



LAST MEAL, LAST BREATH

"Am I home?"

Monday, two days later, George was more tired and quiet than usual. I considered changing my schedule. After talking with him about how he felt, he said he would nap while I was gone. When I returned in the late afternoon, he had refused the dinner I prepared for the nursing assistant to feed him. He told her he'd like to eat with his wife. His nap had rejuvenated him.

He teased me, "Can't a guy get a good meal in this prison? I want steak for dinner." George was a steak and potatoes gourmet, but hadn't asked for either of these for months.

I was shocked. When I left for an appointment, he was barely able to talk, and now he wanted a steak dinner. *What was going on?*

As his nurse, I knew he shouldn't have steak. His digestive system was nearly inactive, and red meat is often the first food to be rejected by the dying. If he ate it, I knew he would be uncomfortable by that evening. But

as his wife, I couldn't refuse him. He asked so little from me. I suspected he was giving me a subtle message when he teased me about a prison, that this would be his last meal.

"Okay, how do you want it cooked?"

"Rare, and I'll have fried potatoes with it," he said.

Gracious me, I thought. *He's up to something.*

"That'll take some time, so come down to the kitchen with me and you can watch your investment program, while I fix our dinner."

Finding something he liked to eat was becoming more difficult because he said food didn't have any taste, now. But the steak had all the taste he wanted.

He slowly chewed every small bite of his steak and literally drooled with delight. I took a mental picture to store in my heart. He ate a few bites of potatoes, which smelled scrumptious to me, but I didn't eat any because of the fat. Then, because the warmth felt soothing on his throat, he decided to focus on his Bushmills.

After I tucked George into bed that night, I sat by his side while he slept, looking around our exceptionally large master suite on the third floor of our townhouse. I knew how blessed we were to be so comfortable. The walls of our bedroom, windowed for more than thirty feet, looked onto magnificent bird-filled trees. We loved listening to the bird songs. His music system played constantly as he changed the programs from his bed with a special monitor. His computer was close by on his favorite antique desk, as he monitored his investments over the