

GRAVE SHIFT

Written by

Carlos Stanfield & Linda Zercher

INT. HENRY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A haze distorts the cramped apartment. The living room houses a worn couch and playbills adorn the walls.

HENRY, 24, the ghost of a proud but shy theater geek, paces. He stops abruptly in front of a mirror.

HENRY

Boo!

Henry nods. He crouches and jumps, slamming his head on a low shelf. Henry rubs his head and checks for observers.

Henry (CONT'D)

As if anyone else could even fit into this pine box of an apartment.

Henry checks his pocket watch. Inside is a picture of his family: his father and mother, himself, and his newborn sister. Henry sighs and looks around at the playbills on his wall. The doorbell lets out a scream.

Henry yelps and clutches his chest.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I swear, if I wasn't dead already...

Henry opens the door, revealing a figure in a dark cloak holding a package. Henry nods to the APPARITION, a gaunt entity veiled in black, and takes the delivery.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Thank you! One of these days we --

The Apparition leaves. Henry shrugs and closes the door.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I bet I'm being promoted to Specter.

Henry opens the package and pulls out a file marked "DEPARTMENT OF FIENDS AND PHANTASMS." He rips the package open.

HENRY (CONT'D)

"Junior Specter #32974, the Department of Fiends and Phantasms has thus far been unimpressed with your performance. This department will remind you that the "Boogey" in Boogeyman has nothing to do with dance, no matter how interpretive."

Henry loosens his tie. He holds the letter in his hands and the rest of the file falls to the floor.

HENRY (CONT'D)

"However, this department has decided to grant you one final audition. Obtain a true scream from the designated mortal before midnight. Failure will result in you being 'Phased Out.' There will be no appeals. There will be no further chances. Good fright."

Henry collapses onto the couch.

HENRY (CONT'D)

One last audition. This is my chance at the big leagues.

Henry looks at his pocket watch. It now glows from 7 to 12. He stands and grabs a single paper from the file.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Get ready to get scared Sarah Miller!

Henry pauses, squints at the name, then shrugs.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Evening rays settle into the warmly decorated room. Several family photos and playbills decorate a wall.

Henry sneaks in through an open window rubbing his hands.

INT. SARAH'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

SARAH, 24, aspiring actress, does vocal exercises in the mirror. She tosses her hair, smiles, and leaves the bathroom.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Henry adjusts his sleeves before coming face-to-face with Sarah. They both freeze in place.

Henry bolts to a nearby table and grabs a lamp. He waves it around in the air and howls. Sarah shakes her head and grabs a baseball bat from her bedroom.

SARAH

Who are you, and why are you in my house?

Henry looks around the apartment.

HENRY

Wait, you can see me?

SARAH

As if you could hide behind a lamp.

Henry reaches for his pocket-watch, giving it a frustrated tap. He glances at Sarah.

HENRY

Piece of junk. It should be impossible for anyone without a close connection -- I swear this never happens, really.

Henry leans forward and studies Sarah.

Sarah steps back, holding the bat with white knuckles.

SARAH

Look, I don't know what you're on, but you better leave before I get some batting practice.

HENRY

So here's the thing about leaving. I --

Sarah charges Henry and swings the bat at his head. It goes right through. Sarah backs away.

Henry clears his throat and adjusts his bowtie. He presents a business card to Sarah.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Okay, take two. I am Henry, Junior Specter, and I am here to haunt you.

SARAH

A ghost with tacky business cards?

HENRY

Tacky? That's bone white card stock. Do you know how many gasps these cost?

Henry puts the card away.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Well, tastes aside, I am here on business. I need you to scream.

SARAH

No.

HENRY

No? You can't just opt out of a haunting.

SARAH

I don't have time for this, not tonight.

HENRY

I'm short on time myself. Just scream and I'll go.

Sarah takes a deep breath.

SARAH

Aah.

Henry checks his watch. The clock face is replaced by a small gauge. The needle barely wiggles.

HENRY

No good. It's got no real emotion behind it. We'll just have to keep trying till you get it right.

Sarah runs to the kitchen.

INT. SARAH'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Sarah slides into the kitchen and snatches a salt shaker. She runs back into the living room.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Sarah points the shaker at Henry and circles him.

SARAH

Get out.

Henry rolls his eyes.

HENRY

Salt? An old wives' tale? Do you really --

Sarah shakes the salt at Henry.

SARAH

Out!

Henry yowls, as if the salt were hot embers. He leaps out the window. Sarah pours salt along the windowsill.

EXT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Henry hovers outside of Sarah's window and pats the remaining salt from his clothes. His pocket watch reads 8:30. The 7 no longer glows.

HENRY

What an animal, absolutely barbaric.

Henry peers into Sarah's window. Sarah scurries around the apartment, spreading salt in front of the entrances.

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

SARAH

Okay Sarah, you got this. No more ghosts or whatever. This is my moment.

EXT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Henry checks his watch and nods.

HENRY

I've got this. This is my moment.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

ADAM, 30, slick and smug actor, knocks on the door. He slicks back his hair and preens as Sarah opens up.

SARAH

Adam, fashionably late as usual.

ADAM

It takes time to get this beautiful Miller. You should try it. You're so flushed, it's like you've seen a ghost.

Adam pushes his way into the apartment. He scuffs the line of salt as he enters.

SARAH

Thanks for the advice, I guess.

Sarah pushes the door shut as she follows Adam inside. Henry places his foot in the doorway, propping it open.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sarah and Adam are seated on the couch. Sarah adjusts her dress as Adam crosses his legs.

ADAM

Don't get me wrong, Miller. You've got chops. You're no Adam King, but the muses only blessed humanity with one of me.

SARAH

I'm glad you're willing to work with me. I want the chemistry for the scene to be just right, like fireworks.

Henry creeps through the living room. Sarah's eyes are glued to Adam. He slips into Sarah's bedroom.

ADAM

Well, you're lucky to have such a good teacher. You know my first --

Adam loses his train of thought as a wail rattles through the apartment.

ADAM (CONT'D)

I thought it was just the two of us?

Sarah's eyes dart to her bedroom.

SARAH

It is! That was my dog. I'll just go quiet him down.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sarah opens her bedroom door coming face to face with a smirking Henry.

SARAH

Can't you take a hint?

HENRY

One scream. That's all I need: a real scream with real emotion.

SARAH

I'll scream all you want tomorrow.

HENRY

Tomorrow will be too late.

SARAH

Then you're out of luck, because I'm busy and I'm not scared. Go find someone else.

HENRY

Find someone else to haunt? Maybe I will.

SARAH

As if I care. Get lost.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sarah closes the door. She's all smiles, until she spots Henry seated beside Adam. Adam is oblivious to Henry.

ADAM
Everything alright, Miller?

SARAH
Just perfect.

Sarah sits in a recliner across from Adam. Henry takes a deep breath and blows on Adam. Adam shivers.

ADAM
Christ, it's cold in here.

SARAH
Cold spot. You know these old apartments.
Here, let's trade seats.

Sarah swaps places with Adam. Henry rolls his eyes. Henry rushes behind Adam's seat, takes hold, and shakes it.

ADAM
What the --

SARAH
It's a massage chair! Relaxing right?

ADAM
If you say so.

Henry huffs in frustration. Sarah shoots him a glare.

SARAH
How about I get us some drinks?

INT. SARAH'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sarah pours two glasses of red wine. As she turns to replace the bottle, Henry rubs his hands together.

HENRY
Time for a little communion.

Henry presses the button on his watch twice. The numbers dim as Henry falls to one knee. He creeps away as Sarah grabs the glasses and returns to the living room.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sarah passes a glass to Adam before taking a sip. Her eyes go wide and she spits out the wine, now warm blood, at the wall. Sarah snatches Adam's glass.

ADAM

Excuse me?

SARAH

It's gone sour. I'll get us some --

ADAM

Don't bother. Suddenly, I am not thirsty. You know, Miller, you've been acting strange all night.

SARAH

Nerves. I mean this is my first romance scene, and with such a big star.

ADAM

Uh-huh. Well, that explains everything doesn't it?

SARAH

Sorry I've made tonight so awkward.

Adam nods his head before pointing a thumb at the wall.

ADAM

And what about that, then?

On the wall, in bright scarlet bloody letters, is written "GET OUT!" Sarah clears her throat.

SARAH

Motivational tool. It helps me to inhabit my characters! "Get out of my shell?"

Henry leans against the wall, hair disheveled and face drenched in sweat. He unleashes a ghastly moan.

HENRY

GET OUT!

SARAH

I have... old pipes?

Adam slaps his hands on his knees before standing up.

ADAM

Well this is officially too weird for me. Goodnight, Miller. Good luck running --

A mouse scampers across the floor. Adam leaps up with a shriek.

Henry checks his pocket-watch. The gauge has returned, but the needle doesn't even wiggle. Henry's shoulders drop.

SARAH

I --

Adam scampers straight out the door, slamming it on his way out. Sarah turns to the collapsed Henry, fists balled.

SARAH (CONT'D)

-- hope you enjoyed ruining my entire career! I'm going to salt you like the slug you are.

Henry takes ragged breaths. He looks up to Sarah and smiles, shaking his head.

HENRY

Ruined? Not many people could act as if their apartment isn't haunted. If you can make it through that, you can handle any scene, Sarah. You're just getting started. I'm already finished.

SARAH

Finished? You're finally taking the hint?

Henry nods and struggles to his feet. He steadies himself on her mantle and weakly checks his watch. It's 11:55.

HENRY

Goodnight, Sarah. I know you'll go far.

Henry takes a step and collapses, sending the pictures on Sarah's mantle falling to the floor.

SARAH

Hey, you okay?

Sarah bends down, and looks over Henry. His pocket watch faintly glows, illuminating the picture of his family inside. She looks to her own family picture and screams.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Henry?

Henry's body convulses. He bolts up, patting his chest, before checking his watch. The needle swings to the far end! Henry matches the pictures. He hugs Sarah.

HENRY

Sarah? When I left you were in diapers.

SARAH

Mom and Dad thought you were dead.

HENRY

I was. I am. First day in Hollywood, I --

The door opens as Adam pokes his head in. He raises an eyebrow as he spots Sarah, her arms wrapped around thin air. Sarah brings her arms above her head.

SARAH

Just doing some stretching.

Adam grabs his wallet from the couch, rolls his eyes, and exits.

SARAH (CONT'D)

So, what will you do now? Go haunt an abandoned mineshaft?

HENRY

Mineshaft? I could have a mansion, or a maybe even a castle posting. Specters get their pick of haunts.

Henry paces with a smile. He checks his watch and catches a glimpse of the family picture inside. Henry looks back to Sarah. Sarah stares at the floor.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You know, I got a scream but --

Henry places a hand in his pocket and smiles sheepishly.

SARAH

I wasn't scared at all. I was just shocked. Doesn't count.

HENRY

Exactly. A castle might be nice, but what sort of Specter leaves a job half-done? I'll have to hang around.

SARAH

Then I guess you'll be around for a while. I'm not easy to scare.

Henry places a hand on his chest in offense, but he grins widely.