
OCTOBER GHOSTS

Campus Life - Book 10

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.
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*Dedicated to my husband, the man who made me feel safe and helped me
trust again.*

Chapter 1

Olivia glared at the back of her roommate's head. "Come on, Paula, the guys are waiting for us." "Do you believe in ghosts?" Paula asked, keeping her eyes focused on the mirror in front of her as she touched up her eyeshadow.

"What? No." Olivia wondered where this strange tangent had come from.

"Really?" Paula asked, glancing at Olivia's reflection in the mirror. "Not even a little?"

Olivia tried to come up with a way to explain herself without offending her roommate. "Real life is scary enough as it is."

"You think real life is scary?" Paula rolled her eyes. "Please. You're a privileged white girl with middle-class parents who are helping you pay for college."

"Okay," Olivia answered with a shrug, refusing to point out that Paula could also be described with that same sentence. Those were facts that neither one of them could deny, but those facts didn't negate Olivia's previous statement. She was literally the redheaded stepchild of her family, and her childhood had sucked, but there was no point in arguing. She'd only been living

with Paula for a week and a half, since the beginning of fall term at Northern Oregon University, but Olivia had quickly figured out that Paula was fanatical about her viewpoints, and she no longer put in the effort to disagree verbally. "Are you done?"

"Almost." Paula focused back on the little mirror on the inside of her closet door and opened her mascara.

Olivia was genuinely trying to get along with her new roommate. On the surface, they had plenty in common, so Olivia understood why the university's housing system had put them together. Paula was majoring in Psychology and Olivia in Art History with a minor in Psychology. They were both native Oregonians, and they were both night owls. But their personalities were polar opposites. Paula was outspoken and brash, while Olivia tended to be introspective and quiet with her opinions.

"Your makeup looks great already," Olivia said. In her opinion, Paula didn't need any makeup to be classified as beautiful. She was tall and curvy with a tiny waist, and she had long black wavy hair that went down to the middle of her back.

"I haven't even put on my lipstick," Paula answered. "You may not care about looking good for Jessie, but I want to look perfect for my boyfriend."

Olivia bristled and crossed her arms. "Jessie's not my boyfriend. I've told you that before." She pursed her lips instead of saying more. Olivia and Jessie had met back in June during summer term at NOU, and they'd connected almost immediately through their mutual love of art, kink, and kinky art, but now they were trying to include their respective roommates in their social circle. So far, it had been a struggle.

Paula shook her head. "Friends with benefits then. Whatever."

Angry, Olivia kept her voice level with effort. "We've never slept together, and we never will."

Paula glanced at her through the mirror again. "I hope he hasn't tried to tell you that he's gay to get close to you. I've seen

the way he looks at me. He's not gay. Bi maybe, but he definitely likes women."

"I know he likes women. He just doesn't like *me* that way."

Paula finished putting on her lipstick and snapped the lid on before turning to face Olivia. Her perfectly sculpted eyebrows furrowed. "Why?"

"He doesn't like me in that way because..." Olivia wasn't sure how to finish that sentence without going into sexual orientations, and she wouldn't out herself as submissive if it meant outing Jessie as well. "I mean he likes you because you're..." the word 'pushy' came to mind, but that didn't sound particularly flattering. Jessie had used the word 'dominant', but Olivia didn't think Paula was dominant in the way Jessie wanted her to be, and he certainly wouldn't want that word repeated. Eventually, she finished her sentence with, "...outspoken. You're not afraid to speak your mind. I'm too quiet for him."

"Oh." Paula smiled. "Okay, I guess I can see why you guys wouldn't be a match."

Several scathing comments went through Olivia's mind, but she kept them to herself.

"Ready?" Olivia asked.

Paula nodded. "Let's go. I can't wait for you to meet Braden."

"Yeah." Olivia knew that wasn't the response her roommate wanted. Paula wanted Olivia to be excited and enthusiastic, so she could gossip about all of Braden's great qualities, but Olivia knew for certain that the qualities Paula wanted to gush about were not qualities Olivia would find noteworthy.

Even with the lack of enthusiasm, Paula prattled on about Braden as they walked from their dorm room in Monroe Hall to the cafeteria across the street. Luckily, Olivia only had to hear about Braden's good looks, muscular physique, and wealthy parents as they crossed the street.

Once they were in the lobby of the cafeteria, Olivia scanned past the line of students waiting to get in and spotted Jessie

standing against the wall with his roommate Seth. Jessie was tall and lanky, with green eyes, light brown shaggy hair, scruff on his chin, and pale skin that had tanned over the summer months. Seth was shorter, at five-foot-eight, but more muscular than Jessie. Like Olivia, Seth was a redhead, but his short-cropped hair was bright orange, where Olivia's was a darker auburn.

Olivia still hadn't made up her mind about Seth. Usually, she could tell within minutes if a guy was worthy of some initial trust. All men were potential predators, and she was good at spotting the bad ones. But so far, Seth had her stumped. He rarely spoke, but when he did, he seemed smarter than most of the people around him, which was intimidating. But Jessie approved of Seth, and that was good enough for her—until he did something to prove himself untrustworthy.

The guys moved to stand at the end of the line with the women and said their hellos.

"Wasn't your new boyfriend going to have dinner with us?" Jessie asked Paula, glancing toward the doors behind them.

Paula nodded absently while checking her phone. Smiling, she said, "He's already inside saving us a table."

"Oh, great," Jessie answered.

Olivia could tell Jessie's cheerful answer was forced but doubted the others could. She linked her arm with his in comfort. She didn't understand or approve of his attraction to Paula, but she knew the oblivious rejection had to hurt.

Paula put her phone away and said, "Hey, Jessie, do you believe in ghosts?"

"Uh, sure. Why?"

"What about you, Seth?" Paula asked.

He shrugged. "Yes and no. I believe paranormal things happen that can't be explained by science alone, but I don't believe in the idea of a specific person's consciousness becoming an incorporeal entity that stays on our earth once they're dead."

"Incor-what?" Jessie asked, moving forward in the line.

"Incorporeal," Paula answered, smiling at Seth. "Meaning something that has no physical existence."

Seth nodded while Jessie muttered, "Oh."

Paula turned to Olivia. "You said you don't believe in ghosts, but what about other paranormal stuff?"

Olivia shook her head. "Just because science can't explain some things yet, doesn't mean there isn't a scientific explanation waiting to be found."

"What about you?" Jessie asked Paula. "Do you believe in ghosts?"

She nodded. "I do, but that's not why I was asking. I'm supposed to do a project for one of my psychology classes. I'll tell you guys about it inside." She let the cashier scan her student ID and entered the cafeteria.

The cafeteria seemed to always be crowded and noisy, but even more so at mealtimes. Once they got through the entrance, the line formed to pick up a tray. The center of the room was filled with tables and chairs, with people coming and going as they finished their meals. One wall held both the entrance and the exit, and the tables were surrounded on the other three sides with food options and an area to put used dishes and trays.

Once everyone had their food, Paula pointed out Braden, and their group went to sit at his table. Soon, Paula had introduced everyone to Braden.

Olivia knew Braden was on the wrestling team, and in her opinion, he looked the part. Tall, muscular, military haircut, nose that had been broken once or twice, and a scowling resting face. But he was pleasant enough when they started talking, so she tentatively gave him the benefit of the doubt.

"I was just telling them about our class project," Paula said as she sat next to Braden.

"Did they want to do it?" he asked.

"I haven't gotten that far yet." She turned to look around at the other people at the table. "Braden and I are supposed to do a

project about group mentality and shifting opinions and beliefs. Our theory is that people who share an experience are likely to change their opinions to match the group consensus. Since I love ghosts and ghost stories, and Portland is full of supposedly haunted places, I decided to make that the basis for our project." Paula gestured to herself and then around the table at each person as she talked about them. "I'm a believer, Jessie is a believer, Seth is open to the possibility, and Olivia is a non-believer. I couldn't ask for a better subject pool."

Jessie turned to Braden. "What about you? Are you a believer?"

"No, but it doesn't matter, because I'm going to try to be impartial."

Paula put her hand on Braden's shoulder and said, "He's going to be the cameraman, so he doesn't get an opinion."

"Cameraman?" Olivia asked, not liking the sound of that. She wasn't fond of seeing herself on camera, and she certainly wouldn't want it shown to people she didn't know.

"To record any potential paranormal stuff and everyone's reactions. I've picked four haunted places in Portland, and I thought the five of us could visit each place together. We'd do one every Saturday this month and then at the end of October, I'll ask everyone's opinion again and see if they've changed with the group experience."

"Your plan isn't scientific. Are you going to have a control group?" Seth asked.

Paula scowled at him. "Obviously, it's not scientific. It's not supposed to be a scientific experiment; it's a project. It's about observing people's reactions and comparing notes on the projects with the rest of the class at the end of the term."

Braden spoke up. "One guy is asking people if they believe in God and then taking them to church for four weeks."

Paula nodded. "So what do you guys think? Will you be my Guinea pigs for October?"

"I would," Jessie said, "but I can't do this Saturday. There's a meeting Olivia and I both go to on the first Saturday of every month. But if we could start the following Saturday, then I'd be up for it."

Olivia appreciated Jessie including her, even though they weren't going to the same event. They were going to the same club but at different times. It was easier to avoid questions if people thought they were going together.

"October has five Saturdays," Seth pointed out. "When is the project due?"

"Not until the end of the term, so we could start the Saturday after this one." Paula turned to Braden. "That will give us more time to buy tickets and make reservations."

"Tickets and reservations?" Olivia asked. "You didn't say anything about this costing us money."

"Oh, it won't," Paula said. "Braden's paying."

Braden nodded. "It's my contribution. Paula's writing the paper."

"Does a reservation mean spending the night?" Seth asked.

"Yes. Two of the haunted places are hotels, so we plan to get a room for the night, but that doesn't mean we'll be sleeping. It's just a way to get access to all the supposedly haunted areas. Although we could crash for a few hours before going home if we're all tired."

Olivia didn't love the idea of spending the night in the same room with Braden and Seth since she didn't know them very well, but if Jessie and Paula were going to be there, too, she could deal.

"So if we started the following weekend, would you guys be up for it?" Paula asked.

"I'm in," Jessie answered with enthusiasm.

"Sure," Seth agreed.

Olivia wanted to say no, especially since her opinion was the one Paula wanted to change, but she knew Jessie would eventu-

ally talk her into it anyway, because he liked Paula. With a sigh, she nodded. "I guess."

"Fantastic! I'll give you guys more information once we make reservations."

Saturday afternoon, the bus dropped Olivia off two blocks away from Club Domino. She was looking forward to the 'Little's Munch and Play' that the club hosted on the first Saturday of every month. Later tonight, Jessie would be going to a very different party at Club Domino and meeting up with his regular Domme, Angie, for some bondage and impact play.

Walking the two blocks to the club would have been enough time for most people to get into their Little mindsets, but Olivia's brain didn't seem to work that way. It always took her significantly longer to get into that mode than it seemed to take her friends. When she entered the bland, nondescript lobby, she was still twenty-year-old Olivia instead of eight-year-old Olivia.

After paying her entrance fee, she stepped into the backroom and looked around at the decor to try pushing her Little side to the forefront. Normally, Club Domino had dim lights, loud music and, on kink night, equipment staged around the room. But for the Munch and Play, the lights were on, the music was low, and the equipment had been pushed to the side. For this party, there was a big conference room table on one side, filled with foods that children enjoyed, and another conference table in the middle of the room that held several coloring books and sets of crayons. In the corner of the room, they had a small television set playing old Scooby Doo cartoons, and there were beanbag chairs on the floor around it.

Olivia frowned as she took in the orange and black streamers and balloons around the room and noticed that all the coloring books were Halloween themed. Even the five back bedrooms

against the wall had streamers in them. It was only October third, so all of this seemed premature to her. The logical adult side of her brain knew this was an adult perspective and that eight-year-old Olivia would love to watch some cartoons and color a pumpkin, but her adult side wouldn't be pushed back.

She'd arrived about ten minutes late, so there were already fifteen people in the room. She searched the faces for her friends and saw Faith, Juan, Beth, and Ian at the coloring table. Ian caught her eye and got up to greet her.

"Hi, Liv, I'm glad you could make it," Ian said.

"Hey, Ian."

"Not 'Hey, Daddy Ian'?" he asked.

She shook her head with a frown.

"Not feeling it yet?"

She shrugged.

"How about we go to a bedroom and I'll help get you there?"

"Okay," she answered softly. She didn't want help; she needed it. Letting Ian help would make the rest of the two hours much more enjoyable.

He put an arm around her, and they walked to a back bedroom. He shut the door behind them and sat on the corner of the bed. He guided her over his lap, and she went where his hands directed without any verbal or nonverbal protests.

"Safeword?" he prompted, resting his spanking hand on her back.

"Red," she answered dutifully while rolling her eyes. They'd been playing together all summer, but he always made her acknowledge her safeword, even though she'd told him that he didn't need to.

"Okay. How old are you, Liv?"

"Twenty."

"Let's see if we can fix that." His hand smacked down hard on her left ass cheek.

She grunted and whined. "Not so hard."

Another smack landed just as hard on the other cheek.

"Ow," she complained.

After ten swats, he paused and said, "How old are you, Olivia?"

"Twenty!" she answered, kicking her foot on the ground.

"Hmm." He started spanking again, harder and faster than before.

"Ow! Ian, not so hard! Please."

His only response was to wrap an arm around her waist and pull her against his torso as he continued to swat the seat of her jeans.

"Owww!"

After twenty whacks, he paused again. Her entire ass burned unpleasantly.

"How old are you, Liv?"

"I don't know," she whined. "Please stop."

"That's not the way good girls ask, is it?"

"I don't know." She squirmed and pushed to get up.

He started spanking again.

"Owww, Daddy!"

"There's a good girl," he praised while his hand slapped down even harder.

"Please stop, Daddy. I'll be good." She put a hand back to cover her bottom.

He grasped her hand and moved it out of the way as he said, "You're always a good girl, Liv. Ten more."

She shook her head, but his hand slapped down again and again while she squirmed, whined, and begged him to stop.

He paused and said gently, "How old are you, Liv?"

"Eight," she answered, sniffing and wiping her face with her free hand.

"Are you my good girl?" he asked.

"Yes, Daddy."

"Okay, all done." He let go of her wrist and helped her stand.

He opened his arms in invitation. "How about a snuggle before we go back out?"

She sat on his lap and rested her head on his chest while he enveloped her in a hug. She hugged him back with one arm and put her free hand on her backside to rub out the sting. Ian was a great Daddy. He was a safe Daddy, because Ian had a wife. He'd made it clear before they'd ever played that there could never be anything sexual about their age-play, and that worked out perfectly for Olivia, because sex was for adult Olivia only.

After a few moments of comfort, he said, "Do you want to go color with Beth?"

She nodded against his chest. Beth was a better artist than Olivia, which sometimes made her jealous, but if they were doing coloring books instead of freehand drawing, that wouldn't be a problem.

"Okay." He helped her to stand, and they went out to the table side by side to find a coloring book for her.

Two hours later, after saying goodbye to her friends, twenty-year-old Olivia got on a bus back to campus. She looked out the window at the city going by and tried to assess her feelings. Usually after being Little for a couple of hours, she felt happy and relaxed, but today, happiness eluded her. She'd found out that her friend and fellow Little, Faith, was engaged to her Daddy, Juan. Olivia knew that she should be happy for them, and on some level she was. But mostly, she just felt sorry for herself, because she didn't know if she could ever trust someone to be her husband *and* her Daddy. That was way too much trust to put in one man.

Two days later on Monday, Olivia scanned the faces of the women sitting in a circle with her as she said, "Hi, I'm Olivia, and I'm a survivor,"

"Hello, Olivia," the group murmured in unison.

"Thank you all for coming tonight," she said. "I see some new faces in the circle, so I'm going to quickly go over a couple of things before we start. This group is for people identifying as female who have had some kind of sexual assault in their past. If that doesn't apply to you, I would respectfully ask that you leave before we start. There is an all-gender inclusive meeting on campus on Sundays, and I'm happy to give you that information if you'd rather go to that one."

She paused to see if anyone wanted to leave and then nodded. "This group is also confidential. Nothing said here leaves the room. We will go around the circle left to right, and everyone can say hello and give us your name or the name you'd like to use. Then after that, anyone who wants to share can get my attention, and I'll call on you to share as much or as little as you want. We do not comment or judge what people share; we simply say thank you and move on to the next person. We only have the conference room for two hours, so try to keep your initial story to ten minutes or less so that everyone has a chance to talk, and then when it's over, we can mingle and visit. Any questions before we start?"

When no one raised a hand, Olivia began. "Okay, let's introduce ourselves first." She looked to the woman on her left and nodded.

"Hi, I'm Emily, and I'm a survivor."

"Hello, Emily," the group answered.

Once all thirteen women had introduced themselves, Olivia said, "To start the ball rolling, I'll share my story. I was molested by my aunt's neighbor when I was eight. I used to get dropped off for the weekends a lot because my mom was dating. I'm an only child, and my aunt had six boys, five older than I am, and one younger. They lived on a farm with a lot of land. Her oldest was just about to start college, and he was friends with the neighbor's son who was a year older. I don't remember his name, but

he had black wavy hair, blue eyes, and he always smiled at me. Most of my cousins couldn't stand me, because I was a girl and a nuisance to have around. But not him. He was incredibly friendly and made me feel worthy of attention when not many other people in my life did. He never yelled at me when I wanted to hang out and watch him fix cars, even though my oldest cousin hated it when I tagged along."

Her gaze focused on the library's well-worn carpet as she continued. "The afternoon it happened, I think my cousin might have forgotten I was there watching them work on the car. Or maybe he was just so annoyed that I was there that he didn't care. He accidentally whacked his thumb with a hammer and went home to ice it. I stayed. The neighbor was quiet for several minutes, and I didn't dare say anything, because I was afraid he'd send me home if he realized I was there. Then without looking my way, he gently asked me if I wanted to help him work on the car."

A bitter chuckle escaped her throat. "Of course, I said yes, and he got out this rolling floor mat that he used to lie on to look under cars. He told me I'd have to lie on top of him while we fixed the car because there was only room for one person on the mat. I jumped at the chance. I was so fucking desperate to be of use and to be wanted that I would have done anything he asked. After I lay on top of him, it gets a bit choppy. I remember the smell of him, the way his chest vibrated under my back when he spoke, the bottom of the car an inch from my face, his hand snaking into my panties, and feeling so very afraid that he'd hate me if I told him I wanted him to stop. I'm not sure how long we were there. I don't remember leaving or how I got home. I just remember feeling guilty and ashamed that I'd ruined our friendship without knowing what I'd done wrong. I remember hoping he would still like me. But I didn't get the chance to see him again, because my mom decided to marry one of the jerks she was dating, and we moved."

Smiling ruefully, Olivia said, "Ten years later, my best friend was fangirling over Joseph Gordon-Levitt and made me watch a ton of his stuff. One night, we watched the movie *Mysterious Skin*, about a couple of kids who get molested and how they each handle it differently. I hadn't thought about that neighbor for years, but after watching the movie, I couldn't stop shaking and I felt nauseous. I had to go home and take a shower until the water ran cold, and then I just sat there crying, shivering, and thinking *he wasn't my friend; he was my abuser.*"

She shrugged. "That was two years ago, and since then I've thought a lot about that day and about him. I'd like to say that if I saw him again I'd kill him, or at the very least confront him, but that would be a lie. I'd probably just keep silent, the way I did back then, and feel ill while hating myself."

She looked around at the faces in the circle and said with a smile, "That's it for me tonight."

"Thank you for sharing," some of the regulars said, and the new members echoed them.

"Who else would like to share?" she asked.

Emily raised her hand, and Olivia said, "Go ahead, Em."

Emily said, "Three and a half months ago, I was drugged and raped during a party at Sigma Alpha Kappa."

Olivia gave each of the women her full attention as they went around the room sharing their stories. She'd been running these meetings for a year now, and as always, by the end of the two hours, she felt a kinship with each of the attendees even though she didn't know most of them outside the group. But that was the point. Solidarity, and a safe space to say what they were feeling without judgment, unwanted advice, or pity.

Nothing got under Olivia's skin quicker than pity. Fuck pity. And while she was at it, fuck people who wanted to judge her and make assumptions about her because of her past. But mostly, fuck advice. If some therapist, or as Olivia liked to call them 'the rapist', wanted to mind fuck her and tell her what she should or

shouldn't do to 'get better', they could just jump off a cliff. Yes, she had issues, and yes, they sucked. But they were *her* issues. She wasn't about to share them with her family, her friends, or some stranger who got paid to 'fix her'. She was broken, and she was fine with that self-diagnosis. She had accepted it as her truth, and she would find a way to live with it without anyone's professional help.

The alarm went off on her phone, signaling the end of their allotted time for the campus library's conference room. She stood and asked the women to help her put the chairs back around the table. As the women were leaving, she handed out business cards for one of the college's counselors, Dr. Megan Stryker. She wasn't opposed to therapy as a concept; she was just opposed to therapy for herself.