

# Healing Love

## *Chapter One*

“Clear!”

The lifeless body on the bed arched slightly as 250 volts of electrical current passed from one defibrillator paddle to another. Five pairs of eyes focused on the cardiac monitor waiting for any indication of a return to a normal heart rate.

Nurse Valerie Garrett reached over to the defibrillator. “Charging to 300,” she said firmly, her hazel eyes focused upon the tall, dark-skinned doctor standing beside her. As he held the paddles in place on the chest of Eastmont Hospital’s latest emergency room patient, Dr. Ben Shepherd waited for the head nurse’s signal that the paddles were fully charged once more. As soon as Valerie nodded, Dr. Shepherd commanded his staff to stand clear and discharged the paddles. The body of the 36-year-old patient arched once more, and again, all eyes followed the thin white line on the overhead monitor. Suddenly, a small blip appeared, followed by another, and then more in a somewhat irregular pattern, but one that could sustain life.

“We got him back, folks. Now let’s keep him,” stated Dr. Shepherd. He placed a stethoscope on the patient’s chest and listened while the ER staff around him automatically moved to stabilize their patient.

“BP’s low, but holding,” reported Valerie as she watched a student nurse attempt to establish an intravenous line in the hand of the patient.

“We need that line in now,” Dr. Shepherd said brusquely.

“Mrs. Garrett, I don’t think I can get this in,” whispered the young woman who had just stuck a needle into the hand of the nonresponsive patient.

Valerie saw the student nurse’s hand trembling. Resisting the impulse to take the needle from the young girl and do it herself, Valerie spoke reassuringly to her. “Don’t retract the needle. Hold it

steady and feel for the vein. You know it's there; it just needs an anchor. You can do it, Beth. Once you feel it pop, advance the needle forward a bit and slide the catheter into the vein."

The blonde woman nodded her head and palpated the patient's vein once more. Valerie glanced upward and saw Dr. Shepherd observing Beth intently. His dark brown eyes moved toward Valerie and met hers. Nodding slightly at the doctor, Valerie saw his concerned face relax, and she knew that her small gesture had succeeded in reassuring Ben Shepherd that everything was under control.

"Got it!" Beth announced as soon as she saw the blood ash back into the hub of the catheter. Quickly retracting the needle, she secured the IV tubing to the catheter and taped it in place. Looking up at Valerie, she softly confessed, "I didn't think I was going to get it in. Thank you."

"Get those meds on board," ordered the doctor as he turned his attention to the overhead monitor.

Valerie smiled understandingly. "I know, but you did fine. It's much more difficult with a compromised circulatory system. Those little veins just don't want to be stuck." She quickly administered the drugs ordered by the physician, and then moved slightly to accommodate the electrographic technician preparing to take an EKG.

"Get cardiology in on this, and then let's get this fellow to the cardiac care unit," instructed Dr. Shepherd as he wrote on the ER chart.

"Yes, Dr. Shepherd," responded Beth as she hurriedly exited the room.

"Nicely done, Val," commented Dr. Shepherd as he handed the chart to Valerie. He removed his latex gloves and tossed them into a biohazard bin. "I didn't think she was going to get that line in."

Valerie agreed. "Neither did I."

Ben raised an eyebrow. "Really? I thought that was a look of confidence you shot me, or was it a look of 'Shut up'?"

“It was neither,” Valerie laughed. “I didn’t want you to say something to scare Beth any more than she was. She’s going to be a good nurse one day, Ben. She just needs practice.” Valerie raised the side rails on the patient’s bed.

“Scare her? Me?” grinned the doctor. “I try not to do that, you know. I happen to be a very nice guy. Just ask me.”

Valerie chuckled as he continued.

“I think I’ll grab a cup of coffee after I talk to the patient’s wife... if she’s here. After that, I’ll be in the lounge if you need me.” He gave her a parting nod as he left to find the young man’s family.

Valerie watched Ben leave the room, and then went back to her patient. She did a quick assessment of his vital signs, checked his IV, and made him presentable for his trip to the cardiac care unit.

“How does a 36-year-old man have a massive heart attack?” she muttered softly as she made some notations on his chart.

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Valerie took a sip of her lukewarm coffee and sat down at the nurses’ station to review the status of the ER. Two possible fractures were awaiting x-rays; one asthmatic was receiving a breathing treatment, and one woman was waiting for an obstetrician to determine if her abdominal cramping was genuine labor or merely the false labor of Braxton Hicks contractions. The waiting area was nearly empty, and Valerie thought this would be a great time for a break.

Walking into the staff lounge, Valerie found it unoccupied. Only the sound of muffled conversation from the hallway disturbed its silence. She emptied her coffee cup in the sink and refilled it with the warmer brew in the coffee maker. More than halfway through her twelve-hour shift, she sighed as she plopped down into an overstuffed recliner. She was looking forward to meeting her husband later and having a romantic dinner as they

celebrated their sixth wedding anniversary. She gently fingered her wedding ring. The center diamond glittered softly in the dim lighting of the lounge. The brilliant blue marquis sapphires flanking the half-carat diamond were Valerie's favorite gem, and she fondly remembered the moment Will had presented the ring to her and asked her to be his wife.

She smiled dreamily, closed her eyes, and allowed her memories to transport her to the moment when he had dropped to one knee and made his request in the middle of a crowded restaurant. A hush had fallen upon the patrons surrounding their table, and when Valerie had nodded her consent to his proposal, a burst of applause had erupted in the Italian bistro. As she reflected on that evening nearly seven years ago, the door opened and jarred her back to the present.

"Val, we need you in treatment room four."

Valerie rose to her feet, took one more sip of her coffee, and exited the lounge.

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Stepping inside the examination room, Valerie saw an elderly man sitting on the bed. Holding a cloth over his left ear, he kept murmuring to himself. Standing next to him was a woman who appeared not much younger than the man. Valerie quickly perused the couple, noticing the woman's blue-gray eyes darting around the room, and her frail, wrinkled hand gently patting the back of the man.

"Hi, I'm Valerie." She smiled at the woman, and then turned to the patient as she picked up the admittance chart. "What happened to you, Mr. Halwood?"

The old man looked at her, a puzzled expression on his face. "I don't know what happened." He turned to the woman beside him. "Do you know?"

The woman's eyes misted over. "He slipped and fell on the sidewalk. Hit his ear, and I think... I think part of it is gone." Her

voice wavered a bit. "He... um... he has a hard time remembering things. Do you think you can help him?"

As she put on a pair of latex gloves, Valerie nodded reassuringly to the woman. "Absolutely. We'll take good care of him. You sit right here. Are you his wife?"

The woman's voice trembled. "Yes, we've been married forty-four years. Joseph was my high school sweetheart." She glanced over at her husband.

As she listened to Mrs. Halwood, Valerie gently removed the cloth from Joseph's ear. The outer ear was very difficult to visualize due to the extreme amount of bleeding, but it was evident to Valerie that there was a great deal of tissue damage. As she wiped away some of the blood, she could see that the layers of skin in some places had been abraded down to the cartilage.

"Mr. Halwood, can you hold this on your ear for me?" She placed a thick layer of clean gauze dressings over his ear.

"Sure," he replied, and then added, "I don't know what happened to me. Is it still bleeding?"

"Yes, it is," said Valerie as she turned to his wife. "Mrs. Halwood, there's quite a bit of bleeding from this wound. Is your husband taking a blood thinner?"

The gray-haired woman thought for a moment before answering. "Yes. Yes, he is. He takes one of those pills every day. Plus, he has a heart pill and a gout pill, but his gout hasn't been bothering him lately. Oh, he also takes a water pill."

"Thank you," said Valerie as she jotted down the information. "I'm going to go and get Dr. Shepherd. I think you'll like him very much. He's a very good doctor."

Mrs. Halwood smiled nervously at Valerie. "Thank you, dear."

Valerie walked to the nurses' station and saw Ben Shepherd scribbling in a chart.

"Can you see Mr. Halwood in four? Laceration to the left ear with quite a bit of bleeding. On warfarin, and probably has some dementia. His wife is in there with him," reported Valerie.

Ben looked up. “Sure, Val. No problem. Let me just finish this, and I’ll be right there.”

Within five minutes, Valerie followed Ben into the treatment room where the Halwoods waited. The doctor quickly donned a pair of latex gloves and began examining the patient. Valerie stood by, ready to carry out his orders.

“Let’s see if we can irrigate this a bit, so we can get a better look,” he said to Valerie. Then he turned to Joseph. “Mr. Halwood, I’m going to have to rinse out this ear, so I can take a better look inside. Is that okay with you?”

The elderly man nodded his head. “Sure, Doc. Whatever you need to do is ne with me. Hey, what happened to me anyway? I can’t remember a thing.”

“You had a little fall and hit your ear,” replied Ben as he adjusted the overhead lighting.

“He forgets things,” interjected Mrs. Halwood. A tear trickled down her cheek.

Valerie handed her a tissue. “Would you like to wait outside?”

Mrs. Halwood hesitated, looked at her husband, and then nodded. “Maybe I better. He will be all right, won’t he?”

“We’re going to do our best to make sure he is,” reassured Valerie as she directed Mrs. Halwood to the waiting area.

As she turned back to the doctor, he stated, “Let’s get this irrigated. I need to see what’s going on in there.”

Valerie quickly opened an irrigation set-up and a bottle of saline. She moved the tray table next to the doctor and opened another bulk package of gauze dressings.

“Now, this is going to feel cold, Mr. Halwood,” cautioned Ben as he squirted some of the liquid into the old man’s ear.

“Goodness, that’s cold!” cried Joseph. He moved his hand toward the injured ear.

“Keep your hands down, Mr. Halwood,” ordered Valerie in a soft voice. “Dr. Shepherd is rinsing out your ear.”

“My ear? What happened to my ear?”

“You fell down and hurt it,” responded Valerie.

“I did? Why, I don’t remember doing that. How’d it happen?”

“You slipped and fell, and hit your head on the sidewalk.” Ben maneuvered the overhead light once more to better illuminate the outer ear canal. He frowned as he carefully probed the bloodied lining of the canal.

“Aha!” he said triumphantly. “There’s a small bleeder in here. Looks like an arteriole from the way it’s pulsating. Let’s stitch that up and see if that helps. Let’s also get him some vitamin K to counteract the warfarin.”

He turned to Mr. Halwood. “Sir, I have to numb your ear a little because it’s going to need a few stitches.”

“That’s just ne, Doc. Is it still bleeding? I just can’t remember what I did,” repeated Mr. Halwood.

Valerie smiled as Ben patiently explained once more about the fall to Mr. Halwood. She placed a vial of anesthetic on the tray table with a needle and syringe, opened a suture kit, and set it within easy reach of the doctor.

“This is going to sting a little,” informed Ben as he began to numb the ear.

“Ow!” cried Joseph, “That sure does hurt my ear, Doc.”

“Hang in there, Mr. Halwood. Just a little more.”

Ben repeated the numbing procedure a few more times until he was satisfied that the ear was deadened to sensation. He carefully began to suture the torn blood vessel as Valerie stood by, waiting to assist him if needed.

When finished, Ben turned to Valerie. “Let’s get a pressure dressing on this and watch him for an hour or so. Once the bleeding is stopped, we’ll need a CT scan of his head. I want to make sure there isn’t any intracranial hemorrhaging. If that’s okay, we can let him go to be followed up by his regular doctor.” He removed his gloves and tossed them on the tray. “Thanks for your help.”

“No problem, Dr. Shepherd,” replied Valerie as she depos-

ited the used needle and syringe into the sharps container. She turned to Mr. Halwood. “Joseph, don’t touch the bandages on your ear. I’m going to go and find your wife.”

“What’s this on my ear for?”

Valerie smiled slightly and reiterated, “You had a fall...”

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It was nearly eight o’clock when Valerie had finished giving her patient report to the oncoming nurses. Now, with her shift ended, she leisurely entered the staff lounge, walked over to her locker, and opened it. After stifling a yawn, she removed the stethoscope from around her neck and carefully draped it over a hook inside the locker.

“Long day?”

Startled, Valerie jumped and turned, coming face to face with a handsome, dark-haired oncologist.

“Will Garrett, you scared the life out of me!” scolded Valerie as her husband leaned forward and kissed her on the forehead.

“Sorry, sweetheart, I didn’t mean to. I thought you heard me come in,” apologized Will. “Forgive me?” He cocked his head and gave her a lopsided grin.

“Always,” replied Valerie, her tone quite a bit softer. She put her arms around his neck and kissed him firmly. “Happy anniversary!”

“Happy anniversary to you too, sweetheart. Still feel up to dinner?”

“Definitely! I have been looking forward to this all day.”

“Me, too.” He took Valerie in his arms once more just as the door to the lounge opened, and one of the nurses poked her head in.

“Oops, sorry, but... Val, where’s the silver nitrate? Dr. Shepherd says he needs it for Halwood. Apparently the bleeding hasn’t completely stopped, and he wants to try that.”

Valerie sighed as Will released her. “I’ll meet you at the



car?"

He nodded. "No problem. I'll pick you up at the ER entrance." He kissed her lightly again on the forehead and walked out of the lounge.

Valerie watched him go, and then hurried to assist Dr. Shepherd.