

BARNUM'S GHOSTS

A Novel by **Warren Cook**

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WEDNESDAY

CHAPTER ONE

On a morning in December 1977, Ted Cassidy walked the perimeter of Brooks Hall, unsuspecting of the extraordinary odyssey about to unfold.

A man emerged from the side entrance dressed in an ensemble reminiscent of the 1800s, complete with a watch chain dangling from his vest. He approached Ted.

“You’re Ted Cassidy, show producer, right?”

“I am. I see you’re already dressed for the festival.”

“These are my everyday clothes. Barnum’s the name. You may have heard of me.”

“You look like the photos I’ve seen of him. Great job. You must be exhibiting at our show this weekend. What’s your craft?”

“Do you believe in spirits, in ghosts?” the Barnum impersonator asked, changing the subject.

“I’m skeptical, though I’ve heard tales of haunted places, and plenty of folks say they’ve seen ghosts.”

“Exactly. Because I’m the spirit in body form of P. T. Barnum. But I’m not here to haunt. I’m offering myself as your partner for this weekend’s fair.”

“I don’t think I need a partner at the moment.” Still, he was curious about this man’s aim. “What are you proposing?”

“I’ve seen your newspaper and television advertising. The billing reads: *Enter a 19th Century Village Fair*. I can provide that to your audience. With my help, they *really will* visit the 19th century.”

“Great, you’ve seen our ads. I wanted to distinguish my event from

the other art and craft fairs popping up. I added the 19th Century theme this year and asked my artists to dress in 1800s outfits.”

“Excellent. Allow me to clarify; I’ve called from the spirit world ghosts of famous actors and artists from the last century. I’ve brought together those eager to perform on stage again or display their paintings, sculptures, or inventions. Your show and my spirits present a perfect fit.”

He’s some kind of screwball. I wonder how he got through the locked doors?

“I read the disbelief on your face, Mr. Cassidy. Very understandable. When I was alive, if a being told me he was a ghost, I’d have laughed and said *prove it*.”

Ted folded his arms across his chest. “Can you?”

“Yes, I can give you proof—or at least more questions. I’ll bring by Mark Twain and Vincent van Gogh. You know what they looked like. Well, they’ve chosen to appear as they did in the period they want to *re-live*, which is not exactly the word for it, but you catch my drift.”

Ted nodded.

“I’ll return in an hour. In the meantime, please consider how these spirits can exhibit or perform on your stage this weekend.” The man walked through the side entrance and vanished.

Ted continued strolling through the dim, subterranean exhibition hall, chilly with the heat turned off. He paused now and again to pencil in modifications to his floor plan.

He frowned as he reflected on why his shows weren’t as successful this year as he’d hoped. Despite incorporating the 19th-century theme and costuming into his *Autumnfest* fairs, attendance the last three weekends—in San Diego, Sacramento, and Seattle—had barely improved from last year.

Committed to boosting the sales of the artists and craftspeople at his festival, Ted wondered, *what else can I do? Hell, I’m spending thousands of dollars on advertising. And I don’t begin to believe this Barnum crackpot and his offer of ‘ghosts from the spirit world.’*

He finished crossing the hall and climbed the stairs to his show office. It featured two desks, chairs, and three tables against a wall. Adjacent

to it, a smaller room with a desk and chair served as the office for Ted's ticket manager, ideal for cash handling and paperwork.

Rachel Williams, his assistant, had arrived and was showing a man from Pacific Bell where she wanted the office phone installed. She wore a San Francisco State sweatshirt, Levi's, and Birkenstocks—the outfit of a twenty-year-old college student.

"I'm glad you're here, Rachel. I met the strangest fellow in the hall."

"I only got here a few minutes ago to meet with the phone man. So, you met someone in the hall?"

"Yes. He introduced himself as P. T. Barnum, the circus legend from a century ago. The weirdest thing was he looked like the photos we've seen of him—tall, balding, pot belly, wispy hair, prominent nose, down to the collared shirt, bow tie, vest, coat, and watch chain."

"He must be one of our new exhibitors in the San Francisco show."

"That's what I asked him. But he said he was the ghost of Barnum. And that he wanted to be my partner this weekend."

"Far out! Having Barnum's ghost as your partner would be great PR. What else did he say?"

"He said he could bring together spirits of famous performers and artists from the 1800s. He told me they longed to perform again or show off their paintings or other works they'd created."

"And he said he'll return with the ghosts of Vincent van Gogh and Mark Twain."

"Can't wait to meet them!"

"I know you're joking. I guess we'll find out later who he is."

At 8:00, Ted heard the decorator's truck roll down the ramp and into Brooks Hall. He grabbed his revised floor plan, descended the stairs, and walked across to the entrance at the foot of the ramp. He shook hands with Chuck Parker, owner of Bay-Area Expo Services.

Chuck and his crew would spend the rest of Wednesday erecting pipes and drapes and laying out electrical lines for the 300 festival booths. Ted spread the plan on the truck's hood, showing Chuck where he wanted the booths set. He asked him to leave extra pipe, drape, and electrical cords for last-minute sign-ups.

Another man dressed in 19th-century costume appeared mid-ramp. He wore a wool suit, vest, high collar, tie, and derby, and sported a mustache. He walked the remaining stretch of the incline to Ted.

“Hello, Mr. Cassidy. I hear you’re the organizer of the 19th-century-themed festival this weekend. Allow me to introduce myself. I’m the spirit of Dr. Henry Holmes. I lived in Chicago during the 1893 World’s Fair and invented a special medicine there. I wish to offer my bottles of *Dr. Holmes All-Pain-Relief Elixir* to your customers. Myself, I can only mix it in ghost form, which would be useless to your people. But I’ve found a pharmacist in San Francisco who can follow my recipe. I would be indebted to you if you could find me space.

How am I attracting these kooks?

“Whoa, you’ve said a mouthful. I think you and your friend P. T. Barnum have come here to play a prank on me—saying you’re spirits and looking to join the show. Is this a practical joke? Or a dare?”

“I never met Barnum. But he was the great showman of my time. I heard through the spirit grapevine that he was inviting 19th-century artists and actors to take part in your *Autumnfest* this weekend. I sent him my request. Unfortunately, he declined; he said he wasn’t taking anyone who wanted to *sell* products. So, I’ve come to ask you, Mr. Cassidy, to fit me into your magnificent event.”

This Holmes character is too smooth. “I haven’t discussed with the Barnum lookalike how his “spirits” could take part this weekend. Plus, I can’t have an exhibitor selling an *elixir* here. I won’t risk customers getting sick and suing me because I allowed an unproven patent medicine into the show. No, I’m afraid not.”

“Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I’ll try to think of another way to participate in your festival. I’m eager to introduce myself to your modern-day exhibitors and customers and tell them my story.”

Ted noted the man’s eyes would not meet his. “Very well, Dr. Holmes.”

Holmes ambled up the ramp and disappeared. Ted stood and shook his head over these two “19th-century” personalities. *If it’s a practical joke, I can’t see the point. And I don’t want to consider they’re spirits! “Humbug!” Barnum would have said.*

Ted headed to the show office. As he reached the stairway, Hope Wolcott's voice reached his ears, prompting him to smile.

He entered the workspace. His bride-to-be wore bell-bottom jeans, Hush Puppies, and a bright green and white striped blouse. She'd tied her strawberry blond hair in a ponytail with a red ribbon.

Boy, she always looks terrific. And here's me; old jeans, old sneakers, and a faded-out flannel shirt. Well, they say opposites attract.

"I just arrived," she said in her cheery voice. "Rachel and I are talking about how the *Autumnfest* shows the past three weekends went well for some artists, but not so great for others."

Ted jumped in. "Even though my 19th-century theme isn't bringing in as many customers as I'd hoped for, here in San Francisco we'll benefit from the following we've built the past four years. And we're on the first weekend in December—perfect timing for Christmas shopping."

"No one can accuse you of losing your confidence," Hope said.

Ted shrugged. *Actually, I'm worried, but I'll keep that to myself.*

"And you have Nick as MC this weekend," Rachel said.

He turned to his assistant. "Did you tell Hope about the man I met—the guy who claims he's P. T. Barnum's ghost?"

"No. I didn't get a chance to bring it up."

"I will then. But now another character has appeared." He repeated to Hope what he'd shared with Rachel.

To both, he related his encounter with Holmes.

"Wow, you've met two ghosts in one morning!" Hope said.

"I'm so lucky. And remember, this Barnum said he'd be back here with more."

The man who claimed to be Barnum entered the show office, accompanied by two others. "True to my promise, I've brought along the spirits of Mark Twain and Vincent van Gogh, or as you might call them, their ghosts."

Ted's eyes widened as he witnessed the resemblance between these *ghostly* characters and their historical counterparts; they looked like the photographs he'd seen of Mark Twain—white suit, flowing white hair,

mustache—and the self-portraits of van Gogh—thin body, angular face, red hair and beard.

Barnum gestured towards his companions. “Mark Twain is eager to give a lecture to your guests and then answer questions. Vincent wishes for a booth to exhibit his paintings and catch the reactions from your attendees.” Have you noticed—he has both his ears?”

The two “spirits” smiled. Neither offered a hand to shake.

“I don’t have any idea how you found these dead ringers—heck, even yourself. We’re set for this weekend’s festival, but they might add something *next year*. How much money are you asking?”

“We don’t desire monetary compensation; money isn’t good to us ghosts. No, like I said, we want a stage to perform on and booths to display our works in. And—your audience. So far, you’ve only met the three of us.”

“Four. I met a Dr. Holmes a while ago. He said you were refusing anyone who wanted to sell products.

“I’ve communicated with many spirits who want to participate in your festival. I’ve had to turn down a few—like him—because I didn’t think they’d fit in. Still, I don’t remember a Dr. Holmes.”

“No problem. I told him he couldn’t sell his elixir here.”

“Good. Permit me to share with you which of my ghost friends I was hoping you can accept *this year*.

“For your stage: Buffalo Bill on horseback; Annie Oakley sharpshooting; Sarah Bernhardt playing *Camille*; Harry Houdini performing impossible escapes; Dvorak and his *New World Symphony*; Tchaikovsky with selections from *The Nutcracker*. And more!”

Ted shook his head. “I must admit, you’ve impressed me, but I still doubt the existence of ghosts. That said, it would be remarkable if you could produce these renowned figures you’ve mentioned who can perform as if still alive.”

“Wait! You’ll come to believe in all of us.” Barnum began counting on his fingers. “And I’d need booths for Vincent and my five other painters—Gauguin, Monet, Mary Cassatt, Winslow Homer, and Edvard Munch.

“Plus, display space for Rodin and his sculptures, Tiffany and his

lamps, for Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell and their inventions.”

The images of these celebrities flickered through Ted's mind like a rapid slideshow, each one distinct yet fleeting.

“Amazing! But they'd be competing with my artists for customer sales.”

“No, they won't. The famous works your audience would encounter are housed in museums or private collections. These can be looked at as *ghosts* of the originals. Even new pieces they create at the show will be *ghost* works of art.”

“That's better.”

“I also need space for my authors—Herman Melville, Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, Jules Verne, Frederick Douglass, and many others to showcase their books.

“And a stand for the *Art and Craft Movement* of the last century. Plus one for me featuring the *1893 Columbian Exposition*, but I might include a few oddities from my American Museum.”

“Enough already! This sounds intriguing. And you and I will have an *entire* year to prepare.”

“I want to give you these celebrity spirits *this* weekend. Think of the media attention they would get.”

“I'm not sure if newspaper and TV editors would believe all that.”

“We only need to get one or two here and the word will spread. Believe me, I know how this works. Remember, I specialized in getting every newspaper in town to cover my acts, such as General Tom Thumb, Jenny Lind—the Swedish Nightingale, and Jumbo the Elephant. I rallied millions of admirers for these performers.”

“I'm counting on my own publicity bringing in crowds this weekend.”

“And how is that going?”

“It's only Wednesday. I should have a good read on it by tomorrow.”

“I'm hopeful you'll change your mind. I told my spirits to be ready in case it works out for them here.”

“Understood. Back to your entertainers—you said you wanted your

acts to perform on *our stage*?”

“All I’m requesting is one day—preferably Saturday, because you’re open longer that day—for my folks to perform. Your regular acts would appear on Friday and Sunday. Remember, you won’t be paying us, so it’s asking your entertainers to give up a day, but not wages.”

Throughout their exchange, Hope had stood shaking her head. She leaned to Ted and whispered, “It sounds exciting.”

“Too good to be true.”

“With the stage, maybe you should bring Nick into this.”

“Right. Though it wouldn’t happen until next year, I’d like Nick’s take on the performers this fellow said he could bring.”

Rachel had caught the showman’s enthusiasm. “Ted, like Barnum just said, if he produced all these personalities, you’d have terrific PR opportunities.”

Sounds of gunshots suddenly reverberated. Ted bolted from the office. With only a few rows of drapes installed by the decorator, he could view across the vast hall.

At the rear, he spotted a man dressed in buckskin and wearing a cowboy hat, alongside a woman clad in a vintage dress and a wide-brimmed hat, holding a rifle. He watched the man toss up objects, and the woman shoot and shatter each.

“Stop!” Ted yelled. He rushed down the stairway and across to the woman and man.

She didn’t fire again. “Just practicing for the fair. I’m Annie Oakley, and this is part of my act.”

“And I’m Buffalo Bill,” the man said. “Annie’s the biggest attraction in my Wild West show.”

Amidst the chaos, Ted felt a surge of excitement about these “ghostly characters.” Despite his doubts of their authenticity, the prospect of featuring *19th-century celebrities* hinted at an event beyond the ordinary.

CHAPTER TWO

“**Y**ou folks are doing a great acting job as characters from the past,” Ted said to the pair who mirrored the photos he’d seen.

“We’re not actors, my friend,” the Buffalo Bill look-alike said. “We’re spirits from the last century. P.T. contacted us and other entertainers and artists and asked if we wanted to travel to a fair for a 1977 weekend. Annie and I told Barnum we’d be happy to take part.”

Ted smiled and shook his head. “I’ll play along with your story—if nothing else—for the novelty of it. Heck, for the fun of it.”

Though he was beginning to reconsider, he thought he should add: “But we’re talking about next year. Everything is in place for this weekend. But even for next December, we’d need some sort of agreement. For one, we’d have to find a way for you, Annie, to show off your sharpshooting skills without endangering anyone.”

“Bill and I guarantee it won’t be a problem,” Annie answered.

“Follow me to our show office. The actors playing Barnum, Mark Twain, and Vincent van Gogh are already there.”

The three walked to the office. They exchanged greetings with Hope and Rachel and the others. No handshakes. *I guess ghosts—or at least those portraying them—can appear with physical attributes if they want. But not shaking hands must be part of their act.*

“I’m phoning Nick DeMartini, our master of ceremonies,” Ted said to Barnum. “I’ll ask if he can come and meet you.”

Ted made the call. “Hi, Nick. We have a fascinating development here. A fellow who claims he’s P. T. Barnum’s ghost wants to bring together a host of beings—call them spirits or whatever—to entertain and exhibit at this weekend’s fair. I told him that wouldn’t work for now, but we could discuss next year. He has Mark Twain, Vincent van Gogh, Buffalo Bill,

and Annie Oakley here.”

“What are you smoking, Ted? That’s the most incredible story you’ve ever told me.”

“I’m not making it up. Hey, I can put Hope and Rachel on the phone to confirm it.”

“Okay. Debbie is in school until 3:00. It’s 10:00 now. I’ll be there as quick as I can.”

Nick arrived at 10:30 dressed in a Golden State Warriors T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. In his early thirties, Nick, with his new TV series role, was taking care of himself; his beer belly had disappeared. Today, he wore glasses instead of the contacts he used when acting or emceeing at *Autumnfest*.

~

Barnum moved to greet Nick.

“You must be Phineas T. Barnum,” Nick said. “Your costuming and makeup are impressive—as well as your friends here.”

“I don’t think any of us are wearing makeup, and the costuming is our everyday clothes.” He introduced Nick to the other four “spirits.”

“How did you pick our show for your group?” Nick asked Barnum.

“I saw the newspaper and TV ads. The billing invites people to a 19th-century Village Fair. That’s what we can offer your audience—a genuine 19th-century experience.”

“Makes sense. What can we do for you, or rather, what can you do for us?”

“I told Ted I wanted to be his partner this weekend. But I guess that’s me exaggerating again; I’m known for that! So far, he hasn’t consented to have us here this year. He wants to wait until next.”

“That’s what he mentioned to me. Still, it’s great to talk now.”

“I want to showcase my performers on your stage for a full day. Nick, you’d be the MC, but I could step in to introduce each act.”

“That’s asking a hell of a lot.”

“I understand. But we aren’t requesting any money, so you could still

pay your entertainers what you've contracted. And, I promise, we'll give you and your audience a fantastic show for that one day.

Barnum shared with Nick the all-star cast he'd earlier given to Ted.

"How do we know you could pull all this off?"

Barnum chuckled. "As you may have heard, I'm not an amateur at bringing acts together. Each spirit I deliver would perform what they were known for—and what they've presented hundreds, if not thousands, of times.

"The hardest part would be getting them off stage for the next act; each would wish to keep performing, and your audience would ask for encores. But I'd keep things moving."

Barnum heard piano music coming from the hall. He stepped outside the office onto the landing above the stairway leading to the exhibition floor. Nick was behind him.

They had a clear view of the festival's Main Stage from their vantage point. It was a wooden platform, large enough to host a variety of performances, and elevated a few feet for visibility. Tall curtains spanned the rear.

A Black man wearing a navy blue suit, white dress shirt and bow tie was playing an upright piano on the stage. He performed a familiar tune, "The Entertainer."

"That's the spirit of Scott Joplin," Barnum said. "Remember, Joplin wrote that song."

Nick walked down the stairs and leaned against a wall. Barnum smiled as Nick looked captivated by Joplin, who presented three additional ragtime tunes. Scott ceased playing, rose from the piano bench and left.

Another "spirit," a woman in a blue satin fitted bodice and skirt, walked on stage along with a formally attired gentleman who sat down at the piano.

Barnum joined Nick. "That's Jenny Lind."

"My turn!" Jenny said. She sang a set of scales and then delivered a song in a beautiful soprano voice. Lind went on to sing two more compositions.

"I don't know these songs," Nick said to Barnum. "But I have to admit, she makes each thrilling to listen to."

Lind transitioned to a song Nick said he did recognize: "Evergreen," the popular Barbara Streisand song from the 1977 movie *A Star Is Born*.

"What do you think of my performers from the past—my *spirit* entertainers?" Barnum asked Nick.

"Unbelievable. The woman's voice is out of this world. And the man before her played the best ragtime I've ever heard. I admit to being fascinated with these actors of yours playing entertainers from another time."

"I've titled them and my exhibitors *Barnum's 19th Century Celebrity Spirits*. It has a nice ring to it, don't you think?"

"Catchy—you're playing the showman, famous for coining slogans. But I'm not enthusiastic about giving your performers a full day on stage at the expense of ours. I'll talk with Ted about it, but I'm glad it won't happen until next year."

"Thank you, Nick. I've pondered the question for months and believe it's the way it will work for *everyone's* benefit."

Barnum hopped up the stairs and into the show office. A moment later, he and his four spirits exited the room and vanished through a door into the Plaza above.

~

Nick walked into the office and told Ted about the Scott Joplin and Jenny Lind performances he witnessed.

"I heard them. So, how did your conversation with Barnum go?"

"Good. He almost has me believing in his ghosts, or spirits, as he calls them."

"I can't say that I do. But it doesn't matter. Next year, we can promote them as 'spirits from the past.'" *And they might be the key to attracting the larger audiences I've been aiming for.*

"He's calling them *Barnum's 19th Century Celebrity Spirits*."

"Sounds kinda sexy. I guess we could work with that."

Hope and Rachel joined the conversation.

“Whether or not they’re ghosts, I’d like to meet all the artists and inventors Barnum mentioned,” Hope said. “I wonder if Vincent van Gogh and Mary Cassatt would paint in their booths? And if Thomas Edison would bring his original inventions?”

“You’d need to phone the papers and TV stations and let them know about your spectacular additions,” Rachel added.

“You’re one hundred percent correct,” Ted said. “You’re always thinking of the publicity angle.” *But all of Barnum’s actors playing ghosts would need to show up. If not, the media could turn around and bite us in the ass.*

From the hall came the sound of a march. Ted, Hope, Rachel, and Nick exited the office onto the landing. Across the way, they saw a man conducting a small band.

“They’re playing the ‘Washington Post March,’” Nick said.

“John Phillip Sousa!” Ted said. “Wow, this Barnum fellow doesn’t give up.”

Nick left at 2:30 to pick up his daughter from school. Hope remained to help Rachel. Later, the two women walked the show aisles distributing sheets of paper—each marked with an exhibitor’s name and booth number—to help artists find their spaces on move-in the next day, Thursday.

By 5:00, Chuck Parker and his crew had finished installing pipe and drape and laying out the electrical cables for the booths. The decorator told Ted he’d be back at 7:00 the next morning to fill special orders from exhibitors for carpeting, extra drapes, or additional lighting.

“I’m heading home,” Rachel said to Ted. “I have homework due tomorrow.”

“Can’t believe you’re working full blast with the show—and taking classes at SF State,” he remarked.

Rachel grabbed her coat, exited the office and the hall, and headed toward the BART station.

“Let’s you and I go too. I’m hungry,” Ted said to Hope. They pulled on their jackets, locked the office, and left into a cool and cloudy evening.

The couple walked a block to the San Franciscan on Market Street. They passed through the lobby of the old hotel, rode the elevator to the third floor, and on to their room. Each took a shower and jumped

into nicer clothes for the evening—Hope, a dress, and Ted slacks and a sports shirt.

“Where do you want to eat?” Ted asked as they exited the hotel.

“How about Tommy’s Joynt? We haven’t been there for a while. They have great food, and we don’t need a reservation.”

“Perfect.”

The two crossed Market and walked up Grove to Van Ness and on to Geary and Tommy’s Joynt. Ted had buffalo stew and a Heineken beer, Hope a corned beef sandwich, and a cappuccino. Afterward, they walked along Polk Street toward their hotel.

“I have to admit, I’m worried about our attendance this weekend,” Ted said.

“You haven’t had much media attention, have you?”

“Nope, lots of advertising, but no newspaper stories. Just mentions in their event listings. With TV, we have our ads on Channel 12, but I haven’t had success getting them to commit to come to the festival on Friday.”

“That was Barnum’s biggest pitch—adding PR for your show.”

“Precisely. In fact, if there aren’t any articles about us in tomorrow’s papers, I’m considering adding in Barnum’s artists but not his entertainers.”

“You know best, honey.”

Ted turned silent. He was in deep thought.

They continued walking to the hotel and made their way to their room. Once inside, they began hugging and kissing and undressed each other. Even though they’d been together a year, they still made love nearly every night.

Hours later, Ted was jolted awake by a nightmare. In it, he witnessed throngs of people wandering aimlessly across Civic Center Plaza, the park above Brooks Hall. But the crucial ramp connecting the Plaza to the expo hall had disappeared. Below, all of his artists sat in their booths, expectantly waiting for customers who never arrived.

Ted’s heart raced as he hoped this disturbing vision wouldn’t manifest into reality.

THURSDAY

CHAPTER THREE

Ted and Hope rose at 6:30 on Thursday morning. They dressed in work clothes: jeans, flannel shirts, and sneakers. Next stop, the lobby. The hotel gift stand was open and selling the day's local newspapers. Ted bought the San Francisco Chronicle, Oakland Tribune, and San Jose Mercury. As he and Hope ate breakfast in the hotel restaurant, he thumbed through the papers.

"I can't find articles on *Autumnfest* in either the Tribune or Mercury, only our ads. But here's an item in the entertainment section of the Chronicle."

"Well, that's something," Hope said.

"Damn! Not something good. It reads:

Autumnfest returns to Brooks Hall, Civic Center, San Francisco Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. This year, it's billed: "Enter a 19th-Century Village Fair." This sounds rather silly for an arts and crafts event with modern-day artisans. What will they add—pony rides, sheep and pig judging, a carousel, some old-time carnival acts?

"Then it gives the times and admission prices, and that's it."

"That's discouraging. What's your next step, Ted?"

"I have to do what's best for my artists and customers. I need to save the show!"

"You're being overdramatic," Hope said.

"It's time for high drama. I'm going to find Barnum."

Stepping outside the hotel, they were greeted by a dawning sunny but chilly day. They pulled on jackets.

Hope left to get her van in the parking lot behind the hotel.

Ted walked across Civic Center Plaza and down the broad ramp that led to a level loading area in front of the hall entrance. This site was spacious; capable of accommodating dozens of vehicles during exhibitor move-in or move-out.

He arrived at 7:00 and greeted a dozen artists in their trucks, vans, and cars waiting to unload and move into their booths. He used a house phone to request hall staff to fully retract the sliding glass doors at the entrance, creating an expansive eighty-foot entryway for easy access.

Artists exited their vehicles and began pulling out their booth setups and stock, placing these on carts and dollies, moving into the hall, and to their spaces.

Barnum appeared. *Out of nowhere*. He was dressed in the same sharp clothes he'd worn yesterday.

"Good morning, Ted. I felt you might be looking for me."

"Yes, I am. After much thought, I'd love to have your actors portraying artists, inventors, and writers participate in *Autumnfest* this weekend."

"Wonderful! Thank you! But how about my incredible performers?"

"As outstanding as they are, we're completely set. I'll try to fit in at least some of them next year."

"I'm disappointed, but I understand. I'll give my exhibitors the good news. Will you phone the newspapers and TV stations to announce *Barnum's Spirits*?"

"I will once I've seen they're set up."

"Where are we going to be?"

Ted saw that Chuck Parker, the decorator, had arrived with one of his crew. "We have spare space at the back of the hall. I'll ask our decorator to add twelve extra booths for your exhibitors."

Ted approached Chuck and told him what he needed. Chuck pulled out the floor plan from yesterday, and Ted marked off where the booths should go.

The decorator and his assistant and Barnum headed through the hall.

Hope arrived and drove her 1970 Ford Econoline down the ramp and

parked. Exiting the van, she swung open its rear doors and removed her cart. With Ted's assistance, she loaded the shelves and tables for her booth and several wooden crates filled with her ceramics. Hope walked to her space in the festival's first aisle, with Ted pushing the cart alongside her.

Ted told Hope he'd spoken with Barnum. "He seemed to know I was going to take his invitation."

"I think he knew he could convince you from the beginning. He sensed how much you care about your show and your artists."

They arrived at Hope's booth. "I'll take it from here," she said. "I know you'll want to go see how Barnum's going to set up his space and then roam the hall to make sure move-in goes smoothly."

Ted walked to the rear of the hall. He saw the decorator had added Barnum's booths and was laying down their electrical cords. A dozen booths branched out from the opening Ted had asked Chuck to create in the back row of his regular exhibitors' spaces: six on each side, with a fifteen-foot aisle down the middle in a cul-de-sac arrangement.

Ted turned to Barnum. "Should I call you Phineus or P.T.?"

"P.T. is fine."

"You decide where you want to locate your exhibitors. Rachel can mark out sheets of paper with their booth numbers and names."

"I think I'll place my six painters down one side. I'll set Rodin, Edison, Bell, Tiffany, William Morris of the *Art and Craft Movement*, and my stand for the *1893 Columbian Exposition* in the six booths on the other. At the back, I'll add an 'Authors' Corner' where my writers can place racks and tables with copies of their books. I've invited twenty, but they'll come and go as they please.

"Your customers will see my painters painting their masterpieces—for instance, Vincent painting *Sunflowers* and Edvard Munch *The Scream*. Edison and Bell will have their original inventions, Rodin and Tiffany samples of their works. Your folks can also have conversations with my authors about their works, for instance, discussing *Huckleberry Finn* with Mark Twain or *Little Women* with Louisa May Alcott."

"Impressive! I can't wait to see them in place and, hell, I want to meet them too."

Vincent van Gogh appeared.

"Where should I set up?" he asked P.T.

"You're the first, so take the booth at the entrance to our *Celebrity Spirits*." Barnum told Ted where he wanted the other five painters placed.

"I'm going to make a banner to hang at our entrance. Can your decorator raise it above the aisle for us?"

"Sure! I'll ask him."

"I have work to do getting this ready," Barnum said. He and Vincent strolled into the addition.

Ted made his way to the loading area. As he walked along, he regarded the show site.

Brooks Hall was constructed in the late 1950s to hold trade and consumer shows. It had its original advantages: It was 90,000 square feet of exhibit space—vast for the time; and was located in Civic Center in downtown San Francisco, accessible via public transportation and surrounded by ample parking facilities.

He frowned, as he also viewed the hall's disadvantages: It had a low ceiling and dozens of fat, load-bearing columns that either limited where booths could be installed or obstructed crowd flow. And worst of all—the facility *laid completely underground*.

Exhibitors referred to the site as Mole Hall or Gopher Palace. Still, artists and craftspeople loved having *Autumnfest* here because of the loyal customers who came every year and purchased their works.

Ted found himself at the hall entrance. Bart and Betty Zonka, his good friends from Kings Beach on Lake Tahoe, had arrived. The couple began unloading boxes of their wooden toys—train sets, jack-in-the-boxes, merry-go-rounds—onto a hand truck from their 1950s-vintage Volkswagen cargo van. Bart, skinny as ever, wore Farmer John coveralls; Betty, a Mother Hubbard dress, which hid her plumpness.

"Hi, guys! I want to share what's happening with you."

"Sure, what's up?" Betty asked.

Ted told them how he met a man calling himself P.T. Barnum yesterday morning.

“So, this fellow showed up a day early,” Bart said.

“No. He said he was the ghost of Barnum and that he wanted to be my partner this weekend.” Ted detailed the rest of yesterday’s happenings.

“Come on, Ted,” Bart said. “What were you smoking?”

“I know, I know—it’s the same thing Nick asked. It sounds like a pipe dream out of *Alice in Wonderland*. But all of Barnum’s ghosts look like the real people.”

Betty smiled. “Heck, you’re advertising the show as a 19th century fair. I guess they’d fit right in.”

“Precisely what Barnum said; he told me he could offer a *genuine* 19th-century atmosphere to our customers. I asked how much money he wanted.”

“That’s it. He wants real dough for his pretend ghosts,” Bart said.

“No. He said money wasn’t any use to ghosts. He said he wanted booths for his spirit exhibitors to display their works in. And—more important—our audience.”

Bart and Betty finished loading their cart and left for their space.

Rachel appeared. “I took BART over and went straight to the show office,” she said. “Artists are asking the usual questions about getting badges for the weekend and where they can store extra stock. So, I need to get back. But now Annie Oakley and Buffalo Bill appeared on our stage and began tossing and shooting objects out of the air.”

“Not again!” Ted said.

“I told them they were endangering people. But Buffalo Bill assured me they were using *ghost bullets*—seemingly realistic to onlookers, but not made of lead or any physical substance.”

“Probably like the *ghost paintings* Barnum told us would be in his *Celebrity Spirits* painters’ booths.”

“You sound like you’re beginning to believe Barnum and his people are authentic ghosts.”

“I’m working on it—especially since once the story breaks in the papers and on TV news, it’s bound to increase our crowds this weekend.”

He recounted to Rachel what had recently transpired between him

and Barnum. Ted took a small tablet out of his pocket and drew a diagram of where Barnum wanted his *Celebrity Spirits* situated. He handed it to Rachel, instructing her to make name sheets for them and then place these in the respective booths.

Hope returned to the entrance and her van to get more pottery just as Cindy Harris arrived with her own vehicle. Cindy jumped out and gave both Hope and Ted hugs. "Great to be back here in Brooks Caverns!" she said.

"Yeah, it's like coming home—now that it's our fifth year of *Autumn-fest* here," Hope answered.

"And I get to wear my vintage-style costumes again this weekend."

"You're the master of design. And you're even selling more of your work this year with customers taking notice of your outfits."

"Yep, it's working for me." Cindy began unloading her van and placing clothes racks and her work on a dolly.

Ted helped both women. He soon saw Dr. Holmes leaning against a column near the glass doors into the hall, his hands balled into fists and his gaze fixated on Hope and Cindy.

Ted approached him. "Since you're not part of the festival and these artists need to concentrate on setting up, would you mind leaving?"

"Mr. Cassidy, I merely came this morning to see if I could find a way to join your fabulous event." Dr. Holmes vanished.

Hope stepped to Ted. "That was the man saying he was a ghost that you met here yesterday, wasn't it—the one who wanted to sell his medicine?"

"Yes, that's him. Did you see how he was staring at you and Cindy?"

"I couldn't help but notice it. Kind of spooky. But I guess ghosts *can be spooky*, can't they?"

~

"Follow me," Hope said to Cindy. "I'll show you where your booth is—it's next to mine, of course." Along the way, Hope told her friend about the weekend's ghost exhibitors.

"They're probably new artists wearing better-than-usual costumes,"

Cindy suggested.

“That’s what I thought at first too. But you have to see them to believe it. And there are *lots* of them!”

Hope arranged her booth. First, she covered the ten-foot-square space with a rug. Next, she bolted together three sets of four-level wooden shelves and placed them along the sides and at the back.

She unpacked her ceramic wares from the crates. She laid out: stoneware mugs, cups, soup bowls, and plates on one set of shelves; teapots, serving dishes, and fruit bowls on the second set; and on the third, the one at the rear, positioned her vases, candleholders, and soap dishes.

Hope stepped to the front of her booth and peeked around at her good friend, who was still setting up. With her red hair in a pageboy and freckles, at twenty-five—the same age as herself—Cindy still looked girlishly cute.

Cindy arranged her knit jackets on two free-standing metal racks down the middle of her booth and hung samples of her sweaters and shawls on wooden pegboards at the back and two sides.

Across the aisle, Hope glanced at Bart and Betty, placing their wooden toys on shelving and tables. Betty saw her and waved hello. Hope walked over.

“Did Ted tell you about our *guest* artists this weekend?”

“You mean our *ghost* artists,” Bart said, grinning.

Barnum passed down the aisle. “Please present me to your friends, Hope.”

“These are Bart and Betty Zonka, toy-makers from Lake Tahoe. Bart and Betty, meet P.T. Barnum himself.”

“Golly, you sure look like Barnum,” Bart said. He reached out his hand to shake.

Barnum didn’t lift his hand. “We won’t try that. I don’t want to shock you when your hand goes through mine, and you feel nothing.”

Bart laughed. “C’mon. I can’t believe that.”

“Okay, but I warned you.” He raised his hand to Bart’s. It passed clear through.

Bart jumped. "Wow, how do you do that? You a magician?"

"Of sorts, I guess I am. It's feeling like magic bringing all this together."

Barnum turned to Hope. "I'm looking for Ted. I'd like him to come and see how we've arranged the spirits' stands."

"I saw him at the show entrance. I'll walk there with you." They strolled down the aisle. "That was something else—your handshake, or sleight of hand, I should say. Maybe you are a ghost, maybe the spirit of P.T. Barnum."

"Wonderful. I expected some doubting, but I'm glad you're now accepting me. What's your story, Hope? You have a New England accent."

"I grew up in Maine. Yes, I guess I do have a *Down East* accent."

"How did you get to California?"

"I left home at seventeen, ran away with a boyfriend. But that affair soon ended."

"You didn't want to move back to Maine?"

"No, California is great. It never rains in the summer, and winter here is a lot warmer than there."

"How did you become a potter?"

"I had taken ceramic classes in Maine, which I enjoyed. And I apprenticed myself to a potter here, a woman who lives in Marin County. After two years of learning and practicing, I headed out on my own. I started selling to galleries and at craft fairs. I've exhibited at *Autumnfest* since its beginning."

Hope spied Ted talking with artists as she and Barnum arrived at the entrance.

She waved at him and shouted, "P.T. here is looking for you."

Hope regarded her future husband. *He's not that handsome, but he's always smiling, which more than makes up for it. At thirty-four, his hair is already thinning. But he takes care of himself.*

She turned and left for her booth.

Ted stepped to Barnum. "I heard Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley are back."

"Yes, Bill is a showman. He toured with his *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* show for decades and can't stay away from the action. Do you have a few moments to walk to the *Spirits* section again?"

"Sure. Let's go." The two headed through the hall.

"I asked Hope to give me her story," Barnum said. "Now, tell me about yourself. Where did you grow up?"

"In Wyoming, near the Teton Mountains."

"And you moved to California from Wyoming?"

"Actually, I attended the University of Oregon. I graduated with a degree in chemistry and a teacher's certificate, and got hired at a high school in Concord, California, where I taught science courses."

"How did you go from teaching to promoting craft fairs?"

"It was simple. I'd put together parties and small events in college. One summer vacation I organized a little outdoor craft fair to make some extra money. And guess what—I enjoyed producing the fair more than teaching and decided I'd try it full time. Within a year, I presented the first *Autumnfest*."

Along their walk, Ted couldn't help but notice artists casting curious glances, seemingly wondering, "Who is this splendidly costumed man accompanying Ted?" They reached the new section. It already had the banner raised above the aisle:

Meet Barnum's 19th-Century Celebrity Spirits

Barnum having communicated his good news to his exhibitors, many spirits had now appeared and begun constructing their booths,

Down the left-hand side, Ted saw the painters setting up. Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Mary Cassatt, Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch, and Winslow Homer were hanging well-known works on panels or screens in their booths, and each had also set up an easel and canvas.

Barnum introduced Ted to the recently arrived painters. He didn't try to shake their hands.

Ted was delighted—these were some of the best painters of the 19th

century. His doubts about their authenticity seemed unimportant; he realized that he now wanted to believe in ghosts.

Barnum walked up to the one woman hanging paintings in her booth.

“Ted, I’d like you to meet Mary Cassatt, who I think is the past century’s greatest female painter.”

The artist’s spirit appeared to be in her mid-thirties. She wore a floor-length black-and-white striped dress, and a hat trimmed with artificial flowers.

“Hello, Mary,” Ted said. “Welcome to our festival. Your work is beautiful.”

“Thank you, Mr. Cassidy. And thank you for having us at your exhibition. I’m excited to show my finished works to your visitors this weekend, and I plan to create a new painting during the event.”

Across the aisle, in the first booth on the right-hand side, Barnum introduced Ted to Auguste Rodin, who was placing his famous sculpture, *The Thinker*. In the corner of his space was the half-finished *The Kiss*.

Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, and Louis Comfort Tiffany occupied the next three booths. William Morris and John Ruskin, representing the *Arts and Crafts Movement*, took up the fifth booth. The last space on that side showcased Barnum’s 1893 *Chicago Columbian Exposition*.

“I’ll show you my booth later,” Barnum told Ted. “I took the liberty to ask your decorator to set up a space ten-foot deep by forty-five-foot wide at the end of the aisle. This will make an ample *Authors’ Corner*—roomy enough if they don’t all show up at the same time!”

Mark Twain’s ghost was laying out his books on a tiered book rack. Other spirit writers were doing the same. Barnum introduced Ted to Herman Melville, Jane Austen, two Bronte sisters, Washington Irving, Frederick Douglass, and Jules Verne.

Bart walked through the entrance of *Celebrity Spirits*. He began shaking his head, but then smiled and finally laughed. “Incredible! I’m having to see it to accept it.”

“Yes, I think that’s what it takes—seeing all these spirits at one time,” Ted said.

“But I’m not *completely* convinced. I wonder if Barnum is one terrific magician and has brought these actors together as part of his act. Maybe he’s looking for you to give him status and publicity.”

“He does indeed want status and publicity. But I don’t think he’d be able to get all these *actors*, as you call them, together in one place; all these beings who look like *exactly* like their photos or portraits. That would be *Mission Impossible* makeup jobs, but not on one or two people like in the TV show, but on dozens. Look at all the painters and inventors and writers here.”

“Okay, I hear what you’re saying. Maybe we’ve entered a fantasy world?”

“That’s a way to look at it, I suppose, that we’ve all entered the *same* illusion. Since it seems to only be happening here, maybe Brooks Hall is fantasy land—at least for this weekend.”

“Well, it’s spooky but also cool. Hell, I guess I can suspend my disbelief for a few days for the fun of it.”

“There you go. Somehow, I’m hoping most of our artists here will join you and me in suspending our disbelief—like you said, for the fun of it.”

Barnum stepped to Bart. “Give me your thoughts on my friends.”

“They’re amazing. Can I talk with them?”

“You sure can. That’s the idea—that you and the other artists, plus the customers this weekend, interact with the spirits I’ve brought here. They can’t wait to show you their works.”

Bart walked up the aisle and spoke with Thomas Edison’s spirit. Ted overheard Bart say, “Mr. Edison, you’re one of the most recognizable ghosts here. Your mind and your inventions have fascinated me.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Edison replied. “As you see, I’ve set out several inventions. For instance, here’s my original phonograph, and next to it is the one I later developed with the cylinder recording and the big trumpet horn. It could play for all of two minutes.”

“Can I pick them up?”

“Unfortunately, no. They’re *ghost* machines, like me,” he laughed. “You can try to touch them, but your fingers will pass through.”

"I know how that goes!"

Ted watched Alexander Graham Bell come around into Edison's booth.

"Come and see the improvements I made to Tom's original phonograph," he said to Bart. "And you'll want to see how I developed the telephone."

"Hold on, Alexander! I hope you won't be stealing my visitors this weekend. This gentleman will make his way around to you in due time."

"I see there's a little rivalry here," Bart said. "I need to help Betty finish setting up our booth. But I'll find time to return and visit with *both* of you as soon as I can."

Barnum turned to Ted. "As you see, even though these beings are spirits, they're still *lively*. It should go smoother when more people are strolling through. All the inventors, painters, and writers will find their own fans to excite with their achievements."

Rachel appeared. "Hey, Ted. Clem and Mitzi are here. They want to talk to you about this weekend. They're at the stage watching Scott Joplin play his piano."

Ted walked through the hall toward the stage. Halfway there, he again saw Dr. Holmes. He stood in the aisle staring at Jill Bankhead setting up her booth. Jill, a slender woman in her early thirties, sold black-and-white photographs, mostly of tombstones and other graveyard settings.

Ted frowned at Dr. Holmes, who nodded and moved down the aisle.

Damn, he keeps reappearing. But I don't see how I can keep him out of the hall. "I'll ask Barnum what I should do about him," he said aloud.

Ted arrived at the stage as Joplin finished playing "Felicity Rag" and then vanished along with his piano.

Clem and Mitzi both had puzzled faces. Clem, as usual, was wearing his green overalls and yellow sneakers. Mitzi, Clem's wife and partner, sported red slacks and a white jumper. She had her Brunette hair tied back with a big white bow.

"Nick phoned and told us what was happening at the hall this weekend," Clem said. "I was skeptical at first, but now I'm beginning to wonder. Who was that guy and how did he disappear?"

“That’s Scott Joplin, one of Barnum’s ghost entertainers. I think he misses playing to an audience, so he keeps appearing. Some of P.T.’s other performers have also passed through, even though I told Barnum we couldn’t put them on stage until next year.”

“Good. I’m glad to hear we don’t have to worry about *that* this weekend!”

“We want to set up and test our sound system,” Mitzi said. “Is Tim coming today?”

“I don’t know. We’ll ask Nick. I see he’s gotten here himself.”

Ted saw through his unzipped jacket that Nick had changed to a San Francisco Giants T-shirt.

“Clem and Mitzi are asking if Tim is coming to help adjust the sound system.”

“He should be here any time.”

Barnum arrived to the stage. “Good morning, Nick.”

Mitzi turned to the two. “Nick, you told us P.T. Barnum was bringing together a host of exhibitors this weekend. And this must be him.”

“Let me introduce you,” Nick said. “Clem and Mitzi, with Jim and Andy, play the best bluegrass you’ll ever hear.”

Barnum didn’t offer his hand but said, “Pleased to meet you. I’ve listened to your record. Your music is wonderful. It reminds me of the fiddle songs friends of mine who lived in the Appalachian Mountains played when they got together on Sunday afternoons. I’ll be here to applaud your performances tomorrow.”

“We’re happy to meet you too,” Mitzi said.

“Thanks for picking up our album,” Clem added.

Ted took his chance to speak with Barnum about Holmes. “The spirit I told you about yesterday, Dr. Holmes, keeps appearing. He says he’s here looking for a way to join the festival. But I caught him staring at Hope and Cindy earlier and at Jill Bankhead—a photographer in our show—a short time ago while she was setting up her booth. Can you get him to disappear?”

“I’ll talk with him. But I can’t force him to leave. Perhaps just make

him feel unwelcome.”

“And maybe you, in your capacity, can find what he’s all about? He mentioned he was in Chicago during the World’s Fair if that helps.”

“That’s why I don’t recognize him. I died a couple of years before the 1893 World’s Fair. But I’ll ask folks who were there that year, such as Annie Oakley and Buffalo Bill.”

“Thanks, P.T. Say; it’s time for me to announce *Celebrity Spirits* to the world!”