

## The Greatest Escape

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The plan was set. Trixie and I were ready. The great escape could begin. I could only take few belongings with me. I slipped the knitted scarf my wife, Margaret, made for me when we first met into one of my many dressing gown pockets. My grandson, Peter, who had recently gotten his P-plates, was waiting in the carpark. The only thing standing in between me and freedom was the nursing staff, Trixie's curiosity, and the high fence surrounding the facility. It was just like the Hanoi Hilton all over again. This was about freedom, except this time, it was for Margaret.

Pinning my Vietnam Medal to my dressing gown, I called Trixie to my side. Margaret loved Trixie. I never much liked silky terriers, but she was my war buddy now. We would make it out together. I would finally be freed from the shackles of scheduled luncheons and Bridge games.

I stepped towards the door and opened it a crack. There was one thing to do before we executed our escapade. We had to say goodbye to Reggie. He had escaped a Viet Cong POW camp with me back in the day and I wasn't gonna leave without a final salute.

'Come on, Trixie,' I whispered.

I stepped into the hall and made sure it was empty. I glanced at the clock on the wall: 12:30pm. The nurses were out with my fellow prisoners at lunch: perfect. Peter would be waiting in the carpark. He is a good grandson; I was so proud of him for passing his driver's test. His success was pivotal to the plan.

Trixie and I snuck up the corridor towards Reggie's room. His doorknob was cold. I opened the door, and Trixie ran into the room with a pitter patter of excitement. It was empty. I looked around, wondering if Reggie was hiding as a joke, but nobody was there. Trixie stared at Reggie's favourite chair by the window. I stood for a moment, taking in the silence and emptiness.

A knock at the door startled me. Trixie jumped to attention, as Nurse Kirsty peeped in.

They got me, I thought, and they've probably taken Reggie too!

'Mr Harold, what are you doing in here?' Nurse Kirsty inquired, swinging the door open.

'I was here to, um—chat to Reggie!' I said truthfully.

‘Harold, remember yesterday? When we had a chat?’ Nurse Kirsty asked.

I noticed the look of concern on her face, the look of deception. She was trying to get me to fess up. Well, I wouldn’t have it! I had to find a way to get out of this prison before whatever happened to Reggie happened to me.

‘Oh well of course, I’m not braindead. I’ll see Reggie another time,’ I said, looking for a quick exit.

‘Harold, listen.’ Kirsty placed a hand on my shoulder. ‘Reggie passed away Monday morning.’

‘What an outrage! How could you? Reggie was a good soldier! You’ve violated the Geneva Convention, you Commie bastards,’ I yelled before pulling my revolver, which had gotten me back to Saigon in ’68, out of my dressing gown pocket. ‘Now, listen carefully. My Lieutenant, Trixie, and I are going to leave this room. If you make one move, I will be forced to defend myself. You saw nothing, Kirsty!’

To my surprise, Nurse Kirsty grinned. She was obviously trying to be smart with me, which I detested.

‘Come on Trixie,’ I commanded, and Trixie—fine soldier that she was—left the room.

Before I went into the corridor, I made sure the gun was back in my pocket to avoid any unwanted attention. Trixie went ahead for reconnaissance, and I stayed close behind. The doors were at the end of the corridor and, so far, I had been hiding in and out of rooms, curling up into cupboards and even crawling under tables to avoid the nurses’ attention. All I could hope was that my seventeen-year-old, getaway driver was still waiting outside. He was a good soldier, a bit like Reggie.

How I hoped Reggie was alright. I had to get out of here before they got Trixie or me. I was doing this for Reggie and for my beautiful Margaret. Thank the lord she never had to experience this hell hole.

Trixie and I approached the end of the hallway. Almost there. One corner between us and freedom, and the fence of course, but we’d figure that out later. I looked around the corner, four nurses were gathered at the entrance. Damn it! So close to our escape, this was a hurdle we couldn’t afford.

I picked Trixie up and sat around the corner to wait them out. I peeked at the group of war criminals. Drat! Nurse Kirsty was among them. How had she managed to get there so fast? Lunch had to be ending soon; it was gonna get crowded in the hall. Our escape had to happen right there and then!

I glanced around the corner again and noticed something peculiar. It was pitch black outside. But it was only 12:30pm when I last saw the clock. They were tricking me! They were trying to scare me by using some special effect. Peter had told me all about special effects! Tricky little things. We saw some special effects when we watched that *Star Wars* motion picture at the cinemas that cold winter's day. Peter had always been such a good kid. I hoped he wasn't fooled by this effect either.

As I was about to make a run for it, Peter walked through the door.

'Peter no! They'll get you!' I yelled, making a tactical somersault into the main foyer.

'Sorry everyone. I was working offsite today, and the highways were chock-a-block,' Peter explained to the nurses.

My heart sank. 'Peter, they're brainwashing you!' yelled at him.

'Hey Dad, let's go have a cup of tea,' Peter said as he grabbed my shoulders to pull me up and walked me down the corridor. Trixie following suit.

Dad? Why would he have been calling me Dad? Then it hit me! It was all a part of the plan! Clever boy!

'Smart plan, Petey boy. Now, when do we escape?' I asked him as we entered my room. Peter sat down in a chair as I sat down on my bed. Trixie settled into my lap.

'Listen Dad, you have to stop running around the care home and hiding in cupboards. The nurses have let you have your fun before, but this time, you went on for too long. Dad it's almost 7:30,' Peter said, continuing with the charade.

'Listen Pete, we're alone, you can drop the act now, eh? I've still got a lot to teach you, Grandsonny,' I told him with a chuckle as a nurse appeared at the doorway.

'Thank you, Nurse Kirsty, he always has these war stories—' Peter said, voice trailing off as he got up to speak with her.

That bitch. Nurse Kirsty was everything an enemy needed to be, cunning and evil. I knew I had to save Pete before she got to him like she got to Reggie!

'Hands up, Kirsty!' I shouted, pulling out my revolver.

'Such a vivid imagination,' Nurse Kirsty said, amused.

How dare she be amused at my declaration of intent!

'Not this again,' Peter said, as he went to grab the revolver from me.

'Listen now, Pete, I suspect that Nurse Kirsty is a communist,' I declared for all to hear. She was a communist, after all.

'Give it here, Dad,' Pete said softly, taking the revolver.

‘Be careful, Petey, that’s something you might be a bit young to handle,’ I warned him. He was only seventeen.

‘Dad, it’s a water pistol. Please, sit down,’ Pete said.

He was committed to the act, and I thought he’d be an espionage agent in no time.

Pete finally sat down with me after interrogating the treasonous Nurse Kirsty. ‘I hear Uncle Reggie died Dad,’ Pete said as he put his arm around my shoulder.

‘Mate, I will find him. I know they’re holding him here somewhere,’ I whispered.

‘You gotta take things slow for a while okay, Dad? I’ll be back in the morning to see you again,’ Peter said as he stood to leave.

‘Ah yeah, see you later, uh—son,’ I said with a wink and a nod as he left.

He was coming back in the morning. That was code for another escape. Lieutenant Trixie and I had another chance at freedom. The Great escape could begin! I just need to make sure to tell Reggie before I leave in the morning.