

What If...

A Temporal Inversion?

By Dr. Katherine E.A. Korkidis

Ana Quin O'Rourke sat on her balcony sipping a cup of her favorite tea, Earl Grey Black with Lavender. Her home facing the waters of the Pacific Ocean. The view of the crashing waves seem to carry her to times passed. She was a young woman, a wife, and a mother in her early thirties. Petite with long dark hair flowing over her slender shoulders. Some would say she was attractive to the eye, yet she never saw herself that way. She was a mother of two young sons and her focus was her family then her career. Her career was on the upswing and her family was growing and thriving. Some would say she had a charmed life, yet for Ana on this evening something was missing. Something was lost and as time moved forward it could never be found.

Four years ago Ana lost her mother. Her mother Sophie barely in her fifties died suddenly of a brain stroke. They spoke about the children just that morning. Laughing and enjoying each other's company. By evening she was gone. It was hard for Ana to accept this loss yet time marched on and for the sake of her father she faced her new reality. The acceptance of loss does not mean that the pain is any less. It is just that we learn to live with it. It was hard on her father losing the love of his life. In his mid-fifties he had taken early retirement so they could travel and see the world. He built a home by the sea for she loved the view, not unlike Ana. Often husband and wife, now with their children settled with families of their own, would walk along the water's end with the silvery reflection of the moon in its waves. For Mr. O'Rourke the future he had planned was now gone. His regrets were many and the guilt was strong. Why did he choose that day to take a fishing trip with his neighbors. Why did he leave her alone for hours? She seemed fine when he left. Could he have changed her fate if he returned home earlier? One does not know what difference

time makes. Ana too felt this loss and the guilt that comes with it. She spoke to her mother that morning and all was well. It was a busy day for her boys and her daughter, Nicole. Both boys had sporting events and with her husband away on a business trip she was a single parent. She was always at her children's events whether musical or sporting. On this day her eldest, Jonathan, had a school play. She picked up the children at the conclusion of school, fed them and prepared to return with them to see her son's performance. Her mother called earlier to say that she had decided not to attend that evening. She was tired and chose to get some rest. Ana understood and did not disturb her. The play went well. The children needed to complete their school work. Dinner was ready and the children were bathed and laid to sleep. Ana was tired and as she sat on the couch, fell asleep. She was meaning to call her mother but did not wish to wake her. So morning came and a call from a frantic spouse arose her. Her mother was gone, and nothing could be done. So Ana helped her father make the arrangements and her mother was laid in a permanent rest.

As the waves crashed on the shore, Ana remembered that day and how life changed for her, her father, her children, and her siblings. She wondered what would have been different if her mother was found in time. If she received emergency care when it was needed. So many what ifs with no answers. As Ana sat on her balcony, some will say she fell asleep and dreamed what was to come. Others more imaginative would say that Ana had a unique experience. It was getting late, and Ana had a presentation first thing in the morning. She went to bed hoping she would get enough sleep to be clear headed in the morning. The presentation went well with many accolades. As she returned to her office to continue the work of the day, her secretary had left her a note – “your Mom called and asked if you could call her back when you get the chance.” Ana was convinced that the note was in error. How could this be? It was four years since her mother had passed. This must be a joke, a sick joke at that, or in error. She waited for her secretary to return and to question

her. This young assistant was a sub since her wonderful secretary Terri left the day before for her maternity leave. Maybe a woman called, and this sub mistakenly thought it was Ana's mother. Ana had older friends that were in some ways a second mother to her. She addressed the note when Melissa, her new secretary, returned.

"Melissa, did someone call for me earlier when I was away from my office?"

"Yes, it was your mother. She seemed very nice. She would like you to call her back at your convenience."

"Are you sure she said she was my mother?"

"Absolutely, I asked her name, and she told me Mrs. Sophie O'Rourke."

"Yes, that is my mother's name, but are you sure that is the name she gave you?"

"Ms. O'Rourke, yes, I am sure."

Ana, confused and upset, decided to call the number because she recognized it. A woman answered with her mother's voice. This cannot be, she thought.

"Mom, is that you?"

"Of course, honey, your dad is not home at the moment. I hope I did not disturb you at work. I just wanted to check what time we should come by to see Jonathan's play. We are so excited to see our grandson perform."

"Mom are you sure you are, okay?"

"Honey why do you ask? All is well. What time should we be there?"

"Dad and you are coming? I thought Dad was on a fishing trip."

“He canceled it so we can both attend Jonathan’s play tonight.”

“Mom, thank you for coming. I missed you very much.”

“Honey, I miss you too and look forward to seeing you tonight.”

Ana was floored. The woman she was talking to was her mother. The voice and phrasing was the same. How could this be. My mother is gone. This cannot be true. I must be losing my mind. I need to see her right away. She told Melissa and her boss that she had to leave early for a family matter. Mr. Nelson knew his Director of Research and Marketing to be a hard working dedicated employee. He was convinced this must be important. He agreed to handle her appointments for the afternoon. She rushed to her parents home. She found her father in his favorite place, in front of his house tending to the growth of his flower garden. She hugged and kissed him and asked if her mother was in the house. He replied yes and pointed towards the kitchen. As Ana entered the kitchen, she could smell the chocolate chip cookies her mother always made. Standing there by the counter preparing the cookie dough for baking was the woman she loved deeply since she was a child. Ana became frightened. She knew rationally that this woman was now gone. She could not be standing there, yet she was.

“Mom the cookies smell wonderful. The boys and Nicole will be thrilled if you bring them to the play.”

“Of course, I will. Is Nicole, Jonathan’s friend.”

“Mom, are you okay? Nicole is your granddaughter.”

“Honey, are you okay? I have two wonderful grandsons from my only child.”

“Mom, that is not right. You have three grandchildren and two additional children, my sister Julie, and my brother Zachary.”

“Honey, you must be tired. Why not take a short nap and I will wake you up when it is time to pick up the boys. If you like we can pick them up for you?”

“Mom, I think I need that nap, thank you.”

Ana went into her old bedroom that was still intact. There was one other bedroom beside her parents’ master bedroom, and it looked like a guest bedroom. There was no evidence of her brother and sister. The photos on the walls were of herself, Davin, her husband, Jonathan, and Michael. There were no photos of Nicole. This cannot be but she convinced herself that she needed to sleep.

Once awake all will be back to what they had been. Yet she was thrilled to see and talk with her loving mother once again. How much she missed those moments. All Ana wanted was one more hug from her loving mother.

“Ana, it is time to wake up. The boys are here with me.”

“Mom, you look tired”, said Ana’s boys in unison.

Ana arose still confused but grateful to have this time with her boys and their grandmother.

“Let us have dinner and then we can leave for the play.”

“Yes, Mom, I am so glad you can attend the play with us.”

“Honey, I would never miss my grandson’s performance!”

“Mom, I know you would not do so.”

Yet Ana remembers that indeed this woman, her mother, did miss Jonathan's play. This was the day she passed. Yet now she was here with them. This must be a dream or a mental breakdown. To Ana it all did not make any sense. How can the events of this day change? How could this woman she loved so deeply be here with her? None of this was possible. Ana decided to play along and see where all would end. She put her doubts and concerns aside for now.

The evening went smoothly, and Jonathan was so happy to have his grandparents attend his play. Jonathan was the lead, and all were proud of him. They drove back to her parents home. The boys were tired, and Ana thought it best that they spend the night.

"Good night, Dad, wonderful dreams."

"Good night my sweet girl, see you in the morning. We are very proud of Jonathan."

Ana remained in the kitchen with her mother.

"Mom, dad looks tired. Is he okay?"

"Yes, honey, he is in excellent health, as am I. Nothing to worry about. Would you like a cup of Earl Grey Black with Lavender?"

"Mom, you know my favorite late night relaxer."

"Of course my girl, I know all that you love and enjoy."

"Mom, will you promise me never to leave me."

"Honey, I wish I could say 'yes' but we are all controlled by our fate. I might not be with you, but I will be with you always in spirit. Never doubt that."

"Mom, can I have a hug?"

“Of course honey.”

As they hugged tightly Ana did not wish to let go. Yet after a few moments her hands fell to her side, and her mother was gone.

She was now in her own kitchen, alone.

Was this a dream? Did she truly visit with her loving mother she missed so much? We will never know. But for Ana she received the best gift she could have ever received – A hug from her mother, Mrs. Sophie O’Rourke.