



Dead Not Gone

Theresa Chaze

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The rays of sunset melted into mauves and lavenders as it faded into the west beneath the sliver of moon. All around her, Anna could smell the intense sweetness of the lilac bushes intertwining with a hint of smoke from a neighbor's bonfire. *The first of many*, she thought looking across the field. The neighborhood was quiet except for the barking dogs in the distance. Shifting her backpack, she waited hidden among the lilac bushes, watching the burned out remains of a house at the top of the hill. She had to be sure he was gone before she attempted the ritual. *There could be no mistakes.*

The remaining color paled to gray then darkness. *It is time.* Saying a prayer of protection to the Goddess, Anna surrounded herself in Mother Earth's energy to cloak her from what she knew would appear. In the spiritual realm, she would now be as invisible to him as he was to most in the physical world.

Starting as a small spark at the back of the house, the sickly glow grew in intensity as it moved through it and out the front door. On the remains of the porch, it took shape. As in life, he was a large man both in stature and in weight. His hair was dark and well combed. While alive, Anna only met him once. He had towered over her; his vacant blue eyes examined her as if she were a piece of meat lying behind a butcher's display case. Although the encounter had been brief, yet it still had left her drained and ill. It took her several days and healing from a friend for her to recover. Now looking up at his spirit, her stomach again became queasy.

The Coyote Springs Police had ended his life when he refused to surrender, choosing instead to shoot at them. A volley of bullets gave cover as the smoke bomb crashed through the front window. The house burst into flames. His gunfire prevented the fire department from extinguishing the fire and saving his life. Hours later, his charred body was carried out, but Davis was far from being contained. His body may have been dead, but the children were far from safe from his abuse.

The night after his remains had been laid to rest, she had been abruptly awakened by her furkids hissing and fearfully running around the house. Quickly getting out of bed, she searched for the reason for their panic. It was not unusual for spirits to wander through the house, looking for help. Sometimes, her furkids took exception to them. Looking around the house, she didn't see or sense anyone. Yet there was something that was very off.

An energy stench blew through the open window and she gagged. She quickly moved to close it. Looking through the glass, she searched for the source. His spirit appeared onto the burnt remnants of his porch. She had quickly thrown up her shields to hide her home from his sight. He lumbered down the street and found entrance into the home of one of the children he had victimized in life. Moments later, a child's screams echoed. Lights appeared in the windows, driving him out. An ambulance arrived soon after. After the third night of torment, the family left and never returned. A moving company collected their belongings and a for sale appeared on the lawn. That had been three weeks before. Every night since children's screams shattered the night. Each time the attacks became more violent. The night before the child nearly died. Anna vowed it would never happen again.

From the porch, his spirit looked up and down the street. Even though most had already settled in for the night, nearly every house had lights shining behind curtained windows as a way to ward off the evil that they refused to admit stalked them.

Two blocks away, her home also had a light shining like a beacon, only it had so much more. Before she left, she set her shields and called her patron dragon to protect her furkids. She needed to know they were being protected; it wouldn't be safe for either if her attention were divided.

Now she had to wait. While he was on his home turf, he was too powerful for her to face. He needed to choose his new victim and attack. It was only after he left his power source that he was vulnerable. She had no choice but to risk another child. The surrounding houses quickly learned that leaving the lights on meant a peaceful night. Their lights forced him to go further to find a home he could enter. For this she was grateful for it would give her the time she needed to perform the ritual and safely escape.

Brushing the leaves away from her face with one hand, she reached into her pocket for the blessed crystals with the other. Their energy pulsed in her palm. Thrice blessed by the Maiden, Mother, Crone, they were the only weapon she could find that would be strong enough to stop him. In the backpack, she had other more mundane forms of protection; most of which would only slow him down, but they wouldn't stop him. She brought them just in case. She refused to think about those possibilities. It would only create the fear that would weaken her and empower him.

Once he left his porch, Anna needed to run up the hill, complete the ritual in the center of his home, and escape before he returned. If he came back before she completed the ritual and returned to the safety of the field, she would be completely vulnerable. Once she entered his territory, he would be able to see her and she would become his next victim, leaving none left to stop him.

She had approached several religious members of the neighborhood and told them what she knew. But they didn't want to listen; it didn't fit in their reality. She had hoped that at least one of them would have the courage to see beyond their doctrine and at least watch her back.

The leaves again tickled her cheek. *What was he waiting for? Did he know? No, he couldn't. There would be no way he could.* Her mind raced in circles, doubt forming, but dissipating just as quickly

In her other pocket, she felt for the cheat-sheet and the mini flashlight. She had spent hours memorizing the ritual, but she didn't want to take the chance she would forget. It was too important and she wouldn't get another chance. *If he caught me, would I have the courage to stand my ground and finish?* She thought of her furkids. *Who would care for them?* She had many friends; the cat lovers among them already had a house full. The rest of them she wouldn't trust to care for them properly. Shane is so particular about who he allows to take care of him; he is truly a momma's boy. Leeda, the leader of the pride, isn't one to be told what to do. Baby, being the youngest, would fare better, but not much.

Anna again looked up the hill. It was so far and steep. *Am I strong enough? They aren't my children. If their parents couldn't protect them...* the thought dissipated. *The Goddesses wouldn't have shown me the evil or given me the ritual if I wasn't to get involved. I need to trust in myself and them.* She had to believe she was up to the task.

Her mind turned to alternative escape routes. She would be vulnerable as long as she was on his property, which was the house and the mowed lawn. Once she was off it, she would once again be cloaked and could return to the safety of her home defenses. On the backside of the house was another field of tall grass and trees. She could run there. But not if the ritual hadn't been completed. He would know her and turn his attention to her home and family. The dragon would protect them, but not if it sensed she was in trouble. He would leave her home and search her out. Her furkids would be exposed. *Could I really put them at risk? Do I dare?* She suddenly realized she had no fear for herself, but for those she loved. She shook her head to dispel the negative thoughts and again focused on him.

In life, his name had been Michael Davis. Anna knew little about him. He was married. Usually, the family was quiet. However several months before that suddenly changed. Late night arguments brought

the police. After several weeks, his wife took his children and left in the middle of the night. No one knew where they went or what happened to them.

Davis started lurking around the neighborhoods. He watched the children. Several times parents caught him looking in the children's bedroom windows. Again, the police knocked on his door. All was quiet for days. Then the first child disappeared from her bed. Her body was found two days later in the woods behind the sub-division in a shallow grave. Shocked, parents became overly protective. The police questioned everyone. A neighborhood watch patrolled night and day. Nothing happened for six weeks. Slowly, life returned to normal.

Yet, there was a growing underlying tension that would not go away. Four weeks ago, the Patterson's heard a noise outside their house. The Coyote Springs Police were called. They found nothing but a few footprints by the road.

The next night a neighbor saw a shadow; he followed it to the Patterson backyard and saw Davis prying up the daughter's window. He screamed for help. Davis broke the window and attempted to grab the girl. She fought him off and he ran. The police cornered him in his home. He died that night, but it was only the beginning of the nightmare for the rest of them.

Suddenly Davis's attention focused toward the west. He slowly started marching down the hill. Reaching the bottom, he continued down the street and turned the corner.

Watching him, Anna waited. When he disappeared from sight, she took a deep breath and ran toward the top of the hill. The tall grass slapped at her thighs. It was so loud to her ears that she was certain he could hear. She dismissed the thought. It was counterproductive. Stumbling over cast-off lumber, she finally reached his yard. Refusing to give in to the fear, she continued across the lawn and up the front porch. It creaked under her weight. For a moment, she thought she would fall through. She kept moving to what looked like the dining room.

Stopping, she pulled the crystals from her pocket and held them out. Circling, she waited for them to tell her where to put them. They brightened in front of a bedroom door. She looked in and sensed other spirits. There were so many she couldn't count them. Young and old they looked at her and soundlessly plead for her help. Time was running out. She had to start the ritual. Yet she just couldn't leave them. She didn't know what to do. "I don't know what to do...help me know what is right."

Call me. Echoed in her mind. I will send a guide to free them and lead them from harm's way.

"Gaia?"

Yes, child. I am the I am.

Anna hesitated. It could be a trick. A defensive system he created. Her spiritual path was no secret

Child, I am always with you. But you must hurry. He has found his mark. But I cannot intercede without a request.

Taking a deep breath, Anna decided to trust. "Gaia, send a guardian--guide to lead those trapped between worlds. May they be freed to move on to whatever destiny has planned for them...and if you have the time, please watch my back?"

From above a bird screeched. Anna jumped, nearly running toward the door. The largest snowy owl, she had ever seen, swooped down and landed on the remnants of the roof. The spirits looked up at it. She saw them communicating. But was not privy to the conversation. One by one, they melted into one another creating a glowing ball of light. The owl leaped into flight, circling the whole. The ball drifted up. With a strong flap of the wings, he swooped down and caught it in his talons. For an instant, their eyes met. Anna saw through his eyes. Davis sensed what was happening. He was coming.

Startled, Anna's first instinct was to run. She could not. Extending her arm, she returned to the center of the dining room. "Show me where." She spun around. The crystals were equally as bright. The seconds ticked. He was closer. This is as good as place as any.

Arranging the crystals as she was shown in the vision, she stood and extended her arms upward. "Hella, goddess of the dead. Ruler of the nine worlds of the Land of Mist. Here me and attend. With my will and the power of the universe, I open the doors between you and me. Come through now. Let this crystal be your beacon." The breeze stilled. The foundation creaked. Ash fell in through the holes in the roof. A golden orb hovered over the crystals.

Amazed, Anna quickly continued. "Isis, great mother. Guardian of the living and the dead. Seer of the unseen. Mother of magic and mystery. With my will and the power of the universe, I open the doors between you and me. Come through now and let the crystals be your beacon. A mist appeared above her head. Droplets of water appeared and dripped from the roof. The mist reformed itself into a blue orb above another of the crystals.

She quickly continued. "Manea, Goddess of the night spirits and departed souls. Here me. Let my will and the power of the universe open the doors between you and me. Come through now and let the crystals be your beacon." Without fanfare, the response was immediate. A white orb appeared above the third crystal.

He must be closer than I thought. She needed to finish. But there was something-someone missing. Suddenly she knew. Ripping the crystal pentacle from around her neck, she dropped it in the center. "Hecate. Dark Goddess. Queen of the night. Protect and join this circle of power."

Suddenly from everywhere dogs howled. The wind whistled through the burnt and broken walls. A flame radiated up from her necklace.

Quickly child.

Her resolve wavered for an instant. Anna looked out the window. She saw him. He ran around the corner. But suddenly stopped short. He pushed against an unseen force. Surrounded by blue light, Dorothy Anthony stepped out of her front door. She pointed at him and the light flared to surround him.

Surprised, Anna watched in awe.

Now child! She cannot hold him for long.

Shaking her head, she focused on her task. "Goddesses both light and dark. See into my heart. A dark soul has escaped from the in-between, so he can continue causing pain unseen. Let his cruelty be revealed, so those he harmed can be healed. Take him now to the place, where souls' histories can be traced. In his place of power and might, remove him now and leave not a trace in any sight. Let the

justice be done for all, so that no more tears will fall. For the best and highest good of everyone, let my words be done."

She shoved the crystals together. Immediately they were hot in her hand. The heat pushed her back. Hecate's flames turned white. The orbs melted into it. Through the window, the blue light beamed like a laser radiated into the center. The flame turned purple.

Run.

Anna looked toward the door.

No. The back. Go to the field.

Jumping to her feet, Anna ran out the open back door. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him running up the hill. She didn't know if he saw her. Her chest hurt. It was hard to breathe. The tall grass seemed so far away.

Behind her, she heard him shouting curses. His voice was closer. She glanced over her shoulder. He didn't go to the house. He ran towards her.

How could he not go to the house! It didn't work! "Goddesses protect me!"

The owl dived from above. It flew towards him, the orb still in his talons. It flashed before Davis. It was only an instant. But it was enough.

Anna dived into the tall grass. The owl and his charges flew into the night. The ground trembled and rumbled. The purple flames burst through the roof. The fire spread throughout the house and jumped to the lawn, radiating in all directions. He tried to escape in the field. It caught him. He screamed. Then he was gone. The flames flashed and vanished. The house, the field, and the neighborhood were silent.

Anna slowly stood. Nothing else moved. She stared where he had stood. The grass hadn't changed. She expected a burn mark. It had yellowed, but not blackened. The house looked the same as did the rest of the yard.

She looked down the hill. The breeze blew through the tall grass. Down the street, Dorothy stood on her front lawn. The blue light had returned to her. It hovered over her, becoming one of the most beautiful women Anna had ever seen. Love radiated from her. The woman looked upward toward the house and nodded.

Anna followed her gaze. Above the house, the four Goddesses hovered. They were as she expected them to be. They nodded and were gone. Anna looked back at Dorothy. She stared back at her. She didn't know what she would say to her. Of all the people she asked for help, she was the last she thought would.

Miracles happen when we come together in love and respect. The voices echoed within Anna. She wondered if Dorothy heard it too. Or if they would ever talk about what happened. Sending a blessing of gratitude to her, Anna started walking home. She needed a hot bath and to hug her furkids.