

# The Translucent Boy

By Jolene Poole

Morgan's breathing was heavy. She couldn't calm herself down. There was a blindfold over her eyes. Ray had seemed like a nice enough man at first, but what was happening now proved otherwise. She would almost prefer to see his face than nothing at all.

He had dark skin, like he had been out in the sun one too many times. He had a black beard and black hair to match. He was in his mid-forties; the wrinkles surrounding his eyes gave away his age. Actually, he looked much older than he was. He looked rough. He probably had a rough life.

Still, there was no excuse to do what he had done. Morgan had never done anything to him. She was completely innocent. She had turned eighteen just a few weeks ago and this was not how she planned on celebrating. Ray had caught her completely off-guard; she had been walking home from her friend's house when he grabbed her and threw her into the back of his car.

She never thought it would happen to her. Of course everyone thought that, but she couldn't understand why he had chosen her. She supposed all victims wondered that. Morgan was pretty normal; nice, social and adventurous. She had a lot of friends and family who would miss her if she died.

That was a thought. What if she died? That was the only way this could end. She was never going to get out of here, not unless Ray was dumb. Could he be manipulated? Some girls got away that way. She could try to pretend that she cared about him, or she could try to make him see her as a person.

"If you scream, I'll kill you right now," his scratchy voice said.

Morgan didn't want to die. She would do anything to prolong her life. Ray pulled her out of the car and into a mobile home. He had put it there years ago; it was closed off from the rest of the world. No one bothered him, so he didn't need to worry about being caught.

He threw her onto the couch and tied her hands and legs together with duct tape. She wasn't gagged because she was too shocked to speak. Morgan blinked at him when the blindfold was taken off, her eyes wandering around this new place.

Her deep brown eyes were wide with fright; her short auburn hair was knotted from all the struggling she'd done. Morgan took a deep breath and opened her mouth to speak, hoping that words would come out. "Wh-why are you doing this?"

Ray let out a dark chuckle. "That's always the question, isn't it?"

Clearly, that wasn't the question to ask. "Are you going to kill me?"

He tilted his head curiously, as if he was deciding right then and there. She hoped that wasn't the

case. "I suppose that depends on your behavior."

"I'll be good," she promised, knowing that she wouldn't be. She would do anything she could if she thought that it would get her out of this mobile home.

"Excellent! The first rule is that you can't scream...and if you do, I'll have to punish you."

The first punch confused her. She lost her balance and fell over on the couch. If beatings were going to be a regular thing, she didn't want to know what her punishment would be. She didn't scream, not even after the fifth punch, or the seventh.

Her cheek was red and sore. Ray lifted her to her feet, only to knock her down again. He hit her, kicked her and picked her up by her hair. She didn't make a peep. She thought that she should keep quiet, at least for now. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw a boy. She was able to look at him for a moment before Ray hit her again.

After what seemed like hours, he was finally done. He simply walked out of the mobile home and she waited to hear his car drive off before sitting up. It was difficult to lean against the couch. She was sore and bruised all over; she could only hope that nothing was broken, though that might be next.

Morgan looked up where she had seen the boy; it was right in between the bathroom and the bedroom. She sighed disappointedly when she didn't see him there. It would have been nice to have someone to talk to. Then again, if he had been there, it would have meant that he had been kidnapped too. She didn't wish that on anyone.

The next day, she woke to an apple sitting in front of her and her hands were untied. She spent an hour trying to find her way out of the mobile home before she decided that it was no use. He must have put something in front of the door.

Sighing in defeat, she sat down and munched on her measly breakfast. After she finished it, she sat down on the couch. She was about to go back to sleep when she saw the boy again, in the same place she had seen him the night before.

"It's you!" she said excitedly. "Where have you been?"

"I was in the bathroom," the boy said as he approached her.

"Oh..." She had tried not to go over to the bathroom. She was sure that the smell was coming from there, and she didn't want to make herself sick. "How can you stand being in there?"

"Ray gave me an order. I'm supposed to stay in the bathroom." He sat down in front of her. His face was smooth, pale but healthy. His eyes, on the other hand, looked sad and tired. She wondered how long he had been there.

“Does he hurt you too?” she asked. “You look alright...from what I can see, anyway.”

“There are a lot more scars underneath my clothes.”

Now she felt sorry for him. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be rude...”

“You’re not rude,” he shook his head, “I would have given anything to have someone to talk to. I guess that was kind of selfish of me...I gave up on the idea.”

“Well, you’ve got me now.” The sentence didn’t make either one of them feel better. This was an awkward situation. He had clearly been here for a while, and with her there, what would that mean for him? Would Ray get rid of him? “How long have you been here?”

The boy rubbed his chin for a moment, needing to think. “Um...a year, I think.”

Morgan blinked. A year. This poor boy had been there for a whole year. On the bright side, he was still alive. But he had been there for a year. She knew she wouldn’t last that long, and though she was embarrassed, she started to cry.

“Don’t do that,” he said gently as he placed a hand on her shoulder, “Please don’t cry. Everything will be alright, I promise you.”

There was something about the way he spoke that made her believe him. She wiped away her tears and smiled softly, still glad to have someone to talk to. “What’s your name?”

“It’s Sean,” he answered, “I know your name is Morgan. I heard him talking about you.”

Morgan scrunched her nose. It was awful to think that Ray had been planning this. “I was so stupid. I trusted him.”

“Come on, now. Don’t do that to yourself.” He got up from his seat at the table and plopped himself beside her on the couch. “That’s what Ray does. He gains your friendship. He usually targets kids who don’t like their parents...or runaways.”

“Oh.” So this was her fault. If she had gotten along better with her mother, this wouldn’t have happened.”

“So which one are you?”

“My father died when I was little. My mom’s gone through a lot of boyfriends that I don’t approve of, so I started hanging around Ray, and...here I am.”

“I see. He was kind of a father figure, right?”

“Yeah,” she nodded, “I know it’s stupid because I’m eighteen, but I haven’t given up on the idea of a father yet. How old are you?”

“I’m sixteen.”

Well, this was awkward. Why did she feel so much younger than he was? “And you’re calming me down...”

Sean smiled at her. “I’ve been here longer; it’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

They both looked up when they heard the car pull up. Sean hurried into the bathroom and Morgan prepared herself for whatever was about to happen. She might be able to handle another beating, but it would hurt too much now not to make a sound.

Ray moved whatever it was in front of the door and walked into the mobile home, grinning when he saw her. “Did you sleep well?”

She didn’t know if she should speak or not. It wasn’t a question that she could answer truthfully, so she said nothing.

“Did you try to escape?”

That was something she knew she should answer truthfully. She didn’t know if he had a hidden camera somewhere, or if he would be talking to Sean. “I...looked for a way out. But I couldn’t find one.”

“That’s my girl.”

She wanted to spit on him, or at least let her features express how disgusted she was by him. But Morgan knew that she couldn’t test him. One wrong move could cost her her life. At first, she was relieved when he didn’t beat her. Then he wrapped his thick fingers around her neck and she couldn’t breathe.

She felt like her eyes were popping out of their sockets as her face turned red. Morgan was struggling as much as she could with her legs still taped together. She could hear Sean mumbling something in the bathroom, or maybe he wasn’t mumbling. Maybe he was shouting. Her senses were fading.

Ray let go of her and walked over to the bathroom. Morgan closed her eyes and prayed that sleep would come. She couldn’t hear what Ray was saying to Sean, if he was saying anything at all. She hoped that he wasn’t hurting Sean. She couldn’t bear to see that poor boy hurt. It was hard enough to see the hurt in his eyes.

When Morgan opened her eyes again, it looked dark outside. The front door to the mobile home was open and there was a note beside her on the floor. It read: Don’t try to leave. You know what will happen if you do.

No she didn’t. She had no idea what would happen if she didn’t follow his rules. He had already beaten her and choked her nearly to death. Maybe his punishment wouldn’t be as bad as she thought it would be.

Morgan got slowly to her feet and walked over to the front door. She took in a breath of fresh air.

She had already forgotten how it felt. She wouldn't last much the longer; she needed to go outside. Just as she took another step toward the door, she heard his voice.

"Don't do that, Morgan," Sean told her.

She spun around to face him, wondering whose side he was on. "Why not?"

"Because...I tried that." He went over to the kitchen area and pointed to one of the cabinets.

She would never have noticed it if he hadn't pointed it out. It was a small black thing in the middle of the cabinet; a camera. "Oh..."

"He'll know if you leave." Sean sat down on the couch and waited for her to sit next to him before speaking again. "I know how you feel. He waited months before leaving the door open for me, and I fell for it. I thought he was done with me."

"Is that why he told you to stay in the bathroom?"

Sean nodded. "I tried to escape. His punishment..." He paused, wanting to find the right words. He didn't want to be blunt. He wanted to tell her gently and not freak her out, though that might be a good thing to do. "He tortured me. I mean, I couldn't walk."

Morgan slumped back against the couch. Sean was making her feel more sorry for him, and more hopeless for herself. "Then what?"

"I had to stay in the bathroom. He left me there for a couple of days. I don't even know if he meant to, but the door was open. I could have escaped. I just didn't have the strength anymore. So now I'm stuck in the bathroom...it's not a fun place to be, Morgan. I don't want that to happen to you."

Being careful not to disturb her bruises too much, she curled up on the couch. Trying to escape was probably the only chance she had, and he was telling her not to do that because she might die. It sounded like Sean almost had. "I guess I should trust you."

"You should." He offered her a small smile so that he didn't look so serious. "I'll get you out of this place alive, but you have to listen to me, okay?"

Morgan didn't want to believe him. After all, what could he do to help her? Would that mean that he would be left behind? No matter what might happen, she still trusted him. He sounded so sincere. "Do you promise?"

Sean smiled again, resting his hand on her shoulder. "I promise."

His smile was contagious, so she smiled back. "Will you sit here with me? If it won't get you into trouble, I mean..."

"Of course I will."

There were many nights that like. Ray would beat her and Sean would sit with her when he left. The good news was that the beatings hurt less. The bad news was that she was losing time. She relied on Sean to tell her how long she had been there.

It had been three weeks. Almost of month of being in this smelly mobile home with hardly any food or water, and that horrible stench in the bathroom growing a little worse each day. She asked Sean how he could stand it and he said that he had gotten used to it.

They were hugging now. She didn't care if he smelled or not. She couldn't tell if he smelled too or if it was just the bathroom, but she supposed he had to smell somewhat, going in and out of there so often. She just didn't notice it.

"What's in there?" Morgan asked him.

Sean smiled. He had a strange sense of humor about everything. "Garbage. Lots of garbage. Oh, and human waste, you know...that was left over from whoever used the toilet a century ago."

Ray came by and let Morgan go to the bathroom outside. It was creepy the way he watched her, but she would rather do that than go into the nasty bathroom. Maybe Sean didn't mind it because he was a messy teenage boy back at home. Maybe, in a way, it reminded him of home.

He never talked about his family. She couldn't figure him out; she couldn't figure out if he hated his parents or if he was a runaway...or both.

They heard the car pull up and Sean stared at her for a moment, his eyes full of fright. She didn't know why he was so afraid. He never looked so scared when Ray returned, so why should today be any different? It wasn't comforting at all.

Just before ran came in, Sean ran to the bathroom and locked himself inside. Morgan stared up at Ray, trying to remember if she had broken a rule. She hadn't, but he looked livid. He must have had a bad day in the outside world.

"They're looking for me," he said in a deep voice. "They know who I am."

Morgan wanted to smile with relief, but Ray didn't like it when she smiled. So she kept quiet, waiting for whatever would come next. "How do they know?"

Ray grabbed her hair and pulled her feet, his breath hot on her face. "Maybe you told them."

"Ray," she said, her voice shaking with fear, "I haven't told anyone! I haven't - you know that!"

He stared at her for a while, considering his options. Morgan wanted to fight him now, but with his temper so dangerous, she couldn't risk it. "Still..." his voice trailed off.

He pulled a knife out of his pocket. Very quickly, he ripped off the lower part of her jeans and started

cutting up her legs. She had to scream. He had never cut her before.

Ray was satisfied to finally hear her scream, though he looked angry. He then proceeded to cut up her arms, the blood dripping onto the couch and the floor. She didn't know what he would cut next. For a second, it looked like he was going to go for her throat.

Then, like an angel, Sean started pounding on the bathroom door. Ray immediately jumped up, leaving Morgan to bleed on the couch. She was sobbing softly as she curled up into a ball. The blood was warm as it left her body, but as soon as it touched her skin, it was cold.

She was still bruised from her last beating. Her cuts felt like fire. It was a searing, aching pain that she felt. She was afraid that if she lost consciousness, she would never wake up again. She had made a promise to herself not to give up, but it was so tempting when it hurt this much.

Ray left the mobile home abruptly, leaving the door open again. Sean rushed out of the bathroom and scooped her into his arms as gently as he could. "It's okay," he told her, "You'll be fine."

"I hate this!" she cried. "I hate not knowing when he's coming and what he's going to do next! I hate being in this place!"

"I know," he spoke softly, "It'll all be over soon."

She sniffled and tried to blink away her tears, wanting to be able to see him clearly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean...he wants to move you. If that happens, Morgan...they'll never find you."

His answer only made her cry again. "What does that mean? You promised me that you would get me out of here!"

"I intend to keep that promise. You'll have to trust me, though. Really trust me. If you go against anything I tell you to do, you'll die." It was rather harsh, he thought, but it was needed. She needed to understand how important it was.

"You know I trust you. I'll do anything you say."

"Good." He got to his feet and carried her to the bedroom in the back. He set her down on the floor and lifted up the bed, revealing that there was space underneath. "He hasn't figured this out yet."

Sean helped her over to the bed so that she could see what he was talking about. It wasn't just space; it seemed that he had cut out the flooring. It led straight to the ground...to outside.

"But isn't this how you tried to escape?"

He shook his head. "I did this after he sent me to that bathroom. I was able to do this, but then I was spent. I couldn't try to escape, you see. I figured that if he brought someone else here, this could be their

chance.”

“Oh, Sean...” There was a lot that she didn’t understand about him. She understood why he hadn’t tried to escape again after such a horrible beating - she wouldn’t either. The difference was that she had his help...and he had no one to look out for him.

“Thank me later,” he chuckled.

He helped her into the space and onto the ground. Sean lowered the top of the bed and laid with her on the ground, sighing softly. “We have to stay here until he comes back.”

Morgan looked at him strangely. She thought if there was a time to make a run for it, it was now.

“Why?”

“You said you would listen to me, remember?”

It wasn’t long until she fell asleep. She was awoken the next morning to Sean whispering in her ear. She jumped awake, knowing that Ray must be there again. She could hear his footsteps coming closer to the mobile home and then stepping into it.

Morgan looked over to Sean, who raised a finger to his lips. Ray was swearing loudly. It sounded like he was looking under every nook and cranny. Sean gestured for her to follow him. Though she was shaking, she crawled out from under the mobile home and sat in front of one of the tires.

She heard Ray open the bed. He lowered himself into the hole and looked underneath the mobile home, then swore loudly again. Sean tugged at her sleeve and she hurried underneath the mobile home once again. Seconds later, Ray left the mobile home. They both listened intently when it sounded like he was calling someone from a cell phone.

“She’s gone,” he said to the person on the other end of the line, “She escaped. I have to go to Mexico. They’re onto me.”

Morgan smiled softly at Sean. Now they knew where he was going! This was wonderful news. Even better was when they heard Ray driving away. She squealed excitedly as she and Sean crawled away from the mobile home.

She kicked the tire with her foot. It made her feel a little better. “He won’t be back, will he?”

“No,” Sean assured her, “He’s long gone.”

“Well...now what do we do?”

He turned to her, letting out another sigh as he put his hands on her shoulders. There was something he wasn’t telling her; she could see it in his eyes. “Morgan,” he said quietly, “I have to go soon.”

“What do you mean? He’s gone...we’ll be okay now, won’t we?”

“Don’t you worry; the police will be here in a few minutes, but I...won’t be.”

Morgan blinked at him. He had saved her life! More than once, she was sure. He couldn’t just leave her. Where was he going to go? Wouldn’t they still be friends after this? “Sean...I don’t want to be without you. I want to in my life. I mean, you...you saved me!”

“I know,” he sighed, “I know...”

Neither one of them had a chance to say anything else. Sean left her quickly and went back into the mobile home. She wanted to follow him because she wanted to finish their discussion, but it didn’t matter now.

There was lots of police cars and then were some people who looked like the FBI. They all jumped out of their cars with guns at the ready.

“Is your name Morgan?” one of them asked.

“Yes,” she said, “But you have to catch Ray. He left a few minutes ago; he said he was going to Mexico.”

A few of the cars left again. The remaining people swarmed around her with blankets, food and water.

“I’m alright,” she assured them, “But there’s a boy inside. His name is Sean.”

Morgan followed them inside. She smiled at Sean, who was sitting at the table. He looked very sad. She didn’t know why he should look that way. They had been rescued. They were going home. Even when the officers flew right past him, she didn’t understand.

The officers followed the stench and opened the bathroom door. The few of them in front of the door cringed and covered their noses. “Don’t let her back here,” one of them said.

Morgan tried to push through them, but there were too many of them. She looked back at Sean who had tears in his eyes. He got to his feet, his eyes on the floor. She stared at him for the longest time. She was his only focus while the officers did their job.

“You’re still in the bathroom,” she whispered.

Sean nodded solemnly. He still wouldn’t look at her. He wouldn’t even speak. Either he was too sad or he didn’t want the officers to think she was crazy. She was talking to a ghost, after all.

She didn’t care. She didn’t know if she would ever see him again, so she stepped out of the mobile home, motioning for him to follow her. He thought it was the least he could do. He sat with her on the dry ground outside of the mobile home, looking into the sun and not having to squint his eyes.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she asked, her voice breaking.

“You needed to believe I was alive,” he said softly, his tone stronger than she thought it should be, “You would have given up if you had known.”

“I guess that’s true.” She wiped her eyes. She couldn’t believe that she had complained and he had been dead the entire time. He was trapped here, in this mobile home and in that bathroom. He deserved so much better.

“You don’t have to cry for me,” he told her. “I’ve been dead for about six months, now.”

“You’re my friend. Of course I’m going to cry for you. But I still don’t understand how you could be with me and...touch me. I know I felt you.”

“I’ve had a lot of time to practice. There are lots of spirits that can touch things.”

“Alright.” She looked over at him, then leaned her body against his. She knew he wasn’t really there, but she could still feel him. “What happened to you?”

He swallowed hard. He wished he had the excuse of his breath being caught in his throat, but there was no excuse not to speak when you were dead. “I hated my parents. At least, I thought I did. They were too strict and I didn’t want to follow their rules, so I ran away.”

Morgan wiped her eyes again. She didn’t want to hear anymore, but she owed it to him to listen. It was painful to think of him as alive. She would never be able to know him.

“Ray picked me up off the street,” he continued, “He was good to me for a while. Then one day, I followed him. I caught him stalking this girl, and...he put me here. For six months, I was starved and tortured. I kept trying to escape. The only reason he kept me alive was because...he said I was his favorite. And then...one day...I wasn’t.”

More cars were arriving. It was a distraction. She wanted as much time with him as she could have. “And you stayed to save my life.”

“I knew you were coming,” he nodded, “But I was his last victim before you. I couldn’t save anyone else.”

Morgan chuckled. He made it sound like he didn’t think he had done enough. “So you’re going now...to Heaven?”

He looked around at the cars and the people, shrugging his shoulders. “I can’t yet. I have to tell my parents something, but...I don’t know if they’ll be able to hear me.”

“I can hear you,” she said excitedly, “I could go to them. If they can’t hear you, then...I’ll give them your message.”

Sean smiled at her. “You would do that?”

“Of course I would!”

One of the officers helped her to her feet and said he was going to take her home. “No,” Morgan said, “I want to see Sean’s parents. Please...he’s my friend.”

Morgan gave the man the biggest eyes she could and he caved. Sean rode along with them, whispering the directions in Morgan’s ear so that she could tell them to the officer. It took about half an hour to get there. She was so nervous and so excited. She finally got to help Sean.

The three of them walked up to the door. The officer knocked and a woman answered. She was shocked to see Morgan in the state she was in, but she seemed to know what this was about.

“I heard about Ray on the news,” she said, “You’ve found Sean, haven’t you?”

The officer lowered his gaze and nodded. “I’m sorry, ma’am. We found his body. He’s been dead for some months.”

As the woman fell to her knees, her body shaking with sobs, there was a man behind her to comfort her. He was in tears too. Morgan was holding back tears herself, only because she had a job to do. She nodded to Sean, then knelt next to his parents.

“I know this is hard to believe,” Morgan began, “But your son saved my life. I may not have known him when he was alive, but he’s still my friend now.”

She looked at Sean, hoping he would tell her something to catch his parents attention. “Oh,” he said quickly, “When I was seven years old, my dog died. I wouldn’t stop crying about it, so they told me that my dog was still in the house; he was just a ghost. He could still hear me and I could still play with him.”

Morgan repeated the story to his parents, who looked up at her, blinking in disbelief. The officer looked very confused. “How did you know that?” Sean’s father asked.

“He’s standing next to me,” Morgan smiled. “I think he wants to say goodbye.”

They both stood shakily. She had their full attention. She looked over at Sean and gave a nod, wanting him to give it a try first. He cleared his throat, even though he didn’t need to, and looked directly at his parents.

“I want you to know that I’m sorry. I was young...I was foolish. I know that your rules were there to protect me. I know we left on bad terms, but I thought about you every minute of every day. You were my last thought, and...I just wanted to say that I love you.”

His parents were looking around, hoping that they could see him. Then they stared at Morgan blankly, not having heard their son’s voice. So she repeated what Sean had said.

“We love you too, son,” his father said.

“And we miss you,” his mother added, stifling a sob.

Sean heaved a sigh of relief. He had wanted to say that for quite some time. He had been a prisoner in the mobile home. Morgan was the only reason he was able to leave it. He smiled at her fondly and held out his arms.

Morgan hugged him tightly, tears streaming down her cheeks. It must have looked so strange to them, but it felt perfectly natural to her. “How can I ever thank you?”

“You already have.”

She could feel her heart breaking as he let go of her. He still looked so normal to her, so solid. She didn’t want to think that she would never see him again. “I guess this is goodbye...”

“I’ll still be around,” he assured her, “You’re my pet project. I have to check on you every now and then.”

Morgan stood there, watching his bright and young face slowly disappear. It wasn’t fair that she was alive and he wasn’t. Sean could have done so many great things. She was nothing. She had no desire now but to live for him. She wanted to live with him, but that wasn’t possible. How would she be able to do it?

“Is he gone?” his mother asked.

She nodded slowly, then sat herself down on the ground. The officer was watching her cautiously as she allowed herself to cry, grieving for the translucent boy who had saved her life.

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