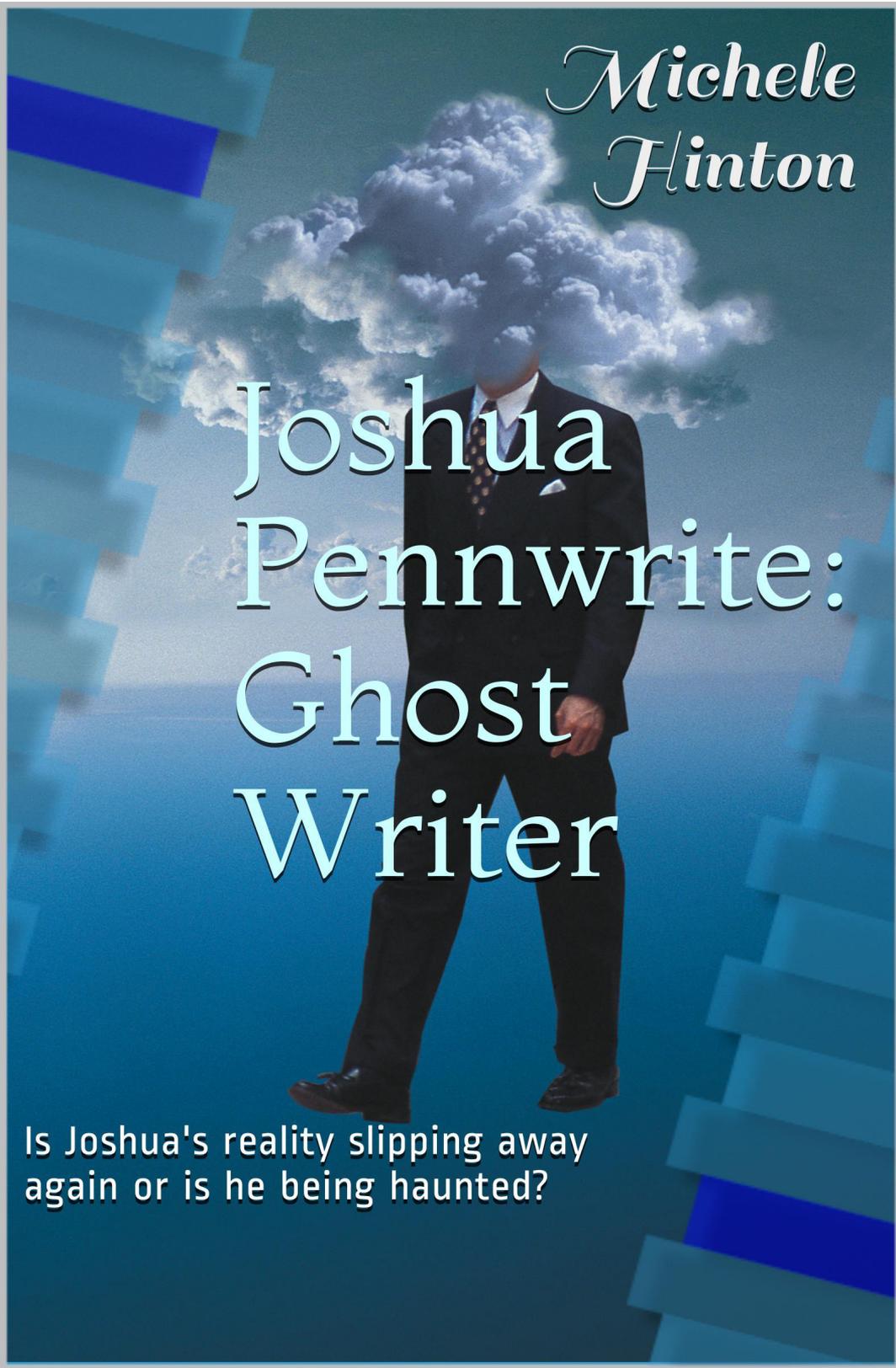


*Michele
Hinton*



Joshua
Pennwrite:
Ghost
Writer

Is Joshua's reality slipping away
again or is he being haunted?

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Ghost Writer

Tiana saw the dragon drawing nearer as she tried to escape it. She cursed herself for disobeying her father by going for a morning ride; then she cursed her horse for breaking its leg when it stumbled and fell at hearing the dragon's roar.

The forest was only five hundred yards ahead, but the dragon was considerably closer. She took a quick look behind her as she ran and could see the greenish glow from its slanted eyes. She turned her gaze forward and pushed her legs to go faster. She could feel the breeze from the beast's wings. Her heart was threatening to burst from her chest, and she felt as if she could spit forth fire from her lungs. She knew her last moments had come; then suddenly....

~ ~ ~

Justine Hawkins felt a stabbing pain in her chest. "Oh no!" she exclaimed. "Not now! I'm so close!" Her nitro was in her purse, but it was on the table across the room. She got up from her computer, took two steps away from her desk,

and fell to the floor. She pressed the lifeline button she wore around her neck and heard:

All operators are busy at this time. Please stay on the line and someone will be with you shortly.

She was too weak to move. None of her muscles worked. She thought about her life – her two nieces, Sharon and Jakki and – her electric bill.

“Oh crap! I forgot to pay it!” Justine laid there staring up at the ceiling.

~ ~ ~

“Good evening. I’m Charlie Calvert...”

“...And I’m Silvia Jordan. This is your six o’clock evening report on Bowling Green’s own, WBGK, Channel 6,” said the anchorwoman. She looked at the other camera. “This morning, fifty-two year old Justine Hawkins, Bowling Green’s newest author of the critically acclaimed fantasy novel, *Tiana’s Sword*, was found dead in her apartment.”

The camera switched to Charlie. “The body was found by the landlord after tenants complained of a foul smell coming from her apartment. The preliminary coroner’s report states heart failure as cause of death. It’s reported that Hawkins had been dead for approximately two weeks. The electricity had been cut off for nonpayment.”

The camera cut back to Silvia. “The other feature story is this weather. And all I can say is – Hot! Hot! Hot! For the past three weeks the temperature has been in the triple digits. Today’s record temperature for this year is 105°....”



Justine looked around the room of the morgue. “How did I get here?” She vaguely remembered being in a place other than her apartment – but that was all. She looked down at the body they’d just put in a drawer. It reminded her of one of those bodies on a crime scene story after the autopsy; the chest had been cut open and stitched up roughly. The brownish hair was in disarray, the skin had a grayish hew and something had eaten a hole through the cheek as well as other places on the face.

Justine turned up her nose. “I look terrible!” She shook her head. “What a pity. No open casket for me!”

She looked at the man standing by the drawer; he was wearing a mask. “I must smell bad also.” She bent her ghostly head closer to her body to take a whiff – but nothing. Suddenly, the man closed the drawer and the front panel went right through her head. “Hey! Watch it!” she shouted at him. She instinctively felt for possible injury, and when she discovered she wasn’t hurt, she rolled her eyes. “Duh! I can’t bleed any more – I’m dead!”

The man in hospital whites that had been working with her body had gone over to the sink. She found herself standing next to him and leaned against the wall. “Can you hear me?”

But he continued to wash his hands oblivious to her. She watched as he went to the desk and filled out a tag. After he put it in the slot on the drawer that her body was in, he went back to the desk.

“Alas – Poor me,” Justine sighed. She turned around hoping to see the light, as everyone called it, so she could walk