

劫數難逃

jie2 shu4 nan2 tao2

Jack, a Yorkshire terrier, dodged a painful death when he was rescued by a good-hearted couple who found him tied to a tree and left to the fates.

That was 10 years ago, when Jack was 16, very old for a dog. He was treated well afterward, being fed sirloin steak and corned beef. Just when his owners hoped that he would live out the rest of his life in comfort and peace, disaster struck again – he was attacked recently by another dog, and perished from extensive injuries – dying at 26, an almost impossible age for a canine.

It seemed that horrible deaths followed members of Jack's family. His brother was reported to have been fed to a Rottweiler. For Jack, a tragically apt tombstone inscription may be: “劫數難逃” (*jie2 shu4 nan2 tao2*).

“劫” (*jie2*) is “a calamity,” “ill luck,” “數” (*shu4*) “the

Idiom by Lon Yan

number; “fate,” “destiny,” “劫數” (*jie2 shu4*) as a term, means “inexorable (不可阻擋的; 無法改變的) doom,” “predestined fate,” “ill luck.” “難” (*nan2*) is “difficult” and “逃” (*tao2*) “to escape.” Literally, “劫數難逃” (*jie2 shu4 nan2 tao2*) is “inexorable doom that is hard to escape.”

The idiom means “Destiny is inexorable, there is no fleeing it.”

“劫數” (*jie2 shu4*) refers to any great misfortune, not necessarily death. When an employee survives a first round of layoffs just to get fired later, it is also a case of “劫數難逃” (*jie2 shu4 nan2 tao2*).

Terms containing the character “逃” (*tao2*) include:

逃避 (*tao2 bi4*) – to evade; to flee

逃走 (*tao2 zou3*) – to run away; to escape

逃脫 (*tao2 tuo1*) – to make good one's escape

逃犯 (*tao2 fan4*) – a fugitive from justice