

# **Barnum's Ghosts**

A Novel by **Warren Cook**

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Wednesday

## Chapter One

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

As he continued his rounds through the cold, unheated exhibition hall, he paused occasionally to jot down changes to the floor plan he was holding.

Glancing at his watch, Ted realized the morning was slipping away. Soon the decorator would arrive to install pipe, drape and power for the booths of the Fifth Annual San Francisco *Autumnfest*.

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

Committed to boosting the sales of the artists and craftspeople at his festival, Ted thought, *I'm already pouring thousands into advertising. What more can I do?*

He finished crossing the hall and climbed the stairs to his show office. The space was functional but sparse. It housed two old steel desks and a couple of folding chairs set against one

wall, with three Formica-top tables positioned along the opposite wall. Adjacent to it, a compact room with a modest desk and another folding chair served as the office for Ted's ticket manager, ideal for managing cash 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. She looked up and smiled at Ted.

“I'm glad you're here, Rachel.”

“I only got here a few minutes ago to meet with the phone man.”

After the installer finished setting up the phone and left, Rachel began unpacking boxes of show supplies she'd brought from the festival's central office.

“Here, let me help you with that,” Ted said.

On show days at *Autumnfest*, exhibitors were offered a complimentary breakfast of coffee and donuts. Ted unpacked a crate holding coffee essentials: two large urns, cans of coffee, styrene cups, sugar packets, creamers, and stir sticks. He laid them out on a table near the office entrance.

Ted glanced over at Rachel and recalled the day two years ago when they first met. He had reached out to the placement office at San Francisco State for a temporary assistant. Rachel—petite, pretty—and Black—was the first to respond. He couldn't recall whether he hired her because she was attractive, seemed intelligent, or simply to bring more diversity to the office. What he did remember was that he hired her on the spot.

At 8:00, Ted heard the rumble of the decorator's truck rolling down the ramp and into the 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, the owner of Bay-Area Expo Services. Chuck appeared to be in his early fifties, and was trim and fit—*Likely from all the walking and heavy lifting involved in setting up and breaking down trade and consumer shows*, Ted thought.

The decorator and his crew would spend the rest of Wednesday installing pipes and drapes, and running electrical lines for the three hundred 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 power cords for last-minute sign-ups.

Ted made his way back to the show office. As he neared the stairway, the sound of Hope Wolcott's voice brought a smile to his face. During last year's tour, he and Hope—a twenty-four-year-old potter in his festivals—had moved from a love affair into a full-blown relationship. After the 1976 San Francisco show, Ted proposed to Hope, and she responded, "Of course!" They planned to get married in the spring of 1978.

Ted gave notice on the house he was renting in Kings Beach near Lake Tahoe, and soon moved in with Hope at her home in Point Reyes Station, Marin County. Her property included a pottery studio and kiln, perfectly suited to her work. In the next couple of months, they planned to find a house to rent closer to Ted's office in downtown San Francisco—yet with space for Hope's studio and kiln.

With those thoughts swirling in his head, 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 blonde 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.*

Hope looked up as he walked in. “I just arrived,” she said in her usual 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 added.

Rachel, now assisted by Hope, continued unpacking the show supply boxes. Ted gathered the empty boxes, loaded them onto a cart, and wheeled it through the door to a corner in the adjoining room.

Ted decided he should check on the decorator. He left his office, descended the stairs, and headed over to where Chuck Parker and his team were busy setting up a row of booths. Since Ted frequently received last-minute sign-ups, he directed Chuck to leave an open space in the back row for potential expansion. The decorator then asked Ted to accompany him to the rear of the hall and showed him where he would set aside the extra pipe and drape and power cords.

Chuck returned to his work, and Ted turned to go back to his office. At that moment, a man emerged from the side entrance. His appearance grabbed Ted’s attention—he looked as if he’d stepped straight out of a Charles Dickens novel. The man, around forty, wore an elegant collared shirt, cravat, coat, and a vest with a watch chain dangling from it.

The man hastened toward Ted.

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

Ted, caught off guard by the stranger's theatrical entrance, nodded. "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," the man said with a wink, his tone suggesting he was enjoying this moment.

Concealing his surprise at this character's obvious invention, Ted responded with a cautious smile. His eyes now took in the man's features—his prominent nose, potbelly, and thinning hair retreating from a balding scalp. "Well, you do resemble the photos I've seen of him. Congratulations on your impressive getup. You're probably exhibiting at our show this weekend. What's your craft?"

The man's expression grew more serious. "Do you believe in spirits, in ghosts?" the Barnum impersonator asked, changing the subject with an unsettling directness.

Ted took a step back. "I'm skeptical, but I've heard stories 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."

Ted's mind raced as he tried to make sense of the situation. "I don't think I need a partner at the moment." Yet, this eccentric's aim aroused Ted's curiosity. "What are you proposing?"

With a grin, the self-proclaimed Barnum said, "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 last century."

Ted felt a mixture of amusement and doubt, but played along. "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,” the Barnum poser replied. “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?* Ted wondered.

“I read the disbelief on your face, Mr. Cassidy,” the Barnum imitator continued, undeterred. “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, scrutinizing the man. “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 *relive*, which is not the word for it, but you catch my drift.”

Ted nodded.

“I’ll return shortly. In the meantime, please consider how these spirits can exhibit or perform on your stage this weekend.” With that, the man glided across the cement floor—his polished shoes making no sound—and vanished through the side entrance.

Ted made his way back to the show office, his mind buzzing with the morning’s odd encounter. Climbing the stairs and stepping inside, he approached Hope and Rachel. Shaking his head, he shrugged and said, “I met the strangest guy in the hall just now.”

“I thought only the decorator was here today,” Rachel remarked.

“But you bumped into someone else out there?” Hope asked



“Yeah,” Ted responded, still looking a bit confused. “He introduced himself as P. T. Barnum—you know, the famous showman from a century ago. The weirdest thing was he looked like the photos we’ve seen of him—tall, balding, down to the collared shirt, tie, vest, coat, and watch chain.”

“He must be one of our new exhibitors in the San Francisco show this weekend,” Hope said.

“That’s what I asked him,” Ted said, shaking his head. “But no. He claimed he was the ghost of Barnum. And get this—he said he wants to be my partner this weekend.”

“Far out!” Rachel exclaimed. “Having Barnum’s ghost as your partner would be great PR. Was he scary?”

“No, not at all,” Ted laughed. “I’m sure it’s a practical joke or some kind of dare.”

“Did he say anything else?”

“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 artworks. And he said he’ll return with the ghosts of Vincent van Gogh and Mark Twain.”

Rachel grinned. “Can’t wait to meet them!”

“I know you’re kidding,” Ted answered.

Hope chuckled, nudging Ted playfully. “That’s quite a ghost story. So, when should we expect this spectral entourage?”

Right on cue, the man claiming to be Barnum strode into the show office, accompanied by two companions. “As promised, I’ve brought the spirits of Mark Twain and Vincent van Gogh, or as you might call them, their ghosts,” he announced with a dramatic flourish.

## Chapter Two

Ted's eyes widened in disbelief as he took in the sight before him. The resemblance between these *ghostly* characters and their historical counterparts was uncanny. 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 toward his companions with a proud smile. "Mark Twain is eager to give a lecture to your guests and then take questions. Vincent would like a booth to display his paintings and gauge the reactions of your attendees. By the way, have you noticed—he still has both ears?"

To Ted, the two "spirits" appeared more like robots. In sync, they bowed, smiled, and said, "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Cassidy," without offering a hand to shake.

Nodding in disbelief, trying to process the bizarre situation, Ted said, "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?"

Barnum chuckled with a conspiratorial tone. "We don't desire monetary compensation; money is useless to us ghosts. No, like I said, we want a stage to perform on and booths to

display our works in. And—your audience. Permit me to share with you which of my ghost friends I'm 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 with his *New World Symphony*; Tchaikovsky with selections from *The Nutcracker*. And more!”

Ted raised an eyebrow in disbelief. “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 all these renowned figures you've mentioned who can perform as if still alive.”

Barnum's grin widened. His confidence seemed unwavering. “Wait. You'll come to believe in all of us.” He began counting on his fingers. “And I'd also 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.

Ted's skepticism softened as he considered the possibilities. “Amazing! But they'd be competing with my artists for customer sales.”

Barnum shook his head. “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.”

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

"Plus a stand dedicated to the Arts and Crafts Movement of the last century and another for me showcasing the *1893 Columbian Exposition*—though I might throw in a few curiosities from my American Museum."

Ted held up a hand, overwhelmed by the sheer scope of Barnum's plan. "Enough already! This sounds intriguing. And you and I will have an *entire* year to prepare."

Barnum's eyes gleamed with anticipation. "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."

Barnum waved off the concern. "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 paper 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."

Ted couldn't deny the appeal of the idea, but remained cautious. "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."

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

Ted nodded, his mind still turning over the possibilities. "Understood. Back to your entertainers—you said you wanted your acts to perform on *our stage*?"

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

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

“Too good to be true.”

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

Ted agreed, his mind already racing ahead. “Right. Though it wouldn’t happen until next year, I’d like Nick’s take on the performers this fellow claims he could bring.”

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

Before Ted could respond, the sounds of gunshots reverberated through the hall, sending a shock of adrenaline through him. Ted bolted from the office, his heart pounding. With only a few rows of drapes installed so far by the decorator, he had a clear view across the vast hall.

At the rear, he spotted a man in fringed buckskin with a cowboy hat pulled low. His leather attire draped loosely over his sturdy frame, with boots reaching up to mid-thigh. Beside him stood a woman clad in a vintage dress and a wide-brimmed hat, holding a rifle. Ted watched in stunned silence as the man tossed up objects. The woman, looking focused and poised, raised her rifle, and with each sharp crack of the shot, the airborne targets shattered mid-flight, displaying her impressive marksmanship.

It took Ted several moments to process what was happening. Then, regaining his composure, he shouted, “Stop!” and hurried down the stairway and across to the two.

The woman lowered her rifle and smiled at Ted's approach. "Just practicing for the fair. I'm Annie Oakley, and this is part of my act."

The man beside her tipped his hat. "And I'm Buffalo Bill. Annie's the biggest attraction in my *Wild West* show."

"You folks are doing a great job acting as characters from the past," Ted said to the pair who mirrored the photos he'd seen of them in books.

"We're not actors, my friend," replied the Buffalo Bill look-alike. "We're actual 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 join."

Ted smiled, though his mind whirred with doubts. "I'll play along with your story for the sheer novelty. Heck, for the excitement 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," she answered.

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

When he arrived back at the office, Ted noticed that the "ghosts" Barnum had brought earlier had loosened up and were now chatting with Hope and Rachel. Bill and Annie greeted the women and the other "spirits." No handshakes. *I guess ghosts—or at least those portraying them—can choose to appear with physical attributes, but not shaking hands must be part of their act.*

As Ted glanced at Mark Twain's 'spirit,' his mind wandered to his favorite of the author's works: *Huckleberry Finn*. He had read it twice—once as a teenager, around fourteen or fifteen, and then again just a few months ago at thirty-four. To Ted, it felt like two completely different books. The first time, it was simply a fun adventure with Huck and Jim; now, he saw it as a powerful critique of the way people lived and thought in the South before the Civil War.

"I'm phoning Nick DeMartini, our master of ceremonies," Ted said to Barnum, pulling himself back to the present. "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 it wouldn't work for now, but that we could talk about it for next year.. He has Mark Twain, Vincent van Gogh, Buffalo Bill, and Annie Oakley here."

There was a pause on the other end before Nick replied. "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 casually 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*.

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Barnum approached Nick, giving a slight bow as he said, "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. DeMartini."

"Just Nick, please. You must be Phineas T. Barnum. Your costume and makeup are impressive—as are your friends here."

"I don't think any of us are wearing makeup, and these clothes are our everyday attire," Barnum responded before introducing Nick to the other four 'spirits'.

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

Barnum's eyes twinkled with mischief as he replied, "From the newspaper and TV ads I saw. The billing invites people to a 19th-century village fair. That's what we can offer your audience—a genuine past-century experience."

Nick nodded slowly. "Makes sense."

Barnum continued with his pitch. "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."

Barnum's expression softened. "I want to present my performers on your stage for a full day. You'd still be the MC, Nick, but I could step in to introduce each act."

"That's asking a hell of a lot."

"Yes, indeed. 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 then shared with Nick the all-star cast he'd earlier outlined to Ted.



“How do we know you could pull all this off?” Nick asked, his voice reflecting a mixture of curiosity and doubt.

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 want to keep performing, and your audience would demand encores. But I’d keep things moving.”

As they spoke, Barnum heard piano music coming from the hall. His expression brightened, and he stepped outside the office onto the landing above the stairway leading to the exhibition floor. Nick followed.

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

On the stage, a Black man in a navy blue suit, white dress shirt and bow tie was playing an upright piano. He performed a familiar tune, “The Entertainer.”

Barnum gestured toward the stage. “That’s the spirit of Scott Joplin. Remember, he wrote that song.”

Nick walked down the stairs and leaned against the wall. Barnum smiled as he watched Nick become captivated by Joplin's performance. After playing three more ragtime pieces, Scott stood up from the piano and quietly departed.

Another 'spirit,' a woman dressed in a white satin bodice and skirt, stepped onto the stage along with a gentleman in formal attire who took a seat at the piano.

Barnum descended the stairs and 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 numbers.

“I don’t know these songs,” Nick said to Barnum. “But I have to admit, she makes each one a thrill to hear.”

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, gleaming with pride, 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?”

Nick smiled at Barnum. “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 this for months and believe it’s the way it will work for *everyone’s* benefit.”

With that, 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.

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Nick walked back into the office and shared with Ted the performances of ‘Scott Joplin’ and ‘Jenny Lind’ he’d just 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 audience 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 love 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 creations?”

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

“You’re absolutely right,” 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 exclaimed. “Wow, this Barnum fellow doesn’t give up.”

Nick left at 2:30 to pick up his daughter from school. Hope remained to assist Rachel. Soon, the two women began walking 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.

Meanwhile, Ted wandered to the entrance at the base of the ramp, where he saw that Chuck Parker's truck remained parked.

Another man dressed in past-century costume appeared midway down the ramp. He wore a wool suit, vest, high collar, tie, and a derby hat—completed with a styled mustache. As he approached, covering the last stretch of the incline, Ted felt a sudden drop in temperature and an immediate sense of unease.

“Hello, Mr. Cassidy,” the man said. “I hear you’re the promoter of the 19th-century-themed festival this weekend. Allow me to introduce myself. I’m the spirit of Dr. Henry Gordon. I lived in Chicago during the 1893 World’s Fair and invented a special medicine there. I wish to offer my bottles of *Dr. Gordon’s 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.”

Ted blinked, trying to process the man’s words. *How did this kook find me?* He wondered, his mind spinning.

“Whoa, you’ve said a mouthful. I’ve already met a few others of P.T. Barnum’s actors playing 19th-century personalities. Did he send you to visit me?”

“I never met Barnum. But he was the great showman of my time. I heard through the spirit grapevine that he was inviting artists and actors from the last century to take part in your *Autmnfest* 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.”

Ted narrowed his eyes, suspecting that there was something deeper at play. *This Gordon character is too smooth.* “I don’t think that the Barnum lookalike and his ‘spirits’ will take part in the show 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.”

Dr. Gordon sighed. “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. Gordon,” he said, though the exchange left him feeling unsettled.

Gordon ambled up the ramp and disappeared. Ted stood and shook his head over all of these “19th-century” personalities.

When Ted arrived back at his office, he found that Hope and Rachel had also returned. To the two, he related his encounter with the actor claiming he was the spirit of a Dr. Gordon, and wanted a booth to sell his *Dr. Gordon’s All-Pain-Relief Elixir* to the show’s customers.

“Well, we don’t have anyone else selling an elixir here,” Rachel said, grinning.

“If you have a cancellation or add on extra booths, will you let him in?” Hope asked.

“No way!” Ted answered. “I told him I couldn’t risk my customers getting sick and suing me because I allowed someone into the show selling a strange concoction.”

“Then that’s one less spirit we have to worry about,” Rachel joked.

“Maybe not,” Ted said. “He seemed pretty determined. In fact, he told me he’d try to think of another way to take part in the festival. It wouldn’t surprise me to see him show up again, maybe as soon as tomorrow.”

“At least that’s probably our last *ghost story* for today!” Hope said.

By 5:00, Chuck Parker and his crew had finished installing pipe and drape and laying out the electrical cables for the booths. Chuck told Ted he’d return 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 starving,” Ted said to Hope. They pulled on their jackets, locked the office, and stepped out into a cloudy twilight. The streets still hummed with activity.

The couple walked a block to the San Franciscan on Market Street. They made their way through the lobby of the old hotel, with its spacious, high ceilings and polished marble floors, then took the elevator to the third floor and headed to their room. It was simple, with a double bed, a wooden dresser, two upholstered armchairs, and a patterned carpet that seemed to have seen better days. Each took a shower and changed 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 in a while. They have great food, and we don’t need a reservation.”

“Perfect,” Ted agreed, slipping his arm around her as they set off.

The two crossed Market, walked along Grove Street past Civic Center Plaza and City Hall, then turned up Van Ness Avenue for several blocks past the opera house, car dealerships and small shops to Geary Boulevard and Tommy's Joynt.

Inside, it was as if Ted and Hope had stepped back several decades. The hofbrau-style restaurant featured old neon signs, Tiffany lamps hanging from the ceiling, checkered red and white tablecloths, shelves filled with quirky knick-knacks, and a fully stocked bar.

The couple lined up at the cafeteria-style counter and when it came their turn, Ted ordered buffalo stew and a Heineken, while Hope opted for a corned beef sandwich and a cappuccino. They settled into a cozy corner, surrounded by the lively chatter of other diners.

After dinner, they strolled along Polk Street toward their hotel. Even though it was a Wednesday evening, the street was bustling with people. Dive bars, cafes, delis, and upscale restaurants each attracted their distinct customers. Bookstores, record shops and thrift stores were still open at this hour, which added to the bohemian vibe of the neighborhood.

As they weaved through the crowd on the sidewalk, Ted turned to Hope and said, "I have to admit, I'm worried about our attendance this weekend."

"You haven't had much media attention, have you?" Hope replied.

"Nope, lots of advertising, but no newspaper stories. Just mentions in their event listings. With TV, we've got our ads running on Channel 12, but I haven't had success getting them to commit to covering the festival on Friday."

"That was Barnum's biggest pitch—adding PR for your show."

"Exactly," Ted agreed, his mind racing with possibilities. "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."

Hope slipped her hand into his as they walked. “You know best, honey.”

Ted fell silent, lost in thought. The quiet between them was comfortable, filled with the unspoken understanding of a couple who knew each other well.

They continued on to the hotel and headed up to their room. Once inside, the mood changed. The stress of the day melted away as they embraced and kissed, their touches becoming more intense as they undressed one another. Even after a year together, their passion hadn't dimmed, and they made love with the same intensity as if it were the first time, their connection deep and undeniable.

Hours later, however, 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 become a reality.



THURSDAY

## Chapter Three

Ted and Hope rose at 6:00 on Thursday morning. They dressed in work clothes: jeans, flannel shirts, and sneakers—preparing for a busy day ahead. Next stop, the lobby, where 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. They made their way to the hotel restaurant, the aroma of brewing coffee greeting them as they entered.

They sat down for breakfast, and Ted began thumbing 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?”

Ted pushed his plate aside, no longer interested in finishing his breakfast. “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.”

They stepped outside the hotel, greeted by the moment between first light and sunrise, where fading stars marked the edge of night and day. The air was cool, prompting them to pull on their jackets.

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

Ted crossed the street and made his way through Civic Center Plaza. Its walkways, lawns, and symmetrical rows of trees were only faintly visible, bathed in soft grays and pale pinks. At the far end, City Hall stood tall, its iconic dome casting a long shadow over the park.

He reached the broad ramp that led to the loading area in front of the hall entrance and hurried down. Designed to accommodate dozens of vehicles during exhibitor move-ins and move-outs, the area offered an abundance of space,

It was already 7:00, and some fifteen artists in their trucks, vans, and cars greeted Ted, eager to unload and set up 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.

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.”

Ted, momentarily startled, nodded. “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 Celebrity Spirits*?”

Ted glanced around, already imagining the impact this would have on the event. “I will once I’ve seen they’re set up.”

“Where are you placing us?”

Ted saw that Chuck Parker 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 explained where to place the booths. The decorator, his assistant, and Barnum then headed out.

Hope arrived and drove her 1970 Ford Econoline down the ramp and parked. She exited the van, swung open its rear doors, and removed her cart. With Ted's help, she loaded the shelves and tables for her booth and several wooden crates filled with her ceramics. She then walked to her space in the festival's first aisle, with Ted pushing the cart alongside her.

Ted shared his recent conversation with Barnum. “He seemed to know I was going to take his invitation.”

Hope smiled. “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 see how Barnum's setting up his space and roam the hall to make sure move-in goes smoothly."

Ted walked to the rear of the hall and saw that the decorator had added Barnum's booths and was laying down their power 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, who was surveying the scene. "Should I call you Phineus or P.T.?"

"P.T. is fine," he replied with a chuckle.

"You decide where you want to place 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 to display their books. I've invited twenty, but they'll come and go as they please.

"Your customers will see my painters creating their masterpieces—for instance, Vincent painting *Sunflowers* and Edvard Munch *The Scream*. Edison and Bell will showcase their original inventions, and Rodin and Tiffany samples of their works. Your folks can also have conversations with my authors about their books, 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 pointed out to Ted where he’d like the other five painters situated.

“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 back to the loading area, his mind buzzing with thoughts of what was to come. 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, easily accessible via public transportation and surrounded by ample parking.

Ted frowned as he also regarded the hall’s disadvantages: it had a low ceiling and dozens of fat, load-bearing columns that either restricted booth placements or obstructed crowd flow. And worst of all—the facility *was 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 returned every year to buy their creations.

Ted found himself back at the hall entrance, where he spotted Bart and Betty Zonka, his good friends from Kings Beach on Lake Tahoe, unloading boxes of their wooden toys. They stacked train sets, jack-in-the-boxes, and merry-go-rounds onto a hand truck they’d pulled out

from their 1950s-vintage Volkswagen cargo van.

Bart, as skinny as ever, wore Farmer John coveralls, while Betty's Mother Hubbard dress concealed her plump figure.

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

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

Ted told them how he'd met a man claiming to be P.T. Barnum the previous 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 went on to elaborate the rest of yesterday's events.

"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, her eyes twinkling with amusement. "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, 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, her tone brisk. "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 Annie Oakley and Buffalo Bill just appeared on our stage and began tossing and shooting objects out of the air.”

“Not again!” Ted exclaimed.

“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.”

Rachel gave him a serious look. “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 then took a small tablet from his pocket and sketched a diagram of how Barnum wanted his *Celebrity Spirits* situated. He handed it to Rachel, instructing her to make name sheets and place these in their corresponding 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 hugged both Hope and Ted. “Great to be back here in Brooks Caverns!” she said.

“Yeah, it’s like coming home—now that it’s our fifth year of *Autumnfest* here,” Hope answered.

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

“You’re the master of design. Customers notice your outfits, and you’re selling even more of your work this year.”

“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 then saw Dr. Gordon leaning against a column near the glass doors into the hall, his hands balled into fists, and his gaze fixed 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.” Gordon vanished.

Hope stepped to Ted. “That was the fellow you met yesterday who claimed he was a ghost, right? 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. 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, the colors adding warmth to the area. 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 moved to the front of her booth and peeked around at Cindy, who was also setting up her display. With her red hair in a pageboy and freckles dotting her face, Cindy at 25—the same age as herself—still looked girlishly cute.

Cindy placed 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 organizing their wooden toys on shelving and tables. Betty waved hello, and 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 introduce me to your friends, Hope.”

“Meet my dear friend Cindy Harris, a talented clothing designer who sells her own creations; and Bart and Betty Zonka, outstanding toy-makers. Cindy, Bart, and Betty, I present to you P.T. Barnum himself.”

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

Barnum didn’t lift his. “We won’t try that. I don’t want to shock you when your hand goes right 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 back, his eyes wide. “Wow, how do you do that? You a magician?”

“Of sorts, I guess I am. It feels 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 our 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 beginning to accept 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 much warmer.”

“How did you become a potter?”

“I had taken ceramic classes in Maine, which I enjoyed. I apprenticed myself to a potter, a woman here 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 looked at her future husband thoughtfully. *He’s not that handsome, but his constant smile more than makes up for it. His hair is already thinning, but he takes good care of himself.*

She turned and headed back to her booth.

~

Ted approached 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 Tetons.”

“And you moved to California from Wyoming?”

“Actually, I attended the University of Oregon. I graduated with a degree in chemistry and a teaching 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 with Ted?" They reached the new section. It already had the banner raised above the aisle:

### **Meet Barnum's 19th-Century Celebrity Spirits**

Ted encountered a breathtaking scene. With Barnum having communicated his good

news to his exhibitors, many spirits had materialized and begun constructing their booths with *otherworldly* precision.

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.

Ted delighted in the sight before him, recognizing some of the finest painters of the 19th century. His doubts about their authenticity seemed unimportant; he realized that he now wanted to believe in ghosts.

Barnum led Ted to one painter, a woman hanging her works 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 warmly. “Welcome to our festival. Your work is beautiful.”

Mary smiled. “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 presented Ted to Auguste Rodin, busy positioning his renowned sculpture, *The Thinker*. In the corner of his space, *The Kiss* stood half-finished.

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 of asking your decorator to set up a space fifteen-foot deep by thirty-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 arranging 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 believe 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.”

“I’m sure he wants status and publicity. But I don’t think he’d be able to get all these *actors*, as we’ve been calling them, together in one place; all these beings who look *exactly* like their photos or portraits. That would be *Mission Impossible* makeup jobs, not on one or two people like in the TV show, but on dozens. Look at all the painters, 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 approached Bart. “Give me your thoughts on my friends.”

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

“Absolutely. 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 didn’t need further encouragement. He 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 always fascinated me.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Edison replied. “As you see, I’ve set out several of my 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 right through.”

“I know how that goes!”

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

“Come, look at 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!” Edison exclaimed. “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. Gordon. He stood in the aisle staring at Jill Bankhead as she set 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 Gordon, 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 wore puzzled expressions. Clem had showed up in his usual 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 called and told us what was happening at the hall this weekend,” Clem said. “I had my doubts, but now my curiosity’s kicking in. 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,” Clem replied. “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 just got here.”

Ted observed Nick had changed into a San Francisco Giants T-shirt, visible through his unzipped jacket.

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

“He should be here any time,” Nick said.

Barnum arrived at the stage. He greeted Nick with a "Good morning!"

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, along 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 and P.T. left the stage and walked up the stairs to the landing outside of the show office. Ted seized the opportunity to bring up the matter of the Dr. Gordon "ghost" with Barnum.

“I didn’t get a chance until now to tell you about another character who claims he’s a spirit. Yesterday, just before we closed up, a Dr. Gordon met me on the ramp. He told me he



wanted to sell an elixir to our customers. He said that he had communicated with you, but you told him you were refusing anyone who wanted to sell products.”

“I’ve interacted with many spirits who want to participate in your festival,” Barnum answered. “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. Gordon.”

“No problem, because I also told him he couldn’t sell his elixir here,” Ted said.

“Well and good.”

“Not so much. Dr. Gordon has shown up a couple of times today, saying he's 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 vanish?”

“I’ll search him down and talk with him. But I can’t force him to leave. Perhaps just make him feel unwelcome.”

“And maybe you 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.!”

“When will you reach out to the newspapers and TV and radio stations about your *new addition*?” Barnum asked.

A grin spread across Ted's face as he spun towards the door into his office. “Right now! The world’s about to meet *Celebrity Spirits!*”