

THE LAST DANCE

*I*t often happens that people share their treasured experiences with me after one of my lectures. This day was no exception. I had just finished lecturing to a group of nurses at a critical-care symposium. The previous speaker had been a dynamic woman who had discussed many new perspectives on and hiring practices of current health-care organizations. She had given a wonderful PowerPoint presentation with her computer, and many audience members crowded up to talk with her after she had finished. The presentation had run at least ten minutes over the allotted time.

My talk was the last one of the day. I felt at ease with the group, and the stories I told (ones recorded in this book) were well received. I walked to the back of the hall and was surprised to see that the previous speaker had stayed to listen. She thanked me and said that she had had just one similar experience. It had happened early in her career, when she was working as a nurse in a coronary care unit.

As she was reporting for her shift, she saw the cardiac monitor in a patient's room suddenly go from normal sinus rhythm to ventricular fibrillation. She ran into the room and delivered a precordial thump, a forceful blow to the sternum designed to shock or startle the heart back into normal sinus rhythm. Resuscitative efforts were started, and the patient, an elderly widow in her late seventies, was quickly stabilized. The nurse felt proud and pleased to have been of such service.

Later in the evening, as her shift drew to a close, she decided to go back to check on the lady. She walked into the room and introduced herself, and she was somewhat surprised when the lady said, "Oh, so you're the one!"

"Yes, I saw the monitor and realized you had slipped into ventricular fibrillation. I ran into your room to help you," she said, not at all expecting what was said next.

"Well, I must admit that I don't quite know if I should be thanking you or not. You see, I was having the most extraordinary dream. My dear husband, who died several years ago, was standing just above the bed," she said,



quickly wiping a tear from the corner of her eye. “He put his hand out to me and I took it, and then he lifted me up right out of this bed. Gently, he wrapped his arms around me and we began to dance. He always said he would save the last dance for me. We danced blissfully in each other’s arms — that is, until you hit me in the chest!”

The nurse looked at me with a smile on her face. “I didn’t know what to make of it then, but it’s the reason I stayed and listened to your lecture.”

As I drove home in rush-hour traffic, I, too, hoped that he really did save the last dance for her.

