

Some Things are Better Off Left Alone

Bradford was standing in the ER conversing with Brighton. He looked almost comical as he wore a large bandage over his swollen nose. Perhaps compensating for his facial apparel, he seemed overly animated as he spoke.

“You know—this could’ve all been avoided if the Medical Board hadn’t dragged their feet on the issue. I tried to tell them that Wright was a menace, but Tunney was so combative every step of the way. Yet, a two year intern walks in and they take your word as *Gospel*.”

Brighton responded rather glumly. “Well, I really didn’t expect things to turn out this way. If I had known that somebody was going to lose their life, then perhaps I would’ve reconsidered.”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself. Wright knew what he was doing. Besides, you were following my directions and I don’t feel any remorse for the man. He was playing with fire and he got burned. If you really think about it, what he was doing was quite sick!”

“Well, I don’t know about all that, but as you said, I was following *your* directions, so I really hope that you’re going to keep your end of the bargain and get me out of this God awful ER.” Brighton’s tone had become very solemn as he made his plea. For the first time he refused to let the other man intimidate him.

“In time my boy,” Bradford asserted in a patronizing tone. “Things have become somewhat heated around here and we need to let them cool down before I submit a transfer request to the Board.”

Brighton knew that he was getting the brush off the moment Bradford opened his mouth, but he also knew he had no recourse in the matter.

Suddenly, the ER entrance doors flung open with a flurry of commotion. A man on a gurney was soaked with blood, yet there were no obvious perforations in his clothing. Apparently, the blood was not his own.

“We’ve got a live one here,” shouted one of the paramedics. The man on the gurney was struggling, but there were several straps on his legs and across his chest and arms, restricting his overall movement.

“Can we get some help over here,” the same paramedic shouted urgently.

Brighton motioned towards the man, and right at that moment the struggling criminal freed an arm and slid it behind his back.

The paramedic shouted, “Get that arm restrained!” Brighton reacted and grabbed the man’s arm. But it was too late. Removing his arm, the man produced a gun.

“Weapon,” someone screamed and everyone scurried for cover. Brighton attempted to twist the gun from the assailant’s hand, but was momentarily stunned by the unusual crack that rang out from the barrel. “That was an odd sound,” Brighton mused, mentally relating it more so to a loud firecracker than to a gunshot.

Finally, removing the gun from the hand of the struggling criminal, Brighton sighed heavily. Yet, he was literally gasping as he tried to take another breath. Pointing at his

chest, one of the nurses screamed out. Brighton looked down to find a large crimson stain expanding through his medical jersey. He gasped for another breath and ultimately fell to his knees.

At that point, several staff members as well as the two original paramedics had finally pinned down the man on the gurney, but that didn't stop him from laughing uncontrollably. As Brighton ultimately slipped away into blackness, he heard the man utter, "Ya should'a left it alone!"

All eyes were fixed on Bradford as he walked into the Boardroom. He failed to acknowledge the contemptuous stares as he finally took a seat.

Somewhat nervous about the nature of the proceedings, he wore a conjured smile and spoke rather loudly. "Well, I'm glad to see that you finally came to your senses. I just hope that you don't blame me for the outcome. I mean, I tried to tell you early on that he was a liability. Surely, you can see that now." Bradford seemed to be fishing for some kind of vindication, but the Board members remained silent, watching the man slowly unravel himself.

After allowing him to squirm for a few more minutes, Tunney finally chimed in. "Dr. Bradford—this Board is not here to make any moral or legal judgments. I really don't know if you have any remorse for the part you've played in Jackson Wright's death. And personally, I really don't care how you feel. As for the legal ramifications, that will be up to the appropriate authorities to decide whether or not you were directly or indirectly responsible for his death. What we are here to discuss is your inappropriate actions within this institution."

Bradford cleared his throat and quickly edged in. “Look. I’ll be the first to say that, perhaps, I was a little overzealous in my approach to the situation, but I can assure you that I still handled things professionally and within the guidelines of this institution.”

“Not according to our sources,” Tunney retorted sharply.

Again, Bradford seemed very nervous as he responded. “And what unreliable sources would you be referring to? I’m sure that there’s no substance to their claims.”

Tunney smiled confidently. “On the contrary, Nurse Hardcourt has come forward and told us everything you’ve been doing for the last week. The unauthorized relocation of Wright’s office—confirmed by your own secretary. The theft of his property—namely the device that he was using for the bulk of his research, which incidentally was entirely funded by Wright. An internal audit has finally established this fact. In reality, he never touched a dime of the money that was allocated for his research. So, as you can imagine, this has left this entire institution with a horrible black eye. Our PR department is already implementing damage control. And,” Tunney’s face became completely expressionless. “You have become a major liability. Thus, it is our determination that you will take the fall for this entire fiasco. Not only have we terminated your employment from this hospital, but we’ve also advised the Medical Association of your recent activities. In response, we have been authorized to inform you that, pursuant to a full investigation, your medical license will be revoked.”

Bradford was floored. He stuttered breathlessly for a moment, but finally managed to speak. “This is outrageous! I have never seen such hypocrisy in my life! You people have no idea who you’re messing with. I can assure you, you

haven't heard the last of this. When my lawyer gets through with you, you'll wish..."

Tunney motioned to one of her associates as she harshly cut him off. "Doctor, I think you're in enough trouble as it is without making idle threats."

Within moments two burly security guards stepped in and took a secure hold on each of his arms. Again, Bradford was dumbfounded. He was finally at a loss for words and ultimately remained silent as he was escorted from the room. Tunney said nothing, but wore a smile of complete and total satisfaction.

Several days had passed and a large group of friends and relatives had gathered for Wright's funeral. Amongst the attendees were Merritt, Hardcourt and Andrea. As the minister applied the appropriate words, many of the mourners wept.

Hardcourt was less apt to express her emotions openly, but as the minister concluded, a single tear formed in the corner of her eye and eventually ran down her cheek.

Looking towards Merritt she quietly began to speak. "You know, I really wish I could have thanked him for what he said the other day. After thinking about, I realized that I've wasted so much of life being angry and bitter. And for what? The man that murdered my daughter is dead. So, I can either spend the rest of my life seething in my past or I can simply start living." Pausing for a moment, she took a deep breath and exhaled. "I choose to live."

In a rather unusual fashion, Hardcourt closed her eyes and put on a slight, but genuine smile. It had been years since she had felt such a sense of peace. Finally opening her eyes, she looked down towards the casket and mouthed the words, "Thank you."

Nodding graciously at Hardcourt, Merritt then turned his attention to Andrea and offered her a tissue. She had been crying through the entire procession. Her sheer respect and admiration for Wright had led her to risk her own life among other things.

“I truly hope he’s found happiness—but I really wish we could have had that dinner.” She was having difficulty holding back the tears as she spoke. “Why did this have to happen? What was so important, that Jack gave up his life to protect it?”

Merritt took a deep breath and responded. “To be honest, I don’t know. And No one ever will. Right before Jack left the house, he erased all the information. And the monitor itself was completely destroyed.” Looking down at the grave, Merritt shook his head. “Jack, I hope it was worth it.”

As the large mass of people began to disperse, Merritt addressed both women. “Ladies, can you give me a few minutes? I just want a moment alone to say goodbye.” Both women nodded graciously and headed towards their vehicles.

When the last of the mourners had dispersed, Merritt again looked down towards the casket and spoke. “Jack—I just want you to know that I won’t let your research die with you.” Reaching into the breast pocket of his suite coat, he revealed a small compact disk. “I know how important this was to you.”

The lid of the casket exploded into a shower of splintered wood, littering the entire grave site. Merritt fell backwards from the blast and landed on his backside. Almost simultaneously, the gruesome decomposing forms of Jack and Cassandra leapt up out of the grave, each taking a hold of one of Merritt’s ankles. As they slowly drug him into the opening, he screamed out desperately.

Merritt awoke to several pairs of eyes fixated upon him. The faint whistle of the ventilation system and the loud droning hum of the jet engines played in the background. As everyone slowly drew their eyes away, Merritt sighed heavily and thought to himself, “Well, at least they’re together.”