

II

Transportation is my afterlife specialty—my quest to help Savannah meant I spent a lot of time tracking down sources. In other areas of ghost activity, I'm not so good, though I didn't think the Fates really needed to send me through that damned orientation course three times.

My afterlife world was a version of Earth, with some weird sub-dimensions that we really tried to avoid. Everyone here was a supernatural, but not every supernatural was here. When I'd died, my first thought on waking had been "Great, now I finally find out what comes next." Well, actually that had been my second thought, after "Hmmm, I thought it would have been hotter." Yes, I'd escaped the fiery hell my mother and many others had prophesied for me, but in dying, I hadn't found out what comes next, only what came next for me. Was there fire and brimstone somewhere else? Were there halos and heavenly harps? I have no idea. I only know that where I am is better than where I expected to be, so I'm not complaining.

I dropped Kristof off on the courthouse steps. Yes, we have courts here. The Fates take care of all major disciplinary issues, but they let us handle disputes between ghosts. Hence the courts, where Kristof. Not that he'd practiced law in real life. The day he'd passed the bar exam, he'd

gone into business with his family. But here he was, playing lawyer in the afterlife. Even Kris admitted this wasn't his first choice for a new career, yet until they started a ghost world NHL franchise, he was stuck with it.

Speaking of jobs . . . Kristof was right. I needed a break. I'd known that for a while now, but couldn't bring myself to admit it. I knew Kris's "odd jobs" wouldn't be the kind of employment the Fates would approve of, but that was more incentive than obstacle.

That thought had no more left my mind than a bluish fog blew in and swirled around my leg.

"Hey, I was just—"

The fog sucked me into the ground.

The Searchers deposited me in the Fate's throne room, a white-marble cavern with moving mosaics and tapestries on the walls. The Fates are the guardians of the supernatural layers of the ghost world, and just about the only time they call us in is when we've screwed up. So when the floor began to turn, I braced myself. When it didn't turn fast enough, I twisted around to face the Fates myself. A pretty girl threaded yarn onto a spinning wheel. She looked no more than five or six years old, with bright violet eyes that matched her dress.

"Okay," I said. "What did I do?"

The girl grinned. "Isn't the question: what did I do now?"

I sighed, and in less time than it takes to blink, the girl morphed into a middle-aged version of herself, with long graying dark hair, and light brown skin showing the first wrinkles and roughness of time.

"We have a problem, Eve."

“Look, I promised I wouldn’t use the codes for excessive unauthorized travel. I never said—”

“This isn’t about unauthorized travel.”

I thought for a moment. “Visiting Adena Milan for spell-swapping? Hey, that was an honest mistake. No one told me she was on the blacklist.”

The middle-aged Fate shook her head, eyes twinkling. “Admittedly, there might be some amusement to be had in making you recite the whole list of your infractions, but I’m afraid we don’t have that much time. Some time ago, you made a deal with us. If we returned Paige and Lucas to the living world, you’d owe us a favor.”

“Oh . . . that.”

Damn. In the last eighteen months, they hadn’t mentioned it again, so I’d hoped they’d forgotten. Like that’s going to happen. The Fates can remember what Noah ate for breakfast on the morning of the flood.

My first instinct, as always, was to weasel out of it. Hell, what’s the worst thing that could happen? Well, for starters, they could undo their end of the bargain and bring Paige and Lucas back to the ghost world. So no weaseling out of this one. Besides, I had been looking for a distraction. Which made this all seem very coincidental.

“Did Kristof put you up this? Finding me something to do?”

The Fate morphed into her oldest sister, a hunchbacked crone with a wizened face permanently set in a scowl . . . well, at least, whenever I was around.

“Kristof Nast does not ‘put us up’ to anything.”

“I didn’t mean—”

“Nor are we going to be doing favors for the likes of him. We thought that lawyer job would keep him busy.” She snorted. “And it does. Keeps him busy getting into trouble.”

“If you mean the Agito case, that wasn’t Kris’s fault. The plaintiff started lying, so he had to do something. It wasn’t really witness tampering . . .”

“Just a means to an end,” she said, fixing me with that bright glare. “That’s how you two think. Doesn’t matter how you get there, as long as you do.”

The middle sister took over. “An interesting philosophy. Not one we share but, in some cases . . . useful. This particular job we need done may require some of those unique skills.”

I perked up. “Oh?”

“We have a spirit who’s escaped from the lower realms. We need you to bring her in.”

The lower realms are where they keep the ghosts who can’t be allowed to mingle with the rest of us—the seriously nasty criminals. Hmmm, interesting.

“So who is—”

“First, you need to do some research.” The middle-aged Fate reached into the air and pulled out a sheet of paper. “This is a list of books—”

“Books? Look, I’m sure you guys are in a hurry for me to get this job done, so why don’t we skip this part? I’m really more a hands-on kind of gal.”

The girl appeared, grinning mischievously. “Oh? Well, in that case, let’s do it the hands-on way.”

She waved a hand, and a ball of light whipped out and blinded me.