

Dead Silent

by Leah Cypess

Shanna leaned over the edge of the ferry, watching the water turn to white froth as the boat plowed noisily through it. She loved looking at the froth. It coiled and swirled angrily for several yards around the boat's bottom before dashing out against the gentle swells of blue-green water beyond. Shanna glanced once at the gray-green line of mountains in the distance, then returned her gaze to the water.

"I don't know what's wrong with that child!" Her mother's voice, from two seats behind, was barely discernible over the roar of the ferry's engine. "Look at her. This is the first time she's smiled during the entire trip."

"At least she's enjoying herself." Danny, unlike her mother, was making an effort to lower his voice. Shanna's opinion of Danny crept up, as it had periodically since her mother first brought him home for dinner a year ago. He obviously suspected that Shanna understood more than she let on, and treated her with a wary respect that would have been unusual even if Shanna had been a normal twelve-year-old.

Her mother's voice got even shriller. "So what am I supposed to do — take her back and forth on ferry rides for the rest of our vacation? In the rain forest yesterday I thought I would kill her! And I can tell you what she'll be like on the beach. We won't get a moment's —"

"We'll discuss this later." Danny's voice was unusually firm, and Shanna's mother stopped talking abruptly. Shanna didn't have to turn around to know that she was pouting, her eyes sparkling with displeasure.

It was better this way. The silence meant she could forget about people and concentrate on the ocean. One person had died on this ferry several months ago, but he had died on the lower deck to the front of the boat; she could barely feel the sudden pain that had gripped his chest, the moment of choking panic, the last impact as he hit the floor. She leaned over the rim, letting the wind lift her hair and lash her face. It was so strong it almost hurt. Later, her mother would yank the tangles out, and that would hurt more. But for now she didn't care.

The white froth, thick as it was, parted occasionally to give her a glimpse of the dark green water beneath. If she fell over... the thought made her shudder with sudden longing. People must have drowned in the sea, lots of people. But their deaths didn't last. The waves and currents tore them apart. The sea was empty of ghosts, empty of last memories. *Empty*. It was wonderful. She gripped the rim with both hands and leaned over, so far that she could see the front of the boat, where clouds of white spray were propelled into the air by the boat's motor.

"Shanna!"

Her mother grabbed her upper arm, long fingernails digging into Shanna's flesh, and jerked her backward. Shanna fell off the ledge and landed on the hard white bench, one leg twisted under her. Her mother lifted her quickly and placed her on the floor, looked at her once to make sure she wasn't hurt, then slapped her.

The pain felt like an echo: something unreal, coming from very far away. Shanna brought her head back up and looked at her mother.

"Don't *do* that!" her mother said. Loudly, clearly, the way you were supposed to talk to someone who was mildly retarded. "It's dangerous. Bad. *Bad*. Do you understand?"

Shanna nodded, then turned to climb back onto the ledge. Her mother grabbed her again.

"Danny." That was her "I'm-at-my-wit's-end" voice.

"I've got it." Danny came up behind them and smiled at Shanna. He looked like he belonged on a boat: he had blue eyes, longish blond hair, a lean body, and a sailor's rakish grin. Shanna had once seen a ship's captain on a television show who looked exactly like him. "Come on, Shanna, come with me. We'd better go down to the lower deck. We only have about fifteen minutes before we dock in Vieques."

"Water," Shanna said obstinately.

"You want to look at the water?"

"Yes."

"Well, how about if you sit with me in the middle? You can still see the water over—"

Shanna raised her voice. "Here!"

"Danny," her mother said warningly. People were looking.

"All right," Danny said, after a long moment. "You can stay here until we dock. I'll hold on to you to make sure you don't fall. But you have to promise that when the boat docks, you'll get off without an argument. Do you promise, Shanna?"

To get off they would have to pass the endlessly dying man on the front deck. Shanna couldn't promise. Eventually, after meeting her stony stare for several seconds, Danny sighed and lifted her back onto the ledge.

Shanna felt grateful, but not that grateful; when it was time to get off the boat, she refused to go. Danny had to pick her up and carry her, and with every step he took closer to the memory of death, she screamed louder. Everyone stared. Her mother, who was not that brave — despite that one moment of courage years ago that had changed their lives and then vanished — hunched her shoulders as if trying to collapse into herself.

Their motel was, fortunately, only a short walk from the harbor. Even during that walk, though, Shanna noticed that something was wrong. She stopped screaming and became very quiet, letting Danny lead her and staring around wide-eyed. Danny sighed with relief when they mounted a few steps and stepped into the lobby of the Seaview Hotel.

“Hi!” A tall, thin man with dark skin and large eyes strolled out of the office. He was wearing shorts and a white t-shirt. “Do you have reservations?”

While her mother was checking in, Shanna closed her eyes and — for the first time in her life — reached out with her mind, consciously looking for death. Nothing. The island was as echoingly empty of ghosts as the sea.

Danny’s hand went suddenly tight around hers, making her open her eyes and look around for the cause of his tension. Her mother was laughing very gaily at something the hotel manager had said. Danny was not laughing at all.

“Thank you, John,” she said when she had finished laughing. “I’m sure we’ll enjoy our stay. This place seems marvelous.”

“Anything I can do...”

“We’ll let you know,” Danny said shortly.

John looked at him, then down at Shanna as if seeing her for the first time. His eyes narrowed slightly.

“Is something wrong, little girl?” he asked.

Shanna realized that she had been frowning. She didn’t bother to stop, just looked at him blankly.

“That’s... um... my daughter,” Shanna’s mother admitted. She took a deep breath. “She’s...um...she’s not...”

But Shanna’s blank stare had already told the man what Shanna was not, and he apologized hastily, putting Shanna’s mother back into a bad mood. She didn’t even bother taking Shanna to her own room, which adjoined the adults’, before dumping their luggage onto the bed and pawing through it for bathing suits.

“I am going to enjoy this vacation if it kills me,” she snapped at Danny, who looked back at her as if that would be perfectly fine with him.

But it won’t kill you, Shanna thought, with absolute certainty and a tinge of fear.

As far as she could tell, nobody had ever died on this island.

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John Savortas, the friendly hotel manager, offered to drive them to one of the many deserted beaches that a small Caribbean island was bound to have. The beach he had in mind was only reachable by jeep, but, as he explained jovially, he had planned on going himself. So if they didn't mind company....

Shanna's mother was thrilled. They had gone to a beach nearly every day since landing in San Juan a week ago. Aside from making sure that her daughter didn't go too far out into the water, Shanna's mother approved of her behavior, which was to wade out into the waves and stand there. Shanna loved the feel of the water pulling around her and the occasional waves strong enough to lift her off her feet. But most of all she loved the emptiness, the freedom from thousands of deaths.

Here, of course, that wouldn't matter. She could have it just sitting in front of the hotel.

It was a ten-minute drive to the beach. Three minutes before they got there, Shanna felt the ghost.

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"I'm so sorry," Shanna's mother gasped, her fingers so tight on Shanna's wrist that they threatened to cut off circulation. "She hasn't thrown a tantrum like that in...I don't even remember the last...."

"I understand perfectly," John said smoothly. "I had a colleague with a son who was also...autistic, is it?"

"Not exactly. She wasn't born like this. There was a traumatic event when she was very young. Her father—"

"I don't really think we should rehash this," Danny said coldly. Not for the first time, Shanna wondered how much her mother had told Danny about her dead husband. "Not in front of her. She seems quiet. I think we should stay at the beach."

"Home," Shanna whimpered, but without much hope. She settled for being allowed to stay in the jeep, her body curled up, trying to shut out the feel of the ghost.

She didn't know how long she stayed there before someone else stepped into the jeep. She remained in her curled-up position, prepared to ignore whoever it was.

"Come on, Shanna!" John said jovially. "You don't want to stay here. Come to the ocean. It's beautiful."

Shanna shook her head. John sat down on the seat next to her, and she wondered whether she should hit him. It was sometimes hard to tell what would discourage helpful adults the fastest.

“You don’t have to worry about the ghost,” John said casually. “They can’t hurt you, you know.”

Shanna froze.

“He died about two weeks ago.” John rubbed the side of his jaw, which was sprinkled with black stubble. “I left him here because I want to know what he’s saying. I’m going to take care of it tonight, though.”

Shanna sat up abruptly and stared at him. He looked down at her, dark eyes set deep in his craggy face. Shanna didn’t see what it was about that face that had made her mother act so ridiculous when they checked in. He looked frightening to her.

“That’s right,” John said, in the same soft, gentle voice. “I know you can see them, Shanna. But there’s nothing to be afraid of. I can see them too.”

The logic of that escaped Shanna completely. She turned her back on the man and stared over the sand to where the ghost twisted in agony near the sea. She could actually see a vision of what he had looked like when alive, so his had been a recent death. A man with long black hair, wearing jeans and a white shirt.

“Do you want to go closer and see him?” John asked.

She shook her head.

“You should, you know. He can’t hurt you.” He found her hand and took it in his. “Come on.”

Shanna was an expert at deflecting adults who wanted to make a difference in her life. But she was still too stunned to think clearly, so she let him pull her out of the jeep and walk with her toward the sea. Not toward the ghost — that didn’t take thought; pure instinct made her dig her feet in and go limp when he tried to steer her in that direction. But when they were finally near the shore, water lapping near their feet, they were a lot closer to the ghost than she had ever planned to be.

He was an angry one. Enraged when he died, at whatever had killed him. She could feel the terror of his struggle to live, the realization that he wasn’t going to live, with the rage running through it all. She was far enough from him to bear it, but only because she had been bearing things like this all her life. Her defenses were strong.

“You can feel him, can’t you, Shanna?” John whispered. “Tell me how he feels. Betrayed or surprised?”

Both. Shanna kept her mouth shut and turned from the ghost to stare at the sea. It was slightly restless, waves with green undersides arching down in sprays of white. But it was still more peaceful than any strip of land she had ever stood on. No, not more peaceful — *emptier*. She wished she could just walk right out into it. She wouldn't care if the waves smothered her. Then she could be part of the sea, also empty, also clean.

Well, a little voice in her mind whispered, *why don't you?*

He'll stop me, she thought. It was a good reason, but it was also an excuse. Her body was too strong for her mind. Her body had one stubborn priority, to stay alive, even if life was messy and full of fear, even if death would be so much nicer. Her body wouldn't let her drown herself. Her legs would stop moving, her arms would start flailing, driving her above the wonderful water. Her mouth would scream and people would hear her. If she wanted to die she was going to have to trick her body into it.

The ghost turned and looked at her. His mouth opened and closed, and even from this distance Shanna thought she could hear him speak, a wind-borne moan:

“Don't...trust...them. Not anybody. The goods are worth too much....”

And all at once she was dying. Something tore into her heart, something that felt small for a moment and then very big. The pain was all over her chest, not coming from one little spot, even though she knew it must be. A moment of panicked hope — maybe it hadn't hit a vital spot, maybe she could still... and then she looked down and saw the blood pouring down her white shirt (but she was wearing a bathing suit... well, never mind) and felt the sheer intensity of the pain and knew that it wasn't true. It was over for her. The books all said you felt peace at a moment like this, but she didn't, all she felt was fury — and then the pain was so great that she felt nothing but pain, and all she wanted was for it to end — well, it would, maybe that was what they meant by peace, maybe—

“Stop it! Stop it, Shanna! What did he say?”

John was shaking her. She was screaming. Shanna realized that with a jolt, and realized that she must have been screaming for a while, but she decided not to stop. He was trying to worm through her walls, to shatter the small defenses that managed to keep her alive if not happy. She went on screaming, loud and shrill, until her mother and Danny came running down the beach. John let go of her and stepped back abruptly.

“Shanna!” Danny reached her first, knelt down and took her by the shoulders. His grip was firmer than John's, but he didn't shake her. “Shanna, what happened?”

An instinct bloomed in her, letting her know exactly what she had to do to make John leave her alone forever. She whirled and pointed at him, and wailed, “He *hurt* me!”

There was a short silence. Shanna watched her mother's face turn white, waiting to see the steel she knew lay beneath the fearful, annoyed surface. She was surprised by how strongly she wanted it, and knew suddenly that she hadn't spoken just to get John to leave her alone. She wanted, just once more, proof of how much her mother loved her. Of what she would be willing to do for her. Not that she would be able to do much; John was bigger and stronger, and her mother had no weapon this time.

But it was Danny who stood up and faced John, something new in his stance. Something Shanna had never seen in him before. She had been killed so often she recognized a killer when she saw one. All at once she was afraid, and would have taken it back if she could, but John beat her to it.

"Don't be ridiculous," he said, utterly calm. "Look at her. I didn't do anything. She was walking straight into the water and I had to fight her to stop her."

Shanna's mother let out a small wail, and Shanna knew her attempt had failed. Once, at the beach in New York, she had tried to walk into the ocean. She would have failed even if a lifeguard hadn't seen her, but that was when her mother had begun to consider her truly crazy. Not just traumatized by her father's death, but irrevocably impaired.

Danny and John stood for a moment, eyes locked. Danny turned away first.

"Come on, Shanna," he said resignedly. "I think it's time to go to bed, don't you?"

Shanna took his hand and let him lead her toward the jeep. She did not look back at the water, or at the pale ghost twisting and moaning on the shore.

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The drive back was uncomfortable. Shanna's mother was effusively grateful to John, while Danny was grim-faced and suspicious.

"I can't stand it anymore," she kept saying — a phrase Shanna had heard so often that it was like background noise to her, without meaning. "It's so difficult. You don't understand!"

"Oh, but I do understand," John said. To Shanna, it was clear that his words were directed to her as much as to her mother. She sat still as a stone and listened to the wind whistling in her ears. "I understand more than you know. Maybe I can help you."

"Oh, I appreciate it. But we've been to experts, and they couldn't do anything. Nothing but give me hope that she'll grow out of it. That was five years ago!"

"What happened?" John asked. This time he actually glanced back at Shanna. She ignored him.

“Her father committed suicide. She was there.”

Even John had nothing soothing to say to that.

“He was a horrible person,” Shanna’s mother said wildly, as if her daughter wasn’t sitting in the back seat. “After he died, she became... unstable. They think it was something latent, something that sprang out then. But I think he said something to her, before he did it. I don’t know what. I’ll probably never know. She doesn’t *talk*. For two years I hoped. So many therapists....”

“Who was your first?” John asked.

“Oh, you never would have heard of him. A doctor in New York. Does it matter?”

Shanna closed her eyes and blocked the conversation out, as easily as shutting her lids blocked out the view. Her mind had learned to do that, and often it was useful for more than ghosts.

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That night her mother and Danny fought so loudly that Shanna heard them in her room. The fight started out about John but, as all fights with her mother did, ended up being about Shanna. This wasn’t something that usually bothered Shanna, but she could tell from Danny’s voice that he was really angry, and she kept remembering the way he had approached John at the beach. She lay in her bed tensed for the sound of a slap, of flesh hitting flesh, of her mother’s gasp and whimper. Sounds she hadn’t heard for a very long time.

But they didn’t come. Instead, the fight finally died out with Danny snapping, “I’m exhausted. We’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

Shanna closed her eyes and tried to relax her body into the mattress. It wouldn’t obey her. She tried to stop the thoughts crowding into her mind, and they wouldn’t obey her either. She could feel her hands shaking. She hadn’t dealt with hope for such a long time that she had forgotten how to.

Shanna pulled her blanket off, put on her slippers, and tiptoed out of bed. The door to her room had been locked from the outside — she knew that without checking. Ever since the incident in Boston last year, her mother had managed things like that. But the door to the balcony slid open easily, bringing in a steady breeze from the sea. The ocean was dark and terribly still. Below her was the pool, aqua blue and empty.

Keeping her thoughts and actions firmly separate, Shanna climbed over the balcony and jumped into the pool. She did it as quietly as she could, but the resulting splash was incredibly loud. It was too bad she didn’t know how to dive. She climbed quickly out of the pool, soaking wet, and climbed another gate. Then she found herself on the road.

It had been a ten-minute drive to the beach that afternoon. It took an hour and twenty minutes to walk it, and Shanna couldn't keep her thoughts frozen for that long. A half an hour after she had jumped out the window, she had no choice but to focus on what she was doing. She stopped short and turned around. Then turned around again.

She was going to see the ghost, and to find out how John could make it go away.

I have to, she thought, and to her humiliation felt tears come to her eyes. There she stood, crying like a baby on a deserted road at three o'clock in the morning. She hadn't cried since her father died.

Since her father died.

Who was your first? John had asked. Not speaking to her mother. Speaking to her.

After he died, she became...unstable. They think it was something latent, something that sprang out then....

Shanna's mother hated her. Not a lot — not more than she loved her — but she hated her a little. Partly because she knew that Shanna's condition was her own fault.

Shanna hated her mother a lot. But still not more than she loved her. It was amazing how much you could love a mother you hated.

I just have to, her brain lamely informed her body. And her body, cringing with every step, continued trudging down the road.

She heard the motor long before the headlights reached her, but she made no move to hide. She didn't stop and wait for him either. She just moved to the side of the road and kept trudging along, not looking back even when the brakes squealed right next to her. She only stopped when she heard the car door slam.

“Want a ride?” John asked.

She looked up at him then. *He can't hurt you*, he had said that morning. Wrong, so wrong. Her body was covered with invisible bruises, memories of bruises, dozens and dozens of aching proofs that a ghost could hurt her. But he had also said, *Maybe I can help you*. Just because he was wrong about one thing didn't mean he was wrong about the other.

She walked past him, slid over the driver's seat, made a little half-jump to get over the gear shift, and landed awkwardly on the passenger seat. By the time she straightened, the car was already rattling its way along the gravel road at something resembling speed, and John was smiling, a closed-lip smile that formed sharp creases around the edges of his mouth.

They drove in silence. Shanna sat stiff and aloof. Several times John glanced at her as if about to speak, but she kept her eyes trained on the jeep window, pretending to be enthralled by the shapeless darkness outside, and each time he kept his mouth shut.

She felt him before she saw him — a black mass of malevolence, a whirling fury of disappointment and anguish. She had to bite her lip to keep from screaming as they drove closer and closer to the dead man who could hurt her, and hurt her and hurt her, but whom she could never hurt back.

She heard a voice in her mind: *This is your fault, you stupid brat!*

And, also in her mind, she heard the sound of flesh hitting flesh. Her whole body flinched, a quick spasmodic reflex.

John glanced at her yet again, but still he bided his time. When they finally came to a stop, Shanna could smell and feel and hear the ocean, but she couldn't see it. It was pitch black outside. When John switched on a flashlight, revealing a swath of pebbly beach and white-rimmed waves, she felt oddly disappointed. Dark was good.

“Do you want to learn how I do it?” John asked, his voice slightly hoarse. “How I make them go away?”

Shanna followed the flashlight's beam with her eyes as it moved through the darkness, finally coming to a stop on a dark figure that swayed on the rocky sand. From a distance, it looked as if the ghost was dancing.

“Why don't you talk to me, Shanna? I know you're not unaware. How could you be aware of *them* and not be aware of me?”

He was right, more right than he knew. The more aware she was, the more open she would be to *them*. She had to shut things out, to close herself up, or *they* would overwhelm her. Shanna felt her heart beating as it hadn't beat in years, and knew that this was bad. She was letting him get to her. It was this island, this stupid island. It was too safe.

“You must have noticed,” John said, after a long moment, “how few ghosts there are here.”

“One,” Shanna said. One-word answers were all right.

“And that's one more than there should be. He was a tourist; drowned three weeks ago. I should have taken care of him back then, but I got caught up with things.”

“Taken care of him,” Shanna repeated.

“Exorcise him, I suppose you’d call it. It’s a surprisingly simple process. They’re not real ghosts, you know. Just an imprint of memories.”

“More real than you know,” Shanna snapped, and regretted it immediately.

The flashlight swung around suddenly, the beam passing over her head and illuminating her face. “How do you know that?”

She flinched and squinted. The beam didn’t move. “Who was the first ghost you ever saw, Shanna?”

She clamped her lips shut. Enough was enough.

“Why are you so afraid, Shanna? The only thing they feel is a need for vengeance. They can only hurt you if you’re responsible for their death. Didn’t you know that?”

Silence. Silencesilencesilence. Soon she would be on a boat again, with the emptiness of the sea wiping her mind clean and this man far behind her.

“Why don’t you watch,” John said finally, and opened the jeep’s door.

At the last minute she realized that she was afraid to stay in the jeep alone, so she followed him onto the sand. He grinned down at her as he neared the ghost.

“Why don’t you do it?” he suggested. “Don’t you want to learn how?”

She didn’t want to learn how. She was fine the way she was. It didn’t matter what her mother thought of her.

This close, the ocean was a blanket of darkness, nearly indistinguishable from the sky. Out of the darkness rose frothing white lines, the crests of waves. Shanna knelt down and dipped her finger in the water.

“That’s right, it takes seawater,” John said. “Main ingredient. But not yet. First the words. Do you know how to read, Shanna?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Here.”

He handed her a sheet of paper with a few lines typed in large print. Shanna lifted the paper, and John handed her the flashlight.

“Go on,” he said encouragingly. “Go closer to the ghost.”

She shook her head.

“You have to, or it won’t work.”

She wasn’t going to. Not this. No. But her feet were moving toward the ghost, and they kept moving even when his pain and fury became unbearable, until she was standing right in front of him.

She had never been this close on purpose before. Every single one of her long-labored defenses snapped up, and it almost wasn’t enough to keep her from going insane. She wanted to curl up and cry and shake. But she had come here for a reason. She tried to lift the paper, dropped it, and quickly put a foot on it so it wouldn’t blow away. The ghost howled at her, and she lifted the flashlight shakily so that she could read the words.

The words leapt out of the paper, large and black: *Who did you see before you died?*

The first part of the spell? Did that make sense? She couldn’t think straight, but she managed to get it out, whimpering. “Who did you see before you—”

Agony. She was in his mind, in his eyes, the blood pouring down her skin, the breath rasping in her throat. In front of her stood a blonde man with a cool smile, and she knew his name. She screamed it with all her might.

“Logan! Get away from me, you—”

More pain. Something hit her on the head; she fell, sobbing. A part of her mind wrenched free of the ghost, terrified that she would die with him, and made her eyes focus on the paper.

The rest of it wasn’t in English. Shanna chanted the syllables through her pain and horror, and when she was done the ghost was still there.

The ghost was still there....

Realization tore through her. The pain in the heart, the blood running down from the hole in her chest, the rage and betrayal. The feel of a bullet tearing through her insides. She knew what it felt like, she had felt it before.

Drowned three weeks ago, John had told her.

But he hadn’t drowned. He had been shot.

Suddenly she understood. Drugs, something to do with drugs, because there was that buzz in the dead man’s mind that she also recognized. A secret shipment, a double-cross... it was all very vague and it didn’t matter. This man was dead. What mattered was the trick that had been played on *her*.

She couldn't move. She was too close, too caught up in the death throes, too much a part of the dead man's mind to control her own body. She would go insane and never talk again, *never*, and no one would ever know why. She couldn't turn to see John, but she knew he must be smiling.

Her defenses came down as if pulled by an avalanche, all of them, all at once. It felt like sure death, but she had no choice. It was her only chance to live.

And then the man's mind *was* hers.

It was the worst thing she had ever experienced. The pain was intense and real, the fear choked her, she couldn't scream because there was blood in her throat. She wasn't experiencing someone else's death, she was *dying*.

It's his fault! she thought. Not thought — knew. *John. He set this up. He set me up. HIS fault!*

A pause. The death throes didn't stop, but got so intense that time seemed to stop. It must have been only a second, because she couldn't have borne it for more than a second.

And then the ghost was gone.

She would have fallen if she hadn't already been lying on the sand, screaming and crying. There was sand in her face and sand on her tongue, but no more blood. No more blood. She staggered to her knees and watched the ghost lunge at John.

John's smile was gone. He was running backward, his face a rictus of fear.

"I didn't kill you, it was Logan! You said so yourself! Stop it — NO—"

They can only hurt you if you're responsible for their death, he had told her confidently as he sent her toward insanity.

"Or if they think you're responsible," Shanna whispered, in a voice grown hoarse from screaming, watching him fall to his knees as the ghost enveloped him.

She knew that. Therapist after therapist had told her she wasn't responsible for her father's death, and they had been missing the point. She had known that all along.

He hadn't.

He had been beating Shanna when Shanna's mother shot him. She never would have done it on her own account, so her father had a point. Shanna had lived through a month of agony, during which he tormented her worse than he ever had when he was alive, before she and her mother had moved to New York. Then it had stopped. Apparently

cross-country was too far for a ghost to follow. But by that time the damage had been done.

She hadn't known that he was the only ghost who could hurt her. She had had no choice but to defend herself against all of them. Or try to.

She got to her feet and walked across the sand. John was cringing as the ghost hit him, again and again. Hits that would leave no mark, Shanna knew, but would hurt all the same. He would scream and scream and no one would understand why.

She knelt by him, and he stared at her with dark accusing eyes, still screaming. Not even her mother would have found his face handsome now.

"You lied to me," Shanna told him. "You just wanted to know who was horning in on your territory, and you didn't dare get close enough to ask yourself. You *used* me."

"Help me," he gasped. "Please, oh, god, please—"

"Tell me how to exorcise them," Shanna said. "For real, this time. And I'll do it."

He choked on imaginary blood, but managed to spit the word out. "Water. Seawater works best. You throw enough at them, and they dissolve. There's a bucket in the jeep—"

She didn't dawdle as she went to the jeep, but she didn't run either. She took off her slippers before stepping into the water to fill up the bucket. She had to fill it and empty it seven times before the ghost was gone, and by that time John was a quivering wreck.

She decided not to wait for a ride back to the hotel.

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The sky was not as blue as it had been when they came. Instead the horizon was rimmed with a swath of gray and white, and the ocean was silvery. Shanna sat near the back of the boat this time, at first watching Vieques disappear into the distance, then turning her attention to the wide path of white thunder that the ferry left behind it. The frothy white didn't last long; the glittering water moved in on it, slowly but inexorably, cutting it into pieces and then overwhelming it. By the time the ferry reached the harbor, there would be no remnant of its passing here at all. The ocean held no memories.

Shanna's memories crowded at the back of her mind, held away only by the sea's power over her — and only barely. She didn't dare look away from the water, in case the memories overcame her too soon.

Her mother was in the interior of the boat, silently mourning. When Shanna had walked into her room and calmly announced that John Savortas had driven her to that abandoned beach and tried to hurt her, but had had some sort of seizure before he could, she had seen

her mother's eyes light up in a way they hadn't in years. But then Shanna had gone back to her room and not spoken again, not even to the police, and her mother had wrenchingly concluded that she was back to being her old self.

She was wrong. Shanna could never be her old self again. The fear that had given her the ability to live in her own world was gone. Even now she could not completely lose herself in the sea, but was always aware that they were drawing inexorably closer to land.

She could have pulled herself away from the water now, and let in the memories — her own, this time — that were bound to come eventually. She could have gone and reassured her mother that her daughter was now going to be normal, as defenseless to the world as anyone else. But she didn't. Instead she stood and watched the spray shoot away from the back of the ferry. When they got far enough from the island the engine stopped and the end of the white road vanished slowly, revealing the undisturbed sea beneath it. Shanna smiled despite herself, then turned around to look at the Puerto Rican mainland coming up ahead.