

Dead Het Boys

Sean

Graymoor Mansion

February 14, 1998

Sleet smacked against the wavy glass of the window as I looked down upon the ice-encrusted trees from my third-story bedroom. The wind was howling and rattling the window panes as if trying to find a way in. The scene outside was more reminiscent of Christmas than Valentine's Day.

I stepped away from the window and returned to the newspaper sitting on my desk. It was going on a year now, but I knew I couldn't read the editorial without it stirring up a lot of bad memories. Perhaps I would be wiser not to read it, but my curiosity got the better of me.

The Verona Citizen – Thursday, February 12, 1998

VERONA MURDERS REVISITED

HAS JUSTICE BEEN SERVED?

Late last spring Verona was the setting for three grisly murders. The victims have been laid to rest in the Verona Cemetery, and one of murderers lies buried only a few feet away. The two remaining murderers are behind bars, sentenced to twenty years each for their crimes. With good behavior, the guilty could be released before serving half their sentence. Is this punishment enough for hate crimes that ended in cold-blooded murder?

The first victim was 16-year-old Marty Crawford, whose body was discovered in the woods behind Verona High School by hikers. First deemed a suicide, it only later became apparent that Crawford did not put a bullet in his own head. His murderers may well have escaped punishment for their crime had they not proceeded to murder more Verona youths.

Ken Clark, also 16, was the next to die. There was never any doubt that Clark was murdered. He was found beaten to death with a note that read "God Hates Queers" attached to his corpse.

Fifteen-year-old Tony Paulik was the third and final victim. Paulik was found bound and gagged approximately 10 yards into a wooded site near Verona Park. He died shortly after he was discovered. The cause of death was massive internal bleeding from a severe beating with a baseball bat that was found not far from the body. A note similar to that found on Clark was left with Paulik's body, reading "God Hates Queers. The righteous will not rest until all fags are exterminated."

With the third murder the motive was well established. Someone was killing the gay boys of Verona. The prime suspects were initially the members of a fanatical religious group from Colorado who had taken it upon themselves to preach against homosexuality. Their catch phrase "God Hates Queers" was found on the notes attached to both Clark and Paulik, and several members of the group displayed signs with the same message while picketing the victims' funerals. A connection between the group and a neo-Nazi movement was later discovered, and five members of the group were later arrested on charges of child pornography and child molestation. While no members of the group were proven to be connected to the murders, it became clear that the young murderers were inspired by the Colorado-based group to commit their crimes.

One of the murderers was killed by an intended victim in self-defense, meeting the same fate he dealt out to others, albeit a less violent one. The other murderers are sitting in prison cells. In less than ten years they could be free. The outsiders who came to our peaceful little town and spread their messages of hate, messages that inspired the murders, have escaped punishment completely. Many believe that justice has been served, but would Crawford, Clark, and Paulik agree? Their young lives were violently cut short. Two of the three died brutal deaths. Nothing can undo what was done here. We can't give those boys back what they've lost. Perhaps some believe that the prison terms handed out to the guilty were enough, but what price can be put on life. Has justice truly been served?

Tears welled in my eyes as the editorial brought those horrible days back to me. No, justice had not been served. A part of me wanted those who had killed Marty and the others to experience for themselves what they had done to their victims. Another part of me didn't believe it was right to deal out pain and death, even to such monsters as Kyle and Dusty. Marshall never spoke of it, but I knew guilt plagued him: guilt for killing Justin. I'm sure Marshall never meant to hit him that hard, but as far as I was concerned, Justin got what he had coming to him. He and Kyle were trying to kill me, and if it ended in his own death, that was his problem. If Marshall hadn't taken Justin out, I'd probably be dead.

The clock on the distant stairwell chimed a quarter till five. I needed to get a move on if I

was to meet Nick at Café Moffatt on time. I bundled up in my coat and red scarf and made the long trek down the hallway and three flights of stairs. Then I walked across the parlor, out the front door, across the snow-covered lawn, and through the main gates of Graymoor onto the street. That might not seem like a long journey, but it took me a good ten minutes and not because I walked slowly! Graymoor was simply that vast. I took a moment to look back at the old mansion. I thought my parents were out of their minds when they bought Verona's most notorious haunted house, and I still found it creepy upon occasion, but I'd come to think of it as home. I smiled and turned my feet and thoughts toward the boy awaiting me in Café Moffatt.

I slipped on patches of ice as I walked quickly along. The temperature hovered at freezing, and the moisture falling from the dark clouds couldn't decide whether to come down as snow, rain, or ice. The once fluffy snow had turned brittle as it partly melted, only to refreeze once more. The wind tore at my coat as it had the window panes, unfortunately with more success. I jammed my hands into my pockets trying to keep already chilled fingers from becoming icy. Sometimes, I wished the whole town of Verona could be moved to Florida.

Nick was waiting in a booth when I arrived at Café Moffatt. He waved, and I plopped down across from him after tossing off my coat and scarf.

"Have you been waiting long?" I asked.

"All of two minutes!" he announced.

"My apologies then," I said with a grin.

"What are you having?" asked Nick.

"I'm starving, so I'd like to order the farmer's breakfast."

"You mean the feeding frenzy?"

"I said I'd like to order it. I think I'll just have an order of pecan pancakes. That'll be more than enough. I'll ruin my weigh loss for the entire week if I'm not careful."

"How did your weigh-in go this morning?" asked Nick. I weighed myself one morning a week, and this morning had been judgment day.

"I lost a pound!"

"Excellent," said Nick. "You're doing well."

"You don't know how lucky you are," I said. "You can eat anything."

"I'm cursed with high metabolism."

"If only I were cursed so."

I gazed into Nick's eyes. He was so very handsome with his dark blond hair.

"So...has Oliver asked Clay out yet?" asked Nick.

"I don't know, but he said today was the day. It's perfect timing. What better day to start a relationship than Valentine's Day? I guess we'll find out soon enough."

"You know Clay will say yes. They're like destined for each other according to Mark."

"He didn't exactly say that," I said.

"Close enough. It's almost too bad in a way. Clay is quite a hottie."

I scowled.

"What?"

I didn't have time to answer, because our waitress arrived just then and set a glass of ice water for me near Nick's.

"What would you boys like?"

Nick ordered a huge meal of a double bacon cheeseburger, fries, onion rings, a chocolate milkshake, and a Coke. I ordered the pecan pancakes and iced tea, unsweetened. Nick waited until

our waitress was gone and then repeated his question.

“What?”

“You’re always talking about how hot other guys are!” I said, a bit too angrily.

“Come on, Sean, so what? Don’t you think Clay is hot?”

“That’s not the point!”

“I’ve seen you look at Skye,” said Nick.

“Everyone looks at Skye! Straight boys check out Skye! Hell, my *mom* looks at Skye.”

“I bet you’ve fantasized about him,” said Nick.

I didn’t answer.

“Your silence speaks volumes, Sean, but I don’t blame you. I’ve had a few fantasies about him myself.”

I could feel the furrows on my brow deepen, even though it wasn’t quite fair to get angry over Nick’s lust for Skye. To be perfectly honest, I did have a few fantasies about him, and the fact that I’d felt guilty afterward didn’t erase the sin.

“You’re always looking around, Nick.”

“Not always, and so what if I do? It’s just looking. I’ve been faithful to you from day one, Sean. I haven’t so much as hugged another guy, well, except for my dads and that doesn’t count.”

Just in case you don’t know already, I should explain: Nick has two dads, Ethan and Nathan, and, yes, his dads are gay. They adopted Nick months back, and he’s lucky, because they are great parents.

“I don’t want to make a big deal out of it, but I don’t like it,” I said.

“I’ll stop, okay? You’re going to have to allow me a few slipups, but if it bothers you, I’ll stop. You know, we used to check out cute boys together.”

“I’m sorry, Nick. I just... You make me so happy. I guess what we have just seems too good to be true.”

“Hey, we argue now and then. You don’t love *Phantom* nearly enough, and we have other differences. That should be enough to keep our relationship from being too good to be true, so relax.”

Nick took my hand across the table.

“I love you,” I said.

“I love you, too.”

Our food soon arrived, and our meal passed pleasantly. I’d always yearned for such companionship and warmth, and since Nick and I had been dating, a matter of several months now, I had gotten my wish.

After supper we killed a bit of time by strolling around Verona. There wasn’t all that much to see, but everyone probably thinks that about their hometown. There was the antique store, the library, a barber shop, a gasoline station, Café Moffatt, which we’d just left, The Park’s Edge, Ofarim’s, and a handful of other places of note. I was glad we didn’t have much time to spare because it was far too cold to be strolling around for long.

As seven o’clock drew near we headed toward the Paramount to take in a movie. Nick and I looked at each other and grinned when we spotted Oliver and Clay just a short distance in front of us at the ticket booth. Oliver saw us as he and Clay stepped away from the booth, and they waited for us under the flashing marquee.

Tickets in hand, Nick and I walked over to them. Oliver smiled from ear to ear, and Clay looked just as pleased. It was obvious they were on a date: their first date, no less. They had an

excited yet shy look to them.

I glanced at Nick. He was checking out Clay, but quickly looked away when he realized what he was doing. I was making a big deal out of nothing, and I knew why. I was insecure. I knew Nick could do a whole lot better than me, and I was afraid I'd lose him. I knew, also, that part of the problem was my own lack of self-esteem. I'd been working hard to improve myself, but I still had a bit of flab, and nothing short of plastic surgery was going to make me look hot. I knew looks weren't everything, but when you hang around guys like Skye, it's easy to feel inferior.

"I obviously don't have to ask how things went today," I said to Oliver. He grinned.

I noticed Nick didn't check out Oliver like he did Clay. Oliver was kind of cute, but like me, he carried around a bit too much weight. He could best be described as a somewhat pudgy Harry Potter. He even wore the same round, black-rimmed glasses as Harry, although it wasn't an attempt to look like him. Oliver had worn glasses like that as far back as I could remember. He looked like Harry Potter before there was one, so I guess it could be argued that Harry Potter looked like him.

"Hey, why don't you guys—" began Nick.

"...enjoy the show," I said, kicking Nick in the leg. "We'd better get moving, or we'll miss the previews. We'll see you guys at school, okay?"

"Later, Sean, Nick," said Oliver.

"Bye, guys," said Clay.

I pulled Nick away.

"I was going to ask them if they wanted to sit with us," said Nick as we passed through the glass doors and into the ornate lobby.

"I know, but it's their first date. I think they'd probably prefer to be alone."

"I hadn't thought of that!"

"Not everyone can be a genius," I said.

We walked across the worn black-and-white marble floor and onto the red carpeting that led into the auditorium itself. We found ourselves a spot about a third of the way down and leaned back in the old-fashioned, red-velvet seats. I loved the Paramount. It was an old movie palace, very ornate, if a bit worn by the passing decades. The scent of buttered popcorn and polished wood filled the air. I wondered how many dozens of couples, hundreds perhaps, had experienced their first date in the old theater.

I took Nick's hand in an act of defiance against the prejudiced, but mainly just because I loved him. He smiled at me. Things had sure been a lot better for boys like us since Ethan and Nathan had started the gay-youth center and especially since Skye had come out. Skye was our own personal superhero. With a guy like him looking out for gay boys, we all felt a lot safer. Things were far, far from perfect, but I didn't live in constant fear anymore.

There were very few previews, probably because *Titanic* was such a long film. It had been released last December, but Verona didn't always get new movies quickly, especially those as popular as *Titanic*. Nick and I held hands through most of the film. I think I enjoyed that more than the movie, not that I failed to enjoy Leonardo DiCaprio. Now, there was a hot guy. I resisted the urge to look around and see how Oliver and Clay were doing. They certainly didn't need me spying on them on their first date. I experienced a sort of vicarious happiness for them. I knew the contentment of being in a relationship. Oliver and Clay had it all ahead of them: the thrill of their first kiss, the discovery of the joy of being held, and so much more. Sometimes, I wished I could go back and do it all over again, but I wouldn't trade the present for anything.

I don't want to make it sound like finding a boyfriend is the solution to all problems—far

from it. As much as I loved Nick, I think I've had more problems while dating him than ever before. Relationships are a lot of work, especially when neither partner is perfect, which is always the case. Nick and I have our disagreements—even our arguments—as he himself pointed out. Things definitely aren't as I'd imagined they would be, but that's not to say they aren't good. I guess I had some kind of fairy-tale image in my mind when I was dreaming about a boyfriend, but real life isn't like that. Still, even with all that, our relationship does often seem too good to be true, so the good outweighs the bad by far.

At the end of the show I stood up. I'd sat still so long my legs were nearly asleep, not to mention my behind. I had to work my feet around a bit before I dared to move. Otherwise I might have tumbled onto the floor.

I gasped and grabbed Nick's biceps tightly as I turned toward the aisle.

"What's wrong?" asked Nick.

"I thought I just..."

I made a split-second decision, rushed past Nick, and hurried toward the aisle. I turned and headed for the doors, but couldn't make much headway because of the crowd. I pushed right past Oliver and Clay and rushed into the lobby. I jerked my head in every direction as I made for the doors. Once I hit the sidewalk I looked up and down the street and all around. I kept searching until Nick, Oliver, and Clay caught up with me.

"Sean, what are you doing?" asked Nick.

I gazed down the sidewalk for a few moments more, then turned to my boyfriend.

"I thought I just saw Ben Tyler."

"Are you sure?" asked Nick.

Oliver looked frightened, Clay a bit confused.

"Pretty sure," I said, "but the light's dim in there. Maybe I was just seeing things."

"Let's hope so," said Nick.

"What's this about Ben Tyler?" asked Clay.

"Maybe you'd better bring him up to speed," I said to Oliver. I had neither the time, nor the inclination to tell the tale of those we'd all come to refer to as the Evil Four. We said our goodbyes, and then Nick and I walked toward Graymoor.

"Ben Tyler," said Nick, with dread in his voice. "Do you really think you might have seen him?"

"I might have, but I'm just not sure."

"It's amazing when you think about it," said Nick as we strolled down the slick sidewalk.

"What's amazing?"

"How many people don't know about what happened. Just think of it: the Evil Four very nearly killed Skye and Oliver, yet almost no one knows about it."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I never thought about it like that."

"Things like that are usually big news: like last spring."

"Let's just not talk about it, okay?"

Nick's eyes met mine. He could tell I was upset. It takes a long time to get over the murder of your best friend. Ben had something to do with Marty's death. That's the main reason I got so upset when I thought I'd spotted him. He might not have killed Marty himself, but most likely he'd been there when Marty died. For all I knew, he's the one who killed him. Pretty much everyone thought all the murderers had been caught, but Kyle, Dusty, and Justin weren't the only ones with blood on their hands. That discovery had truly disturbed me. It seemed that every time I thought

the danger was over, it was only beginning. Ben was supposed to be on the run. What would happen if he'd come back? The thought that he might even now be walking around the streets of Verona galled as well as frightened me. It wasn't fair that murderers walked around free while Marty lay moldering in his grave.

"I think I can come up with something to keep your mind off the past," said Nick, as he stopped and looked around to make sure we were alone.

Nick pulled me close and kissed me. The taste of his lips and the sensation of his tongue sliding into my mouth made me forget my grief, my fear, and even the icy wind that whipped around us.

Marshall

You are changed. It had been nearly a week since Mark spoke those words to me, and they still echoed in my mind. Words spoken by an angel are not easily forgotten. I'd been gone for months, living an entirely different life, yet not one of my friends knew it. To them, no time had passed at all. I knew I was back where I belonged, but I couldn't help but feel out of place. It was difficult to return to my ordinary life after all my recent adventures.

Now I know how Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy must have felt when they stepped out of the wardrobe at the end of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. They experienced incredible adventures in Narnia, but then found themselves right back where they'd started, as if nothing had happened at all.

My adventures were of a more terrible nature, however. I'd sought to do good. I'd tried to make things better for all, and I'd come very close to destroying those I'd tried to help. That's what I got for messing with things I didn't understand. Lesson learned. I guess I had it easier than Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy did. Where they were gone for years, I was only gone for months.

Fortunately my friends knew nothing of what I'd done. I could just imagine what they would think of me. I could almost hear Sean screaming, "WERE YOU OUT OF YOUR FREAKING MIND?" I knew I should come clean with Sean and the others, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. Admitting to what I'd done would at best make me look foolish and at worse insane. What had happened to me was unbelievable, except for the fact that it had actually happened. I destroyed the only evidence, so there was no proof of my adventures. At least Sean and Nick had seen the book of magic that made my journey possible and had believed in me enough to help destroy it.

Removing the temptation of that terrifying book was the only wise thing I'd done of late. I had learned my lesson, but I didn't know if I was strong enough to resist the book's allure. Had I not destroyed it, I might well have performed more mischief with it. I liked to think I was wiser than that now, but who could say for sure? I guess I didn't need to concern myself with it, for the book was gone, out of my reach forever. I was thankful for that.

Sean had not yet asked for a full explanation, but I knew it was only a matter of time. Curiosity had to be eating at him. He had to know he'd taken part in the end of a story; otherwise, I wouldn't have been so desperate to destroy the ancient tome. I knew I'd have to reveal my foolishness to him at some point, but I couldn't help but put it off. Perhaps I'd get lucky, and he would think it was only a flight of fancy that had taken place only in my mind.

I knew it was no dream, however, not even a nightmare. I didn't feel quite comfortable in my own skin. *You are changed.* I knew it was true. I was changed. I didn't feel quite like me anymore. I felt as disoriented as if I was trying to walk while gazing down at a mirror I held in my

hands. I used to do that as a kid. I knew my feet were firmly upon the floor, but looking at the mirror I saw the ceiling instead and had the queerest feeling I was about to fall up. That's how I felt now. It was as if nothing was quite what it appeared to be.

I flipped through the pages of the latest *Fangoria*, my favorite monster/gore magazine, as I sat at my desk. My homework sat untouched mere inches away. I shivered suddenly, although I'd been toasty warm only a moment before. Other boys might have suspected their parents had turned down the heat to save on the gas bill, but I knew something far more interesting was up. My breath turned to fog, and I looked quickly to the window. Frost formed inside the panes even as I watched. In mere moments, my room turned into a deep freeze. I grinned. Something was about to happen that would take my mind off my troubles far more thoroughly than even *Fangoria* did.

A chill wind ripped through the room, fanning the pages of my magazine. The hair rose on the back of my neck. I could feel a presence behind me. I dropped my magazine to the desk, stood, and looked toward the door. A column of what looked like fog coalesced before my eyes into a boy of perhaps fifteen. He was no ordinary boy, of course, anyone could see that.

Chances are you would wet your pants at such a sight, but not me. I've seen ghosts before. I'm fascinated by them; some say obsessed. The boy and I just peered at each other for several long moments. He seemed as interested in me as I was in him. In that time I committed every detail of him to memory.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Blackford Manor," he whispered hoarsely.

"What about Blackford Manor?"

He didn't answer. He dissolved into nothingness.

I was giddy with excitement over my brief encounter with the other side. Never had an apparition appeared to me in my own room before. Never had I seen one so clearly. He'd spoken to me! This was not a matter of past time intruding upon the present, nor of a traumatic event replaying itself. We had communicated!

I pictured the ghost in my mind as the warmth of my room quickly returned to normal. He'd been wearing what I'd call knee breeches, old-fashioned pants that ended just below the knees, as well as a long-sleeved shirt, but no shoes. A realization hit me as I recalled his appearance. I'd seen him in color! The few ghosts I'd seen previously were grayish, colorless, but this one could nearly have been mistaken for a real live boy had it not been for his face. His features were bluish, and the latticework of veins just under the skin was clearly visible. He had the coloration of someone who had suffocated. He was quite obviously dead.

The boy's breeches were dark brown as were his hair and eyes. His shirt was off-white, almost tan. It was linen and obviously homespun. I wasn't a great expert on fashion, but I knew no one had dressed like that since the middle of the Nineteenth Century. The specter who had visited me was a good hundred and thirty or more years old.

I knew from my voluminous reading about ghosts that they almost always had a purpose when they chose to appear to someone. I knew also that most people did not possess the psychic ability to see what was right there before them. I'd long lamented the fact that my psychic abilities were too weak to allow me a really good look into the other side, but at last I'd managed it!

It could be argued that the "ghosts" I'd seen previously weren't true ghosts at all, not spirits of the dead. The reenactment of the Graymoor murders was a case in point. Frightening as it could be, it was nothing more than a replay of past events. The dead were not there. The Graymoor boys made their presence known from time to time by moving furniture and even speaking in disembodied

voices, but as far as I knew no one had seen their actual spirits, only memories of the living Graymoor boys.

The spirit who had just visited had communicated directly with me. I wished we could have conversed more, but I knew it took tremendous energy for a spirit to appear. Those two words were probably all he could manage. I was so excited I wanted to tell someone, anyone, but it was much too late to use the telephone. I should have been in bed long ago myself, but I couldn't sleep. I thought about emailing Sean about my encounter, but it would be much more fun to tell him face to face. He wasn't as excited over ghosts as I was, but at least he wouldn't scoff. He'd experienced too many extraordinary things in the past to doubt the existence of spirits. Most of my friends were the same. Not so long ago they all thought I was loony, but they'd learned I knew what I was talking about. Even Skye had come around and no longer referred to me as a freak.

Blackford Manor—the two words spoken by the spirit echoed in my mind. It was quite obviously a place, but where was it? What was so important about it that a boy had come from the other side to bring me the message? I'd need powerful magic to find the location of Blackford Manor, so I turned to the internet.

A search for “Blackford Manor” returned only one relevant link (and a few hundred irrelevant ones) and I quickly followed it. On a website called “British History Online,” there was an entry on Blackford Manor in a book called *A History of the County of Somerset*, edited by R.W. Dunning. The earliest reference to Blackford was in 1066, when it was held by the Abbot of Glastonbury. What followed was a tremendously long list of those who controlled Blackford until 1810, with a note that no further trace of the estate was found. I wondered what had happened to the manor. It couldn't have simply disappeared after nearly 800 years, yet there was no record of its destruction or continued existence. My ghostly visitor was from the past, but could he be from that far back? Was he even referring to Blackford Manor in Somerset, England? If so, why? What did an English manor have to do with Verona, Indiana? As far as I knew, Verona didn't even exist in 1810, and we were a long way from Great Britain. Perhaps what I'd found had nothing to do with my ghost at all, but apparently there wasn't a Blackford Manor anywhere in the U.S. or anywhere, period, except for Somerset, England. I had a lot of questions, but no answers.

Indiana did possess a Blackford County and the town of Blackford in the southern part of the state, both named for a pioneer judge, Isaac Blackford. Could there have been a manor in one of these locations? Manor was a decidedly British term, however, and rarely used in the States. I needed more information if I was going to get anywhere with my investigation. I was excited. Here, at last, was something to take my mind off recent events. As Sherlock Holmes would have said, the game was afoot.

The next morning I tracked down Sean on his way to school. He was accompanied by Nick, of course, and when I found them they were making out, partly obscured by a tree. I disguised “horn dogs” in a pretend cough.

“Yeah, like you and Kate don't spend most of your time tongue-wrestling,” said Nick as he pulled his lips from Sean's.

“Guess what happened last night?”

“There was a monster movie marathon on cable?” guessed Sean.

“You found another *Fangoria* magazine on eBay for your collection?” guessed Nick.

“No, but I had a visitor! A ghost!”

“You’ve seen ghosts before,” said Sean, “although I guess the new never quite wears off, does it?”

“This one was different. He looked nearly as real as any of us. If it hadn’t been for his old-fashioned clothing and his blue face, I would’ve mistaken him for a burglar.”

“Blue face?” asked Nick. “Was this the ghost of a Smurf?”

“What’s a Smurf?” asked Sean.

“You know, those little blue guys on old cartoons,” said Nick.

“No. Blue as in lack of oxygen, as in suffocation. I’m so excited! I’ve never seen a ghost like this before! We even communicated!”

“Ask you for date, did he?” asked Nick. “Did you tell him you’re only interested in girls?”

“No! I asked him what he wanted and he said, ‘Blackford Manor.’”

“Sounds lost to me,” said Nick.

I noticed that Sean looked thoughtful.

“What is it, Sean?”

“I was just thinking; that name, Blackford, I’ve seen it somewhere before.”

“Where?”

“I don’t remember... Wait, yes I do. ... The crypt! Remember when we were down there showing Oliver around, Nick? We noticed some of the dates went way back, and I found that one crypt dated 1812. There was a crypt marked Blackford, too. I don’t remember the first name, but I thought it odd, because it was the only crypt without the name Graymoor on it. Some of the crypts had a surname other than Graymoor, but Graymoor was somewhere in every name on every crypt, except for that one.”

“Interesting,” I said. “Can I get a look at it sometime? I’ve got a date with Kate tonight, but maybe tomorrow after school?”

“Of course,” said Sean.

“Great. I did a little investigating on the internet last night, but I didn’t come up with much.”

I told Sean and Nick what I’d discovered as we walked to school. I was even more excited by the appearance of the name Blackford in the Graymoor crypt, however. Could it be the tomb of the boy who had visited me during the night?

“Uh-oh,” said Nick. “Marshall has that look in his eye again.”

“The one he gets every time something weird happens?” asked Sean.

“That’s the one,” said Nick.

I smiled.

“I’ll catch you guys later,” I said as we neared Verona High School. “I want to hit the library and see if I can find any Blackford references there.”

“Later, Marshall.”

Eager to discover more about my midnight visitor, I raced toward school.