

Scarecrow's Dream:

Note: Acknowledgments:

Photo credit: Michael Powell Photography

Michaelpowellphotography.com

The cover photo was taken by my nephew, Michael Powell, in New York City in 2012 ... three years before I wrote the book ... and four years before I even met Mike. (His mom, Lynda, married my brother Don in May of 2016.) An avid hiker, Mike tragically died at the age of 36 on October 18, 2016 on the climb down after summiting Mt. Whitney, the highest peak in the contiguous United States.

Why all the dates? Because I think Mike's photo captures the essence of a ghostly setting in Manhattan while retaining charm and a bit of humor, and provides the right mood for Scarecrow's Dream. It's as though Mike instinctively knew the intent of the shot and graciously passed it on to me.

Mike will always be missed but his loving spirit and his talent remains.

Chapter One

A nail must have pierced the rubber on the rear tire. There was an odd popping sound, followed by screams I was pretty sure were mine. A small chunk of the tire, or perhaps a sharp stone, must have hit my spine because it hurt like hell. I let go of the handgrips on the sides of the motorcycle and hurtled upward. I

grabbed the pendant that threatened to hit me in the nose and clutched it tight.

Sucking in as much air as possible, I let gravity take over and plummeted toward the cold water under the bridge. The vendor's words pounded like a fierce mantra through my head. "You can fix this."

I could see the script I'd taken out of my bag moments before—or was it hours?—flying into the air. I reached for the pages through the snow, like some optimistic fool trying to touch a rainbow. I couldn't see it. I couldn't see anything.

Was he beside me?

I blacked out. The next time I felt anything was the pressure in my right hand as it grazed against a sharp rock—on dry land. Land. I looked up and saw the Henry Hudson Bridge above and to my left. I'd managed to make it to the edge of Inwood Hill Park and leave the icy waters behind. I was safe.

I sat up and surveyed the area. No one appeared to be out and about. No big surprise, since it had to be close to two in the morning. The only living creature I saw was an eagle circling high over the bridge. I forced myself to stand. My shoulder bag draped at an uncomfortable angle, its strap resting on the wooden pendant and pressing it against my chest. I adjusted the strap and headed north toward my apartment on Park Terrace, about five blocks from this section of the park. The snow had stopped, replaced by a light rain.

Something was nagging at me, something I should remember. Or someone? Didn't matter. I needed to get home, crawl into my bed, and sleep for the next year. I felt disoriented, as though I'd just awakened from one of those dreams where the dreamer isn't sure what's reality and what's not.

I made it to the apartment building in about ten minutes and then stood between the outside entrance and the door leading into the lobby, searching my bag for the keys. They were gone. Great. So was my wallet. Doubtless, every item I'd put in the bag was now resting at the bottom of Spuyten Duyvil Creek.

I started going through names of folks in the building who were loony enough to let me in at this hour if I buzzed, but not a single one came to mind. I couldn't remember if I had a roommate. The nameplate for Apartment 207D read Kennedy, which didn't sound right, although it seemed familiar.

Before pressing buttons in a desperate hope of finding a tenant who kept crazy hours, I gave the lobby door a push. It opened. Someone not too bright had left it unlocked and I blessed his or her folly since I had no desire to explain to a neighbor why I was out in the middle of the night while trying to remember where I'd been, how I'd gotten there, and why I resembled a refugee from a hurricane.

My apartment was on the second floor, so I didn't bother with the elevator. Instead I trotted up to 207D and prayed I'd been as careless as one of my fellow residents and not bothered to lock up before I left. The door was already open. Then I was inside, dry and warm, feeling secure but very thirsty. I was heading for the kitchen when I bumped into a piece of furniture—some kind of telephone stand or island.

Weird. I was positive the space had always been devoid of large objects. The lights came on and I whirled around. A short, plump woman in her early seventies, with a mass of auburn-and-white hair untamed by a blue crocheted beret, dressed in jeans and an army jacket covered with protest slogan buttons, stood in the doorway holding a laundry basket. A small tan, mixed-breed dog, still a puppy, ran inside, danced around my feet, barked

with much enthusiasm, then sat and looked up at me with adoration in its deep brown eyes.

“Boo-Boo! Hush. What’s the matter with you, mutt? Have you gone loco? Chill, puppy.”

I wasn’t in the mood to make nice. Two long strides brought me within a foot of the doorway in case I needed to make a quick exit. “Who the hell are you, and why are you waltzing into my apartment?” I demanded.

A gasp, wider eyes, and then a beautiful smile flashed across her perfect peaches-and-cream complexion.

“I am not waltzing. I am trudging. I save my waltzing for the dance floor, although I prefer the tango.” She squinted. “Oh sweet Mother Mary. I’m talking to an auditory hallucination. What the hell did my bartender put in the last margarita? Boo-Boo? Are you seeing this? I’m either beyond schnockered or losing my mind.”

“What do you mean, ‘auditory hallucination’? And exactly who are you?” I responded to what may or may not have been a question. I was sure I knew her, but no name was coming to mind. I spoke a bit more gently. “Are you on the wrong floor? Do you live upstairs?”

“I live here. I have for forty years. And if you’re not an auditory hallucination, then why are you invisible but speaking loud enough for me to hear you?”

“Wait a second. I’m sorry, but there’s no way you’ve lived here for forty years. Dad and I only moved in about seventeen years ago.”

She must be senile. Or completely demented since she was babbling about invisibility. Then an explanation for her odd behavior hit me. “Uh, you do seem familiar. Are you my great-aunt Lucy? We met once when I was about six. Are you

visiting? If so, I apologize for the inquisition. My dad didn't tell me."

She shook her head. "I'm not Lucy. And I'm not visiting. I live here. I'm Adelaide." She drew a sharp breath. "And I may be nuts but your voice sounds like...well, let's just say if you're who I believe you are, I'm the aunt who read all your awesome prose back when you were ten and encouraged you to become the next Lillian Hellman, although I seem to recall you were leaning more toward being the first female Walter Cronkite. I lived with you and your dad until you hit early adolescence. Don't you remember?" She yelled, "Down!"

I jumped before I realized she was addressing the pooch trying to lick my face while imitating a pogo stick. The woman was bonkers.

"Sorry," I said. "Look, first we're in two-oh-seven. My apartment. Has been since I was three and we moved here when my dad became super of this building and the one across the courtyard. I'm cold and tired and beyond pissed because somehow I landed in Spuyten Duyvil Creek from the bridge and, lady, you need your eyesight checked since invisibility doesn't exist." I sounded way too angry. I spoke more gently. "Besides, you can't be my aunt Adelaide because she's thirty-two and I don't see any spooky portraits of her around so...oh, crap. I give up. Do you mind if we sit? It's been a rough night and I'm...tired."

She nodded. "Good idea." She motioned to a sofa by the center wall.

It looked comfortable, but foreign to me.

The imposter plopped the basket on the floor in front of a rocking chair older than her obvious seventy-plus years and began to rock. "Take a breath, hon. Something damned weird

appears to be going down. First of all, Henry Rodriguez is the current super and he lives on the first floor. Believe me, there's no way he's your dad. Secondly, my eyesight is remarkable for any and all humans, no matter their age, so the issue is on your end, not mine."

I clenched my teeth and my fists. "I'm confused."

"No shit."

I leaned down and patted the dog on the head while I glanced around the living room. I didn't recognize a single piece of furniture. I was getting nervous. What the blinkin', blame fool was happening here?

The crazy lady, dressed as though she'd either just returned from a protest march or was about to leave for one, leaned down and began sorting through the clothes. I took the opportunity for a longer, more intense look at the living room. The windows seemed to be in the right place. The kitchen was off to the left of the front hallway. If I headed down the hall I'd end up in the first bedroom—my dad's. Aunt Addie's bedroom for the ten years she'd lived with us was at the end of the apartment, next to the bathroom and my bedroom. The layout was the same. The furniture was not.

Yet, there were pieces I knew—like the cherry wood china cabinet I was certain had been built by my grandfather, and the little pie safe Dad bought at a flea market down in Greenwich Village.

A sense of dizziness came out of nowhere. "Oh boy. I'm feeling strange, and kind of sick and sort of disoriented."

She rose and again gestured toward the large couch littered with throw pillows.

“Sit.” She snickered. “That’s if you haven’t already. Lie down.” The dog did both. “Not you, Boo-Boo, although I’m very proud of you for being proactive with your commands.”

She took a deep breath. “There’s some serious shit goin’ down in Apartment 207. Things are way wrong and we need to figure out what and why. Hang in there, while I get you something to drink.” She muttered to herself as she left the room but I still could hear, “Assuming you can.”

I nodded and sank down onto cushions, where I was enveloped in sheer comfort. Boo-Boo jumped up and sat beside me. I stroked the soft fur, waited for the water, and once again surveyed my surroundings.

Curiouser and curiouser. The TV was skinny, with almost no back to it. Some device with the appearance of a small calculator with a flip top lay on the crowded coffee table. Next to it was a silver object that sort of resembled a typewriter, but was also absurdly thin. It appeared to be attached to a picture frame where the photos changed every few seconds. The majority of the pictures were of my new acquaintance, posing with folks who must be her friends, along with scenes from Manhattan.

I sat up straight. Those pictures included several of my dad, except that he looked much older. Which made no sense. Dad was forty-three. In these photos he appeared to be in his late fifties.

I touched the keyboard and suddenly the screen changed. Now there were news articles and weather information and a row of names I’d never heard of. Google. Twitter. Wikipedia. Facebook. In the top right-hand corner of this screen were the date and the time, April 9 1:46 AM. They were the only things

consistent with life as I knew it, and with the events of this night.

A beep sounded from the kitchen, following by a click. I heard stirring. The woman rounded into the living room holding a mug, which she set on the coffee table in front of me.

“Here. Screw the water. I made hot toddies.” The drinks smelled of whiskey, lemon, and nutmeg, and I was thrilled my nose was working, but I was more interested in information. She headed back to her chair muttering, “Can’t wait to hear what whoppers you dreamed up while I was in the kitchen.”

“Thanks, uh, Adelaide.” I ignored the mug on the table.

“Sure.”

“What the hell is this?” I pointed to the silver screen on the table.

“Can’t see what you’re asking about. Remember? Audio only?”

Fine. I’d play along. “It’s a skinny silver screen like a television and you set the mug about six inches away from it.”

“Ah,” she responded. “Computer.”

“But it’s so small. I thought computers were huge. Scientists keep them inside large warehouses or something. What does this one do?”

“Everything. Searches the Internet, plays music, keeps me in touch with my buddies around the globe.”

“I don’t understand. So far this isn’t helping. And what’s an Internet?”

Adelaide took a sip from her own mug, swallowed and said, “This is a laptop computer, also called a notebook. It’s a smaller, more convenient version of the desktop model, which generally range from about seventeen to thirty inches these days. As for the Internet...Hmm.”

She pursed her lips and puffed out a small breath of air, then inhaled.

“Wow. How does one describe it? Um, it’s like this connection between computers all over the world. They can pick up data and let people talk to other people. I’ll just pull it up on the laptop and show you in a minute because it’s not important right now.” She smiled. “And you’re proving my theory with every question.”

I shut my eyes. “Theory. I’m ready.” I opened my eyes and stared at the crazy lady. Go ahead and spill it. I’d like for something to make sense for a change tonight. This is all very—disconcerting.”

“No shit. Look, let’s go back to the beginning and try to sort this out. You’re ... oh boy, this sounds stupid. Again, I can’t see you but I can hear you, and it’s very apparent you’ve suffered some sort of trauma and it’s got you all discombobulated.”

I sniffed and squelched the desire to burst into tears. “Oh yeah.”

The dog began to snore. I patted the soft fur then glanced back at this woman who claimed to be my aunt.

“Okay, can you help me by explaining what I’m finding damned bloody confusing? I’m sure this is my place, yet your furniture is in here, but there’s still some stuff I recognize, and you’re telling me you’re my aunt Adelaide but—no offense—you don’t look thirty-anything.”

She inhaled. “Never mind. First of all, I’m Adelaide Malone Kennedy, the Kennedy courtesy of an ex-husband, and I go by Miss Adelaide when I write my entertainment news column for the Manhattan Chronicle and their online blog.”

“Blog?”

“Oh boy. You’re really not in the world, are you? Okay. We’ll hit terminology later. Meantime, look at blogs as public diaries. Very public. Oh, before I forget and just to clarify, the dog is also Miss Adelaide, which is why I call her Boo-Boo and I go by Addie. Not important in the grand scheme of things. Anyway, you never called me Aunt Adelaide or Aunt Addie. Or aunt anything to tell you the truth. It was always Addie, so let’s stick with that. Now then, my intro is done. Your turn.”

“I’m...I’m...” My breathing turned into gasping. My mouth was completely dry and my heart was beating as though I were running a never-ending marathon. “Oh my God. I don’t know who I am! I mean I don’t know my name! I went straight to this building and this apartment and I recall a relative or two including my dad and you, if you’re who you say you are and not Great-Aunt Lucy. How can I not remember my own name?”

I glared at her even though she claimed she couldn’t see me. “But you know. Right?” I began to cry, going from light tears to big nasty gasping sobs. I’d made it through the terror in the water only to face a nightmare in my own home.

Addie jumped out of the rocker with surprising ease, hurried over to the couch, and plopped down beside me. She reached out and then immediately pulled back.

“Yow! Talk about not right. Not right at all. I’d say this clinches it. But if you’re still not convinced...” She grabbed a purse sitting on the table and pulled out a compact, but didn’t open it.

“What’s happening?” I asked. “This night is racing from a bit weird to demonically strange. As in non-reality-loco land.” My voice croaked. “Want to know the truth? I’m scared.”

“Now, now. Don’t let the weirdness get to you. But, let me ask you one more thing. What do you remember before you

came into the apartment tonight? Where were you? What were you doing? Specifics, please.”

I tried to concentrate and looked up at the ceiling for some sort of guidance. “I was on the Henry Hudson Bridge and then I was falling into the water. I sort of blacked out. Then I was on the bank of the creek and then I walked over here and managed to get into the building because someone had left it unlocked and I’d lost my keys and half my stuff in the water because my bag was open.”

“Okay. Here’s the biggie. How did you get out of the water? Let’s face it. Swimming under the bridge in the cold rain at this time of night is not what I consider the sport of choice for most people.”

“Hold on a second. It’s like...” I couldn’t put into words the sensation but I could hear an odd, whirring, tinny noise then feel myself flying through the air. And every sound and feeling seemed as though it had happened to someone else a long time ago. I couldn’t remember what I’d been doing before the ‘flight.’ Zippo. I explained this to Adelaide, and then I sat straight up.

“Wait. Motorcycle. I’m sure I was riding on one before I went sailing off the bridge. I can still hear the sound of something hitting the tire.”

“How long were you in the water?”

“No idea. I don’t really have a memory of hitting the water. I suppose I woke up once I’d made it to dry land.”

She snapped out the next question before I had a chance to think.

“When did this happen? Any idea?”

“Last night.”

“Not what I meant. I’m talking year, here, not day.”

“Year? Year? What kind of crazy question is that? Now! I mean, this year. As in 1973.”

“Oh boy.”

“What?”

Addie stayed silent.

“What? You’re scaring the fool out of me.”

“I’m sorry. I’m not calm either, believe me, although I’ve lived long enough to see a helluva lot of freaky things. I’ve always been very interested in the paranormal and studied up on the subject. I’ve even attended the odd séance in my life.” She chuckled. “And I do mean odd.” She stopped. “Sorry. Not funny. I’ll go on then, shall I?”

“Oh sure, what the hell, why not? I’m dying to find out where this is going.”

“Well, let’s start with the year. Which is 2016 and has been since January. Let’s move to the interesting fact that, whether you want to believe it or not, I can hear but not see you. Which leads to me saying when I came close enough to touch you I got this bizarre sensation. I have no words to describe it. It’s like...electricity humming? It’s very interesting and also very not of this world. Finishing with, and no offense, but, you’re not quite what I’d call—uh—corporeal. I’m so sorry. This is all sounding crazier with every word.”

“Go on.”

“First, do you have a wallet or anything? One with identification?”

“It fell out into the creek along with my keys.”

“Ah.” She added, “Oh well, that’s okay. Forget it. We don’t need it, anyway.” She pushed the compact she’d taken out of her bag in my direction. “Open it.”

I did. “So?”

“Check the mirror.”

I did. And saw nothing.

“What!”

Addie’s tone turned almost mischievous. “I should consult with some of my occult buddies as to the physics of this to be certain but the only explanation for now is...you may not have made it out of the water as fast as you imagined.”

It took me a good two minutes before her comment made sense. Finally I asked, “Are you saying...wait, you’re saying I drowned? You’re telling me I died?”

“Pretty much. It’s forty-three years later than you believe it to be. I am your aunt Addie and I’m seventy-six years old. Isn’t it obvious? I’m sipping hot toddies with my niece, Holly Malone—who just happens to be a ghost.”