

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Mitch Albom

Author of
Tuesdays with Morrie



the five people
you meet in heaven

The End



*T*HIS IS A STORY ABOUT A MAN named Eddie and it begins at the end, with Eddie dying in the sun. It might seem strange to start a story with an ending. But all endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time.

THE LAST HOUR of Eddie's life was spent, like most of the others, at Ruby Pier, an amusement park by a great gray ocean. The park had the usual attractions, a boardwalk, a Ferris wheel, roller coasters, bumper cars, a taffy stand, and an arcade where you could shoot streams of water into a clown's mouth. It also had a big new ride called Freddy's Free Fall, and this would be where Eddie would be killed, in an accident that would make newspapers around the state.

◊ AT THE TIME of his death, Eddie was a squat, white-haired old man, with a short neck, a barrel chest, thick forearms, and a faded army tattoo on his right shoulder. His legs were thin and veined now, and his left knee, wounded in the war, was ruined by arthritis. He used a cane to get around. His face was broad and craggy from the sun, with salty whiskers and a lower jaw that protruded slightly, making him look prouder than he felt. He kept a cigarette behind his left ear and a ring of keys hooked to his belt. He wore rubber-soled shoes. He wore an old linen cap. His pale brown uniform suggested a workingman, and a workingman he was.

◊ EDDIE'S JOB WAS "maintaining" the rides, which really meant keeping them safe. Every afternoon, he walked the park, checking on each attraction, from the Tilt-A-Whirl to the Pipeline Plunge. He looked for broken boards, loose bolts, worn-out steel. Sometimes he would stop, his eyes glazing over, and people walking past thought something was wrong. But he was listening, that's all. After all these years he could *hear* trouble, he said, in the spits and stutters and thrumming of the equipment.

◊ WITH 50 MINUTES left on earth, Eddie took his last walk along Ruby Pier. He passed an elderly couple.

"Folks," he mumbled, touching his cap.

They nodded politely. Customers knew Eddie. At least the regular ones did. They saw him summer after summer,

one of those faces you associate with a place. His work shirt had a patch on the chest that read EDDIE above the word MAINTENANCE, and sometimes they would say, "Hiya, Eddie Maintenance," although he never thought that was *funny*.

Today, it so happened, was Eddie's birthday, his 83rd. A doctor, last week, had told him he had shingles. Shingles? Eddie didn't even know what they were. Once, he had been strong enough to lift a carousel horse in each arm. That was a long time ago.

∞ "EDDIE!" . . . "TAKE ME, Eddie!" . . . "Take me!"

Forty minutes until his death. Eddie made his way to the front of the roller coaster line. He rode every attraction at least once a week, to be certain the brakes and steering were solid. Today was coaster day—the "Ghostr Coaster" they called this one—and the kids who knew Eddie yelled to get in the cart with him.

Children liked Eddie. Not teenagers. Teenagers gave him headaches. Over the years, Eddie figured he'd seen every sort of do-nothing, snarl-at-you teenager there was. But children were different. Children looked at Eddie—who, with his protruding lower jaw, always seemed to be grinning, like a dolphin—and they trusted him. They drew in like cold hands to a fire. They hugged his leg. They played with his keys. Eddie mostly grunted, never saying much. He figured it was because he didn't say much that they liked him.

Advance Praise for *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*:

"This is the fable you will devour when you fall in love. This is the tale you will keep by your side when you are lost. This is the story you will turn to again and again, because it possesses the rare magic to let you see yourself and the world anew. This book is a gift to the soul."

—**Amy Tan**, author of *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*

"Anyone who loved *Tuesdays with Morrie* should delight in reading *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. Mitch Albom has populated his larger-than-life tale with memorable characters and filled it with the abundant warmth and wisdom that we've come to expect from this gifted storyteller."

—**John Burnham Schwartz**, author of *Claire Marvel*

"This is a lovely book, sweet, entertaining and wise. What a gutsy, surprising follow-up to *Morrie*."

—**Anne Lamott**, author of *Traveling Mercies* and *Blue Shoe*

"Deep, profound, superbly imaginative, written with the quiet eloquence of a storyteller who dares to leap into the most magical of places. This poetic book is full of lessons and hope."

—**James McBride**, author of *The Color of Water* and *Miracle at St. Anna*

"A moving flight of fantasy come to teach us that Heaven is where we finally learn what our life was about."

—**Harold S. Kushner**, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

"In *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, Mitch Albom lifts us to a new level. You'll find here echoes of the classics—*The Odyssey*, for one—and that puts Albom's book in the best of company."

—**Frank McCourt**, author of *Angela's Ashes* and *Tis*

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