

THE GHOST IN THE WAREHOUSE

By

Ellie

His nickname was Maverick, and that's what I'll call him since I don't know his real name. I imagine the name had been earned during his younger days when he might have been a bit of a radical, tending to join unions and mouth off at the bosses during his time underground in the mines. He had mellowed since he had been laid off. Stooped and walking stiffly on rainy days, he was the proud grandfather of three. He had taken a job in a warehouse to bridge the time between the lost of his mine job and retirement.

This wasn't an industrial warehouse with wide rolling doors and forklifts. Rather, it was a basement made of rock and cement, and it stored stationery goods like paper, pens, rulers, desks and computer supplies. It was damp down there, but fortunately, the inventory moved out quickly through the storefront upstairs or by vans loaded through a back door, so that there was no time for items to get musty smelling. No wheeled machinery helped move the items around. Products moved on and off the shelves by hand.

Maverick worked the afternoon shift from four to midnight. His eyesight was getting weak and he soon discovered this when he had started the job and had trouble reading the product numbers in the dim lights that hung in strips from the ceiling. After three months of denial and squinting at the writing on the packages, he finally admitted he needed glasses. He wore these on a string around his neck.

During the day two guys carried the merchandise up the rickety wood ramp to the delivery vans. Soon after Maverick came in for his shift, the transport truck from the main warehouse down south arrived with new stock, and Maverick and the two dayshift workers unloaded the big truck. Alone in the warehouse in the evenings, Maverick stacked the shelves with the newly arrived items. He liked to listen to talk radio while he worked. The radio kept him company, and he was prone to argue with the commentators on the radio.

One evening he was at the front of the warehouse stacking the shelves with the products that moved out the fastest. He heard a noise coming from the back. He assumed it was one of the guys from the day shift who had forgotten something. Back there was a toilet and a closet where the workers stored their lunches, coats and boots. The noise had come from that direction. He shouted, "Steve? Bob?" No answer came.

Maverick returned to emptying the box of pens. Pens were a product that needed his undivided attention. There were so many different types and different colours, and it was easy to make a mistake, and inadvertently put a box of red pens where the green pens were stored, or place some gel pens where ink pens were supposed to be stacked. Maverick had to concentrate hard to avoid errors. He liked to daydream about his upcoming retirement, and that made it harder to keep his mind on his work.

He heard the noise at the back again. "Steve? Bob? You back there?" Those two young guys annoyed him. They liked to tease him because he was older. They liked to play tricks on him. Maybe that's what they were up to back there. He would ignore them. The more attention he paid them, the worse they got with their shenanigans. He heard a box fall. Now they were getting out of hand. They would break something.

He took off his glasses and let them dangle on his chest. He started to make his way to the back of the warehouse where it was darker. Suddenly, a cool breeze blew around the boxes and chairs and desks, ruffling a stack of discarded plastic wrapping. Either Steve or Bob had left the door open on his way out. Tomorrow, he would give them a piece of his mind. He reached the door. It was shut tight and locked. He turned to return to the front.

An old man ran across his path. Maverick jumped back surprised. "Can I help you?" he asked. Nothing. He looked in the direction the old man had disappeared. Nothing there but a wall. It didn't make sense. He could not have gone through the wall. He started looking behind stacked boxes and behind file cabinets. He was alone. And yet he couldn't be. He had seen the old man.

"Can I help you?" he shouted. Nothing. Maverick walked to the wall where the old man had disappeared and put his hand on it. It was icy to the touch. The breeze was gone. It was so quiet he could hear himself breath.

It was time to retire, he told himself. He vowed not to tell anyone what had happened. If the two day-workers had played a trick on him, he would not give them the pleasure of having him talk about it. But the following day, he had to bring a supply of HB pencils to the store upstairs, and he couldn't help delighting the female sales clerks with the story his ghostly visitor.

"That's old Larry," Betty, one of the older women, said. "He used to work here before you came along. He died down there of a heart attack."

Maverick felt a chill down his spine. If he didn't get out of that dark, dingy basement warehouse, he might suffer the same fate as Old Larry, dead and haunting the place. Immediately, he went to the top floor to the manager's office and quit.

