

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Of

Barbara Alice

Pamela laid the ghostly message down on the glass tabletop. Ruby had just chased us out of the kitchen, and we were now ensconced in the formal breakfast room.

"Do you think it's a lie? Victor warned us about being fooled." She bit noisily into a piece of dry toast.

"Our haunting is different. The spirit we're dealing with here isn't evil, and I've got a gut feeling she's telling us the truth."

"Have you thought about what that means?"

I moved my wicker chair into a warm patch of sunlight before answering. "I thought about it all night long. If Barbara Alice is alive, does that mean she killed her own twin? If it was an accident, why did she steal her sister's identity?"

"What are we going to do? We can't prove anything."

"We have to. Obviously, this is the real reason we're being haunted. Our ghost wants justice."

"Easier said than done." Pamela picked up her coffee mug. "I hope you have a master plan."

"I have some ideas. Reading the rest of that diary is the first thing I need to do. If Bethany is dead, it makes sense that her journal, and her music, would stay hidden all these years. The Rose Room must have been her bedroom, not Babe's."

"Talk about confusing. The more we find out, the more complicated it gets."

"Maybe the proof is in the diary." I stared into Pamela's eyes. "But even if it isn't, even if we're being deceived, I have no choice: I've got to confront Babe with what I think is the truth."

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Tuesday, 9 January, 1900

It was a day fraught with domestic turmoil. I spent the morning in Mama's studio, working on my latest watercolor landscape. When I returned to my bedroom, I found Susan, our new maid, going through my secretary. I was cross with her, as I should have been, but then the girl began to cry so hysterically that I soon found myself trying to comfort her. She begged me not to tell her Aunt Beatrice, who has been our housekeeper here for nearly thirty years. It would have broken Bea's heart, I knew, so I let the girl off with a stern warning. I am especially glad now that I discovered the secret drawer. The secretary has been in our family for several generations, but now I am the only one who knows of the drawer's existence. I couldn't even bring myself to tell Sis about it. The knowledge somehow makes me feel a little more special, and much more secure. One never knows when a snooping Susan will attempt to invade one's privacy. And now for the other tale of strife. It happened not long after lunch. I was reading in the solarium, trying to get my mind off missing James, when I heard raised voices in the hallway. When I arrived on the scene, Aunt Tabby and our cook, Esther Hauck, were exchanging insults. Sis was there, too, and would occasionally join in the fray. At first I was afraid I would have to find Papa's pistol and shoot it into the air to get their attention, but finally they took notice of me. Aunt Tabby had just fired Esther, which she has done a few times already in the past. Esther is a large, crude woman who likes to drink. She is fond of swear words, and uses them often, much to my aunt's dismay. This time Esther was found smoking in the cellar, and my sister was with her. When Aunt Tabby accused Esther of being a bad influence on her niece, Sis spoke up and told her it wasn't true. She had been smoking for years! Our aunt was so outraged she couldn't speak. I seized the opportunity to take charge. I asked Esther to leave. She knows Papa will have the final say. And when it comes to this matter, he always lets his stomach rule over his head, for, despite all her faults, Esther is a most excellent cook. I am certain she will be back on Thursday, since we are to have a dinner party that night for twelve. Mr. and Mrs. Davenport are coming, along with their daughters, Joyce and Veronica, who are my closest friends, and who will soon be my sisters. They will bring James' little brother Joshua as well. I believe he has a crush on Sis. He blushes every time she looks at him. Our other guests will be William Goebel, who Papa says will soon be the governor of Kentucky, and also Madison Cawein, a famous local

poet whom I admire very much. I suspect it will be an interesting evening, even if Aunt Tabby and Esther Hauck manage to get along.

Friday, 12 January, 1900

Papa and Nathan returned from their trip to Cincinnati on Wednesday, and the business venture they have been working on is going to be a grand success. I am not surprised by this. Nor am I surprised that Esther is back with us once again. Nathan is the only one who found the row amusing. Sis received a lengthy tongue-lashing. Having a cook who behaves in a commonly fashion is not nearly as bad as having a daughter who does the same. I am convinced that Papa will never tame my sister. She is just as strong-willed and stubborn as he is. They are so alike. It must be the reason they clash so often on every conceivable issue. Everyone thinks I am most like my mother. How I wish I could have known her. I wonder if she avoided confrontations the way I always do. Thankfully, the dinner party last night was blessedly free of conflicts, despite all the political talk. Papa feels certain that when the General Assembly has finished their investigation, last month's election results will be overturned, and Mr. Goebel will be declared the governor instead of Mr. Taylor, who is a Republican. (When Papa says that word, he makes it sound like the lowliest of insults.) I've noticed that my father does not object when a woman speaks her mind on these matters, as long as her thoughts and views echo his own. Sis barely said a word for most of the evening, having been warned to control her temper and her tongue. As for Mr. Cawein, he completely charmed all of the females who were present, including me. He complimented Sis and me many times on our appearance. We were both wearing our ivory silk evening gowns. It is impossible for anyone to tell us apart when we dress in similar attire. Sis finds this more humorous than I do. When everyone had consumed the fabulous dinner Esther prepared (stuffed Cornish game hens), we adjourned to the music room, where the poet recited his most recent verses on nature. Mr. Goebel looked rather bored by it all, but he was polite enough to act impressed afterwards. He and Papa then continued their political discussion on the many faults of President McKinley, while my sister and brother played a game of billiards with Joshua and Mr. Davenport. Nathan insists on being on the same side as Sis. This saves him the embarrassment of losing to a woman. I and my future sisters-in-law talked with Mr. Casein about books and poetry, while Aunt Tabitha and Mrs. Davenport put their heads together to come up with ideas for the wedding. My aunt is so excited; one would think it's her nuptials that are being planned. We are trying to decide on a convenient date in June. It is a difficult thing to arrange a marriage ceremony around everyone else's schedules. I want the wedding to take place in the middle of the week, which is supposed to bring good luck: "Monday for wealth, Tuesday for health, Wednesday -- the best day of all! Thursday for crosses, Friday for losses, Saturday -- no luck at all!"

Wednesday, 17 January, 1900

I wrote a long letter to my beloved today. I told him about the dinner party and the wedding plans, suggesting we marry on Wednesday, the twentieth of June. Joyce and Veronica eagerly agreed to be my bridesmaids, and I have asked Sis to be my Maid of Honor. It was odd how subdued, almost sad, she acted when she heard the question. She has always been plagued with queer moods. I suppose it is worse for her in the winter. She hates being kept indoors. It has been frightfully cold this week. The skies have been bright and clear every night. I stare out my bedroom window almost every evening, gazing at the jewel-like stars, and at the end of my letter I asked my darling for a small, silly favor. At nine o'clock in the evening, on Valentine's Day, would he take the time to stare for awhile at the moon and think of me? I will do the same, and perhaps our thoughts will touch and bring us closer.

Monday, 22 January, 1900

Poor Beatrice. Day and night she has been caring for her husband Walter, who is quite ill with pneumonia. She is exhausted and Susan has not been much help. Every time she looks at her ailing uncle she falls apart. Bea has no other family nearby. Sis and I have been sitting with Walter during the day so Bea can get some rest. Aunt Tabby brings us all supper, which she makes herself. (She refuses to ask Esther for any help.) Today Walter's condition seemed a little improved, but Dr. Rutledge warned us not to get her hopes up yet. He and Reverend Minot have been visiting him twice a day. Our church members said a prayer for him on Sunday. Everybody likes Walter. He has such a humble, trusting way about him. What I like most is his quirky sense of humor. He and Beatrice make a perfect match. Walter has been our trusted gardener for many years. I know that whatever happens, it is God's will, but every waking moment I pray for a miracle.

Wednesday, 24 January, 1900

Our prayers have been answered: Walter is going to live! His fever broke last night, and the pain in his chest has lessened. Doctor Rutledge says the danger is over. Bea cried when he told her -- for the first time since her ordeal began. She is a strong woman, but Aunt Tabby insisted that she stay home for another week to recover her own health. We are all so relieved and happy.

Tuesday, 30 January, 1900

Terrible news has reached our ears. William Goebel was shot today in front of the capitol building in Frankfort. He is still alive, but no one expects him to survive his wound. The assassin has not been found. It is obvious that someone wanted to keep Mr. Goebel from becoming governor. The General Assembly had just decided to overturn the election results. Papa is beside himself. He and Mr. Goebel had become close friends. We are all praying for his recovery.

Friday, 2 February, 1900

An ice storm hit today like a bad omen. It is Joshua's fifteenth birthday, and the party that had been planned for this afternoon has been postponed until next Saturday. We hear Mr. Goebel is at death's door, but is still struggling to hold on for a little longer. He is the governor now, but they say it is likely that his only official act will be the dissolving of the state militia, which Mr. Taylor called out after the shooting. Papa's friend is not a vengeful man. His courage will never be forgotten.

Saturday, 3 February, 1900

Mr. Goebel lost his brave battle today. His funeral will take place on Monday. We are all saddened by his death, but from the beginning we knew it was inevitable. We would be comforted if the killer was brought to justice, but it is unlikely to ever happen.

Monday, 5 February, 1900

A light snow has been falling all day. Papa, Nathan, and Mr. Davenport left for Frankfort this morning to attend Mr. Goebel's funeral. I think it a shame that we women were not allowed to go. Even though we are not related to the deceased, we still would have liked to be there to show our support and respect.

Tuesday, 13 February, 1900

I received a gorgeous Valentine today from James. It is actually a fan made of silk and feathers. He enclosed it with a letter, promising to gaze at the moon tomorrow night and dream of me. He has instructed the Davenport's gardener to deliver a dozen red roses to me in the morning, and he let me know he approves of the date I have chosen for our wedding. He expressed concern over the letter his father sent him recently. (Mr. Davenport is disappointed that his eldest son will not be taking over either of the family's businesses.) James hopes to visit us again at Easter. I cannot wait to see him, and long for the time when we need never be separated again.

Sunday, 18 February, 1900

I have a confession to make. I did not listen to a word of Reverend Minot's sermon this evening. I kept staring at the altar, imagining how I will feel on my wedding day when I see James standing there, waiting for me. I will walk down the aisle holding on to Papa's strong arm. (Hopefully he will not trip over my flowing skirts.) Dear Aunt Tabs shall, of course, weep softly into one of her scented handkerchiefs. How glorious it all will be! Tomorrow I am to visit Miss Gloyer's shop in Louisville. She is the most popular seamstress in the city. She will take my measurements and help me choose a design for my wedding dress. I really don't think I'll be able to sleep tonight.

Tuesday, 20 February, 1900

Sis refused to come to Louisville with us. She claimed she wasn't feeling at all well. Aunt Tabitha and I ended up spending the night there with Uncle George, my mother's older brother. He still lives on Fifth Street next to Central Park, in the same house he and my mother grew up in. My uncle became a widower recently, and is alone now except for two servants. He was so tickled to have family members stay with him -- it made me feel guilty for not visiting him more often. He seemed to enjoy hearing about our busy day, and was thrilled to learn about my engagement. Aunt Tabby and I did get a good many things accomplished yesterday. Miss Gloyer says the fitting for my bridal gown will be sometime in early May. If only I could properly describe what it is going to look like. Ivory silk over Belgian lace, with pink rosettes along a scalloped hem. It will have puffed sleeves above the elbows and a lace bodice, but no train. The tulle veil I chose is twelve feet long! As for the wedding cake, Mr. Iliff has promised to create a masterpiece in the shape of our gazebo. The wedding supper would be too much work for Esther, so we have hired Miss Benedict and her catering staff to handle the arrangements. The Davenport's greenhouse shall supply me with all the pink roses I will need for the ceremony. I suppose the next thing I should worry about is the guest list. James' mother has kindly agreed to help me with the Davenport side of the problem. I will not be surprised if there ends up being three hundred guests on her list alone!

Saturday, 24 February, 1900

Susan found herself in trouble again today. Aunt Tabitha caught her talking with a gabby cousin on our telephone -- without permission -- when she should have been polishing the silver. Bea went home early today, so this time it was Sis who pleaded Susan's case. Apparently she has been in trouble before over her fascination with our telephone. I have a strong feeling that even if Sis hadn't spoken up for her, the girl's tears would have worn my aunt down a second time.

Friday, 2 March, 1900

I received a precious letter from James this afternoon, and it was such a mild, pleasant day that I read it in the gazebo. It was all about our future. He has promised to take me to London and Paris for our honeymoon. Right now he must work and study hard for both of us. He will be a second lieutenant when he graduates, and will be required to serve as an officer in the army for six years. He wants to have a lifelong military career, though, despite his father's disapproval. He only hopes that the life he is choosing will be agreeable to me. I smiled when I read those words. I could live anywhere on earth, endure any hardships that came our way, as long as the two of us were together.

Wednesday, 7 March, 1900

I was so disappointed in Sis today. I found her in my room, reading the letter I received from James last week. I had left it on top of my secretary. I told her I was hurt that she had chosen not to respect my privacy. We weren't children anymore, after all. She could have asked to read the letter and I would willingly have given it to her. Sis said she was afraid I would say no. James was like a brother to her, and soon would be a relative. If I had been willing, why hadn't I already offered to share the letter with everyone, instead of being selfish? She stalked out of my room before I could even answer. I don't understand Barbara Alice's moods lately. She is so disagreeable. I can't imagine what could be wrong with her.

Monday, 12 March, 1900

I believe Sis has been avoiding me since our confrontation last Wednesday. I truly don't feel that I had anything to apologize for, but I said I was sorry anyway. I expected her to do the same, but she merely said, "I won't go into your room ever again." That wasn't a proper apology, in my opinion, but it is the best, and only one, I can hope for.

Saturday, 17 March, 1900

It's St. Patrick's Day, and everyone wore something green this afternoon at the church's charity bake sale. It was a tremendous success. Aunt Tabitha had one of the largest tables, and it was covered with every imaginable kind of dessert. Most of them had been made by Esther, but Aunt Tabs felt she needed to compete for the sake of the widow's and orphan's fund. Several of her pies were put aside to replace old Mrs. Claxton's. The poor woman is nearly blind, and for the past few years her dreadful pies have been whisked away behind her back to be fed to Reverend Minot's hogs. I realize that pigs are hardly discriminating creatures, but heaven only knows how they are able to stand the taste!

Thursday, 22 March, 1900

It has rained for three days straight. By this morning, Sis had had enough of staying indoors. She took her stallion out for a long ride. Papa saw her jumping the south fence in the mud and rain, and when she returned to the Manor he scolded her rather harshly. The fence is quite high, and Papa doesn't believe in taking chances in such weather, risking the necks of both horse and rider. He told her how irresponsible she had been, and asked her to swear that she would never do such a thing again. She calmly replied that swearing wasn't something a lady should ever do, and she hated making promises she couldn't keep. She went up to her room after this bold announcement. Papa had a mind to storm up the stairs after her, despite his game leg, but Nathan restrained him. Whenever Barbara Alice is in trouble, Nathan always takes her side. Sometimes I think he understands our sister better than anyone.

Wednesday, 28 March, 1900

I had the strangest dream last night. Remembering it makes me uncomfortable, even nervous. I dreamt it was my wedding day, and I was so deliriously happy. My wish was coming true at last. I went up to my bedroom to change into my wedding dress, but it was missing. I searched every room, to no avail, and then I noticed I was alone in the house. Had everyone gone to the church without me? It was almost time for Papa to walk me down the aisle. I tried to leave the Manor, but every door and window was locked and bolted. I couldn't get out. I was going to miss my own wedding. I woke up then, my heart racing. The anxiety I felt was overwhelming. I told myself I was being foolish. It was just a bad dream, and I should forget all about it. Maybe I'll be able to now that I've written down the disturbing details. But, please God, please never let me have this nightmare again. I don't think I could survive it.

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