



Delia

“... I can’t remember when I learned about Delia. She’s just always been there, a part of my family. My mother didn’t like to talk about her, but one day she finally sat me down and told me her story...”

Delia comes from my father’s family. Mom told me that when she and Dad met and married, far away in Anchorage, Alaska, he had failed to mention the family ghost. She learned about Delia one evening while they were still in Alaska. She was brushing her hair, and had set down the brush to fish a stray lash from her eye. Suddenly, the brush started moving on its own, running very gently through her hair. She jumped so hard she nearly gouged her eye.

‘Albert!’ Mom was trying hard to keep from screaming and running away. ‘Albert, something is happening here that I don’t understand.’ My mother enjoyed understatement in all circumstances.

Meanwhile, the brush kept moving through her long red hair. She could feel a little flip up at the end of each stroke and could see the very ends of her hair curl up in response. It was an excellent hair brushing, she told me, and strangely calming, despite her confusion. ‘Albert!’

My father walked into the room. He looked at the brush moving through the air and Mom’s hair flipping up at the ends. ‘Oh! Delia, hello! This is Rosa. She’s my wife – we just married. I’m sorry I haven’t introduced you sooner. I did not know you had come along on this trip.’ Mom said she was completely unable to move and not sure if she was crazy or Dad was.

‘Rosa, meet Delia. She’s my great, great, great – or is it great, great, great, great... aunt. She’s our family ghost.’

My mother thought to herself, Oh of course, your family ghost. Every family needs one. She just kept staring into the mirror, afraid to turn around. Feeling silly, she forced herself to say, ‘Hello, Delia. It’s very nice to meet you.’ She debated thanking the ghost for brushing her hair and decided not to – not yet, maybe never. In the mirror, she saw a vague flicker of human form, but it lasted only a second. An invisible hand gently touched hers; then, suddenly there was a feeling of absence.

‘Albert... is she still here?’ Mom could not believe she was saying this.

‘No... she can’t stay very long at any time. Brushing your hair probably used up a lot of her energy, and she just had enough to say hello. I think I owe you an explanation, Rosa.’

Mother drew a very deep breath. ‘Yes, Albert. I think you do.’

'Delia has been in my family for generations. Her name was Fidelia Boyer. As I said, she's a distant aunt, from about 140 years back. She died at the age of fourteen from scarlet fever, they say. Her spirit attached itself to her older sister, who became my great, great...' He rotated his hand in little circles. '... whatever... grandmother, and stayed in the family. All my life, Delia has been part of us. I grew up with her just being around, from time to time. I'm sorry I hadn't prepared you to meet her, Rosa. As I said, I didn't know she was traveling with me.'

My mother was angry. 'Albert, I should have been told I was marrying into a family with a... ghost. I didn't even know they were real. My goodness, I haven't even met your mother, but I've met your family ghost!' Mom forced a laugh.

'Rosa, it's not as if we're haunted. She's a very nice spirit, and very polite. We all love her. She doesn't intrude or cause mischief, but she is sort of a family secret: we don't talk about her much, even among ourselves. We try to respect her feelings. She must like you, since she decided to make herself known.'

'Delia attaches herself to one family member, usually female. I'm the only person in my generation, so right now, she's attached to me.' He lowered his voice. 'I believe she's sort of lonely.'

'Is she here, now?' Mother started thinking about her privacy, and felt uneasy.

'No. She will never be around without letting us know, and as I said, she doesn't intrude. I think she felt that brushing your hair was a nice way to say hello. I can call to her, and she'll come, but it takes a lot of energy and she has to sort of, be in the area to hear me. My parents and I love Delia, and I'm sure you'll come to love her, too. You'll find she isn't around very often, though, as I said.'

Mom did come to love her, and on the day I was born, Delia was right there with her. Delia attached herself to me when I was a toddler, and became my good friend. She stayed in my room much of the time and could even talk to me, briefly. She was always very nice, but yes, she was lonely.

My dad told me I have an unusual sensitivity to ghosts, and that's why Delia could talk to me. It's like I'm easier for her to reach, so she has more energy for talking or picking things up. She liked to brush my hair, too, and sometimes could put it into old-fashioned braids.



Though I can't remember at all when I learned about Delia, I clearly remember the day I finally understood that not everyone believes in ghosts.

'Hah!' Isabel said. 'I knew there was something weird about you!' I had finally confided in the girl I thought was my best friend. She didn't really understand, though, and she wasn't a good friend after all.

'Annie's crazy! She thinks she sees ghosts!' Isabel's round cheeks were red with excitement and she told it to everyone in the second grade at our school. They all laughed and pointed at me. I told the teacher I was sick, and Mom took me home. I was embarrassed and felt alone and sad, because Isabel was not the friend I thought she was.

I shut myself in my room, and called Delia. She came to me right away. Though I could hardly see her, I knew she was feeling sad with me, and that made me feel less lonely. She was just able to whisper 'Annie, it will get better.' I could feel her petting my hair.

Mom was sympathetic and let me stay home for three whole days on the strength a make-believe stomach ache. The next Monday, though, I had to go back to school. Some of the students looked at me and snickered, but I kept to myself and in a few more days some other poor kid became their point of interest. I decided to never again trust a living friend.



In the years that followed, Delia started to visit me less and less, and she often seemed sad and vague. She told me it was getting harder for her to materialize, and when she did, she couldn't stay as long as she had before. It was as if she was fading away. I loved Delia and I worried about her.

I decided I should do something about it. I didn't want to intrude on her privacy. It wasn't really minding her business though: she was my best, and really my only, close friend. I didn't want to lose her.

She had once told me that May 22nd was her birthday. 'I'll be fourteen all over again,' she joked. She usually didn't come to me on her birthday, and I always thought that she had something else to do on that special day. Lately, though, I'd been wondering. She seemed so lonely that I wondered what it was she did while she was away. I asked her, one day.

Delia looked at me, surprised. 'I don't do anything when I am not here. It's as if I'm alone and in a heavy fog, and I can't even tell how much time is passing. I'm not sad, or frightened, I'm not even bored – I'm just, still. I just stay still and collect my energy until I have enough to come here again.'

'Don't you have any friends there?' Delia shook her head. 'No, it is only me... Maybe if I knew someone else... there...I could find that person, but I don't, so...' her voice trailed off. She had to leave soon after saying that much.



I decided to do something special for her birthday and to call her to me then. She couldn't eat cake, of course, but she had told me that she had loved the daisies her mother grew in her garden. She called them 'marguerites' so I had to look it up, but they are daisies.

So, I went to a neighbor, an older woman who grew lots of flowers and asked her if I could buy some daisies from her. She showed me her daisies – there seemed to be thousands of them, shiny and white with yellow centers. 'How many do you want,' she asked.

I had saved five dollars and had it in my pocket. 'All that five dollars can buy.' I pulled out the bills and change from my pocket.

'Well, that would buy a lot of daisies!' My neighbor smiled at me, with a quizzical look on her face. 'If you don't mind, may I ask what they are for?'

She seemed like such a nice lady that I didn't want to lie to her, so I just said, 'My friend is feeling... sick, and I think the daisies would make her happy.'

The old lady's face lighted up in a beautiful smile. She cut one hundred and fifty daisies for me, and wouldn't take a penny. I wondered how she came to choose that number. It gave me an idea.



The next day was May 22nd, and I called Delia to my room. She came, but seemed very faint. Then, she looked around the room. I had decorated every surface with all the daisies and had lit the fourteen white candles I bought with my five dollars. 'See Delia? One hundred and fifty daisies, plus fourteen candles. For your birthday.'

Delia looked at me. Her image was flickering, but I thought I saw tears in her eyes. 'Annie, this is so wonderful. Thank you! I haven't celebrated my birthday ever since... well, not ever in this reality.' She smiled, and it felt like a warm hug.

Delia made a pretense of blowing out each candle, but she could barely make the flames flicker, so I helped her. 'Delia, is there something wrong? You seem so much weaker now than you used to be.'

'I'm fading, Annie. I feel it every time I come here. I think there is just not enough... life... when I go away, to give me the energy I need. It may be that this is the end of me.'

'No, that can't be! You are my best friend! I need you here! I want you here!'

Delia patted my hair and said, 'Annie, you need to have living friends, too. Thank you for my birthday surprise.'

She was gone a moment later. I cried from sorrow and anger. Isabel's mean snicker was just as strong in my head as it had been three years earlier. 'I will never trust a living friend again! Never! Delia is my only friend.'



Although the birthday daisies seemed to make her stronger for a while, Delia was still fading away, and she came to me less and less over the years that followed, but I still did not want any other friend. That finally changed when I was fourteen, starting ninth grade. Next to me in Spanish class was a girl from Argentina named Carmen. She had only recently come to the States, and was still learning English, but she of course was very quick in Spanish. I had learned some Spanish on my own, so the teacher put us together, thinking I could help her with her English. Though I don't know that I was much help to her, she improved my Spanish, and we had fun talking and became good friends.

Carmen was stylish and pretty and interesting, which I was not, and I thought we would probably someday stop being friends when she became popular. She didn't want to be popular, though, and I didn't understand that at first. Strangely, she tended to avoid people other than me.

With her long, nearly black hair and eyes, smooth brown skin, long slim legs, her beautiful sandals and her stylish skirts, Carmen looked like someone out of a teen fashion magazine. She was funny and nice and understood a lot about people. I liked her a lot.

We often went to each other's house after school to do our homework together, but mostly to read magazines and blogs and listen to music. It was nice to have a living friend again.

Carmen and I walked around town a lot and would go to shops and try things on. Sometimes, she would buy herself a skirt or dress, and I bought a tee shirt one time, that was on sale. It really was about shopping together, not about buying.

One day, we went into a chain restaurant to have sodas. We sat down at the first table we were given, toward the back of the restaurant, but I became very uncomfortable there. The spot felt unfriendly. Also looking uncomfortable, but without saying anything to me, Carmen flagged down the waitress. 'Can you move us to a table near the front?' At the new table, we had fun talking and didn't speak about what we each had felt.

We usually did talk about everything, except I just couldn't say anything about Delia to Carmen. I had learned my lesson from Isabel. Then, one day, we were in my room chatting and I accidentally mentioned Delia's name to her.

Carmen tilted her head to one side and said, 'Who is Delia?'

'Oh, she's my cousin, who lives pretty far from here,' I lied. 'We talk on the phone at times, and sometimes she comes to visit.'

'I would love to meet her. Is she on Twitter, or one of those sites?'

Uh, oh. I'm getting in deep. 'No, she's sort of... old fashioned and doesn't do media. She doesn't even have a computer, or a smart phone, or anything.'

'Oh, well.' she pointed to a magazine illustration. 'Look at this dress. This would be perfect for you!'

I stayed over at Carmen's house all the next weekend, and at Friday night supper I met Raul, her brother. He was two years older than we were and was very good looking, and very nice to me. I felt comfortable with him, which surprised me.

Later in the evening, we all watched a horror movie together and ate popcorn. Part of the time, I felt that there was someone else in the room, but thought it was a feeling from the movie.

After breakfast the next morning, Carmen said, 'Raul, I would like to show Annie around the house, including your room. May I do that?'

The Nuñez family was quite well-off and had a large house. I had only seen part of it before. It was cleaned daily by their live-in maid, and what I had seen of it was elegant. They even had a big in-ground swimming pool. I was curious about the house because it was so different from my family's old-shoe-comfortable, but rather messy, home.

Raul and Carmen spoke in rapid Spanish that I couldn't follow for a few seconds. 'Annie, Raul wants to come with us. Let's start with the library...'

The house was truly beautiful, with each room carefully furnished and decorated. We finally got to Raul's room. It was a nice room, too, comfortable and very clean. I thought that was a bit

surprising for a sixteen-year-old boy, but maybe not in that family. The minute I entered it, though, I could feel the hair rise on my arms.

Carmen and Raul looked at me curiously. 'Do you sense something?'

I was a feeling bit dizzy and wanted to leave the room, but I also wanted to stay. There was a ghost there, I was positive. I wasn't sure what to say. 'I, um... I uh, yes, there's something.'

Raul sat on his bed, and said, 'Por favor, sit down, Annie.' I sat on the chair of his amazingly uncluttered desk, and Carmen sat on the bed next to her brother.

'You sense los espíritus, ghosts, don't you?'

I was embarrassed. 'Well, sort of, I guess. It felt like there was one in this room when I came in.'

Both Carmen and Raul smiled. He said, 'That is Francisco. He is muy importante to our family.' He looked intently at me. 'Annie, Francisco was our great grandfather's younger brother. He is an espíritu, a spirit. He is muy simpático, very friendly, and we all care about him. He died in a riding accident before he was twenty. He has been part of my family ever since. Francisco was attached to my father, and he is now attached to me.' Raul cautioned, 'We don't usually speak about him outside of the family, but Carmen is very intuitive. She thought you would... understand and be discreet.'

'Of course, I would. So, you have a family ghost, just like I do... that's wonderful!' I was excited. 'Is he here, now?' I couldn't feel his presence any longer.

'No, he left when we came into the room.' Carmen smiled at Raul, then looked at me expectantly. 'You have an espíritu also? I thought you might. Tell us, about your... family.'

I told them about Delia. I hoped she wouldn't mind. 'Carmen, I'm so sorry that I lied to you about her. I have felt so... strange about Delia, because I have had to be very careful to keep her and my friends apart.' I explained about Isabel, so long ago.

'I think that each of us who have family spirits must have a story like that from our childhood.' Carmen smiled. 'There is still a little bit of rumor around the school about you seeing ghosts, or being different in some way, but only a little. I heard it when I came to school, and that's part of why I decided to get to know you better. Even if it was not about ghosts, why would I seek out friends who are just like everyone else? It is very nice that we are such close friends, though – that, I did not expect!'

'I like that, too! Could I meet Francisco sometime? Could Delia meet him, if she wanted to?' I had so many questions.

'We will have to explore these questions; we don't really know any more than you do.' Raul stood up and said. 'It's a warm day. I want to go for a swim and then thought I'd like to go to the zoo. I haven't been there yet. Do you two want to come along?'

Sure we did, and the three of us had lots of good times together after that. Francisco and Delia did manage to meet, and now they spend quite a lot of time together in... wherever they go. It has given her much more strength, and they each seem happier. Raul and I went together to his, and then, my high school proms, we dated through college, and were married after I graduated.



“And that, my sweet son, is how I met Delia, and Francisco, and your father, and your Aunt Carmen. Now, you go to sleep – you have that math test tomorrow. Didn’t Delia and Francisco already come here to say good night to you? Sleep well, Mijo.” I kissed my ten-year-old son on his forehead. He smiled sleepily at me and rolled over. He is beautiful, just like his father, and I think Delia and Francisco love him, and his sister Marguerite, our little Daisy, almost as much as we do.

