

Untaken: 12 Hours Following the Rapture

C.O. Wyler

Published by C.O. Wyler, 2022.

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

UNTAKEN: 12 HOURS FOLLOWING THE RAPTURE

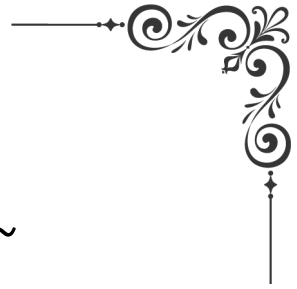
First edition. February 13, 2022.

Copyright © 2022 C.O. Wylar.

ISBN: 978-1386310402

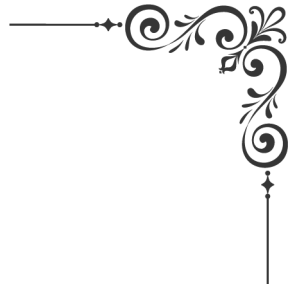
Written by C.O. Wylar.

To Lois ~ Thank you for your support, love, prayers, and
friendship.



~ Beginning ~

My brother. Leave it to him to pull something like this at the last minute. I know he means well, but must he always put me in an awkward position? He may be years older than I, but he needs to stop bossing me around and constantly pushing my buttons. He's been doing it for decades – as long as I've been alive. But what can I do? I'm an adult in my fifties and have been around the block long enough to know what I like or don't like. Thanks for the gift, but why would I want to read this book? *Untaken*? Yeah, untaken from what? Believe me, I won't be taken in again by him.



~ Amy ~

Hi, welcome to my world.

Guess you're here, in my mind, in my life, and hopefully not in my way. I didn't ask you to be with me, witnessing this blow by blow of my current life; you've come here of your own free will, by your choice. I certainly didn't twist your arm; remember that and remember you can leave whenever you want. You're the one in control of how often you access my thoughts.

I get it – it's the way the world is now with artificial intelligence. Electronic units practically read your mind while listening to every conversation in your house, car, or workplace. Within seconds, social media shows you a barrage of ads for hot tubs if you clicked on any website that contained them. If you're in an auto accident, smartphones determine your exact location and send first responders before you reach out to them. City cameras monitor your every move, including when you make a left turn on a yellow light. Via satellites, the government can see how many people are in your bedroom doing who knows what. And now, people can get into your brain and read your thoughts.

Forgive me. I'm not quite used to the idea of having this complex AI neural network accessing my mind. It may be convenient for shopping and flipping through television channels or inputting photo captions for work, of course, all without speaking aloud or lifting a finger.

But can you really hear my thoughts? See what I'm seeing? And most astonishing, why would you subscribe to *my* thought-streaming?

I'm not even famous yet, but here you are aware of everything I do, say, or think.

Please don't misunderstand me or think I don't want you here. You're in my head, watching every move I make, observing everything I see through my eyes, and considering my opinions and perspective. I didn't plan it that way; it is what it is. Like I always am telling my husband, Denny, we need to work together and figure things out, need to be a team. Isn't that the current mantra of the decade? Help or care about others. You're here to help me – you're a team player, right? So let's do this.

Since you entered my life this second, you know virtually nothing about me nor I about you. You'll learn soon enough about my personality, attitude, values, beliefs, et cetera. Don't judge me as I have no way of reciprocating – I can't know you; I have no way of being your friend unless we become connected on social media or meet for coffee. There may be a chance I may be a Type A person and you a Type B – one of us in control, always in the know, and the other more relaxed and easy-going. That's fine, but understand we are different individuals with different memories and experiences. You may relate and get me, or you may think I'm self-absorbed, nit-picky, and frigid. Fine. I could say good or bad things about you too if I were in your head.

It's like what I would expect of you if you were my caddy during a round of golf: I would tell you to "show up, keep up, and shut up." Well, that does seem a bit harsh, especially when you get to know me, but time will tell.

So hang in there, and things will make sense soon, even if you think you may be more confused than I am.

Now, I'll get back to the ranting I was doing before you arrived, but since you're here now, I'll rhetorically ask your advice, "What would you do?"

I'll explain it simply: I hate her; I hate her. Hear me. I. Hate. Her. And I know you would too.

The audacity of that woman butting in my life, into our lives. How dare she. Who does she think she is, and can't she realize that I'm not her and never want to be? I bet you wouldn't want to be her either. Ugh, I hate her. She doesn't get it. Leave me alone, leave us alone!

I push my straight, long, naturally blonde hair out of my face and tuck a section of it behind my ear, considering if I should cut it short again. Denny likes it cropped above the shoulders, neat, and trim, but I prefer it more carefree, wild, and blowing in the wind when I drive around in my bright yellow VW convertible, top-down in the Southern California sun.

I roll up the sleeves of my thin shirt and head for the kitchen sink. Tonight's dirty dishes are screaming for attention. I fill the basin with hot sudsy water and plunge the encrusted lasagna pan in to soak.

It's a little awkward for me, knowing you're here in my head. I try to silence my thoughts by concentrating on the counter, black specks embedded in tan granite. But I'm too steamed to focus on them.

Forcing my brain to ignore what has been bothering me constantly all day, I redirect my thinking to something positive. I love our townhouse. We bought the eighteen-hundred-square-foot two-story fourteen months ago while the prices were starting to go up once again in Granada Hills, a suburb of Los Angeles, known to us natives as "the Valley." I'm happy here. Yes, we have traffic, crime, gangs, and every ethnic restaurant possible within walking distance from each other, but this is where I was raised and grew up. This is my town, my city. I'm a true Valley girl and proud of it despite its overcrowdedness, rude people, and often helicopters circling with bright lights in the middle of the night, searching for bad guys.

Do you love or enjoy where you are in life? Most of the time I'm happy. But not today.

Dennis and I love this condo. We knew it would be perfect the minute we saw its layout online – a spacious great room/kitchen/dining area, three bedrooms and two full baths upstairs, and best of all, it's

a corner unit with only one wall abutting the neighbors. Granted it was over-priced, but isn't any property in L.A. County these days?

Back to my tirade, which I'm sure you want to know more about; I won't leave you hanging. I'll scrub the death out of this pan if I get all huffy over someone like her. It isn't right.

Ah, my husband's aunt. The ever-present, ever-nagging, ever-everything you'd expect of the nosy, busy-body, pushy, never-married aunt, Ms. Amy Colton.

I felt it the day I met her. Denny warned me. Yes, he let me know about her overbearingness in his considerate, thoughtful manner. His aunt has been and will always be a control freak and must have everything her way. He told me stories of how she'd base every decision on right or wrong, good versus evil, or punishment instead of reward. Always repercussions and consequences. No fun, no silliness, no joking around, no nothing. Boring lives, dull upbringing, and always following-the-letter-of-the-law attitudes and outcomes. Do you know that kind of person? I don't know you that well, but I'm sure you have one in your life too. A parent maybe? A spouse? Friend or co-worker? Everybody does.

Tragically when Denny was ten years old, his parents died in a car accident on curvy Mulholland Drive, and Amy had to deal with raising her brother's sons. Single with no parental experience, she took it to task to make sure the two were "raised right" in every conceivable way. Truthfully, I wouldn't have wanted to be in her shoes; it would be hard to raise two boys at any age. I should give her kudos for trying, even if she botched it in several aspects. In my book, parenting is no fun.

Denny's dad shouldn't have been on one of his drinking binges on Christmas Eve when he drove home from a party in Malibu, killing himself and his wife instantaneously. Instead of helping her nephews with the loss, goodie-two-shoes Aunt Amy hindered them with her incessant nagging, prodding, negativity, and demoralizing. How she

treated them, I thought, was over the top and brutal. And, I bet, you know at least one or two people who are like that too.

Although to this day, Denny says he loves his aunt dearly for taking care of his brother and him. He does agree she favors Hal, who's two years younger than he is. In my book, the self-righteous Amy consistently put the screws to my husband. As per Denny, she grated and chastised him regularly, telling him to clean his room, practice his music lessons, always dress or look perfect, or act a certain way.

Not dear Hal. He was her golden boy the minute the court gave her guardianship of them.

Why couldn't she give them any slack? They no longer had a drunken father who drove himself into a tree in the middle of the night, unfortunately killing their mother in the process.

From the stories I've heard, I could see why the ol' bat never married – like anyone would fall in love or want to live with her. I know what you're thinking: it's mean of me to think that, but it shows how much I can't stand the woman. I'm honest here. Thanks to modern technology, if we like it or not, you see my every thought: the good, the bad, and the downright ugly. On the positive side, at least you can't backtrack into my past thoughts, only those in this instant.

Isn't life about having a fun time, knowing what you want, and accomplishing something positive? Do things for you, for your satisfaction, not to please everyone else all the time. Be in control. At least that's my take on life.

Couldn't she stoop low enough to let those boys enjoy something?

I met her for the first time at the restaurant on the golf course on Victory Boulevard, about four months after Denny and I started dating. I never want to step foot in Copperfield's again. Denny was worried she wouldn't like me. Up to that point, it was like I was in one of Denny's shoe boxes, set apart from everyone else in his life, only to open when she wasn't around. No wonder both he and I were tense when I finally met the woman. And get this: right there, while we're sitting by

the window that looks over the eighteenth's green, she stops to pray for her food. How embarrassing! Everyone must have been staring at us, at me. I smiled and looked down as I had no clue what else to do. Next, she was preaching, ranting, and going on about stuff I've never heard of or care about – you should do this, don't do this, you need to do that, blah, blah, blah. Bunk, I say, total bunk.

As she continued her proselytizing, I smiled and nodded as I ate my club sandwich with no mayo and a side of fries, knowing that Denny had told me to nod, agree with her, and keep showing my pearly whites. He pegged that one right.

What a way to ruin lunch.

Do you get the picture I'm painting of her? Sound familiar to anyone you know? How did you handle the person? A piece of work, huh?

In twenty minutes that seemed like hours of trying to reboot a complex computer program without instructions, she was on her religious pulpit declaring how poorly the world runs and evil people are determined to drag it further into the ground. If it isn't about today's warped politicians trying to take over the nation, more countries going to war against each other, the latest cyberattack, or how morals are worse than when she was a kid, it was how God is in control of her, her dear Hal, Dennis, her son's new girlfriend (you guessed it, me), and the silly salad she was feebly picking. Everything, good or bad, has a purpose, has a reason. Yep, I've got a minor in psychology, and she's telling me she knows all about how people are, the meaning of life, and if such exists, the hereafter. I say all religion or afterlife beliefs are a bunch of hocus-pocus nonsense that people grasp as a crutch because they're insecure and inadequate to believe in themselves.

Sure. Whatever, woman.

You agree with me, don't you? Tell me you don't believe in all that God stuff, especially in today's chaotic world where who knows what will happen around the next corner.

I admit I was angry then, but I also was afraid – she made me nervous and does to this day, four years later. Forever walking on eggshells, I can't please her. I can't win with her. I must put my guard up continually. Do I want to?

Would you?

Should I try to play her games?

Nope, not me. And neither should Denny.

Denny once told me he married me because I was like his mother and aunt. I'm fine being like his mom; apparently, she was thoughtful, loving, and had a sharp mind. But me being like Amy? Oh no, please, no! He's right that we're both independent thinkers and doers, but that's where the similarity stops. I don't want to be opinionated or domineering like her, although she may think I am. At this point, who knows, you may even believe that.

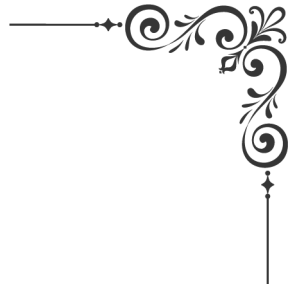
Okay, I'm not perfect, but I'm a good person. I don't intentionally break the law or hate people so much that I want to hunt them down with an AK-47 or strap a bomb to myself and explode in a sports stadium. Yes, I usually get my way because, I admit, I sometimes have to manipulate others to prove a point or accomplish my goal. I always do it for a good reason.

I'm a twenty-eight-year-old, college-educated woman with a master's in journalism, working for the *Valley News* in Los Angeles. I'm successful because I've put effort, sweat, and knowledge into my vocation, years of well-planned and positioned work. I did it myself and am accomplished. I've arrived, and I don't like nor appreciate anyone stepping in my way or on my toes.

You know my type – I know what I'm doing, am confident, learn things only I'm interested in, stay logical no matter what's happening around me, and don't need anyone telling me anything. If I want to learn something, I'll research it myself and not be told what's what. I must have order and know everything pertinent that's going on around me. Honestly, I must be always in control, and I must get my way in

situations and circumstances. I may do things differently than you, but usually, I win. Like it or not, I'm not changing for anyone, anywhere, or anyway, especially for that bat! I'm not like her! And no, I won't change for you either. Sorry, you heard it from me directly; you'll find that I'm blunt about my opinions.

Using the side of a sharp knife, I carefully chip away at the burnt cheese on the edges of the lasagna pan, determined to let my anger subside toward her and my unobservant husband. How dare he take her side! Especially if I guess what could be happening to me is true. He has no clue, and I want to keep it that way.



~ Beliefs ~

I let the pan soak in the sink, grab a dish towel to wipe down the kitchen island's countertop, and restack the clay coasters that we had used at dinnertime. Returning to the sink and rinsing off a wine glass I used, I set it upside down on a neatly spread-out hand towel.

After making sure the rest of the kitchen looks worthy of a magazine cover, I turn my attention back to my husband. Where is he? I look around the corner of the great room to the stairs that lead to the bedrooms and Denny's office; I check if the door is still closed. As I expected, it is.

Being upset with Amy is not the crux of my problem. It's multifaceted, and here's why:

After I'd gotten home from work early and before dinner tonight, Amy stopped by for a few minutes. Only a few minutes, thank goodness. Amazing how fast she can ruin a day.

Because of the current financial problems in our state, she wanted to give Denny a copy of her redone living will that her lawyer drew up under the new restricted laws about passing on property to others and the tax implications. She was barely inside the house before she started her preaching.

The main thing she emphasized was that I have no morals (which none of us does, so that includes you too). Before coming to that point, it was all about Heaven, Hell, salvation, the forgiveness of sins – you know, explosive topics Denny and I avoid discussing. She said I'm sinful and need to repent, but there was nothing she could do about it –

something about “love the sinner but hate the sin.” Back on her religious gig.

My father hammered into me to always stand up for my beliefs as they are the most important thing a person has. So, I took his wise advice, telling her flatly to get off her soapbox and stop evangelizing all the time.

Well, that’s where the problem started. I told Amy she should bend her pious, stupid rules, and this is who I am, and she had better accept me as is because I’m not changing for her or her God or anyone. And, for your information, my morals are perfectly fine. I’m a good person overall, as I’m sure you are.

My words didn’t go over well, as next she turned to my husband and said in a timid tone, “Dennis, you still believe in God, don’t you? You know He’s alive and in your heart?”

Denny muttered with that deer-in-the-headlights look, “Yeah, Aunt Amy, and I know He’ll never leave me nor forsake me.”

I will tell you and only you that Denny is such a patsy. He’s never said something so blatant like that before in my presence. It’s always “to each his own, religion is a private thing,” and I’ve let it go at that. But to say he believes in God, and a Deity of some kind will always be with him? Excuse me, that’s not my Denny. It’s as if he has changed, and I’ve noticed a different attitude in him over the last several days. His words came out of nowhere. Who did I marry? Why does his aunt have this grasp on him that he cowers to every time? What’s with him? Do you have any idea?

When Amy abruptly left, her last words were that she’d pray for us. Okay, lady, do whatever you want, including praying, but please don’t get me personally involved.

Since only I had wine tonight, I carry the now washed and dried glass to the curio cabinet and open the top hutch, being careful not to clink it against my grandmother’s antique tea set. I offer another glance up the staircase to the closed door. No movement, no sounds.

As I said before, I'm as good as the next person; I mess up here and there, but I'm a decent human being. It's not like I've broken the Ten Commandments – "thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal." I'm a law-abiding citizen. I'm so tired of it. I'm tired of her interrupting our lives.

At this point, for some reason I'm on the verge of crying, mainly out of frustration and exhaustion, so don't be surprised if I do.

After the disturbing lady left, Denny and I had a fight during dinner. He and I said hurtful words to each other. I won't go into the details as I don't think it's proper for me to rehash them, especially to you, someone I don't know. I'm confused, hurt, and upset. I don't know anymore.

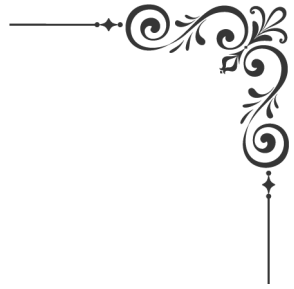
My eyes tear up as I try to remain resolute and composed; I twist the hand towel, straighten it out again, and repeat the process before finally returning it to its holder next to the fridge. I check to make sure no wrinkles show on it.

Do you think I overreacted to Amy's self-righteous sermon? Should I go upstairs and apologize to Denny? You may think I should be the first to admit fault, but that's not me. I don't do regrets well either.

Due to my surprisingly emotional state, I probably am overworked and exhausted right now.

What do you think? It'll be all right, won't it? Denny and I will patch things up, right?

Amy praying or not, my marriage will stay intact. Especially now.



~ Denny ~

Considered to be one who's logical, I rationalize the situation.
Hear me out on this.

I shouldn't be mad at Amy. It should be Denny.

Opening the dishwasher, I put a serving spoon in its proper slot. I hate when anyone puts plates backward in a machine. Especially if it's my machine. Silverware's another big issue. Point them down in the trays, not up, to get a proper cleaning. You'd stab yourself if you did it the other way. Don't people think?

I rinse a small dish towel out and start wiping down the range for the third time. I'm fanatical about it looking clean with no caked or baked-on food on its grates. Tell me I have issues with OCD, tell me I'm anal-retentive and need to chill and relax. Remember, this is me; this is how I am. Let me get inside your head and see what's in there. Will I roll my eyes at you like you just did to me?

When I met Denny at UCLA, he was finishing his degree in marketing and I was a sophomore, taking photos for the college paper including those of him being on intramural basketball and baseball teams. Since part of my job was to capture the fun, I naturally saw a lot of him. But it took me a year and a particular thrilling baseball game to maneuver our relationship into a hot, steamy romance.

At first, my friend, Rochelle, did the writing, and I did the picture-taking. Thanks to her falling in love and quitting school, I took over both tasks. But photojournalism remains my first love, my vocation and avocation.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

