

Chapter 29: The revenge; in the terrorists' camp (1993)

Haifa, 1993. It was my third year at the Rambam Hospital.

As our rental contract was due to expire, we considered purchasing a home and settling down permanently. A cozy flat, with sea view, at walking distance from the hospital had become available, and I approached Prof. Maccabi: "Meir, we found a lovely flat, just on the beach, we want to take a mortgage on it, what do you think?" This was an indirect approach asking whether I would be continuing to work at Rambam—would my contract be renewed beyond the third year? Would I become "tenured? While I was describing to him the desired flat, I noted a change taking place in the bottom of his brown eyes—like a shutter closing down behind his pupils. It was fleeting, but long enough for me to sense that *there was a problem*, even before he said, "Moshe, this is a significant decision. Let us clarify your future here before you buy any property near the hospital. By cursing that woman, you didn't improve your position."

"So now you are on their side, eh? As if I was the one to blame? What would you have done if it was your mother?"

"Look, it is *your* name all over the newspapers, not mine—so it is *your* problem. Wait. Don't sign on any mortgage, and I'll come back to you."

During the following weeks, on the surface, my relationship with Maccabi was affable, but I perceived an impending change. One day I harshly criticized Dr. Klein—who had just become a consultant—for doing something stupid in the OR. This time, he replied, "Look, don't tell me what to do—I only take orders from Maccabi."

"Maccabi's on vacation, in his absence I'm running this department, and I won't let you continue doing what you're doing."

"Really? Your days as Maccabi's deputy are numbered!" Did Klein know something that I didn't?

One morning, back from vacation, Maccabi seemed agitated. "Moshe, Revach will see you at 9 a.m." He did not look me in the eyes, and I guessed

that a decision had been made. This was my second visit to *Napoleon's* office. The first had taken place some three years prior, when he tried to block my way to Rambam. But this time Revach didn't even stand up from behind his desk, nor did he offer his hand. He proceeded frostily: "Look, Schein, we, the management, don't have any complaints against your professional performance. However, we decided not to renew your contract. This decision was based on our perception that your social-personal assimilation within the Rambam family has not been successful."

I knew that my fate was sealed and that there was no point in arguing further with that military technocrat. But still, I could not just say thank you and leave. "What Rambam family? What are you talking about? I made more friends here than..."

But for Revach, the meeting was over, and he would not let me finish. "Yes, you made a few friends, but you have to understand one thing..." He slowed down, emphasizing each word: "We tend to bestow tenure only on the very *best* doctors. I would advise you to start looking for a new job, and we, of course, would support your applications elsewhere."

We tend to bestow tenure only on the very best doctors. This repeatedly pulsed in my brain as I climbed the stairs back to our department. *The very best doctors—so I'm not one of the very best. Ha? Assholes.* I had a very strong surgical ego. Revach aimed at the heart and managed to hit right on the target. I was deeply insulted, and this called for revenge. I rushed straight into Maccabi's room. *Coward*, I thought. Couldn't he have warned me about this already a few weeks ago? Now he's hiding behind Revach's back. But Maccabi's ceremonial attitude signaled that our brief intimate semi-friendship was now over.

"It was a very hard decision, believe me—it was hard," he said. "But please, let us continue to be good colleagues. I would like to ask you to please promise me to continue and maintain agreeable working relationships with the others, and with me, until the last day. I will strongly support your application for any job!" Then his face relaxed, and he changed the topic, like switching frequencies on a radio transmitter: "By the way, Moshe,

congratulations. I see your name and picture in the last issue of the *British Journal of Surgery*, so you are on their Editorial Board now. Very nice—how did you manage this?”

“Thank you. But I did nothing. They simply wrote that they wanted to nominate me and asked whether I agree, and I did.”

“Somebody must have supported you, pulling on the strings.”

“Not at all. The only influential surgeons I ever met personally in the U.K were in Leeds, and they can’t be considered great supporters of mine. But anyway, I’m very proud. You know, it is as if a lowly journalist from a local newspaper in Haifa were elected to the editorial board of the *London Times*. But of course, here in Rambam, you bestow tenure only on the *best* surgeons.”

“Please, Moshe, no bad feelings—please promise me. You want to go to Hong Kong for the International Surgical week? Go. We’ll pay. You want to take Ahmad with you? OK. You two could also visit Bangkok, did you hear about the massage parlors?”

I accepted his hand, but this time his handshake was brief.

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There is no doubt in my mind that Maccabi sacrificed me to improve his long-term interests. When I had joined his department, it had been on the brink of death, and I had helped him put it back on the map. But now he was washing his hands of me. So why did Maccabi sacrifice me? A tenured professor and chief of surgery; he could have backed me. He probably sensed that I had been loyal to him, unlike his previous senior staff that had tried to dethrone him. So why did he forfeit me? The answer, I believe, lay in Maccabi’s sexuality! His sexuality had compromised him throughout his professional life. Because of it, he had to maneuver and manipulate; because of it, he could not afford any standoffs with those who could harm or protect him—like Revach.

I will touch here on Maccabi’s sexuality only because it is a key element to what he did to me or did not do for me. Often, I look at my three boys, so American in their ways and speech; and Americans they probably

will remain. I know that this had been the crucial moment. Had I stayed in Rambam, my boys would have become Israelis, not Americans. I know that many newcomers to America are proud at how “American,” how well assimilated, their children are, but I, egotistically, would have rather had my sons growing up Israelis. Blame it on Maccabi?

But who really was Maccabi, the man rumored about in the medical community from *Metula to Eilat*, the man on whom many had tried to step on and destroy, but who always managed to survive?

A brief outline of Maccabi’s persona can be reconstructed from what *he* had told me, from gossip by others, and from facts. He had arrived in Israel with his parents from Bulgaria after the Second World War—he had been their only child. They had settled in Jaffa near Tel Aviv. His parents had been poor. “I had one pair of trousers and one white shirt. The shirt was washed each day after school, and eventually the collar frilled off. As I grew up, my trousers came up to the level of my shins, and the kids used to laugh at me,” Maccabi recounted. But he had been a studious little chap and possessed an excellent memory. He had been bright enough to be admitted into Jerusalem’s Medical School, postponing the obligatory army service. Mind you, while obsessively hard working, Maccabi was not a classical “intellectual” but an accumulator of information, which he had collected and filed obsessively—he threw out nothing. His collections included many thousands of records—later compact disks—of classical music and operas, each piece entered into an elaborate index which was later computerized. Likewise, he had managed to establish an amazing departmental medical library, which I helped him to maintain. Not that he read everything, but he loved to have all this information at his disposal—he was an arch-archivist. His other vast collections included albums of travel, nature, and art. Like homosexuals in general, he appreciated art.

I had been “pre-warned” about Maccabi’s homosexuality already when considering the position with him. The evidence for it was sporadic, suggestive, and gossipy, but taken together, the case was solid. Rambam’s old timers spoke about it openly. “Oh, don’t you know? Everybody knows. Go

to Eli's barbershop opposite Cinema *Armon*—he's the king of *homos* in town, and he'll tell you about Maccabi. He would say, Ah, Maccabi is one of us! You see, Haifa's gay community is small, everybody knows each other."

Another source was the deputy commander of the battalion in which Maccabi had served as a battalion doctor following medical school. Apparently, a few of the battalion's soldiers had complained that Maccabi "bothered" them. The military police had been involved in the investigation, but, recounted the deputy commander: "We, the commander and myself, liked Maccabi and saved his butt. He got transferred to a desk job—his record was white-washed."

After completing his military service, Maccabi had commenced surgical training in Rambam. (Did anyone of you reading this ever encounter a gay surgeon? Probably not.) They must be very rare, and if any exist, they must be well disguised. Surgery is a domain of men who undress and dress together in OR locker rooms, where they sit in their underwear and tell rude jokes—it is a masculine club, like a team engaged in any contact sport.

True, an occasional woman may succeed in penetrating the surgical guild, but most such women are asexual, look like men, or have a thick skin to survive the mandatory harassment which is their fate during the training years. Imagine the fate of a declared gay man trying to be accepted into such a club. Hence, Maccabi had to hide his sexual orientation; and he did what gay men do when living in societies—such as India or Africa—that reject homosexuality. He had married, adopted children, and pretended to lead a "normal" life. But basic desires tend to break through, are hard to suppress, and tend to recur.

Another well-known anecdote from Rambam's mythology had taken place about ten years before Maccabi became the chief of surgery: again, complaints against him by a young male patient about sexual harassment. The police had to interfere, and Maccabi was incarcerated but immediately released, thanks to the efforts of a former director of Rambam who had managed to suppress the scandal. Who was that director, who in the middle of the night had extracted poor Maccabi from the dungeon? He was none

other than the father-in-law of our surgically useless Dr. Klein. Thus, Maccabi “owed much” to that family and could not simply brush aside Klein’s pleas to remove Schein, who had tried, but failed, to improve Klein’s surgical standards.

Maccabi’s preferences were apparent to those of us who worked with him. He simply was not interested in women the way men tend to be. During summers, exchange students from Germany or Sweden rotated through our department, and a few of the girls were dazzling. We salivated over the stunning Nordic amazons, but Maccabi did not even look at them. However, if the blonde, or the tall, athletic body belonged to a male, then the Professor would wake up and invite the student to scrub for the *hepatectomy*. “Come, Hans, you stand on my side,” he would command the flattered and flustered student, wedging him between the patient’s right arm and himself.

Twice a week I attended, with five or six young surgeons, the outpatient clinic, where we were following up on old patients, and assessing new referrals. Chiefs of surgery in Israel do not tend to “waste” their time on such clinics—whoever wishes their *personal* attention has to see them privately and pay. But Maccabi was exceptional—he did not miss a clinic! From my first week I had learned the long-established routine: Maccabi occupied the first room on the right to the clerk’s office, and we occupied all the rooms on the left. When Maccabi was on leave, I would inherit the right room. The clerk would then drop a bunch of charts on my desk. “Here you are, Doctor, you will see twelve soldiers today.”

“Why only soldiers?” Soldiers referred to the clinic usually suffered from minor conditions like hernias, hemorrhoids, or non-specific abdominal pain—rule out malingering; GMG in our lingo, or *gurnisht mit gurnisht*—nothing with nothing in Yiddish.

“You are Maccabi’s deputy, so you take his clinic. Maccabi sees all soldiers, this is a routine.”

When Maccabi had been present, often he would call me into his room to discuss a problem case or to confirm that, in fact, there was no hernia. I had noted that his patients were examined naked. This was a little unusual,

because when we evaluate a young, otherwise healthy patient for a possible hernia, there is no reason to strip him naked. Noting my surprise, Maccabi's old boys would smile, laugh, and chuckle—*let the old man have some fun*.

Obviously, Maccabi had a past and a current "problem" which compromised him. Was this why Revach had tried to dump him—an Army general disgusted by "that homo"? In order to survive, Maccabi had to placate his defenders—who were those who wanted my head. He was not in a position to fight for me. And indeed, toward my last months in Rambam, during my revenge campaign—to be detailed below—was underway, yet another scandal reached the newspapers. Now Prof. Maccabi was being accused by three soldiers for sexually harassing them.

Details were graphic. This is from a long article entitled, "Does he touch, or doesn't he?" published above a picture showing a serious-looking Maccabi in a dark suit. According to soldier A., "He played with my penis for fifteen minutes, I almost ejaculated...I saw him a few times, other doctors never removed my underwear, but he always did and touched my testicles and lower abdomen."

Soldier D. told the journalist: "I went to him to exclude a hernia...this started like any routine examination, but then he told me to remove my underwear, touched my testicles and penis, touched it in a few places, moving it from side to side...then inserted a finger in my rectum...he helped me stand up holding my penis with one hand and my buttocks with the other." The newspaper mentioned, "Already fifteen years ago a similar complaint had been laid against the surgeon; the police investigated but the case was closed."

This scandal would smolder for almost two years, receiving sporadic media attention, and dying a natural death when the local female state prosecutor—who had previously been operated on by Maccabi—closed the case because of "lack of evidence." Why was there "no evidence"? Because Maccabi denied all allegations, claiming that the soldiers were malingering, asking for "a release from duties" that they did not deserve. In addition, "A polygraph test showed that he told the truth when denying homosexual

contacts with the patients.” Of course, there were doctors who supported Maccabi’s practice, like the District Chief Physician, who said, “A thorough examination of the lower abdomen, rectum and penis is crucial to exclude an inguinal hernia and any discharge from the urethra.”

This “sexual scandal” erupted in parallel with another one, which I unleashed as a vendetta against Rambam. But I never incorporated Maccabi’s sexual orientation into my own anti-Rambam narrative. When journalists asked me, “Is it true? Is he gay? Does he touch young soldiers?” I refused to answer. To exploit Maccabi’s sexual weakness in my revenge against Rambam seemed to me unfair, hitting a man whom I had respected and liked, under the belt. Do I exploit Maccabi’s weakness now, by writing about it? Perhaps yes, but doesn’t it belong to my story?

A couple of years ago, ten years after the above events took place, Maccabi and I resumed a polite, albeit formal, communication via electronic mail. Both sides declared that the bitter past should be put to rest and old animosities forgotten. It is hard to forecast Maccabi’s reaction if these pages should ever reach his eyes. However, on my side, any resentment toward him has evaporated: I understand why he did what he did and will remember him as a master surgeon and good man entangled in the fish netting of life. But before reaching this stage of acceptance I had first to try and take my revenge.

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My revenge was unplanned, naïve, and thus self-destructive. As all such revenges it achieved nothing. Years later my wise chairman in Brooklyn told me, “The perfect revenge should be significantly delayed, when those on the receiving end have forgotten what they had done to you, when they can’t comprehend who is doing it to them.” But Revach’s word, “we tend to bestow tenure only on the very *best* doctors,” continued replaying in my mind—no way would I go without leaving scorched earth behind me

Of course, I could have done what most would have chosen to do—move to another hospital, develop my private practice, provide for my family,

and wait. Sooner or later people would forget about the “cursing surgeon.” But I had to *show them*. I started with the office of the State Comptroller. I knew that that office had been already busy “investigating Rambam,” so I dropped them a line. I was invited to a shabby office in a gray government building and repeatedly interviewed by a pleasant and soft-spoken gentleman who told me that he was dying of cancer. I told him all that I knew and handed him hard evidence. But I sensed that this official would die soon and Revach’s corrupt Rambam would survive, and this is what eventually happened. I also called the office of the State *Ombudsman* in Jerusalem and asked for an interview, to which I was invited a year later—a week before we departed for America. I petitioned the “Physicians’ Union” of Rambam— to which I had contributed each month— for legal aid, but was told, “It’s your private problem.” At the same time, they were paying for Maccabi’s lawyers as if his alleged sexual misconduct were a “public matter.” A year later the head of the union became Revach’s deputy. I hired a lawyer in Tel Aviv but soon realized that I couldn’t afford any serious litigation. I contacted an organization that declared itself as defending wronged civil service employees. I arrived punctually to the scheduled interview with the organization’s president, but he did not show up, nor did he apologize. Later I learned that they specialized in defending Arab citizens—wronged Jews were of no interest to them.

Meanwhile, I applied for vacant positions of chief of surgery in some peripheral hospitals, but Revach saw to it that my efforts were futile. Yes, I know that this is boring: I did, I said, I complained—simply unreadable. But I mention it to show how an apparently “successful” individual can find himself a pariah in his own town, only because he has fallen out of favor of a few *Apparatchiks*. And this was modern Israel —not the Stalinistic USSR.

Pumped up with resentment, I started contemplating emigration to the U.S. or even returning to South Africa. At that time I was receiving a few calls from Israeli surgeons with what seemed attractive job offers; rumors spread fast within a small country; but I could not face the idea of starting

yet again in another Israeli hospital, under yet another Napoleon—surrounded by a bunch of “new colleagues.”

And then the journalist called. He introduced himself as Rami Rosen, a regular, freelance contributor to *Haaretz*, the Israeli liberal highbrow daily—a local equivalent of the *New York Times*. “Doctor, my sources told me that the corrupted Revach is busy ejecting you from Rambam, and that you know a lot. Would you be ready to talk?” I never learned who his “sources” were, but he was well connected, and I liked his directness; beside, I was susceptible and he hit directly on the right spot in my mind—*corrupted Revach*.

We rendezvoused on an early spring Friday afternoon in a sidewalk coffee house at the center of Mount Carmel. He had a coffee, I a *Goldstar beer*. He chain-smoked cigarettes, I puffed on my pipe. He—scruffy looking, balding, in his late 40s—admitted having just recovered from a heart attack and subjected me to a long monologue on how his ischemic heart disease had been diagnosed. Then we talked about Rambam. He was the first person who wanted to listen, and I talked and talked. In my mind, I had nothing to lose. My mind was made up already—I was not going to work within this system any longer.

He listened attentively and said, “This will have to be a major investigative report. We need evidence, and we’ll have to carefully verify everything— *Haaretz* is a serious newspaper. And even then I can’t predict how much we’ll be allowed to publish. It is a small town, in a small country—everybody needs access to healthcare. It may take many months before it’ll come to print, if ever.”

We stood up. “When are we going to meet again? Oops,” he said as he felt in his pocket, “I’m out of change, would you pay?”

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Autumn 1993, the Negev Desert, just off the Egyptian border. In Israel, doctors, until the age of fifty, are called up each year for a month of military service. Within such a system, doctors of advanced chronological age and professional seniority —and the help of *protekzia* — are allocated to

serve in the rear, or not serve at all. A year after returning from South Africa the Army Reserves' computer had located me. I had not complained and did not seek *protekcija* and was thus dispatched to wherever no one wanted to go— the notorious military jail of Ketziot. Here, in the middle of the desert, the State of Israel jailed most of its captured Palestinian terrorists. I would not object if anyone prefers to call them “freedom fighters”, for if one looks at things objectively, they have been fighting for their freedom, whatever that may mean. However, among the many thousand inmates, many had innocent civilian blood on their hands, and a few were probably innocent themselves.

The huge jail was a sprawling modern concentration camp divided into four separate camps. Each camp consisted of pens or compounds surrounded by tall fences and barbed wire. Inside each pen a few hundred inmates lived in large tents. On the edge of the camp stood barracks where the guards slept; they were usually aging reserve soldiers, too old to serve in the infantry. The permanent staff of the camp, mostly Arab-speaking Israeli Arabs or *Druze* soldiers, resided separately elsewhere.

It was late afternoon when I arrived at Ketziot after a long drive through the rocky desert south of Beer Sheva. I parked near the headquarters and presented myself before the jail commandant, a tall colonel—I think he was a *Druze*. He was smoking a cigarette and drinking black coffee. “You are the new doctor? What—a surgeon? We never get a surgeon—pathologists, ophtalmologists, skin doctors, name it—but never a surgeon. Are you a Russian or what?”

“No, I’m not a Russian.”

“Look, whatever you are you must understand—the bloody Red Cross is on our backs. They arrive every week and write long, silly reports. I do not need any complaints, any violations of human rights, or whatever you call this shit, understand? Treat the buggers as if you were treating your patients in Haifa. But on the other hand, this is not a sanatorium, this is not Davos, Switzerland, and they are not *Gandhis*. Most of them would kill you with their

bare hands if they could, doctor or no doctor. One more thing: try to solve all the problems and don't send them, I repeat, do not send them to the emergency room in Beer Sheva unless absolutely necessary. Each time we ship an inmate, we have to dispatch a squad of guards and two vehicles—this is disruptive. OK. That's all. Now go and have dinner, and we'll dispatch you off to camp A."

The jeep maneuvered between the corridors of wire separating the pens. I could see inmates eating, washing their *mess tins*, or kneeling and praying towards Mecca. I was dropped off at the "clinic," which was a large tent wedged amidst the pens—tall wire fences and pens on its four sides and thousands of inmates. A partition separated the tent into two parts: one serving as the "clinic", the other as the dormitory for the doctor and his three medics. An obese middle-aged man in dirty uniform, his sergeant's stripes pinned to his shirt with a security pin, welcomed me.

"Shalom, doctor, I'm Motti—a pharmacist from Jerusalem, now your chief medic. Welcome to the Mayo Clinic." Through the thin canvas of the tent I could hear the inmates shouting, singing, and laughing. Motti lifted the flap, and we exited the tent. A cool desert night was gathering. I saw inmates sitting in small groups. "Political sessions," explained Motti. "Those who don't hate us are being indoctrinated to do so. You incarcerate naïve kids, and out they'll go as dedicated terrorists, not so naïve anymore."

"What's he doing?" I pointed to a kid throwing something above the tall fence—it flew in the air and fell off into the center of a neighboring pen.

"Oh, this is how they communicate—a piece of paper wrapped around a stone. They call it a FAX," explained Motti.

"Is it permitted?"

"Yes, within the fences they can do whatever they want, you'll see. They run their pens under a strict regimen enforced by their own *mughtars*. Each pen gets its supply of daily rations—pitas, vegetables, olives, and meat. They cook and share, like in a happy *Kibbutz*." He giggled.

I shuddered. "Gee, they are so near. Give them a wire cutter or a knife, and in the morning they'll find us with our throats cut."

"Well, Doc, everything is theoretically possible, but it hasn't happened yet so..." He shrugged his shoulders. "Come Doc, let's go in and have some coffee. Soon they'll start lining up for the 8 p.m. clinic."

"Will it be busy?"

Motti laughed. "Very. Whenever a new doctor arrives, everybody wants to test him." We re-entered the tent, where two medics were stretched out on their military cots in their uniforms, snoring lightly. "Hey guys, wake up. Meet the new Doc—clinic time!"

"How do the inmates know that a new doctor has arrived?" I asked.

"They know everything. They watch us all the time—what else can they do? By now they may have already discussed your C.V—nu, have a *shluk*." He handed me a flat bottle of *777 Brandy*. Ahh—it burned my throat.

A long line of "patients" stretched from our tent back into the gate of the neighboring pen—two poorly shaved reserve soldiers, burning cigarettes between their lips, aimed loaded *Galil* assault rifles at the waiting inmates. A third guard was "protecting" the medics and me inside the "infirmary."

The first patient stumbled in and collapsed on the examination bed, groaning loudly and pointing to his buttocks. A handsome, young inmate entered as well. He smiled at me, shook my hand, and said, "I'm Machmud, the translator." His Hebrew was perfect.

"Not only a translator but a major *macher*," said Motti. *Macher* meaning a big shot in Yiddish.

"OK, what's his problem, Machmud?"

"Oh, Mister Doctor, he suffers from his rectum. Very bad pain in his rectum. He needs lots of *antibiotica*."

"Tell him please to take off his trousers, I need to examine him." As Machmud translated this, I saw the patient's pupils dilate with fear.

"He says that it is very painful and that no doctor touches his insides, he needs *antibiotica*, his supply is finished."

"Ask him how long he was receiving antibiotics?"

"Five months."

"Tell him no more *antibiotica* until I see his bum. Tell him that I'm a surgeon, a great surgeon from Haifa, a *mughtar* of surgeons."

After five minutes of negotiations the inmate stripped off his trousers and underpants to reveal a huge perianal abscess. It was a "cold" abscess or an *antibioma*—this is what happens when suppuration is left undrained, but suppressed with antibiotics. This is what happens when internists and ophthalmologists treat pus and do not wish to annoy the authorities by shipping inmates away to a surgeon. "Motti, give him 15 mg morphine i.m. and get me some lidocaine and a blade."

To the sounds of screaming, I drained the ischiorectal abscess and packed it with gauze. Now, with the morphine on board, the patient's pupils were pinpointed, and he looked at me with admiration. "I'll see him tomorrow," I told the translator, "Bring in the next patient."

The next patient had a perianal abscess, and so did the next one. "Blease, doctor, he needs Vaseline," said Machmud after I had drained the fourth abscess. Arabs have a problem with the "p"—a "problem" would come out "broblem."

"Why Vaseline?"

"Come on, doctor, where do you come from? Why Vaseline? Why do you think they all have anal problems?" said Vladimir, a tall, skinny blond medic who previously used to be a gynecologist in the Ukraine. He spat on the floor. "*Tfu cholera.*"

It was 11 p.m., and I continued seeing patients. The line outside didn't seem to end. The guards showed signs of irritation. *Fuck it, man, we want to sleep.* Motti said: "Doctor, we have to close shop. We'll continue tomorrow. It seems that the word has been spread: the new doctor is a surgeon, he cuts, drains pus, no more *antibiotca*. They all want to come now and see you and feel the knife." I looked at Machmud; he smiled at me enthusiastically, nodding his approval.

"OK, let's see another one, and we'll continue tomorrow after breakfast."

The next guy had a suppurating inguinal lymph node. As I made myself ready to lance it, the flap of the tent opened, and a tall, dark officer entered with his entourage. I saw that he was a lieutenant colonel—the others were a major and two captains. “What’s going on here?” the colonel barked loudly in an Arabic accent. “It’s almost midnight. We have to lock up the dens for the night. What are you doing?”

“Are you talking to me?” He was rude, and I did not like it.

“Yes. To you! Send this man away.” He gestured at my naked patient, and then said to the guards, “*Chalas*, the party is finished. Lock ‘em up!”

“Would you please leave the tent,” I told the officer.

He looked at me in disbelief, as if he didn’t believe what his ears had just heard.

“What?”

“I said, please leave. This patient is naked and is undergoing a surgical procedure, and I want you out. And you as well.” I pointed to the others. “Just go and let me work!”

“Do you know who I am? I am the commander-in-chief of Camp A. This place belongs to me. How dare you contradict me in public? One word from me, and you will be locked up yourself.” He was furious. But I was irritated.

“Look, I don’t know who you are, and frankly, I don’t care. All I know is that you can’t storm into my examination room while I am conducting a surgical procedure. Not even the chief of the Israeli Defense Forces can do it. Want to lock me up? Please, be my guest, but I promise you that very soon you will lose your rank. Now please leave and let me finish with this patient.”

The officer looked at me silently and then turned around, raised the flap of the tent, and left. His officers followed. We closed the shop and went to bed. An hour later I woke up to face a blaring light aimed at my eyes. It was the major—the colonel’s deputy. “Doctor, pack up your things, you are going away.”

I thought he was taking me to jail. “Switch this light off, and don’t hurry me. Where am I going, to jail?”

“No. You are being transferred to Camp C, changing places with their doctor. No jail.” He smiled.

“Why? I like it here with Motti and the other guys.”

“You don’t understand. You disobeyed the colonel in front of the inmates. The commandant is a God to them, and now you have undermined his authority and stature. You have provided the inmates with an example of how to disobey. Understand?”

“No, I don’t understand your bullshit, but anyway, Camp C—who cares?”

Camp C was like Camp A—numerous I+Ds of abscesses and middle-of-the-night cases of hysterical, hyperventilating young inmates, whom I was treating with generous doses of morphine and valium. This made me, again, very popular. I suspect that many of them had been victims of rape. I got on well with the commandant and enjoyed treating the terrorists—real terrorists, imaginary or potential.

Often, when reading or hearing about the abuse of prisoners at the U.S.-controlled jails of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, I think about my short stint at the Ketziot Camp. Naturally it was not a Swiss Alpine Sanatorium, but to the best of my knowledge, there was no abuse. That the guards were mature civilians from all levels of life on short-term duty, rather than enlisted mercenaries, probably had contributed to the more humane treatment of prisoners. I also learned that we doctors should always take the side of the underdog, whoever he is, even if in doing so, we have to challenge and be challenged by systems that are stronger than us.

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During my service in the prison the journalist Rami Rosen called me a few times. After long months of verifying, double checking, and corroborating the information I had provided to him, he was still busy writing and rewriting his forthcoming masterpiece—according to him “the bomb which will kill Rambam”—and arguing with his editors and legal consultants about what should not be omitted.

"Schein. When are you returning home?"

"In two weeks, but this coming weekend I'll be off."

"Well, you'll find a different Rambam. Since yesterday they're running around like drugged rats in the cage. We sent Revach a long list of questions, such as: this is case A, this is case B, case C, and so forth. We know what was done to him or her—now, what do you have to say about it? They don't know from where the shit is raining on them."

"Oh, they'll guess very fast. I hope my name didn't come up. They are still paying my salary."

"I have told you that your name will come up in the article as one of the many doctors we have interviewed but not as the main source."

But in reality, I did not care anymore. I was on my way out, and to hell with them.

On Thursday morning I bade farewell to my medics and left the camp to go back to Haifa, which I reached in the late afternoon. Israel is a tiny country—at its widest point you can cross it in less than an hour. You can drive its length, from north to south, in less than half a day.

Before climbing to our home up on the Carmel—after my mother's death we had moved into her home that now became ours—I decided to stop at Rambam and retrieve my mail. I parked my car. *What should I do with my Galil?* In Israel soldiers keep their personal weapon with them at all times, even on vacations. But my gut feeling told me to do the unusual and what shouldn't be done—and *what if the car is stolen?*—and lock the loaded weapon in the boot of my car. I went up into my department which seemed deserted at this hour, and approached my office at the end of the main corridor. *Unlocked— why?* I opened the door and found everything in a mess: open drawers, documents on the floor, disheveled bookshelves. *Bastards.*

I rushed to the nursing station, where the nurse in charge smiled embarrassingly at me. Yevgeny, a junior resident, tried to avoid my gaze. "Where is Maccabi," I asked. "Who broke into my room?"

"Everybody is in the OR."

"Just get Maccabi's ass up here before I break into his room and throw all his expensive books on the floor." The nurse did not reply but picked up the phone. Meanwhile, I saw the current attendings' on-call roster lying on the desk. My name was not included—no calls—no money. *Who did it? What's happening?*

Maccabi arrived: breathless, in scrubs, a mask hanging on his tanned, hairy chest, with Dr. Klein behind him. His manner was solemn, and he spoke to me as one would speak to a mental case. "Dr. Schein, I have to request you, please, to leave this department immediately."

"Why? Am I fired? I'm still on contract. And who has broken into my room? Was it you? One is called up for military service," I pointed to my uniform, "and this happens. And why is my name off the roster? Who took me off?"

Maccabi said nothing but picked up the phone. "Please connect me with security." Everything around me moved in slow motion. Everybody was watching the drama evolving between the director and his deputy. No one moved or opened his or her mouth. "Security, this is Professor Maccabi." In Israel, immediately when you become a professor, you use the title as many times per day as possible and demand that others do the same. Listen to the sound—p-ro-fe-ssor. How lovely it is to the ear. "We have a disruptive element here on the floor. Yes, Surgery B. Please come up immediately. Yes, I'm Professor...."

"Disruptive element? You little son of a bitch!" I exploded and grabbed the phone's handle from his hand and slammed it back on the hook.

"You have assaulted me—everybody saw it," Maccabi hissed dramatically, looking around at the bystanders for support.

"I assaulted nobody. I just want to talk to you, but you don't want to listen. Why don't you invite me to your office and explain what happened—who broke into my room and why?"

Two security guys appeared, positioned themselves at my sides, each grabbing one of my arms. “*Yaala*, move, or perhaps you want us to get the *bolice*.”

“Dr. Schein, why don’t you leave now? There is nothing that you can achieve by arguing.” I do not remember who said it, perhaps our chief nurse. Irritably, I shook off the security men. “Don’t touch me. I’m leaving. And you,” I pointed my index finger toward Macabbi, “you *will* hear from me.”

Beware, Schein, it’s a snake pit. Three years ago I had laughed at the warning, and now—now I knew that my next and last visit to the department would be at night to vacate my tousled office. I unlocked the boot of my car and retrieved the *Galil*.

“A senior doctor, suspected of assaulting a director of department in Rambam Medical Center.” This was a newspaper headline which appeared a while later.

“Haifa’s police opened an investigation against a senior doctor in Rambam, who is suspected of assaulting Prof. Meir Maccabi. Prof. Maccabi complained that the senior doctor grabbed forcefully a phone handle from his hands and this against the background of tensions and accusations concerning leaking information to the media. A spokeswoman for the police said that there is no evidence that any physical struggle took place. A tense and murky atmosphere continues in Rambam Hospital.”

How wise I was to leave the *Galil* behind—or else the headline could have been different. One never knows.

* * * * *

See picture below



The Ketziot detention camp, Negev Desert