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**An Interns Story:**

As the intern on call at Huntington Hospital, I was assigned to sleep in the house staff quarters during my nights on duty. I was responsible for emergencies for all hospitalized patients during the night, often rushing to resuscitate patients in shock or cardiac arrest. The tasks were challenging, even exciting, and honed my interest in cardiology rather than the career in psychiatry, previously anticipated.

Intern call brought one sporadic late night task which haunted me, that of pronouncing dead the wasted, chronically ill patients who expired without any attempt at rescue. They were victims of cancer or other lingering, terminal diseases and often died without family present. Death would sometimes go unnoticed for an hour or more, if the nurses were preoccupied with paperwork or late night personal telephone conversations.

By the time I was summoned, the corpse was often rigid and waxy. While confirming the absence of a pulse or respiration, I would feel on the body surface a coating of cold sweat. On occasion there would be a family member present in the room, but more often I was alone at the bedside with the deceased, while making notes in a chart. Telephone calls to the attending doctor followed and then often at his request a call to family asleep at home; family whom I had never known and probably would never meet. I would make a feeble attempt at comfort, but then escape embarrassment by ending the conversation as quickly as possible.

Then I would return to my own bed in the house staff quarters, where I would fade in and out of fitful sleep. A dream that my own father had died would invariably recur, and I would awaken in my own waxy, cold sweat, with fear in my heart. I would believe in that moment, that an opportunity had been lost forever--to either gain additional wisdom or to sufficiently express my love.

In the "twilight" of near sleep, I would pass the balance of the night, believing that my father was dead and that I was unprepared for what would follow.

I could not see that he had taught me everything that he knew, both good and bad, whether he had intended to or not. I could not appreciate that the confusion which left me striving and often devoid of joy was greater in him than it was in me--because he had, in fact, been a much better father to me than had his father been to him. And then I would awaken and realize that his death had been a dream.

There is a limit to improvisation, when you are making up the way to live a life as you go along. There is a limit to what you can fake about love, when what you have been taught is incomplete. Pain leads to desperation and desperation to a hardened heart. And thus to some degree, life turns all our hearts to stone.

From my earthly father I learned hard work and to always endure. I learned to expect little, but know that much is expected. I learned to hide my shame. But when the late night confrontation with death became my own, would I have to fake that too?

My Heavenly Father promises "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." To be joined to His heart our own hearts must be transformed. Our time here is short, because He longs to hold us sooner, not later--and that for our sake, not His own.

To gain my own life, I must know that I will lose it. And urgently cling to Him, not to what I can see or hear or feel.

And thus it is Death that brings us life.