



**AFTER
DACHAU**

A NOVEL

**DANIEL
QUINN**

**BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
ISHMAEL AND THE HOLY**

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A NOVEL

AFTER DACHAU

DANIEL QUINN

ZOLAND BOOKS

AN IMPRINT OF STEERFORTH PRESS

HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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First published by Context Books in 2001

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selections from this book, write to:
Steerforth Press L.C., 25 Lebanon Street,
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

The Library of Congress has cataloged the
Context Books edition as follows:

Quinn, Daniel.

After Dachau : a novel / Daniel Quinn.

p. cm.

eISBN: 978-1-58195-240-7

1. Children of the rich—Fiction. 2. Reincarnation—Fiction. 3. Young men—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3567.U338 A69 2001

813'.54—dc21

00-012191

v3.1

For Beau Friedlander

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A Note to Readers

Also by Daniel Quinn

Except for obviously historical persons such as Jackson Pollock, Willem DeKooning, Mark Rothko, Roy DeCarava, and Walter White, all persons mentioned or portrayed in this book are fictional.

The epigraphs introducing the various sections of this book are all from *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality*, by Paul Barber.

PART ONE



FORGOTTEN

Bodies do not always stay buried.

ALL CHILDREN OF the rich and famous grow up believing they were switched at birth for the infants their parents *really* wanted, and I'm no exception. I'm Jason Tull—but not the rich and famous one, obviously. That's my father.

Had my parents been given the infant they wanted, he would have grown up behaving exactly like a rightful heir, which is a thing I understand perfectly well but have never been able to do (and have rarely seen anyone else do). Perhaps it's something genetic. Rightful heirs have special genes that kick in and take over at age five or six, and the rest of us don't.

Naturally Mom and Dad assured me that nothing at all was expected of me just because I happened to be their son. They loved me for myself, and so on. But as one nears the end of school life (in my case, in the year 1992), the people close to you begin to hold their breath—to see if you're possibly going to begin acting like a rightful heir after all. I didn't, and before long everyone began to breathe normally again.

Instead of behaving like the rightful heir, I conceived an eccentric interest. This was the way my relatives perceived it, not the way I perceived it. Having nothing else in particular to live for, I found a hobby (they must have thought)—and a bizarre one to boot, just to prove I'm special. It irked me that they thought this way about it, but I know I might think the same in their place.

In my sophomore year at prep school I spent spring vacation with another son of rich and famous parents. My friend's mother was a gaunt and melancholy person who whiled away her days reading. Mornings she spent in the morning room. After lunch she moved to one of several rooms that counted as living rooms. When the sun began its decline, she donned a sweater and moved to a shady spot by the pool. In the evening, before taking her book to bed, she seemed to feel obliged to spend an hour or two with the young master and his friend—a period that was painful to get through, as she was so clearly bored to stupefaction by the two of us.

All this leads up to the fact that I took a fancy to one of her books, which she'd left unguarded for a moment on the arm of a chair. I only had time to read the dust-jacket notes, which heightened my interest, and I began to wonder how I could get hold of it when she was done. She was the sort of person who would think it an impertinence to suggest that I might read the same books as she. A sort of sumptuary thing, like only kings wearing purple. She somehow gave the impression that the books she read had been written on commission for her exclusive use.

It was an impertinence even to ask what I actually asked, which was (in a very offhand way), “What do you *do* with all the books you read? Do you keep them somewhere here or donate them to a library or what?”

She was instantly on her guard—against what, I can’t guess.

She explained that her maid took them to a used-book dealer who evidently had the royal entitlement to resell all her paper castoffs. The rich mostly know very well how to pinch a penny.

The next day I angled in on the maid. You never know. Some servants are even haughtier than the people they serve, but I was lucky with this one, and a few hours later the book was delivered into my hands. It didn’t occur to me at the time that this book (or any book) was going to shape the direction of my life. At this age I didn’t even know that lives can *have* a direction.

IT WAS A STORY—purportedly a true story—about something that happened in a small midwestern town in the middle of the nineteenth century. I suppose it’s silly of me to be cagey about this. I later learned that this case was well known to people interested in such things, but at the time I not only didn’t know it was a well-known case, I didn’t even know it was a case—meaning an instance of a phenomenon. I thought I was reading about an event unparalleled in human history, completely unique.

In Vettsburg, Missouri, a little girl by the name of Mary Anne Dorson surprised her mother one day by starting to gossip about some people who lived on the other side of town, the Prescotts. The reason this surprised Mrs. Dorson was that the Dorsons didn’t know the Prescotts, though they were vaguely aware of their existence. She asked Mary Anne if she had met the Prescott children at school, and the little girl explained that the Prescott children were much grown up, no longer in school, though still living at home. So how did Mary Anne know them?

“I guess I know them from my dreams,” Mary Anne said.

This didn’t please her mother, who liked to think she was bringing up a child with her feet planted on the ground. She didn’t pursue the subject, but this didn’t end it either. Mary Anne not only went on talking, she began bringing forth details she couldn’t possibly know by any means whatever, which could only suggest she was making them up, fabricating them—lying, in short. Mrs. Dorson told her daughter very firmly that she didn’t intend to hear any more of this nonsense, not another word of it.

Stunned, Mary Anne fell silent. It was the beginning of summer in her eighth year. By the middle of the summer, the entire family was engulfed in her silence, which oppressed them like the still air before a thunderstorm. Mary Anne’s dresses hung on her like rags. She was losing weight, melting before their eyes. They took her to the family doctor, Dr. Jansen (telling him nothing of the Prescott business, of course), who found nothing in the world wrong with her. For her parents’ sake, he prescribed a tonic, told them to make sure she spent time playing outdoors every day, and so on.

Neither the tonic nor the sunshine helped. Finally, beaten, Mrs. Dorson begged Mary Anne to tell her what was wrong, praying she was not going to hear a single syllable of the name Prescott. The girl’s eyes filled with tears.

“I miss Mommy and Daddy,” she said. “I miss Connie and Francis” (those being the Prescott children).

Mrs. Dorson thought her heart would stop or her mind would explode from her head like a bird frightened from a tree. She was starkly terrified. She summoned her husband home from his office on the double, but even when

he'd heard it all, he had no better idea what to do than she did.

Was their little girl insane? Devil-possessed? They almost would have preferred the latter. They took her back to Dr. Jansen, not to be examined this time but because they didn't dare leave her at home or with a neighbor. When the doctor finally heard everything he should have heard in the first place, he didn't waste time worrying about insanity or demonic possession. Though he didn't know what was going on, he knew what had to be done, and that was to bring Mary Anne and the Prescotts together.

Faced with this idea, Mr. and Mrs. Dorson knew they'd rather have been forced to choose between the insane asylum and the exorcist. It needs to be mentioned, I'm afraid, that the Prescotts were several rungs below the Dorsons on the Vetsburg social ladder. To expose their family difficulties to people of that class was completely unthinkable (though I suspect it was rather more unthinkable for Mrs. Dorson than for her husband).

Seeing that the Dorsons would have to be brought to the idea by stages, Dr. Jansen made this suggestion. Through his contacts in the medical community, he'd check out the Prescotts and make sure they weren't the sort of people who would take advantage of this strange situation. Then if they passed this inspection, he himself would undertake to contact them.

"But what do you hope to gain from this?" Mr. Dorson asked.

"In a matter like this," the doctor said, "we're like people trapped in a cave. We can sit here and starve to death or we can set off to explore the only corridor that presents itself and hope for the best."

The Dorsons reluctantly agreed.

But there was something else Dr. Jansen wanted first, and that was to satisfy himself that he wasn't being gulled. He had a scientific turn of mind, and his first hypothesis in this case wasn't going to be that something uncanny was going on. Though he didn't say so to the Dorsons, his first hypothesis was going to be that Mary Anne was playing a mean practical joke on her parents, possibly with the collusion of one or more of the Prescotts or of someone who knew them.

During the fortnight that followed, the doctor spent two or three hours a day with either the girl or her mother. Mrs. Dorson insisted it was completely impossible to suppose that some outsider was coaching her daughter. Mary Anne wasn't one of a passel running wild; she was an only child living virtually every minute under her mother's gaze. She had two or three friends she visited occasionally, but these weren't people who would have any connection with the Prescotts, though of course the doctor was free to check this for himself—and he did.

You could see in the telling that Dr. Jansen was really getting into his role as investigator. His tests and stratagems were ingenious, subtle, and persuasive. But unless these very ordinary middle-class families were all joined in a fiendish conspiracy (and to what point?), Mrs. Dorson was right: Mary Anne had not been coached. Nor had she pieced together her picture of the Prescotts from things she'd heard or overheard at her friends' homes. The

Prescotts were unknown to them all.

The doctor's next hypothesis was that the girl's babblings about the Prescotts comprised the sort of generalities that fortune tellers make their reputations on. If pressed, she'd shy away from details. If pressed harder, she'd start inventing things and soon get tangled in discrepancies and contradictions. The hypothesis foundered immediately. Mary Anne was eager to supply details of the most minute kind and was unruffled by any challenge.

The doctor's next and final hypothesis was that even if Mary Anne's lies were internally consistent, they'd collapse when compared to actuality. Of necessity, this brought him face to face with the Prescotts themselves. He proceeded with the confidence of a Grand Inquisitor, presenting himself at their house unannounced, practically accusing them of perpetrating a confidence swindle on the Dorsons. They stared at him with such open-mouthed incomprehension that he couldn't doubt what he'd already heard from others, that they were a family of thoroughly prosaic and innocuous working-class people. He apologized for having made this blustery beginning and went on to explain why he was there. When they finally understood what had been happening at the Dorson house, Dr. Jansen asked if they could imagine any ordinary way Mary Anne could have come into possession of detailed information about their lives and household arrangements. When they gave the expected answer, it was time to test the information itself.

He'd divided it into statements he could verify with his own eyes (descriptions of the house and family members) and statements only the Prescotts could verify (habits, history, And so on). It would serve no purpose to recite the process here. The material Mary Anne had provided was a mass of hits and misses, but not a hodgepodge. By the time they were finished, the character of the data was unmistakable. It was remarkably accurate—*but ten years out of date.*

Connie and Francis were no longer living with their parents, for example. Connie was married and had a home of her own. Francis had joined the army and was now a career soldier. Many of the furnishings and decorations Mary Anne had described were gone, but they'd certainly been there ten years ago.

The significance of "ten years ago" was no mystery to the Prescotts. Ten years ago they'd lost their firstborn, Natalie, to leukemia.

Now eight-year-old Mary Anne was telling anyone who would listen: "I am Natalie."

The rest of the story is rather anticlimactic and more than a little chilling. When Mary Anne finally met the Prescotts, it was eerily like a reunion. Mrs. Prescott started weeping and couldn't stop. Dr. Jensen finally had to administer a sedative and put her to bed. The Dorsons watched, frozen with horror and bewilderment, and when it was all over and they took their daughter home, they knew they'd lost her. It was an inevitable thing now. Two weeks later Mary Anne moved in with the people she considered her true parents, and that was the end of that.

News of the wonder couldn't be suppressed. With the Prescott house at its center, Vetsburg became a place of pilgrimage for thousands who wanted to believe that Mary Anne was living proof of life after death and reincarnation. It would be nice to be able to say that the girl was unaffected by all this hullabaloo and grew into an angelic young woman, but it seems she grew into a perfectly normal young woman (one who, according to most witnesses, was a bit more than normally inclined to be sulky, spoiled, and demanding). She married twice, divorced twice, and in later life distinguished herself in no way whatever. Any sanctification that had come with being reborn in another girl's body (if that's what happened) was distinctly short-lived.

THIS WAS the version of the story that was put forward in the book I read at my friend's home. Later I would read other versions that were neither so tidy nor so apparently conclusive. No matter—that was later.

The uncanny events of Vetsburg opened up a new dimension of sight for me. That's the best way I can describe it. It's as if I'd been living in a sort of flatland up till then, and this book directed my gaze up into a sky I'd never suspected was there. It was not in any sense a religious experience and confirmed no religious belief on my part, since I had none. In fact, I didn't see religion as having anything to do with it and still don't. If Natalie Prescott was in fact reincarnated as Mary Anne Dorson, then this was surely a wondrous event—but no more supernatural than a caterpillar being reincarnated as a butterfly. If Natalie Prescott was in fact reincarnated as Mary Anne Dorson, then this was surely just a manifestation of a natural law whose workings are usually not manifest at all. If Natalie Prescott was in fact reincarnated as Mary Anne Dorson, then we're *all* the reincarnation of someone else—and destined to be reincarnated as someone else as well.

I slipped the book back to the maid, and that was that. The vacation came to an end, and I went back to school. Life continued as before—for another seven years, when I graduated from college and told my family I was going to work for We Live Again, a threadbare but earnest little organization devoted to reincarnation research.

They wanted to know what I meant by “work.” I explained that the foundation had only two paid full-time employees, the founder, Reginald Fenshaw, and his wife, Marcia, who coordinated and compiled the fieldwork of dozens of enthusiasts working on a volunteer basis around the world. I would in effect become their first full-time field-worker, bringing to the task not only my time and energy but the financial resources to follow up on reports anywhere in the world.

My mother thought the idea amusing and original, as if it were all an invention. My father thought it would make “an interesting way to spend the summer.” In his cunning and tactful way, he was opening an avenue down which I could retreat when the project began to bore me (as he was sure it would, sooner or later). However, he had a request. Before taking up my labors on behalf of We Live Again, he asked me to talk to “Uncle Harry,” who was coming to dinner the following evening. Of course I said I would.

Harold Whitaker, Ph.D., was a longtime close friend of the family (and not really any sort of uncle). I'd known him since childhood, when every adult seemed elderly, though in fact he wasn't very old even now, being perhaps in his late thirties. I seemed always to have known the man's legend better than

the man himself. He'd studied at that frightfully ancient institution, Heidelberg University, and had a dueling scar on the left side of his face to prove it. He possessed several obscure academic degrees but said he favored the Ph.D. over the others because it didn't need to be explained.

For a decade after leaving school he'd been "something in the military" and wore his beautifully tailored suits as if they were uniforms. Everlastingly slim and fit, he always looked like he could rise from the dinner table and run a mile without getting winded or mussing the careful set of his fine blond hair. Now no longer in the military, he was "something in the government," and I wasn't in the least surprised to learn that recruitment was the object of our conversation.

When we were settled with our brandies in the library after dinner, he said, "I think this venture with the Reincarnation Institute sounds like fun, and I'm sure you'll learn a lot."

The family didn't care for the name of the organization, and it was quite their usual practice to reshape reality to suit themselves. Thus We Live Again had almost immediately become the more dignified Reincarnation Institute.

"But," Uncle Harry went on, "you mustn't get them too accustomed to leaning on you. In a year or two you're going to want to move on to something else."

"Yes, that's only good sense," I agreed blandly.

"I want you to be aware that anytime you want it, there's a place for you in my outfit."

"Doing what?"

"Doing what I do."

"And what's that, if I may ask?"

He shrugged. "I assumed you'd know by now that I'm in Intelligence. Or guess it."

I suppose I had guessed it, I told him, though I'm not sure I could have put the name *Intelligence* to it. "I know what you do is ... mysterious, perhaps sinister."

"Neither one, most of the time. The government—every government everywhere and in every age—depends on men like me. On large numbers of men like me, in fact. When a leader stands in front of an audience or answers a question from the press, he almost never speaks from his own knowledge about the issues and problems of the world. For the most part, he's merely voicing *our* knowledge of those issues and problems. This is no exaggeration, I assure you."

"I believe you, though in my innocence it never occurred to me until now that this might be the case. But why me? I'm no good at languages. I have no very useful specialties."

He shook his head impatiently. "Linguists and specialists we buy in packets of ten. It's the talented generalists who are difficult to find, people with classical educations, people who are intelligent, well-bred, well-connected, and, above all, *known*."

“Known? My father is known. I hardly consider *myself* to be known.”

“You’re known to *me*, and that’s all that matters. I can vouch for you absolutely, which is something I can never do for anyone who just walks in off the street looking for a job. He may have degrees spilling out of his pockets from the world’s leading universities and letters of introduction from dozens of national heroes, but to me he’s an unknown, and I wouldn’t even trust him to empty the wastebaskets.”

“I see. To be honest, I was expecting something like this but thought you’d just be doing it as a favor to Dad.”

“Not at all. In fact, it’s the other way around. I’m the one who asked for the favor, and your father granted it.”

I told him I was flattered (and I was) and that I’d certainly keep the offer in mind.

“What you propose to be doing for the Institute,” he went on, “could actually turn out to be excellent training for Intelligence work, I think.” He paused to ponder that for a moment. “I suppose you could say that, in a sense, what you propose to be doing is Intelligence work.”

I didn’t particularly care to know what he meant by that, so I thanked him and adjourned the meeting *sine die*.

IT'S HARD TO THINK what my family, including Uncle Harry, would have made of Reggie and Marcia Fenshaw. They were so unlike anyone I'd met at home or at school that they might as well have belonged to another species. My father, I fear, would have thought them hardly different from criminals, their values were so foreign to his. They used atrociously the meager funds they had, caring nothing about money, and neglected themselves the way uncaring parents neglect their children, wearing shabby clothes, going unwashed for days, living on candy and snacks, and letting their teeth visibly rot. At the same time, if you had the slightest interest in their obsession, they would before long begin to seem to you as charming and graceful as a pair of dotty old royals pottering in their garden.

The one thing they did superlatively well was manage the data they collected from around the world. They lived for nothing else (and I've never met a happier couple in all my life).

The central feature of their system was a vast index of file cards generated by the reports they'd received over the years. If you wanted to study cases like Mary Anne Dorson's, they'd ask, "Like in what way? What feature are you looking at? Her age? The period she lived in? Her social status? The way she began to remember her last incarnation? The way her family reacted? The fact that she knew what family she belonged to in her last incarnation? The fact that this family lived nearby? The involvement of the doctor? The way her predictions were tested? The fact that the Prescotts accepted her as the reincarnation of Natalie? The fact that the rest of her life story was perfectly ordinary?" By using the card index, they could (for example) track down all the cases in which the reincarnate was able to name his or her former family. Virtually every story they had was like Mary Anne's in *some* way.

Every three or four months they rewarded their correspondents and financial supporters with a newsletter carrying the best reports received in the interval. It was, however, seldom more than four pages long, and its "best reports" were seldom worth reporting at all. In truth, it's hard to imagine anything more frustrating than the pursuit of credible evidence of reincarnation, and anyone who takes it up is putting his or her sanity at risk. The problem isn't so much that evidence isn't there but that it's invariably tainted beyond redemption by the time you get to it.

Take Mary Anne Dorson's case (which, incidentally, is one of the very "best" on record). In the efforts he made, Dr. Jansen wasn't trying to prove the reality of reincarnation, he was just conscientiously practicing family medicine. He felt sure that the "healing" of Mary Anne could only be effected by bringing the Dorsons and the Prescotts together (and of course he was

right). But the moment he succeeded in doing this, all the evidence he'd collected became worthless, and all hope of collecting further evidence disappeared forever.

If he'd been trying to build a case for reincarnation, he would have proceeded very differently. He would have immediately isolated the girl, moving her as far away as practically possible from anyone who might have knowledge of the Prescotts. Living in seclusion, she'd be wrung dry to make a record of every supposed memory of her life as Natalie, down to the smallest detail. Meanwhile, a team of scientists would descend on Vetsburg to begin work on many different fronts. Every neighbor and every child at Mary Anne's school would be examined as a possible source of her information about the Prescotts. The Prescotts themselves would be interviewed no less exhaustively to make a record of their memories of Natalie and every circumstance of their lives during the time when she was alive. When all this was done, the two records would be compiled and compared by an independent panel of scientists, and a new round of examinations would begin in order to resolve as far as possible the discrepancies and conflicts revealed. Not until all this was done would anyone dream of introducing Mary Anne to the Prescotts in the flesh—and even then it wouldn't be designed as a festivity for the girl (who by this time would probably be a young woman) but as a further and final opportunity to gather evidence.

Assembled in this way, the case would be compelling (which it otherwise certainly is not). With coincidence, blind luck, collusion, and deception decisively ruled out, skeptics would be hard pressed to suggest any other "ordinary" explanation for the wonder. If Mary Anne truly had no normal access to ten thousand items of thrice-verified information about the Prescotts during a twenty-year period before her own life began, how explain this marvel except as an instance of reincarnation?

The case as it stands convinces only those who are already convinced or who want to be convinced. When I arrived on the scene, there wasn't a single case in the files of *We Live Again* that did more than that. Not one even came close to doing more than that.

The Fenshaws understood this as well as anyone (and better than most of their supporters). "Someday we'll have it, though," they said.

They called it the Golden Case. The Golden Case wouldn't convert the scoffers, but it would certainly give them something to deal with, something they couldn't just wave away as superstitious nonsense.