

# **The Moment**

**By Todd Maternowski**

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*5:55 pm*

Five minutes to the apocalypse and they're still showing commercials.

I'm not an idiot. The TV stations got their money. But what is anyone going to do with a pre-owned Ford F-150 five minutes from now?

Sophie doesn't seem to notice. Or if she does, she doesn't care. Her eyes are closed. She's still praying. I should be too. Nothing good can come from watching the television. Not now.

Such a blessing to us. I can't tell her that enough. Every day. Every single day. Every hour if I could. Mom was right about that. "Plant your dreams, and watch a little girl grow." Or something like that. Maybe I got it wrong. I got a lot of things wrong. A lot of 'somethings like that.'

Too many.

God I miss her.

Sophie hasn't said anything about her, but she never knew her so that's not surprising. It's been fifteen long years since she passed. Nothing more I could've done. Nothing more the doctors could've tried. No more tubes, no more IVs, no more catheters, no more sticking her six times in her bony arm trying to find a single usable vein. No more meds. No more going to the bathroom by emptying a bag. Nothing more to do.

Sounds like freedom. A relief.

For her.

Again, with the shaving commercial. When are they going to get back to the real news?

I can't believe we went through with it all. Trying every little thing. Hope fading every day. The best the doctors could give, the absolute best, was an artificial status quo.

We fought so hard for so long, and for what? It happened just as it was supposed to anyways. God rest her soul.

Fifteen years of crying for us. For me. Fifteen years of waiting, for her. Waiting for this moment, this time right now, five minutes from now. Finally, Sophie will get to meet her grandmother. Just five minutes from now. The two most important women in the universe, never together in life. It's perfect. It'll be perfect.

*5:56 pm*

But I won't be there.

Aagggh, here it comes again. Rising in the back of my throat. Fight it down, man. Push it down, push it way back down. Everyone is looking at everyone else. Got to be strong for Sophie. This is serious. She can't —she can't. Fight it. Hmmmmf. Wow. Whoa.

That one was powerful. Stronger than the others by a long shot. Can't cry here, though. Sophie, heck, Sophie hasn't shown any sadness. No sadness, no fear. She's the strong one here. Jesus. It's hard to look at her without it coming back up. But I have to look at her. I've only got her for four more minutes.

Ah! Wow. TV's back. The news. Something about a fire? No, they're talking about the Finals. Game Two is tonight, or would be. Will they still go ahead and finish out the game? What about all the missing players?

Maybe that won't be an issue with them at all. Jerry used to play back in high school. Such a jerk. Even in front of Sophie this morning. This morning! He can mock us all he wants, but in the name of Jesus, not in front of my kid. Not today. Not any day.

I doubt the Finals will go on as regularly scheduled. Larry never mentioned that, what happens in that case. 'Best laid plans' and so forth. I can't really fault them for ignoring God's message. There's too much money to be made. Too much temptation. Too easy to lose sight of the important things. The real things.

No excuse, Jerry. Heck, you're not even in the Finals. Never came close. Kicked around the minors for, what, two years? Three? Talk about a waste. At least these millionaires got something out of it. At least they stand to lose something tonight, something more than a Civic with a scratched rear fender and a

house that isn't even

I'm sorry honey. What? Nervous? No, not nervous. I just—I don't know.

Ok, maybe a little. A little nervous. I'm sorry. I won't—no, go ahead. Yes. Yes, I'm praying too. Maybe too hard. Yes. Yes, you're right, let's pray together.

*5:57 pm*

Christ, give me the strength I need to endure these final four—three.. three?— minutes. I can't let Jerry get to me like that. What's done is done. Aaggh, it's in the back of my head now. Wow. Pent up rage. Aggression. This is not right. Calm down, man. Calm down. Save the excitement for later. It's coming. And there's nothing anyone can do about it. It's coming.

Whew. Breathe. Take a breath. Agggghh... my head. Breathe through your nostrils, dummy. Ugh. Feels like I just got punched. Damn Jerry—no! That's not, I can't— no, that's, I'm sorry. I forgive Jerry. No spite for the blind. Not my place to judge. No, not my place, not my place at all.

Forgive me, Father. Judge me, yes. Unworthy though I am. I have been, I am, I am still a fool, Lord. Karen and I, we, we just made a mistake. I didn't mean for it to end that way. I still don't know what else we could have done. Maybe it wasn't a mistake. Or maybe the mistake was in the begi—no, but then we'd never have Sophie.

Jesus, man. Stop thinking like that. It's your headache. Your nerves. It's spreading down my neck and arm. Who's punching me? No, Sophie was right. It's my nerves. I'm nervous. I'm scared, scared to death. It's coming. He is coming.

He's taking Sophie. No doubt, no doubt. She's done nothing but bring love to this worldly realm. Joy. Love and joy to people like me who didn't deserve it. Karen, I can't believe her, she just has no idea. No idea at all on what she missed out on. None. Ahhhhhggg... something's happening. Something is really happening here.

*5:58 pm*

Something is, it's now. Two.. two minutes? It's happening now. I feel it. My head is spinning. Focus. Pray. Get a hold of yourself. Grab your face. Aggh.

The room is still spinning. People are crying everywhere. Why are they crying? Are they worried about what they're leaving behind? None of that matters anymore. It was all going to be left behind anyways, no matter what happened. All of it. Gone. One way or the other.

The people, though. That hurts. Will it hurt in two minutes?

How could it not?

My head, my neck, is .. it's killing me. Am I holding her hand too tightly again? I can't even feel it. Sophie's got her eyes closed, though. Maybe she can't feel it either. Maybe this is what is supposed to happen. Maybe this is what, this is exactly what it is supposed to feel like. My other arm is fine. Our hands, held together, that's where it's coming from. That's where we both feel it.

That's where it's coming from.

Focus. Not on the headache, not on the arm. Focus. Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, we come to you—the room is spinning. Something on the news. Earthquake? What are they saying? What is anyone saying? Has it started already? So soon?

Larry is standing up. He's telling us something. Christ, man, open your ears. What's wrong with me? Does it—is this how it—I never imagined it would feel like this. Not like this. Is this—

*5:59 pm*

It?

Wow. Oh, wow. My head. My head is leaving my skull. This is happening. This is really happening. My neck, my head. Thank you, Lord. Oh God I love them both so much thank you. My arm, Christ, I can't feel it at all. I'm looking straight at it and I can't, it's not even a part of me anymore. Sophie. My last minute with Sophie. Last minute? Last forty-five seconds? No, no, no.

It's happening. For real. It's happening to me, too. Karen, I—no, that's not—it can't, it's a mystery, it's in His hands. And always was. It was meant to be. It was meant to happen exactly like it did, and now this

is happening. Exactly as it was.

Hmm? No honey I'm fine. I'm better than fine. I'm ready. I wasn't before, but I'm ready. I'm ready now. Too what? I—it's, I can't stop it, it's beyond us now, it's— no baby don't cry all is well. We are well. You're still so young. You will understand. Just a few seconds now. I can feel it coming. My soul is clawing its way out my neck and head even now. We're headed upstairs. Together. My voice, it's, it sounds so distant. So far away already. I love you honey, you have no idea. This is our time. We're fading now. Everything's, yes. Good. This is our moment.

Yes.

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About the Author: Born in Madison, Wisconsin, Todd studied Ancient Near Eastern religion and early Judeo-Christianity at the University of Chicago before heading into the real world. He has since worked as a ballroom dance instructor, bass player, mediator, credit specialist, art preparator, janitor, journalist, copy editor, armored car money counter, mambo dancer and satirist. He lives in Dallas, Texas with his hyper-creative wife and baby girl.

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