

The Ghost of Grover's Ridge

Back Cover

Out of work paranormal investigator Ken Parker arrives in Groverton. He meets and falls in love with cute red-headed Jinny Talbot. He gradually realizes that there is magic in the town, good witches and evil warlocks, and sees a war looming between the two. He discovers that his girlfriend Jinny is a witch, and more surprisingly, that he himself is too. As battle with the warlocks draws near, Ken joins with Jinny and the witch covens to fight the warlocks and the Ghost of Mordecai Grover.

Sample file

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Dedication

Dedicated to my daughter Katherine, who enjoys reading my stories, and to my wife Sally, who gives me such great support, even though she's a die-hard mystery fan and hates the stuff I write.

Sample file

Chapter One

Groverton

Ken Parker drove his Miata over the crest of the hill and started down. He could see a town in front of him, in a small valley surrounded by high hills. A sign at the side of the road told him he was entering the City of Groverton, population unreadable on the weathered wood. Fifty miles from the nearest Interstate. At least a two hour drive on the twisty mountain roads; more like four hours since his last snack at one of the infrequent rest areas. He was starving.

As he passed the sign, the “itch” that had been bothering him all week went away. Not a physical itch, a psychic itch. The same “itch” had been helpful back when doing his research, but he had no idea why it had come back. He was no longer seeking anything, just driving around trying to forget about what had happened to him. He dismissed the idea that someone—or something—wanted him here in this little town he had never heard of.

Now the road had occasional houses and a few businesses. Seeing a gas station, he pulled in and filled his tank. Continuing down the road, the houses became more frequent, and a few miles farther along he got to the center of town. Grover Avenue, speed limit 25, with a few stores on either side of the street.

The street ended abruptly in front of a large brick building with a City Hall sign, and he had to follow signs around it to get back on Grover Avenue. Whoever built this blocking the main street, he thought, was either an idiot or a megalomaniac.

After another two blocks, he saw what he had been looking for, a restaurant. He pulled in to the curb, parked and got out. “Mamie’s Eats,” the lettering on the window said. There was a menu fastened to the glass, but faded to the point of being illegible. He shuddered a little, but the growling in his stomach was a powerful argument to try it. For all he knew it might be the only place to eat in town. And it was getting late, better get something before they rolled in the sidewalks like so many other small towns.

He got out of the car, and then smoothed down his wrinkled slacks. Taking a quick look at the sky and deciding it was safe to leave the top down, he headed over to the door of the

restaurant. He entered and looked around, unsure of whether to sit or to wait to be seated. A passing waitress, a tall blond with 'Flo' on her name tag, solved his problem. "Park it anywhere, pal, menus'r on the tables, somebody'll take yer order in a minute."

He selected a two person table by the window and sat. Several menus stood on edge between the napkin dispenser and the salt and pepper shakers. He took one of the menus and began to study it.

After a few minutes a second waitress, younger and shorter than Flo, walked up to his table and asked, "Are you ready to order, Sir?"

Ken looked up at her. She was cute, red-haired, with a name tag that read "Jinny."

"Well, Jinny," he said, "what would you recommend?"

"The meatloaf is quite good. I have it myself at least once a week, sometimes twice. Or the chicken pot pie, that's pretty good too."

"I guess the meatloaf sounds good, I'll have that. With french fries and string beans."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Sir, we don't have french fries. The deep fryer broke a year ago, and Mamie hasn't gotten it fixed yet." She paused, then bent down and added in a very low voice, "But she won't spend the money to get new menus printed either!"

Ken laughed. "Okay, Jinny, I'll take the mashed...just make sure there's plenty of gravy. And a soda of some kind, whatever you have." Jinny nodded, scribbled on her order pad, and headed for the kitchen. Ken sat back to wait.

When the food came it looked good and tasted better. Just as he finished polishing the plate, Jinny whisked it away and dropped a slice of apple pie in front of him. He ate the pie a little more slowly. Jinny had placed his check on the table, and when he picked it up he couldn't believe the price. The whole meal, pie and soda included, added up to only \$6.50. He dropped a ten on top of the check and rose to leave.

With almost magical speed Jinny scooped up the check and the ten, took them to the register, and returned before he got more than halfway to the door. "Sir," she said, "you forgot your change."

Ken stopped and looked at her. "Keep it. That's your tip."

"Oh, no, Sir, we're not allowed to have such large tips." She pointed to a sign reading "No Tips Over \$1" with her left hand, while she attempted to give him the money with her right.

As her fingertips brushed his hand he felt a tingle, almost an electric shock, and he jumped

back, spilling the money on the floor. No! No! This can't be happening! he thought. He frantically tried to suppress memories of the old man telling him he had the power to detect magic and magic users with exactly this sort of sign.

* * * *

The white haired old man in the bed was close to death, but he had enough strength to address Ken. "You seek my magic. I can sense that, and that you have the potential to use it."

"I seek magic, but as far as using it..."

"Give me your hands. I have only the strength left to give you one of my powers. The one that will help you most now..." He took Ken's hands and Ken felt a tingle. "There. Feel the magic..." The old man dropped Ken's hands. He closed his eyes, and his breathing slowed to a stop. Ken touched his throat, and felt both the tingle and the man's pulse fade to nothing at the same time.

* * * *

"Excuse me, Sir, is there a problem?" Jinny asked as she bent down to pick up the dropped money. "Did I do something wrong?"

Ken stood there trying to catch his breath. This time when she gave him the money nothing happened. There was no tingle. He handed her the permissible dollar and pocketed the rest of it. Had he just imagined it the first time? Or had she also noticed it and suppressed it? But that would mean she was...? He decided to worry about it later, if at all.

"No, Jinny, you didn't do anything wrong, it was something I just remembered." He paused. "But there is something you could do for me. I just realized how tired I am, and I'd like to find a motel for the night. Can you tell me the best way to go?"

Disappointment showed on her face. "I'm sorry, there aren't any motels anywhere near here. The only one we had burned down five years ago, and it had been closed for lack of business for several years before that." Then she said, "But there is Mrs. Matherby's 'Lodgings' where I live, and she has some available rooms. She isn't too fond of renting to strangers, but if I give you a good reference she'll do it."

"That's fine. How do I get there?"

"Oh, well, I think you'll have to wait until my shift ends in half an hour. Then we can go together, I can show you the way, and I can introduce you to her so she won't worry. Would that be all right?"

“Fine, I guess. Can I just sit here and wait? Maybe get another glass of soda?”

“Certainly!” She led him back to where he had been sitting and placed a fresh glass in front of him. “Mamie says this one is on the house.” Again Ken got a funny feeling. He had not seen Jinny go anywhere to ask Mamie—or anyone else—about it. But he shrugged it off and leaned back to wait.

The time went by swiftly. At the end of the half hour, he saw Jinny go into the kitchen. She came out in a blouse and skirt instead of her waitress uniform, waving to somebody behind her. “Okay, we can go now. I usually walk, but if you’re from out of town you probably have a car, right?” she said to Ken.

Ken led her out to his car, opened the door for her to get in, then went around to the driver’s seat.

“Just go straight ahead on Grover for about five or six blocks, then turn left on Walnut,” she said. He followed her directions, driving slowly enough to read the street signs. When they got on Walnut she said, “Now about four blocks, you’ll see the sign on the right. Just before you get to the sign, turn into the driveway. She has parking in the back so her guests’ cars don’t clog up the street.” Following her directions he parked in the little lot. They got out and he put the top up. Almost to the door she stopped and said, “Ohmigosh! I forgot to ask your name, I have to know it to introduce you to Mrs. Matherby!”

“I’m Ken Parker. And if she asks, I’m from New York, down here on an extended vacation.” He thought bitterly, but didn’t say aloud, extended...probably for the rest of my life! “And by the way, what’s your last name?”

“Talbot. I’m Jinny Talbot, Mr. Parker.”

“Pleased to meet you, Jinny Talbot. I’ve been calling you Jinny all this time, how about you drop the ‘Mr. Parker’ and just call me Ken?”

She gave him a quick smile. “Okay, Ken.”

Mrs. Matherby was a sweet looking older woman, and she seemed willing to accept Jinny’s introduction. “Glad to meet you, Mr. Parker. Most of our rooms are fifteen dollars a week, or five dollars a night if you are only staying a short time. Of course our special rooms are more.”

Surprised at how cheap the lodgings were, Ken couldn’t help but ask, “What is special about the special ones? And how much are they?”

“The specials are those with private bathrooms,” said Mrs. Matherby. “Those are thirty

dollars a week, ten dollars by the night. All of them, both regular and special, include breakfast, but lunch or dinner is extra. And you have to let me know a day or so in advance if you're going to want meals."

"That's fine," said Ken, pulling out his wallet and extracting thirty dollars. "I'll take a special for a week. I don't know exactly what I'm going to be doing, so I'll plan on eating elsewhere, at least for a day or two."

Mrs. Matherby showed him to his room and gave him his key. He went back out to the car and got his suitcase, returning just as Jinny started up the stairs. "Good night, Jinny," he called.

"Good night, Ken," she replied.

He went into his room. It was reasonably spacious and nicely furnished. The only unusual thing he noticed was that it had no TV. He quickly brushed his teeth, got into his pajamas, and flopped down on the bed. "Very comfortable," was his last waking thought as his head hit the pillow.

Sample file

Chapter Two

Executive Producer

“Yeah, you’re screwed,” said John Hornberg, Ken Parker’s attorney. “Well, that is, if you can call five million dollars ‘screwed.’ Five million dollars *and* a guaranteed salary of two hundred thousand a year for the next five years—that brings it up to six million—for doing absolutely nothing.”

“But what about my reputation, John?” asked Ken. “The Institute, and the College, both seem to be taking a dim view of this whole business.”

“Well, it’s hard to say what will happen as far as your professional reputation goes. Your original pilot will never be seen—the network execs are going to make sure of that. They wanted your idea but not your execution of it. So they paid you a very good price to get total control. On the other hand you’ll be credited as Executive Producer on the series.”

“They aren’t giving me any control over the series at all. And the contract keeps me from doing anything that competes with them for the next five years. Aren’t non-compete clauses illegal?”

“That isn’t really my area of expertise, Ken,” said the attorney, “but I looked into it a little when this came up.” He picked up a pad and flipped through the pages to find his notes. “First, it varies a lot by state. In California you might have a shot, but here your chances are much slimmer. And even in California, if they pay you not to work for a competitor, since they are not depriving you of your livelihood, the clauses usually hold up.”

“Great! Have you seen what they’ve done?”

“Yes, I looked at the DVD you gave me of your original pilot, and at the one of their pilot. I agree, it’s a travesty, a total farce. But I’ve been asking around, and the deal they gave you is considered extremely generous—far more than fair—in the TV industry. Ken, you signed the contract voluntarily.”

“I guess I should have come to see you *before* I did that, huh?”

“Well, you should have, yes, but dammit, I probably would have told you to sign!” He waved his pen at Ken. “It’s a great deal, a five-year paid vacation. When the five years is up, go back to your research. In fact, you could probably keep working the whole time as long as you

keep it under wraps, don't try to publish or anything."

"Great! Maybe I can finally track down those last few clues, and find a way to cast a spell on the damn network executives. I was pretty close before I decided—I have *no idea* why I decided—I should do the TV show."

John laughed. "Cast a spell on them? Ken, I know your version of the show looks very realistic, but come on! You're going to tell me you found *real* witches and *real* sorcerers?"

"No, I didn't find them, not quite. But I did find something...only I haven't been able to teach it to anyone else. I can identify magic-users...sometimes. If I touch them I get a funny tingle...most of the time. It's intermittent, inconsistent, I don't know why. But it happens often enough that I'm sure it's real."

John looked startled and dropped his pen. "Ken, you're scaring me. I think you need, well, if not a five year vacation, at least a bit of a rest. Put your research aside, relax, teach your classes, or even take a sabbatical. You can afford it. I'll keep an eye on your money, we have accountants on staff." He reached into the desk drawer and handed Ken a small plastic rectangle. "This credit card will make it easy for you to access your money. It's got a \$10,000 limit, best I could do on one day's notice. If you need more, give me a call." Ken put the card in his wallet, and the lawyer got up and opened the door. He shook Ken's hand as he ushered him out.

As Ken came out of the building, he caught sight of a bar just across the street. Ken was only an occasional drinker, but—this was definitely an occasion. He crossed the street, entered, hesitated, and finally decided to sit at the almost empty bar. When the bartender came over he ordered a Margarita, remembering having one at a faculty party and liking it. Realizing he no longer had to worry about the cost, he pulled out the credit card and placed it on the counter in front of him.

He sipped his drink, contemplating what to do. At some point he noticed the glass was empty, and he signaled the bartender for another. In fact he had done this several times and the bartender had brought him another drink each time. When he signaled this time, however, the bartender took his card and ran it through the register. Instead of a drink, he found himself looking at a charge slip, and the bartender holding a pen out to him. More or less automatically he signed and put the charge card back in his wallet. He started to get up, then thought about it and said, "Wait a minute...I ordered another Marga...Marga...drink."

"Sorry, pal," said the bartender, "but you aren't getting another one. At least not here."

You've had enough, I could lose my license if I serve you more. And please, don't drive. You want me to call you a cab?"

Ken considered this, although he seemed to be having trouble concentrating. "I don't have a car, I came down here on the bus...bus...I could never afford a cab home, its way," he swung his arm in a wide circle to indicate how far, barely missing another customer, "way out of town."

The bartender gestured to one of the waiters. "Take this gentleman out and pour him into a bus stop. I didn't realize how hard it was hitting him, shoulda cut him off earlier, but nothing else we can do now." The waiter took Ken's arm, gently but firmly steered him out the door, and sat him on a bench by the bus stop.

Ken sat there for a while, watching people get on and off the buses that came by, without really thinking about anything. It was a busy stop, several lines stopped here. Nobody noticed him.

Finally, however, a patrol car came by for the third time, and seeing him still sitting, pulled over to check him out. The cop got out, walked over to Ken and asked, "Sir, is there anything wrong?"

Ken looked up and said, in a cloud of alcoholic vapors, "No, officer, I'm waiting for a bus. Do you know what time the bus to Bradmont comes by here?"

The cop looked at him warily. "Sir, have you been drinking? And may I please see some identification?"

Ken fumbled out his wallet and handed the cop his driver's license. "I did have a drink or two, officer. Is there something wrong with that? I'm over twenty one."

The cop scanned his license through his handheld device, then when the light showed green handed it back. "Sir, the bus to Bradmont doesn't come by here. This is just the city buses. You need to go to the Metro Bus Station to get the out of town buses. Perhaps I could get you a cab to take you over to the Metro?"

Ken shook his head. "I don't have much cash, don't know if I could afford it." Suddenly, he remembered how he'd paid for the drinks and asked, "Do the cabs take credit cards? My lawyer gave me one."

"Some do and some don't," said the cop. "Let me see if I can find one." He turned to the street and waved an arm at an approaching cab. When it stopped, he spoke briefly to the driver, then came back to Ken. He led him to the cab door and helped him in. "I've told him you need to

go to the Metro, and he will take your credit card.”

As they worked their way across town, the driver asked Ken, “Where ya tryin’ to get to?”

“I’m headed home to Bradmont.”

The driver said, “Uh oh, I think ya got a problem.” He picked up his mike, spoke into it, and listened to the faint reply. Then he said to Ken, “The last bus of the day for Bradmont left a half hour ago. Ya gotta wait until tomorrow, and believe me, ya don’t wanna sleep on a bench in the Metro. Ya want me to take ya to a motel?”

Ken thought a moment, trying to clear the fuzz out of his mind. Then he asked, “What would it cost for you to drive me to Bradmont?”

“Are ya kiddin’ me?” the driver replied. “Crap, that’s thirty or forty miles, and deadheadin’ back, on the meter it’d be a fortune! Lemme check somethin’.” Again he spoke into the mike and listened to the faint reply. “Okay, dispatch says we gotta special rate for that, better’n on the meter but still not cheap. Two hunnerd bucks, and I gotta collect in advance. That okay?”

“Fine,” said Ken, pulling out his wallet. “Just put it on my credit card.” The driver pulled over to the side of the street. He ran the card through the reader on the dash and had Ken sign the slip. They had hardly started moving when Ken fell asleep.

Ken didn’t wake up again until the driver called back to him, “Hey, pal, we’re just about to Bradmont, where ya wanna go?”

Ken gave the driver the address of his apartment, concentrating on keeping his head from falling off. The hour or two of sleep had left him a little more sober but with one hell of a headache. When they arrived he got out. The driver told him that special rates like this included the tip, and Ken was feeling crummy enough to totally miss the not-so-subtle hint that tipping extra was in no way forbidden. He entered his apartment, removed his tie, and kicked off his shoes. He took some ibuprofen with a large glass of water before falling on the bed fully dressed. He was asleep in minutes.

Chapter Three

Disaster

Two days after Ken's visit to his lawyer, he received a summons to appear before the Board of the Institute for Paranormal Studies. The Montcalm College campus wasn't large, and it took Ken only a couple of minutes to walk from his office in Buford Hall to Rhine Hall, the Institute headquarters. He climbed to the second floor and announced himself to the secretary sitting outside the board room. She told him to have a seat and went back to whatever she was doing. After fifteen or so minutes, during which Ken was becoming increasingly nervous, a buzzer sounded.

The secretary stood up and said, "They want you now, Dr. Parker. Come with me, please." She led him over to the door and opened it.

Ken winced as he was escorted into the Institute's board room. The giant TV screen on the end wall showed the network's version of "Ghosts." The episode ended and the credits rolled up the screen, including "Executive Producer Dr. Kenneth Parker, Fellow, Institute for Paranormal Studies."

The TV went dark and the lights in the room brightened. The board members swung around to face the table, and Institute Chairman Wilton saw Ken. "Ah, Dr. Parker, you're here. Please take a seat." He gestured to the lone empty chair at the foot of the table and Ken sat. "Dr. Parker," the Chairman continued, "we have just seen that horrible travesty which is apparently based on your work, and which gives, er, 'credit' to you and to this Institute. What do you have to say about this?"

"Dr. Wilton, I never planned anything like this. I intended to create a serious TV series on paranormal research—probably for PBS—and had no idea the production company would distort it like this. I apologize to the Institute, but my lawyer tells me that according to my contract, I have no recourse at this point." Ken knew his apology was going to be inadequate, but he had to try.

The Chairman spoke again, and Ken found out just how terribly inadequate his attempt at an apology had been. "Dr. Parker, you are calling the good name of the Institute into ridicule and dishonor. Your membership is terminated, with prejudice, and we are banning you for life from

any further association with the Institute.” Ken sank lower in his chair. A lifetime ban? But the Chairman hadn’t finished. “We have contacted your production company and told them you are no longer a Fellow. We have asked that the Institute’s name be removed from the series, including the mention in the credits. They agreed to do so for any future episodes. They obviously can’t do anything about copies already out in the hands of the public, or even copies already distributed to stores. But they said they would re-edit—as long as we would pay the cost—for any reruns. And they will re-edit and re-manufacture any supplies of DVDs on hand, destroying old copies—again, as long as we pay the costs.” Ken shuddered. The Institute was notoriously stingy about money. If they were willing to shell out cash for this, they were obviously pissed beyond anything he could imagine. Ken prepared to apologize again, hoping against hope he could avoid what was coming, but he wasn’t given a chance.

Chairman Wilton sat down and gestured to another board member, Dr. Farley Josephson, head of the Department of Paranormal Studies of Montcalm College, Ken’s boss. Dr. Josephson rose to his feet and directed a look of loathing at Ken. Normally a mild-mannered man, today he seemed to truly deserve the “Fearsome Farley” nickname used clandestinely by the department. “Dr. Parker, it is my duty to convey to you the terms and conditions under which you are employed by Montcalm and by my department. College policy allows departments to set standards of appropriate professional affiliations for faculty members. Failure to comply is grounds for dismissal, and for revocation of tenure if need be. My department specifies that faculty must, in fact, be members of this Institute. Since you are no longer a member, I am forced to inform you that your tenure is revoked and your employment is terminated. In fact, to put it more bluntly, Dr. Parker, after watching ‘Ghosties’ it gives me *great pleasure* to tell you that you are *fired!*” He sat down, but now the look of loathing was replaced by a broad smile of pleasure.

Chairman Wilton rose again. “Dr. Parker, I will tell you that the board contemplated one further action against you. We looked into the possibility of revoking your doctorate, but we were—unfortunately—unable to build a strong enough case. So you retain the right to call yourself ‘Doctor.’ But don’t think you will ever be able to work in this field again. Do you have anything to say?” Ken shook his head no. “Then, Dr. Parker, you may leave.” Ken got up and walked slowly toward the door. He could feel the hatred radiating from the group.

The walk back to Buford Hall took no longer than the walk over, but it felt like a journey of a hundred years. He knew word had already gotten out. The faces of the students no longer held

respect for him as a faculty member. Instead, they had the expression of watching someone carried across campus in a tumbrel, heading for the guillotine.

He opened the door of his office and stopped, thunderstruck. The blade of the guillotine had already fallen. During his brief absence, the entire contents of the office had been packed into shipping cartons, all labeled with his address. Other than the boxes, the office held nothing but an empty desk, empty bookcases, and a couple of chairs.

As he stood there, Violet Orlando, the department secretary, came up to him. She had always been friendly, but now, in a voice dripping icicles, she said, “Your belongings will be delivered to your apartment tomorrow, Dr. Parker. If you have anything there that belongs to the school, please pack it up, and let me know. I will arrange for it to be picked up. There will be no need for you to return. And Dr. Josephson told me to make sure I collected your keys.”

Ken nodded and pulled out a ring of keys. His office, Buford Hall, Rhine Hall, a few labs. He reached out to hand them over, but then realized that the ring was a prize he had been awarded by the Institute, and he wanted to keep it. He opened it, took the keys off, dropped them into Violet’s hand, and put the ring back in his pocket. His state of mind was such that he didn’t even think about the tingle as his fingers brushed her hand.

“Thank you, Dr. Parker,” she said in the same cold voice. Then, as he turned to leave, she leaned over close to his ear and said very softly, but in her usual friendly voice, “Ken, we’re all sorry about this, sad to see you go, but we’re not allowed to say so. At least not anywhere old Fearsome Farley can hear us. Good luck.”

As he walked back down the corridor to the exit he met no one, but somehow he had the feeling the rest of the department was watching through doors open barely a crack.

Back at his apartment, he surveyed the available floor space, and decided that if he brought in all those boxes there wouldn’t be room to move. There were storage lockers in the basement, they cost extra, but that was no longer much of a concern. He went down to see the Super.

“The college is sending over a bunch of shipping cartons tomorrow. I’d like to get a storage locker for them.”

“Sure thing, Mr. Parker, but you know they cost, right? And different sizes are different prices, right? How big do you want?”

“I don’t know. I guess whatever is the smallest size that will hold everything. Just have whoever delivers them put the boxes in, I’ll come by and pick up the key later. And just add it to

my rent, Okay?”

“No sweat, Mr. Parker. It’ll be all taken care of.”

It *was* taken care of, but not the way the Super implied. A week later, the mail that should have had a reminder that his rent was due contained an eviction notice instead. He had forgotten that the College owned this building. The letter gave him thirty days to vacate the premises, including the basement storage area he had just acquired.

A quick call to his attorney accomplished nothing. “Ken, they pretty much have the right to do that. Oh, you might delay it a few months, say until your lease comes up for renewal, but what’s the point?”

“Well, then what do I do?”

“Find a place at least fifty or a hundred miles away, a small house or an apartment with lots of storage. Probably you should buy a car for house-hunting, just put it on your credit card, I’ve had that raised to a hundred thousand limit. When you find a house, send me the paperwork on it so we can be sure neither the college nor the Institute owns it. Then move!”

“What if I move somewhere but don’t like it?”

“Then you move again. But what I was going to suggest—once all your stuff is stored somewhere—go on a six month road trip, find a place you really would like to settle into.”

“All right, John, I’ll do it your way. I guess I don’t have a lot of choice.” As he hung up the phone he looked around the apartment. It was a nice little place and he liked it, but there must be lots of “nice little places” out there. He shrugged and went out to look for a car dealer.

A few days and a few hundred miles in his new Mazda Miata convertible found him in possession of a small rental house with a large garage. Large enough to store all his books and papers, and still get the small car in. Greasing the wheels of commerce got him the services of a mover with almost no delay, and shortly after that he settled into his new home.

It took only two weeks with nothing to do to drive him to the edge. John’s suggestion of a road trip seemed more and more sensible. He arranged with the rental agent to have someone keep an eye on the place. He packed up the special suitcases he had bought to fit in the Miata’s trunk, threw them in the car, and drove off in a random direction.

Chapter Four

A Walk Downtown

On waking in the morning Ken initially felt a little disoriented by the strange room, but then he remembered that he was in Mrs. Matherby's Lodgings. He washed, shaved, dressed, and went down to see about breakfast. The buffet before him would have put many luxury motels to shame. He had just loaded his plate and taken a chair when Jinny entered the room. "Good morning, Ken. Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, quite well. This is a very nice place."

She filled her plate and sat down next to him. "What are your plans for today? Are you staying in town, or do you have somewhere to go?"

"I think I'll stay here and relax for at least a couple of days. I've been driving a lot and I need the rest." He paused, and then asked hopefully, "What are you doing today? Off work?"

"Yes, it's my day off, Flo and Alice are working today, I was kind of hoping....," she hesitated, "you might want to see the town and the rest of the valley, and you might....," she hesitated again, "you might want a guide to show you around."

"And you just might be a good choice for that guide? That sounds perfect. I couldn't have come up with anything better." Her hand was resting on the table and he reached over to grasp it. Again he felt the sharp electric tingle he had gotten from touching her hand the previous night. He clamped down on the memories that tried to flood his mind, memories of strange and supernatural events he had encountered and truly wanted to forget.

His face must have shown some sign because Jinny asked, "Are you okay, Ken? You looked a little funny for a moment."

"Just a cramp. I must have slept on my arm wrong...or something." It happened the first time he touched her when she gave him the change, but not the second. Then it happened again this morning. He tried to remember if he had touched her any other time, perhaps helping her into or out of the car, but he couldn't be certain.

After they had finished eating, Ken leaned back in his chair. "Okay, where are we going to go first?"

"We're going to walk downtown and see some of the sights there. Maybe look in a few of

the stores. We'll come back here for lunch." Ken started to say something, but she continued, "I know, I know, you told Mrs. Matherby you'd eat out, but if I talk to her before we go I'm sure she can handle an extra lunch." She got up and went in the kitchen, returning a moment later. "Lunch is all set. Let's go."

Ken found the downtown area largely uninteresting. They walked down one side of the street until they got to the City Hall. Jinny took him inside and up to an observation cupola. To the south he could see the highway on which he had entered town, snaking its way down the side of the mountain. To the east and the west were similar mountains. But to the north was a much higher rock face, rising almost vertically from the valley. Ken pointed and said, "Wow! That is some big cliff, and steep, too."

"Yes, that's Grover's Ridge." She turned to look at the mountain and continued, "they say Mordecai Grover died up there...the man who founded the town. There are a lot of silly stories floating around about his death, don't believe any of them."

Ken took another look at the mountain. "What I'm not sure I believe is that he was able to get up there in the first place. It looks like it would be very difficult to climb, if not impossible."

"Oh, it would be impossible to go straight up. Long ago there used to be a road, well, at least a trail that curved way around to the east on a much less steep route. But a big storm caused a rock slide, wiped out the trail. Now the whole thing is totally unclimbable, nobody has been up there in way over a hundred years."

After they left City Hall, they started walking back toward the boarding house. Jinny said, "You never told me last night why you are here in Groverton. If you don't mind talking about it, that is. Nothing much new ever happens here, so we're always on the lookout for new gossip." She laughed as she said it.

"No, I guess I don't mind talking about it. I lost my job, under circumstances that left me with far more money than I would have had if I had stayed. I was a Professor of Paranormal Studies, and I did a research project on magic and magic users. I made a video of it, but then a Hollywood producer bought it—for lots of money—and changed it to a sensationalist TV presentation. The college felt embarrassed to be associated with it and they sacked me."

"But that doesn't explain how you got here."

"My lawyer suggested I do a road trip, just to work things out of my system. But how I got here? I don't really know. I was just driving around, but I kept taking roads that somehow *felt*