

Melissa Albers

## Writing Mystery

This ghost smelled like spearmint, sharp and crisp in the air. He tried to ignore it, instead focusing on the game. One more pop fly to catch, and they would win the tournament. Bottom of the ninth, up by one, two outs, the whole shebang.

The stinging scent hit Gavin stronger and stronger, invading his nose and seeping into his brain. His head began to swim, and he finally turned to acknowledge the ghost. "Hey," he snapped. But the tension in his body dissipated when he saw her.

The girl had long hair, flowing down and beyond where her spectre materialized. The colors were muted from death as normal, but her whole body had a blue hue to it. She was younger than he was used to, and he blinked at her in surprise. The mint smell released its hold on his brain, but didn't dissipate entirely.

The ball scrambled his thoughts, smacking him squarely on the temple. His fraternity brothers were screaming his name, trying to get him to pick up the ball and throw it. Gavin blinked, trying to orient himself while the world spun down by his feet. Grasping the ball, he whipped it towards second, hoping that he hadn't fucked up the game for them.

Sitting down seemed like a good idea, and Gavin wasn't one to disagree with good ideas. His knees agreed and gave out beneath him. The ghost was the first face he saw when he looked up, and hers was etched with concern.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Dude, it's me. Connor. Man, that hit must've been bad." His best friend crouched next to him, his dark hair glistening from sweat. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, sure."

"Really?"

Gavin nodded and then winced. "Well, maybe it hurts."

"Let's get you back to the house, yeah?"

"Sure. Did I fuck the game up?"

Connor grimaced. "Yeah."

"Shit. How mad is Dave?"

"Probably pretty pissed. What distracted you?"

Gavin's eyes flickered over to the girl, who was still gazing at him in concern. "Uh, a girl."

Connor smiled and nodded knowingly. "Been there. But come on, let's go." He helped Gavin stand and moved them off the field.

Connor had looked up what to do for a concussion online, which meant Gavin was finally allowed to be alone. His best friend told him to rest and be quiet and if he vomited, to text him right away. Gavin had nodded and closed the door to their room, finally turning to look at the ghost girl who had followed them back. The spearmint still lingered in the air, along with the look of concern on her face.

Gavin sighed and sat on his bed, pressing a hand over his temple. "So what's your name?"

She opened her mouth, but no sound came, and she closed it in frustration. Her hands rose and began to move frantically, the movement leaving wisps of blue and silver around her body. The colors made it hard to focus. The pattern wasn't random, though, and it took Gavin a few moments too long to figure out what it was.

"Oh, God. Okay, okay, sign language. Just gimme a second." He reached over onto his desk and grabbed his laptop. When he opened the screen, he immediately turned down the

brightness, wincing at the headache it gave him. "Let's take this one motion at a time, okay? My head is killing me. Name, let's start with your name. Can you spell it for me?"

She nodded and began to sign. Gavin pulled up a chart of the alphabet in ASL. He hoped she was speaking ASL. She stuck her thumb out in the middle of a fist. "N?" he asked. The ghost nodded and moved her thumb to the outside of the fist. "A." They continued until he had a full name. "Nadine? That right?"

The spirit smiled and moved closer to him, faster than humanly possible. It made his head spin. "Woah, okay. Nadine, got it. So what can I do for you, Nadine?" He hoped this ghost would be done soon. He really wanted to sleep. Moving them along to the next plane of existence or the afterlife or whatever normally didn't take too long. At most, a few days. He was hoping this could be wrapped up in the next few minutes.

Still signing the alphabet, Nadine spelled out her message, and he managed to follow along. A two finger point, a flattened fist, the shape of an "L", and an odd configuration that he finally decided was a "P". "Help? Yeah, that's what I try to do. Help people like you. When I can." He wanted to close his eyes, but he couldn't. Not when he needed to see her to communicate.

Nadine relaxed and nodded, giving him a thumbs up. Gavin gave a small snort, despite himself. He liked her so far. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if she stuck around a day or two longer. "Okay, and what can I help you with? Coming to terms with it, saying goodbye to someone, a last wish? Please tell me it's going to Disneyland, because let me tell you, I've been hoping that would be someone's last request for a while. Though attending a college party would be an easier goal." But her face fell, and she shook her head no.

"Okay. Well, what do you need help with?" He almost missed her first letter, he was so distracted by the blue hue that took over her body. It was so unlike most of the spirits that visited

him, who were paler, to be sure, but always a muted version of themselves. This girl, Nadine, her eyes were blue, but so were her lips and her fingers.

“Death,” he said when she was finished. “Ah, okay. Yeah, you’re gone. I’m sorry, I can’t bring you back. No one can. But I can help you work through it, maybe. Hopefully.” Nadine shook her head in frustration and tried to touch his shoulder. His spine had familiar chills when her hand went through him, and he could feel her icy breath on his temple when she sighed. It was almost like an ice pack for the pain.

“Try again.”

She did. Halfway through, Gavin felt his heart sink, invading the space of his stomach, and he thought he would be sick. And not from his possible concussion either. His eyes met Nadine’s when she signed the final letter.

“You were murdered. Well, fuck.”