

Revelation

By Hank Hietman

The two bodies lay on the bed, hand in hand. Bill and Maggie O'Shea were finally at peace. The empty bottles of sleeping tablets they had shared put them in a blissful slumber, a very permanent one. The bed had been neatly made under them with a pale green chenille spread. The dishes had all been washed and put away. The floors had been swept and the furniture dusted. All of the empty whiskey bottles had been put out in the trash. There would be no shame after death.

Maggie and Bill had lived in the small cottage apartment in South Miami Beach for almost thirty years. It was neatly tucked between Collins and Washington Avenues. The small buildings in front and in back of them had all been small hotels at one time. Some had become rooming houses for the aged and some had been scheduled for demolition. South Beach was to be renovated. Things were changing and it seemed Bill and Maggie would be left behind. The beach as a reasonable place to live would be no more. Their emotional scars and years of drinking were too much to carry forth. Bill and Maggie chose a very final way to leave.

Mike Dolan was given the assignment to cover the double suicide for the Beach Observer. These types of stories were the reason he wanted to leave his reporter job so badly. The sad tale was especially painful because he knew Bill and Maggie. They were Kathy's parents. Kathy, the girl he had loved in high school and still loved, would have to be contacted. After almost five years of not seeing her, it was not the way he would have chosen to speak with her again.

Mike had seen the police photos of Bill and Maggie lying side by side holding hands. Years ago Mike had been on that bed with Kathy when her parents were out working. They laughed, kissed and shared their dreams. Their souls were more intimate than their bodies, but they were very much in love. Mike's mind drifted back to those times as he stared at the sad photo. Kathy had gone to Cape

Cod to chase her dreams of becoming an artist. Mike had stayed behind, got a job with the local paper and tried to hold on to his dream of becoming a writer. The stories that he wrote for the paper were not part of that dream. Mike thought about Kathy, her sweet smile, her golden hair and the way she always smelled like wild flowers. After all these years, he would have to be the one to bring her painful news. He had asked the police permission to do it, but now felt the tension. He also felt his heart beat faster at the thought of possibly seeing her again.

He found Kathy's North Truro number in his wallet. He had thought of calling her so many times after she left, but never did. She had called him and sounded so thrilled with her new life that Mike just felt he wasn't wanted or needed anymore. The gap and the miles between them became too great to overcome, it seemed.

Mike unfolded the yellowed slip of paper and slowly dialed her number. Her familiar voice answered on the third ring and Mike took a breath not knowing exactly what he was going to say.

“Hi, Kathy, It's Mike.”

“Mike, I can't believe it. How the hell are you? Are you in the Cape?”

“I wish I was, Kath. No, I'm still in Miami Beach.”

“It's good to hear your voice, Mike. How are things?”

“Kath, I have some sad news to tell you. It's about your parents. I hate to say this on the phone, but they passed away. Peacefully, Kath. It's important for you to come down here to take care of some things. I'm so sorry, Kathy.”

“Oh, Mike, I feel so bad.” He could hear her crying quietly. “I haven't called them for a while. I should have been there. How did they die?”

“We can talk about that when you get here. Kathy, they didn't suffer at the end. Get a flight down and call me with the information. I'll pick you up at the airport. Are you ok, Kath?”

He heard her take a deep breath.

“I’ll be alright. I’ll call you later. Mike, I’m glad it was you that told me. Thanks.”

“Speak to you later. See you soon, Kathy.”

Mike hung up and took a deep breath too.

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The airport seemed empty when Kathy's flight arrived. For Mike, she was the only one there. The years had not aged her, but rather deepened her beauty. When he hugged her, she still smelled of wildflowers.

“Oh, Mike, it is so wonderful to see you. I feel so bad about my parents. Somehow, I feel guilty. She stepped back and looked at him, then hugged him again.

“Tell me what happened.”

“Kath, let's go to Gino's and have a drink. We can talk there. Are you hungry?”

“No, but a drink sounds good.”

The ride to Gino's was almost silent. There was a light drizzle, but the lights reflected off the water as they crossed the causeway to the beach made the night beautiful in spite of the sadness. As she stared at the water, Kathy reached for Mike's hand and held it for the rest of the ride to Gino's.

There were two couples dining at the front tables covered with the familiar red checkered tablecloths. Kathy and Mike had enjoyed quiet dinners on those tables many times. It brought back warm feelings for both of them. The bar was empty and the bartender was someone new. They both ordered scotch on the rocks and were glad not to see Gino tonight. This was not a night for socializing, although they were glad to be together. They sipped their drinks and Mike cleared his throat.

“Kathy, they decided to go together. They took sleeping pills.”

Kathy looked at Mike and said nothing for awhile, looking for answers that just weren't there.

“I can't believe it. Their life was suicidal with all the drinking.. But not intentional suicide.

Why now?”

“I think they just had enough. They saw no future and decided to end it. They died holding hands. They were at peace.”

They finished their drinks and Kathy reached out for Mike's hand again.

“Can we go to the apartment? Where are they now? I know they always talked about being cremated and having their ashes scattered in the ocean. I have to take care of things. It's so sad, Mike.”

“We can do all of that in the morning. You need to get some sleep. I have a pull-out couch. We can go over to the apartment early and you can make whatever calls you have to. Ok, Kathy?”

She looked into his eyes as tears fell from hers.

“Thanks, Mike. Thanks for being there for me.”

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Mike got out of bed as the first light filtered through the blinds. Kathy was still sleeping peacefully as he walked to the kitchen to put up a pot of coffee. She looked beautiful in the early morning sun with her hair spread over the pillow. Mike enjoyed seeing her there. As she opened her eyes she smiled at him. They both had coffee at the kitchen table and with some feeling of awkwardness, got ready to leave. That feeling melted when she hugged him before walking out of the door.

It was a short ride from Mike's place on Michigan Avenue to the apartment on Collins Avenue. Both of them had butterflies in their stomachs as they parked the car and walked to Kathy's old home. She used her key and opened the door slowly. The neatness of everything almost startled her.

As she stared at the pale green chenille bedspread Mike said, “That's where they took the pills. They held hands and looked like they were sleeping.”

“It's so sad, Mike.”

“I don't think so, Kathy. It was almost a happy ending for them. They wanted to go and, you know what, they did it with dignity. Probably something they hadn't felt for years.”

“I hope you're right. There were so many bad times. All that drinking. I couldn't watch it anymore. I had to leave. I didn't want to. I didn't want to lose you. I just had to go.”

“I know you couldn't stay, Kath. I'm just sorry that I didn't go with you.”

She turned from looking at the bed and went into his arms. They kissed and it was as if the kiss revived all of the love they once shared. Mike stroked her wet cheek and kissed her again, even more tenderly than before.

They walked to the closet hand in hand, feeling more able to deal with the sadness now that they were together. There really wasn't much to do. The small amount of clothing and sparse furnishings could easily be given to charity. By phone, Kathy quickly made arrangements for her parents' cremation. It was then that they both noticed the metal box high on shelf in the bedroom closet. Mike easily opened the locked box with his pen knife and let Kathy lift the lid.

There was a white envelope on top addressed “To our Beloved Katherine.” She recognized her mother's beautiful handwriting. Kathy opened the envelope hesitantly and began reading the note aloud.

“Dear Katherine:

If you are reading this letter, we are already gone. Your father and I thought about what we finally did for a very long time. The pain in our lives became just too much to bear. We are so sorry for the pain we know we caused you. Perhaps, after you see what's in the box, you will understand us a little better and somehow find a way to forgive us. We have always loved you dearly. You have been a ray of sunshine in our lives. We wish you only good things and happiness.

Love,

Mom and Dad”

As Kathy finished reading, tears were streaming down her cheeks. Mike held her for a moment and gently lifted a yellowed newspaper article from the box. It had a photo of two young boys in bathing suits smiling at the camera. The small headline above the picture starkly read “Twins Drown at Racing Point Beach.” Mike glanced quickly at the words below and read the names “Kevin and Patrick O’Shea.” Kathy saw the names, too, and saw the date handwritten on the top of the article. It was two years before she was born. The names of the grief stricken parents were given as “William and Margaret O’Shea,” and their North Truro address was given, too. It was the house that Kathy was living in now.

Both Mike and Kathy slumped to the bed. They sat there for a moment in shock, staring at the clipping in disbelief. Kathy never knew. A secret kept from her all of her life. How was it possible, she thought. She had twin brothers who drowned and no one told her. The house she lived in was her parents' home and not bequeathed to her by her uncle Liam. She looked at the article again. It went on to describe how both parents furtively swam out to try and rescue their sons, but the current was too strong. Bill and Maggie had to be rescued themselves by lifeguards who were just too late to save the boys. The article described the O’Sheas as “popular and successful owners of the Pirate’s Cove Restaurant in Provincetown.” Kathy knew that her father had worked in some of the finest hotels in Miami Beach as a *Matre’de*. He was well liked, but the drinking eventually kept Bill moving from job to job. The drinking always made Kathy feel ashamed of her parents. Now, after so many painful years she saw them in a different light. They had been successful and respected restaurant owners who suffered a blow from which they never recovered. Perhaps they thought Kathy could help them overcome their tragic loss. For an instant, Kathy felt that maybe she had failed them. Mike seemed to sense what she was thinking.

“Kathy, they tried. They just couldn’t do it. You were always a good daughter. It just wasn’t enough.”

They slowly sifted through the other things in the metal box. There were photos of the boys at various ages, a photo of a youthful Bill and Maggie in front of the restaurant and a yellowed menu from the Pirates Cove. There was a Last Will and Testament that simply left all of their assets to Kathy. A bankbook under the Will revealed what those assets were. “Mike, there is over two hundred thousand dollars in this bankbook. With interest, even more. They never touched this money. They went through hard times for nothing.”

“Kathy, they went through it for you. It was their way of asking for your forgiveness. They were never drunk enough to stop thinking of you and loving you.”

“I feel so sorry for them. I wish I could tell them I understand. They left me so much. Not just the money. I feel whole again. Why did it have to happen so late?”

“It's not too late.”

“Mike, come to the Cape with me. You can write. We can make a life. My mom and dad helped us find each other again. I finally found them. The money they left gives us a chance. Let's take the chance, Mike. I love you.”

“I love you too, Kathy.”

They carefully put the pieces of the past back into the metal box and began thinking of the future.