

Chapter 1

Michael's Last Lifetime

My name is Michael and I am the Essence of Ralph. My last day on Earth in my own body was a bright summer one in Rome, waiting for the colonel to announce my future. I was standing in shackles before three senior officers of the Roman Army, an army in which I had served for a decade. Beside me stood my closest friend, Jean-Luis, a 28-year-old officer of equal rank in the Gallian Army. Our armies were at constant war with each other, a fact which had brought us to this confrontation.

"Captain Michael, you have been tried and convicted of the high crimes of treason and sedition by this Military Tribunal, convened under the authority of General Gaius Marius," intoned the colonel in charge. "This tribunal sentences you to death by beheading, the sentence to be carried out immediately."

I had expected that sentence, but still my mouth went suddenly dry. I traded a glance with Jean-Luis, who was standing by my side.

The colonel continued. "You, Jean-Luis, from the tribe of the Londe, and a captain in the Gallian Army, have been ordered by your own superior officers to be tried by this tribunal. You, also, have been found guilty of treason and sedition. The sentence is death by beheading, with the sentence to be carried out immediately."

So that was it. Both my best friend and I were due to die today, not on the battlefield in honor, but here in a small park in Rome, in dishonor. What had we done? We had wanted peace, not war, between our two neighboring countries. But our generals did not.

Since we were to die in dishonor, we were not to be given a proper grave and funeral ceremony. Two of the Roman soldiers, who knew in advance what the penalty would be, had already dug a hole in the park big enough for both our bodies, if crammed together without coffins. Our grave was waiting.

The colonel then called forth another Roman soldier, Zenuitias, whom he suspected of being one of our group. The officer hoped to trick him into confessing his complicity in our plot by refusing his next order. "Zenuitias, I hereby order you to behead both Michael and Jean-Luis." If Zenuitias refused to behead his friends, this would surely implicate himself in our pacifist plot. But, when a soldier offered him the weapon, Zenuitias took the executioner's ax, tested its blade for sharpness, and told us, his friends, to kneel over the grave site, one at a time.

He, like us, was a professional soldier who considered it his duty to always obey the orders of his superior officers. He intended to act with honor in the most difficult battle he had ever been in, one with his closest friends. While he agreed with our ideals, he felt duty bound to take the ax and do that which was personally the most distasteful act he had ever been ordered to do in his military career.

I moved first and knelt with my head over the hole before me, knowing these were the last breaths my lungs would feel passing through them. I heard the "swish" of the ax coming down toward me and touch the back of my neck. I relaxed and let go. The end of that life had come.

I now know that Jean-Luis then moved into position next to my fallen body, and Zenuitias raised the ax again and severed Jean-Luis' head from his neck. It fell into the pit next to mine. His time to cease to exist had also arrived.

Having executed us as ordered, Zenuitias returned the ax to the soldier who had given it to him. He had fooled the colonel, who could not now find him equally guilty. The next day, he committed suicide, as we all had planned to do if any of us were captured.

The other soldiers then stripped off our shirts and trousers, and, with their swords, dismembered our two bodies, tossing our limbs and trunks into the pit. Some of those soldiers had served under me in combat, and they felt that I was one of them, a brave soldier who had seen a better future with peace instead of war. Inwardly, they still honored me and my best friend, Jean-Luis, so they did what they could do to honor us in the only way possible for them. On the top of the body parts, they placed two of our arms across each other, to allow us to be friends and partners in death as we had been in life.

At the time of my beheading, I was in my late twenties, unmarried, childless, on active duty with the Roman Army as a combat officer. Having no memory of dates, I only know it was sometime during the tenure of General Marius who, according to your encyclopedias, lived between 157 B.C.E. and 86 B.C.E. Since these two dates are based on the year of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, who had not been born when I ceased to exist, I cannot be sure of any precise date. However, your encyclopedias describe how General Marius, the most talented general of the Roman Army, took his troops into Gallia, now known as France, to save Rome from invasion by Germanic tribes, the Teutons and the Cimbri, in 102 and 101 B.C.E. It must have been about 103 B.C. E when Jean-Luis and I ceased to exist, as we did not join in those battles.

I was born in Rome, the eldest son of a high-ranking official in the Roman Republic. My younger sister was named Ruthea, and my brother was named Satorias. We lived in a large, spread-out home with private quarters connected by walkways. It was located in a park now called Villa Borghese. My quarters were located in the northeast side where the city zoo is now located.

My parents' plan was for me to do my time safely in the army, then go into government service and eventually succeed my father in his position. After finishing school, I joined the army, serving as a junior officer under General Marius.

Your encyclopedias record that Marius was elected consul of Rome, the highest official of the Republic, seven times, for a year at a time, a record. He was elected first in 107 B.C.E., then each year from 105 to 100 B.C.E., and again in 86 B.C.E. During his last tenure as consul, during which he died, he ordered the deaths of many high officials whom he believed had treated him treacherously. At the time of his death, many had questions about his sanity.

During my first campaign, Ruthea, my devoted younger sister, rebelled against our parents and followed me with a group of other women commonly known as camp followers. She was naive and inexperienced in the ways of the world, but, being an adventuresome adolescent who felt indestructible, she was determined to see the world as her big brother led his company into battle.

Most of the women in this group were prostitutes whom the army leaders encouraged to provide sexual services for their soldiers. Ruthea did not realize this when she decided to follow me, her big brother. But the soldiers who came to her camp assumed she was there to pleasure them, and, when she refused, they raped her. As a result, she created an alter-personality to cope with sexually aggressive men. When I found this out, I sent her home to recuperate. With the help of our mother and some wise servant women, she overcame her problem and became well again.

This event sparked my interest in the field now called the "dissociative disorders," as my own sister suffered from that disorder. Now at last I could guide Ralph, my charge, in learning how to properly diagnose and treat a problem which has been shrouded in mystery for so many years.

During one of these campaigns, we were ordered to go through the Gallian town of Avignon and lay waste to the homes of all who lived there. Jean-Luis was a Gallian Army officer who was on his tour of duty when his family members were all killed in that campaign. When he returned to what had been his home, he found it destroyed and all of his family dead. He was so angry he vowed a blood oath to avenge his family's deaths. He begged his tribal leader for permission to go to Rome as a spy, where he could assassinate the Roman consul, General Gaius Marius.

On one of his trips to Rome, Jean-Luis strolled around the city and visited the Foro Romano (Roman Forum). The leaders of Rome conducted much of their business there. He found Marius engaged in a friendly discussion with another high official, who was identified to him as Herodius. He thought he might have a better chance of getting close to Marius if he befriended a close associate of his. Herodius seemed to him to be a likely candidate.

He stopped for a drink at a nearby oenothèque, a wine bar. While sipping his wine, he was attracted to a beautiful, dark haired young lady. Upon greeting her, she gave her name as Ruthea, but she was coy as to any other information about herself. But she was willing to meet him again, and they had several dates which went well. During their time together, Ruthea became quite aware of his anger and desire for revenge. She felt a strong need to help him to move past such painful feelings. She thought that her love for him might do that.

On their third date, she revealed that her father was Herodius, the official he wanted to befriend. He was surprised at his luck in meeting this official's daughter, so it seemed his plan might work. Now he had a natural way to get close enough to Marius to kill him.

But Ruthea was a charming and clever young lady. Something about this young Gallian man intrigued her, and her heart was warming up to him.

At another oenothèque, she first introduced Jean-Luis to me, her older brother. Jean-Luis later told me he was not impressed with me at first, as I seemed to him to be the high born son of his enemy. I tried to be friendly with this young man to whom my dear sister was so attracted. But he thought I was a snob, and maybe I was. He did not think much of my comments about liking peace more than war. It did not feel genuine to him, so he decided we were gullible enough to help him get close to the man he hated the most – Marius. He decided to use us.

Another night, Jean-Luis was sneaking around Villa Borghese near our house. Roman soldiers patrolling the area stopped and questioned him. When they found him to be armed with a Gallian knife, one soldier knocked him unconscious with the flat of his sword blade.

Ruthea and I heard the commotion and went to investigate. When we found it was Jean-Luis, we told the soldiers he was our friend, and we would take him into our custody. We put him in one of our many bedrooms, and Ruthea tended to his back wound. After several days of being in the same house with me, we had become the best of friends.

He and Ruthea continued falling in love deeper than ever. She knew this had to be as that was the only way he would give up his anger at Marius and his drive for revenge. She soon had him totally enthralled with her charms, and ideas about the destruction of Marius faded from his mind.

I talked with him about my recent convictions that we had had too much war for both our countries. We had both seen many friends die in battle and knew there must be a better way for our

two countries to deal with each other. I sometimes expressed these antiwar thoughts at work and became persona non grata at my own army post. Eventually, a household servant of mine betrayed us, and Jean-Luis and I were arrested.

After my execution, my disgrace was visited upon my entire family. Our house was destroyed, and the family name was erased from all official records, as if we had never existed. My father had tried to protect me, but even he was unable to accomplish anything for his eldest son. He now went into hiding but was discovered, put on trial, and also executed. My brother, Satorias, died soon afterwards. My sister, Ruthea, was pregnant with Jean-Luis' child and fled to Gallia. She bore their daughter, Maria, there. Ruthea raised her to be a beautiful lady.

Marie raised her own family and had one daughter she named Mary Magdalene. This young woman traveled to Israel, where she met Jesus Immanuelle, the son of a carpenter. She was a devoted student and disciple of this man Jesus, who lived until the age of 33, when he was executed by crucifixion by the Roman Army. At the time, they had wed as husband and wife, but they had not announced their marriage to others before his death at Golgotha. She was pregnant with his child at the time of his death. She moved back to Gallia, where she bore their daughter, whom she then raised to adulthood.

In today's world, Ruthea has become Becky, the Essence of Marie McKenzie, a friend and former MPD patient of Ralph's. Satorias, my brother, has become the Essence of Mike Hogan, a friend of Ralph and Marie. The executioner, Zenutias, has become the Essence of John Mott, Ralph's close friend. The wife of Zenutias, named Herataineia, has become the Essence of Cathy Bethel, a close friend of Ralph and Marie. Jean-Luis is now the Essence of Dr. Norio "Woosie" Sanjoh, a Japanese gynecologist and Ralph's close friend and student.

I have since learned why our attempt to bring peace to the Roman-Gallian region was not allowed to succeed. We were unaware of The Creator's plan, long in preparation, to have Jesus be born in Bethlehem a century later. Jean-Luis had to be stopped from assassinating Consul Marius, or history would have been changed. Ruthea had to gain his confidence and change his attitude from one of revenge to one of loving her. If he had killed Marius, the Roman government might have become more compassionate, just before Jesus was born.

The Roman empire needed to be the ultimate villain to keep the repression of the Jews intact, to let the brutality continue. Only in that scenario could Jesus bring the idea of revival after death to the attention of the Jews. There had to be a continued buildup of Roman repression, with an attempt to destroy the Jews as a nation and culture in 70 A.C.E. Without the expectation of total death of all Jews, Jesus' execution on the cross by Roman soldiers would have had no special meaning. So well meaning reformers had to be kept out of power in the Roman government at that time. As pacifist activists, Jean-Luis and I were a century too early.

In 2002, Ralph, Marie, and Woosie attended a professional conference in Rome. Remember that I, Michael, am the Essence of Ralph. Becky, who was Ruthea in that past life, is now the Essence of Marie. Jean-Luis, who ceased to exist with me, had also completed his last lifetime then and is now the Essence of Woosie.

Woosie had arrived in Rome the day before Ralph and Marie. He stayed at the same hotel as Ralph and Marie and had found his way from the hotel to the conference center and back again. But when the three of them were coming back from the center the first time together, Woosie missed a

turn, and Ralph found himself in a strange part of Rome. He thought they were lost, though Woosie was briskly walking confidently ahead as if he knew just where to go.

Ralph asked Woosie if he knew where they were, and he answered, "Don't worry. I've been here three times before." Then they came to a plaza from where they could see the street to their hotel.

Woosie later claimed he did not hear Ralph ask him if they were lost, nor his answer. He, as Woosie, had never been to Rome before. So it must have been Jean-Luis who was walking and talking at that moment.

After visiting the location of my Roman home in the Villa Borghese, Marie, being very psychic, led us to where she believed the bodies of Jean-Luis and myself were buried. She felt it was west of the Borghese museum in a semicircular park across the street from the School of Architecture. Trees encircle the park, and Marie felt that our bodies had been buried by the third tree from the sidewalk.

When Woosie climbed the hill from the museum to the park, he went into an altered state of consciousness, and Jean-Luis took control of his body. He was full of memories of that last lifetime with his friend, Michael, and his lover, Ruthea. He remembered how beautiful she was and how much he regretted leaving her. I took over Ralph's body while both of us stood over our grave and hugged each other.

While standing over the grave site, Woosie started having a headache. Marie said it was appropriate, since here was where he had lost his head! He regained his composure by the time we returned to the hotel.

Later that same year, Ralph received an e-mail from Woosie's computer in Japan. It was in French, a language Woosie did not know. It disputed one idea as to where Jean-Luis had lived in France and identified Avignon as his true hometown. The message was signed "J.L."

Recently, Woosie wrote another e-mail to Ralph stating that Jean-Luis is now teaching him French. Woosie himself sent Ralph a note in French saying, "I am learning a little French," signed "Woosie." Jean-Luis is apparently preparing Woosie to be able to visit Avignon, in the Provence section of France, so that he will finally be able to come home again.