

WE THOUGHT WE KNEW YOU

M. WILLIAM
PHELPS



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Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals connected to this story.

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For Remington Jade and Kathleen Paige

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IN THE PAST, I'VE opted to use CAPS to indicate text messages between people. Sometimes I've used a different style of font, or bold text to separate texting from actual dialogue. Because texting has become such an inherent, personal part of daily life—and the main source of communicating among most of us—in this book I am including text messages as normal conversational dialogue, mainly because a majority of us text to each other (sadly) more than we actually talk face-to-face. That said, frequently when I include a text conversation in this book, it will be qualified as such—i.e., “she/he texted.”

Likewise, the use of written messages, such as love letters, or court transcripts and sheriff's reports, will be treated as quoted conversations when they are referenced in the text. They will only be italicized when presented in full or in an extracted form. These written pieces of dialogue will only be corrected for misspellings, grammatical difficulties, or problematic punctuation. In nearly all instances, they have been maintained to reflect what the participants said, and how they said it.

The more hidden the venom, the more dangerous it is.
—Marguerite De Valois

PART I

SHE'LL BE THE DEATH OF ME

1

BILL YODER DIDN'T NEED an alarm clock. On most days, the sixty-nine-year-old chiropractor was out of bed by 6:30 a.m. After washing up, he found his way to the exercise room inside his upstate New York home. As Bill spent the next hour getting his blood pumping, his sixty-year-old wife, Mary, rushed around the house getting ready for work.

Keys? Briefcase? Lunch?

"I generally stayed out of her way," Bill said.

After Bill finished his workout routine, a white towel slung over his shoulder, he made his way into the kitchen to rehydrate. At about the same time, Mary was ready to take off for her workday at the chiropractor practice they'd owned and operated for the past thirty years. The office was a fifteen-minute drive from their modest, upper-middle-class home. Bill generally kissed his wife, said good-bye, and told Mary to have a great day.

After Mary left, Bill had coffee with his usual morning reading. On certain days, he'd head over to the local Panera to write out "some thoughts" or "do some of my reflective reading." Other days, Bill pattered around the house doing "handyman work Mary needed me to finish." When he felt inspired, he'd tackle bigger projects in Mary's prized garden she'd assigned him.

With so many things going on at the same time, Mary Yoder was one of those people who forever ran a little bit late. She'd be on

her way out the door and realize, *Oops, I have to do that before I leave.* And then off she went to accomplish what she presumed was a five-minute task that actually took twenty.

Bill would tease her about it.

“No, no . . . Bill. I used to be like that, but not anymore.”

The Yoders’ youngest child, and only son, Adam, was the practice’s full-time office manager. Quite punctual, since starting in 2013, Adam was usually at the office by the time Mary arrived, opening the doors and completing a few duties in the quiet desolation of no one else being around. By the end of that year, however, Adam had returned to school and could no longer work full-time. So he asked his parents if his then-girlfriend, twenty-year-old Kaitlyn “Katie” Conley, could split the time with him. Both would work part-time, Adam explained to his parents. They would divide up office manager responsibilities. Rarely work the same hours.

Into early 2014, as school became more intense, Adam stopped working at the office altogether. He suggested Katie take over full-time office manager responsibilities herself.

Katie was pretty, in a girl-next-door way. Responsible. Smart. She had a royal look about her, like Kate Middleton: classy and businesslike, intelligent, sophisticated. She came from a family with deep roots in the Utica community. Many around town seemed to know a Conley. The house where she grew up and lived with her family sat on acres of land. They raised horses and livestock. Most who knew Katie would describe her as soft-spoken and shy, harmless, and wholesome.

Bill and Mary had gotten to know Katie fairly well as she immersed herself in the daily business of the practice. They liked her. Before that, they knew little about her. Adam had always been a private person, Bill explained, where his personal life was concerned.

“And he had been, from the time he started having relationships. So we didn’t really know Katie until she came to work for us.”

By all accounts, when they weren’t fighting, Katie seemed to make Adam happy. There were bumps throughout the relationship, but Adam was unwilling to share exactly what was going on. The Yoders grew to love and trust Katie. However, the idea of Adam and Katie getting married one day was not something Bill and Mary thought much about.

“Simply because their relationship was too up-and-down at the time,” Bill Yoder explained.

Still, Bill said, “We were reluctant [to hire her full-time] because we didn’t want to have any relationship issues in the office.”

A family-run business was difficult enough, even though Bill and Mary had figured it out. According to Bill, “Mary and I loved working together. We were grateful we could do it. There were no husband-and-wife difficulties where running the business was concerned.”

But Adam had pleaded with his parents. It would be okay, he promised. Katie would focus on work while in the office. Their personal life would be left outside the door.

“We finally said okay,” Bill remembered.

With Katie running the office, Adam pulled back even further when sharing anything about his and Katie’s relationship. For good reason.

“Look,” he told his parents not long after Katie started full-time, “you’ve got this work relationship with her. Our personal stuff should not have anything to do with how she’s treated at the office.”

Fair point.

The office hours were 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The office closed between 12:30 and 1:30 p.m. every day for lunch.

Doors locked. OPEN/CLOSED sign flipped around.

Bill scaled back his hours as chiropractor almost completely during the summer of 2015, focusing on the books—taxes, accounting, payroll. He worked two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and a half-day wherever he could fit it in. He still saw patients, but less as his retirement seemed to be beckoning. Mary covered the other days of the week: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. So dedicated to her work, Mary often drove out to nearby Amish country on certain days after working hours to provide treatment to the Amish. The horse-and-buggy trip into Utica was too far. Likewise, it was too difficult to arrange rides from non-Amish neighbors.

“And that was Mary,” said a friend and longtime patient. “She drove out to the Amish because they *needed* care.”

An accomplished potter and avid gardener, Mary viewed both

hobbies as an extension of her life, not something she did to tinker around and pass time. She also became a Shaklee company rep, selling the products out of the office. According to the company, “Shaklee Corporation is an American manufacturer and distributor of natural nutrition supplements, weight-management . . . beauty . . . and household products.”

Mary kept a “little shop in the back office,” where she sold pottery, health-centered books, and herbal supplies, with lots of Shaklee inventory always on hand. She was passionate about organic products and food. Mary encouraged friends, family, and patients to give themselves the best chance at a healthy lifestyle. Within her own life, a default lunch for Mary on those days she had forgotten to bring one from home was a Shaklee protein shake. She kept a large cannister of Shaklee protein powder in the office refrigerator and mixed a smoothie when a craving hit. The simple recipe she favored never changed: almond milk and Shaklee powder.

As the summer of 2015 burned hot and humid in Oneida County, New York, Mary and Bill seemed to be on autopilot toward retirement. They were dividing the workweek, with Katie Conley running the office, and son Adam completely out of the picture. The Yoders had started to make plans earlier that year to sell the business and to travel.

“Life was as perfect as it could be,” Bill said.

2

CUTTING THROUGH THE CENTER of New York State, Mohawk Valley has a combined populace of about 650,000. Situated between the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains, its aesthetic wonder is impossible to miss as you trek through the New York State Thruway.

That summer of 2015, Bill and Mary Yoder were actively looking to sell the practice. Every time the subject came up, however, step-by-step, behind-the-scenes process of the sale seemed daunting and exhausting. A sale would involve two years of bringing someone in—that is, after they found a qualified buyer with whom they were happy. Then they'd have to train the doctor, beyond making sure patients were comfortable with him or her. To Mary and Bill, the patients were their number one priority—people with whom they'd spent their careers building relationships.

“We were always too busy to do it,” Bill said regarding a potential sale. They'd routinely begin a conversation about retirement and selling, then table it.

Elizabeth Kelly had been a Chiropractic Family Care patient since 1998, seeing Mary and Bill three times per week.

“As my condition became better, I saw them less often,” Elizabeth said. In fact, during the third week of July 2015, Elizabeth was scheduled to see Mary for her one visit that month. On July 20,

Elizabeth checked in with office manager Katie Conley around 2:30 p.m.

“Good afternoon, Elizabeth. Take a seat,” Katie said. “Mary will be with you shortly.”

A few moments later, Elizabeth was on her way into the back office to one of the patient rooms.

Not long after Mary walked into the room, Elizabeth noticed immediately, something was wrong. “She didn’t seem to be as exuberant as I would know her to be. She wasn’t as bright.”

Elizabeth wrote it off as Mary appearing “to have her mind focused someplace else.”

Was it the potential sale of the practice nagging at Mary? Something she ate? A personal problem?

As the afternoon progressed, Mary’s demeanor significantly changed. The people who knew her best, along with those patients who had seen Mary for decades, were taken aback by her behavior and temperament.

“Something is terribly amiss,” Elizabeth Kelly told herself, watching Mary run in and out of the room.

AS A HABIT, MARY and Bill “always kissed each other good-bye” before the start of their day. They had thirty-eight years of marriage behind them, and July 20, 2015, proved no different.

With split shifts at their business, Chiropractic Family Care, Monday was Bill’s turn to stay at home, run errands, and have the day to himself. After a quick smooch, Bill told his wife, “I’ll see you later.”

Mary smiled; she had a glow about her that day, Bill recalled. “Mary was the healthiest person I know,” he added.

She was the most positive, pleasant, and graceful, too. Not much got to Mary, or seemed to bother her.

This particular Monday was another beautiful summer day in upstate/central New York. It was Mary’s favorite time of year. Leaving the house, Mary had one goal in mind: get to work, finish the day, and get home to garden.

“Bye, honey,” Mary said.

“I’ll call you later.”

The Yoders were in the midst of planning a much-needed, long-awaited vacation to Europe. It was something they had discussed nearly every day throughout June and July. In the four decades of their marriage, Mary and Bill had never taken such an extended trip so far away. Generally, four, maybe five days were the most time they could get away from the practice. There were patients who needed to see them every week.

This was going to be the “first, in all of our marriage—a long vacation we never had,” Bill said.

The previous Christmas, Liana Hegde, the couple’s oldest child, had given her parents a cruise.

“As long as we’re going to take a cruise, why don’t we leave three weeks early and travel around Europe and then finish off with the cruise?” Mary suggested to Bill one day.

Bill smiled. It was going to be a “full month just with each other.”

Total relaxation. Completely cut off from the Yoders’ everyday, busy world of running a business, maintaining a home, taking care of family. Just the thought of getting away from the chaos of Adam and Katie’s relationship, and its demise the previous year, was welcoming enough.

The trip was planned September 5 through October 5. The Yoders had arranged with a chiropractor from nearby Syracuse, New York, a man they both knew and respected, to come into the practice one day a week and handle those patients who could not miss a session.

Throughout early summer, leading up to July, Mary and Bill logged on to their computers, booked travel, made hotel reservations, and mapped out the trip. It was an exciting time. They’d worked nearly their entire lives for this moment.

Since Adam’s now–ex-girlfriend, Katie Conley, had taken over as the office manager, he rarely came around the office anymore. Adam was too busy with school and other things, not to mention he and Katie were at odds. Katie seemed to have things in the office under control. Adam and Katie had been together since 2011, on and off. Every so often, a kink in the chain of their relationship presented itself and they’d break up. Contentious as those separations had been, they’d kept most of it private.

By the summer of 2015, however, Adam wanted nothing more to do with Katie romantically. They'd once talked marriage and children, buying a house together, spending the rest of their lives in love. That was all before the nasty text exchanges and rip-roaring fights between them. Each hurling spiteful and hurtful comments. Law enforcement had been involved once. Another man was involved, too. Maybe more, Adam felt. As far as he saw it, the relationship was behind him. Completely over. There was not a chance Katie was going to win him back this time.

After Mary left for work at 7:45 a.m. on July 20, 2015, Bill sat down and took a moment to collect his thoughts. Interesting thing about Mary, Bill recalled, was that she never ate breakfast. She didn't skip it, forget, or was in too much of a hurry to eat. Mary was just not a morning eater.

For Bill, according to what he said later, the day turned out to be a rather ordinary Monday. He claimed to have run errands and napped. Afterward, he did a little bit of work from home. By then, Bill suggested later, he was counting the days until he and Mary were on a plane, taking off for a month of no worries, no stress, just time together.

Throughout that day, Bill Yoder never saw anyone. Or spoke to anyone by phone. He was alone. By himself, he claimed, inside the Yoder house all day. He never left.

3

NEAR 6:30 P.M., ON July 20, 2015, Mary Yoder called home. She explained that she was still at the office. Bill and Mary generally spoke every night before Mary left work, if only for a brief moment. It was a daily routine: Whoever wasn't working would prepare something for dinner.

"I'm coming home," Mary said.

She didn't sound like herself, Bill noticed right away during that call.

"Mary?"

"I'm feeling really sick, Bill," Mary added.

"Mary? You okay?"

"I'm on my way home."

Mary's voice was "strained and exhausted," Bill recalled. It was unlike her. Mary was usually upbeat, plenty of energy, raring to go. Even after a full day of work.

"I don't feel well," Mary said again before hanging up.

Bill stood for a moment. He could sense something wrong. Mary hardly ever got sick. She never complained about being ill when she was.

Thinking about it, Bill decided not to prepare dinner. Mary said she did not want to eat, anyway. Whatever was ailing her, food was the last thing on her mind.

Between 6:45 and 7:00 p.m., Bill looked out through the blinds

in the kitchen and watched Mary pull in. After hastily parking the vehicle, she rushed up the short walkway and entered the house through the kitchen.

Bill was sitting by the door. He heard it open. Mary's entrance sounded difficult and laborious. She was frazzled and in a hurry. Just after barging in, Mary hurried through the kitchen toward the bathroom without saying anything.

Bill got up. Followed his wife. "You okay?"

Mary was already inside the bathroom, on her knees, holding on to the toilet. She didn't say anything.

"She looked drained," Bill remarked later. "Walking dead."

Giving Mary her privacy, Bill stood outside the bathroom door. He paced, listening to his wife vomiting. "Mary! What's going on?"

"I'm feeling really bad," she said in a raspy whisper, in between sudden bursts of vomit.

In total, Mary spent the better part of thirty minutes in the bathroom. Bill knew his wife; he gave Mary the space she needed. When she came out, Mary appeared pale, exhausted. Sweaty. Barely able to walk.

Bill put an arm around his wife's waist, her arm around his shoulder, and helped her walk. Mary carried a plastic vomit bucket. They made it to the living-room couch. Mary plopped herself down, lay on her back, placed her forearm over her forehead.

She didn't say anything.

Twenty minutes passed.

Bill stood by.

At one point, Mary sprang up from the couch and dashed into the bathroom.

More vomiting.

The summer flu? A bug? Food poisoning? Bill could only guess. Mary wasn't one to get sick like this. She was careful about what she ate.

The back and forth to the bathroom and couch continued for the next two hours. Bill sat, stood, and paced, watching Mary dart in and out of the bathroom.

According to Bill, near 9:30 p.m., Mary said, "Just go upstairs to bed. I'm really sick. I'll be okay, once it passes. I need to do this by myself. I'm going to sleep here on the couch."

Bill had his reading glasses in hand. He looked around the living room. Then toward the bathroom.

“Are you sure?”

Mary shook her head yes. She wanted to be left alone.

Bill reassured his wife that if she needed anything, to yell for him. “I’ll be right upstairs if you need me,” Bill said before walking up the stairs into the Yoders’ bedroom.

4

*I*N PRIVATE, MOST AROUND them unaware, Adam Yoder and Katie Conley had an intense passive-aggressive relationship. In several undated letters Adam wrote to Katie during the beginning of their relationship, Adam poured out his heart. Perhaps he wrote these during that euphoric high of thinking about the other person constantly, the world beyond the bubble not existing. Katie had “changed” him, Adam wrote, “for the better.” He had “fallen completely in love” with her in just the “short time” they’d been dating. He had never been more “certain . . . confident . . . without any doubts” about anything in his life.

As he wrote, Adam allowed a whisper of insecurity to creep in. Based on what Katie had been telling him, during “all the times” they had expressed devotion to each other, Adam could not “understand” how she “could still say” she “wondered [about them] sometimes.” It seemed as if Katie was ambivalent, holding back, afraid of falling completely. She appeared to be afraid of reciprocating Adam’s willingness to share his feelings.

Adam described how they could “hit a slump” from time to time, but not a day or night ever ended without the “smile of [Katie’s] face” on his mind. He was infatuated. Completely taken in. Like a young boy in love for the first time. Similarly, however, Adam understood the relationship could turn volatile within a terse text or misunderstanding, constantly teetering on the edge of breakup.

Still, he knew what he wanted. He described how, instead of being negative, he always tried to focus on those “perfect days” they’d shared. He called every twenty-four hours spent with Katie an “honor.” He hoped she felt the same.

As Adam continued discussing their relationship in this early letter, he admitted that, at times, he could get “a little coo-coo-bananas.” Come across as immature. Impatient. He knew his life, up to that time, had been a demanding battle he had been losing. He was in and out of school. Focused on a career, then not. He suffered from depression and anxiety.

Katie had expressed a need for stability. She wanted a man who knew exactly where his life was headed. A man working toward family and adulthood, on a path to responsibility. She was having a hard time believing Adam could fulfill those needs.

Adam considered his instability a symptom of being so much in love with her, adding how he loved her “an extraordinary amount.” But then he wondered, “why . . . the evil little things come out [of you] too . . . ? Because you love *me*?”

What did Adam mean when he referenced “evil little things”? Had Katie exhibited some sort of erratic and strange behavior that he had overlooked? Or was he being flippant and generalizing? Out of the two of them, it was Katie who seemed grounded, able to set and achieve goals, stay on the path of her dreams, keep her head in the right space, fully commit to a longtime pledge of family and love.

Contrarily, Adam seemed unable to commit, regardless of all the gushing language. He had no direction. One day, he came across loving, caring, sweet. The next, a total contrast—full of anger, loathing, and verbal venom.

Adam hardly ever talked to his father about the problems he was having with Katie. His personal life was his own, he’d tell both parents. Quiet, introspective, and private, Adam did not want to burden anyone around him with his demons. He would confide in his mother. But those conversations were subject to how Adam was feeling on a particular day.

At the office, Katie was a consummate professional. Not one patient, or anyone interacting with her throughout the business day,

would say different. Katie took on a task, and she did it. If she messed something up, Bill or Mary would explain how to do it properly.

“Good employee. Responsible. When we gave her a list of things to do, she’d return the list completed and we never worried that she’d *not* done it,” Bill said later. “She’d do whatever it took.”

One of the tasks Katie mastered was keeping records. She entered which patient paid and which patient didn’t, the amount the insurance covered, co-pays, and how much a patient still owed. Mary and Bill were so dedicated to patient care, there were patients who paid with produce (vegetables). Others with pies. Money wasn’t an issue; it was about making the patients feel better and putting them on a path toward their bodies healing themselves.

The accounting always balanced out, Bill explained. “Katie never made mistakes with one or the other, when it came to the books.”

Neither Bill nor Mary worried about trusting Katie. It was never an afterthought or part of any discussion. Katie never gave them reason.

They’d ask Adam about Katie.

“Don’t want to talk about our relationship,” he’d say.

About a year after Katie starting working at the office, Adam approached Bill and Mary one night.

“Katie is not invited to any of our family events or family functions any longer. She’s not going to come over and play board games anymore. Not going to go down to Liana’s anymore. She’s just not invited to any family stuff.”

Adam said he wasn’t bitter or angry. It was simply what he wanted. No details. No specific reason given.

To Bill, Adam was making a statement about his personal life. He never mentioned an event stirring the decision; he just needed it to be known.

“Everything okay?” Mary asked.

“Yes. I’m not going to say why.”

Bill and Mary knew to let it go.

Playing board games became a monthly, sometimes biweekly,

event for Adam, Mary, and Bill. As they played and talked one night after Adam had explained Katie was no longer invited, Mary and Bill picked up on a different tone in Adam's comments about her. He sounded more positive and loving when he'd mention her. They felt Adam had turned a corner with Katie. They were getting along better, so Bill made a suggestion.

"Katie is still welcome to come over for our board game nights, Adam."

"We'd like that," Mary added.

"No! I told you. She's not welcome at family events any longer. She's not going to be invited to *any* family things again."

Mary and Bill looked at each other. Were Adam and Katie together or not? To Bill and Mary, the status of their relationship always felt uncertain. In limbo. They knew better than to press Adam for details.

5

*M*ARY YODER DID NOT focus on food. On those Mondays she worked, for example, she might take a bag lunch with her, if there were leftovers. Or toss a salad together and throw it into Tupperware. Most days, however, Mary preferred those Shaklee protein shakes she mixed at work. It was easy. Healthy. Convenient. A no-fuss way to get the nutrients she needed without being bogged down all day by a heavy breakfast or lunch, bloated and groggy.

This was one reason why Bill was startled by his wife walking into the kitchen after her day and rushing by him into the bathroom. He wondered what might have brought on such a violent, sudden illness.

At six-thirty on July 21, the morning after Mary came home ill, Bill opened his eyes and jumped out of bed. Mary had not come upstairs all night. She'd stayed on the couch, close to the bathroom. Bill made it downstairs as fast as he could to check and see if she was okay.

When Bill hit the final few steps, he felt a sense of mild relief upon seeing Mary sitting up on the couch.

"Mary! My goodness. How are you?"

She was pale, sweaty. Her sitting up wasn't a sign of feeling any better.

"She was actually worse than the night before," Bill later remembered.

"I haven't slept all night," Mary uttered, her voice broken and weak. "Vomiting, diarrhea . . . abdominal pains. I've been running in and out of the bathroom. Sitting on the toilet with a bucket between my legs, nonstop throwing up and diarrhea."

Bill picked up the phone and called Liana, their daughter, a medical doctor. He explained the past twelve hours, rattling off as many of Mary's symptoms that he could recall.

"What should I do, Liana?"

Liana advised the emergency room immediately. "She needs fluids, if nothing else."

"Sit tight, Mary. We're going to the hospital."

Bill had just been through this same situation a few months before with Adam, who had come down with a seemingly similar gastrointestinal, or GI, bug.

All of the same symptoms.

"I knew what the course of this was going to be because I had been through it with Adam. You love the person. You take care of them, thinking this is going to come and go."

Bill ran back upstairs. Got dressed.

It was 9:00 a.m. by the time Bill finished dressing and went back downstairs. Mary was fading, getting worse as the morning progressed. St. Luke's Hospital was a short drive from their home on King Road in the Sauquoit section of Whitesboro, a Utica suburb.

On the way out the door, Mary grabbed her vomit bucket. A slow walk to the car, Mary's arm slung over her husband's shoulder, she and Bill struggled to get her into the passenger's seat. She was now beyond weak and rubbery.

Bill drove fast. Looking at his wife, he reassured Mary everything was going to be fine. The ER would take her right away. They'd figure it out. She'd get IV fluids. Meds. She'd be back to herself in no time.

Bill helped Mary into the ER. He explained to reception what was going on. They took Mary in without delay. Doctors and nurses pumped fluids into Mary via IV, getting her rehydrated. She got a bit of energy back, but still couldn't stand on her own feet. Bill sat by her side, watching, listening, hoping the pain his wife was suffering would soon subside. It crushed him to think Mary was hurting in any way.

Late into the day, after a CAT scan and several additional tests, Bill consulted with the doctor outside Mary's room.

"We just don't know yet what's going on," the doctor explained, adding how he'd ordered more tests. "We'll figure it out. The process will take time."

Doctors were able to control Mary's vomiting and diarrhea, giving her medications to suppress both. They also gave her "something for [the] pain," her body throbbing, every nerve seemingly pulsating.

Mary dozed in and out all day.

"She didn't look good," Bill recalled.

A patient Mary had seen on the morning she became ill described the chiropractor as "happy, enthusiastic, vibrant . . . full of life." A few hours after lunch, however, Mary became the opposite. Something between the morning and early afternoon had touched off this bout of whatever illness Mary had. She'd been fine. Smiling, laughing, being her usual jovial self. Then, after visiting her ninety-three-year-old mother at her sister's house during lunch, leaving Katie Conley to handle the calls and stay at the office, returning about 1:30 p.m., Mary was a different person.

"Can you go home and get my ADVAIR?" Mary asked Bill at about 3:00 p.m. on the day they sat in the ER. She was having trouble breathing and attributed it to allergies and not having her meds.

Bill rushed home, found the ADVAIR, then rushed back to the hospital. As he came around the corner and looked toward his wife's room, Bill saw several nurses and a doctor at Mary's bedside. They were rushing around, working on her.

Bill hurried. Walked in, placed the ADVAIR on the nightstand by her bed.

"What's going on?"

"We're giving her a nebulizer breathing treatment," the nurse said. Mary needed help clearing her bronchial tubes. She was struggling to get her breath back.

It took some time, but doctors were able to stabilize Mary's breathing and she indicated feeling slightly better, as far as her breathing. Still, she had a gaunt, pasty look. Her skin gray. Her eyes tired, heavy.

After everyone left the room, Bill sat with his wife. He couldn't help but think how the previous day they were sketching out a monthlong trip to Europe. Now, Mary was in bed, in the ER, and there had been no change from the previous night. If anything, she was worse, weaker than Bill had ever seen her.

Then some news: Based on all the tests they'd run thus far, Mary did not have the flu. Or a stomach bug.

Whatever she had picked up was far more serious.

"We want to keep her overnight," a doctor said late afternoon.

Bill looked at his wife, then back at the doctor. His first thought: *They had done that with Adam when he came down with the same bug.*

"Just to keep a check on her," the doctor added.

Being a doctor himself, Bill knew a sixty-year-old woman suffering from some type of GI illness working its way through her system was safer overnight in a hospital. Mary hadn't thrown up in quite a while. She seemed to be resting well.

Thank goodness, Bill thought early into the evening.

"But the truth is," he later recalled, "by the time we arrived at the hospital that morning, my wife was already dead. We just didn't know it."