



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 15

ROMANS Part 149

Chapter 16:14-15

Sophie's Secret

(The final installment.)



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

She pulled me into Dean Hough's office, closed the door and said, "I have something to say to you, Martin. But I don't know if you're ready for it. Please sit down." We sat on the floor, facing each other.

"I'm ready for anything," I said. "Try me."

"I can't go back," said Sophie. "I can't."

She wasn't kidding. No, I wasn't ready for it. I didn't expect it. I started to respond, but she cut me short. "I can't go back without that expectation. I've convinced myself of the immanency of Christ's return. Paul convinced us. Life is *hard*. You have no idea how hard it is for us. The persecution under Nero has been horrible. It's still going on."

"But Paul told you to be subject."

"Yes, I know. That saved some of the radicals among us. Most of us were already cautious. We knew instinctively that it was not ours to wrestle with the authorities. We already knew not to defy them. We knew the example of our Lord when He stood before Pilate. Barely saying a word to Pilate. Not fighting him. Not struggling at all. Like a sheep before the shearers, right? We knew that this movement was not political. But for some of us it was too late. They went down into the catacombs. There are catacombs running right under my house. I know how to get to them. It unnerves me that they're even down there. Those people made a big deal of it. They saw themselves as a political movement."

"But you guys were—I mean, *are*—meeting, too. How do you do it? Aren't you defying the authorities as well?"

Sophie looked around, as though preparing to tell me another secret. She lowered her voice, as though Nero himself were at the door listening. "We keep it low-key. We don't proselytize. We meet on different nights with different people. It's rarely all of us together at the same time."

"I would say the key is that you don't proselytize."

"And that we don't sing songs and get all loud about



it. Some idiots insist on singing hymns. They're crazy. They're stubborn. They will sing a song even if it kills them. And some of them, it does kill. The authorities nabbed a small ecclesia this way. Why? Because of their stupid singing. And then some of them felt compelled to stand on the street corner and proselytize, which is even more obscene. They're all dead. I think they had a death wish."

"God, I'm sorry. They're martyrs."

"Are they? Paul told them to shut up. It's zeal without common sense."

"I agree."

"As though the kingdom depends on us proselytizing. As if God can't bring in new members of the body of Christ unless we risk our necks in defiance of civil authority."

"Paul risked his neck."

"You mean he *risks* his neck—oh, wait. I see. It's so strange to hear you referring to Paul in the past tense. I can't quite wrap my head around the fact that, as we're sitting here, Paul has been dead for nearly two-thousand years. *God*. If I even think about it I get dizzy. Seriously. I get weak. I can't believe I'm handling this."

"Then how can you want to stay here? And the next question is...*can* you stay here?"

"I'm telling them. I'm telling them. They don't need me. Maybe they can handle it to go back after this, but I can't."

"But you have no idea of the world you have stepped into."

"It can't be any worse than mine."

"Honestly, you haven't seen anything. I now realize that God arranged for the snowstorm to keep you from seeing everything of what the world has become. But even what you *could* see is nothing. You don't realize what we've become; how we're overwhelmed with complexity and information. The entire woes of the world get poured upon us. Call 1-888-625-8872."

"*What?*"

"Call 1-888-625-8872."

"Why are you saying this to me?"

"That's 1-888-625-8872."

"Stop it! You're making me crazy!"

"If *that* makes you crazy, I'm not sure you can handle the rest. Have you ever heard of the World War I?"

"No."

"World War II?"

"No."

"The Holocaust?"

"No."

"Hiroshima?"

"No."



“Jeffrey Dahmer?”

“No.”

“Abortion?”

“No.”

“Jack Kevorkian?”

“No.”

“Prozac?”

“No.”

“Ritalin?”

“No.”

“Heroin?”

“No.”

“Joel Osteen?”

“No. Now please stop. I have questions for you.”

“Fire away.”

“Have you ever heard of the Babylonian captivity?”

“Yes.”

“The Rhodes Earthquake?”

“Yes.”

“The Minoan Eruption of Thera?”

“Barely, but yes.”

“Nero?”

“Of course.”

“The Slaughter of the Innocents?”

“It’s in the Bible.”

Now she hesitated. “Damn,” she said, “I think I’m getting your point.”

“Not only do I know of the disasters and maniacs of world history prior and up to your day of ‘56 A.D., but I know of all the disasters and maniacs from that time forward, giving me two-thousand more years of wars, disasters and maniacs—in addition to the ones that you know of. And it has gotten incredibly worse.”

“How?”

“The world is connected now. It’s connected in ways that you can’t imagine. The woes of the entire globe are heaped upon our heads. We know everything at all times. Not just the woes in our immediate area, but from everywhere. Every day.”

“How is it possible to get this every day?”

“It’s not *even* every day. It’s every hour. It’s every minute. It would take a while to tell you. To show you. I wouldn’t even want to, really. In your time, these are isolated events. Isolated disasters. Isolated crimes. We still have the same criminals and crimes. We still have the same war-mongers. But the difference is that there are more of them. Many more. And they are everywhere, even in the smallest towns. And they are insane.”

“We have demoniacs.”

“We have them, too. But now people become that way by subtler means. It’s not direct possession. It doesn’t need to be. Satan is far subtler now. The poison is in the air. It’s in the water. It’s in the food. We actually spray our food with poison.”

“*What?* Why would you do that?”

“They don’t call it poison.”

“Stop it. You can’t be serious.”

“The world is so complex now that people are going insane. But they don’t call it insanity, they call it ‘depression.’ And there are drugs for it. But the drugs make you more insane. The cure is worse than the disease. Almost every ‘cure’ in the day that you are standing in is worse than the disease.”

It was all going over her head, I could tell. And thank God that it was. How could she know?

“Go back to wars,” she said. “We have wars.”

“I know. But you fight them with swords and horses. We have weapons of war capable of killing every single person on the planet in a single day.”

“That’s impossible. Only God can do that.”

“Not anymore. We have unlocked the destructive power of the very building blocks of life.”

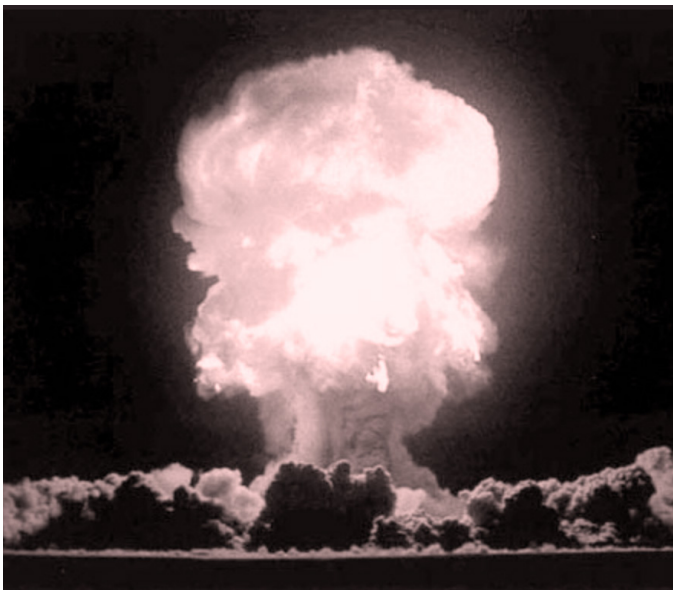
This caused her pause.

“God, Sophie. I love you. Can you tell?”

“Yes, of course I can. When did you know?”

“When I was looking at you in the rearview mirror and you were going on and on about the snatching away. I saw how important it was to you. You drilled right into it. You spoke your mind. It’s your passion. It’s that you love God as much as I do. And you’re funny. Lord, you’re a laugh a minute. You’re funny even in the angst. I think that maybe even angst is funny to you. If you don’t laugh at it, you’ll go mad. That’s *so* like me. You’re half nuts. And I’m the other half. Between us, we make an entire nut pie. And yes, you’re beautiful. *God*. Maybe I fell in love with you before you even got into the car. You’re a goddess, Sophie.”

“And you’re funny. Lord, I think that maybe even angst is funny to you.”



“But I could make it,” she said. She reached for my hand. “I could make it with you.”

This is what I had been waiting for. And now, I was senseless. This is what it was building to. All my arguments meant nothing now. This is what I had been hoping for. It was what I wanted. All I wanted now was to protect her. I became happy now for the wreck of the world, so that I could protect my Sophie, and love her. Suddenly, I was facing the greatest adventure of my life. I was facing the cure to insanity. Before me now was a reason to live. I returned the squeeze of her hand.

“I fell in love with you when you were speaking,” she said. “I couldn’t take my eyes off of you. You have the passion of Paul. You are a man of conviction who is also fearless. That gets to me, it always does.”

“But you are surrounded by that in your ecclesia.”

“No, not really. The men are polite. They are not dangerous. You are different.”

I laughed a little bit. “I’m *impolite*? And a threat to the republic?”

“Part of it is because you’re exotic; I admit. You live in this strange time, and yet you stand. You stand for the truth. You stand for the truth two-thousand years after the truth was written. Paul is mad, I hope you understand that. A crazy man. He would do anything. I see the same thing in you. It is the most peaceful thing ever, but also one of the most dangerous things. Like a leopard in a tree—totally beautiful except to the enemies of God. Does that make sense? I feel that I am rambling. And yet you have a sense of humor. This, Paul lacked.”

“No, it makes sense to me.” I was still holding her hand, but now I looked at the ceiling. “I can’t believe this is happening. Leave it to God to do something like this. But I want this. I swear I do.”

“You are not married,” she said.

“No. I used to be.”

“What happened?”

“My wife left me.”

“I’m sorry. Why?”



“I met Paul in Corinth in ‘52.”

—Sophie

“For the same reasons that you love me.”
A long pause covered us. The dominant sound was now the wall clock.

“I have something to confess to you,” she said.

“Nothing would surprise me now, Sophie.”

She drummed her long fingers on a naked knee. “Remember when Nereus said in the car that only he and Hermas had met Paul?”

“Yes?”

“Well, that’s not exactly the case.”

“What are you telling me?”

“Something that I have never even told *them*.”

* * *

“I met Paul in Corinth in ‘52,” she said. “He had just come there from Thessalonica. Before that, Philippi. He’d had the dream about the Macedonian man. It was his first venture to Europe. They nearly killed him in Thessalonica. Silas was with him. The Greeks loved him, but the Jews got wind. Paul and Silas were staying with a guy named Jason, also a believer.”

“I know about Jason.”

“Okay. A mob dragged Jason out and they just about took out all their frustrations on him. God knows they tried to kill him. The authorities threw him in jail, but Paul bailed him out with his own money. The magistrates saved Jason from the Jews—how about that? I don’t know why I’m telling you all this, but I’m telling it to you the

way Paul told it to me.”

“This is blowing my mind,” I said.

“Do you need medicine?”

I laughed, “No, it’s just a figure of speech. I’m amazed; dumbfounded. I’m trying to grasp the fact that you met Paul.”

“It was quite more than that,” she said. She saw the look on my face. “Don’t think too much just yet, love.”

“I’m trying to control myself. How did you end up in Corinth?”

“I’m from there. Born and raised. I only winter in Rome. At least that’s what I was doing in ‘52. But listen. I had no spiritual disposition. Nothing. If anything, I was superstitious. I shouldn’t have said, ‘nothing.’ I believed in Zeus. But I wasn’t a serious Zeuser. I was part-time—do you know what I mean?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t live and die with it. I had a cosmetic business. But I wondered about the origins of things. I sell eye make-up and I ponder the universe. I am the kind to be constantly thinking.”

“I already know that about you.”

“I have always wanted to know the secrets of the universe. That, and lipstick. So then one day, my mom and I are at the agora on South Stoa where the central shops are, adjacent to the Sanctuary of Dionysis.”

“I know the place.”

“Be quiet, Zender; I’m trying to be serious here. So there’s a commotion down at the Peirene Fountain.

Naturally, I rush over there to see. Well, it's Paul. He was arguing with some Greeks, which was fine, but some of the Jews who had heard him at the synagogue the previous Sabbath hunted him down and were contradicting everything he said—as Jews are wont to do. Paul is not one to let an argument go, as you may know. So he's arguing, and it's civil for awhile, but then one of the Jews throws a punch. Hits Paul in the side of the mouth. He glanced him, but still. Paul got rocked."

"My God. What did Paul do?"

"He swung back. Hit the guy in the chin. I'm talking *hard*. He made a tent with the guy's face, basically"

"Wow."

"Knocked the guy to the stones. Never saw it coming, that Jew. Woke up the next day, practically. For Paul, it was instinct. He defended himself. But the guy is strong, Paul is. Knuckles like you would not believe, and you can thank the tentmaking for that. Making tents is what did



that for him. And pricking himself with a lot of needles, I guess. It put him in a bad mood a lot of times. Anyway, the Jew was out for about a day. Paul knocked him out on Tuesday and he woke up on Wednesday. I'm exaggerating a little bit, but not much. Paul did not get out of it unscathed, as I said. The damn Jew got a shot in."

"And that's when you took over."

"I couldn't help it. I used to be a nurse's assistant. I invited him to our house. I was living with my mom.

We lived out west near the museum, only a fifteen minute walk. I had ointments that you would not believe. It was part of my cosmetics business. I fixed Paul right up, but he was not anxious to leave. You should taste my mom's cooking."

"How long did he stay with you and your mom? We know from the Scriptural account that Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months. How long did he stay with you?"

"Eighteen months."

"Wow!"

"Yes, the whole time. It was my mom's cooking. No, not really, but that was part of it. Corn pitas and hummus, basically. Lamb on the spit, too. But seriously, he made us both into believers. Plus, I loved him. And he knew that. Why would he leave? I learned everything from him. He gave me the whole of the evangel. I got it right away, too. Part of that was due to Paul's spirit. It was all goodness coming from him. I sense the same in you, Martin."

"But why didn't you tell the others that you'd had this history with him?"

"Because I dated him."

"Say again?"

"I dated him."

"You dated *who*?"

"I dated Paul."

The conversation had just spiraled upward into a new and unanticipated level—a level that shamed the stratosphere for intrigue. I felt as though we needed a break so I said, "Sophie, my dear, may I get us some wine from the kitchen?"

"Yes. But don't be long. Do you have an Italian *grand cru*?"

"No, but I think we have a California Malbec."

"It will have to do. Don't be long," she said again.

"Not to worry. I wouldn't miss this for the eon."

* * *

I returned with our glasses. "Thank you, Martin."

"I want to serve you. Forever. Even beyond the eons. And now. You were about to ruin my entire opinion of Paul."

She smiled. "I guess that depends on your entire opinion of Paul. If you think that we engaged in unbridled debauchery, do not trouble yourself. Your opinion of Paul remains intact."

"And yet..."

"And yet...he did ask me out. We went on many dates together. In the evenings, we went to dinner and plays.

Every morning, we would sit beneath the large olive tree in my back yard and talk about God.”

“Would you hold hands?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Did you kiss?”

“My God, Martin.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t help it.”

“Yes, we kissed. But it was not passionate. It was polite.”

“On the lips?”

“Zender.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Yes, on the lips. But still. As I said, it was polite. Lean here, boy. Let me show you how I kissed him.”

And she showed me. Then she said, “And now, Martin Zender, I will show you how I did *not* kiss him.”

And then she showed me that, too.

I felt like the Jew then, knocked to the stones. Out for the count.

“Sweet contentment,” she said. “You don’t seem much interested in the wine anymore, Bible Man.”

“Wine? What’s that?”

* * *



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“Sophie, how can we fall in love so fast?”

“It’s because of our spirits,” she said. “The spirit makes up for so much time. That, and you’re cute.”

“I already said that you’re a goddess.”

“Would you worship me?”

“I’m already am.”

“You passed my test.”

“And I will pass it a hundred more times. A man needs this. God made Adam to need it. You are my completion. Without you, I’m lost.”

“And you lead me. I gravitate toward men like you. The younger men don’t know anything, but they think they do. It’s the experience, the wisdom. And you know women. I sense that you know me.”

“You’re attuned. This is a serious thing to me.”

“So now how do you think I feel? Now that I have met you, how can I leave?”

“I don’t want you to leave.”

“I won’t. I can’t.”

“I’m not going to let you.” A grin came to me.

“And now, you’re going to have to explain your new countenance, Mr. Zender.”

“You’re not going to believe this, *Mrs. Zender*—and I probably should not tell you—but I’ve had a thing for Tryphena and Tryphosa.”

“The twins? You can’t be serious.”

“Their names are so melodic.”

“Methinks you live in a fantasy world, Bible Man. The twins are *not* charming.”

“Say it isn’t so.”

“Oh, it’s so.”

“Why do you say that?”

“No sense of humor. Boring. Quite dull, those two.”

“It is so strange,” I said.

“What is?”

“I never even thought of you. The Scripture only says, ‘Greet Nereus and his sister.’”

“I know.”

“Why didn’t Paul mention you by name—oh wait.”

“Now you’re getting it. He wanted to downplay me. He didn’t want anyone to think that anything happened between us. Didn’t even want to suggest it.”

“But nothing *did* happen.”

“But people would think that it did. He kind of pushed the envelope with me. I think I worried him for a little bit. But don’t *you* worry. Paul is married to his work. He has no time for a woman.”

“And that’s why you never told the others that you’d met him.”



“Me, a little Greek girl, reminding the great apostle of his own teaching.”

—Sophie

“It’s how rumors start.” Now she was staring at me. “God, I love your mind.”

“Really? And I love your nose.”

“Oh, *please*.”

“How odd this all is. I’d never thought of you, and now I’m going to spend the rest of my life with you.”

She snuggled closer into me. “I want to have children. Can you do that?”

“With room to spare. We’ll have an army of children who will conquer the forces of evil in the world.”

“It’s what I’ve always wanted. With a believer. With a man who knows himself. I think that I would be able to make it through this new world with you.”

“And I with you. You *can* make it with me. I will tell you everything. I’ll explain the whole world to you. The truth is the same, but the world isn’t. I promise that I’ll protect you.”

“I know that about you. And I will take care of you. I’ll take care of you forever. I know most of my mom’s recipes. But listen to this! We will be snatched away together, you and I. I feel bad for the others now. Oh,

well!” I imbibed deeply of her black hair. “I’m never letting you go,” she said. “But Martin. I have to ask you. How do you know so much about Paul?”

“How do you mean?”

“His thorn. What you spoke on today. It was brilliant. It’s as though you walked with him.”

“I knew that it had to be sin. Grace is the answer to sin and nothing else. It couldn’t have been a physical infirmity.”

“It is so right,” she said. “But you do not know the sin?”

“I do not,” I admitted.

“What do you think?”

“I appreciate you asking. I have a feeling that you *actually* know what it was.”

“I do. But I want to hear your take.”

“I am torn. I have always thought it was anger. But then I thought that it could be impatience. It comes through in some of his letters; it’s thinly gauzed.”

Now Sophie had tears in her eyes. She put her head deeper into my chest. “Oh, my man. It *was* anger. Paul fought it all the time. For the most part, he conquered

it. But not all. He was never that way with me, ever. But I saw it with others; that flair of impatience that led to a harsh word."

"Do you know about his tiff with Barnabas?"

"Yes! It's why Mark did not come on his second trip, the one to Europe when I met him. Paul told me about it. He was ashamed of it. I kept reminding him of justification. How is that, then? Me, a little Greek girl, reminding the great apostle of his own teaching, that God looked upon him as a righteous man and that his sins did not count against him."

"Astounding," I said. "And yet his weakness made him strong."

"He had no confidence in the flesh," she said.

"It was *because* of his failings in the flesh that God became so powerful through him."

"It could be no other way."

"Sophie, I will never leave you or forsake you."

"I know you won't. And I will never leave your side. Ever."

"When will you tell them?"

"As soon as we get in the car."

Just then, a knock came on the door. It was Nereus. "I hate to interrupt you two," he said, "but we really must be away. Our time is short. The snow has stopped a little."

"Give us five more minutes," I said.

Nereus sounded impatient. "*Only* five. After that, I'm coming in with a rope."

* * *

"Sophie, this moment is perfect. I want to take a photograph of you."

She giggled a little. "What is that?"

"It's an image made with light that can last forever. It captures precise moments, just as they are. This is such a happy moment and I want to remember it." I went to my Bible bag. "Here it is. It's called a camera."

"Can I hold it? What do we do?"

"All you have to do is look at me. Look into this lens here, and pretend that you are looking into my eyes. But really, you will be looking into the eons at all the members of the body of Christ."

"That sounds so exciting!"

"I want the world to see you."

"Can we make it darker in here?"

"Yes, but why?"

"I want to be mysterious."

I turned out the lights and pulled the drapes.

"Now what?" she asked. "Oh, yes. I look into that thing as though I am looking into the eons."

"Yes! God, you're so beautiful."

"I reach out to the ages," she said. "Like this. To all the members of the body of Christ throughout time." When she said that, the tears came into my eyes.

"That's perfect, my love. Yes. Hold out your hand just like that. Through the darkness of time into the body of Christ, you come. Into my eyes. Into the eyes of our children. Into the face of God."

I snapped the shutter at the perfect moment.

"Did it happen?" she asked.

"Did it ever?"

"When will I see it?"

"When the worlds sees it, my love...when the world sees it."



* * *

The snow had started up again when we got into the car. "I can't believe this snow," said Nereus. They piled in as they had piled out. Sophie was now next to me in the passenger seat, with Nereus in the back. I held Sophie's hand. The others knew that something had happened between us, but no one said anything.

It was becoming dusk. At a stop light outside of the

small town of Romeo on Route 53, Sophie leaned into me and whispered into my ear. “Never let me go,” she said.

“I will never let you go,” I said. “*Ever.*”

And yet still she could not tell them.

The miles passed in silence. About ten minutes north of Detroit, Patrobas said, “Martin Zender, we have something for you. Something to remember us by.” I wanted to tell him that I would remember them because Sophie would be with me forever, but of course I did not say that. Patrobas reached up and handed me a short leather cord. “This is half of the cord that tied the scroll,” he said. “I cut it in two and gave the other half to Aquila. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Scroll?” I said. “What scroll?”

“The letter that Paul wrote to us.”

“You don’t mean—”

“Paul to the Romans.”

“My *God*, man...” I could barely get the words out.

“Nice little gift,” said Hermas. “Hang onto that, Martin Zender. Who knows, maybe it will be worth something someday.”

“I...I hardly know what to say.”

“Don’t worry,” said Hermes. “You’ve already done enough for us.”

The rest of the trip passed in relative silence. I think the Greeks were becoming depressed.

Now it was night. I was getting nervous at how Sophie might tell them. I wondered *when* she would tell them. I wondered how they would take it. We were running out of time.

* * *

And now, here we were at the intersection at Blissfield, twelve hours exactly after we had begun. As they emerged from the car, Nereus said, “We must huddle just as we did when we left. Just as we did when we arrived. Come, everyone.” He reached out to shake my hand. “Martin Zender, it has been quite an experience.”

I looked toward Sophie. It was now or never.

She cleared her throat. The snow and cold were not affecting her. She looked so strong in the dim light. I knew then that she possessed the resolve to carry us.

“Nereus. All of you. I have something to say to you. I love you all, you know that. But something has happened here. I have met a man who has changed my life.” She wrapped her arms around me and kissed me. “I am staying with Martin Zender. I cannot go back. Please

understand. It is not just my love for him. My love for him is real, but it’s more. I cannot return to a time when I have no expectation. You all are stronger than me.” She pointed to Julia. “Even you, Julia. You can make it. You can all make it. But I cannot. You know me. It is too much for me.” And now she gestured toward her brother. “I know this is sudden, Nereus. But *all* of it is sudden. It must be this way.” Now she was crying. “And please! You must leave before I change my mind. I will see you all at the snatching away. Greet my family. Tell them what happened. I love all of you! Please. Tell them that I am happy because I have found my true love.”

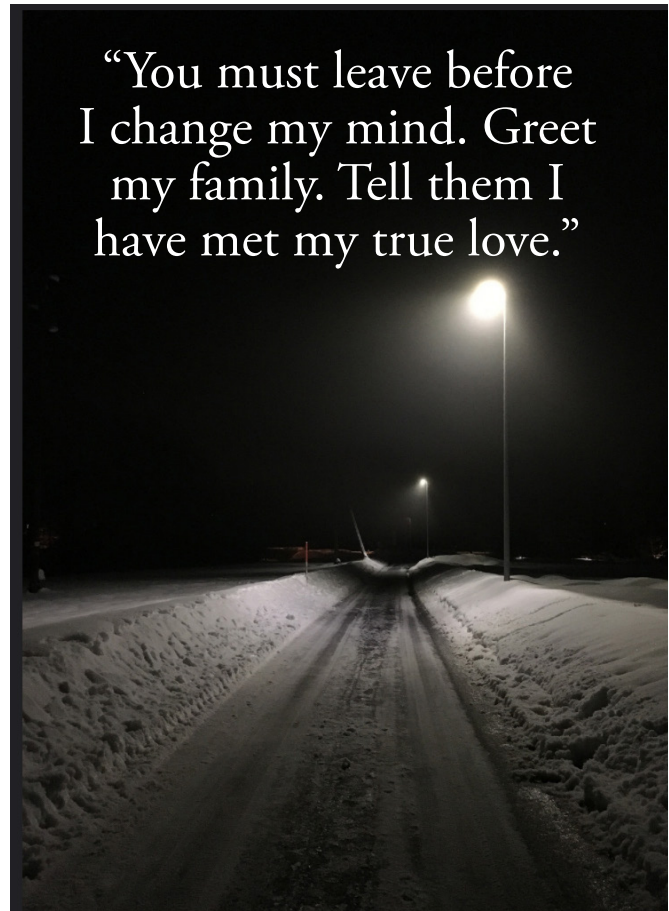
The seven of them stood there like statuary. Nereus then spoke with a conviction that terrified me.

“Oh, my dear sister. I am afraid that you do not understand. This is but a vision. The Lord has given us a vision. A vision, by definition, is not real.”

“What do you mean it’s not real?” Sophie’s voice contained panic. And anger. My blood turned to ice. “*All* of this is real! I have not felt anything more real in my life.”

“It is real *now*, he said. “But when we get back,” we will remember nothing of it.”

“You must leave before
I change my mind. Greet
my family. Tell them I
have met my true love.”



“What do you mean, we will remember *nothing* of it?”

“We *can't*,” Nereus said. “It’s the expectation. No one can live without the expectation. Christ does not want us to live without it.”

“You are crazy!” she screamed. “What are you talking about? God does not waste experiences.”

“No, He doesn’t,” said Nereus, remaining calm. “This time is not lost forever. You’re right in that, dear sister. It will come back to us at the snatching away, when we greet all the saints. When we see all these dear saints of the United States of America again, it will all come back to us. And then

“The spiritual journey bears
fruit then, not now. In the
meantime, it must be gone
from us.”

we, of all people, will have a depth of knowledge that only we possess, because of this spiritual journey. The spiritual journey bears fruit *then*, not now. In the meantime, it must be gone from us. And why? Because of the expectation. And because of the expectation, we will remember none of this. None of it—until Christ completes us.”

Now Sophie rose up. “*Fine* then! You go back and gain your expectation. I don’t need to. I have it right here. I have it here with Martin Zender. The snatching away can happen any time for us. And then we will see you. And we will all talk about this because then you will all remember it. But I will not leave this man.”

“Sophie is my wife,” I said.

“With all due respect,” said Nereus. “I am afraid that she is not. She must return with us. The Lord has made it clear. I’m sorry.”

Sophie was now beside herself. “You’re *sorry?*”

She went to fight him then. She threw herself at her brother, to slap him. But to do that, she had to leave my arms. That was my mistake—to let her out of my arms.

When they had her, they brought her into the huddle. This was their opportunity.

“Nereus, *no!*” were the last words I heard her say. She turned to look at me, but could not complete it. Her eyes were almost to mine when the Greeks went away—all of them.

* * *

As I sit here drinking my third glass of whiskey, Sophie is 1,900 years in her grave. She arrived back in Rome that

night, in the middle of an intersection outside the city, not realizing why she had gone there. None of them knew. They all just shrugged and went home.

As for me, the memory of her has tortured me ever since. It took me five days to get home because I retired to a Holiday Inn Express in Toledo with a bottle of Knob Creek and cried for four days. But no whiskey could touch the pain. In many ways it has been worse than death.

Not a day goes by when I do not think of Sophie, though she returned to Rome never having even heard my name. I’m sorry to be telling you all of this. I have been tempted to hate God for it because of the new brand of loneliness that He has created for me. But I can’t. Wisdom is justified by her children. And for this, one must wait.

If you think that I can’t wait to see the Lord at the snatching away of the body of Christ, then perhaps you can imagine how I long to see the sister of Nereus.

“Greet Nereus and his sister.” —MZ

