



Hungry Ghost

By Keith Kachtick
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Introduction

Carter Cox is 38, a talented but dissipated freelance photographer living in New York's East Village with his sad dog and his bad habits. Though Carter travels to exotic places taking pictures of models and celebrities, he yearns to do more meaningful artistic work and to mend his womanizing, substance-abusing ways. He also tries to practice what he learns from his Buddhist betters but continues to carry with him his "seduction kit" -- a chessboard, cigarettes, a deck of cards, and a Cormac McCarthy novel -- along with a plentiful supply of rationalizations for his caddish behavior.

At a Buddhist retreat in upstate New York, Carter meets Mia Malone, 26, beautiful, smart, and serious -- a devout Catholic interested in other religions and determined to remain a virgin until she is married. Carter falls hard, and Mia -- attracted by Carter's struggle with Buddhism, his passion for art, and his knowledge of the world -- nervously agrees to join him on a five-night, beachfront photo shoot in Morocco. With both of their souls hanging in the balance, they quickly go from the ocean to hot water. During their romantic standoff, Carter and Mia crash their rental car, get arrested, run afoul of a sadistic gendarme, and try to flee the country -- an adventure that leads to the discovery that karma and the human heart work in mysterious ways indeed. With its sure pace and narrative surprises, *Hungry Ghost* is a sharp and sexy novel about chastity and salvation, and will satisfy any reader's appetite for entertainment and literary excellence.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways does Carter challenge himself? And does Carter think of himself as a better person for taking on such challenges? Furthermore, how do these tasks change over the course of the novel?
2. What does Christopher see in Carter? What does Carter see in Christopher?
3. Carter says of himself, "What good is any spiritual path ... for someone completely devoid of patience and generosity and love?" Is this a fair assessment? In a novel in which characters are measured by their moral and ethical worth, why would Carter judge himself to be so low on the scale?
4. What do you believe is the significance of Mia Malone having changed her original name?
5. Mia calls Carter a "truth seeker." Do you think this is true, and if so, what sort of truth is Carter seeking? If Mia is mistaken, what exactly is Carter searching for?
6. Mia claims that Carter is a "juggler of pleasure and ethics," and in many ways, the novel is an exploration into the ways in which the two can and can't be reconciled. What elements of Carter and Mia's lives are both pleasurable and ethically rewarding?
7. In what ways are Carter and Mia similar?
8. What is the importance of dates in the book (i.e., Friday the 13th; Easter Sunday, etc.)?
9. Why do you think the author provides two different endings to the novel?

About the Author

Keith Kachtick grew up in Texas, attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and now lives near Woodstock, New York. His writing has appeared in a number of publications, including *Esquire*, *Texas Monthly*, the *Missouri Review*, and the *New York Times Magazine*. He is senior instructor of the Lineage Project, a nonprofit organization that runs meditation classes in youth prisons in Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.