

Redo

I take a deep breath while standing in front of the well-known pitch black building with a sign above reading Sherwell Industries' slogan: "Find Your Way to a Better Past."

"Alright Robby, this is it," I say to myself, give a long exhale, and then push the button for the intercom.

A slightly robotic female voice answers, "Sherwell Industries. Giving you a better past, today. Please state your business here."

"This is Robert Goldman," I say. "I have an appointment at 2:30."

There's a couple of seconds of silence while the computer looks up my information. Then the robotic voice is back:

"Of course, Robert Goldman. Please press your right hand on the blue outlined panel."

Suddenly, on the black creaseless wall, a glowing blue outlined box appears. I press my right hand within the outlined box and when I remove it, I see my handprint glowing blue within the box.

There's a brief pause while the system collaborates, retrieving my data. Then the female robotic voice says. "Access approved. Please enter." The creaseless wall opens revealing two automated sliding doors. The robotic voice then prompts, "Thank you for choosing Sherwell Industries. Find Your Way to a Better Past."

I walk in and hear the automated informational messages talking about the company's history. It's another female robotic voice, although different than the door greeter.

“In 2021, Dr. Harold Sherwell found a major discovery which showed actual potential in time travel. Fifty-eight years later, his vision was made into a reality....” the robotic voice explains. But I’m not focused on this. I’ve heard my father explain this to me countless times before. And I have more pressing matters on my mind.

It all started eight years ago. The date is drilled into my mind. May 3rd, 2093. That’s when the first snowball started the avalanche that wasted over seven years of my life and brought nothing but pain. I try not to perseverate on it—as difficult a task as that is, given the circumstances—so I’ll just state the facts.

On May 3rd, 2093, I was in a bad place. It was the one month anniversary of my father’s passing and I was still in mourning. That was when I shared a dance with the woman who ruined my life: Colleen Booker. After that, we exchanged numbers, started dating, and then I made the awful mistake of marrying her. We had a child together, and I was in pure bliss. That bliss only lasted two years when I found out that my daughter was not my biological daughter at all. I found out that Colleen cheated on me, and I filed for divorce. I may have been able to forgive infidelity, but learning that my child wasn’t at all mine: that was a different story altogether. So *that* is what I came here to change. I need to go back to that May night at the bar, turn down her offer—maybe even be rude about it too—and make sure I don’t see her ever again. I need to avoid wasting eight years and make sure she doesn’t ruin my life.

I walk over to the front counter to check in, and then they bring me upstairs for further explanation and to fill out some paperwork before I embark on my travel. Gerald O’Connor, a colleague of my father’s before he passed, greets me with a warm but wary smile.

“Robby, how are you doing?” he extends his hand.

“Not perfect, I guess, which is why I’m here,” I say.

“Of course, of course,” he says. “Have a seat.”

I sit down in a plush chair across a semi-transparent grey table. Instead of sitting in the seat across from me, he leans back on the table next to me.

“Remember, we only allow each person one chance to go through this, the cash is final, and sometimes the end results aren’t what you would hope for,” he says.

“I’m fully aware,” I say.

“Are you sure you want to spend the money your father left for you on this?” he says while raising an eyebrow. “It is a hefty sum.”

“I’m sure.” I cock my head slightly and give a smile. “There seems to be hesitation in accepting a customer’s money. Is that question standard procedure?” I ask, though I know the answer.

He sighs. “No. It’s just a favor to your father, and it’s a lot of money to spend on a failed relationship.”

“I need those years back, Gerald,” I say.

George taps on his table a few times, and an agreement splays out on the table. I scroll to the bottom, sign with the electronic pen, and place my thumb print in the box provided.

He then walks me to a white room with a large, white, opened cylinder, tells me to strip off my clothes, slip them through the door slot and someone will be there shortly. Then he says, “Good luck, Robby,” and leaves, closing the door behind him.

I do as I’m told. I strip my clothes off, put them through the slot in the door, then sit down on the horizontal opened cylinder and wait. In about five minutes, a male nurse walks in with a clipboard and an electronic pen. His eyes have significant bags, and I can tell he can’t wait to get off his shift and head home.

Lifelessly, he grabs the equipment to check my vitals, oxygen levels, and temperature. Wordlessly, he works on my body as if I were not human at all, but a test dummy in nursing school that has no consciousness whatsoever.

It's not until after he's done jotting down my information that he says a word. Those words seem as though they're spoken to himself. "All good," he says barely audibly and still looking at his clipboard.

Finally, he looks at me and says, "When you get back to your starting point in the past, you will find yourself heavily disoriented-"

"Please," I say. "My father was Nick Goldman. You can skip all this; I've heard all this before."

"I don't care if you are Harold Sherwell come back to life," the nurse says, annoyed. "What I'm telling you makes sure my ass doesn't get fired or get a million-dollar lawsuit, so you're going to hear me through."

I'm surprised by this response, so I say, "Sorry. Go on."

"Anyway," he goes back to what he was saying, "When you first get back to the starting point of your past-revision, you will be heavily disoriented. It is not something to worry about. This is just the mixture of the mind coping with you being sent so far into the past and your current consciousness entering your past consciousness in such an abrasive takeover. To help smooth this transition, your emotional state in this starting point will still be with you for a significant time, although you will eventually recover from this over time," he pauses. "Would you like me to explain why we do this or continue?"

"Please," I say. "Continue. Just the basics."

The nurse continues, “The important thing to do in the first thirty some-odd days is to take some time alone to clear your head. It’s a healthy way to stay on track. Also, Sherwell Industries is not to be held accountable for any accident that you may suffer when you change your past or if your experience does not meet your expectations. You can only change your past once, and there are no refunds. Any questions?”

“No,” I say.

“Good,” he says. He flips through his electronic tablet with his finger.

“Please sign here and put your right thumbprint here.” He hands me the tablet and I do so.

Next, he puts me in the open cylinder and slathers on some jelly-like substance on my temples and applies wireless electrodes. He then tells me to wait five minutes and then presses a button to seal the doors to this cylindrical time machine.

I lie there in the machine, waiting for something to happen. Over time I become a little claustrophobic. I know it’s only psychosomatic, but I find it harder and harder to breathe. *It’s all in your mind*, I keep telling myself. But it still is difficult to fight this.

Finally, I begin to feel some warmth in the capsule. The walls of this cylindrical capsule glow a bright white light all around me. Then I feel an intense pain in my head while my thoughts scatter all about. I can’t think clearly and coherently to save my life. I begin twitching as I feel an electric current run through my body. I bite down and grind my teeth. I’m groaning in pain, the white walls pierce through a blinding light although my eyes are closed, and I shake and twitch all over. Finally, I scream, and then I find myself in an empty void for a moment. I hear noises all about me, unaware of where I am or how I got to wherever I am. Music is playing. People are shouting over the music, though I can’t make out anything. Glasses are

clinking, there's boisterous laughter, then the voices all around me become coherent though they don't make sense.

"Excuse me,"

"Hahahaha!"

"So then I told him..."

"Shot!"

"Go on, ask her out."

"Can I get a whiskey on the rocks?"

"What a dumbass."

"Walter! How are you doing?"

"Over here!"

All I hear are these random voices all over. I don't know what's going on. All I know is that I am on the verge of tears.

Finally, I open my eyes, and find myself around a number of people who all look familiar, but for the life of me, I can't remember who they are. I realize that I'm holding up a shot glass filled with something, surrounded by six people whose names elude me for the time being, all holding up shot glasses with me.

One of them says, "To Nick Goldman. May he rest in peace."

The rest of them drink, but I find myself too weak to hold the glass anymore. I drop the glass on the counter, feel my knees buckle, and grab onto a stool for support. The only two things that I know for sure is that I'm depressed, and I'm just realizing now that I'm incredibly intoxicated.

The man who led the toast slides up next to me, puts an arm around my shoulder, and says, “You okay Robby?”

Still unsure who he is or where I am, I say, “I... I just need to step outside.”

“Sure, Robby,” he says. “You do what you need to do.”

I step outside and sit on a bench, trying to figure out what’s going on. Unfortunately, my mind is too jumbled. I feel drunk, *very* drunk. On top of that I don’t know why I’m so sad. To figure things out, I empty my pockets. I look at a card that I pull out: it’s from my father’s funeral. I see the bottom where it says, “Passed Away” and underneath it says, “One Month.” It’s the one month anniversary of his death? How could I forget that? How drunk am I? Also in my pockets are a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. But for some reason I thought I quit smoking seven years ago. Even though I could have sworn I quit, I have a craving for one. I pull one out and light it, trying to figure out what’s going on.

I read the card. It has a quote from my father. “Above all the virtues of intelligence and humor and kindness and courage that I’ve tried to set by example to my family and friends, the one that I value most is love. I am content in believing that I have succeeded at that.”

I read it over several times. It was something that he told me many times, I now remember. He told me to love and care for those that care for me, those that despise me, those that are indifferent to me, and those that never heard of me. Love all, he told me, and never let hatred corrupt your heart.

I feel a tear roll down my right cheek.

Then I hear a woman’s voice from my left. “Hey, any way I can get a cigarette from you?”

“Of course,” I fish one out and hand it to her.

As I look at her, my eyes are too watery to make out what she looks like. All I see is a female body in red clothes with dark hair.

“Are you okay?” she asks while taking my cigarette.

“I... uh... yeah,” I say. “It’s just that my dad recently passed.” I pause. “A month ago.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she says while sitting next to me on the bench.

“I haven’t thought about it in a while,” I say. “It’s just kind of hitting me now.”

There’s a long bit of awkward silence as we sit together on the bench smoking. I shouldn’t have dropped such a powerful bomb right away, especially to somebody that I just met.

After she finishes her cigarette, she says, “Look, I’ve had a pretty bad day too. I just had a bad break up a week ago, and have been having trouble coping with it and it’s affecting my work. I have no idea what I could say to help you out right now. I really wish I did, but I don’t,” she pauses. “So I propose the two of us try to forget about all the shit going on, and have as good of a time as we can to forget our misery.”

“How do we do that?” I ask.

“We dance,” she says. “We dance and drink our misery away.”

I say, a little skeptically, “Sure.”

So that’s what we do. We go in and dance. A little later, a live band comes in and they’re pretty good. Luckily, they’re not one of those bands that pervert their music with an overuse of synthesizers. They’re a throwback to rock and roll days. They have two guitarists—the rhythm guitarist is the singer—a bassist and drummer. They play music that lifts spirits and is easy to dance to.

We bop and shake and twirl about, and I start to actually have fun. Even though I'm already very drunk, we drink more, and I see a glow to her face. I don't know if it's natural or it's just the booze—whether it's her intoxication or mine distorting her face—but it feels great being with this woman.

On one of our breaks where we grab a drink she says, "I'm sorry, I don't think I ever gave you my name."

I laugh. "I don't think I gave mine either."

"Colleen," she says pointing to herself. And for some reason that name flashes through my mind with some familiarity. It gives me a bittersweet mix of emotions, but I shake it off.

"Robby," I say.

"What do you do for a living?" she asks me. I realize that is one of the many things I don't know right now. Everything's kind of chaotic in my head. But I get saved by her own interruption when the band covers some song I don't know and she screams, "I love this song! Come on."

She grabs me by the arm and drags me to the dance floor. Neither of us dance at all professionally, but we sway our hips and make up random moves and sometimes laugh at ourselves for how dorky we look.

We live in the moment. We *do* talk. But hardly anything we say is pertinent to who we are or what we're going through. It's good for me since, because of the alcohol, I'm so confused, I don't know anything that's going on. And I guess it's good for both of us since neither of us are having a good life right now, so why even bother with talking about our situations and ruining the blissful state we're in.

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The hours pass with Colleen as we dance our blues away until my friend grabs me by the shoulder.

“Hey Rob, sorry to ruin your time, but I have to get back to the wife and kids.”

Unaware of whom this person fully is, I say, “Alright, I’ll catch up with you another time”

He smiles.

“Robby, I’m your ride.”

“Oh,” I say, feeling like an idiot. “Sorry. I’ll be right there.”

My friend, who for the life of me I can’t remember his name, says okay and then gives Colleen and me our space to say goodbye.

“I guess it’s time for me to hit the road,” I say, sad that the night has to come to an end.

Unexpectedly, she hugs me tightly and we hold each other for a long time.

“You don’t know how much you helped me tonight.”

“Neither do you,” I say the only thing tonight that I know for a fact is the truth.

We exchange numbers and then I head home and fall asleep.

I wake up groggy, with a massive hangover, and my mind is still jumbled. Every memory I have feels like more of a dream than a memory. It’s hard to distinguish what’s real and what’s fantasy. I look at the clock and see that it’s after two in the afternoon.

“What the hell is happening to me?” I ask myself.

My phone rings and it reads that it’s Colleen. I feel those bittersweet emotions run through me as the name rings of familiarity, but I can’t tell who she is. A part of me tells me to answer it, but another part tells me to never pick up the phone when it’s her again.

I ignore that irrational thought and pick up, “Hello?”

“Hi, how’s it going?” she says.

“All right, how are you?” I ask.

“I’m doing good. But you sound hungover,” she chuckles.

“Guilty,” I laugh.

“I just wanted to thank you for last night. I haven’t had that much fun in a long time, and it was great to just stop being sad all the time and just forget about it all and have a good time,” she says.

I smile, now remembering last night.

“Agreed.”

“Would you want to do something again?” she asks. “Maybe grab dinner on Friday night?”

“I think that would be wonderful,” I say. “Where?”

“How about my place?” she says.

I’m a little shocked by how quickly we’re already going to each other’s houses, but am not at all disappointed. I hope I’m not just a rebound, but I’ll take what I can.

“Sounds like a plan,” I say.

“Great, I’ll text you the address,” she says warmly.

“Should I bring anything?” I ask.

“Nothing comes to mind,” she says. “All you have to do is bring yourself.”

“Great,” I say. “Can’t wait to see you.”

“One last question,” she says.

“I’m all ears,” I respond.

“Are you okay with seafood?” she asks.

“I *love* seafood,” I say.

“Well, until then,” she says.

“Until then,” I tell her, and then hang up the phone.

I am much more elated, and then I head to the shower to wash off all the body odor and booze from last night. That’s when it hits me: Colleen Booker. It comes over me like a wave, and once again I feel so weak that I drop to my knees in the shower.

She’s the one I shouldn’t have danced with. *She’s* the one I ended up falling in love with. *She’s* the one I married. *She’s* the one I had a daughter with. *She’s* the one I found out cheated on me. *She’s* the one who told me little Debbie wasn’t mine. *She’s* the one who broke my heart. *She’s* the one who ruined my life. And *she’s* the reason I went back in time.

I start crying and sobbing as all those memories come flooding back. The divorce, the heartache, the fights. It’s too much for me to take. For hours I cry in the shower, wishing I knew all this last night. All I had to do was ignore her. All I had to do was tell her I didn’t want to dance. All I had to do was just tell my friends I wanted to go home before all of this started.

I guess I’ll just have to call her up and cancel. I want to shout at her too. I want her to feel miserable for what she hasn’t done to me yet.

I get out of the shower and grab my phone, go to my contacts, and then look at her name. But then I remember how my father always told me to be a gentleman and to always treat women with respect. So, I decide I’ll tell her in person that I can’t see her again. It’s the proper thing to do. Now, I guess I’ll just have to wait until Friday.

But that whole week is just a pit of depression. I go to work and come home. Sometimes I talk to my friends or family—it helps now that I can remember their names—but still, I feel no relief. I feel no satisfaction. I know in my full life it’s been over eight years since my father died, but as the apathetic nurse told me, and my father told me countless times before, you will still

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feel the same emotional state as you would when you come back here for over a month, so I have no way to talk myself out of this state.

I look down at my father's funeral card. Passed On One Month Three Days. The quote has changed. Every new month that passes, the funeral card reads a different quote.

“The phrase ‘curiosity killed the cat’ should be removed from common speech. Without curiosity, there would be no cures for any diseases, no way to stay in touch with loved ones, no ways to travel outside of where you can walk, no global communication, or any medical or scientific advances for that matter. And in personal experiences, if I wasn't curious to see if my beloved Hellen would be interested in dating a guy like me, I would have never been blessed with having her hand in marriage, some of the greatest moments in my life, or our four children that we love and cherish so.”

I give a sad smile. “I love you too, Dad,” I say, “wherever you are.” But for days to come nothing alleviates my sadness.

Friday comes, and I drive over to Colleen Booker's house. I contemplate how I can get rid of her. I can't just shout at her for all the things she's done to me because she hasn't even done them yet. And I know it is ill-advised to tell people that I am one of those people who have come back from the future, so I can't tell her that I'm breaking up with her because of what *will* happen. So what do I do? I guess I'll just have to tell her that I can't see her anymore and leave it at that. I'll give no further explanation. I don't care if I seem mean-spirited or cold; I just have to stop this once and for all.

I get to her house and she opens the door with a warm smile. I was all set to tell her off right then and there, but now I find myself melting in a way. I can't do it now. The timing's not right. I'll do it tonight. I'll be tactful. But I can't do it now.

“Great to see you, Robby.” She gives me a hug to greet me.

“You too,” I say, not sure of what to say.

I feel her embrace, and I warm up. I know I say my feelings for her are bitter, but as I said, it’s bittersweet: there’s still a sweetness to it. And right now, even though I know it will only hurt me in the long run, the happiness I feel right now is something I haven’t felt for a long time.

The automatic kitchen is off cooking and mixing our meals to perfection while we’re allowed to talk between ourselves over some wine. She asks me about myself and tells me about herself. We dig into deeper topics than we did the night at the bar. I know that I’ve already experienced this before, almost exactly, probably on this same night in an alternate timeline, but I find it too pleasant to stop. So far, since I traveled back, the only moments I wasn’t depressed were when I was with Colleen, so I’m going to enjoy this night for as long as it is acceptable. I know it will hurt Colleen more but, for what she puts me through in my future, I think it’s more than justified.

“What type of music do you listen to?” she asks.

“Twentieth century Rock and Roll,” I say.

“You’re kidding me!” she exclaims.

“I can assure you, I’m not,” I say.

“That’s my favorite music too,” she says.

“Really?” I say, sounding surprised even though I already know.

She nods her head, places her thumb on the end of the table to open up a transparent screen between us, slides over to music, and then shows me the thousands of songs she marked

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down as her favorites. I scroll through, and see the oldies from as far back as Elvis Presley to the newest being The Offspring.

“What do you want to hear?” she asks.

“How about we put it on shuffle?” I offer.

She tells the house to play shuffle, and on comes “Gallows Pole” by Led Zeppelin.

She drinks down her wine, I do the same and then she stands up and gestures for me to do the same. “Come on.” Then she tells the house to raise the volume, and we both dance.

This time she’s more hands on and we laugh as we shake about and I twirl her around and dip her and she clings to me. Then something comes over and, although I know I shouldn’t, I give her an open-mouthed kiss which she does not decline.

We look into each other’s eyes for a bit. I see her green eyes and serene smile. Her dark hair has been spun about her face with all the dancing in a chaotic sort of beauty. I see this woman now, and there’s no part of me that wants to end this, even though I must. I forget all about the horror that I will endure. I forget about everything that this woman will do to me. Those full lips, smiling at me, invite another kiss. But instead she spins around and goes back to dancing as though nothing happened.

The dinner comes out looking great, and we slump back in our chairs laughing. Colleen lowers the volume, and we refill our wine glasses. We enjoy the delicious salmon, sautéed vegetables and mixed rice, and drink a lot more wine.

We drink so much, and I have such a great time that I mess up on my task again. By the end of the night I find myself in bed with her.

After we have our fun, and we’re lying next to each other in a postcoital cuddle, Colleen says to me, “Where do you see yourself in ten years?”

Unbeknownst to her, I actually have a pretty accurate idea. I think about the pain I'll be in after she treats me so poorly, but then again, that will change as soon as I do what I need to do about her. So, I guess I'm not really sure. But then I do remember how much money I spent on this redo. And I know that somehow they know to still charge me, even though the past will be completely changed—*how*, I'm not too sure of—so I say, "Broke."

I guess the bizarre answer surprised her, so she bursts into laughter. With her laughter, I temporarily forget the alternate future once again, so I roll on top of her and we go for round two.

I swear I try my hardest to leave her, but instead we start to see each other frequently. I realize the only time I'm not depressed is when I see her. I decide that after this month, when all this wears off, *that's* when I'll end things with her.

But the month passes, and it's too late: I've fallen in love. I made the same mistake again. And although I keep trying to end it, I can't. It's not that I don't have a choice; it's just that even though I know it will cause me misery, I can't bring myself to tell a woman I'm so deeply in love with, and I care so much for, that I've got to call it quits without giving any reason.

A couple years later, we take a trip to Ireland together. We land in Dublin and at first tour the historic parts of Ireland and the nightlife. Then we make our way towards the West Coast where the cliffs and hills have the most beautiful scenery.

One morning, I wake up early and randomly think of my father. I take his funeral card out of my pocket. It says he passed away two years, seven months, and twenty-four days ago.

On it is a quote: "If you spend all your time deciding if you should or shouldn't do something, rather than just doing it, you'll find yourself a lonely old man full of 'could haves' and 'what ifs'. Life is full of opportunities; are you brave enough to take them?"

I read this line and remember that when I read this, on this day on my trip to Ireland, in the alternate present, it made me decide to propose to Colleen. I think hard about it. I know I am deeply in love with her right now, but I know she hurts me in the future. But then again, that was an alternative future. Is it worth the risk?

But then I reread my father's words, and I go out while Colleen is still asleep, and buy the same ring I bought in another life to propose to Colleen. And the next day, while she is busy admiring the scenery at the Cliffs of Moher, I drop to one knee, and she says yes.

Am I crazy? Maybe. But I read somewhere that an insane brain and a brain in love look similar in a neurological vantage point. So, if you think of it, aren't all people in love a little crazy?

Soon after that, the wedding bells approach, and I ignore my last chance to change this and say, "I do." Then I kiss my wife and we celebrate our love. We go to the Bahamas, just as I did the first time I married her and, once again we spend just as much time enjoying the outside as we do in our five-star hotel.

Once again, we enjoy the view out of our balcony in nothing but our robes, and Colleen says to me once the sun fully sets, leaving only a small bit of orange above the water, "You're the only man I will ever love."

And although the only honest thing I can say would be, 'I hope so', I tell her once again that without her nothing would matter. And once again we kiss each other on the balcony and then make our way to the bed in passion.

In two years, I once again find out I am going to be a father. And I find out she's pregnant and we find out the due date, and those dates are the same as the time in my alternate

reality. So I know from the beginning this time that I am not the father, even though she doesn't tell me.

I cry to myself, wondering what to do. I feel as though I should file for divorce and avoid the pain, but I don't. I see our daughter, Debra Caitlin Goldman, born, and even though I know she's not mine, I let myself forget about it in a way. And I can't help myself. I once again fall head-over-heels for my little Debbie even though I know she's not mine.

And once again, my wife confesses to me years later that Debbie is not mine. I knew this day would eventually come; I had prepared for it, and I swore I would not say those hateful things and follow the same mistakes. But I feel it only necessary to feign shock and betrayal, and then ultimately forgive her and stay with her and raise the child as my own.

But when I begin acting shocked and betrayed, I remember the humiliation the first time around. I remember originally learning that I was a duped cuckold, and that pretend anger and humiliation, turns into real anger and humiliation.

And once again I say things that could not be unspoken nor unheard. Once again, I went too far with my outrage. And once again we file for divorce.

Another year passes, and I walk around aimlessly: a divorcee whose wife mothered a child that wasn't his and told him two years later. I'm a man that's even further off the market for a potential mate. I check my bank account and see almost all of my money drained. I guess today is the day I made my decision to go to Sherwell Industries to change the past. I made the same mistakes, only now I'm a pauper. But this time, there is something different.

I don't perservate on all the misery that I went through, and I believe that if I could do it differently, I'd make the same mistakes once again. When I first lived through this, I looked at all those times with disdain. But now I realize there were some great moments: when Colleen

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and I met at the bar and we danced away our misery, staring down at her while we had our first kiss, when she accepted my proposal while we were at the Cliffs of Moher, watching the sunset in the Bahamas on our honeymoon, seeing little Debbie being born, seeing Debbie take her first steps, hearing Debbie's first words—'daddy', ironically—I wouldn't take it back for the world.

Thinking of my father, I grab the funeral card in my pocket. Passed away for eight years, four months, and fifteen days. I see that the quote has changed. I read it.

“Life is heaven or hell depending on how you look at it.”

“Amen, dad,” I say, and continue to walk ahead, finally free to live the rest of my life.