

Family

Ray walks into the hallway and sits in the chair and stares at his cellphone. He holds it in his hand for a moment lost in thought. He dials. He waits. After a few rings there is a familiar voice on the other end of the line.

"Hello," Beth says.

"Beth?" Ray says awkwardly. He knows it is her. It just been a very long time since he has talked with her.

There's a pause, she's not sure what to say. She's angry, sad and hurt. He doesn't wait for her, "it's Ray, I called to see how you were doing."

"I'm OK," Beth says.

"That's good," Ray says. "That's good. How are the kids? How are they taking it?"

"As well as can be expected, I guess," she says.

They both get quiet for a moment.

"I feel bad, Beth...I feel real bad. I miss him so much...."

"So do I Ray, so do I...."

"I just can't believe he's gone, Beth. I just don't want to believe he's gone."

"I know, I know. I just don't want to believe that he won't be bounding up the steps after work anymore. It got so that I would wait every afternoon to hear those footsteps...."

"Do you think you are going to sell the house?" Ray says, not sure of what to say.

"I don't know Ray, it's all so sudden," Beth says sharply.

"It just doesn't seem real," he says. "It feels like it was only yesterday that we were kids."

"You know Ray, I can still feel him in our bedroom, I can still smell him in his clothes, it's like he's still here."

"I just don't know where the years went," Ray says.

Beth tucks her phone between her ear and shoulder, walks over to the kitchen sink, and turns on the water. After rinsing out a glass she makes her way to the refrigerator. Pulling out a pitcher of orange juice, she fills the glass.

"It's so hard to believe that two weeks ago he was here with me. After all the time we had together you tend to forget how easy life can be turned around," Beth says.

She walks back to where the phone is hooked up to the wall, and leans against the counter across from it. She folds her arms, juice in hand, phone tucked between her shoulder and ear.

"Well...I just called to see how you and the kids are doing. I guess...I wanted to check in, " Ray says.

"We're doing OK," Beth says. "The kids miss him."

"So do I," he says, his voice trailing off.

Ray moves to the dining room table. Holding the phone in his left hand, he puts the elbow of his other arm on the table, and rests his head in his hand.

"Will you and the kids be OK? I mean...do you need anything?" Ray says, trying to find some way to help, to reconnect.

"No, we're fine," Beth says, feeling a little offended.

"Do you need any money? I mean, none of us were ready for this. I have some savings if you need some help?"

"No, Glenn left us with a lot," she says, "I didn't realize how much he had put away until now. We actually have more money now than before."

There is a pause and then Ray says, "where did the years go Beth?"

"I don't know Ray...."

It gets quiet again.

"I mean, how could we have drifted so far apart? We were so close."

"I've missed you Ray, and so did Glenn."

"I've missed the both of you too...."

"He loved you," Beth says.

This catches him off guard.

"Are you sure you don't need anything? There's nothing that I can do?"

"All we need is time."

There is another pause and as the silence grows, a deep sadness settles on the both of them like a wet blanket.

"I can't believe my baby brother is dead," Ray finally says, breaking the silence.

"I can't believe I'm a widow," Beth says softly.

They both pause, and Beth walks over to the sink. She empties her glass, rinses it out, and sets it out to dry. She stays there, by the sink, looking out the window into the field across the street. Lost in a memory.

"An aneurysm, 55 years old, and he dies of a brain aneurysm. It must have been tough on you finding him like that."

"I keep asking myself what I could have done. He was just in the garage, working on the car. You know when I found him he was bent over the front seat. At first I thought he was bent over praying," Beth says.

"At least he didn't suffer long," Ray says.

"You know Ray, an hour before we were at the store, we were holding hands while we shopped. When I found him in the car the first thing I did was grab for his hand...it was cold...it was so cold," Beth says.

"How are the kids holding up," Ray says.

"They're stunned, just like me, stunned."

"I've thought of you all a lot over the years. I really have missed seeing you. I wish that we hadn't drifted so far apart."

"I wish so too, Ray. The children have missed seeing their uncle."

"You know how it goes Beth, life leads us so many ways, we all have to do what we have to do. Isn't that how that old saying goes...."

"If you say so Ray."

There is silence again. A painful silence.

"I just haven't had the time to spend with family that I would have liked."

"That happens," Beth says. "He did miss you Ray."

"I missed him too Beth," Ray says. "You know, I've been sitting here thinking about the times we used to have when we were all first married. Remember when we would all go bowling, and then to that little bar out in Southeast?"

"That was a long time ago Ray."

"Yes it was Beth, but those are some of my best memories."

"We did have some times," she says.

"What made us stop Beth? I can't remember, why did it all stop?"

"I guess we just started our own families...."

"Yes, but we are family too," Ray says, realizing the time lost. "We were so close when we were kids. How could we grow so far apart?"

"Things change Ray, so do people."

"Yes people change, but what doesn't change is that we are family. I mean, how do we become so wrapped up in ourselves that our life passes without us even noticing it?"

"I don't have time for those types of questions anymore, Ray."

After a pause she says in a near whisper:

"What I do know Ray, is that we have always been here, you have always known how to find us...."

Ray gets up from the dining room table and walks back into the hallway. The afternoon is almost over and it's starting to get dark in the house. Ray and Beth stay on the phone together in silence. Beth frustrated and sad. Ray lost and confused. He's not sure what to say and he's not happy with what's been said. All he knows right now is that his baby brother is dead. He stands this way, lost and feeling hopeless, as the sun goes down and the room darkens around him.

He has something more to say, something more he needs to get out. As the gloom settles around him, he's decided he's going to stay on the phone until it gets said.

The End