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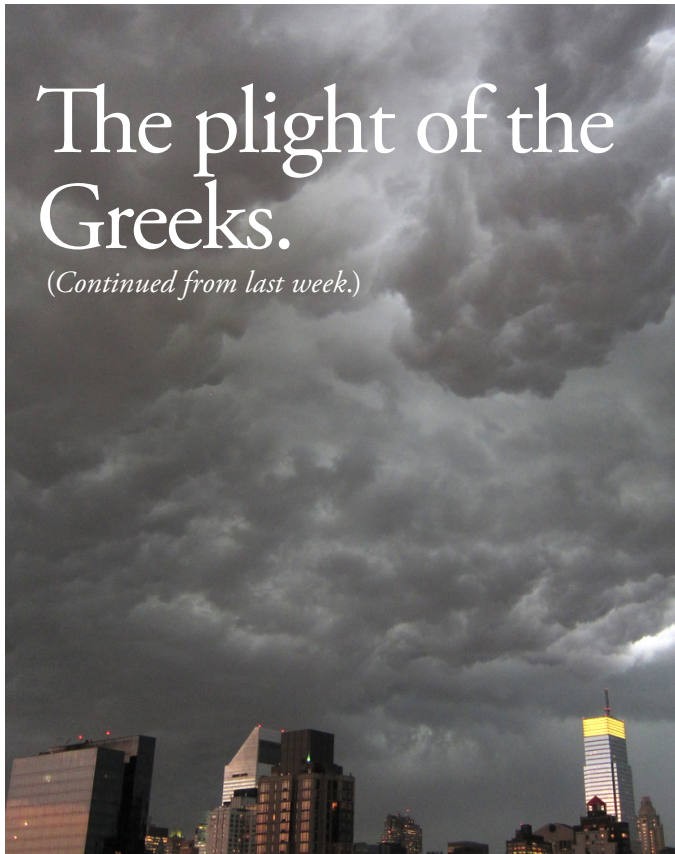
Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 14

ROMANS Part 148

Chapter 16:14-15

The plight of the Greeks.

(Continued from last week.)

Greet Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brethren with them. 15 Greet Philologos and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas.

The realization overtook us like storm clouds overtaking the sun. If the Greeks were two-thousand years into the future, and the body of Christ was still on the planet, then they'd have to return

to first-century Rome assured of their own deaths. They could not be snatched away alive in their lifetimes, for the snatching away was at least 1,958 years away. The gloom came then, and I felt it for them. I sensed the sunshine fading from their countenances. I perceived the imminence of their mortal demise.

As I pulled off I-75, the spirit convinced me more than ever of why God never offered a date for the snatching away of the body of Christ (though He assuredly knew it): *A date would destroy the hope—of all but the relatively few remaining unto that day—of being transferred out of this life directly into the next.*

ASK AND YOU SHALL BE STONEWALLED

Our Lord treated hope as a sacred commodity when, fielding a question on the topic from His disciples before returning to heaven following His resurrection, He refused to answer it. He had gathered His disciples at the Mount of Olives when one of them (probably Peter; he was the boldest) posed the query that every single one of them had been thinking, “Are you at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

No question could have been more pertinent or personal. Surely the kingdom was at the door. The longed-for Messiah had come to Earth; He'd died for the sins of Israel; the Millennium was heralded both by John and by the Lord as “at hand” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17), and now that Messiah had been raised from the dead by God, He claimed possession of all power in heaven and on Earth. All that remained was the acquiescence of the people (not a few of them, but all) to the heralding, by the disciples, of Christ's resurrection.

Had the political and spiritual hierarchy of Israel (the chief priests) accepted the testimony of Jesus prior to His death, the kingdom would have burst onto the land *then*. (Daniel's sixty-nine sevens of years—Daniel chapter nine—had been fulfilled.) We know now of the necessity of the crucifixion, but few realized at the time

(not even the disciples) that Jesus had to die. Prophecy demanded that Jesus *say*, “Near is the kingdom,” even though secret, intervening times lay ahead. The offer had to be real. The carpet had to be rolled out and red.

It was and it was—but the Jews trampled it, then tripped over it. Save for a few such as Nicodemus, the priesthood rejected Christ’s testimony. They didn’t want Him. He was too plain for them, too uneducated, too quick to hand over spiritual wealth and political clout to prostitutes, tax collectors and fishermen. For rejecting the Son, however, there was forgiveness (Luke 12:10). Thus, from the cross, Jesus Christ overlooked even the chief sin of Israel, that is, of crucifying its own Messiah; He let them off the hook (Luke 23:34). Thus was closed the curtain upon Act I.

ACT II

Act II was the testimony of the twelve at Pentecost. Here was another chance for the sons of Jacob to accept God’s gift. But does God operate according to the precepts of chance? The testimony of Peter, specifically, at Pentecost would prove to be, not a chance, but the divine leveling of one more charge (heaped upon other charges)



against Israel: *you rejected Me again*. This was Exhibit K in a long line of alphabetically-enumerated exhibitions showing Israel rejecting every single man of God sent her—from Moses, to the prophets, to the Son Himself, to the fishermen and the tax collectors carrying His name and His message. Throughout her storied yet tragic history, Israel rejected every heaven-based overture. None of the divine emissaries proved to be smart enough, attractive enough, ambitious enough, rich enough or self-righteous enough for the precious sons of Jacob. Act II, then, turned into yet another demonstration in another unique circumstance of the spiritual bankruptcy of the Jews.

MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION

As our Lord stood with His disciples on Olivet, Pentecost was a few days off. Jesus needed His apostles to witness once again to the Jews that the kingdom was near. He needed a muscular testimony. He needed heralds starving for the kingdom themselves and convinced of its immediacy. The Jews had rejected the Son, and now they needed (yes, *needed*) to reject the testimony of the holy spirit. But how could they do that unless the holy spirit once again presented a ripe, juicy offer? And how could the offering properly flex its muscle if the offerers themselves (being weak, mortal humans) were absolutely assured of their failure?

KNEE DEEP

You may be wondering now why Israel, having rejected the Messiah during His earthly sojourn, must now reject the testimony of the holy spirit as heralded by the Twelve? Only multiple failures under multiple circumstances will prime the Jews to finally accept Christ. Only repeated pressure bends the knee of a people infamous for stiff-neckedness. And why bend the neck or the knee with a club when self-realization, via humiliating circumstance, is the surest (though not the shortest) way? Once the neck is softened, the knee follows suit; the knee bone is connected to the neck bone; the neck is closer to the head, where the thinking occurs. The thinking organ of the Jews will one day convict them: *we blew it in every conceivable way at every conceivable turn; we’ve no more excuses*. (It happened again in Acts 28:28 when they officially rejected Paul after a legal wrangling of historic proportions in both Caesarea and Rome.) It is only the realization that they’ve run out of excuses that will finally shut up the Jews and toss into the Dead Sea their last shekel of pride.

UNFORESEEN SEQUEL

What no one but Jesus knew at the time of the Olivet query was that an unprophesied epoch to be known as “The Era of the Nations” (or, “The Time of the Gentiles”) sat on the cusp of world history. It was an epoch during which a new message would go forth to non-Israelites, calling them into a new body (the Body of Christ, as opposed to the Bride of the Lambkin) that, rather than reconciling the Earth to God, would gather heavenly beings into His loving arms. And rather than administering a kingdom upon the earth—as would Israel—this rag-tag, fugitive fleet would administer it from a place far above the most distant star.



Jesus knew this, but how could He tell His disciples? He could hardly answer their “Are-You-at-this-time-restoring-the-kingdom” question with a, “No, I’m not. At *this* time, I’m dashing every one of your hopes and dreams, and the hopes and dreams of your fathers and their fathers before them—not to mention the hopes and dreams of a progeny a few hundred generations after you. You are days away from prophesying brilliantly, with the help of

the holy spirit, to thousands of people. Thousands of your countrymen will receive your word, making you the celebrities of the hour, the most famous men in the city. But the temple leadership will reject you just as they rejected Me. Your popularity will enrage them, naturally, and every single one of you will die without setting so much as a toe into the Millennial kingdom. But never mind that. Go out there and give it your best shot.”

No, the disciples could not be told this. They could not have psychologically managed it. Christ needed them enthused. He needed them assured of the proximity of their own cause. It wasn’t like He was tricking them. He was rather withholding information. And so His answer to their question was a masterpiece of noncommittance, and it went like this: “Not yours is it to know times or eras which the Father placed in His own jurisdiction” (Acts 1:7).

A man of few words, that Messiah.

SQUARE MEAL

Our Lord’s non-answer speaks to the necessity and need, for the human, of enthusiasm, hopes, expectations. God bakes this trilogy of emotional survival-food into our very constitution. These things are as essential for our emotional survival just as water, food and air are essential to our physical continuity. These things, being Christ-based and kingdom-allied, are no less physical. They are a part of the *human* fabric and, as such, cannot be denied and won’t be denied us by God.

ANY MINUTE NOW

And so it is with the snatching away of the body of Christ. Paul wrote of this event in one of his earliest letters—1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. This is how important it was for the saints to have it. God gave it to Paul immediately and Paul published it, I think, while it was still warm from the mouth of God—

Now we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are reposing, lest you may sorrow according as the rest, also, who have no expectation.

14 For, if we are believing that Jesus died and rose, thus also, those who are put to repose, will God, through Jesus, lead forth together with Him.

15 For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who are surviving to the presence of the Lord, should by no means outstrip those



who are put to repose;

16 for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first.

17 Thereupon we, the living who are surviving, shall at the same time be snatched away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And thus shall we always be together with the Lord.

18 So that, console one another with these words.

Knowing the hardness of the world, God gives His saints the sweet expectation of deliverance from it. It's a mercy built into the evangel; it's a mercy that is not sold separately *from* the evangel. But if this thing—this instant deliverance from mortality to immortality without the intervening horror of death—happens in a moment, and if the moment is known by God, and it's a *single* moment, and the single moment happens on a single day, at a fixed time, then how could every saint of every era enjoy its sweet expectation? There is only one way: *God keeps the date to Himself.*

But now let us consider again these eight Greeks,

instantly transferred by God from 56 A.D. to 1993, snapped suddenly to reality by the sister of Nereus, namely Sophie, realizing before anyone the obvious and yet unwanted (and thus heretofore unseen) fact that the snatching away would not/could not occur in their first-century lifetimes.

AN END TO SUFFERING

Their very own apostle had put forth the teaching of the instantaneous lifting of the body of Christ members from Earth, without death, as a present hope, a near event to every saint, and he did so in the very letter in which he unveiled it. He said to the first-century Thessalonians “*we, the living, who are surviving to the presence of the Lord...*” No one was deceiving anyone here. Paul did well; he wrote well. This thing ought always be a present hope. The snatching away ought always be taught as a near-event, even by its inaugural herald. No one is to ever say, “It is years away, decades hence, or possibly even centuries into the future.” No teacher of the evangel ought ever utter such dirty words. Such a one can produce no evidence for so hazy a horizon, any more than the man saying “it's five minutes from now” can

produce evidence. But the “five minutes from now” herald is worlds closer to the spirit of God, the spirit of Paul, and the spirit of the expectation of the evangel than the man who says, “Phooey. This bondage to corruption could go on for another dozen or so centuries.”

Away with such words!

I-75 BIBLE STUDY

“How can we go back with no expectation?” said Sophie. “It’s fine right *now*, because we are sitting here with Martin Zender in his car in the distant future when the snatching away *could* happen at any time. But—Olympas! All of you!—did we not believe in *our* day that it was imminent? Did we not look into heaven for Christ? Were we deceived?”

“Of course we weren’t,” said Julia. “Paul set it forth to us as a present expectation.”

“Of course,” said Sophie. “Of course that is the right answer. But now look. Over nineteen hundred years, and it *still* has not happened. It’s ridiculous. But how much closer must it be *now*, from where we sit in this ridiculous thing called a ‘car.’ And here we are in such a distant place in such a distant future, and here is Martin Zender who, like us, believes that it is imminent, that it could happen at any moment.”

I then said to the group, “I’m always teaching that it’s five minutes away. I’m famous for it.”

“It *is* five minutes away,” said Sophie. “It *is*. I know that *now*, from *this* perspective, but when we go back, then we will know for sure that it is most certainly *not* five minutes away, no, not even nineteen hundred *years* away. How can we live with that? Why would God do that to us?”

Nothing could be heard just then except the ping-pinging of snow and ice crystals against the ridiculous thing called “a car.” I was thinking that I had better move from the shoulder of the Interstate and start motoring north again.

“God is good,” said Patrobas. “We don’t know how this little excursion of ours will end. We don’t know what will happen at this meeting.”

“That’s a great point,” said Hermes. “It is possible that, at this meeting, the snatching away will occur.”

“Oh, my God, it’s weird that you should say that,” said Philologos. “Just as you said it, I was thinking the same thing. Maybe this is it. Maybe this is why God brought us here; to bridge a gap. To join together with saints of the future and to experience this thing with them, and then, together, to meet our Lord and our dear Paul in the air.

My goodness! That is a wonderful thought.”

When Philologos said it in that way, it seemed possible to me as well. In fact, it was starting to seem likely. Why else would God do this? As for Sophie, she seemed to be gravitating to it like a honeybee to the tree of life.

ARRIVAL AT DEAN AND GISELA’S

Having settled down then, our contingent of ancient and modern saints negotiated the last ten miles of Route 53 to Almont, Michigan, in a state of relative peace. And so now, here we were at the snow-bound, country home of Dean and Gisela Hough. In spite of the weather, seven cars were parked outside. These meetings were never large. It wasn’t the Crystal Cathedral.

Dean Hough was the managing editor of *Unsearchable Riches* magazine and a longtime acquaintance of mine. I’d listened to his cassette tape teachings for years. Some might call him a hard teacher to listen to; there is nothing hair-raising or pulse-inducing about Dean’s



Dean and Gisela’s.
Almont, MI.

presentation, but no one of my acquaintance held more insights into the evangel of Paul than Dean. I told the Greeks as much. I had said to them in the car, “Wait until you hear Dean Hough.” Dean’s presentations cored down into the deepest wells of Pauline truth. I said, “Dean may be the slowest presenter you have ever heard, but he says nothing without purpose. He thinks while he talks, which is rare in this day. Most people talk first, *then* think. In fact, it is my humble opinion that no one since Paul has so thoroughly plumbed the depths of our evangel, especially the words of Romans, than Dean Hough. This man *loves* the letter that Paul wrote to you. Just wait until I introduce you to Dean Hough. He’s not exactly Dean Martin, but you’re going to love him. And wait until he meets *you*.”

“Who’s Dean Martin?” Julia had asked.

“I’ll explain that later,” I said. “I’ll explain it while gesturing with whiskey and a cigarette. I don’t know if you’ll get it, though.”

So here we were. We reverse-clown-car’d ourselves out into the Michigan winter and ran for the door. To say that Gisela Hough was surprised would be like saying that her husband was not Dean Martin.

“Zender! I wasn’t sure you’d be able to get up here with this crazy weather.” As we stomped into the house, Gisela said, “Who are your friends?” What she did *not* say was, “..and why the heck are they wearing togas?”

THE MICHIGAN SAINTS ARE AMUSED

Everyone thought it was a joke. Everyone. I had done something like this before—that was the problem. My friend Matt Rohrbach had come up here with me the previous year, and I had him dress like a King James translator of 1611, and I said that he *was* a King James translator of 1611, and that God had sent him here into the future so that he could explain to everyone why he had decided to translate the Greek word *aionian* “eternal,” even though, in several contexts, it was pluralized. It was a big hit. Matt never stepped out of character. When Gisela tried to serve him coffee, Matt said, “Thou art kind, my lady, but I preferreth tea. It is my beverage of choice whenever I undertaketh to mistranslate the sacred Word of God.”

So I’m afraid that I was now the kid who cried “wolf.” I had now brought up *actual* people from the *actual* past, but I’d already screwed myself. Which is not to say that I didn’t try to tell them. I did. I told them the whole story, from my hearing the voice in the corn to Nereus’ dream.

To no avail. Tony Nungesser played along for awhile and asked Nereus, “So what was it like holding the actual scroll of ‘Romans?’”

Nereus said, “It felt just like any other scroll. You know—rolled-up papyrus.”

Tony smirked and winked at me and said, “Oh, I see.”

Jim Best also played along, asking Hermes, “Did you ever meet Paul?”

Hermes said, “No, but I met Silas one time up in Antioch.”

“Oh!” said Jim. “What is Silas like?”

“He’s a lot like Paul,” said Hermes, “but more hair.”

If these Greeks actually *had* been actors, they could not have done a worse job convincing people of the veracity of their first-century citizenship.

THEY MEET THE MAN

I finally brought them to the homeowner and chief evangelist of this Almont conclave, who is also one of the humblest men on the planet and who would shudder to read me calling him “chief evangelist.”

“This is Dean Hough,” I said to them.



Dean Hough.

Dean's eyes sparkled, as they always do. He loved fun.

"Very happy to meet you all," he said. "You've come a long way."

"Martin Zender has told us all about you," said Julia. "He says that you love Paul's writings and that you have dedicated your life to studying them. We are so happy to hear you speak. We are so interested in understanding the modern perspective on our friend Paul. You have no idea. We are all amazed, quite frankly, that Paul's letter to us still exists after all this time."

"And that all of Paul's letters have been gathered together into one scroll," added Hermes. "It's astounding."

"It's a book," I corrected.

"Thank you for allowing us into your home," said Patrobas.

Dean said, "It is an honor to have you. Our friend Martin here is always full of surprises."

"That's for sure," said Sophie, and she gave me a wonderfully little nudge with her wonderful little Greek elbow.

"What will you speak on today, Dean Hough?" asked Hermas.

Dean looked away, turning thoughtful as he always did. It took him a while to call up the words, but when he finally managed, they came purposefully. "Paul said that God is operating all together for the good of those who are loving God. But we know that God operates all together for the good of everyone, not only those who are loving God. But there is a nuance in the Greek in this passage suggesting that it's the *knowledge* that God is operating all together for good that comes only to those who are loving God. God does good for all, but only those who are loving God are aware of God's greater work."

Even I was having trouble grasping Dean's thought—his thoughts always delve deep—but Philologos got it immediately. Well, no wonder; the man natively spoke Koine Greek.

"That's so *right*," he said. "You have got it exactly right, Dean Hough. I'm looking forward to hearing the details."

Dean smiled.

PACT WITH THE DEVIL

I was gratified to see the women talking to Gertrude Venlet. Gertrude, an attractive woman in her 80's, wrote on the evangel herself, publishing a little biweekly paper called, "Faith Fellowship." I considered Gertrude the modern equivalent of Priscilla.

"Gertrude Venlet is so beautiful," Julia said to me. "Inside and out. How do elderly people look so good?"

"Oil of Olay," I said.

"The Word goes forth from *everyone* here," she said. Also, the one that is called 'Tony Nungesser' writes something called 'The Savior of All Fellowship.' Everyone is so active in the evangel. I love this!"

"Paul committed his work to Christ," I said, "and Christ came through for him, I'm certain, beyond his wildest dreams."

"It heartens me," she said, "that nearly two-thousand years after us, so many people still care for Paul's words, for the letter that he wrote us."

Hermas ran over just then, excited as though the house had caught fire. "Martin Zender! Come here. You must explain this." He led me to the coffee maker. "This thing. It's making coffee. Do you hear me? *Coffee*. Because look. Steam arises. And look, the coffee comes into the pot. Drip, drip, drip, into it. I touch the pot—see?—and it's hot. But Martin Zender—where is the fire? From whence comes the heat?" I then led him to the refrigerator and opened it. "If you think that's something, put your hand in *here*." Hermas swooned. "I think I'm going to die. Who made a pact with the devil for these things?"

"Hamilton Beach and Westinghouse."

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Patrobas wrestling with the doorknob.

"Who made a pact with the devil for these things?"

—Hermas



“Patrobas, what are you doing?”

“I need to empty my bladder,” he said. “I need to relieve myself before Dean Hough addresses us. How does this thing work?”

“You turn it clockwise. But never mind that. Come here.”

I led him to the bathroom and explained everything. I’d clearly flustered him. He called Julia and Philologos over. “Look at this,” he said. “You relieve yourself in this. *In the house.*”

“But where does it go?” asked Julia.

I reached over and flushed it.

“It’s alive!” shouted Julia.

Patrobas ran his fingers madly through his hair. “Who made a pact with Satan for *this*?”

“Eljer,” I said.

DEAN SPEAKS

They hung to every word of Dean Hough, as I knew they would. Anyone wishing to mine the depths of a Dean Hough address must not wander, not blink, must patiently wait for the cracking of the nut. It always comes, too. Always. It comes for those who wait. For us moderns, the attention span is ever challenged. With every year of our so-called technological breakthroughs, the corporate ability to concentrate wanes. Our generation invented the fidget. But not these Greeks. Oh, no. They possessed the patience, it seemed, to watch grass

grow. Yet here, for them, came a man possessing Scriptural insights from which they could take neither eye nor ear. I was so proud of Dean and his knowledge. So happy to have impressed these first-century believers. So satisfied that our generation, for all its woes, had not dropped the ball on them.

Sophie had made a point to settle herself next to me on the sofa. I watched her jockey and admittedly helped it along. Her eyes never left Dean as he held forth from a makeshift podium in front of the fireplace. But her left shoulder clearly had another agenda.

PANGS OF SOUL

“He is wonderful,” said Sophie afterward as we stood in the kitchen. “And so are these. What do you call them?”

“Potato chips.”

“How do they get to be so crunchy?”

I explained to her about frying in oil. “You should try our french fries,” I said.

“Oh, I’d like to. Can I try them with you?”

My heart leaped a little. “I’d fight off anyone who would attempt to take that honor, my dear.”

What had I just said? I’d just called Sophie “my dear.” It had just come out. The words had a will of their own. Free will was a fallacy now for sure.

I tried to divert my gaze from Sophie, but couldn’t. I wanted to pretend that I needed more potato chips, but my feet seemed cemented to the floor.

“Are you nervous for your talk?” she asked.

“I’m always a little bit. But I’ve come to realize that no one comes to these things to hear me. They come to hear what God would have to say through me. This takes all the pressure off of me. It’s not about me, it’s about Christ.”

“Martin, I love that.”

She had never called me simply “Martin.” The effect of this upon my nervous system—and other systems—was instantaneous. She noticed it, and I wanted her to. Suddenly, I wanted this woman to know everything about me. I wanted her to know of my childhood, of my parents, of my favorite books, my favorite foods, the inner pangs of my soul, my hopes, dreams and expectations, my love of candlelit restaurants, the best places to go in the United States of America for seafood. I swallowed hard; I had to re-gain some control. I needed to re-group. I steered my mind back toward Scripture. I knew that she was about to ask my topic, so I just told her.

“I’m speaking on Paul’s thorn in the flesh. I don’t think it was a physical infirmity. Do you know about that?”



“When did he write of it?”

“In the second letter to the Corinthians. No, I don’t think you’ve seen that one. He wrote it in ‘57.”

“I have never heard of it,” she said. “But I am intrigued by your thought. Tell me more.”

“Paul claimed that, because of the height of his revelation, God gave him a thorn in the flesh. In our day, many theologians and commentators have basically guessed over it. Some say it was an eye problem.”

“That is ridiculous, isn’t it, Martin.”

“Yes, Sophie. It is.”

“And what do *you* say?”

“Ah. You are about to find out. Dean is calling us to order.”

I TAKE THE PODIUM

Now I really was nervous. How to deal with it? Simply the way I always did: I’d be relaying information from the spirit of God.

She sat on the floor in front of the podium and never took her eyes from me. Never had anyone pulled so much truth from me, so hard. My words went directly into her, with no atmosphere in-between. I spoke of how the answer to Paul’s affliction was grace, and how grace, in Scripture, was always the remedy to sin. The remedy to physical afflictions was splints and ointments. Grace was for sin, and nothing else. Paul was as human as the rest of us. And like the rest of us, he’d been confronted—no, invaded—by a depth of love and grace, from above, that he’d never experienced. In the light of Christ, every human frailty is exposed. Such revelation potentially destroys men. But for those knowing the love of Christ, it ushers them in thankful adoration to His feet.

Forty-five minutes passed as though it were nothing. For all I knew, it was but a moment. Speaking had never been easier for me, never more fulfilling. I’d never been happier in my calling, never been more thankful for my place in the body of Christ.

I went into the kitchen, where Gisela was preparing lunch.

“That was really good,” she said. “Thought provoking.”

“Thank you.”

When I’d left the podium, Tony had said, “I’ve never quite thought of it that way.” Dean said nothing, but he usually didn’t. His nods from the chair in the back of the room told me everything. I really wanted only one person’s opinion, and I didn’t need to seek it. She grasped me by the

elbow and pulled me into the small vestibule by the side door next to the living room.

We faced one another and now our eyes locked and they wouldn’t leave. Every pretense had now evaporated. Death could come, and it wouldn’t matter. The snatching away could come, and it wouldn’t matter. For here was my completion. The eons gathered in a common heartbeat, with attendant stars and every ray of sun that had ever settled upon two souls. She was the first to speak.

“I need to talk to you,” she said. “Alone.”

Gisela directed us to Dean’s office. Sophie nudged me in ahead of her and closed the door.

“I have something to say to you, Martin” she said, “but I don’t know if you’re ready for it.”

—MZ

(Next week: *Sophie’s Secret.*)

