

# THE ENCHANTMENTS

A Novel

David Orsini

CHAPTER ONE  
THREE SPIRITS

"I'm calling on the two of you to set things right," Robert Steerforth says. "There's much to be done, back there on Earth. There's so much that both of you can *do*."

"To make things better?" Melanie asks him.

She wants Robert to clarify more precisely the nature of this new assignment.

"To influence what happens," he answers her after a moment's reflection. "To bring justice into the lives of the five persons that you will be meeting. To teach them how to accept responsibility for their behavior."

Now Captain Randall Johnson, Melanie's husband, comes into it.

"There's so much we can do *here*," he says. "There are so many lived-out lives to review and so many judgments to make about the newly dead."

Clearly, the captain and Melanie are uneasy. Their doubts are understandable. So Robert perceives as he considers their present situation. It is a long time since they completed their previous missions on Earth, millions of

miles away. It is an even longer time since they walked along the various paths of the Earth as human beings who participated in the happenings of the era into which they had been born. It has been many decades since Randall died and several years since Melanie also sprang free of ordinary time. Right after that, they entered the world not of the dead. They left their dead selves far behind them, back there, within Earth that is time-trapped and temporary.

Robert understands exactly what they are feeling and why. Despite his experience and his assurance as a Spirit, he too has sometimes had misgivings just before he embarked upon a new mission to Earth. As a reliable and undaunted Spirit, he now regards that territory as somewhat foreign. Time-trapped and fallible, Earth often disguises its dangers and masks its deviousness. Even the hardest Spirits need to navigate its treacheries with steel-true courage and keen-eyed awareness.

Sojourn, the new world that he and Melanie and the captain now inhabit, is also time-bound. But it is tethered to a more quickened, supernatural time that precedes the journey into the Eternal. Spirits, Shadows, and Shades live here. Apparitions, Phantoms, and Specters—their ghostly relatives—also reside here, roomless and unhoused as they navigate the waves and ripples...whorls and coils and spirals of always-mystical space. For those who are allowed to become embodied once again, Sojourn is a vast world

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that never seems crowded. Capacious rooms and long, wide halls and corridors go on expanding with sinuous velocity. Space keeps winding and curving and meandering even as it spreads its voluminous dimensions into still wider rooms, corridors, fields, plains, avenues, and whole cities. There is an Art Deco look to many of the rooms, and modernist architectural designs bring stylized individuality to private homes, corporate buildings, and thriving streets. The beauty of the decor within homes, inside business centers and halls of justice, and along public thoroughfares here in Sojourn melds with their functionality. Every room, every building, and every street offer precise amenities and understated usefulness.

In Sojourn, there is no need for food. Even during those times when the Spirits here become once again fully embodied, they do not need food. Water from purified lakes and springs provides all the nourishment that Spirits need.

Sojourn is a natural satellite of Earth that is located within a transitional space between one's Earthly home and the First Heaven. It is a haven and a temporary place for the newly dead that are waiting to make the journey to The First Heaven. Sojourn is invisible to even the largest telescopes, the swiftest spacecraft, and the most advanced NASA instruments. The dead who have recently arrived here only to discover that they are not dead in Sojourn have not lost their memories of Earth or their yearning to return

to the places that knew them well and the people that gave them their unconditional love. Perhaps, they will never lose that memory or that yearning. But they are millions of miles away from Earth, which is The Second Heaven and the one that most human beings never recognize as a treasure beyond price and as a world filled with miracle workers and beneficent Spirits.

While he observes Captain Johnson and Melanie, Robert reviews all these truths. It is his habit to assess the continually evolving scenario that he and the other Spirits around him are presently occupying. Realist that he is, Robert rightly interprets the advantages and the liabilities attaching themselves to unpredictable missions and to the sometimes-enigmatic Spirits assigned to them. For the most part, he knows all that he needs to know about Captain Johnson and Melanie. He knows about their past lives on Earth. He knows, too, about their commendable work here in Sojourn. He also knows that, in times of danger, they have always summoned unstinting courage.

During the first months of their training in the Afterlife, Melanie and the captain each acquired the appropriate powers of every kind of ghost, including those of a Shadow, an Apparition, and a Phantom. For the first months after their deaths and all through their training in ghostliness, they often appeared to be full-bodied, even though their bodies of flesh and blood, yoked as they always are to the

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Spirit-Life informing them, were vanishing by nearly imperceptible degrees. Gradually, they became fully radiant Spirits.

Right now, because they are preparing for a mission that will return them to Earth, they appear as full-bodied human beings once again. Even though they are fully embodied, the prospect of returning to Earth has made them uneasy. It has been almost eighty years since the captain was killed in a World War Two aerial battle. Nearly a decade has passed since Melanie died, yearning always for the fiancé that she lost to the war. In those days, she was Melanie Dickinson. One month after her Earthly death seven years ago, the First Spirit allowed the captain and eternally young Melanie to marry. On that festive day, all of Sojourn and the First Heaven rejoiced that so ideal a couple were being conjoined, body and soul, because of their love for each other.

On this radiant morning, though, the captain and his wife are about to enter a different kind of adventure. Their Earth-bound mission will propel them into episodes fraught with surprises and tensions. Connecting to the persons of an altogether different era whose lives they will be influencing complicates their mission.

Captain Johnson's unease, harnessed as it is to his military bearing, persuades him to ask Robert another question.

“Why are you choosing Melanie and me for this assignment? There is so much to do here in Sojourn. Why are you sending us back to Earth?”

“The two of you are the best Spirits for this mission,” Robert answers him. “Besides, both of you need a change. You, Randall, are becoming too severe in your judgments of the new arrivals. It’s difficult enough to deal with the newly dead who have not yet accepted their Earthly deaths. But, as our most meticulous judge, you have become too caustic and too harsh in your decisions. You lack empathy. You’ve lost touch with compassion.”

“In all our courtroom trials, I serve justice first of all,” the captain replies, his clipped words pausing at the cusp of bluntness. “My experience as a pilot in that war of long ago taught me well. It showed me the savage nature of most human beings.”

“You are a fine realist,” Robert says. “No one denies that. But you need to learn more about being an eternal. You are too harsh toward the dead who arrive here from Earth bewildered by the newness of their existence as Spirits and beleaguered by the wrongs that they committed during those years when they were alive on Earth.”

“I do what has to be done,” the captain insists. “Some of the dead have led rotten and even criminal lives. They deserve to be condemned to eternal disappearance.”

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With wise and heartfelt words, Melanie now urges this stalwart young man whom she so profoundly loves toward a new way to see. There is nothing tremulous in her petition. Self-possessed and intuitive, she is a confident woman who believes in her capacities for changing existence for the better, even here in Sojourn, a natural satellite located halfway between the luminous First Heaven—the home of the First Spirit which is millions of miles beyond Sojourn—and the finite Earth, which is the Second Heaven that most of its inhabitants fail to recognize. She is well aware of the tremendous responsibility that Captain Johnson—her prodigious Randall, her loyal husband and soul-damaged hero—as judge of the spirit and the flesh fulfills with rigorous morality and with careful exactitude.

When the newly dead arrive in Sojourn, Randall—one of the many judges who serve in various locations within this natural satellite—presides over a courtroom of twelve Secondary Spirits, including herself, who serve as conscience-bound jurors. These jurors review the lives of the defendants whose fallible lives on Earth unfold once more with irrevocable and sometimes lacerating energies. Those lives flash up as vivid realities on the wall videos that surround the celestial courtroom. The videos reveal the truth about the defendants, though not the whole truth. Not even the vivid images propelling the video narratives or the



testimonies of Spirit witnesses who knew the defendants while they wended their way together through their temporal existence reveal the layers of truth that stay hidden behind those images and beneath the testimonies. Those layers never disclose their intricate nature to anyone except the First Spirit, who knows everything that happened in the past and that is happening now and that will happen in the future.

Though they often command laser-sharp perceptions of the past, present, and future of every human being, Secondary Spirits are not all knowing. The eternal truths about the behavior of people, with their complicated causes and ambivalent consequences, often elude them. Within the harsh glare of a probing courtroom here in Sojourn, the twelve Spirit-laden jurors struggle to discover the authentic identity of each defendant. Yet too often they decipher only the shadows of truth. Despite the extraordinary powers of seeing that the First Spirit has granted them, these jurors apprehend surface impressions, incriminating foibles, and controversial occasions when they are examining the tarnished or bruised or broken lives of the defendants. At times, the brutal accuracy of the wall videos and the subjective recollections of the witnesses yield merely spurious correspondences of the defendants' lives—bogus revelations and makeshift news about their characters. What the video images show and the testimonies disclose

are merely the shapes and shadows of the defendants' lives, with the reality of truth often taken out of them.

All of these problems Melanie comprehends with quick-witted insight and with respectful awareness of the responsibility—indeed, the ordeal—placed upon her husband, the brave Captain Randall Johnson, whose embattled Earthbound experience in the Second World War tested and proved his heroism even as it destroyed his belief in the goodness of most human beings.

Because she wants to dispel her husband's tension, hovering as it is beside his military officer's arrogance, Melanie chooses sensible words that may guide him onto a more promising path. She also wants to recognize the validity of Robert's remark about her beloved Randall's hard-heartedness.

"Have pity, Randall," she counsels her husband. "Have pity on all those newly dead persons who arrive here with some goodness still flickering within themselves, like the embers of a fire that has not yet burnt itself out. You can do it. You are capable of mercy. You have that gift within you—that quickened inspiration, that quiet sensibility. I know you have it."

She watches Randall as he watches her. He studies the whole, embodied form of her with the gleaming brown eyes that always reveal new layers of the love for her that pulses within him, undying and eternal. Stalwart and honest, he

finds softer words that tell her all over again exactly what kind of man he is.

“I can only be the man that I really am,” he explains. “I *am* judgmental. I *am* demanding. I uphold all the rules that the First Spirit has set forth and all His commandments. Yet, because you ask it, and—yes—because Robert has also requested it, I will try to bring at least a little more mercy to my judgment of wrongdoers. I will even summon all the pity that I have stored away. Yet I will not allow pity or mercy to tarnish the justice that I intend to uphold.”

His answer pleases Melanie. She is not surprised that Randall refuses to compromise the unblemished nature of justice or of his character. But his willingness to explore the more forgiving aspects of his nature pleases her.

“I know that you will do your best. You will do the things that need to be done,” she tells him. “You always do.”

Robert has more to say.

“Good to hear,” he tells Captain Johnson. “Even a dram of your mercy may save a few people who are not behaving well on Earth. You may also guide a few wrongdoers to a better path.”

“Of course he will,” Melanie declares. “When we return to Earth, Randall will be a wonderful guardian Spirit for all those persons whose lives we will be influencing.”

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A smile touches Captain Johnson's lips for just a moment. He is grateful for Melanie's kind words.

But Robert has still more to say. This time, he directs his words to Melanie.

"Randall's being a successful guardian will be more likely if you are with him," he says. "That is why the First Spirit is sending you on this mission with him. Your right-minded mercy will temper the quality of his stern justice. This mission may also teach you a thing or two about those persons who are beyond the reach of your mercy, as creditable as your mercy has always been."

His words spark Melanie's attention. Already, this new assignment intrigues her.

"I am always willing to learn more about other people," she says. After a pause, she says more. "I also like to learn more about myself."

Another smile touches Captain Johnson's lips. He perceives the promise of adventure in Melanie's words. He also appreciates Robert's realistic appraisal of him and ponders over the favorable predictions. The possibility that mercy will temper his stern justice impresses him. Yet there lives within his soul, immortal and resilient, the soldierly promise that he has made to the First Spirit. He will never hesitate to wage battle against deceivers, thieves, murderers, and the many other betrayers of innocence.

In her heart and soul, Melanie accepts Randall for the man that he is. So does Robert. For different reasons, perhaps, they would like Randall to explore a different aspect of his identity. They want him to become someone who, though not altogether new, has attained a different level of understanding, has experienced unanticipated Earthly adventures, and has reached even more astonishing chapters in his Spirit life.

Melanie is eager to begin their mission. She is pleased that Randall may learn more about himself. She is already wondering what events will teach them new truths about themselves.

On this bright Monday morning in Sojourn, where Time still imposes its mandates and its penalties upon the varied episodes unfolding here, Robert—ever dutiful and watchful—is also eager for Melanie and Randall to return to Earth to begin their mission. He observes the two of them with careful and prudent awareness. In the stillness of this moment, he reflects upon the persons they represent here in Sojourn. He also considers the persons they were while they lived on Earth. He never knew them while the three of them were alive on Earth. But their behavior in Sojourn validates the information that he has gathered about their exemplary lives on Earth.

Melanie and Randall sometimes reside in the First Heaven, millions of miles away from Sojourn. There, they

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mingle with the Blessed Angels and become further enlightened by the Presence of the First Spirit, who has created all that exists. Melanie's and Randall's exemplary conduct on Earth purified their Spirits even before they reached Sojourn, the first stopover for everyone who has died and whose lives unfold in review upon a vast wall video that encircles the courtroom and flashes with telling images before the eyes of a Spirit Judge and twelve Spirit Jurors. On frequent occasions, Captain Johnson has served as the Spirit Judge at many trials of the newly dead. Those court sessions have often yielded fierce legal battles involving rebellious and unrepentant defendants, letter-of-the-law prosecutors, and the sternest of Spirit Judges—Captain Randall Johnson.

While observing Randall and Melanie, Robert remembers all these things. He respects Captain Johnson. He believes that he knows him as well as he can know any other human being or fellow Spirit. He also respects Melanie, whom he regards as the emblem of truth and decorum.

Robert recalls how Captain Johnson appears in the panoramic courtroom within Sojourn. The captain always makes a formidable presence, anchored as it is to his brisk manner and his military bearing. Standing at six foot, six inches as he enters the room and joins his colleagues at the interviewers' table, he is a very tall man. He is also a young

man. Despite all the years that have passed since his earthly death, he has remained twenty-two, the age he was when his plane was shot down during an aerial battle over Berlin in July 1943. His brown-haired handsomeness still wears traces of battle fatigue and wartime bitterness. He rarely smiles. Beneath his no-nonsense demeanor, there lives a harnessed rage against the criminality, potential or activated, of most human beings. He is a prosecuting attorney. He is an emblem of Stern Justice. He is the fully embodied Spirit who may prevent wrongdoers from returning to Earth for important missions or from moving forward to the First Heaven. He well may be their executioner, condemning them to eternal disappearance. Captain Johnson is, nevertheless, an honorable man. Melanie is the love of his life, the one bright spark that stirs his ardor for her and influences his hard-won forgiveness of some wrongdoers.

Here in Sojourn, Melanie appears as a blue-eyed blonde woman of twenty-two, even though she died in 2013 when she was ninety-two. The man that she loved saw her on Earth for the last time when she was twenty-two. That was the year when her fiancé, Captain Randall Johnson, was killed in the Second World War. On Earth, she was a self-assured woman. She owned a successful dress shop in Boston. She also designed an impressive line of dresses and gowns that became a national brand. Always, during the

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many years she lived on Earth without him, she worried that in the Afterlife her fiancé would not recognize her because she had grown old. Shortly after her arrival in Sojourn, though, she was elated to learn that she could choose to be the age she was when her fiancé, Captain Randall Johnson, last saw her on Earth. After she died on Earth, she was reunited with her fiancé in the First Heaven. Knowing of their goodness, the First Spirit regards them as the perfect couple whose love is a healthy blend of the sensual and the spiritual.

“These two were born to be married,” the First Spirit told the Blessed Angels in the First Heaven, not long after Melanie arrived there to be reunited with the man who had been her fiancé many decades earlier. “My plans for them did not allow them to be married while they lived on Earth. But the First Heaven is the ideal place for them to marry each other. Their marriage will last through all eternity.”

Whenever she returns to Sojourn, Melanie is a temperate and good-natured mediator.

In this new mission to Earth, Randall and Melanie will appear most of the time as their full-bodied selves. They will be wearing contemporary clothes and modern haircuts. As he muses upon their unease, Robert in the secret chambers of his heart accords them his empathy. He, too, has sometimes returned to Earth for difficult assignments. He, too, has experienced the trauma of visiting a homeland



that is no longer a home or even familiar except in vague or nebulous ways. No memory of having lived, enthusiastic and contented, within a white clapboard colonial house on a wide, clean street shaded by rows of flourishing elm trees atones for the later disappearance of all those cherished mementos. On Earth, Time kills everything and everyone, eventually.

Time killed him, the man who on Earth was a human being named Robert Steerforth, when he was not expecting to die. His Earthly life ended when he died of a brain aneurysm at the age of forty-two. In that period, he was a vice-president of a steel corporation in Pennsylvania. He died when he was addressing a symposium of global business leaders in Brazil. He had been speaking to ninety-nine other corporate leaders about the importance of diversifying their products and their markets. He believed that what he was saying was meaningful and helpful. He felt that everyone who was in that room appreciated what he was saying. He remembered thinking that he was living through one of his happiest days. That was his last thought before he keeled over and fell away from the speaker's podium. That was the moment he died, without a warning and without a chance to say goodbye to his wife, their two sons, and their daughter.

Eventually, his wife Amelia joined him here in Sojourn. Always adaptable, she soon came to enjoy her assignments

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as a Spirit Juror in the court trials of the newly dead and as a Shape Shifter or as her fully embodied self during missions that temporarily returned her to Earth. When she first arrived in Sojourn, she was astonished by his appearance. Here, in this natural satellite so far away from Earth, his lanky body sometimes glows. Its amber sheen moves in and out of brightness that often leaves the dead who have just arrived in Sojourn completely amazed. They wonder whether he is a god or some holy messenger. Whenever the brightness covering him becomes dim, they see him as the man he was in the moment that he died. His oblong face, with its forehead, cheekbones, and jawline similar in size; his slightly tousled dark hair; and his well-groomed beard give him the look of a college professor who may be in his mid-thirties or even forty. Eventually, they perceive him as a Spirit who is honest, reliable, and fair-minded.

All his present thoughts about the captain and his Melanie influence Robert's keen-sighted awareness of them and his comprehension of the conflicts that await them in this new mission that they are about to begin. To fulfill their mission, they will at times become Shadows and at other times become equally mysterious Shape Shifters, Apparitions, and Specters. They will also share the ability to see into the future. Clairvoyant and well-trained, they are not strangers to the unpredictable and the dangerous. Their

hesitation about this mission has nothing to do with hidden fear or with eroding confidence. It is their returning to a homeland that they can no longer claim as their own that goads their unease and their sorrow. Most of the places that knew them well have altered beyond recognition or have entirely disappeared. Relatives and friends who meant so much to Melanie and her captain have reunited with them in Sojourn and in the First Heaven. This ideal couple has no pressing need or even a latent desire to return to Earth. But the possibility that they will be able to rescue five persons from their self-defeating errors, devious plots, and sensual inclinations has inspired new layers of Melanie's compassion even as that possibility has roused Randall's lawyerly aptitudes.

So Robert perceives and, perceiving, draws them more deeply into the complicated chapters that await them.

"You must try to help these five people," he tells them. "You may even be able to rescue some of them."

"To change them for the better," Melanie says, eager to simulate the positive spin of his words.

"Or to bring them face to face with their selfishness and with their crimes," Randall says. He obviously anticipates more stringent consequences and darker aftermaths in the rescue of these five persons.

"Helping them to navigate their lives more intelligently will be a very good thing, indeed," Robert says. "The First

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Spirit is counting on the two of you to do everything that you can to help these five individuals to be honest with themselves and with other human beings. Help these lost persons to discover their souls. Help them to see that they live first of all as Spirits. Their Earthly bodies are merely temporary shelters. Help them to know that physical things depend upon spiritual things.”

“We’ll do everything we can to help them,” Melanie says. Her genteel voice sounds confident and determined.

“We’ll guide them to the destinies that they deserve,” Randall promises. His words sound no less determined than Melanie’s. But their implicated complexities are cryptic, ambiguous, and even mysterious.

Robert sees through these complexities. Yet he is not offended. Randall’s ingrained cynicism and his low estimate of most human beings will hold the mission to its realistic bearings. Melanie’s compassion—her inveterate belief in the regeneration of errant persons and in the soul-enhancing power of forgiveness—will effectively balance the captain’s hardheartedness. That these two blessed Spirits may learn more about the limits of their judgments will make the mission even more significant.

“I’m certain that the two of you will work hard to save these persons from themselves,” Robert says. “You will do everything that the First Spirit requires of you. Whether each of these five persons is willing to change is another

matter. The First Spirit has given them free will. He, of course, already knows what is going to happen. But He is giving them the chance to choose their destinies. He is giving them the opportunity to save themselves. Since we sometimes think of life as a gamble, we might say that the First Spirit is loading the dice in their favor. He is sending the two of you to help these persons see things more clearly and less selfishly.”

Robert wants Melanie and Randall to know more about these five people. For that reason, he hands them *résumés* that outline the essential facts about the five troubled people that they will soon be meeting on Earth. The instant that they see the names of these five individuals, the captain and Melanie recall their specific faces, as well as their achievements, failures, and aspirations. Their training as Spirits has granted Randall and Melanie a nearly omniscient awareness of everyone who is alive on Earth and everyone who has died there and reclaimed life here in Sojourn. They know the highlights of these lives, without the specific details that denote the hard-won moral victories and the soul-damaging compromises. The *résumés*, of course, are not enough to spark completely Melanie’s and Randall’s memories of the selfish motives and the bad deeds of the troubled individuals that they will soon be meeting. What prods their memories are the videos that, after a wave of Robert’s right hand, flash across the giant

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walls encircling the capacious room and the long conference table where they are sitting. Instantly, scenarios filled with temporary happiness, long-lasting suffering, and bitter consequences cover the walls. Two young men, two equally young women, and one middle-aged man live and love—sometimes with hope, sometimes with despair, always striving for fulfillment that they rarely know how to earn. Some of them acquire wealth through honest or devious ways. Others learn to be faithful to their lovers and to their friends, and some learn how to betray them. Still others scheme so that they can ride roughshod over everyone who gets in their way. They disguise their malice, envy, and ambition. They devise ingenious plots, and they manipulate the rules when doing so is to their advantage. They dupe adversaries, they trap competitors, and they tarnish their souls.

These are the three men and the two women that the Captain and Melanie will try to rescue.

Right now, right after the video narratives have flashed before their seeing, the names and faces of these imperiled persons do not yet incite the captain's wrath or subdue Melanie's pity. What Melanie and her Randall draw from the tangled lives unfolding before them are the various plots that have already begun weaving their dangerous obsessions and betrayals.

There is, first of all, Brett Robinson—a popular young man who, although he is engaged to an emotionally repressed young woman, falls in love with her beautiful stepmother. This young man, a lawyer on his way to immense success, uses women for his carnal pleasure and bonds with powerful lawyers with whom he shares a predilection for wily courtroom maneuvering and other shady business practices.

There is Lisa Caulfield Calhern, the young stepmother and a former debutante, who has entered a loveless marriage to a wealthy man because he can enhance her social status and because his money can buy her privileged society's forgiveness for her previous scandals with wealthy, jaded playboys and with a charismatic movie actor.

There is Tate Calhern, the arrogant husband of the faithless stepmother. He secretly hates the daughter whose birth killed his first wife, the only woman he was capable of loving. This autocrat—this ruthless tyrant and lost soul—has made a mockery of his second marriage. He withholds his love from his second wife even though he pretends to be an ideal husband. Ironies further stymie his happiness. The two young men that he regards as substitute sons betray his trust when they become his dissatisfied wife's secret lovers.

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There is Naomi Calhern, the emotionally repressed young woman who has allowed herself to become the victim of her father's hatred. She has brought similar insecurities to her relationship with two men who want to marry her for her money.

There is Jake Boldwood, the young man whose troubled past has made him a dangerous partner for the emotionally repressed daughter and a volatile adversary for the young lawyer who is using the repressed woman for his own gain.

"Some of these people may not be worth saving," Randall says, right after he and Melanie have reviewed the quickened flashes of the five troubled lives unraveling their fury and anger before him. "Only miracles could save them."

Robert quickly agrees.

"You are so right, Randall," he says. "Your no-nonsense approach to people provides you with special insight. To save these people, miracles are needed. You and Melanie are the right Spirits to make those miracles happen."

"What do you want us to do?" Melanie asks him. "Only because of the most grievous circumstances have we been asked to make miracles."

"That is true," Robert agrees. "This is one of the grievous times. The First Spirit wants you to you draw upon your previous training. Surely, you remember that, when you were first connecting to your ghostliness, you dabbled in



the making of enchantments. You learned how to cast a spell over a person to compel a necessary response. To inspire troubled and even criminal individuals to change for the better, you invoked magical visions in their everyday surroundings and inside their nighttime dreams. Your enchantments challenged their willpower and subverted their evil plots. Those same enchantments brought these wrongdoers face to face with their betrayals and with their obsessions.”

“Will that be enough to save them?” Melanie asks. “Will their coming face to face with their wrongdoing persuade them to make amends for their mistakes? Will our enchantments guide them to a better path?”

“In most cases, you would know the answer to those questions. Usually, you and Randall know what will happen to the persons you are sent to rescue. Your clairvoyance shows you their future long before it happens to them. But for this mission the First Spirit is preventing you from foreseeing the climactic episodes that will determine whether these five people discover the paths that will lead them to redemption or to eternal disappearance. This mission will be a test for you as well. It will test your judgment, your compassion, and your courage.”

After hearing Robert’s description of the challenges awaiting them, Randall and his Melanie have compassed

their proper bearings. They are more certain than ever of the direction in which they must proceed.

They have two more questions. Melanie asks the first one.

“Who are the persons that Randall and I will become for this mission?”

With no hesitation, Robert tells her.

“You will be a clinical psychologist. You are also a married woman. Randall, your husband, will be a top-notch lawyer in Tate Calhern’s law firm. Each of you will be twenty-nine years old.”

Randall, speaking for himself as well as for Melanie, chooses the words that form the second question.

“When does our mission begin?”

“Right now,” Robert answers him. “The two of you know all there is to know about teleporting. Concentrate. Focus upon Blue Ridge, a town in Fairfield County, Connecticut. Its vivid imagery will impress itself upon your awareness. It is, you will recall, an upscale community located fifty miles from New York City. The privileged human beings who live in Blue Ridge enjoy the luxuries of homes bordering Long Island Sound. Many of these persons are affluent careerists. Among them, there are uptight citizens with unforgiving hearts, uncaring immoralists, peddlers of deception, and potential

murderers. Save them if you can. Do what you must do to bring them face to face with themselves.”

“I’m eager to start,” Melanie tells Randall. “Let’s begin with Naomi Calhern and Brett Robinson. Naomi is the troubled young woman that Brett—a young lawyer on his way to the top—is courting, even though he has fallen in love with her beautiful stepmother.”

“I’m all for that,” Randall says. “Let’s begin. Let’s do the things that need to be done.”

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