



Brandon stood motionless backstage, better yet, in a state of shock. The more he watched Mr. 5008, the more he resisted, telling his eyes and ears not to accept what he was seeing and hearing.

Had he bumped his head that hard? Why couldn't he wake from this dream? He struggled to find a sense of balance, to feel the ground below his feet as he walked through the thin hallway and into the showroom.

His footsteps were slow and cautious as he went up the seating aisle. He kept his head down, afraid to look at the empty seats, afraid of facing the stage, terrified he wouldn't make it to the lobby. He'd only got fifteen feet up the aisle when he heard, "Hey, you! I'm over here!"

Every muscle in Brandon's body twitched. He spun his head around in slow motion.

Mr. 5008 was prancing around onstage, tipping his hat to the empty seats and smiling from ear to ear. "Looks like you got your wish," Mr. 5008 hollered out.

Brandon tried to speak, but hardly a stutter came from his lips.

"*In charge*, boy. You're in charge now," Mr. 5008 told him. "Ain't that what you wanted?" The ghost shimmied his way to the microphone, where he once again embraced his re-claimed desire for the stage.

As Brandon watched the ghost command the stage, he realized everything he'd ever known about spirits could fit in a single sheet of paper, and that sheet of paper had just gone up in a blaze, taking his world of reality with it.

He knew when he took this job he'd be leaving his safety zone; that he'd have to walk the wire without a net, but he had no idea he'd be faced with something that would obliterate his senses in a matter of minutes, something that could wipe the slate clean of any preconceived notion that spirits were no more than a bump in the night, or rumors of

some dead Sea Captain that frequented a foggy lighthouse.

He also found it strange that within a few hours, and without lifting a finger, he'd suddenly moved up in the ranks. Was this another trick?

“It’s just you and me now, kid,” said Mr. 5008.

Brandon stared at the ghost.

“Say ... I’m real sorry for your bad luck, but don’t look so sad. You’re gonna like it here ... now that the Dame’s gone, that is. We can sing all we want.”

Brandon turned to leave, but his muscles seemed frozen. He felt himself pushing and straining with everything he had, trying to move away. His feet wouldn’t budge.

Mr. 5008 bursted out laughing, tilting his head back as he pointed at Brandon. He put his hands to his hips and said, “Well don’t just stand there. I’m ready to sing! What time do I go on?”