

## Saturday, November Eleventh

**Feast Day of Saint Martin of Tours  
Born in Hungary, uncle of Saint Patrick,  
Raiser of the dead (397 AD)**

*My Namesake's Feast Day!!*

### 1

“YOU MISSED IT,” SAID THE PRIEST, finger poised above the tattered Bible on his lap.

“What?” asked the gardener, looking again at the page of his own moth-eaten Douay-Rheims translation. “What did I miss?”

“Recite the verse from Deuteronomy again,” instructed the priest.

“Chapter six, verse five,” quoth the gardener: “‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength.’”

“Now read the lawyer’s reply to Jesus in Saint Luke’s Gospel.”

“Chapter ten, verse twenty-seven: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and—’ Ah, I see what you mean. The lawyer added something of his own: ‘with all thy mind.’”

“Exactly. And what does this tell us?”

“Hm,” said the gardener, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. He was suddenly distracted when something plopped into the ivy next to his feet.

The priest was Father John Baptist. The gardener was yours truly, Martin Feeney. The place was the garden between Saint

Philomena's Church and the rectory. The time was ten o'clock, and it was a beautiful Saturday morning. After all the miserable weather the previous month, it was a joy to sit in the crisp autumn air, smelling the flowers and basking in the sunshine.

Father was sitting on a wooden bench facing the statue of Saint Thérèse the Little Flower. I was resting my weight on the rim of the cement birdbath, its pillar recently reset in cement by none other than Monsignor Michael K. Havermeyer after it had been knocked over by Chief Montgomery "Bulldog" Billowack, who sprained his ankle in the process. My perch, up until just a moment ago, had been shared by the little porous stone bird who, having been broken off long ago and never properly repaired, was forever falling off the edge into the ivy.

"Here, little one," I grunted, easing myself onto my haunches and retrieving my sedimentary avian friend. Gripping my cane, I hauled myself back up onto the rim and set the bird in its proper place at my side.

"So?" said Father patiently.

"So," I said, gathering my thoughts again. "It would seem the lawyer 'enhanced' the Scripture just a tad to suit his purpose. I don't suppose there was much he could do with the next line: 'and thy neighbor as thyself.'"

"Oh, but there was," said Father. "If you turn to the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus, starting at verse sixteen ... Martin?"

My attention was distracted again, this time by a sound—the distinct, unsteady clapping of high heels on the uneven brick path. It's one of those sounds, as you know, for which every man seems to have built-in sonar. I turned my head to see the approaching feet and froze. The shoes were *red*, and they were attached to a pair of shapely legs—legs that were bisected by the most beautiful set of female fulcra I had ever seen.

**GARDENING TIPS:** It has often been said that the eye is the mirror of the soul. True. But as my sagacious dad used to point out, "The knee is the fulcrum of the leg." Dad, you see, was a "philofulcrapher," a predilection inherited by his son, Martin.

--M.F.

N.B. Yes, Mom had great fulcra. Count on it.

“Oh,” I said, struggling to my feet. I was looking at the woman I wanted to marry, right there in the garden, Father Baptist presiding. Her dress, too, was red; and she was one of those rare women on whom red was not an announcement, a dare, a tease, a lure, an exaggeration, or a come-on, but rather a simple statement of fact. Red was her color. It looked good on her.

“Excuse me,” she said, her long brown hair flowing gracefully around her face and splashing over her shoulders. Her highlights, too, were—you guessed it—red.

“Um,” I said, swallowing my lower jaw. Yes, yes, I knew it would never work out: me without any visible means of support, she carrying herself with obvious confidence, self-reliance, ambition, and acumen; she being a cultured pearl and me being an uncouth mothball; me being twenty years closer to the Apocalypse than she. All this I understood, even though I’d never laid eyes on her before. I also knew that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. The details we could work out along the way.

“I’m looking for Father Baptist,” she said, slowing to a stop.

“You’ve found him,” said Father, rising from the bench and extending his hand. “And you are—?”

“Sybil Wexler,” she smiled, accepting his hand, and not with that pseudo-equal muscle-pumping grip that many women are so fond of these days, but rather as a gentle, deferential, sweetly feminine gesture.

“Miss Wexler,” beamed Father, “at last we meet.”

“Yes,” she laughed. “Here’s my card as a memento of the occasion. We always seem to just be voices on a phone, or initials on a memo. I’m so glad to finally see you.”

“Indeed, indeed.”

“I trust your wound is healing,” she said, referring to Father’s right shoulder. “I heard that you were shot.”

“The bullet merely grazed me,” said Father, rubbing the spot thoughtfully with his left hand. “It smarted for a week or so, but I’m fine now. Allow me to present my associate, Martin Feeney.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you, Mr. Feeney,” said she to me, the sound of her words swirling around my head like swallows

circling the Mission San Juan Capistrano. “I understand that you’re Father Baptist’s right-hand man.”

“Martin,” I managed to say around the obstruction in my mouth—my tongue and my tie had gotten themselves tangled into a “reverse double-Windsor.” Nodding stupidly, I shook her hand, then I shook it some more. “Please call me Martin.”

“Only if both of you will call me Sybil,” said she, turning her head back toward Father, her hair whirling behind.

In that simple action of her head and hair, the whole scenario of “Martin and Sybil” whirled past my eyes: the love, the tenderness, the hopes, the dreams, the wedding, the honeymoon, the in-laws, the pregnancy, the birth, the midnight feedings, the diaper service, the in-laws, the pregnancy, the birth, the in-laws, the pregnancy, the birth of twins, the in-laws ... Yes, it all went roaring by; and when I snapped back into focus I remembered why I had never married, and probably never would. Still ... she was gorgeous.

“Agreed,” said Father, motioning for her to sit beside him on the bench. “And what can I do for you?”

“Official business,” she said, digging a small spiral notebook and fountain pen out of her purse. “I need information, and I think you’re the one who can give it to me.”

“Police business?” asked Father.

“Yes,” she nodded, uncapping the pen. “As you know, I used to work for Homicide Division attached to the County Coroner’s Office. Now I’m in Burglary.”

“I’m surprised,” said Father. “Why Burglary?”

“It was the farthest place Chief Billowack could think to transfer me without firing me outright.”

“Oh,” said Father, a whole tone lower. “A disciplinary measure.”

“You might say that,” said Sybil.

“What made Monty mad enough to do that?”

“You.”

“Me?”

“Well, something you asked me to do.” She hefted her right fulcrum over the left and settled against the backrest. “Remember that suicide note you asked me to photocopy?”

“The Buckminster Turnbuckle incident,” said Father. “You gave the copy to Sergeant Wickes.”

“And he gave it to you,” she said. “And you gave it to Cardinal Fulbright.”

“Did I?” said Father, thinking back.

“You did,” I nodded, resuming my awkward place on the edge of the birdbath. After all, I’m Father Baptist’s unofficial chronicler. It’s my unofficial job to remember such details. “You shoved it to him across the conference table in his office.” I turned to her. “It was what you’d call an emotionally charged moment.”

“I’ll bet,” she said. “But I’ll wager it was nothing compared to the hour I spent in Chief Billowack’s office after the cardinal passed it on to him.”

“Oh,” gulped Father. “I’m sorry it got you into trouble.”

“That it did,” she said, but without a hint of further accusation. “Actually, I’m glad for the change. I was never particularly happy about being typecast in the role of a forensics assistant. There are other branches of police work that are less gruesome, and in some ways more interesting. For example, I was immediately assigned to a newly formed task force dealing with the theft of religious objects—which is why I’m here. I’m not a Catholic, and I confess my knowledge of these things is sparse.”

Not a Catholic, I mused. Well then, there wouldn’t have been grounds for much of a relationship right off the bat. Of course, conversion was a regular part of our parish work, but it’s something I’ve always considered best achieved free from emotional entanglements. On the other hand, God moves in mysterious ways. Then again ...

“I was unaware,” Father was saying, “that there has been a rise in the theft of religious objects. In fact, I would have assumed, in light of current trends of thought on the subject, that the issue would be almost moot.”

“Indeed,” I added, “in the rampant move toward ‘renovation,’ a lot of Catholic churches have been ridding themselves of their old trappings.”

“Yes,” she said, “which confuses me, let me tell you. The antique shops are full of discarded Catholic accouterments: tabernacles, altar bells, vestments, you name it. I would have thought that these artifacts would have been turned over to museums.”

“Museums wouldn’t pay for such things,” said the gardener. “And the clerical renovators would prefer cash.”

“True,” she said, turning her golden brown eyes on me. “Which confuses me even more.”

“Not if you understand the underlying impetus of Modernism,” I said. “It’s what’s known as a ‘loss of Faith.’”

“So, Sybil,” said Father, “how can we help you? What information do you need? And why?”

“The why will have to keep for the present,” she said, flipping open her notebook. “What I need at the moment is a clear understanding of ‘relics.’”

“Indeed,” said Father. “What, may I ask, is your religious background, Sybil?”

“My father was a Unitarian,” she answered. “In fact, he used to brag that he was a ‘fallen-away’ Unitarian.”

“Not very far to fall,” mumbled the gardener. “And to what?”

“My mother,” continued Miss Wexler, tossing me a curious glance, “was a sort of an ‘anything goes’ Christian. She used to tell me the Bible was full of ‘truth stories,’ tales that explained moral insights, but that they weren’t supposed to be accepted as ‘true’ in and of themselves.”

“Hm,” said Father. “That’s not much of a background on which to base an understanding of the Catholic veneration of relics. Where can I possibly begin?”

“Why not at the beginning?” suggested Sybil Wexler.

“That would take days,” said the gardener. “You could go all the way back to the traditions that surround Genesis, and the preservation of Adam’s skull by his descendants.”

“Really,” she said, setting fountain pen to notebook.

“Yes,” said Father. “Extra-Biblical sources say the skull was placed aboard Noe’s ark, and later buried by one of Noe’s children in a place which the Babylonians called ‘Golgotha,’ the ‘place of the skull.’”

“You mean the place where Jesus was crucified?” she said, eyebrows halfway up her forehead.

“Indeed,” said Father.

“You’re not joking,” she said.

“Not at all,” said Father. “The spot is still marked and venerated to this day—though our detractors deny all vehemently. But perhaps we’re starting too far back. I suspect your inquiry with respect to relics would have more to do with those of Catholic Saints, relics which were venerated for generations and which have been recently discarded by the modern clergy.”

“True,” she said. “I’m torn now because I’d like to hear everything, and you’ve opened up a considerable line of inquiry. I’ve got a pressing appointment shortly. Perhaps, to save time, you could begin by explaining the difference between a ‘first class’ relic and one that is ‘second class.’”

“Certainly,” said Father, closing his Bible and slipping it within the mysterious folds of his cassock. “A ‘first class’ relic is a piece of the Saint himself.”

“You mean a piece of bone,” said Sybil.

“Yes,” said Father, “or a strand of hair. In some cases it can be the entire body, or any part thereof. The head of Saint Catherine, for example, is preserved in a gilded copper case in Siena. The shoulder of Saint Christopher resides in Saint Peter’s in Rome—”

“I thought he wasn’t a Saint anymore,” interrupted Sybil, frowning. “Sergeant Wickes told me there wasn’t enough evidence that he existed so he was de-canonized back in the sixties.”

“Sergeant Wickes,” said Father, “is hardly an expert on Catholic Tradition. There is plenty of evidence that Saint Christopher existed.”

“If he didn’t,” interjected the gardener, “then whose shoulder is preserved in Rome?”

“Good question,” said Sybil. “Of course, I’ve heard—through Sergeant Wickes and others—that most relics are probably fraudulent.”

“Some relics,” corrected Father, “undoubtedly are, but not most. There are procedures for authentication, but even so, the prevailing opinion these days is that such things are unimportant, so I hardly think that this is the time for a booming trade in underground relics—which would make *counterfeit* relics a thing of the past, would it not?”

“One would assume so,” said Sybil. “But before I comment, what about ‘second class’ relics?”

“Martin?” said Father, motioning toward me.

“Oh,” I said, authoritatively shifting my cane from one hand to the other, “that would be an object that was touched by the Saint. A piece of his habit if he was a monk, a page of a missal, that sort of thing.”

“Not so important then,” said Sybil.

“No and yes,” said Father. “In the Acts of the Apostles, pieces of cloth touched by Saint Peter cured people of illness. Similar miracles have accompanied objects touched by Saint Francis of Assisi and even Padre Pio in recent years.”

“Saint Pio of Pietrelcina,” said the gardener under his breath, using the good padre’s canonized name, “pray for us.”

“How about a chalice?” she asked.

“If the Saint in question were a priest or a bishop, certainly,” said Father. “Perhaps if you would tell me what it is you’re investigating, I could be of more help. I feel that I owe you—”

“You do,” smiled Sybil, putting the cap on her pen and closing her notebook. “And though I must press on right now, I’ll get back to you when I need more information.”

“This wouldn’t have anything to do with what’s happening this morning, would it?” asked the gardener.

“What do you mean?” asked Sybil, slipping her notebook into her red purse.

“Cardinal Fulbright,” said Father, “has ordered the transfer of the relics of Saint Valeria from her resting place under the high altar in the cathedral to the mausoleum at New Golgotha Cemetery.”

“It’s one more step,” I added, “in his plan to tear down the old cathedral so he can build a modern monstrosity in its place.”

“You don’t know that for sure,” said Father.

“It’s an educated guess,” I countered. “He’s been making noises about tearing down the old cathedral for months now. The historical societies have blocked him so far, but he’s bound and determined. I think removing the relics of the namesake of the cathedral is just another step in his plan to undermine their arguments. Why keep Saint Valeria’s Cathedral standing if she isn’t even there?”

“Sounds possible,” said Sybil, “but would a prelate of the Catholic Church do such a thing?”

“I wouldn’t put it past him,” admitted Father. “He has styled himself as a ‘champion of change,’ and he has made a number of public expressions of his desire to build a new cathedral. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

“Why don’t you join us?” I said, smiling at Sybil. “We’re planning to accompany Saint Valeria to her new resting place shortly. There will be a modest ceremony at her re-interment. We’re going with a group of friends, an interesting bunch. Since you’re interested in relics, there’s a wonderful story behind Saint Valeria, and—”

“I wish I could,” said Sybil, rising to her feet and snapping her purse shut. “But I’m working on this case.”

Father was on his feet instantly. It took me a couple of seconds, struggling against my spinal arthritis.

She waited patiently, then shook Father’s hand. “I shouldn’t say anything, Father Baptist, but I suspect that

you're going to be receiving a call from the cardinal's office some time soon. Perhaps this afternoon."

"Why?" asked Father. "And how do you know?"

"I'm your proverbial fly on the wall," she said to him while she absently shook my hand. She glanced at her watch. "And I must flee if I want to be one jump ahead of the fly-swatter. Good-bye."

With that she went clip-clopping down the brick path, the red of her dress quickly absorbed by the overgrown greenery in the garden.

"Pick it up, Martin," said Father, settling back on his bench.

"Pick up what, Father?" I looked to see if the stone bird had fallen into the ivy again. No, it was still perched on the cement birdbath.

"Your lower jaw," said Father, smiling. "It's sitting on your right shoe."

"Oh, that."