

# Ghosts

by Robert Lamb

"It was a ghost, I tell you. I seen it with my own eyes." Glenn crossed his heart and looked from face to face around the kitchen table as Gerry shuffled the cards for the next hand.

"Saw," Gerry said. "You *saw* it with your own eyes." To the rest of us, he said, still shuffling, "Honor-roll student and can't speak good English." He shook his head.

Pinhead scoffed. "How the hell can you see with somebody else's eyes, anyhow?"

Pinhead wasn't trying to be witty; he was simply very literal-minded, a trait that had helped to earn him the nickname. His real name was Raymond, Raymond Wilson, but he'd probably go to his grave being called Pinhead. He was older than the rest of us, nineteen and still in high school. But, no two ways about it, his head was small. Not that he was a freak or anything, but that little white head atop his tall, skinny frame made him look like a Q-Tip with legs.

"Maybe he had an eye transplant," Johnny said. "Now all he needs is a brain transplant."

"No such thing as ghosts," Buster said. "Now let's play cards."

"Yeah," Rusty said, "I'm down 30 cents here. Let's play."

Glenn's "ghost-sighting" had momentarily derailed both the game and the previous topic of conversation: college. All of us except Rusty and Pinhead were college-bound come next fall. Rusty planned to join the Marines after high school, and Pinhead told people he just didn't want to go to college. That wasn't the truth; he had told me in confidence that his mother, recently widowed, couldn't afford college. I realized of course that academia would not go into mourning over Pinhead's "decision," but I kept that thought (as well as his confidence) to myself. For that matter, I was no scholar, either.

Gerry cut the cards one last time and began to deal. "This game is five-card stud," he announced. "Deuces wild."

"Ah, that's pussy poker," Johnny said. "Let's play men's poker."  
"Deuces are wild," Gerry repeated. "Dealer's choice, remember?"  
Johnny peeped at his first hole card and said, "Okay."  
"Now we all know: Johnny's got a deuce in the hole," Gerry said.  
"Fuck you," Johnny said.

"Be the best you ever had," Gerry said. "Everybody ante up." He pushed a dime to the center of the table.

I threw in my dime and looked at my hole card. It sucked. A jack to go with the piss-ant trey that was showing. I hadn't had a winning hand all morning. "I'm not living right," I said, slumping in my chair.

"Everybody who knows you knows that," Glenn said. Glenn was very religious, Catholic. I was Catholic, too, but not very religious, and Glenn was on me all the time about it. I said, "Go piss up a rope, altar boy."

"Let's leave religion out of this," Buster said. "For once."

Buster was so big, a lineman on the football team, that you naturally paid attention when he spoke. Besides, we were playing at his house. Both his parents worked long hours, in retail, I think, and he had no little brothers or sisters around to pester us, so we spent a lot of time there after school and on Saturdays.

"He started it," I muttered.

Buster gave me and then Glenn a pointed look. "Play cards."

Buster, a Protestant, was religious, too, but he didn't wear it on his sleeve, like Glenn did. Glenn could — and did — work religion into any conversation. Johnny said Glenn had Jesus Fever.

Gerry dealt another round of cards.

"Who else saw this ghost?" Buster asked, turning up a corner of his new hole card to take a peep.

"My dad. Like I said, we was visiting my Aunt Betty over the weekend—"

Gerry interrupted. "*Were* visiting. 'We' takes a plural form of the verb."

Glenn ignored him. "She lives right across the street from the cemetery. People who live around there have seen the ghost lots of times, she said."

Johnny snorted. "I think your Aunt Betty's been nipping the cooking sherry again."

He could have added that Glenn's daddy was probably three sheets in the wind, too. We all knew he liked his booze. But nobody said anything. It was an unwritten rule that you could criticize your own parents, but nobody else could.

"That the big old cemetery down by May Park, near the city jail?" Pinhead asked. "Got a tall brick wall around it?"

Glenn said yes, that was the one.

"That place is spooky," Rusty said.

We all nodded. It was easily the oldest cemetery in town, with graves going back to the Revolutionary War, maybe even earlier. Lots of tombstones with inscriptions so faded you couldn't read them anymore. Ancient mausoleums and big grave-markers — fancy ones — all over the place. And it covered more than sixty acres, stretching for at least three long city blocks one way and a very long one the other way, too. I was glad I didn't live near it. Cemeteries gave me the creeps anyhow, and I couldn't imagine living in a neighborhood dominated by one.

Buster said, "What did this ghost look like?"

"They say it's a woman carrying a lantern. Woman, man — I couldn't tell. What *I* saw was a bright light moving through the cemetery."

"Moving?" Pinhead said.

"Yes. It was moving, and not along the ground, either. We were on my aunt's front porch, looking across the street, toward the cemetery, and the ghost or whatever was clearly visible, a light moving from tree to tree, like maybe the ghost, carrying a lantern, was out for an evening stroll through the treetops."

"That wall is at least six feet high," Pinhead said. Like Johnny, a runner, he was on the track team, high hurdles, his one distinction in high school. "For ya'll to see it, that ghost had to be at least fifteen feet off the ground. Prob'bly more." His eyes were wide with wonder.

"All I know is what I saw."

Rusty laughed. "And only you and your laundry lady will ever know how scared you were."

By now, the fifth card had been dealt. We hadn't been paying much attention to the game.

"Bet a dime," Gerry said. "Calling all suckers."

"You're bluffing," Johnny said. "See yours and raise it a dime."

The rest of us threw in our cards. My hand had started off pathetic, and gone from bad to worse.

Gerry told Johnny, "You're trying to buy it. I call." He threw another dime into the pot and laid out his cards: a natural spade flush.

"You named your own poison," Johnny said, laying out a full house: Two fives, two jacks — and a deuce. He raked the pot to his side of the table.

"Whose deal?" Glenn asked.

"Yours," I said, "but count me out. I'm tired of playing."

"Me, too," said Gerry.

"Yeah," said Pinhead and Glenn.

"I'm tapped out anyhow." Rusty yawned and stretched.

"Never fails," Johnny said. "I start winning and everybody wants to quit."

Glenn's mind was still on the ghost. "But when you try to get close to it," he said, "the thing disappears."

"You tried to get close to it?" Pinhead said, disbelieving.

"No! I'm just sayin' what everybody else says: you see it clearly from outside the cemetery, but if you go through the gate and walk toward it, it disappears! You can go back and start over: there it is again, clear as could be. But when you go toward it, suddenly it's gone."

Buster got up from his chair. "This I gotta see."

"Me, too," said Pinhead.

"Count me in," I said.

Gerry scoffed. "I don't believe a word of this, but it looks like I'm out-voted." Gerry was the scientific one in the group. If it couldn't be proved in a lab, he didn't believe it. Except for Catholicism. Go

figure. He added, "And, Glenn, it's *everybody*, not *everbody*, for Christ's sake."

We all looked at Johnny. Earlier in the day, when he saw that the rest of us had already struck out, he had said that he *might* be able to get the family car for the night. His dad had been staying close to home lately, he said. The subtext, unspoken, was that Mr. Kelly was on the wagon again.

"Whatcha think?" Buster asked.

"Well, it *is* Saturday, so no promises," Johnny said. "But I'll ask."

"Ain't your daddy on the wagon?" Pinhead asked.

We all looked at him. Talk about bad form.

"Why?" Johnny said in an icy tone of voice.

Pinhead broke into a donkey laugh. "Well, he don't need a wagon *and* a car." He nearly collapsed with laughter at his own joke, glancing from face to face for confirmation of his wit.

We just looked at him. If looks could kill, Johnny's would have struck him dead.

"Grow up," Buster said at last.

Looking chagrined, Pinhead muttered, "It was just a joke."

"Wrong," Buster said. "Jokes are funny."

Buster was right, of course; alcoholism was not funny, I'd seen its collateral damage up close in both Johnny and Glenn, whose fathers were, as the saying went, "bad to drink." I felt sorry for alcoholics. But I felt sorrier for their children. The most helpless I'd ever felt was in watching my closest friends cry over yet another bender by their dad.

"You'll just never know what it feels like," Johnny once told me.

I said, "I hope not, brother."

But luck was with us this time. A sober and genial Mr. Kelly handed Johnny the keys to his nearly new Ford Galaxy and told him to "have a good time, drive carefully — and don't wake up the dead coming in tonight."

*Or going out tonight*, I amended silently, my mind on our mission. Spiffed up in new jeans and a favorite t-shirt, I had already come to

Johnny's house, two blocks from my own, because, well, because it was Saturday night in Teenage America, and I knew we'd do *something*, car or no car. It was, like the poet said, "a soft October night," and if shoe leather were our only means of conveyance, then so be it. But, ah, wheels made all the difference! And once Johnny had those car keys in his hand, we were out of that house like a shot.

Starting the engine, Johnny said, "This ghost better show up, is all I've got to say. It's not every Saturday night I get the car."

"I'd be just as happy with a no-show," I said. "I don't believe in ghosts and I don't want a reason to start believing."

We picked up Buster and Gerry first, and then Pinhead and Rusty, saving Glenn for last because we knew he wouldn't be ready when we got there — no matter when we got there. And, true to form, when we got there he hadn't even begun to get ready; he was still in the bathtub, for cryin' out loud.

"Been in there a hour," said Vera, the McNultys' maid, her tone of voice saying what she thought of such indolence. She pointed down a hallway toward a bathroom door. "Most likely waterlogged by now."

With me right behind him, Johnny opened the door — it wasn't locked — and there lay Glenn, fish-belly white and soaking, eyes closed, water lapping up to his chin, radio playing softly on a stool beside the tub. As if rehearsed — in fact, we'd done this many times before — Johnny turned off the radio, reached into the water and pulled the tub's plug while I yanked a towel off a rack and tossed it to Glenn as he struggled to his feet, splashing water all over the floor.

"Get dressed," Johnny told him. "You've got five minutes."

"Five minutes!" Glenn said, affronted.

"Four minutes, 55 seconds," Johnny said. "We'll be outside — and if you're one second late you'll see my tail lights disappearing into the night."

Grumbling, grouching, muttering, one shoe off, one shoe on, hair uncombed, belt unbuckled, Glenn climbed into the car with maybe two seconds to spare. "What's the big rush?" he snapped, squeezing into the back seat with Gerry, Rusty, and Pinhead. I was riding shotgun. Buster had moved up front with me and Johnny.

"McNulty, you'll be late for your own funeral," Johnny said.

"I won't be late for it," I said. "I'm looking forward to it."

Gerry snapped, "You're always late, McNulty? You must have lead in your ass."

Pinhead laughed. "He'll move if that ghost gets after him."

"If he doesn't, he'd better not get in my way," Buster said. "I'll run right over him."

"You'll be running interference for me," Rusty told him, "'cause I'll be right behind you." That had the ring of truth — Rusty played halfback for the Irish and had ripped off many a yard carrying the pigskin behind Buster and the team's other blockers — but it wasn't in fact true, because Rusty was fearless. Grew up in the toughest part of the toughest part of town, Hicks Street, in Harrisburg, and was revered even there for his courage. That reputation, combined with his exploits on the gridiron and a devil-may-care charm, had earned him entry to just about any social circle in town that he cared to join.

After a moment of silence, Pinhead asked, "How could you be late for your own funeral?" He sounded truly puzzled.

We all groaned.

"God, I hope what he's got ain't contagious," Johnny said.

Looming out of the darkness, the cemetery's wall looked higher than I had remembered. But as we turned off Watkins Street into Third Street, which ran down one of the cemetery's long sides, activity around the city jail caught our attention. Located down the street, next to the park and across from the cemetery, the jail was lit up like a fairground.

Johnny pulled over to the curb near the cemetery's main gate and killed the engine, but nobody got out. We were all staring at the jail.

Gerry spoke for all of us in wondering aloud: "Gee, what's going on there?"

"Jail break," Glenn said, still in a sulk. "Heard it on the radio. Could've told y'all if you had ever stopped bitchin' at me."

"What kind of jailbreak?" Pinhead asked.

Johnny groaned. "How many kinds of jailbreak are there, dummy?"

"You know what I meant," Pinhead said.

Buster barked at Glenn: "He meant give us details, for Christ's sake!" To the rest of us, he said, "Jesus! Suddenly I'm Pinhead's interpreter. I gotta get myself some better friends."

Just then, two police cars whizzed past us, moving toward the jail. No siren, but their flickering blue lights seemed to ricochet all around us.

"Think we should stay?" Gerry asked.

"We're not doing anything wrong," Buster said.

Gerry pointed to a sign posted on the cemetery gate. "No one allowed in cemetery after dark."

Buster said, "We're not in the cemetery — yet."

Johnny said. "I'll park in front of Glenn's aunt's house. We won't be conspicuous there."

He put the car in gear, but before he could pull away, another patrol car drove up beside us, its blue light flicking over our faces and casting an eerie pattern of light onto the cemetery wall and against the darkening sky itself. The driver, riding alone, put down his window.

"What you boys up to?"

My window was down and he was parallel to me, so by default I was the designated liar. "We were just dropping off a friend at his aunt's house and saw all the excitement. What's going on?"

"Where's the aunt live?"

"Watkins Street."

"What's the address?"

I turned to Glenn. "What's your aunt's address?"



Glenn, sitting directly behind me, had rolled down his window the better to hear the policeman. He leaned out a bit and gave the address. "It's just around the corner," he added, pointing behind us.

That seemed to satisfy the cop. "Okay. Better move along."

Even I will admit that Glenn's next question was a stroke of brilliance. "Is my Aunt Betty in any danger, officer? Should we get her out of the neighborhood?"

Before answering, the cop looked at Glenn and then at me, and then swept his eyes over the car and its other occupants, I swear I could hear the gears of his mind whirring, churning, evaluating. At length, he said, "It's probably nothing. Two inmates didn't answer up at roll call after supper. Happens a lot. Could be a dozen different reasons. They'll turn up."

He sped away.

Rusty spoke in mock wonder. "They need the whole Augusta police force just to check jail attendance?"

We laughed.

Buster said, "Wonder what they'd do if a prisoner failed to turn in his homework."

"Prob'bly call out the National Guard," Gerry said.

"Well, the prisoners got detention for *something*," said Pinhead — and for a moment we all stared at him in wonder. A witticism from Pinhead was not just a witticism, it was a fucking miracle. Nevertheless, we all laughed and told him he'd gotten off a good one.

Johnny shook his head and said under his breath: "And people say there's nothing new under the sun."

Moments later, he parked the car in front of the aunt's house and we all got out.

Many of the houses across from the cemetery, including the aunt's house, were dark, at least on the front, and there was little or no street traffic. Clouds hid the moon, and a bare bulb in a nearby street lamp shed such feeble light that it made the night beyond its

dim halo look even darker. Standing in front of the aunt's house, we asked Glenn to point out where he had seen the ghost.

He pointed toward the center of the cemetery wall. "Straight through there."

"How far in?" Rusty asked.

"A good ways."

"Let's go," Buster said.

We knew we'd have to go over the wall. None of us had missed the big lock and chain on the main gate. We moved across the street as one and stood looking at the wall, taking its measure, and glancing up and down the street for approaching car lights.

"Piece of cake," Rusty said, and next thing I knew he was up and over the wall as if in a single bound. Then in a slightly muffled voice, he said, "Last one in's a rotten egg."

Soon we all stood inside the cemetery.

"Jesus, it's dark in here," Gerry said.

But as he spoke, the clouds parted, a pale moon spilled light onto the cemetery, and a breeze sprang up, rustling the leaves of trees all around us. It was like a scene from an old Wolf Man movie. And I wasn't the only one who thought so. Rusty, I think — I couldn't be sure who — howled like a wolf and then laughed.

Joking, Johnny said, "Gee, I think I left something boiling on the stove. See you boys later."

Buster joked, too: "*You* can leave; the car keys stay."

And that's when I saw the ghost: deep in the cemetery, dead ahead (no pun intended), maybe fifty or sixty yards, a brilliant, shimmering light appeared and began to move, move like somebody strolling among the tree branches a good twenty feet off the ground, just as Glenn had described it.

"Holy cat shit!" somebody said.

"I want my mama," somebody else whined, only half joking, I'd've bet.

I also heard curses and an awe-stricken "God Almighty!"

"I told you," Glenn said, vindicated. "I told you."

For a moment we stood there as if frozen in place, staring in disbelief as the spectre moved among the swaying branches. But after the initial shock, we all wanted to get closer. Scared or not, we all wanted to get a good look at this graveyard ghost, this tree-top phantom, this ambulatory apparition.

The main problem in trying to fix its location was that the spectacle came and went. We walked toward it twice — and both times it disappeared after we had advanced no more than ten or fifteen yards.

“Told you,” Glenn said. “Now you see it; now you don't.”

So we devised a plan. We would fan out across the cemetery and move forward as long as at least one of us could see the ghost. We wouldn't be able to see each other. The cemetery was wide, and visibility at ground level was poor, especially under the trees — and there were lots of trees. But we planned to keep in touch by speaking to our nearest partner, who could then pass it on. Sound carried well in the cemetery, and as long as we didn't yell we weren't likely to arouse neighbors or the police.

“Not much here to absorb the sound,” said Gerry, ever the scientist among us. “The walls help the acoustics, too.”

“And the dead don't care nohow,” said Pinhead.

“*Azyhow*,” Gerry prompted, scowling.

“Whatever,” Pinhead said, dismissing him, something not easy to do with Gerry, who always had to have the last word — but an emerging moon interrupted the bickering, and seconds later the wind sprang up and the ghost appeared again.

“There it is!” said Johnny, pointing deep into the night, but the rest of us had already seen it, and again it looked like a glowing, shimmering phantasm moving among swaying tree branches.

Quickly we fanned out: Buster, Gerry, Johnny, and Glenn on my left, and Rusty and Pinhead on my right. Then we all began to move toward the mysterious light, sending word up and down the line: “I still see it.”

We advanced slowly. We had resolved not to step on graves (and we didn't want to bust our asses by falling over them, either), and graves were everywhere, many of them covered by tombs that sat high above ground level.

"Damn!" I heard on my far left.

"I think Buster fell," Glenn said.

"Stumbled over a grave," Johnny said. "But he's okay."

Later, from my right, came the sound of crashing branches.

"Pinhead picked a fight with a tree," Rusty explained. "The tree won."

By now my eyes were somewhat accustomed to the meager light, and I saw dimly that I was passing endless rows of graves and tombstones and crypts. It was spooky. Grave markers of all kinds were everywhere: crosses of every design, angels in every posture, mausoleums of every architectural style, headstones and monuments of every size and shape. And when the moon glowed especially bright, and I could see farther, the cemetery with all its shadowy statuary and mausoleums looked indeed like a miniature city of the dead. Have I mentioned that it was spooky?

Twenty yards farther along I still saw the ghost — but I seemed no closer to it than before. Worse, I had been staring so fixedly at the light that I had lost sight of everybody except Rusty, whose yellow T-shirt I could just barely make out in the distant dark.

"Glenn?" I called softly to my left. "Johnny?"

Nobody answered. And when I looked to my right again, Rusty also had disappeared. "Rusty," I called.

He didn't answer. I moved forward and to my right to look for him — but clouds again covered the moon, and a cloak of blackness engulfed me. For a moment I felt panicky, and when the moon popped out again the ghost, too, had disappeared.

I was now in a part of the cemetery that was especially dark. Thick evergreens kept the moonlight from penetrating, but just ahead, standing out in the open, was, of all things, a tent, with rows of chairs beneath it! And, off to one side, a mound of dirt! I had not

known, actually had not thought about it, that funerals were still held there.

But the thought flew from my mind when I felt a poke in my ribs, and somebody said, "Hold it right there, bubba."

That scared the *peewollikinshellac* out of me, and I'm sure I both jumped out of my skin and froze in it at the same time. Was that a gun in my ribs?

"Walk straight ahead, bubba, to the tent."

The voice was definitely Southern, and not particularly menacing, but I could tell he meant business. I walked toward the tent, and when I got close I saw Rusty and Pinhead sitting beneath the canopy, and a man standing over them with a pistol. Still another man was sitting with Rusty and Pinhead.

"Gotcha another one," said the voice at my back. "Held him up with a stick." He laughed and showed the stick. "Sit," he said, pushing me roughly toward the seats. I took a seat next to Rusty, who sat next to the stranger.

"Who's he?" I whispered.

"Caretaker, night watchman."

"Shut up!" one of our captors snarled.

In spite of his order, I said, "Uh, sir, I don't know about this other fellow, but my buddies and I—"

"Best keep quiet, son," the stranger said. "They broke jail and they're desperate."

But the two escapees moved a few yards away from us and fell into a hushed conversation, so it seemed okay to talk.

"What happened here?" I whispered.

"I fell into that damn grave," Pinhead said softly, pointing toward the mound of dirt. "Nearly broke my fool neck."

"And he fell on top of me," said the caretaker who, anticipating my next question, added, "I came out tonight to make sure this grave site was ready for tomorrow morning's burial. The gravedigger ain't the most reliable of men. Soon as I got here, the prisoners jumped me, overpowered me, and took my gun. Then they forced me to get into the grave so I couldn't suddenly make a run for

it." He pointed at Pinhead. "Then along comes this fellow and falls in on top of me."

"Scared me half to death," Pinhead said. "I thought for sure a corpse had grabbed hold of me. I nearly wet my pants."

Rusty added, "I heard the scuffle, ran toward the sounds — and walked right into a man holding a gun on these two." He motioned toward Pinhead and the caretaker.

"What do you think they'll do with us?" I asked.

"Kill us," Pinhead said, his eyes as big as saucers.

"Not without a fight, they won't," Rusty vowed.

"Don't make any sudden moves," the caretaker cautioned.

But at that moment the night around us exploded in light, a gunshot went off, and a voice boomed out of the shadows: "Drop that gun! This is the police and you're surrounded. Make a move and the next shot won't be in the air."

As ten or twelve policemen, pistols drawn, some with shotguns, moved toward us, I sat as if in a daze, But Rusty seized that moment to fly toward the two escapees and tackle them — while in the same instant Pinhead sprang from his chair and lit out like a scalded dog, running like the wind — and heading straight toward the cemetery wall as if he intended to run through it!

As Rusty wrestled with the escapees, several policemen scurried over to help him. But the rest of us stared in amazement as Pinhead hurdled one, two, and then three high and wide graves — and then sailed over the cemetery's six-foot wall as if it were your average picket fence. To this day, I'd swear that what I saw was impossible. Surely there hadn't been a leap like that since the cow jumped over the moon.

And that wasn't all. Policemen staked outside the cemetery said that Pinhead hit the sidewalk in full stride, jumped over a patrol car parked at the curb, and then sailed over yet another one across the street before disappearing into the night.

"He cleared my car — over the cab, mind you — with plenty of room to spare," one of the patrolmen said.

"Flew by me like a bat out of hell," another policeman said.

His partner chuckled. "He was sure hauling ass when he blew by me."

The two escapees were led away in handcuffs. Johnny, Gerry, Buster, and Glenn, free now from police protection, emerged from the shadows.

"Did I see what I think I saw?" said Buster, looking in amazement at the spot where Pinhead had flown over the wall.

Johnny was staring at it, too. "That wall is six feet high if it's an inch," he said. "That's two-and-a-half feet higher than the high hurdle in track."

"I saw it — but I still don't believe it," Gerry said. "It's physically impossible."

"So much for science," said Johnny.

A few minutes later, with the help of a policeman who was writing up an incident report, we pieced together what had happened. The police had known that the escapees were hiding in the cemetery and were about to move in when first the caretaker, and then we, threw a monkey wrench into their plans.

"How'd you know they were hiding in the cemetery?" Buster asked.

"The jail sits in the open across the street from the cemetery," the policeman said. "Where else is there to hide?"

Gerry said, "But why there? It's so obvious."

The policeman shrugged. "People who recognize the obvious don't usually wind up in jail."

He went back to writing his report, but he must have felt us staring at him. A philosophical cop?

He looked up again. "Law school," he explained. "Nights."

Glenn, who must have missed that whole exchange, told him, "We were trying to be quiet."

"An invasion of chimps would have been quieter," the policeman said. "We heard you coming from two blocks away. We were able to get to the ones who were nearest us, but the rest of you were too

close to the escapees, and we knew they were armed and holding a hostage.”

“When you grabbed me,” Buster told the policeman, “I thought for sure the devil had got hold of me.”

“Better pray he doesn't.” Glenn made the sign of the cross on himself.

I rolled my eyes. I couldn't help it.

Thanks to Rusty's bravery (and his well-known exploits on the football field, I'm sure), the police went easy on us, but they laughed when we told them why we were in the cemetery at all.

No such thing as ghosts, they said.

They told us we could go — but not before they took our names, addresses, and phone numbers — “just in case,” was the way one cop put it, “and don't leave out your buddy who flew the coop.”

When we started to leave, the caretaker — whose name turned out to be, so help me, Mr. Graves — invited us to follow him. “I'll show you your ghost,” he said.

Using a flashlight, he led us through the cemetery to a needle-like monument that soared about thirty feet into the night. Shining his beam onto the smooth, flat surface on one side of the monument, near its top, he said. “Here's your ghost. That shiny surface is like a mirror, and when it reflects moonlight, people outside the cemetery see it and think it's a ghost.”

We all tried to speak at once. “No! What we saw was *moving* — like somebody carrying a lantern through the trees.”

The caretaker smiled. “Back away while I shine this light on the surface.”

“What?”

“Start backing away. Keep watching the light on the monument.”

For the first few moments, all we saw was a reflection of a flashlight beam on the shiny surface of the monument. But when we had backed off by, oh, say, twenty yards, a soft wind stirred some tree branches in the line of sight between us and the monument —



and as they swayed back and forth, the light seemed to move! It was an uncanny sight.

“An optical illusion!” Johnny said. “*Sonofagun!*”

“I knew it had to be something like that,” said Gerry.

“Sure, you did,” Buster said. “That's why you shit your pants when you first saw it.”

We thanked Mr. Graves for his time and attention, and went back to the car, laughing at our folly and gee-whizzing about our adventure — one that we dared not mention to our parents, at least until we reached the safe harbor of adulthood.

Alas, not all of us would reach that harbor, and those of us who did would find that adulthood could churn up seas much rougher than a squall of parental ire. We had been lucky, anyhow, to be teenagers before law enforcement (and society in general) began to see juvenile mischief as juvenile delinquency, and to supplant judgment and common sense with the witless policy of zero tolerance. But all of that is a story for another time.

For now, I'll just report that instead of going to college Johnny joined the Air Force, and Buster, Glenn, Gerry, and I went up to the University of Georgia, in Athens, as planned. Johnny disappeared from my radar screen altogether after we exchanged a couple of I'm-fine-how-are-you letters, and though Buster, Gerry, Glenn, and I were on the same campus for several years, our paths after high school crossed only now and then. Why do youthful friendships slip away? I have no idea. Maybe it's nature's way of telling you that your boyhood days are over, move on. Maybe.

Then there was Rusty, who right out of high school joined the Marines and went off to Parris Island, S.C., for basic training. Later that summer, he came home on leave looking like a million bucks in his dress-blues, which he wore proudly to show off to his old buddies. A few days later, he was buried in that uniform. Out joy-riding one night, he and a drinking buddy, who was driving, slammed into an oak tree at the end of a dead-end street. “Police estimated the speed at impact as 80 miles an hour,” the newspaper

story said; “no skid marks were found.” Rusty was a month shy of 19 years old.

I still miss him, and in my mind's eye I can still see him as clearly as I saw the Ghost of Magnolia Cemetery that night, see him running a phantom touchdown on a spectral Friday night of yesteryear, see in a kind of unearthly twilight zone his impish grin and devil-may-care smile. For that matter, from time to time I still see all my old poker-playing pals in that twilight zone, and just like Rusty they haven't aged a day in all these years. They have, in a sense, become ghosts themselves, it seems, making it hard not to think of memory itself as a cemetery of sorts.

But enough of that.

As for Pinhead, he got to college, after all! The brother of one of the cops who witnessed Pinhead's amazing feats that night had run track in high school and knew somebody who knew somebody who knew the track coach at Clemson University. After a try-out, Pinhead received a full scholarship. I never see him anymore, haven't seen him in years, but I'm told that he set an ACC record in the high hurdles that still stands.

