

*Crossing into
the Mystic*

DL Koontz



Lighthouse Publishing
of the Carolinas

PRAISE FOR *CROSSING INTO THE MYSTIC*

Crossing into the Mystic is an engaging, page-turning read. Grace's pain, confusion, and desire for freedom to be herself are feelings most of us can identify with. As if that isn't enough, D.L. Koontz deftly paints pictures with her words by showing us the landscape, both beautiful and haunting, where her story takes place. Her historical research is evident, and the rich descriptions of days gone by serve as another magnetic draw. I'm waiting impatiently to read book number two.

~**Anita Agers Brooks**

Author, International Speaker, Inspirational Coach

DL Koontz' writing is incredibly compelling! I started *Crossing into the Mystic* yesterday afternoon, read as late as I could last night - had to talk myself out of calling in sick to work in order to finish it this morning - and missed my favorite show to keep reading. I finished it just as soon as I got home from work this evening after spending the day more focused on these characters than the ones I spent the day with. If you enjoy a good mystery, and don't mind the hairs on your neck standing up a bit, you will love this page-turner!

The vivid language and descriptions, the deep characterization, the powerful verbs...Koontz' craft is superb! The story is complex and unexpected, and I enjoyed the surprising twists of plot. The author masterfully weaves in the heroine's background and the history of the Civil War to create a marvelous tale.

~**Felicia Bowen Bridges**

HR Manager, Pastor's Wife and Mother of Four

Thoroughly enjoyed reading Koontz' book, *Crossing into the Mystic*. Intriguing storyline that pulled me right into Grace's life. Loved Koontz' voice as well as her way of describing people, places, and events. Looking forward to hearing more from this author.

~**Beth Fortune**

Inspirational Speaker and Writer

Crossing into the Mystic captured my attention with its strong, emotional character descriptions from the first page, as Grace, an orphaned teen, plans her escape from her temperamental aunt and wrestles with the death of her parents and sister. As Grace begins her extraordinary journey from her chaotic Boston environment to her inheritance, a mysterious ancestral estate in the Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia, the intricate descriptive scenes set the mood for an imaginative, gripping storyline. A romantic triangle and the supernatural invade Grace's incredible pilgrimage as the narrative develops, creating an engaging paranormal romantic suspense novel.

~**Karen Jordan**

Author, Speaker, Writing Instructor, Blogger

A hefty trust fund, an SUV, and an ancestral estate – all for Grace, a 16-year-old orphan anxious to leave Boston, alone, to live three months in the ancient manor home nestled in the Blue Ridge mountains. No one has been in the mansion for centuries except for Grace's stepfather – something has prevented the intrusions. The feisty heroine develops extraordinary relationships – both with the living and the dead. Grace, as well as the reader, must delve into her own belief system as the author creates an interweaving tale of suspense; a tale tossed with paranormal phenomena, geography, history, religious, and love elements – topped with a bit of humor. Vivid descriptions engage the senses as Grace explores the beautiful mountain areas, the Shenandoah Valley, and the abandoned estate house; experiences life during the Civil War era and the Battle of Antietam through the eyes of the soldiers; feels the turmoil and joy of real-life young love; struggles to understand death and the life thereafter; and learns that life is defined by the decisions one makes. Koontz has created a gripping story with a few unanswered details that entice the reader to yearn for a sequel.

~**Darlene Reighard**

Educator and Consultant

Crossing into the Mystic takes one girl's struggle with fear and loss and creates a world where death isn't so final, and love isn't so far away.

From the first few pages, I cared about Grace. Her spunk and bravado and ability to conjure up tons of quotes on facing fear kept me wanting the best for her and reflecting on how I often let my anxiety determine too much for me. So

many of her struggles are familiar to most of us at some point or another (except for the scary ghost part), and Koontz artfully crafted a paranormal world around a mostly normal girl.

A story painted inside another story bringing two worlds to light, *Mystic* takes a good look at death and life, exploring the spirit world in a fresh and trustworthy way. Koontz handles the unknowns carefully and keeps the story moving. Her description and wit are refreshing, and she maintains the pace planting little gems along the way. Great job!

~**M B Dahl**

Author of *Through the Balustrade*

Crossing into the Mystic is a fascinating and engrossing story. D.L Koontz has created a unique tale of life, death, ghosts, other dimensions and mystery. From the beginning of the book, I found myself taken in and I read it in a short number of days. While many other things were demanding my attention, I wanted to get back to it.

In *Crossing into the Mystic*, D.L. Koontz makes a very different world real. Her rich characters, through fascinating discussions and experiences, bring us into a world of life and after-life with ease. As I read, I let my mind ponder the mysteries of life and grew in the process. We witness the main character, Grace's journey towards faith as she experiences great tragedy and asks questions of life and death and mystery. The book takes the reader into a vivid history of the Civil War, and you feel you are there. The book has many unexpected twists and turns, keeping you engaged.

The book ends with words of wisdom on the meaning of life and death and what is unknown to us here. You want more, and I believe D.L. Koontz has left some doors open, so we may have just that.

~**Ann Vanino**

Career Coach and Blogger at MovingForward.Net

Mystery and historical fictions lovers rejoice! *Crossing into the Mystic* deftly weaves the hauntingly beautiful West Virginia landscape with complex (sometimes supernatural) characters and spiritual truths to create an irresistible plot.

Merging well-researched Civil War history with a modern-day heroine's search for love and self, D.L. Koontz keeps us anxiously turning the pages. Grace inspires us as readers to assess our own reactions to fear and change, and to question our encounters with the supernatural.

Needless to say, the next book in the trilogy cannot come soon enough!

~**Alden Cayse**

REALTOR® and blogger, www.austinhomestead.net

Crossing into the Mystic drew me in from the start and wouldn't let me go until I'd consumed the entire story in one sitting. Whew! An incredible ride that captivated me and left me thinking about love that is stronger than death. I'm already hungry for the sequel.

~**Lori Roeleveld**

Author of the Blog, Deeper with Jesus in Rhode Island

Just finished *Crossing into the Mystic*...I was mesmerized from the first word. It touched me on so many levels. Would love to have coffee with the author to discuss the places, in my own life, that her words allowed me to experience. Beautifully written and anxiously awaiting Koontz's next treasure!!

~**Joanne L. Stiffler**

Entertainer, Mother of Two, Controller for Real Estate Investor

CROSSING INTO THE MYSTIC BY D.L. KOONTZ

Published by Lighthouse Publishing of the Carolinas
2333 Barton Oaks Dr., Raleigh, NC, 27614

ISBN 978-1-941103-03-6

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Cover image by Urosh Bizjak, <http://uroshb.prosite.com>.

Cover design by Ted Ruybal, www.wisdomhousebooks.com.

Interior design by Sherry Heinitz.

Available in print from your local bookstore, online, or from the publisher at:
www.lighthousepublishingofthecarolinas.com

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Brought to you by the creative team at LighthousePublishingoftheCarolinas.com:
Rowena Kuo, Eddie Jones, Meaghan Burnett, and Brian Cross.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Koontz, D.L.
Crossing into the Mystic / D.L. Koontz 1st ed.

Printed in the United States of America

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For helping me bring *Crossing into the Mystic* into the world, I owe thanks to so many:

I'm grateful first to my husband, Joseph Roberson, and my son, Matthew Traverso. Joe always seems to know when I need his encouragement and strength the most, and he never fails. My son Matt patiently heard every sentence of this book read aloud, offering, as usual, a keen insight that startles me. To my lovely step-daughter, Megan Roberson, for many hugs and words of encouragement.

To my parents, R. Clair and (the late) Mary Koontz, together they built a life farming and doing their share to feed America. They are/were courageous and steadfast, and taught me the joys and rewards of hard work, and an appreciation for history and wide open spaces.

To my cousins, Brenda Orndorff and Darlene Reighard, whom I must daily remind myself are not my sisters; thanks for clearing my head with laughter when I need it the most. And, to Charlie Stanley, for encouragement and goading that I hurry up and write more.

To Mandy Feight, Beth Mende Conny, Cheryl Burgwald, Anita Agers Brooks, and Johanna Doebling, for loving me, inspiring me, helping me grow, and believing in me, each in her own way.

To my late Uncle, Jake Koontz, the most crackerjack storyteller I've ever known, for proving that the Koontzes have stories worth telling.

To Dean Koontz for reminding me that even kids from the boonies in Bedford County, Pennsylvania can develop wild imaginations and capture them with ink. I aspire to your level of masterful storytelling and sky-high talent.

To Michael McGowan, Eva Marie Everson, Kristin Procter, Keiki Hendrix, and Reverend Dale Seley for delivering encouragement in a way that you probably didn't even realize at the time. To Torry Martin, for making me laugh and reminding me that laughter is an amazing gift, Divinely given.

To the amazing writers in my writing group, the Light Brigade, a collection of future Pulitzer Prize winners, *New York Times* bestselling authors, and some of the most inspiring writers I've met. You each have spent time with me on this tortured and thrilling walk called the writing life, continually offering praise and prayer, as we've stumbled down the path together. Thanks for kvetching with me when I needed it most.

To Dale Hansen, for first chances. To Eddie Jones, for bigger and better second chances. To my incredible editor, Rowena Kuo, for removing chance and replacing it with exactitude. And thanks to the other extraordinary people at Lighthouse Publishing who provided tireless expertise and support: Brian Cross and Meaghan Burnett.

To all the American soldiers and wounded warriors for giving me freedom, particularly the freedom to live my life—the writing life—the way I choose. God bless each of you.

And, thank you, Lord, for the blessings of the journey and all you've taught me along the way.

Visit the author's website at www.dlkoontz.com

Crossing into the Mystic is a work of pure fiction. While there are elements some might find open to interpretation, it should not be misconstrued as hindering Biblical truths. Instead, its storyline is intended to open a door of dialogue and an exploration of God's word. Isaiah 8:19-22 says to look to God for answers, not to the dead, and that God will judge those who pursue the occult.

DEDICATION

*To my mother, Mary Audrey Stanley Koontz, who moved on to live in heaven,
as I was writing this book. All that I am is because of the foundation, love,
and encouragement you provided. I miss you every day.*

PART I

Valley of the Shadow

Chapter 1

All of it became mine that day: the hefty trust fund, my mother's red SUV, and my stepfather's ancestral estate isolated amidst the caverns of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I was embarking on a 500-mile journey to make solo use of all three.

As long as I remained in Boston, I would continue to live my life backward—dwelling on the past and longing for the parents and sister who were dead. Buried. Gone. There was no way I could have known that by turning away from death I would be running into it.

That day seemed like the perfect time to launch my escape. The rising sun shot beguiling streaks of crimson through the divisions of the massive brownstones on Boston's Beacon Hill, teasing away any threat of "Red sky at morning, sailor take warning."

In the stillness of the morning, I heard a house door latch, then a husky voice grumble. "Ouch ... ouch ... dang!"

My cousin, Michael, barefoot and clad only in gym trunks and a T-shirt, pranced between stones as he hurried up the steep three-block incline toward me. He was carrying travel snacks, but what I hoped he was bringing me was reassurance of our individual escapes.

"Grace, go! Go! Go! Click your heels and get the Sam Hill out of Oz before she changes her mind!"

Though Michael's words echoed my resolve, I laughed. He was four inches taller and eight years older, but a million times more sociable and often reminded me of an oversized little boy.

"Auck, Dorothy." He reached my car, glanced back toward our house, and handed me a zip-locked bag stuffed with trail mix. "You're too late. You'll never get to Kansas now."

I turned to see the subject of his wicked witch allusion exit through the oversized front door of our ivy-covered brownstone and begin her march up the sidewalk with Uncle Phil dawdling behind. Aunt Tish wasn't toting a flying broom, but she was storming along, face scowling, hands fisted.

Michael grinned. “I guess she’s saving the flying monkeys for me.”

“Maybe. She wasn’t very happy about you leaving tonight for Chile. You sure you’re tough enough to stand up to her?” I elbowed him, knowing he wouldn’t feel the jab. Despite his baby face and wire-rimmed glasses, he had the abs of a bodybuilder.

“No problem. She can’t control me anymore. It’s you who better leave quickly.”

“I’m going. Don’t worry about that.” I tossed the trail mix on the back seat. From the front, my dog, Tramp, watched it land and turned back to the front window, more excited about going somewhere than the goodies. He barked twice. *Let’s go.*

“Good. It will be two years before you’ll get another chance,” Michael warned in a whisper. “I won’t be here this summer to save you like I have before.”

“Which is exactly why I’m leaving today. Thanks for coming home to see me off. She’s not that bad you know.” Maybe voicing such hope would make it so.

Eyes wide, he said, “What? She’s an unstable, soul-sucking—”

“Shush.” I stifled laughter. “She’ll hear you.”

He sobered and leaned against my car, crossing his arms. “You’re sure about this?”

“The trip? Of course.”

He shook his head. “The house. It sounds ... weird. Like Norman Bates lives there.”

I looked at him, startled. Michael was generally carefree and titillated by the unknown. He loved the notion that people held secrets within themselves.

“That’s crazy,” I affirmed, lest his uncharacteristic concern unnerve me.

“Is it? Jack was so close-mouthed about the place.”

“Michael, stop it! It’s only a house. Jack was there three years ago. How bad could it be?”

“Remember. I’m only a phone call away. You have to live there what—three months?”

“That’s what the will says. Then it’s mine to do what I want. Including selling it. And, of course, that’s exactly what Aunt Tish expects me to do.”

“We’ll work that out later. Stick with this charade that you’re fixing it for your senior project, then selling it and moving back to Boston. By the end of summer, my new company will transfer me back to the states, and you can live with me. Just don’t come back here.”

“I know, I know.”

“And keep Tramp close by.”

I shook my head to indicate his concern was unnecessary. But inside, I couldn’t

help but wonder if Tramp would be able to stop *all* threats that I might encounter.

* * *

After stopping to assess her own vehicle and bark orders at my Uncle Phil to take it to the car wash, Aunt Tish reached us. As her eyes scanned my car, Uncle Phil plodded up behind.

Beside me, Michael murmured, "Shoulda' tied garlic around our necks," then he donned a Cheshire grin and bellowed, "Good morning, Mother dearest."

"Nice of you to grace us with your company, darling," Aunt Tish clucked with saccharin sarcasm and crossed her arms. Her face was stern, her eyes leveled. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you were trying to sleep your way through the day until your flight leaves."

"Got in late, Mom."

She arched a skeptical brow. "If you're turning right around and leaving for that ridiculous job in Chile, why did you even bother coming home? You could have been working at MacGruder's, you know. They *are* the most prestigious firm in Boston."

"Yeah, Mom, I know."

"They certainly would have paid better. Must be nice to have no concerns about money."

"I haven't cost you a cent since I turned twenty-one. And if you're so worried about money, why do you live in this pretentious place? How can you afford it anyway?" He clicked his thumb and middle finger. "Oh, that's right. You used Grace's education fund."

She exhaled into a pout. "You kids are so disrespectful. Why do you do these things to me? Haven't I suffered enough?"

"Here we go." Michael rubbed his forehead.

"And look at you. Go put on some clothes. What will the neighbors think?" Her eyes darted to the windows of the lofty brownstones shadowing the street.

"Yeah, Mom. They'll probably think I feed nails to little children since I don't wear shoes." He turned his back to her and smiled at me, then withdrew to the back of the car and shook my bike as though to make sure it was tethered securely. I could see his grin from the corner of my eye.

"We'll talk later about you arriving home one day just to leave the next."

She turned to me, swapping irritation with sadness as easily as if she'd replaced a straw hat with a ball cap. Wiping at invisible tears, she sniffled and brushed

back a lock of frizzled hair, causing her peace sign earrings to sway to and fro. With characteristic dramatic flourish, she took one of my hands and pressed an object into my palm.

“Your keys. Why your mother insisted you keep this atrocious gas-guzzler, I’ll never know. I never did understand her.”

I wrapped my fingers around the keys, feeling the shape of independence. “Thank you.”

It was expected of me to treat this as a heart-rending gesture on her part, even though she had readily agreed to the trip because she wanted the house to be sold as quickly as possible, thereby placing more money into my accounts, to which *she* had access.

Aunt Tish pouted. “You selfish kids are breaking my heart with these trips.”

I kept quiet. Best not to acknowledge her fabricated sadness or her varnished insult.

Receiving no response from her selfish kids, she turned to my uncle. “Philip, I must be crazy. I’m going to be thrown in jail for letting a 16-year-old live by herself ... in some creepy house in a ... a ... redneck wilderness.”

From the back of the car, Michael groaned.

“Aunt Tish—” I began.

Uncle Phil cleared his throat and stood tall, looking for a moment more like the commanding professor he was when teaching Chaucer at Boston College than the ventriloquist’s dummy he played at home for his formidable wife. “Tish, she’ll be fine. It’s only for the summer.”

“But it’s so far away from Beacon Hill and civilized society, for bloody sake,” she responded stiffly. “She won’t be around our kind. Those people are so provincial. What will my friends think? And that house ...”

Uncle Phil sighed. “The house is fine. The management company said so.”

“Yeah, Mom,” Michael scolded from his retreat, “just because the place is old doesn’t make it creepy. Heck, our house is old.”

Uncle Phil shot his son a quelling look. “Jack loved the place. He spent a lot of time there. It must be in good shape. And if it’s not, then Grace will fix it up. That’s the whole point of this trip anyway.” He frowned. “Besides, by the time you were sixteen, you had already been arrested for disturbing the peace and indecent exposure.”

“Oh gawd, Pops.” Michael cringed and reached up to rub his temples. “Too much information.”

Uncle Phil continued. “You already set up a bank account for her. She has a credit

card. She's got everything she needs. If anyone can take care of herself, it's Grace."

"Yeah, Mom," Michael chimed from behind the car. "Crimeny, she's been taking care of you for the past three years."

Aunt Tish pushed her tangled hair behind her ears and huffed. "Fine. Obviously no one cares what I think. Just go, Grace. But stay out of trouble. I don't want any calls from the police."

I mouthed a "thank you," to Uncle Phil, shoved my backpack on the heap of boxes lining my back seat, and shut the door. Tramp sat waiting on the passenger seat. On the floor, my cat Chubbs crouched in his carrier, obviously annoyed. On the console sat an envelope containing \$5,000 in cash, covered with road maps graphing my way from Massachusetts to West Virginia.

"Aunt Tish, I'll be fine." I pulled her into a sideways embrace as I rounded to the driver's side and opened the door. She was my only aunt and despite her opinions of me, I wanted to believe her capable of feeling genuine concern. "I promise to call every day."

"Be careful. If something goes wrong, it's a reflection on me." As she pulled away, she flicked at my hair. "And for pity's sake, Grace, do something with that ridiculous hair while you're there."

I ignored her. "Remember your dentist appointment tomorrow. I left a note on the fridge."

She waved that away with a *Yes, yes, I know all this* dismissal, but I knew she would forget.

Then, because I felt it was expected of me, I looked back toward the house and lied, "I'll miss this place."

I voiced some inane comment about what I'd miss, but my thoughts were on the excitement of being *me*, rather than a dead couple's orphaned child or Tish Rosenburg's ungrateful niece.

The goodbyes complete, I climbed into my car and pulled away. I could see Michael standing behind my aunt and uncle, flailing his arms in a dramatic *don't-stop-keep-going wave*.

"Call your Grandma Sadie, she's not doing so well," was the last thing I heard Aunt Tish bark as I descended the hill and rounded the corner onto Beacon Street, took a final glance at Boston Common, and headed toward I-95 South.

The trip underway, I exhaled deeply. I'd loved to have driven into the future without looking back, to have fast-forwarded to summer's end when Michael and I could plant roots somewhere together. But, there was no shortcut to that

time, and I felt dread press in on me as if each accumulated mile were adding a hole to the safety net I hadn't yet hung in place.

Chapter 2

I was scheduled to meet that evening with an agent from the management company that was caretaker of my stepfather's estate. My appointment to meet Ling Ma was at 7:30 p.m. at a café in Williamsport, Maryland. According to Internet maps, that was the town across the river from Jack's house in rural Marlowe, West Virginia. I had hoped to arrive early, find the house, get my bearings, and make a list of questions for Ling.

My plans changed.

Besides encountering road construction in Connecticut and rush hour traffic around Philadelphia, I had to make countless stops to accommodate my pets. Tramp seemed to think he needed to meet every dog on the roadside walking trails, and Chubbs—in true catlike obstinacy—meowed his complaints about sleeping accommodations until I stopped and rearranged boxes and duffle bags to create the perfect cozy sleeping nook, twice. I didn't arrive in Williamsport until 7:00 p.m.

It looked like a honeysuckle and iced tea kind of town: clean streets, huge elms, and tidy houses with enticing front porches decorated with American flags and hanging flowerpots. There were no exhaust fumes, shrieking horns, or street punks with bolts through their lips.

With only a half-hour to spare, I opted to go to the café and get something to eat. The house would have to wait.

A block past a small brick library, I found the *Time Out* on Canal Street, flanked by a small music shop and a drug store. Various other businesses ran in both directions—curio shops, a bank, an old-fashioned ice cream parlor.

Canal Street seemed to be aptly named because the road sloped down a hill toward the river and the C&O Canal, which ran parallel to the river. From there, the street ushered vehicles across a long bridge spanning the wide Potomac River into West Virginia. I judged that to be about a half-mile away for a bird, but more than a mile by car. The land rose dramatically on the other side of the river and, judging by the backdrop of blue mountains in the distance, kept rising as one traveled south into the state. Little wonder West Virginia was nicknamed "The Mountain State."