



“A Last Goodbye” (Photo: Glynnis Jones, Big Stock Photo)

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A Last Goodbye

Theodore Jerome Cohen

“Thank God you made it,” the floor nurse said, grabbing the Marine’s arm and ushering him into the old man’s room. “He hasn’t much longer.”

The only sounds heard were the beep of the patient’s monitor and his labored breathing. When the Marine stepped next to his bed, the patient could see him dimly through the plastic of his oxygen tent. He reached out to him.

The Marine took the old man’s hand, squeezed it, and whispered words of encouragement. Seeing the man respond, the nurse brought a chair for the Marine. He sat, still holding the man’s hand, and stayed through the night, offering to pray with him and, in both word and deed, attempting to lift his spirits.

The dying man said nothing, content to hold the Marine’s hand and simply listen to the sound of his voice.

Sometime in the early morning hours, the man died. The Marine released his hand and sought out the floor nurse, who confirmed the death. She offered her sympathy, but the Marine was puzzled.

“Who was that man?” he asked.

“Why, I thought he was your father.”

“No, but somehow I felt he thought I was his son, so I stayed. Actually, I’m here to find Mr. James Thompson. I need to inform him of his son’s death in Afghanistan. What was this gentleman’s name, anyway?”

“Mr. James Thompson,” the nurse replied, with tears in her eyes.