

My name is Alexa Bentley, but you can call me Alex. I'm also what you might call a ghost therapist. Think that sounds like a bunch of woo? I did too, until I didn't.

Do you believe all our cares simply melt away and our soul soars weightless after death? I hate to break it to you, but everyone you've ever loved and lost still has all the same baggage. And in some cases, dying makes it even worse.

The hardest part for me is when they don't know their life is over. Imagine having to tell a powerfully psychotic killer that he's dead. Or how about telling a devoted mother she can no longer help her children? It gets messy. And when things get messy in the spirit world, humans often pay a steep price.

That brings us to today. There's a good reason I'm lying flat on my ass in the dusty attic of an old Victorian home in Baltimore. The ghost I'm currently trying to counsel is *not* taking it well.

I steel myself against the inevitable next assault and raise my head. "I'm very sorry for your loss. But you're scaring your wife. Is that really what you want?"

The ghost's cold eyes consider me. Spirits don't look like people envision, at least not to me. Where you might see nothing at all or just the slightest wisp of a darkened outline, I see them as they once were. But even the kindest, most gregarious ghosts often become a hardened version of their former selves. Unfortunately for me, there's nothing kind about this one.

A blast of air engulfs my body as a roar of anguish escapes his spectral lips. I end up on my back again. I've picked more splinters out of my behind than any one person should ever have occasion to, and I'm pretty sure the one that just wedged itself into my skin won't be the last of the day.

Hostility oozes out of him. I do a quick mental checklist. His name is Ronald Bellhouse. He was an accountant. His wife, Maryann, still lives in this house. Well, she did, anyway. His frequent moaning and thrashing has her so afraid that she recently jumped out a second-story window. I guess it's more accurate to say she currently lives at Baltimore General Hospital.

"Maryann needs you to stop this, Ronald. And I'm here to help."

His cruel laughter fills the room. "Help? How could you possibly help me? You're a mortal," he sneers.

"So, you know what you are, then?"

"I'm a god!"

Oh boy. That's not good. Usually they're broken-hearted about being dead, but this one is suffering from delusions of grandeur.