

HOTLINE TO HEAVEN



A METAPHYSICAL NOVEL
IN EBOOK FORMAT
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There were two navy blue police cars at the crime scene when Jillian Malone arrived, as well as an ambulance and several other vehicles. A variety of official-looking people she didn't know milled outside the trailer that housed the psychic hotline she'd so reluctantly agreed to work on. Robert, Jillian's best friend and fellow hotline reader, ran over and flung himself into her arms. She engulfed his tiny form and held him tight, feeling him shake.

"Oh, Jillie, it's so awful! I'll never be able to put it out of my mind! When I got to work, she didn't answer the buzzer, so I let myself in and found her on the floor. I shook her, thinking she'd passed out or something, but her body was limp. She's dead!"

"What happened? How did she die?"

"She was strangled. Her color was terrible, and her tongue was sticking out. You know how big her eyes were, but they were bigger than ever. They were clouded over, staring into space. I'll see them in my dreams. I won't sleep for a week."

He shuddered and sobbed convulsively in her arms. "I feel bad about the way we always put her down. She was a pain in the neck, but she didn't deserve to be killed. He paused to catch his breath, then went on. "And, I can't bear to say it, but she didn't have any panties on." As risqué as Robert was always pretending to be, he had probably never been with a woman in his life.

They wheeled the body out then, sending Robert into hyperventilation. *The black bag on the stretcher--how many times have I seen that scene on the news*, Jillian asked herself unbelievably. *I never thought that some day it might be somebody I knew.*

She bit the inside of her cheek to find out whether this was a dream—something her dad had taught her when she had nightmares as a child. It hurt, so she had to be awake.

She overheard a cop at the door of the trailer, talking to the ambulance attendant. "What a rummy bunch this is—trouble waiting to happen. Can you believe they're fortune-tellers from New York City? A 900 hotline right here in Port Townsend? They shoulda stayed back east. We sure as hell don't need them here."

She burned with shame as the ambulance attendant snickered to the cop. "A fortune teller? If she was so damned psychic, why didn't she see this coming?" They brayed with laughter.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Donna Cunningham, an internationally respected astrologer with nearly 40 years experience, is the author of 20 books on metaphysical topics. Listed in several Who's Who volumes, she has given seminars on astrology around the world and won the prestigious Regulus Award at the 1998 UAC. She also has a Master's Degree in Social Work from Columbia University. She uses this combined approach in her "Dear Abby" type column in Dell Horoscope and her ongoing series of articles in The Mountain Astrologer. Donna still does a limited number of personal consultations by phone to stay in touch with the ever-unfolding patterns of the Cosmos.

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The Outer Planets and Inner Life, v.3: Aspects between the Outer Planets—Exceptional Souls and their Generations. 12/06

Counseling Principles for Astrologers. 10/2006

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An Astrological Guide to Self-Awareness, Revised Edition. 1/2005

Hotline to Heaven. An astrological/metaphysical mystery novel. 8/2004

Angel in Peril. An astrological/metaphysical mystery novel. 8/2004

Flower Remedies—How Plants' Energies Can Heal Us. 2007 Edition

This book is dedicated to Karen McCauley for all the good times—and the good mysteries—we have shared. And for her help, so freely given during my illness.

About the Charts and Other Features of this Ebook: The characters in this book gave birth to themselves, and it was only after I came to know and love them that I began to speculate on their astrology charts. Having an idea of their age, I got a feeling for their Sun, Moon, and Rising Sign and then looked through the ephemeris for dates that fit those signs. Not only did I find the charts, but also the charts fit the characters well. Then, eerily enough, the transits for those charts also worked, using the year 1995, when the mystery was being written. Click on the bookmark tab on the right hand side of the page to find the characters' charts and to return to them whenever you like. Unfortunately, not all the characters were willing to cough up—I mean, divulge—their birth information. Those who are not students of astrology can use bookmark tab for the glossary, which contains definitions of the astrology jargon Jillian lamentably insists on using.

An ebook is also searchable—an advantage you will have in solving this case that neither Jillian Malone nor the police had in 1995. And so, for instance, if you started to feel like the scarves were significant, you could easily look back and see where else they were mentioned. Open the search engine by clicking on the binoculars on the tool bar. When it opens, put the term you wish to search for in the search engine box, and in seconds it will generate a list of all the places in the book that term appears. Click on the links to go to those sections.



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Chapter One

March 20

The Angel of Death kissed the panties that the Whore of Satan had worn and put them back on the altar.

*I warned her to change or die.
I gave her three chances.
She continued to sin.
Then she went to her rest, and peace was restored.*

The Angel of Death lovingly kissed the worn white leather Bible.

*The Whore from the Bookstore was only the first.
Now they say more of Satan's spawn are coming.
The Lord will need me again.
The world is full of sin.
I will give them a chance to change.
I will warn them they are to die.*

The Angel of Death knelt and prayed for strength.

* * * * *

March 25-27

It wasn't until Montana that they seriously began to get on each other's nerves. Jillian Malone, whose turn it was to drive, was exhausted from days of wrestling with the big, overloaded trailer that held all their belongings. With one hand, she tried to subdue her fly-away blonde hair, but after a week on the road, it was as unruly as the trailer. Her long legs were cramped from being confined in the small rental car.

Irritated, she said, "I knew we shouldn't have turned off for Helena, but you insisted. Butte was much closer on the map, and we could be having dinner by now."

"You'll live, Girlfriend," retorted her best friend, Robert Pierce, who held her plump, tattered tabby cat Beastie on his lap. "You're not exactly malnourished. There's another town coming up. We'll stop there."

But, like the three they'd passed since the last exit, that town was closed up tight, not even a gas station open. After a flaming sunset on the distant mountains, the rapidly

descending night was turning the vast stretches of land to ink. Not a point of light could be seen.

She glanced nervously at the fuel gage, which registered empty. "If we run out of gas in the middle of nowhere, it's your fault! We should have filled up in Bozeman, but you said keep going, we could get a better price."



"So, why did you listen to me, Smarty Pants? It's as much your responsibility as mine!" He was working his way into a snit. Displeased at his tone, Beastie dug in his claws, and Robert gasped. "I'm starting to HATE your rotten cat."

She looked over at Robert and felt contrite. His black eye had faded, but his face was still marred by cuts from the gay bashing that convinced him to make this move. Usually gorgeous, his well-trimmed black hair, rosy cheeks, and wicked humor gave him what she called the laughing pirate look.

"I'm sorry to be cranky," she told him. "I'm just upset about having to leave New York City."

A wave of loss washed over her. So much to leave behind, so many witty, insightful friends, and such richness of experience. But she'd had no real choice--no money coming in, and no reason to believe it would get better. There were more bills every day, collection agencies getting nastier all the time. She'd been two months behind on rent and her March rent had been due. The landlady was threatening to have her son Anthony deal with Jillian. Robert had seen Anthony in Mafia restaurants in Little Italy with some bad numbers and had warned her not to cross him.

She'd even considered looking for work, but the last time she'd tried, five years ago, she couldn't get so much as a temp job. At forty, she had no recent work history, and the astrology practice that had supported her well enough for years had gradually dried up. The psychic hotlines were so easy for people to access—pick up the phone and get a quick fix. How a legitimate astrologer could work on one of those things, she didn't know. The ads were so hokey.

Then late last month, after three years of dead silence, her ex-husband, Gary Jones, had called her about coming out to Washington State to work on the line he was starting, called The Hotline to Heaven. She wouldn't even have considered it, but just at that point, Anthony was beginning to put the squeeze on her for the rent.

Her stomach clenched. "Oh, Robert, I can't stand the idea of doing readings that way. You know how I work--it's like therapy, using the chart to find the reasons for people's problems. It doesn't make sense to predict without understanding why they get into the same situations over and over. Otherwise, what's to stop them from making the same mistakes?"



Before they'd left New York, Robert had been working for one of the lines for several months because they'd also cut into his Tarot practice. He said it wasn't that different from private readings--the same kinds of people, the same problems, but many of them wouldn't know where to find a reader in their own area.

"Don't be so down on the idea, Jill-Jill. You might like it after all."



"You may be right, but I still don't know if I can do it. And I learned long ago not to trust Gary."

She and Gary were married for five years, divorced now for ten, but Gary popped up from time to time. He was promising her a steady income, with long hours until he found enough readers. It's just like him to get into a 900 number, she thought. He falls for anything that looks like a fast buck. The trouble with his grandiose schemes is that I've never known one to work.

Looking over as she sighed, Robert said, "I hated to leave, too, Jill-Jill, but it's really not safe to be gay in New York anymore." He'd recently taken home

one of those hunky little Midwestern guys he found so attractive. The guy was straight, beat him to a pulp, and robbed him.

Robert shook his thick black hair and adjusted his diamond stud earring. "I know at least four others who've been beaten up. It's only a matter of time until gay bashing is named the official New York City team sport. I just didn't know where to go or how to support myself. I'm too old to be a chorus girl any more."

He'd come to New York from rural Ohio to be a dancer and had been in several Broadway productions ten years ago. She thought of him as a young Harvey Fierstein--but better looking. At just over 5', he had a dancer's slim body with tight, shapely buns.

She said, "God knows, we'll be the only New Yorkers out there in the Boonies." In her bleak state, even Jillian couldn't predict that in just three short months, she'd be so hopelessly in love with her new home that she'd wonder how anyone could live in New York.

Robert told her, "Oh, Seattle--and the gay life--can't be that far away. And there are faggots everywhere, girlfriend."

She was amused, as always, at his sardonic use of words like queer and faggot. Let those outside the gay life use them, though, and he'd be all over them like an irate hummingbird.

Robert and Jillian had been neighbors in Park Slope, a gentrified area of Brooklyn. They'd grown close, debriefing tough clients and chewing over metaphysical questions until late at night. He was already discontented with the city's filth and crime, and when he'd been beaten up, he decided to work on Gary's line, too. In just a couple of days, they'd arrive in their new home, Port Townsend, which Gary described as a jewel of a town in the mountains.



A loud snore erupted from the back seat, startling them. In their bickering, they'd forgotten their passenger. "That's another thing," Jillian said, "I'll never forgive you for sticking me with her!"

"Astarte's a pain in the tush," Robert agreed, "but you need her to work on the line, and you were glad enough when I introduced you. Where I worked before, she was the most popular reader. Best there was when it came to LOOOOOVE."

Jillian admitted, "She was good when I tested her. Came up with many of the same things you did in the tarot reading about this move, though she uses plain playing cards. She got both the Ace of Hearts and the Ace of Diamonds, so she said I was going to meet someone and that we'd do well financially. But, God she's aggravating! She talks about herself all the time--typical Leo.

He offered snidely, "You just hate her because she's young and beautiful."

That rankled, though it was probably true. Astarte was 24 years old and gorgeous. She had masses of fine, blonde hair, a pink, unmarred complexion, big green baby doll eyes and not an ounce of fat on her long, willowy torso.

Worse, she was spoiled rotten by her wealthy, doting parents. Jillian had observed that the Sun in the fifth house of the birth chart—like Astarte had—was often the mark of a spoiled child. Jillian had done Astarte's chart prior to recruiting her for the line to make sure Astarte's psychic gifts were genuine--and her strong Neptune testified that they certainly were.

Jillian said, "I wish I had parents still alive to bail me out of tough spots like this. It's just me and Beastie, and not a dime between us."

Robert reached over and kneaded her shoulder, working out knots from the long days of driving. "Don't worry, Jill-Jill. We're in this together, and we're going to make it."

Comforted, she still had to get it off her chest. "Astarte's folks give her the best of everything, so she expects us to do the same. She's so self-centered."

"Not so," he reminded her. "She's ALWAYS friendly and helpful when it comes to men."

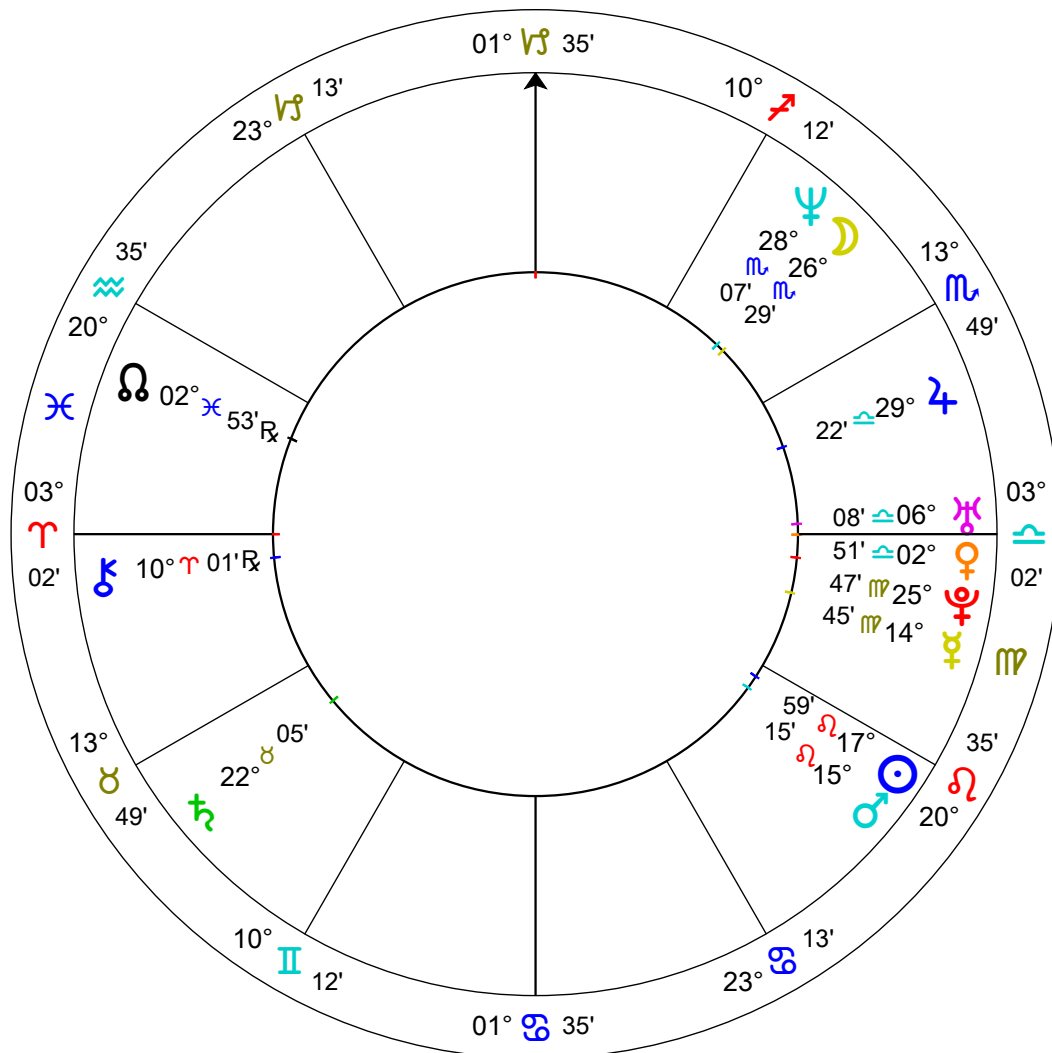
"You got that right. The next time we stop for gas and she cozies up to some Neanderthal trucker or biker, I'm going to let him carry her off."

"Oh, come on! Some of them were cute, in a greasy kind of way. I'd go for a ride with one of them in a minute. OOOOOOH, those muscles!" He pretended to pant.

"Right, and wind up in the morgue the minute you laid a hand on them! She has no taste at all. It doesn't seem to matter, as long as it's male."



astarte:
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There was a stirring in back, then the continuing snores reassured them Astarte was dead to the world, so they relieved tension by thoroughly and happily trashing her until they saw the lights of Helena ahead.

The motel was only marginally less dismal than the others they'd stayed in. The spreads and drapes in the room Jillian and Astarte took were a vague, faded chintz, the furniture a Formica relic of the 1950s. Astarte claimed the better bed, leaving Jillian with a thin, lumpy mattress. They sneaked Beastie in and set up his litter pan in the rust-stained bathtub. He was 17 and crabby, but still in good health. He plopped down at the foot of Jillian's bed and started his bath.

She groaned inwardly as Astarte began preparing for her nightly meditations. "Do you really need those candles on all night?" It was hard enough sleeping with the drone of truck traffic.

Astarte imparted her candle lore self-importantly. "You must burn them at least eight hours a day to experience their power. The red one is to attract love. I want to get over my relationship with Jimmy and meet someone. I'm made to love and be loved."

Jillian tried not to sound judgmental. "It seems to me you'd want to give yourself time to heal...and maybe learn something from it."

Astarte protested, "I never dreamed he'd turn violent. Jimmy loved me so much at first, he wouldn't let me out of his sight. I felt I'd finally found my soul mate. He swore he'd never treat me like he did his wife...said her constant nagging provoked him, but that he could never get angry at me. Things only changed little by little, after he went back to drinking."

"Did you know he was an alcoholic when you got together?"



"He said he drank because he was so miserable over the divorce. When we started seeing each other, he gave it up for me." Astarte's big green eyes lost their focus, and she sighed as she recalled the hazy, romantic beginnings.

"That lasts about as long as the roses they send you." Jillian had dated an alcoholic or two herself--who hadn't?--but she'd never stand for someone hitting her. "Things must have gotten pretty hairy, or you wouldn't have been ready to drop everything and come with us."

Astarte nodded and massaged the wrist she'd sprained when he pushed her down the subway stairs during an argument. "It wouldn't have been safe to stay. Jimmy would never give up on getting me back--or making me pay for leaving him."

Jillian decided, *in our own ways, we're each fugitives. Her from her boyfriend, me from Anthony, and Robert from the gay bashers. Astarte may be one of a kind as far as her ideas go, but she's no different than any of the battered women in my old social work jobs and my astrology practice. They all think they can tame the tiger--that if they're just loving enough, they can make these men over and not get hurt.*

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