

The Reluctant Prophet: A Love Story

Chapter 2

It was 7:00 a.m. when Zeke woke to the sound of the front door opening and closing. He stood up and looked out front to see his father climbing into his car, backing out of the driveway and driving off to work. With no job and little prospect of finding one soon, he lay back on his bed and dozed off. Within a minute, he was fast asleep again.

In his dream, Zeke woke to the sound of his mother crying. He hurried over to the master bedroom where he found her sitting on a chair by the window sobbing. His sister, Rachel, was sitting on the opposite chair with reddened eyes and the tracks of teardrops on her cheeks. He walked over and tried to comfort his mother by touching her cheek, but could not feel her. It seemed as though either he or the two women were ghosts, oblivious to the presence of the other. "When did they tell him?" Rachel asked.

"About ten o'clock this morning," Sarah replied. "Jack asked him to stay a little late so he could remove his things when the rest of the staff weren't around."

"What a heartless bastard!" Rachel exclaimed. "Dad's worked for that man for more than a decade and this is how they treat him?"

"It will be okay, Rachel," her mother sobbed. "Companies reorganize all the time. That's the way things are. Unfortunately, the economy still isn't good, but we have money for a while. We just have to have faith."

"Mom, you know how hard Zeke has been looking for work. There aren't any jobs anymore. You can all move to Florida and stay with me."

Sarah smiled warmly and held Rachel's hands. "Thank you, sweetheart, but we'll wait a while to see what happens. I think things will work out."

"I don't know how you can rationalize that, Mom," Rachel argued. She turned to stare at Zeke with her dark blue eyes. "What do you think, Zeke?"

Zeke's eyes popped open and he sat up in bed. The dream was still locked in his mind, replaying over and over again. He looked at his bookcase and thought about writing down this dream, but then changed his mind. "Dreams are just dreams," he said out loud. He looked at his alarm clock and saw it was 7:20 a.m. He climbed out of bed and walked to the bathroom to get ready for his day. He had an interview later this morning and needed to look his best.

Seconds later, he rushed back into the room and grabbed the last notebook and began to write: "September 22, 2014. Dad fired, please God, don't let this one come true. 7, 21, 23, 38, 41, 46." He looked at the words and thought about marking them out. Instead, he slipped the book back in place and went to take a shower.

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Three hours later, Zeke was sitting across a conference table from Mr. Smith, the human resources manager for a small local firm. Their ad said they were looking for a junior accountant to supervise accounts payable and the general ledger. Zeke was hopeful, but all too often, there were hundreds of applicants for every job, and his prospects were not great. Smith sat quietly reviewing Zeke's resume. Every few seconds, he would look up and smile thoughtfully at the young man. Finally, he said, "Mr. Thompson, let me be totally honest with you. Yesterday, a major firm made a purchase offer to our CEO.

While it is too early to know, if this sale goes through, this office will likely reorganize, so I can't say how permanent any jobs are."

Zeke felt his phone vibrating in his pocket. It was after ten o'clock now and Zeke had a feeling his father was calling him about the layoff. "Mr. Smith, I understand the state of the economy, and that nothing is really permanent nowadays. I just want to work hard and help out where I can."

"That's admirable, Zeke. I'll hold on to your resume, and once things calm down a bit and we decide to move forward, I'll let you know," Smith said as he stood and extended his hand. Zeke stood and shook his hand. "Have a good day."

"Thank you for your valuable time, Mr. Smith," Zeke said, and then turned and walked out of the room and out onto the street. A new thought buzzed in his head, starting when he touched Smith's hand. He leaned back against the building and pulled out his phone. He saw a voice-mail from his father, but first opened his notepad and typed, "Baltimore Enterprises acquired by First National. San Diego office to close by end of year." He closed the app and tapped the key to play his voice-mail.

His father's voice said, "Hey, Zeke, it's the old man. Things are kind of shitty here today. I just got laid off. Don't worry, son. Everything will be okay. I sure hope you didn't have that vision! That would really screw up your day. I'm looking forward to watching the game with you tonight. I love you. Bye." He sighed heavily, overwhelmed by the confirmation of his dream. Noticing a coffee shop just down the block, he headed toward it.

Minutes later, Zeke was sitting at a small table near the front windows of the Starbucks cafe, taking sips of his venti cafe latte. The store was mostly empty at this hour, sometime between the morning commute and lunch hour. He glanced back at the clerk behind the counter. She appeared to be about his age, very cute with black hair in a pixie cut, and bright red lipstick. She glanced over at him and smiled. Zeke quickly turned to look away and blushed slightly. Two men sat at a second table close by. They were in a deep conversation about something, but Zeke tried hard not to listen. Just beyond them, a tall, leggy blonde was sitting and typing on her laptop. Zeke focused on his drink, faced with the realization that his father was now out of work too and there was no way he could help out the family. His brain sped up with thoughts of losing the house and even living on the street. There had to be something he could do! But there was no way his finding a job could make up for Abe's income. Things were about to become really bad.

"Hi there," said a voice to his left. He turned to see the clerk standing next to him. She extended her hand and said, "I'm Bea Watson."

Zeke stood and shook her hand. "Zeke Thompson. It's nice to meet you."

"I hope I'm not being too forward, but would you like to join me for lunch?"

"Sure!" he exclaimed. "How long do you have for lunch?"

"My shift just ended. It's that twenty-nine hours per week thing. Fortunately, I have another source of income, but it still makes the paychecks pretty small."

"You're lucky, Bea," Zeke replied. "At least you have two jobs. I'm having a hard enough time getting one."

"After we eat, I'm going to buy a Powerball ticket. Maybe you should too. I've been told that I'm pretty lucky." The realization struck Zeke's mind like a lightning bolt. The six numbers he wrote down in his journal earlier. Could they be lotto numbers? The woman took his hand and began to pull him toward the door. "There's a great burger joint down the block. Let's go."

A man's voice said, "Don't forget our appointment, Bea?" Zeke noticed that the two men at the nearby table were watching them. "Be ready in an hour, okay?"

"You got it, Granddad!" she smiled. "I'll be ready."

As they moved down the sidewalk, Zeke began to engage his mind in a moral dilemma. Would it be cheating if he used his unique ability to win the lottery? Some people already knew of his gift and might make the connection. There was the physical proof on the page of his journal. On the other hand, there was no way anyone would know whether other lottery winners did the same thing. If he did not follow the vision, what would his family do for income? The warmth of Bea's hand in his brought him back to reality as they stepped into the small restaurant, the smell of frying potatoes filling the room.

They sat at a small booth. Bea began to flip through the menu while Zeke contemplated his situation. Why was this pretty woman so interested in him, he wondered. Rather than asking directly, he took another tack to learn more about her. "Bea, you called that man Granddad. He didn't look that old."

She set the menu down and smiled slightly. "Actually, both of them are my grandfathers. I'm sorry. I should have introduced you. Dave and Charlie are great guys." She picked up the menu again and said, "I recommend the black and blue burger, if you like blue cheese, that is."

"You didn't answer my question," he replied.

The server was standing at their table. "What can I get you folks?"

"Black and blue for me," Bea said. "Medium. Well-done fries and a Diet Coke."

"I'll have the same," Zeke noted as he handed the menu to the server. She thanked them and walked away, returning moments later with their drinks.

Bea took a sip of soda and looked at Zeke. "Let's say my grandparents and parents got married very young."

"Is that the truth, or is that just what you want me to believe?"

"Well, it is a bit complicated, Zeke. I'd say it's true though. Why are you so interested in them?" she asked.

"Frankly, that's the only thing I know about you. I am a bit surprised you asked me to lunch."

Bea cleared her throat and looked down for a moment. Then she raised her head and looked at him again. "Let me lay it on the line, Zeke. I know all about your visions, and I came here specifically for this chance to meet you." He stared back dumbfounded. She opened her purse and removed a folded sheet of paper, unfolded it and handed it to him.

Zeke looked at her in disbelief and then looked at the paper. It was a copy of the sheet in his journal he had written only a few hours ago. "Where did you get this? This is impossible." The part of the page below the lottery numbers was blacked out.

The server returned and set their plates in front of them. "Anything else?" she said.

"No, thank you. This looks perfect like always," Bea replied. Zeke remained staring at her. The server walked away. Bea cut her sandwich in half and then took a bite. "Man, these things are great!" She looked up and saw him just staring blankly. "Zeke, please eat your food before it gets cold." He looked down and seemed surprised as though the plate had suddenly materialized in front of him. "I'm from the future, Zeke. My job is to keep an eye on the course of time. People in your century are just beginning to realize that time is not a straight line that only goes forward. There are eddies and bumps in time, going in both directions. Just like what happens today affects tomorrow, what happens tomorrow affects today."

Zeke focused on his burger, which was spicy, cheesy, and excellent. He tried to understand the woman's words, but they were too strange to believe. Why would this person come from the future to see him? That didn't make any sense. "Assuming any of that is true, what has this got to do with me? Why don't you take me to your future so I can believe you?"

"I wish I could, but that would defeat the whole purpose for me being here," she replied while dipping a fry into a puddle of ketchup. "Zeke, you need to buy that lottery ticket. My world depends on it."

He laughed out loud. "What? That's crazy! The future depends on me buying a lottery ticket. That's absurd."

She reached across the table and took his hands in hers. "Zeke, I don't have much time, so let me lay it out for you. That ticket wins a 200-million-dollar prize. That money resolves the money needs of you and your family. That's good, right?" He nodded. "But there's more to it than that. Without having to worry about money, your father begins to write books."

"He has always loved to write. He showed me a bunch of poetry he wrote back in high school once."

"His novels talk about the fragility of time and how people might use it as a weapon. The more he writes, the more the scientific community starts to play with the concepts. Over the years, it leads to the discovery that time is as fluid as water. It can be dammed up, diverted, and even changed. Centuries later, it leads to a global war that almost destroys the planet!" she exclaimed.

"You want him to start a global war?"

"Abraham Thompson didn't start the war, Zeke. That happened hundreds of years later. It was the abuse of time and thirst for global domination that started the war."

Zeke shook his head. "I still don't understand why you want a war."

"You're missing the point," she scowled. "The horror of the war led to the first extraterrestrial contact. The Kalideans could not stand by and watch us destroy ourselves. They came to Earth to stop us. That ended the war and led to the advances that became my Earth. If Abraham doesn't write those books, the war will not occur."

"But the war did occur, or else you wouldn't be here."

She sighed heavily. "I know it's complicated, Zeke, but you have to trust me. There are others who seek to change the line of time in order to prevent the war. There are civilizations in the galaxy who would love to conquer this planet. Without the war and the intervention by the Kalideans, Earth will be enslaved."

Zeke pushed the plate away. "I think I lost my appetite. Bea, I think you are a beautiful woman, but certainly you must be nuts if you expect me to believe that tale."

"What's the worst that can happen?" she asked. "You don't win, and you can forget me forever as the crazy girl from Starbucks. Or you do win, and your parents don't have to lose their house and live on the street."

"They'll lose the house?"

"I don't know that, Zeke. Honestly, in my history, you buy the ticket and win. But are you willing to take that risk with your family?" She opened her purse and removed three twenty-dollar bills. She slipped two into the folder containing their check and handed the third to Zeke. "Here, now you won't even be out the cost of the ticket."

Without his noticing, Bea's two grandfathers had entered the restaurant and strolled over to their table. "You about ready?" one of them said.

"All set here," she smiled. "Let me introduce you two to Zeke Thompson. Zeke, these are my grandfathers, Dave Brewster and Charlie Watson."

"It's a pleasure to meet you both," Zeke said as he shook their hands.

"I've read a lot about you, son," Dave said.

"Take care of our future," Charlie added.

"Huh?" Zeke squeaked as Bea stood up.

"I'll see you later, Zeke," she said as she bent over and kissed him on the cheek. "Can you believe it? I kissed Ezekiel Thompson."

"Wait, can I ask you another question, Bea?"

"Make it quick. We only have a couple of minutes," Dave replied.

"Let's say we win the lottery, and my dad writes all of those books. What happens to me?" Zeke asked.

The two men chuckled. Bea sat down next to him and held his hand tightly. She leaned in and whispered in his ear, "There are a lot more notebooks to complete. You'll be a busy guy, believe me."

"And why was the rest of that page blacked out?"

She took his head in her hands and turned it to face her. She pressed her lips lightly against his and then stood up between her grandfathers. "You're so silly, Zeke. You haven't written the rest yet. We don't need to tell you the future. That's your job." The three walked out of the restaurant and down the sidewalk.

The server walked up to the table and took the folder and slipped it in her apron. Then she began to gather the dishes. "Where can I buy a Powerball ticket around here?" he asked.

"Right across the street and a couple doors down, there is a liquor store. Good luck!" she grinned and walked away.

He left the restaurant and walked toward the store. He realized he did not know which of the six numbers was the Powerball number, so he decided to buy six tickets, just to be sure.

As Zeke pulled his car onto the driveway, he noticed his father's car already there. That seemed odd. In his dream, Abe's boss asked him to stay late so as not to upset the rest of the employees. Now it was two o'clock in the afternoon, and he was home. That discrepancy made Zeke very happy. Perhaps Bea really was a crazy person and the rest of her story was just a fantasy. His father would not be responsible for a world war after all. He pulled the tickets from his pocket and considered tearing them up. He thought better of it and shoved them back into his pocket. He walked into the house and found his mother sitting at the table in the breakfast nook, watching her husband sitting out on the patio. Zeke kissed her on the cheek and then walked out back.

Abe sat there silently. Chachis was sitting on his lap and he held a glass with whisky over ice in his left hand, slowly swirling the liquid. Zeke patted his father on the shoulder and sat next to him. Abe's eyes were bloodshot and teary. "Everything will be okay, Zeke," he sighed.

"I know, Dad. I need you to sign a few things for me, okay?" He pulled the lottery tickets from his pocket and handed them to Abe.

"Is this our investment portfolio?" Abe laughed.

"Just sign them on the back, Dad. It's for good luck."

Abe began to sign them dutifully. After the fourth signature, he dropped his pen and looked up at his son. "These all have the same numbers, except they're moved around. What's this about? This wasn't another of your dreams, was it?"

"Not every vision I have comes true, Dad. And besides, with neither of us working, I figured we might as well take a shot."

"I'm not sure this is ethical, son."

"What are we going to do for money if neither of us can get a job?" Zeke asked.

Abe thought about what to say next, but then signed the last two tickets. "Let's never do this again, okay? I appreciate what you're trying to do, but it scares me a bit. It's almost like stealing in a way."

"Never again, cross my heart," Zeke said. "You keep the tickets, Dad. It's your money, if we win."

"Our money, son," Abe noted as he put the tickets and pen back in his shirt pocket. "How was your day? As you can see, mine was awful." He took a sip of whisky.

"The interview was a bomb. That company is on the verge of being bought out. I saw the press release in my mind saying that office was closing. Then I had lunch with a gorgeous, but completely insane, woman who works at the nearby Starbucks."

"Insane in what way?"

"She said she came from the future, Dad. She talked about a war that leads to the first contact with extraterrestrials. But she first told me to buy these tickets. She even gave me the money to pay for them."

"That's pretty crazy, alright." Abe took another sip of his drink.

"There was one thing that made me sort of believe her," Zeke noted. His father set his glass down and looked at him. Zeke pulled the folded paper from his pocket and handed it to his father.

Abe looked at the page in disbelief. "This is your handwriting, right?" Zeke nodded. "Did you write this today? You saw that I was being laid-off and here are those lottery numbers too! This is unbelievable. Did you give this to her?"

"She gave it to me, Dad!" he exclaimed. "I've never seen that woman before or even been to that Starbucks. Also, no one ever looks at my notebooks. I know you and Mom would never mention them to anyone. Rachel knows about them, but I wrote this page this morning! Isn't this weird?"

"I just don't understand. But maybe there is hope for us, even with me out of work. Just maybe there's a chance it will all work out, even though I have no idea what to do next."

Zeke smiled and said, "Maybe you should write a book."