

DEAD SILENT Boxed Set

by Multiple Authors

Excerpt from Mortuary School

I read the heading as I took it from her. Phi Sigma Eta - A Co-ed Fraternity. I laughed and immediately felt guilty. Why shouldn't there be a fraternity for mortuary students? Hadn't I spent hours trying to convince Gran that the death industry was a noble one? "Are you going to join?" I asked.

She snorted again. "No way. My mama would kill me. On the way out the door this morning, she says," the girl adopted an artificially high tone, "Rochelle, watch yourself, girl. There's gonna be a lot of strange folks at that school. You're not there for socializing."

I nodded. I got it. I'd tried to convince Gran that funeral directors were like the pastors of their own ever-changing flocks. I'd thought this was an especially nice touch, since Gran was born again in the 1970s during the Jesus Movement. It didn't sway her. "Yeah, my Gran isn't too crazy about my career choice either."

"Oh, Mama is fine with the career choice. It was hers, not mine."

I looked Rochelle up and down critically for the first time. She didn't look like most of the students on campus, and it wasn't because she was Black. She was too all-American. Too clean cut. Too old, probably only a couple of years younger than me. And above all, too pretty in a TV newscaster kind of way. "Why did you agree? I mean, it's kind of . . . Well, you gotta be into it."

"My uncle owns a funeral home and. . . It's a long story." She stuck out a hand. "Rochelle." I took it and shook. "Imogene."

We fell into step, meandering through a swirl of leaves in the general direction of what I hoped were the classrooms.

"Where are you headed?" Rochelle asked. "Anatomy 101. How about you?"

"Same. Do you know where it is?"

I stopped walking. "No. I thought you did."

Rochelle pulled a campus map from her backpack. "I think it's behind the registration building."

We looked at the map together, pivoted, then pushed our way down a narrow wind-tunnel of a path between the registration offices and the library.