

THE BREAK-IN

When I returned from the office that afternoon, I could see my father through the bay window in the breakfast nook sitting on the swing in the backyard.

It was a rustic swing made of logs. My wife, Sally, found it in a garden catalogue for the two of us and the children to rest on, talk or just relax quietly, especially after supper in the quiet of the late evening. Dad enjoyed sitting there because the yard was secluded and quiet and he liked the flowers, bushes and trees, especially the lilacs, willows and tall oaks. Sally had also installed a cement Victorian fountain with circular bowls that provided the sound of water continuously gurgling and splashing into the stone basins.

She genuinely had tried from the day of my father's arrival to be accommodating to him and to me. In retrospect, she knew who buttered her bread and that she would want to have my help and compassion for the day when her widowed mother eventually suffered illness or dementia. Even before then I had noticed how distant she had become. She complained more and more about my absences and her needing to do most of the parenting of our two girls. She was tired too of her luncheons and get togethers for cards and book clubs with wives of my colleagues. She wanted me to spend more romantic moments with her, to travel and enjoy the theater and share parties and cookouts with old friends. Yet, it was clear to me, if no one else, that she was still quite angry that I had invited Dad to come live with us, if only until he could be permanently situated into assisted living or memory care. I had invited him before consulting her and that accounted for much of her anger. Since his arrival, she treaded the house quietly in a tense silence that made me feel guilty as though I'd been caught in an adulterous act and she wasn't prepared yet to deal with infidelity. I found her strange in that way.

I suppose I still felt insecure in our marriage after many years together given the fact that she'd chosen me over a star athlete at the university we attended. I saw her as the beauty and me the bespectacled wallflower. Before the children arrived and I was just out of medical school and busy with internships I worried that she might be banging away on an undergrad while I was sweating under the operating room lights. She gave

me no reason to suspect her of cheating but I knew that several of my colleagues had discovered their wives were having affairs during the long hours they were away.

Sally was more than effective in giving me a sudden look of wrath. My feelings would freeze and I'd go numb inside. That afternoon I watched her mix her famous Asian slaw a bit too aggressively on the countertop and bang the barbecue tools here and there too loudly on the stove to let me know in her passive-aggressive way how she really felt. I assume my father had done something earlier in the day that particularly irked her. He was too far gone to know what minor infraction he might have committed in her eyes and she seemed to prefer steaming over whatever he might have done for me to have any inkling of why she was so overwrought. It may have only been the fact that she just didn't want him in our house. It didn't seem to matter either that my father was still seriously grieving over the death of my mother only two months before. Diagnostically, he was still considered to be in the early stages of dementia, forgetful, occasionally confused, not as gregarious and talkative as he had been before retirement from his medical practice. I had already taken away his car keys and sold his car. He continued to participate and enjoy having conversations with us over dinner and in the breakfast nook.

I tried to creep up behind Sally and hug her in her shorts, bulging somewhat out of them now; I assumed as a result of overeating as a form of self-medication. I tiptoed quietly into the kitchen to make small talk into her neck and kiss her behind the ear as she liked for arousal but nothing I did seemed to interest her and she shrugged me off. She drew her mouth tightly over her teeth and looked off into the air, her face at least ten years older in her anger than when she smiled. She had a lovely smile and a fetching laugh when she wanted to show them to me.

I had been looking forward to this Labor Day weekend all summer since it would probably be an uninterrupted one, except for an extreme emergency. I was the founding partner of our clinic and it was my turn to have a long holiday. I had the utmost confidence in my associates. As neurosurgeons, we were always on call, day and night. There would be accidents and strokes but we were a good team and our schedule seemed to work well for all of us. I had my tools in a bag and an on-call nurse at my fingertips.

Some of my staff, and then other medical colleagues, have suggested to me after the break-in that I should have known better. I counter that my specialty is the physical

anatomy of the brain, not its psychological or forensic components. Many of my colleagues would disagree and I suppose we could debate the issue ad infinitum. However, since the patient in point is my own father, I didn't have that cool scientific perspective I otherwise might have had. The essence of science, they say, is skepticism and wonder. I would add, especially with that complex organ, the brain. For example, is there any consciousness beyond its physical boundaries? I tend to doubt it but I have left room to wonder. I also have concluded that rationality in human nature is the exception, not the norm. As many people age as determined by their genetic makeup and lifetime experiences, as they lose brain cells and memory, I've found that they tend to revert to very primitive and unconscious early childhood fears, beliefs and biases. I have wondered if that was Dad's condition when the break-in occurred.

Thinking back, I might have given more attention to the fact that Dad's brain was deteriorating faster than expected. I wrote off the changes to his getting older and my mother's unexpected death — his being cranky, sometimes short in conversation, occasionally forgetful, uncharacteristically opinionated. Then again it's one thing to observe a patient with whom you have no emotional ties and another to look at your father and admit he's slowly descending into dementia or cracking up. We tend to want to protect the ones we love, don't we? And I've always loved my father. And still do. We also tend to overlook certain things, particularly when one's father has had a long career as an outstanding and distinguished physician, a respected internist who worked long hours, loved my mother, never seemed to skip a beat with his patients and the vocation he honored. Always on top of it. He seemed favored for that reason by business types and enjoyed many corporate referrals. I think his relationships went back to college days where he was well liked and hobnobbed with the sons and daughters of the country club set. Our family home was a good seven thousand square feet, a Tudor style in a forested neighborhood where each house had its own architecture and landscape design. I particularly liked the reading nooks, bay windows, the massive stone fireplace in the great room and smaller but antique fireplace in the den. It wasn't a mansion like those of some of his classmates but a solid home on a full five acres with a circular drive and a number of leaded glass windows.

He sent me to a day school where many of the contacts for my practice originated. Of course, we brain surgeons do rather well. It was my father though whom the club crowd knew and stood up to acknowledge when we walked together into a room. I couldn't go anywhere with Dad but that we weren't greeted by the president of this or the CEO of that. He was quietly charming with a warm, solid handshake and a well-lit smile for all.

Again, in retrospect, there were signs.

When my mother first told me that Dad had bought a gun, an army surplus Forty-Five, I was amazed. My father? Yes, he loved to fish; we drove to Colorado and Wyoming many summers, standing in our rubber leggings in the cold waters, tossing line after line with flies made on the spot to tangle with ruthlessly brilliant trout, tossing them back just as fast after admiring them, their brio, their flash. Roman gladiators of the streams.

But buy a gun? For what? He had never hunted. No, not Dad. We had several dogs growing up and Dad treated each of them with fondness, wrestled with them, nursed them when they were sick or injured, mourned them when they died. One of the hardest things I think he ever did was agree to put down Ginger, his cocker spaniel, blind, dying of stomach cancer, unable to hold her urine. I watched the tears mark his cheeks. We cried together, Dad, mom, Louie, my older brother who was killed in an auto accident in his twenties and my sister, Elaine and me. In fact I called Elaine after getting off the phone with mother about the gun and she thought it odd too that he had, of all things, bought a gun. Mother pleaded with me not to try to talk to Dad about the gun unless he became preoccupied with it or became confused or out of touch with things. He seemed to be thrilled to know he had one tucked away in his condo.

Dad was a tall, broad shouldered man with thick fingers, too thick he often said for surgery, hardened by chopping wood, with the feel of the crust of homemade bread just out of the oven. When he took the blood pressure of a patient with white coat hypertension he held their hand in that warm rugged palm of his and usually the blood pressure went down. He had patients shit all over him during anal exams and stood patiently by them until help arrived to clean up the mess. One day he had to change his white coat three times. When I was younger I remember him returning home late at night

when I was still doing my homework, leaving his black leather office shoes outside because they had been soiled by a patient.

He bought the Forty-Five, according to my mother, after a break-in at their condominium complex in Boca Raton. Mother had nagged Dad into retirement at the age of 70. He had always been wary of moving to Florida and decaying in the humidity. In fact, I suspect he hated it. All those pushy, problematic New Yorkers, he'd say, or having to hang out with the crotchety wrinkled crowd complaining about their ninety-nine cent breakfasts that were supposed to come with a large orange juice, not a small one. Mom was tired of Ohio winters; gray, drab and boring, she always said. Dad was a hiker but mom just wanted to lay back, read, play bridge, do nine holes of golf now and then and throw cocktail parties. With his thick white hair, healthy tan and haute couture glasses, Dad was quite handsome. He confided to me once that he enjoyed being courted by all the ladies at Boca Raton condominium complex parties though he reassured me that his loyalty to my mother had remained in tact and always would.

The break-in at their Florida condo complex occurred on the fourth floor. A widow there made the mistake of inviting a minor employee of a fine arts firm who delivered and mounted paintings and other objet d'art to view in her gallery of Impressionist acquisitions, some of them purchased at auction at Sothebys and Christies during that absurd flurry of activity in the '80's when the Japanese overpaid for just about everything. One night when she returned from dinner, she surprised the employee, a Hispanic kind of man, going through one of her jewelry boxes. She later told her friends and the police that he severely beat her, leaving her for dead. But she survived. She suffered a broken nose and jaw, two cracked ribs and was in a coma for four days. I am sure that the image of this woman curled on her kitchen floor caused my father to picture images of my mother in similar circumstances.

Dad and mother visited their neighbor at the hospital several times a week and, fortunately, she was able to bounce back, old as she was. Just after that break-in Dad, without any prior conversation with mother, went to one of those sleazy pawn shops and paid cash for a Forty-Five.

Mother didn't seem particularly alarmed by it. For all his congeniality, Dad never liked being questioned or second-guessed. Possibly the only times he snapped at mother

was when she corrected him. No, she told me how he brought it home, laid it on the kitchen table, took it apart, cleaned it with one of her worn tea towels and oiled it. She watched him load the magazines, one slug at a time. After that, they never discussed it. He put the Forty-Five in the drawer of the end table by his bed and seemingly forgot it.

Another disturbing item was his intense obsessive bitterness about all the changes in the medical profession. As a partner in a medical office that catered to successful businessmen and their families he acquired a sense of how the world really worked. His practice had a cardiologist, endocrinologist, gastroenterologist, Dad, the internist and neurosurgeon, even a proctologist. He used to joke that many of the firm's patients were striving to become perfect assholes.

I noticed in the last couple of years of his practice he often commented sarcastically about "Queen Hilary" this, "Queen Hilary" that, about HMO's, about the prostitution of the medical profession by "corporate whores." Dad was one of those people who rarely said anything negative about anything or anybody. It was his habit at the end of a difficult conversation to open his hands, smile and declare, "What can we say?" But he thought the corporate trend in medicine was bad for doctors and patients alike. His comments, by themselves, were certainly reasonable and I agreed with most of them; it was the force and nastiness of how he expressed them later on that surprised me.

I have been asked too why I didn't require him to give the gun to me for safe keeping or just secretly confiscate it and pretend ignorance if he inquired about it or reported it missing. Actually, it never occurred to me. I was as distraught as he was about mother's sudden stroke and death. A total shock and surprise. When I helped him pack their things and close the condo I had all but some of his clothes and personal items delivered to the storage unit they rented after they sold their home. I didn't give the gun a second thought. I packed his two suitcases and a carry-on bag item by item with him at my side and, if the gun had appeared, of course, I would have dealt with it then. I didn't want a weapon in our house. If he had objected to selling it or giving it away, I would have sneaked it away when he wasn't looking and either hidden it in the attic or the basement, given it away or sold it at a gun shop. Because of his mental capacity, his occasional confusion, I would have thought he might simply have forgotten about it. I had no idea.

The gun never entered my consciousness until he fired it in the hallway of my house. Guns were for other people to fool with. Certainly, guns had nothing to do with me nor I with them.

The afternoon of the night of the break-in at our house, my two girls, Ginny and Helena, were rollerblading with their neighborhood friends. I wanted a martini and I asked Sally if she would join me. T-bones were thawing in the frig so we grilled those. The girls, eight and ten, , were happy with a frozen pizza. That's what they had. Dad sipped some red wine and said he was tired. It was obvious he had lost much of his energy and zest. He typically went to bed early, usually around seven or eight o'clock. We put him up in a dormer not far down the hall from our room just below the attic level. The girls shared a bedroom on the other side of the stairway. Our home had five bedrooms in all, including the dormer, a bit smaller but similar in size to the one in the house where I grew up.

Sally and I and the girls sat on the patio that night until who knows when. The cicadas seesawed their instruments early. The tree frogs gave us a concert. It was a calm relaxing night, the breeze stirring the full leaves lit brightly by the moon.

After lights out, I again moved to put my arms around Sally but she rolled away. I had hoped for a foray in the breeze with the windows open though we typically made love in the morning when we were clean and fresh after having our showers and brushing our teeth and the girls were in school or off to a summer activity. I was aroused by the night and the prospect of three days of doing not much of anything. Laying there, I felt tormented by the memory of her breasts, the soft moistening patch of hair between her legs, of the opening of her thighs spontaneously to receive me. I was certain it was the aggravation over Dad. A shame on such a romantic night. Too, I felt angry that she couldn't give my father this brief period of time to adjust. Sure, it was inconvenient. He was, as she said, always there. He never really asked for much of anything. He made his own breakfast and cleaned his dishes, made his bed. Sally would come home from the club and find him vacuuming, weeding the flowers, raking the odd leaf. Always there, she griped. She had a housekeeper twice a week and before dinner parties didn't need my father digging around in her home. She just couldn't be herself, she said. Perhaps that's how I felt when her mother (Susie Q. I call her) showed up for one of her

unannounced visits and usually overstayed several days beyond her scheduled departure. Took Sally from me, and gave Sally a chance to constantly be out of the house, off to a movie, shopping, visiting friends, leaving me in an empty den when I returned from rounds at the hospital or at the end of an office day.

I lay there restless that night, listening to the wind, inhaling its freshness. I began going over the women I worked with at the office, the nurses at the hospital, a woman doctor who admired me or at least admired my work. In the middle of those fantasies I thought I heard something snap in the backyard, a dry tree limb, leaves crackling underfoot. We had deer in the neighborhood. Often, opossums swung from limb to limb or a fox or raccoon passed through. I never worried about safety. Our development was on a large former estate protected by stone walls largely hidden by tall trees and foliage and was gated at the entrance with a guard in a small enclosure who monitored the comings and goings twenty-four hours a day.

I cocked my head to hear better. There were no sounds other than the night creatures and the leaves. I was eager to get back to my fantasies and thought of having an orgasm on my own. I could feel myself becoming erect at that thought and in the process of sliding my hand down my stomach I was shaken by a very loud explosion in the hall.

The first blast sounded like a bomb. Sally lurched from her sleep and jumped upright beside me. I had carried a Forty-Five during my brief eighteen-month career as a draftee in the military at the very end of the Vietnam War and I knew its sound from the required practice rounds on the firing range at the Navy installation in Illinois where I was assigned just out of medical school. A Forty-Five fired at close range can almost take a man's head off. My immediate thought was: "Forty-Five".

"Call 911," I shouted on impulse harshly into Caroline's ear, thinking for some reason that Dad had placed the barrel in his mouth or against the side of his head. Who else would have fired a Forty-Five in our house? The girls wouldn't have had a clue.

I hurriedly grabbed my robe from off the floor by the bed as I lurched towards the door and cautiously cracked it open.

Dad stood at the top of the stairs, squinting in the dim light and peering over the railing. His bedroom light was on and partially lit the hallway. He was naked and

barefoot and I watched his limp white buttocks stiffen as he fired again. I couldn't understand at the moment what was happening so I stood there paralyzed, peeking to see what I could.

I heard a younger man's voice shout:

"No! No! You don't need to shoot me anymore, mister. I give up. Don't shoot!"

Again, Dad fired. I must have heard another four or five shots, then a click. Dad fumbled with the handle of the gun to eject the magazine. He picked up another magazine from the hallway table, shoved it into the handle. A standard 1911 .45 magazine holds about seven rounds with another in the chamber. He loaded the first round, then quickly unloaded it down the stairway in rapid fire order. I could hear the bullets shattering the stairway spindles and ricocheting off objects below.

"Okay, you black cocksuckers," I heard him say calmly. "That'll teach you a thing or two."

"Dad!" I shouted. He turned on me with the empty Forty-Five and stepped back, surprised, as if awakening from sleep. I had never heard of him sleepwalking. He just seemed to be startled, shocked.

"Animals," he said with an expression of disdain I'd never seen before. "Came in through the kitchen door. I heard them sneaking up the stairs."

I decided to temper him.

"Dad," I said. "You've forgotten your robe."

"Oh, good lord," he laughed. "I surely have."

He turned and walked slowly up the steps to the dormer, the Forty-Five pointed down at his side. I switched on the hallway lights from the outlet just to the right of our bedroom door. That was my initial glimpse of what had transpired. There were two young hatless black men sprawled sideways on the stairs, both obviously deceased. I knew this in an instant. Their brain matter was splattered on Caroline's flowered wallpaper and on the Asian carpet runner up the stairway. The bodies were twisted in shapes I didn't know the human body was capable of arranging for itself: contorted sculptures, two nudes descending the staircase in reverse, ascending. Already I could smell the raw open flesh and bloody scent, the telltale odor of urine and BM of the newly dead.

Simultaneously, the girls began shouting, "Daddy! Daddy!" from the door of their bedroom down the hall on the other side of the second floor and I yelled at them to stay in their room and lock the door. But they yanked it open instead and rushed wide-eyed down the hall towards our master bedroom within viewing distance of the scene below them through the stairway spindles. For an instant they froze, hands over their mouths. I pushed out my door and rushed to them to block their line of sight as quickly as I could. Behind me I could hear Sally charging through the bedroom door in the same direction and screaming hoarsely, "Get them out of here! Get them out of here!" in a voice too painful and wounded for me at this writing to describe.

She shoved past me, clinching her teeth, spitting her words.

"Goddammit, son of a bitch..." she spat, grasping the girls by their necks, turning their heads, ushering them ahead of her, blocking the view with her body, pushing them into their bedroom, slamming the door and locking it behind her. From my other side I heard Dad close and lock his door behind him with a soft click.

In my career as a brain surgeon I have learned to remain calm and steady in the midst of delicate procedures. I automatically inhaled/exhaled into this mode. I had conditioned myself to gain and hold presence of mind. I had taught myself to shut down anxiety in a split second. I did this and began to survey the overall scene. Even then, I noticed my fingers tingling and shaking ever so slightly. I held my right hand in front of my face until it became still and under my fully conscious control.

There was no way I could walk down the steps through or around the bodies. It occurred to me from what I had read of the forensics of such situations that the police would want the scene of a shooting to remain as undisturbed as possible. After a moment of reflection, calm now and in surgical mode, I awkwardly swung my body over the railing of the landing as if on parallel bars, fearing the whole contraption would collapse under my weight. Like Dad, I am a tall man of a good weight for my height and I did this as slowly and deliberately as possible. I lifted my legs over the railing onto the narrow ledge and slowly slid my body downward, one leg at a time, holding on to the bottoms of two spindles until the full weight of my body was anchored, the heels of my hands solid on the ledge. I took a breath and then let go, falling several feet, landing flat on my bare

feet, fell backwards, banging my left buttock and hip, bouncing, tumbling onto the foyer floor.

I stood a moment vigorously rubbing my hip and tailbone. As I massaged my injuries I spotted two police cars, lights spinning. They came at angles from different directions to the curb of the circular drive with sirens blaring. The emergency lights flashed in the shadowed light of the tall pole lanterns we had chosen after a long search to decorate the front of the house.

Three policemen hopped out of their cars. I learned later they had already called for backup. They raced towards the front door with their weapons drawn. Two of them crouched several feet behind the lead officer with their weapons held out in front of them as he drew his own weapon and crept forward onto the stoop. He rang the doorbell with the end of his long flashlight then banged the rim of the glass storm door in rapid fire order with the elbow of the same arm.

"Open the door! Open the door!" he kept shouting.

I pushed myself up and limped towards the door, dressed only in the boxer shorts I had worn to bed, peeped through the eye hole, slid off the chain lock and cracked the door to get a closer look.

"Someone called 911 about a shooting," the first policeman shouted excitedly, holding the lighted flashlight up and into my eyes. He was a tall, lean brown-skinned cop with a neatly trimmed mustache. He spoke with a slight accent, possibly Caribbean. I later learned his name was Turner. The two backup officers Chuck and Luis.

"Yes, there was a break-in. I believe there are two dead."

"How would you know?"

"I am a physician."

"Oh? Anyone currently in danger?"

"I don't believe so, officer."

He turned to the third policeman in line.

"Luis, better check out the back. Need another ambulance. Chuck," he said to the policeman directly behind him. Back me up, I'm going in."

He turned again to me.

"Open the door slowly, very slowly and move backwards and to your left, he said. Stand facing the wall, hands locked over your head. We're coming in."

I did as he said, bumping into the small antique table that Carolyn had placed there topped by a rather flowery note pad and a tall pen decorated with a feather.

"Show me the victims," he said, pushing his way in, forcing me to step back. Chuck followed him.

I hesitated. In my mind, there were five other victims. A mother and two young girls were upstairs locked now in our master bedroom. Dad was back in the dormer and then there was me. I thought: *One of the victims is looking you in the eye, officer, goddammit.* I finally turned myself in the direction of the wall across from the stairs and switched on the foyer lights. Even with lights turned on, Turner coming through the door moved the beam of his flashlight up the stairs across the bodies of the two young black men.

"Holy shit," he said. "Who did this?"

"My father."

"Where is he now?"

"Upstairs in his bedroom in the dormer."

"Still armed?"

"Yes."

"Anyways up there 'cept this stairway?" he asked aiming a finger upwards to the two bodies sprawled on the steps.

"Yes. A stairway in the back of the kitchen. Leads to the other end of the upstairs hallway."

He waved to the policeman directly behind him. "You stay here, Chuck. Anyone else in the house?" he asked me.

"Yes. My wife and two daughters. Locked in our bedroom down the hall." I gestured towards it.

"Are they injured?"

"Not visibly. Not that I know of."

Officer Luis disappeared through the front door for a few minutes. He appeared to be Hispanic, much younger than the black cop. Chuck was an older black man with a

paunch. Their blue uniforms looked crisp, official, with large shining badges, brass buttons and other insignia. None of them wore a hat. Luis quickly returned.

"Ambulance and fire truck on the way," Chuck said, holding a walkie-talkie to his ear.

"Well, Chuck," Turner sighed. "Here's what we got. Looks like two fatalities. Try to check their pulses if you can tiptoe around this mess. We gotta get some lab people over here. There might be a guy downtown who could drive over here this time of night. Tell the paramedics they can come in but to hang loose a while. I want some photographs before they go carting these kids off. Uh, you, mister, uh doctor, I want you to stay right there facing the wall, hands above your head and flat against it." Luis joined them a few minutes later.

"Nothing on the perimeter I can see," Luis said and clipped a flashlight to his belt.

"Back door locked?" Turner asked me.

"Yes," I said. "At least it was."

"Luis, go through the kitchen and up the back stairs. Stay at the other end of the hall. I'll be right behind you. There's a guy up there with a weapon. I don't know how many rounds. If he's got any left. I'll be right behind you. Chuck you stay here for now with this guy."

Turner grimaced. He whispered something over his shoulder to Chuck. I only heard the words, "cool as a cucumber," and immediately wanted to slap his face as hard as I could.

I knew better than to argue with him, certain it was going to be a long night and was going to take a lot of time to sort through the details. My first thought was, *There goes my long weekend.* Not my finest moment but that's what passed through my thoughts. I think I was in shock.

I stood on wobbly legs facing against the wall. I felt pain everywhere from my fall. Chuck had little to frisk but ran his hands over my body anyway.

"What happened here?" Chuck asked the back of my head as he patted the sides of my boxer shorts and slid his hands in the crevices between my thighs and my scrotum.

"A break-in," I said.

"Yessir, that's for certain. But what else?"

He pushed on my shoulders to squat me down on the floor.

"Stay put," he said.

At that moment Dad walked out of the dormer and stood at the top of the stairs holding the pistol into the air. Now he was wearing his faded blue pajamas. He had seen Chuck patting me down as though I was wearing clothes "You leave him alone!" he shouted, his bottom lip quivering. "He's my son. You keep your hands off him. He's my son."

"You...you..." Turner shouted and pointed up to my father. "You drop that weapon right now."

Dad let it drop out of his hand onto the top step. I flinched at the sound. "You," Turner shouted again sharply to my father, "Open your hands in front of you and then flat on the top of your head. Come down those steps right now. One at a time."

"Go fuck yourself," Dad said.

"You either do as I say or I'll blow your ass right against that wall," Turner said in a harsh voice that surprised me for all the anger I heard in it. Dad began stepping down one foot at a time, balancing himself against the wall to his right. As he did Turner tiptoed up the steps around the two intertwined bodies in the little space that was left.

When Turner reached the landing at the bottom of the dormer stairs he directly faced my father, he said, "Now turn around very slowly."

My father hesitated with a defiant smirk. "Do it, Dad," I demanded turning my head in the direction of where he stood. "Just do it."

"I don't owe these bastards anything," my father said. "They can't boss *me* around."

"Dad, it doesn't matter. Just do it. It's the protocol. Just do as they say. You have to do as they say."

"Motherfuckers," Dad said finally turning around.

Turner cuffed him. "Do as I say and you won't be harmed."

Turner looked down the hall. Luis was positioned there.

"Luis, take him down to the kitchen. I'll get Chuck to bring the son to the kitchen as well. Chuck, did you hear what I said?"

"Got it," Chuck said. Then, "What a mess," He said quietly to no one. "What a goddamn mess."

I found myself agreeing with him. A horrifying mess. But, I thought, *Maybe not quite in the way you think.*

Glancing sideways through the open door I saw a small fire truck, alarms and other lights disturbing the darkness, enter my view and heard it whoosh to a stop. Two back-up police cars arrived. Several firemen jumped off the rig and one of them, hatless, carrying a black medical bag quickly headed towards the house. An ambulance arrived at about the same time, braked and drove up next to the fire truck, its emergency lights flashing in the background. Paramedics jumped out, opened the rear doors and pulled a gurney over the stone tiles of the walkway to the front door.

Turner walked my father down the hall and the back steps to the kitchen joining Luis, my wife and two girls who were standing packed together in a corner near the back door. He seated Dad in a kitchen chair where he struggled with the handcuffs behind his back and bowed his head. Chuck helped me stand up in the foyer, walked me to the kitchen and seated me on a bench in the kitchen nook.

"So," Turner said and began flipping through a small tablet to a clean page. " Who are you? Luis stood beside him.

"I am Dr. Drake."

"You a doctor too, huh?"

"That I am," my father said proudly in a clear voice.

"Lots of doctors here. Hey, did you do this?" he asked waving towards the foyer. My father sat silently and raised his eyes to the ceiling.

"Luis, I want you to witness this."

Turner directly faced my father. Then, to my anger and surprise, he read him his Miranda rights. It was my understanding that this is not done until a person is under suspicion or being placed under arrest. Maybe not, I thought. I wondered if he was going to read me mine.

"You understand all that?"

"Yes, I do," my father whispered.

Turner nodded to Sally and the girls.

"Mrs. Drake, I understand your friend is waiting at the station. There's a squad car waiting outside to take you there."

I learned later that Sally had made the 911 call on her cell phone, locked herself with the two girls in their bedroom on the other side of the staircase, then used her cell phone to call her friend. She pulled the two girls out of their bedroom and rushed them down the hall to the back stairs and the kitchen. It was the last time I saw her and the girls since that night. Custody and visitation issues. I have only talked to Sally twice. She tells me the girls are still in shock and are seeing a therapist. Their doctors have advised Sally that they are not to speak to me or to my father, even over the phone. I guess I can understand that with respect to my father but also to me? My lawyer is still working on visitation rights.

The two officers walked my father back up to the upstairs hallway to question him alone. They allowed him to go to the bathroom, dress in his street clothes, then led him to the top of the back stairs to the kitchen. once they knew Sally and the girls were gone. I understand the three of them were driven to police headquarters and then released. Our family friend, Christina DeCarlo, picked them up and took them to her home.

Turner stood at the end of the hall with my father while Luis, wearing surgical gloves, tried to count the shell casings on the floor by the dormer without stepping on them. Then they took my father back down to the kitchen, one on each of his arms. I sat uncomfortably on the floor for more than an hour while two men from the crime lab gathered evidence and the two bodies were removed.

Then two other officers covered the stairs and hallway with clear plastic sheets. Luis returned from the kitchen to the foyer and now stood beside me at the bottom of the stairs looking up.

"I ain't never seen the likes," he said.

I pleaded my father's case.

"What else would you expect, officer? Burglars in the house in the dark. A senior citizen still grieving the recent death of his wife. His whole world upside down? He has a right to..."

"...defend himself. I know all that. But this, this...mess. Looks like an execution, a slaughter."

"I think it's called fear," I said. "It's a natural response to danger."

"Humm. Ain't for me to decide," Chuck smirked, rolling his eyes and shaking his head.

"I didn't know it was routine to keep a crime victim handcuffed," I said. He snapped his head in my direction and looked directly into my eyes.

"This don't look like no routine thing to me. Them boys didn't have a weapon between them. No guns, no knives, no tools. Nothin'. It was like he was waitin' for somethin' like this to happen. An ambush."

"Quite an assumption. That's not my father."

"Mister, uh, doctor, you must not know your father very well."

He walked me up the back stairs to my room and ordered me to dress. Though my father had admitted to the shootings, Luis told me I might also be under suspicion or at least I needed to give a statement. I had blood on my body and boxers.

When I arrived at the station I was shivering from the cold air. They gave me a blanket to wrap around my shoulders. I was seated in a locked interrogation room for questioning and to give a statement. The officer was a young woman, pleasant enough and businesslike. She asked me to write a brief account. I was careful not to include what I had heard the one boy shout to my father for fear my words would be misinterpreted. I was already concerned that the shooting was being twisted into something it wasn't. It was certain to be on the news and I've been told by several of my media friends that the details of such incidents are often leaked by busy-body cops who relish the celebrity of the moment.

I asked for a telephone and to my surprise she brought me one from the front desk and plugged it into to a jack by the table. I called a former patient and friend, Joe Derwin. I saved his life several years before by removing a large brain tumor. A complete recovery. It was benign but located in a challenging area. I think of the surgery as one of my masterpieces. He had heard from his other surgeon friends that my work was impeccable. I'd never had any of my patients be so appreciative. After his rehab, he invited me to his club and we became racket ball foes. A nice dinner at his house two or three times a year. A football game in his paneled cherry wood Victorian den.

I enjoy the perk of having other professionals as friends: doctors, lawyers, financial wizards, developers, the collegiality of those who took the time in their lives to develop their talents, the gifted people of the world who get real things done. Joe was one of them.

He arrived an hour later, bouncy, bright, I thought for two in the morning. I read him my statement and given the situation he thought it was fine. I asked to see my father and was refused. He was being held at least until a hearing in the morning. At eight o'clock Joe made some phone calls and the same female officer who questioned me brought Joe and I from the waiting area near the front desk back to the cell where my father was being held.

While Joe and I waited for the cell door to be opened, I felt myself tearing up. I was exhausted from lack of sleep, horrified by the killings and mayhem and frustrated by the all-night wait. Here was my father, the most caring and responsible physician I have ever known, sitting slumped on a cot in a jail cell, elbows on his knees, head hung between them.

He looked up as we entered, his skin gray, his face haggard. He had been weeping. His eyeglasses lay upside down on the cot beside him.

"Son," he nearly wailed, "there's something wrong in the world," then sobbed openly in his hands. I watched Joe Derwin tear up, a lawyer who had probably handled more criminal cases than F. Lee Bailey.

Later that afternoon a judge sitting alone in a small courtroom with a clerk and a young blond female prosecuting attorney ordered Dad to undergo a three-day psychiatric evaluation at the jail. The judge explained that there would be an investigation and if warranted a case presented to the Grand Jury. Charges might be filed. Did he understand? He nodded, head bowed, and left the courtroom led without cuffs by an officer out a side door back to the jail.

Dad was released after his three-day stay at a locked psychiatric ward into my custody. And so we wait.

Sally is gone now, gone with the two girls to North Carolina where her high school friend, Dodo, as I nicknamed her, has a fancy condo on the beach. I can see them head-wagging from shop to shop, gunching and jawboning and flipping through the racks

of clothes. Both of them wear those long skirts to cover their hips and let their tits hang down without bras letting them swing free. With that much gravity they should be allowed to flop. I can just hear them plotting the intricacies of the divorce, custody, child support, who gets this and that. Follow the dollar, you get the dollar. Sally should have stuck with the college quarterback but I guess she didn't have the guts to take the risk of not having an affluent husband.

I really hadn't realized until now how much I had come to dislike her. I can't pinpoint the actual time and day when I noticed that my bright cute sorority girl had suddenly emerged from a bedroom doorway dressed as a young old bag more interested in planning the next ballet ball over lunch with her friends then jumping with me into the sack. I suppose some might claim I am a misogynist. So be it. I am a scientist. I follow where the evidence leads me.

I miss the girls, I really do. I must admit, I don't miss Sally. On the Q.T. I've been hanging out with two steamy surgical nurses I've known for years and always felt some affection for. I don't know how attracted they are to me physically but it doesn't really matter. Probably the doctor thing, my lucrative practice, all that. As long as my sex life is still active, it's okay by me. I doubt that Sally and I will ever get together again. It's as though "the stairway incident" as Dad and I now call it has eviscerated something between us. Sally claims the two girls are too traumatized to talk to me. I've got Joe Derwin working on that.

Joe arranged a meeting with the DA. He's a neat, nice looking young man who stood to greet me in his office with a handshake and a genuine smile from across his desk. He has a clear window view behind him of the city from his tenth floor office. From his coloration I thought he might be Hispanic, Italian, Greek or Eastern European, slightly dark with thick black hair, a trim build, as trim as I would like to be if I had the time. Joe says he'll no doubt be running for a higher office soon, maybe an appointment to state D.A., then for governor. I can't see it. Not in this state.

"Please sit down," he said. "My secretary may have told you I have an appointment in ten minutes. Joe talked with me about your father. It's a tragedy. Beyond that as you are aware I can say very little. I hope, however, I can at least answer some of your questions."

As I started to speak, he held up his hand. "Before you begin, I am completely familiar with your father's case. We are still waiting for the investigation to be completed before deciding whether or not to bring him before the Grand Jury. Once we make the decision we can move the case rather quickly. A situation like this, all over the news, requires a swift response."

He spoke with a slight accent. I remembered him from his appearances on television during the campaign, an accent, very slight, but still there. I didn't know much about him. I voted against him.

I nodded.

"I guess I am puzzled and confused," I said. "It would seem to me on the face of it that, clearly, there is no case at all. I mean, here you have an older man who's in the early stages of dementia, being awakened in the darkness from a deep sleep, confused, so confused in fact that he walks into the hall unclothed. He sees two dark figures apparently rushing up the stairs towards him. He fired as I would, by instinct, as a matter of self-preservation. You're taught that if you feel threatened you shoot to kill. No hesitation, no wing shots. Stop the attackers in their tracks. I can't see that a crime has been committed. It is obvious Dad shot in self-defense."

The DA looked at me from across the desk with a slight smile and the cold eyes of someone well trained in forensics, unlike most of the gladhanders who dabble in being self-righteous and looking ahead for political gain. He breathed in and out slightly before speaking.

"Clearly?" he asked and sighed. "This case presents several issues that are under discussion by many diverse groups. For one, there is the ferocity of the shooting. There are seven rounds in a .45 clip, one in the chamber, and as I recall he fired all of them from, not just one, but from two clips into just about every part of the two bodies. Several in the face and head. One of them was shot twice directly, if you'll excuse me, in the balls. Was he right to defend himself? Did he need to, as some have written in the press, mutilate the bodies? You've seen what a Forty-Five does to someone's head at close range? I'm not judging. I'm repeating the questions. Is this something I should decide and put in front of a jury? Along with the issue of competence? I have no answers yet. We are studying the law. These were pretty young kids. One of them was only

fifteen. Does this make a difference? To some. They invaded your home. Your father reported that they were 'charging' up the stairs at him in a threatening way. Many other things to consider. Your father has never been charged or convicted of a crime. From all appearances he has led a pristine life. He has received many honors in his profession. He is revered among his patients and so on. There is some evidence to indicate a cognitive disturbance. We'll do our best here to take all of these factors in account. That's all we can do."

With that, he stood again and reached over his desk to shake my hand. I rose slowly recognizing I was being dismissed. As far as I was concerned he had committed to nothing. A waste of time.

Within a week he submitted the case to the Grand Jury. I suspected he would have to do that, no doubt under political pressure from minority groups and the ACLU. I didn't tell Dad about the meeting at the time. He seemed too fragile to discuss much of anything about the break-in. To my surprise the Grand Jury returned a No Bill. They found the shootings to be justified and Dad not to be responsible for his actions. The black community felt the ruling unjust because they thought him to be of sound mind. There have been ongoing protests at the courthouse. Complaints of excessive force. Racism. Letting rich people off the hook. Stand Your Ground laws. Dad stopped reading the newspapers or watching the news on television. A civil case filed by the two young men's families is going forward.

At the time of the shooting Dad was not legally in violation of any concealed weapons laws nor did any of us know and we still do not know if he would have been judged to be mentally incompetent. Dad certainly does not think he was. The issue is whether or not he committed a crime. He has never been charged with committing one. He was the one who was attacked. The grand jury agreed and in effect exonerated him. Because of that and all that he and my family have been through, I have asked Joe Derwin to file a formal complaint against Turner with the Police Commission and to look into a lawsuit for false arrest and any other claims he might have against the city and the D.A.

It's spring here. I have taken a sabbatical until I can sort through my family matters and the civil case. Dad and I walk together in the evenings, usually after dark,

mostly discussing my patients and the surgeries I have performed over the years. I carry a .38 now just in case.

Dad's friends have been sympathetic though a bit more distant than I expected. Some say they'd have done the same thing. Others say nothing or simply nod their heads in agreement at whatever he says though he rarely discusses that night in any detail except when we meet with his lawyers. Usually, he is sullen and quiet, impatient to be done with the meetings. He sits out on the swing when the weather is nice. I'm not sure he is always with me. I don't know where or what his thoughts are. He'll make what I think are irrelevant comments about the topic of a conversation or wander off onto tangents about mop heads and kikes and I need to bring him back into the present. Sometimes he cracks me up. The other day, out of nowhere, he asked:

"Remember Dubowsky?"

The cardiologist in Dad's practice.

"Sure, with all the show dogs."

"The man is an absolute idiot," he said. "Can't find his ass from a hole in the ground."

The house has been thoroughly cleaned by one of those companies that specializes in cleaning and sanitizing homes after fires, floods, homicides and suicides. We have reclaimed it, Dad and I. New carpeting and wallpaper. I still sleep in the master bedroom and why shouldn't I? It's my home. I moved Dad from the dormer to a downstairs bedroom. I am going to try my best to keep the house. I have Dad's power of attorney in all matters and I think I can use some of his money to buy out whatever interest Sally might have in the property.

We go now and then to the movies or out to dinner. Dad's taken quite a liking to Northern Italian cuisine. He enjoys the pasta. He used to be mostly vegetarian, except for the occasional salmon filet or piece of roasted chicken.

I must admit I have developed a somewhat different perception of the brain in relation to human thought. I find it surprising and troubling that after talk therapy with a trusted colleague and experimenting with a number of psychotropic medications I have been unable to rid myself of reoccurring dreams of the two dead bodies. In my dreams, the intruders have the bodies of very small black boys, perhaps as little as seven or eight

years old. They are standing nude on my blue grass lawn. I look at them through a camera. They keep waving and shouting to at me to 'stop, stop. don't take any more pictures'. But my camera keeps flashing and they explode piece by piece from the inside, first the forehead, eyeballs splattering, then the heart, the intestines. As I lay awake after the dream, sweating, my heart pounding, beating rapidly, I find myself counting again the rounds Dad fired: boom, one; boom, two, and so on. After the first dream of the break-in counting the number of explosions, I double checked the civil lawsuit against him and found that in my dream I count the exact number of rounds Dad fired from the first clip.

And I have begun to stutter again, something I have not done since I was four years old.