



by Pippa Hinchley

A brilliant Australian academic who has lost his faith in God, and an unassuming Bostonian housewife with an extraordinary ability, scientifically prove there is life after death. This is a true story.

GENRE: Historical psychological thriller - feature.

THE PRESTIGE meets THE KING'S SPEECH – set in a Steampunk, gothic, smog-bound Boston & London, 1890.

Australian born man of science, RICHARD HODGSON, is the leading investigator for the Society For Psychic Research – a group formed by some of Britain and America's most brilliant minds, in a new, post-Darwin, godless age – who are desperate to prove some kind of survival after death.

As Spiritualism has swept across America and Europe bringing hundreds of people who claim to communicate with the dead, Richard has become the arch debunker of fraudulent mediums, and a harsh critic of other scientists he believes have been fooled. He has devastated hopes of the bereaved and made enemies of his peers.

An obsessive swimmer, constantly trying to improve his time, Richard is a workaholic who has recurring nightmares of a drowning girl and uses dangerous drugs to experience the boundary between life and death.

And he is beginning to doubt they will ever find any genuine supernatural phenomena but when he is invited to Boston by America's leading psychologist, the WILLIAM JAMES, (brother of novelist, Henry) to examine a medium James has become convinced by, Richard's ego can't say no to the flattering request.

Within minutes of meeting the unassuming and suburban, LEONORE PIPER, and witnessing her horrific descent into trance, Richard knows she is something totally different. It's going to take a little longer than normal, he thinks, to work out exactly how she does it.

In trance, Leonore takes on another personality - that of her supposed 'control' from the other side - a foul-mouthed, French man, Phinuit, who claims to have been a physician 200 years before. Despite the outrageous character, the information Leonore, or Phinuit, provides to sitters seems extraordinary.

Richard begins a punishing investigation; dozens of sittings, gruesome tests on Leonore in trance, a detective to scrutinize her whole family's movements - until he finally has to accept there is no *fraud* here. That the information Leonore gets must involve at the very least involve 'telepathy'. To prove something *beyond* telepathy, beyond reading the minds of sitters or those they know, Richard needs what he calls a 'Case Absolute': He needs Leonore to produce some kind of information that *no one living knows*, but which can somehow be verified.

And then Leonore suddenly becomes Emma, Richard's own lost love, and his objectivity is challenged to its core. Is she reading his mind, telling him what he desperately needs to hear, or is she, in fact, communicating with the dead?

A journey of head and heart begins that changes both forever. Richard risks career, reputation and both their lives in pursuit of his Truth, whilst Leonore sees she is competing with a dead woman for his love.

Whilst swimming, Richard has an attack and is diagnosed with a heart condition. William forbids him to speed swim - the exertion could be fatal.

Richard persuades Leonore to go to London so his colleagues there can study her but when he presents her with great pride to them, a glaring error on his part is exposed. The supposed Frenchman, Dr. Phinuit, apparently can't speak French.

Embarrassed and angry, Richard viciously grills Phinuit, who insists he was a real person; that Leonore is 'unwell' and in need of an operation and he names an obscure part of the womb. But Phinuit is banished by Richard, told never to return as Leonore's control. At the end of the session, Leonore collapses in a pool of blood and needs life-saving surgery.

Phinuit, despite his shady origins, was exactly right in his diagnosis of Leonore's condition. It's something no one could have known before the surgeon opened her up, and, ironically, Richard has his 'Case Absolute'. But at what cost?

Richard prays for the first time in years, as Leonore's life hangs in the balance, and when she recovers he opens himself up to her entirely. He tells her how he read Darwin and lost his faith,

then Emma, because of it. How he was responsible for her death because he was reckless; how he couldn't swim fast enough to save her.

Leonore has become the person he is closest to. She knows it, can feel he loves her, as she does him.

Taking Leonore to convalesce, her ability to go into trance returns but, with no Phinuit as gatekeeper, the flow of spirits wanting to communicate is constant. She is bombarded, then begins to physically experience the way in which they died, and her life is in danger. Soon she has to be permanently sedated, tied down to her bed – neither Richard nor William are able to stop the assaults on her body or reinstate a control.

Richard wakes to see Leonore walking into the lake, re-enacting Emma's drowning. He races to the water and swims as fast as he can, not for his life but for hers. He pulls her out of the water and then, as William warned, Richard himself collapses and dies.

But in death he is Leonore's new 'control' on the other side; her gatekeeper & protector, able to stem the flow of clamouring spirits, so saving her with this ultimate sacrifice- proof of his love. They are together still – and always will be.

The Script: ** Finalist, The Page competition, 2017 ** Final 40 the Tracking Board Launch Pad feature contest 2017 **Winner, Scriptwriters Network Hollywood Outreach Competition. **