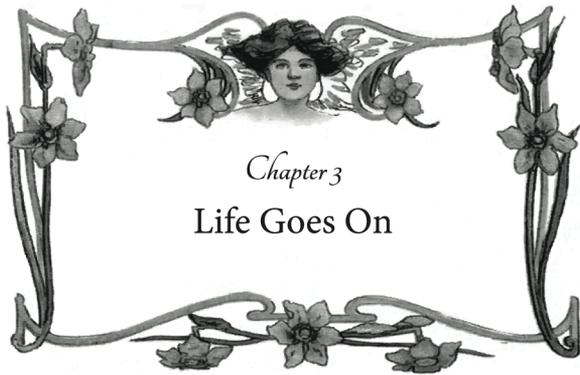
A surreal landscape featuring a single tree on a golden, curved hill. The hill and the tree are mirrored in a sky that is also curved and filled with clouds and stars. The overall scene is ethereal and dreamlike.

*Swedenborg's  
Daughter  
Memoirs of a Mystic*

*Donna Wolfe Gatti*



*As you become enlightened, you will have a greater understanding of death, for no one ever dies. You merely walk into another dimension.*

—Delphinia, Angel of Time

In 1974, I had a near-death experience. For a short period of time, my heart stopped beating and my brain ceased to function. After my physical body died, I entered a world made of white light. My story begins in the operating room of a hospital in the Midwest.

I was given general anesthesia for a common but invasive medical procedure, and near the end of the operation the doctor made a terrible mistake. He cut an artery and I lost massive amounts of blood, too much blood to sustain life. As my body lay dying on the operating table, I rose up and surveyed the situation.

The doctors and nurses were in a frenzy — yelling at each other, grabbing white towels, passing metal instruments, and sweating as if *their* lives were on the line instead of mine. I felt their fear as they tried desperately to save me, but I couldn't understand why they were so upset. Surely they could see I was perfectly fine.

“Calm down,” I said, laughing a little to ease the tension. But they kept at it, as if they didn’t hear me. Maybe I needed to speak a little louder.

“Relax!” I shouted. “Take it easy!”

They continued to ignore me, so I flew into their faces and went nose-to-nose with each one of them. “Look at me! I’m all right. There’s nothing to worry about.”

They acted as if they didn’t see me, and I was standing right in front of them! Why wouldn’t they acknowledge me? It was frustrating.

I watched them for a few minutes and then grew bored. If they weren’t going to talk to me, there was no reason to stay put. So I took off like a bird, as if flying was a natural thing to do. For a while I just flew around in circles over my lifeless form and the bent heads of the steadfast surgical team.

Slowly, I went higher and higher until I was caught up in a brilliant white light. It was whiter and brighter than the rays of the sun, but not at all glaring or hard on the eyes. I could have stayed there forever, basking in the warmth and comfort of its mysterious glow.

The sound of a masculine and utterly magnificent voice captured my attention. Veiled from sight, he addressed me as if I had just awakened from a coma. He told me who I was, where I had been and where I was from. He answered every question that had ever crossed my mind, as if my smallest concern was of utmost importance. I felt respected and loved. It was a solemn moment. But when he told me why Aunt Bettie married Uncle Fred, which had always baffled me, I broke into laughter.

“OK,” I said, smiling at the man in the light. “I remember now. You don’t have to say anything else.”

It was blissful in the spiritual realm, floating in an ocean of white light. I was content, until one of the nurses screamed, “We’re losing her!” and the sound of distress hit my spirit like a cannonball shot to the belly.

Emotional energy feels stronger to a free spirit than to a spirit wearing a bodysuit made of flesh and bones. The force threw me into the air and I came to a halt about three inches away from the ceiling.

I looked down at my spiritual body to make sure it was still intact, and what I saw surprised me. There were two cherubs, stark naked except for tiny loincloths, and every bit as cute as the putti in Raphael’s paintings.

“We are Escort Angels,” said one of the twins, with the noble pride of a royal servant. “We have come to take you home.”

Suddenly the white light was much brighter. The cherubs positioned themselves on either side of me, near my waist, and we drifted to the corner of the ceiling. I was fully prepared for take off, but my head hit the wall. I repeated the motion again and again, each time expecting the wall to give way, but it didn’t budge.

The cherub on the left flew close to my face. “You have forgotten something,” he said. “There is something you must do before you can leave.”

I struggled with my memories, trying to figure out what I was supposed to do. Finally, it came to me. “Oh, that’s right. I forgot to look at the body.”

My eyes zoomed in on the woman lying on the bed below us. She was twenty-five years old and in perfect health, except for the loss of blood and spirit. Like a seasoned mechanic inspecting a car, I knew I could fix her.

“This isn’t serious enough,” I said, more to myself than the cherubs, and in a split second I was back in my body.

I plunged headfirst into the navel, and it was like diving into wet concrete. My body felt stiff, and I had to twist and turn to make my spirit fit. After settling in, I looked up at the ceiling. The cherubs were waiting for proof that I was all right. I made eye contact with one of them, and then they flew through the same wall that had prevented my escape.

Tears brushed my cheeks. *What have I done?* I could have left with them. Right now I could be on my way home, but once again I’m trapped in a world of limitations.

My self-pity soon turned to embarrassment. *I forgot to thank the angels!* They had gone to great trouble on my behalf, traveling from far away and through multiple dimensions, and I didn’t thank them for coming or apologize for wasting their time. My behavior was appalling.

I was ashamed of myself, and for fifteen years my heart wouldn’t let me rest. Whenever I thought about my near-death experience, I felt the sting of a guilty conscience. My lack of etiquette was inexcusable.

One day, while thinking about the Escort Angels and feeling as remorseful as ever, one of the cherubs appeared in my mind’s eye. He stared at me for a few seconds, and then sighed. The expression on his face conveyed a sadness equal to my own.

“Why don’t you thank us now?” he said.

I began to laugh and cry at the same time. I had wronged the cherubs and they could have abandoned me. Instead, they were giving me the opportunity to make amends. It was an extraordinary act of kindness.

“Thank you,” I said, and a wave of relief swept over me.

The other cherub entered the picture and the two of them started dancing. They were happy because I was happy, and they celebrated like it was New Year's Eve. There were corks popping from bottles of champagne, balloons bouncing in the air and confetti falling from Heaven.



The answers the man gave me were a gift that I wasn't allowed to keep. I had to return to Earth with only a vague recollection of the conversation. Nevertheless, I think Aunt Bettie married Uncle Fred because he looked like Elvis.

After my physical body recovered from the near-death experience, I needed mental and emotional help. I wanted someone to explain what had happened to me. Scheduling an appointment with a psychiatrist was too risky. If a doctor decided I was crazy, he or she had the legal means to send me to an insane asylum. The thought of being strapped into a straightjacket terrified me.

I knew I was sane, but didn't know how to prove it. Would the authorities believe I was normal after hearing that I died and went to Heaven? No, of course not. How would they respond if I told them about the voice in the light? I could imagine the conversation.

"She's hearing voices. She thinks she talked to God. This is a classic case of paranoid schizophrenia."

I wasn't sick and didn't need medication. My troubles were more spiritual than mental. There had to be someone who could solve a spiritual problem. Who would know about God, Heaven and out-of-body experiences?

A priest.

I considered myself a Roman Catholic, even though I had become disillusioned with the church and rarely attended

Mass. The pope's hypocrisy irritated me. How could he preach the virtue of poverty while living in a palace? If he sold one painting, a golden crown or a faded document from the Vatican's secret archives, he could feed all the starving children and stop demanding money from his poor parishioners.

Like a woman filing for divorce, that was just the beginning of my complaints. I was mad about the restrictions on birth control, corporal punishment of parochial school children and the illicit love affairs of the clergy. (It was 1974, many years before the pedophile scandal.)

The nuns were almost as bad as the pope. Those virgins in habits who venerated Mary, the Mother of Mercy, didn't act very merciful. They taught us ten-year olds that you had to be Catholic to get into Heaven, knowing full well several kids in catechism class were from interfaith marriages.

"Sister, is my dad going to hell because he's a protestant?"

"No, not necessarily. But he can't go to Heaven."

The conversation evoked tears followed by heavy sobs, and it wasn't Sister doing the crying. I didn't know if nuns were small-minded or naïve or too indoctrinated to think for themselves. In any case, their words were hurtful.

I cared about my friends, but the underlying cause of my indignation was more personal. I had been having mystical experiences since early childhood, and I suspected the priests and nuns were having them too. After all, they had dedicated their lives to God, which made them holier than me, an average sinner. I figured they knew about the spiritual realm but weren't telling. Maybe if I confided in a priest, he'd share his stories and I wouldn't feel so alone. I called the rectory to set up a meeting.

We settled on Wednesday at seven o'clock in the evening. Feeling nervous but excited, as if my life was about to turn in a new direction, I went to the two-story house next to the church and rang the bell. A matronly woman answered the door and ushered me into the priest's study.

"Father will be right with you," she said, adjusting the bib of her starched apron. "I have to finish washing the dishes. Make yourself comfortable."

I sat on a burgundy-colored leather chair and looked around. It was a softly lit room, lined with wooden bookcases. Hanging on the walls were photographs of popes and groups of children in uniforms, along with framed diplomas and a dreary crucifix. Lord, I prayed, will they ever let Jesus climb down from the cross? Hasn't he suffered enough?

Father came in and took a seat behind the made-to-last-forever mahogany desk. He had gray hair, but the smooth skin on his forehead betrayed his age. He couldn't have been more than twenty years older than me.

Skipping the pleasantries, he immediately got down to business. "What can I do for you?"

I described my near-death experience, without using that phrase. It didn't enter the vernacular until 1975, when Raymond Moody coined the term in his book *Life After Life*.

The priest listened attentively and then sat back, laced his fingers together, and began to pontificate. He told me life is difficult, so our imaginations fabricate stories to make us feel better. I shouldn't worry, he said, because the imagination is a gift from God. But I should go home and try to be a good person and learn to accept reality and the mundane life God gave me. It took an hour for him to deliver his homily, and

for the entire sixty minutes he somehow managed to avoid looking me in the eye.

I left his office, drove home, closed the bedroom door and wailed for four hours. At the end, I knew organized religion was not for me. I would have to find my own way. Twenty years later, I asked the angels for their perspective.

Angel Titus, a Universal Messenger, said, “All religions are good and a blessing to the Creator. We are not here to take away love, in any form, from the Creator’s radiance. Rather, we come forth to lift you up and connect you directly to your soul and the Creator.”

Occasionally I visit churches, temples and synagogues. I like the songs, the sacred ceremonies, the smell of candles and incense and the feeling of fellowship. Sometimes I attend spiritual meetings and workshops. Like many other people, especially near-death experiencers, my reply to those who ask is, “I’m spiritual, but not religious.”

Almost everyone who has had a near-death experience no longer fears death. It’s impossible to be afraid of something that doesn’t exist. Of course, the physical body dies. It must, because it’s made for just one lifetime.

Archangel Chamuel said, “The body you wear is a garment for your spirit.”

Just as astronauts need spacesuits to walk on the moon, we need bodysuits to accomplish our mission on Earth. The voice in the light talked about my mission, but then my memories were erased. All I could remember was the thought: It’s not that complicated!

The answers to life’s Big Questions are simple, elegant and beautiful. But what are they?

My curiosity soon grew into an obsession. I didn't *want* to know, I *needed* to know. So I petitioned my guardian angel, Dalia.

"Why am I here?"

"You returned upon this planet to explore the infinite dimensions of love."



Excerpt from "Swedenborg's Daughter: Memoirs of a Mystic," by Donna Wolfe Gatti.  
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