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Echo of Death

by T.L. ORCUTT

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T.L. ORCUTT

ECHO
OF DEATH

A NOVEL

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FICTION NOVELS

- 2019 *Pre-existing Condition - A Novel* (Revised Edition)
2016 *Pre-existing Condition - A Novel*
2012 *The Path of Return Trilogy*
 Jamayah - Adventures on the Path of Return
 Collateral Karma
 Letters from the Afterworld
2012 *Letters from the Afterworld*
 (only published within the trilogy)
2009 *Collateral Karma*
2005 *Jamayah - Adventures on the Path of Return*

NONFICTION

- 2006 *That's What I'm Talkin' About!:*
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1995 *Magicians of the Soul: Exploring the*
 World of Paranormal and Mystical Experience
1994 *Integrative Paradigms of Psychotherapy*
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1989 *No Beggars Just Balloons:*
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A CROWING ROOSTER SHATTERED an ominous dream to pieces and Billy tumbled out from underneath the warm covers to silence the alarm. Respecting his customary routine he gulped a glass of water, dressed in khaki shorts, a T-shirt, navy nylon shell and hurried out the door of his modest La Jolla apartment to walk a well trodden path to the beach. Outside, pale yellow hues backlit an overcast sky. Slick asphalt announced the few showers that had fallen during the night leaving a marine layer impregnated with a damp mist. Salty scents filled his lungs.

A block from the surf, twenty-eight-year-old Billy turned his head away from the street to detect a milky light whispering through a stingy gap in the sheer ivory curtains of a luxury condominium. He slowed his gait and could not help but peer at moving shadows. For a

moment he froze. The folded curtains yanked open, shook from the sudden force and snapped closed. The peekaboo sliver vanished but silhouettes showed two bodies either dancing in a cool boogie or fighting in a nasty argument. None of this scenario was Billy's business and before he was guilty enough to glance away, he heard a piercing scream and saw a smudge of blood smear the crushed curtains as a body fell against the window. Billy broke into a run.

Beach ahead, palm trees lined the streets in the wealthy seaside neighborhood. Billy reached the surf short of breath. Foamy waves rolled ashore in an on-shore breeze. Billy stopped and jerked a phone from his pocket, dialed 911 and reported the incident to the police, giving the address of his observation, his name, and current location. A dispatch officer directed him to stay where he was until uniformed officers arrived to question him further.

Securing a six-foot-one frame, Billy's bare feet sank into the sand cold from the night. Squeezing the sand between his toes, he approached the water's edge, studied his imprints in the firmer shoreline, and turned back near the street. He sat on a sea wall with the fresh ocean breeze blowing his chestnut hair. Had someone got wounded? Killed?

A half hour later, a police car screeched to a halt along the shoreline curb, red and blue lights swirling atop the cruiser, no siren. Two officers emerged from the vehicle and approached Billy. One was fat, the other thin. "Are you Billy Jay Lord, the person who reported a violent incident up the street?" inquired a tanned lanky man over six-feet in a crisp and starched uniform.

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“Yes.”

“I am Lieutenant Jamison and this is Sergeant Cullen.” He gestured toward a heavysset man whose uniform welcomed ironing.

Lieutenant Jamison did most of the talking. “Can you repeat the address for us, the address where you reported hearing a scream and saw a bloody curtain?”

“218 Ocean View Drive.” Billy pointed up the curvy street to the condo.

“Mr. Lord, we investigated that address a few minutes ago. We knocked several times, and no one answered. We inspected the window beside the street. Closed curtains showed no activity and no blood. To enter the property and investigate further, we would need a court order and while we will include that fact in our written report, there is not enough evidence for a judge to grant permission.”

Billy noticed the officers acted as if they did not believe him, and he knew about peace officers. He grew up with a father who was the Chief of Police in Sparks, Nevada, less than four miles east of Reno. Family barbecues often included dad’s friends in the department. “Well, clear as day, I described what I saw and as a concerned citizen was obliged to report it.”

Like tournament golf professionals putting away their score cards, the officers shoved their notepads in their hip pockets. “Thank you for your time Mr. Lord,” said Lieutenant Jamison. “Is the phone number you gave the dispatch officer the easiest way to get a hold of you?”

“Yep. The only phone I own.”

“How is it you noticed the activity in the residence?”

asked Lieutenant Jamison.

“Oh, this street is a usual walking route I take, at least twice a week. Activity in the window drew my attention.”

“Uh huh. Well, should we have any further need for your testimony we’ll be in touch. Enjoy your day.”

The police drove away. After he saw the black and white vanish, Billy sauntered up the street to check the window in the condo again. Sure enough, as the officer had stated closed curtains showed no signs of blood, and the condo was quiet with no moving shadows. What the hell?

Feeling crazy, Billy strode to the front patio and entry door and banged the brass clapper several times. After a few minutes, an attractive woman opened the door but kept the screen closed. Long blond hair that was freshly styled spilled over the collar of her white terry cloth robe and dark red polish gleamed on her nails. No jewelry but maybe it was too early for fashion.

“Yes, may I help you?” She brushed a swath of hair off her shoulder.

“I’m sorry to bother you this early. I walked by your home earlier and thought the occupant might be at risk. None of my business, but I wanted to make sure everyone was safe. Are you okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine. Who are you and why do you ask?”

“My name is Billy Lord. I live a few blocks away and use this route often. The front of your home drew my attention forty-five minutes ago. Through the curtains, I saw shadows that resembled a physical confrontation and notified the police. The police knocked on your door maybe twenty minutes ago but no one answered.”

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Billy viewed the woman as flirtatious in movement, but not in language. “No one has been here this weekend. Until you, I have not heard anyone knock on the door this morning. I was in the shower earlier. Cannot hear anything with the water running. You know how that is, but thank you for your consideration. Everything is fine.”

“Very well. Sorry to have bothered you. Have a great day.”

“Thanks. You too.”

As Billy resumed his walk, issues about his report to the police bounced around his mind like marbles shaken in a small wooden box that made a racket but held no organized rhythm. On his second visit, there were no stains on the curtains or the occupant’s white robe. Why not? The resident volunteered she had entertained no guests that weekend. Who screamed? How could he have seen two body-shadows?

Last, it was possible she was in the shower when the police knocked, but the police give ample time for someone to answer before leaving. Before answering the door for Billy, the woman might have needed extra time to clean a disturbing mess. Questions corralled no answers that made sense. Something was happening and Billy could not ferret satisfactory solutions. His mind raced in circles and choked the marine scents that danced in a gentle breeze.

Billy flopped on the sofa at home. These were the times he was glad for ordinary friends—basic guys to whom weird things didn’t seem to happen, so he thought. Searching for a distraction, he called a fellow employee

at United Parcel Service, John Henderson. "John, Billy here. Say, you want to play poker this evening?"

"Great idea. How about I ask Bob Rosenberg?"

Bob was a bad poker player with expendable money to lose who Billy and John had played with in the past. Billy laughed. "Okay and I'll invite Danny Dominguez." Billy had met Danny on a camping trip and fished with him the year before.

"Fine with me."

The conversation ended. The guys played more for fun than money. That night the cordial foursome played at John's apartment, the dealer called the game from nine until two in the morning, pizza and beer, and loud laughs. At the close of the game, Billy was happy to break even. John swept fifty-seven dollars. Dependable Bob lost eighty-three dollars, and Danny won the extra twenty-five and change. Billy knew that was cheap amusement for detouring his brain from the freaky drama.

Billy returned to work where he drove a delivery truck. UPS paid well with excellent benefits. Driving a truck with doors open in brown shorts ushered daily holiday associations. Liking the nuts-and-bolts routine, for two years he worked at a shipping location measuring, weighing, and collecting fees, and shifted to field delivery of packages which had been his duty the last two years.

A healthy week of work later, Billy's stroll on a Sunday morning followed the same route at the same time as the earlier week. Once again, the pavement was glossy from rain the night before and grey clouds masked the sun. When he reached the address where

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the woman lived, he saw a rescue ambulance and two squad cars parked in front on an angle. Emergency lights flashed above the vehicles.

He eyed the same window. Again, closed curtains showed a smudge of blood. At that moment, the ambulance sped off with a siren blaring. A police vehicle followed with red lights swirling atop but no siren. Lieutenant Jamison and Sergeant Cullen approached Billy on the sidewalk.

“Good Morning Mr. Lord. Did you just arrive?” asked Lieutenant Jamison.

Once again, Billy recognized their professional suspicion. “I’m on my usual morning route and noticed the activity. What’s up?”

“Half an hour ago, a man called 911 and requested an ambulance for a woman we believe is a resident of this condominium. The victim is on her way to the emergency room. The caller met us at the door.”

“What happened to the woman?”

“We are investigating the cause of injury or death. Did you know any of the residents at this property?”

“Not before I first called you but last week after you drove away, unsettled I walked back here. As you stated, closed curtains showed no red stains. I knocked, and a woman answered the door. She was in her early twenties with long blond hair, and dark red nail polish.”

Lieutenant Jamison handed Billy a small color photo of a woman and a man in a frame they confiscated from the bedroom dresser inside. “Is this the same woman?”

Billy handled the framed photo. “Yes.”

“And last Sunday was the first time you ever saw her?”

“Yes.” Billy filled the officers in on the conversation.

“Did you see her after that communication?”

“No.”

“Have you ever seen the man in the photo?”

“No.”

“And after our meeting last weekend, and you returned to the condominium, was that the only time you have ever been there?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know any more than you have already told us?”

“No. You have my whole story.”

Lieutenant Jamison and his partner surveyed one another. Lieutenant Jamison asked, “Do you find it odd you reported a potential murder a week before it happened on the same weekday, at the same time, and the same place, and with a blood smudge on the curtain?”

Billy had told the truth and was now aggravated by the officers’ questions, as if he were a potential suspect. “Well, I did not report a murder. I reported what appeared to be a violent incident between two people from a scream, thrusting shadows, and what appeared like a blood smudge on the curtains. Also, the curtains snapped open and closed as fast.”

Sergeant Cullen took a small notebook from his hip pocket, thumbed through it, and stopped at a page. “You did not report that observation—the one with the curtains opening and closing. I do not know what to make of it. Were the curtains closed tight?”

“No. When I first looked, there was a narrow gap. Right after I noticed the crack, the curtains flung open and flew closed.”

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As if it was a brilliant conclusion, Sergeant Cullen spoke, "Looks like someone wanted to make sure no one could see inside." Billy thought, *Duh*.

Lieutenant Jamison said, "Sorry to disturb you again, Mr. Lord. Thank you for your time. If you think of anything else you neglected to mention, please call us." Lieutenant Jamison handed Billy his business card.

Billy arrived home in another hour, after eight, picked up the newspaper on the porch, took a shower, and made a breakfast of a cream-cheese bagel, and coffee. He sorted through the Sports Section and grinned at a few comics.

He put the paper down and questioned what happened at the fancy home of the mystery woman. Even as a concerned citizen or spectator why was he involved? Why did he even care? Why couldn't he purge his mind and move on? *Let it go, dude*.

But Billy did not believe in random occurrences. Everything happened for a reason. He believed the event held significance to him or he would not have experienced it.

Billy knew this recent vision would freak most people out. He could not see the future at will but had experienced thirty-seven similar precognitive visions before they happened since the age of three.

In the beginning, awareness of future events was part of his reality, meaning he did not view such experiences as anything special. His father and mother did not have these abilities but accepted Billy's random visions as childhood fantasies.

By six he learned other people did not have these experiences, and by eighteen he wished they would go

away. Like the current vision, they had become more confusing than entertaining and since he had not fostered adequate discrimination, they were more intrusive than helpful.

Now Billy realized his experience with the shadows, scream, blood stains, and the curtains opening and closing were events as they would unfold at a later undisclosed time on a linear timeline. He didn't know why he hadn't considered that before, but these precognitive visions held no pattern or reliable expectation in his life.

This future time happened one week later within minutes of the earlier vision, at the same address, with the same woman, and with the same weather. Billy's disruptive metaphysical history was a major influence in him having chosen a grounded day job, one that balanced his precognitive abilities.

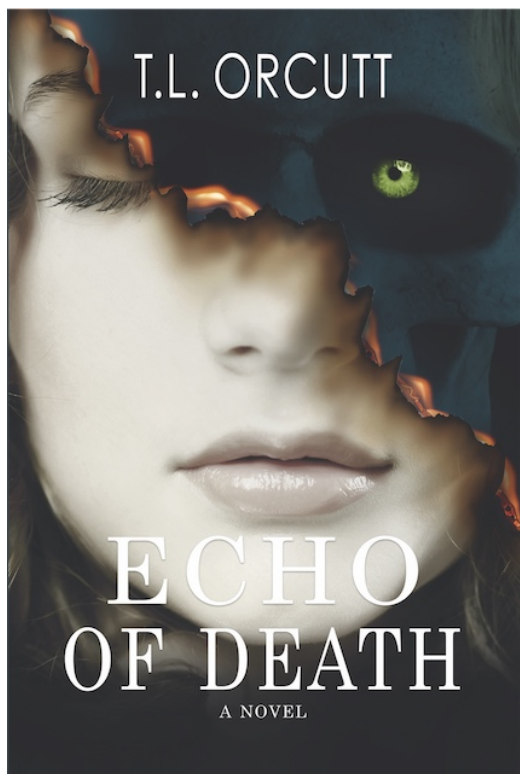
Yet, two overriding issues bothered him. As was often the case with his previous visions, at first he had failed to recognize the event as a vision and accepted it as real. The second issue was that when he had unraveled his mysterious visions before, the events accompanying them became important and he had no clue how the importance of this event might effect him.

His inclination was confident the near future would give an answer to his role in this mystery, and he expected not to like it. That was what usually had happened in the past, like a karmic punishment for errors in a former life, a nemesis that sucked him into helping with curiosity, but an event in which he was otherwise disinterested.

He knew that was the reason death erased memory,

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for a clear blackboard on rebirth. Memory did not reincarnate, only the karma associated with it. He hoped to hell he had not been too bad in former lives, but while he appeared successful on the exterior, inside things were not getting better.



An evil ghost haunts a hard-working UPS driver with trouble discriminating realities from previews of upcoming events. The ghost resorts to terrors against the people who harmed her in life. After visiting a medium and street diviner, our hero embarks on the services of an afterworld-sorcerer who teaches him the ways of astral flight and battle.

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