

## An EXCERPT from THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT by Dani Harper

“So what’s your name?”

“Galen. Galen McAllister.”

“Kerri Tollbrook. And hey, what you did was pretty awesome, you know. Most ghosts can’t manifest as well as you can.”

“That’s because I’m not a ghost.”

*Aand we’re back to this.* “Many of the newly departed have a hard time adjusting. It’s totally normal.”

“There’s nothing normal about it.”

“Death is pretty normal, actually.”

“I’m *not* dead,” he said through clenched teeth. “I just need your help.”

She folded her arms and surveyed him. “If you really want help from me, then you’re going to have to take the first step.”

“What’s that?”

“Admitting that you’re dead.”

“For God’s sake, haven’t you been listening? *I’m not dead!*” he shouted.

Kerri put her hands up in a show of surrender. “All right, all right, maybe the *d word* is too traumatic for you right now. We’ll slow down and start from scratch, okay? When did you, um, *notice a change in your state?*”

“Day after Christmas, last year. I woke up and found that I was separated from my body.”

A whole *year* of denial? Well, he wouldn’t be her first stubborn case. “We have a word for that.”

“Look, I can show you my body. It’s in Sacred Family Hospital. In a bed. Being tended to like a houseplant. Because I’m not dead.”

She stared at him then. “Omigod, are you in a c...coma?”

“No. And hey, your teeth are chattering,” he said.

“It’s nothing. J...Just takes a while for the car to warm up.” She was hugging herself and shivering. In the mall, her coat had been far too warm, but it wasn’t helping much now. *Damn.* She knew she was feeling the aftereffects of the attack, not the winter weather. It had shaken her more than she first thought, but still she tried to make light of it. “I swear, it’s c...c...colder inside this t...t...tin box than st...standing outside.”

Suddenly the car was filled with warmth. Kerri found herself drawing balmy air into her lungs and felt her body immediately relax. She touched the steering wheel, then the seat. Both were warm to the touch. The windows cleared as if by magic. “*You did this?*”

Galen shrugged. “Seemed like a good idea. Since you were, uh, *cold.*” He made quotation marks in the air with his fingers, and she knew he saw right through her bravado as surely as she’d seen through his image at the mall.

“Thanks,” she said quietly. “You know, I’ve never met a spirit with your abilities.”

“You meet them all the time?”

“Ever since I was little.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but isn’t that kind of creepy? You sound like that old movie with the kid and the psychiatrist.”

Kerri shook her head. “Those ghosts were depicted as gory and scary. It’s really not like that.”

“What *is* it like?”

It wasn’t often—okay, make that practically *never*—that she got the chance to talk to someone new about this part of her life. Usually, the dead were pre-occupied with their own issues, and the living were seldom receptive to this kind of information. She took deep breath. “All the women in our family, as far back as anyone can remember, can see ghosts. In my lifetime, that means my grandmother, my mom, my aunt, my cousins. And me.”

“You grew up with things that go bump in the night. Yet you don’t find that strange?”

If he was teasing her, she couldn’t tell. “It’s not that big a deal, not really. I was taught not to be afraid of the dead, that ghosts are just people. And I learned to listen to them and find out what they want.”

“And what is it that they want?”

“Some ghosts just want a little attention. Some have unfinished business that they need to work through, emotions they have to process. Some want to get a message to a loved one. A few—” she looked pointedly at Galen. “—don’t understand they’re dead. You can see why I might jump to conclusions about you.”

Without warning, her car shifted into gear, backing out of the stall on its own then began wending its way towards the street. “Hey! Stop that!”

“We’re going to the hospital. So you can jump to some different conclusions.”

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**THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT by Dani Harper is available in Kindle ebook or paperback on Amazon.**