

Nothing to Regret
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The settlement on the edge of the Amazon rainforest was heaving with visitors. Neighbouring tribes had gathered to pay tribute to the immortal gods. According to ancient legends, Tula, the Sun God, had descended to Earth to make man in his own image. With the help of his wife, Arany, he first shaped the natural world, the forests and mountains, the oceans and rivers. When it was time to create man, he formed small clay statues and breathed life into them. Such was their belief.

By night fall the festivities were at their full height. When the drumming and the ceremonial fire dance reached a crescendo, a plump, dark-skinned girl was pacing up and down inside a large, palm-thatched hut. Her skin was gummy with sweat and exuded the rancid smell of fear. Sticky, yellow goo oozed from her eyes; a condition made worse by her constant rubbing. Had she been able to tear off her skin to escape her body, she would have done so. But with the heat pressing down on her, the girl dropped heavily onto her knees, covering her face with both hands. If she had any chance of survival, she would have to strike the first blow.

“Be aware that there is another reality!” The deep, resounding voice of the workshop leader brought Deborah back to present time. She shifted her weight on the hard, wooden chair to find a more comfortable position. But there was no room. The past life regression she’d booked herself in for was a sell-out and every chair was taken.

“Now go back to the beginning of this life and find the cause of the problem you’re experiencing.”

Deborah took a deep breath and allowed herself to relax. Just before she drifted back into the past, an ugly scene from the day before replayed in her mind. Her boss shouting at her over a trivial mistake, her angry face bearing down on her. Across the room, her colleague, Aisha, a silent witness.

Within seconds she was back in the Amazon settlement, looking at herself in a previous existence. She’d lost her parents at a young age and had come to live with her uncle. Though barely four years old, he’d subjected her to vile, degrading acts; furtively at first, then more and more openly. Not a single person in the extended household had come to her rescue. They’d simply turned their backs. When her ordeal was over, their cold and pitiless eyes made her feel dirty and used.

What else could she have done? Uncle provided a roof over her head and let her eat at his table. How could she have stopped him? She learnt to endure his assaults and the savage beatings that followed. But today was different. On the inside she felt like a tightly coiled spring, bursting to attack. Hidden under her grimy blanket, the feel of a cold jagged knife gave her confidence. Fate was dealing her a good hand. Still she couldn’t fail, that much she knew. She had to strike the first blow or he would kill her instead.

By the time her uncle got back from the celebrations, he’d be as drunk as a pig. Too drunk to get aroused. All she had to do was wait.

“Remember, the past and the present are one. You have the power to change the events in that life. From the vantage point of your Higher Self, you are writing and

directing the script of your life. Only you can change it.” The workshop leader continued.

The advice came too late. Besides, Deborah was impatient to know how the story had ended. Taking another deep breath, she drifted further back in time.

At the sound of heavy footsteps outside, she hid behind a large wooden chest. There she waited silently for her uncle to enter the hut. His feet unsteady and his mind intoxicated, he didn’t notice her, until she stood right behind him.

With all the force she could muster, she drove the knife into his back, right down to the shaft. Blood spurted in all directions covering her hands and face. He fell, heavily, to the ground. She’d given him no time to call out or turn to face her which made the killing easier. As she bent over her uncle’s blood-soaked body, she felt no remorse. He deserved to be punished. He deserved to die.

“Now go to the end of this life.” The speaker’s voice cut through her thoughts once again. “Who are you with and what are the lessons you have learnt?”

The images started to change once more, like in a fast-swirling kaleidoscope. It took some time before she could make out clear shapes and outlines. From her elevated position she was able to look at the final scene.

The Brazilian girl had to flee the settlement after her uncle’s murder. Pursued by vengeful relatives, she went deeper and deeper into the Amazon. Grubs and berries were her only food. When the canoe people found her, she was barely alive. But they welcomed her into their tribe. A marriage was arranged with an elderly widower. Late in life she gave birth to a daughter who took care of her in her old age. Life had taught her important lessons in survival.

“Everyone has a right to live, however young, however poor. It was a terrible crime to kill my uncle, but I couldn’t take any more beatings. It was his life or mine. That’s how I saw it,” she told her daughter shortly before she died. With that the image faded.

Deborah took a final look at the Amazon household where the young girl had lived. Her uncle’s coarse face reminded her of someone. Where had she seen these features before? All of a sudden her heart skipped a beat and she knew. It was the face of her boss, Valerie. This was the link she’d been looking for. Now the regression began to make perfect sense.

“I am going to count you back from ten to one. When I get to one, slowly open your eyes and come back to the here and now.”

The workshop leader’s voice boomed through the microphone.

In the confined space of her seat, Deborah stretched her arms and legs as best as she could. When she opened her eyes, her friend Kim was looking at her with concern.

“What’s wrong, Debs? Have you seen a ghost?”

“Kim, you won’t believe what’s just happened to me. It was scary, really scary. Let’s get out of here quick. Come on. We need to talk,” she said, pulling her friend to her feet and dragging her to the exit.

Getting through the crowd seemed to take forever. By the time they found a small café nearby, Deborah was still shaking with shock and excitement.

“What on earth is going on?” Kim asked. They’d known each other for years. But when Kim first heard about the workshop, she thought her friend was joking.

“Past life regression, don’t tell me you believe in stuff like that?” It was only when Deborah produced two fully paid tickets that she relented. Why not? It could be an interesting experience and the chance to spend a day with her friend.

“But how can you be so sure?” Kim exclaimed, when Deborah gave her a quick summary of her past life regression.

“How can Valerie and your uncle be one and the same person? That’s crazy.”

Deborah couldn’t remember why she’d made the connection with such certainty, but she knew she was right.

“Kim, I can’t really explain it and it doesn’t make sense, but I know they are.”

Maybe the workshop hadn’t just given her access to past life memories, it had also given her a greater insight into her own psyche. It was as if someone had laid out the pieces of the jigsaw before her and all she had to do was fit them together.

Fact was that Valerie Burke had made Deborah’s life miserable for more than two years. Her work situation was the partly reason why she wanted to do a past life regression.

Landing a job at TLP had been a big breakthrough in Deborah’s professional life. Her salary had almost doubled and she was able to put down a deposit on a flat. But within months her hopes for a successful career in marketing were dashed. While Valerie was civil to start with, before long she went out of her way to ruin Deborah’s reputation and destroy her professional standing in the company. Important documents began to disappear from her desk, messages from clients were not relayed correctly and her computer was hacked into.

By the time Deborah realised that her boss was behind this hate campaign, the damage had been done. Though initially well-liked among her colleagues, Deborah began to feel isolated and paranoid. In meetings Valerie openly humiliated and undermined her. There were constant snide remarks and put downs. Any mistake was pounced upon, whereas other team members got away with it. It was a mystery to everyone why Valerie treated her with such contempt. As far as Deborah was concerned, her boss was an utter nightmare to work for. She’d already sent out dozens of applications to find a new position, but to no avail.

“You know, there are days when I do want to stick a knife in her. She has this effect on me. Just walking past her in the corridor makes me feel angry.” Deborah said.

“I know I could just hand in my resignation, but that would leave me with two major problems. Finding a job as well paid as this one and keeping Aisha, my assistant, out of the firing line. I feel quite protective towards her and Valerie would make her life hell.

“Ok, let’s assume you are right,” Kim said. “If Valerie was the uncle you killed in a previous life, she might still hold vague memories of it. Every time she saw you around, she’d feel uneasy. And if you unconsciously associated her with your paedophile uncle, then your anger would make sense as well. On a rational level, there’s no reason for you to dislike each other. You are both professional women in your thirties, but as soon as you get near each other, all that nastiness erupts.”

Deborah frowned. She’d already spent the past two years fretting about work. Her job had brought her close to despair. Working with a maniac boss who did everything to hurt and humiliate her was certainly no fun. Her confidence and belief in herself had hit rock bottom.

“Anyway what’s the point of finding out now? What am I supposed to do with this information, whether it’s true or not?” she said.

“Well, I guess the timing has to be right. Two years ago this insight would have been wasted on you.” Kim replied.

Deborah laughed. Her friend was right. Even six months ago she wouldn't have paid good money for a past life regression. But the pressure at work had cracked open her defences. She, who had always been in control of her life, felt helpless and insecure. An irresistible desire to get to the root of the problem kept her going. As for the next step, she had no idea. There was no telling whether the regression would have an impact on her work situation. It was a case of wait and see, she told herself. It was a journey into the unknown.

"Debs, do you think it's possible that we meet the same group of people again and again, considering we are reborn many times? That would be odd, wouldn't it?" Kim said, reflecting on the day.

Deborah thought for a moment.

"I guess it's possible, especially if such strong emotions are involved. They say that deep hatred, jealousy or love can stay with you over lifetimes. Resolving the underlying issues seems to be key. Once you know what the problem is, it should be easy."

One thing Deborah knew for sure, there was no point sharing her experience with her boss, however real it might seem to her. Valerie would think she'd gone completely mad. And since she was in the process of applying for jobs, there was no need to rock the boat. It was time to make a decision.

"Right, I will do my very best to bury the hatchet with Valerie. It can't do any harm and who knows, she might even give me a decent reference. I've got a strange feeling things will change now."

They didn't return for the afternoon session, since Deborah couldn't face sitting through another regression, when the last one was still fresh on her mind. Instead they went for a stroll in St James' Park. Spring had rolled around and the blend of green, yellow and pink spring flowers lifted her spirits. It felt good to be outside.

Deborah remained unsettled for the rest of the weekend. She didn't know what to make of her regression into the past and began to doubt its importance altogether. Waking early on Monday morning, she managed to snap back into her usual work mode. Dressed in a black suit and cream blouse, she forced herself to focus on the day ahead. Walking the short distance from her flat in Brick Lane to Liverpool Street Station, she blended in well with the crowd of smartly-dressed city workers. The first train arrived within minutes and she was lucky. The rush hour hadn't quite started yet, so it wasn't overcrowded.

Travelling on public transport had never been easy for Deborah. A dread of confined spaces and the feeling of other passengers pressing against her made her feel nauseous. Today the odour of unwashed bodies hung heavily in the air. How strange, since the carriage wasn't as packed as usual and none of the other passengers looked in need of a shower. The smell seemed to be getting stronger. She sniffed the air again, when the realisation dawned. It was coming from her. Exactly the same stench she had experienced yesterday during her past life regression. It was the foul odour of the young Brazilian girl.

Deborah looked around in a panic. Had other passengers noticed it too? Nobody glanced in her direction. They had their heads down playing with their iPhones or reading the morning papers. Should she get off and go back home? It was a bit late to phone in sick, but under the circumstances? Then she remembered that an important order had to be placed today. She was the only member of staff who knew the

procedure. Shit, as if she didn't have enough problems. Now she smelt like a piece of rotten fish.

"Just go in, you'll think of something" she told herself.

"Once the order has gone through, you can always fake a migraine."

When she arrived at TLP's headquarters, a modern steel and glass building off Chancery Lane, Deborah didn't use the lift. Instead she quickly walked up the stairs and disappeared into the ladies toilet. Aisha, her assistant, stood in front of the mirror, adjusting her headscarf.

"Morning, Deborah," she called cheerily.

Deborah went to the sink to wash her hands.

"Morning. Aisha. How are you? Ahem, listen, I have to ask you something? Can you smell anything?" she asked, trying not to stand too close to her friend.

"You mean like a new perfume? Sorry, not really. If you want the blokes to notice you, you have to splash on a bit more," she grinned.

Deborah felt almost giddy with relief. Surely, she was imagining things. After exchanging some light-hearted remarks with Aisha, she made her way to her office.

Walking through the door, she found her boss already waiting for her. Tapping her foot impatiently, Valerie's face looked like thunder. A tall, bony woman with black, arched eyebrows and the hint of a moustache, she had an air of power and dominance about her. Her masculine appearance was contradicted by her curiously high voice. Nobody had ever seen her wearing a skirt or dress, but her sharply cut trouser suits accentuated her height as she towered over the rest of her staff.

"Morning, Deborah, could I have a quick word? In my office please." she said briskly.

Deborah felt her shoulders tense up as she followed her. They sat facing each other in Valerie's office.

"Great," Deborah thought, "Here goes my job!"

Valerie gave her a strange look. She seemed to weigh up carefully what she was about to say.

"I'll be very brief, Deborah. I know we haven't exactly hit it off in recent months, but it hasn't gone unnoticed that you have been putting a lot of time and effort into your work. In fact, I mentioned to senior management last week how conscientious and hard working you are."

Valerie cleared her throat before carrying on.

"It is important that you keep the information I give you now confidential. I have to undergo a medical procedure and will be on sick leave for some months. I was born with a hole in my heart and although it was dealt with in childhood, it seems to need further attention now. I have spoken to the CEO and we both agreed that we would offer you a senior position in the company until next January. Hopefully I should be back by then, fully recovered. I realise that this must come as a bit of a surprise."

She hesitated before carrying on.

"Of course, I don't expect an answer straight away. Why don't you go for a short walk and think it over. But if you could let me know by tomorrow that would be great."

With a wave of her hand, Valerie dismissed her. Deborah left the office without a word. She was in shock. Everything around her seemed like a blur. Somehow she made it across the road to her favourite coffee shop and ordered a large cappuccino. Her

hand was shaking so much that she had to pick up the cup with both hands. She couldn't remember how long she'd sat there until she heard someone calling her name.

"Deborah, what are you doing? I've been looking everywhere for you! We need you to put the US order through. Have you forgotten?"

Aisha was standing right in front of her. Noticing Deborah's pale face, she sat down beside her.

"What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

Deborah managed a smile. Aisha had a knack of appearing when needed, like a genie out of a bottle.

"Don't tell me you've been sacked?" She blurted out.

"To be honest, a few minutes ago I thought my career at TLP was over," Deborah replied. "But, believe it or not – she's been offered a promotion. After giving me hell for two years, Valerie has suddenly realised she hasn't got anyone to replace her. The woman's got a nerve. I feel like turning it down."

She put Aisha in the picture.

"Turn it down? Are you crazy?" Aisha looked at her in disbelief.

"You've been working so hard. You deserve it. Take it, you fool. When Valerie comes back after a few months, you can still apply for another job."

"What? Do you think I should do her a favour?" Deborah replied.

"Stop being so pig-headed! I can't bear the thought of you leaving. Remember what happened last time?"

"What do you mean, last time? I've only known you for a couple of years." Deborah laughed.

Looking at Aisha, an uneasy feeling crept over her. Again she was reminded of yesterday's workshop. Faces she had seen, people she had recognised. All of them were somehow related to her workplace.

But Aisha was deeply in thought.

"All I'm trying to say is ... take the opportunity. Forget what's happened in the past. If you leave now, you will always remember the bad times. But if you can turn the situation around, everyone will benefit."

Deborah looked at her watch and got up abruptly.

"Come on. Let's get back, before they send out a search party."

Aisha looked relieved. She could sense a decision had been made.

"By the way, what was that question you asked me this morning? About a funny smell?" she remembered suddenly.

"Oh, don't worry," Deborah replied. She was smiling now.

"It's gone."