

Skye Maxwell starts to have paranormal experiences after receiving a dream catcher as a gift: It suddenly begins to spin, glow in the dark, and talk! With the help of young ghost hunters, Skye helps a spirit attached to the dream catcher move on to the Other Side.

Skye Blue & the Dream Catcher Ghost

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Skye Blue



& the
Dream
Catcher
Ghost



Susan Martínez

Skye Blue & the Dream Catcher Ghost

Skye Blue Mystical Adventures Series, Book 2

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1

Karate

Skye Maxwell stood alone in the center of the classroom feeling lower than the lowest. And she was, literally speaking.

In spite of her ice princess demeanor, on the inside she was raving mad her grandmother Violet for making her try the karate school membership she had given her as a twelfth birthday gift. Geez, she just started junior high school the month before. Now more stress. So there she was, looking around, feeling like an alien from Mars.

There really wasn't much to look at. The classroom was simple and stark: three plain walls, one mirrored wall, a high ceiling, and a thinly carpeted floor. The only attempt at decorating appeared to be the rainbow colored karate belts that were tied just so and hung side by side on the walls. She knew that each color represented a

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different rank, ranging from white belt through black belt, from beginner to expert.

Skye gazed at herself in the mirror and hardly recognize the girl looking back at her. That girl was dressed in an over-sized, unbelted white karate suit with bare feet and shaking knees. Her normally glam long blonde hair was hastily pulled into a sloppy ponytail. No make-up, no jewelry, not even a smear of lip-gloss.

She decided that if one of the goals of karate training was to tear you down to nothing so they could build you up to something great, they had succeeded, judging by how she looked and felt at the moment. And she hadn't even taken her first class!

For the past four years the girl looking back at her in the mirror had been a ballet student, confident, poised, and graceful. She had been told when she was eight years old that she had an ideal ballet dancer's body: long arms and legs, a long neck, nicely arched feet, and a comparatively short torso. And the perfect ballerina's face:

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a sweet look with wide eyes and full lips. Plus she was flexible, slim, and strong.

So where was the ballerina now? Apparently she was hidden beneath two pieces of shapeless white cotton that was charmingly referred to as a karate uniform. Even the word “uniform” repelled her. She didn’t want to be and look the same as everyone else. What’s wrong with wanting to be unique?

“Hello, Skye Maxwell,” a big male voice interrupted her narcissist mirror gazing.

Skye jumped, clearly startled.

He stopped before her and bowed to her.

“Welcome to Spirit Rock Martial Arts Institute.”

Skye smiled stiffly and said, “Hi.”

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“Has anyone ever told you that you look a lot like that young actress, Dakota Fanning?”

“No,” she lied, entirely sick of people telling her that.

“I’m your martial arts teacher,” he said with a broad smile. “My name is Jacob Antonius, but you can call me Mr. Jake. Everyone does; even my grandson. Or you can call me Mr. Right because I’m always right.”

He chuckled at his little stab at humor, but Skye didn’t. She was too far out of her element to do anything more than stand there motionless and stare up at this big, bald, brawny man.

Mr. Jacob Antonius was dressed in a black karate uniform tied with a well-worn black belt with four yellow stripes on one end. The school’s brochure mentioned that Mr. Jake was a fourth degree black belt; hence the four yellow stripes, Skye assumed. He reminded her of the actor/wrestler “The Rock” only with lighter skin. This guy

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even had that weird eyebrow thing going on and a smile practically as wide as his face. Mr. Jake was one of those ageless men. Only the deep laugh wrinkles around his eyes and the gray in his goatee hinted that he was probably pushing sixty.

Leaning in towards Skye, he asked in a playfully sinister voice, “Are you scared of me, young lady?”

“Yes, I am,” she admitted without hesitation, purposefully avoiding his intense blue eyes. Some people’s eyes are very hard to look into for some unexplainable reason—like his. Mr. Jake’s eyes were like two clear portals into a shadowy abyss. The image of a monster leaping out of his pupils and strangling her zipped across her mind. Instead of peering into those scary depths, she let her gaze wonder across the elaborate tattoos on his forearms.

The colorful images inked there spoke volumes about this strange man. There was a fire-breathing dragon, a smiling skull, Homer Simpson on a Harley, and

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a sword-wielding angel with long curling hair, to name a few. Plus there were words tattooed on the front of his hands, too. The right hand read “Be Brave” and the left had read “Be Strong.”

“Excellent, I’m glad that you’re scared. I want you to always be a little scared. I don’t want you to ever get too comfortable with those that outrank you. And at this point, everyone outranks you.”

“I know. I might as well be a dumb bug on the floor.”

He laughed.

“I like students with a sense of humor. It doesn’t hurt as much if you can crack a few jokes.”

“I didn’t come here to get hurt!” Skye injected self-defensively.

“Why are you here?”

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“Because my grandmother made me.”

“Smart lady.”

“She may be smart, but she’s also very, very bossy.”

Mr. Jake laughed again.

“I really am starting to like you, Skye! And I predict you’re going to love the martial arts someday.” Skye rolled her emerald eyes, seriously doubting this man’s judgment. He continued, choosing to ignore the green eye rolling incident...this time.

“The martial arts are very special,” he began, clasping his hands before him as he spoke. “But before I show you any punches, blocks, or kicks, I want to tell you a little about this sport and art form. The first thing you need to know is that you can use karate only in the karate studio and not on other people...unless, of course, you absolutely need to defend yourself or another person.”

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“Can I sit down while you talk?” Skye asked, her legs already getting a bit tired from standing in place.

“No, you can’t sit down!” he shot back. “Standing still and listening is something we do a lot of here.”

Skye sighed, feigning fatigue, and forcing her shoulders to slump.

Mr. Jake continued, paying no attention to her little drama...this time.

“There are many different styles of martial arts,” he began as if reciting a favorite poem from heart. “The style we teach here at Spirit Rock is American Taekwondo. Some people call it ‘karate’ which is technically inaccurate, but acceptable. Taekwondo is believed to be one of the oldest Oriental arts of unarmed self-defense—unarmed meaning no weapons like guns, knives, etcetera. It originated in Korea a long, long time ago and became an official Olympic sport in 2000.”

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“I watched the Olympics,” Skye piped in, excited to contribute her own two cents to his monolog. “I really liked watching the girl’s gymnastics.”

“That’s nice,” Mr. Jake said in a patronizing tone, which Skye easily detected. *You might as well just pat me on the head and call me a brainless twit*, she thought.

He continued his special poem like an actor auditioning for a role.

“Martial art students are taught to defend his or herself, but this type of training also promotes strong bodies, strong minds, strong wills, and self-confidence.”

“But I already have a strong body, mind, and will. Plus my dad says I have enough self-confidence to be a movie star. So maybe I really don’t need to be here.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” he barked, not hiding his annoyance one bit. Skye took a step back and cringed. He looked like he was about to snap.

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Beware! Big, angry teacher! her mind shouted but her mouth stayed shut...for once.

“Do you know that around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, forced into sex, or otherwise abused during her lifetime?” The long, heated question flew out of his mouth, fueled by hefty emotion. “Could you defend yourself if you were attacked?”

Before Skye was able to respond, Mr. Jake wrapped an arm around her waist and effortlessly picked her off her feet and ran with her towards the closed classroom door.

“Gotcha!” he said smugly, carrying her around the room tucked under his arm as if she were nothing more than a big old bag of dog food. “Gotcha! Gotcha!”

“Let me down! Don’t be a hater! That was a dirty trick!” she protested as she tried to twist and turn out of his tight grip. “You could’ve warned me!”

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He returned her to her place and asked her, “Do you think bad guys use clean tricks on their victims? Do you think they give them fair warning?”

“I suppose not,” she had to admit, adjusting her messed-up uniform and trying to compose herself. “I suppose I could use a few lessons in self-defense.”

“Yes you could, and you would also benefit from the *other things* that the martial arts teach people.”

“What *other things*?” Skye asked; her curiosity sparked just a little.

“Things like honor and respect. You will learn to honor and respect those who are more experienced and knowledgeable than you. In some martial arts traditions, a student wouldn’t even be permitted to enter a room before someone of higher rank.”

“And I thought ballet was strict!” Skye exclaimed.

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“Karate and ballet are a lot alike, actually. Both art forms demand grace, power, determination, and discipline. Any questions?”

“Where’s the rest of the class?”

“It’s just you and me, little ballerina, during the first introductory class. After that, if you think karate is for you, you’ll join a class with other students of your same rank.”

“Cool, I guess.”

“Let’s get started. First I want to show you a basic fighting stance, a couple of blocks, punches, and kicks, plus how to bow and yell. If you show me you can handle that, I’ll let you peek inside the black belt class in the next studio. They’re practicing their karate forms which are also called martial ballets.”

“Martial ballets?” Skye asked, the idea instantly capturing her imagination. “Do they actually dance?”

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“They perform war dances. Martial ballets are actually choreographed battles with an invisible enemy. Every student does the same moves at the time, so it looks like a choreographed dance.”

“Sounds wicked! Is there music, too?”

“Just the music of their passionate hearts pumping blood in unison,” Mr. replied with a faraway look in his eyes. Skye was impressed and a little taken aback with Mr. Jake’s poetic remark. *Strange, strange man*, her mind commented. “So let’s get this show on the road.”

With that, the teacher and the student worked together in synch to accomplish the goals set down for a brand new karate student. Mr. Jake taught Skye how to do a front kick, a thrust kick against a thick red rectangular pad that he held against his chest, a jump front kick, a tricky sidekick, a high block, and a basic punch.

It all went very, very well. When they were finished Mr. Jake complimented her profusely, then walked across

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the floor and quietly opened the door to the adjoining studio and stepped inside.

Skye beamed with self-satisfaction as she waited and once again gazed at herself in the mirror. Once more, she hardly recognized the girl looking back at her. This girl was sweaty, disheveled, and breathless...and she felt great. She felt mighty. She felt invincible. And she already knew she liked karate.

A few minutes later, Mr. Jake returned to Skye and said, "We can go in, but you're not permitted to speak or to distract the class whatsoever. Can you handle that? Can you be silent for five full minutes?" A smile was quivering at the corner of his mouth so she knew he was teasing her.

"I can handle it."

Skye followed Mr. Jake into the classroom like a duckling following its mother. The heat and energy in the room hit her in the face and the room reeked of Icy Hot.

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She tried not to show how impressed she was by the sight of the ten black belts standing at attention in a straight line at the front of the room. Their expressions were stern and focused. They were all sizes and ages, male and female. The only common denominator appeared to be the color of their belts. Skye quietly wondered if this is what real life ninjas looked like.

As nonchalantly as she could manage, Skye sat on the floor at the back of the classroom next to Mr. Jake and waited for something to happen. And happen it did.

A teenage boy, apparently the instructor, yelled out something in Korean and the stoic ten quickly formed a circle. The instructor yelled once more and the ten grabbed hands and proceeded to move in a circle while they sang the nursery rhyme: "Ring around a rosie, a pocket full of posie. Ashes, ashes, we all fall down!" And fall they did – in a rowdy, laughing heap of humans.

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Mr. Jake tossed his head back and roared with laughter while Skye looked on, wide-eyed and entirely baffled.

When the instructor disentangled him self from the mass of bodies on the floor, he rushed over to Mr. Jake and bowed. He was sweaty and full of mischief and very cute, Skye instantly decided. His hair was sort of long, dark, and messy, his dimples were deep, and his smile was absolutely charming. To Skye, he looked like a TV star or maybe a singer in a boy band.

“Very funny!” Mr. Jake said to his grandson.

“The black belts were getting crabby training for the state karate tournament. I thought they could use a little comic relief.”

“That was comical!” Mr. Jake exclaimed, then turned to Skye and said, “I’ll be right back. I need to get something.”

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“Can I go now?” she asked her teacher.

“Not yet. Just give me a minute. I have something for you.”

“Oh.”

He turned to his grandson and said, “Rain, this is Skye. Please keep an eye on her for me.”

Rain turned his attention from his grandfather to the new blonde student sitting cross-legged on the floor, looking immensely uncomfortable. Or was it bored?

“Hi Skye, I’m Rain. I see you’ve met my big, Greek grandfather.”

“Yes,” she said impassively, trying to appear to be unimpressed with this adorable guy. He was built just like Mr. Jake—strong and sturdy.

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He chuckled when he added, "So you're Skye and I'm Rain. That's a really weird coincidence, don't you think?"

"No."

"Tough audience," he replied with a pretend frown on his face. "So did you like our performance?"

"Hel-lo. I was hoping to see a martial ballet, not some silly nursery rhyme."

"Silly? Come on! Did you know that nursery rhyme is actually about the Black Plaque that killed over fourteen million people in the fourteenth century?"

"I suppose you learn that on Jeopardy."

"Are you making fun of me?" Rain asked her directly.

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Skye got to her feet, looked him in the face, and said, “Whatever.” She was about to leave the classroom when Mr. Jake rushed in with a brand new white belt in his hand.

He moved to the head of the class and said something weird that made all the students, including Rain, rush to their places in line and stand at attention with their feet apart and their hands clasped behind their backs.

“Come here, Skye.”

She did what she was told without protest. All eyes were on her and she felt extremely self-conscious. She stood before Mr. Jake at the head of the class as he ceremoniously unfolded the belt, then wound and knotted it around Skye’s tiny waist.

“The color white symbolizes purity and every student begins with a clean, pure slate. Congratulations, Skye. You’ve been promoted to white belt!” he announced

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proudly. All the students clapped and cheered for her and she could feel her cheeks redden with embarrassment.

“Thanks,” she said as she shook Mr. Jake’s extended hand.

Rain turned to the student beside him and whispered, “I think I’m in love!”

Just as Skye was about to walk out the classroom door, Rain touched her arm, stopping her, and said, “Congrats.” Then as if by magic, he produced a red Tootsie Pop and presented it to her. She took it and gave him a little smile, mildly impressed with his sleight of hand trick.

“Dude, next time make it a chocolate one,” she added as she stepped out of the classroom and back into the real world; a world she totally understood.

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