



Present Rewritten

by STEVE BENTON

After experiencing an explosion and witnessing the death of a neighbor, Glenn finds his present rewritten.



He knew it was an explosion, but only because of the compression. The quick, crystalline blowout happened so fast that everything was over before the sound even reached his ears. He watched his kindergarten year flash through his mind. There wasn't even time for first grade.

Then it was suddenly over. He was sitting on the couch again.

What the hell was that?

"Would you like another cappuccino, sir?" asked Piper, the cute, blond-haired, blue-eyed barista Glenn wanted to plow.

"Um, I'm good. Thanks anyway," said Glenn, not bothering to look up.

He gave his laptop a blank stare, trying to piece together the vision he just had. The most striking part was that he remembered Miss Millikan, his kindergarten teacher. He had forgotten about her for the past thirty years, so how was he able to suddenly recall the pretty woman's last name? One moment he was sitting there, in his favorite coffee house, The Java Hut, typing away on his computer, putting another chapter in his blog. The next moment he was dead. And now he was alive. It was all very confusing.

Glenn Davies was nothing less than a failed writer. Although his family and friends had encouraged him for many years, he basically stunk at his chosen craft. He was excellent, however, at certain musical instruments, which probably led those same people to have an intense faith in anything he would do on an artistic level.

Rummaging through his left pocket, he jingled the change he had left and instinctively knew he hadn't enough to purchase another coffee. He had been laid off his job the week prior. They told him they didn't have enough work to keep him busy, but he knew the truth—he was a terrible employee and never completed his tasks on time, preferring to write in his blog—a blog that nobody read.

As the hard drive in his older MacBook whirred and spun, he brought up a popular job search site and looked for anything remotely similar to the work he had before.

Crap. I gotta find something before I starve to death.

Surviving Death



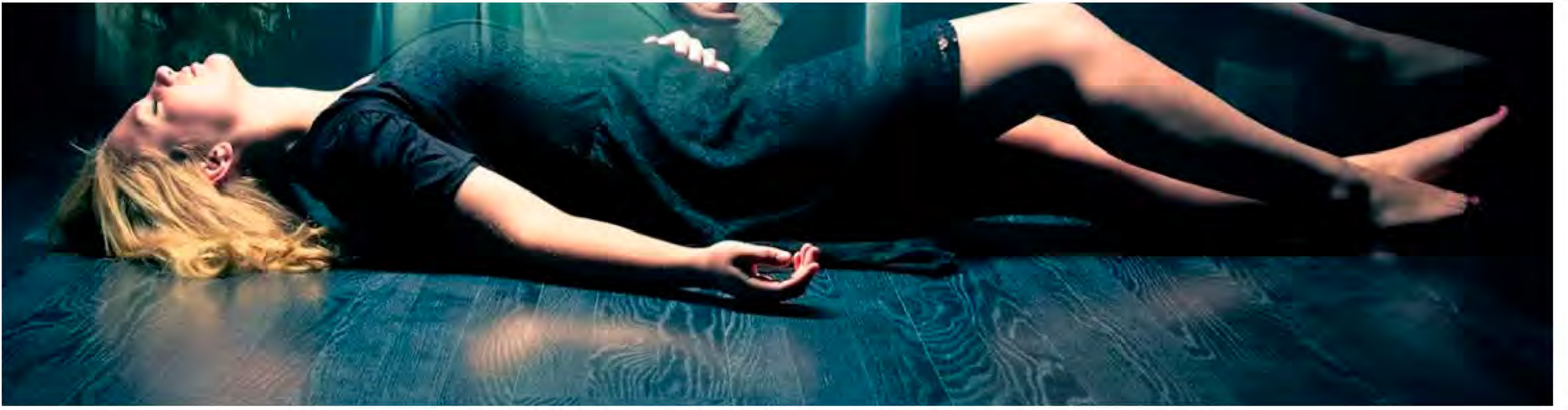


Image via [All Night](#)

Harbor Boulevard was busy with traffic, making it difficult for Glenn to merge. His beat-up 1983 BMW 320i sounded more like a lawnmower than a decent, functioning automobile. It sputtered out into the far-right lane with his foot slamming down on the accelerator, barely keeping up with the flow as he tooled along toward his small apartment two miles away. He was at least smart enough to have a separate bank account for managing his bills so he would have a place to live until he found another job. He had created the account when he ripped off a client for some web development, not finishing the project but pocketing the money anyway. Still, he always found new work, even though he had a terrible employment history.

Glenn burned his bridges, but for some reason managed to survive.

His car stopped with a chug and the sickening sound of metal-on-metal as he pulled into his parking space.

This thing's about toast. Maybe I should get a bus pass?

Bounding up the stairs to the second floor, he walked down the hallway to his small apartment, and saw Mrs. Wilson, the resident crazy cat lady, in the hallway calling out to her beloved feline companions.

"Morning, Mrs. Wilson."

"Oh, hello Mr. Mavies," she responded, mangling his name as usual. The slender, unkempt woman was a bit off, and always smelled of cat piss, which disgusted Glenn to no end.

I'm going to make it. I just know it. Then I'll get a decent place to live where pets aren't allowed.

As he put his key into the doorknob to his room he heard a slight whine and a light

thud. Glenn spun around, only to see a very dead Mrs. Wilson lying in the middle of the hallway, with three of her cats sniffing her head.

Aw man, I don't need this. Damned cats probably want to eat her.

"Hello, 911? Um, a woman just died in the hallway of my apartment complex," said Glenn, wanting to get the woman's body off the ground in the hallway before it started to smell worse than it already did.

"Are you sure she's dead?" asked the operator on the other end of the line.

"Yeah, pretty sure. Can you get someone down here? It's pretty gross."

"We are dispatching police and paramedics momentarily. Please provide your address."

Inside the small living room, Glenn sat on his old, musty couch, opened his trusty MacBook, and logged onto his blog. He had to change his latest entry. His most recent writings were a collection of multi-chapter short stories, with the latest one being a fictitious account based on his life. In the coffee house he had written how Mrs. Bertram offered the story's protagonist some chocolate chip cookies. Now he had a better twist to his storyline—she would be found in her apartment, dead and half-eaten by her disgusting cats.

A knocking sound brought him out of his creative stupor. Getting up, he walked over and looked through the peephole, seeing a county sheriff. Having no other choice, he opened the door.

"Glenn Davies?"

"Um, yeah?"

"Are you the person who called 911 about a dead woman in the hallway?"

"Yeah, that was me. She just fell and then..."

"You should know that making prank calls to 911 can result in criminal charges."

"Huh? Prank call? Mrs. Wilson was... just..."

Glenn looked over and saw Mrs. Wilson speaking to a couple of paramedics, holding

two cats in her arms. She looked over and gave Glenn a curious glare, causing him to avert his eyes.

"Um, officer, I swear. She was dead on the ground right there," he said, pointing to her doorway.

"Well, she's alive and well now. Please make sure you don't make any more mistakes from now on, got it?"

"Yes, sir. Sorry."

Glenn shut his door and turned around.

Wreck my brain!

His old couch had been replaced by a leather sectional, and his trusty MacBook was on a sleek glass table next to a brand-new desktop computer system. In fact, his entire apartment was remodeled.

What the hell?

He walked over and ran his fingers over the desk's surface, trying to comprehend what he was looking at. A yellow Post It note was stuck to one of the dual twenty-four inch monitors.

Client meeting, 10/3 at 2:00 PM

Oh crap. Who am I meeting with?

Glenn sat down and opened his calendar to October 3, double-clicking the date to get detailed notes on his meeting.

I have clients, and I write technical documentation? This is cool. What else has changed?

Meeting Bob





Image via [thinglink](#)

The sun gleamed brilliantly on the hood of his completely restored 1983 BMW 320i. Glenn grinned as he opened the door and sat down. The car started with a purr and even smelled like vanilla, his favorite scent. He opened the console between the two front seats and counted about fifteen dollars in small bills and change.

Maybe I'll have another cappuccino.

"Hi sweetie," Piper called out, as Glenn walked back into The Java Hut. He smiled and waved, and was about to take a seat in his usual spot when the cute girl walked up and kissed him on the lips.

She's my girlfriend? Or am I insane?

"Hi Piper. Um... cappuccino?"

"You know you don't need to ask, silly," she said while handing him a steaming mug of his favorite beverage. "So, are you coming over tonight? Or we could stay at your place..."

"Uh, why don't you... come over to my place?"

"Well, it's about time, dork! I've been dying to see your new furniture. Anyway, gotta

get back to work. But don't forget to give me a kiss before you leave."

"Okay, hun. I won't forget."

Glenn was growing more confused with every passing moment. He sat down and quickly noticed a new customer in line. The Java Hut wasn't a popular spot, and Glenn knew everyone who went there. The tall gentleman was definitely a newcomer. He was older, appearing about sixty or so, and sported a long, gray beard with an impressive mustache braided into it. Then, to Glenn's surprise, the gentleman waved to him and smiled.

That's odd. I wonder who he is?

Opening his laptop, he logged onto his blog. To his astonishment, he had 78 comments on his most recent posting. He had never recalled getting a single comment, as no one ever read it.

9/13 1305: G, love the story. Looking forward to the next entry.

9/13 1421: Mr. Davies, you are truly a literary treasure.

9/13 1436: I'm so glad I found this blog. I go to it every day while hoping to see a new chapter.

"Interesting, is it not?" asked the older gentleman Glenn had first seen only moments ago, now seated next to him.

"Um, hello. What's that?"

"Oh, things. All sorts of things here and there, hither and thither."

"Are you a foreigner?" asked Glenn, noting the man had a European accent.

"No, oh no," he laughed, "I am from much further away."

"Right. Well, I'm..."

"Glenn. Glenn Davies. Yes, I know well who you are, young man."

"You have me at a disadvantage, sir. I don't know your name, among other things."

"Well, I have had many names throughout my life, but please, call me Bob."

"Bob? Not Robert or Norbert or anything like that?"

The man shook his head and chuckled.

"No, just Bob. And I have come here to speak with you. Could we meet, perhaps this evening?"

"Um, I'm getting together with my girlfriend tonight."

"Oh yes, the girlfriend you never knew you had."

Glenn's heart nearly stopped.

"How did you know that?"

"An old woman died in your hallway today. Then she was no longer dead. Do you not find that to be odd, Glenn?"

"Who are you?"

"Bob. I already told you, young man. My name is Bob."

"Okay Bob, I have a lot of work to do. It was nice meeting you." Glenn was obviously getting nervous and wanted to get away as quickly as possible.

"We need to have a talk, Glenn. You see, your mind has just acclimated and you are now finally seeing reality."

"Reality? How's that? I think I'm going insane."

"Glenn, do you remember your vacation in England when you were a child?"

"Yeah, sure. It was my first time overseas. Why do you ask... and how did you know that, Bob?"

"The shard of metal you found at Stonehenge. I assume you still possess it."

Glenn instinctively brought his hand up to guard the necklace he had made from that very object. It was a memento from the last vacation he had taken with his father before the man passed away.

"Yes. I still have it. It's a necklace now. Why?"

"Tell me, Glenn. Do you know anyone who has... died?"

"Just my dad. When I was a kid. Why?"

"And you have kept that metal shard with you ever since?"

"Yeah, I have. Dude, what the hell is going on? How do you know my name, and how did Mrs. Wilson die, but didn't die?"

Bob sighed.

"You possess a piece of a very powerful object—millions of years old. Think of it as ancient technology. It gives you certain... abilities."

"Huh? I don't understand."

"You died today."

"No I didn't. I'm right here."

"A terrorist's bomb exploded right behind this couch. In fact, at this moment, Homeland Security is combing through the wreckage—just somewhere else."

Glenn thought back to his earlier vision.

Life and Death

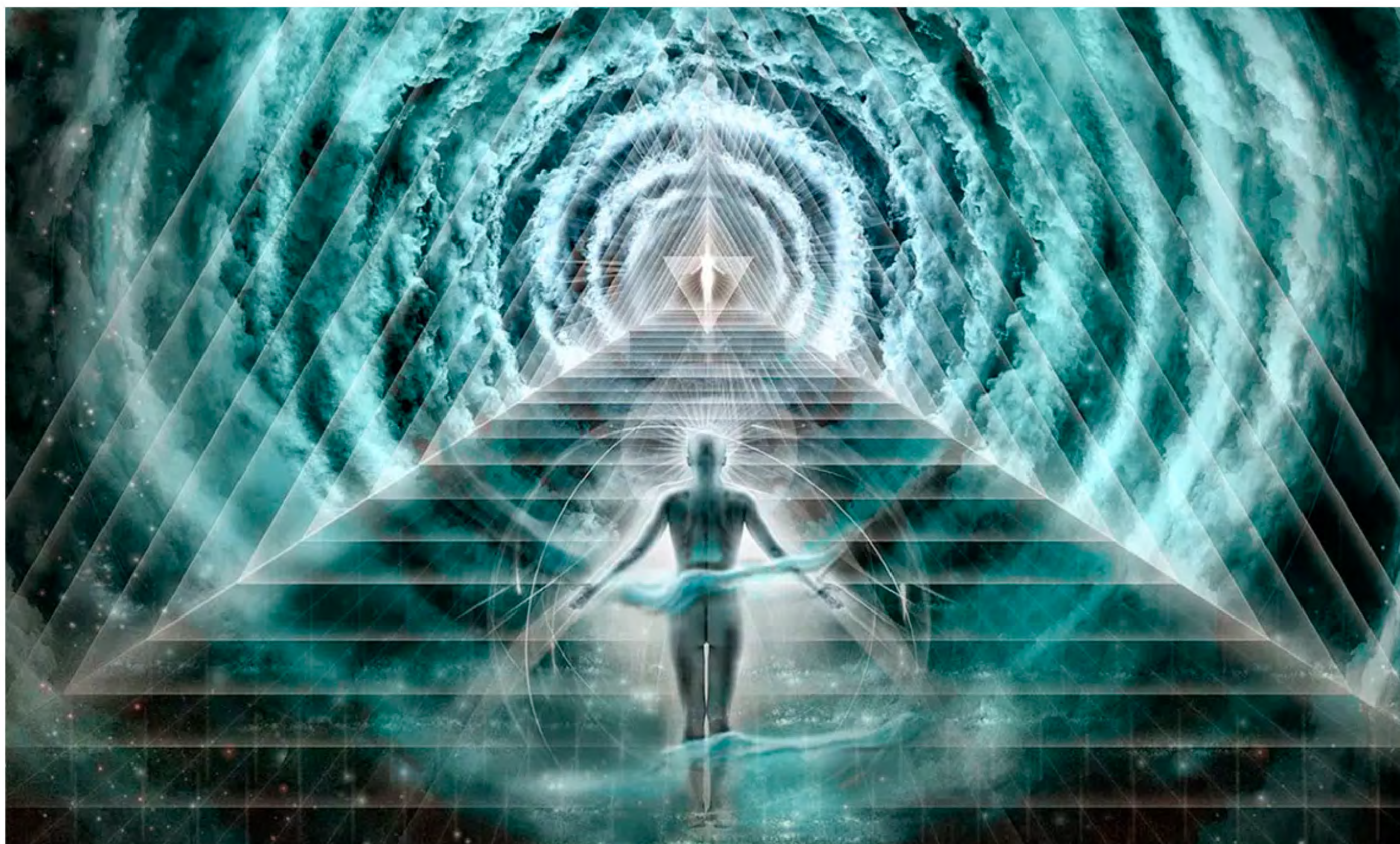




Image via [Visual Meditation](#)

"Okay, this is weird. What do I have? What's wrong with me?"

"Oh no, my boy, there is nothing wrong with you. No, nothing at all. You are merely able to realize one of the truths of the Universe."

"And... what's that?" asked Glenn.

"That no one ever really dies in the way you believe."

"Okay, now I'm really confused. This morning I saw a flash, and then I was broke, drinking my last cappuccino. I go home and my apartment is updated, Piper's my girlfriend, and I have a popular blog. What gives?"

"Whenever someone dies in a timeline, their consciousness transfers to an alternate line, or schism, retaining no memory of their death. They simply continue living with no memory of whatever it was that caused their demise. Likewise, no one else knows they have continued. You, however, actually see death, and travel with whomever it has touched. You happen to have gone through two in one day. First when you were atomized by that most unfortunate bomb, and then later when Mrs. Wilson passed."

"Look, I'm a writer. This is way beyond anything I've ever imagined. But if you're right, how come my life got better once Mrs. Wilson came back?"

"Were you imagining a better life when she died?" asked Bob.

"Yeah, come to think of it. I was. I was thinking I was gonna make it with my writing and get the hell out of that rancid apartment complex."

"And now things are better, I would assume."

"Yeah, so what's next?"

"Well, you continue to live your life, of course."

"But, what if I die? People die every day. Why doesn't my life get better when they do?"

"Only the deaths of those whom you know personally, or those you see with your

own eyes can trigger the effect, bringing you along."

"Oh wow, so I'm immortal?" asked Glenn, excited at the prospect of eternal life.

"No, my boy. Not at all. Everyone eventually dies, but from old age. "

"Mrs. Wilson is old."

"But it is not yet her time. Anyway, I must be off. Please, do not abuse this gift," said Bob.

Glenn looked down and again touched his necklace, trying to do the math in his mind. He had something that let him remember death that didn't happen.

I could write a cool story about this.

Looking up, he couldn't see Bob anywhere.

Later that evening, Glenn fell into his new, king-size bed. Piper slept next to him, her small curves gently moving with each gentle breath. He put his hands behind his head as he formulated a plan.

If I can see someone die and I'm thinking good thoughts, I can shift to a better timeline.

The following day, Glenn called his only friend, Joe Walker, who worked as an orderly at a local hospital. He had a plan, and he knew his buddy could unwittingly help.

"Hey Glenn, what's up? How's Piper doing?"

"Um, she's good. Yeah. Anyway, I have a writing project coming up, and I'd like to get access to the ICU for some research. Can you get me in?"

"Sure! You know, a couple of doctors here read your blog. You're becoming sort of a celebrity."

"Cool. Well, I'll give you a call when I get there. Thanks, man."

Glenn had already passed three days walking through the halls of the intensive care unit, still grabbing and studying patient charts. On that particular day he got lucky, hearing an alarm when someone's life signs were failing. Rushing to the location of

the alarm, he peeked into the room while trying to imagine himself as a world-

famous author, married to Piper, and living in a big home by the ocean.

The alarm flatlined as Mrs. Wilson, his neighbor, passed on from the world of the living.

One Life, Many Deaths





Image via Deviant Art user [WyckedAngel](#)

An ocean breeze gently blew into the massive, open sliding doors of Glenn and Piper Davies' estate in San Clemente. He was working on his latest novel, a sequel to the wildly successful *One Life, Many Deaths*. Sure, he got the idea from everything Bob had told him in The Java Hut, where his wife used to work, but he didn't see any harm in writing about it. He looked up from his laptop just in time to see a very plump Piper bring him one of her famous cappuccinos, and then give him a light kiss on the cheek.

This isn't bad. Nice home, great career, he thought to himself, as he reached up and touched his necklace.

She's not so hot now that she's all fat and stuff. Maybe it's time for a change...

Glenn wanted more. He wanted more money, more fame... and the new domestic employee.

That maid, Cassy Lapella, was a gorgeous, highly-educated woman from Venezuela. However, her family had lost all of their wealth when a new government had taken over. Forced into menial labor for a couple of years, she managed to make it to the United States on a tourist visa, and took a job as one of the servants in the Davies household. Glenn of course found her attractive, and he frequently flirted with the girl.

"Señor Davies, I am sorry, but I cannot be with you. Señora Davies is pregnant. It would be wrong," said Cassy, as Glenn cornered her in the palatial home and wrapped his arms around her waist.

"Cassy, don't worry about Piper. I have a plan. It's foolproof. Honestly, wouldn't you like to have all this?" he asked, waving his arm out to the ocean.

She looked around, remembering her opulent life in Venezuela, as well as her tragic years of poverty. "Yes, I would. Very much, but what do you propose? Are you going to file for a divorce?"

"Don't worry about that," said Glenn.

Later that afternoon he asked Piper to shoot some photos on the patio overlooking the ocean.

"Okay, honey. Lean up against the railing and put your hands on your hips," said Glenn, as he focused his digital SLR in for the shot.

Piper leaned back, and as planned, the railing gave way, with the woman plunging to her death on the rocky shore below.

But Glenn knew she wouldn't really die.

"All rise for the honorable Judge Angela Morton," called out the court bailiff.

A small woman in black robes entered into the chamber and took a seat at the bench. Still standing was Glenn Davies, accused, tried, and convicted of the murder of his wife, Piper Davies.

"Mr. Davies. You have been found guilty of murder in the first degree with special circumstances, and a jury of your peers has sentenced you to death. Do you have anything to say before leaving this courtroom?"

Glenn shook his head, laughing inside. He looked back at everyone in the courtroom, seeing Cassy, one of the prosecution witnesses, seated in the back. He hadn't taken into account that, even though the woman would willingly destroy a marriage, she would have morals when it came to homicide. Still, he sometimes wondered why he didn't traverse over with Piper when she went over the edge. But it didn't matter anymore. He had bigger fish to fry.

"Very well then. I had hoped you would show some remorse, but perhaps you truly are the monster the prosecution made you out to be."

Somebody will die in jail. Then I'll be free.

Standing before a caged window inside the state penitentiary, Glenn emptied his pockets, handed over his wallet, and maintained a smirk while being processed as a prisoner.

"Remove your necklace, please," said the guard behind the cage.

"What do you mean, I can't keep my necklace? I need it!" he cried out.

"You don't need it, Davies. Where you're going, you won't need anything."

"No! I have to keep it! You can't take that!

One of the prison guards ripped the chain from his neck and handed it through the cage. The processing guard dropped the jewelry into a box and handed it back to an assistant while other guards dragged the screaming man away to solitary confinement.

A struggling Glenn looked back to see a tall prison guard with a long, gray beard and braided mustache give him a remorseful look, and then take the necklace out of the personal belongings box before fading from sight.



Steve Benton

Based in Southern California, Steve is the author of The Prīmulī Prophecies series, which so far includes Lives of Future-Past, Lives of Lost Angels and Lives of the Provectus.