

Chapter 1

Wait!” Nina called out. A young couple hurried away. They were nearing their SUV. Nina chased after them.

“You’re leaving already?” Nina asked cheerfully. “I thought you were staying for a week.”

Nina Blake was assistant manager at High Chalets. It was a mountain ski lodge. This was her first job. She was twenty-two and anxious to do her best. Her number-one task? Make sure guests were happy.

“We didn’t bargain for howling sounds all night!” the man shouted. “That wasn’t in the brochure.”

“And those weird rapping noises on the windows,” the woman said. She threw

her suitcase into the SUV parked in the driveway.

“Well, look,” Nina said. “Maybe somebody was partying in the next cabin. I’m sure we can straighten this out. What a shame for you to shorten your trip.”

Nina struggled to convince the guests to stay. She had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. These were not the first people to be driven away from Chalet 17. There were strange and unnerving noises inside that unit.

Nina’s boss was Mr. Cowles. He had been worried about the problem for several months.

“You can straighten out anything you want,” the man said. He slipped behind the wheel of his big car. “We’re getting as far away from this crazy place as possible. And don’t think we won’t review this dump. This is a one-star resort. No way is it five stars!”

Nina watched the SUV roar off. Then she walked to her manager’s apartment.

“Uh, Mr. Cowles? I’m sorry to say there was a problem in Chalet 17. It’s vacant again. The couple that was staying there just left,” Nina said. “They were in a big hurry.”

Mr. Cowles was a thin, nervous man. He was pushing fifty. Nina knew he had lost a long-time job due to downsizing. Now he was desperately trying to build a new career.

“What do you mean?” he demanded. His eyes were wild with panic. “What happened?”

“The young couple staying in Chalet 17. The Osborns. They took off like bats out of hell just now. They said they heard strange noises all night. There were tapping sounds on the windows,” Nina said.

Mr. Cowles turned pale. “What the devil!” he cried. He sat down hard in his chair. Then he ran a hand through his thinning hair. “Chalet 17 again! More money flying out the door! Nina, do you realize we’ve lost five guests in less than two

months? That's a lot of money down the drain! And it all affects the bottom line. The owners are going to wonder why we can't get on top of this problem!"

"I tried to talk them into staying," Nina said defensively. "I'll send housekeeping down. They can tidy up the place for the next guests."

Mr. Cowles looked furious. "The next guests? Are you crazy? How long do you think this can go on? Don't be foolish, Nina. We've got a problem. And it's a huge problem. You're the one who has to get to the bottom of it! Forget all about fluffing up the pillows! Find out what's going on in Chalet 17. Put a stop to it! If you don't, both of us are history. Understand?"

Nina nodded nervously. This was not her career. She just had to earn her teaching credential at the state college. There were student loans to pay off. She wasn't a detective!

What was Mr. Cowles talking about? Did he really think she was some kind of ghostbuster? But Nina loved this job. And she needed the income. “Well,” she said calmly. “I’ll surely do my best, Mr. Cowles.”

“I don’t want to hear that, Nina. I want you to solve this problem. Do you hear me? It cannot get around that we have a haunted cabin here. It’ll be the kiss of death for this resort. My job is on the line. So is yours! Check out social media. Make sure nobody is blabbing,” Mr. Cowles said. “And find out what is going on in that cabin!”

“Okay. Well, I’ll get right to it. I’ll try to find out what’s going on,” Nina said. She backed out of Mr. Cowles’s office.

It was a cold February morning in the high mountains. A light dusting of snow sprinkled the Swiss chalet-style cabins. They looked as beautiful as postcard pictures.

Nina had never dreamed she could find such a perfect job while she was still in

college. It paid fairly well. And when she was off duty there was time for skiing. The job also meant free evenings and weekends. This meant spending time with her drop-dead cute boyfriend, ski instructor Brian Holland.

Now Nina went hunting for Brian. Like her, he was a college student who worked here to pay for his education. High Chalets was a small resort. Brian was a ski instructor when there was snow on the ground. When the snow melted he was a janitor.

“Brian, got a minute?” Nina asked. She had found him checking out the newly fallen snow.

“Sure,” Brian said. “Darn! There’s not enough snow for skiing.”

“Brian, I told you about the spooky stuff, right? The stuff that’s been happening in Chalet 17. Well, it’s happened again. A young couple went tearing out of here this morning. They seemed to be scared out of

their wits. Mr. Cowles is beside himself. For some reason he expects me to get to the bottom of it. I don't know where to begin," Nina said.

"Could be something spooky," Brian said. "These chalets are really old. They were built back in the 1890s. Of course they've been remodeled and updated. But a lot of people have lived within those walls. Who knows what could have happened in Chalet 17?"

"What are you saying?" Nina asked shakily. "You think something horrible happened in that cabin? You think it's haunted or something? Some spook is roaming around at night?"

Brian shook his head. "Who knows? I've read about weird stuff like that happening. I've heard some of the guests' stories about the howling and rattling windows," he said.

"But what am I going to do? Mr. Cowles expects me to fix things," Nina said.

But then she remembered something. There was a really old house down the road. Mr. Peebles lived there. He was really old. Nina had talked to him once. He seemed to know everyone. And he knew everything about the mountains. “Maybe Mr. Peebles would have a clue about what happened in Chalet 17. What do you think, Brian?”

“Yeah, good idea. He knows where all the bodies are buried,” Brian said.

“Don’t say that!” Nina said. She shivered.

“Nina, come on! I just mean that he’s someone who knows all the dirt. Mr. Peebles never did like this resort. Maybe he’s behind the stuff that’s scaring the guests. He told me he’d like to see the mountain back like it used to be. He is anti-development. The woods should be for the bears and bobcats,” Brian said.

“I guess I’d better talk to him,” Nina said. “It’s a start anyway.”

Nina climbed onto her motorcycle. She drove down the highway to Mr. Peebles's house. She wasn't certain he would tell her anything useful. But she didn't know where else to turn.

The old man's property adjoined the resort. His house was made of stone. His father and grandfather had built it. That was a long time ago. The land had been all forest. A fall of fresh snow remained without footprints for weeks.

Nina got off her bike in Mr. Peebles's gravel driveway. She went to the door. But then she saw the man walking across his yard. He was piling up freshly cut cordwood. "Morning, Mr. Peebles," Nina called out cheerfully.

"Hello there, young lady," Mr. Peebles said with a smile.

Local people said the old man was eccentric. But he had seemed nice enough

the few times Nina had talked to him. His wife had died several years ago. Nina guessed he was lonely. That must be why he kept so busy chopping wood. He also built birdhouses.

“Mr. Peebles, I wonder if you could help me with something. You know I work at the High Chalets Resort. We’ve been having problems in one of the cabins. It’s Chalet 17. Guests who stay there have heard some odd sounds. They get scared to death. Then they leave. That’s really bad for business, of course. Do you know anything about it? Did something odd happen in that cabin?” Nina asked.

Mr. Peebles nodded. His face turned serious. “That’d be the cabin facing the lake. Yep, I know the one. Got a twisted pine out front.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Nina said.

“It’s not a good place for people to be.

I'd shut it down. Better yet, tear it down. Right to the ground. Plow over it. Terrible thing happened there. Terrible! Worst thing that ever happened in these mountains," Mr. Peebles said. He shook his head from side to side.