

Chapter 45: The lynching (2005)

It was late afternoon on the Monday following the last scuffle with Dr. K' when Dr. Philips entered the OR change room, where I was sitting, in my underpants, dictating an operative report. He seemed agitated and I guessed immediately that it had to do with last Friday's events in the OR.

"Moshe, you'll have to appear before the Medical Executive Committee tomorrow at seven am. There are serious allegations laid against you by the department of anesthesia and the head OR nurse."

"Nonsense Bill. Bullshit, yes, bullshit —this is my response. Look, I'm tired. I've been on call constantly for thirty days, had a rough weekend, and just finished a difficult laparotomy. Please let me dictate and leave me alone."

"Moshe, sorry, you'll present yourself tomorrow sharp at seven am. We'll listen to your version of what happened."

"Bill, I knew that they would complain about me. I could have complained about them too, but what's the use? When I do complain, nobody listens. You know that this is all part of Jack's vendetta against me."

"We'll discuss it tomorrow morning. See you then." He walked towards the door but I stopped him, not able to suppress the rage and disgust in my voice: "No, Bill, I won't be there. I'm tired of playing to their tune. I'm not going to jump and reply to any frivolous accusation. That game is over for me. I'm tired, need to rest and think. I won't be there tomorrow morning."

"As you wish. But be aware that anesthesia has declared that as of now they won't provide anesthesia to your patients."

The following day, during morning rounds Bill Philips paged me: "The meeting is postponed to 1.30 p.m. Will you appear? If not, we'll discuss it without hearing your version. This is your only chance—."

"Ok, I'll be there."

Again we sit along the same long oak table. Only six months since I was sitting here, defending myself against Jack's allegations that I had assaulted him with a "head but". What was their verdict? Was I reprimanded? Did they warn me to behave myself? So much happened since, and before; how can I remember details of all the political troubles that are following me like tireless ghosts? Why don't they leave me alone?

As usual the members of the Medical Executive Committee enter the room one after the other, a few minutes late. I look around: Bill Philips the radiologist is the president. A WASP, originally hailing from the south, he has been— or so I think— sympathetic to my cause all along. To his right I see Art's heavy bulk; he is our second radiologist, an African American hailing from Chicago. I like him: ever friendly and amicable—the only black doctor in town ought to support the case of the only Jew, right? On the left side of the table sits "the Prince", Dr. D: tall and gaunt —perhaps the only physician around who's always sporting a necktie—he is considered the leading physician in town. He did his graduate studies in Princeton and never fails to mention this to you. As the only physician born locally he has become the established healer to Keokuk's VIP's. At his side sits Dr. H. who is a lanky Iowan, a pilot in his free time, originating from up north, and a partner to the Prince. On my right hand I see Dr. Don Brown digging into a paper plate of chicken wings; he is our orthopedic surgeon and the rotating Chief of Surgery. Originally from Iowa City, he arrived in town only a year before me; of average height, chubby, round eyeglasses on a pleasant face, contorted in an everlasting Midwestern grin. I perceive him as one who would never take sides overtly but would take them covertly when it serves his own interests, while always maintaining that sunny Iowan oh'-how-happy- we -are -loving -each- other attitude. *He's the only potential enemy,* I make a mental note to myself; he spends too much time in Rachel's OR office. Who's missing? Of course Neville could not make it; an old time member of the staff, he is running a busy general practice in neighboring Missouri and cannot drop his busy schedule.

Philips shuffles his papers and opens the meeting in his pompous albeit civil drawl. I do not listen. I know that politically correct garbage by heart: serious allegations, our role in the medical staff...protect doctors from abuse...eradicate inappropriate behavior, bla, bla. Instead my mind is formulating immediate strategies, how should I respond? I sip from my cup of coffee and play with the thick volume of Medical Staff Bylaws, which I brought with me.

"Dr. Schein," concludes Philips, "could you please share with us your version of the events and respond to the allegations made against you by the anesthesiologist Dr. K. and Mrs. Rachel Kelly, the head OR nurse?"

"Could I please see the specific allegations? According to the Bylaws," I open the white volume and take my time finding the specific section, "here, I read section 6, second paragraph, I quote: 'A request for an investigation or action must be in writing, submitted to the medical executive committee'. Could I please see what's in their letters of complaints?"

"Well, the letters are being produced but let me tell you what they accuse you of..." Bill consults one of his papers, "they use the words 'Dr. Schein behaved in a loud and threatening fashion in the presence of witnesses.'"

"Yes, I understand. But prior to making any statement I need to see their letters, do you really want me to reply to accusations which may affect my fate in this hospital without being able to see them?"

"Um. Look Moshe, this session is *investigative*, we ask and you reply. When and if the issue moves to the next, *judiciary* stage, you'll have the right to view documents and bring your own legal consultant. We need to move on, please talk to us."

"Yes, just tell us what happened," says Dr. H. The others nod in agreement.

Don't surrender, do not yield, obstinacy may pay off. I reply: "I need time to think and formulate my reply. I'm fatigued and stressed. I didn't sleep last night. I would prefer to reply in writing. You'll have my written version by tomorrow morning. This is complicated. I don't want to discuss

the current allegation in isolation without bringing up the whole background. To me it's all one story—an ongoing witch hunt, call it a lynching if you want—initiated against me by my ex partner Jack, and his buddies.”

Silence. The Prince is the first to reply, serious as ever: “Be assured that we are aware of the specific background you allude to. But the hospital is facing now an urgent dilemma and we have to deal with it promptly. Therefore, we'll have to proceed with this investigation with or without your input.”

“What's so urgent? Why can't you wait until tomorrow?” I persist.

“Dr. K', after what took place last Friday, isn't ready to administer anesthesia to your patients. Mr. Terry, her nurse anesthetist wouldn't work with you as well and, as you are our only surgeon, this is a serious matter.”

Bastards. Let me spit it out then. I stand up. “I want to start with the background against which this episode is taking place. More than six months ago you, and the administration, investigated the alleged claims of personal and professional misconduct brought against me by my ex partner. His allegations were never substantiated and, as you know, he's left our system. However, my ex partner did not take with him his quest of revenge and settling scores. And this brings our discussion to Mrs. Rachel Kelly, the one of the two who laid the current allegations against me. I wish I would know what exactly she accuses me off—.”

I pause and look at them: fat Art digs into a bag of potato chips, the others gaze at me or at the table. I continue: “Nurse Kelly is a long time employee of the hospital and well entrenched in Keokuk's social community. She is well known as a close personal friend of my ex partner and his family”—I force myself not to mention that she most probably is or was his lover—“during my early conflict with Jack, nurse Kelly promptly changed her initial professional attitude towards me, to an open and non-disguised disapproval and animosity. Numerous times I mentioned nurse Kelly's unprofessional behavior to our CEO but nothing was done and nurse Kelly continued to be an adversary. I then approached directly the Head of Nursing Services, she listened to me but didn't comment. What I'm trying to tell you is that until

last Friday I did not sense that anyone really tried controlling the unprofessional conduct of nurse Kelly.”

“Moshe,” Bill Philips stops me, “let’s focus on Dr. K’. Nurse Kelly’s is a side issue, please carry on.” Philips, who is seriously committed to transcendental meditation, has perfect manners.

“OK”, I empty my cup: “Until last September my relationship with Dr. K’ seemed to me smooth. As least on my side, there was always attitude of gentle and friendly respect. On the morning of that day—was it the 19th?-- however Dr. K’ decided to cancel the scheduled elective hernia operation of a patient from Nauvoo. The patient has been worked up by me for three months and was “cleared” for surgery by one of our internists. However, when I walked into the operating room that morning I was told by Dr. K’, and her nurse anesthetist, that ‘he has liver disease’ and ‘smells of alcohol’ – which he didn’t. I was also asked ‘how will he pay for his operation?’ while the patient had prearranged payments with the hospital.”

“Dr. Schein. I’ve discussed this case with you before. You were rude to her, arguing in the corridor,” says Philips.

“Come on Bill, this is your own interpretation of events.”

Philips looks at his watch, “We know the background, why don’t you come straight to the events of last Friday? A few of us have to go back to work.”

“Sure Bill, but please let me just mention what took place last Monday, just a few days before the key incident, OK?”

“You mean the trauma case? It has nothing to do with Friday’s events, please come to the point.”

“But—.”

“Look, Moshe, we are running out of time,” said the tall internist H. who, as a part time job, owns a few blocks of flats for rental. “This is only a preliminary meeting, you’ll have another opportunity to address us, if you would wish, now please let us focus on last Friday, what happened?”

I sense that they are in control and I am in their hands—all my resolution to be obstinate, to dictate the pace of events, have now evaporated. So this is how the Kangaroo court continued:

“OK. I’ll tell you what happened on Friday,” and I tell them about the pregnant patient with gallstones and how she arrived at the OR.

“So now I’m standing, scrubbing my hands like this,” I imitate the procedure with my hands, “and then Dr. K’ arrives at the sink, you know, to rinse her laryngoscope. She leans towards me and says ‘it’s dangerous what you’re doing...one doesn’t operate on pregnant ladies.’” Quoting her I put on my best Indian accent, I already know that this would irritate them, but I can’t suppress myself. Silence. They are listening attentively. “I say to her, ‘why? You really think so? You wanna tell me that you never saw people performing cholecystectomies in pregnant patients in this hospital?’ She replied emotionally, her face near mine: ‘No, never, it is not done, it’s dangerous to the child.’ So now I’m becoming upset...here I’m busy scrubbing for the operation for which she has already agreed to anesthetize the patient, and she’s telling me that what I do is dangerous. I say: ‘you imply that what we’re doing is dangerous, but why didn’t you discuss your anxieties before putting the patient to sleep?’ But she doesn’t listen and persists: ‘it’s dangerous...for the child...I did obstetrics and never, never have I seen anyone operating during pregnancy.’”

I walk towards the conference room’s door with my hands raised. “So imagine that this is the open OR door. Now I’m moving towards the room holding my wet hands upwards, and on my left side I see nurse Kelly, her face white; I know that she’s arrived to see how I am “abusing” her old friend K’”. I do not tell them how ugly, contorted, hateful was the nurse’s face; and suddenly I have enough –why should I tell them anything at all. I’m exhausted. I return to my chair and whimper: “I can’t go on...I’m too emotional...”. I put my head between my hands—my emotion is real and fake at the same time—I know that Americans sometimes appreciate naked emotions and a few tears.

But nobody says a word, they all look at me, waiting.

"I won't go on, I can't," I repeat.

Silence. I pour myself a glass of water. *Fuck them*, should I leave?

Then I stand up and continue: "OK, let me finish the story. So here is my patient, and her fetus, under anesthesia, induced by this anesthesiologist, who now claims that what I'm going to do is dangerous. I say: 'But Dr. K', when did you do your rotation in obstetrics? Was it in Pittsburgh thirty years ago? Things have changed since then, you know, and anyway, if you think it so dangerous, why did you agree to put her to sleep, why can't you discuss issues with me beforehand?' You know what her reply was? She said: 'it's your problem— you are the surgeon'. Please try to imagine yourself at my place. Do you see the absurd in the situation? Do you sense that now I'm being harassed? The patient is asleep, her fate and her fetus' fate are in my hands, each nerve and muscle in my body is tense and fatigued—that during the night I had received the mandatory 2 or 3 calls from the ER and just 2 hours prior I'd removed a perforated appendix. And imagine that your great enemy nurse Kelly stands there waiting for an opportunity to incriminate you in something—whatever—can you perceive my frustration and pain?"

Silence.

Again I approach the door. "So my hands are wet and sterile and thus obviously I can't touch Dr. K', nor nurse Kelly, and therefore I can't threaten them whatsoever. I now walk through the open door into the OR, where Joan, who as you know is nurse Kelly's daughter and Mr. Becket, who's a scrub tech, are present. I don't remember who else was there, and as I walk into the room my final reply to Dr. K' is: 'you think that what I'm doing is dangerous because you are so outdated, why don't you take some CME vacation and educate yourself somewhere?'. This generates an emotional barrage. I don't recall what exactly she says. Anyway, when inside the room I use my foot to shut the door behind nurse Kelly who is left outside; of course I can't use my sterile hands to do so. How many times have I complained to the CEO that I don't wish nurse Kelly's interference during my operations? And now I want to calm down, restore a peace of mind needed to perform the operation—."

"You used your foot to close the door at nurse Kelly's face, right?" Dr. Philips interrupts me.

"Yes, of course, I told you that my hands were sterile."

"How much force did you use to close the door?" asks the Prince.

"As much as needed to close the door."

"So you kicked the door, slammed it at her face, eh?"

"I used my foot, and you can term it however you wish". *What a moron!* "But then nurse Kelly opens the door and enters the room. I approach her, my hands now covered with a green towel I received from Mr. Becket to dry them, and I calmly say: 'would you please leave the room, I can't operate with you, you make me nervous.' She says something like, 'I won't leave as long as you two are fighting.' I say: 'just leave, the fight is over, now we have to operate.' She leaves, and in frustration...". Now I remove a handkerchief from my pocket and throw it on the floor, "this is how I did it, I damped the green towel on the floor and said: 'shit I'm fed up with this'."

"What word did you exactly use?" asks the Prince.

"I just told you—."

"Didn't you use the F word?" Bill Philips comes to the Prince's aid.

"Maybe I did, so I said fuck, so what? I didn't say fuck you or fuck her, only fuck. Dr. H., when your car hits a deer, wouldn't you reflectively exclaim 'fuck'?"

Silence. I continue: "So now nurse Kelly leaves the room. We do the operation. No word is spoken. Patient wakes up and goes home the next day. After the operation I call the obstetrician and tell him about the episode. He comments laconically that Dr. K' had talked to him before the operation and had no problems whatsoever. I think that's all." I sit down.

"Moshe, do you have anything else to add, perhaps you forgot to say something?" asks the ever polite Dr. H.

"Yes Tom, I should add that my ex partner is well known for throwing tantrums in the OR, abusing nurses, making them cry. Did anyone complain about him? Of course not: we do not complain against a "local" guy, and

who would complain against a personal friend of nurse Kelly? I hope that you understand that this is a continuation of a personal vendetta organized by—.”

“Dr. Schein. There’s no vendetta and Rachel Kelly has nothing personal against you—.” This declaration comes, in neutral, benign, non-committal, Iowan tone from our orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Brown, who until now did not utter a word.

“Come on Don,” I respond, “are you talking now as her spokesman? But let me continue...”.

“Moshe, hold on, you’ll have an opportunity to continue. You can also write to us whatever you feel is important for us to know. Thank you for coming.”

“Thanks guys.” I leave the room.

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Agitated and starved I went directly into the adjacent doctors’ lounge only to find Dr. Delgado clearing the last doughnut from the tray. He flushed his tooth pasty smile at me, like a bright sun shining at the background of his brown face: “So Moshe, they fucked you already?”

“How d’ya know?”

“The rule here is that everybody knows about everything within five minutes and everybody pretends he knows nothing. What they do is smile, smile. Hey, didn’t I warn you?”

“Yes, you did...but, you know, this is minor, I have survived heavier fire before; they like to speak, to show you how important they are, to play in being judges or umpires.”

But Delgado was not listening. His smile did not leave his face when he turned around and showed me his butt, as he had done before, and pointed to his anus. “Is you ass stretched enough, Moshe? I hope it is, because they are going to fuck you big time. Did you ever believe that your ex partner would let you take over Keokuk’s surgery? And you have underestimated Dr. K’, don’t you know that she and her husband own half of the property in town? Never underestimate the *Brahmins*, whether they are fuckin white or Indians. What did I tell you? I told you to smile and keep your ass tight and

what you did—you relaxed the anal sphincters. You have boys in college, eh? Like me? We have to continue to provide for them. I wish you good luck.” He pressed my hand and left the room, still smiling widely and in snow white.

Half an hour later, just as I entered the building of the Surgical Specialists of Keokuk, my secretary informed me that Dr. Philips had just called “They want you immediately back in the conference room”. I rushed across the street, through the back gate of the hospital, and re-entered the meeting room. They were still sitting, like when I had left them earlier.

“Thanks for coming back,” said Dr. Philips, “please sit down.” I did and he continued with all the *gravitas* he had gathered as a head boy in his private school in Georgia, and later as a president of some obscure college fraternity: “The Medical Executive Committee has discussed at length the serious allegation against you and decided to temporarily revoke your operative privileges in this hospital, pending an investigation. According to the bylaws we have to report any revocation of privileges, be it temporary or permanent, to the National Physician Databank. To avoid this, at this stage, you may decide to voluntarily ask for a vacation, as of today.”

I was stunned, *those boys are moving fast!* I looked around the table and said: “You do surprise me, guys. Did all of you vote to suspend me? No one was against?”

“We didn’t vote,” replied Dr. H, “this is a preliminary hearing. We had to solve an acute situation, before the Thanksgiving Weekend. We’ll continue next week. Anesthesia won’t work with you, so the problem is now solved as you won’t operate and you won’t be on call.”

““And who will provide care for surgical emergencies in my absence?”

“No problem, the ER will be instructed to ship them elsewhere,” said Philips laconically.

“Look guys, I don’t mind a short vacation, but I have to tell you that I’m surprised, I did nothing wrong.”

“Moshe, the Medical Executive Committee will conduct a careful hearing next week, after Thanksgiving. We’ll call witnesses and you’ll have a

chance to speak again. Until then, enjoy the holidays everyone. This meeting is adjourned.”

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That afternoon I dropped in the CEO’s office, as I often had done to discuss Jack’s intrigues and the continuing efforts to recruit another surgeon. He had been always friendly and supportive; but I knew that he was wedged between the Trustees, above, and the medical staff, below—his existence depending on his ability to satisfy both, which was impossible. But behind his courteous and smooth Mid America façade I had noticed seeds of fairness and remnants of a rebellious personality— in his free time he was writing play scripts—partially suppressed by many years of managerial occupation. As I walked through his open door he turned around from his computer and shook my hand. He didn’t say, as usual, “what’s up”—he knew already.

“I’m suspended, you know?” I uttered. The CEO looked at me and said nothing. “What’s now? Who will take over my patients?”

“From what I understand you can continue seeing your in house and office patients. But no operating and no ER calls, now you can enjoy your red wine.” A faint smile.

“What are my chances?”

I noticed him tensing up but forcing himself to look at my eyes: “Moshe, it seems to me that the snow ball is rolling, um, enjoy Thanksgiving and give my regards to Heidi.”

As I walked out of his office I saw the President of the Board of Trustees waiting to see the CEO. I nodded and smiled to him but he seemed not to notice me. *What is he doing here?* It was his crazy wife who had that delusion about me showing her the finger. *Is he here to discuss me or am I paranoid?*

The snowball is rolling. What does it mean? Rolling in which direction? On my way out I stopped at radiology where I found Bill Philips mumbling ten words per second into his microphone, dictating yet another radiology report. Each day I had come to this room to review images with him and we would talk about restaurants, politics and gossip. He and his wife had dined at our

home but we were yet to be invited by them—"after we move to our new house".

I asked: "Bill, so what exactly would be the next stage? Should I get a lawyer? Will I be able to call on witnesses? Can I be present during the procedures?"

"I advise you to study the bylaws, hum, I'm sure you already did. The next phase will be "investigatory": we'll ask questions and we may take action. No, you don't have the right to call in your own witnesses and you can't be present—this is all confidential. However, depending on the outcome, you will have the chance to ask for a "judiciary" hearing; which is more like a court proceeding, your lawyer, court recorder, the whole *spiel*." Bill had trained in Boston and liked to show off his Yiddish. "I hope you have full trust in the members of the Executive Committee, they are all your friends, you know, and you have the right to exclude anyone of us, if you think that there may be some conflict of interest."

"Thanks Bill. I trust you all. However, I'm not too sure about Brown—he's too cozy with Rachel Kelly—."

"No problem. What about Dr. L? He is a respected and long term member of the staff."

"Sure. I've no problem with him; actually that pregnant lady with the gallstones was his patient. But Bill, why not stop the bullshit, can't you negotiate a ceasefire with Dr. K'? You know that I'm not as difficult as she tries to portray me. Ask the nurses in the OR how nice I am with them."

"Hum, are you sure that they will come out to defend you? Don't forget their loyalty to Kelly and Dr. K'. But Moshe, again, the Executive Committee doesn't care much about Kelly—it is Dr. K's complaints that we have to address. And she's scared of you. I'd warned you about this before. She's concerned about your Internet activity, your surgical discussion group."

"Look Bill, how can she know? If I am writing something it is to a limited Internet List or to private friends."

"And what about Jack, isn't he feeding her concerns?"

"Jack resigned the Internet List almost a year ago."

"How can you be so sure?" The radiologist looked at me mockingly.

Later that night I picked up the novel, *"The plot against America"*. But my mind was jittery and not prone to Roth's endless sentences—it was occupied with another plot—the plot against Schein: authored by Jack, his lover and a chubby, Sari-clad, middle-aged, Indian woman.

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That year the snow arrived after Thanksgiving and buried Keokuk in white. A deep chill followed, the lakes froze over instantly; young deer loitered about, probing for food under the snow. Our chicken huddled together in their chicken coup, their egg production halved. Now with my operating and ER privileges on "voluntary leave" I enjoyed the sudden leisure and awaited, with no excessive anxiety, the outcome of the "preliminary" investigation by the Medical Executive Committee. I judged my chances to survive this episode as sixty percent—surely the committee members would not get rid of their only surgeon...who's doing such a good job; but on the other hand, deep in my heart, I worried. *Didn't the CEO say something about the snowball?*

After Thanksgiving I arrived at the conference room at 7.30 as requested. In the corridor I saw nurse Rachel Kelly; I guessed that she had been already interrogated. I opened the door and peeped in: I saw the diminutive but fleshy figure of Dr. K`, surrounded by all the tall men of the committee —engaged in what appeared a cozy discourse. *Bad sign —she's not "interrogated, she's one of them.* Bill Philips noticed me: "Moshe, please wait in the library, we'll call you in a few minutes."

I was summoned in at 8.30. The usual mini speech by Philips about my "rights"; then, "could you please describe again the events of Friday, November 18?"

"Sure." I stood up and played it again. By now, having performed it already alive and in writing, I knew it by heart.

"So you said the F word," reaffirmed the Prince laconically.

"Yes, I told you that I said FUCK to myself, like you would say FUCK when you are busy inserting a pacemaker into a sick patient and somebody tells you that what you are doing is not indicated." The Prince's grimaced like if being forced fed a bowel preparation for colonoscopy: "Yes, we understand, no need to repeat that word."

Philips: "Would you like to say anything else"?

"Yes. That my body language may be different from what you are used to here...I tend to speak using and raising my hands and my voice may be an octave louder. If any of you watches Italian movies, you can see that people speak and move their hands differently...and somebody could define it as threatening."

"But do you realize that your style may not conform to local standards?" asked Philips.

"Yes, perhaps, but we all have different DNA, some are tall, some fat...and some move their hands when they talk."

"But your overall behavior is unacceptable," the Prince came back to life; something in him appeared to me different but I could not figure out what. "You'd shouted at Dr. K', in the corridor, when she'd canceled that hernia."

"I didn't shout, I tried to discuss the case with her and she didn't even listen."

"You see, now you are interrupting me too, this is your insufferable style...and you were abusive to her during the cholecystectomy case...everybody who was present in that room, on that day, testified that this was the case."

"Dr. D., I don't believe a word you are saying, this was organized by nurse Kelly, I told you about the totalitarian regime in the OR...her regime of fear". I looked at Art, who was emptying a bag of potato-chips: *does he even know what "totalitarian" stands for?*

"Thank you Dr. Schein. Please make yourself available in about 30 minutes?", said Phillips.

When they summoned me back I smiled at them but not even Art smiled back. They were somber, frozen faced, like in a funeral. "Thank you for coming back, please take a seat."

I did. Trying to control the gathering anger. "Dr. D., would you please summarize the committee's decision?" said Philips.

The Prince shuffled his papers. His long, pale and thin face looked at me at that moment like the face of an *inquisitor*, albeit a puritan-protestant one. A month ago, I had been invited to his house to watch a ball game—Iowa City against who knows—I understand nothing about American football and thus had excused myself. I saw Dr. H's benign face, now grim, carefully studying the polished surface of the table, restlessly moving his long legs. Two weeks ago he had invited us to his home for Thanksgiving dinner—but we had been invited elsewhere— and now he's one of them. Waiting for the Prince to start I had an ample time to study each of them; I sensed that this may be the end of our Keokuk story and my last opportunity to analyze their body language. On my left Neville—the ever-cheerful Neville, ever eager to share with you his expertise on restaurants, cars, and wine —gloomily studied the tips of his fingers. Dr. L, the obstetrician, looked ahead at the space—his task was to simply sit here—a replacement for Brown the orthopedist to whose presence I had objected. And Art? Poor Arthur probably cherishing his judiciary role among the big white boys.

"Moshe," started the Prince formally, "Moshe. I was your friend and you know it. You were my surgeon, my only surgeon. I believe that all present in this room were your friends." The others nodded their heads gravely and murmured their approval. "But this is too much...you clearly abused Dr. K`, who is a small and soft spoken woman. We've known her for many years...we know that she could not have started the argument with you—."

"But..."

"Let me continue, six months ago, after your encounter with Dr. Cappuccino, we had warned you. Here, let me quote from the letter this committee had written to you: 'Any future incident of shouting, threatening,

profanity, physical contact, or any disruptive speech...will meet with the consequences as outlined in the Medical Staff Bylaws. Include would be options for limitation, suspension or termination of privileges.” The Prince paused and looked at me sternly, like a headmaster at Eaton.

“Well, what’s new, you allow them to provoke me and then you take their sides, Jack has been screaming in the OR for many years...did you ever discipline him?” I said with disgust.

“Many people are afraid of you in this hospital,” retorted the Prince.

“Who are they? They, they,” I sneered contemptuously, “Who are the *many people*? Stop hiding behind empty words and show me some evidence?”

“Look at you. This is exactly your style... interrupting and disrespectful—.”

“But if I am accused I should know who is afraid of me and why?”

“Not at this stage...many people are afraid of you, we warned you, we can’t let you work here—”. Now even the cool Sir Osler of Keokuk lost his composure, “and you’ve shared information with patients... which may subject doctors to litigation—.”

“What!?”

“Yes, after the hernia affair, you went to speak with the patient and blamed the cancellation directly on Dr. K’.”

“For God’s sake, whom should I have blamed? Myself? God Almighty? She canceled him—not me...not you, and the patient was upset. I would be too. On which side do you work, eh?”

But the Prince ignored me and continued: “... thus we decided revoke your privileges in this hospital.” *So this is their verdict. No use to argue; let the tape-recorder in your pocket record the rest of their BS and shut up.*

Now Philips concluded: “Dr. Schein, we advise you to resign now—if you resign nothing will be reported to the Physicians’ Databank. Alternatively, of course, as you know from the Bylaws, you have the right to appeal. I should emphasize to you that, naturally, if you decide to appeal, this would be reportable. You have three days to decide.”

This was not what I'd expected. A warning? Yes. You're a bad boy. Apologize and be nice to Dr. K? Yes. But not a summary execution a la` Soviet *troikas* during the great purge of the late 1930s. I was stunned and incensed and my mind was grinding like a crushing computer: So what now? I have to resign. If I continue fighting they'll report me, which means no chance of another employment until when? And meanwhile? How will I pay for the boys' schools? What will Heidi say? I looked around the table, at each one of my henchmen but knew that the person responsible for my fall is not among them. As I left the room without a word I recognized that my ex partner Jack has finally won!

On the way home I saw that ice has formed on the snow covered gravel road— I had to engage the F-150's gear in 4X4. I parked in the garage and walked into the kitchen where Heidi was busy slicing vegetables.

"Already home?"

"Yep. I am fired". I remembered saying so in the past: when the kids would ask me, "Dad, why are you home early?" I would reply: "they fired me, from now on we'll eat only bread—." They never thought it was funny.

* * * * *

See pictures below

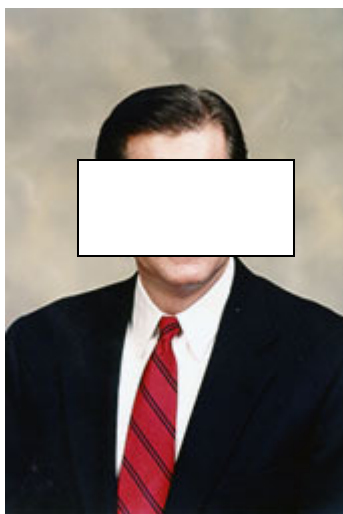
Members of the Medical Executive Committee...



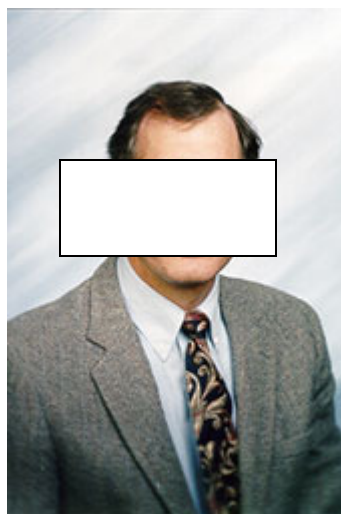
Chairman of Medical
Executive Committee:
Dr. Philips (radiologist)



Vice Chairman: Art (radiologist)

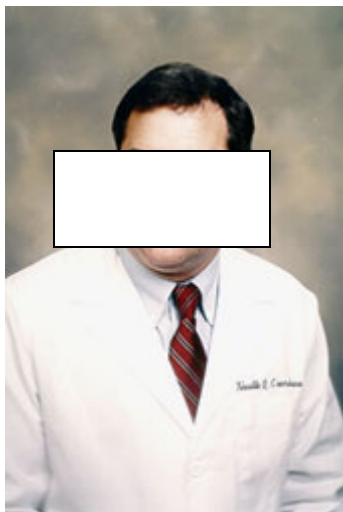


The Prince (internist)



Tom H (internist)

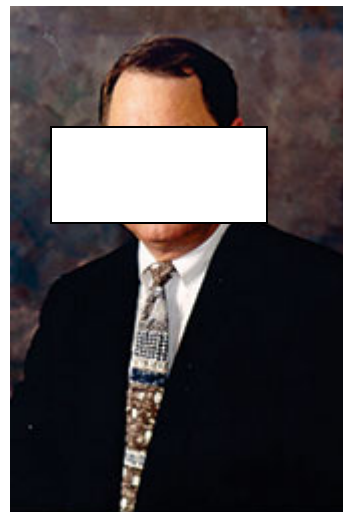
More pictures below...



Neville (family practice)



Dr. L (gynecology)



Dr. Brown (orthopedics)