

## Excerpt from *Deadly Cure*

What's that awful noise?" Dr. Ben McKay asked the obstetrics resident as they walked together from the ER to Labor and Delivery.

Fred shook his head. "Don't know. Sounds like one of those old Baruga car horns."

"You're too young to remember those."

"Hey, don't make yourself sound so old. Forty's not that ancient. And yeah, I'm old enough..."

The sound grew louder, then quit as the two dark-haired men approached the L&D unit located next to the maternity entrance. Suddenly a woman dressed in black leather and high-heeled boots slammed through the door screaming, "Help! Help me! She's having a baby! She's having a baby in my car!"

My turn again, thought Ben, the OB attending physician on "walk in" call. All OB specialists associated with the Northern Virginia hospital took a monthly turn serving as "doc in the box." This entitled them to render care to everyone who showed up at the hospital without a personal physician.

Ben picked up his pace. "Go grab a nurse and a precip pack," he told Fred. "I'll see what's up."

Fred nodded then hustled through the L&D door barking, "Got a delivery on the dock. Get me an OB pack and come on!"

Ben followed the hysterical woman—clearly a "lady of the evening"—out to her car. He fiddled with the door handle on the well-worn 70s Chevy that had chrome everywhere and a paintjob that defied description. When the door finally opened, Ben was met with a blood-curdling scream: "It's coming! It's coming!"

"It's all right," Ben tried to calm her with his voice. "I'm a doctor, and we can help you. Let's just see what's—"

Before his next word, another contraction gripped the woman. She took her hands from between her legs and grasped Ben's forearms with all her might. In doing so, she dug her long nails into his flesh. Ben ignored the rush of pain and worked to find the baby's head. He could see sufficiently thanks to the fluorescent light of the ambulance loading dock. There it was—the tiny head, already delivered.

Ben assessed the situation. He eased his fingers below the baby's ears and found the neck. Two loops of umbilical cord encircled it.

The woman continued to scream and squeeze Ben's arms as he gently slid the cord, one loop at a time, over the infant's head. Then he guided it, starting with the upper shoulder, with gentle downward traction—no small feat in the cramped backseat of a Chevy.

Though the woman writhed, kicked, and called Ben new combinations of old words, he elevated the infant, freeing its posterior shoulder. Out it came with a gush of water and blood.

"Just breathe, ma'am. The baby's out. Please try to relax." Ben shifted his position in the tight quarters. With one hand on the baby's chest, he could feel a pulse, but he detected no respiratory effort. I wonder how much the cord impaired its oxygen supply. He wiped the infant's face with his thumb and bent over him to puff a few breaths into

## Excerpt from *Deadly Cure*

his mouth.

Fred brought Maryann, the OB nurse, out on the dock pushing a gurney. They brought the OB pack containing instruments, sponges, cord clamps, and scissors—all the necessities for a rapid delivery.

“How’re we doing?” Fred wanted to know. As a first year resident, he still got excited about obstetrical adventures.

“Baby boy,” Ben said. “About five pounds. Just now starting to breathe.” At that, the new arrival started to cry. Soon his whimpers escalated to a robust scream.

The mother, however, had sunk back into the seat and lay in silence.

Ben spoke in a lowered voice. “How’re you doing, Mom?”

She responded with emphatic profanity followed by unintelligible syllables.

Ben looked at her friend and pointed to the patient with his thumb. “What’s going on? Has she taken something? Is she on anything?” He smelled no alcohol, but the mother’s odd behavior troubled him.

“She took some stuff for the pain, man. I gotta go.” The driver of the vehicle lit up a cigarette, turned to get in, then looked back at Ben. She swore and accused him with, “You really made a mess of my car.”

Ben shrugged.

“I gotta go, man. Can you put a move on it?”

Ben swiftly clamped the umbilical cord in two places, then cut between the clamps. He handed the baby to MaryAnn, who wrapped him in a blanket and headed for the nursery. With considerable difficulty, Ben and Fred lifted the woman out of the back seat and placed her on the gurney.

Ben turned toward the driver and called out, “Does your friend have any previous pregnancies or medical conditions?”

“I don’t know nothin’. I just brought her here.” With the obstetrical pads and sponges still in the back seat, she fired up the engine, slapped her car in reverse, and popped out of the lot without another word. Speeding away, she blasted her horn and again filled the night with the annoying bar-oo-ga sound.

Ben blinked against the bright lights as he wheeled the patient into the hospital toward the L&D admission desk. She offered no resistance as she lapsed in and out of consciousness. Looking down, Ben noticed he was covered with blood, meconium and amniotic fluid. What a night! He glanced up to see that the clock on the wall read 4:50. He looked at Fred. “I’ll go change while you deliver the placenta and repair any tears. Shouldn’t be too tough.”

“Got it covered.” Fred waved Ben in the direction of the doctor’s locker room and headed down the hall with the patient.

As Ben passed the nurses’ station, the charge nurse looked him over and chuckled, “Birthing Room’s not good

## Excerpt from *Deadly Cure*

enough for you any more, eh? Gotta go with the 'Birthing Buick'?"

Ben smiled. "Chevy actually—old Impala."

"Well, aren't you a bloody mess!"

"Don't say that in Australia. They'll think you're cussing me out."

"Got it, 'mate.'"

When Ben walked into the doctor's lounge, a glance in the mirror revealed blood smeared all over his scrubs, hands, even some on his face. Gee, forgot how much "fun" this was. Having worked a long, busy shift, he sat down and rested his elbows on his knees, trying to muster up some energy. Finally, he stripped off his scrubs. In doing so, he noticed the blood had soaked through to his skin. Better jump in the shower before pulling on some new blues.

When the hot water pouring over him stung his arms, he looked down with alarm. The woman's "death grip" had actually gouged through the skin in several places along his forearms. Ben stared at the wounds. He inspected them carefully to see how deeply she had cut him. They ought to give us combat pay for "walk in" call.

The shower returned some of his energy to him. Ten minutes later, as he sat pulling on fresh scrubs, Fred came bounding through the door.

"Hey, doc. How ya doing?" Fred asked.

"Fine. But really tired of emergencies. Everything go O.K.?"

"Sure. The placenta was sitting there when we got back, and it took only two stitches to fix a small tear."

"Good. No abnormal bleeding?"

"Nope, she's fine—but a bit snockered. You should've seen her arms. Track marks everywhere. This lady, whoever she is—definitely a junkie. I drew all the labs, drug tox screens. And Maryann said the baby was fine—but they're gonna put him on narcotic withdrawal watch for a couple days just in case."

"Did you get an HIV test in the labs?" Ben tried to sound casual.

"You bet," Fred replied. "I order that on all the walk-ins. You never know."

"Good job." Ben stood. "You're right. You never know..."