

"A GREAT HEROINE."
—CHARLAINE HARRIS, *New York Times*
bestselling author of *Definitely Dead*

POLTERGEIST

A
GREYWALKER
NOVEL

KAT RICHARDSON

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Poltergeist

Greywalker 2

By Kat Richardson

THIS IS ALL THE PEOPLE WORKING TO FERRETS IN CALIFORNIA.

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If I've forgotten someone—and I'm sure I've forgotten many some-ones—I hope they will forgive me my Swiss-cheese memory. I'm indebted for everyone's assistance, and where I've gotten things wrong, it's entirely my own fault.

PROLOGUE

Living, lambent fog overlay the living room around me. Vague shapes and eddies moved through the gleaming mist trailing subtle colors while the bright gold of the houses protective spell coiled around the structure like a friendly vine. It was almost restful in that place and company, though I doubted I'd ever come to like it. Though Mara Danziger was safely in the normal world while I was in the Grey, I was able to see the sleeping child in her lap as a white shape, and my friend had been shrouded in a blur of blue light and gold sparks. I was even able to hear her, though the sound had a slight underwater quality to it.

"You know, you don't go slipping accidentally anymore," Mara said in her tumbling Irish voice. "That's good. Are you still seeing things the same way?"

"Yes, and no," I murmured, sitting on the couch—the shadowy shape of a couch on my side—and closing my eyes. "When I'm in here, it's not much different. When I'm outside, I can look at it without having to go all the way into the Grey, but I see layers now, and colors—people and things have...colors, like threads, tangles, glows. I can slide down below the fog if I want to and look at the power lines—"

"Can you, indeed?"

"Yeah. The deep part of the Grey is like...It's all bright lines, like computer drawings." Then I shut up because I didn't want to say that the lines weren't just lines or conduits or paths; they were somehow alive and I felt compelled to conceal that.

Mara was quiet a moment. "I think that's the grid itself—the network I've told you of, through which raw magic flows."

"What are the colors? What do they mean?" I asked.

"I'm sorry to say you'll know more than I on that score. I don't see magic as you do. The glows are auras, but the others...I'd guess they're connections, like electric cords that connect related things in the Grey to each other or plug the things into the power grid, but I'm not sure. Y'could ask Ben, if he can stay awake long enough. Between the class schedules and keeping after the child, we've neither of us enough free time to spit."

The Danzigers were both instructors at the University of Washington—Mara taught geology and Ben languages and linguistics—but they each had personal interests in the paranormal and they'd helped me out with this Grey business from the very beginning. Ben was the theoretician and scholar. Mara, being a witch, was a bit more practical.

Mara continued. "Still, you're doing much, much better than a few months ago. Feeling better about it?"

I drew a deep breath, pushing the Grey away, and opened my eyes as I exhaled. "I don't feel sick all the time," I replied. "And I don't have to live in it, most of the time. Sometimes it still gets the better of me and I fall in, but mostly I have control of it more than it has of me."

Mara grinned at me from her couch, her green eyes sparkling, and said, "Don't go getting too cocky, now, Harper. There's still a vast trickiness to the Grey."

I snorted. That was not news to me, even then.

* * *

That was a couple of months ago. We'd been sitting on the matching couches in the Danzigers' living room, a sunny, comfortable spot and a far cry from the slippery mist-world of the Grey—the here/not here place that lies like a fringe of shadow between the normal and the paranormal. It's the world of ghosts, vampires, and magic, and I am one of its few dual citizens. There are people like Mara—witches and so on—who can touch the Grey in some way and draw power or information from it, but as far as I know, only ghosts and monsters truly live there. I, however, seem to be half in and half out all the time. I can't do magic, or exorcise spirits, or anything flashy like that: I'm a Greywalker—a human who can enter the Grey and move through it as if it were the normal world. Apparently I got this way when I died for a couple of minutes.

So far, no one had been able to explain why me and not everyone else medical technology pulls back from clinical death, but I seemed to be the only Greywalker around the Pacific Northwest. There didn't appear to be a cure or even a way to quit, but Mara and Ben had been teaching me how to keep it under control and how to stay out of trouble, insofar as I could stay out of trouble. My work and the Grey seemed to intersect more often than I'd have liked and it hadn't been pleasant. As a private investigator, I usually carried a pretty dull caseload, but once the ghosts and vampires found me, things got weird fast.

In October, months after the calm on the couch, I wished that the meeting I was driving to would be normal, even boring, but since I'd been recommended by Ben, the self-proclaimed "ghost guy," I wasn't holding out a lot of hope. Within a few minutes of my arrival, even that bit of hope was totally dashed.

ONE

I sat in a boxlike office for twenty-three minutes as Professor Gartner Tuckman told me that he and a motley group of strangers had made a ghost. Not in the film noir, bang-bang sense but in the creepy, woo-woo sense. Frankly, I found Tuckman creepier than some of the ghosts I've met. He was thin and intense with a hectoring, arrogant manner, a sharp voice, and the cultivated piercing gaze of a silent film villain. He was also a liar—at least by omission.

I held up a finger to stem the battering wash of his words. "Let me see if I understand this, Dr. Tuckman. You put together a group of people who made up a ghost and haunted *themselves*?"

"No. They did not 'haunt' anything. There is no ghost. It's an artificial entity powered by their own belief and expectation. The parapsychologists would call it a group thought-form—"

"I thought you were a parapsychologist."

He scoffed. "I'm a psychologist. I study the minds of people, not spooks. The point of this project is observing how rational individuals become irrational in groups and how that is reinforced by the group itself. In re-creating the Philip experiments, I gave them an acceptable focus for their irrationality."

"The group in the Philip experiments claimed to have created an artificial poltergeist, right? Psychokinetic phenomena and all."

He rolled his eyes. "Overly simplified, but yes."

"So you told your group to make up a ghost, believe in it, hold these séances, and they'd get phenomena. Did they?"

Tuckman tossed his head. "Of course they did. Regardless of anything else questionable about the Philip experiments, they did, undeniably, manifest minor instances of psychokinesis—PK. Once my group had that information, they became open to the idea that it could be done. Then I supported their belief in the phenomena so they produced PK effects on their own."

"You're sure this isn't a real poltergeist?" I asked.

"Poltergeists don't exist. They're the conflation of simple events, suggestion, coincidence, and minor stress-induced PK activity by the operator. There is no 'ghost' involved. Just people. By reinforcing their expectations and subconscious irrational beliefs, I hope to see how far they'll suspend rationality before they rein themselves in."

"Your group produces measurable, reproducible PK phenomena?"

"Yes. But suddenly the phenomena are off the scale. We've had a massive jump in the number and strength of the phenomena, as well as the kind. I think one of the participants is faking additional phenomena. I want you to find out who is doing this and stop them, help me get them out of the group before they ruin the experiment."

"If the faked phenomena are helping the group believe in ghosts, how is that bad for you?"

Tuckman glowered. "Because those phenomena aren't under my control and are too far outside probability to be legitimate responses."

I sat back in my slick chair and let Tuckman stew in his angry silence. His request—and his anger—didn't make sense. He wanted to see how far his group would go, but when they went farther than he expected, he assumed he was being scammed. He didn't seem to believe in the paranormal himself, but he'd accepted PK—or had he? I tilted a glance at Tuckman through the Grey and watched green tendrils dart out from around him like tiny snakes striking at flies. I hadn't seen anything quite like that before, but I could make a good guess what it meant.

"Why do I have the feeling you're not telling me something, Dr. Tuckman?"

"Nothing you need to know."

Fat chance. I stood up and slung my bag over my shoulder. "Dr. Tuckman, I doubt Ben Danziger told you I was an idiot when he recommended me, so why you're treating me like one I don't know. But I don't need the money enough—or the aggravation—to work for a client who lies to me or hires me under false pretenses. If you want a serious investigation, you'll have to level with me about your ringer, because I'd find him or her eventually. But if what you really want is a patsy to go through the motions and take the blame for something, you need to look elsewhere."

"I don't know what you mean."

I gave him the tired face. "Bullshit. You said you reinforced the group's expectations. The easiest way to do that is to create apparent PK phenomena yourself—or have a confederate do it for you. I've seen plenty of con games and this is pretty much the same thing—get someone or a group of someones to believe they're special, then you see how much you can get from them before they figure out they're being conned. Now, I don't care about the particulars of your experimental technique, but if you want me to find your problem—assuming you really have one—you have to disclose the truth. What you tell me is confidential, but I don't work well in the dark and I get a bit testy when I feel like I'm being had—or set up."

I stood and stared at him a moment. He gave me the villain eyes again. I rolled mine in response. "Fine," I said and turned to go.

Tuckman leapt up. "No, wait." I felt his hand close on my upper arm. The cold of his personality licked my skin like the little green snakes I'd glanced in his aura.

I spun back, yanking my arm loose, and gave him a glare that burned up from the very depths of the dead through the network of Grey that limned my bones—the "gift" of a meddling vampire that tied me into the grid at the deepest level of the Grey. Tuckman pulled his hand back to his side with a sharp inhalation.

"I'm—I apologize, Ms. Blaine. I need to find the individual who's undermining my project and I cannot do it myself. I do have a...confederate in the séance group who helps reinforce the phenomena. Please sit down and we can discuss it further."

I sighed and gave the chair a sour look. It was bowl-shaped and upholstered in repulsive green vinyl. I threw my bag into it and pulled out my notebook, again. Still on my feet, I turned back to Tuckman as he returned to his desk chair.

I can't like every client—economics doesn't let me be that choosy—but I disliked and distrusted Tuckman and was sure I'd regret staying on. I comforted myself with the petty pleasure that at five foot ten I towered over him.

I summarized his recent recitations and asked for a list of project participants. "Be sure to include all of your assistants, including the ones running the magic tricks—they're the most likely to be involved. I'd also like to see exactly what phenomena you're getting. I'll need to see recordings, but I can tell a lot more if I can observe the whole setup in person, in real time." If Tuckman was getting any legit paranormal activity, I probably wouldn't be able to see most of it on a recording, but in person was a different situation. Even glass and sound baffles wouldn't filter it all from my Grey-adapted eyes.

For a moment, I thought Tuckman would object, but he swallowed it. He had to. Spoilers at work wasn't the only possible answer to Tuckman's problem, but he wouldn't consider any that couldn't be seen or recorded. I, on the other hand, had firsthand knowledge that ghosts and poltergeists did exist and weren't just conflation of ordinary events by stressed minds. Few people get smacked as hard by them as I'd been, though. OK, so call me prejudiced, but I did wonder what he was really getting.

"All right," Tuckman conceded, looking sour. "There's a session tomorrow afternoon. I'll arrange for you to observe from the booth—"

"I'd prefer to be in the room."

"Impossible. Disruption of the setting may cause the legitimate phenomena to fail. The experiment must remain clean—that's why I need you. Everything is monitored. Everything is documented. I have an early session video here and I'll get my assistant to sort out some more representative recordings for you to study. But unless there is no other way, you cannot be in the séance room during the session."

It was frustrating, but I had to give him the point for now. "All right. Now, you said that your group did produce some actual PK activity on their own, yes?"

"Yes. They do produce some verifiable and reproducible table raps, movements, light flickers—that sort of thing." He let his mouth curl into a smug little smile. "They've demonstrated remarkable skill at it, especially considering the short time they've been working together."

"Then it's possible your group is actually producing all these phenomena themselves."

"It is *not* possible."

So speaks a mouth attached to a closed mind—and here I'd had such hope for science when I was younger. "What makes you think so?"

"The phenomena are too large, too powerful. It's beyond the ability of simple human minds to exert such physical force without physical contact. You'll understand when you see the sessions."

I suspected I'd understand a lot more than Tuckman did. "How big is the group?" I asked.

"Eight. Seven study participants and one assistant—I'll count Mark Lupoldi as a participant, though he's my...special assistant."

"The one who fakes phenomena."

"Yes."

"OK. Make sure he's noted on the list that way. Can you take me to see your experiment space now?"

"No. I have a lecture to give in fifteen minutes."

"I can go by myself if you'll give me the key and directions. Unless there's something in the room you don't want me to see..."

"If you want to start digging into it right away, I won't object." He took a ring of keys from a tray on his obsessively neat desk and removed two. He held the large, brassy keys out to me. "Here. It's room twelve in St. John Hall. The building is unlocked this time of day, but you'll need the key to the rooms, including the observation booth. The room numbers are stamped on the keys. Sign in and out with the front desk and leave the keys with the proctor when you leave."

He unlocked the file drawer in his desk and pulled out a pristine manila folder with a typed label that read *celia*.

"Who's Celia?" I asked.

"Our 'ghost' is named Celia Falwell. It took quite a while to find a name for which there was little or no information on the Internet."

"Why did it matter?"

Tuckman shook his head with impatience. "Because I didn't want them Googling the name and dragging information in, subconsciously, about whoever they found. The personality had to be consistently their own creation." He looked at his watch. "I don't have time for this." He drew a computer disc and a sheaf of paper from the folder and stood up. "I have to get to my lecture." He picked up an expensive, soft-sided leather satchel and pocketed the rest of his keys.

He waved me out and locked up his office before handing the pages and disc to the department secretary. "Please make a copy of these for Ms. Blaine and put the originals in my box, Denise."

Denise frowned at him. "OK." She was over thirty, but wore her hair, clothes, and makeup like a twenty-year-old. As soon as Tuckman turned away from her, she puckered her face into a disgusted expression.

"I'll see you tomorrow at the session. You can call me this evening if you have questions," Tuckman said, giving a little nod before he left me alone with the secretary and her sour silence.

Once Denise had finished making copies for me, I headed for St. John Hall.

Pacific Northwest University was founded by fire-breathing Calvinists in 1890. I guess they figured that the visitation of more literal hellfire in 1889, when the downtown core of the city burned to the ground, proved that Seattle needed some salvation through education—since neither temperance nor politics seemed to have had much effect in that direction. Its religiosity didn't take very strong root, however—the school is pretty secular now, and not as large or prestigious as the nearby University of Washington. A lot of people mistake the small campus of PNU for a private high school. Its apparent size is deceptive; quite a few of the large houses nearby are actually school property, in use as dorms, labs, and offices.

I strode west through the quad, raising flurries of new-fallen leaves before me and a scurry of phantoms in the edges of my vision. Places people frequent tend to build up a layer or two of ghosts and lingering Grey things after a while and the campus of PNU had collected its share. So long as I kept my eyes straight ahead, I could keep the vague, uncanny figure that flowed along beside me in my peripheral vision. If I turned my head, it seemed to vanish, though I knew that was just the treacherous nature of the Grey. I held it at bay for now. The ghost turned and faded through me as I stopped in front of my destination. I shuddered from the rough cold of the phantom's passage.

St. John Hall was a squat Art Deco building of yellow brick and odd-sized windows. I suppose the intent of the architect was a warm, golden building with glinting windows that filled the interior with light. Time and use had made the building look grubby and half blind where the windows had been covered up inside. I peered at it, letting the chill and the cloudy light of the Grey well up around me. The building didn't look a lot different in the Grey than it did in the normal, except for the usual flickers of history and a bright, hot spot of yellow that seemed to penetrate one of the upper windows like an arrow shaft through a target.

I was reluctant to step all the way into the Grey and take a clear look at that yellow shaft of energy. Bad enough that I was standing out in public looking at it, without risking going all translucent and slippery myself. I had no idea what anyone else would see if I let myself go through to the deep Grey. I knew what I would see, though: black emptiness and a blazing grid of lines that describes the world in hot colors of energy and potential magic—this was the inexplicably alive thing I could not describe to Mara or anyone else. That gleaming yellow shaft looked like part of the grid and I was willing to bet it ran through room twelve.

I pushed the Grey back to a controlled flicker and entered St. John Hall. Although there was a small reception desk in the entryway, no one was manning it. I could hear a couple of people talking and giggling nearby, but I didn't disturb them. I just signed the guest ledger and took myself upstairs.

Room twelve was at the front of the third floor, right across from the stairs. The door labeled 12. was intersected by the hot yellow shaft, as I'd expected. Beside it was another room marked 0-12. The keys in my hand matched the numbers on the doors. The lair of Tuckman's merry band of ghost-makers was hardwired directly to the Grey via that bright piece of the grid. They wouldn't be able to avoid tapping or touching it in some way if they had any psychic or magical ability at all—and it, in its way, would touch them, too. I wondered if the power line had started in that position or if it had been pulled there by the activities of the group. Either could explain the sudden elevation in phenomena, though I didn't think Tuckman would buy that.

Still, grid or no grid, something had triggered the change, and finding that trigger was what I was being paid for, not proving my client to be an ass. And the intrusion of the grid could be a coincidence. In spite of my unusual knowledge, I couldn't assume the problem was strictly paranormal any more than Tuckman could assume the opposite. People are more likely to do bad things than ghosts are: people have volition and imagination; most ghosts or paranormal constructs have neither.

I let myself into room twelve and closed the door behind me. The space had been converted into a sitting room complete with bookshelf, end tables, and bric-a-brac. A pillow-strewn sofa sat against the wall that faced the control room mirror and a large round wooden table standing on a flower-figured Oriental rug in the middle of the room. A small brass chandelier hung from the ceiling above the table. The corner nearest the door had a tall white-painted board with Christmas lights sticking out of it

in disciplined rows sorted by color. A few wooden chairs stood against the walls. A potted plant and a stuffed toy cat sat on the sill below the window that was transected by the Grey energy shaft.

Someone had put up a few pictures and posters on the walls. I walked around and studied them. Several were publicity photos or movie posters from the 1930s and '40s. One of the pictures was a modern computer art portrait of a pretty young woman with her hair rolled back in a style from the 1940s. She looked a bit like a blond Loretta Young and had a wistful look as she stared out of the page that had been framed and hung on the wall. Next to it was a ragged photo of a man in the uniform and patches of a World War II pilot—or that's what I guessed the winged patches meant, since the picture looked about right for the era.

I spotted a few bits of obvious recording and sensing equipment set around the room, but not as much as I'd expected. I got down on my knees and rolled up the edges of the rug. There were several black objects with wires running out of them attached to the bottom of the rug. Some of the wires poked up into the tufting and wound their way around in the design on the top side. Most likely these were part of Tuckman's equipment for creating phenomena. I'd have to get someone more tech-savvy to take a look at them and tell me what they did and how. I didn't want to be in the dark about what Tuckman's team could manifest without aid and what was mere trickery. If the elevated phenomena were the real thing, I would have to prove to Tuckman that they could not be anything else. But, if Tuckman was right about additional faked phenomena, I'd also have to know how the machines could be interfered with—if they could be at all. I laid the rug back down as it had been and sat on the floor.

With the door closed, I thought I was safe enough to drop my guard and step into the Grey to take a different look around. I got comfortable, closed my eyes, and took a deep breath—this part still weirded me out and I needed to brace myself before full immersion in the Grey.

Even sitting, I had a moment of vertigo as I pushed across the barrier into the Grey, feeling the sudden burden of exertion and an unusual sensation of weight. I opened my eyes to the cold and the foggy light of the Grey, filled with the shapes and shadows of things long gone hanging in an endless mist-world. I could hear the mutterings of Grey things and the thrum of the grid. Room twelve was still there, dim under the swirl of the Grey and as shadowy as if it were the ghost world, instead. The table in front of me was hung with a drapery of overlapping shapes so various and complicated I couldn't make them out. Among them a few swirls in the fog glowed with red, blue, and green tracteries, and a crowd of half-formed human shapes seemed to press toward the table. They were unrecognizable, having no faces or details, only fog creatures that had no gleam of life. They weren't ghosts, but the habit-worn impressions left in the Grey by live people doing the same thing in the same spot over and over.

A harsh yellow glow emanated from under the table. I looked, then crawled forward, pressing between the chilly shapes. A globe of pale yellow energy pulsed brighter and

dimmer in a slow breathing rhythm. The thing was beneath the exact center of the table, about the size of a basketball hovering over the floor. It was difficult to keep in focus as I crept near. I was panting a bit as I worked to hold my equilibrium against the two worlds—normal and paranormal—that pulled on me.

Closer, the ball of energy wasn't an even glow, but a jumble of gleaming threads like a living scribble made by a giant child. I staggered a little on my hands and knees, tossed off balance by the writhing view. Bits of history, mist-things passing through me, and shifting layers of Grey made me dizzy for a moment and I tumbled forward, getting a shock of ice and fire as my head and shoulder punched into the loose knot of Grey light and energy. I pulled myself back from the cold/hot sensation that had whipped through me and rested on my haunches, unsettled by the eerie feel of the thing in front of me. I wiped at my face, trying to remove the cobwebby sensation of it.

I peered at the ball of energy, narrowing my concentration further. The mist thinned, leaving more of the grid exposed as I burrowed deeper into the Grey. I could see that gleaming threads spun out of the yellow ball and crawled away over the room, like creepers gone wild across an old brick wall. The room was thick with them; they twisted together, finally, into the energy shaft from the grid that stabbed through the window. Even the mirror wall was scrawled with them, though less thickly than the rest of the room. I turned my head with care, the worlds slipping over each other like half a dozen old black-and-white films projected at the same time on a stained screen, but I couldn't see any reason for the energy vines. They were static, not growing or moving, yet they were throbbing with some imminent coil, producing a nerve-scraping whine.

I yanked myself back from the Grey, feeling the jerk and twist of the transition throughout my chest and spine. I kept my head down and gulped in air that tasted of dirt and dust until the sensations of nausea and pressure passed. I crawled from beneath the table and got back to my feet, my arms and legs a little shaky as I did so. I hadn't expected to feel so worn out. I checked my watch and thought I'd lost some time, somehow. Working in the Grey is tiring and takes concentration, but this was disproportionate for the duration I'd been in there, even though I wasn't sure how long that was. I'd left Tuckman's office almost an hour earlier and the walk to St. John Hall had taken no more than ten minutes. Time passed oddly in the Grey, but I'd never just lost so much while I was fully immersed in it before. I'd have to ask Mara what was going on, when I had the chance.

I leaned against the doorframe, getting my equilibrium back and letting my breathing return to normal. I peered through the corner of my eye into the Grey and took one last glance around. The glowing vines, the knotted ball of energy all had the air of something poised, waiting. I disliked it and felt a ripple of disquiet run down my back.

I left the séance room and went into the observation room. It was even less enlightening. Through the glass, one corner of the main room near the door was a bit

obscured, but the rest of the room was in view—only the room itself, however. I could barely see any sign of the Grey from inside the booth—just some of the strongest concentrations of light as dim gleams, nothing of the ghostly shapes or finer energy strands. In the booth, monitors, recorders of various kinds, switches, and black boxes with mysterious acronyms stenciled on the cases were arrayed neatly on or under the counters. There was no sign of wires or other rigging I would have expected, although there were controls for the room lights and for "ambient sound." I would have loved to have a baseline reading of the room, but I didn't dare touch the switches. I'd get it from Tuckman, later.

I wondered why the Grey was all but invisible from inside the booth and if the double-thick panes of mirrored glass were somehow filtering it out. I'd noticed before that glass sometimes held the Grey at bay, or made it harder to see at least, but this seemed more filtered than usual. I was getting curious about the number of Grey oddities in this set of rooms. In the absence of a greater authority, I was the expert on the scene, but I didn't know enough to guess why things seemed...off.

I checked and double-checked, but there was nothing more to find. At least not at that moment. I gave it up and headed for my office to go through the files Tuckman had given me. I wanted some idea of their contents before the session on Wednesday.

TWO

In my tiny office in Pioneer Square, I stretched out in my chair and skimmed through Tuckman's files. I didn't have the time to dig into the details—I just wanted an overview of the project and the people involved in it. File information indicated the group had been working together since January and having remarkable success. There were two layers to the experiment: the official goal of creating and controlling a "poltergeist" through the power of the human mind, which the participants were made aware of; and the deeper goal—which Tuckman kept between himself, his assistant, and Mark Lupoldi—of studying the group's reactions, interactions, and evolution when their increasingly outrageous goals met with success. They had followed the protocols, such as they were, of the Philip experiments conducted by the Canadian group New Horizons in the 1970s. Tuckman's group at PNU jumped past the Canadian experiments' mis-starts and improved upon the techniques a bit with modern technology, mechanical and objective observation and recording, and the help of specialists in illusion and misdirection. An appendix explained the function parameters of the equipment in technical terms I couldn't decipher: leverage, nanometers per second, air resistance, impedance, induction, and so on.

As in the original experiment, the PNU group had created a deliberately flawed and error-ridden biography, history, and even a portrait of their "ghost," whom they'd named Celia Falwell. Naturally, Celia's was a tragic story. Born in 1920, she had been a student at PNU in 1939 when World War II broke out in Europe. She was then nineteen years old, frivolous, headstrong, and engaged to a "wild" young man named James Baker Jansen—also entirely fictional—who was a civil aviation pilot. Desperate to get in on combat action, "Jimmy" had volunteered and gone to China to join up with Chennault's Flying Tigers—even though a quick check of info on the Internet proved that the American Volunteer Group had included no nonmilitary pilots. He later transferred to the Army Air Corps and moved on to fight the Japanese in the air war over the Pacific.

Idealistic and romantic, Celia—who had often flown with Jimmy—earned her own civil aviation license and left school altogether in May 1941 to volunteer with the Air Corps Ferrying Command, flying planes from the factories to the training fields and transshipment points. When the Ferrying Command became the WASPs, she stayed on, in spite of Jimmy's objections. Celia never saw Jimmy again. She was killed in 1943 when the B-26 Marauder she was ferrying crashed on landing at MacDill Army Air Base in Tampa, Florida. The notorious "Widowmaker" bomber had claimed another victim, while, ironically, Jimmy—the combat fighter pilot—survived the war unscathed.

Tuckman's group had committed this story—flaws and all—to memory and concentrated on making Celia a real person in their minds. With the Philip experiments as a guide, the group made Celia the focus of their thoughts and attempted to create the right mental and emotional atmosphere to foster poltergeist phenomena they could

attribute to her. They'd been successful from a very early stage—with the help of Mark and special equipment installed in the room. Now they were just trying to see how powerful the unaided phenomena could get. At least that's what they thought.

I glanced through the participant and staff dossiers—Tuckman had not included one for himself—trying to get an idea of what the group members were like, but they seemed very dry and bland on paper. I thought I might have better luck with the video, so I gathered the files and the disc and hauled them home where I could watch the disc while eating dinner.

Chaos, my ferret, kept me company while I ate. She clambered around trying to find a way to snatch a mouthful of whatever I had and doing her war dance, hopping and chuckling and waving her bared teeth around, whenever she was thwarted—which was more often than not. She managed to dump my water glass twice and get halfway across the table towing a slice of bread backward by humps and jumps before I gave her something else to do.

"OK, goofus," I said, scooping her up and touching my nose to hers. "Enough of that. Jar time for you." I'd discovered that she liked to crawl into a large mayonnaise jar I'd tried to put in the recycling bin. Putting the jar on the floor with one of her balls inside was guaranteed to keep her occupied for ten or fifteen minutes—an eternity in ferret terms—as she squirmed about, in and out, trying to catch the ball as the jar turned and rolled around the kitchen linoleum. If the ball escaped out the open end, she skittered after it, slipping and hopping across the slick floor until she caught the ball and returned it to the jar, wriggling her way inside and starting the whole show again. I smiled at her antics and finished my dinner while the first séance videos flickered across my TV screen.

As I watched, occasional Grey blobs streaked through my living room and small objects fell off the bookshelves with or without the assistance of Chaos. I let the things lie and smacked the floaters aside with a mild irritation at the unusual level of activity. I put it down to the fact that since I was paying more attention to the Grey than usual, it was paying more attention to me.

The first segment on the video was unremarkable. Eight people sat around the table in the séance room I'd seen earlier, chatting and discussing "Celia." They were self-conscious and, except for some false-positives, nothing much happened. By session three, Tuckman's group had managed to make some knocks and the table had rocked a bit from side to side and scooted a short distance across the floor. The lights flickered on the colored light board and the overhead lamp swung. Nothing seemed out of the realm of mechanical fakery or very simple PK and I wondered how much the phenomena had changed since the early sessions. But, as I'd expected, I couldn't see any Grey indicators on the video, so I couldn't tell if they hadn't had any Grey activity or if the recording just hadn't been able to show it. The video wasn't very good quality—hastily copied for me on the secretary's computer from what was obviously not an original master to begin with. I'd have to judge their real ability by tomorrow's session.

I sighed, shook my head, and reached for the phone. I was going to need some help to understand the room's mechanics. I paged Quinton and waited for him to call me back. He was a renaissance man of technology, though he didn't seem to own a phone or a computer of his own. He could hack, kludge, or wing anything. He'd once installed an alarm system in a vampire's car for me. No matter how bizarre Tuckman's setup turned out to be, I doubted it would ever beat running a panic button into the spare tire well of a classic Camaro that sported two inches of dirt in the trunk.

THREE

It drizzled on Wednesday, the sky that homogeneous Seattle gray from horizon to horizon that lasts from mid-October through the first of May. This is the weather some people claim induces suicide—difficult to credit when you consider Seattle's death rate is lower than most US cities its size and its homicide rate equally small. I suspect it does contribute to our large number of bars, though.

I'd decided to pack the ferret along for the investigation of the séance room since she was curiosity personified most of the time and good at finding small openings and hidden things—usually when I didn't want her to—which could be useful.

I spotted Quinton outside St. John Hall. He was standing under a tree near the doorway, wearing a full-length waxed drover's coat and hat against the rain, though some had managed to get into his close-trimmed beard, somehow. His long brown hair was pulled back and tucked into his collar. He kept his coat on as we collected the keys and went upstairs.

"What's the setup?" he asked.

"This group is trying to create psychokinetic phenomena in a series of monitored séances with a fake ghost. Some of what they get is caused by the sitters, but some of it is caused by the technicians in the booth and a ringer in the room. What I need to know is what equipment are they using, what does it do, and has any of this stuff been tampered with or added to."

"OK," he replied, opening the door to room twelve.

"Is it always like this?" Quinton asked, looking at the small room and its overload of furniture.

"I'd assume so. It was this way yesterday." Well, physically, at least.

Quinton hung his coat up by the door while I put the ferret on her leash. Once harnessed, she scampered around, digging at the floor and looking for holes. I glanced around and noted that the ball of energy threads was hot and bright under the table—even hotter than the day before and grown to the size of a beach ball with an unpleasant, beach-wrack stink and streaks of red. The sound was now a buzzing howl. I pushed the Grey away and used a trick Mara had taught me, pulling the edge of the Grey around me and Chaos to make a shield between us and the pulsing thing under the table.

Quinton walked around for a while, then stopped.

"I'm going into the observation room for a minute. I'll be right back," he said.