

Marilyn Nease

A SICKBED MEMORY

Being sick is probably the thing I most hate. I've found only a few good things about it. One is that once I'm well again, I have a renewed appreciation for health and the routine things of daily life. Another is that it affords me a chance to be reminded of how much I like having family and friends and knowing they care about me. The only other good thing I've discovered about being sick is it allows me lots of time to think. When I'm sick and can't sleep, my mind sometimes turns in upon itself and reviews its past. I've recalled and relived many scenes from the past while staring into the empty space of daylight or the darkness of night, waiting for the healing power of sleep to return.

One night recently, as I lay for what seemed hour after hour, alternately coughing and lying quietly, waiting for my eyes and mind to drift into the haze of sleep, I found myself thinking of my father and wanting him to be there by my bed to wait with me. I began to remember all the times in my high school and college years when I'd awoken in the dark of a winter night, coughing because of congestion in my lungs, and soon I'd realize Daddy was there beside my bed, waiting with me. It never failed. Daddy was always there. He always waited.

We never said much, other than perhaps when I quieted, he'd sometimes say, "You okay, Chicken?" and reach out to touch my arm or hand, and I'd mumble a sleepy answer and fall back into my pillow and the world of sleep. I never heard or saw him come to my bedside or leave it, but he was always there in the night when I needed help.

It's odd what thoughts come to my mind at times. Thinking of Daddy makes me think of other scenes from my childhood. Daddy and I are a lot alike. We're both "stubborn as mules." My hard-headedness must come from him. Neither of us liked to give in. I suppose our quarreling was natural. He was my father and was responsible for getting me ready for life on my own. I was his daughter and wanted to begin my own life—ready or not. Through it all, we survived, and our love for each other did, too.

Perhaps that's why he came to my mind in the darkness that night. He was there beside my bed, waiting with me, after all.