

DEATH BY DREIDEL by Susie Black

EXCERPT

Queenie's eyes twinkled. "Since Buddy no longer has any competition, did your mother reserve the wedding venue?"

As I opened my mouth to make a snappy reply, the temperature dropped fifty degrees. I shivered and pulled my blazer tightly around my shoulders as the two spinning whirls of freezing air I'd become a tad too familiar with spun counterclockwise as twin tornadoes swirled down, and landed next to me.

Grinning from ear to ear, Marie and Justine LaValle bounced around like a couple of runaway beach balls and did their high-step version of the happy dance, replete with a synchronized wave and an ass-shaking hokey-pokey-style finale.

Once they finished their routine, Marie put her thumb and index finger between her lips and blew out an ear-splitting victory whistle. If she wasn't already an apparition, her whistle would wake the dead. She raised her arms above her head and squealed, "*Praise Heaven above and Hallelujah!* Our prayers have *finally* been answered."

She skidded her palms across one another. "Ah say, goodbye and good riddance. It's about time the damned fool realized the error of his ways and said adios. What took him so long to figure out he had *no chance* of winning your hand *as long as I am around* is simply beyond me." She wagged her index finger at me. "Ah declare, that man is *almost as slow* on the uptake as you, and hand to God, Ah didn't think it possible."

Marie rubbed her hands together. "Well, as Mee-maw always said, the good Lord screwed our heads on lookin' forward for a reason." She clapped twice and grinned. "You better hustle your bustle, Missy right fast, because we don't have a lot of time to make all them arrangements and a proper weddin' takes some plannin'."

Whoa. I'd better put the brakes on *this conversation* and pronto. I shook my head at Marie, but she didn't take the hint. If I didn't want to look like a crazy woman talking to the air, I needed to speak to the ghosts away from the Yenta's nosy ears. I held up my coffee cup and smiled sheepishly. "Little girl, little bladder. I'll be back in five minutes, and you guys can give me your fifty cents worth of opinion you're no doubt all dying to share."

The cane made an annoying clicking sound as I shuffled to the ladies' room diagonally across from the elevator bank in the mart lobby. I reached the door and prayed I'd find no one inside. I pulled open the handle and let out a sigh of relief. Praise the Goddess—nobody at the sinks and all the stall doors were open and empty.

The two ghosts floated through the door and followed me into the restroom.

Marie's icy glare froze me in my tracks. "What the Sam Hill are you talkin' about? Now that you're free of your *encumbrance*, we can proceed to the weddin'." Marie crossed her arms over her chest and impatiently tapped a foot waiting for my answer.

I jutted my chin defiantly. "Hold on a Cincinnati minute, lady. We're a long way off, *if ever*, to making wedding plans."

Justine's lower lip trembled. "Why don't you want to marry my daddy? He's such a nice man. He'll take good care of you the same way he took care of Mama and me."

Isn't this dandy? First, I'm almost killed by a maniac. Next, I'm dumped by one of my boyfriends. And now, I have two ghosts strong-arming me into a quickie marriage to the other man in my life. Geesh. I can't catch a break.

I plastered a sincere-looking smile on my kisser and leaned over on my cane to get closer to the level of the ghost of Buddy's baby girl. "You're right, sweetie. Your daddy is a wonderful man and I care for him quite a bit. And maybe someday we will get married. *I hope you understand that if we do*, it will be when *we* think it's the right time for *us*, not when somebody else thinks it's the right time."

Marie smiled wickedly. "Listen up, girlie—that's all well and good. But *you'd better understand this*: it's no use you fighting the *inevitable*. Time isn't on your side. Justine and me have an *eternity* to wait around here until you and mah Cajun Boy tie the knot. So, rest assured, we'll encourage you in our *special way* to goose the process along...*for however long it takes*."

Before I could explain to Marie LaValle in *vivid detail exactly where she could shove her wedding plans*, the two ghosts disappeared into thin air.

Queenie walked in and glanced around the empty room. "Who were you talking to?"

Queenster, you wouldn't believe me if I told you.