

Line of Fire

Category: Guns

written by Laurin Bellg | March 1, 2018

My patient was dying, and her son was angry. She was eighty-nine and buckling under the weight of septic shock. With his mother failing, her son had lost it. "You will regret letting her die!" he said as he lunged at me. He was intercepted but continued to stare me down. I tried to hold his gaze as softly as I could, willing him not to kill me.

Hospital security called the police, who decided the threat was real. Over the course of a long, slow hour, the hospital entered lockdown and police swarmed everywhere. The son had a record of violence, it turned out. But by the time the police decided I was actually in danger, the son was gone and nowhere to be found.

For three days, the police drove by my house periodically, security escorted me in and out of the hospital, and my neighbor brought me a gun. I'd never owned a gun, but suddenly, not knowing where an unhinged son was, it seemed an interesting option.

Everything I believed about nonviolence now seemed impotent. I accepted the gun reluctantly but immediately hid it in a drawer. I couldn't decide if I was more afraid of the son or of a weapon I had no idea how to use.

The day my patient died, the police were present when I broke the news to her son. My pronouncement seemed thin and inadequate. He sank to the floor in front of me and sobbed.

Suddenly, with striking clarity, I understood. His threats to me had been a desperate attempt to hold on to a mother he loved and was losing. Maybe she was the only one who had ever truly believed in him throughout a troubled life. Perhaps I was a convenient target for his internal desperation to latch on to something he could control.

Seeing him buckle under his grief, I knew that I was no longer in the line of fire. Perhaps I never was, although it had seemed like a real threat at the time. To lose someone you love can bring out the irrational in all of us. Yet I still choose a path that often puts me in the line of fire, even though it will occasionally mandate a police escort.

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