



POP USUALLY DROPPED me and Jason off at school early on his way to work. As soon as we got there, Jason ran off to join his friends playing basketball, and I made my way to the library. It seemed so small, neglected and sandwiched as it was between the school's main building and the massive church, but it was my favorite place at St. Lawrence's Catholic School for Boys.

"Hector Griggs."

I dropped my backpack off on the nearest table. "Hey, Mr. Morhill."

Mr. Morhill looked like a scarecrow in a fancy plaid suit and round wire glasses, but his head wasn't full of straw. He was one of the smartest people I'd ever met. He'd shown up last year to replace Miss Calloway, who'd won the lottery and immediately retired to travel the world. Unlike Miss Calloway, Mr. Morhill allowed students into the library before school. When I didn't have any homework to finish, Mr. Morhill let me practice piano in the music room at the back of the library.

But that morning I wanted—no, I needed—to talk about the haunted clergy house and the ghost. The other teachers and priests at St. Lawrence's thought it was nonsense, but Mr. Morhill was different. He was always asking us boys for stories about the ghost, and he talked about how the world was filled with weird and wonderful things that defied explanation. Mr. Morhill was definitely

the strangest librarian I'd ever met, which was one of the reasons I liked him.

"I heard the ghost yesterday."

Mr. Morhill was standing behind the checkout desk, scanning a stack of books into the computer, but as soon as I spoke, he looked at me over the rims of his glasses. "Was that before or after your scuffle with Mr. Nesbitt?"

My cheeks burned. Mr. Morhill had an uncanny knowledge of what was going on around St. Lawrence's. None of the other teachers seemed to care, but Mr. Morhill knew which students were fighting, who was being bullied, who was having trouble at home. If I hadn't known better, I would've sworn he could read our minds. "It was nothing," I mumbled.

"Was that why Gene ordered you to run laps?" Mr. Morhill said. Gene was Coach Barbary. It sounded odd when teachers called each other by their first names.

I'd already decided to take my mom's advice and apologize to Blake, so I wasn't in the mood to discuss it with Mr. Morhill. "Didn't you hear me? The ghost talked to me. It knew my name!"

Mr. Morhill wandered out from behind the desk and sat across from me, folding his hands on the table and giving me his full attention. "I'm listening. Start from the beginning."

"Okay, so I was running—"

"From Mr. Nesbitt?"

I lowered my eyes. "Yeah. Anyway, I didn't know where to go, and this voice called my name. It didn't sound like a student. It was kind of raspy and thin, like Mrs. Ford the time she got bronchitis." I told Mr. Morhill everything. About running toward the old clergy house, about the deadbolt. He listened without interrupting until I was done.

"You didn't go *into* the clergy house, did you?"

I shook my head.

"Is there anything else you remember?" Mr. Morhill asked. "Was it chilly, did you feel the moment of your imminent demise, did you smell anything like sulfur or potato salad that's turned?"

"I didn't smell anything weird. But there was this feeling."

"Yes?" Mr. Morhill said.

“I swear it was coming from the clergy house. It was like someone stole the sun and took all the warmth with it.”

Mr. Morhill leaned forward on his elbows. “It was cold, then?”

“Yeah,” I said. “But the cold was inside me. I don’t know how to explain it.”

“I think you’ve done an admirable job.” Mr. Morhill bridged his hands and held them to his chin, his eyes distant. “Promise me you won’t go near the clergy house again, Hector.”

Returning had been the last thing on my mind until Mr. Morhill mentioned it. But now I was curious. “Why? I think the ghost was trying to help me.”

“Have you heard of the yellow pitcher plant?”

My mom had a pretty big garden in the backyard at home, but I’d never heard her mention a pitcher plant.

“Found in the south, the *Sarracenia flava* uses its vibrant color and sweet nectar to lure insects into a hollow pitcher, where it traps them and slowly dissolves them in its digestive juices.”

“Cool!” Nature was gross, but also awesome.

Mr. Morhill shook his head slowly. “Yes. However, my point is that occasionally, things that appear helpful are, in reality, trying to eat you.”

Before I could respond, the library door swung open and Gordi Standish stuck his red head in.

Mr. Morhill looked over his shoulder. “The air conditioning in this building barely functions as it is without you letting what little cold air it produces escape, Mr. Standish.”

Gordi zeroed in on me. “I was looking for Hector.”

“Congratulations,” he said. “You’ve found him.”

“Blake asked me to tell you to come outside,” Gordi said to me, ignoring Mr. Morhill.

Gordi was one of the guys I used to sit with at lunch. He didn’t talk much, and I wasn’t sure if it was because he was shy or because he didn’t have anything to say. I was surprised Blake had sent Gordi instead of Luke or Arjun. I’d always gotten along with Arjun because he wasn’t Catholic either. He was only at St. Lawrence’s because his mom taught first grade there. When the other students went for confession, Arjun and I sat in the back pews, each trying to make the

other laugh first. Sending Gordi was a strange choice, and it made me wary.

“What for?” I asked.

Gordi shrugged. “He wants to apologize or something.”

If there was even a small chance I could patch up my friendship with Blake, I had to take it.

“We’ll finish our chat later, Mr. Griggs.” Mr. Morhill glanced again at Gordi. “Remember what I said about the pitcher plant.”

I followed Gordi out of the library and around the back of the church to a small garden that was off-limits to students. Blake stood under the shade of a gumbo-limbo tree, his lips pinched and his arms crossed over his chest. He was flanked by Evan Christopher and Conrad Eldridge. Evan was the kind of boy who agreed with whoever spoke the loudest, and he was up for anything as long as everyone else was doing it. We’d usually gotten along, but that was before Blake had decided I was the enemy.

Conrad Eldridge was an eighth-grade boy who had a reputation for being a teacher’s pet. They loved him because he got straight As and did his homework and always knew the answers to questions when they called on him. He had buzzed brown hair and thick eyebrows. He was also the tallest boy in our school, and his voice was deeper than even Coach Barbary’s. I was surprised to find him with Blake.

I stood with my hands in my pockets and my eyes on the ground. With Gordi, Evan, and Conrad attending him, I doubted Blake actually intended to apologize, but I held tightly to hope, refusing to let go. “I’m here.”

Conrad whispered into Blake’s ear. Blake snickered. “Yeah, I didn’t think he’d be stupid enough to come either.”

I flinched. Blake was using a lot of words I’d never heard him say before. It might have been pointless, but I decided to carry on with my plan, since I might not get another chance. “I’m sorry, Blake.”

Blake had rarely worn anything but a cheerful smile. Even when his moms punished him, he accepted it without complaint. But as he stood under the gumbo-limbo tree, his lips were twisted into a vicious sneer. “Shut up.”

“I’m sorry I set your science project on fire.”

“Shut up, Hector!”

“And I’m sorry I asked you to be my boyfriend.”

Blake lunged forward and shoved me into Gordi. “I told you to shut up!”

The attack caught me off guard. “Stop! This isn’t you, Blake!” Tears welled in my eyes.

Conrad whispered to Blake again, and both boys laughed.

“I told you guys he was a *freak*,” Blake said, but *freak* wasn’t the name he called me. “Hold him.”

Gordi pulled my arms behind my back, but he wasn’t holding them tightly. “I don’t think this is okay.”

“Did he really want to be your boyfriend?” Evan Christopher said like it was the funniest joke he’d ever heard. I definitely wasn’t laughing.

“What’s wrong with you, Blake?” I said. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because you’re a *freak*,” he said. “And this is what happens to *freaks* at this school.”

My mom had been wrong. *Sorry* wasn’t going to fix our friendship this time. The Blake calling me names wasn’t the best friend I’d spent the summer with, biking around town and eating candy until I was sick. I didn’t know the Blake standing in front of me, and I didn’t want to.

“You’re going to regret we ever met,” Blake promised.

I couldn’t reason with Blake, and I’d proven the day before that I couldn’t fight him. That left me, again, with one option to save myself. I stomped on Gordi’s foot as hard as I could, driving the heel of my loafer into his toes. He hollered and loosened his grip on my arms, and I took advantage of the opening to twist free. Gordi reached for me but only managed to grab my backpack. I slipped my arms through the straps and left him holding it while I took off at a dead run.

I was faced with the same dilemma as the day before. Blake was faster and there weren’t many places to hide. The main building wasn’t open yet, and I doubted I could make it back to the library before Blake, Gordi, Evan, and Conrad caught me. I could’ve tried to reach Jason, but then he would’ve told Pop, and I didn’t want to hear how I was a crybaby who needed to be tougher. I even considered

trying to reach the clergy house—maybe the ghost would help me again—but it was too far away. The church was the only building I had any chance of beating Blake to. Students weren't allowed inside during school hours without permission, but I was prepared to risk detention to prevent another beating from my ex-best friend.

Fueled by fear, I sprinted for St. Lawrence's church. I didn't look back and I didn't slow down until I hit the doors, pulled them open, and stole inside. Churches had been used as sanctuaries throughout history, so I hoped God wouldn't be too upset with me for hiding out even though I wasn't Catholic. I expected Father Allison or Father Carmichael to be there, but the church was empty. Blake and the others couldn't be far behind. I needed to quickly find a nook where I could hide. Luckily, I knew just the place.

There was a small stairway, cleverly concealed behind wood paneling, that led to a balcony where the pipe organ was located. Father Allison had shown it to me once after I'd asked if it was the same as a piano. It wasn't. I was pretty sure Blake wouldn't find me up there. When I reached the balcony, I peeked over the ledge as Blake, Gordi, Evan, and Conrad burst into the church. They weren't even trying to be quiet.

"Find him!" Blake said.

Evan split off, checking the pews, while Gordi crept toward the dais at the front of the church.

"You better come out, Hector!" Blake's voice ricocheted off the stained-glass windows depicting the stations of the cross. "You're only making things worse for yourself."

Blake had every right to be angry at me for setting fire to his project, but I didn't understand why he was so mad at me for asking him to be my boyfriend. He'd told me how kids at school used to pick on him for having two moms and how he hadn't understood why it had bothered them so much, so there had to be something more going on, and if I could figure out what it was, maybe I could fix what I'd broken. But I couldn't do anything if he wouldn't talk to me without calling me bad names.

My legs were trembling as I watched Blake and Conrad snake up and down the pews. They stopped, and Conrad leaned over to whisper to Blake. Blake turned around and looked right at where I

was hiding. I dropped down, praying he hadn't spotted me, or my perfect hiding place would become a dead end. I tucked myself as far back as I could between the organ and the wall and hugged my knees to my chest.

Don't see me, don't see me, don't see me.

Blake might not have found the door to the balcony on his own, but Gordi was an altar boy and probably knew where it was. I winced as the hinges squeaked.

Don't see me, don't see me, don't see me.

The stairs creaked.

Don't see me, don't see me. Please don't see me.

Blake's long shadow crept onto the balcony before him.

I made myself as small as possible, so small that maybe Blake wouldn't notice me. *Don't see me, don't see me.*

The balcony was cramped, barely large enough for two people. Blake scanned the area. He looked right at where I was hiding. I held my breath, waiting for Blake to yank me to my feet by the front of my uniform shirt.

"He up there?" Gordi called from below.

Blake turned away and leaned over the ledge. "I swear I saw him."

"He probably ran out the back." I recognized Evan's voice.

"Yeah," Blake said. "Maybe." He looked around again, his brow furrowed in confusion. Finally he shook his head and left.

I couldn't believe my luck. There was no way Blake hadn't seen me. Maybe he'd pretended not to because he didn't actually want to beat me up and had only said he did because he was trying to impress Conrad. That was probably too much to hope for, but I couldn't think of another reason that made sense.

I counted to one hundred before crawling out of my hiding place. My knees were shaking as I descended the stairs. I shut the door to the balcony behind me and turned around, nearly running into Father Allison.

"Sorry!" I blurted without thinking.

Father Allison stumbled backward, startled. His eyes were wide behind his thick, round glasses. "Who's there? This is a church, not a playground." He opened the door to look in the staircase, and I had to hop to the side to get out of his way. "Hello?"

“I said ‘sorry.’ ” I waved my hand in front of Father Allison’s face. He didn’t flinch or move or react at all. He was looking at me the same way Blake had. He was looking *through* me, staring at the door to the pipe organ in confusion.

Something wasn’t right. Father Allison wasn’t known for his sense of humor, and if this was a joke, I definitely wasn’t laughing. Either way, I had to leave before I got in trouble. When I reached the door, I turned and spotted my reflection in the glass door of a notice board on the wall. Or rather, my lack of a reflection. I wouldn’t have believed if I hadn’t seen it—or *not* seen it—for myself. I couldn’t see my reflection. I held my hand in front of my face. I could see it with my eyes, but when I looked in the glass, I only saw the reflection of the wall behind me. My brain felt like a frozen computer, fans kicking on high as it overheated, trying to process what was happening. All I could do was stare at my hand and the glass, eyes darting back and forth from one to the other.

Blake hadn’t seen me. Father Allison hadn’t seen me either. Maybe Blake was pretending, but Father Allison would have definitely told me off if he knew I was in here. Then there was the glass. I’d never heard of trick glass that didn’t reflect people, and even if it existed, why would they have it in the church? There was only one explanation.

I was invisible!