

My Past Life



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Chapter 1: A different kind of trip

Dave was hurrying home to his future wife. He would propose tonight. He checked the small bump on his chest to make sure the tiny box containing the ring was there. He had just bought it. He had paid all his savings to buy her the most beautiful ring he could afford. Yep, that was it, the most beautiful ring he could ever afford, not the most beautiful ring there was in store. But he hoped it would be good enough for her. The love of his life, Jasmin. They had been together for three years and he felt it was the right time to propose. Tonight, on Christmas Eve, he would do it. After their annoying relatives would leave, when he would have her for himself, he would kneel before her and pop the question. It would be perfect. He would first make her think he didn't get her anything this Christmas and then he would propose to her and put the ring on her finger.

Dave could almost see it, how she would cry with joy and hug him and everything would be perfect. And by this time next year she would be Mrs. Rogers. Jasmin Rogers. Yup. Perfect. His heart was beating so fast that he had to focus to calm down. He was a strong man, but his heart was racing in anticipation. He searched his pockets for his car keys as he was slowly walking

down a dark alley as it was the only place where he had found a parking spot for his car. There were street lights everywhere but the ones on this alley were flickering until they stopped doing even that. Just a few more meters and he would start his car and go home.

Finally, he found his car keys in the back of his right pocket of his blue-jeans. Then things took a turn for the worse. Everything he had dreamed of, everything he had hoped for, all his life raced in his head in jumbled blurry images when he felt the cold steel of a gun pointed at him and a hoarse male voice telling him to give him his wallet. Somehow, he knew this wouldn't end well. He just couldn't have that perfect life he had dreamed of, could he?

- Wait, please, it's Christmas Eve. I just want to get home to my future wife, Dave said with a pleading voice.
- Give me your wallet and your phone or you won't be getting anywhere, got that? Came the answer and the man nudged him towards his car, putting the gun to his head now.
- And don't turn around, hurry up!, the man went on, nervous now and waiting for him to give him his money.
- I can give you my wallet, but it's empty! And so are my credit cards!
- Damn! I don't believe you, just give it to me, give me your damned wallet man if you want to live for Christmas!

- Here, take it, and Dave gave him his empty wallet. Even if he had had money, he would have given him. It wasn't worth to die for coins. And he treasured his life. Since he met Jasmin three years ago, his life meant something. It was worth living and it was good to be him only for having met her.

The man grabbed his wallet and when he saw that it was indeed empty, he spit on it and threw it on the wet pavement. Then Dave turned around but he could only see the man's dirty clothes and a glimpse of his face. Then it all went dark.

- Damn, why did you have to turn? I am not going back to jail!! Then he shot him in his head and ran away. The bullet went through his left arcade, just a little above his eye.

As he was falling to the pavement, Dave saw him ditch the gun in a trash can next to an empty diner. Then everything went black.

He didn't know how much time had passed, but when he woke up he was blinded by a white light that at first he couldn't see anything. He felt disoriented and dizzy and at first he couldn't remember anything. Then little by little he began to distinguish and to remember. He remembered everything, how he was eager to get home to Jasmin, how he was attacked and killed. Shot to death. But then where was he? Was he still alive?

He took a few steps towards an elderly woman who was coming his way. He looked around and he didn't

recognize the place. When he was next to her, he stopped and cleared his throat to make her look at him.

- Hi, excuse me, do you know where we are?

She just smiled at him and went on without answering. He thought it was odd but he didn't want to panic even more so he decided to ask someone else. He looked around one more time but no one was coming his way. His head hurt and he was sure he had been shot in his head. But why wasn't he in the hospital? And where was the wound? He touched his head where the wound should have been but there was nothing there. Then it dawned on him: he was in Heaven!! Which meant he was dead!!

- Damn! Oops, sorry for the language, he immediately thought! This sucks! Is this heaven? God, where are you? Why did I have to die on Christmas Eve? I was going to propose to Jasmin tonight! We were supposed to get married next year and now nothing will be the way I imagined! Why?? And he began to cry like a helpless baby thinking of everything that could have been but wouldn't be, of the life he could have lived with Jasmin, of the children they could have had.

He sat on a bench and tried to recollect himself. There was no point in crying over spilled milk. He would have to find God and see if there was anything he could do to help him. Or at least tell him why he let him die and did not save him. But which way to go?

He wiped his tears and waited on the bench till he saw someone coming. It was a little girl. As she got near him, he saw that she was limping. He felt sorry for her and thought that maybe she could tell him something about this place.

- Hey little girl, he shyly said, could you tell me what is this place? Is this Heaven? Because I can't see any other explanation. I mean someone just shot me and then next thing I know is that I got to this place.
- It must be. I was crossing the street when a car hit me. Mom was there too but she must have survived. Because I can't find her here. I am scared.
- That makes two of us. Come, let's go this way and find God. He must have a plan for us.
- By the way, my name is Amy, the little girl said with sorrow in her voice.
- I'm Dave, he simply answered and smiled at her.

Chapter 2: Heaven

Dave and Amy, the little girl, went silently side by side in search of God. All this time he was thinking that she was too young to die. But even so, God had taken her to him. Finally, he had to ask her:

- Amy, are you upset that you....
- Died? She ended his sentence. No, my parents have always taught me to believe in God and that He knows best what he does and why he does it. If he called me to him, then I know it's for the best.
- How? Dave asked failing to understand her judgment.
- Who knows? Maybe if I had lived, I would have developed some bad illness and suffered even more. I don't know. And I don't even want to think about it.
- Wow, you are pretty smart for your age. But, Dave went on, I see the sorrow on your face. You are sad!
- Yes, but not for me! I have no idea what happened to my mom. We were crossing the street when that car hit us. I don't know if she is hurt bad. And she must be really sad for me.
- Oh.... Was all Dave could say. Then they were both silent again for a while.

- How did you die?, Amy asked him after a long pause.
- Some junkie shot me for having seen his face. He tried to rob me but I had no more money. I had just bought my girl friend a wedding ring. I was supposed to give it to her on Christmas Eve. And you know what really annoys me? I didn't even have a good look at his face. I don't even know who shot me.
- Would it make any difference if you did?
- Hmm, guess not. But then why do you think God took me? I was healthy and living a healthy life, so don't tell me I could have developed who knows what rare illness or something. Why did he take me? I didn't even get the chance to have kids!!
-, you know, Amy said pondering everything he said, maybe that is exactly the reason why. What if you married your girl friend and couldn't have kids? Or worse? Have had sick kids? What then? What if that pain would have been worse then this?
- Never mind, it looks like you have an answer for everything. Where did you go to school, kid?
- Ha- ha! No, it's not about that, it's about the way I was raised.
- You seem so content with this...being dead and all.
- Do we have a choice? Stop tormenting yourself. The sooner you accept the fact that you are dead, the better. You will find peace.

- I can't! I have to give her the ring! She has to know I love her!
- And how are you going to do that? She said looking with sad eyes at him.
- Not sure yet, there has to be a way. Maybe God will help me. Somehow. Let's find him, ok?
- That shouldn't be too difficult, I reckon. Everybody who arrives here seems to be going straight ahead. We will just follow them.
- Exactly!

After a long walk they finally arrived at some huge shining gates guarded by a man, some saint, Dave reckoned. He had a list in his hands and he was looking for the names of the people in front of the gates on that list. Then he checked it and let them in one by one.

- Look, that man is checking everyone on his list! What if it was a mistake and my name is not on that list? Will he send me back? Dave said with a bit of hope in his eyes.
- I truly doubt that. God makes no mistakes.
- Oh, you are such a party pooper!
- Ha-ha, sorry, didn't mean to be mean, but that is what I think! And by the way, that must be Saint Peter!
- Oh, ok. Let's go then and see if we are on his list!

Amy rolled her eyes and followed Dave. When it was his turn to sit before Saint Peter, he was still hoping that maybe he would be sent back to Jasmin.

- Name? Saint Peter asked.
- Dave. Dave Rogers. But you know, this must be a mistake, please let it be a mistake, I was supposed to propose tonight to my girlfriend. I really didn't plan on dying you know.... I had other plans!!
- Is this some kind of joke? Saint Peter asked gazing at him, piercing his very soul with his icy eyes. But then, after seeing that Dave was dead serious, so to say, he went on unperturbed. YOU had other plans? Looks like God has other plans, Dave!
- Ha, mumbled little Amy to herself, and guess who won? But Dave heard her and it saddened him even more.
- But what about Jasmin???
- What about her, Dave? She is not on my list, but you are!
- Exactly, we were supposed to get married but that can't happen now that I'm dead, right? So you need to send me back, please, I'm begging you!
- Too late for that, I'm afraid!
- But then she will meet someone else and she will eventually marry...
- And would you rather she lives her life as a nun mourning you? She is young... Saint Peter said analyzing Dave.
- Ooh, I didn't think that far.

- No, because you always think of you, your needs, your perfect little life, you, you, you... Sorry, he added, in you go through these gates and you can continue your conversation with the big boss if you'd like.
- The big boss? Dave asked puzzled. Oh, you mean God!
- Who else? Now go, and Saint Peter almost shoved him inside through the shiny gates.
- Next! Was all Dave could hear before the gates closed behind him. He was on his own again.

Dave looked around and there were angels singing everywhere. The music was comforting and sweet and for a moment he forgot where he was. He advanced slowly until he arrived before a large white throne on which sat a middle aged man and he thought that it must be God, but he had always imagined him old and with a long white beard, so this was a little odd. He kneeled before him but before he could say anything, God addressed him first:

- Old man? Why? Time means nothing to me.
- Huh? Dave said puzzled. Oh, that, sorry, I thought...but how did you know what I was just thinking?
- Because I am God, the man said with a gentle smile. I know everything that is and what will come.
- God, forgive my audacity, I know I shouldn't doubt your decisions, but could you make an exception, just this once? It's Christmas Eve and it should have been a special

day for Jasmin and I. I was going to propose to her this night...

- Why should I make an exception for you? What makes you special and what makes you think you deserve that?
- Um, I'm not special. But my love for Jasmin is. I was never a fervent religious man but I tried to help others whenever I could and I never harmed anyone, not on purpose anyway.
- Dave, you have a good heart. And even if you didn't go to church much, you are right. You helped whenever you could, even if it wasn't much. You could have done better though...
- Yeah, well, I didn't think I would die so young. Maybe if I lived longer, I would have. But if I stay dead, we will never know, right? Dave said hoping to get a second chance.
- You are smart, aren't you? I will grant you a second chance. But you can't go back to Earth as Dave Rogers, as you are dead and buried by now. Time here goes differently than there. It's been six weeks since you've died.
- Six weeks? I just died a few hours ago.
- That is what you think.
- Then how can you still help me? He said with sad tears in his eyes.
- There is a way. But it will be painful.
- Painful? How?

- You will be born again. In your home town, close to Jasmin.
- And how will that help me?
- It won't. But when you will be about 10 years old, you will remember this life and Jasmin. And you will get the chance to tell her how much you loved her, which is more than the rest of the ones that die can do.
- Ok, I'll do it!! But could you grant me a guarding angel or something this time? So I don't accidentally die again.
- First of all, it wasn't an accident. It was how it was meant to be. Secondly, you had a guarding angel in that life too, just that you didn't always hear him. Or maybe you just ignored him. And third, yes, you will have a guarding angel again.
- How will I recognize him this time? Dave asked bewildered. What's his name?
- Her name is Susan, but you will simply call her mom!

Chapter 3: Reborn

- How are you darling? Jake was asking his wife Susan, as she was 9 months pregnant and it was due.
- Good, call the ambulance. It's coming. Our baby is coming! Hurry, Jake! And Susan grabbed her purse while Jake was trying to call the ambulance. He was so happy and thrilled that his whole body was shaking with the emotion of the moment. He was about to become a father. He almost dropped the phone but eventually he managed to call the ambulance.
- Ok dear, they are on the way! Just stay calm, ok, they'll be here in a moment or two!
- I'd like to see you stay calm, Susan almost yelled with pain. And they'd better be here soon!

Later that evening, Susan and Jake were the happy parents of a healthy boy whom they named David, after Jake's father. There was a small birthmark on his left arcade, though, a small one. It looked as a small burn.

Susan was so proud to be Jake's wife as she was in love with him just as much as she had been when they were at the beginning of their relationship. Now, after five years of

marriage, they finally had their baby. They had tried even from their first year of marriage, but the doctor said there was a low chance for her to get pregnant. She didn't understand exactly all that he had explained, all that mattered was that he said there was a probability for her of 20% to get pregnant. And as the years passed by, that chance got even smaller. So their son was a miracle. Especially as she was 31 years old now.

They had prayed so much to have a child and it looked like finally God had taken pity on them and granted them their biggest wish: to become parents. And the weird thing was that she had stopped taking the pills the doctor had prescribed her for almost a year now, but she never stopped praying.

Jake too had prayed for a child as he would rather raise and love his own child than adopt. But if she wouldn't have been able to have a child by the time she turned 35, then they had agreed to adopt. Luckily, that wasn't necessary anymore. God had given them a child, a perfectly healthy son.

Now, both Susan and Jake felt that their family was whole, as their lives would have been empty without the joy of having a child. Their lives were perfect now.

Chapter 4: Ten years later

David was the light of their life. As he grew older, he became a very smart boy but he was rather lonely. He didn't like to play with the other kids, he would rather spend the time alone, playing on his tab or reading kids' books. His parents even took him to a doctor, but he said there was nothing wrong with the boy. He advised them to take him more for outdoors activities. Which they did. But David would still read or play alone than with other kids of his age...

Then he started having nightmares. He kept having the same dream almost every night. He dreamt that he got shot on a dark alley and died. But somehow he knew that wasn't him. But still, the nightmare was so vivid. He felt it was so real that he would wake up scared and run to his

parents. He told them about his dream but Susan and Jake thought that maybe he had been watching something he shouldn't have on his tab or on TV. David promised it wasn't that. In the end, when his parents told him that maybe they should just take his tab, he decided to keep everything for himself rather than have his parents take away his tab. He liked his tab, he could play on it, listen to music and even read online books. They couldn't take it away, right?

Then things got worse, he started having flashes of the shooting but while being awake. That's when David knew there was something really wrong and told his mom about it. This scared Susan even more than it scared David himself. After a long conversation with Jake, they decided to take David to a psychiatrist to see what was wrong with him.

- Why mom? There's nothing wrong with me! David said almost crying.
- Nobody said there was anything wrong, darling, Susan tried to calm him and hugged her son while talking to him. We are going to see this doctor and maybe he can help us. There's nothing wrong in that.
- Dad, please tell her, I don't want to go to the doctor!
- David, you know we love you! There's nothing in this world we wouldn't do for you, but mom's right! This is for your own good. We will all just have a nice chat with the doctor, that's all. I promise.

- Ok.... David could hardly mumble. He was scared. Those flashes he had, it was as if they were his memories but how? He saw how he got shot, but somehow that wasn't him. It was too much for his 10 year old mind to understand. Maybe his parents were right and a doctor could explain what was wrong with him. So when his mom told him she managed to make an appointment for the next day he agreed to go with his parents.

- Hello, the doctor, a nice middle aged man, began. Have a seat, please. Then he waited for all three members of the family to make themselves comfortable before he began again.

- So, what's your name?
 - I'm David, David answered coyly.
 - Nice to meet you David, I am doctor Allan, but you can call me All. Your mom told me that you've been having some nightmares. Is that so? And Allan looked at the boy to see his reactions and then opened up a large notebook and began scribbling down everything that was important in his opinion from what was said. And of course, he made his own remarks regarding David's answers.
 - Not nightmares, just one nightmare. Same one almost every night.
 - That's interesting, can you tell me what it is about?

- Well, I am lying on the pavement as someone just shot me. But somehow it's not me on the pavement. Or I am not sure. Sometimes it feels like it is me. Others, like it is someone else. And it feels so real. That when I wake up I am surprised to see that I am alive. I really feel like I die when that man shoots me.

- Interesting, Allan said.

- Doc, excuse me, Susan intervened while Jake was holding her hands, that's not the only problem. One morning when I was making him breakfast, I noticed that his stare was blank. I asked him if he wanted bacon with eggs and he just stared at the air. Then he slowly came back to himself and told me that he had just been shot. But he hadn't, of course. He lived his nightmare while awake. What's wrong with him, doc?

- This is rather odd, Allan answered. I have an idea. This could work. I could hypnotize him and see what we find.

- Is it dangerous, doc? Jake asked this time.

- Not at all. And when I finish, he won't remember anything. And you will both be here and see what he says. What do you say, David? Do you want to play a game?

- A game? David asked more relaxed now. Yeah, I guess so.

- David, I want you to count to ten while looking at my pocket watch, doctor Allan said as he pulled his small shiny pocket watch from his right pocket. Then he started dangling it in front of David as David was following the

shiny thing with his eyes while at the same time counting to ten...

As David got to ten, he was under hypnosis. Allan went on under the watchful gaze of David's parents.

- When I say “school”, you will feel relaxed and safe and when I say “wake up”, you will wake up and won't remember anything. You are safe now, in your home, Allan was saying as David was like in a trance, half asleep but attentive to Allan's voice, and you are going to bed. You are safe, nothing bad can happen, ok?
- Ok, safe.... David could hardly repeat.
- You are asleep now. I want you to dream. Your usual dream. When you are shot but remember, it is only a dream, it is not real. Nothing will happen to you. I just want you to pay attention to every detail and especially to the way it makes you feel, all right, David?
- All right... I am happy, so happy, I have a small diamond ring on my chest pocket. I will propose to her tonight.
- Propose? What is he talking about, Doctor Allan? Susan asked terrified.
- Let him talk, please. You will just witness everything as he is underage and you are his parents, but please let me conduct my session if you want to have a chance at finding out what is wrong with him, ok Mrs. Susan?
- Ok, sorry, she said trying to refrain herself and rather listen to what her son, little David, was saying.

- Propose to who, David? Can you tell me? Allan went on while taking notes of the entire dialogue.
- Jasmin. And my friends call me Dave, not David. Jasmin...
- So is she your girlfriend?
- Yes, I can't find my car keys. Where the heck are they? David swore like an adult, like Dave. At this point Susan fainted and Jake was speechless. Then he helped Susan get well and they both witnessed the rest of the session in dead silence.
- What are you doing now, Dave? Asked Allan, playing along and calling him Dave.
- Trying to open the car. I found the keys. Then David began to shiver in fear.
- What's happening, Dave? School! Said Allan and David immediately relaxed. Then Allan went on: remember David, this is only a dream. No one can hurt you. What's happening now? I want you to look around and describe everything you see or hear.
- I hear footsteps. Someone is behind me. He is pointing a gun at me!!
- What does he want?
- Money, but I have none.
- What does he look like, can you see his face?
- No, he is behind me. I can't look, he will shoot me.
- No, this is just a flash back, just a memory. Nobody will shoot you, you are safe on your bed. Try to look at him, ok?

- Ok... he is tall, has curly black hair and I think he has green eyes. Not sure, it's too dark. Oh!!! David yelled, he shot me! Again!
- Wake up, ordered Allan.
- So, when do we start the game, asked David who couldn't remember anything.
- David, Allan said to everyone's amazement, I am afraid that this was no game and that what I will tell you may come as a shock, but I think that you have memories from a past life. Your nightmares are too vivid, as you call them, and the way you acted and everything you said under hypnosis leads me to think that I am right. In time, you will probably remember more about it. But I think it is enough for today.
- A past life? What are you saying, Doctor Allan? Asked Susan puzzled while Jake was too shocked to say anything at all.
- Yes, I've only seen such a case once before David in my career. But I am pretty sure this is the case now, too. He must have died shot to death as he keeps saying and his soul must have reincarnated in your son at birth. And now he is starting to remember his past life in flashes.
- Oh, when can you see us again, doc? Asked Jake with his lips trembling and hardly muttering the words.
- On Monday next week, is that good for you too?
- Yeah, sure, both David's parents answered.

Chapter 5: Jasmin

3 years later David remembered everything about his past life with the help of Doctor Allan whom he visited regularly. He finally accepted that his flashes were a part of him, even if from his past life. And now that he remembered, he wanted to find Jasmin.

2 more years passed until he finally decided to find and talk to Jasmin. He was 15 now and he could now trace a clear line between his actual life as Susan and Jake's son and his past life as Dave. He wanted to find Jasmin and tell her how much Dave had loved her and see if she married and if she had any children of her own. Then, he would probably be at peace and maybe his past life would be just that, a thing of the past. And he could enjoy this life.

But now he didn't need doctor Allan to remember, now he remembered everything and he knew he was Dave, he had all his memories, he was reborn. So one

sunny afternoon after he finished school, which was so easy for him as he had Dave's mind, he decided to go to Jasmin's house and talk to her. He was prepared for denial at first, but then he would prove to her that it was him.

Jasmin lived only a few blocks away as God had let him be reborn close to her. He had some pocket money for lunch but he saved the money to buy her flowers. He knew she must be 40 years old now and probably married and with kids but he had to let her know how much he had loved her. Then he could live on as David, Susan and Jake's son. And maybe fall in love. But he had to do this first. It was what he wished most. To be at peace. To make sure Jasmin knew how much she had meant to him.

So David bought her a beautiful white rose and rang at her door. Even if she was married and her husband opened the door, he was only a 15 year-old kid and he would explain everything. Best thing would be if she opened the door herself. He rang one more time and waited. He heard some commotion inside and waited for the door to open.

- Who is it? He heard Jasmin's voice through the wooden door. Then he heard a girl's voice asking her who it was. His heart sank. But he quickly recovered. It was only natural that she had married someone else. He had died.
- Jasmin? He could barely speak. Can you please open the door? I need to talk to you.

She looked through the visor and saw the kid. She didn't know why, but she felt there was something strange about him. So she opened the door. First thing she noticed about him was his birthmark above his left eye. As for him, first thing he noticed when she opened the door wasn't Jasmin, but a beautiful girl's head hiding behind her. Then he focused on Jasmin. She was still very beautiful, although older than he remembered. As for the girl, she was about 11 or 12 years old and as beautiful as an angel.

- This is for you, and he gave the rose to Jasmin. He knew she loved white roses.
- Thank you, but who are you? She asked puzzled.
- Mom, won't you invite him in? It's not polite to keep him in the doorway.
- Come in, Jasmin finally said looking at David. He reminded her of someone but she couldn't quite remember.
- I know this will sound weird, but I'm Dave....
- Dave, what do you mean? Should I know you?
- I was going to propose to you the night I was shot, on Christmas Eve.... David said looking at her and at her beautiful daughter. Jasmin almost fainted at hearing him. Then when she could speak, she said:
- How can this be? Is this really you? But you are a boy...
- Yes, I was reborn. I had the ring in my chest pocket that night. Look, I was even born with a scar above my left eye, where the thug shot me in my other life...

- Amy, can you please go to your room until I talk to this young man?
- Sure mom, she said and went to her room without another word.
- Is she your daughter? Are you married?
- Yes, she is my daughter and yes, I married two years after you, I mean Dave, died. I'm sorry. This is so unbelievable. My husband works at the local police department.
- I didn't want to bother you, Jasmin, but I just had to tell you how much you meant to me and how eager I was to propose to you before that thug cut my life short. I went to heaven and back for you. I asked God to send me back so I can tell you all these. I am glad that you have a family, it would have been selfish of me to want anything else for you. By the way, if you haven't read the books from your top shelf again, then there must still be the card I worked on and which was meant to be a wedding invitation... Our wedding invitation... It was meant to be a surprise. I was going to give it to you after you would have put the ring on your finger but I never got the chance.

Jasmin was looking at him as if she was seeing a ghost. Then, with steady steps, she went towards her little library and opened her favorite book. She shuffled it and to her surprise, an old card fell from among its pages. She picked it up and read it. It was just as the boy standing in front of her had said. Now she was one hundred percent sure that everything he had said was true. He really was Dave.... Just

that it was too late now. She fell on her sofa and started crying softly. Her daughter, who had been eavesdropping, heard her and came to her rescue, so to say.

- Mom, are you ok?
- Yeah, it's nothing, darling. Just that this young boy reminded me of someone I used to know before I met your father. Amy, this is....
- David. Pleased to meet you again, he said and winked at her. She too knew who he was. They had met in heaven. She knew who he was the moment she first saw him....
- Again? Jasmin asked puzzled. What do you mean? Amy, do you know this young man?
- It's kind of complicated mom, but we'll try to explain it to you...

Chapter 6: God's will

David helped the police to catch his murderer. Jasmin's husband, Nicholas, understood the situation and with David's help, who told them where the murderer had dropped the gun, managed to solve the crime and put the thug behind bars.

David and Amy became best friends. Years later, they became more than just friends. They became husband and wife. He got over his love for Jasmin the moment he had seen Amy's head behind her mother. That's when he realized that God still had plans for him and that He works in mysterious ways.

David and Amy lived the perfect life they dreamed of and which they deserved. Years later, they had children and they were grateful for their lives for which they thanked God every day for the rest of their lives.

END