

Ghostbusting

by Katie Norton

Jill's number was flashing on Carol's caller ID. Jill, the baby sister she had practically raised after their mother died of a stroke when Carol was 12. It had been months since they'd talked. Jill had been avoiding Carol because Jill's idiot husband Mark had reneged on his promise to buy Carol's water-ski boat. Mark spent the past summer entertaining his church friends at the lake, telling them it was HIS boat, Big Preacher Man. Then he damaged the engine. Now Carol couldn't sell the boat. Left a bad taste in everybody's mouth.

"Hey stranger," Carol answered the phone, every nerve ending tingling.

"I think Mark tried to commit suicide," sighed Jill.

Jill spit out the details and emailed Carol the pictures taken by the paramedic. Mark had sailed his pickup truck off an overpass on a lonely road, but had "threaded the needle," as the tow truck driver called the narrow escape from death. Landed upright on a sand mound in a gully. Walked away with only a few scratches. Mark said he had swerved to avoid an oncoming vehicle, but there were no witnesses to corroborate.

Jill knew Mark had tried to kill himself. "Mark has been acting weird ever since we moved to this farm a few months ago. Cody and Ashlee have always looked up to their Dad, and now they practically have to babysit him," said Jill. "We're Christians and we don't believe in that psychic stuff. But after THIS, I had to call." Jill let out a breath, the weight of the world.

Carol was born with the gift. After Mom died and Dad got all wrapped up in the Assembly of God, they heard nothing but Book of Revelations. The church people saw evil everywhere. Carol could tell you what was evil: those church ladies strutting around in Mom's clothes that Dad gave away. He cleaned out the closet the week after she died. Carol never talked about her psychic ability in those days. She didn't even know what it was. It was just a feeling, of knowing, of being different than those people.

Carol said to Jill, "Mark is making himself sick because he's a phony and a fake. How can he preach to others when he can't even keep his own life clean? I'm sorry, Jill, I had to get that out." It had been bottled up inside Carol, her disgust with her brother-in-law, ruining her relationship with Jill. Carol felt better now that she'd let that out. "Now, what about this farm?"

"We moved here about four months ago. It's got five acres and it's perfect for my horses and dogs and the rent is surprisingly low. The landlord's son is a friend of Cody's. But shortly after we moved in, Mark started acting strange. He almost fell off the roof when he was up there to fix a leak. And he almost got electrocuted when he was working on his car in the garage. He's been having bad luck with everything and he's now afraid to leave the house. Cody started asking around and we found out that a young woman was killed here a few years ago. By her boyfriend. Killed right here in the bathtub," Jill unloaded the story that she had prayed for guidance about, and continued, "Ashlee has a friend at the community college. His name is Lucas, studying paranormal psychology. Sort of like a ghostbuster. She wants him to come over here with his equipment, to see if he can figure out anything that would help Mark," said Jill.

Carol knew the situation must have been dire for devil-hating Jill to consider trying a psychic solution.

"I need to meet Lucas," said Carol.

They met at the Nut House, where the drinks and clientele were strong. Carol, eyes shooting sparks, was drinking a Bloody Mary garnished with celery, olives and a cocktail onion. Like having a salad, except for the double shot of vodka.

Lucas entered the bar and was drawn to her.

"Hello Lucas," Carol said without turning around.

"How did you know it was me?" he asked.

"I'm psychic," she replied, turning to look. He was a long, tall drink of Ghostbuster. "Did you bring your equipment?" she asked obliquely scanning his crotch.

"It's in the truck," he said.

“Do you have any impressions about what's happening to my brother-in-law?” Carol asked after Lucas ordered a beer. She telepathed that he turned her on.

“Because your brother-in-law is a man-of-the-cloth, a demon has come through a portal, possibly the chimney, to try and attack him,” Lucas postulated.

Carol didn't think Lucas an outright idiot, just very young. Seen too many movies.

“Lucas, demons don't come down the chimney like Santa Claus. And as for Mark being a 'man-of-the-cloth,' well let me set you straight: he's NOT. He's as phony as they come. He'd sell his grandmother for a quarter.”

“Ok, then, what do you think?” said Lucas.

“The young woman who was murdered on the farm hasn't passed over to the other side. She is not trying to harm Mark. Maybe his guilty feeling about a certain business transaction involving a family member is attracting her energy,” said Carol.

“What is the difference between a ghost and a spirit?” Lucas asked.

“A ghost is the remains of a person who is dead but hasn't moved on to the other side. A spirit is a form of energy, like a guardian angel. If you encounter a ghost, tell them to go home. A person who dies a violent death can get confused and stuck on this side,” Carol said.

“How do you know this?” Lucas asked.

“All of us have psychic ability to some extent, some more than others. I've worked to develop mine. It's like this Lucas: everyone can draw, but not everybody has the talent of Thomas Kinkade,” she said

“I never thought of it that way,” said Lucas.

“What are they teaching you in school?” Carol asked.

“How to measure electromagnetic field energy. The theory is that ghosts or spirits send out energy that is measurable. I brought an EMF detector tonight. I keep a journal, using the scientific method,” Lucas finished his beer.

Carol and Lucas drove out to the farm in his truck. It was a clear winter night with a crescent moon. They got out of the truck and Carol scanned the sky while Lucas got the equipment set up. Orion's Belt popped out at Carol, and then she found Taurus the Bull. The bull's red eye gazed down at her.

Lucas held the EMF detector, and Carol the video camera. Lucas periodically jotted in his journal as they wandered. In the pasture, horses snorted. A dog woofed. Carol stumbled across uneven ground and Lucas caught her in his cradling arm.

At the edge of the horse pasture, an owl swooped low and lit on a Ponderosa Pine branch, encircled by mist. It stared at them.

"Holy shit, Carol! My meter is off the charts! Turn on the camera!" Lucas tried to write and hold the meter.

Carol was filled with a serenity and happiness that came from knowing she was connected with the spirit world. "The ghost has taken the form of an owl. We need to help her get home," Carol addressed the owl, "Go to the other side. They are waiting for you there. Go now!"

The owl vanished in a cloud of mist. The meter went still. Lucas exhaled, then scribbled in the journal. He hugged Carol and said, "Wow!"

Jill led the way into the living room. Mark sat like a zombie in his recliner, beer can in hand, unseeing eyes glued to the TV.

"We found your ghost," said Carol. "She's gone. But she wasn't the problem, was she Mark?"

Mark didn't move.

"Jill, call me tomorrow," Carol said.

Outside, Carol and Lucas stood close. "Let's go back to my place and debrief," she suggested.

Carol stepped into the passenger seat of the truck as Lucas held open the door. It was so great that she and Jill were back on speaking terms.

