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Regret

by Sue Hitchcock

My father's funeral service took place at the United Reform Church in Tiverton. It was the church my parents had agreed to attend, when they retired there, though my mother would have preferred to belong to the Brethren. It was just as well that I knew nobody except my immediate family, as I was crying like a fool, distraught, tears pouring down my cheeks. My family might have suspected the reason, though they had their own grief to deal with. Hopefully, though, the strangers would have assumed that I was the most devoted.

It had been a year of change. My daughters, four and six years old, had started full-time school and it was time for me to start making a serious contribution to the household income. The obvious choice was to become a teacher, so I had enrolled at the local Teachers' Training College. The news that my father had had a stroke came just as a period of teaching practice had started.

My mother told me that he had difficulty speaking and swallowing, but could walk about and was managing. I delayed visiting. My sister and her family visited them for Christmas and I was relieved to have time for my little girls, who weren't enjoying spending time with a friend's family for an hour after school.

My husband went back to work after New Year, at least he set out. It was six weeks before he came home after being run over, still on crutches for yet another six weeks. One benefit was that he was at home for the girls. During that three months I was a superwoman, visiting the hospital, writing essays, teaching during another period of teaching practice, besides being wife, mother and housekeeper.

My father? He was struggling and my sister kept me informed. He could still walk. I couldn't converse with him on the phone – he couldn't talk. I would visit at Easter, but he died, too soon, before I could go.

So at his funeral, I wept. I was in the depths. I had failed the father who had never failed me. Could the strangers in the church know my shame? They didn't even know my name.