

Adrienne's Ghost

A Novella by Leah St. James

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Rachael followed Yates to an area criss-crossed with black-and-yellow tape that marked the crime scene. Against the far wall stood the mammoth green cabinets he'd described, where the body had been buried in two separate pieces. She avoided it. Whatever clues it held would have no meaning to her. Instead, she moved to the center of the taped off area, closed her eyes, and waited.

After several minutes of silence, Yates chuckled and said, "Yeah, good luck with that."

"What?" Her eyes opened to see him watching her, arms crossed over his chest, mouth twisted in a half-smile, eyebrows lifted in obvious amusement.

"You really think you can conjure up her spirit?"

Lifting a shoulder, she said, "Maybe." Even as she admitted it, the ridiculousness of her theory struck her, and her mouth scrunched with the effort to hold back a laugh. "I'm sorry. I don't mean to make light, but I got a sudden mental picture of antennae rising out of my head."

"Yeah, me too. Only my vision has you in costume." His half-smile turned into a grin, and he laughed in a tone so teasing, so engaging, she shivered with the warm tingle that ran up her spine, out to her fingertips.

"Really." She crossed her arms in a pose mimicking his. "And what would that be?" Before he could answer, the room chilled, instantly, as if they'd passed into a freezer container. Their gazes locked, wide-eyed.

"This is it, the cold I mentioned to you."

"Shh." She grabbed his hand and squeezed. "Wait."

God only knew why she said it, but somehow, she knew what was coming next. As if listening to her thoughts, her heart began galumphing in her chest, and her lungs decided to stop working, forcing her to hold her breath. An aroma of amber and musk, strong and pungent yet not unpleasant, whooshed into the room, and along with it, a humming, a kind of energy Rachael had never before felt. Like a pulse. A heartbeat.

As her gaze scoured the corners of the basement, finding nothing, the dingy space before her faded, replaced by the visions from the television studio. Only this time they were fuller, longer, clearer. Lovers murmuring to each other. Hands stroking, caressing, from the face down, covering every inch of skin. The woman's hands seeking and finding another's flesh, a man's flesh. Soft skin over steel-hard muscles. The man sighed, groaned, while his lips trailed kisses up her leg, over her hip and stomach. The woman's voice laughed out a plea, *Kiss me, Harvard*. Sighing, the man turned to her breasts—first one, then the other—tender, wet caresses that sent a hot ache burgeoning to what felt like her soul. Rachael's soul. Then he spoke, his voice, Jackson's voice, deep and gruff in response, "*Sugar and spice, my favorites.*"

“Oh my God.” She didn't realize she'd said it out loud, nearly didn't recognize her own voice, husky as it was with the sensations of passion, a passion she'd never herself experienced. Her skin tingled, her breath stuttered out in choppy bursts, and she knew that if she looked Jackson Yates in the face, saw through the eyes of the spirit, she'd be lost.

“What did you feel?” Jackson's tone was no steadier than hers, and when she didn't answer, simply stared, open mouthed, unsure how to respond, he said, “It was Adrienne, and me, together, wasn't it?”

“Yes.” The word rushed out along with the breath she'd been holding. And before she could catch it again, calm her skittering heart, a frigid tingling filled the air, hovered overhead, and settled in front of them. The energy materialized, less than five feet away. A hazy image of someone dressed in khakis and a blue polo. The image firmed, took form. A pale, oval face, skin as smooth as melted caramel. Huge brown eyes, filled with despair, and torment. The apparition reached in slow motion, its hand slender, ringless, beseeching...

Jackson stumbled—forward, then back—and nearly fell into Rachael. She clutched his hand and held on.

“It's okay,” she whispered, convincing herself as much as him, then stepped forward, toward the entity.

“Adrienne, right?” She barely heard her voice over the thundering of her heart, the buzzing in her ears, but the ghost heard. It nodded, slowly, like its head were pushing through molasses.

“Something's happened to keep you from rest. I want to help.” She squeezed Jack's hand. It was stiff, unyielding, his palms damp. “We want to help.”

Jackson ignored the cue to speak, and instead, threw her a panicked look. She nodded her encouragement. “Tell her.”

Finally, after a faltering breath, his words rushed out. “God Almighty, Adrienne, I'm so sorry. Who did this to you? Do you know?”

The spirit nodded, again with effort.

“Someone at the Bureau? Someone you knew?”

Another nod, more effort. She was becoming agitated. The energy cost her. She began to fade.

“Wait! Don't go, Adrienne. Tell me!”

Too late. She was gone.

The air hummed for what seemed an eternity, and when it, too, dissipated, Rachael turned to Jackson. He'd gone pale, his lips compressed into a thin line, his eyes wild with shock. She tried to give him a smile of reassurance, but couldn't push her frozen lips into place. Finally, she managed to spit out the only thing she could think of. “Adrienne's ghost.”