

King of Escapes

by

Marcin Gwizdon



*I'd lived just past my twenty years,
With thirty more in rot and fears.
What hope was there in crimson pain?
I vanished swift –
Through bathhouse pane.*

– Zdzisław Najmrodzki, *Faces of Truth (Oblicza prawdy)*



MarcinGwizdon@gmail.com

+447902360421

MARCH 1978

ZIGGY (24) and a FELLOW INMATE stand on the train platform, handcuffed to two POLICEMEN. POLICEMAN#1 is younger, slightly excited about the trip. POLICEMAN#2 is sulky - older, clearly more seasoned.

POLICEMAN#2

I told the chief Dorota had tonsillitis and to send someone else, but no - "bish bash bosh and you're back. She won't even notice you were gone". Now I'm stuck with you lot. She'll skin me alive.

POLICEMAN#1

Come on... we'll hit up some shops while we're in the capital, buy her something nice. I wouldn't mind going myself.

POLICEMAN#2

Another couple hundred down the drain...

PASSENGERS nearby watch them with poorly concealed curiosity. Ziggy notices.

ZIGGY

Got a pen gents? Looks like I might have to sign a few autographs.

Policeman#1 looks amused. Policeman#2 remains stone-faced.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The train from Katowice to Warsaw is now arriving at platform 3, track 4. Scheduled departure at 16:51.

A train appears in the background. People on the platform turn to look. The train halts. Passengers board. Finally, the Policemen with Ziggy and the Fellow Inmate.

They move through the corridor and enter a compartment. The Policemen uncuff the Inmates from themselves and cuff them to one another instead. Everyone settles in comfortably. A conductor's whistle sounds outside. The train departs.

POLICEMAN#1

You watch Nights and Days yesterday? Second episode was on TV.

Policeman#2 responds with a disapproving look.

POLICEMAN#1

Beata made me. So boring I started watching the fucking fern next to the TV grow.

(mocking Beata)

"Oh dear, how unhappy she is. First her son, then her sister. Life's so unfair..."

Policeman#1 laughs at his own impression.

POLICEMAN#2

They made a movie out of the book before, right? With that actress... uh... Barańska. Fine-looking woman.

POLICEMAN#1

Mmm...

ZIGGY

Even better in person.

The Policemen look at Ziggy.

ZIGGY

They filmed some scenes near our village. We've got this manor house, so I was on set every day during shooting. When was that...

(thinking)

Must've been five years back.

The Policemen perk up. The Fellow Inmate stares blankly out the window. Ziggy's in his element. Storytelling's his specialty.

ZIGGY

We took some big shots from the Polish Film hunting once. Two hours in a stand, a cold November morning. Nearly froze their balls off.

(laughs)

Then I spot this stag - head poking through the trees, forehead and brows dusted with snow... Beautiful animal. Front tracks on the clearing, rear in the brush. Then - BANG - my old man fires the rifle, and the stag - like it's surprised or something - stands there a few seconds before dropping.

Policeman#1 listens intently. Policeman#2 feigns disinterest.

POLICEMAN#1
 Stars got it made, huh? Hunting,
 parties, film premieres...

Ziggy suddenly changes tone.

ZIGGY
 How about taking these bracelets
 off, gentlemen? They're so
 uncomfortable, and we've got a
 whole night ahead of us, right?

Ziggy looks to the Fellow Inmate for support. Policeman#1
 glances questioningly at Policeman#2, who hesitantly nods
 permission. Policeman#1 uncuffs them. Ziggy rubs his wrists.

ZIGGY
 Best part was skinning the stag.
 One actress wanted to see how we
 prepare it, walks in - blood and
 guts everywhere, freaks out. Goes
 pale, then runs to the bushes to
 puke. Ha! Wanted venison so bad. We
 nearly pissed ourselves laughing.
 She wouldn't touch food all night.

The Policemen chuckle.

POLICEMAN#1
 Ha! Good one!

ZIGGY
 Mmm...
 (smacks lips dreamily)
 Nothing beats game. My mom makes
 this venison goulash - finger-
 licking good. Ooh... or wild boar
 liver stuffed with lard. Sweet as
 honey, gentlemen.

Ziggy grows more familiar.

ZIGGY
 All this food talk's making me
 hungry. Do you think we could get
 something from the buffet car?

The Policemen look uncertain.

ZIGGY
 My treat. Just need one of you to
 go.

Policeman#1 looks at Policeman#2, who shrugs. Policeman#1
 stands. Ziggy quickly reaches into his jacket, pulls out
 money, and hands it to Policeman#1.

POLICEMAN#1
 What should I get?

ZIGGY
Anything. Sausages?

Policeman#1 opens the door to leave when Ziggy adds:

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
And maybe some beers too?

Policeman#1 glances at Policeman#2.

POLICEMAN#2
Throw something over your uniform.

Ziggy quickly offers his jacket. Policeman#1 puts it on and exits.

ZIGGY
(calling after)
Make it two each.

The door closes. Ziggy turns to Policeman#2.

ZIGGY
Gotta make the trip bearable.

OUTSIDE:

Open countryside. The March sky darkens. Lights of another train appear in the distance. A loud whistle cuts through the silence.

Train wheels clack on rails. The steady rhythm of tracks. City lights glow ahead.

INSIDE:

House lights flash by increasingly often. The train slows approaching a station.

In the compartment, dim lighting. Everyone sleeps. Empty beer bottles around.

Ziggy wakes, rubs his face, stretches. He looks around, then at the window:

The train stands at a platform. Passengers exit and board. A muffled conductor's whistle. The train departs. A sign flashes by: ŻYRARDÓW.

Ziggy stands, approaches the window, looks out. Checks his sleeping companions. Sits back down, restless. Looks to the window again, then at the sleeping Policemen. Quietly takes his jacket from the hook, sneaks to the window, looks over his shoulder.

Starts opening the window when another train appears on the opposite track. Ziggy steps back, checks the Policemen again. Notices the Fellow Inmate staring blankly at him. Ziggy puts a finger to his lips. The passing train

disappears. Ziggy steps onto the bench, opens the window - just as Policeman#2 grabs his pant leg.

POLICEMAN#2
FUCK!

A brief struggle. Ziggy dives through the window.

POLICEMAN#2 (CONT'D)
MOTHERFUCKER!

Policeman#1 wakes confused.

POLICEMAN#2 (CONT'D)
GODDAMN SON OF A BITCH!

Policeman#1 panics, grabs his gun, aims at the Fellow Inmate, who raises his hands in terror.

POLICEMAN#2 (CONT'D)
WATCH THE OTHER ONE!

Policeman#2 runs out.

POLICEMAN#1
(panicked)
ZBYSZEK!

Policeman#1 stands frozen, gun shaking in his hands.

FELLOW INMATE
(terrified, raises his hands)
Easy...

3 EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

3

Ziggy runs through the forest like a deer, branches whipping his face. Finally he stops. Listens. Nothing but the wind.

A mix of adrenaline, fear and joy make him gag and then laugh, disbelieving.

He looks back, composes himself.

Then he's gone, swallowed by the trees.

4 INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

4

Behind a counter, SABINA (50) counts change for a CUSTOMER. A phone rings in the back. An ASSISTANT appears.

ASSISTANT
Phone call for you.

Sabina finishes with the customer.

SABINA
Who is it?

ASSISTANT
Your son.

Sabina moves to the back, picks up the phone.

SABINA
(smiling)
Bogus?
(surprised)
Ziggy? What...?

Her face shows concern.

SABINA
Holy Mary, son...

Sabina lowers her voice, looks around cautiously.

SABINA
But how?

A pause as she listens intently.

5 EXT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

5

Ziggy hangs up. Takes a small piece of paper from his pocket, picks up the receiver again, inserts a coin, dials.

ZIGGY
Captain Kotwica, please.

6 INT. CAFÉ - DAY

6

A few PATRONS sipping coffee and smoking cigarettes. At one of the tables sits Ziggy. Something catches his attention, and he rises from his chair.

A smiling MAREK (38), dressed in a military uniform with four captain's stars on his epaulettes and cap, approaches.

MAREK
(removing his cap and
embracing Ziggy)
Ziggy!

ZIGGY
Coach!

Marek releases Ziggy from the hug and looks him up and down.

MAREK
Well, I see you've kept in shape!

Ziggy shrugs with a laugh.

MAREK
 (gesturing to the chair)
 Sit down, come on.

They both sit. A CAFÉ WORKER (40s) approaches the table.

CAFÉ WORKER
 Good morning, captain. What'll it be?

MAREK
 Two coffees, please.

The Café Worker walks away.

MAREK
 So, what's new with you? How's civilian life treating you? Miss the People's Army?

ZIGGY
 Yeah, a lot. Especially the food.

They both laugh like old friends. Marek notices the wedding ring on Ziggy's finger.

MAREK
 Oh, I see you got married.

Ziggy nods. The Café Worker sets cups in front of them.

MAREK
 (to the Café Worker)
 Thank you.
 (to Ziggy)
 Kids?

Ziggy shakes his head.

MAREK
 Huh, I thought you'd be chasing kangaroos in Australia by now.

NAJMRODZKI
 (laughs)
 Yeah, me too. But Australia didn't work out. At least not yet. Right now, I need a job. Then I can think about it again.

MAREK
 Want to come back to the army? You know there's always a spot for you. Ever since you left, we haven't even cracked the top ten in the Spartakiada. Major Kasiuk's losing his mind...

Ziggy reacts to the major's name.

ZIGGY
Comrade Kasiuk. I'll never forget
when he suggested I join the Party.

Marek bursts out laughing.

NAJMRODZKI
And I told him, "Uncle's in
Australia, blah-blah-blah, but
thank you for the honourable
offer."

MAREK
(imitating Major Kasiuk)
"A good soldier should be a Party
member and set an example for his
comrades."

They laugh again, followed by a moment of silence as Ziggy
stirs his coffee. Finally, he sets the spoon aside.

ZIGGY
Coach, there's something...

Marek listens.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
How do I put this?

Marek raises an eyebrow.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
I messed up a little.

Ziggy searches for the right words.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
(lowers voice)
I got a prison time for... battery.
Wrongly, but that doesn't matter.
And... basically I flew the coop
and now I can't find any work, and
at home it's nothing but
arguments...

Marek stares at him seriously. Ziggy looks down, as if
afraid of his reaction. Finally, Marek bursts out laughing.

MAREK
You're a real piece of work, Ziggy!
You haven't changed a damn bit!

Behind the counter, the Café Worker pours a shot for a
CUSTOMER. A PATRON gets up from one of the tables and leaves
the café. The Café Worker steps out from behind the counter
and clears the table.

At the table, Ziggy continues talking with Marek.

ZIGGY

Well, back at the station, they almost had me. Barely got away.

They both laugh.

MAREK

I remember. The Redcaps were pissed as hell. But you got a four-day pass afterward. Ah, the good old days...

Marek checks his watch.

MAREK

Alright, listen. I gotta get back to the barracks. But don't worry about work and stuff. I know some people who might help you out, and your little escape might even be a plus. What are you doing tomorrow?

Ziggy shrugs.

MAREK

Alright, call me in the morning, and I'll tell you what's what.

Marek stands up, shakes Ziggy's hand, and heads for the exit.

7 INT. KOVAL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

7

Ziggy sits on a chair by the desk, looking around. On the armchair sits KOVAL (40) - his expression blank, one arm draped over the back, broad shoulders (like a former wrestler's) visible under his suit. In the background, IGOR (40) - elegant, relaxed, intelligence written on his face - pours himself a drink.

IGOR

So, tell us about this escape of yours.

Ziggy shifts in his chair, thinking how to begin.

ZIGGY

It was March. They were taking me to Warsaw for questioning. On the train, I had a beer with the cops, one thing led to another, everyone fell asleep, and when we passed Żyrardów, I just... kind of felt inspired, and I jumped through the window. And since I'm a pretty fast runner...

Igor sits on the other side of the desk and studies Ziggy

for a moment.

IGOR

And? They're not looking for you now?

ZIGGY

Sometimes the local cop drops by, but otherwise...

Ziggy shrugs.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)

Finding work's the problem.

He glances at Koval, whose face is unreadable.

IGOR

Marek said you could dance the cancan blindfolded on the shooting range.

ZIGGY

(laughs)

Maybe not the cancan, but the English waltz, sure.

IGOR

You know cars?

ZIGGY

Went to mechanic school. And I can drive, too.

Igor stares at Ziggy, thinking.

IGOR

Well, we need a driver who can keep his mouth shut. You drive. The rest is none of your business.

Igor lets the words sink in. Ziggy nods.

IGOR

Alright, tomorrow, you get behind the wheel and show us what you've got. Then we'll see.

Igor stands, signalling the end of the conversation. Koval rises, they shake hands, and Ziggy leaves, escorted by Igor, who closes the door behind him.

IGOR

What do you think?

Koval thinks for a moment.

KOVAL

Well, he's a real character.

Igor laughs. Koval joins in.

8 EXT. TRAINING GROUND - DAY

8

Igor watches as a Fiat 125 speeds down an empty road, skilfully manoeuvring around turns.

It approaches and pulls up beside him. Behind the wheel is Ziggy in a helmet, peering out the open window. Igor walks over and leans on the roof.

IGOR

Ease off the gas before the skid,
or you'll spin out. But otherwise,
good. Now try jerking it before the
turn. Brake and clutch, slide,
countersteer, gear, gas. Go on...

Ziggy peels off with screeching tires. A moment later, Koval stands beside Igor. They both watch Ziggy handle the car.

KOVAL

How's he doing?

IGOR

The bastard learns fast.

Koval and Igor observe Najmrodzki's manoeuvres.

KOVAL

Talked to Sergei.

Igor looks at him questioningly.

KOVAL

They'll take the whole shipment.

Igor smiles at the news.

IGOR

Privashodna! (Perfect!)

KOVAL

(pointing at Ziggy)
We'll take him for his baptism by
fire.

In the background, Ziggy shows off his rally-driving skills.

9 EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

9

The cemetery, enveloped in nighttime silence. By one of the tombs stands Igor with a flashlight. From inside emerges Ziggy, carrying a package.

ZIGGY

That's the last one.

Ziggy walks away as Igor closes the tomb. Ziggy approaches the truck and hands the package to Koval, standing on the cargo bed. Nearby, two parked cars. Soon, Igor joins them. Koval jumps down and covers the cargo with a tarp.

IGOR

Alright, Ziggy, you take the lead car, I'll be in the rear, Koval with the transport in the middle. Clear?

ZIGGY

Yes, sir.

IGOR

Let's move.

They all get into their vehicles. The sound of doors slamming and engines starting. Headlights flare, the convoy sets off, disappearing into the night.