

## *The Visitor*

I cannot tell you how long it was before I finally got to sleep that night. I was restless; tossing and turning as one does when one's mind becomes haunted, full of difficult to turn off worrying thoughts and bad memories. There were plenty of these. It had been a rough year.

Outside, the wind would stir, rustling leaves about. I would awaken. The house would creak as old houses do. My mind would wander off and dig up old memories. Those were the ones I wanted to put far behind me. Yet they are being placed right before me again in all their troublesome Technicolor highlights.

When I thought I finally had put all those mental pictures behind me and started to drift off, I slowly began to have this notion that perhaps I was not alone.

This feeling was not one of danger, but one of something familiar, yet a mixed feeling of both happiness and grief from the distant past.

There was a full moon that night. And in the blue glow of the moon as it lit up my bedroom, I felt I saw my old dog, my old friend Shane in the room with me. This had to be his ghost, yet I felt his presence there at my bedside to be real, and I imagined I could see his big, old, weather-checked, wet nose pointed directly at me. His huge left paw resting on my mattress; his big brown eyes looking at me; his toothy doggy smile told me that he was happy to see me.

He was just as I remembered him. Those large German Shepard ears, ever alert, were pointed towards me, waiting for me to speak to him.

## *The Visitor*

His big tail, wagging hard, made his whole body rock back and forth. It had been a long, long time since I saw my old friend.

Not without some trepidation, I slowly reached my hand out from under the covers and gently stroked his big furry head. I felt that old, familiar texture of his hair on the palm of my hand. After a few minutes of caressing his noble head, he moved his paw off my mattress and began to circle to his right, moving quickly but making sure he remained in reach of my hand. I obliged him by digging my fingers into his fur, leaving a trail of mussed up dog hair on his back as he moved, and I massaged him from head to tail. He arched his back to increase the pressure of the fingers. He always did like his back being scratched.

He quickly turned to offer his other side and I again obliged him with the scratching and caressing. Lord, it was good to see him again!

I could swear that I could even smell him. That strange, yet familiar musty doggy odor. His coat felt rich and healthy, and he felt firm under my hand. Powerful in his youth, we would play for hours.

Shane was the size of a big wolf. He was muscular, and healthy. When he ran, it seemed he could run forever. He loved to chase rabbits, squirrels, and gophers for the sport of it; I never saw him hurt any critter he ever ran down.

Once the chase ended, he would ever so gently and with great pride pick up his exhausted victim and carry it back to show me.

Dropping his prize at my feet, still wet from his drooling, but none the

## *The Visitor*

worse for wear. It would soon gather its strength and run off. He didn't need to eat, just prove a point. Shane must have figured he proved to me (and to the indignant critter he caught) that once again, he is the ultimate predator on the hill!

And as sleek and fit as he appeared now; it was clear that he was being cared for quite well in his new home. I surmised that his home had to be heaven. He deserved that and heaven would have been honored to have him. I was incredibly pleased and happy for him.

A few years after getting discharged from the Air Force, my wanderings took me to the small town of Canon City, Colorado. I liked it there and I eventually ended up purchasing thirteen acres of unimproved mountain land off the Ilse Route, nineteen real rough miles south of town. The view of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains are remarkable, and the location seemed to satisfy my need for the open space at the time. Total payment per month; \$85.00, haul your own water, don't expect electricity for several years and my closest neighbor about a half mile away. And from time to time the county would bring a road grader out and knock down the high spots in the rutted dirt road.

These neighbors, Roy and Billie had two sons and a daughter. They also kept a pack of unruly noisy obnoxious German Shepards staked out to various trees around the property. The family's security system, according to Roy.

## *The Visitor*

They were outgoing people who had been living there for almost 2 years. I got to be friends with them. Daddy Roy, about 33 years old, and an opinionated possessive, yet likeable SOB. He married the still very pretty Billie when they were 16 years old. Billie was a kind and giving soul. And in spite of the obvious hardships of living in such conditions, nonetheless, they seemed to be happy about the situation and were committed to making the best of their pioneering effort. But they did have electricity. And they showed me the location of a water pump in a small meadow some half-mile away.

Terry, their daughter, was fourteen. Roy Jr. was about two years younger and Michael, the youngest, nine. Their home was fabricated from an old pickup truck camper placed on cinder blocks. Using this for a base, they built a small shack off the back of the camper using plywood, an old door, various 2x4's and some insulation. Inside, they had a couple of couches, a small table and some chairs.

For heat, they had a large wood-burning stove placed in the center of the shack. The stove was made from a 55-gallon oil drum, a stove pipe was added to vent most of the smoke through the roof.

Yet, despite all their efforts at smoke mitigation, the interior took on a dingy shade of gray from the smoke that couldn't make it through the pipe to the outside. Everything in the shack smelled like smoke. Cooking was done on the camper's small four burner propane stove. Water heated on the same stove for bathwater. The toilet, merely a

## *The Visitor*

plastic sack lined 5-gallon bucket with a toilet seat on top for comfort. I didn't ask.

All of the dogs were terrors. All the pups were about the same age from the same litter. The mother dog sadly was visibly run down from having too many litters. The father was the dog from hell and would chew on the cinderblock Roy used to chain him to. The dogs were always fighting, yelping, yapping, and snapping at everything and anything. I could see they didn't get fed too regularly. They all slept outside on the ground with no shelter. Old Roy only wanted mean, killer watchdogs around his property and sure enough he, sad to say, almost succeeded with this wish.

All but one, that is.

At 4 months, Shane was gangly but had beautiful markings. He had a long sleek body, and his paws were the size of snowshoes. His ears were oversized and pointed upwards without any droop. His temperament was that of a wild dog, yet I could feel he was not mean spirited, just wild for attention. Somehow, I could sense this in him. He didn't want to hurt anyone and just wanted someone to pay attention to him. Someone to play with him. Someone to take care of him.

One day, while over for a visit, Terry asked me if I would like to see Shane and the two of us went out to see him. She knew this dog was different from the others and told me so. Terry stayed back a short distance as I walked up to him. Much to my surprise, he gleefully

## *The Visitor*

jumped up on me. He and I were friends immediately. But, when Roy found out I actually walked up to Shane and could pet him, he was not too pleased to see one of his “Killer dogs” actually wasn’t much of a killer after all.

A few days later they gave him to me.

Now, those so many years later, I see him again. But he did not stay long that night. He left just as quickly as he came, dreams being the way dreams are after all, and ghosts just being ghostly, are expected to fade away.

At one time I used to share things that were on my mind with him. He seemed to enjoy listening to the sound of my voice and would pay a great deal of attention to what I had to say. Ears alert he would move his head from side to side listening to me. He never answered back but he was always a good listener, tail wagging in approval.

He came back that night because he knew I needed him, even if he could stay for only a short time. I was relieved to see he is happy and in good health. I am thinking he must have lush, green mountain meadows to run in and cool mountain spring water to drink and many willing critters to chase. And he could howl at the moon with that glorious voice of his! Maybe even someone kind and loving like Terry is there to help care for him. She was, after all, the one who knew he was special to begin with.

## *The Visitor*

My exile is not what I wished for. I don't understand it but apparently this is something I must go through at this time in my life for one reason or another. But I believe that everyone needs to be reminded that one is not always really alone. Not really.

Shane came back as if to say, "Hey, I'm here! I love you!"

I have never forgotten my friend, Shane.

I am pleased to know that he has not forgotten me.

I miss him. And I still grieve for him.

But, most of all, Oh, most of all, how I wish I could have been much better for him!

Perhaps he came to forgive me?

Shane- 1972-1983.

