

From The Island Of Final Regrets

by Paul Steven Stone

A friend of mine recently died and went to Heaven, or so I innocently thought. It was only when I received a letter a month later postmarked "The Island of Final Regrets" that I realized he was still in transit.

"Paul Steven" his familiar scrawl began, "don't flip out, but I'm writing from this incredible place where departed souls get to enjoy everything we wanted during our lives, but never got.

"They call it The Island Of Final Regrets; maybe because we get one final chance to make up for our regrets.

"Anyway, if you could see me now, you'd see your old buddy living in a house twice as big as that pretentious barn of Parker Mason's. Don't mean to brag, but I've got plasma TV's in every room, servants everywhere and a fridge stocked with more beer than a liquor store ice locker.

"And remember how Parker's garage was so puny it could barely hold five cars? Well, my villa (as I like to call it) has a garage bigger than a house, and last time I was inside I counted 14 vehicles, though two were only motorcycles.

"Gotta run. I'm having Elvis, Ghandi and Marilyn Monroe over for dinner tonight. I'll let you guess which one won't be going home until the morning. (I'm such a wicked ghost!)

He ended his note with "Yours, Truly Contented," followed by his lifelong nickname, "Spike."

Well, I didn't know what to make of it, but I felt pretty envious of Spike living in a mansion bigger and better than Parker Mason's. Of course, 'living' isn't quite the right word, but whatever Spike was doing he was doing it big. In our circle, Parker Mason set the bar awfully high when it came to pursuing an ostentatious,

expensive and crass lifestyle, and here was old Spike blowing sand and spit in Parker's stuck-up eye!

A month or so later I received a second letter with that same Island Of Final Regrets postmark.

"Greetings, Paul Steven" it began. "If this aint Heaven it gets high marks for trying! I didn't mention it last time, but your old pal is top cock-of-the-walk in these parts. I'm so famous I can't go for a jog in my Michael Jordan platinum running shoes without having to stop every block to give autographs to adoring fans. It's funny but nobody, least of all me, can tell you what I'm famous for. I must have wanted to be famous when I was alive but neglected to be more specific about it.

"Anyway, being famous is just the way I imagined: everybody treating me special, paparazzi taking pictures wherever I go, my photo splattered across magazines at the supermarket checkout. It gets so insane I sometimes have to take off on my yacht just to get some breathing space.

"Speaking of my yacht (all 149 feet of it!), the other day I sailed by this pretty little island surrounded by rocks. Checking it out with my \$1000 Vivitar binoculars, I saw this absolutely stunning woman standing on the dock who not only seemed familiar to me but appeared to be actually waving for me to join her.

"This gets even crazier, because that woman on the dock looked amazingly like my beloved mother, my loving wife, my childhood sweetheart and—go ahead and laugh!—Mother Teresa, all combined into one.

"I don't know what it meant but I could feel some powerful impulse drawing me towards her. If I hadn't been running late for Madonna's pre-concert VIP party I would have sailed to her in an instant. Keep your eye on these pages, old buddy, I'll have more to report in my next letter."

This time he signed off, "Sincerely Satisfied, Spike."

The next and final letter arrived a week later and began, "Paul Steven, I can't take this anymore!

“I know that sounds funny from a guy who thought he had died and went to Heaven, but Heaven starts to get real dry and tasteless when it's simply a pale reflection of your childish appetites and enthusiasms.

“Think about it,” he went on to explain. “every stupid whim or desire of mine gets thrown across my path on a daily basis. I once foolishly thought I could never get enough of Emma's Special Artichoke Pizza. Let me officially state for the record I have now had enough Emma's Special Artichoke Pizza to satisfy a lifetime of cravings. Emma can shut down the oven, throw out the leftover artichokes and head for the showers.

“And another thing, I'm getting seriously bored with all these beautiful women and wind-up sycophants kissing my ass and catering to my every whim. Makes me feel I'm trapped in that movie where all the wives had brain surgery to make them docile. That might have worked in a movie, but here on the Island it gets real old when every word I say is hailed as brilliant and every joke has everyone in stitches. Even when I leave out the punchline!

“Truth is, Paul Steven, it's weird to be so famous and successful when there's nothing behind my success except some regret I had before I died.

“But if I'm honest, my real problem is that babe on the island, the one who was calling to me. Turns out you can only get to her island by taking this one ferry small enough to get through the ring of rocks. But it's so small *you're not allowed to take one single possession with you!* And once you go there, for some strange reason, you can never come back. That's right, I'd have to leave everything behind: the villa, the SUV's, the indoor swimming pool, and wealth so unimaginable I'm still struggling to count it all up.

“Every morning I wake up determined to take that ferry. Honest! I go down to the dock, buy a ticket, empty my pockets (which they make you do) then stand there, frozen in place, watching the ferry go back and forth all day.

“I see her in the distance, standing on the dock waving at me. You might not believe it, but even though I'm dead I can still

experience pain, still feel desire burning in my heart. And yet as much as I'm 'dying' to go to her, I can't get myself to leave everything behind, no matter how hollow and lifeless it all seems.

"Tell you one thing, Paul Steven, the longer I remain here the more I understand why this place is called The Island Of Final Regrets. And it's got nothing to do with regrets I had when I was alive."

The last thing he said in his letter was, "Stay cool, old buddy. I'll write again when I finally get over to that island."

That was two years ago, and since then I haven't heard another word from Spike. I just wish I had some way of writing back so I could ask about Madonna's VIP Party.

