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TITLE INFORMATION

THE DREAMING ROAD

Elizabeth Moore

Turning Stone Press (378 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

An imaginative debut novel about a deceased teenager's adventures in the afterlife, contrasted with her mother's struggles back on Earth.

In an introduction, Moore (Nursing/Vanderbilt Univ.) says that she started keeping a diary after her daughter Cassandra's suicide as a way of processing her feelings. Five years later, as she began turning her diary into a fictionalized memoir, she realized she was "just writing half of the story," so she used "automatic writing" in an attempt to access her daughter's narration. The resulting novel therefore offers a thinly veiled account of Moore's own grief journey. In the novel, Callie Murray, 16, has been in a rebellious phase, drinking at parties and doing drugs with her boyfriend. One morning, her mother, Diane, finds her lying on her bedroom floor, eyes open and lips blue. Although Diane, a nurse, performs CPR, it's too late; Callie had taken an overdose of antidepressant pills, and police find a suicide note. In an afterlife realm known as Summer Wind, Callie states, "I was in a vast, emerald-green meadow strewn with purple wildflowers." She soon meets her great-grandmother Ellie, who explains that Callie can't return to Earth, but she does give her a screen on which to watch her mother. Callie also meets Seraphiel, a guardian angel who will take her on a "journey of self-discovery" to understand her emotional pain so that she can be reincarnated. As depicted here, Summer Wind is described capably, but it does offer some clichés, such as Seraphiel's "gleaming white fortress" and reunions with deceased pets. That said, both main characters undertake convincing and colorful journeys of learning and healing in first-person sections that cover about five years. In them, Callie tells of her new existence on the other side, and Diane continues her everyday earthly life while also looking for ways to continue interacting with Callie through dreams, mediums, and an Angel Awakening class; at one point, spiritual healer Joy, transmitting a message from Seraphiel, tells Diane: "Let Callie go to dwell inside you as a part of you, not separate from you."

A vivid depiction of grief alongside a creative, if well-worn, picture of heaven.

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