



A baby dies in Ooltewah, TN. The parents say a ghost did it. They were incarcerated in a mental institution. They hired a Private Investigator to find the truth...and he did, but it cost him everything, including the woman he loved.

SPIRIT FROM NANTUCKET

by Zack Carden

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ZACK CARDEN



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FROM
NANTUCKET

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ISBN: 978-1-64438-056-7

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2019

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Carden, Zack

Spirit From Nantucket by Zack Carden

Fiction/Mystery & Detective General | Fiction/occult & Supernatural

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019915256

CHAPTER 1

Ghosts aren't supposed to kill ... but they have.

Sam Shamantic finally arrived at his home in Chattanooga, Tennessee. It was decision time. After all the months, after all the research, after all the money, it had come down to this. He dropped his suitcase in the foyer and closed the door. He needed a drink.

On the kitchen counter Sam noticed the Old Fashioned glass he'd left by the sink. He rinsed it out, grabbed the half-empty bottle of Scotch, and twisted the squeaking cork. His hand trembled as he started the pour. The phone jangled and he sloshed the Scotch, spilling it over the tile counter. He cursed under his breath and grabbed at the receiver.

“Yes?!”

“Sam, it's you. Where has my favorite PI been? You left town without a trace. You didn't even say—”

“Well, if it isn't Marshall Garrick. Slow down, man. I just got off the plane. I'm tired and jittery. You just made me pour Balvenie all over the counter.”

Marshall paused. “I know you don't like to fly, Sam,” he said with his condescending smoothness. “So, you're still drinking, huh?”

“You didn't think a little vacation would make me quit, did you?” Balvenie saturated the air. Sam wiped his wet hands on his pants.

Marshall's laugh spun down the wire. “It was hardly a little vacation, Sam. You've been gone since October. No phone call. No card ... nothing.”

“So?”

“So, I thought you said you were going somewhere to dry out.”

“No, that's what you said. I went to get rid of *them*.”

“The ghosts?”

“Yes. Them.”

“Are they still messing with you?”

Sam took a sip ... felt the burn. The Old Fashioned glass was like a lost friend. “Too soon to tell.”

“When’s the last time you saw them?”

Sam thought for a second. “Night before last.”

“They didn’t show last night?”

Exhaustion was overtaking him. “I-I’m not sure. I was wasted.”

“Drunk?”

“Look, Marshall. I’m not in the mood for one of your damned cross-exams. I need to go. I literally just walked in from Jamaica. My suitcase is still in the foyer. Listen. I thought I was going to die down there.” He started to tell him about the exorcism, the rape by the Obeah priest, but he thought, *to hell with it*. “Look, I’m going out on the patio and enjoy the sunset. It may be my last one.” He held the Waterford glass up to the light, an amber essence. “This may be my last shot of Balvenie.” He took another sip. “I’ve decided to end it if they return. I’ve had enough.”

“Whoa there, hoss. Want me to come over? Want to talk?”

“Nah. There’s nothing to talk about. If they come back now, there’s no hope.”

“Good Lord, Sam! What happened in Jamaica?”

He thought about it, about the rape. “Nothing—nothing I want to talk about right now.” He threw the rest of the drink back. “You wouldn’t believe me anyway.”

“Try me.”

“Good bye, Marshall. I’ll call you tomorrow ... if I’m still around.”

“You’d better not do anything stupid, especially after I’ve waited on you all this time. There were two plane crashes while you were away. I thought the same thing might have happened to you as happened to ...”

“Elizabeth? I know what you’re thinking.”

Marshall went quiet. “I’m sorry Sam. I know how I’d feel if I lost Ladydale. She’s my life.” Silence spun down the wire. “Listen, I need you for another case. I have a couple of clients whose lives may depend on you.”

“Is that so? Well, I don’t feel up for lives depending on mine.”

“Promise me you’ll call me in the morning. Sam. Promise me right now, or I’m coming over there.”

Sam ran a hand through his tousled, black hair. It needed washing, like the rest of him. He let the kitchen fan blow in his face. His hollow, brown eyes dragged closed. He knew Marshall. He knew he’d come, sniffing around like a blood hound, baying questions, totally obnoxious. “I’ll call.”

Sam hung up and mopped the Scotch with a kitchen towel. He poured another drink and took it onto the patio. The view from his house was stunning, as always. Lookout Mountain sprawled before him like the Sphinx ... a docile lioness cloaked in the pinks and lavenders of evening. He slumped into his Adirondack chair, air pressing from his lungs. He sat there until the final rays slipped from sight ... until the deep purples turned black. He refused to look at the other Adirondack. That was where *she* sat. And he hated the darkness because that’s where *they* hid.

Back in the house, he set the empty glass on the tile counter and shuffled down the hallway. He paused in the living room, eyes drawn to their photo. It was sitting on a walnut credenza in a silver frame. The photo had been taken six months before she went to visit her mother. He picked it up. He was careful with it, some artifact of a lost love. He closed his eyes, praying for her spirit to leave him alone tonight, or he swore he’d do it. He looked at himself in the photo. Everyone said they made a beautiful couple.

When it was taken, they were standing in front of their home with the clubhouse of the Chattanooga Golf and Country Club in the background. Elizabeth was wearing a yellow skirt and a white tailored blouse. She had a look of Southern aristocracy. He was in a yellow golf shirt with the club logo embroidered on it, a badge of self worth. He remembered what she used to say about him. She called him her tall, dark, manly-man, with eyes so brown they appeared black.

Then she would softly finger the cleft of his chin and tell him it looked as if God had made it with a pencil eraser. He sat the photo back down. So many changes fracturing his life.

Several months ago, Marshall Garrick had told him to get away and take some time, before he had to carry a card with Twelve Steps—before he had to stand in front of strangers whose only commonality was alcohol and say, “Hi. I’m Sam ...” Marshall didn’t understand. It wasn’t about the alcohol.

Every night of his life for the past three years the spirit of his wife ... and the other one, appeared in his dreams. He would wake up screaming. His bed would be soaked and sour with the smell of fear. He couldn’t take it anymore. The dreams of the girl he killed in the raid had stopped. Why not this one? He had determined they would.

Sam thought about it as he returned to the kitchen and poured a nightcap. The tremor was still there. There had been no ghosts last night. Tonight would be the test. Would they find their way to his bedroom, again? If they did, he would end it.

He removed his Colt Detective Special from the nightstand drawer. He opened it and checked the rounds. There was a comforting click as he sent the cylinder back into the frame. He laid it on top of his *Encyclopedia of Ghosts*. When he placed his wallet next to the gun, it fell open to her picture. His eyes moistened from Scotch and love. She was imprisoned behind the yellowed cellophane like an insect in amber, trapped in another dimension. “Good night, Elizabeth, I love you,” he said, just like he always did. He was too wasted to bathe. He switched off the light and buried his face in the pillow and waited for his dreams. *How patient I am*, he thought. *Well, bring it on*. He pulled the covers over him as he lay in the four-poster bed ... waiting.

The alarm jarred him awake. He slung the cover back, sat on the side, and ground his knuckles into his eyes. He had dozed, not slept. He hurt. He stared at the cold presence of the Colt. It was just as he had left it, next to his wallet with his Elizabeth in some other dimension, unreadable. So they hadn’t come last night. No sour sweat. Sam went to shower and shave. He felt the stubble as he lathered up, the bags dragging at his gravelly eyes. He noticed a dried fleck of chicken blood in the edge of his hairline. A chicken blood

memory. He stepped from the shower, towed his hair and checked to see if the blood was gone.

He dressed, a certain comfort in benign routine. Sam lifted his pistol off the nightstand and slipped it into his briefcase, his wallet into his pocket. He thought about how close he'd come several times to putting the snub-nose into his mouth. He knew he still may have to, making sure he blew out the central cortex—no surviving as a vegetable. The prospect of death no longer frightened him; he was more frightened of the undead. Something. Them. Even her.

That's why Sam had gone to Jamaica the first of October in '88. He told no one where he was going. He had to face up to his ghosts alone. He fanned the pages of the ghost encyclopedia. The White Witch greeted him. He nodded. Maybe his research had paid off after all. His books on ghosts counseled an exorcism. He had secretly tried that in Atlanta with a priest, a fat little man with a clerical collar, a banding for his species. It hadn't worked. That left Voodoo and Jamaica. Feathers, bones ... and that pole.

Fatigue pulled at him. He slipped on his jacket and headed for the garage. He revisited the revelation, exploring it, gossamer soft. The spirits hadn't tormented him last night. Why was that, and would it last? The Obeah Voodoo priest said it would, but Sam wasn't so sure. He stopped in the kitchen and checked the damage he'd done to the bottle of Balvenie. He held it up, measuring it. He decided he'd pick up another bottle at Jax Liquors on the way home. He took a deep breath, a celebration of sorts, the first breath he'd taken in a while that felt as if it went all the way down. He ran his ticker tape behind his eyes.

It had all begun three years ago when he kissed his wife goodbye at Lovell Field. He got news of the crash later that afternoon. Sam thought it strange to see the head pro riding up in a golf cart in the middle of his round. He motioned Sam over, put his arm around him and told him about the plane. The pro took him to his office and gave him two double-Scotches. He shielded Sam until he was able to function again and took him home in a golf cart.

Elizabeth had been seven months pregnant when she boarded the Delta flight for Dallas that morning. They had argued again. About

his drinking. She never understood his melancholy—and he could never tell her about the girl who loomed behind his eyes. He would have given anything if they hadn't parted quarreling, raw around the edges. It was like neon in his brain plastered on the marquis at the Tivoli Theater. The worst day of his life: August 2, 1985. One day, two deaths.

CHAPTER 2

Ghosts are not subject to time.

In New England, Caroline Morgenstern stood in a cold Boston rain. She knew his death was coming, but she felt it crush her, pain beyond all imagining. Her life was now on hold. Spring hung in the budding trees. Flowers drooped. Death was life-denying.

Caroline carried an edition of the *Boston Globe* folded under her arm. She'd read it again coming over in the family car. A family car seemed a ridiculous extravagance for a family of one.

The *Globe's* obituary page contained the name of Alistair Morgenstern, her father. It was dated April 21, 1988. It ran for a full ten inches. Caroline had written it. She had bought three copies this morning. She was using one as a shelter from a rain that had just reasserted itself. The paper wasn't large enough or sturdy enough to protect her or the wide brim of her black hat. But she didn't feel the raindrops as they ran down her arms and soaked her black wool dress. Raindrops also dripped from the hem. No tears comingled.

The sound of an unfurling umbrella punctured the stillness. Puddles worked concentric circles around the attendant's shoes as he stepped beside her with the umbrella. He approached as solemn as the quietness of that ugly morning. He cleared his throat. "I'm sorry I didn't fetch the umbrella in time, Miss Morgenstern. The downpour caught me a bit off-guard."

She nodded. They moved deeper into the cemetery and under the graveside tent.

Her father, Alistair Morgenstern, was not a religious man. But she didn't want to take any chances. A minister secured by the mortuary performed the graveside eulogy. He was unctuous, offering the words like he owned them.

"A time to be born,
And a time to die."

A grinding out of the unctuous cliché. The Great Mandela. What hope was in that? He said a prayer to the heavy patter of rain on the tent, made some comment about her father being in a better place, shook her hand, and left her bereft. Time had brought her father down. Time, man's Achilles' heel, had been his enemy. The ghosts in her novel were not defined by time. What, if anything, did that do for her father, now amongst them? He had unfinished business. And Caroline knew from her paranormal research she may see him down the road. Would he say something to her from the veiled Beyond?

She became aware of the sodden paper and laid it on the seat of an empty chair. The cold rain had soaked through to her body and she shivered. Her skin welted with goose bumps.

After a silvered silence, the driver cleared this throat. "Are you ready, Miss Morgenstern?" His voice was solicitous, trained. She nodded as the rain freshened. She allowed herself one last look. No one was there, no one gathered at the grave. Even Solomon Wertheimer, her father's attorney and trusted associate, wasn't present. She'd tried to reach him the day it happened, early Wednesday. She left messages. Nothing. His secretary said she'd try to reach him, but he was on a cruise and she had no idea of his exact whereabouts. *Death was always inconvenient*, Caroline thought. A skeletal finger in the ribs. Grim Reaper calling ... Plans had to be changed, appointments cancelled. When she and her dad talked about death's eventuality, he told her he wanted to be buried quickly, fastidiously, in the Jewish tradition.

Back in the Family car, she sat on a fluffy towel the driver had given her. He provided another for her dress and hat. She dabbed with it as she continued to look at the landscape of tombstones. She drew her coat about her. The driver closed her door. She closed her eyes as it latched. The sound of it reminded her of the closing of the casket at the last viewing. During that last look at the shell of her father, she'd stepped close to him and touched his cheek with the tips of her fingers. His body was waxy, cold. It repulsed her. Now, her father's husk was in a cold, embracing earth.

The driver glanced in the rear-view mirror. "I'll turn up the heat, Miss Morgenstern. Are we going back to the mortuary?"

“No. Just drop me at Harvard Yard, please. I caught a cab to your, uh, place this morning.”

He nodded.

Mortuary. That was the word. But she couldn't bring herself to say it. Mort meant death in French. She couldn't wait to wash her hands—rid them of death. It reminded her of Lady Macbeth eternally washing her hands. How she wished she hadn't touched that waxy remnant of a vibrant life. The soggy, black dress warmed against her body. She took a compact from her purse and re-applied lipstick. Her blue eyes gazed back. She could see the rain-drooped brim of her black hat.

She was now alone. Her life another barren landscape. Antonio was supposed to have been with her, to help her through this ordeal. He knew Alistair's death was impending. But she'd overheard his conversation yesterday morning, treacherous words that had caused her to remove her engagement ring and throw it at him. She rested a chilled hand in the other. The mark made by the ring was still there and her thumb explored it. It felt cold and waxy, too. How long would it take for that mark to disappear, and how much longer the scar around her heart? Antonio had betrayed her. Her dad had been correct once again. She remembered some of his parting comments in the last days before the pancreatic cancer took him. “*Watch him, Carrie,*” he said. “*He's a show horse. I don't trust him.*”

Alistair Morgenstern never trusted anyone. And he knew more than a little about human nature. He'd built his empire as an investment banker putting people together, taking those with fantastic ideas but few resources and putting them together with tycoons who had the money but few ideas. He bought and sold companies, too, chopping them up and selling the pieces. He moved them about like chess pieces. And he moved mere money into wealth. During his life he'd provided well for his family, and along with it, he'd gained an almost flawless insight into people. She closed her compact and returned it to her purse. Beyond the windshield the rain kept up its morbid beat while she thought back.

Antonio Pellegrino was a stockbroker. He'd finished his MBA at Harvard. She'd met him there. He had become an affiliate broker

with E.F. Hutton, then a junior partner at a small firm in Boston. Looking back, it all made sense. He was smart, aggressive, and driven—a lot like her dad.

And he was beautiful. His dark olive skin, coal black hair, and killer brown eyes were perfect compliments to her own blond tresses, blue eyes, and warm vanilla skin. Behind the wheel of that red Alfa Romeo he looked like a Greek god in his chariot. And she had willingly given her virginity.

She'd never said yes with the others she'd dated. She'd waited, and even though she wanted Antonio, she'd waited until they were engaged. She'd saved herself for the one special man in her life. She'd tried to emulate her mother whom she knew mostly from her dad's loving anecdotes and scrapbooks, and what she could summon from early memories. She had read the novels her mother had written. Her mother had kept herself only to Alistair. But he was never home, and Caroline realized that as an adult, her mother, Margaux's sublimation had saved her. She'd plunged into a world of literary passion and fantasy—even as her feminine essence had desiccated.

But it was all too late now, for herself. She'd welcomed Antonio into her embrace many times, too many to count. He was a good lover. He was everything she'd ever hoped for, ever dreamed about, but as her father had cautioned—a show horse, not to be trusted. They'd flown too high, too quickly, and their flawed bond melted like the wax of Icarus' wings, and they had fallen toward the sea. The love she thought was theirs splashed into the deep. That day, Wednesday, April 20, 1988, was a day she'd never forget. One day, two deaths.

CHAPTER 3

Voodoo chants and bells are often used in exorcisms

Tuesday was a pretty day in Chattanooga. Sam drove down Riverview Road headed for his office. The world had become incredibly small. Yesterday, he had left Jamaica. Today, he was going back to work. But there was a fault line, this jagged fissure going back to the islands. Jamaica. And the day that changed everything.

He was drunk before noon. He'd gone to the bar next door to his villa and spilled his guts to the native bartender, a new guy who spoke decent English. Sam told him about the spirits and kept on drinking. He drank as he talked, talked as he drank. Sam told him everything.

The bartender gave him a piece of paper with the menu on it. He tried to get him to eat something, but Sam told him he wasn't hungry. It was hot. Sam saw the blades of the overhead fan turning in his Scotch. Its breeze blew the menu. It made him think of the downdraft ... *the wind that pushed down the plane, the woman inside the plane ... the baby inside the woman.*

He had another Scotch. He told the bartender he was going to blow his brains out when he got home. Before he came to Jamaica, Sam decided he would join Elizabeth if the ghosts didn't leave him alone. Since he'd been there, he'd visited a psychic and had undergone two fraudulent exorcisms. His hope was now gone, along with much of his money. But he didn't want to off himself in Jamaica. He'd do it at home where they'd lived their caring lives.

He remembered staring at the new bartender in his gaily colored shirt. The kaleidoscopic shapes and colors slanted through his alcohol prism. He thought the bartender had looked wise when he shared his confession with him, like a priest almost, like the fat guy

in Atlanta with his too tight clerical collar. He had soft brown eyes. His voice sounded like a plea. "I know someone who can help you, mon. I can arrange it for tonight, if you wish."

Sam thought about the psychic, the other attempts. He thought about the gambling casinos, his other nights here trying to find a way to make his demons stop. He had night terrors. Lots of screaming ... sour sweat-soaked sheets. It was his last night in Jamaica, so what the hell. "If he's for real I'll try it. I'll try anything."

The bartender smiled and looked at the clock. "Oh, he's for real, mon," he said. "Be here at ten tonight."

Sam's finger jabbed at the booth. "I'll be in the corner over there." He crumpled into the wooden booth and waited. He counted the hours with Scotches. *Woman inside the plane, baby inside the woman. All fall down.*

They came for him at ten. Three muscular black men in brightly colored shirts. They drove him to a remote area in a garishly painted taxi that didn't look like it could make the trip. He stood weaving in the center of a clearing in the dense foliage north of Kingston. The moon was a thin crescent. A bonfire licking at the darkness provided the only light, along with what came from the flambeau torches around the periphery. The fire turned the circling faces macabre. Frenzied dancers succumbed in obedience to the drums. Bells tolled, metal clanged, and gourds rattled like old bones.

Sam was stripped. He endured a cleansing bath in a large metal tub given by smiling women with soapy hands and missing teeth. He was placed naked except for a loin cloth in the middle of the clearing. Sam was a modest man, even when foundering in alcohol. He was glad it was dimly lit, but it scarcely mattered. He would never see these people again. His only concern was making the spirits leave. Making them stop.

He clung to the Poteau-mitan, the cosmic axis of Jamaican Voodoo. It was a pole shaped like a rough abstract cross jammed into a hole by the Obeah priest to begin the spiritual exorcism. Natives chanted, bodies glistening, as their bare feet kicked up dust into a low malignant fog, roiling and curling.

The priest was dressed in a dark robe. His long black hair was in dreadlocks. Dark eyes glistened in the bonfire light. There was an earring in each ear and a gold nose ring hooked in his right nostril. It glittered as his nostrils flared. He came and faced Sam as attendants dragged over a primitive, blood-splotted altar and set it on a black cloth between them. The priest raised his arms and splayed his fingers. The crowd fell silent, breathing hard. Eyes glittered as they waited. He laid a cloth doll on the altar and faced Sam. He demanded the source of the spirits who tormented him.

Sam told him only of the woman he married and how her spirit came to trouble him every night after she had died.

The priest took this knowledge deep into himself, his eyes rolling back until only the whites showed, then he raised his arm and made a fist. The chants, drums, and clanging metal began again. He took a large hatpin and drove it into the heart of the doll. The pin felt like a dagger to Sam's own heart. His knees buckled. And he secretly wondered if one pin would be enough for both the spirit of his wife and the other one in her womb, the soul whose name was known only to God.

The priest removed a stone knife from a sheath inside his robe and stabbed the doll in the belly, gutting it. When he inserted his fingers into the abdomen and extracted a very small doll, Sam staggered away and fell weeping into the dirt. Bile burned hot in his mouth. *How did he know? How did he know?* He reached a clawing hand to the priest for help, but the priest drove another pin into the fetus. Sam wretched. The priest spoke in another tongue as he cast a spell. "Be gone!" he screamed, the whites of his eyes reflecting the fires. "Be gone!"

Sam remembered saying, "But will it last?" He had looked at the priest with dark, pleading eyes.

And he remembered the priest replying, "You must believe, and it will last, mon."

Sam gave himself to it. "I believe! I believe!" he cried out, weeping.

“Then get up, mon. Cling to that pole and I will seal it with the blood.” The bonfires continued their dance in the priest’s eyes. “But I warn you. If you do not believe, not even the blood can release you.”

Sam’s body was weak. “I believe,” he whispered.

“Then get up, mon,” he demanded. “Take hold of the Poteau-mitan.” Sam did as he was told.

The priest raised his closed fist, and the drums and dancing began again. The dust roiled. Sam struggled to cling to the post. His heart pounded like the drums. He was soul sick, and he knew he was dying.

Sam heard the squawk. He remembered the priest holding a chicken by the neck on the altar. He’d opened his robe with his other hand and again unsheathed his knife. He watched as the headless chicken flopped about, kicking up the infernal dust. The priest made the sign of the cross in Sam’s face, but he didn’t feel the warm blood spatter on him from the severed head. His mind was torn from him in some obscene rape. He fell unconscious.

Sam awoke to a cold rain on his face in the courtyard of his villa clad in his loin cloth and minus the money in his wallet. He found the wallet in a puddle alongside his wadded pants and shirt. Chilled with head throbbing, Sam cleaned off Elizabeth’s cellophane face and staggered inside to the bathroom. His dark gritty eyes looked in the mirror. Dried chicken blood encrusted his face and chest. The priest had raped his mind, but had he ripped ghosts from his soul. It left him violated—trembling. He splashed water on his face, then dampened a wash cloth and wiped at the blood. He took two aspirins, collapsed on the bed, and prayed to God that the spirits had vanished. He awoke late the following morning befouled and confused. He hung under a hot pummeling shower. He barely made his flight.

But today was a pretty day in Chattanooga. Jamaica was far away, with its exotic and frightening mysteries. The smell of strong coffee took Sam as he drove down Frazier. He drove over the Market Street Bridge, and he got lucky and caught the green turn signal at Seventh. He coughed then sneezed. Maybe he’d caught something

down there lying naked in the rain. He turned up the hill and parked in the space he rented in a lot on Cherry Street. He set the brake and cut the engine. He closed his eyes in the sudden silence, the car now a quiet cocoon. His heart tripped a beat. He forced himself to calm down. Sunlight slanted in, bathing him in warmth. Slowly encroaching voodoo drums faded, blank staring eyes turned away, leaving him sitting in his coat and tie in a civil world. He started to laugh but felt the madness slipping loose and quieted. Maybe they were gone for sure this time ... *Voodoo eyes rolled up in their sockets, mocking him.*

It was the day after Memorial Day. Sam walked up Seventh Street toward his office. He heard the clanging of the chain against the metal flagpole with every gust that rippled Old Glory. In Jamaica they believed clanking metal drove spirits away. He listened to the flagpole as sunlight glinted off the golden dome as he stood waiting at the light.

“Sam!” someone yelled. “Over here!”

Sam looked around. John Yarborough waved from across Georgia Avenue. “What’s up, John?”

The light changed and Sam walked over. “Marshall’s looking for you.”

“Yeah, I know. He called last night. I’d just walked in the door from Jamaica. He said he had two clients that needed help. Any idea?”

“Jamaica, huh? Not much of a tan, sport.”

“The golf courses sucked, so I hung out in casinos and bars. So, any ideas about the clients?”

“He must be talking about Dr. Smythe and his wife. They were remanded to *The Bend* Friday. Didn’t you hear about it?”

“Jamaica. Remember?”

“Well, Marshall got them off on insanity from a murder charge.”

“Did they do it?”

Yarborough offered an odd smile. “Everyone thought so, but they said a ghost did it.”

Sam’s stomach churned. “A ghost.”

Yarborough held up his portfolio. “Due in court, Sam. Let’s catch up later.”

Sam made his way up the steps of the Dome building. Once inside, he recognized other lawyers milling about in their dark suits and conservative ties, lugging lives around in their briefcases. He carried his own briefcase along with a black coffee he’d gotten at the Krystal, reviving a little on the rich Arabica aroma.

The frosted glass to his office went halfway down the door. Gothic, gold-leaf letters read: SAMUEL SHAMANTIC. And directly underneath his name in a smaller font: PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR. The pulsing red message light greeted him. The voicemail was full. He hadn’t thought about that before he left. It drew him, a summoning eye.

CHAPTER 4

Ghosts can create an eerie atmosphere.

An airliner made an instrument landing at Boston's Logan Airport. Solomon Wertheimer, once Alistair Morgenstern's closest associate, sensed the eerie atmosphere. He watched the red wing light pulsing in the murk. It slanted in and stained the lenses of his gold-rimmed glasses.

That evening Caroline Morgenstern jumped when her door bell rang. She peered through the security lens. A short, portly man in a brown raincoat stood on the other side, wiping his glasses with a handkerchief. She opened the door and invited him in. "Mr. Wertheimer," she said. "I didn't expect you."

"Carrie," he said, "please forgive me for coming to your apartment unannounced. I should have called." His breathing was labored. "I was so terribly sorry to hear of your father's passing." His eyes blinked their solace from behind his glasses. "I'm upset I missed the interment."

"I figured your secretary couldn't reach you," Caroline said. "She said you were on a cruise."

His countenance fell. "Yes. We'd just docked at the Grand Caymans. I flew straight back as soon as I heard. We had bad weather and I missed my flight in Atlanta. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." He hung there in the gathering silence.

"Here, Mr. Wertheimer. Let's get you out of that wet raincoat. I'll take it to the bathroom." She offered him a seat on the sofa. "It's okay, Mr. Wertheimer," she said rejoining him, "I muddled through. It's been raining here for the last three days. I got soaked—"

"Your ring." He said abruptly, looking at her hand. "Where's—"

She pulled away. "It's with Antonio, Mr. Wertheimer. Dad was right. We're done."

“Ah. To be honest, Caroline, I was concerned myself. He was too polished, too slick. What happened, if I may ask?”

She summoned the ugly memories. “The morning Dad died I’d just come home from the hospital. I was taking a shower, getting ready to go to the mortuary. I suppose he didn’t hear me cut the water off. I toweled off and put on a bathrobe. I was sitting at the vanity putting on my face when I heard him talking.” She rubbed the ring that wasn’t there. “I thought someone had made a condolence call. I couldn’t hear clearly, so rather than yell, I joined him, coming up behind him. He was talking to Aristotle, his senior partner. My mouth fell open when I heard him say ...” Her voice trailed off, her blue eyes darkened in injury.

“What did he say?”

She repeated the words. “He said, ‘Yeah, Ari. The old goat died this morning about six. Carrie? Oh, she’s in the shower. We’ve got to go pick out a casket, do the obit ... all that stuff.’” Caroline forced out the rest of it. “He had his foot on a chair looking out the window as he spoke. I’d walked up behind him barefoot. I wasn’t snooping.”

Solomon listened. “Could I trouble you for some water, Caroline? Flying makes me dry.”

“Oh, sure. Sorry, I’m not myself tonight. I feel like I’m in this horrible dream ... I can’t seem to get free of it.” Caroline went to the refrigerator. Ice clinked in the glass. “Can you hear me from the kitchen?”

“Yes. Go ahead.”

“I was in shock at what Antonio was saying,” she said as she returned. “It was like a nightmare, Mr. Wertheimer.” She handed him the glass. “I walked up behind him, wanting love and sympathy, I guess. But I got something else. It’s burned into me.” Caroline recited then, like a child learning a poem. “He said, ‘Listen, Ari, baby, I’ll bet her trust fund will come in quickly now that the old man’s dead. Well, I don’t know exactly, but I’ll bet it’s going to be several million. We’re looking at half of it. We’ll be in high cotton, baby. We can retire in Europe. Don’t worry, Ari. I love you—only you—forever you. Nah, don’t worry about her getting cold feet. She’s smitten good. She can’t seem to get enough. Uh, yeah. I

understand you don't like that. I wouldn't like a woman making love with you, either, but we'll be together soon. It'll all be worth it. Ciao, baby.' The parroted lines ended. "She's smitten good," Caroline said. "God, what a fool I was ..." She watched the lawyer sip his water, staring at the carpet. "Anyway, when Antonia finally looked around, I was just a few steps behind him. I'd heard everything and I was already forcing the ring off my finger. When he saw me, he dropped the receiver and turned pale."

"It's not what you think," he said.

"Apparently not," I said. I was sick to my stomach and could barely talk. I finally got the ring off and threw it on the floor. "Get out", I said. "Judas, Antonio—Ari? Another man?"

Tired eyes blinked from behind gold rimmed glasses. "I'm so sorry, Caroline."

"I told him, Look, I'll pack all your personal stuff, your precious ties, all your Gant shirts, and Armani suits. We're through. You can send someone over to pick everything up, and it'd better not be Ari, either. Now, leave." She sat deflated, spent from the ugliness. She picked up a photo of her mom and dad from earlier times, when life was good and decent.

"Did he say anything else?"

Carefully, she replaced the photo. "What could he say? I heard it. I heard it all. He cowered like a scolded puppy, Mr. Wertheimer. He bent over and picked up the ring. Finally, as he opened the door, he made a last appeal."

"An appeal?" A lawyer's word. He waited.

"'Caroline,' he said, 'I'm sorry. I was just popping off to my boss at the fir—'"

"I cut him off and told him to get out. I wanted to scream, but I just felt sick to my stomach."

Solomon nodded, seeking quiet ground, forward movement.

"Mr. Wertheimer, you're a wise man. Do you believe evil exists?"

Solomon watched the question loom in her blue eyes. "*Bereshit*," he said quietly.

"Hebrew?"

“Yes. *Bereshit*. Beginning. It was there in the beginning.” Solomon quickly changed the subject. “And here you are. You lost the two most important people in your life the same day, and I wasn’t even here for you.”

Caroline reached over and patted Solomon’s hand. “It’s okay. No one can predict these things. But you’re right. It hurt losing both of them. Losing Mom was bad, but I was so young I didn’t absorb the full impact. But this betrayal, on top of losing Dad—” She waved a ringless hand, trying to enfold and grasp the wounds. Explain them.

“I don’t see how you handled it,” he said.

“I’ll tell you honestly. I haven’t. When I got home after the burial, I lost it. I cried over Antonio, over Daddy, over Mom. It all broke loose. I cried and I couldn’t stop. I’m alone now, Mr. Wertheimer. Do you know how it feels to be alone?” She waved her hand again, a cutting gesture of self-censure. “God, I’m sorry, that was stupid—”

“Well,” Solomon said smiling, soothing a client, side-stepping pain, “when you get to my age But I must return to Antonio for a second. Don’t take this wrong, Caroline, but I’m glad, for your sake, that he showed his true colors before it was too late.” Solomon stood, his rumpled form taking the weight of her betrayal and loss. “Tell you what, Caroline, I see a problem. Nothing we can’t handle, but we can’t go over things soon enough. Are you up to coming to the office Monday?”

“Can we do it after 3 P.M.? I don’t get out of Abnormal Psych until then.” She managed a laugh. “Catching up with all my reading is going to be horrible. You wouldn’t believe how much they lay on us.”

“After three’s fine, Caroline. Just call the office Monday morning and let Ester know what time is good. I’ll clear my afternoon from three on.” He watched her. “There’s a lot to go over.” Caroline walked him to the foyer and retrieved his raincoat from her bathroom. She held it for him. “Still quite wet, I’m afraid.”

“I’ll manage. I need to get out of these clothes and take a shower. It’s been a long day. Oh, and here’s my card, just in case you misplaced the hundred previous ones.”

She smiled. Only rarely did he offer his dry wit, but from her youth he'd always had a calming effect on her. He was like a surrogate uncle. "I'll see you Monday, Mr. Wertheimer. Thank you for coming tonight. It helped a lot." Impulsively, she kissed him on the cheek. It startled him, but he acknowledged it with a smile.

"Good evening, Caroline." He took the card back and scribbled his home phone number on it and gave it back to her. "Just in case you need anything—need to talk. Your dad was a great man. He dominated Boston, y'know. I felt his presence when we flew into Logan tonight. The fog was eerie."

"Yes, he was a force."

Solomon stood for a moment. She saw his eyes moisten as he reached for the doorknob. Why had she kissed him? But she knew. She had few people to love now. Mr. Wertheimer was almost a blood tie to her father.

"It's still raining. Do you want some tissues to clear your glasses?"

"My handkerchief can manage, but thank you."

The door closed. Something compelled her to look through the peephole. He had vanished. The fog was eerie he had said. She thought of that other eerie day at Auschwitz when her dad saw an apparition of his grandmother shimmer then vanish. His Grosse Mutter. Caroline had enjoined herself to his vision, wanting her closeness, wanting to kiss her. But how does one kiss a ghost?



A baby dies in Ooltewah, TN. The parents say a ghost did it. They were incarcerated in a mental institution. They hired a Private Investigator to find the truth...and he did, but it cost him everything, including the woman he loved.

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