**The Great Escape**

Chapter One

The bald-headed man sat on the rumbling gray motorcycle, tension filling his eyes, one brown, one green, their colors highlighted in the disappearing sun. He wore a tattered gray German army uniform with a silver *Doppellitze,* double braid insignia accenting his collar. His eyes searched the rolling field covered with moist green grass, fright apparent on his strained face. He strapped the Nazi helmet on his head, the enemy always present. Checking the gas tank between his legs for petrol, he revved the BMW engine and raced off, dirt flying from a spinning rear tire.

The man raced through the occupied hamlet blasting over the dirty cobblestone streets. Ahead was a manned checkpoint with its gate down, and he exploded through the wooden postern, scattering the Nazi jack-booted soldiers. A highspeed chase began, with shots ringing out and side-car motorcycles pursuing the fleeing man through winding roads and across open fields.

Before him stood a low razor wire fence, obstructing his escape to the cloud-covered horizon. The man skidded to a broadside stop and looked to the dogging stalkers behind. Far ahead lay freedom, arrival blocked by a soft grass-covered berm flanking the obstructing fence.

Shots struck the ground, ricocheting dirt up around the man. Roaring motorbikes could be heard and would soon be upon him. He debated, his escape versus capture tormenting him.

With a blast of the motorbike, exhaust billowed from the pipes, tires spun, and the bike twisted ahead in a spray of dirt. The cycle climbed the berm, and the man stopped and accessed the barricaded fence. Breathing heavily now, he unlatched and tossed his helmet toward the gathering mob. Turning around, he raced his motorcycle down to the foot of the knoll. With his pursuers gathering around him, he blasted away up the berm, taking flight, and clearing the fence in a beautiful crest at the vertex.

He crashed down on the rear tire, the bike zigzagging wildly as the rider attempted to control the mechanical beast. Shots rang out from the military group, stopping their pursuit at the fence. The man lifted his front tire from the dirt road in victory and sped away to safety.

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The white-coated physicians and nurses stood around the foot of the hospital bed like a menagerie of pale birds of prey. It was morning rounds, with the collection gathering to manage patients.

With interest, the assembly turned to the intern. He was a man with roughly tossed straw-colored hair and three-day facial growth. Michael Nelson, MD, wore a green surgical scrub suit, a wrinkled white coat, and red, loafer-type tennis shoes. He looked at a note card and presented the patient to the group.

"Maurice . . . or Maury . . . Latinsky is a 37-year-old white male with GRID."

"AIDS, or at least HIV, let's use the correct term, Michael." The chief resident, Tara Patel, spoke up, correcting the intern. She was a tallish woman dressed in the uniform of the day, a white coat and scrubs. Black piercing eyes and a short-cut black head of hair stylized the leader of the group. GRID, or Gay Related Immune Disease, was the first term given to the HIV/AIDS disease in the early 1980s. It was 1983, and the modern term HIV/AIDS was beginning to be used.

Mike continued. "He's now a week after a right nephrectomy and drainage of a tuberculous renal and perinephric abscess." The patient had a kidney tuberculosis abscess related to his AIDS condition, treated with surgical removal of the kidney.

Maurice lay in his bed, soaked white sheets scattered around his feet. He began thrashing about amid a fever-induced rigor. Tara spoke up. "Does he have a fever, Michael?"

The intern snapped up the bedside clipboard hanging on the foot of the bed. "His temp is recorded as 103? That was after I saw him this morning, just fifteen minutes ago. He was then afebrile." Mike took his presentation seriously, upset that he missed the man's fever. He looked at Tara, somewhat embarrassed.

Tara tried to comfort the intern. "These AIDS fevers spike like that, Michael," referring to the tendency of AIDS patients to have sudden fevers.

Mike seemed relieved. As an intern, his job was to know everything about the urology service before anyone else. He was a good, solid, hardworking fellow who graduated from the USC School of Medicine, now a surgery intern at the University Medical Center.

"Look at the sweat on his forehead, that shaking. It's a rigor, a shaking chill from fever. Some Tylenol, he definitely needs some Tylenol!" Tara stepped to the bedside. She gently wiped the man's bald head with a tissue.

Maurice was awake suddenly, snarling a loud growl. He opened his left eye, revealing a suspicious green eyeball, glaring at the woman. The group stepped back in fear as the man jumped up, standing on the side rail of the hospital bed and barking like a hound. He eventually began to speak. "Krauts . . . goons. They're everywhere, Freddie!"

The intern grabbed the man's waving arm. He moved to his side and gently led him to sit back on the bed. "Freddie's not here, Mr. Latinsky." He turned to the group and said, "Freddie's his partner."

Sarah was a neatly dressed, attractive nurse. She stepped forward with a disturbing piece of information. "He's been drinking his urine, Dr. Patel. I took away his urinal this morning. I think he is really thirsty!"

"You're kidding, Sarah? He has been NPO for a week now." Realizing the truth before the nurse could answer, NPO being nothing per oral, Tara went on. "Can we feed him?" She questioned the group. "Are you thirsty, Mr. Latinsky? She moved to the patient and examined his abdomen and right flank incision. Using her stethoscope, she listened to the man's belly. "He has good bowel sounds. Michael, let's start him on full liquids." Mike made a quick note on his clipboard.

Maurice seemed more awake; his rigor now passed. He smiled a sly smile and lay back in his bed. "I thought the goons were after me, Dr. Tara."

"Goons? Whatever do you mean, Mr. Latinsky?"

"You know, Goons . . . krauts. They were after me. I got away." The man smiled knowingly, his mouth full of red, swollen gums. He was quite wasted; his weight listed on the bedside clipboard as a dwindling 87 pounds. He seemed, however, proud of an imaginary escape, apparently from the German army.

The group went to the hallway on their way to the next patient. They stopped for a moment to finish up with Mr. Latinsky.

"You should note his heterochromatic eyes, students. His irises are green and brown; the different colors are called heterochromatic." Tara washed her hands quickly, drying them on a paper towel as she walked to the group's center.

Jackson Cooper was the junior resident on the urology service. "Tara, the fact that Latinsky had TB in the right kidney, doesn't that imply that he has TB throughout his urinary tract?"

"You know I have been researching that subject, Jackson. Stay tuned to grand rounds on Saturday. It is on urologic tuberculosis. Anyway, TB gets into the urinary tract through blood seeding. If it is in the right kidney, yes, it is theoretically in the left. The only thing that we can do is treat him with anti-tuberculosis drugs. We need infectious disease to see him." She turned to the intern. "Michael, call ID. Describe his case. I think he should be on triple TB drugs but see what they say." With that, the group moved on to the next patient on the busy urology service.

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The man marched robustly down the hallway, dressed in a neatly tailored beige velour coat and an oversized green hand-tied silk bowtie. Meticulously pressed black slacks, their cuffs touching the shiny ox-blood polished penny loafer shoes with vintage coinage, completed his ensemble. He was carrying a bundle of red and pink flowers; roses, carnations, and chrysanthemums. As he passed the group of physicians, he nodded quietly to the assembly and continued into Maurice Latinsky's room.

"Why is it so dark in here, dear?" The man moved to the window, drew the curtain away, and woke the room. He tossed the old, wilted flowers into the trash and placed the new bundle in the glass vase. He moved to the patient and embraced the man. "Maury, why your sheets are completely soaked."

Maury sat on the bedside, his stick-like legs hanging out under his gown. "Freddie, I am so glad you're here. I had that dream again."

"The Great Escape? Are you Steve McQueen, dear?"

"Captain Virgil Hilts, the Cooler King." Maury looked down and sighed. He coughed up a wad of blood-tinged sputum and deposited it into the yellow emesis basin with a spit. Looking up at Freddie, he appeared as if he was about to cry. "It was so real, Freddie! The goons. They almost had me this time!"

"Did you jump the fence?"

Maury coughed a rumbling cough. He stood gingerly and hugged his friend. "Yes, I was almost flying. I cleared the fence by a mile. Almost lost it on the landing, though. But I was truly flying at the end. Wish I could fly out of this place."

"You're so awake today, dear. You really look marvelous. Yesterday you were mumbling to yourself so much. You were in your shell and didn't seem to know that I was here. I brought you this Polaroid of your baby, Maury. Suzette just had her hair styled. She misses her daddy!" Freddie handed a small picture to the man.

Maury took the photo. He seemed unsure of who it was, a cute curly black-haired miniature poodle. A smile slowly came over his face as the man realized the dog's identity. He lay back down in bed, clutching the photograph to his chest. He stared at the ceiling for a long moment. With a struggle, he turned onto his side and faced Freddie. "My mind, it's going, Freddie! It comes and goes. Sometimes I have no idea where I am."

"It's okay, dear. You'll be going home very soon."