

# Cherish

By

Norma Huss

A Sunset Cloud Ghost Mystery



# Forward

Dani's Diary — Saturday afternoon

Grandma Norma has learned to text! Well, sort of. It's a work in progress since technologies are changing all the time. And for someone in her 80's that's a lot of change in one lifetime. Especially when it comes to phones and all that.

Norma's first texts were to her granddaughter, Leah and daughter Donna today to thank them for their help with this book.

Today 12:47 pm: Norma Huss

Thanks Leah and Donna for keeping me up-to-date on the latest teenage trends, texting and creating the modern-ish text format in this story.

Leah replied immediately, of course:

Today 12:47 pm: Leah

No problm Grandma :-)

Donna's reply came after lunch since she doesn't have her phone with her every second of the day like we kids do.

Today 1:15 pm: Donna

You are welcome Mom. Glad to do it.  
Love ya!

That's all for now. Enjoy reading Cherish! It's an awesome book! I couldn't put it down...but then; I'm in the story. :-)

Dani

# Chapter 1

I'm getting truly sick of finding all the former Mayor Thompsons' gravestones every October and hearing the story of how the first one named our town after himself. I'm getting even sicker of ghosts. I mean, what is Halloween without sheets flapping from trees pretending to be ghosts? But that's not the kind of ghost I'm talking about.

Dani taps me on the shoulder. "Is she here, Kayla?"

"Yeah."

"Where? What's she doing?"

I nod in the ghost's direction. I don't want to point. Does that make sense? Being careful not to point at a ghost because it might bother her? "She's sitting over there under that tree. Her skirt is spread all around her like some kind of fan."

"And she always looks the same? Wow! If I were a ghost, I'd get tired of wearing the same stuff all the time."

"I don't really want to talk about her." But I think about her anyway. Back when I was in first grade I thought she was a lady, but by fifth grade I could see she was a teenager. Now I just wish she'd go away.

“You never talk about her anymore,” Dani says. “Nobody but me even remembers you can see ghosts. You could be famous, like on TV.”

“Don’t think so.” Disturbed is more like it. According to the psychiatrist. Getting attached to reality so Mom doesn’t melt down, that’s boring.

“Personally, I think seeing a ghost proves you’re somebody special. I bet Russ thinks so too.”

I want to agree, but to be perfectly honest... I mean, Russ flirts, sometimes drives me home after school, but has he ever asked me out on a date? No. And absolutely nobody thinks I’m somebody special. Instead, I say, “We’d better find some historic headstone before Mr. Sauder asks which one we want to write about.”

“Follow me.” Dani scoots away. When I catch up to her she says, “This one.”

“What, you have a gravestone staked out?”

“Sort of. I got a major clue from my sister.” She poses with her hand out like she’s giving a speech before thousands, except she whispers. “You see here the family plot of Mr. Sauder’s maternal great-grandparents. Sure way to get points. Now, we don’t mention that they were related to him. We note that her maiden name is Thompson, and ask if she’s related to all the Mayor Thompsons. She was. I’ll ask the first question, then you ask if there are any living relatives.”

Which is when we hear Mr. Sauder blow his whistle to call the whole local history class together. We gather and he leads us around the cemetery to memorials and grave sites with history attached, most of which the entire

class has heard exactly nine times before. We see the headstones of soldiers, somebody distantly related to a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the whole bunch of mayors named Thompson. Fortunately, there weren't any more after the last one died in 1952. Still, we stand there while Mr. Sauder talks up a storm. I, meanwhile, keep my eyes on the mayor's stone that he shares with his wife who died in 1947.

Dani whispers in my ear, "Kayla, look at that. Their daughter has your birthday."

"Really?" I say like I don't already know, and since Mr. Sauder has stopped talking and moved away, I read the words on the stone aloud. "Cherish Thompson. Born December 17, 1930, died November 5, 1946. That means she was fifteen when she died. Almost sixteen." I figured that out last year. I mean, how could I miss doing the math? Practically the largest monument in the whole cemetery with my birthday on it.

"I wonder what she died of," Dani says.

This conversation isn't going away. I shrug and say, "On this hour in 1946 she was exactly the age I am now—and she had ten more days to live." I absolutely want to change the subject. "So, who are you going to be at the Halloween party?"

"Maybe I'll be your ghost. I've got that pleated skirt from last year's play and I could use my white hoodie instead of a fluffy white sweater."

"Don't you dare!"

“Are you listening to me, Miss Dixon?” Mr. Sauder asks.

I’d done the unthinkable. Not noticing we’d caught up to the teacher, then talking louder than he was. But Dani, the ultra-quick thinker, answers him. “We’re pumped about these historic people. Don’t you think it would be a good idea to dress like one of the dead people for Halloween? You know, wear clothes like they might have worn? That would be a real local history lesson.”

“Girls, please discuss parties after class.”

At least Mr. Sauder doesn’t ask me to repeat his last words. Probably because Dani says, “We found a family plot where the woman had been a Thompson before she married. I wonder if she was related to the founders of Thompsonville.”

“Quite likely,” he says. “Where is it?”

Dani leads him right to the plot.

And of course, Mr. Sauder smiles. “Yes, she was. Her father was one of the mayors, and her nephew was the last Thompson mayor.”

Dani pokes me, so I say, “I wonder if she’s anybody’s ancestor. You know, anybody alive today in Thompsonville.”

“Actually, they were my great-grandparents.” Mr. Sauder chuckles and I know something is coming. He continues, “As I told Dani’s older sister Penny two years ago. I’m so glad she remembers her local history.”

I see Dani’s face is as red as mine feels. I also notice the whole class giggling.

Mr. Sauder really beams. He'd gotten one over on us, but the little nod tells me he thinks the whole thing is funny, and not a reason to mark us down on the next test. He leads us around to a lot of grave sites, tells us way more than any other teacher ever did, way more than I can possibly remember, and finally, the class is over.

I don't know why, but I look for my ghost. She has moved. I finally see her in the back of the cemetery, close to the line of tall trees. I hurry to catch up with the rest of the kids for the walk back to the school.

Dani and Michael drift together and lag behind Mr. Sauder so he can't see them holding hands. That's the advantage of having a boyfriend in the same class. Unfortunately, Russ is a senior, which means he has absolutely none of my classes. Instead, Andrew walks next to me, but we certainly don't hold hands. I mean, he's a great friend, but we practically grew up together. And, he's not at all like Russ. Russ has his own truck and can drive everywhere.

Since Russ lives two blocks past me, he usually takes me home. He wouldn't have to. I think it has something to do with his dad and mine being buddies before my dad died. But when I sit in his truck beside him, I pretend he's my boyfriend, even though we never go anywhere except home from school.

We go inside our classroom until the final bell rings for the day. Dani sidles up to me and says, "Hey, I have a ride home today."

"Michael got to use the family car? Great!"

“Super great! That means car dates. And, he’s taking us to Oleare City Saturday to get decorations for the party. We’ll pick you and Andrew up at ten.”

I am so envious. Dani gets car dates, but Michael gets to drive a car.

Dani says, “I wish Mom would let me take driver’s ed. I have to wait until my sister gets her regular license.”

“Mom tells me, ‘Next year.’ Anytime I ask for absolutely anything, she says things like, “Ask me when you’re thirty-six. It’s so unfair!”

This is such an old conversation. Dani doesn’t even nod. She says, “See you tomorrow,” and runs to catch up to Michael.

I lean against Old Lefty who’s the concrete lion on one side of the walk leading to the school. He’s good luck because he’s the survivor. The one on the other side crumbled years ago and they had to remove him.

When Russ comes out of the building, he says, “Hey, Kayla.” I join him and we head for his truck.

“Hey back at you.” Then, since he holds a bag out toward me, I say, “Bet I can guess what you’ve got in there. The charger for my cell?”

“That’s-a-right.” He opens the bag and pulls it out. “Only one with a two-prong plug. Our instructor used it for a demo.”

“A demo?” I squeak. Then I see him grin.

Russ has absolutely got the very best grin in captivity! “He did plug it in,” he says and adds, “Showing the shop

class the huge variety of things we can't take apart without extreme schooling."

I stick the charger in my backpack and say, "My battery is running low."

Russ looks truly weird. Then he says, "How about a movie Friday night?"

Which makes me speechless! "Sure," I finally say.

"Okay if I pick you up about seven-ten? Show starts at seven-thirty."

"Sure." Can't I think of anything else to say? I mean, here I am, a lowly sophomore getting asked out by a senior who's on the Student Council and the Cheer Staff and gets to toss around all the hot cheerleader girls? "Um, sounds good."

"Great."

"I'm so looking forward to it."

Now I did it for sure. Dumb, dumb, dumb. Earth to Kayla—get a brain. What could I say next? Discuss the movie we'd see, but I don't even know what it is? Which doesn't make any difference because there is only one movie theater in town. What do we usually talk about? Suddenly, I am completely tongue-tied.

Russ says, "So, anything new and revolting happen at school today?"

Great, he'd saved me. "Only the annual cemetery crawl for local history class."

"See any ghosts of history past?"

What is he, psychic? "Actually, yes."

Russ slows to a stop at an intersection. He glances out his side window at the mirror before he looks back at me and says, “So, whose ghost did you see?”

Did I actually say that? Do I want to say more? No way. “Oh, nobody, really. Probably just, ah...”

He’s listening, grinning even more, and his brown eyes crinkle up. He almost has a dimple. “So, you didn’t see a ghost. Or, did you?”

“Hey, it’s Halloween. Almost.”

Russ winks and I about die. But he starts driving again, then pulls up to a stop at the next intersection two blocks away from my house. “Okay if I drop you off here? I’ve started a part-time job three blocks over and I don’t want to be late.”

The whole ghost subject is gone. Good. Since I walk the whole way most days, and he’d driven me over half the way, I say, “Sure.” But do I still have a date?

Fortunately, he adds, “See you tomorrow night at seven-ten.”

Okay, I haven’t ruined everything. Ta da! As soon as his truck is out of sight, I text Dani.

Today 3:23 pm: Me

Movies w/Russ!   woeeee! Friday

I send another one to Andrew.

Today 3:24 pm: Me

Russ asked me out. I’m #1. I beat u. 

I should have added an lol or two but that would be mean. He is madly in love with the student teacher. She must be at least twenty. Impossible dream, like he keeps

telling me whenever I mentioned Russ. But him dating someone who's an absolute beauty and at least ten inches taller than he is? Not only impossible, but purely ridiculous!

Slowly I walk toward home, planning what I'll wear. After half a block, I stop. Russ is older. He doesn't need to go out with girls who'd never dated before. He could ask any one of those cheerleaders. But he's taking me.

But I love him. Okay, Mom would call it a crush. She'd say love is a deep, adult emotion. Even Dani tells me I can't actually love somebody I've never even dated. Maybe Russ doesn't love me, but I really love him. I can prove it. I'll flirt, and hug, and kiss him. It will be heaven. I'll be a new me, a grown-up Kayla!

I am a new me—starting now. I've got to stop being a wimp. Use brain before speaking. Yeah, and I'll be more assertive like they say in health class.

Okay, I can do that, but how can I prove it to myself? I need... Then it comes to me. I'll face that ghost. Tell her to go away. Tell her to go wherever ghosts are supposed to go. I mean, hanging around town for years? Maybe I'll even ask her who she is. But definitely, I'll tell her to leave me alone. I turn back. After all, nobody's home to miss me. Mom is still at work.

\* \* \*

The cemetery is crammed full of dead people and their headstones. But it's small, really. Thompsonville is small all the way around. Small shopping center just outside of town, small schools, and, with the work being

done on the road to the nearest big town, a real hassle to get to any truly nice stores.

I don't see the ghost until I am past all the oldest graves. She sits on the tallest memorial, the one for the mayor's daughter. She stares off at those big trees at the edge of the cemetery. I walk up to her.

"Hello," I say. "My name is Kayla. What's your name?"

The girl turns and looks at me, then smiles. "I'm Cherish."

This is absolutely too funky. I point to the tall stone she sits on. "That Cherish?" I ask.

She shrugs, arranges her skirt over her legs to almost cover her knees, and swings her legs, I swear so I'll notice her saddle shoes and ankle socks.

"That's my name, but I'm not there. I don't know where I am," she says. "Help me down?"

She holds her hand out and I reach up and take it.

Her hand is so cold.

\* \* \*

For a moment, Cherish couldn't remember what she'd been thinking. Even, where she was. Wool-gathering, Mums would say. She was in the cemetery just one lot away from home. Those little trees Daddy planted couldn't grow into a nice thick wall between them too fast for her. And where was that strange girl? Cherish had touched her hand. So hot.

What did she say her name was? Kayla? Strange name. She had disappeared. That girl, dressed more like a

boy in baggy blue jeans, was nowhere in sight. She couldn't be hidden behind some tombstone. Not a one was tall enough.

No matter. Mums said she was baking cookies for Trick or Treaters. Seemed like years since Cherish had bitten into one of Mums' delish cookies.

## Chapter 2

1946 – Saturday, October 26

The air was filled with smoke. Forest fire? Piles of leaves burning? Oh, yes, Cherish remembered. What was wrong with her? Half of Thompsonville had burned down two days ago. It must still be burning. Nobody knew how it started. There were so many rumors. It was an accident. No, some Jap escaped from the camp. But, of course, that was wrong. All the Japanese were either returned to Japan, or to their homes across the United States. Someone who hated Daddy? But that was impossible. Everyone loved Daddy.

Cherish swung her arms back and forth, but something wasn't right. The watch on her wrist. It wasn't the new gold Elgin she got for her fifteenth birthday from Daddy and Mums. It was huge with a face bigger than any man's watch she'd ever seen. The band was a black, rubbery thing that stretched. And her arm was covered by a pushed-up, gray clunky sweater of some sort, more like a sweatshirt the boys wear at football practice.

A hoodie.

A hoodie? Somehow Cherish knew it was called a hoodie. She reached up but there was no hood over her head—it was bunched up at her neck.

Ye gads, the world had gone completely mad. Cherish wore that strange girl's clothes. Had she gone crazy like...? She'd better not think that. Daddy says Mums is depressed, not crazy.

Cherish took the short cut through the trees and opened her back door. Mums was in the kitchen stirring a batter.

"Mums, I'm home," she called as she slammed the door behind her. "Umm, I smell cookies. Chocolate chip?"

"Cherish, what are you wearing? You look like a tramp. How could you go out in public like that? What will people think?"

Gads! What could she say? "It's almost Halloween. Trudy and I were trying on costumes. What do you think?" Deliberately Cherish spun around in front of Mums, to show off the weird clothes.

"Halloween is not an excuse to be disgusting," Mums said. "You will not wear rags like the starving people in Europe. You will dress respectfully and beautifully. You have your position to remember. As the mayor's daughter, you must set an example for others. Remember, that young city alderman will be at the party. He's going places. Play your cards right, missy, and you could be a governor's wife. He could end up in the presidency."

Daddy came through the kitchen door. He'd been in the hall listening. He does that all the time. He said,

“Mother, Cherish is only fifteen. She’s still a child. Let her be a child.”

Daddy always took her side. She hugged him and said, “Who wants to marry a governor? I’d rather marry a mayor like Daddy.”

Mums made that growly noise in the throat before she said, “You’re beautiful. Don’t settle for just anyone. You can do a lot better than I ever did.”

“I don’t think I’ll get married until I’m thirty. I’m going to Argentina and sing in a club like Rita Hayworth did in *Gilda*.”

“When did you see that movie? It’s terrible. That woman moves in the most salacious way. Who took you? Did you go with Trudy?”

“The word is sexy Mums. Rita Hayworth is wonderful. She dances better than any old jitterbug.”

Daddy said, “Cherish, do you have homework? Why don’t you go to your room and do that right now?”

“It’s Homecoming Weekend. No homework.” Which wasn’t exactly true, but Cherish headed upstairs anyway. There was enough time to put her hair up. As she passed Mums, Cherish whispered, “Sexy, sexy, sexy.” Cherish knew Mums heard every word. Cherish knew what Daddy would tell her later, too. All that gas about how fragile Mums was, and not well, and we really shouldn’t make her mad because it upsets her so.

Daddy just didn’t understand Cherish. Neither did Mums.

Cherish grabbed a hot cookie from the cookie sheet, ate it as she ran upstairs to her room, and flopped on her bed, face down. She stood up when she remembered the pack on her back—one just like Boy Scouts use to go camping.

She'd pretended that she knew exactly what she was wearing, but it was all a lie. Trudy had nothing to do with the clothes or any of it. Cherish wriggled her shoulders until the backpack came off. There were zippers all over the thing. Notebooks and papers inside. A tiny cellophane package of Kleenex. But Kleenex came in a regular cardboard box. Some pencils. Cherish scribbled on one of the papers. It was ink of some sort. Where did all those things come from?

Cherish wanted to blow her wig, but she couldn't. She had to forget it all and think about tonight. She had to plan.

Maybe she'd win tonight. Really, maybe she could. She'd be the first sophomore Homecoming Queen. But not with her hair smelling of that awful smoke. Trudy had the right idea. Spray her hair with perfume, then put it up in pin curls, and when it dries...

“Cherish, may I come in?”

“Just a minute, Daddy. I'm changing.” Quickly she closed up the backpack with everything inside. She took off those strange, ragged blue jeans, the sweatshirt, even her underwear. Where did that padded bra come from? *Gads, if Mums knew I was wearing a padded bra she'd... probably approve!* She put the backpack in her closet, piled all the clothes on top, and put on her everyday

clothes. Her own jeans were a deep Navy blue, not faded at all. The legs were rolled up halfway to her knees. The old sweater was almost too tight. How would it look with the padded bra underneath? Maybe like Rita Hayworth?

“Dressed yet, Cherish?”

Cherish opened her door and tried to look remorseful for the coming lecture. “Yes, Daddy, I know. I shouldn’t upset Mums. I guess I’m still a little girl who needs to learn how to be a grown-up.”

*This is going to sound strange, but am I another person inside Cherish? I’m not exactly sure who I am. I’m not exactly sure where I am, or even WHEN. Is this a dream?*

\* \* \*

“Telephone, Cherish,” Mums called from the hall.

“Coming, Mums.” Cherish nearly ran into her as she burst out the door. Was Mums listening to hear what music Cherish played? She hadn’t even put a record on her Philco.

“Please tell Trudy that you will not wear that disreputable tramp outfit at the Halloween party.”

“I will, just to please you,” Cherish said, then ran down the stairs ahead of Mums and grabbed the phone before Mums got into earshot. “You won’t believe what just happened. It’s really eerie, but I’ll tell you later.” Then Cherish spoke more loudly. “Hello, Trudy. What’s buzzing?”

“My dad said he’d drive us to the game. He promises not to beep, so watch for us.”

“Yeah, that could be fatal.” Mums nearly got out Daddy’s hunting rifle when he beeped the first time. “I’m putting my hair up with perfume like you suggested. Did you do that too?”

“Uh-huh. But I think I put it up too soon. I combed it out this afternoon and it’s already limp. I need another perm desperately.”

“I have something amazing to tell you.”

“What?”

Mums stood in the kitchen, not ten feet away from the phone table in the hall. “I’ll tell you tonight.” Trudy groaned and said she couldn’t wait, but she would. Mums, however, was standing there, eager to hear it all. For her benefit, Cherish added, “I figured out that answer to our math problem.”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

Trudy would decide she was batty, which was nothing new, but Mums smiled, nodded to herself, and walked away.

*Okay, I’m pretty sure there is something funny here. That does not sound like anything I’d say, but how can I be sure? Cherish can’t be my name. It doesn’t sound right. But who am I? I should have listened better in that mini-psych class in middle school. I’ve heard of bi-polar and multiple personalities. I think. Is this the way people go crazy?*

\* \* \*

Wearing hair in pin curls at the supper table was not usually allowed. But, for a Song Leader and Homecoming

Queen contestant before the big Homecoming game, it was perfectly fine.

Mums had made all her favorite foods. She did that for special days and sometimes for no good reason. “You found strawberries at the store,” Cherish told her. “Groovy.”

Daddy said, “Mother, strawberries in October are so expensive. These are nice, but why don’t we have your wonderful apple pie for dessert more often?”

“But strawberries with sugar and cream are so good,” Cherish said.

“There you have it,” Mums said. “Cherish deserves the best. These were shipped from California.”

“But she likes apple pie just as well, especially with a slice of cheese on top.” Daddy always worried about buying special things that most people don’t get. “And pumpkin pie is excellent too.”

“Not good enough for a queen,” Mums said. “Mark my words. Tonight Cherish will be chosen the Homecoming Queen.”

“That would be great, Mums, but they always choose a senior. I am the only sophomore who is a queen contestant.” And, she was almost sure it wasn’t just because Daddy was the mayor.

Mums snorted. “Thompsonville girls. Cherish, you know you are much better than all of them.”

“Daddy said, “Now, Mother, I do believe Cherish is right.” He looked worried, but he kept talking. “We must encourage modesty in Cherish. She is very pretty, but a

lovely, giving, thoughtful personality is just as important. Her turn will come.”

Homecoming Queen. Maybe Mums was right. Fred would have to look at her then! Mums had to be right. Cherish gave Mums a kiss on the top of her head and dashed upstairs to get ready for the big game.

*Song leader? She's a song leader? Or is that me? What is a song leader? Cherish puts on a blue pleated skirt and a heavy gold sweater. She has a megaphone that's also blue and gold. Of course, blue and gold are Thompsonville High's colors. She even has white boots with little tassels on the front. And, a gold baton like twirlers and drum majors use. Fortunately, she took the bobbie pins out of her hair. She was like a metal-head, full of bobbie pins holding down something called pin curls. She had them all over her head. I sure hope I'm not going crazy. Can't be a dream-it's gone on too long.*

*While Cherish waits for Trudy's father, I hang out, part of Cherish, but not really. Maybe I'm an amnesia victim. But, do amnesia victims end up as two people? And, do they end up in a different time? It's all like some TV show on the History Channel.*

TVs. I haven't seen a single one. But, I only remember being in one house. Some people are just old-fashioned. Yeah, that's it. This whole house is old-fashioned.

# Cherish by Norma Huss

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Norma Huss, Author

Dear Diary: Have you ever said, "Grandma, tell me a story about when you were young?" Norma Huss is a grandmother who listened to her grandchildren, with a twist.

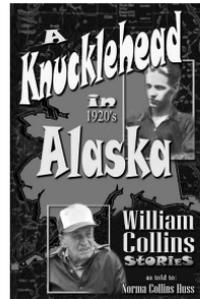
**Cherish** A Ghost Mystery takes place in two different teens' centuries: hers and ours.

## About the Author

With eight grandchildren, Norma Huss calls herself 'The Grandma Moses of Mystery.' Norma has written short stories, and articles. But, while sailing on Chesapeake Bay and beyond with her husband, she was inspired to write her first two mysteries: *Yesterday's Body* and *Death of a Hot Chick*. Her favorite genre is mystery and *Cherish* is her first novel for young people.

Norma's hilarious, historical non-fiction, for both teens and adults, is called *A Knucklehead in 1920s Alaska*. It follows a nineteen-year-old who went north, hoping to earn college money. One summer turned into a three-year adventure in Alaska's wilderness and mining towns.

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