

Under the Mat

Written by admin

Monday, 17 December 2012 14:59 - Last Updated Monday, 17 December 2012 15:35

by Pam Ford Davis



Day or night, I could get inside without bothering my folks. Dad first made the key available when I lived in the college dorm.

"Son, let yourself in; I'll put an extra key on the top step, under the mat."

"Dad, I'll call you or Mom first. I'm not going to just barge in."

"Nonsense! Come and go as you please. Just remember to put the key back on that first step."

From college-to-career man, to Dad's caregiver, I've balanced life upon the top step. Stooping, I've retrieved the key countless times. Today, in great concern, I hurry home.

Mom passed peacefully three years ago. After 65 years of marriage, she suffered a massive stroke, slipped into a comma and never regained consciousness. A day never passes that Dad doesn't grieve his great loss.

I'm hitting every red light.

Gripping the wheel, I mentally replay the early morning call from Dad's home health nurse.

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"Mr. Cunningham, sorry to bother you so early, but thought you should know about my visit with your Dad yesterday afternoon."

"Has he fallen again?"

"No, nothing like that. I hate to cause a fuss, but he acted rather peculiar. As I was preparing to leave, he asked me to sit down beside him."

"Was that unusual?"

"Yes, he knew I had a busy schedule and needed to leave for my next appointment."

"Did he complain about something?"

"No. He said he would not be seeing me again, that he wanted me to know how much he appreciated my visits. I asked if the home health agency was replacing me. I was confused. Why would they tell him before notifying me?"

"Had they?"

She hesitated, took a deep breath, and told me point blank, "He said he was going home. He would not be there when I came back."

"Going home? I'm afraid he is getting senile!"

"No, he is not feeble minded. Your dad said an angel came to the foot of his bed the night before. The angel said it was time for him to be going on home. He pointed above with a look of serenity and excitement. He said he was going to his eternal home."

I should have tried to call Dad, made an excuse that I just wanted to stop by to have a quick cup of coffee on my way to work. He'll suspect something is wrong if I knock on his door so early.

Swerving off to hug the curb, I park and decide to grab the spare key. If Dad is still in bed, I don't want to roust him out of sleep.

I lumber up the creaking stairs. Stopping on the top step, lifting the dew soaked mat, I begin fidgeting for the hidden key. To my surprise, I see two glistening keys.

That's strange. Dad has a key; the nurse has her key and there's the spare key. The nurse keeps hers on a key-chain Why would Dad leave his key here too?

I palm both keys, use one to unlock the door, and pocket the other. Once inside, I see light flooding the living room; between faded drapes, a blinding beam of light targets Dad. I see him in flannel pajamas, stretched out on the sagging sofa. Next to him, on the end table, a reading light burns brightly.

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Dad is the picture of contentment with his right hand resting upon his tattered large print Bible.

Maybe he just dozed off.

I tip toe over torn linoleum, noticing he had circled a scripture on the opened page.

Why won't he wear that new robe I bought for him?

I reach to the back of the couch to pull down Mom's handmade afghan.

That's all he needs, to get chilled and catch pneumonia

As I work to cover Dad, my hand brushes his bristly cheek. I draw back aghast. Devoid of all body temperature, I immediately know that Dad is dead. I go limp and fall down on my knees beside his lifeless body. Tears stream down my face, spilling onto his opened Bible. The circled passage from John 14 beckons. Beginning at verse 1, I thumb down the page

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you"

The Carpenter has finished Dad's mansion. Jesus holds the only key to the heavenly door.

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