

A TALE OF FRIENDSHIP AND FEAR

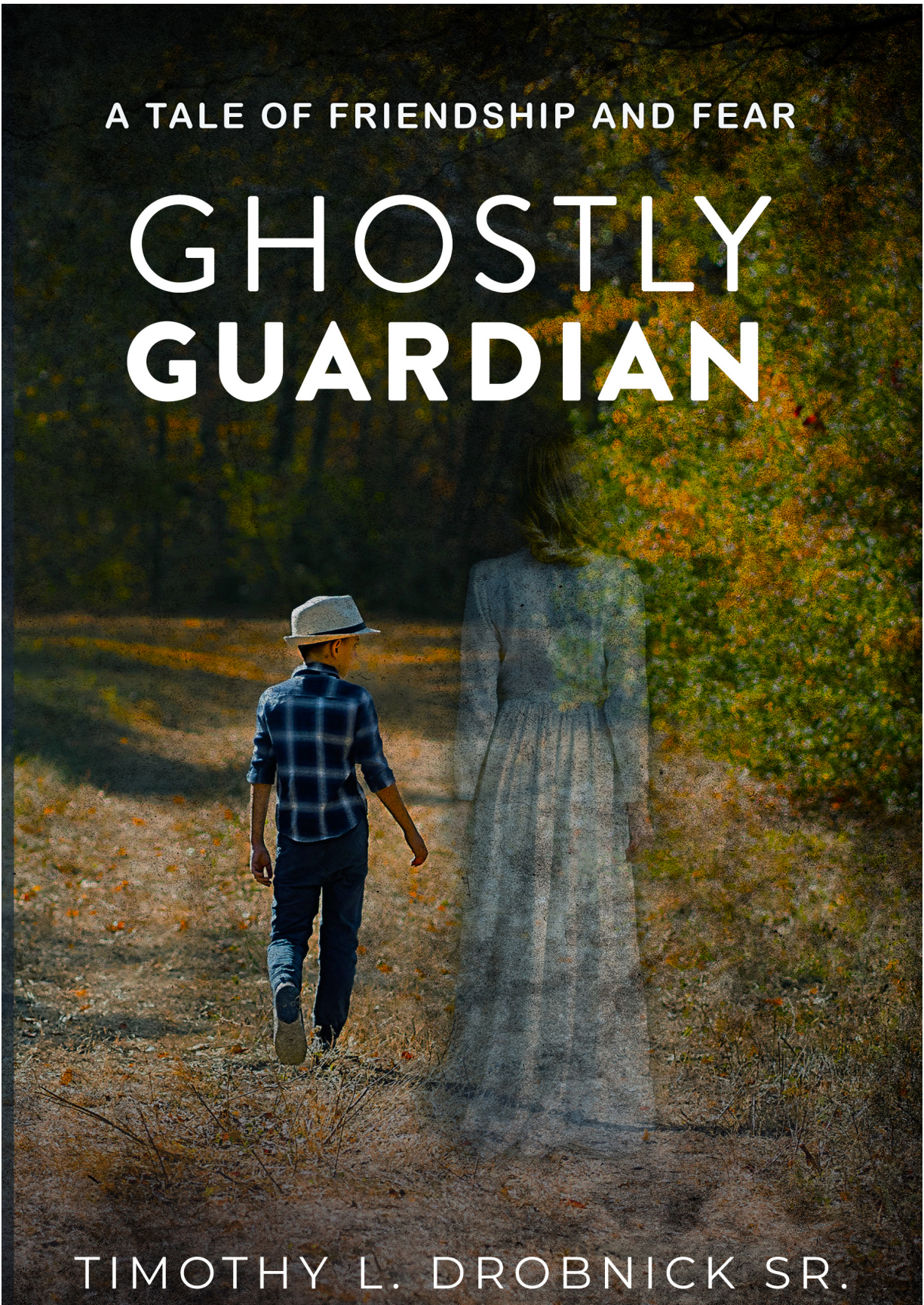
GHOSTLY GUARDIAN



TIMOTHY L. DROBNICK SR.

A TALE OF FRIENDSHIP AND FEAR

GHOSTLY GUARDIAN



TIMOTHY L. DROBNICK SR.



Ghostly Guardian

A Tale of Friendship and Fear

Timothy L Drobnick Sr

Copyright © 2023 by Timothy L Drobnick Sr

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

Contents

1.
Chapter 1

2.
Chapter 2

3.
Chapter 3

4.
Chapter 4

5.
Chapter 5

6.
Chapter 6

7.
Chapter 7

8.
Chapter 8

9.
Chapter 9

10.
Chapter 10

11.
Chapter 11

12.
Chapter 12

13.
Chapter 13

14.
Chapter 14

15.
Chapter 15

16.
Chapter 16

17.
Chapter 17

18.
Chapter 18

19.
Chapter 19

20.
Chapter 20

21.
Chapter 21

22.
Chapter 22

23.
Chapter 23

About the Author

Other Books by the Author

Please Leave Review

Chapter one

Sparks flew through the night air as Dad pounded the steel digging bar into the concrete driveway. The dull clanging sound reverberated around the yard and inside my chest. I stared in fascination as bright orange sparks arced from the metal bar, briefly lighting up Dad in the dark. He struck hard, grunting with effort, a sturdy figure in a red sweatshirt and blue jeans.

In this spectacle of flickering light and searing bits of concrete, the lady who can pass through walls shimmered at my side. Dressed in a dark blue gown, adorned with white frills around her neck and wrists, she seemed to melt into the night. The light of the sparks reflected in her dark eyes, adding an aura of mystery and intrigue to her ethereal form.

“Why is Dad attacking the driveway?” I asked the lady.

“He’s preparing for a fence,” she said. Her spectral form vibrated with each echo of the metal bar.

Curious, I took the question to its source. “Dad, why are you pounding on the driveway?” I held my hands to my mouth as I yelled

over the clang of the striking bar.

“I’m digging holes, Tim,” Dad said. He stood and paused for a moment. “We’re putting up a fence.”

“But why? The other side already has one.”

“That’s the neighbor’s fence. This one’s for us. We need to keep Sam and Marvella safe from the street.”

That was odd. No one ever worried about me wandering into traffic while living in that house.

“You should go back inside, Tim. Sparks can be dangerous,” Dad said.

“Mom told me to come outside. She was sick of me.”

Dad sighed and shook his head. “All right, stay. But keep a safe distance.”

Retreating slightly, I watched the spectacle, a mesmerizing combination of raw strength and dancing sparks. Sharing these moments with Dad were rare gems, especially since both my mother and I found solace in our separation.

By my side, the ghost lady was a silent guardian, her form radiant in the fiery display. Her soft grin was a comfort, a beacon in the nightly dread that haunted me. Demons lurked in every shadow, their ghastly faces peering through the window, thirsting for my fear. The lady who could phase through walls was my sole protection, but I was still worried for her safety.

As Dad finally called it a night after two grueling hours, the ringing echoes of his toil followed me inside the house. The smell of fresh sweat and concrete dust clung to him as he dismissed me. “Get to bed, Tim. First day of first grade tomorrow.”

With the ghost lady's hand on my shoulder, I climbed into my closet sized room that held my tiny bed and a lone window. The whispers of the night following us into my haunted room.

Chapter two

Nestled in my closet-sized bedroom, the floor beneath me nearly swallowed by the bed that I occupied, I waited. The solitary window seemed to pulse with an ominous darkness. The church's teachings whispered in my mind. Demons lurk in the night, they would say, watching through windows, seeking the innocent.

"Lady," I whispered, clutching my blanket tightly. "Are they out there? The demons?"

My lady ghost appeared at the foot of my bed, her dark eyes glowing with a gentle light in the dimness, her long dark hair flowing around her like an ethereal shroud. "Tim," she said in her soft voice, "There's nothing to fear. There's no such thing as those demons they talk about."

"But, the church says..." My voice wavered, eyes still fixed on the window.

"And what does your heart say, Tim?" she asked. She looked at me and held my gaze.

"I... I don't know, Sheena." My small fingers clutched tighter onto the blanket.

"It's all right," Sheena said. She moved to the edge of my bed. "Fear can cloud our hearts, Tim. It can make us believe in things that aren't there."

"But I'm scared, lady," I confessed, my eyes welling up. "What if the demons take us?"

My ghost reached out and cradled my hand, her touch a soothing whisper against my skin. "You're not alone, Tim. Remember, I'm always here with you. Besides, what makes you think a demon could stand a chance against me?"

Her words amused me a little, but I still wasn't entirely convinced. "Really? You're not scared?"

Her dark eyes held a steady gaze. "Not in the least."

Despite my lady ghost's assurance, I couldn't shake off the fear that had taken root in my heart, but her presence was comforting. "Promise you'll stay with me, lady?" I asked, pleading in my small voice.

"Every night," she promised, her voice a gentle lullaby. "Every single night, Tim. I'll be right here."

That night, as I drifted into sleep, I felt braver than the night before. My hand in hers, I closed my eyes to the possibility of demons and opened my heart to the reassurance of my spirit guide. Every night, she promised, and it was a promise I knew she'd keep.

As sleep wrapped me in its velvety tendrils, I slipped into a dream, my first venture into the spirit world. I stood in an expansive space, a spectral landscape stretching as far as the eye could see. People

milled about, shimmering, their bodies emitting colorful lights. Each had their own color. White, yellow, blue, or purples danced around each spirit like ethereal auroras.

“Where are we, Sheena?” I asked. My voice echoed in the limitless expanse.

“We’re in the spirit realm, Tim,” she said. She materialized beside me. She held my hand, her touch warmer, realer than ever.

“This is... amazing.” I gasped. I could see her clearly now, a woman of elegant grace, her beauty enhanced by the soft white glow she emitted.

“Indeed, it is,” she said. As I looked at her eyes, they seemed to be filled with an ancient knowledge. “Those lights you see they represent the energies of every soul, each one unique.”

“Why are they different colors?”

“The colors represent different things. Whites usually signify purity and innocence. Yellows, joy and creativity. Blues are for tranquility and wisdom, and purples often symbolize intuition and spiritual connection.”

As I stood there, taking in the sight, two other spirit figures appeared beside Sheena. Both were male, one emitting a bright yellow aura, the other a calm blue.

“Tim, meet Henry and Orion,” Sheena said.

“Nice to meet you, Tim,” said Orion. His voice was calm as the blue light surrounding him.

Henry smiled. “Hello, Tim. Welcome to our world.”

“Hi,” I responded, still awestruck. “This is... amazing.”

Sheena squeezed my hand. “Ready for a flight?”

I looked at her, my eyes wide with anticipation and excitement.
“We can fly?”

With a nod and a broad smile, Sheena pulled me gently, and we lifted off the ground, floating and flying amidst the multicolored souls. The cool rush of air felt exhilarating. As we soared above the spectral landscape, I felt a deep connection with the spirit world, a profound sense of belonging.

After what felt like hours, we descended back to the ground, the yellow and blue light figures waiting for us.

“That was... amazing,” I gasped, my heart pounding from the experience.

“Welcome home, Tim,” Henry said. He exuded a tremendous feeling of affection.

“Home?” I repeated, a sudden realization washing over me.

“Yes, Tim,” Sheena said. “This is a part of your home now, just as we are a part of your journey.”

That night, I woke up in my bed, a sense of peace enveloping me. The window wasn't scary anymore, and the darkness outside was less threatening.

“Thank you, Sheena,” I said, a soft whisper in the night.

“You're welcome, Tim. Remember, I'm always here for you.” Her voice was a soft echo in the room, a reassurance that lulled me back into a peaceful sleep.

Chapter three

The following morning, my new journey to Taylor Elementary began, just three blocks away from home. Under the ghost lady's watchful gaze, I traversed the familiar paths and entered the realm of first grade. My name-tag adorned a chair three rows from the front. My fingertips tingled as I ran them along the gouges and graffiti-like etchings of the desk's wooden surface.

"I wonder who made these scratches?" I asked my ghost lady. The etchings on the desk mesmerized me.

A shiny layer of wax now graced the tiled floor, its dullness replaced with a gleam that had the shoes squeaking with every twist. The aura of new beginnings was truly palpable.

Suddenly, our classroom door opened. "Hello class, my name is Miss Gibson," she announced, a warm and inviting figure, her golden hair complementing her radiant smile. She scribbled her name on the blackboard and turned to face us.

"Are you seeing this?" I asked my ghost lady. There was an ethereal glow that seemed to surround Miss Gibson.

The classroom air seemed to vibrate as she spoke. “This is my first day, too. I graduated from the teacher’s school last year. I am thrilled to be here with you.”

She wore a lovely spring dress with blue flowers that looked great on her. Her voice was calming, like a stream of water. A sense of wonder washed over me; Miss Gibson’s beauty rivaled my mother’s.

“Now children,” she continued, “take out your drawing pads. Draw something fun you did this summer.”

Drawing was my refuge. But as I poked the eraser of my pencil to my forehead, I struggled. Fun was a concept alien to me. The wasp sting? No. The car door smashing my thumb? Absolutely not. Although, the evolution of my bruised thumb into a shell-less snail was amusing.

“Maybe your visits to Uncle Ron and Lloyd?” My ghost lady suggested, as I continued to grapple with the task. The Three Stooges, their hamster... yes, that was it. The sketch took form under my guided hand.

Soon, Miss Gibson was upon me, her eyes studying my progress. “That’s quite an interesting drawing, Tim. Can you tell me about it?”

I gazed into her kind eyes. “That’s Curly from the Three Stooges, squeezing out of a water pipe. I watch it at my Grandma’s house with my uncles.”

She laughed. “Do you enjoy visiting your uncles?”

“Oh yes, very much,” I said. Perfume wafted from her as she moved.

The end of the day came all too soon. The classroom quickly emptied, all but one. I found myself rooted, hypnotized, by Miss

Gibson. Her occasional smile made me feel something unfamiliar, cherished even.

“Tim, shouldn’t you be heading home?” she asked, after a good thirty minutes.

“My mother doesn’t worry. She likes it when I’m not at home.” I said. It was the harsh truth that mother made clear.

It wasn’t long before my mother arrived. “Tim, why are you still here?” she asked, sounding more annoyed than concerned.

“I was just sitting here,” I said. I returned my gaze to Miss Gibson.

“Well, get your things. Let’s go home.”

The memory of Miss Gibson’s gentle smiles followed me home, a stark contrast to my mother’s frigid demeanor. How I wished for that warmth in my home. Mom seldom smiled, her moods vacillating between yelling, hitting, and resentful outbursts.

“Isn’t that a pretty lady?” My ghost lady’s voice broke my train of thought. “You liked her, didn’t you?”

“I think so,” I said. Her image remained with me. The smell of her perfume still lingered in my senses. “It felt... nice. She wasn’t like mom.”

“That’s good, Tim,” she said. “It’s okay to have people in your life who are not like your mom.” My ghost lady smiled as she looked into my eyes.

Chapter four

My nights were my solace, the time I could converse with my ghost lady as I lay in bed, gazing up at the weathered ceiling. She'd often describe an unseen world filled with vivid landscapes, majestic creatures, and beautiful souls. I found a strange sense of comfort in her tales, a momentary escape from reality.

"I wish Miss Gibson was my mom," I said. It was evening and her ethereal presence hovered above me. "She's beautiful."

She chuckled, a sound like the wind rustling through dry leaves. "Yes, Tim. I can sense your desire for a mother like her. Her kind and caring nature, the affectionate aura around her. She is indeed a beautiful soul."

Days turned into weeks, and my connection with Miss Gibson continued to flourish. She was a beacon of light in my otherwise gloomy world. I found myself drawn to her, seeking the warmth of her presence. Each passing day, her voice was the melody I yearned to hear, her smiles, the sight that warmed my heart.

“Tim, have you finished your assignment?” she would ask, bending down to my eye level.

“Yes, Miss Gibson.” I would hand her my book, my fingers brushing against hers. Each touch was a spark, a pleasant shiver that ran through my body.

Despite the comfort Miss Gibson brought, a somber reality lay in wait. I was a tormented soul, trapped between an icy, detached mother, and a ghost lady who was my only confidante. As the days wore on, the pain gnawed at me. I was a six-year-old forced to bear the weight of an adult’s world. It was an internal struggle only I could comprehend, a battle against emotions I was too young to understand.

“Mom doesn’t love me, does she?” I asked my ghost lady one quiet night, my voice barely a whisper, a question that had been nagging me for a while.

There was a silence before she spoke, her voice softer than usual. “Love is a complex thing, Tim. Your mother... she may have her way of showing it.”

“But it doesn’t feel like love,” I said. Bitterness tinged my tongue with the words.

“I know, Tim...” her voice trailed off into silence.

This was my world—my life—as confusing, painful, and haunting as it was. But amidst the pain, I found small pockets of joy, primarily through Miss Gibson, my beacon of hope, and my ghost lady, the unlikely friend in my solitude.

With every passing day, I wanted to stay after school with Miss Gibson and her warm smiles, even if it meant my mom being

unhappy when she picked me up later.

It was a good year for school. Miss Gibson often encouraged me to draw my own creations, something that wasn't common in school. I felt free when I drew and it gave me a sense of pride to have my work acknowledged by her.

Inevitably, summer arrived, heralding my impending change of schools. Mom and Dad announced they had rented a house in another part of town and were moving us there before the start of the new school year. I dreaded this idea, knowing that I would never see Miss Gibson again.

On my last day, she pulled me aside in an empty classroom. Tears threatened but didn't fall as she told me how proud she was of the progress I had made and how much she looked forward to hearing from me at my new school.

Before long, Mom was at the door of the classroom, ready to take us home for our last night on this side of town. As we said our goodbyes, Miss Gibson gave me a hug that lingered longer than usual; her gentle voice saying "come back soon" when it ended.

The walk home was silent as I stared at the trees, thinking about Miss Gibson's kind words and warm smiles that had become so familiar to me since school began; things lacking at home, which made her even more precious to me. The next morning we were moving to our new house; one without my beloved first grade teacher.

Chapter five

At thirteen years old, in the thick of the Wyoming winter, I came upon a curious discovery. People will pay more money for jobs they hate. The more they loathed a task, the more I profited. Something as mundane as shoveling snow off their driveways became my golden goose.

That glorious morning, I woke to find a fresh, white landscape, the town buried under three feet of snow. The radio issued warnings in a grave tone - schools were closed, frostbite, frozen lungs, even death lay in wait for the adventurous. Perfect conditions for a snow-shoveler.

“Look at this, Sheena.” I said. I looked out the window and saw about three feet of icy cover overnight. “It’s like the sky dumped money all over the place.”

I had learned that the name of my ghost lady was Sheena. It was nice to call her by name.

“Don’t you think, Sheena?” I said, brandishing my shovel like a knight’s sword. “Let’s brave the snowstorm, shall we?”

The rewards on such days were bountiful, sometimes surpassing \$20.00. With the minimum wage being less than \$2.20 per hour, this was no petty sum.

Wielding my shovel, I ventured from one house to another, working tirelessly till dusk, with brief respites at home to warm my near-frozen bones.

But not all were receptive to my services. The lady I called 'Prozac lady' yelled, "Go away!" each time I approached, shovel on my shoulder.

"Sheena, do you think it's the snow, or me she hates?" We watched her slam the door.

"It might be a little of both, Tim," Sheena said. Her voice echoed around me, as if spoken by the wind itself. "Sometimes people don't like to be reminded of the things they don't want to face."

Her answer left me in deep thought, my gaze fixed on the slamming door. It was an unusual perspective, one that made sense yet complicated things at the same time.

"Maybe you're right, Sheena." Even at thirteen, I was understanding the complexities of human nature, thanks to her.

I continued on my shoveling quest, the icy wind whipping at my face, my breath condensing in the freezing air. By late afternoon, fatigue set in, my muscles ached, and I was looking forward to the warmth of home. But one last house beckoned to me from the end of the street.

As I trudged through the snow, Sheena's presence by my side was my only comfort. The house in question was a monstrosity, old and

derelict, its paint peeling off, the windows boarded. It stood eerily silent amidst the white landscape, a relic from a bygone era.

“I don’t know about this one, Sheena,” I said. My heart skipped a beat.

Chapter six

“**W**hat are you scared of, Tim?” Sheena said. Her voice was clear and melodious. She spoke like that when she wanted to soothe me.

“I don’t know, it just doesn’t feel right. The house gives me the creeps.”

“We’ve been through much worse, haven’t we? Besides, it’s just an old, neglected house.”

Encouraged by her words, I steeled myself and approached the front gate. I rang the doorbell, and almost immediately, the door creaked open, revealing an old man. His eyes were pale, almost translucent, and he had an unsteady gait. He studied me for a moment and then nodded, agreeing to my services.

“I’ll be watching from the window, lad. Do a good job,” he said. His voice was frail, and he handed me a five-dollar bill upfront.

As I started shoveling, I could feel his gaze from the window, and an unsettling feeling washed over me. It was as if the house and its

inhabitant carried an eerie aura, a sense of dread that I couldn't quite shake off.

"Sheena, I have a bad feeling about this." I said. I averted my eyes away from the house while I spoke to her.

"I'm here, Tim, you're not alone."

"Thanks, Sheena." I returned my focus to the task at hand. The eerie feeling lingered, but Sheena's presence brought comfort.

I could feel my sides and chest straining as I pushed the heavy snow off the walkway. My breath clouded before me, my muscles screamed, yet I pressed on. The old man continued watching from the window. His unwavering gaze was unsettling, but I reminded myself it was just an old man in an old house.

By the time I finished, darkness had fallen. The house cast ominous shadows that danced in the dim twilight. My heart pounded as I approached the door to collect the rest of my pay.

The door creaked open before I could knock, making me jump. "Done so soon, boy?" The old man asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Yes, sir." I nodded and turned my foot on the step.

He handed me another five-dollar bill. "Good job. Maybe I'll call on you again, boy."

I thanked him and turned to leave, my senses overwhelmed by the desire to get as far away from that house as possible.

As I walked away, I could still feel his gaze on my back, like icy fingers crawling up my spine. "Sheena, I never want to go back there." I looked at the frost gathered on my mittens. "Never." We

walked toward home, the images of the old house and the old man embedded in my mind.

“Tim, sometimes the things that scare us the most are the ones that help us grow the strongest,” Sheena whispered, her voice wrapping around me like a warm blanket. “But I understand your fear.”

Back at home, I couldn’t shake off the eerie feeling. The old man’s pale eyes seemed etched onto the insides of my eyelids. Each time I closed my eyes, his image surfaced, haunting me. Sheena was there, though, offering words of comfort, telling me stories to distract my mind.

In the following days, I found myself inexplicably drawn to that house. It was as if something was calling me to return. After another heavy snowfall, and despite my fears, I stood in front of the house, shovel in hand, ready to dig deeper into the mysteries it held.

Chapter seven

This time, as I approached the door, the old man didn't seem surprised. He merely smiled, handed me another five-dollar bill, and told me to do a good job. He retreated inside, leaving the door ajar. I couldn't help but notice the warm light spilling out onto the snow.

Once again, as I shoveled, I could feel his eyes on me, but there was an added sense of familiarity. It was as if the old man and his house were becoming part of my world, intermingling with my story.

"Look at this, Sheena," I said. I threw a shovel full of snow to the side. "It's not as scary as it was the first time. Maybe you were right."

"About what, Tim?" Sheena asked. Her voice echoed around me, as if whispering from the falling snowflakes.

"About things that scare us the most, helping us grow the strongest. This old man, his house... they don't scare me as much anymore."

Sheena was silent, but I could sense her approval, her encouragement. It was a strange comfort, having a spirit guide like

her by my side. It made everything less daunting, less overwhelming. As I kept shoveling, the wind blew a gust of icy air my way, causing me to flinch. The old man, behind his window, was watching me.

By the time I was done, the streetlights had come on, casting long shadows across the snow. As I made my way to the door, the old man was already there, waiting for me with another five-dollar bill.

“You did well, boy.” He said, his voice less frail than the previous time. He stared at me for a moment before speaking again. “Would you like to come in for a moment, warm yourself up?”

Despite my initial surprise, I felt a sense of trust toward the old man. I nodded and followed him inside. The interior was just as I had imagined - full of old, worn-out furniture covered in dust. It was an entirely different world from the icy outdoors.

In the basement, he showed me a room filled with furniture that looked different - newer, more modern. “Used to be my son’s,” he said, his voice tinged with sadness. He told me about his son’s life, his battle with cancer, and his untimely death.

I felt a strange connection with the old man, a sudden understanding. He wasn’t just an old man in a creepy house. He was a father, mourning his son, living in the shell of his past. And I, a thirteen-year-old boy shoveling his snow, reminded him of his son.

“Your son...he sounds like he was a great person,” I said, tears welling up in my eyes.

“He was.” The old man gave me a soft smile. “And so are you, Tim.”

As I left the house that night, the moon illuminating the snow-covered ground; I felt different. I wasn’t afraid anymore. I didn’t just

see an old, creepy house, but a house that held memories of a father and his son.

“Sheena, I think I understand now.” I said, my voice barely audible. “I faced my fear and found empathy. The old man...he’s just like any of us.”

Sheena didn’t respond, but her silence was comforting. It was her way of letting me know she was listening. She was there. As I walked home that night, a sense of peace washed over me. I was proud of myself for facing my fear, and I knew, somehow, that this was only the beginning.

With the thawing of the seemingly endless winter, the lawns emerged again. “It’s a different kind of peace, Sheena, don’t you think?” I said. “Different from the peace of the town covered in snow.” It was a sunny afternoon, and I was lying on our lawn, the sweet scent of fresh grass filling the air. “Each season, with its own beauty.”

Chapter eight

My lifelong friend, a fellow churchgoer born only two weeks after me, was making his mark in a rich part of town. He was mowing lawns, making a small fortune for a kid our age. His success stirred in me a desire to try it.

We had an antiquated lawn mower tucked away in our shed. I approached my father for permission to use it. With his approval, I was all set to launch my venture.

This lawn mower was a beast from a bygone era. You had to wrap a knotted rope around the flywheel and pull with all your might, like wrestling a monstrous metal bull. Its kickback threatened to dislocate your arm each time. With no muffler, it roared like a furious dragon, turning heads as I pushed it down our quiet suburban street.

Sheena, her dark eyes gleaming with a mix of amusement and concern, trailed silently behind me.

Spotting my first potential client - a yard overgrown with weeds, dotted with decorations, bushes, bird baths, stones - I offered my services. They agreed to pay \$1.25.

Navigating the cluttered yard was like a twisted treasure hunt. I stopped many times to pick up trinkets lost in the grass. After five grueling hours, my first job was done.

The owner, however, was less than pleased. Despite knowing my work was up to standard, having occasionally mowed my father's lawn, they refused to pay. The chaotic state of their yard was beyond the help of a mere mowing.

Rick, my friend from church, listened as I narrated my misadventure the following week. He offered me a pearl of wisdom. "I only work on houses with neatly trimmed lawns. They pay about \$5 for a two-hour job."

The reasoning was sound. After all, why fight a battle with a messy lawn when you can simply tend to ones already loved?

Sheena nodded, seconding Rick's advice.

Armed with this newfound strategy, I began seeking neatly maintained yards. Success found me more often, although I couldn't command the prices Rick could, because of the economic divide of our town. I charged between \$2.00 to \$2.50 for a yard, taking about 1 to 2 hours of work. Limited by the heavy, brutish mower, I only sought houses within a couple of blocks from home. Each push of the beastly machine resonated with the silent encouragement of my spectral companion.

Although I was making a fair amount for a kid my size, there were challenges to overcome. Being just four feet tall and quite weak, every yard was a battle. My slight frame strained with the effort of guiding the monstrosity that was our lawnmower through even the neatest of lawns.

“Are you sure about this, Tim?” the ghost lady asked. She looked at me with worry clear in her dark eyes.

“I’ve got to do this.” I tried to mask the fatigue in my voice. “I want to earn money.”

Every time I pushed the beastly machine across a yard, my arms would shake and my legs would feel like they were turning to jelly. Yet, I was stubborn. I refused to give up. No matter how difficult the task was, I pushed through.

“Only one more, Tim,” Sheena’s voice coaxed me. “One more for the day.”

Encouraged by Sheena, I trudged on. I walked up to a house with a tidy lawn and rang the doorbell.

“No need, son,” the lady at the door said. She didn’t even look at me.

Undeterred, I moved on to the next house. And then the next. And the one after that. I knocked on 20 doors, only one of which finally agreed to hire me.

“Okay, young man,” a kind elderly woman smiled at me. “But it looks like you could use a break. Come inside. I’ll make you some lemonade.”

After the delicious lemonade and a brief rest, I still felt exhausted, with sweat trickling down my back and my hands blistered. I felt ready to drop, but I finished my last job for the day under the soft glow of the setting sun. Sheena, her ethereal form glowing faintly in the twilight, looked at me with a mix of admiration and concern.

“Promise me you’ll take care of yourself, Tim,” she whispered.

“I promise, Sheena,” I said. I had a sense of pride, of having earned my keep. Mom and Dad always needed help with money. I fell asleep that night with the roar of the lawnmower still in my ears, and the ghostly comfort of Sheena in my heart.

Chapter nine

Just as I was feeling the weight of my undertaking, my father presented me with a miracle: a gleaming new Jacobson's self-propelled lawn mower, equipped with an attachable grass catcher. A sense of awe filled me as he granted me permission to use it. In that moment, the world was brighter.

Empowered by this newfound efficiency, I expanded my venture beyond the immediate neighborhood. But what awaited me was an unexpected nemesis.

Three blocks from home, doors closed when a new name was mentioned. Stevie. Doors that were once open to opportunities were now locked shut. I asked the surrounding air, "Who is this Stevie?"

Sheena was silent like the wind. Stevie was a shadow, unseen but felt. His presence was palpable in every closed door. I hadn't encountered this sort of competition when selling greeting cards, nor with any other venture.

Undeterred, I continued my door-to-door efforts, snagging an odd job here and there. Whenever I stumbled upon a "Stevie customer," I

proposed an offer - give me a chance if Stevie failed them.

This stirred a new sense of determination in me. I had to prove myself superior, to prevent my own customers from falling into Stevie's hands.

As time passed, I noticed something. None of the Stevie customers lived within two blocks of my house. It was as if he had an invisible boundary. This ignited a fierce, competitive spirit within me. Stevie's contentment with a few yards contrasted with my ambition to be the Lawn King.

Guided by Sheena, her dark eyes gleaming with a cryptic satisfaction, I visited every one of Stevie's customers weekly, asking about him. They reported he was doing just fine. Until, one day, five weeks later, Stevie was nowhere to be found.

I seized the opportunity, offering to mow their neglected lawns. Some persevered in waiting for Stevie, while others did not. They agreed to let me mow, just once, with the stipulation that if Stevie returned the following week, they'd revert to his services.

Stevie did return, and the residents kept their word. But I wasn't one to retreat easily. With my guide beside me, I persisted in visiting and knocking on doors, ready to help Stevie at any moment.

Occasionally, Stevie would miss a job. I got those jobs permanently.

Despite securing some jobs from Stevie, the battle was far from over. Stevie's customers liked him, so when he didn't show up for the week's mow, his customers would wait. But I noticed he was inconsistent. Sometimes, he'd be a day late. Sometimes, two. So, I

adopted a strategy. I would follow up with Stevie's customers the day he was supposed to mow their lawns.

"I noticed Stevie hasn't mowed your lawn yet," I'd say when I noticed an unmowed yard, my gaze steadfast.

"Ah, he'll be by tomorrow, Tim," would come the response, almost always.

But tomorrow would turn into the day after, and the day after that. Sometimes Stevie showed, sometimes he didn't. But I was always there, ready.

"Stevie's late again," I would remind them. My persistence was wearing them down.

One particular day, a gentleman named Mr. Jackson looked at me and sighed. "Al right, Tim. Go ahead. Stevie's been late three times this month."

I beamed at him. "Thank you, sir."

It was hard work, showing up at each of Stevie's customers every day, waiting for a chance. But I was determined. One by one, I saw doors opening. Stevie was late again and again. Each late day meant a new customer for me. The late days added up.

"Stevie's not been the same," Mrs. Howard sighed one day. "You can mow our lawn, Tim."

By the end of the month, I had five of Stevie's former customers permanently in my roster. I felt a sense of accomplishment, a thrill at having won these hard-earned victories.

Sheena watched, her ethereal form barely visible in the afternoon light, a smile playing on her lips. "Well done, Tim," she said.

I felt my heart swell with pride. “We did it, Sheena,” I grinned, “We did it.”

With Sheena by my side, I was ready for whatever came next. After all, I was the Lawn King. And no one, not even Stevie, could take that away from me.

Chapter ten

It was the sweltering summer of '73. I was fourteen years old. The chaotic noise at our front door shattered the tranquility of the afternoon, and my mother's excited squeals sent a jolt of curiosity about me. Sheena, her raven hair cascading around her face, gazed out the window with a knowing look in her dark eyes.

Pushing my way past the threshold, a sight to behold awaited me. There was a truck, filled beyond capacity with all sorts of stuff—clothes, boxes, furniture. The livestock walls, made of weather-beaten wood, leaned precariously from the truck's rusted bed, threatening to spill its chaotic content onto our peaceful street.

And then, like a clown car at a circus, an eccentric assortment of people emerged from this overloaded vehicle. The sight was straight out of the "Beverly Hillbillies" television show. Like an invading horde, they approached our home, led by an imposing woman clutching an infant and a short man with a misshapen head, his face split by a wide grin. Children, ranging in age from 10 to 15, swarmed behind them.

Their sudden appearance was a shock to my system, and I turned to my mother, bewildered. However, she seemed to recognize them. The short man rushed forward, enveloping my mother in a hug. Unfamiliar faces instantly overran the house and began exploring every nook and cranny of our home.

“Laramie,” my mother introduced him to me, her eyes twinkling, “is my first cousin.”

I was taken aback. I already had 14 first cousins, and now, an additional seven had surfaced! The discovery did little to elevate my mood, especially as my room seemed to be the most coveted territory among the young invaders.

The newfound cousins were an odd bunch, each distinctive in their own way. Chrissy, the infant, could already crawl, leaving a scent trail across the house thanks to her perpetually soiled diapers. Jimmy, 10, was a bit of a brute, eager to engage in fights, and with him being larger than my 14-year-old self, I found it best to maintain a safe distance. Joannie, 11, reminded me of a ferret, her keen interest in rummaging through every corner. And there was Peggy, the oldest, who found a corner, opened a book and ignored the world around her.

As summer wore on, I understood my new cousins better. Chrissy, still confined to crawling, had an insatiable curiosity. I noticed she’d follow me around the house, her doe eyes wide with interest, her tiny fingers reaching out toward me. When I sat to rest, she’d crawl up and sit by my side, making gurgling sounds of delight. There was a peculiar sweetness in her innocence, yet the occasional aroma of soiled diapers was hard to ignore.

Jimmy was a brute and a bully. Built like a miniature football player, he found entertainment in tormenting smaller boys. He would often pin me down or catch me in a headlock until I gasped for breath. His boisterous laughter echoed through the house as I struggled to escape his relentless torment. I learned quickly to keep my distance and keep a watchful eye on him.

Joannie was an odd one. Her obsession with finding hidden treasures in other people's belongings was both irritating and mystifying. Her favorite pastime was turning the house upside down, leaving a trail of disarray in her wake. It wasn't uncommon to find your things displaced or missing entirely. Even Sheena couldn't stop her. There was something unsettling about her, the way her eyes gleamed as she unearthed a hidden object or trinket, a look that hinted at a mischief that ran deeper than just a childish antic.

And then there was Peggy. A lanky, spectacled 15-year-old, always buried in books, oblivious to the surrounding chaos. It was as though she lived in her own world, a world defined by the pages she turned. I could see her in the corner of our living room, hunched over a novel, completely lost. Sometimes she would look up and catch my gaze, her eyes holding a deep, quiet lunacy, a stark contrast to her younger siblings' frivolous nature.

And finally, Millie, a 14-year-old with a mane of golden hair and a mesmerizing laugh, acted as the dutiful elder sister. She took on many roles for her family over the years, such as babysitter, cleaner, and peacekeeper, but they didn't appreciate her efforts. Millie and I bonded over these chaotic times.

Millie was different. She was quiet, observant, and thoughtful, much like me. And unlike her siblings, she held a natural calm that soothed the chaos within their crowded household. Our bond formed almost instantly, like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fitting perfectly together.

“Hey, Tim,” Millie said. We were sitting on the front porch, watching the sunset. “Do you ever feel you’re meant for something bigger?”

I looked at her, intrigued by her solemnity. “I suppose,” I said, “Like a tiny cog in a massive clockwork.”

She laughed, her eyes glinting with the last vestiges of the setting sun. “Exactly. Like we’re a part of something we can’t see yet.”

Over time, our conversations drifted from the mundane, exploring deeper realms of thought. We shared our fears, our dreams, and our mutual desire to break free from the chains of our circumstances. These intimate conversations sowed the seeds of an unspoken understanding, a deep bond that tied us together.

She quickly became my confidante, the one person I could rely on for comfort and counsel. Frequently, when I felt overwhelmed by the craziness that had descended upon my home, Millie would sense my distress. She would lead me away, finding solace in each other’s company.

“Tim,” she said one night, her eyes reflecting the twinkling stars above, “Promise me you won’t let this chaos change you.”

Her words etched themselves into my heart, solidifying our bond. “I promise, Millie. And you too.” We stood together under the inky expanse of the night sky.

While our circumstances were not ideal, our friendship was an oasis in the desert. The more time I spent with Millie, the more I saw in her a kindred spirit, a companion, a rock in the storm that my life had become. Despite the unending chaos, Millie and I remained constants in each other's lives. We found solace in our shared experiences, learning to navigate the unpredictable terrain of our shared familial journey.

Chapter eleven

Peggy, consumed by her books, navigated the world from the safety of their pages, oblivious to the surrounding pandemonium. Sheena, her dark eyes reflecting a strange sorrow, often observed Peggy with a mix of curiosity and concern.

“Peggy never lends a hand, does she?” She remarked once, her voice echoing softly in my head. I shrugged, mirroring her sentiment. It was Millie who endured it all while Peggy seemed to remain deliberately detached.

Perhaps, I thought, if Millie followed Peggy’s lead, their parents would step up.

Mary, their mother, appeared to be the picture of kindness and generosity. Yet, witnessing Millie’s treatment, I found it hard to reconcile that image. With a physique larger than any woman I’d ever seen, Mary was a paradox of gentleness and imposition.

Laramie, the jovial patriarch with a noticeably pointed head, was the heart of their circus. He carried an aura of light-heartedness that belied his capricious nature. His birth story, a tale of a botched home

delivery that resulted in his unusually shaped head, added to the strangeness of his character.

“Laramie has the soul of a jester,” Sheena mused. Indeed, he was a man of many tales and experiences, yet none of them seemed to hold his interest for long. From job to job he’d hop, his gambling addiction and womanizing causing tremendous stress on his family.

Yet, beneath the erratic exterior, Laramie harbored an entrepreneurial flair. His lack of discipline, however, held him back. “A potential squandered,” Sheena said.

Two weeks into their stay, Laramie pulled his family out of the doldrums. He secured contracts for janitorial work around town and found a large house that doubled as an office. Before we knew it, Laramie’s family was living a more prosperous life than ours.

I marveled at his swift turnaround, possibly the seed of my interest in janitorial work. Laramie had proven that with the right amount of discipline and ambition, anyone could turn their fortunes around. It was inspiring.

“Laramie’s Janitorial Services” was a simple name, an unassuming moniker for the business that would soon take the town by storm. I remember Laramie announcing his grand plan one afternoon, his eyes twinkling with excitement, a stark contrast to his usual idle merriment.

“Tim, my boy,” he’d said, gripping my shoulder firmly, “we’re going to make something of ourselves. You’ll see.” There was a fire in his voice that I hadn’t seen before. He sounded certain, focused, a marked deviation from the transient odd-jobs man we’d known.

The once hapless family plunged into the rhythm of Laramie's newfound ambition. Under Laramie's guidance, Jimmy turned from the house brute to a diligent assistant, aiding in the heavy lifting. Even Joannie, with her incessant curiosity, found a role, being put in charge of inventory management. Mary, with her warm and inviting personality, handled the clientele, building relationships and securing new contracts.

I watched with awe as Laramie expertly juggled the chaos of his home life with the demands of his burgeoning enterprise. His once scattered focus had condensed into a laser-beam intent on the success of his janitorial company. There was a method to his madness, an orderly conduct amidst the unruly shenanigans. As if by magic, Laramie had turned his motley crew into a functional, contributing workforce.

"See Tim," Laramie said one day as we surveyed his bustling operation. "We've got more than we ever had before, and we're doing honest work. It's all about making the most of what you've got." His voice held a note of pride that I had never heard before.

It was an underdog story coming to life before my eyes. From their disarrayed arrival to their resilient ascent, Laramie's family had defied the odds, guided by the head of the family, who were finally living up to his potential. It wasn't a conventional path to success, but in its unorthodox nature lay its charm. A charm that made me reconsider my perception of Laramie, a man who turned chaos into a symphony.

Laramie's remarkable transformation from a rudderless gambler to an accomplished entrepreneur had inspired all of us. But the idyllic

rise of his business was not without its flaws. It wasn't long before Laramie's past vices caught up with him, casting a shadow over his newfound success.

Chapter twelve

I had noticed a blonde woman, Deirdre, at the office. Initially just another employee, she soon became a constant presence at Laramie's side. With a fiery charisma and a bewitching beauty, Deirdre had quickly made her way from secretary to confidante, then to something more intimate.

"Isn't it inappropriate?" I had asked Millie once, voicing my concern over Laramie's relationship with Deirdre. She cast her eyes down, a flash of sadness passing over her face.

"Let's hope it's just a passing fancy," she said. But the tremble in her voice spoke of her worry.

One evening, Laramie announced he was going on a business trip to Las Vegas. He was taking Deirdre with him, under the pretense of a potential contract. Mary's face fell, and the usually bustling household fell silent. Yet nobody voiced the unspoken dread we all felt.

Days turned into weeks. Laramie and Deirdre's absence stretched longer than expected. Finally, a letter arrived from Vegas. It was from

Laramie, a scrawled apology that spoke of a terrible gambling loss and his inability to return home.

Shock washed over the family. His entrepreneurial spirit, the effort to build something from nothing, the promises of stability and prosperity, everything came crashing down. Laramie had lost all his earnings in Vegas. Worse still, he had left his family high and dry.

Mary crumbled, her tears falling like the shattering pieces of her heart. The kids, once so full of life, were quiet, their faces reflecting their shared disillusionment. Even Peggy, usually lost in her books, wore a look of desolation.

Despite his past antics, none of us had imagined Laramie could abandon his family, let alone lead them down a path of ruin. But his lust for gambling and his affair with Deirdre had proven to be the family's undoing. The fallout was a harsh lesson in trust, betrayal, and the inevitable consequences of unchecked desires.

As the dust settled, I saw Millie shoulder the weight of her broken family. She filled in the void left by Laramie, protecting her mother and siblings from the cruel hand of fate. And amidst the catastrophe, I found my respect for her deep, a solitary beacon of strength in a sea of despair.

Chapter thirteen

The weeks followed, peppered with my sporadic visits to Millie, their tumultuous household still reeling from Laramie's misadventures.

"I sense much pain here, Tim," Sheena said. Her dark eyes swam with empathy.

After three painful months, Laramie made a comeback. His return was as sudden and unexpected as his departure. One evening, his battered old truck pulled into the driveway. The man who emerged was a shadow of the Laramie we had known. Gone was his jovial demeanor and carefree charm, replaced by a defeated slump in his shoulders and a haunted look in his eyes.

"I'm sorry," was all he said to Mary, his voice devoid of its usual gusto.

His apology seemed to hang in the air, a pitiful attempt at atonement for his betrayal. But Mary, her heart too kind for her own good, accepted him back without a word of reproof.

In the following days, Laramie was a man possessed. In a frantic and erratic manner, he hauled box after box out of their home. He revealed he was moving them all to a smaller town in Montana. He discussed a new job offer for a fresh start, but I noticed desperation in his eyes.

Millie was the most affected by the sudden decision. “Why do we have to leave?” she cried one evening when I found her sitting on the porch steps, her eyes welled up with tears.

“I don’t know, Millie,” I said, sitting down next to her, my heart aching for her. “But we’ll get through this. You’re stronger than you know.”

The day they left was one of the most difficult days of my life. Watching the chaos of their departure, their house, now eerily quiet and empty, was a punch in the gut. I watched as Millie climbed into the truck, her golden hair catching the morning sunlight. She gave me a brave smile, her blue eyes shining with unshed tears.

As the truck roared to life and began its journey, my heart sunk. The end of that summer brought the end of an era, one marked by chaos, disruption, but also friendship, resilience, and an unforgettable bond.

As the dust of their departure settled, my father inherited two of Laramie’s cleaning contracts. I accompanied him in his new venture, which felt like a calm in the midst of Laramie's chaos. The distinct aroma of the barbershops became the backdrop of my evenings - a peculiar blend of smoke, hair crème, aftershave, and freshly cut hair.

My spectral guide watched as my father and I fell into a rhythm, her eyes reflecting the warm glow of our routine. I would handle the

finer tasks - emptying ashtrays, straightening magazines, dusting, and tending to mirrors, while my father, a man of sturdy hands, tackled the heavier tasks like sweeping and mopping.

The trust placed in us by the barbershop owners, as evidenced by the keys entrusted to my father, was reward enough for my unpaid labor. Plus, those post-work hot chocolate sessions at the Sheridan Inn while my father enjoyed his coffee were moments I cherished.

My father's integrity was unwavering, even when we occasionally stumbled upon forgotten money. Any lost dime was placed on the counter and any unlocked cash register immediately reported. His actions spoke volumes, his character a stark contrast to Laramie's reckless spirit.

One of our contracted barbershops neighbored a bar frequented by residents of the Crow reservation. Their revelries, fueled by the government funds that arrived at the start of every month, would often culminate in unconscious bodies sprawled out in the back alley. Having to step over these men to reach the trash cans was an unnerving experience, my spectral guide's warm grip on my shoulder offering a welcome comfort.

Over the years, I watched these scenes play out until they eventually dwindled, the reason for their cessation unknown to me. The memory of the snorts from startled drunk men awakening as I tried to navigate the alley still sends chills down my spine.

The Mission barbershop was a different story. Rather than dealing with inebriated residents of the Crow reservation, we had cowboys and local brawls to contend with, their late-night fistfights vibrating through the shared wall with the barbershop.

I often wondered why Laramie, with all his entrepreneurial spirit, had failed to maintain his contracts. My father, in contrast, could keep the contracts for years with relative ease. A few contracts and unfulfilled potential were all that remained of Laramie's once successful career as a tycoon.

“It wasn’t lack of opportunity,” Sheena whispered, her gaze far away. “It was a lack of discipline.” The echo of Laramie’s choices seemed to reverberate through our lives long after he was gone.

Chapter fourteen

One day I saw my father talking to two men through our wooden screen front door.

“Who are those men, Tim?” Sheena asked. Her voice whispered like the wind.

“They’re barbers from the White Barbershop, one Dad and I clean every night,” I said. My eyes were glued to the scene unfolding outside.

As the conversation continued, I noticed my father’s patience waning. His clenched fists and tensed jaw signaled his frustration. Without another word, he turned on his heel and stormed back into the house, leaving the two barbers standing awkwardly on the pavement.

“I told them to shove it,” my father muttered to my mother in the kitchen, his voice laced with irritation. I slipped into the kitchen, curiosity getting the better of me. The barbers, it seemed, had accused me of stealing a \$50 bill. I felt a chill run down my spine. My

father's steadfast belief in my innocence had led him to sever our connection with the barbershop.

The accusations were painful because they could harm our family's honesty and money. The guilt that washed over me was suffocating, even though I knew I was innocent.

The following day, I found myself in the same position on the couch. The two barbers returned, their demeanors a stark contrast to the previous day's accusatory stance. My father went out to meet them, their pleading voices just audible through the open door.

"They found the \$50 bill," my father relayed to me after their departure, a bitter triumph tingeing his voice. "They've apologized, Tim, and they want us back."

The hope that flickered in my chest was quickly extinguished when he added, "But we're not going back. They accused you, and that's something I won't forgive."

My spectral guide laid a comforting hand on my shoulder, her dark eyes gleaming with pride. "Your father is a man of honor, Tim. Remember this."

Those two barbers didn't stop there. For the next couple of weeks, they'd make regular appearances at our door. Each time their insistence growing, their pleas ringing hollow to my father's ears. Their attitudes had changed from that initial confrontation, and it was clear their desperation was mounting. Their apologies echoed again and again, promises to rectify the situation and assurances that it wouldn't happen again.

"Dad, do they want us to go back to the shop?" I asked. It was evening and we sat on our porch, the setting sun casting a warm

glow over our quiet street.

My father, his face etched with lines of thought, turned to me, “Yes, Tim, they want us back. They said they’ve been having a hard time finding reliable help.”

“And what do you want?” I asked. The thought of returning to that barbershop left a sour taste in my mouth.

“They’ve slandered us, Tim,” he said. His voice was slow and quiet. “They doubted our integrity. I can’t go back to that.”

I looked at my father, his gaze fixed on the setting sun, his jaw set in determination. I then closed my eyes and took a deep breath. “We don’t owe them anything, Dad. We are better off without them.”

My father gave me a curt nod, a thin smile gracing his lips. The truth in my words resonated with him. It was a hard choice to make, letting go of a reliable income source. But sometimes, pride and dignity are worth far more than any amount of money. We weathered those weeks, turning away their pleas, their promises, their apologies.

In the end, they finally stopped coming. The crisp fall air replaced the summer heat, a metaphorical cleansing of our past. I found work as a shoe-shine boy to continue helping the family. Dad took on any overtime his job would offer. It was difficult, but we continued on.

And I remembered. I recalled the sacrifices my father made for the sake of integrity, the respect he demanded for his family, and the unwavering honesty he always expected. He taught me through his words and actions that honor was everything, and it was a lesson I would carry with me for the rest of my life.

Every time I passed by the White Barbershop in the days that followed, the scent of shaving cream and aftershave wafted through the open door, a bittersweet reminder of the past. I would stop for a moment, watching the barbers clip hair and chat away. They'd greet me, and I would respond with a nod before continuing on my way, leaving the echoes of an invaluable lesson in honor behind me.

Chapter fifteen

Sheridan, Wyoming, produced an eccentric and creative character. His name was Stewart Johnson, or Stew, as most fondly called him. A commercial artist on the cusp of retirement, his etchings graced the Sheridan Newspaper, giving life to its static pages. I met Stew when I was fifteen years old.

“Tim,” Sheena said. She leaned over to me with her captivating dark eyes and a waterfall of long black hair. “He leaves a profound imprint not just on paper, but on souls.”

The gateway into Stew’s world was an initiation into the realm of art, an event catalyzed by my father in my seventh-grade year. Under the guise of a work-study project, he introduced me to Stew’s enchanted studio, a place I yearned to call my workspace.

“It’s not just a studio, Tim,” Sheena warned. “It’s a cauldron where dreams and nightmares intertwine.”

That meeting ignited an ambition in me. I aspired to live the artist’s life, shaping narratives with strokes of my brush. To me, Stew had the ideal existence, wrapped in the sublime cocoon of creativity.

During that visit, I soaked up Stew's artistry, how he spun visual tales from mere notions, how he brought an advertisement to life. His studio exuded the heady smell of his ever-smoldering cigar, intertwined with the aged aroma of paint and solitude.

Over time, Stew transitioned from being my mentor to a cherished friend. His retirement only strengthened our bond, yet it bore a peculiar change. Stew no longer entertained talks of commerce or everyday mundanity. His conversations revolved around religion, philosophy, and the advancement of humanity.

"An intriguing shift," Sheena said. Her dark eyes shimmered with curiosity.

Stew's strict code extended to the point of becoming a social litmus test. Should a discussion veer off his approved topics, he wouldn't hesitate to storm out. His intensity was as admirable as it was unnerving.

Always brimming with ideas, Stew once proposed a road to arch over the town's railroad crossing. Despite the financial impracticality of our humble town, he defended his cause fiercely, even earning a feature in the Sheridan Press. Yet, his dream remained a sketch on paper.

The renovation and rebranding of the Mission Bar into the Oasis stirred a tempest within Stew, his world rattled by the change. He saw the transformation as an unforgivable desecration and waged a creative war against it.

His campaign was elaborate. He bombarded the newspaper with protest letters, plastered satirical drawings over the Oasis, and actively discouraged its patrons. Sheena watched him with a mixture

of bewilderment and admiration, saying, “Stew is a cyclone, but even cyclones carry rain.”

One day, in a moment that sent chills down my spine, Stew entrusted me with his cherished drawing tools. When I questioned his need for them, he answered with an eerie calm, “From now on, I’m only interested in religion and cosmic force.” It was strange, even for Stew, and left me on edge.

Stew’s campaign against the Oasis was about to reach a crescendo. He wanted to make sure everyone in Sheridan knew how much the change to the Mission Bar affected him.

“Tim, he’s stirring up a storm, isn’t he?” Sheena said. I heard her sigh. We were in Stew’s studio, an erstwhile sanctuary now turned command center.

“Stew, you can’t keep doing this,” I said, watching as he drew up another caricature of the Oasis, the lines heavy with disdain. “What’s so wrong about a bar changing its name?”

Stew, his attention still focused on his work, responded without missing a beat, “It’s not just the name, Tim. It’s the identity. The history. They’re erasing everything the Mission stood for.”

“But it’s just a bar,” I protested.

“No, Tim. It was never just a bar. It was a part of Sheridan. A part of us.”

Days turned into weeks, and Stew’s campaign gained momentum. He rallied, picketed, and drew. His artwork, once a reflection of life’s beauty, was now a weapon against the perceived injustice. He was relentless, using every opportunity to drive home his message.

“The name doesn’t change the place, Stew,” I finally blurted out one day. His determined eyes bore into mine, his lips pursed into a thin line.

“You don’t get it, Tim,” he said, his voice strained. “The Mission was more than its name. It was about the memories, the shared stories, the bonds formed. And they’re taking it away from us.”

I didn’t understand then, but I nodded, acknowledging his point. His fight wasn’t mine, yet his passion was infectious. I found myself helping him, aiding in his protests, even though I didn’t share his conviction.

Meanwhile, Sheena looked on, her warnings echoing in my ears. “Beware, Tim. The storm is on the horizon.”

We were both swept up in the whirlwind of Stew’s mission, a storm that left no room for compromise. But as fervently as it had begun, it petered out, leaving behind a trail of unfinished sketches and rejected proposals.

In the end, the Oasis remained. Despite Stew’s best efforts, the Mission was no more. The old sign was replaced, the name change official. The patrons still came, oblivious to the creative war waged in its name.

In a last desperate act, at high noon, Stew walked to the Oasis (Mission Bar), read a poem, screamed about the desecration that Sheridan had allowed, and in front of everyone, took his life.

Sheena watched silently as Stew absorbed the final blow. “Remember, Tim,” she said, her voice soft. “Every storm passes, and when it does, it leaves behind clear skies.”

He got what he wanted. People still remember the Mission Bar. But it is still the Oasis. I miss Stew. He was a once in a lifetime type of guy.

Chapter sixteen

It was 1979. I was 19 years old. I was home from college, ready to build a business. Sheena was my only company as I strolled toward the Mission Barber Shop. The scent of stale cigarette smoke, hair tonic, and hot lather immediately embraced me. A vintage barber pole spun by the entrance, casting colors on the black-and-white tiles. The shop was a monument to a bygone era, and turquoise porcelain barber chairs furnished it.

I remembered the two years I spent as a shoe-shine boy at this barber shop. It had been filled with interesting characters and tales. Not least among them was the shop owner, Robert Morris, or Bob, as we all called him. The man was an encyclopedia of experience, always ready to regale you with tales that would make a sailor blush.

Bob was a man who liked to live life on his terms, even if that meant bucking tradition or running against the current.

His life story was a cinematic affair; the man had run a barber shop at the airport in Billings, Montana. Once in a marketing stunt that only Bob could pull off, he had offered to shave stewardesses'

legs for free. That stunt landed him on the front page, and in the hot seat with his first wife. That ended in divorce and Bob in Sheridan, Wyoming, running the Mission Barber Shop.

"The guy had charisma," I told Sheena. "He had this thing about stories. He used them to charm his customers. Also, his haircuts weren't half bad."

"Yes, I remember. I was with you," Sheena said.

"Bob's disregard for rules was legendary. He operated outside the barber's union, constantly undercharging his competitors by a quarter. This, of course, stirred trouble. But Bob, ever the maverick, always held his ground. When a brick flew through the shop's front window in what we guessed was a rival barber's fit of rage, Bob, undeterred, slashed his prices by another dime."

"That's the spirit!" Sheena said. She was always one to appreciate a minor rebellion.

"He was a unique character. Bob was like the Godfather of Sheridan, always speaking in a soft, yet assertive voice."

"Bob had a heart too, beneath the hardened exterior, an almost fatherly affection for the regulars who visited his shop. I remember a young boy, barely twelve, who strolled into the shop one day, his hair cascading down his back, demanding a head shave. Bob had almost choked on his cigarette, but, seeing the boy's determined gaze, he obliged. He sheared off the long tresses, crafting a neat crew cut. But the boy had more radical ideas."

Chapter seventeen

“He asked for it all to be shaved off,” I recalled, my voice filled with the echoes of disbelief that had filled the shop that day. “Bob didn’t protest this time. He just nodded, grabbed his shaving cream and razor, and worked his magic.”

“When the boy had left, cap falling over his eyes and ears because of the lack of hair, Bob and I had shared a hearty laugh. But the humor was short-lived. An hour later, the boy was back, towed by his mother. She shouted at Bob, accusing him of ruining her son’s hair.”

“Bob handled her with his usual cool demeanor,” I continued. “He shrugged, explaining that the boy had asked for it, and even joked about not charging extra for the shave.”

“The shop was always full of life, and Bob was the heart of it all. He tricked me into telling a customer that sheep herders never shine their shoes. The moment I uttered those words, Bob erupted in laughter.”

“Ah, lessons learned the hard way,” Sheena said. “But they shape you, don’t they?”

“They sure do.” A faint smile came to my face as the past and present blended into the reflection of the old barber shop mirror.

As Sheena and I reminisced, I could almost hear the steady hum of Bob’s clippers, the splash of the water against the porcelain sink, and the banter that filled the air. More than the actual haircuts, it was the stories that kept people coming back to the Mission Barber Shop. And nobody could weave a tale quite like Bob.

“Remember the one about the two brothers who tried to rob a bank with a fork?” I chuckled, glancing over at Sheena. Her eyes sparkled with amusement as she nodded. “Bob’s tales were often unbelievable, sometimes blatantly exaggerated, but they were always entertaining.”

“That story had everyone in stitches,” Sheena added. “Even though everyone knew it was likely just another one of Bob’s tall tales, it was impossible not to get caught up in the drama of it all.”

“Bob was a master at engaging his audience, his scissors snipping in rhythm with the ebb and flow of his storytelling. A story, each tale intricately woven like the threads of a tapestry accompanied each haircut.”

“One of my favorites was the time he told us about a local woman who had allegedly trained a pack of wild coyotes to guard her house. ‘She’d feed them raw steaks, right out of her hand,’ Bob would say, his eyes wide, his clippers hovering mid-air for dramatic effect. We’d all laugh, knowing full well that his yarn was likely spun from a single grain of truth, if that.”

"Bob's stories were not all farcical, though. Sometimes, he'd share poignant stories that had us all teary-eyed. The story of his friend, a veteran who returned from Vietnam only to find his girlfriend married to another man, was one that often left a solemn hush over the shop."

"Sheena," I said, a trace of sadness in my voice, "those stories... they were more than entertainment. They were reminders of the world outside our little town. They made us think, laugh, cry, and feel."

Sheena smiled, her eyes full of understanding. "Bob was more than a barber, Tim. He was a storyteller. Through his tales, he brought the world into his little shop. And in doing so, he touched the hearts of everyone who sat in his chair."

And it was true. As I walked away from the old shop that day, I realized that the Mission Barber Shop was not just a place to get a haircut. It was a place where lives were shared, and memories were made. It was a place where a story was always waiting to be told, and a willing audience was always ready to listen. Even after all these years, his stories lived on, etched in the hearts and minds of those who had been fortunate enough to hear them.

"Keep those stories alive, Tim," Sheena whispered. "They are a part of you now."

And I would, I promised myself. Because they were a part of me. They were a part of all of us. They were our shared past, our collective memory. They were the stories of the Mission Barber Shop, and they would forever live on in our hearts.

The Mission Barber Shop was a piece of my past, filled with unique memories. I had grown and learned a lot in the Mission Barber Shop, where Bob, the enigmatic owner, had guided me.

Chapter eighteen

The business I decided to build after returning home from college was a janitorial company. The company was steadily expanding, in need of additional hands, or hand, as it turned out with Keith.

Keith was different, a character straight out of a supernatural thriller, with his one good arm and an otherworldly perseverance. “You know, Tim,” Sheena had whispered one day, “everyone has a story to tell.”

“Do you think he can even swing a mop?” I remember questioning her, staring at Keith’s good arm. She just shrugged, her dark eyes sparkling with mysterious wisdom.

Keith was relentless. He made a wager, his competence against a week of free service. Sheena nudged me to accept. And as the sun sank into the western horizon, I realized that being different doesn’t always mean being less. Sometimes, it just requires a unique perspective.

His mastery with the mop, how he swirled it around with a single arm, was a supernatural feat. Sheena watched, her knowing smile a soft arc in the dim light.

“I tried, you know,” I admitted to her later, “I swung that mop every which way, but I just couldn’t make it work.”

She just brushed her dark locks behind an ear and said, “Sometimes, Tim, it’s not about the way you see, but how you perceive.”

When the break came, I was expecting him to light up a cigarette. “You use a Bic, right?” I asked.

“No, book matches,” came the reply. How he lit it, well, that was a revelation, in itself, a trick so ingenious it could entertain an entire party.

“I just figured it out,” Keith said when I questioned him, his face glowing in the dim light of the match. His story made me reflect, realizing how tunnel vision can lead to a false sense of understanding. Sheena was right, perspective matters.

I discovered more about Keith. He was a recovering alcoholic, a man fighting inner demons and outer biases, the world’s judgment weighing heavily on him. As an employer, I stood by him, seeing a potential in him he perhaps didn’t see in himself.

One day, I blurted out the question about the possibility of a prosthetic arm. The silence that followed was so loud, I could almost hear Sheena sigh. Keith’s discomfort was clear, his hesitation palpable. “Chopping off my arm scares the shit out of me,” he confessed, and I realized my mistake.

“I’m sorry,” I mumbled, my words hanging heavily in the air.

Chapter nineteen

Keith had gone through counselling, had considered amputation, but the state wouldn't support him unless he had a promising career, not just a job.

“Who's going to give an alcoholic with a bum arm a career?” His words echoed in the room, his eyes, however, telling a different story - of ambition, determination, a relentless desire to move past his past.

“You have a career, Keith!” I affirmed, “We're the best damn toilet cleaners in town and we're going to build a massive empire!” His expression changed, realization dawning in his eyes.

Keith's journey was tough, a psychological labyrinth before he got approval for a prosthetic arm. I could only stand by and watch as he navigated the dark forest of fear and uncertainty.

Keith fought, oh how he fought. I saw it in the grit of his teeth when the days were long, and in the iron set of his jaw when rejection after rejection came from the state office.

“I just don’t get it,” he raged one evening, smashing his good fist against the wall. The hollow echo reverberated around us, a sad testament to his frustration. “I’m trying to make something of myself, trying to do better. Why won’t they see that?”

“I wish I knew, Keith,” I said. My heart was heavy for his plight. But Sheena was the one who offered the most poignant comfort. She told me what to say to Keith.

“Keith, struggles don’t define you. How you overcome them does. You’re already making something of yourself. This is just one more hurdle to jump.”

I saw the pain in his eyes ebb away, replaced with a new resolve. He nodded, his fingers flexing, as if longing to feel the phantom arm. “Okay,” he said, a ghost of a smile playing on his lips. “Back at it tomorrow.”

And so it went, days into weeks, weeks into months. He filled out forms, attended counseling sessions, and faced each denial with an unwavering determination that left me in awe.

His story wasn’t just his anymore. The town rallied behind him, cheering him on, supporting his journey. Even Bob, who had by then passed on the barbershop to his son, came by and gave Keith a pep talk.

“Son,” he said, his voice filled with the wisdom of years, “life’s like a haircut. Sometimes, you’ve got to cut off the dead ends to let the new grow in. Just remember, no matter what, Sheridan’s got your back.”

One day, Keith walked into the office with a fresh air about him. He held up a piece of paper, his hand shaking slightly. “They approved

it,” he said, his voice choked with emotion. “They’re going to give me my new arm.”

Sheena let out a whoop of delight while I sat there, stunned. “I... That’s... That’s amazing, Keith!” I finally managed, rushing over to clap him on the shoulder. “I’m so proud of you.”

Keith’s eyes glistened, but he quickly brushed away the tears. “It’s a new beginning,” he said, his voice firm. “I will not let this chance go to waste.”

And he didn’t. He embraced his new arm like it was the missing piece to his puzzle. It took time for him to get used to it, sure, but his perseverance paid off. He became more proficient with each passing day, an inspiration to us all.

“See, Tim,” Sheena said one evening as we watched Keith, his new arm gleaming under the fluorescent lights. “every dark forest has a path to the sunlight. It’s just about having the courage to take it.”

And as I watched Keith’s wide smile and the bright light in his eyes, I knew she was right.

Chapter twenty

As I painstakingly carved out my cleaning enterprise in the dusty corners of Sheridan, Wyoming, Sheena was always near. She was more than just a spirit guide. She was my counselor, my confidante, my sentinel in a world both physical and supernatural.

“I’ve always been a stranger in the realm of commerce,” I confessed one day, surrounded by the echoes of my family’s non-entrepreneurial past. “My kin were not business people.”

One figure I found intriguing was a man named Larry Howell. He was the proud owner of a thriving plumbing venture, complete with a couple of pickup trucks and a dedicated team of workers. His slick office, boasting of a diligent bookkeeper and a receptionist, bore testament to his success.

I yearned to pick his brains, learn the secrets of his entrepreneurial journey. “I need to meet him,” I said to Sheena.

“Silver Spur,” she said.

It was Sheridan’s business hub, camouflaged as a food joint. A nondescript building on Main Street, one could mistake it for an

uninhabited home. Yet, it thrived with contractors looking for opportunities. Perhaps my cleaning business could benefit from their presence as well.

I found myself drawn to the Silver Spur. The city folks might have their extravagant luncheons in glass towers, but here, under Sheridan's vast skies, we had our own humble version. Our attire wasn't as slick, our business cards were more 'personalized' with grease, but the energy was just as electrifying.

The Silver Spur had seen better days. The paint on its wood-paneled walls was peeling, and its floors creaked under the weight of its patrons. The merciless Wyoming sun had faded the caricature of a cowboy with a lopsided grin and a comically oversized spur, which was the sign of the Silver Spur. But to me, it was more than just a greasy spoon. It was an intersection of lives, a congregation of ambitions.

"I remember when this place was just a shack," Larry Howell drawled one day over a plate of soggy fries. He was a stout man with a voice like gravel and hands that bore the testament of years of plumbing. "Used to get the best steak in town here."

In the evenings, the Silver Spur would transform from a sleepy diner to a bustling rendezvous. The tables would fill with men in denim and boots, their hands calloused, their faces etched with the wear and tear of hard labor. They'd share stories over mugs of coffee. The air would buzz with talk of contracts and proposals, cemented with hearty laughter and claps on the back.

"There's Bob 'Three-Fingers' Harper," Sheena said one evening, pointing at a man with a laugh that echoed around the room. He was

a local legend, having lost two fingers in a freak accident, but never losing his sense of humor.

And there was 'Fancy' Nancy, the only woman in the crowd, a painter with a penchant for colorful language and even more colorful outfits. I'd seen her on the job, her clothes splattered with paint, her blonde hair held back with a bandana. However, at the Spur, she always dressed impeccably, and her bright dresses stood out against the sea of flannel shirts and jeans.

"And don't forget about Slim," Sheena said, pointing at a man hunched over the jukebox. His real name was Ernest, but everyone called him Slim because of his narrow build. He was a carpenter by trade, a poet by heart. We spent many evenings listening to his lyrical musings about life in Sheridan.

The Silver Spur wasn't just a restaurant. It was a microcosm of Sheridan, a showcase of the hardy spirit that ran through the veins of its people.

"In a way," I told Sheena one day, "this place is the heart of the city. And its people, they are the lifeblood."

"Yes," she agreed, her gaze sweeping across the crowded room. "Every town needs a place like this, where people can gather and feel connected. It's not about the food or the drinks. It's about the community."

And I was part of it. As I listened to Larry share his tales of plumbing triumphs, Fancy Nancy's latest design project, or Bob's latest escapade, I felt a sense of belonging. In a strange way, the Silver Spur felt like home. And as I made my mark in the world of commerce, I was glad I had this sanctuary, this realm where I could

just be Tim. A man, a janitorial business owner, and a listener of stories.

I saw David Grimshaw at the Silver Spur. He specialized in building underground homes. Settling into a chair across from him was Larry Howell. Pulling out a chair, I ordered their version of breakfast—a plate greasy enough to slick up a car engine.

Chapter twenty-one

“Larry, I’m curious about your business,” I said.

Larry seemed delighted, and his pride shone through his tales of managing half a million dollars of annual revenue. I could barely wrap my mind around those figures, my aspirations, then standing at a mere \$2000 per month. Still, Larry’s willingness to share his experiences left a profound impact.

“First off, Tim,” Larry started, leaning back in his chair, his eyes twinkling behind his thick glasses. “Business isn’t a sprint, it’s a marathon. You’ve got to be ready to sweat, stumble, and get back up, all with a smile on your face.”

Larry was a storyteller. He spun yarns of his trials and triumphs, imparting wisdom with every tale. His first advice was about perseverance, about how a steady pace and indomitable spirit could surmount any obstacle.

“Second,” he continued, spearing a piece of sausage with his fork, “it’s all about relationships. People buy from people, not companies.

Build trust, invest in your clients, and they'll reward you with their loyalty.”

He talked about his long-standing relationships with customers, how he'd spent time to understand their needs, and how he'd gone above and beyond to exceed their expectations. Those words made me rethink my relationship with Keith, realizing that I was right to trust and support him.

“And last but not least,” he said, sipping his coffee, “never forget why you started. There will be bad days, maybe even terrible ones, but always remember the ‘why’. It'll keep you grounded and give you the strength to keep going.”

I thought about my ‘why’. My cleaning business wasn't just about making money; it was about providing opportunities, creating a place where people like Keith could shine, a platform where everyone's ‘why’ mattered.

Larry's advice was simple, but profound. He spoke of virtues like patience, trust, and purpose. He was not just a successful businessman but a seasoned guide, sharing his insights with an eager student.

“Thank you, Larry,” I said, feeling a sense of clarity that had eluded me.

“No need to thank me, son,” Larry replied, patting my back. “Just remember, a good business is like a tree. It takes time to grow, but once it does, it provides shade to many.”

As I walked away from the Silver Spur that day, Larry's words echoed in my mind. They were lessons not just in business, but also

in life. I felt a renewed sense of purpose, a drive to succeed not just for myself, but for Keith and others like him.

Sheena, as always, was there. Her spectral eyes sparkled as she said, “Remember, Tim, patience, relationships, and purpose. These are your guiding stars.”

And they were. As I ventured further into the world of business, Larry’s advice became my compass, leading me through trials and triumphs. I wasn’t just running a cleaning service anymore; I was building a community, one mop swing at a time.

Chapter twenty-two

Larry was a man of infectious joviality, a firm believer in the work-hard-play-hard mantra. He always spoke of his daily ritual of treating his crew to beers after closing the shop at 5 PM. The concept was refreshingly human and endeared him to me even more. He had invited me to stop by any day to join them.

One day, I visited his shop at 5 PM to have a beer with Larry and his crew. But earlier that day, I had heard about an accident on Larry's work site.

While one of Larry's men was digging a trench with a backhoe, a mound of dirt collapsed, trapping one of his other workers. Larry's heroic intervention saved the man's life, jumping into the trench and digging with his bare hands.

I'll never forget the sight that met me when I walked into Larry's shop that day. He was seated at his desk with his hands heavily bandaged. His drained expression was at odds with his usual jovial demeanor.

“I heard about what happened, Larry,” I said. “That was a brave thing you did.”

Larry looked up, a hint of his usual smile playing on his lips. “Just did what had to be done, Tim,” he said. His voice was devoid of the boastful tone I might have expected from a man who’d just pulled off a daring rescue.

He narrated the incident in detail. The way the soil had given way without warning, swallowing his worker whole, the pit filling up with the loose, shifting earth. Larry’s description painted a vivid, horrifying picture.

“It was like the earth itself was alive,” he said, his gaze distant as he relived the incident. “It caved in so fast, just a second’s delay and he’d have been gone. It wasn’t a trench anymore, just a grave.”

He paused, the words hanging heavy in the room. His hands clenched reflexively, the bandages crinkling under the pressure. “I jumped in without thinking,” he continued, his voice rough. “The soil was still falling in clumps, choking the air with dust.”

Larry described how he’d scabbled at the dirt, his fingers sinking into the loose soil. It was like digging in quicksand; the earth slipping through his fingers, collapsing back into the void he was trying to create.

“The world had shrunk down to that hole,” he said. “Every second felt like a lifetime. My hands were bleeding, the soil scraping the skin raw, but I didn’t feel a thing.”

He finally struck something solid, a rough fabric of a work shirt, a human beneath the crushing weight of the earth. With a final

desperate effort, he pulled his worker free, both of them gasping for breath in the dust-filled air.

After he finished his tale, the room was silent for a moment. Larry's hands were a testament to his heroism, bandaged and bruised, but his spirit remained unbowed. He was the same man I'd met at the Silver Spur, as humble and grounded as ever.

"That's what it means to run a business, Tim," he said finally. "It's not just about making money. It's about being responsible for your people, about being there for them when they need you the most."

His words hit me hard, their impact resonating with my ethos. It was more than just advice; it was a guiding principle, a beacon of leadership. And in that moment, I understood that Larry Howell wasn't just an entrepreneur; he was a savior, a hero in the truest sense of the word.

Chapter twenty-three

A bitter chill clung to the air as I looked at the hollow shell of what once was our thriving town, Sheridan. The wind howled, stirring up dust from the desolate Decker Strip Mine, whose closure had sucked the life out of our businesses and our spirits.

“Sheridan just ain’t the same without Decker,” Larry said. His voice echoed the grim reality.

“No, it’s not,” David said. “Feels like a ghost town.”

“I’m heading off to Idaho, Tim,” Larry said. “I have a cousin there who can help me set up shop. It’s not much, but it’s something.”

“I’m bound for California myself,” David said. “A mate of mine’s been asking me to join his business. I guess now’s the time.”

I nodded, my gaze drifting back to the vacant lots that once teemed with activity. “And I’m going to Denver. Got a job lined up there.”

A silence fell among us, the farewell we were delaying finally taking form.

“Wish it didn’t have to be this way,” Larry said. He spread his legs and rubbed the back of his neck.

“Me too, but we have to move on,” David said. “We’ll keep in touch, right?”

“Of course we will,” I said. But I wondered if we really would.

“Yeah,” David said. His gaze traced the main street’s silent shops and empty diners. “This was home. But it’s become a town that time forgot.”

“I always thought we’d retire here,” I said. The words tumbled out in a hushed whisper. “Never imagined we’d be leaving like this.”

There was a pause, filled with the echoing silence of the hollowed-out town. Sheena’s presence felt stronger at that moment, her energy pulsating, whispering reassurances in the silence.

Larry broke the quietude, “Well, we’ve always been fighters, haven’t we? We’ll just have to keep going, no matter what. Life doesn’t stop. Not for us, not for anyone.”

His words sparked a flame in the oppressive darkness surrounding us. His resilience, undeterred by the massive hit, reflected the spirit of Sheridan, the grit they knew us for.

David nodded, a grim determination in his eyes. “That’s true, Larry. We’ll rebuild, just like we did here. And maybe, just maybe, one day we’ll come back and breathe life into this place again.”

“I hope so,” I said, the sentiment resonating in my heart. I wanted to believe in that future. That Sheridan would once again be the vibrant town I knew it to be. A place where businesses thrived, people laughed, and dreams grew.

“Times change,” Sheena’s voice echoed in my mind, her spirit radiating warmth on the chilly night. “But the spirit remains.”

David and Larry said their goodbyes, their words holding a promise of meeting again, a vow to keep fighting. I watched their departing silhouettes, their hopes and dreams packed into their vehicles, ready to brave the unfamiliar roads.

After they had left, I stood alone, the chilly wind whipping at my coat. I looked at Sheridan one last time, the town now deserted and quiet under the starlit sky. I couldn’t believe that just a few months ago, this had been a bustling hub of business and life. But now, it was just a memory, a ghost of its former self.

As we parted ways, I sensed the familiar presence of Sheena. Her soft, dark eyes full of understanding and compassion.

“It’s not the end, Tim,” Sheena said. Her ethereal voice soothed me. “It’s a beginning, a new chapter.”

“Yeah,” I sighed. “But it’s hard to say goodbye.”

Sheena offered a smile. “You’re not alone. Remember, you have me. You have friends who’ll stay connected no matter where they are. You have your family.”

“Thanks, Sheena,” I mumbled. “I just hope...”

“That things will get better?” she finished my sentence. “They will, Tim. Trust in your strength. Believe in yourself, as you’ve always done.”

As I prepared my truck, wife, and son to leave for Denver, I felt a tinge of excitement for the unknown. A blank canvas lay before me, ready for fresh strokes of life. I knew the path wouldn’t be easy, but

Sheena was right. I wasn't alone. I carried the spirit of Sheridan, the lessons I'd learned, and the friendships I'd built.

I climbed into my truck and started the engine. As I drove away, I glanced at the rear-view mirror, watching as the town I'd known and loved dwindled into the distance. It was an ending, yes. But maybe it was also a beginning, a chance to build something new. As I journeyed toward Denver, I clung to that hope, to the spirit of Sheridan that Larry, David, and I carried within us. Because in the end, that was all we had - the spirit of resilience, the determination to keep moving forward. And with Sheena by my side, I knew we'd find a way. After all, we were fighters.

"And remember," Sheena's voice echoed, "no matter where you are, I am with you."

I smiled, my gaze fixed on the road ahead. Yes, Sheridan was behind me now, but my future awaited, filled with promise and new beginnings.

This novella has been an introduction to Tim's seven-part series, a thriller paranormal memoir.

Continue to follow Tim in his lifetime of paranormal adventures. Click the QR code below to get them now or scroll down to read the synopsis of each book.



The "My Ghosts" series.

Book #1: Rescued by Ghosts: A Thriller Paranormal Memoir.

Discover a tale of otherworldly intervention in "Rescued by Ghosts," where benevolent spirits offer hope to a young boy on the brink of despair. As the protagonist develops an extraordinary bond with these enigmatic beings, themes of forgiveness and resilience are explored, painting a poignant portrait of human connections that transcend the boundaries of life and death. Prepare to be captivated by this hauntingly powerful narrative of redemption and the enduring power of hope.

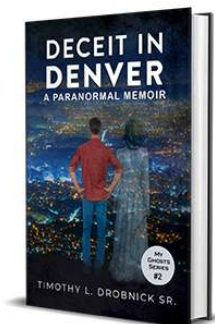


Book #2: Deceit in Denver: A Thriller Paranormal Memoir.

Step into Denver's shadowy alleys as a determined protagonist fights to provide for his family without losing his integrity. Filled with suspense and unexpected alliances, this paranormal thriller is a wild ride.

As the layers of deception peel away, the story delves into themes of trust, betrayal, and the lengths people will go to protect their secrets. The main character confronts their demons and history, becoming more complex in the story. Set against the backdrop of Denver's vibrant streets, "Deceit in Denver" paints a vivid picture of the city's underbelly.

"Deceit in Denver" is a captivating and thought-provoking book that makes readers ponder truth and human nature.



Book #3: Evict Evil: A Thriller Paranormal Memoir.

"Evict Evil" is a thrilling and suspenseful story with action, eerie encounters, and surprising plot twists. The story blends supernatural and human feelings, giving readers a mix of fear and optimism. The book has a strong message about courage and resilience.



Book #4: Death Disturbed: A Thriller Paranormal Memoir.

Death Disturbed is a **paranormal thriller memoir** that will grip you and keep you entertained from beginning to end. In it, you'll follow Tim as he fights against evil in all its forms.

Tim is a regular guy who is suddenly attacked by a supernatural dark energy that is produced by the hatred of a rival. Plus, Tim must work with an evil man who has murderous and vile intentions.

A man goes missing, and Tim suspects he may have been murdered. As if that's not enough, he also has to worry about a thunderstorm disturbed by death that is attacking him and his family.

Tim uses violet energy to protect them from the evil forces around them. Will a murderer working for and stealing from Tim kill him? You'll have to read Death Disturbed to find out.

Fortunately, he has a spirit guide named Sheena who helps him navigate the dangers of this dark world. As Tim fights to protect his

family from evil, he realizes he must also face dangers in his other reality.

With two realities pulling him in opposite directions, Tim is in for the fight of his life against an evil that is determined to destroy him.



Book #5: Tragic Triumph: A Thriller Paranormal Memoir.
Coming soon.

About the Author

I have enjoyed being an artist, potter, teacher, inventor, and much more. I have spent much of my life seeking truth and my spirituality.

From 1994 to 2015, I was a stay at home dad and raised seven children. I supported my family by providing services for the Internet, preparing taxes, and writing stories.

My patio is where I love to write. I miss my two chihuahuas that used to keep me company while writing, but their spirits have visited me occasionally.

You can chat with me in my private readers' group on Facebook and join my mailing list for my latest news.

<https://RescuedByGhosts.com>





Other Books by the Author

This is an introduction to a seven-part series:

Book One: Rescued by Ghosts

Book Two: Deceit in Denver

Book Three: Evict Evil

Book Four: Death Disturbed.

Book Five: Tragic Triumph

Books Six through seven coming soon.

Find them on Amazon.

Join my author's group at <http://RescuedbyGhosts.com>



Please Leave Review

Please leave a review of this book on Good Reads or Amazon. This helps me to continue to write. Believe it or not, less than one out of every 100 readers leave a review. I appreciate you. Thank you.