

Purging Purgatory

Also by Roger Mendoza:

NON-FICTION:

My Little Cowboy

FICTION:

The E. B. Roberts Chronicles:
Alexander's Journey (No. 1)
The Sheriff (No. 2)
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The E.B. Roberts Chronicles: An Anthology

Purging Purgatory

A Ghost Story

ROGER MENDOZA

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PURGING PURGATORY

DEDICATION

To my mother – Carmen.
She called me to this life and nurtured and cared for me.

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SOME SOULS

Some Souls, the Roman Catholic Church preaches, go to Purgatory. It is a place where impure souls are purified in the fires before they may enter into Heaven.

Some Souls spend a short time in Purgatory; others will stay in Purgatory until the end of time after which they will go to heaven.

Some Souls are granted permission to visit the living to beg for prayers or to have masses said for them. Through these prayers, their time in Purgatory may shorten. The living have considerable power with prayer.

Some Souls in Purgatory pray for the living for it is too late for them to pray for themselves.

Some Souls from Purgatory appear to the living as horribly disfigured, barely recognizable beings. They are laden with guilt for committing lesser sins. As the flames of suffering burn these impurities in the soul away, the lightness and beauty of the human essence reveals itself again. All souls in Purgatory eventually end up in heaven.

Some Souls who have committed heinous acts against God will never go to heaven. They will spend an eternity in Hell. Those damned souls have no power over the souls in Purgatory. Those godless souls, however, can influence the living to turn away from God.

Some Souls visit the living. It is difficult for the living to tell if they come from Purgatory or Hell.

Some Souls are not souls at all. They are dark angels or demons from Hell. They are beings of pure evil. They must never be invited into the life of the living. Doing so will make one's life a living hell.

Some Souls born in the light of this world are unaffected by evil's influence. These souls, new upon the earth, stand in innocence as the evil flee in horror from them. These souls belong to the new heroes, the likes of which have never lived on earth before.

Part One

A turbulent breeze blew open the curtains in seventeen-year-old Catherine Danvers' room. She'd left it open the night before when she snuck back into her room. She was still asleep in her bed wearing the smoky clothes she'd worn to the party the night before.

The tree outside her room was full of chirping birds. Her breathing quickened as she put her head under the pillow to silence the shrieking chaos from the tree. After a minute, she gave up, put the pillow aside, and opened her eyes.

The room was spinning ever so slightly. She'd drunk a few beers along with a little blue pill at the party. A daily habit she'd recently developed. As she sat up, the room started to spin faster. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and let it out slowly. She sat quietly for a minute as warmth ignited deep within her. She could feel the soothing fire spreading throughout her body. She felt a warm tingling sensation reach her palms and then extend to each of her fingers. She opened her eyes and looked at her hands; they were vibrant with life. She smiled as she surveyed the room – all was steady now. She'd recently learned how to wash away the deleterious effects of the drugs that she occasionally took.

A few minutes later, she showered and was dressed in her favorite washed out jeans and black tank top. As she walked down the hall, she noticed that her mother's door was ajar.

“Mother?”

No answer. She pushed the door open a little wider and saw that the bed was disheveled. She stepped inside, walked to the far side of the room, and looked around the corner. She was alone in there. She took a deep breath and let it out all at once. She shook her head and quickly pulled the comforter over the pillows. Less than a minute later, the bed was neat and orderly.

She went downstairs and started towards the kitchen.

“Catherine!” shouted her mother, Dorothy.

A surprised Catherine turned to see her mother standing in the middle of the room flanked on either side by two burly men.

“What’s going on?” said Catherine as she looked at the two men and then back at Dorothy.

Catherine saw small wisps of dark smoke slowly intertwine with the multicolored auric smoke that she usually saw around her mother. Thinner streaks of the dark smoke seemed to wrap tightly around the arms and legs of the two men.

“You’ve got to get control of yourself. Those drugs you’re taking are messing with your mind,” said Dorothy.

Catherine took a menacing step towards Dorothy.

“We’ve talked about this before! I have everything under control now.”

Dorothy gasped as she stepped back.

“Catherine, stop! These men are here to take you to the hospital.”

Dorothy nodded to the men.

Catherine widened her eyes in disbelief as she looked from her mother to the two men and then defiantly back at her mother.

“You’re not going to put me into that nuthouse,” Catherine snarled.

Catherine raised her hands, palms facing towards the men.

“Stay away from me,” Catherine shouted.

She recoiled her arms and sharply extended them towards the men. The men went flying, smashing hard into the wall behind. A horrified Dorothy looked at the men and then back at Catherine.

Dorothy, her eyes narrowed took a step towards her daughter.

“It’s for your own good,” Dorothy shouted. “You’re in too much pain, and I can’t take this anymore. I miss them too.”

Catherine looked down at the two men as they moved clumsily on the floor trying to sit up. Beside them, she saw ghosts materializing. She saw brilliant streams of light slowly flow from the ghostly apparitions into the men as if healing them. Suddenly a dark shadow caught her attention above her mother’s head. She looked up at the still growing ominous darkness. Piercing yellow eyes surrounded by gray oozing smoke stared at Catherine. She shut her eyes, shook her head and slowly opened them. The menacing eyes were gone. Her gaze fell slowly from the darkness and met a horrified Dorothy staring back at her.

“You need help,” pleaded Dorothy.

Catherine saw the darkness spreading wildly around her mother as the other colors usually around her faded away.

“It’s that damned priest that told you to do this. Isn’t it?”

Dorothy stepped back incredulously.

“Don’t speak of Father Mahoney in that manner. He’s been nothing but supportive.”

“If Edward was here-,” Catherine started.

“Your brother’s death was not your fault.”

“My fault?” Catherine, several feet away, extended her tightly clenched hand towards her mother. She slowly raised her hand. “You’ve got to be kidding me! It’s your damn fault that he’s dead, not mine!”

Dorothy grasped at her throat to pull the invisible fingers that were gripping at her as she started to rise off the floor. She gasped for air as she struggled, her legs kicking the stale air below her.

A gray smoke coalesced into the shape of a twelve-year-old boy below Dorothy’s dangling feet. Catherine looked down at the now solid form. It was her brother, Edward.

“Let me in, Catherine!” shouted Edward.

Catherine, eyes wide with horror screamed, “Leave me alone!”

The room filled with heaviness as Edward shouted, “Let her go!

The room shook as powerful shockwaves blasted in all directions from Edward’s thunderous bellow. Catherine fell back as the invisible force knocked her over leaving contrails of dense wisps of dark smoke. Dorothy fell to the floor stunned gasping for air, choking and coughing.

Edward stood over his mother and then looked up at Catherine. “You’ve hurt our mother.”

Catherine looked up at Edward as he faded into nothingness.

She looked at her mother lying crumpled on the floor still gasping for air.

“What have I done?” Catherine asked as she broke down crying, nestling her head into her hands.

The two men stood and looked from Dorothy to Catherine in disbelief. One of them helped Dorothy get to her feet. The other man took a step towards Catherine.

“I don’t understand what just happened. But I can see that you didn’t mean to hurt your mother.”

Catherine looked up in horror as the disheveled man stood several feet from her.

The man took a step closer to Catherine as he extended his hand towards her. “I don’t want to hurt you. We are here to help you.”

Catherine stood abruptly.

The man jerked back in fear, his breathing shallow.

A shaken Catherine looked at her mother and then back at the man.

He squinted his eyes and clenched his teeth, expecting the worse and said, “Will you come with me to the hospital?”

“Yeah, I’ll go,” she said surrendering.

It didn’t take long before Catherine was admitted to St. John’s Hospital. The day nurse, followed by Catherine and Dorothy walked down the hallway towards the visitor’s lounge. The nurse stopped just outside of the lounge.

The nurse pointed into the room. “Catherine, this is where you

can visit with your mother during visiting hours starting at 3:00 pm.”

Catherine looked into the lounge. A few feet away, she saw an attractive young man talking with an older woman.

Dorothy took a step towards Catherine and said, “I’ll come by every day. I promise.”

Catherine looked sternly at the Nurse. “I won’t be taking visitors.”

Dorothy half smiled and then looked down. That morning she’d felt that she was doing the right thing when she called the doctor to have Catherine admitted, but now she was having doubts.

“I guess I should get going,” Dorothy said dejectedly.

Dorothy leaned forward to hug Catherine. Catherine turned away. Her arms crossed, she looked into the lounge. She saw the young man turn towards her. He looked up abruptly and smiled at her. She smiled slightly and turned back to see her mother shuffling towards the exit door. She could hear her mother whimpering.

The nurse turned to leave, shaking her head and grimaced, “Well, that went well! If you have any questions, just stop by the nurse’s station.”

“Thank you. I’ll hang out here for a little while before I head back to my room – if that’s okay.”

“Not a problem. Just remember to stay away from the exit doors. There are more than a few burly security guards there,” said the nurse as she walked away.

Catherine looked back into the lounge at the young man. He looked up and winked at her. Catherine smiled. She saw the woman stand to leave. The woman turned and glared at Catherine and then leaned over and kissed the young man on the cheek. Catherine’s eyes widened as she noticed wisps of black smoke flowing behind the woman. Catherine became alarmed when the woman began to walk towards her.

“Excuse me. You’re in the way,” said the woman condescendingly.

Catherine hadn’t realized that she was standing in the doorway, blocking the woman.

"I'm sorry," said Catherine as she impudently stepped out of the way.

Catherine watched as the woman walked down the hallway to the exit door. She saw dark shadows draped down the back of the woman as if it was an extravagant cloak flowing smoothly behind the woman. Catherine narrowed her brows and then turned back towards the lounge. She saw the young man still seated at the same table staring at her. She walked up and stood across from him in the same spot where the older woman had been standing.

"What the hell are you looking at?" she asked.

"A beautiful woman."

"Oh brother! Now I've heard everything."

The man stood, extending his hand.

"My name is Gregory Prescott."

She reached for his hand and lightly shook it. "I'm Catherine Danvers. Who was that woman that was visiting with you? She's dressed a bit fancy for this part of town."

Catherine sat down across from him. He stood for a second longer ogling her and then sat down.

"That was my mother – Mrs. Prescott. She helped me get out of some trouble. She thinks I'm addicted to drugs," he chuckled.

"I like getting high when I need to escape my pathetic life," she offered.

"You don't look like a drug addict."

"I'm not! I dabble every now and then," said Catherine. "Although, things got a little out of hand today. I tried to choke my mother."

"Wow! That's heavy."

"She'll get over it."

"My mother threatened to disown me if I didn't get my act together," he chuckled. "That's why I'm here."

Catherine looked at the far corner of the lounge and saw wisps of light gray smoke forming into multitudes of ghosts just above two people that were having an animated discussion.

“Damn it! They’re always around,” said Catherine.

Gregory followed Catherine’s gaze. He saw two people chatting. One of them was crying. Gregory reached for Catherine’s hand.

“I know someplace we can go for a little bit of privacy – if you get my drift,” Gregory smiled.

Catherine turned abruptly back to Gregory as she stood.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” Catherine snarled. “I have to get settled in.”

“Can’t blame me for trying. Huh?” Gregory chuckled.

“Yeah, whatever,” she said as she started for the door. “See you later.”

Gregory watched Catherine walk slowly out the door. He thought for sure that he’d seen a spark of interest from her. He’d never been wrong about a woman before.

The following day, Catherine felt a bit more clear-headed. It was nearing 3:00 pm, and she wanted to tell her mother the fantastic news that her doctor had prescribed a new medication that was going to help her. She knew her mother would welcome that news.

She rushed to the lounge and stopped at the doorway. She saw Gregory chatting with his mother at the same table they’d been at the day before. Catherine stepped back in horror as she saw wisps of black smoke reach from Mrs. Prescott towards Gregory. The darkness gently caressed his face as they talked. His eyes were half closed as the smoky tentacles darkened around his face.

Catherine gasped loudly. The black smoke suddenly retreated as Mrs. Prescott, eyes narrowed, turned abruptly to Catherine. Catherine moved uncomfortably back as Mrs. Prescott’s piercing yellow eyes probed her. When Mrs. Prescott blinked, her eyes returned to normal. She turned back to Gregory and patted his cheek as she stood.

Mrs. Prescott walked towards the door, where Catherine was standing. She felt a tinge of electricity zap at her arm as Mrs. Prescott brushed passed her.

Catherine stood transfixed as Mrs. Prescott walked slow and deliberately down the hallway and out the door while one of the guards held the door open for her. Catherine looked back at Gregory and saw that he was rubbing his eyes. She could see wisps of darkness dripping from his face. Panicked, she rushed to the chair next to his.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m just a little tired.”

She could see the darkness pulsating across his face and down his arms. She shook her head, her face full of concern.

“Give me your hands.”

Gregory looked up crooked at her. “Why?”

“Damn it! Just give me your hands.”

Gregory grimaced as he reluctantly offered her his hands.

She took a deep breath and closed her hands tightly around his.

“Now close your eyes.”

“This is weird,” said Gregory as he looked around squirming in his seat. He grimaced as he looked at her and then closed his eyes.

Catherine looked at her hands and saw a brightness grow subtly. It washed across from her hands onto his hands and then up his arms. She looked up at his face and saw a lone tear escape from his right eye as he squirmed in his seat. She saw the shadows that had been dancing across his face suddenly lighten and then dissipate into nothingness.

Gregory abruptly opened his eyes and smiled broadly, “What in the hell did you do to me?”

“Nothing. It’s just something I do. No big deal!”

“You certainly have some gift! I’ve never felt anything like it before.”

“It’s more of a curse.”

Gregory laughed. “Whatever it is. Thank you. I feel fantastic!”

Catherine half-smiled and looked around the lounge. She saw patients visiting with people from the outside.

“I guess my mother isn’t coming today.”

"I heard you tell the nurse yesterday that you weren't taking visitors."

Catherine cocked her head at Gregory. "You heard me?"

Gregory chuckled. "I think everybody heard you, even my mother."

"I was flying pretty high yesterday."

"Thanks to you, I'm flying pretty high right now," he said grinning ear to ear.

"Yeah? That's good."

"I wish that I was going to be here a little longer. It would have given us time to get to know each other a bit better."

Catherine furrowed her brows. "Are you leaving already?"

"Yeah. I get out tomorrow. My mother suddenly needs me back home in Los Angeles." He rolled his eyes. "And don't ask me why. Yesterday she was telling me that I'll be in here for at least two more weeks and today she wants to yank me out right away. I convinced her to leave me here until tomorrow."

"Why would you want to stay in this place another day?"

Gregory looked down and then up at Catherine. "Well, to be honest. I was hoping to get a chance to talk with you. I wanted to apologize for acting so damn forward yesterday."

Catherine blushed. When she had held his hands, she had felt his emotions intensely. It was a side effect of this ability of hers, to feel an intensely arousing connection through her touch. She felt vulnerable.

"Don't worry about it. You seem like a nice person," she said as she felt a wave of passion wash over her. "Why don't we go somewhere else for a little bit of privacy?"

Gregory started to smile. "Really?"

Early the next morning, Catherine rushed down the hallway and slowed a few feet away from the door to the visitor's lounge. She knew that Gregory would be waiting for her inside. He'd told her so the night before. As she got closer to the door, her heart sank when

she saw through the glass door that it was dark inside. Usually, the light from that room spilled out through the door onto the floor just outside. Instead, she saw the light spilling softly into the room from the hallway. As she opened the door, she saw Gregory sitting at the table halfway in. She smiled at him as she rushed over and sat next to him.

“Oh, my goodness. I thought that I missed you. Why on earth are you sitting in the dark?”

“It’s not that dark. The light switch is over there if you want more light in here,” said Gregory.

“That’s okay. The darkness feels a little cozy.”

Catherine looked around the room and then back at Gregory.

“Anyhow, I wanted to talk with you before you left.”

“I know.” Gregory smiled warmly.

Catherine started a smile.

“Last night was special.”

“For me too,” he said as he leaned in closer to her and handed her a business card. “Come visit me in California. Here’s my phone number.”

Catherine took the card and looked at the back. It had a phone number scribbled on it. Her smile faded.

“Is this really your private phone number?”

“Yeah! It is.”

Gregory leaned over and kissed her.

Two months later Catherine sat alone on the couch smiling as she held the piece of paper that Gregory had given her and dialed the number. She was almost giggling as the phone rang. After the third ring, Gregory answered.

“Gregory, I have some fantastic news! I’m pregnant!”

“You should get an abortion.”

Catherine’s smile faded. “What? But it’s yours.”

“How do I know that?” he condescended. “For all I know, you could have messed around with who knows who.”

"It's yours," she demanded. "I don't want an abortion."

"Look, I'm just getting started here. I don't need this now," he growled. "Now go get yourself that abortion and leave me alone."

"I thought that you wanted me to go to California."

Catherine heard a loud click followed by dead silence.

She burst into tears as she held the phone painfully to her ear.

Dorothy rushed towards Catherine.

"Catherine, I heard everything. I'm here for you. Calm down. We're going to see the doctor right now."

Soon Catherine and Dorothy sat across from the gynecologist. Catherine was fidgeting in her seat as the doctor spoke.

"You're not that far along," said the doctor. "Maybe a month."

Catherine leaned forward and narrowed her eyes.

"I was raped."

Dorothy shot a stern look at her daughter.

"Catherine! That's not true!"

The doctor cleared his throat.

"It's not too late to abort the-"

"Okay, let's do it!" said Catherine indignantly.

Dorothy jumped from her seat and faced Catherine squarely.

"Absolutely not! To destroy life is forbidden by our religion."

A gentle breeze swayed the curtains in eight-year-old Tommy's bedroom. Sharp spears of early-morning sunlight danced across the floor next to his bed in rhythm to the softly swaying curtains. Every now and then, the wind would blow the curtain open just far enough to send the brilliant beams of light across his bed. They almost reached Tommy's serene face as he slept.

A cacophony of early morning birds announced the beginning of the new day. Tommy didn't stir. Today was the first day of his summer vacation. Yesterday had been a long, action-packed one. After school, he had played soccer with his friends until his mother came to pick him up.

The breeze blew the curtain open a little wider, and a burst of sunshine raced across Tommy's face. He winced slightly and then returned to his smooth breathing.

Tommy was very short for his age. Although, his larger than life presence with his friends easily made up for his humble size. He was very popular with them. They felt energized around him. Although, on occasion, his friends might call him a "Mommas Boy." It didn't bother him. He assumed that they called him that because he had no father. Even so, he'd smile happily as it made him think of his mother. He often wondered about his father, although he'd never known him. From time to time, he would ask her about him.

She would frown and say, “Sweetie, he left us before you were born. Maybe, someday he’ll come back. For now, we are your family – you, me, and your grandma. We love you very much.”

They were all the family he had ever known, except of course for Thomas.

A small ghost of a smile formed on Tommy’s lips as if he had heard one of his mother’s jokes or had enjoyed a nice walk in the park with her. His breathing continued softly.

His mother, Catherine was sleeping in the main bedroom just on the other side of the kitchen. He didn’t know how much she struggled to make ends meet. Although he always felt loved and never wanted for more.

A shadow crept slowly across the floor and then up the side of the bed. The sunlight that had danced across the floor just a few seconds before was gone. Only small slivers of light bounced along the edge of the shadow as it moved closer and closer to Tommy. The shadow belonged to Thomas.

Tommy lay motionless as Thomas sat down on the edge of the bed. Tommy continued to breathe softly as his little body slid ever so slightly towards the spot where Thomas sat.

Thomas quietly watched Tommy as he slept. Thomas looked around the room and saw poster after poster of superheroes. He recognized some of them from when he was a young boy. It was a time when good was much easier to discern from evil. That was a long time ago.

He smiled at the thought that this little boy, who believed so much in superheroes, would one day become one himself.

“Perhaps a better name might be Supernatural Hero,” he whispered.

Tommy inhaled deeply and then let it out slowly with a faint sigh. Perhaps that was Tommy saying goodbye to the dream world. In that world, Tommy was always the hero (at least most of the time).

Thomas could tell when Tommy was waking up. First, he would stretch his legs, then his arms and then his tongue would make a

funny clicking sound as it clung to the roof of his mouth and then let go.

He smiled as Tommy began to rouse from his sleep.

Tommy started his stretching and followed with his tongue clicking sounds.

“Are you afraid of ghosts?” asked Thomas.

Tommy smiled widely and then opened his eyes, squinting to keep the sun at bay.

“Thomas!”

Tommy sat up and hugged his favorite person sitting next to him.

“Those are pretty bright pajamas that you’re wearing there,” said Thomas.

Tommy laughed.

“These are my new pajamas. Mom gave them to me yesterday after we left the park. Look at all of the soccer balls,” said Tommy as he pointed to his sleeves painted with scores of soccer balls.

“Nice,” said Thomas.

Tommy looked towards the partially open door. Just to the right hung a poster of a superhero, above a large dresser drawer.

“Does Mom know that you’re here?”

Thomas followed Tommy’s gaze towards the door and then briefly glanced at the open window. A breeze kept the curtains gently swaying from side to side. The sun mixed randomly with the leaves to cast diffused patterns on the floor.

“Nope. Our little secret. She doesn’t much care for me.”

Tommy half smiled and sat up higher as he leaned back against the headboard.

“I’m glad that you’re here.”

He rubbed his eyes then stretched out his arms wide and yawned.

“Not all of them. Some of those ghosts are very scary.”

Thomas scrunched his forehead in confusion.

“What?”

“You asked me if I was afraid of ghosts.”

“Oh yes, yes,” said Thomas while trying to suppress the urge to

yawn.

Tommy smiled.

“Are you afraid of me?”

“Of course not.”

“That’s good.”

“I’m not afraid of the ghosts at Grandma’s house either. I know that they won’t hurt me.”

“Those ghosts at your Grandma’s believe that they have some unfinished business that keeps them from going to heaven.”

“That’s what Grandma told me. She said the ghosts that visit her are there for help. She prays for them so that they can go to heaven. There is a whole bunch of them there.”

“You can see them?”

“Yes. Those ghosts look like regular people with a bright light inside.” Tommy looked up at Thomas. “Some are brighter than others.”

“What about me? I mean, what do I look like to you?”

Tommy smiled.

“You look like...” Tommy hesitated.

Thomas leaned forward.

“An old man?”

Tommy’s smile faded.

Thomas smiled and then tickled Tommy.

Tommy giggled and squirmed with laughter.

“Okay, you were saying,” said Thomas.

“Well, you have a bright white light where your heart is,” said Tommy as he pointed to Thomas’s chest.

“What happens when you hold my hand?”

Thomas reached for Tommy’s hand.

Tommy pulled back his hand and looked down.

“It’s okay, Tommy.”

“Sometimes people get mad when I touch them.”

“I won’t get angry. I promise.”

Tommy reached for Thomas’s hand and laid it gently on top.

Thomas felt a tingling sensation on his hand and closed his eyes.

Tommy's eyes widened as he saw the globe of light near Thomas's heart grow brighter and brighter.

Thomas opened his eyes and smiled.

"See Tommy? That's your superpower - thank you."

Tommy smiled broadly and hugged Thomas.

"I wish my grandma could see me the way that you do," said Tommy as he looked down at his hands.

"In her own way, I think she does."

Tommy smiled and looked up at Thomas.

"I love my grandma. I love it when we visit Grandma. She and I talk about what happens when people die and that some turn into ghosts."

Thomas smiled broadly.

"I guess that's one way to look at it."

"She told me that some ghosts don't even know that they're dead."

"That's a myth."

"A myth?"

The smile on Thomas's face went a little crooked.

"It's an untruth," said Thomas, his smile returning."

"Look, Tommy, when a person dies, it's like suddenly opening their eyes for the first time. They see things as they are, not as they believe them to be. They all know that they are dead. How can they not?"

Thomas looked away for a second, then back to Tommy. "I guess maybe it could be that they just don't want to admit it."

Tommy blinked.

Thomas would sometimes forget that he was talking to an eight-year-old boy. Tommy was a lot more grown up than the average eight-year-old was. No matter, he thought. He'll understand it eventually.

"What else did your grandmother say?"

"She says that sometimes it's hard to tell the good ones from the

bad ones.”

“She pointed to a man once and said that he was evil. But when I looked at him, he was almost as bright as you are right now. He hardly had any black smoke around him. I thought he was a good person, not an evil person like Grandma thought.”

“Sounds like you already know how to tell the difference for yourself. Most people are not evil.”

Tommy rushed on. He wanted to tell Thomas all about what he and his grandmother had talked about before it was time for Thomas to leave.

“Grandma told me that I shouldn’t talk to ghosts. She said that I should just ignore them.”

“Does that work?”

“Sometimes.”

“What do you do if they don’t leave?”

“Grandma said that I should just say a prayer for them so that they can move on.”

“Is that what you do?”

“Yes, most of the time I do, but sometimes there are too many of them.”

A stiff breeze rustled the curtains and caused the door to open a little wider. Tommy looked at the door.

“Mom?”

There was no answer.

Tommy looked back at Thomas.

“Mom doesn’t like to talk about ghosts.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. Grandma told me that Mom used to see ghosts just like I do.”

Tommy took a deep breath and then continued.

“Now she takes medicine so that she can’t see them anymore.”

“Not everyone can see ghosts. Many people have a hard time even believing in them. But some of those who do believe in them are afraid of them. Maybe your mom is just afraid of them.”

Tommy looked down and sighed.

Thomas reached to Tommy's chin and gently raised Tommy's head.

"What's wrong?"

Tommy took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

"Sometimes, I'm afraid of them too."

Thomas looked intently at Tommy and waited for him to continue.

"I had a dream the other night. It was scary. There was a man, a very shadowy man. He wasn't alive. He wanted to hurt Mom. He wasn't trying to hurt me. He wanted to hurt her. I was afraid of him."

Thomas leaned in closer.

"You do understand that even a shadowy man can't hurt you."

Tommy looked down at his hand and then back at Thomas.

"I guess," he whispered. "I'm not afraid of those ghosts that visit Grandma. That shadowy man was different from those ghosts. He was cold. He was icy cold. He was mean, really mean."

Thomas moved uncomfortably.

"Tommy you must believe me. Those dark beings can't harm you. You must believe this. You must trust me. I promise you," Thomas almost shouted.

Tommy's eyes widened. He had never seen Thomas get upset before.

Thomas reached for Tommy and hugged him tightly. Tommy reached around and hugged Thomas even tighter. He tried to let go, but Tommy clung fast.

"Tommy, I believe in you. I believe in the light inside of you. I love you."

Tommy let go of Thomas and looked up at him.

"But when I told Grandma about it, she got angry with me. She said that I should stop talking to the ghosts. She said that I had dreamt about demons. It scared me."

"Oh, Tommy. She means well. Your grandmother is a firm believer in her faith. She believes that the souls that she prays for are

stuck.”

“Grandma said that they’re in Purgatory.”

“Yes. It’s not exactly a place. It’s where a soul is not quite pure enough to enter into heaven. At least that’s what she believes.”

“Don’t you believe that too?”

“Tommy, it’s what you believe that’s important. What I believe doesn’t matter.”

“Grandma believes in demons, I guess.”

“Don’t breathe life into those things that your grandmother believes. Does this make sense?”

“Kind of,” said Tommy with a sigh. “I couldn’t even talk to Mom about that dream. I started to tell her, and she just rolled her eyes. She said that I was spending too much time talking to Grandma. She said that Grandma was filling my head up with nonsense.”

“Tommy, you’re fine. I’m confident that both your grandmother and your mother love you just the way you are. You have such an incredible gift. You may not realize it yet, but there is a fire inside you that burns brightly. You don’t have to be afraid. There is nothing in the ‘ghostly’ realm that can harm you. You have to believe that. Anything that happens to you only makes you stronger. I have no doubt that you will realize this for yourself soon enough. I-” started Thomas.

The telephone rang loudly from the kitchen.

They both looked at the door as the phone clanged away.

“It’s Mom’s phone.”

Thomas moved to stand

“I better go. I’m sure that your mother doesn’t want me here.”

Tommy frowned.

“Please don’t go. Not yet, please!”

“I’ll be back, Tommy. I promise.”

“We are going to Grandma’s house today for a few days. Will you visit me there?”

Thomas smiled.

“Yes, I’ll be there.”

The phone sent a piercing harshness of tones into Catherine's ear. She slowly raised her hand to her head as she rubbed her temple. She tried to open her eyes, but sharp edges of light pierced through her eyes into her aching head. I only had a couple of glasses of wine, she thought. When she and Tommy got home from the park the day before, she had made a nice dinner. Afterward, she had tucked her son into bed and then relaxed with a book and a glass of wine.

"God," she mumbled. "What the hell?"

She yawned as she reached for the cradle that usually held her phone. It was empty. The phone continued its assault on her pounding head.

"Damn, it's in the kitchen," Catherine groaned. She crawled out of bed and jumped as the phone rang again, quickening her pace.

"I'm coming," she yelled at the phone.

She grabbed her robe, pulling it on as she ran to the kitchen. As she reached for the phone, she saw the empty bottle of wine next to the sink. She picked up the phone and poked the answer icon on the screen.

"Hello," she said rasped.

"Catherine?" said the caller.

"Yeah. What do you want?"

She cleared her throat, still rubbing the side of her head.

“It’s Gregory.”

The gruff voice sounded familiar. Catherine's eye's widened as memories of the only man that she had ever loved rushed from the depths of the box where she had locked them away. She gasped. She couldn't speak. A sudden rush of adrenaline pumped into her blood.

“Are you there?” he asked.

Her fingers wrapped tightly around her phone, her knuckles white. She took a deep breath and exhaled quickly.

“Yes, I’m here. ... It’s been a while.”

Long suppressed feelings stirred uncontrollably inside of her. A fire erupted in her heart as her forehead creased.

“Yeah, it has.”

Catherine regained her composure a little, as her face flushed red. She remembered the rage that she had felt the day that he had left town; left her. She remembered how he had told her just a few days before that he loved her and wanted her to come to California with him. She would have done anything for him, and she did. That was nine years ago. She looked down the hallway at Tommy’s door. It was partially open. She heard Tommy talking. She clenched her teeth as she forced out her breath through her nose. She turned away and walked towards the other side of the kitchen next to the center island.

She closed her eyes as a tear trickled down the side of her cheek. She gritted her teeth and took a slow deep breath through her nose. She let it out all at once.

Her face relaxed a little.

“How did you find me?” she asked in the calmest voice she could muster.

“On the internet. It had your address and phone number. It says you are at 1622 Carnegie Avenue. It even shows your mother’s address.”

“Hmm. No privacy,” said Catherine as she felt the awkwardness of both loving and hating him at the same time.

“I still have the letters you sent me,” he said.

Her breath rushed out of her. Throughout the years since they

met, she had vacillated between loving and hating him. When things were going right for her, or when she'd had a few drinks, she hated him. Other times, when she was feeling down, she loved him; she blamed herself for his leaving her. She didn't know how she felt right at this moment. The edge of her lip curled up ever so slightly as her right cheek quivered. He must have felt something for her after all, she thought.

"You saved them?"

"You sent quite a few."

"That was a long time ago. You never wrote back, so I had to move on. I had a son ... we had a son," she said.

Gregory coughed loudly into the phone.

Catherine winced as she pulled the phone away from her ear and then brought it back.

He cleared his throat. "Catherine, I want to see him."

"You can't be serious. You didn't even want Tommy."

"That was a long time ago. I am not the same person that I was back then. I have many regrets; the biggest of them was walking away from you when you needed me the most."

Catherine rubbed her forehead as she sat down on the bar stool next to the center island.

"Why now? He doesn't know anything about you."

Gregory coughed again. This time, he moved the phone away from his mouth and then cleared his throat.

"I'm dying," he said with a garbled voice.

"What?"

She almost dropped the phone. She hadn't expected that answer.

"I said I'm dying, and I'd like to see my son before it's too late."

Catherine gasped.

"You're dying?"

Gregory was silent for a few seconds and then continued.

"Look, I can't drive. Otherwise, I would come to you. I am at the end of my rope here. Please let me see my son. Don't you feel anything for me?"

"I'm not sure what I feel," she confessed. "What's wrong with you?"

"I was fine last week, but just a few days ago I collapsed during a meeting. The doctors have been running test after test."

"Which hospital?"

"I'm at the Prescott Hospital here in Austin."

"You're here in Texas? That's just down the street from me."

Gregory cleared his throat again.

"Yes."

"Gregory, I-," she started.

"Think about it and call me back. Don't take too long. I don't know how long I have. Okay?"

"Okay," said Catherine curtly.

"For what it's worth, I did love you," whispered Gregory.

She never expected to hear those words from the man she thought that she once loved. She didn't say anything as she pulled the cell phone away from her ear and pressed the "End call" button.

She looked at the phone number of the last caller. It said, "G. Prescott."

She put the phone down and put her hands over her eyes. Her lips quivered as her breathing became shallow. A torrent of emotions flowed from her eyes as she put her arms crosswise onto the counter and nestled her head in them, muffling her cries.

She thought about Tommy. He had never met his father.

This might be the only chance Tommy would have to meet him, she thought.

"Mom, are you okay?"

Catherine looked up with tears in her eyes.

"Oh sweetie, I'm all right," said Catherine as she wiped her tears away. "I just had a call from someone I haven't talked to in a long time. It was a very special person."

"I heard you talking, and you sounded sad."

Catherine cupped her hand under Tommy's chin and pulled up slightly as she smiled.

"You are such a special little boy."

"I'm already eight."

Catherine chuckled.

"I love you so much, and I'm so grateful that you came into my life. You are such a miracle," she said as she hugged him tightly.

Tommy's concern melted into a broad smile, "I love you too."

"Why don't you get out of those beautiful pajamas and take a quick bath? I'll make your favorite: bacon, eggs, and pancakes."

"Oh boy!" said Tommy as he ran to his room.

She took a deep breath and picked up the phone. G. Prescott was still showing as the last call. She hit the redial button.

A weak voice answered.

"Hello," Gregory struggled.

Catherine replied tersely, "What time?"

"Ten o'clock today."

Catherine gripped the phone even harder.

"Okay, see you then."

She pulled the phone away from her cheek and hit the "End call" button. She took a deep breath as she put the phone down. She let out her breath slow and easy as she wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"Oh God. Mother is not going to like this," she muttered as she started to prepare breakfast.

A few minutes later Catherine had whipped up a hearty breakfast. "Tommy the food is ready. It's going to get cold," she called.

Tommy walked into the kitchen dragging his suitcase behind him.

"You have that pretty full."

"I'm taking extra just in case."

"What for? We're just going to your grandma's for a few days."

"Grandma wants me to go to church with her, and she's taking me to the park to play soccer. I hope that I don't run out of clothes."

Catherine rolled her eyes and shook her head proudly smiling at her son.

"I see," she said. "Now eat your breakfast. I'm going to go take a shower."

“When are we leaving for Grandma’s?”

She hesitated.

“We need to go visit someone in the hospital first, and then we can be at her house just after noon.

Tommy cocked his head.

“That person you were on the phone with?”

“Yes. It’ll be fun. There are lots of ghosts in the hospital.”

Tommy smiled.

Catherine looked at the wall clock.

“Oh dear, I’ve got to get ready!”

Tommy watched his mother run to her room. He smiled and then went back to eating.

Catherine took a quick shower, and a few minutes later, she was packing her things for the long weekend at her mother’s house in San Antonio. She had taken Monday and Tuesday and part of Wednesday off work. She was looking forward to the mini-vacation.

She continued to pack as she thought about Tommy and his obsession with ghosts. He probably likes to go to that old church with his grandma to see the ghosts there, she thought.

She eyed the bottle of red pills sitting on her dresser.

Catherine took another deep breath and let it out slowly as she walked over to the bottle and put it into her purse. She remembered how happy she’d been when she’d been prescribed those pills.

She sat down on the edge of the bed as the memories of when she first met Gregory came flooding back. They overwhelmed her because they accompanied those of her brother, her father, and the darkest parts of her life.

She thought about her stay in the hospital when she started taking those pills. She was in the open psych ward with a bunch of other troubled teens. Some of them became her friends. Although, most of them committed suicide once they were released.

She never thought about killing herself. It didn’t even occur to her to do that. Although, back then she’d thought about killing her mother for putting her in there.

“What kind of a mother commits her seventeen-year-old daughter to a nut house?” she thought.

Those little red pills were a powerful anti-hallucinogen that made the aggressive haunting remnants of her brother go away.

In her mind, she felt cured. Thanks to those pills, she no longer felt cursed.

Those pills changed her. They freed her from a life of hiding from the horrors of losing her brother and then right after, her father. They even helped her move on from her budding attachment to Gregory.

Catherine snapped back to the present as tears flowed down her cheeks again.

“Mom, are you okay?” asked Tommy.

Catherine looked up slowly as she wiped her tears away.

“I’m all right, Tommy. Let’s get going. I want you to meet someone very important.”

THE END

Thanks for Reading the Preview

PRINCIPLES

Dorothy Danvers

Dorothy Danvers, a widow that lives in San Antonio, Texas.

Catherine Danvers

A single mother who raised her son Tommy in Austin, Texas.

Tommy

Catherine Danvers' son.

Gregory Prescott

Billionaire.

Mrs. Prescott

Gregory's mother.

Linda Stevens

Psychologist.

Dr. Rhodes

Psychiatrist.

Thomas

Ghost; Visits Tommy, acts as his guardian angel.

Edward

Son of Dorothy Danvers

Father Mahoney

Priest of the parish where Dorothy's family attends church.

Father Charles

The young priest of the parish where Dorothy's family attends church.

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Thank you to my sister Mary Carmen. She gave me detailed edits that helped improve the book even more.

For the third printing:

Thank you to my critics who prompted a major re-edit of this book.

AUTHOR NOTES

Do you believe that ghosts exist? Have you ever seen something out of the corner of your eye that seemed just to disappear? Have you ever wondered that if ghosts do exist, then what are they really? Well, hopefully, I have an explanation that might give you something to think about.

In the preface to my book: “My Little Cowboy: My Reincarnation Story” second edition, I explained that when a soul is created, it has an aspect of itself called a thought-collective. That thought-collective is an aggregation of all of the thoughts ever thought by the person. The soul and its respective thought-collective uniquely form the personality and experiences of the person forever.

After the person dies, their soul and associated thought-collective no longer receives input from its physical body. Because they are no longer “tied” to the physical body, they are able to experience “life” from a unique perspective that is not limited by the senses of the physical body. Can you imagine how liberating that would be? What would you do in that “situation?”

If you lived a life where you were a happy person (for the most part), after death, you might want to help others (i.e. living people) see the many wonders of life. Perhaps, you’d be a superhero of sorts that goes around uplifting the spirits of the living. The living might see you as their guardian angel or spirit guide. People who resonate with you and what you are about might even “see” you. Your soul would be bright.

On the other hand, what if you lived a life full of anger and hate. Perhaps, some people saw you as cruel and heartless. Maybe you viewed life with contempt. At death, you might experience a shock as you are exposed instantly to a much broader perspective. For some, this abrupt change in perspective might be enough for you to realize that you lived a life that kept you from finding happiness. This kind of person might experience regret. You might feel the need to seek

absolution from the folks you wronged. If you could, you might want to “contact” the people that you “wronged.” You might even become obsessively tied to the target of your obsession (i.e. repeatedly appearing to your loved ones). Your soul would have some brightness.

What if the life you lived was full of hatred? Perhaps others thought of you as having lived a life that had no redeemable value. Maybe you held the life of others in such low regard that you would have felt no remorse if you were to have taken their life. After your physical body died, you might see the horror of life you had lived from a much broader perspective. As a living person, you had little regard for life, now in death, you might feel loathingly powerful. Your egocentric views allow you to see others that resonate with you (i.e. “think” like you). If you could, you might want to contact those who wronged you. You might be attracted to those who think as you do so that they could do your bidding (i.e. influence you). If you could “see” your soul, it would be very dark.

As a living person, like really does attract like. The thoughts you are thinking emanate emotionally from you like a beacon. Thinking thoughts that make you feel good are the kinds of thoughts that attract the brighter souls. Thinking thoughts that make you feel bad tend to attract the darker souls. If I were you, I would always try to think thoughts that produce happy feelings. And when something happens that results in your feeling badly, then reach for a happier thought. Happy thoughts add brightness to your soul. Darker thoughts diminish the brightness of your soul and...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roger Mendoza lives in San Antonio, Texas, the seventh largest city in the United States. In 2014, he moved back to his birth town of San Antonio from Parker, Colorado where he had lived for fifteen years. Living on the outskirts of San Antonio, he still enjoys the taste of the rural life that he loves so much and the many conveniences that the big city provides.

He worked most of his life as a Software Engineer in the defense industry where he cultivated his passion for computer programming but is now retired. Along with writing novels, Roger is also a professional photographer and can often be seen toting his camera looking for photo opportunities in and around town. He loves to capture nature photography and beautiful scenery.

He was born eighth in a family of ten children. There were five boys and five girls with an age span of about twenty-three years. With a fascination for his family history, he has spent years gathering his parent's family photographs and documents. He has cataloged the family's collections and digitized them all. He loves keeping the family tree database updated with new family members as they are born. Roger loves to review the thousands of family photographs and documents while imagining what these people – these relatives and their stories were like.

Roger has always had an interest in understanding the philosophy of life, why people act the way they do and how we all fit into the grander scheme of life itself. He still believes in 'happy endings' even though life, on occasion gets in the way of that outcome on occasion.

He's always had a fascination with unusual phenomena – the most being the drama of life itself. It still amazes him why so much drama fills the life of his friends and family. Perhaps it is observing that drama that sparks his imagination and gives his characters life.

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1. Why did Catherine take the anti-hallucinogen?
2. Were Dorothy, Catherine, and Tommy likable characters? Why or why not?
3. Is Tommy a superhero? Why or why not?
4. Dorothy prayed for the souls in Purgatory. Do you think that she was worthy of this task since she was once a Medium?
5. Why did Catherine hate Father Mahoney so much? Was she justified in hating him?
6. Will suicide send the person to Hell or to Purgatory?
7. Even though Catherine wanted nothing to do with ghosts. Did it make sense that she would not interfere with her son's desire to talk to ghosts? Did she support her mother's praying for the souls in Purgatory?
8. Why was Gregory Prescott so consumed with darkness?
9. Who or what is Mrs. Prescott?
10. Did Catherine love her brother after he died? If so, why wouldn't she want to see him?
11. What is the deal with the red pill, the white pill, and the blue pill?
12. Did the story have an effective ending?

