

Garrett's Ghost

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Prologue

Pendleton, Oregon

1893

Margarite Chase stood on the walkway, her cumbersome carpetbag pulled on her arm. The heavy trunks would be delivered to her rooms at Mrs. Stockton's boarding house off Main Street.

After she settled in, she'd go to the telegraph office and let her cousin, Luella, know she'd arrived safe and sound.

Not sure which direction she'd be going, she bit her lip and reread the letter. Margarite turned and bumped into a young man.

"Oh goodness. Pardon me. Could you direct me to Dorion Avenue?"

With a twinkle of deference, he tipped his hat. The man's deep voice was melodious. It calmed her anxiety. "Of course, ma'am. I'm actually heading in that direction and will escort you."

He was a solid built man, with gentle, almost borderline feminine gestures when he spoke to her. She looked at his newly groomed brown hair; and short mustache. His eyes were small but welcoming. He had a slightly large nose but when he smiled, she could see he had good healthy teeth.

Margarite wasn't sure why she absorbed details of the man, but it reassured her she'd be able to describe him, if by some slight chance she'd need to. She dismissed her concern as silly. Of course, she was on edge. She was in a new town; and in an unfamiliar area.

He took her bag. "Brandon Goodwin at your service. Welcome to our town."

They walked slowly chatting with each other. She gave him her name and told him she'd be teaching at the school.

Brandon smiled, "I'm employed as a carrier for the local post office. If you have need of assistance..."

The two stopped abruptly at an unexpected roadblock.

"Oh my!" She strained to see around the crowd. "That doesn't look good..."

"It appears to be a bad carriage accident." He took her arm. "Let's go this way. I know a short cut."

Chapter One

The Time Travel Compendium

21st Century

Garrett Houston pulled the chair out for Trishia. It was a while since he was on a date or even interested in seeking a woman's companionship.

He was thrilled the Harrises invited him to travel to the compendium for helping them understand 19th century life for their movie they were shooting. Who would've thought a simple ancient broach in the shape of a phoenix would send them to different worlds?

Who would've believed time travel was real?

She smiled at him and murmured a pleasant thank you.

"Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Yes. I've never been to a convention before, and certainly not one like this. It's quite a different world than I'm used to but in a good way. It was a bit of a shock the first time Eric brought me to this time period."

He held back a grin. Trishia was discretely eyeing Garrett as she read the menu. He rubbed his rough jaw, feeling and hearing the scratching of the five o'clock shadow. It was a constant fight for him until he realized, quite by accident, it attracted the ladies. It gave him a *didn't bother to shave* sexiness, completing the devil-may-care persona.

He wasn't sure where she was with Eric. Being a time traveler didn't make it easy on a relationship, and Trishia being from the 19th century didn't help.

At least, he and Trishia were from the same time period.

Originally, he'd thought they were a couple. The way she looked at Eric spoke to him, and touched him. It made Garrett believe there was something there. When both said no, he was open to see where this could go with Trishia.

They were similar in some ways.

Eric was lean with a medium build. He had at least four inches on Eric. He was more citified. He owned a ranch, and did investigative work on the side. But Eric was from the 21st century.

Garrett was from the 19th century. He was a ranger, a rancher, and was a Texan through and through. He and Trishia had more in common.

A couple walked by the table and bumped the chair next to them. Garrett scowled.

"Is there a problem?"

He frowned at the chair for a moment, staring at the apparition that was haunting him for the last few days. "No."

She gave him a curious tilt of her head as he continued to glare at the chair.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, just a wisp of a ghost that won't go away."

"A ghost?" Trishia put her hand on her chest.

Now you've done it. She's going to think you belong in Bedlam.

"Not a real one."

Oh, thanks a lot.

He glared at the chair. The woman sitting in it was dressed in tattered, dirty clothing. Her dark hair appeared to have, at one time, been taken care of and well groomed. But it was knotted and unkempt, sticking up as if she'd been having a fight with dirt.

Trishia bit her lip before speaking. "Will you be returning to Texas after the TTC Convention?"

"Yes, I seem to be at a dead end." He shook his head. "I don't know what else to do. I can't find any leads."

Dead end? Really? Are you trying to be funny?

Garrett gritted his teeth.

You need to find my killer before he kills more innocent women. Did you need me to give you directions?

He grunted. "I'm trying."

Not realizing he wasn't speaking to her, Trishia was apologetic. "I'm sure you are, Garrett. I didn't mean to imply you weren't."

"This case has been difficult." He glared at the chair again. "But it didn't start haunting me until I got here to the convention."

Seriously, you need to go back to Oregon.

Relief was on both of their faces when the food arrived.

But the ghost wouldn't stop.

You need to go back to Pendleton before he runs away again.

She touched his arm sending a shiver all the way to his soul.

He's good at that, you know. That's why they couldn't catch him in Texas.

She looked at Trishia.

She's not your type. Besides, she really likes your friend, Eric.

He asked Trishia, "Is your meal satisfactory?"

After an awkward pause, she responded, "Yes, thank you."

The irritated apparition hit the table with her open hand trying to get Garrett's attention. Trishia's water glass trembled. Her eyes widened, and she looked around to see what caused the glass to shake.

Stop ignoring me.

He snapped. "Stop it."

"Pardon?" Confusion was sprinkled in Trishia's questioning breath as she leaned away from him.

"Not you." He shook his head. He could feel the heat of anger rushing to his cheeks.

Listen to me.

She touched him again, and he pulled back, crossing his arms in defiance.

He keeps jumping on the trains before anyone has a chance to even realize someone's missing.

Garrett grumbled.

It's too late for me, but there's other women he's going to go after.

The ghost sighed.

Garrett. I told you I'd help you. Please, go back to Pendleton.

By the time the meal was over, Garrett had the sinking feeling the date was a complete and utter disaster.

"I have no idea where to start looking." Garrett drank from his mug of ale. "I thought the man I was looking for was in Florida, but from your description, it's two different men."

Eric Elliott swirled the ice in his glass. "Well, when I hit an impasse like you have, I try to retrace my steps."

See, he doesn't say dead end. And I told you. Pendleton.

Garrett jumped. He quickly looked at Eric to see if he'd seen but luckily enough, Eric was signaling the waiter. He scowled at the ghost.

It's not the same man. I told you when we landed in this place. And how did you do that? She swept her hand outward. How'd you go from Oregon to here in the blink of an eye?

Garrett looked away, making a sad attempt at ignoring her. "So, you think I should start back in Texas where this all started?"

No!

"Yes. But, let me see those files again." Eric opened his hand for the envelope. "I'd love to know how in the hell he escaped from prison."

Yes, well, hmm. She tutted. *I'd like to know, too.*

Garrett shook his head. Just what he needed, a sarcastic manifestation of a restless spirit. "They were transporting him to Huntsville."

The ghost grunted.

Eric opened the file. "Clarence Stephens signed a confession in August 1892. He admitted to all these murders and rapes?"

"Yes."

That's not his name. He told me his name was Brandon Goodwin.

Garrett looked at her. "What?"

Eric blinked. "What?"

Garrett quickly recovered. "I think he might've been using pseudonyms."

"I wouldn't put it past him." Eric tapped on the papers in front of him.

The ghost jumped up to read the documents behind him.

Garrett saw goosebumps go straight up Eric's arms.

"Air's blowing right on my back." He looked up at the air vents, and back down to the papers. "Okay, let's see what we got."