

Chapter 5. Mind Over Matter

The moonlight shining through the living room window illuminates just enough for the five ghosts to find the business card they're looking for. It's poking out from under a letter about Council Tax.

Serena squints at the card. 'I can't see the words. Most of it's hidden under that damned letter, but it looks like it could be the business card the old copper left here.'

'What a stroke of luck,' says Keith. 'Now all we need is another lucky break. I don't know if you've discovered how to move sheets of paper around yet, Julia, but if we all concentrate, we should be able to shift that letter off the card and onto the floor, so we can read the address.'

Julia looks puzzled. 'I can't say I've ever tried wafting paper about, lovey. I've not been dead that long, and I've had more important things to concentrate on.'

'Wish we'd hooked up with you earlier, Julia. Carl and I might've been able to help you adjust to your new circumstances. Still, at least we've bumped into each other now, so we five can each support each other in this strange hinterland. You can help us right now, if it's okay with you.'

'You know I'll always help you, Keith,' says Julia, then thinks, *Despite you having cheated on my daughter, you ratbag, but that'll have to be water under the bridge if we're all going to get along.* She smiles sweetly and says, 'So, what do you want me to do?'

'I need you, and everyone else, to concentrate their energy on shifting the piece of paper that's hiding the name and address on the business card. Julia, I can't tell you now how vital it is we succeed in shifting it, but trust me, it is. I'll tell you the reasons why later.'

'You sound so serious, Keith, you're frightening me.'

'Sorry ... didn't mean to scare you, Julia. We're not in danger because we're already dead. But, if we don't get a move on, concentrate hard, and move that sheet of paper, numerous living people might be in unimaginable danger.'

Carl snorts and says, ‘Nice job at not frightening people, Keith. I suggest we all stand in a line and focus on the paper. Visualise it floating over onto the floor on the right. If we concentrate our energy in one direction, the plan should work. We’ll be an invisible wind, shifting the paper onto the carpet.’

It’s now Keith’s turn to snort. ‘Very poetic, Carl. Never seen a visible wind, but I know what you mean. Right, girls, stop messing around. Let’s do this.’

Serena and Melanie have been admiring their glowing, colourful energy strands in the floor-length mirror, but the stern tone of Keith’s voice snaps them out of their girlish titivation. Acting on sergeant major Keith’s orders, all five line up and summon up every scrap of energy they can muster. Their focus is formidable. When the sheet of paper eventually moves a few millimetres, Carl shouts, ‘It moved!’ thereby destroying their combined energy force, bringing the movement to a frustrating halt.

Keith glares at Carl. ‘You twat! You’ve bugged it up!’

Carl looks shiftily. ‘Oops, sorry, mate. No more outbursts from me.’

They regroup and channel their joint power. Several minutes later, the letter from the Council is lying on the carpet.

‘Yippee! Success at last!’ shrieks Serena. She leans forward and eagerly scans the tiny words on the business card. ‘So, the old copper’ name is John Broom. That’s easy enough to remember. As we ghosts have no way of writing anything down, it means we’ll have to memorise this info.’

‘It’s lucky he lives in Cork and not Wales. Remembering some of those tricky Welsh place names would be nigh impossible,’ says Keith. He knows there’s a ridiculously long Welsh name over fifty letters long, but can’t even begin to pronounce it, which is hardly surprising. ‘I suggest we each memorise a line of John Broom’s address. You don’t have to do that, Julia. I’m guessing you don’t want us to drag you over to Ireland with us.’

Julia looks indignantly at him. ‘Says who? I wouldn’t mind a trip to Ireland. I might have been knocking on a bit when I

was alive, but age is irrelevant now. I won't tire out any quicker than any of you, so why shouldn't I come too?'

Carl laughs at the sight of Keith being scolded, for once. 'Quite right, Julia. You tell him. Keith, you shouldn't be so condescending to Julia. We're all equal now we're dead.'

Keith shoots Carl a glare that could have stripped paint, then turns sweetly to Julia. 'Of course you can come with us, but it won't be a picnic. We've some vital business to attend to. We'll fill you in with the story soon. You must be busting a gut with curiosity over what's worrying us four.'

'Yes, that'd be nice, dear, but tell me when you're ready. Right now, my thoughts are with Beatrice and the kids. They should be back soon.'

As if on cue, the front door opens to reveal a distressing sight. Beatrice enters, obviously still in shock, her eyes puffy and red from crying. She's dressed head to toe in black, as are her children. Tristan is bawling his eyes out, and Emily and Lizzie are sniffing and dabbing their eyes with tissues. Beatrice's copper, Pre-Raphaelite hair, so like her dead daughter's locks, appears incongruously cheery.

'I was hoping they might dress in bright colours to celebrate my life, not mope around in black. They look like a bunch of Goths,' says Serena.

Keith floats closer to the woman he'd been married to for years, stroking each of his children as though to comfort them, wishing they could feel his touch. 'Your poor Mum is now a dab hand at grieving, Serena. She's experienced more than her fair share of bereavements, as have your siblings. Your death is naturally still so raw to them—'

'It's pretty raw for me too, don't forget,' says Serena.

'I know, lovey. It'll be ugly around here for some time. Wish there was something we could do to help the family.'

Not wanting to feel second best, Carl also floats closer to Beatrice. He awkwardly hovers around, feeling awkward as Keith is hogging the space. 'Well, sadly, there isn't, except perhaps save them, and the rest of the world, from that evil pair of tiles—'

'Tiles?' says Julia, wondering if she's misheard.

‘You heard right, Julia,’ says Keith. ‘We have the whole of eternity to tell you the tale of Tile X and Joe.’

Julia smiles, changing a rosy pink with pleasure as she’s missed conversation and swapping stories. ‘Oh, I love a good story. Hope it’s a funny one.’

The other four spirits laugh bitterly at hearing Julia’s words. ‘Far from it, Gran,’ says Serena. ‘Tell you what, we can tell you the entire ghastly saga as we head to Ireland. I wouldn’t mind setting off soon. I can see why you felt so upset and wanted to escape your home in Liverpool, Mel. Being around all this misery and being unable to do anything about to help is sapping my energy. It’s too painful to watch. Do you mind if we leave Manchester soon?’

‘Whatever’s best for you, Serena. You and Mel are the most recently deceased, so whatever you two feel most comfortable with takes priority,’ says Keith.

Carl looks at him, thinking something entirely different. *What if I want to hang around near Beatrice for a little while longer? I was her lover after you, Keith, you bossy bugger. Don’t I get a say?*

‘Don’t you agree, Carl?’ says Julia, as though reading his mind.

Carl struggles to hide his real feelings. ‘Oh ... er, yes, of course. Whatever Serena and Mel want to do is fine by me, Julia.’ *I guess majority rules. Anything for a quiet life, or should I say death?*

With a final look around the home he knew so well, Keith leads the way outside through the exterior wall. The others trail on behind like vibrant smoke. As they make their way through the night air towards Ireland, Julia is made fully acquainted with every detail of the girls’ involvement with their respective dominating tiles.

Julia’s brain hurts after the saga has been related. ‘I completely understand now why you two girls topped yourselves. You poor darlings. Sounds like you’ve been through hell and back.’ She thinks, *What the devil have I got myself roped into?*