

**AfterLife: There Will Be Trouble****E. Vince**

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*At last freed from her pain, a woman who loves her family enters paradise for a period of spiritual growth in the fantastical novel AfterLife.*

In E. Vince's religious novel *AfterLife*, an angel is assigned to guide a troubled family back to God.

Karen has a weak heart, and her health is deteriorating. With her doctors unable to do much other than manage her pain, she receives hospice care at home. She has regrets: she has not been able to be the wife and mother she wants to be for years. Her immediate family members are indelicate about the situation, though: her husband, Bert, and daughter, Melody, exhibit selfish and aggressive behavior toward Karen that borders on cruel; only her son, Roy, tries to show her some respect.

Once Karen passes in her sleep and is freed from her suffering, she arrives in paradise—"a place of rest and nurture while we wait for Heaven." There, she is welcomed by family members she never had the chance to know in life, as well as by AJ, the angel entrusted with her keeping. She learns that everyone in paradise is there for the purpose of spiritual maturation.

Back on Earth, though, the family's troubles persist: Bert, Melody, and Roy still suffer, though the causes of their individual suffering vary. Their home descends into further chaos. Bert and Melody harbor such intense anger about the situation that they become absurd, their characterizations flattening into stereotypes—he fills the role of the drunken, enraged father; she is a superficial, silly teenager. Indeed, scenes of high tension among the family members are so frequent that the novel's tension on the whole deflates; its general lack of joyful scenes on Earth results in a tepid reading experience. Further, though Roy is more sympathetic than his father and sister (without his mother, "his home feels empty, with no joy, color, music, peace, comfort, or direction"), he is not a strong enough presence to carry a solid sense that hope may prevail for the family.

Though the story seems to be most concerned with Karen's spiritual growth in the afterlife, this thread is ultimately too diffuse, and too much of her spiritual education happens off of the page. Instead of covering the knowledge that Karen soaks up in detail, her time in paradise is often described in terms of its distractions. These include baseball games and fellow residents with famous names, resulting in an atmosphere that is more amusement park than ethereal. Indeed, it isn't until quite late in the story that Karen's objective of saving her daughter emerges.

The book's dialogue includes odd slang, is too exclamatory, and is rendered in an awkward manner (it is sometimes interrupted by parenthetical remarks describing people's behaviors, for example). In addition, the book's ending is quite abrupt, and the hope that is built up on behalf of Karen's family is somewhat disappointed as a result.

In the spiritual novel *AfterLife*, an angel assists a deceased mother who hopes to put her living children's lives back on track.

CIERRA TAYLOR (April 5, 2024)

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