

RAINY DAY ON A BRIDGE

The incident on the bridge brought Eddie back to his Aunt Trudy to whom the family simply referred to as Trudy as though she was lesser than. And to Denise, one of his two older sisters, who seemed to follow Trudy into her own form of mayhem. And later when he was assigned as a psychiatric aide to Mr. Mendes, the man on the bridge.

In the mid-1950s when he was six years old, Eddie made what he called a discovery. At that moment in his childhood he couldn't put a name to it or the subject of a research project. What he had picked up from his first and only meeting with Trudy was more like a hunch, an inkling that developed into a hypothesis. His insight had to do with wiring, the wiring of the brain.

He hadn't seen Trudy in person until then. She appeared in several photograph albums as a younger woman laughing and doing handstands. No framed pictures of her were displayed on the mantle of the fireplace or on tables around the house as were other members of his family. Usually, only his father, Spence, and his mother, Maureen, traveled across town on the fourth Sunday of most months to spend an hour or so with her and the psychiatric hospital staff. When they returned home, they settled in the kitchen whispering to each other and sipped a glass of red wine. The children knew from past interruptions not to bother them. On the few occasions when Clair, Eddie's oldest sister, accompanied them, she said little about what she saw or heard during the visit except for a standard reply to their questions of, "Weird." Denise, who was two years younger than Clair, stayed home to babysit Eddie.

Eddie felt curious and a little frightened when Spence told Denise not to start setting out dishes and silverware for breakfast that Sunday morning. They were going out for breakfast at Spence's favorite cafe, all of them, even Eddie. At Maureen's direction he dressed in his Sunday slacks, belt and polished shoes. The Caldwell's were not particularly wealthy. But Spence did well enough. That was his starter joke when asked how he was feeling. "Well," he enjoyed saying, laughing at himself. When Eddie was enrolled in first grade Maureen went back to teaching kindergarten. Eddie's sisters were nine and eleven when he was born. Eddie was something of a surprise.

The Caldwell's lived in a four-bedroom bilevel home on a street of full-grown trees with well-kept lawns and sent their children to an upper middle class school. Eddie and his sisters had

plenty of neighborhood children and school mates to play with. The Caldwells and their neighbors held street parties and cook outs. They saw themselves as a normal family. Except for their secrecy about Trudie. They rarely talked about her. Eddie never heard them talk about her outside the family. Due to the age gap between him and his two sisters and his natural curiosity Eddie read whenever he found himself alone. His library cards were fully stamped. He kept them as souvenirs.

The day of Eddie's visit to meet Trudy was cold and overcast with a chance of rain, cold enough that they needed to wear windbreakers. After a breakfast of pancakes and waffles at Spence's favorite Sunday morning restaurant, Eddie felt stuffed. He had to be nudged to finish his orange juice. He could have used a nap. On the drive outside the city to the county home as his parents called the place where Trudie lived he nodded off and on. He woke as Spence turned onto the winding road that led to a monumental red brick building enclosed by a tall chain link fence and through a double gate that had been left open. He parked in the front row of the lot. A light mist sprinkled the windshield.

"Stay here," Spence told his children. As he left the car he and Maureen slipped back into their jackets and zipped them up the front. They moved hand in hand along the long cement walk to the ornate entrance with their heads leaning towards each other. To Eddie, they seemed sad or to use another word he learned from his reading, forlorn.

Eddie wrestled with the boredom of being stuck in a car with no idea of how long he would have to sit there. He knew Denise and Clair were bored too because they sighed a lot. They weren't allowed to bring their music to church. No earphones. Eddie was not allowed to bring the book he was reading. With the exception of that day he was usually required to attend Sunday school with kids he didn't know and did not care to know. The family was going to brunch instead. The three of them stared in one direction, then the other. Nothing special to report.

"They have to meet with the staff first," Clair said. She looked at her watch. "It usually takes about a half hour. So go back to sleep if you want."

Eddie's word for the scene was "grim," another word he learned to use a lot. Boring and gray. His mouth tasted dry like stale maple syrup. He missed brushing his teeth. He only minded brushing his teeth when he was tired. He could have used a toothbrush and a gargle. He enjoyed a fresh mouth.

Spence and Maureen finally emerged from the front doors of the building. Spence whirled the air with his index finger in a round-up motion and pointed to the car. He stopped the children halfway and led them towards it.

"We haven't seen her yet. They're bringing her down. Let's wait here," Spence said nodding to the sidewalk in front of the car.

A few minutes later, the doors opened again. A male aide in a white uniform and short sleeve white shirt pushed Trudie in a wheelchair down a ramp to the right of the stairs. He was followed by a nurse and another male aide both dressed in similar white uniforms. Trudie, or so Eddie guessed, was slumped in the wheelchair with a brown blanket across her knees. She wore a plain brown jacket and folded her hands in her lap. She seemed much older than any of her pictures. Her hair was oily and poorly combed. Bed hair.

"Hello, again, Trudie," Spence said in what seemed like a forced upbeat cheerful voice. "How are you today?"

She sat immobile, her head bowed. Eddie fidgeted. He wanted her to say something right off, do something. He wanted to hear the sound of her voice. Even a hello would have been better than a nothing. She was sedated, Clair told him later. When she did begin to speak, she raised her head slightly. Based on what he saw Eddie expected her words to be whispered or slurred.

"You know how I am," she said. Her words to Spence sounded sarcastic. "The only way I can be. I am what you have made me to be."

Spence ignored what she had said.

"Your nurse says you've been asking to go for more walks lately," Spence tried to grin.

"If I didn't, I'd go completely nuts. I'm only halfway there. I've lost my spark."

Spence moved to stand behind his three children and encircle them with his arms.

"You haven't seen the kids for a while," he said. "Eddie sure has grown."

Aunt Trudie shot Eddie an eye.

"Nice looking boy," she said, then coughed. "For a Caldwell."

Spence pretended to let go a jolly laugh.

"He's really good at math," Maureen said. "All my children are."

"Is that right?" Trudy said.

A few years later, Eddie learned the word, "banter." That's how the visit went. He could tell that even his father and mother could think of nothing much to say. In answer to Trudy's rapid list of questions, both Clair and Denise answered, "Fine."

After the brief back and forth, Trudy asked, "Does the boy speak. Or is he a deaf mute." Spence winced. Maureen shuffled. Eddie looked up at the darkening sky.

"Now, Trudie..." Spence started to say but Eddie broke in.

"I do speak," he said. "I talk a lot actually."

"Glad to hear it. Maybe next time you're here you'll have something worthwhile to say," she said. She cleared her throat a lot. Eddie found it distracting.

He sighed. More pauses, more silence. Trudy snapped them out of their lack of imagination.

"When are you going to get me out of this place," she barked at Spence. "All they do here is stick me with needles and feed me tasteless food."

"Well, Trudie," Spence said, rocking on his heels. "They say you been a bit unruly lately."

She sat upright.

"Anybody would be. This place..." she said, then stopped. She pointed a shaky finger at him. "You know what you've done. You need me to tell Eddie and the girls about it. They probably haven't heard the story of how you got me locked up in here. It's your fault. You called the police. You bastard! You hired some fancy lawyers."

"Now, Trudie...let's not get back into all that again."

"It's the truth. That's what's in short supply here."

She looked again at Eddie.

"Come over here, Eddie. Let me look at you from close up."

Eddie stood only a few feet away. As he stepped forward, Spence bent over to grab the shoulder of his jacket to stop him. That's when Trudie sprang out of the wheelchair, tripped on the foot rests and landed flat on her hands. Before the nurse and two aides could stop her Trudie leapt to her feet, screamed and cursed, coming at Spence's face with hands formed as claws. Eddie was shoved aside and to the ground as the nurse and two aides converged in time to stop her from ripping through the skin of Spence's face. They wrestled her onto the grass, turned her to one side and cuffed her. With real handcuffs, as Eddie recalled. She stopped screaming,

twisted under their restraint, made moaning sounds. She yelled "You bastard!" again and again. "Liar! Tyrant!"

"The less you move the less you'll suffer," the nurse scolded. Trudie still tossed and tried to kick. The two male aides flipped her over on her back. One held her head up while the other grabbed her legs. They carried her to the front steps, up the ramp and lifted her inside the building.

"I was afraid she's pull one of her tricks," the nurse told Spence. "That's how she's been lately. She must have been saving it up for you. I've been suspicious. That's what her good behavior the last few days has been about."

Spence gathered himself. Maureen put her arm around his shoulder.

"Sorry, Eddie," Spence said. He was clearly shaken and short of breath. "Sorry you had to see all that. Wasn't expected."

In her many visits Clair had never seen Trudie attack Spence. Usually, she told Eddie, she just sat in her wheelchair and hummed.

"Why don't you kids go sit in the car," Spence said. "I promise we won't be long."

The nurse turned the wheelchair around and pushed it up the sidewalk. Spence and Maureen followed her to the entrance and stayed inside the county home for another stretch of time, too long a time for Eddie. He had to go No. 2. The mist changed to a light rain. The three of them climbed back into their places in the car.

Eddie used the time to relive how he felt when Trudy jumped out of the wheelchair. Like his surprise when a scary witch in a television show springs out of a thick bush. When Trudy was spread on the grass and handcuffed he thought of a suspect being captured by the police. Definitely not a patient in a hospital as he had expected. Not only how she had looked and acted but how she had been treated. He thought of the girl in the photograph album and the subdued woman in the wheelchair. What had happened in between? The hunch he could not explain was that she probably had never expected to be the older woman he had just seen. Maybe, as he had heard some people say, she had lost her mind and could not find it again.

The ride back home was subdued. Spence's face was pale, tightly drawn. Maureen looked out the window. After Spence unlocked the front door of the house Eddie and his two sisters hurried to their bedrooms. Their parents took off their coats and hung them to dry on the coat stand and walked together into the kitchen. Eddie put his jacket on the hook at the back of his

bedroom door, went to the bathroom, changed into his jeans and a sweatshirt, then down the steps to living room and sat in an easy chair by the sofa. They didn't notice them. He could hear them talking in whispers. He saw Maureen get up from the table, bring back two glasses from the cabinet and set them next to a bottle of wine. As she did, she saw Eddie.

"Eddie, why don't you go back upstairs and play for a while. We'll talk about this some other time."

The other time didn't come for quite a long time. Eddie was left to make up that Trudie was locked in chains in a dungeon. Or that the two aides were slapping her around. The nurse was sliding a long needle into her chest. He dreamed the bitterness of Trudy's face, that she was shaking him, yelling at him to say something, do something. Suddenly, one day when he and Spence were in the backyard raking leaves, Spence stopped and leaned on his rake. The Sunday before he and Maureen had visited Aunt Trudie at the county home. Eddie might have been about eight years old then.

"You see, Eddie," Spence said out of nowhere, "your aunt has a serious mental illness. She's what's called manic-depressive. Showed up when she was in high school. Lots of drinking, partying, stealing from drug stores and such, hanging out with weirdos. They sentenced her to one year in juvenile detention. She'd be better for a while and then up and go on a tear. This went on for several years. We had to make a lot of trips to bail her out of jail. Didn't want her to be locked up in there. After all she is my sister. When we were little, we played together almost every day with our friends. Too bad you didn't get to meet your grandma and grandpa. They loved to see us outside playing together. I think she was their favorite, clowning around, making them laugh. Then she changed. They couldn't understand it. Nobody could."

He moved his rake from one hand to the other.

"Stopped hanging out with us. Left home and disappeared for a while. She turned up one afternoon after we were married and asked to spend the night. Stayed with us a few months. Mostly sat around the house though she did help us cook and clean. Went for walks by herself. Got restless and disappeared again. This went on and on. Another time after she dropped by we got her a job at a grocery store sacking groceries and what-not. We helped her find an apartment. co-signed so she could buy a used car. One night she called us and said she was going to commit suicide. We hurried over to see what she was up to. The minute we walked through the front door she jumped at me with a big old butcher knife. I was lucky. I grabbed her wrist and

forced her to drop it by twisting her arm. After too many times to count your mother and I decided, well, we'd had enough. We had two little girls to raise. She was in and out of hospitals. All kinds of hospitals. Kept threatening to kill herself, you see. Wandered off from one of them and disappeared again for several months until the police picked her up as a vagrant. We couldn't tell if she was just being irresponsible or was a criminal or what. Long story short I became her legal guardian and signed the papers to commit her. She's gotten worse over time. Her health isn't good. I'm sorry to say she might not last too much longer. I wish I had an answer. Not only for her. But for others like her."

With that father and son continued to rake. Eddie heard what Spence said but he couldn't believe so much had gone on between Trudie and them. Seemed like one of his nightmares. Her alone on a dark street wandering around like a spook. He looked out his bedroom window more often waiting for a crazy person with sharp teeth and claws to wander by, climb up the side of the house somehow, try to crawl through the window and come right at him like a wild animal with its sharp teeth and slobbering with rabies. Made him think more about his hunch. From what he had seen Trudie was not only out of control; she had no control at all over what she was doing. That was his best guess.

When his sister Denise started high school he watched her change too. The change started slowly, then sped up very fast. She went from being a lot of fun, teasing and wrestling with him, making sure he didn't get lost at the shopping center, buying him ice cream cones, to hiding in her room, keeping to herself, pushing him away with a monster look on her face. He caught her pulling out her hair, sticking strands of it into her mouth, chewing on it. She stopped following the family rules, came in late at night or not at all. There were arguments and fights with Spence and Maureen, throwing of cups and glasses, breaking of Maureen's family China. Police cars in the driveway. She screamed so loud through her bedroom window that the neighbors came out of their houses to see if someone was being attacked. When she had one of her spells, as Maureen called them, Eddie hid in his bedroom closet. He didn't want to see or hear her make a scene. He was embarrassed. Some of the other kids in the neighborhood teased him about having a nutcase for a sister.

Eddie listened in on conversations at family reunions about cousins, aunts and uncles who had troubles like Trudie and Denise and worse. Denise either seemed angry or fearful for no special reason, running to her room, standing by the living room picture window as if she was

waiting for a ride or angry at Eddie for just being there, reading a book. He avoided her if he could. She became a stranger. Then she joined what Spence called "a crowd of loony toons." A time came when he and Maureen stopped chasing after her. Eddie could hear her sneaking into the house when they were gone, watched her stuff food from the kitchen cabinets and refrigerator into a gunny sack, wrap leftovers in aluminum foil, dash out the door and jump back into a car. At other times when no one was home she'd tear up rooms, overturn furniture, break glasses on the kitchen floor. After she left the house smelled like rotten cabbage. Spence had to change the locks. He tried to hire a lawyer to have her declared incompetent, just like he had with Trudie. Denise was smart and clever. She had enough savvy to talk herself out of it. The judges would rule in her favor. Eddie guessed that Spence and Maureen had to let her go her own way just like they did with Trudy. They explained she was of age and out of control.

"She's always welcome to come home," Spence told Eddie. "But she's got to abide by our rules, get some help, take the medication the doctors prescribe. She just won't play ball."

Clair had already graduated from college by the time Eddie finished high school. He won a writing contest his senior year, a short story about himself, a young boy not having an older brother to teach him stuff or a younger brother he could teach stuff to. A story about loneliness and fear. With both sisters gone he filled his spare time by reading novels, short stories and magazines he saw on tables at the library about what was going on in the world. That's why he decided to major in English Literature and teach other lonely people how to read and write. His winning story was easy to write because he knew how such a boy might feel. His story helped him get a scholarship from a small college in the Midwest. He moved away from home as fast as he could to the small town near the campus. After Spence and Maureen helped him load his things into the dorm he looked down the stairs as they left, waved goodbye and saw that they had aged. He was neither angry with nor felt guilty about them. Just perplexed and sad. He hoped he wouldn't end up that way.

The second semester of his junior year in college he had a brief exchange with a psychology professor, a tall thin stern man with a small bent mouth, that convinced him he needed to change majors from English Literature to psychology. The subject of that particular class was the difference between mental illness and criminal liability. The professor often offered his services as an expert witness for the prosecution.

"We are born with a free will," the professor insisted. "There is a right and there is wrong. We have been given an innate ability to choose between them. There is a clear line between mental illness and the choice to commit a crime. We must take responsibility for our actions."

Eddie's hand shot into the air.

"Yes, Mr. Caldwell," the professor said.

Eddie stood.

"How can you be so sure about that?" he asked.

"Experience. Research," the professor said, too abruptly for Eddie. "From studies about repeat offenders. I can spot a phony a mile away. A criminal mind. Pretending to be psychotic to avoid jail time or the death penalty. Psychopaths comes in many variations. They don't need to be intelligent or well educated. Just canny. Street smart. Usually impulsive. Vengeful. No self-control. Lazy. Looking for a short cut. An easy way out."

He grinned.

"I'm never surprised when they find another way to lie and cheat."

From his tone, Eddie could see the professor had some kind of problem with his own brain. No use debating him. He could instead spend his life doing his own research. Something, he thought, might be wrong with the brain itself or a brain that was damaged in some way. He wanted to show why people like Trudy and Denise lived and behaved as they did. Maybe he could help find ways to help them feel better about themselves, not end up in a jail or in a hospital that was like a jail.

He knew changing majors at this time in his college career would be disruptive and expensive. His scholarship was for two years. With the money Spence had given him and a work-study job at the college, he was able pay his monthly expenses. But the "well" in Caldwell that Spence liked to joke about was no longer "well." Spence's job of many years was cut from his employer's budget. The salary at his new job was not enough to cover his own expenses and Eddie's too. At the end of the semester Eddie moved back home.

Spence was not happy about Eddie's new plan. He had an image of Eddie inspiring low income students to travel the wonders of the literary world no matter where it might lead them. After several long walks listening to Eddie and his enthusiasm for his new interest, he shrugged. It was Eddie's life. Maureen agreed.

"We have a great university right here," she said. "One of the better known teaching medical schools. I know of friends who've gone to the psychiatric ward there. They do a lot of research," she said. "You could enroll this summer, transfer your credits and be on your way. If you wanted, you could have your old room back."

"Hey, mom, thanks," he said. "But I've already been accepted at another university that specializes in psychological research. I've applied for a job as a nurse's aide in the psychiatric ward. If I get it, I'll have to go through a six-week training course. And if it works out, they may have a room for me in the dorm to share with a med student."

"Gosh, Eddie," Spence joked. "You've done well."

Eddie thought Spence looked relieved. Maureen smiled.

"We're proud of you, Eddie."

With those good wishes, Eddie moved on. As far as he knew he had been lucky enough to be born with a healthy brain. It hurt to think of Denise. He wanted to prove his psychology professor wrong. The training course was a general one for the medical floors of the hospital.

"If you want to be assigned to the psychiatric wards," the senior nursing instructor told him. "It's on the job training. Mostly observation, spending time with patients, helping with paperwork, supplies, running errands. It can get rough if patients lose control. You're not that big a guy. Not just physical attacks. Verbal ones too. You have to have a thick skin. Some of the patients will look for a way to try to make you feel bad. Others might physically attack you. Think you can handle it? They could use another student aide."

"I want to try," Eddie said. "After I graduate from the university I want to apply to graduate school. If not here, then wherever I can be accepted."

"Cross that bridge when it's comes to it" she said.

Eddie began working at the hospital the following August. He was assigned to the three-to-eleven shift. He could go to classes during the day, study in his dorm room and at the medical library. The hospital found him a small room that he didn't need to share. He felt a little disappointed. He could have used a friend and maybe a mentor. It wasn't to be.

There were two other student aides on his floor at the hospital, the second floor, and two older black women, Miss Kay, and Mrs. Penn who had been there for years. The third floor was limited to violent patients who sometimes needed to be restrained. They were usually scheduled to be transferred to the more permanent state hospital. Security officers were on duty twenty-four

hours a day. As part of their training his nurse's aide class was taken on quick tour. They walked through quietly and asked few questions. Some of the patients were locked in their rooms or restrained. They could be seen through the small window in the door. The ones that sat in the dayroom sneered at them or looked up with eyes that begged for sympathy. Eddie could sense many of his fellow trainees were uncomfortable and glad to move on.

"Not for me," one of the other trainees, a young woman, whispered to him as they left.

All the psychiatric wards were locked wards. No patient could leave without an escort and in some cases not even a family member without specific permission from the three doctors who occupied offices on the first floor. The evening shift on Eddie's floor was usually managed by an intern, all young men. The doctor sat inside an open nursing station in the center along with an LPN who distributed medications. The floor had an enclosed music room, a game room with a ping pong table, a dining room, a day room with a television set and patient bedrooms. Eddie thought the furnishings, the gray drapes, the easy chairs and sofas looked worn and drab. Grim.

When he mentioned this to Miss Kay, she casually said, "We don't want patients to feel too comfortable here. This is a rapid treatment center. We want to see them get past the acute stage and back home as soon as possible. Then they can continue their treatment with an outside practitioner. Sometimes they just don't make it and have to be hospitalized at a state or private hospital. If they can afford one. Compared to the state hospitals it's pretty nice enough here as it is. And a whole lot better than jail."

Most of the patients, Eddie noticed, came from middle class families. They included hospital staff, university professors, members of their families and occasionally overwrought medical students. Low-income patients were taken from emergency rooms to city or county hospitals and clinics for short term care, then transferred from there if they needed more attention.

The aides were assigned each evening to specific patients and asked to write journal entries about what they had seen or heard during their shift. They were not allowed to read the medical files or to know the patients' diagnoses but were included in a meeting at the beginning of each shift where the staff discussed the patients' state of mind and behavior that day, what to watch for and to report any unusual behavior, talk of suicide, being disruptive or hurtful to other patients. The food was brought to the floor and distributed by name. The patients were

responsible for cleaning up their places at the tables and putting their trays back into a slot on the metal food cart. Eddie felt uncomfortable monitoring patients who broke or who were about to break some of the rules, especially what might appear to be sexually touching. They could hug but not kiss. At first Eddie felt uncomfortable about mixing with the patients and then writing down his notes about them.

"Makes me feel like a snitch," he confided to an intern everyone called Dr. J because his last name was hard to pronounce.

"There needs to be a record," he told Eddie. "For personal and legal reasons. Otherwise, the only contact we might have with a patient would be in our private fifty-minute sessions. It's hard for anyone to trust enough to talk about their deepest fears, their strangest thoughts. What they do and say on the unit often doesn't match up. It's helpful. You can be our eyes and ears. Keep it simple and report what you observe. They are aware that you will be filling in the blanks. We try to keep it low key. Otherwise, it might be hard for them to relax and be themselves. We want the best for them. No need to feel guilty about that."

By the time Eddie was in his last semester at the university and applying for graduate school he had become an old hand. He had witnessed violent patients, patients being discharged feeling better than when they had been admitted, patients who went through periods of feeling worse once they let go of their denial of depression and anxiety. Some patients needed more time than a few weeks or months.

Eddie would remember the handyman who wrote on his admissions form that he was depressed because he was "not 2 smert." His wife had an affair and left him. He was no longer able to work and lost most of his customers. One afternoon the television and a section of overhead lights in the ward blacked out. The maintenance crew would not be available until the next day. The television served as a gathering place for many of the patients. Eddie called it their fireplace. The handyman offered to help and was escorted to the electrical room for that floor with a small bag of tools. He had the television and the lights back on in a few minutes. From then on he was asked to help the maintenance crew around the hospital. When he was discharged, they offered him a full-time job.

He remembered a man sobbing on the edge of his bed, unable to leave his room.

"What's the matter?," Eddie asked. "Why are you crying?"

"I haven't sneezed for a month," he sobbed. "Just doesn't happen anymore."

He remembered the older woman who was in love with a movie star. She carried around his framed photograph everywhere and set it at night on her bedside table. She was so obsessed with him that she kept running away to try to meet him at the train station.

He remembered a very smart young man who returned from a home visit lying in a coma on the general bathroom floor of the unit. He had drunk alcohol after being on a regimen of antabuse. He almost died. Eddie wondered if he chose to drink anyway thinking he could escape the consequences or if he couldn't help himself. Brought him back to Trudy.

He wrote about them in a daily journal he kept in his room. He discussed his inkling about the brain with Dr. J when the two of them worked the late eleven-to-seven shift. Most of the patients were asleep. They could talk openly,

"The brain, of course," Dr. J agreed. "But there hasn't been enough research and maybe there never will be. We know if the brain is damaged or if there is a serious chemical imbalance that the brain affects thoughts, perceptions and behaviors. But to what extent? That's the question. Some claim there is another dimension to the mind we haven't been able to understand. And maybe never will. Do we as human beings have full control of our minds, some control or very little at all? It's quite a big question, Eddie. Different beliefs among different people and different cultures. I'm afraid the mind and how we feel will be remain a mystery for a long, long time. Are the mind and the brain one in the same? The more research, the more studies, the better. I don't think your psychology professor has all the answers either. There's many new research projects that are digging deeper into the brain. I think you should go for it."

One of the biggest mysteries for Eddie was the case of Mr. Mendes. His full name was Howard Jacob Mendes, a man who had become a wealthy financial investment banker at a young age and a major contributor to the university. To Eddie, he had everything a human being might want or need: a beautiful and faithful wife, a home in an upscale neighborhood they had designed and built together, a vacation villa in the Caribbean, three healthy teenaged daughters, a board member of several charities, friends, time to travel and see the world. As Spence might have said, "He's nailed it."

Mr. Mendes was a good-looking man in his forties with olive colored skin and dark hair who wore a conservative pair of dark eyeglasses. He dressed in a suit and tie with polished laced shoes every day except for occasional outside walks accompanied by an aide. For walks he removed his suit coat for a black windbreaker. Eddie met him on his third admission to the ward.

His previous admissions had lasted several weeks two years apart. It was generally known among the staff that he had seriously attempted suicide at least twice and that his diagnosis was clinical depression. Eddie mistook the man he first saw sitting in the dayroom as either a doctor waiting for a patient or a visitor.

Unlike the other patients, Mr. Mendes preferred to eat alone. Patients were not allowed to eat in their rooms. He waited until most of the patients were seated, took his tray out of the food rack, sat in an easy chair and ate from the tray on his lap. Between appointments he either returned to his room or sat silently by himself during required group meetings and activities. Eddie had never witnessed him participating in a group or answering a question asked of him by the group leader.

When Eddie tried to visit with him, check on how he felt, he kept his answers to a few abrupt words.

"How are you feeling today, Mr. Mendes?"

"Fine."

"Did you enjoy your family when they visited yesterday?"

"Yes."

After the evening meal he retired to his room again to read newspapers and documents his wife, Caroline, delivered for him to sign.

"He has no marital problems," Dr. J told Eddie. "At least none he cares to talk about. His wife says his daughters are doing well in school and have a busy social life. It's tough to speculate why he feels depressed enough from time to time to want to end his life. He can sign himself out whenever he wants. He has no other noticeable health issues. Apparently takes his medication after being discharged and is very active in his business. A real puzzle. We don't know what to do with him. He just suddenly goes dark or takes enough pills to kill a horse. He's free to sign himself in and out. We're really not allowed to use the hospital for someone who just wants a few weeks off from whatever pressures they feel. Sadly, for me at least, I think it might be because he contributes so much money to the hospital. But if he doesn't respond pretty soon, we'll just have to send him home as is. There's no evidence that's he's suicidal at the moment. And he's certainly not threatening us or any of the patients. His wife doesn't want us to let him go before he's ready. I'm on the fence about him."

When two of the senior doctors confronted Mr. Mendes with the probability that he would have to be discharged and seek care elsewhere if he continued to be unresponsive he finally agreed to join in group therapy and discuss his feelings in the private sessions with his doctors. When he spoke in a group it was with a whisper. If the group asked him to speak up he seemed to struggle to raise his voice. Where was the powerful business man who had created such a successful company? Eddie asked himself. The man in the suit and tie seemed perplexed, confused, unable to put his thoughts into words.

"What do think of what Karen just said?" the social worker leading the group might ask him.

After hesitating, he might answer, "I agree. We need to believe in ourselves."

"And how do we go about doing that?"

"I don't know."

The group leader would move on, come back to him, move on. One of the other patients finally yelled out, "Come on, Mendes. Spit it out. Jump in the pool with us." He dropped his head and stayed silent appearing neither angry nor sad at what had been said.

Six weeks after his current admission, Dr. J announced at their staff meeting on a Monday afternoon that Mr. Mendes had been told that he would be discharged. He had been expressing his feelings to his doctor, speaking up from time to time in group, and taking occasional walks with Eddie in the neighborhood of older World War II bungalows surrounding the hospital. He said very little, seeming preoccupied and distant. But in his sessions with his doctor, Dr. J told Eddie, he suddenly said that he felt well enough to go home and back to work. He wanted to be with his wife and three girls. He missed them.

Eddie was surprised. He knew nothing more about Mr. Mendes than when he first saw him sitting alone in the dayroom. Eddie mentioned this to Dr. J in a private discussion later that night.

"I mean," Eddie asked, "Did he just need a little time to himself or what? It seems to me he's been wasting our time."

"I can't discuss this with you, Eddie," he said. "It's between Howard and his doctor."

The next afternoon Mr. Mendes walked up to Eddie in the dayroom dressed in his black windbreaker and a pair of sporty walking shoes.

"Eddie," he said. "I'd like to go outside for a while. Are you free to take me for a stroll."

Eddie did not recognize the Mr. Mendes he had observed for the last six weeks. He stood before Eddie smiling as though he had no cares in the world.

"I am, Mr. Mendes," he said. "But the weather doesn't look too great out there. Cold, windy and looks like it might rain."

Grim, was the word he hadn't used.

"Oh, we can handle that, can't we? A brisk outdoor walk. A change in scenery. I need some fresh air. I don't mind the cold so much."

Eddie tried to read his face. Who was he to know?

"Okay, let's give it a shot," he said. "I need to check us out at the nurse's station and then grab my jacket. I'll bring an umbrella along just in case. Want one?"

"Nice of you to ask. But, no thanks. I'd rather have my hands free."

The February wind was cold and damp. When they walked out the front door, Eddie turned left in the direction of the neighborhood where he preferred to lead his patients through the streets of bungalows on the south side of the hospital and university and towards the small park of older trees that had a circular walkway. A busy street with heavy traffic swished to the west side and ran directly across the four-lane bridge over the river. Drivers could either exit on the left side of the bridge to the interstate or continue directly towards downtown. This time of day the cars were bumper to bumper until the stoplight at the north corner turned green. At rush hour the long bridge became a speedway over the roiling gray river, its frame and spars stark against the sky. The bridge had a reputation for jumpers as they were called, patients and members of the public who ended their lives in the river.

Eddie put on his gloves, turned up his collar, hoping to hint to Mr. Mendes that a walk on that late afternoon wasn't such a great idea. But Mr. Mendes rushed along at more than a brisk pace. He seemed determined to take the wind head on, to defeat it. When they arrived at the edge of the park, Mr. Mendes turned to his right towards the busy street.

"Mr. Mendes, let's go around the park. That street's too distracting for me."

"I'm tired of the park and sick of the neighborhood. Too ramshackle for me. And I'm sick of seeing the same old houses."

Before Eddie could dispute him, Mr. Mendes quickened his long strides, leaving Eddie to catch up. He felt a mist against his face. Several cars already had their headlights on, creating for Eddie a spotted and confusing view.

"Mr. Mendes," Eddie said. "We really need to turn back. We're not allowed to walk with patients along this street."

"I'm making an exception. I'm an exceptional man."

Eddie hadn't heard of Mr. Mendes speak of himself that way. Maybe he had his self-confidence back.

"Makes no difference. It's a rule."

"Not one of mine."

They reached the hospital and the red traffic light at the intersection before the bridge. Eddie hesitated. He could stay with Mr. Mendes or run back to the hospital entrance and wave down a security guard. The light changed before he could decide. Mr. Mendes hurried forward towards the bridge three short blocks away. The mist turned by degrees into a sprinkle, the sprinkle into a soft steady rain. Eddie pulled the hood of his coat over his head.

"Mr. Mendes!" Eddie shouted forward. "Howard! We're not supposed to be here. Stop. We've got to turn around."

A stream of speeding cars splashed through the wet pavement, the drivers looking ahead, not noticing the two of them hurrying to the bridge. Once Mr. Mendes stepped onto the walkway that ran along the bridge Eddie grabbed for, held and yanked at his left sleeve.

"Mr. Mendes, stop! You're not allowed to be here."

"I just want to look at the river. I've been cooped up too long. I need to see something alive, something moving."

"We can go to gym. Shoot some baskets. Walk along the track. As fast as you like. Work up a sweat."

"I need the air," Mr. Mendes shouted over his shoulder. "I have to look down at the river. I need to keep going."

He shook Eddie off, stomping as he headed towards the middle of the bridge. He paused there, leaned against the railing with both hands, went silent again.

Eddie thought about waving at the passing cars to show Mr. Mendes was in some stress. The wind and the rain pouring down steadily now made the confusing atmosphere chaotic.

Mr. Mendes stood staring, wiped his glasses with a wad of tissue from one of his pockets. He did this again and again. For that brief interval Eddie felt more relaxed as he watched, his

body close to touching his patient's arm. The rain saturated Mr. Mendes dark thick hair, scattering it down over the top of his forehead.

"Mr. Mendes, getting wet like this in the wind isn't healthy. We need to get back to the hospital. Get out of the rain."

Mr. Mendes wasn't listening. Rain streaked his cheeks. He again wiped the fog and rain off his glasses, slid them into a side pocket. He folded his hands on the railing, rested his chin on what looked like hands in prayer. Eddie pulled his hood down over his eyes. He was going to be drenched. Too late to do anything about that. He decided to take a breath, calm down, stand next to Mr. Mendes a few minutes more and pretend to look with him down at the river. The river was its usual fast moving, violent self, silver and black in turns.

"Mr. Mendes, we really must go back," he finally said. "They'll be sending out security to look for us. Your time is up."

Mr. Mendes opened his jacket, one button at a time, wrangled it off his shoulders and tossed it backwards onto the walkway. He elbowed Eddie to one side, pulled his body upward to the railing, tried to lift his right leg over it. Eddie clamped one hand on his ankle, pulled at his belt with the other. Mr. Mendes shoved him away, quickly slinging his leg up to the knee over the railing, using his hands and on tiptoe with his left foot to propel himself further onto the railing. Eddie switched to his other side, pulling Mr. Mendez's hands away from the railing, holding his back with his shoulder to keep him from a hard fall backwards. They wrestled in the water collecting on the pavement, Mr. Mendes fighting to stand upright, Eddie tugging to pull him back. One car honked followed by several more. The traffic sped past. It was impossible for the drivers to brake and stop without sliding into the car to their front. Eddie tore Mr. Mendes shirt open at the collar, wrapped his arm around his neck, pulling, choking him, in an attempt to keep him on the ground away from the railing but his patient was larger and extremely strong.

"Leave me alone, Eddie," Mr. Mendes gasped, choking and coughing. He turned to one side, then on his stomach, flattened his hands on the pavement, tried to push himself up on his knees..

"I'm not going to let you do this, Howard," Eddie said. "Come on. Knock it off. Think of me. I need this job. I can't let you do this to me."

Mr. Mendes with Eddie kneeling on his back, dropped down to the pavement, catching his breath.

"Okay, Eddie, okay," he said. "I've had enough. "Let me kneel. You're hurting my back."

"No tricks, Mr. Mendes," Eddie said, also out of breath. "I don't want to have to hit you. I will if you're going to try it again."

Mr. Mendes slowly found his feet, wobbled to an upright position, lifted his jacket off the walkway, shook it, and slung it over his shoulder. He inhaled a series of deep breaths, turned and walked slowly in the direction of the hospital. Eddie followed, exhausted, his legs wobbling and weak. Once inside and more steady on his feet Eddie led him to the elevator. It opened to the hallway that led to the double doors of the unit. Eddie unlocked it with his key and guided Mr. Mendes by the back of his elbow to his room.

The nurse on duty that day, Mrs. Wagner, looked up at him.

"Eddie! You're soaking wet," she said. "Do you have a change of clothes in your locker?"

"A uniform...But, listen, Mrs. Wagner," Eddie heaved, "something happened out there. That's why we're so late."

She looked towards one of the windows.

"Oh, goodness. It's raining cats and dogs. Did Mr. Mendes slip and fall?"

"Worse than that. He needs to be watched. Security," he said between heavy breaths.

"I'll call them right this minute," she said, picking up the phone. "You go get changed. Then we'll talk about it."

Eddie watched as two guards from Security led Mr. Mendes out of his room, out of the locked doors of the unit and to the elevator where they would take him the third floor. After Eddie told Mrs. Wagner about the incident on the bridge, she asked:

"Do you just want to go to the dorm and rest or can you write up your notes first."

Eddie looked at his hands. They were steady.

"I'd like to do it now. Can you unlock Dr. J's office?"

"Sure. Let's get to it. Then I think we can get an aide from a medical floor to take your place for the rest of the night. Do you need a day off?"

"Maybe a couple. That is, unless they want me to come in and answer questions."

"Plan on some days off. We'll call you late tomorrow morning to see when they want to talk to you about it. I'm sure they will."

Eddie spent close to an hour in Dr. J's office. He didn't quite know how to begin. His first

sentence read: "About 3:30 this afternoon Mr. Mendes approached me in the dayroom..." He wanted his notes to be concise and convey the seriousness of the attempt that Mr. Mendes made to climb over the railing and fall to his death. His hands wavered slightly as he tried to depict how the combination of rain, wind, cold air, the sound, speed and danger of the traffic, added to the chaos, the difficulty of restraining his patient, the strength of Mr. Mendes's determination, his insistence on being allowed to climb the slick railing and let go. He wasn't certain he could accurately describe the contortion of the face of the man he had wrestled to the ground: the fear, anger and amazement, and how quickly those feelings fell away, went calm and smoothed out. He read what he had written in the letter-size spiral notebook. He wanted to scratch out some words and add others and phrases but could not. The notes had to be written in pen and ink and continuous with previous entries. He handed the notebook to Mrs. Wagner as is and waved an early goodnight.

Back in the dorm he showered and slept until he was hungry, made a sandwich in the dorm kitchen, and exhausted, slept again until early morning. He waited during the day for a phone call, studied as much as he could but none of the other students called out his name when the phone in the hallway rang. He thought about going to the unit to see if Dr. J was on duty. Maybe not, he thought. They would call him if they wanted to talk directly to him. He still felt fatigued and anxious. He needed to sleep. Sleep didn't come easy.

When he returned to work on Thursday afternoon he learned that Mr. Mendes had signed himself out on Wednesday. Mrs. Wagner was not on duty. Another LPN he had not seen before was busy with paperwork and only looked up to nod hello. Eddie never saw Mr. Mendes again. He could never seem to lose him either. Despite his ordinary appearance at first sight he would to Eddie be odd and inexplicable. As were many of the subjects of his research. He had dreams about him, about the bridge itself, its haunting specter and long history of suicides.

"Try to let it go, Eddie," Dr. J said on Friday. "Sure, you won't be able to forget what happened with Mr. Mendes. Try if you can to move on. Some memories stick; some don't. There are patients I've totally forgotten. Others I'll never forget. Everyone handles trauma differently. So far, I've decided I'll be a better doctor if I deal with the patient in front of me."

Eddie didn't have much more time to think about Mr. Mendes. Two months later Trudie died in her sleep of a massive seizure. There was no wake or funeral service. Spence's relatives lived out of town and since they had had no contact with Trudie for many years they simply sent

cards to Spence and Maurine or donations to charities. Trudy's body was cremated. The internment consisted of Spence, Maurine, Claire and Eddie. Denise was somewhere out there in her own universe. Spence read the short introduction from The Burial of the Dead from The Book of Common Prayer that begins, "I am the Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord..." They spent a quiet lunch with not much to say about Trudy's life. That night, Eddie, home from graduate school to spend time with Spence and Maurine for the week, sat at the kitchen table with Spence looking down silently into a glasses of beer after Maurine had gone to bed.

"Well," Spence said, "at least, we helped her live a little longer, didn't we, Eddie?"