

*Secret  
Souls*

-jerry ebert



# *Secret Souls*

While editor of a Hudson Valley Weekly in the late 1970s, I wrote a series of articles on houses rumored to be haunted. Years later, an elderly woman mentioned those articles, but said the truth about spirits was far more frightening.

This is her story, and her granddaughter's story. It continues to this day.

Names and places have been disguised to protect identities.

*-jerry ebert*



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# Part 1: 1975

“To hell the wicked will depart,  
all those who forget the good.  
The needy will never be forgotten,  
nor will the hope of the afflicted  
ever fade.”

*-Psalms 9, 18-19*

## *Chapter 1*

# The Unseen

Anna and her seven-year-old granddaughter Nina lay on a blanket in a backyard, looking into the October night sky.

Indian Summer, 1978. The village of Cornwall-on-the-Hudson sleeps under a veil of moon and stars.

“I can’t see it Granma,” says Nina, frustrated.

“Mi cariño” soothes Anna in her native Spanish. “Relax. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Clear your mind. Then slowly open your eyes and look *inside* the sky, not at it. Make your eyes flip it over.”

Nina shuts her eyes and calms herself. Then slowly, she opens them.

For a split second, the white moon and stars turn black as the dark night brightens.

She blinks in disbelief; it reminds her of an x-ray she once saw in a doctor’s office.

The image disappears.

“See inside it,” Anna presses.

Nina tries again.

The moon and stars become black dots, and the darkness turns light. This time she holds the image.

“Wow...Granma...I *see* it.”

“Bueno, Nina, bueno...*this* is how you see the unseen. This is my gift to you, my legacy to you alone. Tell no one; this is our secret: *nuestro secreto*.”

“Can I see my brother in Heaven?” asks Nina, still staring in a half-daze into the strange sky.

Anna catches her breath before answering.

“You can’t see inside Heaven until you go there, and that’s a long time from now. But don’t worry, Davey’s watching over you. He can see you, so he’s happy. Someday you’ll see him again. No se preocupe – don’t worry.”

Nina shifts her eyes to her grandmother. “*Oooh Granma...I see your colors...so pretty...bright...*”

She sees her grandmother’s form glowing three colors: white, yellow and blue, almost invisible, like waves of heat rising from summer pavement.

Anna smiles at her granddaughter’s excitement.

“You’re seeing the colors of my soul, Nina.”

## *Chapter 2*

# Colors

Nina is in school, daydreaming about the previous evening. She remembers her grandmother's voice: "Look inside it, not at it." Relaxing while moving her eyes, she sees the warm, bright colors of her classmates.

Her teacher raps the blackboard with his wooden pointer. In her reverie she hears only a distant patter. He looks at her and calls her name.

She thinks she's dreaming. His colors are dark.

From faraway she hears her classmates giggling.

"NINA!" He approaches and taps the pointer on her desk.

She shakes her head.

"STAND UP RIGHT NOW."

She attempts to rise but is unsteady, and falls back in her seat.

"What are you looking at?" he demands.

"Uh...your colors, Mr. Oliver."

"*What* colors?"

"Brown...dark green...grey," she says in a monotone.

One boy snickers. "Like boogers" he adds. The giggling increases.

Another says loudly "Or poopie-poop."

The children erupt with laughter, except Nina.

Mr. Oliver waves his pointer.

"QUIET!" he repeats, but the laughter continues.

Turning on Nina, he yells “Get up!”

He pulls her from her seat. She stumbles.

“GET UP!” He swats her leg with the pointer.

She cries out, and her classmates hush. She rises, and is pushed into a corner.

“You won’t think it’s funny after I speak with your mother again,” he hisses at her.

Toward evening, Anna is about to knock on the door to Nina’s home when she hears her son Manny and daughter-in-law Donna arguing.

“Mr. Oliver thinks Nina’s schizophrenic, seeing *colors* in people,” says Donna. “She’s not right in the head - she needs a special hospital.”

“A *nuthouse*, Donna? Our daughter is NOT going to an asylum. Do you know what they do to kids in those places? Maybe if you paid more attention to her -”

“HOW DARE YOU?” she shouts but he continues.

“Since Davey died last year you’ve been so busy blocking your own grief you never saw Nina’s. She doesn’t have a job she can run to every day.”

Anna knocks on the door. A long silence.

“Mama, come in,” says Manny. “Buena noches.”

“You’re in America – speak English,” Donna whispers, elbowing him. She turns to her mother-in-law.

“We’re in a hurry. Nina’s in bed already, grounded. Major mess at her school. We’re late.”

After they leave, Anna calls up the stairs “Nina, come help make dinner.”

They silently enter the kitchen.

“Thanks for letting me out,” says Nina. “I won’t tell Mom.”

“What happened today at school?” asks Anna. “*¿Que pasó?*”

“I saw Mr. Oliver’s colors, and he asked me what I was looking at. Everyone started laughing and he hit me with his stick.”

Anna freezes, the color draining from her face.

“Nina...you must *never* - *nunca* - *never* tell anyone you see their colors.”

“Why, Granma? You always tell me no secrets.”

“Seeing people’s colors is a gift meant only for you. If you tell people, they’ll think you’re crazy. I never even showed your daddy how to see, because he was not meant for this gift.”

“Can other people see?”

“Very few, but they keep their gift a secret. Others can hear, but not see.”

“Why is it a secret?”

“Because the world is afraid of our gift. And because sometimes people use it to do bad things.”

She looks solemnly at Nina and says “I give *only you* this gift – *sólo tu* - because it is meant only for special people. Use it to see if people are good or not so good, or if they’re healthy or sick. They cannot hide who they truly are, if you can see their three colors. If it’s a very bad, mean person, like a kidnapper, you’ll see it. His colors will be dark and nasty-looking. And if a person is sick you’ll see it too...the colors will look dull and shaky.”

She takes Nina by her hands.

“But you must be careful with this gift, and keep it to yourself. Use it only for good. Never talk about it. Never use it for anything bad or selfish – *nunca*.”

“Mr. Oliver’s colors are nasty,” says Nina after a pause.

“Well, maybe he has problems. Maybe he’s sick. Maybe someone hurt him, and he’s still angry. Be on guard around people whose colors don’t

look good. Use it to help *you* see how people really are. But promise me right now you'll tell no one about your gift. *Prometeme.*"

"Ok, ok...I promise."

Smiling, Anna says "And promise me you'll not use your gift while you're supposed to be doing something else, such as paying attention to schoolwork."

Nina giggles, and promises. "Si, si granma."

Anna moves behind Nina's chair and hugs her. "Mi dulce nieta – *my sweet grandchild*...one last thing...how are you doing when you think about your little brother Davey?"

"It's ok Granma, I know he's in Heaven with our family there. He's ok."

"That's right, Nina. But you can still miss him. And you can pray to him – he hears your prayers. Wish him well in his new home."

"Does everyone go to Heaven when they die?"

"Children go back right away, just as Davey did. But sometimes older people take a little longer, because they have to fix something wrong inside them. And some bad people such as kidnappers don't want to go to Heaven, so they choose to go to a very bad, evil place."

"With the devils? Mr. Oliver told us about the devils and hell."

"There are no devils, Nina...there are no monsters...there are just people over there who choose to be more bad than good, and they *pretend* to be monsters, but they're just bad angry people who are dead."

"Can they hurt Davey?"

"No, bad people aren't allowed in Limbo or Heaven. Davey's in Heaven, so he's perfectly safe, and he has many other family and friends around him. *Él es felice*....he is happy."

Another long pause.

“I wish my mommy was nice.”

Anna strokes her hair. “Your mother and father love you very much, Nina. Give them a chance to fix themselves...they miss Davey too.”

Anna picks up her pocketbook and removes a small notebook.

“I’m going to write in this book some things you must learn about life. We’ll keep it at my house for now. Por favor, don’t show it to anyone.”

Nina looks at the cover: on it, Anna had drawn a simple, four-pointed star.

“What’s that for, Granma?”

“It’s the Star of Life. As you grow older I’ll explain it to you. Now let’s finish cooking.” She places the notebook in a kitchen drawer.

Later that evening, as Nina falls asleep, Anna sings her a lullaby.

Near midnight, Nina wakes to the sound of her mother’s voice.

“I can-NOT stay home with Nina every day. I have a career.”

“So do I,” says her father. “She needs help. It’s not right my mother is stuck with her all the time. *You’re* her mother.”

As they continue arguing, Nina drifts into sleep.

## *Chapter 3*

# The Other Side

Nina is dreaming. She sees her grandmother approaching through fog.

“Come child, *vamonos*, we have somewhere to go together.”

Anna takes Nina in her arms and makes a quick movement with her right hand, creating an opening in the thick wall. She steps inside, and appears to be at the tip of a v-shaped room. She sees people drifting in the distance.

“You will forget all this when you awaken, and remember it when you sleep again,” says Anna, sweeping her hand over Nina’s forehead.

Nina sees in the far distance a speck of brilliant white light. It reminds her of nights she can see only the North Star in a dark sky.

It seems as if it’s raining, but they don’t become wet.

Anna whispers in Nina’s ear.

“This is Transition. It’s the first place people go when they die. Always move away from the entrance, straight toward The Light.” She points to the bright speck in the distance. “You cannot leave the way you came in. You must always go forward, toward The Light. Al frente – straight.”

They move forward. Nina notices she can see Anna’s colors clearly, without having to reverse her eyes.

A man glides toward them. It frightens Nina that his legs don’t move. He has only one color: pale white. His shoulder appears blown open, as if by a gunshot wound.

“Hey everyone, look at the colors on these two,” he yells, gesturing toward Anna and Nina.

“They must still be alive...they have life-light,” says another man approaching.

“Help us...help us, we want to go back,” more voices cry as others come closer. “How’d you get in here?” asks one in a raised voice.

Anna sternly whispers to Nina “Ignore them – they’re just stuck here for now because they won’t accept that their bodies are dead. Always move toward The Light.”

The pale dead souls glide nearer, and one zooms within reach.

Anna spins three times and hisses “Back up or I’ll incinerate you.”

The ghost retreats, yelling “She’s freaking hot.”

Anna and Nina continue their flight through Transition.

More pale souls sail around them, talking in a confused jumble: “Am I dreaming?” “I want my mother,” “Take me home,” “Don’t go that way,” “Are we dead?” “Get me out of here,” and other cries and questions.

Moving behind the confused souls are two men shrouded in dark cloaks. They look different from the others. Inside their pale light are barely visible shades of red and black.

“White-lighters,” whispers one of the shrouded men, looking toward Anna and Nina.

“What are they doing in here? They’re alive,” says the other.

Anna looks directly at them, and spots their red and black colors.

“She sees us,” whispers the one, panicking.

“Shut up,” says the other. “Pretend you don’t notice.”

Anna subtly shows Nina the two men.

“See how different those two in dark shrouds are from everyone else? They’re very bad people. We call them Evil Ones, or EOs. Don’t look at them directly, and don’t let them know you see them. They kidnap people and take their energy and hurt them.”

Anna and Nina glide forward; the EOs do not follow.

Gradually the voices fade. The rain-without-water recedes to a slight drizzle.

“Hold close to me child,” says Anna.

Moving toward the far edge of Transition, they suddenly face a long, packed line of children and adults glowing with an extremely bright white light. Most appear to have Down’s Syndrome.

“These are our best Guardian Angels,” whispers Anna. “We call them Liners, because they line the borders over here and keep out the bad people. They are the purest, most obedient and dedicated angels. When they are born to our side they are living angels.”

A Native-American man emerges from the line. He does not have Down’s Syndrome, and is tall and muscular, with a white headband around his long, straight black hair.

“Anna,” he says with authority.

“Montrose,” she answers with a trace of anger.

“The Elders need you in Limbo NOW,” he orders.

“Why do they ask me to bring Nina?” demands Anna. “You *know* I don’t want that.”

“It’s not for me to answer you.”

“You’d better not be hiding anything from me,” she retorts.

An entrance forms in the wall of Liners. As Anna and Nina step through

it, Nina notices this area appears to have four sides. She hears below her a loud, rushing sound.

“We’re in the place called Dream-Training now. Don’t look down,” commands Anna, but Nina risks a glance. Not far below her, she sees the top opening of a huge, slow-spinning tornado. She thinks she sees people moving inside the vortex.

“Here is where we reach out to train people while they’re dreaming and after they die,” says Anna. “Below us is the Whirlwind. Don’t look at it - *no se ven*. The Evil Ones hide in its bottom, in the place some call hell. Above us is where the Guardian Angels stay. We’re not going there tonight. We’re going straight ahead, to Limbo.”

They quickly move across Dream-Training, seeing scattered groups of people who ignore them.

They approach another wall of Liners. An opening is created for them. They pass through, the opening closes, and the noise of the Whirlwind grows muffled. The false rain has completely stopped.

“Welcome to Limbo,” says Anna.

Thousands of people young and old stretch before them, like lily-pods on a large pond. The area has three sides, in the opposite v-shape of Transition. On the horizon toward the small point of the v is The Light. It seems much closer than when they entered Transition.

As they wade through the crowd of luminous bodies, Nina notices that these souls are quieter and healthier-looking than those in Transition.

There are many children. Subdued cries of “Where’s my mommy?” and “Look at their colors” can be heard.

“Welcome, welcome,” booms a cheery voice. A short, round, nearly bald, bright-white soul approaches. “Any trouble?”

Anna puts Nina down. “No, Jake, but there are at least two EOs in Transition,” she says. “Thank God they didn’t attack us.”

They embrace. “What’s the problem here?” she asks.

“The problem is Mohammed.” Jake says in a low voice. He gestures toward a five-year-old boy sitting cross-legged nearby, hiding his face with his hands.

“He’s a very important soul, a natural leader. Two days ago he was killed by a bomb on his way to school. He doesn’t want to go to Heaven yet.” Jake points toward The Light. “Instead, he wants to go out the same way he came in, because he wants to find his mother.” He points in the opposite direction, toward Dream-Training and Transition.

“So does everyone else around here,” mutters Anna.

“Yes, but Mohammed is different, and the Evil Ones know it. We were lucky to rescue him out of Transition; the EOs almost lured him before Montrose scooped him up. Mohammed is stuck on returning to his mother, and we can’t talk him into moving forward to Heaven where he’ll be safe. It’s making us very nervous, and we thought that maybe you and Nina -”

Anna cuts him off. “For this simple procedure, I shouldn’t have been ordered to bring Nina with me. It’s dangerous. I could just read Mohammed’s thoughts myself, take on the form of his mother, and coax him into Heaven, without Nina.”

“We can’t do that with Mohammed,” says Jake. “We can’t risk that kind of false memory. We need to soothe him into entering Heaven. He died very violently, and misses his mother terribly. We can’t screw his head up any further.”

Anna looks at him probingly, but says nothing.

She then kneels on one knee before her granddaughter.

“Nina...how would you like to make a new friend and sing a song?”

“Sure Granma.”

They approach and sit next to Mohammed. At first he keeps his head in his hands.

Anna holds Nina, and they softly sing “Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star.”

Other souls join in. Mohammed raises his eyes. He appears awed by Anna and Nina’s colors.

“Hello Mohammed,” Anna says.

“I want my mother,” says Mohammed.

“Then you must wait for her in Heaven, that way.” She points toward The Light. “She’ll come join you there someday.”

He doesn’t move.

“Why do you have bright colors?” he asks after a pause.

“Because we’re good angels,” says Anna.

“Then take me back home,” he says, pointing away from The Light, toward Transition.

Anna indicates the other direction. “Home is that way,” she says.

“No, home is back there, where I came in,” he answers, voice rising.

Silence.

Anna sings a pretty melody Nina never heard before, to these words: “Into The Light, into The Light, into The Light we will walk.”

Nina sings with her, then takes her hand as they rise.

Other children join in, forming a circle.

Mohammed doesn’t move.

Anna says loudly “Come children, come sing in Heaven, your real home.” She slowly begins to move them toward The Light.

She whispers to Nina “Ask Mohammed to come with us.”

Nina goes to him and takes his hand.

“Come sing with us, Mohammed. We’re taking you home.”

He hesitates, then rises, still holding Nina’s hand.

“This way,” Anna says to the children, leading them forward. Nina and Mohammed join them.

A few of the children break away, crying “Not this way, don’t go,” but most remain in the moving circle.

As they approach The Light, Mohammed says “I want to go home.”

Anna answers “You *are* going home.”

“My brother Davey is there,” says Nina.

Anna adds “Your mother and father will come find you there.”

“I don’t have a father,” says Mohammed.

“Allah is your true father, and he lives there.” Anna points toward The Light. “Straight ahead.”

They see brightly-glowing souls in the vague distance, waiting. An opening forms.

Anna takes Nina’s hand, separating her from Mohammed and placing his hand in another child’s.

“We can’t go with them into Heaven,” she whispers to Nina.

“Why, Granma? I want to see Davey.”

“I know...I do too...but we have to wait, Nina. If we go inside Heaven, we’ll feel so good that we won’t *ever* want to come out, and we won’t see your mother and father until they too come to Heaven.”

The circle of children slowly moves forward, still singing.

They see a beautiful, light-filled landscape, with people hovering beyond the opening the Liners have created.

“Go to them children, go to your family,” says Anna.

Again she sings the song about crossing to The Light. Some of the children appear frightened.

Mohammed breaks from the children, and goes to Anna and Nina. "Come with us," he says.

Anna kneels in front of him, taking his hands.

"We have to help other children go home, Mohammed. We *can't* go home yet...that's why our colors are so different. But we need *you* to take the children home right now, Mohammed. *You* must lead them home."

"Your mother will find you there," says Nina.

Mohammed looks toward the opening, then at Anna and Nina.

Nina asks "Will you tell Davey to wait for me?"

He hesitates, then nods yes.

He returns to the circle of children, and their singing grows louder. He leads them forward.

As the opening widens, Anna and Nina can see the distant people extending their arms toward the children. Beyond are rolling hills with solitary trees, more people...and above the hills, a dome of purest blue-white light.

"Come mi nieta," says Anna, gathering Nina in her left arm. She makes sharp movements with her right hand, and opens an exit from Limbo.

Before leaving, Anna puts her free hand on Nina's forehead and again says "When you wake up, you will *not* remember any of this until we sleep again."

The clock in Nina's bedroom ticks to 6 a.m. The buzzer sounds, and she awakens. She shuts off the alarm and shakes her head.

She looks at the picture of Davey on her bed stand. Her eyes moisten.

She doesn't know why she suddenly misses him so much.

## *Chapter 4*

# The Evil Ones

Ominous, low buzzing. Hundreds of ugly, menacing men – and a few women – are massed in a large room with a low clouded-glass ceiling.

In the center are the two shrouded Evil Ones Anna and Nina saw in Transition. They are on their knees before a grotesquely-muscular man. He speaks in a low growl.

“How did Mohammed get away from us? HOW? Let me hear it from *you* first,” he says threateningly, pointing toward one of the shrouded men. “WHAT WENT WRONG?”

“Sade - Master - we thought we had the boy Mohammed,” the shrouded man pleads. “We told him we knew where his mother was, and tried to lead him away -”

“YOU FOOLS!” hisses Sade. “I warned you Mohammed was not stupid. He wanted to go out the way he came in. You should have taken advantage of his weakness, and pretended to take him backward. Then you could have jumped him and carried him here, you IDIOTS!”

He bellows into the crowd: “*Does everyone see what they did wrong?*”

Terrified and roused, they yell “Yes.”

Leering above the shrouded men, Sade says “What happened next?”

“Montrose came with others, and we saw him attack your brother. Montrose himself destroyed him.”

As he speaks, Sade points his palms toward him, thumbs locked, and sees the image of his brother's terrified face as Montrose kills him.

"AAAAAAUGH!!!!!" Sade howls, throwing his fist in the air, crying and raging at the same time.

He wipes his mouth and concentrates his furor.

"THEN WHAT?"

"Montrose and the others surrounded Mohammed. They spoke to him, and by then the boy was so frightened he – he left with Montrose, into Dream-Training and – and then Limbo, where we cannot go."

"Cannot YET go," Sade yells.

"Cannot YET go," the shrouded men repeat.

"And then?"

"We saw a woman and child come in," says the other shrouded man. "They passed through Transition. They had life-light." He looks inquisitively at Sade. "I never saw life-light in Transition before."

"You never saw MANY things, idiot. Did you follow them?"

"No, Master Sade, no."

"WHY?"

"Master, we were afraid...she saw us...she has life-light, hot, burning, strong...she can kill us."

"I CAN KILL YOU," Sade thunders, lifting him by the throat with one arm. "My masters can suck your energy dry in one freaking breath."

In a complex motion, Sade pulls the shrouded man into him and visibly drains his energy, sucking him into a lifeless grey shrivel. Sade's energy glows brighter. He hurls what's left of the body into the crowd.

"ANY OTHER COWARDS HERE?"

They scream back "NO!"

“Those who show fear, DIE. Those who fail, DIE,” snarls Sade. “We have only one thought – ONE THOUGHT – and that is LIFE. When you forget all other thoughts you will remember that one thought. To control life we must control the energy of our system. For too long it’s been in the hands of God and his fucking white-lighters. Those who stand in our way DIE.”

Sade points at the other shrouded man, huddled on the ground next to his dead companion.

“Go back to Transition, and wait to see if the woman and child return. If they do, follow them out of Transition. We will supply you with energy. Do NOT let them know you see them. GO NOW!”

The shrouded man quickly leaves.

Sade then points to an Evil One with swollen eyelids on his left.

“Toad – you go, and take five others. Wait in Dream-Training. Watch for the old woman - her name is Anna. Find out about the child. Watch for Montrose.

“When the moment is right, KILL THEM!”

## *Chapter 5*

# Guardian Angels

Morning. Anna is alone in her home, perspiring as she moves through a series of complex, yoga-like stances.

Unnoticed behind her, Montrose appears.

“Good movement, Anna.”

She spins and cries “Hey,” then angrily says “Don’t do that again.”

“Surprised?” he laughs. “Guardians must be ready for anything.”

“Yeah well, I’m not ready for dead people showing up in my living room.”

“I am *not* dead,” he says, annoyed.

“You’re not exactly flesh and bones either. What do you want?”

“The Elders ask for a meeting tonight, after you fall asleep of course.”

“Fine,” says Anna brusquely.

“Bring Nina.”

“*Not* fine,” Anna snaps. “It was risky enough last night bringing her into Limbo for Mohammed. Did you know you had two Evil Ones in Transition?”

“We must have missed them,” says Montrose casually.

“Yeah well, we didn’t. And they saw us. I would have destroyed them right there, but the child was with me.”

She looks directly into Montrose’s eyes.

“I don’t want the EOs knowing about Nina. I want her safe.”

“There is no safety from the enemies of our souls,” says Montrose solemnly.

“Spare me the high and might,” says Anna. “I don’t mind risking *my* life for the greater good, but I will *not* risk Nina’s life.”

Montrose is exasperated. “Nina must be trained. She must be conditioned. No matter how hard you try to keep her a secret, the Evil Ones will someday find her. Her colors are too pure, especially her white color. She will stand out and be targeted. She is born at the time of the end of things as we know them, a time of great danger. We can protect and shield her. But she must be trained – we *need* her.”

“Yes we need her, but she needs her life.”

“And she will have her life. Bring her with you tonight – the Elders command it.”

“Is it they who command it, or you?”

“The Elders,” he answers with finality. “I have to return to the battlefield. Bring Nina with you tonight,” he says, then turns and disappears.

Nightfall. Nina is in bed. Her father sits beside her.

“Daddy, why doesn’t Mommy like me?”

“Nina, that’s not true.”

“She never plays with me...she just yells. Since Davey died she’s been mean.”

“She still misses Davey, but she loves you very much. She’s working too hard. I’ll talk to her. Give her some time.”

After a silence, Nina says “Tell me that prayer Granma used to say when you were a kid.”

Her father strokes her hair and says “Dear God, thank you for my life and thank you for your love. Protect me as I sleep, and send your Light shining deep inside me. Keep me strong and keep me pure, until I wake my soul endures.”

Sleep...fog... Anna appears. “Nina, come with me.” She holds Nina in her left arm, and uses her right hand to create an opening.

Transition again: the wounded-looking souls. “Hey, look at their colors” and “They’re alive” echo around Anna and Nina. They move forward.

Without showing it, Anna spots the shrouded Evil One.

They reach the far side of Transition, and see the Liners waiting. The Liners immediately create an opening, and they enter Dream-Training.

Anna swiftly moves to the side. She places Nina in the arms of one of the Liners, and quietly speaks to them.

“I order you to hold the child here. Protect her. Don’t let her go, and *don’t* let her see what I’m doing.”

Anna moves above the opening. The shrouded EO tries to pass through; she grabs him by his hair, and locks him in her arms.

“What’s this?” she asks.

“No, no,” he cries, shocked.

“Why are you following me, you little twerp?” She slaps the side of his head. “Talk to me or I’ll snap your neck.”

“Please nice lady, please.”

“Tell me who sent you.”

“I wanna live.”

“Talk to me now or I’ll send for Montrose.” She tightens her grip.

“Let me go ple-e-ase.”

“TELL ME WHO SENT YOU.”

“My master Sade.”

“Why?” asks Anna.

“He *very* angry. Sade wanted little boy Mohammed, and Montrose took him instead, and Montrose *kill* Sade’s brother.” He feigns sadness.

Anna pauses, surprised, then speaks.

“The Evil Ones know the rule. If you leave the Whirlwind, we have the right to destroy you, and you have no right to revenge.”

“Sade no like rule. Sade want new rule. Let me go now, nice lady.”

Anna pulls his head backward and snaps his neck. She quickly, almost mechanically, separates his head from the body. She then flings the head into the Whirlwind below, and wipes herself clean of the EO’s pus-like blood.

Her face shows no emotion.

She moves toward the Liners, who have been shielding Nina from the violent spectacle.

“Come child.”

Again she holds Nina, and they move upward.

“Granma, why aren’t we going toward The Light?”

“Because we’re not going to Limbo tonight, we’re going to the Guardian Angels’ home.”

As they rise above Dream-Training, they approach more Liners. Montrose is waiting with them.

“Hello Anna, I hear you had a problem.” He smiles.

Anna glares. “No, *you* have a problem. While you were rescuing Mohammed yesterday in Transition, you killed Sade’s brother.”

“Hah,” Montrose laughs, surprised yet amused. “Really...oh well, that’s life.”

“Don’t act so smug. You’ve invited the Evil Ones’ negative revenge. They’ll risk destroying themselves now, just to contaminate you. You may have made a big mistake killing him.”

Montrose appears insulted. “I am *not* smug, and I do not require your advice.”

“I’m not advising you, I’m *warning* you.”

“I didn’t have a choice. All of them had to die. We had to save Mohammed.”

“You *always* have a choice Montrose. *Siempre*. That’s your big mistake in life.”

Montrose stops short, and looks at Anna angrily yet curiously. Finally he says “The Elders are waiting.”

Rising, they pass through more Liners. Another opening...it is suddenly quiet. They hear meditative, chant-like singing.

They come to an area where dozens of men and women are sitting and standing. The group is of every different race and color, and all shine bright-white. Included are Montrose and Jake. Beyond the group they see even more people.

A thin, elderly African man speaks.

“Welcome, Anna and Nina. Thank you for helping us move Mohammed into Heaven.”

“I live to serve the good, Ali,” says Anna. She hesitates before continuing.

“I am afraid for Nina. Must we involve her?”

“We too are afraid for Nina,” says Ali. “That is why we have asked to speak with you.”

“We are learning that the enemies of our souls are slowly but surely building toward a period when they will be challenging us for control of the system of life, death and life again. That period will begin in the year 1991, a year of great significance for the Evil Ones, and only 16 years from now. They call it a *reflective year*. Just as the number 1991 exactly reflects in a mirror, so too the Evil Ones will push for your side and the Other Side to reflect and interact much more intensely than usual. It’s a theme for them, a rallying cry, as they train and prepare their armies. The numbers are important because the EOs *make* them important.”

“We believe the trouble will build through the years 2002 and 2020, the second and third reflective years until 2112, if your world survives that long. By the year 2020, we fear that the Evil Ones will mix unnoticed with the living. It will be a slow, painful deterioration of things as they are. Come 2020, they dream of controlling your side and cutting off The Light.”

“No one knows the outcome of the battle, or what year it will finish. We only know big trouble is coming. Destiny is what we decide to do. Our fate is not predetermined. There are no predictions, only warnings.”

He looks directly into Anna’s eyes.

“We need to train and prepare Nina. The Evil Ones are not as stupid as we’ve thought. They’re mastering the science of their negative energy. They want to overthrow the Star of Life, the system of life and death and life again that we have fought through the ages to protect and defend.

“The EOs are obsessed with returning to your side. They’re angry we’ve blocked them from entering newborn babies, so they experiment with channeling in other ways. We suspect they’ve figured it out. Meanwhile, they’ve become more organized and disciplined. They think we don’t notice...they move very slowly...but we can sense them growing, expanding,

taking more chances. Also, we have drawn certain information from EOs we've captured."

He moves to Nina. She does not appear to comprehend what he is saying. He places his hand on her shoulder, and looks at Anna.

"We need to pass along to Nina our knowledge and training, so that by 1991 she will be prepared for the beginning of the end. We need her to help us, Anna."

"That's 16 years away," says Anna. "I am afraid for her. *Tengo miedo.*"

"No one is safe, Anna. We promise to protect her in special ways that are normally not allowed. Our warriors Jake and Montrose will work closely with you. And from the Elders, Shen will also be involved, as will myself directly."

An Asian woman steps forward, and Anna immediately embraces her.

"Shen, do you understand my fear?"

Shen nods yes. "It would be *my* fear."

Anna turns to Ali and says "For the sake of the good, let it be done. But give me time to prepare Nina before anyone appears in front of her. She'll be frightened. She can see the unseen."

"Thank you Anna," says Ali. "Take her back now. Teach her how to live the Twelve Virtues in the Three Areas. Prepare her for the reflective years of 1991, 2002, 2020 and whatever may follow. When you are ready, we will send Montrose, Jake and others to help you train her."

Ali raises his hands, palms forward. Everyone bows their heads.

"We thank you God for all you give us. May your Light pour through us as we face the challenges ahead."

## *Chapter 6*

# Trouble

Just above the Whirlwind, Toad and five other Evil Ones sent by Sade are examining the gory headless body of the shrouded man Anna killed.

“Can we find his head and put him back together?” asks one.

Toad shakes his head no.

“Impossible now. Too much damage.”

They look above.

“Anna will soon come out of the white-lighters camp,” says Toad.

“Should we attack her?” asks one.

“Not right now,” says Toad. “She’ll have others with her, and they’ll kill us.”

“But if we return with nothing, Sade will kill *us*,” says a nervous EO.

“We will follow – at a distance,” Toad orders.

Anna and Nina emerge into the upper section of Dream-Training, surrounded by Liners. They move swiftly downward, finding a spot near the point where lower Transition and the Whirlwind meet. An opening is created by the Liners; Anna and Nina step through it, returning to Transition and then, their side.

Toad and the five EOs watch from a concealed distance.

“In a moment, challenge the white-lighters to attack,” Toad whispers.

He drifts sideward, unobserved, near the spot where Anna and Nina just exited Dream-Training.

The five EOs shout obscenities at the Liners.

A few dozen Liners rush toward the EOs before a lead Liner orders “Hold positions.” The Liners quickly return to cover the opening they had just created for Anna and Nina.

However, before their formation is complete, Toad slips behind them and disappears through the opening, following Anna and Nina as they exit Dream-Training and return to This Side.

Anna awakens. She shakes her head twice, then listens intently. She hears an ominous, low buzzing, punctuated by a dog barking in the distance. She senses – and almost sees – the presence of a dark form. The clock reads 5:31 a.m.

Through her window she sees clouds shrouding a low, dark moon. She rises, goes to her desk, opens Nina’s notebook, and begins writing:

*Nina, mi nieta, you are born into a time of great confusion, doubt and fear, the end of things as we know them. Everything will be challenged, everything will change.*

*Remember in times of danger to concentrate, focus and notice details. Always be on guard against bad people on this side and the other. Use your gift of seeing to protect yourself, but keep it a secret because the world fears it.*

*Every day you must practice the Twelve Virtues in the Three Areas.*

*The Twelve Virtues are purity, sincerity, dedication, humility, self-belief, patience, lightness, honesty, balance, concentration, persistence, and the most important virtue, hope.*

*The Three Areas are the mind, the body and the emotions.*

*In each area, each virtue must be practiced separately.*

*For example, think of purity of mind, purity of body and purity of emotions. Ask yourself three times a day if you are living that virtue in those three areas.*

*Next, think about humility of mind, body and emotions.*

*Continue the same way through the other virtues in the three areas, and challenge yourself to live them.*

*If you learn nothing else from me, learn this discipline, for it is all you need do to survive the greatest of evils in this life and the next.*

*True love is the combination of the first three virtues: purity, sincerity and dedication. I pray you find that love as you grow older.*

*Always remember to keep your heart pure. Let it be a reflection of God's heart, so that God's Light will always be drawn to you.*

*Do not judge anyone, for only God's judgment is important, and none of us should speak or think for God.*

*Be considerate of everything living, for when you care about others you are doing God's will.*

*To show love and compassion is to show you love God. To show hatred, judgment and revenge is to show you place yourself above God.*

*If someone is not good to you, respond with kindness, for you do not know what suffering brought them to be angry. Forgive everyone who harms you, and harm no one in return except those who threaten your life or the lives of others.*

*There will be much danger ahead, for you have chosen to be born at a time when good and evil are in a struggle over control of who lives, who dies, and who lives again.*

*Be careful. Do not challenge evil directly, or you will be the mourned fool. Don't go looking for trouble, or you might find it, and it might find you. Do not experiment with your gift of seeing the unseen, and never use it for personal advantage. Remember it is my legacy to you alone. Someday let it be your legacy to your child or grandchild.*

Anna looks up from her desk, again sensing the frightening presence of pure evil...a low ringing.

The hair on her arm rises. The clock reads 5:59 a.m.

## *Chapter 7*

# **The Attack**

Nina moves in disturbed sleep. The Evil One Toad floats over her, forehead sweating, palms facing but not touching her head, whispering “Show me your thoughts little girl, show me your grandma.”

The clock clicks to 6 a.m., and the sudden ringing of its alarm shocks Toad. Nina stirs.

Toad freezes, then quickly backs off Nina and fades into the near distance.

Nina sits up, turns off the alarm, and hears a strange, low buzzing in the area where Toad has just hidden.

Three rapid knocks on her bedroom door, and it opens.

“Wake up Nina, wake up,” comes her mother’s stern voice. “Time for school. Make sure your bed is made and your laundry brought downstairs.”

From the bathroom she hears her father’s voice.

“Good morning sweetheart, Mommy and I work late tonight so Granma’s picking you up after school.” The toilet flushes.

Anna locks the door to her home and looks at the cloudy mid-afternoon sky. She opens the car door, and again feels a strange presence, a low buzzing...she starts the car, and pulls away.

Unseen by Anna, Toad is nearby transmitting negative thoughts and energy into her by holding both hands together, thumbs locked, palms pointed at her.

She hears an inner voice complaining “Everyone’s using me...the Elders, Montrose, my son and his wicked wife...they’re all using me.”

As she drives beneath a railroad overpass, suddenly the road seems to close in front of her, and the illusion of a wall of concrete appears.

Low buzzing...she glimpses Toad.

She swerves left, the wall disappears before her eyes, and a truck bears down on her. She turns the wheel sharply right and just misses it.

“Concentrate, focus, notice details,” she commands herself.

In controlled terror, she realizes she was purposely distracted with false images by an Evil One who must have physically channeled into her side.

“He’s very close,” she repeats to herself. In all her years, she has never had to deal directly with an Evil One crossing into physical life.

She makes it to Nina’s school just as the children are released.

“Granma, Granma!” Nina is overjoyed to see Anna.

“I love you,” whispers Anna, almost crying, hugging Nina on the schoolhouse steps. “Love you too Granma,” says Nina.

“Walk with me for a little bit Nina, ok?” she asks, consciously postponing driving again.

“Sure Granma...can we cook tonight?”

“We can do anything you want,” she answers, taking Nina’s hand.

They move down the autumn street, shadowed by threatening clouds. Nina talks of everything she learned in school that day. Anna listens, but is on full-alert.

They pass a Baptist Church. “Let’s go in,” says Anna.

They enter, taking seats in the back.

From the altar a choir practices a gospel ballad. The group is standing, except for one elderly blind man wearing sunglasses.

Anna hands rosary beads to Nina and says “When you pray, first always thank God for all he gives us.”

Nina bows her head. “Thank you God for everything.”

Silence. At once, Anna and Nina hear a low buzzing. Anna’s head straightens up, as does Nina’s – and they listen.

“What’s that, Granma?” whispers Nina.

“Just bad noise from bad people. Ignore it.”

“I heard it when I woke up today,” Nina says.

Anna’s face does not reveal the terror she feels at Nina’s words.

Toward the front of the church near the choir, she thinks she sees a shadow behind a pillar.

It’s Toad, sweating and nervous. He closes his eyes and concentrates.

“I see them Master Sade – what should I do?”

From his telepathic consciousness comes the low voice of Sade. “Stay with them...if Anna sees you, she will not try to kill you in church, with her precious Nina at her side. We will recharge your energy – don’t sweat it.”

“Not a good place here,” whispers Toad. “I feel weak.”

“Are you afraid?” asks Sade leeringly.

“No, no...no fear. Church. Church makes me not – breathe - right.”

“Does it remind you of something from your dead childhood? Sade asks, anger rising.

“No Master Sade, no memory, but -”

“But nothing, unless you’d like more training. *When you forget, you’ll remember.*”

Suddenly the blind man from the choir rises, rips off his sunglasses, and points directly at Toad.

“The devil’s right there!” he cries. “I hear him plain as day.”

The choir is shocked and silenced. They see nothing.

“I’m telling you, I hear him *right there*,” says the blind man, fully animated, as a few in the choir try to calm him.

Toad, completely surprised, turns around and sees the blind man.

“Fucking white-lighter,” he hisses.

He flows swiftly into the man, roaring “RAAAAAUGH.”

The blind man collapses from a heart attack. “Aaagh...no,” are his last words as he clasps his chest.

Pandemonium.

Anna watches in horror, shielding Nina’s eyes. She rises and they quickly leave.

“Idiot,” says Toad, shaking himself loose from the blind man’s lifeless body.

“YOU are the idiot,” a furious Sade transmits to Toad. “You fool; you exposed yourself to Anna. *Now do what I say or die*. Follow Anna, but do *not* let her see you. Watch for them to fall asleep, and stay behind them. We’ll have a big surprise waiting.”

Night. Nina is home in bed. Her mother and father enter.

“Hey kiddo...what’ja do at Granma’s today?” asks her father.

“We went to church...and cooked.”

“That’s nice,” says her father.

“Which church, Nina?” asks her mother.

“The one down the street from school, with all the gospel singers. One of them started yelling and fell down.”

“This is wrong,” says her mother, voice lowered but angry. “Your mother needs to know we are raising Nina a strict Catholic. Why do we pay money to send her to Catholic School in Newburgh if your mother just takes her to any church she chooses? What would my friends say if they saw Anna bringing Nina out of a *Negro* church?”

“Mama taught me to respect *all* religions,” pleads Nina’s father. “Many rivers to the same sea –“

“She’s wrong. Only Christians go to Heaven, and Catholics get special treatment. What would she know about religion anyway – she can’t even tell you who your father is.”

As their argument continues, Nina pulls up her covers.

Upon sleep, her grandmother immediately appears. She is with Montrose, Shen and several Liners.

“Stay here tonight, Nina. These Guardian Angels will stay with you.”

“I want to go with *you*, Granma.”

“Not tonight Nina. Quédate aqui - stay here.”

Low buzzing. Anna looks at Montrose. Shen whispers “Hear him?”

Montrose nods his head. “Don’t show you know.”

Anna hugs Nina and Shen, then leaves with Montrose, quietly aware she is being followed by the EO.

Montrose and Anna travel through Transition, enter lower Dream-Training, and quickly separate, with Anna acting as a decoy and Montrose hiding above the opening.

Toad sticks his head through the opening, sees Anna in the near distance, and moves forward.

Montrose immediately jumps him, grabbing his hair.

A sudden rush from the Whirlwind below: hundreds of Evil Ones emerge, led by Sade. He pulls Anna to him before she can react, locking her in his grip.

“LET HIM GO,” yells Sade to Montrose.

“LET HER GO FIRST,” screams Montrose.

“*YOU KILLED MY BROTHER,*” answers Sade. Looking at his followers, he screams “DOWN NOW!”

They descend the Whirlwind with Anna.

“ANNA!” wails Montrose. He destroys Toad, but it is too late.

Other Guardians and Liners rush to Montrose’s side, surrounding and stopping him from entering the Whirlwind.

As the Evil Ones drop down the center of the Whirlwind, a dazed Anna sees pale dead souls bouncing against its walls, and sees them re-living the memories of what they had caused others to suffer. Further down she sees people being sucked of their energy, tortured and molested. She hears the words repeatedly “*When you forget you’ll remember.*”

Slowly she realizes the only reason she’s not yet dead is that Sade wants to torture information out of her.

Summoning all her strength, she pounds Sade’s stomach with her elbow, and breaks free.

“Then DIE, bitch,” Sade screams.

From inside himself he pulls out a dirty-yellow ball of energy and smashes it into Anna’s back.

She crashes into the walls of the Whirlwind, and is pounded and buffeted by the spinning motion.

She awakens in her bedroom, choking, holding her throbbing heart. Montrose appears.

“I can’t – breathe -” she gasps. “*Ayudame...help.*”

She reaches for a wooden statue of Buddha on her nightstand, and knocks it over.

Montrose catches her before she falls off the bed.

Her heart feels as though it is exploding.

“Anna, Anna,” Montrose cries as he cradles her.

She dies; her soul awakens, rising from her corpse and still unaware of it.

“How – how did I get out of the Whirlwind?” she asks, dazed. “¿Cómo?”

Montrose is highly upset. He moves from the bed.

“I woke you up, but it was too late. Your body - died.”

She looks at her arms – her soul’s arms – pale white except for the bruises from the Whirlwind.

Then she notices her body lying on the bed.

She looks at Montrose and begins to cry.

“What about Nina?” she repeats.

“I don’t know,” Montrose says, distressed.

At that moment they hear in the background a low evil buzzing.

“You have to move on,” he pleads. “The Evil Ones will try to block you.”

“But I didn’t say goodbye to Nina.”

Montrose shakes his head no, and says with urgency “It’s *impossible* now; you’ll draw the EOs to her. Someday, but not now.”

Shen appears, hugs Anna, and says “Look at me, Anna. I will protect your child from the EOs with my life. Right now you **MUST** move on.”

The buzzing grows louder.

“You *have* to go quickly into Limbo, before the EOs catch up to you,” Montrose begs.

Anna cries. She takes Montrose’s hand as they move from the room.

Autumn hilltop, cemetery. A priest sprinkles holy water on Anna’s casket. “We ask the blessing of Almighty God on the soul of Anna, beloved mother and grandmother. And we ask God’s blessing on the living, that they may accept Anna’s passing with the peace of mind that she is with our Heavenly Father and his angels, and her grandson Davey.”

Nina stands between her father and mother, crying inconsolably. She whispers “No Granma, no.”

A few days later, a visibly-frail Nina and her parents are at Anna’s house. Nina sits on a kitchen stool while her parents sort through the cabinets.

“These appliances are so out-of-date,” complains her mother.

“Nina, please do your homework while you’re waiting,” says her father.

Nina is unresponsive.

“She hasn’t said a word in six days,” her mother whispers. “She refuses to talk, and she’s hardly sleeping. If this keeps up...we have to put her in a special hospital.”

Nina’s father says nothing.

Unnoticed by her parents, Nina opens a drawer and removes her grandmother’s notebook with the star on the cover.

She slips it into her book-bag.



## **Part Two: 1991**

“Attaining repeated birth amongst  
the species of demoniac life,  
such persons can never approach God.  
Gradually they sink down  
to the most abominable type  
of existence.”

***-Bhagavad Gita, 16:20***

## Chapter 8

# Halloween 1990

Wednesday October 31, 1990: Halloween.

Nina is 22 years old. She lives in a converted warehouse on the east bank of the Hudson River, in the old industrial city of Newburgh, just north of Cornwall. The huge brick building faces the river on one side, and railroad tracks on the other.

She stands in front of her bedroom mirror, making final adjustments on her Dorothy costume from the movie *The Wizard of Oz*.

“Granma loved that movie,” she thinks in passing.

On the TV is General Norman Schwarzkopf talking about the possible invasion of Kuwait to remove Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi army.

Sudden knock at the door.

As Nina turns the knob, a gory-looking zombie pushes the door open.

“RAAAH,” the zombie screams.

“Crap, Danielle,” yells Nina as she falls backward on the floor.

“Happy Halloween! How do I look?”

“Like your boyfriend,” says Nina, annoyed but laughing.

“You wish you had one, bitch,” Danielle says. “Nice costume. So ya ready or what?”

“Just about.”

Danielle browses through Nina’s apartment. Everything is in its place, including a guitar in the corner and a crucifix on the wall.

“It looks like a convent in here,” Danielle says of its simplicity.

“Nun of this, nun of that,” jokes Nina as she combs her hair.

Danielle moves to Nina’s nightstand and opens the small drawer.

“What’s this?” She pulls out several prayer beads, tangled together.

“My Granma left me them. They’re holy beads from every religion.”

“Weird.”

“She thought all religions are equally right and wrong.”

Danielle picks up a small framed photo of a smiling dark-haired man, with a background of the famed Rialto Bridge in Venice.

“So ya still miss him?”

“Not really,” answers Nina. “I don’t know why I leave that picture out. I miss Venice more than I miss him.”

Danielle makes a face. “Your mother warned you about those Italian exchange students.”

“What can I say...I was in love.”

“Well, let’s find some love tonight,” says Danielle.

They drive north in Danielle’s jeep. Nina flicks on the radio, listening to each station a few moments before saying “Nah” and moving to the next one. The dark countryside rolls past.

News flashes of the troop buildup in the Mideast.

“This is such crap,” says Nina.

“Hey, where’s your patriotism?” asks Danielle.

“Screw war,” answers Nina.

“Saddam Hussein is the next Hitler; we need to get rid of him,” Danielle says.

“There’s a little Hitler in a lot of people,” says Nina. “Whad’re we going to go kill them all?”

A beautiful song comes on the radio.

“Shhh – I like this one,” says Danielle.

“Me too.”

It is a song about memories. Nina imagines first the man in the photo on her dresser...then her grandmother Anna.

They spot a road-sign ahead: “Mid-Hudson Bridge, Poughkeepsie,” Danielle reads aloud.

“So where is this party?” asks Nina.

“I told you it’s a surprise. Peter’s gonna meet us there, and he’s bringing a few friends.”

“Peter-Peter pumpkin eater. Is he gonna marry you?”

“If I want,” Danielle laughs.

She pulls into a large parking lot. A neon sign advertises a dance club, and Nina moans.

“I thought you said it was a party. I hate bars.”

“It’s the biggest party in the whole valley,” says Danielle. “Maybe tonight you’ll finally meet somebody.” She sings the chorus from the 60’s Jefferson Airplane song: *“Don’t you want somebody to love?”*

Nina laughs. “I don’t like crazy places.”

“It can’t be any crazier than that nuthouse your mom stuck you in when you were a kid,” says Danielle.

“Don’t joke about that, Danielle.”

They park the car and make their way inside to a jungle of costumed party-goers. Winding their way to an elevated portion of the room, they find an empty table.

Danielle orders two drinks.

Eerie, dark music, heavy pulsing beat.

“Notice anyone interesting?” yells Danielle.

“Not yet,” answers Nina. She reverses the picture in her eyes, and sees the colors inside the people. There are a few with bright colors, but most are murky or dark.

“Rough crowd,” she thinks to herself.

The drinks arrive, and Nina pays. She sees a man standing alone, dressed in an undersized suit with nerdy black glasses, a bowtie, and slicked-back hair.

She looks at his colors: healthy blue, yellow and shining white.

“Wow,” she says to herself, surprised, for besides her grandmother she rarely sees white among the three colors in anyone.

He doesn't notice her, and is looking intently in the direction of the women's bathroom.

As Nina follows his line of sight, the bathroom door opens and a woman in a black leather outfit emerges.

Nina sits up straight. Unlike the colors of any other human she's ever seen, the woman has only two colors: black and blood red.

“She's dead,” Nina murmurs, locking eyes with her.

Immediately the leather woman realizes Nina has noticed her. She looks directly at Nina's colors, and sees her pure white. Soundlessly she flashes the angry telepathic question “Who the hell are *you*?”

Nina turns away, blinks a few times, and tries to stop seeing.

The leather woman approaches.

“Hey, you all right?” asks Danielle of Nina, noticing her sudden tension.

The leather woman reaches their table, spits at Nina, says “See ya later,” and walks away.

WHAT THE HELL!” yells Danielle, furiously rising.

Nina pulls Danielle’s arm, holding her back, saying “No, leave it alone.” They see the leather woman disappear down the stairs to a basement dance floor. The nerd with the white light follows her.

“Get me out of here,” says Nina.

“Who WAS that?” Danielle demands.

“*Get me out of here,*” Nina repeats.

“Now?” protests Danielle. “I can’t go – Peter’s coming.”

“Give me your keys. Peter’ll take you home, and I’ll drive the jeep to work tomorrow.”

“Shoot, Nina, we just got here. Who *was* that bitch?”

“I really don’t know, Danielle, I just want to go home – NOW. I can’t stay here. *Please* give me your keys.”

Nina is driving south toward Newburgh, scared, half-crying.

She remembers her grandmother’s warning from the notebook: “Don’t go looking for trouble – you might find it, and it might find you.”

She sees dark forms on the road ahead, and wonders if she’s imagining them.

Home. Inside her apartment, after trying to calm down, she is setting the alarm for 7 a.m. when she senses a low buzzing.

Asleep. Dreams. Floating. A room.

An opening appears in front of Nina, and the leather woman emerges.

“Damn,” says Nina.

“Who the hell are you?” asks the leather woman.

“No one.”

“You’re coming with me.”

“No I’m not.”

“Yes you IS,” the leather woman screams, reaching for Nina’s hair.

“Screw you,” says Nina, pushing her back.

The leather woman pulls a ball of dark energy from inside herself and throws it at Nina, who ducks.

“COME WITH ME OR I’LL KILL YOU!” shouts the leather woman.

“No freaking way.”

They struggle, and Nina is punched hard in the face. She is terrified by the leather woman’s viciousness.

Suddenly the nerd from the bar appears, in shorts and a sleeveless shirt, a white bandana around his head. He is lean but muscular.

He moves quickly between them with a series of spins that build up a bright light around him, then whips a bright ball of energy from inside himself.

The leather woman reels, shocked. With quick hand movements, she creates an opening and retreats.

The nerd chases her, energy-ball in hand, and they disappear.

The opening closes.

Nina wakes in a cold sweat, pain throbbing in her cheekbone. She goes to the mirror and sees a large bruise where the leather woman hit her.

Fear.

## *Chapter 9*

# **All Saint's Day**

The next morning, Nina and Danielle are at the children's day care center where they work.

"Who was that girl in leather last night, Nina? How'd you get that bruise?"

"I don't know who she was, and I got the bruise falling down at home. What are you doing after work?"

Danielle shrugs her shoulders. "Driving home with you – you have my jeep, remember?"

"Sorry. Listen – it's All Saint's Day. We Catholics are supposed to go to church the day after Halloween. It's a Holy Day of Obligation. Can we stop by?"

"You ain't taking me to church, Nina. You know I'm a practicing atheist."

"C'mon."

"No way."

"Well then at least come visit the cemetery with me."

"Wh-a-a-t?"

"My grandmother Anna's there. It's on the way home."

"Whad'ya mean, she's there?"

"She's buried there. I don't like to go alone."

"Aaaah...ok, Nina, ok. But not for long."

A few hours later Nina is reading from a gravestone. “Anna Maria Saldano, June 12, 1914, October 9, 1975.”

Stark November twilight.

“What was she like?” asks Danielle.

“Sweet – gentle. She was born in Columbia, South America....and she was more a mother to me than my real mother.”

“Who was her husband?”

“She never married, as far as I know.”

“Hmm...how’d she die?”

“Heart attack in her sleep. I was only seven.” Then, closing her eyes, she silently prays “Granma...I hope you’re happy wherever you are. I’m very scared tonight...I miss you...I need you. Help me.”

They return to Nina’s apartment and watch TV: more news of the invasion of Kuwait.

Nina looks at Danielle’s colors, and sees a weak spot in her mid-section.

“Your stomach bothering you, Danielle?”

“Yeah, my ulcer. How’d you know?”

Nina’s eyes go wide: she sees the bright but ghostly form of her grandmother Anna standing behind Danielle. Anna looks younger, perhaps in her mid-thirties.

“Don’t be afraid,” Anna says. “*No tengo miedo.*”

Nina catches her breath, and her eyes widen. She looks at Danielle, who doesn’t seem to have heard Anna.

“Danielle, do you hear anyone talking besides me?”

“No.”

“Do you see anything over your shoulder?”

Danielle looks and answers “No. Why?”

Anna says “I love you Nina. It’s me, your grandmother Anna. Te amo.”

Nina gasps. “DANIELLE – did you hear that?”

“You pranking me, Nina?” asks Danielle, bewildered.

“Your friend cannot hear or see me, Nina,” says Anna. “Watch the lampshade. *Mira.*”

Anna moves to the lamp and detaches the shade. She moves it, mid-air, first to the left, then to the right, before re-attaching it.

Danielle’s jaw drops. “CRAP, NINA!”

“Ask your friend never to reveal what she just saw to anyone,” says Anna.

“Danielle, my Granma – Danielle, swear you’ll never tell anyone what you’re seeing here.”

“What the hell!!!”

“Swear.”

“Freaking-A, ok, I swear.”

“Nina, mi dulce nieta, forgive me for doing this, but -”

Anna looks intently at the television; it turns from the news to a fuzzy screen.

She concentrates, then says slowly “Nina and Danielle, believe in God.”

The words transmit through the television.

Danielle’s eyes go wide.

“Sh-i-i-t. What the hell’s going on?”

“Hell is going on,” says Anna to Nina.

“Whad’ya mean, hell’s going on?” asks Nina.

“I’m here tonight because someone from hell is threatening you.”

“Excuse me???” says Nina.

“Excuse who?” Danielle asks.

“The leather woman you met last night,” Anna says to Nina. “She’s very bad...*peligroso*...After your friend leaves, we need to talk.”

Nina becomes visibly upset. She turns to Danielle.

“Do you believe in ghosts?”

“No – yes, I don’t know.”

“I am not a ghost,” says Anna. “I’m a Guardian Angel, a warrior soul.”

“You look like a ghost to me,” says Nina.

Danielle snaps. “I’m outta here.” She moves toward the door.

Nina follows.

“Danielle, we’ll talk at work tomorrow. Please don’t tell anyone – they’ll think we’re nuts.”

“They’ll think *you’re* nuts,” says Danielle before slamming the door.

Nina and Anna are now alone. “Shit,” says Nina. She sits on the couch, and Anna sits beside her.

“I’m sorry, but I *had* to do those tricks in front of your friend,” says Anna. “Otherwise, you might have thought you were going *loca*.”

“I AM going crazy,” says Nina.

“No you’re not. I’m here because you’re in big trouble. Last night in that bar, you channeled into a powerful dead Evil-Walker – un demonio que vive. That’s a bad dead person who gains physical access to your side. It’s very very rare. She knows you identified her, and she sees you as a threat because of your white light. She’s coming after you, and she won’t stop until she kills you. That’s why I’m here tonight.”

But Nina hardly hears her grandmother. She stares incredulously at her, then says “What happened to you? Did you know my mother put me in a mental hospital after you died?”

“I did know. *Yo sabía.*”

Anna pauses, then speaks slowly.

“I was watching you, but I was forbidden to directly interfere, because it would have been dangerous for you...it could have revealed and exposed *you* to evil people on my side. I was watching the whole time. I saw your suffering, I felt your suffering...it was like I was seeing you through a one-way mirror. I could see you, but you couldn't see me. And I felt *all* your pain. If it wasn't for the strength of those around me, your suffering would have destroyed me.”

Nina tries to compose herself. “Can I touch you?”

“Si,” says Anna. They touch hands. “I feel a tingling,” says Nina, “I can feel your energy. Why do you look younger than when you were alive?”

“Because when we die, after we make it through the first stage of Transition, our bodies revert to the age when we were most healthy.”

She looks into Nina's eyes.

“I have so much to explain in so little time. *Tanto*. When you fall asleep tonight, the leather woman will be waiting for you. So listen carefully. You need to understand the full picture. Do you still have the notebook?”

Nina goes to her desk, takes out the notebook and returns to the sofa.

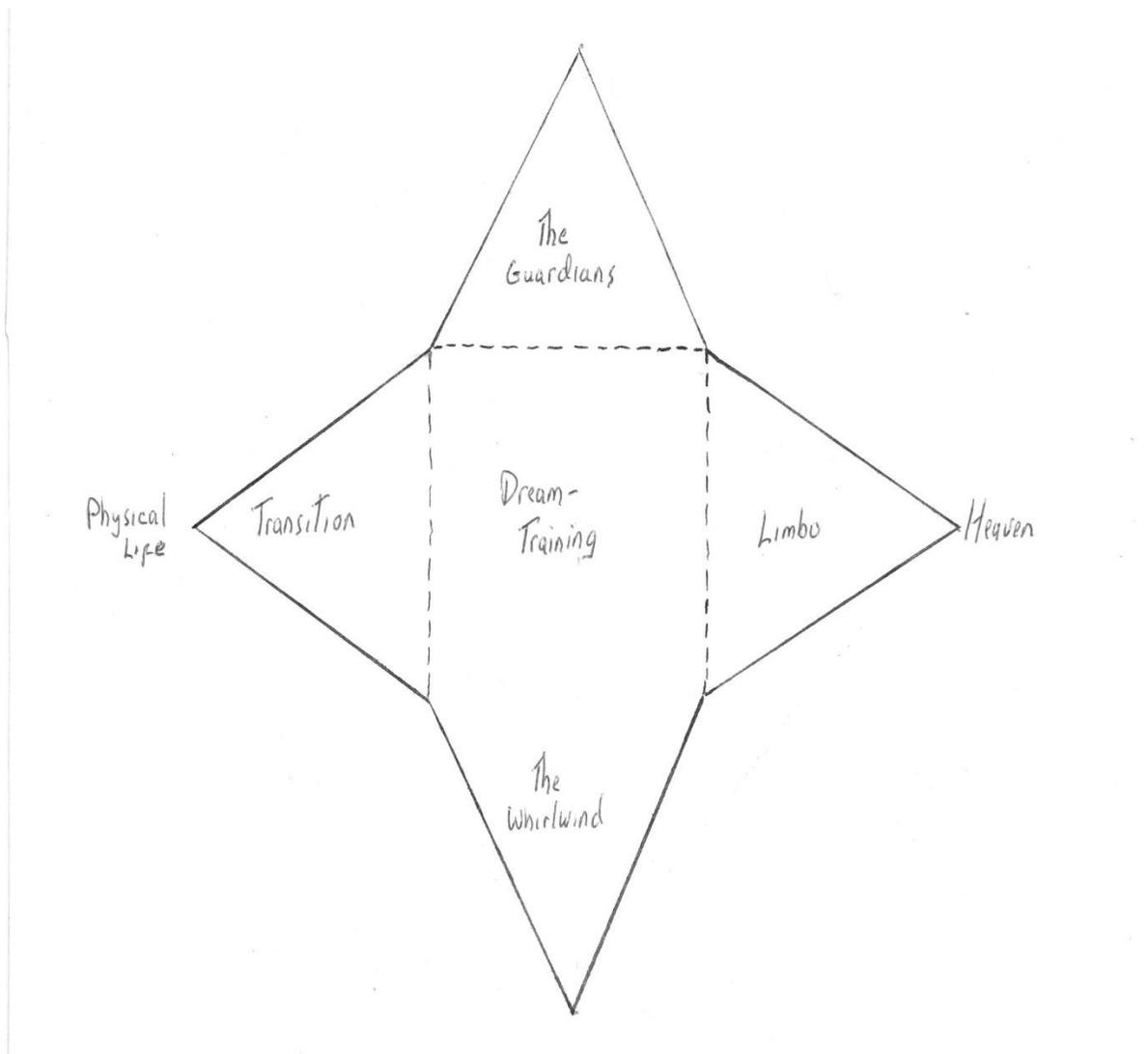
“You didn't explain the star on the cover.”

“The Star of Life...I never had time.” Anna pauses before speaking.

“Look at the Star...four intersecting triangles, and four points. It is the pattern God has chosen for the system of life and death and life again. It is a map of our full existence on both sides. Once you understand the Star of Life, you understand *why* things are the way they are, and what we must do to survive the enemies of our souls.

“Our souls come from God’s home, in Heaven.” She points to the right tip of the star. “They are pure, conscious energy. They have physical bodies and a dream-like consciousness. They can think, and feel, and do things, just as a person in dreams. Good souls are strengthened and recharged by their connection to God’s Light, which on your side you call the divine presence or the holy spirit.

Anna then has Nina label the sections of the Star of Life thus:



“There are two elements to the soul: form and substance. Good souls have positive form and substance, and evil souls have negative form and substance.

“There’s a science to it, a physics to our energy, a miraculous biology to our souls,” she says, gazing in wonder at her glowing arms.

Anna continues, pointing at the Star.

“When our bodies die, our souls come fully alive. Familiar people such as relatives are escorted by Guardian Angels to help us move forward. We are placed in a familiar, comfortable setting. We see a bright white light – this is God’s Light from Heaven, magnified greatly. *La luz pura de Dios*. We follow that Light and cross into Transition,” she points inside the left-hand tip of the Star, “where we may stay a few moments, a few hours or days, or for many years.”

“Some new-dead want to go backward, back to life, but it’s physically impossible, and so they remain stuck. You call them ghosts or poltergeists.

“After we make up our minds to leave Transition, we *all* must cross into Dream-Training, directly over the Whirlwind. Everyone dips in a little bit, even the best among us. Some dip deeper, depending how heavy our souls are from guilt, shame or regret. We *all* must spin a little in the Whirlwind, to cleanse ourselves. This is God’s way of keeping Heaven pure of heart and free of the Evil Ones. Our negative memories and inclinations must be spun from our souls before we enter the House of God.

“When our bodies die and our souls leave Transition and dip into the Whirlwind, we re-live again and again the pain and nausea we caused others, until we are cleansed of those negative impulses by the Whirlwind’s natural spinning action.

“Some stay *forever* in the Whirlwind, and we call them Evil Ones. They live toward the bottom, a very cold place, and they often travel upward into Dream-Training and Transition, looking for souls like wolves hunting for stray lambs. They know how to suck the energy out of a person, and they feed off that energy to give themselves strength. They are like vampires, except they suck energy rather than blood from people. The leather woman is one of them.

“Here in the top triangle of the Star are the strong, good souls who protect and preserve the system, the Guardian Angels. There are four types of Guardians, and we all have a position to maintain. There are Warriors such as me, living on the Other Side *and* your side, who police the system and guide souls through. We also watch for situations such as the leather woman crossing over. There’s a group called the Elders, who have been around a long time and have much knowledge and wisdom to help us with strategy. There are the Teachers, who prepare souls in Dream-Training and Limbo for Heaven. Finally, there are the Liners, whose energy is so pure that the Evil Ones can’t penetrate it. We use them to protect the boundaries inside the Star of Life. Most of them have what you call Down’s Syndrome and other quote-unquote ‘disorders.’ On your side they are living angels; their bodies are on your side but their minds and souls are with us.

“The Guardians’ colors will always include pure white – blanco puro - although sometimes we disguise ourselves and hide our colors. The EOs’ colors are black and red, and they too can disguise their colors, although if you look carefully, you can tell the difference between them and us. Theirs has a dirty tinge to it.”

“Can a living person be killed by the Evil Ones?” asks Nina.

“Si, if correct procedures aren’t followed or a mistake is made.”

“Is that what happened to you?”

Anna nods yes just once. “Back to the Star...we have so little time.

“Once our souls cross the Whirlwind, they enter Limbo. It is a place where we are made ready to move forward into God’s Light. It is a holy place, and a place of great learning. The Evil Ones are completely blocked from entering Limbo, so it is very safe.”

She points to the right-hand tip of the Star.

“And here...here is the beginning of what you call Heaven, and we call Home. It is in Heaven that our souls re-charge and live inside the pure Light of God. There are teachers, guides, and just normal good souls enjoying themselves, surrounded by family and loved ones. It is *very* safe. Sometimes souls in Heaven are allowed to connect with the living for a brief period, especially in Dream-Training, but it’s *always* supervised by the Guardian Angels in case the EOs try to interfere. We don’t want them channeling in and hitching a ride into Heaven.

“In Heaven, any good thing one imagines can come true. It is a place of great beauty, beyond anything you will ever know in physical life. There is singing, playing, family, laughter, loving, eating, celebrating, and peace...*true* peace. Our bodies feel totally healthy, our minds clear, and our emotions positive.

“Only those purified in Dream-Training, the Whirlwind and Limbo may enter Heaven. Once you enter, you can only leave if you choose to be reborn. I myself have never been to Heaven because I *chose* to join the Guardian Angels. I was offered the option, once I made it to Limbo. If I had decided to go to Heaven I would have absolutely no desire to fight anything, let alone Evil Ones.

“But I have glimpsed inside it. It is guarded on its borders by many thousands of good souls. It is safe.”

“Why didn’t you want to go to Heaven?”

Anna pauses.

“Because I wanted to stay with the warrior angels, in case you needed me.”

Nina looks with love at her grandmother.

“Who is God?” asks Nina.

“God is the purest of pure, conscious Light, the collection of all the good we’ve fought through the ages to protect and preserve. People think of God as a noun, a being, but God is equally a verb – action as well as being.”

“Why doesn’t God use his power to destroy the Evil Ones?”

“God is not destructive,” answers Anna. “God did not create the Evil Ones...people created the Evil Ones. God works through the good people on both sides. From God comes the great Light that powers everything beautiful in life. And if God and the angels tried all at once to destroy the Evil Ones, we’d have quite the battle. The outcome could not be predicted. Destiny is not preordained; destiny is what we decide to do, hopefully at the moment of perfected opportunity. God waits for the right time, not *our* time.

“Meanwhile, every day we contend with the mischief of the Evil Ones. Their goal is to contaminate and overthrow the Guardian Angels, so that *they* gain control of the system. *They* want to control who lives, who dies, and who lives again.”

“Can the Evil Ones gain control over a good person who dies?” asks Nina.

“Si, if that person has any deep weaknesses, and the Evil Ones can take advantage of those weaknesses upon death, then that person may be lured

to the lower part of the Whirlwind before the Guardians can do *anything* to stop it. God doesn't judge us; we judge ourselves, and weigh ourselves down. That's why following the Twelve Virtues in the Three Areas is so important."

Nina's eyes mist as she says "I've repeated those virtues to myself a million times since you wrote them in the notebook."

Anna smiles. "It's the summary of what *all* the good religions try to say on your side, but it's *not* a religion, it's an exercise we Guardians do as a shield against the Evil Ones. Practicing those virtues brings the good Light to your soul, feeding and nurturing you every day. *That* is how you survive the Evil Ones. EOs don't like hanging around people whose light is strong; it's boring and irritating to them. They prefer to prey on the weak. It's just easier. They're looking for a quick fix of energy to power themselves, and they want to make a connection so that you'll listen to them at the moment of your death, and follow them. That's all. It's not rocket science: it makes sense. *Que tiene sentido.*"

Anna pauses, while Nina lets it all sink in.

She continues.

"Above all else, don't be afraid of them, but be on guard against them. Never fear what you understand. The EOs aren't so different from bad people among the living. They want what all evil people want: power and control. They want to live on your side again, to be born from a mother's womb, as our souls from Heaven are born to your side. They want control of the system. They want the Guardians killed, and Heaven either eliminated or sealed up, so that no one can enter or leave. Right now they have influence on your side but *not* control. They want control.

“Now pay close attention. On *your* side, the warrior Evil Ones channel into three kinds of people: Drones, Breeders and Evil-Walkers.

“Drones are living people who are usually not aware they are being manipulated by the Evil Ones. Drones are controlled through dreams when they’re sleeping and through subconscious mental telepathy when they’re awake. The untreated mentally ill are particularly vulnerable to being used as Drones. Also, people constantly drawn to perverted fantasies are vulnerable. The Evil Ones get into their heads, and use them to create great trouble and tragedy. When a sick person such as your *Son of Sam* killer says the devil told him to murder someone, he’s telling the truth. We Guardians often say that psychologists and police on your side do more to fight evil than the high priests of any of your religions. Serial killers, rapists, molesters, or just people who break down emotionally and do something horrible such as kill their kids...in many cases, the EOs pretend to be their friends, get into their heads, and manipulate their thoughts.

“Then there are a handful of Breeders on your side. These are men and women who *consciously* follow the Evil Ones, and who try to conceive and raise children to serve the purpose of evil. Most are a joke, but some actually succeed.

“Finally, you have Evil-Walkers such as the leather woman. They are the most dangerous, because they are in full communication with their evil masters, and they can be consciously directed to do something horrible. Evil-Walkers are very rare, *muy raro*, because of the problem the EOs have transferring energy to your side. It’s extremely difficult for them to cross over to the living while maintaining their physical form. For the most part, the biology of their souls can’t take it, and they disintegrate. But like mad scientists they keep experimenting at it. They have their own black magic,

and in many ways it's a reflection of our white magic. All magic is merely concealed science. So the EOs keep trying different methods and procedures. Every now and then they get it right."

"Like the leather woman," says Nina thoughtfully. "How does she cross over?"

"We don't exactly know, but we suspect her energy is being re-charged somehow by other Evil Ones. She's highly advanced. She has a direct channel to their energy, and that's what keeps her cooking. But we don't know how or where they're re-charging her."

"Why is she so mad at me?"

"You identified her when you channeled into her at the bar. Evil Ones are paranoid of being discovered. To her, you are a threat, *una amenaza*."

"*Why?*"

"Although EOs look terrifying and sound terrifying and manipulate terrifying events, they are actually very weak and vulnerable physically, *especially* if they show up on your side. After you first channeled into her at the bar last night, she walked away from you because she knew if you or Danielle punched her hard enough, she'd disintegrate into a pile of dust right in front of you, and be forced back to the Whirlwind, still alive over there. On the Other Side, it's harder to trap them. If you know what you're doing, you can snap their necks with one strong motion, or incinerate them with the strength of your energy if you spin it or throw it from inside yourself. They usually can't come near people whose souls are pure and strong, without becoming weaker themselves."

"How will she try to attack me?"

"She'll probably do it from the Other Side, because it's safer for her. She'll wait until you sleep before she makes her move. She saw your white

color, and she knows if she can bring you to her evil masters, she'll win extra favor because of your high energy. Energy is money and power to them."

"What should I do?"

"I don't know yet...no lo sé. The other Guardians are helping me figure that out. For now, concentrate, focus and notice details. Be on guard, watch for everything. We have to take her out."

"Granma...who was the guy who saved me from the leather woman last night?"

"I don't know his name. He's with the Guardian Angels, but he's from your side."

"Can you find out?"

Anna nods yes. "I have to return to the Guardians now, but I'll be back before midnight."

She looks at the clock: 10:30 p.m.

"Until I return, please don't go to sleep. I love you."

"I love you too Granma...I can hardly believe what's happening."

"I love you too. Believe, Nina."

Anna turns and disappears.

## *Chapter 10*

# **In Procedure**

Anna meets with the Elders and Guardians, above Dream-Training.

“As Evil-Walkers go, this leather woman is strong but not unbeatable,” says Montrose. “Her name is Lucia, and she works with Sade.”

“Where is she obtaining her energy?” asks Ali.

“We don’t know,” says Jake. “My man Mark has been trying to corner her for three days now.”

“Maybe *your man* isn’t good enough,” says Montrose.

“Would you like to put one of your people on her?” Jake calmly responds.

“My people are busy,” snaps Montrose.

Anna cuts in. “Lucia pounced on Nina last night. They were actually fighting each other. If Mark hadn’t intervened, Lucia would have killed her.”

“Did you teach Nina how to snap neck yet?” asks Montrose, making the motion with his hands.

“They were just reunited tonight, Montrose,” Shen answers, irritated.

“You should shut up Shen, because if you’d followed my advice and trained Nina all along, she wouldn’t be in this mess.”

Anna looks sharply at Montrose. “It was I who made that choice to protect Nina, so fight with me over it. I didn’t want Nina endangered.”

Montrose scowls. “Now we are all are vulnerable to attack. Evil-Walkers such as Lucia have whole armies supporting them.”

A buzz breaks through the group as they react to Montrose’s statement.

“Montrose, *please*,” Shen says. She rises. “We are in this situation together, and we must deal with it and help each other. What is the best procedure to destroy Lucia?”

“How much of a risk do we want to take?” Montrose asks.

“I believe Mark and I can handle her,” says Jake. “I ask permission to work with Anna, and develop a plan.” Anna nods yes.

“Anyone have a problem with that?” asks Ali.

Montrose raises his hand.

“Yes, because I’m the one who’ll be stuck picking up the pieces.”

“Montrose, cooperate,” admonishes Ali.

Ali then turns to all and says “We are now *In Procedure*. Rely on your training, and stay within your positions. No one is to act without authorization.

“Let us bow our heads and pray that God’s Light strengthens and protects us. We fight for that Light. We fight to protect The Light from the enemies of our souls.”

As they silently pray, a brilliantly pure bluish-white Light enters and spreads among them.

Nina is sitting on her bed, playing quite chords on her guitar, trying to stay calm. It is near midnight.

“Hello Nina...I brought a friend with me.” Anna appears with Jake.

“Hi kiddo...my name’s Jake. Really nice to meet ya – I’ve known your grandma for a long time. Once you and I met on the Other Side when you

were young – we saved a kid named Mohammed together – except you probably don't remember.”

“What the hell -” says Nina, alarmed.

“Oh I'm not from hell, I'm with the good guys, and Jewish to boot. In my past life I had a wife, but she was killed – and I became a drunken bum. I died from one too many in 1926, in Chicago Illinois.”

“Jake,” Anna says sternly.

“Sorry Nina,” says Jake. “I'm just a little nervous meeting you here in the flesh, so to speak,” he lifts his ghostly-wavering arms and laughs.

“Anyhow, I'm here to help you. Me and my partner Mark from your side have been tracking that leather witch Lucia for a few days now, and we're gonna try to nail her butt TO-night,” he says.

“Jake, slow down,” says Anna.

“Granma, I'm scared. You never said anything about past lives.”

“Because past lives are *supremely* unimportant right now,” says Anna, looking sharply at Jake. “We have a bad situation approaching. Jake, leave us alone please. *Por favor.*”

Jake looks troubled but disappears, saying “Ok...sorry, sorry.”

“What's going on, Granma?”

Anna is upset. “Nina...mi nieta, I wish I could have returned under different circumstances. I wanted time...time to tell you of the beauty and mystery of the Star of Life, time to remember, time to love.”

She motions for Nina to sit next to her.

“What's going to happen tonight when I go to sleep, Granma?”

“We're going to wait and see if Lucia comes looking for you. We'll protect you. Jake will be with me, as will the man you met last night. His name is Mark.”

“*He’ll* be here?” asks Nina.

“Yes – he’ll be here,” answers Anna. “He works with Jake.”

“What do I do if Lucia shows up?”

“Concentrate, focus and notice details. Protect yourself, but do *not* attack her, because you are NOT trained to fight, and it is NOT your position. She may pretend to be someone else from your life. If you look closely you’ll see her dirty light. Stand your ground, but do not advance alone or you’ll become the mourned fool, and you’ll endanger all others. Be calm but alert. Breathe deeply, remembering that the mind controls the body but breathing controls the mind.”

She looks Nina in the eyes. “I’ll stay with you until you fall asleep.”

Nina quietly prepares for bed. After pulling up the covers, she says “Sing for me Granma.”

Anna sings softly, beautifully, the lullaby from Nina’s childhood.

Nina sleeps...fog...low buzzing in the near distance...sudden flashes of memories...sense of floating...bursts of strange foggy light...Nina sees someone approaching, then hears her mother’s voice: “Nina, it’s me, your mother, I’ve missed you for so long.”

An opening forms a short distance from Nina. She remembers her grandmother’s warning about pretenders. “Concentrate, focus, notice details,” she repeats to herself.

She looks into the opening and sees her mother’s form, beckoning to her: “Come walk with me a little while.”

Nina resists a strong, dreamlike curiosity to go to her mother. She looks closer and notices bloodshot eyes. She reverses the picture, and catches a glimpse of Lucia’s form behind the image of her mother.

“Come to me Nina.”

“You come to me, Mommy.”

“I can’t, Nina...come to your mother.”

Anna appears next to Nina, and calls out to Lucia: “How nice to see my daughter-in-law again.”

Lucia approaches, still with Nina’s mother’s false image, and says “Come with me, Nina, come talk with me.”

Several hooded men appear behind her.

“These are my friends.”

“And these are mine,” says Anna.

Jake and Mark appear.

“Well well, what do we have here?” asks Lucia, dropping her false form. “Fatso Jew and his altar boy.”

“I *have* put on a little weight, Lucia” says Jake, feigning humility but deliberately saying her name.

Lucia looks at Mark. “Hey little faggot, your daddy says hello.”

Jake holds Mark back.

“See ya later, jerk boys,” says Lucia as she backs into the opening. It closes.

Jake looks at Anna. “It’s gonna be a long night. You stay here with Nina. Mark and I will scout around. I have an idea.” They disappear.

“It *wasn’t* my mother,” says Nina.

“Did you want it to be her?” asks Anna. “Because whatever your

weakness is, the enemies of our souls will use it to lure you into their power and control.”

Lucia returns to the lower Whirlwind with the EOs, and stands in front of Sade and several others.

“Why have you returned with nothing?” snarls Sade. “We give you energy so you can return it. Yet you bring back *nothing*.”

“I’m working on something good, Master. I need help,” says Lucia.

“What something good?” asks Sade suspiciously.

“Four white-lighters, two dead, two living, including Anna and the fat Jew.”

Sade’s eyes go wide. He speaks low but forcefully. “Listen carefully. They must be destroyed. If you have the chance to kill them, kill them. The woman is an old enemy. She must be destroyed before our masters’ plan can proceed.”

They are interrupted by the entry of another EO. “Someone’s snooping above us.”

“Fucking white-lighters...show us who it is,” snaps Sade.

The EO, through telepathy, is able to channel the image of Mark drifting above the Whirlwind, calling for his father.

Lucia exclaims “That’s one of them – the fat Jew’s altar boy, looking for his daddy.”

“Do we have his father?” asks Sade.

“No – he was destroyed years ago.”

“Well then, I’ll be his daddy tonight.”

Mark is drifting in Dream-Training, just above the Whirlwind, trying to lure Lucia out.

Sade appears; he has read Mark’s mind, and taken on the image of his father.

“Hello Mark, it’s daddy,” says Sade. “Come to me – come be with me. It’s nice in here but I miss you terribly. I’m *so sorry* for how badly I treated you when I was alive. I’m different now. I want to make it up to you.”

Mark moves closer, almost deceived by the image of his father, yet subconsciously repeating to himself it’s only Lucia. He steadies for the fight to come. “Come take my hand, Daddy.”

Sade reaches forward. “Come here, my son...my son-of-a-” He grabs Mark’s arm and quickly wraps him in a bear hug.

Mark is shocked by Sade’s strength.

Jake and a group of Liners move toward Mark, but at the same moment EOs move forward to protect Sade.

Mark tries to wrestle, but Sade quickly dominates. He places Mark in a headlock as his army moves around him.

“MARK,” yells Jake.

“Hello fat Jew,” Sade taunts Jake. “I have your altar boy. Shame on you for trying to deceive us. Now if you’re good, I may give him back to you – IN A THOUSAND YEARS!”

He laughs harshly; he and his army descends the Whirlwind with Mark.

Breathless and near-breaking, Jake returns to Anna and Nina.

“I have a big problem. I tried to use Mark as a decoy to lure Lucia out of the Whirlwind – but I lured more than I thought - I lured Sade - and -”

“And?” asks Anna.

“And he trapped Mark. He took him down the Whirlwind,” says Jake, highly distressed.

“Oh NO,” says Anna. “Should we call Montrose?”

“No...yes,” says Jake weakly.

“Montrose - Montrose -” Anna sends out the telepathic call. He appears.

“Problems?” he asks.

“Big problems,” answers Jake. “I tried to run Mark above the Whirlwind as a decoy, but Sade caught him.”

“And where is Mark now?” asks Montrose.

“With the EOs down the Whirlwind,” Jake barely whispers.

“Now listen to me,” says Montrose in a low, firm voice. “It is too dangerous to send anyone down there for him. We cannot afford to lose any more. Consider Mark destroyed, a sacrifice – and consider yourself stupid for trying this stunt against such a powerful enemy in his own backyard.”

He looks directly at Jake.

“You are such a fool.”

“I am,” admits Jake, chin trembling.

“What can we do?” asks Anna.

“*Nothing*,” says Montrose. “Chalk it up to experience. Let it go. And don’t say I didn’t warn you.” He leaves.

“Anna, I can’t let it go,” says Jake.

“I know,” says Anna.

“Why don’t you use me as a lure?” asks Nina.

Anna and Jake both turn to her, and say at the same time “No.”

Nina persists. "I owe him one. All we need is a plan."

"They're too strong – you can't overpower them," says Anna.

"The Whirlwind is too dangerous, and you don't know how to fight yet," adds Jake.

"But I can trick them," Nina argues. "They want me – Lucia wants me – so all I have to do is take advantage of that want. I can draw her to me, if someone has a plan after that."

Jake and Anna are silent. Finally Anna says "There is a way, but it's a long shot and very dangerous. If you die, we all die."

"Let's do it," says Nina.

"Then we must develop a plan – a procedure," says Anna. "You must do *exactly* as we tell you." They talk quietly.

Nina is drifting alone above the Whirlwind. "Lucia, Lucia," she calls.

Lucia surfaces, with other Evil Ones behind her. "Well lookee here, poor little angel girl all alone."

"I want to see my mother," Nina says. "Can you take me to her?"

Lucia looks surprised yet suspicious. "Sure can. Here – eat some of this first."

She pulls an energy-ball from inside herself and throws it at Nina. It grazes off her, but she collapses as if directly hit.

"Damn...pick her up," Lucia orders the EOs.

"But Sade said destroy her," says one.

"Sade loves the pretty ones. He'll want to suck this one's energy out of her. But first he'll go through her memory for information. Lift her up – let's go."

They descend to the Lower Whirlwind, passing flashes of the torturing of lost souls along its many sections. They land on a thick, frosty floor. An opening is created, and they enter.

“What do you bring?” asks Sade. Mark’s body is beside him.

“Something to satisfy your craving, Master,” says Lucia. “This one’s fully charged.”

The EOs throw Nina’s limp body next to Mark.

“Hah – very good, VERY good life-light...pretty too, and the child of someone I hate. What did you do to her?”

Lucia glances at the nearby EOs, then says “I fought her fiercely, as you trained us, and I almost killed her. Then I thought of how you like to suck the energy from the luscious ones, so I brought her to you.”

“Excellent,” Sade says as he embraces her. “Your reward shall be to eat from the source of true life.”

He calls out “Bring sweet Lucia some energy – NOW!”

The EOs pull two dimly-lit souls forward.

“Take their energy as your reward for doing my work. Let it re-charge you and give you eternal life, with access to both sides. DO IT!”

Lucia pounces on the men, one by one, taunting and frightening them before she sucks their remaining light into her. They scream and moan before flickering out. She glows brighter with the energy she took from them.

The terrifying orgy of death is cheered by the crowd that circles them.

Sade glances back and sees Nina at Mark’s side, waking him.

“NO!” he yells, springing forward, but Nina moves quicker. She pulls Mark’s body to her, extends her right arm above her head, and rises, creating an opening in the see-through roof with her fist’s motion.

Upward they fly, as Nina remembers her grandmother's instructions: "Shoot directly up the center of the Whirlwind, fist raised, mind concentrating on our light. Don't look around you. We will be waiting for you at the top, glowing like a fireball. Focus on our light, and head for it."

She sees a distant bright light directly above her.

Lucia grabs Nina's foot from below. Nina breaks free but spins loose from Mark.

He awakens, and kick-boxes Lucia in the head.

Her neck breaks, but remains grotesquely attached to her shoulder.

"You shit!" Lucia screams.

"You don't," Mark says as he pulls her head off her body and flings it.

He looks down and sees Sade approaching with a swarm of EOs.

Nina grabs Mark, again spots the glowing light above her, raises her fist, and continues moving upward. Mark holds to her, raising his fist. They rise to the top of the Whirlwind, where a huge concentration of Guardian Angels glow.

Nina and Mark shoot into its center, and are immediately surrounded by Liners.

"DAMN YOU – DAMN ALL OF YOU," screams Sade as his army stops just below the Liners. Both armies face each other.

"You took one of ours, and we have the right to claim him back," says Jake from the front of the Liners.

"You have *no right* to enter the kingdom of my masters," says Sade.

"Tell your masters to stay away from our people," answers Jake.

"My masters will eat your people alive," Sade snarls.

"That's not a very neighborly attitude," says Jake.

“Shut up fat Jew, or I shall tell you again how I slowly raped and killed your luscious bride and your baby-child inside her,” Sade laughs cruelly.

A shadow crosses Jake’s face, but he holds his composure.

“God tells me to forgive you, so I forgive you. Tell your masters to follow the rule and stay in the Whirlwind, or we ‘ll take action again.”

“And tell your masters to FREEZE IN HELL!” roars Sade.

“Let’s go,” motions Jake, and the glowing mass of Guardian Angels rise through Dream-Training.

Campfire, Upper Dream-Training. Jake, Mark, Anna and Nina are sitting around the comforting embers. Mark is exhausted and bruised, next to Nina.

“We must be careful now,” says Jake. “Lucia is dead, and we invaded the EOs freaking territory to kill her. They will seek revenge.

“Mark, we must increase our training. I will continue your emotional training, but you need extra help with the mind and body.”

“I can handle the mental,” says Anna.

“And Montrose must train him in the physical,” says Jake.

“Crap,” says Mark.

“He’s the best physical trainer in all God’s kingdom, and he’ll make sure you’re trained correctly so he can remind me of how inadequate I am,” says Jake.

“Nina...you must be so confused by all of this,” Mark says.

“Yes and no,” she answers. “Granma showed me how to see when I was really young, and I never forgot.”

“Jake, Nina is vulnerable in the emotional area,” says Anna.

“We all are. I shall train her myself,” answers Jake. “What about the physical?”

“Montrose?” asks Anna.

“Montrose,” agrees Jake. He continues as Nina grimaces.

“And Anna – you must handle Nina’s mental training.”

After a silence, Nina speaks.

“When I wake up, what’s going to happen?”

“It’s Friday, so you’ll go to work,” says Anna. “You’ll probably feel bruised from tonight. We have to watch for negative revenge.”

“No - I mean, who will I see?”

“You’ll see me, Jake and Montrose during the day from time to time, and probably Mark in Dream-Training when you fall asleep.”

Nina looks at Mark. “I’m glad for that. Thanks for taking out Lucia.”

“Thanks for saving my life,” Mark replies, reaching out and touching her hand. “Why did you take the risk?”

“You did the same for me,” she answers.

Later, Anna and Jake are with Montrose in Dream-Training.

“How the hell could you allow Nina to descend into the Whirlwind like that?” Montrose grills Jake and Nina. “You risked her life to save Mark.”

“Who are you to say anything? You’d have sacrificed all of us,” Anna angrily counters.

“We need you to train them in the physical,” says Jake to Montrose. “Anna and I can handle the mental and the emotional, but you must take the physical.”

“If I take them, it will be my way or the highway, understood?” Montrose demands.

“Yes yes,” Jake says. “You know Montrose, you really could use some emotional training yourself. You have a very rough attitude. Forgive me for being so honest.”

Montrose snorts and says “Once a bum, always a bum.”

Just before dawn, Nina dreams of Mark...they are sitting on the small porch of her apartment, facing the river, watching the sun rise, holding each other, surrounded by music she never heard before.

When she awakens, she wonders if the dream was real.

## *Chapter 11*

# Training

Nina sits on her bed, sorting laundry.

Montrose appears.

“I’m here to train you. We can make it easy or we can make it hard.”

“Uh-oh,” says Nina.

He folds his arms.

“Let’s see what kind of shape you’re in. Start with ten push-ups.”

“Up yours,” she says.

“GET ON YOUR FEET!” He pushes her off the bed.

“Get your creepy hands off me,” she yells.

“Then move it NOW!”

“Ok, ok. Stop.”

She rises.

“I want ten push-ups.”

Nina struggles through three before collapsing on the floor. “Damn.”

“We have a *long* way to go,” Montrose says, shaking his head.

Nina bangs her fist.

“Just what I need - my very own trainer from hell.”

Mark is thinking of Nina as he falls asleep. Dreams. He hears Jake’s voice.

“The mind, the body and the emotions, Mark. Let’s start with the emotions.”

Mark enters a dream where he is put into a scenario with a Liner acting the part, and taking the physical form, of his father. As with all dreams, the scenario is entirely believable to the dreamer.

A Liner play-acting his father sits in a rocking chair. “Come here, Mark, come to your father,” the Liner says in his father’s voice.

“NO,” says Mark.

“Why not?” asks the Liner.

“Because of what you did to me.”

“And what was that?”

Mark grows agitated.

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“You can tell me. I already know.”

“I can’t...I can’t...” Mark closes his eyes.

When he finally reopens them, the Liner is gone and Jake is there.

“Mark...you must confront the dark memories buried inside you. You’ve failed to face the memories of your father, and that makes you vulnerable to the Evil Ones. They’ll use your negative memories against you. Why do you block him out?”

“Because of what he did to me,” says Mark.

“Talk about it,” says Jake.

“No,” answers Mark.

Jake shakes his head.

Nina is exercising, with Montrose working out beside her. She is sweating heavily. The clock reads 1 a.m.

She stops. “I can’t do any more,” she says, falling into the nearby couch.

“This is just the beginning, Nina,” he says firmly. “We have a little time to go a long distance. I shall require at least six hours of exercise every day, seven days a week. I shall also require you to completely change your food habits, and eat only healthy fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans, grains, fish, cayenne, cinnamon, turmeric, honey, lemon and very little meat. Junk food, processed sugar and salt are completely forbidden in your diet. You must drink only water and apple cider vinegar. Stay away from plastics, nail polish, and other poisons. Purity of body *means* purity of body.”

He bangs his fist. “If you defy me, I will make your life miserable, trust me.”

Nina sticks out her tongue as he turns away.

Jake and Anna are in Dream-Training.

“What memory is Mark blocking?” asks Anna.

Jake looks down. “It’s hard even for me to talk about it. When he was a kid and I first found him, he was floating out of his body in a kind of suspended animation. He was actually leaving his body.”

Anna’s eyes widen.

“That usually only happens with sexual abuse.”

Jake nods yes, and whispers “By his father, of all people.”

“It doesn’t just happen to girls, Jake.”

“Well, until Mark confronts what happened and moves past it, it’ll be a huge weak spot.”

“For him and all of us,” says Anna.

Nina is sleeping. Dream-Training...she is placed in a scenario where she is sitting at a kitchen table with two children and a husband. In her dream she totally believes this is her family. In truth, they are Liners assigned by Jake to act out those roles.

Her make-believe husband leans across the table and says “I’m working late again tonight.”

“You’ve been working nights a lot lately,” she says.

He backhands her across the mouth.

“Stop complaining, witch.”

Nina gathers the two children and moves them out of the room. Quickly returning, she says “I want to know what’s going on.”

He slaps her again, knocking her out of the chair.

“You have no right to know anything, woman. I’m the man of the house. I pay the bills, I make the decisions, I do *what* I want *when* I want *if* I want.”

He rises.

“Are you having an affair?” she asks.

“Why don’t you use your magical powers to find out?” he answers sarcastically, pushing the table while he rises.

He slams the door as he leaves.

Nina breaks down crying.

Suddenly Jake is at the table. He snaps his fingers, and Nina lifts her head.

“Where am I?” she asks.

“Dream-Training,” answers Jake. “What did you learn from that last scenario?”

“All men suck.”

“No, Nina, not all men, but many of them, and an equal number of woman too. Your world is addicted to power and control.”

“So I shouldn’t get married?”

Jake laughs. “No – no. There are good men out there. But you have to expect most men and women on your side to betray you, to abuse and lose you. If you fall in love with the wrong person, he could eventually turn you into an emotional zombie. And if you reveal your secret knowledge to that kind of person, sooner or later he’ll use it against you. Just don’t ever let the sins of your world bring you down. Always focus on the prize, which is the life you earn *after* you die. Expect people on your side to screw up on you – boyfriends, parents, relatives, co-workers. Believe me, you will rarely be disappointed.”

“Is there such a thing as true love?” asks Nina.

“True love is only true love if it holds the three virtues of purity, sincerity and dedication,” answers Jake. “And when two people make love, if their love holds those three virtues, in Heaven we call it unifying. Nina, it is a sacred act, a holy offering of pure love between two people alone, a sharing of mystical energies dedicated just to each other.”

He pauses before continuing.

“But your world...your world has made love a dirty and ugly word, your world weaponizes it to abuse, control and destroy people.”

“What about Mark?”

“Mark lives and breathes the Twelve Virtues in the Three Areas,” answers Jake, “but you will probably never be with him on your side.”

“*Why?*” Nina asks.

“Because the Guardian Angels are forbidden from directly interfering with events on your side unless it’s a very special exception. Too often in the past our interference has backfired on us. The Evil Ones interfere, but the Guardians do so only in special circumstances. That’s one of the things that sets us apart from the EOs. They interfere with people at every opportunity; we don’t.”

“Does Mark love me?” Nina asks.

“You are *persistent*, Nina. Mark has his own problems, his own situations, and he lives quite a distance away from here -”

“Where?”

“Nina!”

“Is he married?”

“No, but -”

Nina holds up her hand. “Say no more. That’s all I need to know.”

Later, as she walks the railroad tracks next to her apartment, she hears in her mind the same song she heard in her dream...a song of longing.

Anna is talking with Nina in the early morning hours as they sit on her porch along the river. Nina takes notes.

“Unity of mind, body and emotions. Unity for the One, unity for The Light.”

“There is a physics to the Other Side. Thoughts are self-creating realities. Thoughts are *things* on the Other Side.

“When you spin your positive energy, you create a vacuum around the outside of your circle of life-light. Use that vacuum to shield yourself, to trap and destroy the negative energy of the Evil Ones.”

Anna rises, drifts over the river, and spins faster and faster, creating a vacuum of pure light energy around her.

Nina is awed.

Anna returns to the shore. For a time they are silent, before Anna continues.

“Souls have their own bodies, their own biology. Good souls have positive form and substance. Evil souls have negative form and substance. The EOs’ biology is different from ours. Theirs is a slimy reflection of the biology of your side, ours is conscious, pure particles of light constituting thoughts, memories. Memories are all we have...that’s why it’s so important to build good, clean memories. *Recuerdos son todo* – memories are everything.

“The Evil Ones depend mostly on trickery to win their battles. Their great weapon is fear, but usually first they’ll try to befriend those they wish to control. They do this by telepathically reading the person’s memories, fantasies and weaknesses, and then playing to them. They will often be the voice inside you that justifies your resentments or complaints about your world. These kind of negative thoughts eventually break you down, like water dripping on stone over many years. The Guardian Angels must sit back and watch...we are rarely allowed to interfere.”

“Why?” asks Nina. “Why shouldn’t the Guardians interfere to save a sick child from dying, or a tragic accident from happening, or a war from killing innocent people, or some poor soul from committing suicide?”

“Because in the past when we have tried to interfere, the world has refused to listen, and instead has blamed God for what people have done. Because if we directly help a person once, but then did not help the next time, that person would act like a spoiled, ungrateful child, and turn against

God. Because if we helped you but couldn't help your neighbor, he would resent us. And because the real war is *not* on your side, but the Other Side."

Anna continues. "Your side looks at death as an end to life. Death is not death at all, because the real you, which is your soul, carries on and keeps going. *La muerto no es la muerte*. That is what the Guardian Angels focus on, instead of doing favors and dog tricks for your side, trying to prove ourselves to those who don't truly believe anyhow. It doesn't matter what people believe, it only matters what they say and do, and whether they act with compassion. There are atheists in Heaven and religious leaders in hell. Compassion is the key to entering Heaven. *Compasión*."

"But why are the Evil Ones allowed to interfere?" Nina asks.

"*Allowed?*" Anna answers with indignation. "We don't *allow* them, they just do it. We have a tough enough time keeping them under control on the Other Side. They have grown very strong as a group during the past few centuries. They don't ask permission.

"And remember this well: unless you give the Evil Ones an opening through stress, anger and depression, through impure lovemaking or perverted fantasies, or through blind curiosity such as a dumb innocent person playing with an Ouija Board or trying other weird tricks, the EOs cannot do anything to you. They cannot channel in on you unless you give them an opportunity. They cannot connect. *That's* what makes them angry. They want easier access to your side. Right now it takes two to tango. They want to be able to tango at will."

The brisk November wind sweeps along the river. Nina pulls her coat closer.

"I have a dumb question," she says.

"The only dumb question is the one you don't ask," Anna responds.

“Ok...how come everyone on the Other Side speaks the same language?”

Anna laughs. “They don’t. What you hear over there is actually mental telepathy – thoughts being transmitted – and it sounds like the same language to you.”

“I have another one. What’s Jake’s real story?”

Anna pauses.

“He was just a normal person with a good job, living in Chicago in the 1920s. But he fell in love with a very special Jewish woman: Jennifer. She had the white light, *la luz blanca*. She could see the unseen, as do you and I, and she was very pure. The Evil Ones killed her when she was pregnant with their first child. They caught her off-guard in Dream-Training, and directly contaminated her.

“That’s when Jake lost it...he became an alcoholic, a bum. He was consumed by her memory, by her loss. When he died, oh what a struggle there was to keep him away from the Evil Ones. They wanted Jake, because he’s a natural genius at psychology, and he knows how to talk to people. We need that in Limbo – desperately. Fortunately, we were able to rescue him before the EOs could lure him away. *Gracias a Dios*.”

Cold wind. They silently watch the small waves roll into the shore.

“And Sade - believe it or not, Sade was a good, generous man on your side. He was very wealthy, and shared much of his money with the poor. But he was violently killed on your side by someone he tried to help, and when the Evil Ones took hold of him in Transition, they turned him. They convinced him he was wronged, that he deserved to return to the living.”

Anna turns to Nina.

“This is a deadly serious game, Nina. This is the beginning of the end of things as they are. The great battle is starting *now* on the Other Side. Both

the Guardian Angels and the Evil Ones are corralling their forces, preparing for the war ahead. *Nothing* is safe, and *nothing* is predetermined, so don't believe any fortunetellers or apocalyptic rapture-predictors. There are no predictions, only warnings. Destiny is what we decide to do."

Mark and Montrose are furiously exercising in Upper Dream-Training, performing swift, yoga-like stances.

Montrose stops, and says "Keep exercising as I speak.

"Since you cannot see me on your side, we will drill these stances every night while you sleep. Because you are a special case, we will allow you to remember what happens in Dream-Training after you awaken. You'll be expected to repeat these exercises every night on your side. Tell no one on your side about any of this. The EOs have their ways of finding out information. Do I make myself clear?"

Mark shouts yes while working through the stances.

Montrose continues.

"Your job as a warehouse worker keeps you in good shape, and it'll be easy for you to build the reserve of strength you'll need during times of great struggle. Once you learn the stances, I'll teach you how to destroy the enemies of our souls with one blow to the neck, to fear no adversary, to walk with courage and strength through the unknown."

That night Nina and Mark are brought together in Dream-Training, along with Jake, Montrose and Anna.

"We need to move some souls out of Limbo," says Montrose. "It's getting too crowded, and we have to ease the pressure."

They enter Limbo. Wordlessly, Nina and Mark join hands and move among the souls. Because their life-light is so bright, the souls are awed and attracted to them.

“Follow us,” Mark calls out repeatedly.

Nina begins to sing “Amazing Grace,” and others join in.

An opening forms, and a large number of souls move into Heaven as Mark and Nina guide them along without entering themselves.

“Those two make an excellent team,” comments Jake.

Thanksgiving Eve, November. Barren trees, dry leaves.

Montrose and Nina are exercising in a schoolyard. Across a ballfield, they see a young woman trudging along the tree line, eyes cast downward.

Nina spots an Evil One near the woman, palms pointing toward her. He wears a dirty t-shirt and ripped jeans, and has long, stringy hair. The woman cannot see him, because he is dead.

“Look away,” Montrose whispers sharply to Nina, barely glancing at the unfolding scene. “Don’t show you know. Keep exercising. Do not draw attention to yourself. Do not channel in on him. If he identifies us he’ll call his friends, and that’s a fight we don’t want right now.”

“What’s going on?” asks Nina quietly, pretending to turn her attention to her exercises.

“She’s depressed, probably because of a stupid heartbreak. She obviously can’t see the EO, and she’s given him the perfect opportunity to channel into her. He’s working on her, sucking energy out of her through telepathy, making his thoughts her thoughts. She’ll probably kill herself in a few hours.”

“Why can’t I just go snap his neck?” asks Nina, alarmed.

“NO – absolutely not!” Montrose hisses lowly. “EOs *never* work alone – he has backups – and your interference would bring the hounds of hell down on us. We would be identified, and could become the mourned fools for getting ourselves into such a mess. Besides, if you killed him they’d just replace him with another, and she’d commit suicide tomorrow instead of tonight.”

“Why can’t I tell her what’s really happening?” she whispers, still exercising.

“Stupid question,” says Montrose. “First, she’d think you’re crazy. How could you explain *any* of this without people thinking you’re nuts? Or haven’t you learned that already? Second, you are NOT to interfere with the lives of others unless you are instructed to do so, for your safety as well as the safety of those around you. We pick our battles carefully. Our procedures are followed. *No one* is allowed to act alone. It endangers *everyone*, including your grandmother and Mark. You could get us all killed trying to be the superhero.

*Do I make myself clear?”*

Nina looks into his eyes, and sees anger mixed with overwhelming anxiety.

She nods yes.

Late afternoon dissolves into evening as the sun torches the skyline.

Thanksgiving.

Anna and Nina are at the table. Anna offers a prayer.

“Thank you God for all you give us. May we always serve your cause, the cause of the good, the cause of the children.

“We are in this world but not of it. We thank you for giving us the truths of the heart, for truth is our freedom. Thank you for this food to nourish our bodies, and may The Light you give us always nourish our souls.”

“That was beautiful,” says Nina as she begins to eat.

“We have so much to be thankful for, especially for being reunited,” says Anna.

“I missed you terribly,” says Nina, “more than I miss Mom and Dad.”

She puts down her fork.

“Granma, did they make it to Heaven after they died?”

“You’re not allowed to ask such questions, Nina.”

Seeing Nina’s eyes fall, she says softly “I’m sorry... nearly everyone *does* make it home, although some take much longer than others because they have to go through intense training. But we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of too much information. What’s important is not the past, but today, the present – what we do with what we have. Most of us are eventually reunited in Heaven with those we love.”

“Why didn’t you ever marry, Granma?”

Anna pauses. “I wanted a child, but I didn’t want a husband. It’s as simple as that. Once I was pregnant with your father I decided to move from Colombia to the Hudson Valley, to get away.”

“Did it bother you that my mother forbade me and my father from speaking Spanish?”

“No, it never bothered me, because unlike your mother I am not a racist. All nationalities are just an illusion anyway, just a source of false pride. In truth we are all God’s children. The only real nationalities are those of good and evil. Our personal histories mean nothing.”

Nina pauses to consider Anna's words. Then she says "I wonder if I'll ever find a good husband."

"I wish you didn't feel so alone, Nina."

"Who's ever gonna want to live with me? Who wouldn't think I was crazy, as my mother always said."

She then angrily asks "Why can't I be with Mark on this side, Granma?"

"He doesn't live around here."

"Why can't you and Jake bring me to him?"

"We are forbidden from directly interfering in people's lives, because it doesn't work in the long run. Plus, Montrose and the Elders believe it would break your discipline and endanger us all."

"Do *you* believe that, Granma?"

"Yes Nina, I do. We sense something big going on...the Evil Ones are working on a plan, and we must figure it out and take it apart. Learn first. Do you think you love Mark?"

"Yes...I do...I feel something powerful moving deep inside me, something I never felt before...but there's things I don't understand about him."

"Such as?"

"He's so – *obedient* with Montrose."

Anna laughs. "Probably because he's scared. When Mark ran into Sade, he was overwhelmed by Sade's immense strength and power. That shocked him. You too must focus, and listen to Montrose. He's training you and Mark to survive *any* attack."

"I know...it's ridiculous. If the Guardians capture a low-level EO, Montrose brings him to us to destroy." Nina makes the snap-neck gesture. "Ugh. I hate ripping their heads off."

"It's the only way that works. Be careful of contamination."

“I know, I know – we shield ourselves. Montrose has us doing the shielding stances over and over for hours.”

“He’s drilling them into you, and making them instinctive. Someday they may save your life.”

“Granma...sometimes it’s so overwhelming.”

“It’s still so new for you,” Anna says. “Twenty-two days ago you knew nothing about the Other Side. Remember mi nieta, you can always walk away from this, and we will do all we can to protect you in your sleep.”

Nina shakes her head no.

“I always wanted to know the truth about life, and now I’m finding out. I love you, I love the good, and I thank God for bringing you back to me.”

Montrose addresses Mark in Dream-Training. Jake listens.

“Because the white light is so pure inside you, you have the ability to heal people if you do it correctly. It won’t work for every ailment, especially in the advanced stages of your so-called cancers. But if you do it right, it may work. There are many healing techniques; we will teach you only this one, because it is the safest for you in your position.

“You first close your eyes and imagine God’s pure Light flowing through every cell in your body, like invisible rain. You may thank God, or repeat one of the good chants or prayers from *any* religion on your side. I prefer the *Our Father*, but it doesn’t matter as long as your intent is pure.

“You fill your mind solely with the intent of what you are about to do; if you are intending to help a sick person, think only of that person’s well-being. Any extra thoughts or distractions that enter your mind will block The Light. These include thoughts of benefits that will happen if you help that person, or thoughts of the presence of anyone else in the room, or

thoughts of fighting evil. Your intentions must only be for the good of the person. *No distractions.*

“You then place your hands gently – very gently – on certain spots on the person’s body such as their forehead, the middle of their chest, their palms and their sides. If your intent is pure, God’s pure Light will *use* you as a vehicle to deliver Light to the person you are trying to heal. You allow yourself to be the middle-man for that healing Light; you become the conduit, the channel. The Light is not from you, but comes through you. It gives the person’s body the strength to fight back.”

“I always thought faith-healing was a phony-preacher thing,” says Mark.

“Much if it is,” answers Jake. “But sometimes, say for example if you have a whole stadium full of good people praying, sometimes the power of all that Light flowing together actually works, even if the preacher’s a fraud.

“There are other forms of healing that we will not teach you, because they’re dangerous. There are healers that can actually suck the illness from the victim, then vomit it out. It can kill you if you do it incorrectly.”

“Speaking of healing,” says Montrose, “how are we ever going to heal the problem with your father’s memory?” He looks directly at Mark.

“Well?” asks Jake.

“I don’t – I don’t want to talk about -”

Montrose cuts him off. “You *must* talk about it. Your weakness makes us all vulnerable, including Nina. The EOs use it against you.”

Mark appears disturbed at the mention of Nina. He looks down, and after a few moments begins to speak.

“I know you both are aware my father molested me for a long time. What you don’t know is how he did it. He...he tricked me...he was so nice about it, so loving, so reassuring...his love was his weapon...he made me believe it

was normal...he started in on me when I was just a kid...and he did it right up until he and my mother died in that car accident, when I was nine...I cried at their funeral...I loved him. Why did I love him?"

Jake takes a deep breath before speaking.

"We *did* know he was tricking your heart, Mark. That's why we came to you when you were so young...we knew everything."

Mark's eyes grew wide. "Why didn't you stop him?"

"We can't. We're not allowed. How could we save one person without saving everyone? Which kids would you select if you had to make the choice? What of those not saved from attack? Should they and their families hate God for helping you but not them?"

Montrose reaches for Mark's hand, and looks him straight in the eyes. "Listen to me carefully. Your world is full of *all kinds* of sex-crazy men and women who do *all kinds* of evil things to kids and innocent people. How would you judge their victims, Mark? Would you say they did something to deserve it? Would you say they should feel ashamed for being tricked by their seducer or overpowered by their rapist? Should they be punished?"

"No."

"*Then why do you punish yourself?*" Montrose asks almost angrily, releasing Mark's hand.

"It's not as confusing or complicated as you think it is," Jake quickly soothes. "It happens every day in your world. It's encouraged by the EOs when they play with people's fantasies. It's part of their plan to ruin the world. That's what we fight against, every day and night. God is your real father, not that sperm-donor who made you call him dad while he molested you. We fight to protect all children from abuse. And we live for the day when sex is not some dirty, perverted, abusive and violent act, but rather

what God intended, a pure and sacred unifying of two people in love. *True* love, such as what you will someday feel for the person you love.”

For once, Montrose listens quietly as Jake continues.

“Mark, what happened to you *led us* to you. That’s a very good thing that came from a very bad thing. We saved you from it, you survived it, but there are many other souls who are crippled or ruined by it.”

“Wrong Jake,” says Montrose, sharply interrupting. “We don’t *know* whether Mark has survived his abuse. The EOs are using it against him, and they could kill us all if they can get inside his head and manipulate his shame.”

Mark is shaken by Montrose’s words, and looks down.

Mid-December, 1990. Nina and Danielle are hanging Holiday decorations in Nina’s apartment. Anna sits quietly in the corner; Danielle cannot see her.

Over the radio comes news of the buildup of American forces on the Kuwaiti border.

“So Danielle, do you believe in ghosts?” asks Nina mischievously.

“Stop, Nina.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“Nothing.”

Nina turns to her grandmother, who appears alarmed.

“Do something to show Danielle you’re here.”

Unheard by Danielle, Anna angrily whispers “Absolutely not.”

“C’mon, something simple...I want Danielle to know it’s real.”

Danielle explodes.

“That’s it, Nina, I’m leaving. I don’t want any part of this craziness.”

Danielle throws down the decorations, grabs her coat, and slams the door on the way out.

Nina is shocked, but Anna furious.

“I told you we don’t do dog tricks, Nina. I did those things last time to prove to *you*, not her, that you weren’t going crazy. Your world would burn you at the stake for what you just asked me to do. You took your gift for granted; you *abused* your gift.”

Nina is ashamed.

“I’m so sorry, Granma...I am so sorry.”

Dream-Training. Nina and Mark are drilled in a strenuous series of stances by Montrose.

Mark is compliant, but Nina resists.

“I ain’t doing it again,” she says after a particularly tough series of stances.

“Again,” Montrose says.

“Screw you.”

“Twice again.”

“*Screw you twice again,*” yells Nina.

Montrose pushes her down.

“Ugh...keep your gross hands off me,” she cries.

“You WILL do what I command.”

“Ok, ok.” She resumes the stances as he folds his arms in front of her.

“We have all night,” he says, “and I’ll be back tomorrow night after you fall asleep.”

Nina thumbs her mouth at him and says “I’ll bake you a cake.”

Mark, who has been trying to continue his stances, finally breaks concentration and bursts out laughing.

Nina is surprised, and smiles broadly at Mark.

Montrose is not amused.

Jake appears in Nina's apartment dressed as Santa.

"HO – HO –HO, Merry Christmas Eve," he says.

"I thought you were Jewish," she laughs.

"Jews for Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, Krishna, Buddha and the rest of all the good ones. God sent many of his children to help us. Anyway, Jesus was *very* Jewish, and I'm betting if he ever comes back it'll be to a synagogue before a church. What made Jesus interesting was what happened after he died...he actually *did* descend into Hell as the New Testament hints, and he turned everything upside down. He took a few breaks from the battle and returned to physical life, which is what your side celebrates at Easter and 40 days after. He and his followers organized the system as it is right now. He figured out how to set up the borders with Liners. Before him, the Other Side was just one big sloppy Dream-Training, with no boundaries...it was a *mess* they called Hades, among other names."

"Do you think Jesus is coming back?"

"Nobody outside Heaven knows the mind of Jesus, or God for that matter. It would surprise the world to know Jesus has many brothers and sisters of *all* good faiths, not just so-called Christians. I can only imagine how he and the others feel about people killing people in the name of their religions. The Evil Ones just *love* that about your side.

"The Guardians know that if Jesus or any of the other great ones ever do emerge from Heaven, they're vulnerable to attack by the EOs. Jesus and the

others wait their time. Meanwhile, if we lose and the EO's succeed, which is the *real* end of the world, you side won't even notice at first. That is, until you pray for God's healing Light and nothing happens because the Light is cut-off or destroyed. Then when you die and try to get into Heaven, *surprise*, instead you're pushed into the hands of the EOs and their freaking torture chambers. And wait'll you see the babies born to your world if the Evil Ones win. The EOs would have the power to send their own evil souls back to life on your side."

"Ok Jake, enough doom and gloom, tell me something interesting such as – what's Mark doing right now?"

"I ain't supposed to tell you such things," he laughs, waving his finger.

"Says who?"

"Says Montrose, the original Scrooge."

"So tell me. It'd be a great Christmas present."

He hesitates, then with a twinkle in his eyes begins.

"Mark is in his apartment right now...he lives alone...he's Christian, so he has the Christmas Tree up...his sister Katie and her kids sent presents for him under the tree."

"What about his parents?"

"Both are dead. They died in a car accident when he was nine and Katie was five. The kids were separated; he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle, and Katie was adopted by an Amish family.

"Does he have a girlfriend?"

"Not right now."

"Is he gay?"

Jake frowns.

“Nina, what a terrible question. We are *all* homo *and* heterosexual. It’s not so black and white.”

“But some are more homo than hetero.”

“And because the world wrongly thinks this is a perversion, they must suffer. That is *not* what Jesus wanted,” says Jake. “Perversion has nothing to do with sexual orientation.”

“Ok, ok, I just wanted to –“

“Mark’s hetero, if you must know,” Jake says. “He just has to find the right woman.”

“Is it me?” she asks.

“Maybe, maybe, gotta go now,” he says, “big parties on the Other Side. Merry Hanukkah!” He disappears.

Nina looks outside her window at the frozen river. The same song of longing she heard in her dream fills her mind.

She picks up her guitar and hums the melody as she plays.

Late Christmas night, Montrose, Mark and Nina in Upper Dream-Training, campfire blazing, stars shining through the perfect sky.

Montrose speaks.

“In the days to follow, look in the night sky for the completion of a clear, full ring around the moon. The angels create that ring at some point during the 12 days immediately following Christmas, to celebrate Jesus’s birth. They call it the Christmas Ring, and it’s a sign of our unity. Look for it every Christmas season; it’s a sign of hope.

“This man Jesus was very good, but many of his so-called Christian followers have been terrible. Jesus came to us too, in South America. We

call him the Pure Light. I have seen him once, from a long distance...there is such a strong Light around him and his mother Mary.”

“What’s Mary like?” asks Nina.

“Bitter, but hopeful always. She comes many times to leave signs on your side, at great risk to herself. The Evil Ones place the highest priority on killing her and those with her. Still the world does not listen. Mary is very sad. She sees the thousands of children that die every day on your side. She knows that your side has become a death factory for children. She sees people killing each other in the name of their religions. She knows the EOs are growing stronger. She cries for every lost child.”

“Are abortions wrong?” asks Nina.

“Yes,” says Montrose, “but so is warfare, so is starving the poor, so is the death penalty, and your society doesn’t care about that either, because it doesn’t understand that ALL life is sacred.”

“Is it true what some say that you can’t go to Heaven unless you accept Jesus as your savior?”

Montrose laughs harshly. “Of course not. That’s just another form of discrimination your side is so expert at cultivating. Suppose your parents were killed by so-called Christians – you’d grow up hating Christianity. Yet if you lived a good life and were compassionate toward others, that’s all that matters. After you’d die, you’d have time enough to discover the real Jesus once you reach Limbo.”

He pauses, then speaks directly to Nina and Mark.

“Jesus and his allies in Heaven are horrified by the atrocities that have been committed in their names.”

“We must fight for the children,” Mark quietly intones.

“It’s a fight we may not win,” says Montrose. “There are some among the Elders who believe we should just shut down the whole system, isolate Heaven for those who have already earned it, and let the rest go to the Whirlwind before they drag Heaven down with them. Much if your side is already lost, except for the children and maybe ten or twenty percent of the adults. Just open your eyes and look at what the world is doing to your kids. It’s preparing them for the Whirlwind. Look at the prejudices and perversions, the heartlessness and hate in your world. Look at the lack of compassion, which is the one thing God wants from all of us. There are some among the Guardian Angels who believe your side is not worth saving.”

Nina angrily responds “Oh that’s great. The EOs would *celebrate* if the Guardians sealed up Heaven and walked away. That would give the EOs full and total control over the living AND the Other Side.”

Montrose is exasperated. “The EOs already almost have full control of your side right now, and their numbers far exceed ours. They’re all geared up for big battles in the three upcoming reflective years – 1991, 2002 and 2020. I don’t think your side’ll make it.”

Mark is not listening to their argument. His eyes are closed and his hands in prayerful position.

“Fight for the sake of the children,” he whispers.

Suddenly his soul brightens: The Light comes through him.

Sacred silence; both Nina and Montrose are awed by what they see next.

The wavering image of a mother holding a newborn child appears in the distance, standing in the rays from same Light pouring through Mark.

The mother says “Hope for the children. Teach them to pray.”

A haunting flute song fills the air. A circle of angels surrounds the moon.

Mark reaches for Nina's hand.

"Merry Christmas," he whispers, then leans over and kisses her on the cheek.

Early New Year's Eve, December 31, 1990, Nina's apartment.

"It's a sacred tradition on our side for the Guardians to deliver a message to those we love on both sides every New Year's Eve," she tells Nina. "I want you to write down what I'm saying in your notebook."

Nina writes as Anna dictates:

*1991, the reflective year of itself. All dreams reflect reality as reality in depth reflects the most hidden of our dreams. Many dreams go unreached through self-doubt, lack of patience, arrogance, and the worst, inability to truly and totally believe in oneself.*

*Heart and soul, although different, are the same, the true bearers of many grounds. Is it the love in the heart that goes on, or the faith in the soul? Which is it? Why is it? Are they two or reflective of one?*

*The bitter silence in life is the joyous music in death. This is hard for those who reach but can't touch to understand.*

*The legacy of Heaven lives within one's self. One must go on to pass on to the true meaning of the word.*

*Give relentlessly, enlighten continuously, and believe entirely. This is the true foundation from which to build your own legacy of strength, dedication, love and perseverance. With this, your legacy will withstand time unscathed, non-transformed sound.*

*The love you hold back in this life is the pain you feel in the next life, so give love every day to yourself and those around you.*

*Through this year of decisions, decide in the best interest, perform in your own truest state, and believe purely in yourself. The rest will fall randomly but accurately in the moments of perfected opportunity, and so be it.*

*The real tapestry of life belongs to those who have seen the unseen. Continue to see, for true reality is the reflection of one's heart's capacity.*

“Where’s the party” interrupts Jake. He’s wearing a top hat and tuxedo, and waving a bottle.

Nina is startled and Anna annoyed.

“They drink on the Other Side?” asks Nina.

Jake answers “Dearie, you have no idea how much fun it is to be with the good guys. When *we* eat, drink and are merry, it’s the best party in the universe.”

“Jake,” admonishes Anna.

“Just a little mirth, sweetie,” he kisses Anna on the cheek. “Haa-pee New Year!” he staggers.

“I have a New Year’s resolution, Jake,” says Nina.

“What’s that?”

“To meet Mark in the flesh!”

“Nina!” says Anna.

Jake cuts her off.

“Oh Anna, let her go. How can you stand in the way of true love?”

“We are forbidden from interfering,” says Anna. “*Esta prohibido.*”

“We’re interfering by blocking them,” Jake responds. “They met, they saved each others’ lives, she loves him and he loves her.”

“He loves me?” exclaims Nina.

“Jake!” Anna warns, but Jake blurts out “Mark loves *only* you, and that’s all I’m saying.”

He then pretends to zip his mouth, saying “Zip zip, my lips are sealed. HAA-PEE NEW YEAR!”

He disappears, leaving Anna scowling but Nina grinning.

Mark and Montrose are alone by a campfire in Dream-Training, New Year’s Day, 1991.

“You’ve surprised me, Mark. You’re strong and determined, and you follow the Way of the Good. You make a fine Warrior.”

“Montrose....I want to be with Nina.”

Montrose smiles, stirring the fire. “She’s a tough woman, I warn you. Tough but fair, like her grandmother.”

Then turning serious, he says “But now is not the time, Mark. We sense trouble dead ahead, and we don’t know where it’s coming from or where it will be directed. This is no time to be tangling with romance. It’s too dangerous. One bad night between you two, one serious disagreement, and the Evil Ones could jump you both and perhaps destroy us all. The time will come if it is meant to be. Now is not that time.”

“I want to be with her,” Mark persists.

“Then make yourself strong and pure for the time that may come with her.”

January 1991: cold, snow, ice, dark troublesome skies.

“You can see the pressure building,” Anna tells Nina as she points toward the growing cloud formations. “You must learn to read the sky, because in

reflective years such as 1991 you can sometimes see what is happening on the Other Side. It's like a big TV screen. The action is not happening in the sky, but is reflected in the sky.

“See how both sides are lining up?” She points toward the clearly distinct lines of black and white clouds. “That’s a reflection of the lineup of the forces of good and evil just above the border of the Whirlwind and Dream-Training right now. Look for openings, look for places we are vulnerable, and places the EOs are building strength.”

Dream-Training. Jake teaches Mark and Nina the nature of direct and indirect contamination by the Evil Ones.

“The EOs rarely but effectively use these two weapons. It’s very difficult for them to do, and it leaves them vulnerable; they know we’ll destroy them if we catch them trying. That’s why Sade didn’t attempt either weapon when he killed Anna’s body back in 1975. He didn’t want to risk his own survival.

“As the system is now, the EOs can only contaminate those who are connected to both sides. This includes people with the white light, such as yourselves. It also includes drones and breeders on your side. And occasionally, the EOs can channel in on an innocent person trying to connect with the Other Side. That’s why true mediums on your side will always have a spirit guide or warrior angel protecting them. Shielding people against contamination by the EOs is one of our most important jobs, along with guiding the new dead into Heaven and escorting souls into birth in your side.

“So let’s talk first about indirect contamination. There are small pockets of space in each person’s body, and trained Evil Ones can pass into that space and deposit a small amount of negative material, which on your sides

appears to be a pus-like substance. The negative material acts like a magnet for the EOs, making it easy for them to focus on that person especially when sleeping, fantasizing or just day-dreaming. If enough negative material is deposited inside a person, he or she will die.”

Jake pauses, letting his words sink in before continuing.

“Direct contamination is even worse, and even rarer. Instead of depositing negative material, the Evil Ones actually enter the body of the targeted person. This is very difficult and dangerous for them to do, because of the huge difference between their negative energy and a normal person’s positive life-light. The EOs will rarely try this. On your side you call it demonic possession, but it is *very different* from what’s portrayed in your horror movies. Usually the person experiencing direct contamination dies within a matter of days.”

Mark looks intently at Jake. “Have you ever known anyone directly contaminated?”

Jake slowly, sadly nods yes. “My wife Jennifer.”

Montrose is relentless in his physical training of Nina and Mark. Six to eight hours per day he forces them to perform the stances, to jog in place, and to repeat the Twelve Virtues in the Three Areas.

“You’re not truly exercising until you break sweat,” he yells at Nina. “If you break sweat at least once a day you’ll never be sick, because it removes the toxins from your body.”

“That’s disgusting – I hate sweat,” says Nina.

“Don’t hate anything – don’t even use that word – it creates negative energy,” says Montrose.

Anna is with Nina in her apartment, and has her write in her notebook a section called “The Elements.”

*There are the Weather Elements (rain, wind, snow), the Earth Elements (water, sky, sun, sunrise, sunset, landscapes), the Turmoil Elements (fire, hail, lightning, storm, earthquakes), the Emotional Elements (confusion, disillusion, rejection, anger, calmness, love, compassion, understanding), and the Color Elements (white for purity, blue for truth, orange for survival, yellow for rebirth, pink for understanding, red for violence, brown for ugliness, bright green for unpredictability, black for aloneness).*

“These elements exist on both sides, and must be understood thoroughly,” says Anna. “For example, EOs can sometimes use their armies to create a great storm on your side by use of the Turmoil Elements.”

She adds that wood can act as a conductor for a soul desperately trying to return to life. “Here’s a weird thing: sometimes souls become visibly stuck in the wood. That’s what happens when souls try to go backward.”

Nina listens intently, taking notes.

*“Diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds have special qualities on both sides because of their purity. “They can be used as transmitters of Light from our side to yours, if used correctly.”*

She pauses, then concludes “There is a science to what we do, Nina. If you find yourself in a terrifying situation, stay calm and remember the

science of the Other Side. It's one of the keys to creating a safe, effective procedure to deal with a problem."

Jake puts Nina and Mark through separate scenarios involving their parents, challenging them to dissipate their anger, to balance themselves with the Twelve Virtues in the Three Areas.

"Resolve your weaknesses now, or else they will be used against you," he tells them. "If your weaknesses involve your parents, I want you to repeat this truth to yourself: God is your real father. Think of God's great Light, and be thankful it is with you. To hell with your damn parents; think of God and the great good we serve."

February 14, 1991.

"No Valentines," says Nina, looking through the day's mail.

"Your time will come," says Anna.

The radio news relates the continuing U.S. troop buildup in the Kuwaiti Desert, in anticipation of an invasion of Iraq. Then comes a report of the accidental bombing of civilians at a Baghdad bomb shelter.

"More than 400 dead people gone over," mutters Anna. "Transition's bursting with new dead right now. The system is overworking. Maybe that's part of the Evil Ones' plan. Something big is building on the Other Side."

"Distractions," says Nina. "Maybe the EOs have already started their little plan, and we just don't see it yet."

"You may be right," says Anna. "This supposed mother-of-all-wars in Kuwait has something to do with it, but it's not the real battlefield. The real battlefield is on the Other Side, not your side. Remember, this is the reflective year of itself. Events on your side will reflect and feed off events

on the Other Side, and vice-versa. We don't know what the EOs are up to. But this we know: there are floods of dead people jamming into Transition, and it's overloading the system."

Toward midnight on Valentine's Day, Jake brings Mark and Nina together after putting them through separate scenario-training.

He stops, says "I'll be back in a few minutes," and disappears.

Mark looks at Nina. "Do you realize this is the first time we've ever been alone together." They both laugh.

"No chaperones," says Nina.

Momentary silence.

"Do you want to be with me, Mark?"

He looks into her eyes. "I *live* for our time together."

"Then kiss me."

They fall into each other's arms.

After a few minutes, Jake returns.

"Enough, enough. If Montrose saw this he'd throw a hissy fit."

He breaks Mark off from Nina, although they remain holding hands. "Lordy Lordy, the power of love. You two belong together. Happy Valentine's Day."

At that, Mark and Nina start kissing each other again.

"Stop, stop," he says, smiling broadly, again trying to pry them apart. "Montrose'll kick my ass if he sees this."

A few nights later Mark and Nina are exercising in Dream-Training as Montrose watches, arms folded.

“You must live the Twelve Virtues in the Three Areas. As you repeat them to yourself, ask whether you are practicing them three times per day. They are a reminder of what it takes to survive the Evil Ones. Live them, make them instinctive, imagine them, become them, and your soul’s body will always be shielded by its own pure Light against the power of the Evil Ones.”

The next day, Anna and Nina sit along the river on an unusually warm February afternoon. Anna speaks while Nina takes notes:

*Good planning is the key to winning in procedure.*

*When facing the enemies of our souls, the plan that takes into account the physics and psychology involved is the plan that will prevail.*

*A good plan requires mental discipline, and the calmness of cold steel. The smartest of the Evil Ones also know this.*

*When the Evil Ones create the need for a large procedure involving all of the Guardian Angels, then the safety of the entire system of life, death and rebirth is in doubt.*

*In the end it is a war over the energy of the children, for souls are conscious energy. Whoever controls that energy will have enough raw power to control the system.*

*Remember that confusion plus doubt equals fear. Be sure of yourself, and believe in your plan and your training,*

*The goal of the Evil Ones is to break our system and impose their own. We do not know whether they will succeed. There is no such thing as fate or predictions; there are only warnings. If warned, always be ready with a good plan, and try to have two or three backup plans. Adapt or die.*

Nina interrupts: “What makes a good plan?” She continues to write as Anna dictates.

*A good plan involves both the physics and psychology of the situation. A good plan uses the relationship between the energy of our thoughts and the use of force on the Other Side.*

*Understand the minds of the enemy. What are they thinking? What do they want – what do they need? What few decent memories are hidden deep inside them? When you move against them on the battlefield of our souls, you use their own thoughts and memories to defeat them. They will try to do the same to you.*

*The EOs will even produce a light that resembles our pure Light. You must learn how to detect the difference between theirs and ours.*

*You must sometimes take on other appearances to fool them. This too they can do to you.*

Nina puts her pen down. “I know...Jake has Mark and me shape-shifting into all kinds of weird scenarios in Dream-Training. It feels very strange to morph into the form of an Evil One.”

Anna takes Nina’s hands.

“Use this knowledge to help Mark. Someday it may save both of you.”

## *Chapter 12*

# False Transition

Monday February 25, 1991. Anna, Mark and Nina enter lower Transition.

Immediately they sense something amiss.

“Why does it feel so weird?” asks Mark.

They notice Evil Ones in the near distance. They also see an unusually-large number of new-dead people who appear strangely lethargic and dejected.

A thick staleness fills the air. They cannot see the place in Transition where The Light glows.

The EOs slowly begin to move around them.

“Let’s go,” says Anna. They drop out of Transition, and the EOs do not follow.

Montrose and Jake are with other Guardians above the roiling Whirlwind.

“It’s rising quickly,” says Montrose apprehensively.

“Like a freaking pressure cooker,” adds Jake. “Where’s all this extra energy coming from?”

“Something’s happening,” says Montrose. “And it’s not just the new-dead from the war in Kuwait. We were expecting more than we’re actually getting from this supposed-Mother of all Wars. The war is just a distraction.”

Nina awakens. Outside her window hangs the insolent moon, with a cloud formation creating the shape of an upside-down triangle inside the dirty light.

4:30 a.m., Tuesday February 26. She shivers.

Anna appears, and points to the upside-down triangle around the moon.

“It’s the Evil Ones’ signal to each other that they’ve begun their procedure.”

“Crap. What’s their strategy, Granma?”

“We don’t know. The EOs pretend to be stupid, but they’re sometimes very smart. They’ve been building a long time for this. Concentrate, focus...notice details.”

Nina repeats. “Concentrate, focus, details...details...did you notice we couldn’t see The Light when we were in Transition earlier?”

“Yes I did,” says Anna, “maybe because all the new-dead were blocking it.”

“Maybe,” answers Nina, not entirely convinced.

Mark is dreaming, meditating with Jake, picturing a country stream.

“In times of greatest stress, hum a calm song to yourself,” Jake says. “We’re entering very dangerous territory now, my man, and the pressure on both of us will be extreme.”

“Jake, earlier tonight Anna, Nina and I were in Transition, and something was wrong...something was out of place.”

“Like what?”

“Like – it didn’t feel like Transition.”

“Whad’it feel like?”

“Like – like a fake Transition. Is it – possible – could the EOs have created a false Transition area?”

“Only if they were able to move our Liners, which would move the boundaries of Transition...that’s practically impossible...hey...if that’s true it would explain why the Whirlwind is so charged up. They’re getting a fresh supply of energy from the new-dead.”

“It would also be a direct channel for the EOs to go back and forth from the Whirlwind into lower Transition,” says Mark. “But how could they pull that off?”

“The Liners,” says Jake, as the answer dawns on him. “The EOs must have *somehow* moved some of our Liner Angels in Transition.”

His eyes widen. “Shoot Mark, we have to go to the Elders *now* with this, we have to check it out.”

“Right now,” says Mark.

The Elders and Warriors are assembled. Montrose speaks.

“For once you’re right, Jake. We have confirmation. The EOs have created their own section in the lower part of Transition.”

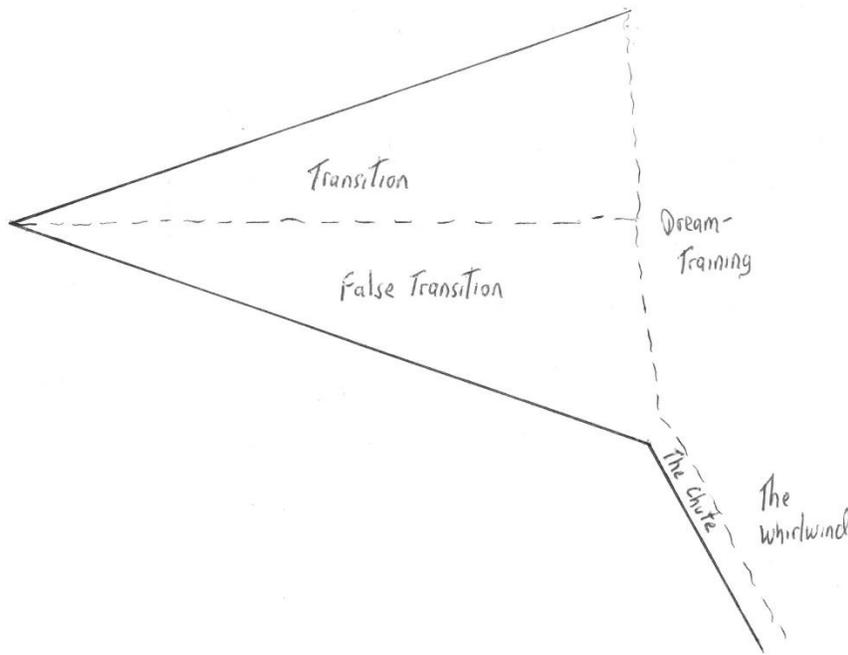
How could they have moved such a large group into Transition without one of our Liners seeing it?” asks Shen.

“Only one way: contamination,” answers Montrose. “They must have contaminated some of our own Liners in the lower section of Transition.”

“How?” asks Mark.

Montrose shrugs his shoulders. “An Evil One could have infiltrated them, and directly contaminated them one by one, getting them to work on the others.”

He sketches a diagram of Transition to illustrate the EOs’ strategy.



“The top section of Transition is still controlled by our Liners, but it’s practically empty right now,” continues Montrose. “The EOs are luring the new-dead directly into lower Transition. It’s jammed packed, and the EOs have very tight lines around it. They’ve created a chute from lower Transition directly down the Whirlwind.”

“And they’re feeding all the new-dead one by one into the depths of the Whirlwind, like lambs to the slaughter,” adds Ali.

“Fresh, massive energy for them,” says Montrose. “No one’s getting out of Transition alive tonight, that’s for sure. He turns to Mark and Nina. “Bad time to die on your side.”

“We must close off the bottom section of Transition from the top section tonight,” orders Ali. “We’ll need a large group of uncontaminated Liners. We need to stop the flow of new-dead into the Whirlwind.”

“Yes, that’s first,” says Montrose. “While we’re setting it up I don’t want the EOs to notice. We can take some new dead from upper Transition, maybe a few hundred, and sacrifice them into lower Transition through the temporary opening so the EOs think they’re undetected.”

Shen reacts strongly. “No Montrose, it’s not necessary to sacrifice them, we can set up the Liners quickly enough.”

“Shen is right,” adds another Elder. “You’re condemning them to the EOs torture.”

Montrose speaks calmly but firmly.

“The sacrifice is necessary, because the longer the EOs think we don’t know their plan, the more time we have to put our own plan in place. If we’re detected early, everything is endangered. Sometimes we must sacrifice a few to save the many.”

“You’re sacrificing innocent souls,” mutters Shen, and others agree.

“The enemies of our souls will attack us quickly if we don’t make the sacrifice,” says Montrose, “*and many more innocent will die.*”

“Montrose is right. Let it be done,” rules Ali. Everyone is silent.

Nina is at her day-care center job. Dark day, driving rain.

She marks off the date on the wall calendar: Tuesday February 26, 1991.

“Hey are we kicking Saddam’s ass in Iraq or what?” asks Danielle.

“Yeah we’re kicking ass,” Nina sarcastically answers. “Lots of dead people.”

She casually looks out the window.

A horrible face, half-man and half-flat-faced dog, appears on the glass.

“Aaaugh,” Nina exclaims, stepping back.

Danielle follows Nina’s line of sight, sees a shadow moving across the window, and gasps.

“Ugly, ain’t he?” asks Nina.

“Nina, what the hell are you dragging to work with you?” whispers Danielle angrily. She turns and walks away.

The rain pours heavier.

The TV blares on and off several times, until Danielle pulls the plug.

The lights strobe on and off.

The children cry in fear.

“It’s Nina,” Danielle whispers to her supervisor. “She brought this with her from home. She talks with ghosts - I’ve seen her do it.”

“Wha-a-a-t?” the supervisor says in a low voice. “Come with me.”

They approach Nina. The lights continue turning on and off.

“Nina,” whispers the supervisor. “Danielle says you talk with *ghosts*. Does this have anything to do with what’s happening here?”

Nina looks at Danielle and says nothing.

“Come onto the front porch,” the supervisor orders.

The moment they close the door, the lights inside remain on.

“Nina,” begins the supervisor.

“I’m sorry, I’ll leave.”

“No Nina, *I’m sorry*, we’re going to have to let you go. You’re fired.”

Wordless, Nina turns and walks through the rain to her car.

Radio news: the war in Iraq. She angrily turns it off.

The rain drills her windshield.

She begins to cry.

Anna appears in the passenger seat. “Como esta - are you all right?”

“I just lost my job. The EOs screwed with the electric and scared the crap out of everyone including the poor kids, and there was a mutant man-dog from hell reflecting off the window.”

“Distractions, meant to confuse you,” says Anna. “Watch for reflective surfaces such as windows, mirrors and water...it’s a reflective year...the EOs’ll come at you that way.”

“They just did,” Nina says, slamming the steering wheel.

“Nina, stay calm. We figured out what the EOs are up to, and we’re going to have to come up with a freaking impeccable plan.”

“Freaking? You *never* used that word before.”

“You never saw me this worried before. If we lose this procedure, God’s direct Light to the living will be cut off.”

Montrose and Jake lead a group from the Guardians high above the rushing Whirlwind, to the bottom of Upper Transition.

“Open it up,” orders Montrose. His Liners create an opening into Lower Transition.

Liners then escort the souls of those who died within the past few days into the chute leading to the Whirlwind.

“I don’t think this is necessary,” says Jake.

“Shut up.”

“Would you sacrifice one of your own if you had to?” Jake persists.

“Yes, in war, for the greater good, yes,” says Montrose.

Nightfall. Nina is at her kitchen table, Anna by her side.

“Draw the Star of Life, Nina.”

On a piece of paper Nina sketches the Star.

“Now draw a horizontal line through the middle of Transition,” says Anna. Nina does so, and Anna continues.

“The EOs have sealed off the lower section of Transition. Right now they control all the new dead inside there. The top part we still control, but only a few dozen are left in there, and as we speak, Montrose is feeding them to the EOs below so that we remain undetected.”

“What?” Nina asks incredulously.

“Listen to me carefully, Nina. I have an idea. Write this down. Inside Transition are five categories of the new-dead.”

Nina is startled. Anna snaps “Write it down.”

Anna then counts off with her fingers. “One, the pure good. Two, the pure evil. Three, the children. Four, those who die and won’t accept it. Five, those who die unexpectedly without reason. Go ahead – write it down.” Nina does so.

“We need a strategy to divide them into separate groups once we move into lower Transition,” says Anna. “Think, think.”

“Granma, where’s Mark?”

“I don’t know; he’s awake now. You have to go to sleep early tonight. We need a meeting with the Guardians.”

The wind kicks up outside, shaking the windows. Nina shivers. She moves to close the curtains, and sees the man-dog staring at her. “Granma,” she cries out.

“Distractions. Ignore him,” says Anna. She spins toward the window, building an energy field. The EO disappears.

Mark is in the place between waking and sleep.

“Jake, are you there?”

“I’m right here,” Jake answers.

Mark looks into Jake’s eyes to confirm it’s really him.

“What’s going on?”

“All hell breaking loose. We’ve got to meet with Nina and Anna.”

“Have the Guardians sealed off Transition yet?”

“Yep, tighter than a drum. Nobody’s going to Heaven tonight. Let’s hope it doesn’t last long. Lower Transition is jamming up, and it’s gonna pop like a cork once we open it.” His arms make a shaking-the-bottle motion.

“Where’s Nina?” asks Mark.

“Home, awake, talking with Anna.”

“She can see Anna?”

“Yep.”

“Why can’t I see or hear you when I’m awake?”

“Because you weren’t trained how to do that, and she was. We all have our positions. Anyway, you wouldn’t want to be seeing what Nina’s seeing right now.”

Nina is sleeping. “Come Nina,” calls Anna.

She moves toward her grandmother, pauses, looks carefully, and notices bloodshot eyes...the image of the man-dog.

Nina backs away.

“Over here, Nina,” she hears her grandmother call, and she turns and sees a glowing white, spinning Anna approach.

“Wild night, honey. Let’s find a quiet space.”

As they move toward the Guardian Angels, EOs approach, lifting their palms toward Nina. She sees the image of her mother bringing her to the mental hospital...then the image of her receiving electro-shock therapy.

The scene changes, and Nina sees herself with a much-younger Anna, inside a windowless wooden cabin with a large stone fireplace. Through a small crack she views a large carved wooden bear, surrounded by flowers.

She sees several people running up the long hill to the cabin. They are shouting, and they carry lit torches.

When they reach her family's cabin, they set it on fire.

It quickly spreads.

Nina calls out "Mama," and Anna grabs her.

The shouting outside the cabin suddenly ceases.

Anna frantically tries to open the door, but it does not budge.

Smoke fills the room.

Nina again looks through the crack and sees Montrose sprinting from the bottom of the hill toward the cabin.

"Papa, Papa," she hears herself crying.

Anna holds her closely as the smoke thickens.

She shakes off the half-dream, and hears Anna yelling from a distance "Focus, Nina, focus. They're trying to confuse you."

"Why was I calling you Mama and Montrose Papa?"

Before Anna can answer, the EOs again approach, palms up.

Again Nina sees the burning cabin, with Montrose trying to break down the front door.

"Snap – out – of – it," Anna commands her, from outside the dream.

The cabin-dream stops, and Nina sees Anna in a spinning whirl, approaching the EOs.

There is a sudden “whoosh” as hundreds of EOs ambush Anna, breaking her spin.

They hit her hard and drag her toward the Whirlwind.

“GRANMA!” Nina screams. A few EOs attack her, and she quickly spins and destroys them.

Liners descend to Nina’s side, led by Montrose.

By then, Anna has been pulled by the EOs into the Whirlwind.

Warriors and Elders are assembled. Montrose, Mark, Jake and the others listen to Nina.

“They took her away. They knocked her down and took her away. They were flashing a horrible scene – I was in a cabin with Granma, and it was burning and we were suffocating.”

She turns to Montrose. “And I was calling you Papa and Granma Mama. Why, Montrose?”

Montrose looks down.

Ali steps forward.

“Our past lives are supremely unimportant right now -”

Nina interrupts.

“But was *that* my past life? Montrose – *are you my father?*”

Montrose again looks down. Shen speaks.

“Nina, your grandmother didn’t want you to know yet, because the past might confuse you. Over 120 years ago, in Columbia, South America, Montrose was your father and Anna – Anna was your mother.”

Stunned silence. Finally Montrose speaks. “I wanted you to know, but it was Anna’s decision not to tell you. Nina – we have to save her.”

“She may be lost already, Montrose,” says Ali.

“We must rescue her,” Montrose plaintively answers.

“That may be just what the EOs want,” says Ali.

“Then let’s take advantage of that want” says Nina, snapping out of her shock. “There’s always a way.”

All eyes turn to her. She outlines a plan.

Montrose and a large group of Guardians gather above the churning Whirlwind, forming a glowing ball.

Nina and Mark appear, their colors disguised in the red-black of the Evil Ones. They hold close to each other and descend directly down the middle of the Whirlwind.

“Hey, who are you two?” asks a suspicious EO.

“We’re looking for the old woman Anna, the white-lighter,” says Nina.

“You can’t go below. Who *are* you?” He tries to peer through her.

“Sorry,” she says, then grabs his hair and snaps his neck in one movement, without separating his head.

“Now comes the hard part,” she says to Mark. “Hold him up.”

Mark complies, and Nina walks through the dead EO, switching his exterior dark form with a portion of her bright-white form.

“Ugh,” she says, emerging through the corpse. “Freaking disgusting.”

She now has remnants of the EO’s negative form disguising her, while the dead EO’s form appears to be glowing with Nina’s white light. “Can you carry him?”

“Yep. Let’s go,” says Mark, throwing the dead EO over his shoulders.

They descend the Whirlwind.

Near the bottom, they see a crowd of EOs around Anna’s body.

“Hey, I got another white-lighter,” yells Nina as Mark throws the dead EO down.

Curious, the crowd of EOs move toward the corpse. As they gather above it, Nina and Mark inch toward Anna’s unguarded body.

“Hey,” yells one of the EOs, too late. Mark throws Anna’s body over his shoulders and holds to Nina. Each extends an arm upward, and they quickly rise.

Halfway up the Whirlwind, Nina spots the man-dog a moment before he slams his full body through her.

She breaks into an uncontrolled spin.

Mark reaches through the spin and grabs her.

“What was that?” he shouts as they continue to ascend, but her answer is lost in the noise.

Above the Whirlwind, Montrose takes Anna’s limp body from Mark. All proceed to the Guardian’s home above Dream-Training.

Montrose lays Anna down and begins to whisper in her ear.

“There’s hardly anything left of her,” says Jake quietly to Nina and Mark.

“Is there hope?” asks Nina.

“Very little,” he answers.

Suddenly Nina hears ringing – a very loud alarm – and she is drawn from the others.

She awakens to hear her phone jangling and radio blaring. The clock reads 5:17 a.m., and it is still dark.

She turns off the alarm and answers the phone: no one speaks.

“You stupid jerks. Show your ugly faces,” she yells to the room.

She hears the low buzzing.

Jake appears.

“Nina, don’t show them anger or fear.”

“Is Granma gonna die?”

“We don’t know yet. We’re trying to heal her.”

The radio DJ wishes everyone a happy Wednesday February 27. “We’re kicking Saddam’s butt all the way back to Baghdad,” he proclaims.

“And killing thousands in the process,” says Jake. “The system is overloaded and ready to burst. The real heroes are the poor Iraqi soldiers brave enough to surrender. They know Saddam’ll kill them for giving up.”

“Screw Saddam,” says Nina. “We need to nail *Sade*.”

“We have to empty out lower Transition. There’s so much pressure it’s ready to explode,” says Jake.

“Granma had a plan,” says Nina. “I need to meet with Mark.”

Montrose is lying next to Anna, whispering in her ear.

“Remember Anna, remember...remember the garden I built you...”

His mind pictures a beautiful flower garden centered around a carved wooden bear. He is planting a flower in the soil, with Anna standing above him. Nina as a child plays a short distance away.

“This is a flower for our first child together, our Nina...thank you for the gift of life.”

He places the next flower in a small hole.

“And this one is for the purity of our love. May it always be as pure and deep as it is today.”

He plants another.

“This is for the power and beauty of God’s light...may it always be within us, each time we unify.”

Anna kneels beside him and plants one more.

“And this flower is for you Montrose, for your strength, for your believing in things that you cannot see, for the purity, dedication and sincerity of your love...I will always remember.”

Their hands lock as Nina calls out “Mama.”

Montrose whispers “Remember.”

Sade and the others are inside False Transition, feeding the new dead, one by one, into the chute leading to the depths of the Whirlwind.

“This way home” the EOs say as they coax and push the new dead along.

“Reminds me of Auschwitz,” says Sade. “Any Nazis with us today?” Another EO says “Me,” and Sade laughs.

“Then you remember too much. Heil Hitler my ass. Hitler was a weakling compared to *my* masters.”

Sudden disturbance. An EO approaches.

“The fat Jew’s altar boy is here, Master Sade.”

“Take me to him NOW” orders Sade.

Nina and Mark have entered lower Transition. Mark’s white light is shining brightly and has already been detected by the EOs, but Nina is disguised as a living Evil One.

“Welcome to Hollywood,” whispers Nina to Mark as they survey the confused landscape of people.

They immediately separate.

Mark moves to the middle of the crowd of new-dead and sings “Into the Light.”

A crowd soon gathers. “Look at his light, look, look,” they echo. “Can you take us home?” some ask.

“If you want to go home, everyone gather the children around me RIGHT NOW!” he yells, then continues to sing.

Meanwhile, Nina is moving among the Evil Ones, still disguised as one of them, loudly repeating “The fucking white-lighters are coming - Sade wants us to form a line *over there*.” She points to the border between Transition and Dream-Training.

Most EOs look at her strangely, but follow her order after she roars “Master Sade COMMANDS it.”

Surrounded by EOs, Sade approaches Mark.

“KILL HIM!” Sade screams.

However, hundreds of the new-dead have completely surrounded Mark, including many children, forming a glowing force field strong enough to repel the EOs. Sade’s rage frightens the new-dead even closer to Mark, and their light grows brighter as they sing with him.

Unnoticed by Sade, more and more EOs slowly move toward the border of Transition and Dream-Training, forming the line Nina has ordered them to create.

Mark turns to the new-dead and in a loud voice asks “Do you want to go home?” They all answer yes.

“Then we’re going to move together in a straight line directly behind those people over there,” he says, pointing to where Nina has lined up the EOs.

Sade steps back, sees but is confused by what is happening, and retreats. He is accompanied by a small group of EOs, along with some new-dead who did not follow Mark because they died unexpectedly or without cause, and were too confused to move.

Led by Mark, the children and the pure good among the new-dead form two parallel lines behind the line of Evil Ones Nina assembled.

Mark and Nina swiftly move to the front of the line, and open the boundary between Transition and Dream-Training with synchronized hand motions.

With a pop like a cork exploding from a huge bottle, the opening forms.

The EOs in the front line realize they've been tricked, but the force of glowing energy behind them crushes them into the opening.

As they are pushed into Dream-Training, they are circled by hundreds of Guardians, who attack.

Divided and separated, the EOs are quickly destroyed, their remnants descending the Whirlwind.

The children and pure good are then swiftly escorted by Liners across the top of the Whirlwind into Limbo.

Nina awakens. Jake is waiting for her.

"We're almost done, Nina. It was beautiful. The EOs fell for it. We'll finish the rest tonight. You did it – your plan did it."

"It was Granma's plan, and it's not done yet. We still have to clear more out. How is she?"

"Still bad. Montrose is with her."

"I don't feel so good, Jake-O."

"Probably just aftershock. You had a rough night. Mark says you took a big hit in the Whirlwind from some man-dog. Don't let him freak you out, he's just a stupid mutation of theirs. Sleep for awhile...you'll need your strength later."

She closes her eyes, but again the visions of the burning cabin enter her dreams. She screams, and Jake shakes her awake.

“What’s going on?” she asks.

“Negative revenge,” says Jake. “Skip the sleep for now.”

Inside the lower false Transition, Sade is furious.

“Idiots, IDIOTS!” How could they fall for something so fucking simple?”

“What now, Master Sade?” asks an EO.

“Keep feeding the new-dead into the Whirlwind.”

“There’s no more left. The white-lighters shut down the opening.”

“*WHAT???*”

Sade grabs the EO and sucks his energy. He moves to the chute and escapes Transition into the Whirlwind.

Campfire, Dream-Training. Nina is talking with Jake and Mark.

Montrose appears. “You ok?” asks Nina.

“Yes,” he answers.

“And Granma?”

“The same.”

“So how does the plan finish?” asks Jake.

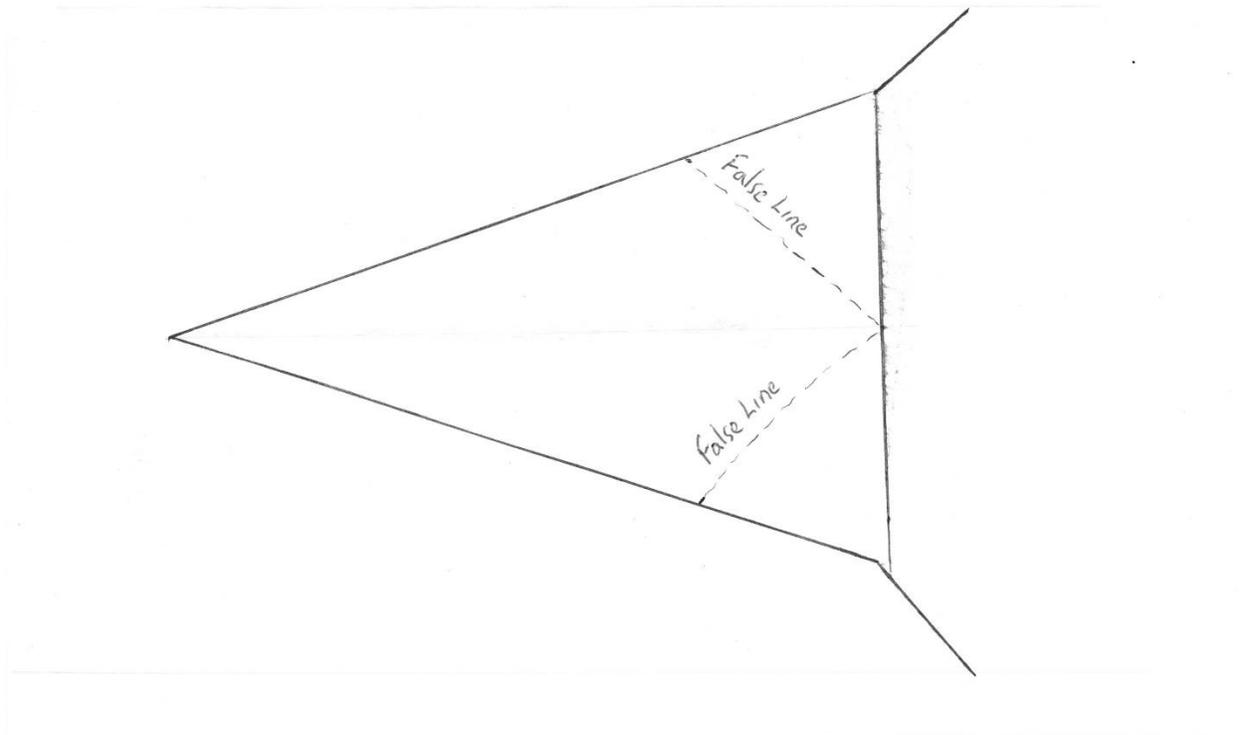
“Very simply,” says Nina. She begins to draw in the sand at her feet. “We have to clear out those left in Transition. There are some who died without cause, some who don’t accept that they died, and some leftover EOs.

“When people die, they go from the small entrance of Transition into the larger end. At first they want to go backward into the smaller end, because they figure that’s where they came from. So let’s take advantage of that want.”

She continues to draw in the sand.

“We’ll bring Liners in, and when I give the signal they’ll move the line up from the bottom so that a false smaller end is formed at the Other Side of Transition facing Dream-Training. We’ll be reversing the triangle. The leftover new-dead in Transition will see the smaller hole and go into it, thinking they’re returning to life.”

Her diagram looks thus:



“So they’ll really be entering Dream-Training, over the Whirlwind,” says Jake.

“And that’ll be the end of them,” says Montrose. “All of them into the Whirlwind. We have no time to sort them tonight, and besides, there’s too many Evil Ones and contaminated Liners mixed in with them.”

“NO,” objects Shen loudly. “Jake and I can screen them; we’re trained for this.”

“We have no time,” argues Montrose.

“We can see into enough of their souls to save some of them,” Jake answers.

“Do it,” orders Ali. Montrose scowls but stays silent.

They move into the procedure. False Transition is cleansed with the sweep of Liners. The chute is completely sealed off. Shen and Jake stand opposite each other, palms extended, and as each soul passes between them they are able to peer into them. Those with only traces of negativity are ushered into Limbo, while the rest are tumbled into the Whirlwind.

Transition is restored to its former state.

“It’s over,” says Jake wearily.

“Don’t claim victory,” warns Montrose.

“There is no victory without Anna alive,” says Jake.

The Guardians and Elders gather, with Ali in front. Next to him is a simple table with a large book upon it.

Ali speaks.

“To Anna and Nina, we owe a great debt of gratitude. Their plan was exquisite in its conception and flawless in its execution.”

He turns.

“And to you Mark, for your unswerving loyalty to the Good, for your discipline and courage, we are all deeply grateful.”

Ali then puts his hands on the book

“In our Book of Life we will record the details of this procedure, so that for all ages good people will know of our struggle against the enemies of our souls.

“This battle marks the beginning of the end of our history as we know it. It is only the first battle in what will be a long war to decide who controls the great flow of life and death and life again.

“Although we won this battle, we paid a steep price with Anna injured so badly. We lost many good Liners. Also, the Evil Ones learned much during their failed effort. They now have the knowledge to walk among the living more frequently, and for much longer periods of time. They have learned how to re-charge their energy. In the years ahead they will use this knowledge to create great trouble for the living. By the time of the next reflective year of itself, 2002, we must expect even worse. Perhaps by 2020 they will move freely with the living.”

Ali bows his head, and everyone follows.

“We pray for the strength to persevere, to endure. We pray for the survival of Anna’s soul. We pray that all good people may sleep far from the enemies of our souls.”

The last line is repeated by those gathered.

Silence...a peaceful light passes among them...but when it reaches Nina, it grows weaker before flowing around her.

“How do you feel, Nina?” asks Shen after the prayer.

“Ah –ok. A lot of aftershock, negative revenge. I feel tired but wired.”

“For the next few days we must all beware of negative revenge,” says Shen. “Most of it will come your way, Nina...we will be there to help you. No one should claim victory until we can all claim it. We are still without Anna...she clings with a thread to her light-life.”

Nina’s radio alarm sounds faintly through her. She looks weakly at everyone and says “Sorry – they’re waking me up again.”

She disappears.

Mark speaks. "Please, all of you, I ask that you allow me to go to Nina's home. She needs help, and I should be with her."

"No – absolutely not," says Montrose.

"Something's wrong with Nina," says Shen.

"Just negative revenge that she can handle alone," answers Montrose.

"I can help her," says Mark.

"We should not stand in your way any longer on this matter, Mark," rules Ali. "Go to her when you awaken."

"How?" asks Mark. "I have no idea where she lives."

"Call her up," laughs Jake. "I memorized her number just for this occasion – oops," he says, looking guiltily at Montrose and Ali. He then recites Nina's phone number. "Wake up and call her!"

"YES!" Mark shouts, fist raised.

Montrose is not overly disturbed.

## Chapter 13

# Contamination

Nina sits shivering at her kitchen table, blanket around her, coffee in hand, waiting for the ascension of the sun. The lights flicker on and off. She is exhausted from lack of sleep.

The phone rings, and she looks at it suspiciously before answering.

“Hello?”

“Hello Nina, it’s me...Mark...Jake gave me your number. After you left last night, Ali said I could come see you.”

Silence.

“Is it *really* you, Mark?”

“I’ve waited so long for this moment, Nina,” Mark answers. “I want to come *see* you. Tell me where you live.”

“Newburgh, about an hour north of New York City, along the Hudson River. Waterfront Road, number 217.”

“That’s only three hours from me...the trucks where I work go there all the time. I’m from Lancaster, close to Philadelphia.”

“When can you come?”

“Now,” he answers. “I’ll find you.”

“Hurry, Mark.”

As she hangs up, a glimmer of sun peaks through her window. She goes to the front door and unlocks it.

She curls up and quickly falls asleep on her couch. Dreams.

“Nina, it’s me, Granma.”

“Granma, are you ok?”

“Come to me Nina.”

Nina approaches the vague form of Anna, who reaches for her.

Too late, Nina realizes it’s not Anna. The man-dog is upon her, hitting her, molesting her. She cannot break from his grip, and is too tired to wake herself up.

Silent screaming. Horror, revulsion, helplessness.

Close is Sade. His palms point toward Nina, and his mind is reading hers. He sees memories of her mother Donna, her boyfriend from Venice, Anna, Montrose, the cabin on fire...Mark... Mark...

Nina goes numb as the man-dog attacks her in Mark’s form.

Sade roars in angry pleasure.

Late morning. Mark pulls his car in front of the warehouse marked 217. He knocks; no answer. He knocks again, and opens the door.

He sees Nina on the floor near the couch, moaning in her sleep, struggling.

“Wake up Nina, it’s me, Mark, wake up.”

He puts his hands on her shoulders, and she pushes him back.

“Nina, Nina...”

She opens her eyes and looks at Mark.

“Help me.”

“I’m here Nina, and I’m not leaving...I’m here.” He embraces her.

Montrose is leaning over Anna, whispering in her ear. Faint light glows within her. Ali and Shen are nearby.

“Montrose,” says Ali, speaking gently but with authority, “Soon the time will come to let her go, to allow her to join her family in Heaven. If she waits any longer there’ll be nothing left of her light-life. She’s dying, Montrose, and only The Light of Heaven can restore her. She has to go home. We will protect her on her way.”

Shen continues. “The time will come when you and Nina will see her again, for the only real death is the death of the soul. Soon there must be a separation if she is to survive. Heaven will restore her.”

Montrose breaks down. “I know,” he repeats.

He strokes Anna’s hair.

“Thank you Anna, for all the love you gave me.”

He kisses her hand.

“Please God, keep her protected until the day I am forever in her arms.”

The faintly glowing form of Anna rises above her soul’s body.

She speaks haltingly, painfully.

“Montrose...I remember...you...and Nina...the garden...tell our child I love her infinitely...as I love you...goodbye for now...I love you.”

As she disappears, Montrose breaks down weeping. He’s comforted by Ali and Jake.

Mark and Nina walk along the railroad track near her apartment. Uneasy afternoon. Ominous black clouds surrounded by grey ones crawl along the mountain across the river.

“Something’s wrong,” says Nina.

“I know. But what?”

Nina shakes her head and takes his hand. “I don’t know...every time I try to sleep the EOs are right in front of me. It’s like I’m a magnet for them.

They've got a man-dog walking right through me, and I can't stop him." She tries to keep herself from crying.

Mark's eyebrows rise at the word "magnet," but he says nothing. He reaches for her. "Nina...be strong...have hope...stay close to me."

A chill wind rises along the tracks, and she clings to him.

"If something bad happens, I want you to know - I love you," says Nina.

"I love *you* Nina. We're gonna get through this, together." They kiss.

Jake, Ali, Shen and Montrose are in upper Dream-Training.

Ali speaks.

"By this time tomorrow night Anna should be safe in Heaven," says Ali. "Right now she is almost through Transition. Soon she will cross into Dream-Training. We need to tell Nina what has happened to her grandmother."

"What if the Evil Ones attack Anna?" asks Montrose.

"We have a *large* group of Guardians and Liners with her," says Ali.

"I should be with them," says Montrose.

"That's not allowed, Montrose," says Shen. "It would just confuse both of you. Remember, it may be a long time for *you* before you see her again, but take comfort it will not be a long time for her. You will miss her, but she will not miss you, because she will be able to see you from time to time."

"I know, I know...please watch over her."

Nina's apartment. The TV turns on by itself.

More news: Saddam Hussein surrenders, and Iraqi soldiers are slaughtered while retreating down the highway from Kuwait.

Mark finally pulls the plug on the TV.

Immediately the phone rings, and he disconnects it, swearing.

“Mark, take it easy.” Nina picks up her guitar.

“I wrote you a song...wanna hear it?”

He calms and nods yes. She then plays her song of longing for him.

He listens in silence. Tears form in his eyes.

“Thank you...so much, Nina,” he says after she finishes.

He reaches for her.

“You’re sweating,” he says, touching her brow.

“I know. I’m burning up.”

“You were shivering less than an hour ago. Maybe we should go to the hospital.”

“No way,” says Nina. “No doctor could cure what’s happening to me right now. I need to lie down. I haven’t slept in three days.”

“Let me come with you.”

“No, Mark, I’m too hot...just watch over me, and wake me if I get in trouble.”

Nina half-closes the door, undresses, and looks at her body in the mirror. She wipes her brow, then touches her sore eyes, her neck...as she stares into the mirror, she sees Mark’s face...almost hypnotized, she feels pleasure...she sees his eyes...bloodshot...NO!

The man-dog leaps from the mirror, and Nina falls backward, screaming.

Mark runs into the room and covers her huddled, naked body with a blanket.

She is shivering again...cold, terrified.

“I’m sorry Mark, I didn’t want it to be like this.”

“It’s not like this. What happened?”

“Do you see anything in the mirror?”

“No.”

“I did. The man-dog jumped me.”

“It’s a reflective year. They’ll use reflective surfaces to go back and forth. It’s an open channel.” He rises, removes the mirror from the wall, and places it face-down on the floor.

“I am so tired...” says Nina.

“Let me sleep next to you. Let me hold you,” Mark says.

She hesitates, then weakly laughs.

“Promise not to seduce me?”

He smiles.

“Never on a first date.”

She quickly falls asleep in his arms. Dreams...darkness...narrow, foggy streets of Venice...the sound of lapping water...she is with the Italian man in the photo by her bedside.

“I love you Nina,” he says, and she relaxes into his arms.

He claws at her violently. She pushes away.

The scenario changes. She hears her mother Donna’s strident voice.

“How stupid of you to get pregnant by an exchange student. And don’t even *think* about an abortion, Nina, or I’ll throw you out of this house forever *and* you’ll be excommunicated from our church.”

Her father, standing off, shrugs his shoulders.

Flashing lights. Nina is on a medical gurney, and Danielle is speaking.

“You’re doing the right thing. You have to abort. You can’t have a baby growing up without a father. You have to go to college.”

A doctor rises from between her legs, blood on his face, hands and shirt, holding a gory aborted fetus in one hand.

“AH-HA!” he exclaims. Nina screams.

Flashing lights again. Nina is with her grandmother Anna inside the burning cabin. They are choking in the smoke. Outside the small, barred window they see Montrose running up the long hill.

“He locked the door from the outside,” Anna gasps.

The phrase repeats itself as Nina continues to choke.

Mark wakes her.

She opens her eyes, and begins to cry.

“Nina, I’m right beside you, it’s ok...what happened?”

She cannot answer.

Jake appears behind Mark, and says “Nina, are you ok?”

“Hey Jake,” Nina says, wiping her eyes.

“Wha’d you say?” asks Mark.

“Jake’s here.”

“You can see him,” asks Mark, dumbfounded.

“Oh yeah, in living color.” She smiles, as does Jake.

“Go easy, Nina...Mark can’t see or hear me when he’s awake.”

“You’re kidding,” says Nina.

“Nope,” says Jake, “Believe me, Mark wouldn’t want to be seeing what *you’re* seeing right now. Please tell him I love him.”

She almost cries again, but gains control of herself.

Turning to Mark, she says “Jake says you should be glad you can’t see what I see. He loves you very much, Mark.”

She sits upright in bed, leaning against Mark.

“What’s going on?” asks Jake.

“The man-dog is coming right in on me, pretending to be different people.”

“Like who?”

“My grandmother, my mother, Montrose...my old boyfriend from Italy.”

“And you can’t see his eyes?”

“No...he’s right on top of me, there’s no room to see anything.”

Absently, she picks up Anna’s rosary beads on her nightstand. “Ouch,” she says, and drops them. “They’re hot.”

At this, Jake’s eyes go wide.

“Nina, tell Mark it’s an emergency, and I have to leave *right now*. Tell him I will be back soon. Tell him NOT to let you sleep.”

“What the hell, Jake?” says Nina, but Jake disappears.

“What happened?” asks Mark.

Upset, Nina repeats what Jake said.

Mark is frightened, but says nothing.

Jake nearly breaks down as he describes to the Elders and Warriors what he just saw with Nina.

“The heat off the holy beads, the extreme hot and cold as they attack her core temperature, the EOs right on top of her, the horrible dreams – this can only be one thing, the same thing that killed my wife Jennifer: direct contamination.”

“But she’s been fully protected,” says Shen, “and she knows how to defend herself. At what point could they have entered her?”

“Probably when that freaking man-dog slammed her in the Whirlwind,” answers Montrose. “Mark told me it was a hard hit.”

“Direct contamination, so rare, so difficult for them to do...no one has ever survived direct contamination,” says Jake. “The EOs channel in on the white light, because it’s the only color connected to *both* sides. When I was

living I didn't have the white light...so they killed Jennifer and my baby, but not me."

"Calm down. Think," says Montrose, for once gently. He puts his hand on Jake's shoulder. "With what you went through with your wife, you know more about this than any of us."

But Jake is so distraught, he cannot speak any longer.

Mark is losing the battle to keep Nina awake.

"Please Nina, you have to try," he says.

"I'm so tired...I can't..." She closes her eyes.

Within moments she cries "No, get away!"

Mark cannot wake her.

In her dream she hears Anna's voice.

"Montrose killed us...remember the fire in the cabin...he locked the door from the outside."

The man-dog transforms into Montrose and molests her.

Mark is near panic. A sudden thought occurs: go to sleep and find Jake.

He falls asleep quickly and calls Jake's name.

Montrose appears.

"Jake can't come right now. Remember to look me in the eyes. You must beware of the EOs taking our forms."

"Where's Jake?"

"With the Guardians. They need to calm him down. He's losing it because this has happened to him before."

"*What* happened to him before?"

Montrose pauses, and answers slowly.

“Jake lost a loved one to direct contamination. Nearly seventy years ago he lost his wife Jennifer. She could see the unseen, as with Anna and Nina. And she was directly contaminated by an EO. She was killed; destroyed.”

“Is Nina contaminated?”

“Yes. Direct contamination. That freaking man-dog from hell.”

“Damn, damn,” Mark tenses. “Think. Is Anna conscious?”

Montrose sadly shakes his head no.

“She’s gone now, on her way to Heaven.” His lower lip begins to tremble.

“Ah Montrose, I’m so sorry,” says Mark, embracing Montrose.

“Anna has Heaven,” says Montrose, “but if we lose Nina, there is no Heaven for her. This will shatter her soul in a million pieces.”

He looks at Mark.

“Nina is my daughter, and Anna is my wife.”

Mark is shocked. Finally he responds “OK, OK. Keep hope alive, Montrose...concentrate...focus...we should go inside Dream-Training to try and see what’s happening with Nina.”

Montrose straightens up.

“Remember your training. If you try to rescue her, you’ll quickly be destroyed by the EOs. They’re expecting us...they have an army around her right now. Do not become the mourned fool.”

They glide into Dream-Training. At the bottom, near the mouth of the Whirlwind, they see Nina being savaged.

Mark tries to move forward, but Montrose grabs his arm.

“It’s a trap. They’re trying to lure us to help her. If they wanted her dead she would already be gone.”

Exasperated, Mark pulls back. “So all we can do is sit and watch her be tortured? What about an exorcism or something?”

“That might work with indirect contamination, but with direct contamination it would kill Nina. Believe me, it has been tried.”

“What happened with Jake and Jennifer?”

Montrose draws a breath. “Jennifer was pregnant at the time. She was being stalked on the Other Side by an Evil Walker who had identified her. One night in her dreams, he lured her to the wrong place...and entered her directly. She lasted a few hours before she died, in Jake’s arms. After that, he lost it...he started drinking heavily, lost his job...he died in the gutter. And when he died, the EOs tried very hard to lure him to their army. The Guardian Angels saved him, and he has served with us ever since.”

“Did Jennifer at least make it to Heaven?” asks Mark.

Montrose slowly shakes his head no.

“Direct contamination consumes and destroys the soul. There’s nothing left in the end.”

Their eyes continue to follow from a distance the savaging of Nina.

Among the EOs in her vicinity, they notice one with a red bandana. He seems to have more energy than the others.

“Who the hell is that?” asks Montrose.

Mark awakens, and turns to wake Nina.

At first she resists.

“Get away, don’t touch me.”

“It’s me, Nina...it’s Mark...I love you...wake up.”

Her body jumps as if shocked; she sits up and opens her eyes.

She pulls a loose tooth from her mouth.

“What’s happening?” she asks, terrified.

Mark takes her in his arms.

“Nina, Nina, stay close to me...it’s negative revenge...stay close.”

They hold each other. Nina looks over Mark’s shoulder through the glass door leading to her back deck, and sees circles of dark clouds lined up like honeycombs in the sky.

“They’re getting ready to attack somewhere,” she thinks to herself.

She spots several grotesque EOs huddled on the outside deck.

“Can you see them?” she asks Mark.

“See what?”

She points. “The EOs have a bunch of high-energy sickos right outside my door. They’re transmitters. They use them to channel their negative energy our way. Probably re-charging the man-dog. Ugly freaks.”

“Crap,” says Mark. “I can’t see them but I can feel their vibration – and I hear their buzz. Can’t we get rid of them?”

Nina shakes her head.

“If we try, they’ll come after us with twice as many. They’ll just replace them. They’re after me, aren’t they?”

“Yep,” he says. “I guess they’re really mad at you.”

“Well, they’ll have to get glad,” she says, weakly smiling.

“Let’s get out of here,” he says, rising.

They drive south along nearby Storm King Mountain, on a road with breathtaking views of the Hudson River.

Soft music on the radio. Clouds raging black...but only a light rain.

“Nina, there’s something I have to tell you. Anna was going to lose her light-life...so she’s on her way to Heaven now.”

“She’s gone?” cries Nina, unbelieving. “That’s twice I’ve lost her without saying goodbye. Twice.”

Mark reaches to hold her hand, but she pushes it away, saying “It was my fault. If I hadn’t been drawn into that stupid burning cabin scenario, she never would have been attacked.”

Mark pulls over near the top of the mountain at a look-out point, and Nina immediately steps out and walks. He catches up to her.

“Nina, come here.” He holds her as she breaks down.

After awhile she says “The whole world cries when it rains. The rain hides everyone’s tears.”

She begins to cry again.

“You don’t need to hide anything from me,” he says, kissing her.

He holds her, stroking her hair.

“Did Anna raise you around here?”

“Yes,” she says, wiping her face. She points north. “My apartment’s over there, and I went to a Catholic school in Newburgh.”

Then she points west. “But I lived in a little village over this mountain, called Cornwall-on-the-Hudson.”

“What was it like growing up there?”

“I don’t know...good and bad. It was home, thanks to Anna. How was it growing up in Lancaster?”

She notices his face darken.

“Ok I guess. We lived in the city of Lancaster, but there’s a lot of Amish farms out there. My parents died in a car accident when I was nine, but I still have a sister. She was just five at the time, and was adopted by a nice Amish family. I got stuck with an aunt and uncle who didn’t want me. What about you?”

“Both my parents are gone, and I had a little brother named Davey who died when he was five and I was six. All I really ever had was Anna.”

“I’m sorry, Nina.”

“My parents worked, so my grandmother Anna raised me. Then she died when I was seven, and I didn’t talk for a few weeks, so my mother put me away for a year in a nuthouse for kids. When I got out I was afraid of a lot of things...myself, my mother, love....then when I was 17 I ran away to Venice with an exchange student I met...and I got pregnant and he left me...he disappeared... and I came home...and had an abortion.”

She looks down.

“I’m not pure. You should know that.”

He pulls her close. “You are the purest of pure, Nina. All of us have shadows in our lives. I’m sure God forgives you because God forgives *everyone*, but you need to forgive yourself. As for me, I love you for *all* you are, for every corner of your life no matter how light or dark.”

She kisses him. “You found me.”

“And nothing can take me away,” he says.

They kiss more, gently at first, then with the full passion that has waited so long to come alive.

Sade is watching from the unseen distance, and is disturbed.

“No fucking way,” he says, pointing his palms toward Nina and closing his eyes.

“Cold cold wind of death, fill her soul, fill her soul.”

His vibration invisibly connects to the man-animal’s contamination inside Nina’s body, like a magnet drawn to metal.

She shivers violently.

“I’m freezing,” she apologizes to Mark. “Let’s go home.”

Dream-Training. Ali, Jake and Shen at a campfire.

Montrose approaches. "How's Anna?"

"So far so good," answers Ali. "She's almost crossed over the Whirlwind. Limbo should be easy."

"I want to go home with her," says Montrose.

Ali, Jake and Shen are speechless.

Finally Ali says "You will someday, but right now Nina needs you."

Montrose's face breaks.

"I am no use to Nina. No one has ever survived direct contamination. I've just lost my wife, and I cannot bear to witness the loss of my only child."

Ali and Shen both put their arms around him.

"Like water flowing downward, there is a path around every obstacle," says Shen. "We just have to find it."

Jake begins to speak.

"I need to tell you what happened to Jennifer."

He chokes up, then continues, picturing each scene as he speaks.

"I knew Jennifer could see the unseen before we were married, but it never worried me. I thought it was interesting. She didn't talk about it a lot, and told me not to tell anyone. It was our secret.

"She became pregnant with our first child. Then one night...one night, she woke from a bad dream, and she was sick. She wouldn't go to the hospital. She said she was in a big fight, in her dreams. I didn't know...we went back to bed and...and it was like someone was running through her body. I could feel her body thump every time it happened, as if she was being punched from the inside. She cried in terrible pain. It was inside her, whatever it was. I woke her up, and she asked me to make pure love with her. We did...it was beautiful, true unity...and I felt something leave her body with a *whoosh*... something bad left her..."

“Less than a minute later I felt the EO re-enter her, with a big thump. I actually felt it happen. I was looking in her eyes when all of a sudden her body jumped in my arms, and I knew whatever had left her had just returned.

“I panicked....I didn’t know what to do. She fell asleep and I couldn’t wake her. She began thrashing her arms. Then she stopped breathing...I gave her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and she started breathing again...then...then she woke up and told me she hated me. I knew it wasn’t her, something in the voice...I panicked...she stopped breathing again, and I couldn’t get her to breathe again...she stopped breathing.”

Montrose, Ali and Shen say nothing.

Finally Shen speaks.

“The Light of your pure unity was enough to push the contamination out of her for a few moments...what does that mean?”

Ali answers. “It means that, as with all other EOs, whoever contaminated her could not stand the presence of pure Light, at least for a few precious seconds.”

Ali turns to Jake.

“Stay back right now. Shen, you stay with Jake. Only Montrose has the physical strength to stop the EOs if they attack. Let him work with Mark.”

Jake reluctantly nods yes, then says “Mark has the ability to fall asleep whenever he wants. It’s a by-product of the abuse he suffered all those years. Tell him to fall asleep when he cannot keep Nina awake. We will meet with him there. Also, Nina is being taunted by the EOs over her abortion. I have to fix that.”

Silence. Then Ali speaks to them.

“We are all here in this moment for a reason. Concentrate, focus, notice

details. And remember the most important of the virtues, hope.”

The evening shadows deepen across Nina’s living room.

Mark is on the phone near the kitchen, talking low, keeping an eye on Nina. She is on the sofa across the room, quietly playing her guitar.

“I know, boss, but I just need one more day off,” he whispers, then pulls the phone from his ear as his warehouse manager yells “You’re either on the loading docks by 7 a.m. tomorrow or you’re fired, Mark. We’ve got trucks rolling out every ten minutes, and I need them loaded, so if you don’t want the job -”

Nina puts down the guitar and leans into sleep.

The man-dog attacks, and her body shakes.

“Crap,” yells Mark, slamming down the phone.

“NO!” Nina screams as Mark tries to hold her. Shivering, she pushes him away as he calls her name.

Her eyes open with the look of a wild animal, and dart around the room before tightly closing again.

“Nina, NINA!” Mark repeats.

“Go away,” she answers, in a voice slightly lower.

“I love you,” he says.

“Screw love,” she says. “I hate you.”

“Is this Nina or someone else?” asks Mark.

Silence. She clenches her fists.

Mark reaches for the crucifix on the wall, and gently places it on Nina’s chest.

Her body jumps and she groans “Aaugh.”

“Who are you?” Mark repeats.

Finally she answers.

“Your daddy.”

Mark again places the crucifix on her chest. “Aaugh,” she cries, and slumps unconscious.

He cannot wake her.

Almost panicking, he realizes he must fall asleep quickly to enter the Other Side. He does so.

Thick fog. “Mark, it’s me, Montrose.”

They find each other.

“Help me Montrose.”

“Stay calm. I was watching you. It was good when you put the crucifix on her, but if you keep doing it you’ll give her a heart attack. When the man-dog surfaces like that and talks with you, I think it weakens him. He’s curious to see your world through her eyes, but he knows he has to stay inside her to keep his energy strong. The second time you used the crucifix, he actually left her body for a moment.”

“But then he re-entered her?” asks Mark.

“Within a split second,” answers Montrose. “The negative material inside her pulls him right back like a magnet. It’ll take an incredible light to actually pry him out of her longer than a few moments.”

“How does the crucifix work on him?”

“Any truly holy object from *any* religion carries with it a connection to the pure Light. Also, any such object that Anna or Nina once used in prayer also carries the memory of their light. It screws up the EOs minds...it reminds them of pure love, such as their own mother’s love...it makes them remember when they were innocent. These thoughts momentarily weaken even the best of the EOs.”

“But then the EOs re-enter the body.”

“It takes them a few moments to re-charge their energy, but yes.”

“We need to kill the man-dog the moment he separates from her,” says Mark.

“Yes,” says Montrose. “For now, keep her awake as long as you can. Get her out of the house. And remember later, if you use the crucifix too much she’ll have a heart attack. Go to a church and get some holy water; it will work almost as well, and it won’t be as damaging to her heart. Use the Buddha statue on the table near her bed; it might not be as rough as the crucifix. Also, in her drawer is a Sikh ceremonial knife, called a *Kirpan*. It belonged to Anna. The Sikhs use it to symbolize the slicing of evil from their souls. Run it very gently along the surface of Nina’s skin.”

Mark is startled. “How will I know how far to go with all this?”

“You have to lure the EO into surfacing and talking with you. The longer he talks, the weaker he becomes. If you see him thumping away inside her body, punching her from the inside, you’ll know you’ve gone too far. Remember, they’re not quite ready to kill her, because they want to lure *us* to her, and because they want to gain all her memories and knowledge before they destroy her. They want to steal the secret information she knows about the Other Side. Most importantly, if you are in trouble on your side, immediately fall asleep and look for me. Be careful; this is all a trap to catch more of us.”

“They’re not going to win this, Montrose.”

“Careful. Don’t show fear or anger toward the EOs; it feeds them and distracts you from the pure love you must give Nina. Wait until the moment of perfected opportunity. Don’t try to be the hero, or you’ll end up the

mourned fool and endanger all of us. Your only real weapon is your love for her.”

As Montrose and Mark talk, unknown to them, Nina awakens.

She puts on a coat but doesn't close it, and touches Mark, who remains sleeping.

She leaves her apartment and walks up the steep hill from the river, into the poorer section of Newburgh.

“Stay awake, stay awake,” she repeats, in a half-daze, turning her face to the drizzling rain. The streets are deserted.

She hears footsteps, and turns to see the Evil One with the red bandana quickly approaching in physical form.

Evil-Walker, she says to herself.

“You die, bitch,” he says, lunging into her.

“Screw you,” she says, sidestepping him and whacking his head with her fist.

He rolls to the ground, and she runs.

Darting through several backyards, she hears his footsteps behind her. She turns a corner into a garage, grabs a metal tire iron, and waits.

As he rounds the corner she slams his head with the iron, and he crumples.

She continues to beat him until he no longer moves.

Astonished, she watches as his body turns to ashes in front of her.

She remembers from her training that he is still alive on the Other Side, that he can only be killed over there.

Mark is driving in a panic through lower Newburgh, looking for Nina.

It's nearly dark, and the rain pelts the windshield.

Finally he spots her.

"I'm sorry," she cries as she gets in the car. "I needed to walk, but I got in trouble."

They hug each other.

"Please Nina, we need to stay close right now," he says, kissing her.

"I'll never leave you again like that," she promises, pulling to him. "I am so sorry."

They drive. After a few blocks they turn into a church parking lot. They try to open the church door, but it's locked.

They walk to the nearby rectory and ring the doorbell.

"Yes?" answers a young priest.

"Excuse us Father, but the church is closed and we need some holy water."

"It's Wednesday night and I'm off duty," he answers.

"We need to bless our house tonight," says Mark.

"It can wait. I don't believe I've ever seen you in our church before. Come to 10 o'clock Mass Sunday morning."

He tries to close the door but Mark inserts his foot. "No Father, please, we need it now."

The priest scowls and says "Wait here."

He returns with a paper cup half-filled with water. "This'll have to do," he says, quickly making the sign of the cross over the cup before handing it to them.

"Real Christian of him," says Nina as they walk to the car. "What's the water for?"

"For good luck," Mark replies, placing the cup in a holder.

As they continue to drive, Nina asks “What are we gonna do?”

“I have to keep you awake as long as I can,” Mark says.

He spots a sign outside a small bar advertising “Live Music Tonight,” and parks the car.

“Shall we?” he asks, smiling.

They step from the car. The rain has stopped. They hear a band playing a slow love song.

Nina pulls Mark to her. “Dance with me here,” she says, “right here.” They pull close to each other.

“I’m with you Nina,” he whispers.

She asks quietly “How much time do we have to love before they kill me?”

He holds her tightly.

“We’ll have our time to love, Nina...we’ll have all the time we need.”

Unseen by them, Sade is watching, furious at the affection they are sharing.

“Too much kissy-poo, fuck, gotta screw her up good tonight when she sleeps, she’s mine.”

A huge, muscular EO enters, surprising Sade. He looks somewhat comical, with bushy red hair along the sides of his head.

“Luxa, Master Luxa, welcome,” says Sade, obviously caught off guard.

“I bring you some food,” says Luxa. He gestures, and several EO warriors drag in three near-dead souls.

“Good good, I’m starving. Mind if I eat first?”

“Go ahead, Sade, suck up!”

Sade picks up two of the near-dead in his hands, and pulls them into him, visibly shaking them as their energy combines with his. His body flares with the energy. He then discards their lifeless, shriveled carcasses.

“Save him for me later,” he says of the third near-dead soul.

“Charge up Sade, ‘cause you got big problems with our masters,” says Luxa.

“WHAT?” asks Sade.

“They’re pissed you fucked up in Transition and lost the battle. They say your plan was no good.”

Sade stops short, then replies carefully.

“Tell them we learned *so much* this time about crossing over, and tell them I’m gonna kill Anna and Nina, and maybe Montrose and the fat Jew too.”

“Good good, but now I’m hungry too,” says Luxa, grabbing and energy-sucking the last near-dead soul.

Sade says nothing, but appears anxious.

Mark and Nina are in her apartment, sitting by candlelight. Montrose appears.

“Want some coffee?” asks Nina of Montrose, nonchalantly.

“I’d prefer a stiff drink,” answers Montrose.

“Visitors?” asks Mark.

“Just Montrose,” Nina responds.

Turning to Montrose, she asks “Can you tell me what’s going on?”

“Sade’s revenge,” says Montrose.

“Why didn’t you tell me the truth about where I was from?”

“Anna believed the past was unimportant.”

“Yeah, well, it *is* important, because I’m suffocating from smoke every night in that cabin, and you’re running up the hill but you never get there in time, *Papa*.”

Montrose slumps. “I couldn’t get the door open quickly enough.”

“Why was it locked from the outside?”

“I locked it.”

“*Why?*”

“To keep Anna from going into town. We lived in the country, near Medellin, in Columbia, about a hundred years ago. Some of the people in town heard that she could see things, and they thought she was a witch, but she wasn’t afraid of them. I was. I thought they were going to burn her at the stake. So I locked her in the cabin whenever I left. I was coming home when I saw the smoke rising from the cabin...people from town had set the cabin on fire while I was gone...I ran up the hill, but it was too late.”

Nina listens intently. “What happened then?”

“After the fire I buried my wife and daughter. I was broken inside. I went into the mountains and lived with a shaman who taught me many things about the Other Side, things that I feared while Anna was alive. But...but I could not take the pain of losing her and you. And so after a time, I killed myself. I committed suicide. I took my own life so that I could see you and her sooner.”

“But you didn’t,” Nina says.

“I was punished for destroying myself. It’s a terrible sin to take away the great gift of life God has given us. I suffered many years of hard training before I was finally allowed to see Anna again. She was very different by then. You were prevented from learning I was your father, because of my suicide. They thought it might taint you.

“But I never stopped loving you and your mother. And now that she’s on her way to Heaven, I feel the loss all over again.”

He covers his face.

Nina looks at him curiously, then reaches for his hand.

The low moon opens for a moment through the thick night.

Anna is being escorted through the final section of Dream-Training, above the buzzing Whirlwind, surrounded by a group of Guardians. Ahead is the opening to Limbo.

Suddenly a tight, honeycombed formation of EOs shoot from the Whirlwind below, puncturing the circle of Guardians. The EOs quickly surround Anna and knock her down. They throw massive energy-balls at the Guardians, who respond with their own attack. Many are killed.

Sade grabs Anna by the hair.

“Come with me, bitch.”

Before the Guardians can stop them, the EOs disappear into the Whirlwind.

Ali, Shen and other Guardians watch in horror from the distance.

“No, NO,” Shen cries.

Ali turns to one of his soldiers.

“Bring Montrose immediately.”

Nina falls asleep and is quickly set upon by the man-dog. She cries out.

Mark desperately tries to wake her, to no avail. He dries her perspiring forehead and attempts to comfort her.

The clock reads 12:34 a.m.

Standing unseen by Mark, Montrose prays near Nina, palms extended, trying to send her Light.

Ali's messenger arrives.

"Montrose, Ali asks that you come right now."

Montrose snaps out of his healing meditation.

"I cannot leave. Nina is inches away from a heart attack."

"It's Anna. The Evil Ones have taken her."

Montrose's face crumbles.

"NO!"

Anguished, he looks at Mark.

"I wish you could hear me." He then places his hands on Mark and says "Give her all your love, all your light."

He tries to put his hand directly on Nina, but it is repulsed by the negative energy claiming her body.

He breaks down, and departs.

## *Chapter 14*

# The Light

Mark sits on Nina's bed, examining her exquisitely-carved wooden statue of Buddha. Nina sleeps restlessly beside him.

He holds the statue to his chest and prays "Thank you God for all you've given me. Pour your Light inside me, my God, pour your strength and love. I only wish to do your will. Amen."

He reaches for the crucifix.

"Dear God and his followers, please help me right now. For the children...for Nina...please help me."

Invisible Light pours through him. He feels calm as steel.

He places the Buddha statue three inches above Nina's back, prays silently, and rests it gently upon her sleeping body.

"Yeooooow," she cries, wildly swinging over.

"Who are you?" Mark asks, pressing the statue on her body.

"Aaaugh," she yells, punching him weakly.

"What do you want?" persists Mark, lifting the statue.

"Her dead," the man-dog says from within her.

Her eyes stubbornly close, but Mark knows the man-dog is not asleep.

Mark puts his fingers in the paper cup with the holy water and sprinkles some on her.

Nothing.

He tries again, making the sign of the cross with the holy water on her head.

Still nothing.

She starts to giggle.

“You stupid,” she says.

“Why?” asks Mark.

She giggles more.

“Your priest no good, he no really bless water, he stupid and *you* stupid.”

She turns on her side as if to sleep.

Mark pauses, staying calm.

He takes the paper cup of water in his left hand, closes his eyes, and with his right hand makes the sign of the cross over the water.

“Please God, bless this water and make it holy, fill it with your Light.”

He feels a surge flow through his hands to the water.

He sprinkles a few drops on Nina.

“Owww – STOP!” she yells, surprised, swinging her arm into Mark’s side.

Mark continues.

“I’ll stop if you tell me why you want to kill her,” he says.

“STOP!”

“Tell me why you want her dead.”

“She break rules.”

Mark stops.

“What rules?”

“She come to my home, so we go to hers.”

“But she only went to the Whirlwind because you took one of ours.”

Nina becomes visibly sicker, and tries to sleep. “Me no talk...me...no...talk.” She turns away.

Mark shakes her.

“Talk to me, talk to me.”

He rubs more holy water on her back.

“STOP!” she shouts, then snarls “Your daddy’s here and wants to see you.”

Undisturbed, Mark says “Fine. I’d like to meet him again.”

She pauses, then says “You no trick me,” and tries to sleep.

Mark takes the Sikh ceremonial dagger from Nina’s bedside, and moves it gently across Nina’s back.

“Aaugh,” Nina moans.

“Who was your mother...who was your mother?” Mark asks, removing the dagger.

“My mother, my mother,” Nina moans, practically unconscious.

Mark smiles, and makes the sign of the cross.

He notices the buzzing in his ears has weakened.

“Thank you God and all the good people in Heaven for helping me tonight. Pour your Light through me, *please*, for Nina’s sake.”

The clock reads 1:29 a.m. Mark quickly undresses and slips into bed next to Nina.

For the first time since morning, her body is resting peacefully.

He falls asleep instantly.

“Nina, Nina,” he calls into the fog.

He hears her response. “Here, Mark, here.”

Ahead Mark sees her vague form...but something strange...bloodshot eyes...he puts his arms out as if to embrace her, then quickly spins and takes her down.

Her face disappears, and Mark sees the face of the EO with the red bandana. Quickly, Mark snaps his neck and flings his gory head.

“Impostor...rest in peace,” he says.

Then looking up, he cries “Nina...Nina...where are you?”

Ali, Montrose and thousands of Guardians are above the Whirlwind. Less than 500 feet below them is a huge mass of Evil Ones, organized like beehives into fighting units, led by Sade and Luxa.

“My masters agree to give you Anna back, in return for Montrose,” says Sade.

Ali responds. “We will make no deals. It was against the rules for you to take Anna.”

Luxa laughs eerily, and yells “It was against the rules for Nina to enter the Whirlwind.”

The unconscious Anna is dragged forward and thrown down. “You want her, give us Montrose,” yells Sade.

Anna opens her eyes and shouts “Montrose NO, I’m contaminated.”

In one motion Ali orders the Guardians down. Before they can reach the EOs, Sade grabs Anna and screams “DIE!”

He reaches inside himself and smashes a massive energy-ball into her. He then commands “Down,” and the EOs disappear into the Whirlwind.

The Guardians gather around Anna.

Montrose holds her broken body in his arms.

“No Anna, stay with me, stay with me.”

Rising above her are images, sparkling before disappearing...memories...the garden, the wooden bear, Montrose and Nina...

Montrose reaches into the images, but they dissolve in mid-air. Her body is crumpled and without light.

The Guardians stand in protected but solemn silence around Montrose.

“She won’t belong to Hell and she’ll never know the peace of Heaven,” incants Shen, “but her memories will carry on in our hearts, infinitely in our memories.”

Montrose weeps.

The man-dog is outside Nina, recovering from the pain inflicted by Mark. He hovers inches above her and Mark, one paw clinging to Nina, seeming to rest.

Sade approaches, alone for once; his army is busy guarding the Whirlwind for fear the Guardians will attack in revenge for the killing of Anna.

“WAKE UP!” he screams at the man-dog. “Get back inside her now, get back inside her.”

The man-dog half-wakes and says “Noooo, me rest a little, holy water hurt me, me rest.” He falls asleep again.

“GET INSIDE HER NOW OR I’LL HURT YOU!” yells Sade, but the man-dog only responds “Sooooon” and closes his eyes.

Unlike most EOs, he is incapable of fearing Sade.

“Nina, Nina...where are you?” cries Mark through his sleep.

Finally he hears her faint voice. “Here.”

They fall into each other's arms.

"I love you Nina."

"And I love you," she answers weakly. "Where are we?"

"Safe for now. Safe." He can feel the man-dog close...a sticky, gross feeling...but he ignores it.

She looks into his eyes. "Dance with me."

They dream-dance in spirit form, a close, embracing dance that allows their energies to intermingle.

"Come to me," whispers Mark.

"I've waited all my life," she answers.

As they make love, a huge, healing glow surrounds their flowing forms, and the purest of blue-white light pours through them.

They unify.

In Heaven, a small group of children are led in play by Mohammed, the same little boy that Nina and Anna helped cross over when Nina was seven. Mohammed appears only a few years older now, for time moves slowly on the Other Side.

Mohammed turns as a woman in a shawl approaches.

"Is it time?" he asks.

"Yes," comes her answer.

He gathers the children around him and says "I'm leaving you for awhile, until we meet again. Pray for me, and always smile when you think of me."

He motions a younger boy to come forward, and says to him "Davey, I'm going to help your sister Nina...I'm going to be her *son*. Pray for us until we all meet again."

Nina's brother Davey hugs Mohammed.

Mohammed raises his hands skyward. "Take me. Let me do Allah's will."

A flock of sparrows pass overhead, and his glowing spirit rises to their center.

Nina and Mark are gracefully floating, moving together in slow, rhythmic motion, sweeping through their pleasure, unifying inside each other with no thought or fear of the danger around them.

"Come to me Nina, come to me," he whispers.

Every inch of their bodies quivers. His lips touch her neck and shoulders, and their fingers entwine.

"Take my light," he tells her.

She answers "Always."

Their moist bodies become one.

An intense blue-white light emerges between them.

The sound of sparrows flying...with them comes another beautifully-pure white light...it merges with Nina and Mark...the scent of roses...a warm and comforting glow surrounds them...Mohammed is conceived within Nina.

Exploding burst of pure blue-white light.

"YEOOW," screams the man-dog in agony.

His form is fully separated from Nina.

He looks around wildly, and thinks he sees Nina in the near distance.

"Here boy," the man-dog hears Nina call.

"No, over here boy," comes Nina's voice from the opposite direction. He spins in confusion and sees Nina again.

Behind him, in Nina's form, Montrose swiftly grabs the man-dog's hair, twists off the head, and flings it.

Jake drops his disguise as the other Nina, and embraces Montrose. “We got him,” he repeats.

Sade watches in shock. Before he can react, he is surrounded and corralled by hundreds of Warriors and Liners. They do not attack him for fear of contamination, but their thick glow is too strong for him to penetrate and escape.

“Fuck you, get out of the way,” Sade screams at them, but they do not budge or allow him an opening.

He rages, pulling in energy with swift hand motions, building for the fight he knows is to come.

Jake and Montrose meet with a group of Guardians.

“Sade must be destroyed tonight,” says Montrose.

“Yes, but he’ll contaminate whoever comes close to him,” says Jake. “We’ll be right back where we started.”

Mark awakens, and places his crossed hands over Nina’s chest, hoping to ease her pain with healing Light.

She opens her eyes and asks “Are we safe yet?”

“Almost,” he answers.

The moon hangs low, with an almost-complete white circle of foggy light surrounding it.

The clock reads 3:15 a.m.

He hears a dog howling in the distance, and holds Nina tightly.

“You are my light,” she says as they drift back asleep.

“Montrose, are you there?” Mark’s voice cuts through Dream-Training.

“Right here. Come to the campfire.”

Mark makes sure it is truly Montrose. They move to the fire, where Jake, Ali and Shen are waiting.

Jake speaks. “We have Nina in a safe place now for a few hours, completely protected, getting lots of healing. So far it seems all the man-dog’s negative material is out of her, but we have to check for traces. She will be very weak and sore when she awakens, but she has survived. Mark, you saved her.”

“Are we safe yet?” asks Mark.

“As safe as our distance from the enemies of our souls,” says Shen. “The man-animal is dead. Sade is corralled by the Liners in Dream-Training. Nina is safe.

“But Anna...Anna was destroyed by the Evil Ones just before Limbo.”

“What?” exclaims Mark. He looks at Montrose.

“What happened?”

“They ambushed her,” says Montrose.

“I am so sorry,” he says, reaching for Montrose.

Montrose pushes him away and speaks angrily.

“Now we must finish what they started. We must destroy Sade.”

“He’ll try to contaminate whoever fights him,” says Ali.

Mark speaks.

“But since I have life-light instead of light-life, like you guys, it’s harder for him to contaminate me.”

“No, Mark,” says Montrose. “He is physically overwhelming. It should be ME fighting him. If *I* am contaminated, my warriors are trained to sacrifice me. My life is worth nothing now without Anna.”

Mark turns, with a furious calm in his voice.

“I am in a better position to do this. And if we lose you, who will train our Warriors in the physical? For you this is a suicide mission, but you’ve already learned from the past just how wrong suicide is. You seek revenge, but when you seek revenge first dig two graves. I seek justice, not revenge. That’s why it should be me fighting Sade.”

“Let it be Mark,” rules Ali.

Sade is still corralled by thousands of brightly glowing Liners. He tries to run at them but is buffeted by the brilliant force of their light. He shrieks and howls, but the Liners sing songs and keep their glowing light strong.

Behind the Liners and unseen by Sade, Mark points his palms toward him, trying to read his memories.

He feels Sade’s roaring anger...the ferocity of a trapped animal...a thick layer of hatred fed by an obsessive desire to return to the living, to live, to live...an obsession with life...Mark feels a pang of sympathy for Sade...he sees Sade’s brother, destroyed by Montrose many years ago, and feels Sade’s anguish...Sade truly loved his brother...Mark focuses on the brother’s face, memorizing it. He hears Nina’s voice: *“Think of what he needs, and take advantage of it.”*

Just then Sade lets out a chilling scream.

Mark hums to himself the song Nina wrote for him. Calm.

He turns to Montrose and Jake.

“If this goes wrong, tell Nina I’ll love her forever, and I’ll wait for her.”

He moves into position.

“Ready.”

An opening is created in the large circle around Sade. He sees Mark enter and hurls himself forward.

“Fucking white-lighter,” Sade hisses.

Mark dives out of the way and throws a bright energy-ball that misses.

He spins, deflecting the dirty energy-ball Sade throws.

Sade raises his palms and takes on the form of Mark’s father.

“My son, I thought you loved me, you told me you loved me every night we were together.” Sade then flashes the image of Mark’s father molesting him.”

Mark instantly halts his spin, takes on the form of Sade’s dead brother, and points his palms at Sade.

*“My Brother Sade, I miss you, I’m alive inside Mark, don’t kill me.”*

Sade freezes.

Mark whirls and flips Sade down, hands on his throat, knees on his shoulder.

“I – want – life,” says Sade, choking, trying to kick Mark.

“You chose the wrong life,” answers Mark.

He spins Sade over and pulls his head off. He hurls the head into the long distance.

The Guardians and Liners, deadly quiet until that moment, explode in cheers of joy. They gather around Mark, many repeating the chant “Monster-killer.”

Campfire, Dream-Training, Montrose, Jake and Shen together.

“Anna’s gone...forever,” says Montrose.

Slowly at first, then uncontrollably, he sobs.

Jake comforts him. Shen speaks.

“Her memories will survive inside our hearts, warm with our tears. Her memories will survive.”

Just before dawn, while Nina and Mark are still sleeping, Jake and Shen approach them. Shen holds a baby girl in her arms.

“Nina...this is the child you gave up when you were younger,” says Shen. “The body dies, but the soul lives on.”

Nina’s eyes go wide. Shen gives her the baby.

“She’ll stay an infant until the time you return to Heaven,” says Jake. “For now...and for the rest of your life...remember her, acknowledge her, pray for her...honor her soul...she lives, and she waits for you.”

Mark puts his arms around Nina.

Early Thursday morning, February 28, 1991.

Nina and Mark sit on the back porch of her apartment, a blanket around them.

Nina has several bruises on her face, and a dark red mark across her neck.

The morning sun pours over the mountains and across the river, brighter and more enveloping than she can ever remember.

In a winter-worn flowerpot on the porch, green blades from a hyacinth bulb have begun to force their way through the soil. Mark points to them.

“Spring’s coming.”

Nina looks in his eyes.

“I – haven’t – even – cried for Granma,” she says.

Her body begins to shake with tears.

Mark holds her, rocking her in his arms, stroking her hair.

“We’ll have time to cry now, Nina.”

He kisses her, and whispers “Time to cry...and time to love.”

# Epilogue

In late November 1991, Nina gave birth to a boy she and Mark named Anthony.

They had one more child together in 1993, Jenny.

Mark and Nina lived in secret in the years that followed, and did not work directly with the Guardian Angels for fear of being targeted by Evil Ones and endangering their children.

They dreaded the upcoming reflective year of itself, 2002, and the final one in 2020. They wondered if by 2020, as Ali predicted, the Evil Ones would “move freely among the living.”

What followed beyond 1991 is told in the next book.

*-Jerry Ebert*