

ONE

*You Can Tuck It In, But Your Past May Not Want To Go To Sleep
Where Bonny Reflects and Jack Deflects
Defense Mechanisms: Psychological Processes That Reduce Anxiety;
Mental Tricks That Help You Keep Your Balance*

“I thought I was going to see the li'l baby Jesus today.”

She quickly closed her book and met his eyes. “Excuse me, Jack, but what did you just say?”

He gave her a wry half-smile and nodding said, “Bonny, my love, today, I really thought I was a dead man.”

She stared at him. “Jack, what are you talking about? What happened?”

“Only that this patient pulled a gun on me and aimed it right at my head.”

“At the clinic?”

“Yeah. Right in my office during an appointment. Can you goddamn believe it? He was sitting about three feet away from me, but that freakin gun seemed a lot closer...and much bigger than it was. Much, much bigger.”

Bonny pressed her hands together and raised them to her lips. She let out a deep breath. “Oh my God, Jack. Why'd he do it? Was this a new patient? An old one? Holy mother, what did you do?”

“His name's Brad. I've been seeing him off and on for depression. Today, he comes into the office, plops down and stares out the window without saying a word. So, I decide to wait. You know, see if he's going to say anything. That's when I notice he's wearing a raincoat.”

“A raincoat? In this Florida heat?”

“Right. I wondered that too. He'd always come in wearing a polo, chinos and loafers.”

“So?”

“So, finally, I say my usual, ‘How're you doing’?”

Silence.

‘Brad, anything happen since we last met?’

Silence.

‘What's with the raincoat? I didn't see any rain in the forecast.’

More goddamn silence.

Bonny, I'm hearing the AC-grate's rattling, the fluorescents buzzing and guys cutting grass outside, but all I'm getting from him is his sullen silence. I'm thinking, ‘Hell. Is this appointment going to be like our others? My trying to pull things out of this stubborn pain in the butt?’

Then it happened. His right hand goes into his raincoat and slowly pulls out this shiny, black gun. He raises it up to his eye and aims it...at *me* for chrissake. And there it is, the muzzle of a pistol pointed right at my face. I look at the gun. I look at Brad. I look at the gun. I look at Brad. The bastard wasn't staring-off now. He was looking at me straight down that gun's barrel with this wise-ass grin.”

“Jack, what did you do then?”

“Well, like out of reflex, I reached out and tried to push the gun aside. As I did, he said, ‘*Don’t do that,*’ in this flat, threatening voice.” Jack smiled. “You can bet I put my hand down pretty fast. Now it’s me staring in silence. I saw the gun was a revolver. So, brilliant me tries to see if there were any bullets in the cylinders. Then I think, ‘you idiot, all he needs is one bullet in the chamber to kill you. Crap.’

And Brad? Not moving. Just sitting there with the gun at his cheek and his eye sighting down it at my head...smiling at me.

I was totally fixed on that deep, black-hole at the end of the barrel. I’m thinking if I tried to lunge at him or run, he could shoot me before I left the chair. I looked to see if he had his finger on or off the trigger. Ha, like that would’ve reassured me. Bonny, talk about feeling powerless. I was freakin frozen.

Then, and I’ve no clue how much time’s passed, he pulls the gun back and looks at it, all innocent. Like...like it’s an ice-cream cone and he’s wondering where to take his first lick. When he started moving it again, I know I yelled, ‘Brad, don’t *do it*’.

And do you know what he does?”

“No, Jack, I don’t.”

“He lowers the gun and starts to put it back inside his raincoat. As he doing that, he starts laughing and says. ‘Huh? Don’t do *what*, Doc? Gee, I just thought you’d like to see it. They sure make these reproductions look real nowadays, doncha think?’

Next, he stands up and leaves, without a word. Oh, and on his way out, he makes another appointment. Maybe he’s got a goddamn replica bazooka to show me next. Jesus.”

As she hugged him, Bonny said, “My God, Jack, that’s incredible. And this horrible, what should I call it, ‘thing’, ‘experience’, ‘traumatic event’ happened this afternoon?”

“Yeah. I saw the rest of my patients and came home. Figured I’d tell you the story, then go sit out on the lanai with a vodka/tonic.”

She stepped away to look at him. “Wait a minute. This guy pulls a gun, aims it at your face and you think you’re about to be killed?”

“Yeah?”

“Then he leaves and you just move along and finish your day? How does that happen? I’d have been pretty shaken-up.”

“Bonny, I had patients scheduled and some paperwork to finish. I got on with things. What else was I supposed to do? Although I did want to run after him and smack that grin off his face.

Anyway, have you noticed? They’re back. Driving home, I got behind this old fart driving five miles-per-hour and saw a granny whose head was below her steering-wheel. Honey, the ‘Snow-bird invasion’ is upon us.”

“Thanks, Jack, for that news-update, but I’d rather hear how you’re doing.”

“Bonny, I’m fine. Really, no shit, I’m *fine*. I just need to analyze what’s going on with Brad. The clear transferential issues, his displacing his underlying anger to me instead of who he’s really pissed at.” He laughed. “You’ll like this. Driving home I began thinking about taking martial-arts classes. Then it hit me how I was rationalizing. Like, if I knew Kung-Fu, I could’ve, with lightning-fast moves, grabbed that gun away and had him cowering on his knees. Crazy how the mind works, huh?”

“Mm-hmm. That ole, crazy mind of yours rationalizing away. It’s adorable.”

“I think so.”

“Well, Jack, I don’t. I’m thinking how really scared and helpless you felt and how you’re going to downplay it with your ‘I’m fine’ garbage just like you’ve done before. You’re good at that.”

“Bonny, why do you have to start busting my chops? I just wanted to share a story with you.”

“Why? Because when I ask you how you are, I get, ‘Oh, I need to analyze...’ as an answer. Jack, a guy aimed a gun at your head and you thought you were going to die. *I’m upset. How are you?*”

“It wasn’t fun.”

“That’s pretty articulate.”

“Look, I’m supposed to control the session. Today, the patient was in charge. Not good.”

“A patient with a gun,” she said.

“Okay. Okay. I’ll admit that for those few minutes I was a little scared. Happy?”

“Hmm. So your being frozen *wasn’t* because you were afraid? It was because, let’s see, the AC was too low?”

“Jesus Christ. Stop. I’m fine. I’m okay. I’m handling things. Got it?”

“You’ve never mentioned this guy before. Have you been seeing him long?”

“A few months. I picked him up at the Clinic after the University’s psych-unit discharged him. He’d tried to hang himself from a garage pipe that broke when he put his weight on it. He fell, hit his head, went unconscious. His father found him, called the EMT’s. After Medicine cleared him, they transferred him to Psych. I saw him a few times, but then he left for the US Naval Academy. After they asked him to take a leave of absence because of his depression, he came home and I started seeing him again.”

“Gee, Jack, I feel so much calmer now knowing my husband’s treating a suicidal guy with a gun.”

Jack shrugged. “Actually, I don’t know if he’s still suicidal because he won’t discuss it. In fact, the stubborn shit won’t talk much about anything. And if he does, it’s smart-ass comments like, ‘Aren’t psychiatrists supposed to help people? Let me know when you start, Doc?’ Or, ‘Your diploma says, Jack Rackham, MD. Where’d you get that MD, online?’ Outside of his being a pain in the ass, he wasn’t worth mentioning,” he smiled, “until our little tête-à-tête today.”

He looked outside. “Ah, I hear the lanai calling to me, ‘Come, Jack, relax, have that drink.’ I just hope those little rascal no-see-ums aren’t around. Man, when they start biting. Hey, Bonny, come look at this sailboat going by on the canal.”

Bonny drummed her fingers hard on the tabletop. “Jack, I don’t care about some sailboat. I care about how *you’re* doing. And, so far, all I’ve heard is that you’re... *fine*. Well, I’m not buying into that.” She paused. “And you know why.”

After a long, dramatic sigh, he turned and found her eyes fixed on his. “Bonny, you just had to bring up that crap from the past, didn’t you? I’m telling you right now that that’s *not* an issue. The issue is my interpreting the psychodynamics behind Brad’s behavior today. Why would he use a gun to show me he was in control? He was already running sessions with his not

talking. Was I getting close to something? Did he need to distance me? And then there's all his pent-up rage. At what? At whom? Now do you get it? What's important here? Or do I have to speak more slowly in monosyllables?"

She glared at him. "No, I get it. Your anger at me says it all."

"Goddammit, Bonny, I'm fine. Just let me do my job, will you?"

She stared at him, unmoved. "Okayyyy, so that pent-up anger, needing to feel in control? We're talking about Brad, right?"

"Yeah?"

"And ...your feeling powerless? Frozen in your chair?"

"Mostly my surprise. And confusion about what I was gonna do next." He laughed. "I added some drama to the story for you."

She raised her hands in surrender. "What can I say? I'm not the expert on the human mind, am I?"

"No, Bonny. *I* am."

"Okay, Jack. Although *you* may have everything under control, may *I* share two concerns?"

"Like I have a choice?"

"The first is how much this... this 'incident' might upset you. Your experiencing something like that and not be affected? I don't think so. But, okay, you say you're fine and I'll have to accept that, at least for the present.

Now, since this guy's already made one serious suicide attempt, it's likely he's going to try it again, right?"

"Yeah, but..."

"My second, deeper concern is that if this fellow succeeds this time..."

He shook his head. "Won't happen."

"Jack, humor me. If he *does* succeed this time, how's the 'Expert' going to react?"

"Can't let that bullshit go, can you."

"Jack, face it, you don't deal well with suicide. Your twin-brother killing himself? Your needing therapy for depression afterwards?"

"Bonny, when I told you about his suicide, I said I was upset, but 'normal' upset. It was my parents who thought I was depressed so I did the therapy for them."

"Of course. Because you were fine, huh? That's why you hid the suicide and your depression from me for years into our marriage. And only told me when? After..."

"But I *did* tell you. Anyway, I worked through his suicide long ago."

"*Really?* You worked it through so well that when your two patients killed themselves three weeks apart, your getting depressed, cancelling appointments, isolating at home, gambling..."

"That was day-trading."

"Had no connection with your twin?"

"No."

"No? Geez, Jack. That's when you finally told me about your brother's suicide. How the patients' killing themselves stirred-up memories of your brother's suicide. How that was causing a depression just like you had after your brother died. That's why I'm saying you don't deal well

with suicide.”

“Bonny, how about some credit for seeing Dr. Lankersham that last time. We did some good work together.”

“Oh? The psychiatrist I dragged you to? I thought he was restarting your engine getting you back to work. But then you come home one day and, without our discussing it, tell me you’re selling your practice, *our* home and, surprise, we’re moving to Florida where you’ll work in a psych clinic.”

“Bonny, where are you going with this?”

“That our moving here had something to do with your therapy.”

“Jesus. C’mon, babe, we’d always talked about moving to Florida to get away from those freezing winters.”

“Jack, the whole move, especially your not talking to me about it, was so out of the blue, I did wonder if Dr. Lankersham was getting too close to something and you reacted, *really* reacted.” Bonny paused. “Crazy how the mind works, huh? I remember our sitting in his office. Him describing your tendency to run from emotions and feelings you’re uncomfortable with. What words did he use? Denial? Avoidance? Rationalization? You just rationalized something about Kung-Fu? Overpowering Brad?”

Jack looked outside. “Yeah, yeah.”

“Please, Jack, I really need you to hear me, to know where *I’m* coming from.”

He half turned to her. “Okay, what?”

“Jack, if something does happen with this guy, I am *very* worried that you, *we* will go through the same problems we had up north.”

“Bonny, Lankersham helped me see some things. But his provoking me to move because he was getting too close to some dark, deep problem inside me? Nuh-uh. *No*. And my not talking with you about the moving? I wanted to surprise you. I thought you’d be delighted with the change.”

“Uh-huh. ‘Delighted’ isn’t quite the word I’d use.”

“And Brad? Nothing’s gonna happen. He’ll come around once I get through his resistance.”

“Jack, you should terminate him. I’m very serious about that. He’s made a significant suicide attempt and he’ll likely do it again. He’s threatened you with a gun. He’s antagonistic. And he’s not engaged in therapy. Where do you draw the line?”

“Dammit, Bonny, it’s what I do, help confused people. And this guy’s definitely confused. Look how he comes to our appointments, then pushes me away.”

“Mm-hmm. And what if the next time, he doesn’t push, he blows you away? Jack, where’s your head? You don’t *have* to keep seeing this guy.”

“Yeah I do. He needs my help.”

“Right. And you need to help him? No matter what.”

“All right. All right. I hear you. I’ll think about what you said. Okay?”

“Thank you. That’s all I’m asking, Jack. That you seriously think about my concerns.”

“For chrissake, Bonny. I told you I will. But right now I’m taking my vodka/tonic and going out onto the lanai... where nobody’ll bother me.”

