mostly exasperation.

"I was hanging in the corner!" It had felt more like a movie.

"Good." Jesse leaned toward him. "I prefer it when you're not running toward the scary people. Are we almost home yet? I need to check you over for trauma."

"I like the sounds of that." Smiling, he pulled into his usual spot across from his apartment.

"I thought you might." The smirk was back, the sadness and annoyance gone again. "I'll follow you up the stairs."

"You worried I might expire on my way up the stairs?"

"I want to watch your ass."

"Perv." He was pleased, though.

"All yours!" Jesse slid through the door of the car and waited for him, gesturing for him to hurry up already. At least, DB assumed that's what all the arm waving was about. He pocked the keys and headed home, putting on a show of wiggling his ass.

"That's the way I like it!" Jesse chased after him, laughing. "Right on up the stairs, no pausing."

"Perv," he called again, happy it was late enough there wasn't anyone else around.

A hand cupped his ass and squeezed, and Jesse crowed with delight. "I've got you now, my pretty."

"I can feel that." God, it could be good sometimes, so easy.

"I know." Jesse sounded delighted and he squeezed again. "You've got a great ass, you know."

He wiggled it for Jesse. "Thanks, man."

"Get it in the apartment, and get it naked." The hand vanished, and so did Jesse.

He was still laughing as he let himself in and headed straight for the bedroom

"I like it when you rush." Jesse grinned at him, half undressed. He was still working on his belt, though the shoes, socks and shirt were off. "It makes me feel all wanted and stuff." The belt finally undone, he unzipped

his hideously high-waisted 80's pants and let them fall off.

"Trust me, Jesse, if you weren't wanted, you'd know." He started pulling off his own clothes.

"Aw, you're sweet." Jesse beamed at him, bent over and shed the last of his clothes. "Hurry up," he insisted, rolling onto the bed. "I need to check you over really, really carefully."

"I'm down with that plan." He wasn't even going to tease Jesse by taking his time undressing. He was naked in a flash and crawling onto the bed.

"Good, good." Jesse nodded and made room for him, shifting to the side of the bed. "You're sure no bad guys got close, right?" A ghostly hand moved over DB's arm, the tingles feeling electric and almost like static.

"I don't know -- I *was* drinking, after all. I think you need to be very thorough, just to be sure."

"That's a very good idea." Jesse grinned at him, the hand now roaming over DB's chest. "Front and back."

"Front first." His cock was already filling.

"If you say so." Jesse didn't seem to have an opinion either way, though his hand was joined by its partner as Jesse got to his knees beside DB. "You seem okay above the waist." The hands solidified briefly to smooth down DB's sides, warm and heavy.

DB arched, pulling a deep breath in and then moaning. God, he loved that, loved these moments when everything was so real. So solid. He let his eyes drift closed -- it helped keep the illusion.

Jesse moved down to DB's legs, the touches occasionally solid, but more often that deep tingle that was so familiar, that meant Jesse was touching him. Jesse avoided DB's cock, but DB was well aware that Jesse was somewhat less than patient; he'd get there soon. With a quiet laugh Jesse's corporeal hands swept up the inside of DB's thighs, his fingers brushing under DB's balls. "Look good here, too. No new bruises, anyway."

"No? Are you sure?" He spread his legs wide. "Have you examined it really, really closely?"

"It would be bad to miss something, wouldn't it?" Jesse's fingers weren't so much brushing anymore as they were *touching* and *fondling* and *rolling*, not a single tingle. Just warm and nimble and insistent, moving over and around, and then there was hot breath on his dick and a very real tongue slid over the base of his cock.

"Jesse! Oh, God." He curled his hands into fists and tried not to buck up, not to move at all -- he didn't want to miss a second of this.

Jesse licked again, not bothering to talk. All the way up from the root, a swirl around the head of DB's cock, and then Jesse took him in, getting him wet all over before starting a loose and lazy suck, head bobbing slowly.

DB spread his legs wider, breathing in long, slow gasps.

Jesse hummed. Just a little, but he was definitely humming, and after a moment or two of that he stopped sucking DB's cock long enough to suck on his own fingers. The combination of wet mouth and wet fingers was even better than DB expected; Jesse knew what he was doing.

Groaning, DB started to move -- he couldn't stop himself anymore. He rocked between fingers and mouth, everything firing up inside him. Fingers pushed at him, nudging and demanding he give way; as they opened him, Jesse made an encouraging sound, a deep groan of his own, and the sucking got fierce. "Jesse!" He wailed out his lover's name as he came hard, his whole body shaking with it.

Jesse took it, swallowing between increasingly frantic sounds until he finally came off DB with a gasp. "Roll over," he demanded. "Now." He moved to make way, not fading away to insubstantial formlessness.

DB did as he was told, not quite out of his orgasmic haze yet.

Jesse fell on him, knees shoving DB's legs apart. "Jesus Christ," Jesse panted into DB's ear. "Oh, God." He had his cock nestled between DB's ass cheeks, his hips thrusting madly. He wasn't trying to fuck DB, wasn't making any attempt to enter him without lube or a please and thank you, but he was humping like he was going to go nuts if he didn't get off within moments.

DB squeezed his legs tightly together, giving Jesse as much friction as he could. The heat of Jesse's cock was amazing.

"DB." Jesse was still whispering, his cock leaking enough that he was slipping faster with every thrust, the weight of his body pushing DB down into the mattress. "Yeah. Oh, yeah." He stopped panting, suddenly, his balls grinding against DB's ass, and then DB could feel him coming, warmth spreading slickly between them.

It was impossible, and yet there it was and he laughed, turning his head to beg for a kiss. Jesse's mouth covered his, the kiss as sloppy and lazy as the start of the blow job had been, wet and warm.

Jesse was back to panting, and it was hard to kiss around the grin, but there it was, all real and non-tingly. "Nice one. I think you avoided injury today."

"I think I did, too. And you're heavy!" He laughed again. Who'd have thought that was even possible?

"Am I?" Jesse bounced up and down, laughing, then rolled off to the side. "And you're sticky and gross." He seemed to be delighted by this.

"I know, right?" He reached out and rested his hand on Jesse's chest, sighing a little when his hand stayed on top of the skin and didn't slide right through.

But then it slowly moved lower, through Jesse, until he was resting his hand on the bed, little tingles on his skin

where it touched Jesse's body. "Love you," he whispered.

"Love you right back." Jesse was whispering, too. "Always."

Chapter Twenty

Jesse sat in his chair and made eyes at DB. He was feeling pretty good and that always seemed to call for a little bit of office silliness. DB, of course, was steadfastly ignoring him, looking only at Duke. Duke, it seemed, had spent a rough twenty-four hours or so trying to get out of custody. Jesse thought he was lucky not to have been admitted to the psych ward.

"I did call a friend at the precinct, but your story was pretty wild." DB shook his head. "I'm sorry about your mother. I thought we had her until control. She was, really, until you went all in."

Jesse snorted. "She's crazy. Don't forget that part."

Duke looked morose. "I thought she was gone. Like, gone-gone. All the way gone."

"Sorry, man. She's... well, frankly speaking, she's off her rocker."

Jesse nodded his agreement. Sometimes DB had a way with words. "Nutso."

Duke nodded, too. "She's... she was always a little difficult, but nothing like this. This was over the top." He sighed and leaned way back in his seat. "So, where do we stand? Is she gone? No one will let me in a game now. Not that I've tried, yet, but I heard a few things yelled toward my cell while I was waiting to be processed."

"That could have been fun to listen in on," Jesse mused. "Not as fun as what we were doing, though." Again, he made eyes at DB.

DB cleared his throat. "Dying, becoming a ghost, it could have pushed her over the edge from difficult to all out nuts, you know? And really -- do you think playing anymore poker's a good idea? You've already been almost dragged down once. Take your money and do stuff that makes you happy with it."

Duke looked like he was going to cry. "Poker made me happy." He sighed again and looked at the ceiling. "Maybe I should take a vacation. She'd probably think that was a waste of money, too. God, what if she turns up in Hawaii and starts throwing drinks again?"

"That's an awfully long way to go." DB glanced over at him, eyebrows raised.

Jesse shrugged one shoulder. "I wouldn't go that far for anyone but you." He batted his eyelids and then got serious. "I haven't seen hide nor hair of her, and I don't think Yanya has, either. She hasn't phoned, anyway, and you *know* she would if the old bat was there making trouble. Tell him to go -- if nothing else, it'll drive her 'round the bend trying to find him if he leaves soon, before she comes hunting. It'll be like he vanished."

"I think it would be hard for her to track you there. Look, she's been pretty scarce since the, uh, ruckus at the game. Go take that vacation. Do it now, go today, this morning. She won't know where you are." It wasn't

much, but it was something and DB was clearly feeling sorry for Duke.

Duke looked thoughtful. "You think? Really?"

Jesse leaned toward Duke and looked a little closer. "Tell him he's pale and needs to go get some sun, watch the bathing suits. That should do it." Honestly, he thought maybe Duke's mother was likely to stick close to home to gather her strength, if she was around at all. She'd want a plan. "Tell him to take a very long vacation."

"Take a long vacation. Go find sun and sand and skimpy bathing suits. Hey, if you decide to buy a house out there, arrangements could be made via a proxy to sell your place here." DB shrugged. "I'm just saying if you find somewhere she's not you might want to stick around for a while, give her a reason to move on."

Duke blinked rapidly. "Move?" His eyes narrowed and he stood up. "If I move I might be able to find people who don't know about the game." Nodding sharply, he headed toward the door. "Thanks, Black. I think I'll take a vacation and think a few things over."

"I didn't mean... Never mind. It's your life. Make it a good one."

"Get him out of our town," Jesse said, rolling his eyes. "I think we're better off without him. Oh, God, make him pay before he escapes!"

Sandra, thankfully, was being her usual awesome self and had that in hand, if the cheerful voice offering his invoice was anything to go by.

"So after all that, all he wants is to find a place where he can keep playing poker. I guess he's well and truly addicted, eh?" DB looked resigned.

"Seems to be." Jesse looked at DB, sitting at his desk and looking very much like an in-charge businessman. "You know, for a ghost case this one kinda... didn't leave me with the same happy feeling as helping ghosts. On the other hand, you didn't get shot at, which makes me very happy. And I met your mom." He was having a hard time filing that appropriately.

"And I got paid. Real money. Actual hard cash. And I thought we weren't going to keep bringing up my mother?"

Jesse ignored the mother thing. It would keep coming up without his help, he just knew it. "Maybe *you* should take a vacation. Although try to stick within a day or so's drive, okay? I'm not sure I can fly." And he didn't want to find out he couldn't, with DB winging his way somewhere awesome without him.

"I was thinking a couple of nights at the Downtown Marriot. Jacuzzi, room service, no one knows where we are... I'll ignore my cell phone if you ignore any ghosties who try to talk to you."

Jesse grinned. "No cops, no secretaries, no Yanya?" He wondered if he'd be able to deal with the Jacuzzi, and decided he'd love a chance to find out. "You're on."

"Cool." DB lit a cigarette and leaned back, feet on his desk. DB blew out a smoke ring.

Jesse hated it when DB did that.

A wicked smile crossed his lips as he had a thought.

"Does your mother know you do that?"

End

Look for more DB and Jesse in the next Eye Spy book.