

If Maddison O’Kirk had been aware of the twenty-seven ghosts who regularly inhabited her living room, she might have more often closed the bathroom door.

Commented [CS1]: Nice (though might have more often rather than might have closed the bathroom door more often is a little awkward!)

The fact of the matter was, however, the ghosts had very little interest in Maddison’s hygienic practices. Especially considering some of them had cared very little for their own during their stint in mortality. Particularly Seamus Sanderson, whose lack of bathing contributed to his own demise in the late 1700s.

But this story is not his.

Nor is it especially Maddison’s.

Commented [CS2]: Watch unnecessary words? The however’s, the adverbs 😊

But since, as of May 28, 2018, she found herself the sole resident of Apartment 23B on Davis Court, the story began to intertwine itself with her life. It wiggled its way around the semi-smothered childhood being pushed behind, curled itself around the new sense of identity spurred by her arrival in Silicon Valley, and settled itself right into her sense of adventure which was only slightly marred by a recent breakup with her high school boyfriend. If you asked her, a new life was not a place for old love.

Commented [CS3]: Is this important (because it’s kind of random)

Commented [CS4]: Oh, so this is an adult book. I totally thought it was middle grade up until now. It’s got that quirky, funny, MG vibe.

The story knew more about love than she did—oh, how it did—and the ghosts did too. But both latched themselves onto her new life in the city and resigned to wait patiently for her to discover the real reason she had been led to Apartment 23B.

To any outsider, her foray on the city may have looked like many others—a coveted internship the summer before college for a prodigy planning to take the world by storm. If you asked her, San Francisco was just the place for Maddison to make connections before diving into her plan to graduate from Stanford in three years—a feat scorned by many, particularly ghost

Commented [CS5]: Oh, okay, maybe YA? I could see that.

Commented [CS6]: This sounds kind of like Maddison is talking about herself in the third person. I suppose we have a sort of narratory thing going on though, so it’s probably okay.

Ellie Johnson who had attempted the same in the 1960s only to fall into a downward spiral of mental health, inadvertently leading to her death in a back alley of **The Tenderloin**. The other ghosts quickly learned to never ask **about any of the above**.

Commented [CS7]: That's where Books Inc. is! I'm not sure how mental health and dying in the tenderloin are connected, so if you're trying to say something specific (drugs, homelessness, or something else, you might need a few more details? Especially with the 'inadvertently'?)

Commented [CS8]: They knew not to ask...Ellie Johnson?

As for Maddison, she was sure early graduation would mean a quick return to Apartment 23B—held in her eccentric relative's name even though Aunt Nellie spent fifty weeks out of the year in Europe—and to the jobs she assumed would be waiting with open arms. At least, they would be if those arms had received an accurate report of her college career.

Many of the ghosts scoffed at her unbridled ambition (“And a woman!” said Ghost Hank Harmon, who one **would like to think lived prior to the twentieth century, but, in fact, was one of the newest to the afterlife**). Most of them wished to smile at her gumption. And they would if things going according to her intentions would not completely upend their carefully-laid plans for the apartment's newest tenant.

Commented [CS9]: Haha also ew 😬

You see, even though their mortal backgrounds, personalities, and opinions varied, the ghosts of Apartment 23B had one thing in common—they all needed **Maddison O’Kirk**.

Commented [CS10]: cool

* * *

“This for another meal?” complained Hank, wrinkling his nose even though smell is not one of the sensations ghosts are granted. “Not only can she not cook for herself—what on earth *did* her mother teach her—those she pays to do it for her can't manage to do so properly.” He harumphed himself into a corner where, luckily, Maddison had not yet placed the plant she had bought as a housewarming gift for herself. “Seaweed. As food! And so expensive. What a joke.”

Lyla Breckinridge placed her ghostly hand on his shoulder as she could only do with another ghost. Lyla had spent most of her life in the service of unlikable individuals, and Hank was easier to appease than most. “Isn’t it admirable though,” she said, “that she is willing to pay others for their services? Even if her tastes run...odd?” Nobody had ever seen fit to pay Lyla or her family for their services to the families in the Presidio. And though it was only five miles to the northwest, those families had kept Lyla busy enough during her seventeen years that she knew next to nothing about the neighborhood in which she now found herself.

Commented [CS11]: nice world building

Truth be told, Lyla had no idea why she was in Apartment 23B. But the story knew.

Commented [CS12]: huh

So, as the ghosts conversed and complained, pondered and plotted, she too hoped Maddison O’Kirk held the key to solving the problem that kept her in spiritual limbo—whatever it was.

Commented [CS13]: okay, so their purpose is to stop being ghosts?

I’m wondering how their ghosts ended up all in this place, because it seems like they didn’t die here.

Though the last redheaded girl who claimed to have a solution for Lyla’s worries brought new levels of woe that, ultimately, led to her ghostly state.

Commented [CS14]: ? I’m not sure I understand.

It seems like all the ghosts’ deaths are secret. Is that something that *needs* to stay secret?

But Lyla wasn’t one to hold a grudge or judge a book by its cover.

Oh, how she missed books. As it was, she couldn’t hold them or turn their pages—which made the feel of her hand resting on nothing but Hank Harmon’s shoulder all the more off-putting.

Unaware of the recurring disappointment hovering in the corner of the living room, Maddison leaned over her rice balls, noticeably inhaling what the ghosts could only assume was the combined smell of the stale, un-lived-in space and tempura shrimp.

Just as she brought the loaded chopsticks toward her mouth (prompting eye rolls from three of the ghosts who pretended to believe forks were superior but, in reality, had simply never

mastered the wooden implements) her cell phone erupted into a series of buzzes from where it lay next to her miso soup.

When their new tenant let out an annoyed huff of air at the name flashing across the small screen, the ghosts closest to her leaned in to see who might inspire such an unenthusiastic response.

Mom.

“Well, I never,” breathed Brenda Ballincourt, whose five children would never have dared awake the waiting wrath of an ignored telephone call from their mother.

Maddison waited long enough to answer that Brenda was sent into a series of gasping half-breaths that left her clutching her chest—not that it was possible she could die of *another* heart attack. Even so, she relaxed significantly when Maddison slid the green talk button across the screen with her little finger. Chopsticks still taking up the majority of her hand, she used the tip of the same finger to set the phone on speaker.

“Hey, Mom,” Maddison said, with more smile in her voice than on her face.

“Sweetheart!” The voice gushed from the speaker, and Brenda Ballincourt couldn’t help the knowing grin that spread across her ghostly face.

“Hey, Mom,” Maddison repeated before taking a small bite of seaweed and rice.

“How was your day? Did you see much of the city? I didn’t hear back from you after any of my texts, so I assume you were busy-busy, getting those city legs under you!”

Truth was, Maddison’s only venture into the city was on a short walk to The Embarcadero where she obtained her dinner from the Japanese restaurant her overly-talkative neighbor had recommended. In fact, in the two days she had been in the city, Onigilly’s miso soup set was the only motivation great enough to push Maddison’s feet out the door.

Commented [CS15]: funny

She was a sucker for soup, especially since San Francisco’s idea of summer seemed to include a permanent, frigid fog. She was not especially a sucker for conversation, which is why she mumbled things like, “Yeah, Mom, the city’s great,” and “I’ll meet lots of people at work,” around mouthfuls.

“If you’re going to wait to meet people at work, I don’t understand why you had to go out there a whole week early,” said the hurt-edged voice on the phone, “especially when your sister wanted so badly to spend a few days with you after graduation. And if you had waited even a couple days, I could have finished the work week and come with you to get you settled. It’s important for me to be there, Maddy, but you know I can’t miss work since your father—”

With a loaded gulp of a swallow that made a few of the more proper ghosts cringe, Maddison hit the speaker button, picked up the phone and put it to her ear.

“Mom, it’s fine. I appreciate it, but I don’t need much to get settled. And I would have stayed to hang out with Becca except I wanted to be here for that thing tomorrow, remember?”

The ghosts could no longer hear Mom’s replies, but all who were paying attention looked to the laptop screen still open from Maddison’s pre-phone-call browsing. In what reminded ghost Adelaide Clark of pre-show jitters—she had been quite the show woman in her time and still had a flare for the dramatic—Maddison had been scrolling through the instructions for tomorrow’s event one last time.

The San Francisco Amazing Scavenger Hunt Adventure—the title and accompanying article spread across the screen with a promise to turn the city into a life-sized board game.

Maddison hated board games, as did exactly nine of the ghosts, who were all convinced that only half the people who play games really care to be doing so.

Commented [CS16]: I like the funny details about them

“I don’t know about fun,” Maddison was saying into the phone. “But it’ll help me get to know the city and meet the other interns.” A pause. “Yeah, I guess they do stuff like this every once in a while.” Another pause. “I don’t know, several miles by the end of the day, probably.” A pause and an eyeroll. “Yes, the tennis shoes I bought during spring break.”

She moved from the table to the trash bag hung over her door handle—making a mental note to buy an actual trash can, while ghost Thomas Bianchi made a mental note to never again stand between the table and the trash. For, even though the seaweed remnant that fell unnoticed from Maddison’s takeout container went through his toe rather than land on it, he still wished he had the ability to give his foot a thorough scrubbing. He’d never liked seafood. As far as he was concerned, the neighbor should have told her about Original Joe’s up on Telegraph Hill. Better food is always worth a longer walk.

Maddison walked to the window and pushed aside drapes, that were annoyingly heavy—Lyla Breckinridge, who had cleaned many lush drapes in her lifetime, would have thought them so too if she still had the ability to feel the weight in her hands.

Chad Billings—the newest ghost and a bit of a germaphobe—noted that there was no hand washing between shrimp and drapes and added the general window area to his list of apartment things to avoid. (Non-bather Seamus Sanderson topped that list.)

Though all of them had spent at least some of their mortal lives taking in this very view, none of the ghosts could keep from looking over Maddison’s shoulder. She looked out over the neighborhood dotted with barely-awake streetlights and watched over by the glowing Ferry Building in the distance. A hushed reverence fell over the room until Maddison ended her phone call with a claim that a neighbor had dropped by. Brenda Bellincourt gasped at the lie, but most everyone else set into discussing the next day’s events.

Commented [CS17]: haha

“It’s a waste of time if you ask me,” grumped Hank. “traipsing all over the city for no good reason.”

“But it will be lovely for her to meet people from other neighborhoods,” Lyla encouraged.

Ghost Matthew Ellis, full of facts and logic, was still fixated on the computer screen. “It says here participants will be sent to various historic and cultural sites.” Looking up and pushing no-longer-existent glasses up his nose, he gave a small swallow. “It says they’ll visit the wharf.”

All movement stopped—except Maddison’s, as she moved around pulling things out of suitcases—and all eyes turned to Matthew.

“*The wharf?*” Germaphobe Chad broke the stillness that, surprisingly enough, was rather uncommon among a group of ghosts.

Matthew nodded.

“She has to go,” Hank Harmon declared.

“She’s already going, Hank. She doesn’t need your permission.” Ellie Johnson added a glare to the declaration. Even though the circumstances of her back-alley death had left her so traumatized she barely spoke, the rare times she did so were usually utilized to knock Hank off his patronizing pedestal.

Lyla, who had rather fond memories of the wharf but no idea why the others found the idea of Maddison’s visit to it so encouraging, smiled at Ellie. She had not known many women who could make so few words count for so much—at least not for much good.

“If only we could leave this blasted apartment and go with her,” Brenda Ballincourt said, pacing and wringing her hands. “We haven’t gotten anything across to her yet; she won’t know what to do, what to look for.”

“She probably won’t,” said Matthew. “But new city folk tend to like the wharf, at least for a while. If she visits it once, she’s likely to go back another day.”

Thomas Bianchi, not even flinching at the prospect of the seafood-riddled wharf, pressed his hands into fists with a fierce whisper, “Another day or tomorrow...it doesn’t matter when she figures it out, as long as it’s this summer. She has to find him.”

Even the ghosts who didn’t know Thomas’ place in the story fell silent at the desperation in his voice. They stayed fixated on him until the determined spell was broken by a sigh from Maddison. Shoulders hunched, she leaned against the wall, fast fingers typed away on her cell phone.

“She’s talking with Bradley again,” Matthew said, peering down at the screen. “He asked how many times her mom called today and if she saw much of the city.”

“She ignored the question about Mom,” piped in Brenda from over Maddison’s other shoulder, “but admitted she didn’t do any exploring today—I guess her mother is the only one she lies to.” She gave a sniff and a dramatic wave of her hand.

“*There’s always tomorrow.*” Matthew read the final text to the group before Maddison tossed the phone onto the couch.

And a collective sigh went up from twenty-seven ghosts for whom that was exactly all there ever seemed to be.

Things we like:

- Loved the first line! “If Maddison O’Kirk had been aware of the twenty-seven ghosts who regularly inhabited her living room, she might have more often closed the bathroom door.” I liked this too Agreed, it’s quirky
- All the casual ghost characterizations are really fun. Lots really great characterization--Brenda the mother who’s incensed by the idea of the MC lying to her mother, The germaphobe ghost avoiding the ghost who won’t bathe, Hank, who you’d think was from 100 years ago based on his biases, but isn’t
- I liked that within the first few pages we know what the ghosts want. Well..kind of? We know they need Maddison, and we know she needs to go to the wharf to somehow set them free of being

Commented [CS18]: why do some of them know and not others? And why can’t we know?

Commented [CS19]: ? Who is that? Them knowing, but not telling us/us not knowing is a little jarring?

ghosts. The first line that says this “all the ghosts of Apartment 23 b had one thing in common-- they all needed Maddison O’Kirk” was a great way to give a punchy ending.

- I also liked the last line, about how for the ghosts, tomorrow was all there’d ever be. It’s a nice way to get some horror in there.

Things that might need a second look:

- The first page says that the story is “not especially Madison’s,” but everything else we read makes it sound like it is.
- I had a hard time with the repeated mentions of “the story” as an entity with some control. I didn’t know how abstract to take it. Agreed--especially since it seems like the ghosts (at least some of them) know what “the story” is but we as readers don’t and no one is sharing. Not even with each other it seems like? It’s pretty confusing.
- The whole beginning of the story, while I like the shape--a girl living in an apartment haunted by 23 ghosts who all need her is pretty cool, and the quirky voice is fun, is kind of hard to follow. The narrative doesn’t flow exactly--it’s constantly interrupted by ghost details. Some of them work really well, and some of them are just confusing and sort of distracting so it feels like the story stops and starts and stops and starts? I totally agree. I like how all of the ghosts seem to be important enough that they’re taking up a lot of page space, but it’s hard to know who to focus on and it makes something that could be pretty short if we just stuck to what was actually happening really long. I also spent so long feeling distant from all 27 ghosts and Maddison that at the end of the chapter I didn’t feel terribly close to any of them. Who are we supposed to care about the most?
- It says both Hank and one of the other ghosts are newest to the afterlife. I think it said Hank was one of the newest, but that a different ghost was the newest.
- It’s mentioned where several of the ghosts died, but not how and it seems like a pretty blatant thing to hold back--is that itself the mystery here, or is it it being held back just for fun? There are really specific details given about a few of the deaths, like places and reason, but not actual details which is a little frustrating, especially because the ghosts obviously didn’t die IN the apartment, so there aren’t any patterns for me to grab hold of. I think all of the ghosts lived in her apartment at some point? It’s hinted that’s the connective tissue since it says “Though all of them had spent at least some of their mortal lives taking in this very view, none of the ghosts could keep from looking over Maddison’s shoulder.” Although that may not be what it meant? It could stand to be clearer.
- Totally thought this book was MG until I realized we’ve got an almost-college age MC. I like the voice. Not sure it’s a problem? What do you guys think? I wondered if it was MG at first too! I don’t think it’s an issue as long as you stick the landing. I haven’t read it in a *long* time, but maybe take a look at **Eyes Like Stars**? That’s another meta story about storytelling and although I honestly can say I don’t remember what the voice was like *at all*, I know it was full of random theater asides. The sci-fi *Persuasion* retelling? Are you thinking of *Eyes Like Stars* in the Theatre Illuminata series? *THAT ONE* hahah thank you!
- Check for any unnecessary words--adverbs, however etc. Some are okay of course, but if there are too many it make the prose feel muddy.