

# The Ghost Guard



Christina Manolescu  
Illustrations by Mary Fitzpatrick

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# The Ghost Guard

by Christina Manolescu  
Illustrations, Mary Fitzpatrick

*Fitz and Ingrid's parents are called away on an urgent mission overseas. That's when their ghostly guardians, Auntie Vannie and Uncle Ed, drift by to say hello.*

**A fascinating story, very imaginative and well written. The illustrations are beautiful. It should help a young person's creative development, as well as expanding his or her knowledge.**

*Joan Plunkett, Educator, Actor; London, U.K.*

**The layering adds a lot of richness; a wonderful book.**

*Margaret Goldik, former Executive Director,  
Association of English Publishers of Quebec, Canada*

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for her enchanting illustrations

To Joan Plunkett and Margaret Goldik  
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for editorial comments and suggestions

# The Ghost Guard

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# Prologue

## THE SOUL-MANSIONS OF AETHERIUM

*Upon a faraway mountain summit, arise the vast glimmering Soul-Mansions of Aetherium.*

*Two Spirit-ghosts appear at the Grand Portal beneath a star-sprinkled dome.*

*It is here, at the Spirit-Guard Museum, that they receive their fearsome Mission before the majestic Portal rumbles shut.*

*The whirling wind-chimes grow louder. Below, are four hazard-zones that the Spirit-ghosts must descend.*

*They tread their way along the perilous Ridge of Traum. Grotesque creatures threaten their passage through the Dangerfields of Delirium. They struggle through sunken Caverns of Quicksilver, only to brave the blinding Foxfire of Phantasm.*

*Now, the blustery wind-chimes fade. With a sense of awe and a sense of dread, the Spirit-ghosts gaze backward at that dangerous ascent. If they fail in their Guardian Mission—who knows—they might never be able to return.*

# Romaine Manor



# Chapter One

## THE LEAVE-TAKING

*England, South East Coast, 31 October, 1951*

“But I don’t understand, why can’t I go with you?” said Fitz, for about the twentieth time.

His mother, Miriam Henderson, tucked a woolen scarf into her pocket and zipped up her traveling bag. She smiled, but at the same time she looked anxious.

“Darling, of course you can’t come. The journey’s going to be difficult, maybe even a bit dangerous,” she said. “Look, we’ll be back in just a few weeks. You’ll be much happier, and safer, here at home.”

Fitz’s parents were leaving tonight for a faraway island—he couldn’t remember its name—which had been struck by an earthquake. Their job would be to find homes for some of the orphan children on the island. Much as Fitz felt sorry for these poor orphans, he couldn’t help feeling a bit resentful that, thanks to all this, it was his father and mother who were now having to go away.

Fitz’s mother was tall and regal-looking. Her hair was powder black and curled at the shoulders. Her eyes, like his own, were the colour of amethyst. Her voice was soft, and when she laughed, it was like the ripple of a pool that’s suddenly stirred. At the moment, though, Fitz wished he could reassure her; she looked so stressed.



“Mr. Latimer will come as usual for your lessons,” she said. “Carmela will be here, of course, and Mr. Darnley—”

“Miriam, the taxi’s waiting,” said Fitz’s father, Lionel. He was a dark-blond Englishman, thick-set and sturdy, with jagged eyebrows and keen, narrow eyes. Thrusting today’s newspaper in his coat pocket, he glanced at his wristwatch.

“Lionel, I really do wish we could have stayed for the funeral tomorrow.”

“We can’t, dear, you know we haven’t the time.”

Fitz dragged the last suitcase, one step at a time, to the bottom of the staircase. Folorn-looking Ingrid clung onto her mother’s arm.

“Carmela, you do have the telex number in case of emergencies?” said Mrs. Henderson.

“Yes, Madam, please don’t worry about a thing.”

Even Carmela’s looking more serious than usual, perhaps she’s feeling a bit anxious too, thought Fitz. Of course, it’s all right for ten-year-old Ingrid to be needing a nanny. Honestly, though, it did feel a bit silly for himself. After all, he was already twelve, and that was practically grown up, wasn’t it?

“You will make sure nothing dangerous is left lying about. You know, like medicine, garden tools, kitchen knives,” said Mrs. Henderson.

“Of course, Madam, of course!”

“Miriam, we really do have to go now,” said Mr. Henderson, pausing for a lightning swift hug all around.



“Oh, Carmela, one last thing, if Ingrid comes down with a fever again like the last time, don’t take chances, ring up Dr. Skinner right away.”

And then the front door opened and shut, along with a gust of leaves all wet from the rain. A flash of headlights and tail-lights, as the motor car rumbled away. The night mist swirled and curled, muffling the old house in a blanket of white, before everything went dark, lonely and still.



“It’s all right, don’t cry,” said Fitz, lamely patting Ingrid on the shoulder.

“Come into the kitchen,” called Carmela, “it’s nice and warm in here!”

She had already dished up her special apple pancakes glistening with sugar, along with tall cups of creamy cocoa. By now, she was smiling and acting more like herself again. She even cleared the table for a game of Rummy, although she watched over Ingrid’s cards, whispering to her which ones to keep and which to put away. Still, it was a treat, all the same, since Carmela rarely had time for more than a folk tale at bed-time. Tonight, it was the story of *‘Rumpelstiltskin.’* Boring stuff for Fitz; for Ingrid, it was bliss.



Carmela's long dark hair was as shiny as chestnut shells and kinked into waves by those old-fashioned press irons she wore at night. Her eyes were dark too, like shiny obsidian beads twinkling underwater. She'd never tell how old she was. Fitz guessed she must be about nineteen. Then, Ingrid said thirty-six, which made Carmela laugh out loud. If they continued their pestering, she'd giggle, *I'm just a year short of my hundredth birthday*, by way of reply. Such an intriguing mix of young and old she was, leading them out on woody moorland expeditions and then, just as often, being their cotton-swab nurse.

Carmela was the eldest daughter of an Italian who had married an English girl from the village. In their thatched-roof cottage was a dreary collection of Farmer's Almanacs, Home&Country magazines, and a Bible with print so small, you needed a magnifying glass to read the Gospels. That's why, this evening, she'd come to browse through the Henderson library, searching for novels and science and history books.

"*Yuk, grusome!*" said Fitz, already in pyjamas, poking his head around the door.

Carmela was seated in an armchair, studying some monstrous-looking encyclopedia. Fitz couldn't help gawking at the horrid skeleton diagrams and illustrations of scary-looking symptoms on the page.

"*Tut*, it's nothing, just a medical book."

"Carmela, you don't really want to be a nurse, do you?"

"Of course I do, and I will be one day, you'll see."

How weird! Fitz knew that Carmela was saving up to train at a nursing school in London. Yet the famous

city of London (once named Londinium, according to Mr. Latimer) seemed so very far away from Mare's End by the Sea.

Upstairs, in the bedroom of their grand old manor house, the damp wind blew; the curtains twitched and trembled, for Mother insisted they sleep with fresh air, winter and summer, to chase away bad dreams. But when Fitz did fall asleep, it was very sudden, like slipping down a black well, only to find himself trapped inside a restless, wide-awake dream.

There was Carmela, scorching the furious card King of Spades in a waffle pan; the old gardener's medicine tablets blossoming into blood-red poppies amongst the rocks; the evil dwarfkin, Rumpelstiltskin, cackling around a forest campfire; a black motor car swerving, crashing, exploding off the cliff.



**Rumpelstiltskin, cackling  
around a forest campfire**

## Chapter 1

### THE LEAVE-TAKING



1. Why are Fitz's parents going away?
2. Whose job is it to take care of Fitz and Ingrid while their parents are away?
3. What is Mrs. Henderson especially worried about?
4. What does Carmela do in her spare time? What is her ambition?
5. What does Fitz think about his parents leaving?

### BUILDING WORDS

- |               |        |
|---------------|--------|
| 1. earthQUAKE |        |
| 2. pan        | watch  |
| 3. suit       | case   |
| 4. wrist      | cakes  |
| 5. stair      | case   |
| 6. camp       | side   |
| 7. bed        | nuts   |
| 8. sea        | lights |
| 9. head       | room   |
| 10. chest     | fire   |

# Chapter Two

## AUNTIE VANNIE AND UNCLE ED

Outside, high up near the roof-peak, the luminous shape of a lady hovered in mid-air. Then the misty shape of a man came floating toward her. He dropped down onto the window ledge; she followed. They looked like a couple of Spirit-ghosts, drifting from place to place.

"This is the old house all right," said the man-ghost. A few coins rattled in the pockets of his navy seaman's suit. "Brings back memories, this does," he said, with the ghost of a smile.

Wrapping her pale shawl around her shoulders, the lady-ghost peeped through the bedroom window. "Oh, Edward, look at those children; just like us, so many years ago."

"*Humph*, I can't see her face all muffled under the quilt."

"You used to tease me all the time," said the lady-ghost. "Remember how you almost pushed me off the old stone bridge just to frighten me, you rotter!"

"Well, what do you expect? Mummy's milk-bottle baby, following big brother around all the time!"

"All right, let's just forget the old quarrels. We have a special Mission now. I want to do this job as best I can."

"But who dreamed up this Mission, I'd like to know. Ghostly guardians to two little rascals! Honestly, I'd rather dig ditches."

“They don’t look like rascals, they look rather sweet,” said the lady-ghost, squinting through the windowpane at Ingrid and Fitz. “The boy seems quite tall and robust. Look at his nice dark hair and noble Roman nose, it’s quite the family trait.”

“Goodness, Vannie, you’ve become quite motherly, all of a sudden.”

“Whatever do you mean?”

“A pity that you ignored your own sweet little darlings. How many *darlings* did you have? Two or three or four—or don’t you remember?”

“I’m trying to be pleasant, Edward. You know my two children, Judith and Jules, perfectly well.”

“Well, didn’t you spend all winter fluttering around Paris? And your summers, on the ‘*muckety-muck*’ posh Riviera?”

“And what about you, Edward? Didn’t you hide a King’s fortune in gold, *when you were alive*, stuffed in a sock or under a mattress somewhere, while your family went around, dressed almost in rags?”

“What!” cried Uncle Ed, looking grave.

But once Auntie Vannie got started, she just couldn’t stop. “And your wife, poor sad Alice, the truth is, she had no spirit, no *joie de vivre*.”

“How dare you!” barked Uncle Ed, flushing ghostly purple.

“And as for that daughter of yours, Carrotty Kate, if ever she finds that fortune you’ve hidden away, she’ll spend every last farthing, bless her.”

Auntie Vannie was tempted to poke out her tongue, like in the olden days, but instead she raised a ghost-finger to her lips.

“Please, no shouting, let’s not disturb the children.”

Uncle Ed glared at her (and if you had seen him at that moment, he might have frightened you quite a bit). “Let’s go inside then,” he said, stifling his temper. “I want to see what changes they’ve made to the old house.”

“I’m coming,” said Auntie Vannie airily.

“Haven’t you learnt that sliding trick yet? Just follow me. That’s it, ease yourself through the wall like this.”

“I’m trying, just wait.”

“Don’t be nervous, silly.”

“And don’t you patronize me, Edward. It took me ages arranging all the details for my funeral. I had to navigate across the Channel back to England. Very blustery it is too, at this time of year.” She unfolded a tattered map and studied it for a moment. “Now, what exactly are these Ley Lines?”

“Well, they’re sort of Spirit-energy channels; they help you travel faster.”

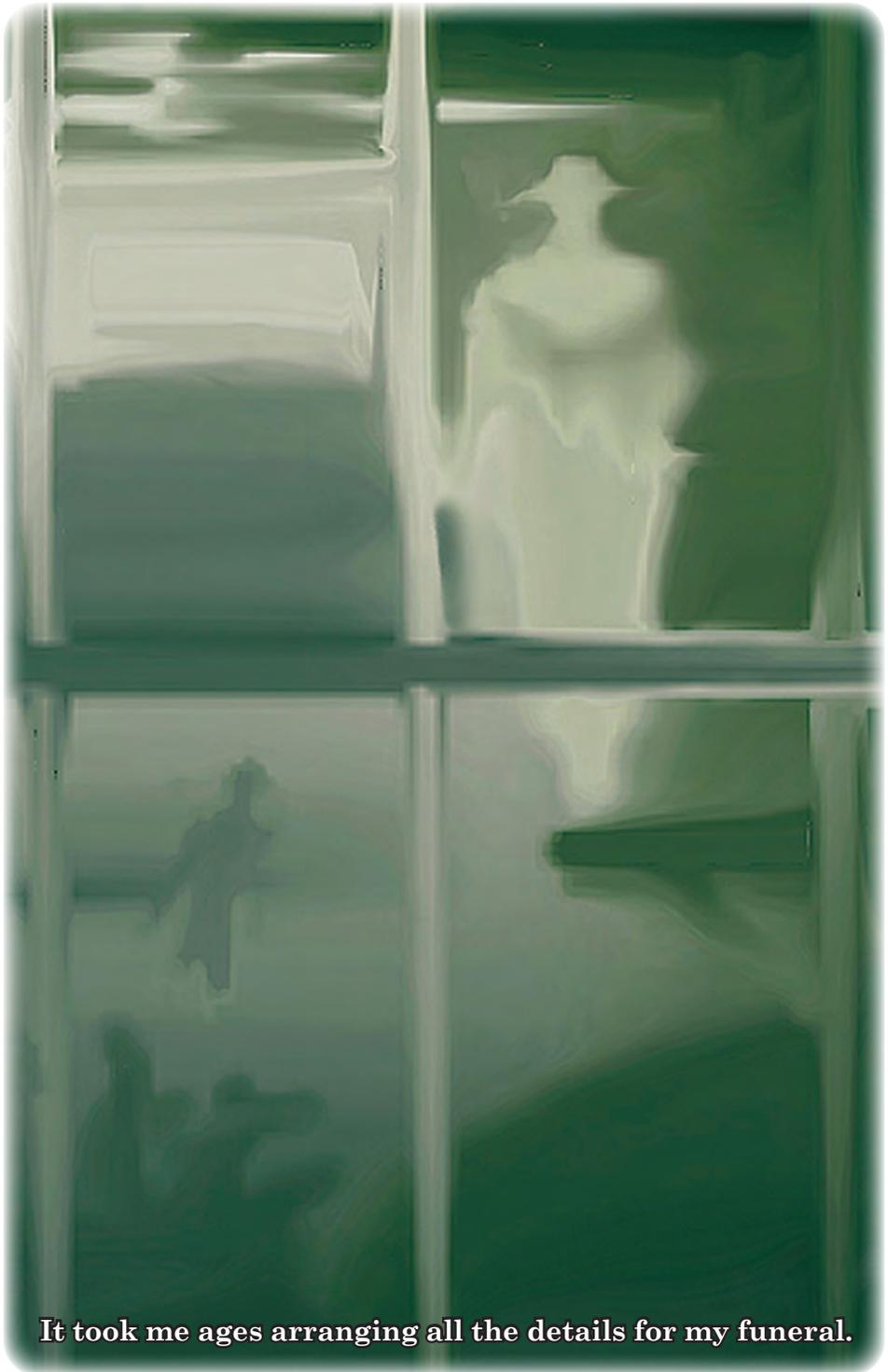
“Oh, I think I understand—”

“There’s a Ley Line running right beneath this house, as a matter of fact.”

“Really?”

“Yes, but you need to watch it! Dodgy characters like to travel along there, too. All sorts of riff-raff you’d rather not meet, if you can help it.”

“All right, I shall be careful,” said Auntie Vannie, folding away her map. “Now, listen, tomorrow is my funeral. It’s going to be very dignified and very sad. I’m going to be laid to rest in the churchyard, right next to you, dear Edward.” Auntie Vannie smiled roguishly. “I thought you’d be pleased.”



**It took me ages arranging all the details for my funeral.**

“Makes no difference to me,” said Uncle Ed, with a shrug. “Are you coming into the house?”

“Yes, and I bet I can glide through, just you watch.” Auntie Vannie floated timidly against the brick wall once, twice, three times without success.

“You always were a scaredy-cat,” said Uncle Ed.

“Be quiet, I’ve got to concentrate.”

“Just hold onto my hand. We don’t have all Eternity, you know.”

Auntie Vannie shrieked as her brother jerked her firmly through the wall. They floated into the children’s bedroom.

“Oh, dear, I must have sounded quite ghoulish!” she whispered. “I hope I didn’t frighten the children.” She glided airily across the carpet and stooped to stroke Ingrid’s ruffled hair.

“*Hmmm*, they’ve put in new paneling and bookshelves,” said Uncle Ed. “Look at the fancy wallpaper, quite modern stuff!”

“And look at the dolls and teddy bears. I never had such pretty things when I was small.”

Uncle Ed’s finger hovered over the electric light switch and the bedside lamp flickered on, then off. Fitz rolled over and buried his head under the sheet.

“Edward, look, I’ve found my ballerina music box!”

“A toy train on tracks,” murmured Uncle Ed, kneeling on the rug. “I always wanted one of those. It must have cost a fortune!”

“They’re so lucky, aren’t they?”

“Shameful extravagance, if you ask me. Feel the quality of these rugs. Just look in this wardrobe!” Uncle Ed pointed to Ingrid’s rose taffeta party dress and a dark velvet jacket belonging to Fitz.

“Oh, I just love these glass figurines and building blocks and sea shells and costumed dolls and miniature deck of cards—”

“*Shush*, not so loud,” said Uncle Ed, ghost-fingering a volume of fairy tales. It had soft leather covers and the pages were trimmed in gold.

“Oh, I think I’ve woken him up,” whispered Auntie Vannie. “Now be careful, I don’t want to frighten him.” She tiptoed backward and tripped over a toy piano. It fell on its back with a bright, stubborn, tinkling sound. “Oh, no, will I never learn to glide?”

“Clumsy!” said Uncle Ed, with a smirk.

Fitz mumbled and stirred. He was almost sure that his eyes were wide open. Two luminous figures hovered just above the rug.

“Now don’t be afraid, Fitzpatrick,” whispered the lady. “We were just drifting by and thought we’d stop to make your acquaintance, so to speak.”

“Allow us to introduce ourselves. I am, at least I was, your Great-Uncle Edward Henderson and this lady, once upon a time, was your Great-Aunt Vanessa.”

“I beg your pardon, but am I still dreaming?”

“Absolutely not,” replied Uncle Ed. “Well, I don’t know, you tell me.”

“You haven’t bumped into Carmela tonight, have you?” said Fitz.

“I leave all the bumping to Vannie,” said Uncle Ed, with the ghost of a grin.

“Have you seen Rumpelstiltskin?” said Fitz. “Or Mr. Darnley or—?”

“Rumpel—who? Never heard of him, but I do know Darnley, the gardener, good man he is!”

“You’ve never ever heard of Rumpelstiltskin!” said Auntie Vannie. “Dear Edward, you are an ignoramus.”

“Master Fitz, let me explain. My dear departed sister, Vanessa, and I used to live here, in this very house—”

“Yes, dear, you see, some seventy-odd years ago, your great-grandfather, Albert Henderson, had three children, Edward, Willy and I.”

“No need to drag out the family tree, Vannie. Suffice to say that we’re here on a special mission to act as your—Spirit-guardians.”

“In other words, we’re here to watch over you both while mummy and daddy are away.”

“Shall I wake up Ingrid?”

Auntie Vannie looked doubtful. “Well, if you really think—”

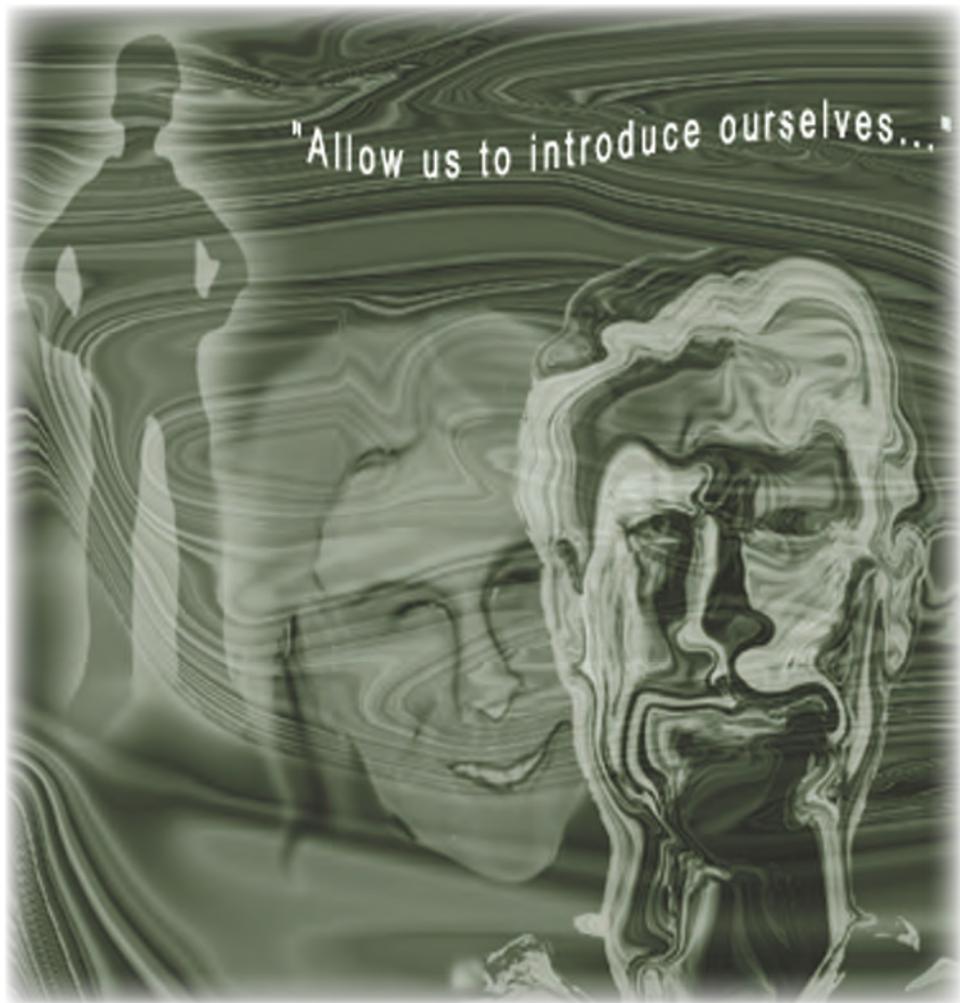
“Ingrid!” called Fitz urgently. “Wake up.”

Ingrid shifted under the bed quilt. Her eyes seemed to be gummed shut. Fitz leapt out of bed and shook her by the shoulders. “Wake up, Ingrid, quick, quick—!”

“Leave me alone,” mumbled Ingrid. She was always irritable first thing in the morning, or late at night.

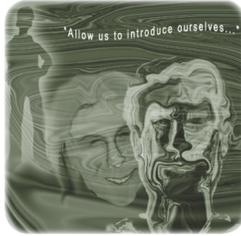
Too late. Uncle Ed gave Auntie Vannie a not-too-gentle push from behind. Together they drifted through the wall. Fitz’s bare feet sprinted across the rug. He was definitely wide awake by now. Well, he thought he was awake. He pushed the window all the way up and leaned over the ledge. Nothing was there. Nothing but the moon gleaming through a mass of purple raincloud. Fitz noticed Ingrid’s yellow-haired rag doll perched beside him on the window ledge. Deliberately, he tossed it out onto the ground below.

"Allow us to introduce ourselves..."



## Chapter 2

### AUNTIE VANNIE AND UNCLE ED



1. Who are the strange visitors that appear at the house during the night?
2. What are the Ley Lines? Why are they important?
3. What do Uncle Ed and Auntie Vannie argue about?
4. What do Uncle Ed and Auntie Vannie think about their guardian mission?
5. How does Fitz test whether the guardian ghosts are real?

## BUILDING WORDS

- |           |         |        |
|-----------|---------|--------|
| 1. book   | SHELVES |        |
| 2. back   |         | walker |
| 3. tip    |         | paper  |
| 4. window |         | cloud  |
| 5. sleep  |         | ward   |
| 6. church |         | man    |
| 7. rain   |         | toe    |
| 8. wall   |         | side   |
| 9. sea    |         | pane   |
| 10. out   |         | yard   |

# Chapter Three

## THE LARES AND PENATES

1 November, 1951

There was a clatter in the entrance hall. The front door slammed shut. Carmela cupped her hand over one ear and pressed the telephone receiver close to the other.

“Yes, Monsieur Jules,” she said. She pronounced this word very slowly and respectfully: Monsieur Jewels. “The coffin has arrived—*stop shouting, Ingrid love, I’m on the telephone*—yes, Monsieur, everything has been arranged. The funeral will be at four o’clock this afternoon in the parish church. Thank *you*, Monsieur Jules.”

Carmela hung up the telephone, looking none too pleased. “Now what is it?” she said.

“Fitz threw Annie out of the window on purpose, and Goldie’s bitten her to pieces. Look—!”

Fitz was trying to wipe the doll with his handkerchief. It was useless. Its soiled yellow rag-head flopped sideways and almost fell off.

“I’m sorry, it was an experiment, that’s all. I had a weird dream last night, or maybe it wasn’t a dream. So I tossed this thing off the ledge, so I could know for sure, and guess what—!”

“I couldn’t care less about your dream!” screamed Ingrid. “Remember last time, you dropped that smelly sulphur all over my desk, I’m sick of your experiments!”

“Mr. Latimer’s waiting for you in the library, Fitz,” said Carmela. She sounded annoyed. “He does hate

it when you're late. Hurry now, the whole family's coming to Tea after the Service."

"Carmela, who's going to be buried this afternoon?"

"Your Great-Aunt Vanessa, rest her soul, the family hasn't seen her in years," said Carmela, pointing to a fancy framed portrait on the wall.

Fitz stood in front of the portrait and stared. He must have walked past here every single day, yet this was the first time he'd really looked at it. Great-Aunt Vanessa. So this was the mysterious dream-time lady of the window ledge, the one who tripped over toy pianos and glided through walls. She had hazel-blue eyes and hair like wispy moonbeams. Her cream-silky frock was fastened by a sparkly brooch. Nearby, frowning as though he'd counted up all his coins and found one missing, was the gloomy portrait of Great-Uncle Edward.



Fitz's thoughts were then interrupted by a resounding tone. "Master Henderson, you are late for lessons, again!"

It was Fitz's tutor, Mr. Marmory Latimer. There he stood, clinking his old-fashioned watch and chain. He had blooming cheeks and dark hair peppered with silvery sparks. Perhaps he was handsome in a pompous sort of way: dark brown eyes of a humourless expression, a stately nose, neat mustache and pearly fingernails. Day in, day out, he wore the same black jacket and wool waistcoat over a pressed shirt and white collar. If he gazed somberly at Fitz this morning, it was because he knew that the Henderson boy didn't give a brass farthing for Latin verse or Latin grammar, not to mention the glory days of ancient Rome.

“Don’t jump so wildly whenever you’re spoken to,” said Mr. Latimer. “Anyone would think you’d seen a ghost. Incidentally, Fitzpatrick, what is the Latin word for ghost?”

Fitz glanced back at the portrait of Great-Aunt Vanessa (that is to say, Auntie Vannie) and she smiled serenely back at him.

“Come, come, boy, you must be prepared for your College entrance examinations. Nouns, verbs, declensions, conjugations, all must be mastered on the final day.”

No answer from Fitz. Appearing slack-jawed, clueless, he reminded Mr. Latimer of a beached fish lying among the pebbles. Would the boy remember nothing that he was taught!

“La-ru-a,” pronounced Mr. Latimer, as though Fitz was hard of hearing. “The word comes from Lars or Lares. Now what does that mean, young man, do you remember?”

“*Er*, no, Sir.”

“It means ‘Household Gods.’ The Lares and the Penates were the departed ancestors of the ancient Romans. In other words, what today we might call Guardian Angels.”

Mr. Latimer smiled indulgently. The portrait of Auntie Vannie seemed to smile as well, but if there was some message to be gleaned, Fitz did not grasp it at once. His own mind went blank, like a tablet of wax. Not so, Mr. Latimer, who was ever keen and alert and who did seem to love hearing himself talk.

“Strange though it may seem, from the root word ‘Lares’ comes the word ‘larva’. That is to say, any old maggot, caterpillar or grub.”

Carmela now approached softly, with a church-like whisper. She had stood through the lecture on Roman ghosts, waiting for the politest moment to interrupt.

“Excuse me, Mr. Latimer, I wonder, would you care to join us for Tea after the funeral?”

Mr. Latimer actually blushed, overcome with surprise. He smiled bashfully, all severity gone.

“Why, thank you, Miss Carmela, I’d be delighted,” he said.

Now, Fitz thought that Carmela seemed respectful enough just then, but there was something in her sparkling gaze that gave her away. Quite perplexing, yet this was the effect the schoolmaster seemed to have on her. And what Mr. Latimer was thinking (if he noticed Carmela laughing at him, at all) Fitz could only imagine.





So, this was the mysterious lady of the window ledge. Nearby, was the gloomy portrait of Great-Uncle Edward.

### Chapter 3

#### THE LARES AND PENATES



1. Whose funeral is at four o'clock in the afternoon?
2. What do you know about Auntie Vannie?
3. What does Fitz think of his Latin tutor, Mr. Marmory Latimer?
4. What does the word LARES mean in Latin?
5. Why is Mr. Latimer impatient with his pupil, Fitz?

#### FILL IN THE MISSING LETTER TO MAKE THE CORRECT WORD:

1. Speak clearly: PR NO N E
2. Close with a bang: S AM
3. The French word for Mister: MO S EUR
4. Burial service: F N RAL
5. Speak in a low tone: M T ER
6. Chemical substance: S LPH R
7. Strange: M S ERI US
8. Piece of jewelry: B O CH
9. Picture: P R RA T
10. Self-important: PO P US
11. An obsolete coin: F RTH NG
12. By the way: NC DENT LLY
13. Happy and calm: S R NE
14. Verb form: C NJUG TI N
15. Roman Household gods, guardians: L RES
16. Shiny black stone used in jewelry: O SIDI N
17. Long journey: E PED TI N
18. Reference book: A MA AC
19. Sign of illness: SY P OM
20. Sternness: SE ERI Y

# Chapter Four

## THE CHEVAL GLASS IN THE ATTIC

While Fitz's attended Latin lessons with Mr. Latimer in the library, Ingrid climbed the staircase to the attic. It was a low sloping place under the roof, directly above the bedroom. Hidden away up here was a treacle-coloured cabinet on top of which, as soon as she learnt her letters, she'd traced her name I-N-G-R-I-D into the dust.

From inside the deep curved drawers came a whiff of old, old wood. And piles of treasures. Well, they looked like treasures. Here was a fancy old jewel box full of brooches, charm bracelets, vintage hairclips, strings of glittering beads. There was a clatter of sea shells, fossil starfish and shiny beach stones. Someone had tossed in the odd ivory Chess piece. A pair of black-and-white dice. Loose jigsaw pieces. Silver church medals. Military medals. Bronze medallions. A tangle of silver chains.

Best of all was Ingrid's 'dressing-up' trunk stuffed with old-fashioned party dresses, moulting fur jackets, worn-out ballet slippers, lacy shawls to drape over your shoulders, and long skinny ballroom gloves. You could tell that no one had cleared out the attic in years. During her lifetime, Ingrid's great-grandmother Henderson had been very much attached to her possessions: an antique cradle, a speckled-silver picture frame, even a rocking-horse belonging to one of the children. Here was a faded blue ledger that squeaked open, scattering a handful of antique stamps into the air. There was a shelf of clunky brown pottery. Some dried flower petals, a peacock feather, a row of musty old books.

And something else, as well. It was a keepsake, a rough crayon sketch of a lady, a stranger, enclosed in a mouldering wood frame. Weirdly, though, this brooding portrait seemed to shimmer and shift, more darkling and ever more lifelike, the longer Ingrid stared. Fascinating, and scary too. Was she imagining it? She blinked hard and looked away. It took all of an effort, finally, for her to stuff the portrait all the way down to the bottom of the trunk, out of sight.

Just then, atop the antique wardrobe, something stirred. A pair of sapphire-blue eyes flashed in the gloom. Lilah, the Siamese house cat, stretched up on all fours. She was definitely staring at something. But what? Her ears flattened right down. Her head shrank low. Her fur stiffened into a war-like crest along the backbone. With a piercing scream, she leapt into the air and crash-landed behind the wardrobe. As both doors shuddered open, something white and fuzzy, like the ghost of a super-large dandelion, rolled over the floorboards and vanished right through the wainscoting.

That's so strange, thought Ingrid, with a shivery feeling. "What's wrong, kitty, come here!"

But Lilah whined and refused to come out from her hidy-hole. The wardrobe doors were still rattling on their hinges as Ingrid looked inside. On the rack pole hung an old-fashioned dress. It was shiny silk, the colour of cream, with a fancy belt buckle and a flounced neck. As Ingrid pulled it off the hanger, something sharp pricked her finger.

*"Ouch!"*

What was that quicksilver ripple in the tall swing-mirror? A twinkle that appeared, then was gone. Was it a sunbeam? thought Ingrid. No, it couldn't be. There was no sun at all this morning. The sky looked as if

someone had stretched a grey blanket over it and put it to bed. But this gold brooch she'd found was all aglitter in her fingers. It was shaped like a butterfly, with pale green wings of polished jade. The fancy dress was rather too long for her, so she rolled it up and tightened the belt around her waist.

She was glad now that Fitz was busy downstairs in the library with Mr. Latimer. She knew what names he would have called her—Silly Cinderella or Patch-Stick or Ugly Dugly—just because she loved dressing up in old-fashioned costumes and parading around in front of the mirror. Ingrid waved a frail yellowed-ivory fan, smoothed her fair hair and fluttered her eyelashes like Aunt Calliope at theatre rehearsals.

“Fairy godmother, dear,” she said loudly, feeling very elegant and grown-up, and trailing the scent of mothballs around the attic. “Please, may I wear this gown to the Ball?”



“Yes, do keep that old frock for dressing up, it’s perfect for Sleeping Beauties and sad Queens,” replied a silvery voice. It seemed to come tumbling out of the air like tinkle bells—*Gosh!* There was that luminous flicker in the mirror again. More than a flicker. It was now a shape, the shape of a lady. Her gossamer gown glinted with silver threads. Her glassy reflection trembled for a moment, then it became clear and still.

“That was my favourite swing-mirror,” remarked the silvery lady, stroking her pale hair. “I don’t know why they’ve buried it up here in the attic. It’s quite valuable, you know. A genuine antique, a cheval glass, with only a spot or two of rust.”

“Your mirror?”

“And my old ball gown, dear, and my favourite antique brooch. I am your dear departed Great-Aunt Vanessa. You can call me Auntie Vannie. And this is—”

Uncle Ed floated, all of a sudden, through the attic wall.

“—your Great-Uncle Ed. Watch him roam around the house now, switching off lamps and things.”

“Dreadful,” muttered Uncle Ed. “All this waste!”

“Now, Ingrid, do you know that I’ve been trying to talk to you for ages?”

“Stop exaggerating,” said Uncle Ed.

“I tap on the windows to get your attention. I ruffle the drapes. I squeak on these old floorboards,” said Auntie Vannie, “but most of the time you and your brother, Fitz, just don’t hear me.”

“I’m sorry,” said Ingrid, looking baffled.



I don't know why they've buried it up here in the attic.

“Sometimes, I might knock a picture down from the wall, but I don’t really like doing that,” said Auntie Vannie. “I hate being a nuisance, don’t you?”

“Well then,” said Uncle Ed, with a ghostly smirk, “From now on, you’ll just have to learn to be rude.”

“By the way, Ingrid, have you seen Contessa?” said Auntie Vannie, blithely ignoring Uncle Ed as he faded away.

“Who?”

“Contessa, my cat. She has long white fur and beautiful eyes, one green and one blue.”

“No, wait, I did see her. She disappeared right through the wall just now. Did *she* frighten my Lilah?”

“Probably,” said Auntie Vannie. “She can be rather nasty at times.”

“Oh, but—!”

“What’s the matter, Ingrid? Why are you staring like that? You do believe in me, don’t you?”

“*Er*, yes, well, I think I do.”

“I’m glad,” whispered Auntie Vannie, dissolving, vanishing, bit by bit, from the dusty glass. “Because I believe in you, Ingrid, honestly I do.”



## Chapter 4

### THE CHEVAL GLASS IN THE ATTIC



1. Why does Ingrid enjoy playing up in the attic?
2. What happens when she looks at the portrait of the unknown lady? When she looks into the antique cheval glass?
3. What frightens Lilah, the Siamese house cat?
4. Who is Contessa and what does she look like?
5. What two gifts does Ingrid receive from Auntie Vannie?

### FILL IN THE MISSING LETTERS TO MAKE WORDS:

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Chapter 4 THE CHEVAL GLASS IN THE ATTIC **CROSSWORD**



Chapter 5 VISITORS **OPPOSITE WORDS**

NERVOUS [**CALM**]

FRIENDLY [UNFRIENDLY]

QUIET [NOISY]

REAL [UNREAL]

USUAL [UNUSUAL]

SHY [SOCIALABLE]

BEAUTIFUL [UGLY]

HEAVY [LIGHT]

APPEAR [DISAPPEAR]

DARK [LIGHT, FAIR]

PRICELESS [WORTHLESS]

FANCY [PLAIN]

TALL [SHORT]

COMFORTABLE [UNCOMFORTABLE]

PLUMP [THIN]

DULL [SHINY, BRIGHT]

LATE [EARLY]

ANTIQUUE [NEW]

STRAIGHT [CROOKED]

VALUABLE [WORTHLESS]

THERE MAY BE MORE THAN ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER FOR EACH WORD.