The GHOST OF WINTHROP

A Mystery Jigsaw Thriller with a Secret Puzzle Image
Story by Katherine Hall Page
About The Author

Katherine Hall Page is the author of the Faith Fairchild mystery series, which falls into both the amateur sleuth and cozy categories. The fifth title, *The Body in the Cast* will be published in November, 1993.


The series is set outside Boston in “Aleford,” a small New England village where Manhattan caterer Faith arrives as the new bride of the local minister. Having a baby and discovering the still warm, but lifeless body of one of the parishioners in the town’s old belfry makes Faith’s life a bit more interesting than she had envisioned. Throughout the series, Faith continues to hone both her detective and culinary skills in Aleford and further afield in France and along the Maine coast. In this jigsaw puzzle thriller, Faith helps Prudence Winthrop solve the mystery of “The Ghost of Winthrop.”

Ms. Page has a long career in education and holds a doctorate in the field. She is currently devoting her time to writing and various community activities. She grew up in New Jersey and now lives with her husband and nine-year-old son in Lexington, Massachusetts. She is a member of Sisters in Crime, Mystery Writers of America, the Author’s Guild, American Crime Writer’s League, and The Society of Children’s Book Writers.
Prudence Winthrop sat straight up in bed, rigid with fear, her quilt clutched to her face. There it was again! The sound of the ancient elevator slowly making its way from the basement to the upper floors of the Beacon Hill townhouse that had served as Prudence’s home for twenty of her forty years.

She held her breath and listened. It was still coming!

When the noise had first awakened her from an uneasy sleep, she thought she’d been dreaming that it was Aunt Eliza coming up to bed after doing her nightly puzzle.

But it wasn’t a dream. It was a nightmare.

Prudence jumped out of bed and quickly locked the door. Her heart was pounding so loudly, it threatened to drown out the noise of the elevator. With a whirring of gears and a gasping shudder, the elevator stopped at Prudence’s floor. The elevator door opened. And all was quiet.

“Who’s there?” Prudence called in a quavering voice, summoning all of her courage. There was no answer.

“Who is it?” she asked again. “Nicholas? Nora?” — knowing it was in vain. Both the butler and housekeeper were away until the following day.

The house was completely silent. She pressed her ear to the door. Footsteps would be muffled by the thick oriental carpet in the hallway, but there wasn’t a cough, the rustle of a garment — anything to indicate the presence of a human being on the other side of Prudence Winthrop’s bedroom door.

The elevator started up again and descended. Prudence ran for her bed, trembling. She didn’t have a phone in her room and going downstairs to use the one in the library was out of the question.

Someone was in the house.

And it couldn’t possibly be Aunt Eliza. She was dead.

“I must be going mad,” Prudence said out loud.

Faith Sibley Fairchild looked over at Prudence Winthrop, who was sitting in her family pew surrounded by a rather intimidating phalanx of Winthrop relatives gathered in full force for Eliza Winthrop’s funeral. Pru looked definitely peaked, she thought. “Peaked?” Faith gave a small inward start of surprise. Quaint words like this seemed to be invading her vocabulary with alarming frequency since she’d left the Big Apple for the more bucolic orchards of New England. It had been difficult to leave her native city, but her first meeting and further acquaintance with the young Reverend Thomas Fairchild, parson in Aleford, a small town west of Boston, happily left no choice.

She studied Prudence’s face more closely. Yes, there were tears glistening behind the lenses of the woman’s horn-rimmed glasses, but Prudence’s aunt had been well over ninety. Could grief alone account for Miss Winthrop’s extreme pallor and lined brow? It looked as if the woman hadn’t slept in months — or had a decent meal. Faith was a caterer and her thoughts quite naturally turned to food. They also turned to mystery. Since coming to Aleford, Faith had become involved in several murder investigations. There was nothing suspicious about Eliza Winthrop’s death, though. The wonder was that she’d lived as long as she had with her self-described, “delicate heart.”
There was nothing else delicate about that lady.

Aunt Eliza ruled the Winthrop family as a not-so-benevolent despot. She did not suffer fools gladly and had been known to banish individuals from her Sunday dinners for crimes ranging from voting for the wrong party to planting gladioli, flowers she detested.

There were no gladioli banking the coffin, Faith noted. She looked back at the Winthrop pew. Winthrops had been among the founding families of Aleford some three hundred years ago. Over the years, the Winthrops had migrated into town, colonizing Beacon Hill and the Back Bay — when it was filled in. Winthrops did not claim to walk on water, despite what some of their detractors might say.

Yet, there had always been some family members who remained in the Aleford congregation, and Aunt Eliza was one of the steadfast. At exactly quarter past ten every Sunday, Nicholas, her chauffeur and butler, brought her vintage Cadillac to the front of the house overlooking Boston's Public Garden. At exactly quarter to eleven, Miss Eliza entered her pew with Prudence scurrying along behind carrying their prayer books. An entire city could safely set its clocks by Eliza with her unvarying routines of morning and evening neighborhood walks, Fridays at the symphony, and nightly bedtime puzzles accompanied by one small glass of Port — taken for medicinal purposes.

Living with Aunt Eliza could scarcely have been one long madcap whirl of pleasure, Faith thought. Perhaps Prudence’s tears were tears of joy, although knowing Pru, this was unlikely. She had been devoted to the aunt who’d given her a home when Prudence had been orphaned many years ago. There was never any mention of a career — Aunt Eliza had plenty for young Prudence to do. Nor were there gentlemen callers — not surprising, since they’d have to get past Eliza first.

Faith continued to scrutinize Prudence. There wasn’t a whole lot to see. Prudence Winthrop was an ordinary looking woman with thick auburn hair cut rather unattractively. Faith noted Pru had large, very pretty blue eyes. And on a few occasions Faith remembered seeing Pru smile, her face had been transformed. Faith had a sudden mental image of an old movie in which the hero gently removes the heroine’s glasses and a bobby pin or two and voila!, she’s a raving beauty. Prudence was never going to be that, but Faith itched to get the woman into the hands of a good hairdresser, slap a little make-up on her, and tell her the wonderful new invention called contact lenses.

Her mind was wandering, as it often did in church despite having not only a husband but a father and grandfather in the business — or maybe because of it.

But suddenly, Faith’s imaginary picture of a rejuvenated Prudence Winthrop became blurred.

She saw something else in Pru’s blue eyes besides grief. She thought of another reason for her ashen color. She realized there was another explanation for the way Pru’s hands gripped the edge of the pew until the knuckles were white.

It was fear.

Prudence Winthrop had all the signs of a woman living in utter terror! And Faith Fairchild decided she had to learn why.
It turned out to be easier to start her investigation than she thought. As they were leaving the church for the cemetery, Prudence drew Faith aside.

“I have to talk to you and Tom. It’s desperately important!” Her eyes looked like a doe’s caught by the headlights and she was gripping Faith’s arm as if it were the last gorse bush on a crumbling cliff.

“Come back with us after the graveside ceremonies and have some lunch,” Faith proposed, gently detaching Prudence’s hand before she cut off Faith’s circulation. She knew that there would not be any cold baked meats at the Winthrop’s townhouse. Eliza Winthrop had stipulated no collation after the services. “Don’t want everyone having a party and messing up the house,” she’d told her lawyer.

“I hate to be a bother, but that would be wonderful. You see . . .”

“A problem, cousin Prudence?” It was Bradford Winthrop IV, looking both elegant and capable in his well cut black top coat. Faith hadn’t heard him approach. He’d simply oozed his way between them.

Prudence flushed in an unbecoming way, “No, I was talking to Mrs. Fairchild about the, uh, service.” Unaccustomed to uttering falsehoods, of any color or size, Prudence was stammering.

“Good, good, then why don’t you join the rest of us for the drive?” Although his voice rose, it was clearly an order.

Bradford was several years younger than his cousin and was known about town as a highly successful businessman who adhered to the belief that “ruthless” was a complimentary adjective.

Prudence looked back over her shoulder, the proverbial lamb to the slaughter. Faith mouthed “Later” at her and was heartened to see a slight nod.

Bradford deposited his cousin in the back seat of the car, then spent several moments in deep conversation with Nicholas before waving the butler-chauveur away. “Miss Prudence is riding with us.”

“Very good, sir,” Nicholas replied.

“I hardly know where to begin,” Prudence said, picking at the attractive plate of chicken salad with tarragon and grapes Faith had set before her. “Aunt Eliza was, well, a bit eccentric — and she did like to play games — but she was absolutely of sound mind.”

“Has someone been suggesting otherwise?” Faith asked, noting that Tom was too busy devouring the salad and accompanying buckwheat walnut bread to be of much help. Miraculously the Fairchild children were variously occupied — for the moment. Four-year-old Ben was playing with blocks and Amy, eight months, was enjoying a postprandial snooze.

“It’s about Aunt Eliza’s will,” Prudence said.

For the first time, Tom looked up with interest.

“Nobody’s actually seen the will,” Pru continued, “and that’s the problem. Aunt Eliza simply deposited a letter with her lawyer, giving instructions for her funeral, and informing him that she’s hidden her Last Will and Testament.”
Faith almost dropped the teacup. "Hidden it?"

"Yes. Somewhere in the house. And she stated that, except for bequests to servants, the church, and some charities, whoever finds the will inherits everything! She called it a — 'treasure hunt.'"

Faith and Tom exchanged surprised glances.

"How incredible," Tom said. "To play games with a fortune like that!"

And what a fortune it was, Faith reflected. Not simply the house, itself worth millions, but its contents. And there were other millions, squirreled away in the bank by Eliza's forebears.

"I get to look first. I have one week starting from the day of her death."

"But that only gives you three more days!"

"I know — and I've been searching everywhere, but I haven't been able to find a thing."

"And bright and early Friday morning, you can bet Bradford and the rest will be at your door with bloodhounds." Faith wasn't quite sure what was used to sniff out documents, but Bradford Winthrop would make certain he knew.

Prudence put down her fork and gave up any semblance of eating.

"There's something else. I think the house is haunted."

Tom choked, hastily drank some water, and said, "Pru, you can't be serious."

Even accounting for her unsettled state due to her recent loss, a sudden belief in apparitions was a shock to his pastoral sensibility.

"I can't think of any other possible explanation."

She told them about the elevator.

"The servants are back now and they swear they have not been using it, but it comes and goes at the same time every night. Aunt Eliza's bedtime. The fire escape ends at my window and last night I thought I saw something white floating outside. When I went to look, it was gone."

"I have the only key to the house. Aunt Eliza was most insistent that we have only two. Even Nicholas and Nora don't have one. Aunt Eliza's key is in the drawer of the cherry secretary in the front drawing room where she always kept it when she wasn't going out. It's still there — I checked. And mine is in my purse."

Faith made the decision. Obviously the woman needed help — in more ways than one, but the beauty makeover could come later. Right now they had to save her home and find out who was trying to frighten her into leaving. Given the cast of characters Pru had for relations, the "who" wasn't the hard part. It was the "how" — and "where," in the case of the missing will.

"Why don't Tom and I come in tomorrow to help you search? You can spare the time, can't you darling?" She reached under the table for her husband's hand and gave it a quick squeeze. She knew the stacks of paperwork and reading material in his study had reached near Mount Sinai proportions, but he could never refuse Faith anything.

"I'd be delighted," Tom said.
Prudence Winthrop smiled.

Phone calls in the middle of the night were not completely out of the ordinary at the parsonage, but at the sound of the first ring, Faith always leaped out of bed, prepared for the worst. Although, with Tom next to her and both children slumbering down the hall, it could only be the next worst: her parents, Tom’s parents, sisters, brothers. By the time she picked up the phone, she had imagined every relation on the same plane gone up in smoke. It was a positive relief to hear Prudence’s voice until she realized what Pru was saying.

“Faith! Someone just tried to get in my window! I’ve locked myself in the library and I don’t know what to do! On my way down the stairs I screamed for Nicholas and Nora, but they must not have heard me. They aren’t answering the bell either! I’m afraid something dreadful has happened to them!”

“Did you call the police?”

“Police?” Prudence seemed to find it a novel thought. Winthrops did not normally have any dealings with Boston’s finest, except perhaps a slight acknowledgement when crossing Beacon Street at rush hour.

“Look, keep the door locked. I’ll call the police and Tom or I will be there as soon as we can.”

“Oh Faith, hurry! I’m at wit’s end. If someone doesn’t come soon, I don’t know what I might do!”

It was Tom who ended up making the trip into Boston and when he returned a few hours later, Faith was waiting up for him.

“No signs of forced entry. The servants had fallen asleep with the TV on and that’s why they didn’t hear anything. By the way, Nicholas and Nora must be real addicts. Large screen, VCR, and every remote control type gadget known to man or woman.”

“What did the police say?”

“Not much. I’m afraid our Prudence may not have impressed them as rock-steady. Of course, she was terrified, but she couldn’t remember whether it was an actual face or just the outline of a person. She told them about the other events, but conceded that the ‘ghost’ outside the window could have been an albino pigeon, when one of the officers offered the suggestion.”

“Sounds like an inventive guy, but I believe Pru. And there’s only one way to stop this nonsense. Find the will. So, let’s see if we can get an hour or two more of sleep, then head in there.”

The last thought Faith had before drifting back to sleep was how odd it was that some people grew up into their names. It was almost predestined. Prudence, indeed! But what about “Faith”? She was asleep before she’d figured that one out.

The next morning the Fairchilds paused to take an appreciative look at the Winthrop’s brick townhouse. A large wisteria vine starting to bloom mingled with the English ivy on
one side of the doorway. A few panes of the original glass, turned purple by the sun, shone in the morning light. The brass door knocker and handle glittered. Everything about the house proclaimed its long pedigree of careful — and wealthy — inhabitants.

Ben was at nursery school, but baby Amy was securely strapped to Tom in a backpack. They’d strolled from their parking place on Commonwealth Avenue through the Public Gardens, pointing excitedly at the swan boats and passing the bronze statuettes of the mother duck and her ducklings from Robert McCloskey’s Make Way for Ducklings. Amy responded appropriately with a string of nonsense syllables and smiles.

But this was no family outing. They had to find the will and they had to find it today. So far nothing had happened to Prudence, but tonight she might not be so lucky. Faith was sure the nocturnal visitor was just trying to get Prudence to leave in order to search for the will without interference. Faith only hoped that he, or she, hadn’t been successful the night before.

They mounted the steps and rang the bell. Nicholas answered. He looked the part, perfectly groomed down to the moons on his fingernails. His white hair was neatly combed and he stood ramrod straight as he announced, “Miss Prudence is expecting you in the library.”

The Fairchilds had visited Eliza Winthrop several times, but Faith was impressed anew by the lovely antiques that filled the spacious rooms. The library was lined with leather bound books in softly glowing colors. A large Rose Medallion porcelain bowl, ballast no doubt from one of the clipper ships the family operated during the China Trade years, sat on a Sheraton card table. The bowl was filled with fragrant tea roses. Prudence was sitting behind a large mahogany desk going through a stack of papers.

“Any luck?” Tom asked.

“No, I started with the books. Don’t people usually hide wills between pages? Aunt Eliza didn’t. At least not in here. Now I’m looking through these correspondence boxes and I’m beginning to think it’s impossible. The Winthropes have been savers for generations. These are Great Grandfather Austin Winthrop’s receipts from his tailor!”

Faith had been thinking as they drove to town and had a plan of action.

“I know your aunt didn’t get about much these last months. In which rooms did she spend the most time?” It made sense that Eliza would have secreted the will near to hand.

“Actually, for almost a year, only two rooms — the front drawing room and her bedroom. We even took our meals in one or the other. She said the dining room depressed her.”

Faith had had a rather lugubrious meal in the Winthrop dining room, with its heavy, light-obscuring damask draperies and rows of dour family portraits staring disapprovingly down from the walls as she took each bite. It was no wonder Aunt Eliza had preferred someplace else.

“Why don’t we start in her bedroom?”

Nora appeared in the doorway. Like her husband, she could have answered a casting call for any number of productions needing old family retainers — pleasantly plump, crisp
white apron, and a kindly look about the eyes and mouth.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Fairchild, but Nicholas and I would be happy to watch the baby if you like."

Like! Faith's diaper bag was stuffed with nourishment and toys for Amy, but Faith had been worried about the effect of Amy's boredom on their hunt. The baby was soon settled in the kitchen delightedly crowing at Nora's huge orange cat, Aster, as he batted at an elaborate cat teaser. "My Nicholas made it," Nora said proudly. "He's very mechanical."

Before Faith joined Prudence and Tom upstairs, she thought she'd take a look around—at the elevator and outside, underneath Prudence's window.

There was nothing unusual in the elevator, except for a new-looking panel of controls, perhaps installed by the mechanically adept Nicholas. Faith stepped in, pulled the ornate gate shut, and descended into the basement. Labyrinthine hallways led past a number of rooms. Noting the undisturbed dust on the thresholds, Faith doubted they had been visited lately by anyone with the possible exception of ghosts. The only two areas that showed signs of recent use were the furnace room and one with a work bench and tools. She let herself out the basement door, leaving it unlocked for her return. The trash barrels were set directly to one side and she lifted the top of the first one, taking a stick to poke around. Nothing incriminating, except some empty pizza boxes. Perhaps Nora got tired of her own cooking. The other can was more interesting. Near the bottom, Faith's stick unearthed two empty Scotch bottles — definitely not the expensive single-malt variety.

She went around to the side of the house and looked at the fire escape that climbed the side of the house next to a tall pine tree. Last night the police had found no signs of an intruder, but the groundcover in the light of day certainly showed that someone had been straying from the brick path recently. The bright purple myrtle flowers were squashed in several places. Faith peered up at Prudence's window. The ivy appeared intact. There was nothing more to see and she decided she'd better get back inside.

Aunt Eliza's bedroom was a shock.

Faith had expected something sedate, a white counterpane on the four poster, a rocker by the window, perhaps a fern stand or two. But when Prudence opened the door, the first impression Faith received was a riot of color. Aunt Eliza was a quilter. There was a gorgeous Double Wedding Ring on the bed, which was indeed a four poster. A vibrant Star of Bethlehem, intricately quilted, hung on one wall. There were quilted pillows in the two easy chairs, a beautiful quilt on the arm of the Boston rocker, quilted hangings, and even a patchwork-covered brick that served as a doorstop.

"This was Aunt Eliza's hobby. Quilting — and her puzzles, of course." Faith noted a stack of crossword puzzle and acrostic books next to the bed. A basket filled with quilt squares sat beside them.

"She told me her mother taught her to make patchwork to help her keep still. The two of them made the quilt on the wall. Aunt Eliza said it was the one thing she'd grab if there was ever a fire."
“Well, let’s get back to work,” Tom said with a heartiness he did not feel. They hadn’t found so much as a codicil and the house was enormous. “It’s not as though we’re searching for a needle in this quilted haystack. A will is bigger than a needle.”

Faith gave him a smile meant to convey appreciation for trying to lift their spirits, and a warning to cool the corny jokes.

An hour later, she would have welcomed any joke, no matter how threadbare. They’d searched the room and its closet from top to bottom. Nothing.

Prudence was sitting on the floor next to the basket of squares. “It was the last thing Auntie was working on. A sampler quilt. She never got to put the squares together. Maybe whoever inherits will let me have them and I can finish it for her.” She started to sob and Faith went over to her.

“There’s still plenty of time. Don’t give up now.”

As she waited for Prudence to have her little cry, Faith started to look through the quilt squares. Each one was different and they were beautifully done. It was hard to believe someone could make such tiny stitches. At the bottom of the basket, she found a small piece of paper they’d overlooked when they were searching for something bulkier.

In a spidery hand, there was a strange formula.

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 3 \\
4 & 5 & 6 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\
6 & 7 & 8 & 9
\end{array}
\]

“What is that?” Tom asked. “Some kind of code?”

“It looks like one of Auntie’s acrostic puzzles. You know, where you transfer letters to numbered squares and get a message.”

“A message!” Faith gasped. “It must be the answer we’re looking for, the hiding place of the will!”

Tom scratched his head. “But where are the numbered squares?”

They were all struck by the same thought. Three heads turned to look at the squares of quilting material in the basket.

Pru picked up the basket and began fingering the colorful designs.

“Auntie called it her ‘Boston Quilt’. She used to tell me the name of each square over and over — they’re all traditional designs. For instance, this one is called ‘Old Maid’s Ramble’. And this is called ‘Fair Play’. And this is ‘Secret Drawer’. . .’”

“Secret is right,” Faith said. “That’s what it is, all right. The secret to the mystery!”

“Do you really think so?”

“You know how much Aunt Eliza liked puzzles! I think she left you this one, as a final legacy. Quick — get a pencil and paper. We’ve got to make a list of the square names.”

“And then what?” her husband said.

“Put them in the right order! Then we’ll have the answer easy as—Boston Creme Pie!”

“I still don’t see how.”

“It’s simple! The number “1” stands for the first letter of the first name. The number “2” is the second letter of the second name! And so on, right down the list! And when we put the letters over the numbers, we’ll know where Aunt Eliza hid her will!”
This is the list they prepared.
1. Boston Puzzle
2. Aunt Eliza's Star
3. Brickwork
4. City Streets
5. Secret Drawer
6. Old Maid's Ramble
7. Maple Leaf
8. Fair Play
9. Cherry Basket
10. Hourglass
11. English Ivy
12. Evening Star
13. Butterfly
14. Church Steps
15. Silver and Gold
16. Duck and Ducklings
17. Bright Hopes
18. Beacon Lights
19. Memory Block
20. Tall Pine Tree

Assemble the puzzle and complete the acrostic. There is a hint below to help you along. Can you solve the mystery too?

**ACROSTIC DIRECTIONS:**

But you dear reader, have an advantage over Prudence and the Fairchilds. Put the puzzle together and the squares will be in order starting at the upper left. The first square is red and white. Remember the list is not in the right order, but by using it you should be able to identify some if not all of the squares.

If you have a problem putting the list in the correct order, read hint #1, then see if you can crack the code.

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1 2 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
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**HINT #1:**

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Row 1 - Old Maid's Ramble, English Ivy, Tall Pine Tree
Row 2 - City Streets, Evening Star, Secret Drawer
Row 3 - Memory Block, Silver & Gold, Beacon Lights
Row 4 - Aunt Eliza's Star, Bright Hopes, Hourglass
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THE SOLUTION:

While Purr and Faith carefully listed all the names of the single stumps, Tom looked around the room. "Tom said, 'Eliza must have gotten into the sewing basket, it's dry out on that shelf!'" Faith said, 'Purr said,' "We need Faust! It's our luck to see them!" Faith said, 'Eliza, deep down, was through, were we going to figure this puzzle out on our own?

ON TOP CHEERY SECRETARY

When they saw what the letters spelled, all three raced out the door of Aunt Eliza's apartment and ran down the stairs to the greenhouse room. Tom cleared the table, gathered a potted plant and stood on top of it. He reached behind the scottish pheasant of the Cherubim<f1>

'Chair.'<f2> "Tess, you're special. Call your lawyer! I'll text you."

"What about cousin Bradgrove?"

"Cousin Bradgrove can wait."

Following Purr into the library, Faith whispered to Tom, "Don't let her or the will out of your sight. I'm going downstairs to get Amy and have a chat with Nicholas. Toward looked at yourugi's tower.' "I'll tell you still about it — I'm right next to you, and that's the good news. Their silence was overpowering."

"Now, said Faith, "Looking Nicholas straight in the eye, "you long for Bradgrove!""

"Nicholas winked and nodded to say yes."

"Of course, Faustly, my Nicholas only takes a hold now and then. W'm would have been out on the street at one am. He would have been able to tell everything!" You shouldn't have come to Providence right away. Now you've got to tell everyone."

"I leave Bradgrove to the Recreant and us. Solly, Faith, could understand Nicholas and who's here or who Bradgrove would like to tell us, and you can tell us."

"Yes, Nicholas said, with a touch of pride. "And I beg leave to mention that when we want our home, we have been there." And what about the ghost of Aunt Eliza at Mis-Winthrop's window? Was that circle?

"I'm going to talk to you later. "That was just a matter of time."

"Well — what are you going to call this case in your memories, Mr. Stropeck?"

"Faith smiled. "How about 'A Stick in Time Saved Nine'?" The she winked over at me."

As he spoke, a small drawer at the bottom of the piece of furniture stood out. Providence

"I'm still here."

Tess' face. "I think we're going to spend that money on a pair of contact lenses.

"..."