

1977-1988. Huh? I could hear Josh calling me, but I couldnt make out

what he was saying. The rest of the world seemed to fall away. I read the deeply etched inscription again: RAY THURSTON. 1977-1988. I stood there, staring at the letters and numbers. I stared at them till they didnt make sense anymore, until they were just a gray blur. Suddenly, I realized that Ray had crept up beside the gravestone and was staring at me. Ray I managed to say, moving the light over the name on the stone. Ray, this one is you! His eyes flared, glowing like dying embers. Yes, its me, he said softly, moving toward me. Im so sorry, Amanda.

Chapter 13

I took a step back, my sneakers sinking into the soft ground. The air was heavy and still. No one made a sound. Nothing moved. Dead. Im surrounded by death, I thought. Then, frozen to the spot, unable to breathe, the darkness swirling around me, the gravestones spinning in their own black shadows, I thought: What is he going to do to me? Ray I managed to call out. My voice sounded faint and far away. Ray, are you really dead? Im sorry. You werent supposed to find out yet, he said, his voice floating low and heavy on the stifling night air. Buthow? I mean I dont understand. I looked past him to the darting white light of the flashlight. Josh was several rows away, almost to the street, still searching for Petey. Petey! I whispered, dread choking my throat, my stomach tightening in horror. Dogs always know, Ray said in a low, flat tone. Dogs always recognize the living dead. Thats why they have to go first. They always know. You mean Petey is dead? I choked out the words. Ray nodded. They kill the dogs first. No! I screamed and took another step back, nearly losing my balance as I bumped into a low marble gravestone. I jumped away from it. You werent supposed to see this, Ray said, his narrow face expressionless except for his dark eyes, which revealed real sadness. You werent supposed to know. Not for another few weeks, anyway. Im the watcher. I was supposed to watch, to make sure you didnt see until it was time. He took a step toward me, his eyes lighting up red, burning into mine. Were you watching me from the window? I cried. Was that you in my room? Again he nodded yes. I used to live in your house, he said, taking another step closer, forcing me back against the cold marble stone. Im the watcher. I forced myself to look away, to stop staring into his glowing eyes. I wanted to scream to Josh to run and get help. But he was too far away. And I was frozen there, frozen with fear. We need fresh blood, Ray said. What? I cried. What are you saying? The townit cant survive without fresh blood. None of us can. Youll understand soon, Amanda. Youll understand why we had to invite you to the house, to the Dead House. In the darting, zigzagging beam of light, I could see Josh moving closer, heading our way. Run, Josh, I thought. Run away. Fast. Get someone. Get anyone. I could think the words. Why couldnt I scream them? Rays eyes glowed brighter. He was standing right in front of me now, his features set, hard and cold. Ray? Even through my jeans, the marble gravestone felt cold against the back of my legs. I messed up, he whispered. I was the watcher. But I messed up. Ray what are you going to do? His red eyes flickered. Im really sorry. He started to raise himself off the ground, to float over me. I could feel myself start to choke. I couldnt breathe. I couldnt move. I opened my mouth to call out to Josh, but no sound came out. Josh? Where was he? I looked down the rows of gravestones but couldnt see his light. Ray floated up a little higher. He hovered over me, choking me somehow, blinding me, suffocating me. Im dead, I thought. Dead. Now Im dead, too.