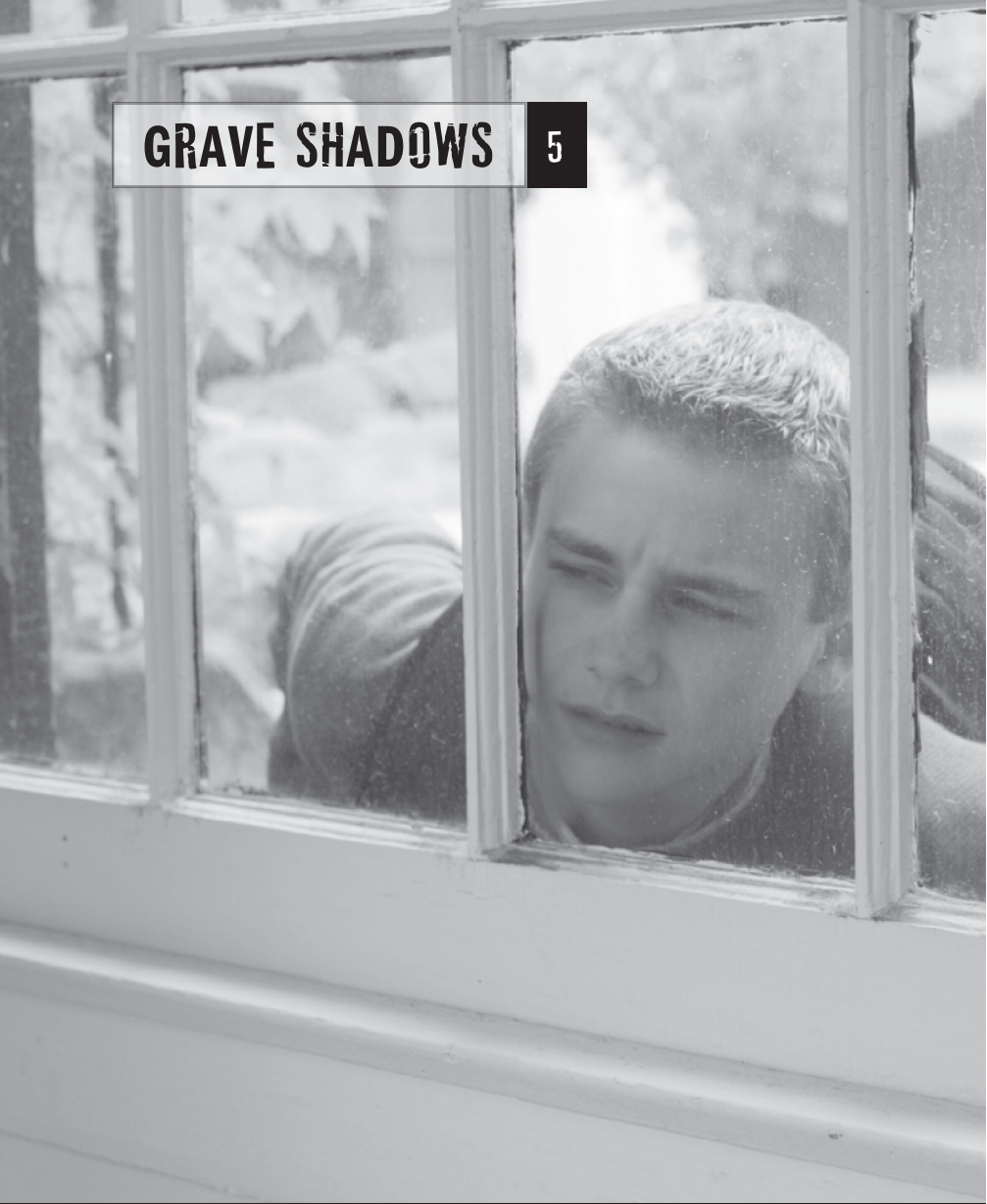


GRAVE SHADOWS

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CHAPTER 1

☺ Bryce ☺

My friend Jeff Alexander was dying. We all knew it. I prayed God would perform a miracle, but I'm not sure I believed it would actually happen. When Jeff mentioned going to the graveyard near the haunted house, it made my skin crawl.

The hardest part of any cemetery is looking at the graves of kids. Did they get sick? fall down a well? The only thing you know is that they're sleeping with angels or in Jesus' arms—that's what the tombstones say.

That summer started out like most. Ashley and I were glad to be out of school and going into the eighth grade. She's my twin sister

and likes to tell everybody she's older, but it's only by a few seconds. We can talk about everything but age.

Instead of just watching TV all day or bugging Mom for extra chores to make money, I told Jeff I'd ride with him on a bike hike. It was the least I could do since he has cancer. Sometimes he looks really good, like he'll live longer than us all. Then he has bad days.

Imagine a 200-mile bike ride. Made my butt numb just thinking about it. But it was for a good cause. Every mile meant more money for cancer research, and it was a chance to spend time with Jeff.

The plan was to start in Vail and ride through the mountains all the way to Colorado Springs. It wouldn't be easy, but my stepdad, Sam, says nothing really good in life is easy. I guess our family should really be good, because it's not easy living with two new people who don't believe the way you do. Sam and his daughter, Leigh, aren't Christians, and my mom and sister and I are. We have a little brother too, Dylan.

Sam's wife and younger daughter died in the same plane crash our dad died in. Sam met my mom at a memorial ceremony, and they fell in love. That was before Mom became a Christian. We moved from Illinois to Colorado, which is probably the biggest change in scenery imaginable. Instead of everything being as flat as a paper plate, there were mountains all around, thin air, animals, snow in April and May, and no Cubs games. It was a shock, but Ashley and I got used to it.

The bike trip was a week away when Jeff suggested the graveyard trip. Ashley and her friend Hayley said they wanted to go too, and I figured the more the merrier.

That's when things got interesting.