



With Dead Certainty



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Introduction: Three Giants

“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Sir Isaac Newton

Giant 1.

This book is dedicated to my long-time literary muse, C.S. Lewis, who planted a seed in my imagination which took forty years to take root and blossom into this manuscript.

God will invade. But I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realize what it will be like when He does. When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks on to the stage the play is over.

God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else—something it never entered your head to conceive—comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time, it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature.

It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.

~ Mere Christianity. C.S. Lewis. New York: Macmillan, 1952: 66.

Giant 2.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the scientist and theologian, Sir John Polkinghorne, whose eschatological insight gave wings to this work of fiction.

We may summarize a viable approach to eschatological expectations in terms of four propositions:

1. If the universe is a creation, it must make sense everlastingly, and so ultimately it must be redeemed from transience and decay.
2. If human beings are creatures loved by their Creator, they must have a destiny beyond their deaths. Every generation must participate equally in that destiny, in which it receives the healing of its hurts and the restoration of its integrity, thereby participating for itself in the ultimate fulfilment of the divine purpose.
3. In so far as present human imagination can articulate eschatological expectation, it has to do so within the tension between continuity and discontinuity. There must be sufficient continuity to ensure that individuals truly share in the life to come as their resurrected selves and not as new beings simply given the old names. There must be sufficient discontinuity to ensure that the life to come is free from the suffering and mortality of the old creation.
4. The only ground for such a hope lies in the steadfast love and faithfulness of God that is testified to by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

~ The God of Hope and the End of the World. John Polkinghorne. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002: 148-149.

Giant 3.

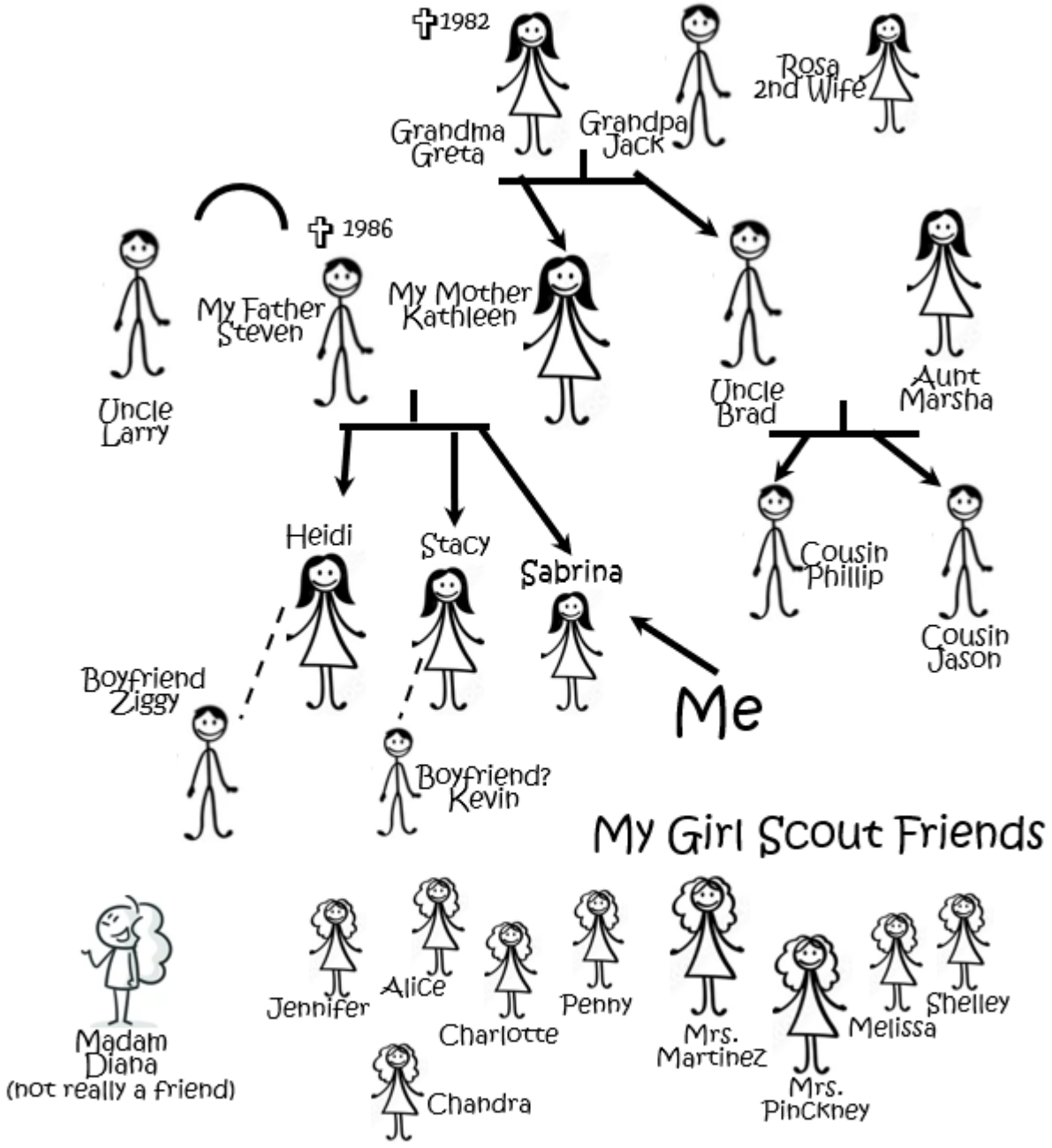
The consummation of this tale is built upon a vision written by Saint John the Revelator around the year ninety anno Domini:

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

~ Revelation 5: 11-14, NIV

Sabrina's School Project in 1988 for 5th Grade



Chapter 1

Pioneer Cemetery

Late on a Monday afternoon, Stacy Adams ambled down a trash-strewn sidewalk. She trudged under a rumbling overpass then peered through the wrought-iron bars of old Pioneer Cemetery. In the midst of suburban sprawl, the two acres of grave stones appeared frozen in time, preserved in a state of *arrested decay*. Several granite monuments lay tilted, others disjointed or toppled. Knee-high metal fencing compassed the markers of long-interred families, their black-painted ornamentation now disintegrating into rust.

The oldest headstone in Pioneer Cemetery showed a death date of 1854, but the ones facing Hesperian Boulevard dated mostly from the 1880s. Stacy recognized some of the big-shot names like *Lewelling* and *Meeks* since local streets were named in their honor.

Once important people, she mused, but now moldering like all the rest. She once learned there was a pauper field on the far lot where indigents were buried without ceremony. She philosophized: Death is truly the great equalizer of us all.

Stacy fixed her eyes on the nearest limestone slab which faced the busy boulevard. Time and weather had blackened the inscription, but a stone relief was still discernable. The carving depicted a Victorian woman, kneeling in sorrow, palm of one hand propping a weary head. “So sad,” she murmured. “So sad.” I wonder who she was. The melancholy image burrowed deep into her troubled soul.

That particular Monday was October 31, 1988, and Stacy Adams was walking home from San Lorenzo High School.

As she let go of the bars, the fifteen-year-old pondered the derelict graveyard. *I don't get it. Why do some of my classmates like to dress up as Halloween skeletons? She glanced back at a sunken gravesite and shivered. The time will come soon enough when they won't need costumes to display their rib bones.*

Stacy then thought of her father. He was resting in a cemetery too; not in this one but at Chapel of the Chimes. His tombstone read: Steven Adams 1947-1986. She remembered asking him one day why ghosts and ghouls were such spooky figures.

Being an intellectual, his answer was of course well thought-out and theologically sound. “Human beings,” he explained, “are what’s called a *conditional unity* composed of a body and a soul. That’s how you and I regard each other in everyday interaction. Stacy, when I look at you, I see your material body, but I perceive an immaterial soul

animating your arms and legs. However, when the unity breaks down at death, the bond between body and soul dissolves and each separated part becomes mysterious—uncanny. A walking soul-less body is seen as a ghoulish or zombie while a visible body-less soul is represented as a ghost or specter. Such half-people become otherworldly.”

Stacy walked to the stop sign reconstructing her dad’s theological logic. She then crossed to the corner of Usher and College Street. She recalled her freshman history class, when she had learned this area was termed *Pioneer Square*, because the original settlement sprang from that city block.

A local historian had explained to her class, “When prospectors first discovered California gold in 1849, successful miners built mansions in San Francisco. Those not so successful squatted here in the East Bay. On this particular mud flat, near San Lorenzo Creek, pioneers built a grammar school in 1865, enclosed the cemetery in 1870, and erected the Centennial Community Church in 1876.”

Stacy recalled interrupting the docent, “This old church is where my father is the minister.” She backtracked with embarrassment, “That is, at least until he died last year.”

After a minute of gloomy reminiscence, Stacy proceeded through the church parking lot then creaked open a side door to the parsonage. Her mom wasn’t home yet, but her little sister sprawled on the sofa, thumbing through an Archie comic book.

Sabrina was oblivious to her elder’s approach.

“Aren’t you supposed to be doing homework?” Stacy chided.

“Right! I was just about to start,” the ten-year old replied with a giggle.

Stacy then inquired, “So, Sabrina, are you doing any trick-or-treating this evening?”

“No, I’ll just pass out candy. I helped mom with that harvest festival on Saturday. That’s enough for me. Anyway, I’m too old for a princess outfit and you know I’m not allowed to dress up like a zombie or witch.” She imitated her mom’s voice. “Such a costume doesn’t bring glory to God.”

The doorbell buzzed and Sabrina raced for the bucket of treats. She plunked a Tootsie Roll into each of three open bags.

After a few minutes, Kathleen Adams flung open the door. The school-teacher mother was tall and fit with a care-worn face. “Sorry, girls” she puffed. “The classroom was crazy today. Plus, I had to stop off at Luckys to pick up dinner. How does spaghetti sound? Hey, I also have this bag full of treats left over from my pumpkin carving contest. I’m sure glad Halloween comes just once a year.”

A dozen kids and a few teenagers rang the parsonage doorbell over the next few hours. At nine o'clock Kate pulled in the pumpkins and turned off the porch light. She noticed the tree across the street was now being decorated with streamers of toilet paper. *Isn't that the principal's son?* she laughed to herself.

The mom permitted an hour of TV time, then asked the two girls to turn off their room lights.

Stacy used that sixty minutes to update her journal. "Sometimes I feel like a misfit," she confessed. "In PE, I got measured today and turned out to be five-foot eight and one-hundred twenty pounds. A short boy peeking at the scales picked on me, 'How's the weather up there?' I can't help it if I'm tall and skinny. I guess I take after my mom; *that's the Nordic genes*, she says. And Sandy, who sits next to me in History class, calls me spring-butt because I stand up to answer all of Mr. Ericson's questions. Well, no one else seems to know the answers. Maybe I'll just have to act stupid like her. And today was Halloween. Do you know what that mean Wendy said? 'Oh, you're dressing up like a hobo today. How sweet.' I like my jeans and flannel shirt.

"On my walk home, I put my backpack down for a while and looked into the old cemetery. I thought about dad. The place was so peaceful. No one there has troubles. Maybe that's where I belong."

She turned off the desk lamp and fell into a profound slumber.

Chapter 2

Halloween Dream

Was it gastric indigestion caused by a spaghetti-Tootsie Roll dinner? Or maybe it was the melancholy nature of the sorrowful gravestone? Or could it have been a true inbreaking from the supernatural realm beyond? For whatever reason, Stacy experienced a nighttime of vivid dreaming. The series of thoughts, images, and emotions did not reset at brief awakenings, but instead persisted from episode to episode; first pleasant, then frightening, next bizarre, and finally mysterious.

The night visions began in Germany where she had once visited her grandparents. Her mom, dad, and sisters were casually strolling along the Berlin wall, snapping pictures of the elaborate graffiti. She stooped her head and peeped through a portal in the concrete barrier. Suddenly she felt herself being dragged by her long braids into the Communist zone. She couldn't find her way back to her family and panicked. She sprinted for miles, stepping above the clouds.

Back on the ground, Stacy discovered she had entered Dachau concentration camp. She didn't want to pass through the spooky gates. She heard her mom insist she was too young for such horror, but felt a yank on her arm as her grandfather pulled her into the death camp.

She stared at a terrible photo of stacked corpses that squirmed at a touch of her finger. She looked out a window to see bulldozers pushing dead bodies into a gigantic crematorium. She spotted a Halloween table festooned with orange and black bunting and heaped high with body parts. Leaping up, one shriveled corpse winked an eye socket at her. A second zombie-like creature grinned with rotted teeth. They both sniggered and lurched forward as she retreated in fright. She screamed with all her might, but emitted no sound.

Her perspective melted into the recent Halloween party that was held on her school's basketball court. She saw several of her high school buddies costumed as witches, grim reapers, and skeletons. She blinked and now realized they were not wearing costumes at all, but exposed bones revealed their cadaverous natures. She shrieked, "What am I doing here?" She looked at her own bony arm. "Is this just a costume or have I become a corpse like them?" Stacy shuddered and awoke, but only for a moment.

She now stood at her dad's funeral, not in the chapel, but at the grave side. As pallbearers lowered the casket into the pit, she glanced to the side to see her mother and sisters weeping. There was Grampa Jack with Grandma Greta. She recognized her

uncles, aunts, and cousins. Everyone appeared so sad, except for the death-camp corpses which now began to dance. Stacy shot up in bed, realized she was dreaming, and returned her head to the comfort of her pillow.

Now she felt her fingers grasp the cold bars of Pioneer Cemetery. A gust of wind whisked shriveled leaves past the gravestones. Once more Stacy's eyes were fixed upon the woman carved in stone. At first observation, the image lay motionless, but slowly the still stone began to animate as in a flickering motion picture. The antique figure stood erect and gazed through the bars and stared directly into the eyes of Stacy.

The apparition called out to her, but her words sounded archaic, in a kind of sing-song dialect. "Why are you starin' at me for? Oh dearie, I'm sorry. Ye can't read my name, can ye? Well, just to let you know, I'm Mary Dickson, born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1830 and died in this God-forsaken hole in 1878." She pointed to her left. "Look yonder. See. That's my new-built church over there."

The phantom continued to speak in her Irish lilt but was soon drowned out by two chattering cadavers which had shambled from a nearby pit. Almost like a comedy skit, the duo were bantering in Yiddish. One spoke something like, "Arbeit hat mich frei gemacht." What was that phrase? "Work has made me free?" The dreamer awoke, her bedroom awash in sunlight.

She sat up in bed, her legs dangling over the sideboards. Stacy knew that if she did not immediately recite the dream in words, the night visions would vanish from memory. "How odd it is," she considered "my actual dreams will dissolve, but not the words that my ears hear."

She grabbed her journal and wrote down three words: *Mary-Ireland-1878*. She then went on with her school day, retaining the eerie apprehension of a perplexing dream.

After school, she put to paper her dream sequence. Once vivid details were already fading. Yet she did remember the casualness with which she had observed the chattering corpses as if such things were a common occurrence. She wrote in her journal: "The most remarkable thing about a dream is that the most remarkable thing within a dream is not remarkable at all."

After school on Wednesday, Stacy paused again at the Victorian tombstone. Once more, she strained to read the obscure inscription situated below the grieving woman. Maybe she could discern the capitol letters of *BORN* and *DIED*, but certainly nothing beyond that.

At the mid-week church service, Stacy sat in the front pew between her mom and little sister. Sabrina took the stubby pencil located with the offering envelope and began drawing faces on the church bulletin. *Not like me at all*, she thought. *Short and round*

and full of laughter, kind of like dad. Her dimples show whenever she smiles, so they show all the time.

Brother Thomas was teaching from a passage about wolves in sheep clothing. *Not as good as dad*, she spoke to herself. However, she knew enough to be grateful to the pastor and deacons. After all, they had granted the Adams family permission to remain in the parsonage even after her father had passed away. True, the property was a bit shabby, but her mom said the rent was reasonable.

Her mind wandered to Heidi. Her older sister used to sit with them in this front pew, but she had turned sour after her dad's death. Last year Heidi told her mom she could not believe in a God who would let her father suffer with AIDS. "That kind of god is not for me," she argued.

At nineteen years old, Heidi moved out of the parsonage to move in with her piano-man boyfriend, Zygmund Dydek. Her mom liked the Polish émigré well enough, but not the fact—as she told Stacy—they were *shacking up*.

On Thursday morning, during photography club, Stacy sought out Kevin. He was probably the smartest student in tenth grade, a bit of a nerd, but she knew the guy was sweet on her.

"Hey, Kevin. I need your help with something."

He put down his Nikon camera. She hadn't really spoken with him before and as everyone knew, blonde Stacy Adams was the cutest girl around. Kevin swept back his unkept hair, struggling to achieve nonchalance. "Sure, Stacy. How can I help you?"

After school, Kevin happily accompanied Stacy strolling down Hesperian Boulevard to the graveyard. He peered through the perimeter fence, scrutinized the limestone, and admitted he could not decipher a single word.

"However," he said, raising an index finger for emphasis, "Let's try this." With his high-quality lens, Kevin snapped several photos of the tombstone from different angles. "Let me talk with Mister Ericson. Maybe he can help us. I'll tell him it's for a school project."

And so, the photo-club sponsor did provide assistance. He instructed Kevin on how to adjust exposure and contrast of the negative, then crop and enlarge the written portion. The lines became intelligible:

In Memory of Mary A Dickson
Wife of James Dickson
BORN in Belfast Ireland
Sept 10 1830
DIED Jan 2 1878

Aged 47 years

On Friday after school, Kevin approached Stacy in the hallway. He showed her two enlarged photos; one a negative print and one positive. On the negative, Kevin had traced over the letters with a yellow highlighter.

Stacy studied the photos, scrunched her face, then pulled her red journal from her JanSport backpack. She read aloud the three words she had scribbled on Saturday morning: *Mary-Ireland-1878*.

Kevin appeared puzzled, “I thought you told me you couldn’t decipher the inscription.”

“That’s absolutely true. I couldn’t.” Then she explained the mysterious means by which she had received the information.

Chapter 3

A Party to Remember

Jennifer was Sabrina's best friend. They did everything together that ten-year-olds are wont to do. This fellow fifth-grader was turning eleven on November ninth and was having a birthday party. Sabrina was invited of course and presented her mom with this written card.

"You are invited to the eleventh birthday of Jennifer Martinez. WHEN? Saturday, November 12, 1988. Party begins at noon; cake is cut at 1:00; and pick up is at 2:00. WHERE? The Martinez house, 306 Lewelling Boulevard, San Lorenzo. WHAT? Please, bring token gifts only - under \$10. WHO? Richard the Magnificent will be entertaining with his array of illusions and parlor tricks. RSVP by phoning Shelia at 350-235-9909."

Plans were set. Mrs. Adams would drop her daughter at the Martinez home on Saturday at noon, picking up Alice Pinckney along the way. She would then return to the house two hours later.

Stacy accompanied Sabrina the few blocks to the K-Mart where the girls purchased a board game called *Pictionary*. Sabrina felt guilty because the gift turned out to be \$10.53 with tax. Stacy relieved her sister's anxiety by saying, "I'm absolutely positive the gift limit of ten dollars was meant to be before tax."

However, events did not proceed as planned.

On Friday evening Jennifer Martinez answered the family telephone. "MOM, it's for you". Jennifer held the receiver at arm's length until her mother plucked the cordless phone from her hand.

With eavesdropping ears, Jennifer understood that Richard the Magnificent would not be coming to her eleventh birthday party. He reported he had wrenched his back moving a piano. He was so sorry.

Her mom sighed as she returned the phone to its cradle.

Jennifer was beside herself. "Mom, what are we going to do? You know I told all my friends that magician guy was going to be here. He was really fun at our girl scout fair."

"Let me check the yellow pages," she replied. "Maybe I can find a substitute." She phoned the Mighty Magic Group and Freddie the Dreamer. The news was not good: eight hours was just not enough notice for any magician to do an appearing act.

Jennifer suggested, “How about that lady next to the roller rink at the strip mall?”

Mrs. Martinez appeared puzzled.

Jennifer continued, “You know, the one with the red hand in the window.”

Her mom guffawed, “She’s not a magician. She’s a palm reader, psychic, or something of that sort. I have no idea if she can do birthday parties.”

The almost-eleven-year-old whined, “But a psychic is like a magician, right? Please-please-please, mom, give her a call.”

“Well, maybe she could be entertaining.”

About noon on the next day, Jennifer’s friends began to drop by the house. A bit later, when seven of eight guests had arrived, Mrs. Martinez formed the group into a circle. The girls were mostly fifth graders from Grant Elementary School.

“I have good news and bad news,” she said in her mom voice. “First the bad news: Richard the Magnificent called me last night and said that he had sprained his back at another party. He won’t be here.”

There were several disappointed groans.

“Now for the good news. Madam Diana the Clairvoyant will be here in a few minutes to show you real magic.” She emphasized the words *Madam* and *real* to elevate the psychic’s status.

There were a few audible moans.

“Come on now. Haven’t you ever wondered about crystal balls and tarot cards?”

The cake was already cut and Diana had not yet appeared. Mrs. Martinez looked at her watch. She then heard an old car sputter into the driveway.

Jennifer opened the front door and Madam Diana squeezed in sideways, struggling with a paper bag in one hand and a suitcase in the other. Diana was a jovial woman of about fifty. She dressed in a gypsy-style outfit with head scarf, shawl, and bangles. She smelt of musty patchouli oil and spoke like Zsa Zsa Gabor.

She confessed to Jennifer, “Darling, this is my very first birthday party,” then winked, “But for fifty bucks I’ll do one every day.”

The clairvoyant ushered all the girls into the living room. She cleared off the coffee table and put her tarot cards and crystal ball on the surface. She also placed a pad of lined paper on the glass table top.

The nine girls slouched in couches or rested on the shag carpet.

Diana called the birthday girl forward and read her fortune with the tarot cards. “Whoa! Your destiny will change this very day. I guarantee you will have good luck.”

The girls were amused but not amazed.

Diana didn’t have to be psychic to tell boredom was setting in.

She asked the girls if any had heard of automatic writing divination.

They all shrugged with indifference.

Madam Diana explained, “This is a method of psychic communication where I let my conscious mind go still and allow messages to be written through my hand.”

Diana thought a moment. “Okay, I’ll show you how it works. This is a birthday party, right? So let me reveal the birthdays of each of you in this room.”

A tingle of excitement shot through the parlor.

Diana tore a single sheet of paper from the notepad and clipped it to a board. She handed the clipboard and red pen to Jennifer and said to all the girls, “Now, I want each one of you to write down your name and the date of your birth.”

Then to Jennifer, she said, “I want you to hang on to the paper and don’t let me see it, okay?”

The birthday girl walked around the room collecting a name and birthday from each friend. When complete, Jennifer added her own name and date, then placed the clipboard face down on the carpet.

Madam Diana then asked for silence. She uttered a few dramatic words to herself then closed her eyes for about thirty seconds. She took her old-fashioned fountain pen and with her eyes squeezed shut she wrote on a pad of fine linen paper.

When she completed her automatic writing, she blinked her eyes, made a face as if awakening from a trance, and looked around the room. Without glancing down, she picked up the paper, flapped it a few times to dry the ink, then handed it to Sabrina Adams.

“Young lady,” she said. “In a moment, please read the first name on my list along with the corresponding birthday.”

The psychic then turned to Jennifer Martinez, “Please, pick up the clipboard on the floor. As your friend reads out the words of automatic writing, you say *yes* if the name and birthdate is correct but *no* if it’s wrong.”

Diana gestured to Sabrina to begin.

Everyone in the room was utterly amazed. Jennifer said *yes* nine times in a row.

Mrs. Martinez was also impressed. “How in the world did you do that?”

Madam Diana spoke in a detached monotone, “Maybe my insight didn’t come from this world. Maybe my hand was guided from a force beyond.”

Mrs. Martinez broke the spell by calling to the girls, “Okay. Let’s open the presents now.”

The gaggle began to shout and the festive mood resumed.

Before the party broke up at two o’clock, Sabrina approached her best friend for a special favor. “My sister is really interested in dreams and psychic stuff. Please let me keep the two sheets of paper; the one we girls filled out and the automatic writing.”

Since the two fifth-graders were best friends, Jennifer handed over the two magical papers.

Parents soon began to arrive at the Martinez home.

Looking out the front picture window, Sabrina informed Alice her mom was at the curb. Both girls picked up their gift bags on the way out the front door. Sabrina made sure the magic papers were tucked deep into her bag.

Both girls slid into the back seat of the Pontiac Firebird and, after a confirmation of buckled seatbelts, Kate drove away.

She casually asked her daughter, “So, how did you like the party, sweetie?”

Sabrina replied with evasion, “Oh, it was okay.”

Alice was effervescent. “Mrs. Adams, it was great! Michael the Magnificent couldn’t make it. So, can you guess who came instead?”

Mrs. Adams replied to Alice with a smile, “I can’t imagine. Who was it?”

Sabrina cringed, as Alice prattled the words. “There was a gypsy lady called Madam Diana. And do you know what she did? She guessed the names and birthdates of all nine of us. I think she called herself a psychic. She closed her eyes, went into a trance, then wrote them on paper. It was really cool. Sabrina got to read out the names and Jennifer said she was right on each of them.”

Alice was pleased with her statement; Sabrina was concerned; Kate was stunned.

Mrs. Adams tried to contain her surprise, raising only one eyebrow. “Sabrina,” she intoned, “Is that what happened?”

“Yes, mom. That’s pretty much the way it was. Jennifer’s mom made all the arrangements at the last minute because the other guy couldn’t make it. We had no

advanced notice a fortune teller would come. Diana told me she got fifty dollars for just showing up.”

“I see,” Kate said to Sabrina. “We’ll have to talk more about this when we get home.”

Silence prevailed until Alice hopped from the car.

After the door slammed, Sabrina whimpered, “Am I in trouble?”

“We’ll talk at the breakfast table,” came the reply. A tense silence ensued as Kate had five minutes to contemplate her response.

Once home and seated across from each other, Kate sucked in a deep breath.

Sabrina was in tears as she explained herself. “I’m sorry, mom. I could tell something was wrong, but what could I do with all my friends around? I couldn’t chicken out.”

The mom sensed her daughter was more shaken by the incident than she had realized.

“It’s not your fault, Sabrina,” her mom soothed. “I’ll have to give Mrs. Martinez a call to ask what she was thinking when she hired an occult palm reader as entertainment.”

“But mom,” she said trying to justify herself. “You know Stacy had something like this happen to her too? Something about dreams, ghosts, and birthdates.”

“What?!” Kate raised her voice involuntarily

“Yes, she told me about it a few days ago.”

“Stay here,” said the mom. “This is going to be a three-way conversation.”

Stacy was sitting in her room, preparing math homework.

Her mom tapped the closed door, then stepped inside. “Stacy, your sister tells me you’re having mysterious dreams. Is that true?”

She looked up from her book. “Did that little snitch rat on me?”

Kate remained calm, “It’s complicated. Can you join us at the breakfast table? Maybe together, we can make sense of Sabrina’s story.”

Stacy drew up the third chair and the three commenced to talk. At first, Stacy was disappointed her little sister had betrayed her confidence, but as Sabrina described her psychic encounter, fascination overcame hurt.”

When Sabrina finally concluded her brush with the paranormal. The mom spoke to Stacy, “It’s your turn now, please give me a full account about what you experienced.”

She began to tell her story, but stopped mid-sentence. “Rather than explain, let me get my journal. I’ll read it to you.”

The fifteen-year-old returned to the breakfast nook, journal in hand, and read aloud details of the Victorian grave stone, her Halloween dream, and the assistance provided by Kevin. She held out her book, pointing to the three words scribbled on Saturday, then she displayed the photos Kevin helped to develop. “I don’t know how to explain this?” she concluded.

Sabrina was reluctant, but she dug out the paper evidence of her encounter with the psychic. Kate looked over the papers and was about to rip them up, when Stacy interceded. “Mom, I’d like to do some research on this topic. If this is a trick by Madam Diana, I’d like to figure it out. Can I hold on to those papers for a bit?”

She pushed the psychic writing toward Stacy. “I’ll let you hang on to them on one condition: That is, that we share the whole story with your Grandpa Jack. He’s hosting a Thanksgiving dinner in Mill Valley. As far as detective work goes, he’s the best there is. Let’s have this same discussion with him and hear what he has to say about Madam Diana.” She paused, “And, Stacy, we can talk about your weird dream too.”

Chapter 4

Turkey for Twelve

Kate had spoken with her father a few months prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. As was often the case, he provided the ten-percent inspiration; she the ninety percent perspiration. “Yes, I can organize that,” she told her dad.

Her task involved getting three family branches together. The East-coast branch included her brother Bradley and sister-in-law Marsha along with their two sons, Phillip and Jason. Hers was the second branch: Heidi, Stacy, Sabrina, along with herself. The senior branch was her dad and Rosa, her step mom of sorts.

Kate was concerned about her brother-in-law. Larry had been depressed since Steven’s death and, when she phoned him, he said he had no interest in the holiday. Jack told his daughter to bring Larry along, saying, “He is certainly invited to the turkey dinner with us. And you can tell him there might be some Mexican food too.”

This reunion would mark the first gathering of the Richardson-Adams clan since 1986 when the twelve assembled for Steven’s funeral.

Kate’s spirits were always buoyed when she conversed with her big brother. They talked of old times; growing up in Marin County in the 1960s and 70s; joking about old classmates from Tamalpais High School and Fort Baker; and reminiscing about their mother who had died in Germany in 1983.

Brad and Marsha owned a substantial house in College Park, Maryland, where, rumor had it, he worked for the CIA. Phillip was a graduate assistant at the Princeton Theological Seminary while Jason was in his fourth year at the Air Force Academy. Brad assured his sister all four were on board with the plan. They would definitely be in Mill Valley on Thanksgiving day.

Kate’s chief concern was coaxing her own daughter to attend the family function. Interactions with Heidi had become strained of late. When she finally phoned her in San Francisco, the prodigal daughter was remarkably pleasant. Yes, she would love to visit with her uncle and cousins; and Grandpa’s house still held a special charm. She asked if it would be okay to bring along her boyfriend, Ziggy.

Kate phoned her dad and reported a full house. She also talked with Rosa to plan the Thanksgiving menu. Kate would be bringing the pies.

On the Saturday before Thanksgiving, Heidi showed up at the house driving the VW Rabbit she had inherited from their father. So much of her had changed, yet so much was the same.

“Hey, ponytail, how you doing,” was her greeting to Stacy. Their age difference was only four years, but their age gulf seemed like an ocean—an adult talking to an adolescent.

“And how are you, drama queen?” joked the younger sister. They both laughed for a while until Stacy began to share about her mysterious dream. She spoke on for several minutes until Heidi cut her short.

“I gave up on the supernatural,” she interjected. “I don’t believe in gods, ghosts or goblins.”

Stacy read aloud her journal entry then showed the scribbled words *Mary-Ireland-1878* that she had inscribed on Tuesday morning. Next, she displayed the photos provided by Kevin, developed on Friday.

“Just a coincidence,” she scoffed. “Sometimes the mind plays tricks, you know. I’m thinking your subconscious mind actually read the stone and your conscious mind didn’t realize it.”

“Oh yeah,” Stacy retorted, “Let’s walk across the street to see what your big subconscious brain can do.”

Upon arrival, Heidi peered through the cemetery bars. She squinted at the tombstone and recited slowly: “*Mary A Dickson; born in 1830; in Belfast, Ireland. See it’s not so hard.*”

Stacy stood astonished, “How did you do that? I couldn’t read it; neither could Kevin.”

As they returned to the parsonage, Stacy peppered her sister with inquiries, but she kept mum. Finally, when they had returned, Heidi casually asked Stacy, “Can I see your photos one more time?”

Stacy handed over the oversized envelope. Her sister held up the negative photo to Stacy’s face. “It wasn’t my keen eyesight or a visit from a ghost.” She laughed. “I just made a point to memorize the information on this picture. Magic is easy when you know the trick.”

Stacy was embarrassed at that simple explanation. “You fooled me,” she raged. “Let’s see if you can solve this one.”

She then recounted Sabrina’s experience with Madam Diana. Stacy concluded by setting before her one paper filled with fifth-grade scrawl and a second sheet elegantly penned by the automatic hand. The names and dates corresponded exactly. “So, How do you explain this, Miss Smarty Pants?”

Heidi examined the two papers and suggested the psychic may have called the school and had somehow gotten the names of the party attendees and had memorized them.

Stacy pushed back, "Is that the best you can do?"

"I don't have a good answer," she responded impatiently. "I would have to watch the whole process, moment by moment, from beginning to end. But I believe her psychic ability is a bunch of hooey. There's no such thing as ghosts. When you die, it's over. You become food for worms." She paused with a devilish grin. "You know. Like it says in the good book: *Ashes to ashes and dust to dust.*"

A shouting match exploded which became so boisterous Kate rushed into the room to check out the commotion.

"Calm down ladies," the mother invoked. "No name calling."

Sabrina soon entered into the bedroom and into the fray. She took the side of Stacy.

After a minute of accusations and finger-pointing, Kate asserted her parental prerogative. "You know the household rules: One person speaks at a time without interruption. Then the other person responds again without interrupting. That's our *Adams rules of order.*"

The rules were adhered to although Stacy made faces at Heidi and Heidi forced a cough at points of disagreement.

Finally, Kate told her three daughters, "Remember what your dad always told us: *You can disagree without being disagreeable.*

"Look, I get it. Heidi is a skeptic, denying anything supernatural. Stacy believes in the paranormal, or at least she's open to the possibility. But me, I'm old-school. You Heidi may laugh and you Stacy might disagree, but I smell brimstone behind this. These night visitations and automatic writings are not from God, but from the enemy of our souls. I will be praying for this family, that God protects us from any satanic attack."

Heidi began to respond, but in deference to her mom, swallowed her comment.

Kate continued, "This issue is very important; important enough to discuss with your grandfather when we see him. Believe it or not your gramps has considerable experience in dealing with the occult. I'll definitely ask him to set aside some time to talk with us all."

A tear welled in her eye. "Right now, how I wish your father were here with us. He could sort out this mess better than I could."

Heidi checked out a VHS tape from Video Droid. It was called *Penn & Teller's Cruel Tricks for Dear Friends*. She insisted her two sisters watch the tape with her. "Look at these magicians. Can you figure out how these guys trick their friends with their illusions. I certainly can't. I'm not surprised that Madam Diana was able to fool Sabrina."

Stacy stuck to her convictions. "I know what I experienced. It was real. There was no trickery." Sabrina nodded her head in agreement. Still, the three girls were putting into practice their father's dictum about disagreement.

Brad and Marsha arrived at the San Francisco Airport on Tuesday afternoon. Brad had rented a Buick station wagon and soon they arrived at the Holiday Inn Express in Mill Valley. On Wednesday morning Phillip and Jason arrived at the airport, catching the Marin Airporter to the hotel.

The stage was set for a festive holiday.

On Thursday morning Kate headed north from San Lorenzo traveling up Interstate 880. She drove Stacy and Sabrina directly to Mill Valley.

Heidi and Ziggy drove from Ashbury Street in San Francisco to West Oakland. Uncle Larry sat in the back seat of the VW Rabbit. He was a large man, unshaven, and dressed in an army field jacket.

The car ride into Marin provided the first opportunity for Larry and Heidi to converse since the 1986 funeral. Once they had passed the toll plaza on the Bay Bridge, Larry asked his niece, "How you been, Heidi?"

"I'm okay," she responded. "You know Zigmund and I have been living together in San Francisco since June. He's the featured piano man at the Arcade Nightclub and I wait tables. Together we make a lot in tips. Mom's upset because we're *living in sin*." The last three words she spoke with derision.

"I understand," he sympathized. "You have to live your own life. Sometimes parents just don't get it. I can see where you'd get tired of having religion shoved down your throat."

Larry then addressed Ziggy. "What kind of name is that you got? You're not from around here, are you?"

Ziggy chuckled, "Well, I come from Krakov, Poland. I've been in your beautiful California for about four years. I came to the Art Institute on a music scholarship and decided not to return home. My country's still communist, you know."

After a few miles of silence Larry spoke up, "Heidi, you understand how things have been tough for me ever since your dad died. I visited him in the hospital almost

every day after he got that AIDS. We prayed a lot too and a lot of good it did.” He shook his head. “My brother said he put his trust in the Lord and look what the Lord did to him. He was only thirty-nine. God, that’s my age now. My mom and dad were devastated. They sold the home and moved back to their roots in Georgia. I didn’t want to go to the South with them, so I stayed behind.

“You know there’s a stigma too. I told my ex-girlfriend that my brother died of AIDS and she says, ‘What? Was he queer or something?’ I say, ‘No way. It was a blood transfusion for his anemia.’ She gives me this look of disbelief.”

He paused, “I know your mom kept up a strong face, but she was hurt. How about you, Heidi? Are you still coping with any of this?”

She was loathe to discuss that terrible time, but Heidi saw her uncle was still grieving. “It was tough around the house for a while. My gramps and Rosa were around a lot. Mom buried herself in classroom duties to numb the pain. We were fortunate the church deacons let us remain in our house.”

Larry chuckled, “Yeah, at least you had a roof over your head. I had nothing. I was homeless for a year before I finally got into section-eight housing. Oh, and I do a little work at the grocery cooperative.”

Heidi glanced into the rear-view mirror at her uncle as he was rocking in the backseat. “Are you okay?”

“It was a tough night. I’m fifty-nine days clean and sober as of today.”

Silence followed for a minute.

Heidi spoke up, “Say, Larry, do you know anything about the occult? You know, crystal balls and fortune telling.”

Larry reflected for a moment at this shift in conversation. “Not much. My mom put that kind of stuff off limits growing up and I never had much interest. Now, I do believe in aliens. I think the government is hiding facts from us.”

Ziggy joined in, “Have you heard about what’s going on at Area 51? I’ve been there, you know.”

Heidi groaned. “Guys, I don’t want to talk about aliens but about fortune telling.”

And all the way to the front door, Heidi spoke about her two younger sisters and described the so-called paranormal activity happening in and around the parsonage.

About one o’clock, Heidi parked her car right behind her mom’s Pontiac. Ziggy and Larry piled out.

Heidi knocked on her grandfather's door and a familiar face greeted her. Yes, it was Phillip. The two embraced and walked up the stairs together. She had always admired her brainiac cousin. Larry and Ziggy followed the fragrance of home-cooking up the stairwell into the noisy living room.

Heidi approached each of the nine relatives, introducing Ziggy to the assembly. The boyfriend bowed formally and spoke with a distinct Slavic accent. Soon, Heidi held a paper plate laden with chocolate brownies and corn chips. Rosa smiled at her, "Don't eat too much of that, honey. There's a lot of wonderful food ahead of you. Have you ever tasted a turkey tortilla?"

When the old German wall clock struck two times, the patriarch Jack bellowed in his army voice, "Okay, let's get in a circle to give thanks for this food. Then it will be time to enjoy God's bounty."

Heidi frowned at the prospect of the familiar circle prayer, but Ziggy embraced the novelty. Grandpa's heavenly petition was earnest and protracted. He thanked God for everything good in life, mentioning each person present by name and even Grandma Greta and Steven. Rosa brought the session to a close with an emphatic *amen*.

The twelve broke down into generational groups. The six oldest sat at the long glass table, while the six youngest gathered around a borrowed fold-out. All enjoyed a traditional menu of Thanksgiving fare: roasted turkey, stuffing, corn, mashed potatoes, gravy, and cranberry sauce. The pumpkin pies provided by Kate proved to be a hit, as were the stack of turkey tortilla wraps.

As darkness fell, Brad excused himself and his family. "We'll see you tomorrow, dad. We're dropping by Marsha's sister's place for some late dessert."

Rosa went into the bedroom to rest and Grandpa Jack was left with Kathleen's family. Six guests settled in the living room as Jack lit the logs in the fireplace. "So, let's talk," he said.

Chapter 5

Jack's Testimony

Grandpa Jack lowered himself into his wingback arm chair. The patriarch was sixty-eight years old; rugged in appearance but gentle in demeanor; plain-spoken in language, but supple of mind. Forty years of Christian discipleship had cruciformed his worldview and lifestyle.

Kathleen, Stacy, and Sabrina settled into the cushy sofa; Heidi into the recliner; while Ziggy and Larry sat in repositioned dining chairs.

Jack looked over his miscellaneous family. "Such a great audience," he marveled. "I want to thank Kate for instigating this forum. She tells me she wants to talk about the occult and certain paranormal happenings. I can do that, but let me start by sharing my own story. You young ones haven't heard it yet. Bear with me if I ramble too much."

"Let me begin my testimony with a word about my father. George Richardson was born in 1895 and was an artillery officer in World War One. Upon his return from France in 1918, he married my mother, Frances. The newly-weds settled in Cleveland where my dad had connections with the Cuyahoga county sheriff. I soon came along in 1920 and Mortimer a few years later. I grew up in the roaring twenties and the depressed thirties. I remember my dad dealing with bootleggers, gangsters, and speakeasies."

"After high school, dad was able to get me an entry position with the Cleveland police department. It was great. I got to wear a sharp-looking uniform and issue traffic citations. After the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, most of my buddies joined the military. Now their uniforms looked snappier than mine. I got a draft deferment as a policeman, but enlisted anyway. In 1943, I went to the army school for military police."

"Not too long after that, I shipped off to North Africa to take part in the invasion of Sicily. I helped with traffic control in the daytime and patrolled the bars at night. The Army never seemed to make much progress against the Nazis in Italy. After D-Day, I was reassigned to the 42nd Infantry Division and by 1945 I was escorting convoys into south Germany. I became part of the MP unit that liberated Dachau concentration camp. It had to be the worst thing I ever witnessed in my entire life; outside the camp were boxcars full of dead bodies and inside walking human skeletons. The whole place stunk of death. I didn't do it personally, but I did see some of my buddies execute a handful of SS guards."

"Finally, Hitler blew out his brains in the Fuhrer-bunker and victory was declared. It was an anxious time. I was preparing my mind for duty in the Pacific, but

fortunately, two atomic bombs put an end to that talk. Having nothing better to do, I volunteered for occupation duty and was stationed to the American Sector in Berlin. I was promoted to buck sergeant.”

“It was there I met this beautiful German woman named Greta Steinberg. She was a year older than me and a recent widow. She explained how she had married a German officer just two days before he was shoved into the meat-grinder of the Russian Front. She showed me the official notice of his death. Let’s just say, Greta and I developed a relationship. I supported her with cigarettes and nylon stockings which were a kind of currency. She was so much alive and fun to be with.”

“When the army was looking for MPs to assign to the Nuremberg trials, my name appeared on the list. Believe it or not, you can catch a glimpse of me in some old film footage of that trial. Like the other guards, I’m wearing a white helmet and belt. My mom called me a movie star when she saw the newsreel at a Cleveland cinema.”

“When I married Greta in 1946, I lost my top-secret clearance; a security risk they said. We managed to stay in Germany just long enough for Brad to be born in a military hospital. You kids may not know this story, but I named my son after a US general. Not after Ike who was a politician, or Patton who was an ego-maniac, or Mark Clark, who nearly lost Anzio, but after Omar Bradley. He was known as the GI general. Omar sounded too odd to my ear, so Bradley it was.”

“I was shipped back to the States, to the MP school at Fort McClellan, Alabama. That’s where Kathleen was born. She’s an Alabamian you know. I just about left the service when the Korean War broke out and I had to go on an unaccompanied tour of duty. My new wife hated that sixteen-month separation. My mother came to Fort McClellan for a while to help with you kids. Then it was back to Germany on an accompanied tour. Greta loved those five years at Kaiserslautern; After that, we were stationed in England for a bit, and finally I was assigned to the Presidio of San Francisco.”

“I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I finagled to extend my stay from four to seven years. The quarters at Fort Baker were outstanding with a view of the Golden Gate Bridge. Katie, I’m sure you remember those years, riding your bicycle around Murray Circle. I finally left the service in 1966 as a Master Sergeant, E8.”

He continued, “A year after I hung up my khaki uniform, Brad put on his navy whites. You’ll have to talk with him if you want to know about his two years off the coast of Viet Nam.”

Jack took a deep breath to focus his thoughts. “Oh, talking so much about the military, I forgot to mention my spiritual journey. Back in 1949, while I was on leave, all four of us were visiting my brother Morty in Los Angeles where he was mustering out of

the Marine Corps. He and Celia, his wife, had just come back from a Billy Graham Crusade. Can you believe it? They were meeting in a gigantic circus tent that held nine-thousand people. Greta and I went there three times. That's where I gave my life to Jesus. Both of us took the plunge. There's been troubles in my life for sure, but I never looked back. Christ has always been my anchor." Jack finally paused to take a drink of Pepsi.

Stacy was the first to ask a question. "Gramps, wasn't it 1978 when we went to Berlin for our great-grandma's funeral?"

"That's right," he said. "I remember because Sabrina was just a few months old and got to fly free."

Stacy continued, "I remember Berlin too; the church that was still bombed out, Checkpoint Charlie, and the wall with graffiti. You also took us to that death camp, right?"

"Yes. We went there too," he said. "I thought it would be educational."

"Gramps, I was only five years old. It scared the heck out of me. I still have nightmares some time."

Jack's face went pale. "What? I'm so sorry, Stacy. I wanted to share some of my history with you. I thought Dachau was set up like a museum."

Kathleen spoke up. "Dad, it was my fault too. My mom waited in the lobby with baby Sabrina. I should have insisted Stacy stay there too."

Jack stopped everything in its tracks. "I want us all to gather around Stacy right now and pray God will protect her from evil memories. And pray for me too, that He may forgive my callous heart."

Jack and Kathleen prayed with ardor; Heidi and Larry with reservation; and Ziggy with curiosity.

Once everyone was seated again, Zygmund informed Jack. "My grandfather fought in the big war too. First against the Soviets, then against the Nazis. Neither of them liked us Poles much. My dad is still fighting Communism. He heads the local chapter of Solidarity in Krakov. Who knows. Maybe my country will be free soon and I can return home."

Heidi didn't appreciate his final phrase and shot him a sideways glare. Ziggy appeared oblivious to her displeasure.

Kathleen jumped in. "Dad, before it gets too late, I want you to listen to Stacy's and Sabrina's stories."

“Stacy, yours occurred first, so tell my dad about your dream.”

The fifteen-year-old recited her story from tombstone through Halloween visions. She spoke about Kevin and his photographs, and about her conversations with skeptical Heidi. She concluded by saying, “What do you think?”

Jack responded to her and her mom, “Let me hear Sabrina’s story first. Maybe there’s a common thread.”

The ten-year-old then spoke, with verbal support from her mom to keep the storyline on track. Together they told of the birthday party, the cancelled magician, the appearance of the psychic, and the automatic hand writing.

“So, what do you think, dad?” Kate asked.

“Hold your horses,” the patriarch replied. “We haven’t heard from your first daughter yet.”

Kathleen looked across the room to Heidi, “But she wasn’t involved in any of this.”

“That’s true,” he said, “but she does have a point of view about this paranormal activity and I’d like to hear it.”

Heidi appreciated her grandfather’s courtesy. She spoke of her recent embrace of agnosticism, and her interest in Eastern religion. “The occult is pure rubbish,” she insisted with the hubris of a nineteen-year-old. “I watched a long TV special on that. They debunked it” She then mocked the whole affair by mimicking the guitar opening of *Twilight Zone*: dee-dee-dee-dee, dee-dee-dee-dee.

Jack Richardson responded. “Heidi, some people see the world differently from you and we can’t just write them off as lunatics. It doesn’t help to ridicule. You know I was a police detective for twenty-five years. I witnessed a lot of strange things that aren’t explainable by human science. I don’t want to be spooky, but I’m convinced a malevolent force exists in our world.”

He looked at his middle granddaughter. “I’ve dealt with the occult since I was your age, Stacy, but I also have to tell you that God is stronger than any evil you might encounter.” He quoted scripture: “Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world.”

“I knew you guys were coming over this evening to talk about the occult, so I’m going to read you an excerpt of a memoir I’ve been working on. He picked up his typed manuscript, flipped the pages to a bookmark, and began to read:

“At the end of October 1935, the family planned a quick trip to Chicago to visit my uncle Henry. For the occasion, Morty and I bought a belated birthday present for

our cousin Edward. We went to a magic shop downtown and couldn't decide what to purchase. All of the Halloween merchandise was on display so we decided to buy him a Ouija board. I figured it was like our Monopoly game, only ghostlier. Mom and I played the board game that evening and it predicted my aunt's baby would arrive on April 23.

“Over the next few days, Morty and I plied the Ouija board with question after question. My brother didn't want to play anymore, saying it was scary.

“I knew for certain that my fingers were not directing that heart-shaped pointer and I studied Mort's closed eyes and could swear he was not choosing the letters. How then did this amazing board operate? It wasn't at all like Monopoly.

“We packed into the Studebaker, leaving Cleveland about six in the morning and arriving in Chicago about three.

“We gave Eddie the Ouija board after dinner. That was our obsession all the way until midnight. Here are some of the question and answers, exactly as I wrote them in my diary:

“Morty: “Where is my lost Brownie camera?” ~ “In the attic under the bed, Mortimer R.”

Edward: “How long will my family live in Chicago?” ~ “Six months longer than six years.”

Jack: “Will Babe Ruth hit any more home runs?” ~ “Yes, about 8.”

The last question Edward and I asked was: “Do you want us to sleep?”

The response was “Yes, very much so. Go to bed please.” The pointer really hovered over each of those twenty-six letters!

“As I processed my short encounter with that uncanny board, I asked myself. ‘If neither Morty nor I manipulated the pointer, then what source provided the motion and the articulate answers?’ I intuited three things. First, the source had to be supernatural. Second, it was not all-knowing because answers were often wrong. Third, the power behind the Ouija board was not heavenly. The God of the Bible would not move a child's fingers along a painted surface to amuse two little boys.

“The Ouija board provided me with first-hand evidence that a transcendent realm does exist. Materialism became forever an alien philosophy to my reason. Odd to say, but in my life, God used an occult means to bring about a heavenly end.”

Jack closed his manuscript. “So, I have two responses to what Stacy and Sabrina report. First, there truly exists a transcendent realm that can invade our time and space.

Sometimes that's exactly what happens. I personally have witnessed and can vouch for that. When that force is good, we call it a miracle; when evil it's called sorcery. Second, in the specific cases you cite, I cannot say if it is human trickery or demonic activity. That would require an in-depth investigation. However, by what you're telling me, I suspect devilry. I would advise all three of you girls to stay far away from anyone who purports to contact the spirit world."

The conversation about occultic practices sputtered on for a while, then devolved into two-person chat groups. Larry and Stacy talked about aliens and Star Trek; Jack and Ziggy about European politics. Kathleen spoke heart-to-heart with Heidi, trying to mend fences. Sabrina worked her way through two issues of Archie.

As the Thanksgiving visitors donned their coats to leave, the phone rang. Phillip asked to speak with Heidi. After a brief conversation, she cheerfully announced that Phillip would meet with Ziggy and her on the next day in San Francisco. The appointment was set for two o'clock at the Arcade Club.

Chapter 6

Rumors of Heaven

Phillip wanted to make a day of it in San Francisco, so he left his hotel room about ten and walked a mile to the Sausalito ferry. He stood at the deck rail as the boat rocked through the choppy waters of the San Francisco Bay. With tourist map in hand, he disembarked at the Ferry Building and took his sweet time strolling up Market Street all the way to the domed city hall. He checked his wristwatch, noting he still had an hour before his appointment. The nightclub was located near Alamo Square so Phillip rested on a park bench.

As he watched pigeons flock, peck, and swoop, he prayed for his cousin Heidi. It was her preacher-father who had led his steps to a faith in God. Phillip liked Ziggy and hoped their relationship could mature into something lasting. He opened his pocket Bible to Colossians 4, recasting a few verses into the first person:

“I pray that God may open a door for my message, so that I may proclaim the mystery of Christ. I pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I ought. Let me be wise in the way I act toward outsiders; making the most of every opportunity. Let my conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that I may know how to answer everyone.”

When he arrived at the nightclub, his watch showed exactly 2:00. The establishment was still shuttered, so Phillip paced the sidewalk. He smiled when he saw Heidi appear at the corner of Fell and Baker Streets and walk toward him. Ziggy wore a tuxedo and Heidi a white blouse with black vest and slacks.

The couple greeted Phillip with an attitude of affection.

Ziggy joked, “Look, Today I’m the same altitude as Heidi.” His eye twinkled, “I put lifts in these shiny shoes.”

Heidi stooped her frame and laughed.

“Well, both of you beat me,” responded the short-statured Phillip who stood on tiptoe.

Ziggy rang the outside doorbell and a set of eyes looked through the peep hole. A broad-shouldered bouncer opened the metal door and ushered the three past the front desk.

A few dozen workers were preparing the cavernous space for its four o’clock onslaught.

The threesome sat at a table near the piano and began to talk.

“Both of us are night people,” Heidi explained. “That’s why this line of work fits us so well. We usually get here an hour before opening. I do some cleaning and food prep and Ziggy talks with the manager about the piano repertoire.”

Ziggy leaned into Phillip, “I need to warm up my fingers. Would you like to hear something?”

“Sure,” he said. “What’s first on your playlist for tonight?”

“I usually start with something classical. I like to impress customers with my virtuosity while they’re still sober. They grasp I’m a concert pianist more than a honky-tonk performer. I’ll do two in a row for you; The first is Chopin’s Grand Waltz, a genteel piece, and the second is the bombastic presto agitato of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata. Tell me what you think.”

Zygmund swayed through the Chopin with practiced elegance, often glancing toward the admiring face of Heidi. The Beethoven required more focus. As Ziggy pounded the keyboard, Phillip couldn’t banish the TV image of Gargamel chasing the little blue Smurfs.

When complete, several of the staff whistled their appreciation.

“Bravo”, shouted Phillip.

Ziggy then gestured to a friend near the bar. The accomplice put a videocam to his shoulder and began recording. Ziggy summoned Heidi to join him at the microphone. “I’ve got something special tonight, ladies and gentlemen. Introducing Miss Heidi Adams!”

Phillip didn’t recognize the disco hit until Heidi belted out, “You can dance. You can jive, having the time of your life. See that girl. Watch the scene, diggin’ the dancing queen.”

Heidi’s vocals and dance moves were impressive and garnered a round of applause. Having resumed her seat, she winked to her cousin, “I’m trying to work my way up from waitress to lounge singer.”

Phillip grasped Heidi’s hands from across the table. “You’re such a special person to me. I’m so grateful I can catch this slice of your life.”

He whispered a prayer that his conversation may be full of grace, then addressed Ziggy. “Tell me. What did you think of the slice of life you witnessed at my Grandfather’s house yesterday?”

Heidi grew uneasy, but Ziggy was pleased at the transition.

“You know I’ve never been around religious people like your grandfather or Heidi’s mother. I admire their faith. They seem to tap into something deep that I don’t have. Look, I’m Polish. I was baptized Roman Catholic like all good Polacks. I know God is real, but in my opinion, Jesus was just a good man.”

Phillip stroked his scraggly beard and responded, “I hear a lot of that, even at the seminary. For me, I don’t understand the *good man* position. As I read the gospels, Jesus had to be one of three things. He must have been a liar who intentionally deceived people, or maybe a lunatic who was delusional, or he must be exactly who he claimed to be, that is Lord of all. If you take the words of scripture at face value, Jesus could not have been a mere good man. A good man does not claim to be deity.”

Ziggy pondered the trilemma, then said, “You know, there’s a fourth possibility. Jesus may have been just a popular Jewish rabbi of the first century, but over time a legend grew up around him. I accept the basic morality of the Christian religion like *love your neighbor*. However, a strong belief held by an honest person leads to a strong commitment to that belief system, and at twenty-two years old, I don’t want a lord ruling over me. I want to be lord of my own life. To be honest, it may be that I deliberately choose not to believe.”

Heidi wished to change the subject and asked Phillip for details of his life.

He responded, “I’m in my second year at the Princeton Theological Seminary. I don’t think I have a calling to be a pastor, maybe a researcher, but I haven’t achieved clarity yet.”

Heidi asked about her cousin Jason.

“My brother is fulfilling his dream. He’s always wanted to fly jet fighters and he’s now on track to do that. Next summer maybe you can come to his graduation at the Air Force academy.”

Heidi followed up with a more sensitive question, “Whatever happened to Nancy? I thought you two were engaged or something.”

Phillip cast his eyes down. “Yes, we were engaged, but she broke it off a few months ago. She gave two reasons. First, she ran across her old sweetheart from high school. Her heart fluttered she said. To her that was an ominous sign. Second, she told me I was too religious and doubted she could ever meet my Christian expectations.”

“That must have been tough,” Heidi sympathized. “Wasn’t there a wedding set for September?”

Phillip sighed. “Yes, but thank goodness we didn’t send out invitations. I was embarrassed and depressed for a while you know.”

Heidi asked, “How could a good and loving God break your heart like that?”

“Heidi, it was Nancy’s decision and not God’s. Do you think I could have forced her to love me? For weeks I felt like a rejected loser. But then, my mind returned to the scripture that says *Trust in the Lord with all your might* and to my early catechism.”

“You know I grew up in the Presbyterian Church. I can’t remember them all, but I can quote the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Do you know what it says?”

Heidi shook her head *no*.

“It helps me to put first things first and keeps my spiritual compass facing true north. It goes like this:

Question 1. What is the chief end of man?

Answer 1. The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”

Ziggy’s interest was piqued. “Phillip, what’s the focus of your religious study nowadays?”

He took a spiritual breath, “It’s something called the *eschaton*.”

“What’s that?” Ziggy questioned.

“It’s a theological term that means the final event in the divine plan or the end of the world. For non-theologians, it’s most commonly spoken of as *heaven* or *eternity*.”

Heidi said, “Well, then why not just say heaven, if that’s what you mean. Why use a fancy theological word?”

Phillip smiled, “The word *heaven* is imprecise and carries a lot of baggage. What do you think of when I say the word *heaven* to you?”

Ziggy jumped in, “It’s the place where good people go when they die; the opposite of hell. Saint Peter guards the gates; Good people turn into angels, wear white robes and halos. They float from cloud to cloud and play harps. It all sounds so silly and boring to me. Who’d want to go to a place like that?”

“Not me,” responded Phillip, “but those are just rumors of heaven. That’s why I prefer the term *eschaton*—the end state of all things, the consummation of history, when time shall be no more.”

Zygmund was intrigued with the conversation. “Time will cease to exist? But we have some time right now. Explain to me what you mean. I’m all ears.”

“Let me give you some background first.” Phillip closed his eyes organizing his thoughts. “Last summer, it was my privilege to do an internship at Cambridge

University. I attended a lecture by the president of Queens' College, a scholar named John Polkinghorne. This man is a theoretical physicist, a theologian, and an Anglican priest. He opened my eyes as to what a true Christian intellectual could be. He is a leading voice explaining the relationship between science and religion."

Ziggy was startled. "How can there be a relationship? I thought science was all reason and religion was all faith."

"There are many who think that way," Phillip laughed. "To understand what I mean by eschaton, you have to take a step back and ask yourself: 'Did the cosmos just come together through random luck. Or is this universe the creative work of an intelligent agent? Like Polkinghorne, I believe our souls within us and the stars outside us point our way to a divine handiwork. We can argue that point later, but for the sake of understanding an eschaton, let's assume a divine creation for now."

Ziggy nodded. "Okay, I'll grant you that."

Phillip was inspired to pursue a parallel track, "Zygmund, you just played a Chopin waltz, right? So, tell me, what are the chances of you randomly striking one-thousand keys—pulled out of a hat let's say—and producing such music? Doesn't a great composition demand a great composer?"

"So, if the world is like a divine composition, as it appears to me, it must be artfully constructed and must make sense not just now, but from the first note to the last. Ziggy, I don't think I'm being irrational to believe that our world is a divine creation. What do you think?"

"In-ter-est-ing," he said slowly. "Go on."

"The next insight flows from the first. If God truly created this world and each inhabitant is a work of purposeful art, it's not a stretch to believe that God loves that which he created. Didn't Chopin love his waltzes? In the end, that is at the eschaton, the ultimate composer will redeem and perfect his masterpiece. Can you grasp that? Our hope of redemption must rest on the faithfulness of God our Creator."

Ziggy stared at Phillip, transfixed in thought. "So, what will we humans be like in the eschaton, as you call it?"

Phillip responded, "If there is any hope of a destiny beyond death, it resides in the divinely guaranteed eschatological sequence of death followed by resurrection. We will not become incorporeal collections of fluff floating around on clouds playing on harps!"

"No, our souls will inherit redeemed bodies, something like we have now but purified beyond our understanding. Our primary source of insight concerning this

redeemed matter is the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself. Scripture provides us with hints of what we might expect our resurrected bodies may be like.”

“My friend, I tell you, the only ground of a true and everlasting hope beyond the grave is the Father’s steadfast love. As I mentioned in that catechism ‘Our chief aim is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.’ I expect I’ll have the opportunity to do just that—enjoy God forever.”

Ziggy glanced at the wall clock, “In ten minutes, the crowds will rush in. Let me play one short number before you go. I’ve performed Chopin and Beethoven, but I have to admit Bach is my favorite. He’s the one who laid the groundwork for all Western music that followed. I’ll play his first etude.” He then laughed as he spoke, “If I ever make it to heaven, I’ll ask God for a mansion in the section where Bach is the cappella-meister.”

Phillip joked back at him, “You need to get an admission ticket before you can choose your section.”

Ziggy countered, “I suppose you’re going to tell me Jesus is the only ticket puncher.”

Just before Bach sprang to life, Phillip rejoined, “Maybe *ticket puncher* is a one-word description of “Way, Truth, and Life.”

The minutes were fleeting. As the piano sounded its final somber note, Heidi asked her cousin, “How long will you be in town?”

The doors flung open and the hubbub began.

Phillip raised his voice, “I’ll be in California until January staying with Grandpa Jack. He has an empty room you know. I plan to do some research at the Baptist Seminary down the road. It’s so close I can ride a bicycle.”

The noisy crowd of thirsty hipsters rushed to the bar.

Heidi shouted into Phillip’s ear, “If I set an appointment at Madam Diana’s Psychic Parlor, would you join us? Please.”

Waving a good-bye to Ziggy and nodding a *yes* to Heidi, Phillip stepped outside into the quiet smokefree air.

Chapter 7

The Flashing Red Hand

Over the next few weeks, Heidi contemplated how she might expose the clairvoyant as a charlatan. She ended up constructing a three-phase plan. First, by telephone, she would set up a consultation session with Madam Diana. Second, she would gather about a dozen people unknown to the psychic and pack them into her lobby. And third, she would demand Diana use automatic writing divination to reveal everyone's name and birthday. To entice the psychic to cooperate, she thought to pay \$100 up front to accept the challenge and \$500 more if the facts proved correct. "That's a lot of cash," she told herself, but there's no risk of losing the five hundred.

To her delight, the plan came together without a hitch.

To begin with, Stacy informed Heidi that on December 18 the skating rink was advertising a *skate-with-Santa* afternoon. Any skater wearing a Santa hat would gain free admittance. Next, Sabrina told her big sister that girl scout troop 230 was collecting red hats for Santa day and the leaders were seeking out chaperones. Heidi immediately phoned Rebecca Pinckney and volunteered the services of herself and Stacy. A drop-off time was set at noon on Saturday and a pick up at 3:00.

Round Table was also located in the strip mall and the girl scouts would feast on a pizza lunch after roller skating. Heidi encouraged Ziggy and Phillip to support her scheme by offering them free pizza. When Kevin-the-photographer learned of Stacy's roller-skating, he asked if it would be okay if he joined the group. "I could take pictures of the skating Santas," he proposed.

Heidi borrowed the nightclub's camcorder as a means to document the psychic fraud for all the world to see. This was important to her, especially in regard to her sisters.

The pieces were now in place.

On the morning of the skating party, Ziggy entered into an argument with Heidi. "Didn't you hear your grandfather's warning? 'Stay away from people who communicate with the spirit world.'"

Heidi spoke with exasperation, "There is no such thing as the spirit world, so there's no danger. What's a matter with you? You've never been superstitious before. I hope all that talk about religion hasn't affected your brain function."

"My brain is working fine," he retorted. "A lot of what Phillip told me made perfect sense. 'Can you have a composition without a composer? Can you have a moral law without a moral lawgiver? Can you have a big bang without someone pulling the trigger?'"

“My sweet Ziggy,” she spoke with frustration. “I’ve tried that God delusion. Believe me, it doesn’t work. I’ve read all the way through the Bible, front to back. It’s full of contradictions and fairy tales.”

He replied, “I promised I would help you with this psychic woman and I’ll keep my vow. I only ask this confrontation you’re provoking will be the last. You know, you can be right—and know your absolutely right—and leave it alone at that. There’s no necessity to prove others wrong, especially your sisters. No good can come of it.”

Heidi grasped his hands. “I appreciate your loyalty. I will do today what needs to get done, then after that, my days as an occult debunker will be over. I promise.”

“Then let’s get it done,” was the response.

Street parking was a challenge in San Francisco. The couple walked all the way to Oak Street to find the Rabbit. They drove over the Bay Bridge to the parsonage in San Lorenzo. Stacy, Kevin, and Sabrina were waiting on the front lawn and squeezed into the back seat. The five traveled down Mission Boulevard to the skating rink.

About ten girl scouts showed up with their Santa caps. The mothers left them in the charge of Mrs. Pinckney, Heidi, and Stacy. After an hour, Phillip showed up without a Santa hat. But he wasn’t interested in skating anyway. He wanted to talk theology with Zygmund.

By 1:30, the group of skaters was pooped and ready for lunch. They returned their skates, put on their street shoes, and shuffled across the large parking lot to Round Table Pizza. Each of the scouts handed over five dollars to Mrs. Pinckney who ordered three large pizzas. Heidi ordered two more from her own pocket.

As the pizza disappeared and the table talk swelled, Heidi was unsure as how to proceed. She figured the logical starting point would be Mrs. Pinckney, so she asked, “You’re Alice’s mother, right?”

She smiled, “That’s right.”

Heidi continued, “I understand my sister Sabrina and Alice went to a birthday party last month. What did you think of it?”

“Alice couldn’t stop talking about that amazing psychic, Madam Something. Later, I got word that your mom got very upset with Jennifer’s mom. The party host apologized, saying the psychic was a last-minute substitute and she thought the old Gypsy was a bit loony but harmless.”

Heidi considered how she might advance her scheme to phase two, finally asking, “Mrs. Pinckney, what do you think? Is she crazy or serious, harmless or dangerous?”

She responded, “Don’t know. I haven’t thought about it. I’ve never met a psychic in real life.”

Heidi seized the opportunity, “Would you like to meet Diana? I have an appointment with her in twenty minutes and I’d love for you to join me. You can see the flashing red palm just across the street, a short walk. It won’t cost you anything.”

Alice, who perked her ears at the conversation, urged her mom, “Say *yes*, say *yes*. I’d love to meet Diana again.”

“Well, I guess we could. We’ve no other plans until dinner.”

Heidi then called all sixteen pizza-eaters to gather in the far corner and spoke to them. “Raise your hand if you were at Jennifer’s birthday party last month.”

Six raised a hand.

She went on. “Sabrina tells me a certain psychic was able to guess your names and birthday by something she called automatic writing. Is that right?”

“Yes,” shouted a few.

“Well, I don’t believe in that stuff and I want to test Madam Diana to see if she’s real or a fake.”

“Each of you can help me with this test by writing your name and birthday on this sheet of paper.” She pulled a notebook from her shoulder bag and supplied a few pens. “Please, can you help me?” She displayed a sad-dog face to the girls.

All agreed to help Sabrina’s sister, so ten girl scouts, two adolescents, and four grown-ups filled in the requested information.

“Great,” said Heidi. “Thank you all. Now, who wants to go with me across the street to test old Madam Diana?” She laughed and made light of the visit. She then checked her watch. “I have an appointment with her in ten minutes. You’re all invited.”

Mrs. Pinckney spoke up. “There may be a problem with that, dear. Four of the mothers will meet us here at Round Table in just twenty minutes. I don’t think those girls can go.”

Heidi’s announcement came as a shock to Stacy. “Didn’t you hear what mom told us about the occult?”

Sabrina shook her head, “And didn’t you hear what gramps said about divination? Sorry, big sister, we can’t go with you.” She crossed her arms. “No way, Jose.”

Heidi sighed, “I understand what you’re saying. You don’t want to upset our mom.”

She looked over her audience. “Well, that means Mrs. Pinckney, Alice, Ziggy, and I can make this consultation.” She looked at Phillip who didn’t seem too thrilled to visit

a psychic. “Phil, why don’t you stay here to look after the girls until their moms show up? Okay? It should be pretty quick.”

“Yes,” he said. “I’d rather sit here with my cousins, anyway. We’ll stay here until you get back.”

Heidi looked at Kevin, “And what do you want to do? You can go with us or stay here until we get back.”

“I’m going,” he jumped to his feet. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world. And I’m taking my Nikon along.”

Just before passing through the glass-door exit, Heidi turned to the group. “I’ll let you know how it goes. I’m betting I’ll expose Diana as just a big fraud.”

The December sky shone clear as they approached the flashing red palm.

“That’s odd,” said Ziggy, pointing to his front. “What’s that burst of smoke coming from across the street? A grass fire?”

“Don’t know,” said Kevin, “But eww, it smells like somebody lit a stink bomb.”

Mrs. Pinckney remarked, “It doesn’t look like smoke to me, more like a raincloud, but too close to the ground.”

Kevin snapped a picture of the atmospheric phenomenon. He then cocked an ear. “There seems to be noises coming from the cloud too.”

A few minutes after three o’clock, Heidi knocked at the entrance of *Madam Diana’s Psychic Readings*.

The door opened and in walked Heidi with her boyfriend, followed by Alice with her mother, then Kevin with his camera. Ziggy held the camcorder under his left arm.

Diana’s face was difficult to decipher. One moment she appeared sunny and smiling; the next pale and terrified, as if an enemy perched on her shoulder.

She used her mentalist skills to pick out her client. “You must be Heidi Adams. I was expecting you, but who are these others?”

“Just four witnesses I brought along.” She looked the psychic in the face, catching a glimpse of apprehension. “Do you remember a birthday party you entertained at about a month ago?”

“Why, yes I do,” the fortune teller said. “About ten girls. They were delighted at the automatic writing divination.”

Heidi opened her purse to remove an envelope of money and a list of names. “I have a challenge for you. I want you to demonstrate your psychic power to me and these witnesses.”

Madam Diana was startled.

With boldness Heidi spoke on. "In my right hand are the names of sixteen people with their birth dates. I challenge you to use your so-called automatic handwriting to tell me who they are and what their birth dates are. It shouldn't be too hard. A few weeks ago, you guessed the birthdate of Alice here and several other girl scouts."

The fortune teller protested, "You told me on the phone you just wanted a psychic consultation for twenty dollars. You didn't tell me about this."

"Exactly! That was my intention. I wanted to catch you unprepared." Heidi then continued. "I'm holding \$600 in this envelope. I'm prepared to give you \$100 if you accept my challenge and the remainder if your writing matches what's on my list."

Diana took a deep breath, mumbled some words, and finally responded, "I notice that Polish guy has a video camera. If you want to record all this, it will cost you an extra \$100."

"Wait," she said. "How did you know he was Polish?"

"I know more than you think," she said to Heidi. Then to Zygmund she extended a greeting, "witam, jak się masz."

Ziggy replied, "szia hogy vagy. And I see you are a true Roma gypsy from Hungary."

Diana broke a slight smile.

"I agree with your request," said Heidi and put two one-hundred-dollar bills into her hand."

Five witnesses stood with backs against the wall and Diana sat at her consulting table. Zygmund studied the room. He noted flickering candles and dangling crystals. Dusty curtains displayed old photographs, and a collection of religious paintings depicting: Buddha, Muhammed, Krishna, Jesus, Pope John Paul Two, and Gandhi. He flipped on his camcorder, green light flashing. Kevin hopped from place to place to take photos.

The smoke, stench, and noise which had lingered outside the studio suddenly re-settled inside the room.

The psychic appeared to argue with something invisible seated across from her table. With reluctance, Diana took up her pen. Her body began to twist and quake. Her eyes glazed white. The automatic pen darted upon the paper, seemingly with a mind of its own. Diana's activity alternated between phrenetic and catatonic. After eighteen such on-off cycles, the pen dropped from her limp hand.

She appeared exhausted. After a long minute, Diana picked up the hand-written note and glanced at it through her spectacles. She did a double-take then read the words

with trembling hands. She clutched the paper to her chest. "I've never seen anything like this before."

She stared straight ahead rocking her body, deciding her course of action. She forced a smile. "Congratulations, all of you will be living for a long time. That's all I'm free to share at this moment."

She wadded the linen paper into a tight ball and tossed it into a waste basket festooned with signs of the zodiac. She then crossed her arms, signaling completion.

"Ha, just like a fortune cookie," taunted Heidi. "You will have a long life and prosper," she mocked with a Chinese accent.

Diana looked to the ceiling, grimaced, and railed at the unseen presence, "This is not a gift. This is a curse."

She then screamed at Heidi, "You're right! I'm a phony. Just go." She threw the two one-hundred-dollar bills in her face. "You owe me nothing. Get your rear out of here."

While Madam Diana was chasing four of the witnesses out the door, a fifth ducked low and sneaked the wadded paper from the waste basket. Kevin quickly tucked it into his red Santa hat.

On the short walk back to Round Table, Heidi strutted and grinned, "See, I was right all the time about this so-called psychic. She admitted she's a fraud."

When the glass door sprung open, all the girl scouts had vanished. Phillip sat happily engaged with Stacy and Sabrina.

Heidi gloated to her sisters in triumph, "See I was right. Ha-ha-ha! Diana admitted her clairvoyance is a trick to fool people and it cost me nothing. She threw the money back to me."

Mrs. Pinckney, Alice, and Kevin weren't so certain of her triumphal statements. Ziggy said, "There was a lot of unexplainable things happening over there. It will be interesting to see what shows up on the video."

"And on my photos," Kevin chimed in.

Stacy and Sabrina put their heads down. Deflated, the two didn't know how to respond, so they kept silent. Sabrina lifted her face toward Heidi once. Tears not dimples shown on her chubby cheeks.

Phillip gave his favorite cousin a stern look of displeasure, then excused himself saying it was a long drive back to Mill Valley.

Mrs. Pinckney left Round Table with Alice, still trying to process the past thirty minutes.

At that point, Kevin removed the paper wad from under his hat, smoothed it out on the tabletop and glanced at it without full appreciation. He handed it over to Heidi, saying, "Hey, I saved this from the trash can. It's for you."

Heidi carefully read the message written by the automatic hand. She re-read it, looked puzzled, looked scared, then laughed at herself. She stuffed the message into her purse without comment.

Sabrina shouted to her, "Take us home, Heidi. *The New Archies* is on TV right now and I don't want to miss it all."

Chapter 8

Upon a Midnight Clear

The confrontation between skeptic and psychic produced a ripple of consequence.

Heidi was befuddled beyond measure. Contrary to all expectation and loud-mouth boasting, it seemed her sisters were right and she was wrong! If not by supernatural agency, how else could one explain it? By what other means could the seventeen lines of Round-Table text match perfectly with the seventeen lines of automatic writing? This went way-way beyond the slight-of-hand of Penn and Teller. And what about that third column of mysterious dates? She couldn't shake a sense of foreboding.

Heidi finally determined to put the whole affair out of mind; block it out. She decided to preserve the letter, but also her dignity. She kept the automatic writing tucked into a corner of her desk, not showing it to any one, not even Ziggy.

At first Kathleen was angry at Heidi's behavior. But as the days passed without a word from her first daughter, she asked herself, "What would Jesus do?" She invited the prodigal to the parsonage for a Christmas get-together, but Heidi said she and Ziggy had to work the holidays.

Stacy and Sabrina grew distant from their sister. The two tooted in the New Year of 1989, but without a peep from Heidi.

Phillip returned to Princeton and kept in communion with Ziggy via a dial-up service called *CompuServe*. The two typed text into their Commodore computers for hours, debating world affairs, spirituality, and especially the eschaton.

Ziggy informed Phillip the video recording of the psychic encounter was *mostly ruined*. His technical friend suggested it was some kind of electrical interference that caused the smoky appearance, flashes of light, and distorted voices.

Kevin handed over his photographs of the Saturday activity to Stacy. The skating Santas turned out great, but the photos of the clairvoyant appeared fuzzy, out of focus.

In February, Stacy got word that *Madam Diana's Psychic Readings* had shuttered its doors and Diana herself had disappeared. Where she had vanished, no one seemed to know.

Mrs. Pinckney was rattled by her thirty-minute contact with the spiritualist. In March, she attended a forum of Girl Scout leaders in Sacramento. She advocated in favor of a no-contact policy with anything related to occult practices.

The balance of world powers began a seismic shift in 1989. Forty years of cold war showed signs of thawing. Could it be true that communism was in retreat around

the globe? Ziggy read his Polish-language newsletters with joy and disbelief. It seemed that Soviet leader Gorbachev was serious about Perestroika (economic restructuring) and Glasnost (openness). Where might it end?

June 4, 1989, was a day Zygmund would remember forever. Poland conducted a free election and Solidarity won a resounding victory. Communism fell and Lech Walesa became president of the republic. Ziggy was able to place a call to Krakov, celebrating with his father for an hour.

The Berlin wall was breached a few months later and Ziggy spoke of his return to the homeland. Heidi frowned at all such talk.

The once-confident twenty-year-old grew despondent and ceased all talk of advancing to a lounge singer. With a variety of physical and emotional complaints, she visited the free clinic in October. She began a daily regimen of valium, but upon advice from an OB nurse, she stopped taking the anti-depressants and actually began to feel better.

Ziggy joked that Thanksgiving 1989 could be a day of Glasnost for the Adams family, telling his girlfriend, "Maybe that Berlin wall should fall down too." Once more the family gathered in Mill Valley with Grandpa Jack. The East-Coast branch was absent but a desire to reconcile was not. All seven at the table knew instinctively that any discussion of the occult was off limits. The whole gang seemed to get along.

But as the calendar advanced to December, Heidi began suffering panic attacks.

Ziggy asked, "What's going on with you?"

"I seem to be afraid of everything," she responded. "I'm just not feeling well; no energy, no motivation."

Ziggy paused then stated the obvious. "Look Heidi, I know your pregnant. Did you think you could hide something like that from me?"

She answered a question with a question, "And do you think we should keep this baby? You know abortion is an option."

His face hardened for an instant, then melted, "Is that what's been bugging you, my treasure?" He rubbed a tear from his eye. "Why have you been bearing this burden of pregnancy alone without me? And why have you been torturing yourself with a choice to kill or not to kill our baby?"

She cried out, "I feel like I'm being pulled in two directions. One part tells me I don't believe in marriage anymore, yet I want you for a spouse. I think a newborn can ruin a woman's career, yet I want this baby more than anything. What can I do?"

The couple wept in each other's arms. "Heidi, Heidi," he whispered in her ear. "I love you and want you for my wife. No problem for me, but I always thought you were such an agnostic and feminist, you'd scoff if I mentioned marriage to you. You might

reject my proposal and that would hurt me more than I could endure. That's why I never asked you."

She flashed a grin. "Maybe I would have rebuffed you six months ago. Did I give you that feminist line that marriage serves as a mechanism to control women's labor, sexuality, reproduction, and places them in a subordinate position to men."

Ziggy chuckled, "Yes, you wrote those things to me in a letter."

"I read them all in a book and never embraced them in my heart."

Ziggy took two long breaths and mustered his courage. "In that case, Heidi Adams, will you marry me?"

"Yes, yes, yes I will."

He shouted with excitement, "So then can we keep this baby as our own, an emblem of our love?"

Her whole body heaved as if a gigantic bolder had been lifted from her chest. "Are you positive you want to be a father, Ziggy?"

"It's the highest possible calling in life."

The couple laughed and talked into the night.

In the morning an unexplainable fear overshadowed Heidi. "Is it okay with you if we wait until January to share this news with others?"

He was puzzled, "Why? I don't understand."

She did not want to show the document of automatic writing to Ziggy, not until January at least. And so, she answered, "Let's just say I have a bad omen about December, that something evil might happen near Christmas. It's a kind of premonition."

"It doesn't have anything to do with the occult and that Madam Diana, does it?"

She fudged her response, "Not really. But can't we wait until January? We can begin a new life together with a new year."

Ziggy caught the spirit. "How about if I make the official marriage proposal at the New Year's bash at the Arcade Club? That will be fun. I can play romantic music and get down on one knee."

"That would be phenomenal," she laughed. Then added under her breath. "If I can survive until then."

The club manager was setting a work schedule for the busy holiday season. Ziggy informed him, "I can work seven days a week for the next month, but Heidi says she needs a few days off."

The manager grew concerned until Ziggy whispered in his ear, “We’re expecting a baby, but please keep it a secret for now.”

The good-hearted boss pinched thumb and forefinger and drew them across his mouth, zipping his lips.

Heidi agreed to wait tables on Christmas Eve, as long as she could return safe to her apartment by 10:00 pm. “I really need to rest all Christmas Day. I don’t even plan to go outside. I might feel better on the twenty-sixth.”

Ziggy didn’t understand what was going on below the surface, but then, Heidi had always been a tad eccentric.

On the morning of December 24, Ziggy slept until noon, but Heidi was up at dawn. When Ziggy first greeted her, she sat cross-legged on her yoga mat surrounded by lit candles and burning incense. Was she meditating or praying? He couldn’t tell. Something was amiss, for sure, but he couldn’t put his finger on it. He desired to ask her directly, but didn’t want to heap on her more stress. Whatever it might be, it was intensely personal.

As they walked from the apartment to the club, the sights of Christmas were on full display: houses with lights, plastic Santas, and door wreaths. On impulse, Heidi grabbed Ziggy’s arm and spouted, “Thank you for putting up with my crazy moods.” Her face contorted. “Tell me you’ll love me forever and never leave me.”

He slowly repeated those words back to her and her eyes brightened. “Okay, enough of that sadness. Let’s work hard and each make a hundred bucks in tips today.”

The Holiday event packed the club. Patron after patron requested a favorite Christmas tune on the grand piano. Alcohol flowed like water. Both Heidi and Ziggy worked their tails off.

At 10:00 one of the regulars had become so intoxicated, the bartender refused him further service. “Time to go home, Jimmy boy,” he told the drunken customer. He handed him a taxi-ride token and the bouncer escorted him outside and pointed across the street to a line of waiting cabs. The inebriant stumbled across the street, but instead of hailing a cab, he walked down a side street, urinated on a front-yard Santa, then began a search for his car.

Heidi informed the head server it was time for her return home. Ziggy put on his overcoat to accompany her back to the apartment. The two walked hand-in-hand past the front desk, then into the crisp night air. Ziggy turned his gaze upward in amazement. “Look how clear the sky is tonight. All those stars! Like on the night Jesus was born.” He noticed Heidi shivering. “It’s so cold, my dear one, and you forgot your wrap.”

He abruptly let loose of her hand and raced into the club. “I’ll just be a second,” he shouted over his shoulder. As Zygmund grabbed Heidi’s overcoat, he heard the wail of a police siren. He took a step toward the door and heard the screech of tires; another

step and he heard the shatter of glass. Bursting through the entrance door, he saw the front end of a police car plowing into a human body, propelling a young woman five feet in the air. Heidi lay crumpled on the curb while, at the same moment, Jimmy crawled out of his overturned Cadillac.

Ziggy pushed his hands over his eyes in disbelief. Two policemen hopped out of a squad car to control traffic and keep onlookers at bay. Patrons of the Arcade Club piled onto the sidewalk to witness the chaos. A few bystanders were already standing over Heidi's broken body. Ziggy still had hold of her wrap and gently placed it over her exposed legs. A cop tapped his shoulder and asked, "Who are you?"

Without hesitation he wailed, "I'm her husband."

The club manager ran to Ziggy's side and shouted, "Oh my God! It's Heidi." The street became an echo chamber as word passed backward, "It's Heidi" then "Poor Heidi" and "I can't believe it's her."

Paramedics were quick on the scene, a matter of minutes. They assessed the situation. Their subject was unconscious presenting major head trauma. They cut away her trousers and shirt, revealing multiple injuries. They lifted her onto a stretcher, then strapped her into a gurney. One needle stuck into each arm along with a blood drip.

Ziggy shouted to a paramedic, "I'm her husband. I'm sitting in the back with her."

The medic said, "hop right in."

"Where are you taking her?" he asked above the racket.

"She's lucky. The UCSF Medical Center is only a few blocks away and it's the best trauma care there is."

Ziggy had earlier grabbed on to Heidi's purse. He fished around her wallet and found an old library card with her old San Lorenzo address and telephone number. The frantic club manager was hanging around the ambulance and Ziggy called to him. "Please phone this number and talk with Kathleen. Tell her the situation and to come to the Medical Center as soon as possible."

Ziggy arrived at the emergency desk about 10:35. The doctor on duty said he would have to sit in the waiting room until he could stabilize the patient. "We're doing all we can to save your wife," he said in obvious distress.

A police detective introduced himself to Ziggy. He wrote down notes as Ziggy described what he saw of the accident.

Kathleen, Stacy, and Sabrina arrived at the front desk about 11:30. All three were trembling with tears. One more time Ziggy recited the details of the accident.

On several occasions Sabrina asked her mom, "Is she going to make it?"

"I don't know," was her consistent response. "She's in God's hands."

At 11:45, the attending physician ushered the four of them into a small cubicle. Heidi lay in a hospital bed wrapped in bandages. Her head was wound about as if in a turban; her eyes covered, and a respirator assisted her breathing. Through an I-V she was receiving blood plasma and adrenaline to keep her heart pumping. An EKG beeped to the left of her bed.

The only exposed body parts were her two feet, sticking out from underneath the blanket. Stacy and Ziggy held on to her right foot; Kathleen and Sabrina hugged the left. Sometimes they wept; sometimes they prayed out loud; sometimes they were silent.

The wall clock ticked. It was 11:55 on December twenty-fourth.

The EKG monitor shrieked and a doctor and nurse rushed into the room. The family of four stepped back to the curtain to provide space. The EKG now showed a flat line. The doctor checked the pupils, felt for a pulse, and waited.”

The nurse asked, “Doctor, is there anything more we can do?”

He removed the patch from the roof of her skull and examined the exposed brain matter. He winced. “No nurse, there was little chance she could survive this.”

The flat line continued for another minute, the only sounds being the whoosh of the respirator and quiet sobs.

The doctor spoke in a professional voice, “Who is next of kin?”

Kathleen was about to affirm her position, but instead looked toward Ziggy, “I heard him say Heidi is his wife. And so, he’s next of kin.”

Fighting tears, the doctor looked toward Zygmund, “Your wife is on life support and in some sense breathing. You can see the EKG indicates she’s had no brain function for the last several minutes and I just examined her head trauma.” He bit his lip. “The wound was fatal. She has died.” A moment passed. “Do I have your permission to turn off life support. That’s my strong advice.”

He looked at Kathleen, “What do you think?”

She nodded a *yes* and he said, “Yes, doctor, do it.”

Just then, Grandpa Jack entered the room. He guessed from the quiet sobs and the doctor’s somber demeanor Heidi had passed away. He rocked his daughter in his arms.

The doctor wrote in his notes: “Heidi Adams, deceased: December 25, 1988, 12:09 a.m.”

Hers was the first of eighteen names on the accursed list.