### Jacob (I Have Loved)

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<td>Series:</td>
<td>Part 4 of Howling Commandos</td>
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<td>Stats:</td>
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**Jacob (I Have Loved)**

by Lasgalendil
Summary

In 1945, Captain America was Killed in Action.

...in 1960, James Montgomery Falsworth wrote a book.
“Once there was a War, and in that War there was a Soldier.

(I say once but it is not true, there was This War, as there Had Been and Are Always Wars, as there Will Be Wars Yet Again.)

There were many soldiers in the War, but this soldier was different. This Soldier had a secret: the Solider was afraid, and so was he ashamed.”

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

CHAPTER ONE

…the familiarity of tone is is reminiscent of early fantasy staples The Hobbit (1937) and The Last Unicorn (1968). It has most often been compared to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s Le Petit Prince (1943). Yet despite these similarities, Falsworth’s novel was never as popular or as beloved. Perhaps it comes as no surprise: despite the simplistic structure and narrative tone, Jacob (I Have Loved) is explicit in a way that at the time was unforgivable. While lacking the crass terminology of Lady Chatterly’s Lover (1928), the frank depiction of a consensual, mutually loving homosexual relationship placed it firmly in the realm of obscenity (Roth v. United States, 354 U.S. 476; 1957). Publication and distribution of Jacob (I Have Loved) did not occur in the United States until 1973 (Miller v. California; 1973).

The first time Lt. James Montgomery “Monty” Falsworth laid eyes on one Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes of the 107th Infantry (US Army), he’d done so from flat on his back, bleeding, staring up at the boots of the Nazi who’d put him there.

Monty had never planned to be a POW, but then again, one really never did plan for such things, did they? Shells, bullets, mortars, mines… no, he’d never feared dying. Not in battle. Not until now. Infection. Starvation. Captivity. He’d been at the camps when they’d liberated Russian POW’s… those were not a man’s way—not a soldier’s way—to die. And Monty was a Soldier. His father, his father’s father, and his father’s father’s father before him had all been soldiers, had been proud to lay down life or limb for the Great British Empire. And Monty, impressionable young Monty, spurred on by love of Queen and Country, the second son, that proverbial ardent child yearning for some desperate glory, for the approval of parent and peer alike… well. Owen was right. *Dulce et decorum est*, what a bloody waste of words.

Oh, Monty had been given a chance, a choice, they’d all been given a choice. Lay down your weapons or be annihilated. Work will set you free. But the work—what work!—fagging about, making the very weapons of their own destruction. Monty had been in an air raid once. Knew the fear of incendiary fires raining down from the heavens above. Seen smoke rising over London, the steaming craters of homes, streets, offices and shops. Broken bodies. City streets emptied of children seeking refuge away from war.

No, James Montgomery Falsworth would not be building these.

He watched the Major and the Captain refuse the task, lay down their lives. Half a league, half a league, half a league onwards. Bright bolt of blue. Nothing left but ash. By the time they got to him the long line of men beyond were kneeling in their own piss. The men’s courage—his own courage—was held on Atlas’ shoulders, and if he shrugged, faltered, well. The whole world would fall.

These Nazi bastards knew it. They were counting on it. Briefly Monty had grandiose visions of rising, a rousing speech, a blaze of glory…but that spark had fled, and the ember cooled, replaced now with fear. He thought to acquiesce, to live to die another day, that perhaps it would be an opportunity, not cowardice, not selfishness, an opportunity of Resistance, to spy, to sabotage—

But the haggard faces of the POWs told him differently. Here work would not set him free. This was only purgatory, a prison for those too weak to let go the shackles of this life for the uncertainty of the unknown. And they paid dearly for it.

It was his turn now. His time to decide. Polished leather boots before him, the muzzle of that strange gun held to his head, a hideous, faceless creature hidden behind the anonymity of war. All the better. Monty didn’t know if he had it in him to stare into the eyes of the enemy, bluffing boldness where he felt none.

Cold sweat was pouring down his brow. What difference would it make—could it make, surely? These men—boys, really, green and fresh-faced, so much like the fellows he went to Academy with so long ago—they were weak. Sick. Frail. Frightened. Human. And one would break. One would break and the others would follow, begrudgingly, relievedly, follow, perhaps cursing the lad for his cowardice while praising God above for this sudden fortune free of shame.

…it could be him. There was no reason it should not be him. He could live. Swallow his pride, his
patriotism, down the bitter pill and live.

A far, far greater rest I go to, a far, far greater thing than I have ever done? But it all felt empty. Hollow. Like Owen’s words. It was one thing, after all, to give your life in service. Quite another to throw it all away. Monty Falsworth did not need to die today.

A stubborn child’s voice screamed within him, to die with honor. To die with pride. To make his death meaningful, to serve King and Country ’til his dying breath. Yet another begged him reconsider. What would this sacrifice gain? This inspiration? Nothing. Nothing perhaps save the slaughter of more of these men, these boys, who, bolstered by his own courage, may seek to find their own.

He was being offered a choice. Monty Falsworth did not trust himself to choose.

He clenched his eyes shut. Offered a prayer, perhaps, up to whatever God may be listening. I don’t want to die.

…nothing happened.

“Damnit, man, shoot me!” he hissed.

The muzzle lowered. There would be no quick, clean death for him. This faceless Nazi could sense his fear, could see the eyes of his compatriots on him, wide and terrified. He was the weak link in the chain, and his enemy would see him broken.

Well, Monty mused bitterly as the butt of the gun found his stomach, send him reeling from his knees to his arse, that would be the Falsworth luck.

“You. English,” only the lower half of the man’s face was visible, fleshy, pallid lips and grotesque teeth pulled into a sneer. “You will work for us.”

“No, I rather think I shan’t.” Stiff upper lip, old chap.

This time it was a heavy blow of a boot that sent him sprawling.

“Rudeness will get you nowhere, old sport. I suggest you take your offer elsewhere. Tell Uncle Adolf I refuse.” Then there was a snarl, the heavy thwap of steel hitting flesh, a strident pain, a string of foul cursing in German and English, and the world around him went blessedly, blessedly black.

“They took him, the Captain said, but they cannot keep him. The grave cannot hold he whom I have loved. Go, and be not afraid.”
Chapter End Notes

I’ve started a research blog associated with the fic, beginning with a character study of Jim Morita:

https://j-ihl.tumblr.com/
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for the Holocaust/HaShoah, slurs, and discussion of sexual assault.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“The Captain spread his body like a map, left no place unexplored by fingers, lips, teeth or tongue. And if the Boy said nothing, then the swell of shaft and spill of seed spoke a hundred thousand words.

How strange a thing, the Soldier thought, that Kings ought send men to commit violence yet take bold offense to such an act of love.”

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

CHAPTER TWO

…Falsworth continued in the tradition of the soldier-scholar, like Lewis Wallace, T.E. Lawrence, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien before him. But unlike the romantic friendship of Judah Ben-Hur and Messala, the master/servant relationship of Frodo and Samwise Gamgee, the devotion of Bilbo to Thorin, the homosocial love of Legolas and Gimli in Tolkien’s Middle-earth, or even the hesitant sensuality in Lawrence’s Dedication that many scholars have claimed as a culturally acceptable smoke-screen to disguise an otherwise homoerotic nature, the relationship between The Captain and The Boy in Jacob (I Have Loved) is openly—but not wholly—sexual.


When Monty woke, his face was throbbing like the devil, the world was spinning, and dark, and cold. And there were—God’s honest truth—voices. The strangest voices. One lisping and nasally, sinister in its relative silence. And the other?

…the other was raised, heated, and above all else, the very worst mangling of Her Majesty’s English that Monty had ever heard, and that included the time George IV addressed commencement. What the devil, he thought, have those damned Yankees done this time?
"—fucking starving my men how the fuck you expect them to work like this—no water no food—
their morale ain’t worth shit and now you’re beating on them—you call this a factory it’s a fucking
butcher shop—you want our help you want our labor fine fuckers but you’re gonna damned well
feed us stop beating us or we’ll fuckin’ unionize, go on strike—"

The fervor continued. Monty chanced opening his eyes, peering out through lashes matted with
salted tears, sweat, and blood.

"Ah. Sergeant Barnes. I am Arnim Zola. I have heard so much about you," the German—or was that
Swiss?—was small and doughy, yet no less sinister for it. “Did you know, production has increased
twenty-one point eight percent since your arrival. At first, I did not believe it, I thought to thank my
foreman, but I was informed the work was of your doing.”

“At your fucking service and your family’s. We got a deal?” The Yank’s voice belonged to a mean
little fucker, lean and handsome.

“Your sentiment is admirable, but mistaken. You do not have the power to negotiate, Sergeant
Barnes. You will continue production as previously.”

“You’re powering this factory not with German soldiers but POWs and you’re treating them like
shit,” this scruffy Sergeant Barnes scoffed. “ Tells me two things: one, German high command either
don’t know or don’t approve of your operation, and I’m going with don’t approve, given how I
found a star of David caved in the fucking floors. Because you used to get Jews here, didn’t you?
Jews and Gypsies and Queers and God knows who else, poor bastards. And you ground ‘em to
death, or near enough to it, then used your fucking H.G. Wells ray guns to hide away the evidence.
But the supply stopped. Tells me you worked them to death too soon and the German High
Command came here and didn’t like what they saw, and maybe you killed them same as you did that
Panzer unit. Hell, maybe they were even coming here to shut you down. You wanna know what I
think? I think we’re all you’ve got, all you’re getting…and you’re grinding us down, genius. Kill us
off and you don’t got nothing to work with. So yeah, I got something to bargain with. You want to
work us to death? Fine. Kill us now because I ain’t liftin’ another finger makin’ something to kill my
own troops. We’re Americans, goddamnit, you tell us there’s no hope and We. Won’t. Work. But
you feed us, get us through, give us hope to get home at the end of this? Then hell, I’ll fuckin’ work
for you Zola, heil who you want, do want you want, kiss your Nazi arsch, be your right hand man if
it means the chance to live another day, stab your fucking back when the moment presents itself.
Your choice.”

Oh, good Lord. The man was going to get himself—get Monty—get everyone—killed.

…and rather horribly.

But Zola only removed his glasses, wiped them on a cloth produced from the pocket of his lab coat.
“You, my good Sergeant, I fear are far too smart for your own good.”

“Aw, shucks, Zola,” Barnes ducked his head, feigning coyness. “I’m just a kid from Brooklyn.”

“You will work?” Zola squinted, eyes small, sharp, and piggish.

“Oh, we’ll work alright,” Barnes drawled. “Every second we’re breathing is another we can live to
fight another day. More I ingratiate us to you the harder it is to kill us. So we’ll work. Work harder,
faster, longer. But no more beatings. No more rapes. And I want rations, dammit. Your boys are the
best fed in this war. You know damned well a man works better, faster with food.”

“I believe you will find me to be a reasonable man, Sergeant Barnes.”

“We’re in the middle of a goddamn world war,” Barnes drawled. “And I’m asking you to kindly stop starving my brothers or making them suck cock. Any of that sound fucking reasonable to you?”

Zola smiled, a truly horrible thing, replacing those spectacles. It did nothing to hide the gleam of hunger—or was it amusement?—in his gaze. “There will be, of course, a quota.”

“Fine.”

“And I cannot make promises about these overseers having…how do you say? Fun. We are reasonable men, you and I, Sergeant Barnes, are we not? We know that the things done in war are distasteful. Disgusting, even. I, like you, derive no such pleasure from them. My interests are scientific, and yet each side, as you say, must maintain their morale.”

But Barnes only scraped dirt from under his fingernails, slumped against the wall, one foot bracing back, the picture of boredom. “I dunno, Zola. If you can’t make deals maybe you ain’t the man I should be talkin’ to.”

“You do not wish to meet Herr Schmidt,” the man’s voice went cold.

“I’m from Brooklyn. That’s mob country,” Barnes continued, still picking at his nails. “Irish, Italian, it don’t matter. Seen some real nasty shit, Zola. Seen a man put a pool cue through a guy’s eye socket for less than the shit your men are pulling. Queer country, too, what with the Navy base and the dockyards. Seen all sorts of mean lookin’ fellas out cruising, once beat a man to death in an alley for putting hands on a friend of mine…an’ I did it with own two bare hands. So next one to stick his Johnson where it don’t belong is gonna lose it, then I’m gonna beat the corpse until your boys get the message.”

_Dear Lord._

Barnes continued chatting away as if discussing the weather. “So trust me when I tell you you don’t want me to deal with the fuckin’ middleman. ‘Cause I will, Zola, and you ain’t gonna like it.”

“Perhaps I was wrong, Sergeant. Perhaps instead you are far too foolish.”

Monty agreed.

“Control your men, if they’re really ‘your’ men, Zola,” Barnes shrugged. “Else I’ll be having myself a talk with your Herr Schmidt, one way or the other. Your decision, pal, whether you’re alive for it or not.”

“You would threaten me?” large eyes blinked, owl-like behind bottle-lens glasses. “It is unwise.”

“Pal, I increased the production in this facility by twenty one point eight percent an’ I’ve only been here a month. Unwise or not, you ain’t doing shit. Hell, Zola, I’m the best damn factory foreman in the Third fucking Reich. If it’s the depression, and it’s down to the two of us, which one d’ya think the bossman’s gonna hire?” Barnes snarled. “‘Cause I got my money on me.”

“I am curious, Sergeant Barnes, given the opportunity, what exactly you may say.”
“Shucks, I ain’t all that eloquent. Figure a ‘fuck you, you Nazi bastard’’ll do just fine.”

…Americans. bloody typical.

“I admire your sense of humor, Sergeant. But I must wonder whether it will save you, or get you killed. And Herr Schmidt is hardly a Nazi—he is HYDRA.”

“Frankly my dear, I don’t give a damn,” Barnes deadpanned.

*He did not,* something sensible  in Monty recoiled, aghast. *He did not just quote*—

But even bruised, bleeding, and fighting for fleeting consciousness, Lt. James Montgomery Falsworth had the very, very terrible notion that his erstwhile savior just quoted *Gone With The Wind* to the embodiment of Nazi Germany. And Monty didn’t know which was worse—that it had indeed occurred, or that the smug Yankee bastard *had gotten away with it.*

“Your men want their fun, they can come through me. Nothing I like better than a scrap. But you’d better warn ‘em: I fight dirty.”

“How is the saying…’there are no rules in love and war’?” Zola asked.

Barnes let out a bark of a laugh. “Pal, you don’t know the half of it. And hell, Zola, your men want their fights…you tell them we can even make it interesting. Betting pool’s cigarettes or chocolate. Eight pagers, if you got ‘em.”

*Oh, yes. Americans in port. Time for yet another platoon-wide sermon on venereal disease and use of rubbers,* Monty rued. But nothing did quite bind men together across all borders or bounds quite like food, fags, and the undressed form the female figure, however crude.

“This is a generous offer, Sergeant Barnes. But I wonder have you considered what should happen when you lose. What will your men do without their hero here to protect them?”

“Don’t lose.”

Zola frowned. “This man—he is not American, no?”

“Don’t care.”

Monty groaned. The man was a goddamned cowboy. About as articulate as John Wayne, too.

“And yet you would risk your life for him. For all of them.”

“Bullies like you?” Barnes snorted. “You really fucking piss me off. Don’t care who you’re pickin’ on.”

“Fascinating,” there was a hunger, a greed in that tone that sent a chill down Monty’s spine. If Barnes felt it at all, he met it with a stubborn, sullen silence. That odd delight only deepened in those piggish eyes. “What were you—forgive my intrusion but I am simply fascinated—Sergeant Barnes? What were you before.”

“Sergeant Barnes. 32557038,” Barnes grit his teeth, took a gamble with the devil.
…and Barnes won.

“I see,” Zola smiled, too intrigued for anyone’s good. “We will talk later, you and I. Until then, farewell.”

“Yeah. See ya around, pal. Pleasure doin’ business. Abyssinia,” Barnes continued to mutter nonsensical pleasantries. Then—

“You can sit up now, ya mook. He’s gone. And I know you’ve been spyin’.”

Monty opened one eye fully, groaning. “If you can believe it, I’d rather not.”

“You will leave me and I will love you. You will marry and grow old with another and I will love you. You will die and be buried and the worms will eat your flesh and yet even then will I love you. If you rise on the wings of the dawn, or settle on the far side of the sea, yet even there will I ever love you.”

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

TRIGGER WARNINGS:

Regarding the Holocaust/HaShoah: Monty overhears Bucky and Zola discussing the fate of the prisoners who worked the factory before the capture of the 107th.

Regarding the use of slurs: I try to make Bucky’s use of slurs self-referential and humorous. However, in this chapter he uses a pejorative term for the Romani people that was common at the time.

Regarding sexual assault: Monty overhears Bucky and Zola negotiating food, work quotas, and the cessation of sexual assault against the 107th as entertainment by their guards.
“I do not mean to hurt you, said the Captain. But hurt me you have, and hurt me you shall, the Boy replied. But I forgive you. God help me, I forgive you.”

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

CHAPTER THREE

Frequently Challenged Books

1) Jacob (I Have Loved), by J. Montgomery Falsworth

Reasons: sexually explicit, homosexuality, gambling, smoking/drinking/drug use, violence, unsuited for age group, “politically, racially, socially offensive”

additional reasons: defamation, libel, sedition

Like The Chocolate War (1974) and Catcher In The Rye (1951) before it, since its initial American publication in 1973 Falsworth’s work has consistently ranked in the top 100 banned or challenged books list at American public institutions.

—Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association

“Aw, shucks, pal,” Sergeant Barnes crouched down beside him, rolling on the balls of his feet. “It ain’t that bad. Seen worse. Coupla bruised ribs is all, nasty blow to the head, broken nose, busted lip, but hey, you’re lookin’ more handsome already. Just a shame about that thing growing outta your face,” he pantomimed something on his own.

Instinctively, Monty reached up to feel—

…his mustache.

Monty was far from amused.

“Jesus H Christ, Limey,” Barnes grinned. “Learn to laugh a little. You’re welcome, by the way.”

“If it’s all the same to you, I’d much rather have died quickly,” Monty muttered. “I’ve seen enough of starvation and sickness to know it’s a bloody nasty way to go.”

“You ’n me both, pal. Only nobody’s dyin’ here. Not today.”

“Tell that to my commanding officers.” He hadn’t known them. Not long. Not well. It was, he rued wistfully, the downside of Parachute Brigade—once behind enemy lines things went to hell and went there quickly. One never knew where or with whom one would end up with. But Lewis and
Grantham had been good soldiers, good leaders, good men.

*Then they rode back, but not*  
*Not the six hundred.*

For the life of him, Monty couldn’t decide if it was relief, regret, or shame that he hadn’t been among them. But Sergeant Barnes shared no such sentiment. “Hate to break it to you, pal, but those men were idiots. You’re the first smart one of ‘em I’ve seen.”

“Those men were soldiers in His Majesty’s—“ he bristled.

“Your Captain and your Major are dead,” Barnes told him bluntly, scowl creasing his brows. “You wanna know why we both ain’t serving under the British flag? It’s ‘cause sometimes you’ve got to fight fuckin’ dirty. Sometimes you’ve gotta do somethin’ you don’t like to bet the job done. Sometimes you’ve gotta get the goddamned Germans to drop their goddamned guard. Drunk on Christmas or just a little lax around you ‘cause they know you ain’t gonna pull something…and then you hit ‘em fast, hit ‘em hard.”

“They were my countrymen,” Monty swallowed. “My commanding officers. I don’t even get to bury them—”

Barnes sighed. Scratched the stubble growing over his cleft chin. “If it makes you feel better pal, they were dead anyways. First minute they got here. I’ve seen enough intake to know. They always take the officers. Cows the men. Weeds out ones dangerous enough to fight back. Those men?” he jerked his thumb towards the smatterings of ash. “They got themselves a good, quick death. It’s more than most could ask for.”

It was an apology. Of sorts. Or at least as near as he’d get to one. “Who the bloody hell are you?”

“Men call me Sarge,” he shrugged. Hauled Monty up to sit. “Lemme look atcha.”

“The devil—“ Monty hissed, sudden bright light sending daggers through his skull.

“Concussion,” Sarge said, palming the stolen blue battery back up his sleeve with a wink. “Your eyes are dilated as hell. Light’s gonna hurt, and loud noise is gonna be a motherfucker.”

“That,” Monty said thickly, “was rather clever sleight of hand.”

“Brooklyn,” Sarge shrugged.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Christ, you posh British boys all are the same. So damned polite. You’d give Steven Grant Rogers a run for his money.”

“Who the bloody blazes is Steven Grant Rogers?”

Barnes sniggered. “Pal, if you don’t know, I ain’t got the time to tell ya. Now, about that ugly mug of yours. Got something that belongs to you.” He opened a palm.

Ah. A tooth. Monty licked his gums in surprise, and yes, there it was, the strange, hollow socket right where his incisor ought to be. The rifle butt that had split his lip in two had gone deeper than he thought.

“I don’t suppose—“ Monty began.
“Open wide, Limey,” Barnes wet the root between his own pert lips, sucking it free of blood and grime, a gesture both equal parts unpleasant and obscene. “This thing’s goin’ straight back where it came from.”

Oh, bloody fucking hell. This was going to hurt. “Are you a medic?” Monty winced as firm hands held his jaw, tight against the bruises blooming over his cheeks.

“Champ, I am the best damned nurse this side of the Manhattan Bridge.” And there was a nasty shove, a squelching snick! and a sharp jolt of pain. Monty grimaced and jerked away, clutching his jaw, licking his teeth. Now just a dull ache, a strange feeling of sudden fullness, but the familiar line of his mouth had returned.

“Now c’mon then, you grimy Limey bastard,” Barnes clapped his beret on, ruffling over both hat and hair affectionately. “Let’s get you cleaned up, and figure out what the fuck this HYDRA and Herr Schmidt shit is, huh?” Monty was far too sore, too sick at heart to note, to care. To realize the Sergeant had been conducting reconn the entire time.

His first impression of the factory floor at Kreischburg was one of intensity, of chaos, of harsh sounds, blaring blue light, and a throbbing pulse behind his right eye and jaw that made him stagger, blind. “’S’alright, pal,” Barnes coaxed, strong arm under his shoulders. “I gotcha.” By the time they reached the holding cells below Monty’s legs were weakening, vision gone from blurry to swimming to dark.

“Gang, Limey. Limey, gang,” was all introduction he received before being laid down on cold concrete.

“If it’s all the same to you, Sergeant,” he heard his own muffled voice from far, far away. “I’d rather be with my men…”

“Fuck you, Limey,” Barnes patted his knee. “Go to sleep.”

Monty slept.

“You may have him for the autumn and winter, for the midnight and twilight. But I had him for the spring and summer, for the morning sunrise, and even you cannot take that from me. I loved him first, the Boy told her. God help me, I love him still.”

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth
"In years to come the water would be dragged for their two bodies. Neither were ever found. But Kings and Queens would place a picture of the Captain before their soldiers, and say to them thus: This was the Captain, be like him. And they used that image to send young men to far away wars where they committed atrocities and killed innocents and did nothing at all in the name of love. In time, it was the Captain’s death and not the Captain himself that Men came to praise. But if the name and image were well known, the Captain himself had long since become inconvenient. And so was he forgotten."

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

CHAPTER FOUR

...But here the comparison ceases. Whereas Lawrence recounted in poetic detail his own journeys in the form of autobiography, and Tolkien exposed the horrors and intimacy of war through fiction "without, need I say, any allegorical significance or contemporary political reference whatsoever (Tolkien, 1965)", Falsworth’s work is both simultaneously more familiar and more distant, a voice uncanny and distinct. Not a retelling, not a re-imagining, a reinvention, a pastiche, neither quite autobiography, allegory, nor alternative universe, Jacob (I Have Loved) with its simple, poignant drama and social commentary is easily recognized among those familiar with the medium as fanfiction.


Since his enlistment into his Majesty’s Army and subsequent capture by enemy combatants, Monty had had the unpleasant privilege of being housed in a cage like an animal with a hick from Buggerfuck, Nowhere Tennessee, an insufferably educated black radioman by the unlikely moniker “Jonesey” (amazed, frankly, that the Krauts had let him survive this long even with his skill set and weren’t desegregated units illegal—?), a Jap, the aforementioned foul-mouthed Barnes, and a Frog. There was, it must be stated, no latrine. It made for rather cramped and rather unpleasant sleeping quarters.

It was the third day—or rather, third sleep, Barnes had them working ‘round the clock, three shifts, eight hours each, eight hours sleep per crew between each “workday” to power the German war machine—when Monty remembered. “The second thing…” he sat, left elbow flailing into the Frenchman’s face. The va te faire foutre muttered in response was so halfhearted it could hardly be counted a curse.

“Mhhmmm?” Barnes asked, face half-lit, half-shadowed by the embers of a cigarette. He was reading
—of all the bloody things—a quashed up Captain America comic.

“The second thing,” Monty tried to stretch, rub sore muscles without disturbing their companions further. “Zola. You never said.”

Barnes grinned, cheekbones stark, eyes glancing up from the pages. “So you were listening. I like you, Limey.”

Well. That was getting old rather quickly, even if there were far more pressing things to worry about. “Falsworth, actually. James Montgomery Falsworth,” Monty extended a hand.

Barnes gaped, nearly dropping his cigarette. “Oh, you’ve got to be shitting me,” he groaned. “James? Really?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Well, fuck me!” Sarge laughed and rolled that comic neatly.

“I fail to see the humor.”

“Oh, you ‘fail to see the humor’, do you? You British bastards are all drier than a nun’s cunt, you know that? What’s funny, you great English lug, is that you’re James,” he gestured with that paper like a conductor’s baton, “he’s James, he’s James, and I—you guessed it, pal—am also James.”

“Well,” Monty agreed. “Quite.”

“He’s Jim. He’s Jacques. And I’m…fuck, never mind, the boys call me Sarge. And we call you—?”

“Monty,” Monty felt his lips twitch on their own accord, if only a little, and rather grimly. “Monty Falsworth,” he extended a hand. “His Majesty’s 3rd Independent Parachute Brigade. Or rather, what is left of it.” Anaheim had not been kind.

“Sergeant Barnes, 107th Infantry, good ol’ US of A.”

And they were, he knew with startling certainty, the only two officers here. “Well, under any other circumstances, Sergeant Barnes, it would be a pleasure to meet you,” Monty freed himself from that strong grip. “But I do advise you not to take me for a fool. I asked you a question, and you’ve yet to answer.”

Barned saluted cheekily, beckoned him closer. In the dying light of the embers his eyes were wide, blue, and earnest. “Don’t tell the fellas,” he whispered. “Think it’d scare them.”

Monty nodded.

“You’re an educated man, ain’tcha? Like Jonesey here.”

“Quite.”

“Then ask yourself, Mr. Hot Shot, what’s wrong with this place. Sure, it’s a shit hole if I’ve ever seen one and hell, I grew up Irish in Brooklyn so I’d fucking know. And fuck, we’re taking orders from the goddamned Reich, but look at it. Really look. We’re sittin’ in this factory, makin’ all these weapons…hell, you saw what they can do. Tore right through those Panzers like they’re made of
glass. You know if the Nazis had their hands on them the war’d be done in a day, and we’d be Heiling Hitler on both sides of the damned Atlantic. But we ain’t, and that means they don’t, and it gets me wonderin’—what are they makin’ ‘em for if not the war? Why kill their own men?”

Then Monty felt it, that feeling of unease, of clenching, right down in his gut, that split-second before his first combat jump over Morocco, that senseless panic, that wonder if his chute had been packed correctly, if he weren’t jumping out into the void only to plunge to his death.

“It’s all wet, that’s what,” Barnes snarled. “And that gets me thinkin’ a man don’t stockpile shit unless he aims to use it. And hell, whatever war this stuff’s for—I sure as hell don’t want to be fightin’ in it,” his voice dropped, no more than a whisper. “And t’be honest, I don’t think we’re gonna.”

“They’re playing it out, Monty. All of them. Pitting us, the Brits, the French, the Russians—Japanese, Italians, Germans—hell, fucking all of us—against each other. Don’t want to show their hand, play their cards too early. Can’t risk this stuff gettin’ into anyone else’s hands, give up their advantage. And us? Well. We’re making their work easy. They don’t gotta conquer the world. The world’s gonna be in a big enough mess, ‘nough people dead, they’re gonna win this thing without a fight. By the time HYDRA takes over, ain’t gonna be no one left.”

Such a thought was ludicrous, surely? The North African Campaign, Pacific Theater, The Western and Eastern Front…all just a clever ploy? A distraction? Every bomb dropped on British soil, every schoolboy dying on the battlefield, crying out for his mother, for his mates—all for naught? The reach of such an organization…

The thought was ludicrous.

The thought was terrifying. And the longer he pondered, the more terrible it became. “If we are indeed fighting the pawn,” Monty ventured at last, “then I should very much like to meet the puppeteer.”

“You ’n me both, pal. Cigarette?” Barnes offered the butt between his teeth.

“Oh thank God,” he rolled it between his fingers, took a long drag, savoring the familiar texture, scent, sharp acrid taste, handed it back. “Haven’t a fag in days.”

Barnes snorted, waved him on. Monty took another grateful drag. “You Brits say the damnedest things, you know that, pal?”

But Monty only closed his eyes, pulled the last bit of tar and smoke down into his lungs and left the cigarette to die slowly to ember and ash on his lips. It may well be his last. He was damn well going to savor it. “We have to tell them.”

“Nah,” Barnes said. “Spook ‘em, that’s what.”

“Or motivate them.”

Barnes gave him a sad, sad look. “Or make ‘em think they won’t ever make it home. ‘Cause pal, from what I’ve seen, there ain’t gonna be a home to get back to whether we make it or not. And nothing scares the shit outta me like a man with no hope.”

Monty frowned, pondering. "And what are you hoping for?"
“Me?” Barnes shrugged. "Not much. Got someone I gotta see. After that, I don’t much care. But this lot? This lot wanna live. Gonna get home, make love to their sweethearts, settle down, get married, make babies, fill the whole fucking world with more goddamned Jameses, ya know? Can’t take that away from them. Even if it’s all a lie. False hope’s better than no hope.”

“Yet you’ve told me,” Monty said. Sargeant Barnes was confiding in him, a fellow officer, in a way he hadn’t—couldn’t—with his own men. And that’s when Monty knew.

“Yeah, well, that’s different.”

“How so?”

“Monty, champ, you’re British,” Barnes grinned. “You dour bastards wouldn’t know hope if it danced naked wearing the queen’s jewels.”

“Why’d you do it?”

But Barnes only shrugged. Smoothed the well-worn cover of that comic. “Don’t like bullies.”

“No,” Monty said sharply. “Why’d you really do it?”

Barnes bit his lip. Rolled the thick line of his mouth down until it was a vicious press of blood and gleaming teeth. “Recognized the uniform. Knew I got myself a parachute man.”

“And the Captain?” Monty insisted. "The Major?” Barnes let both men die, of that he was certain.

“Officers, born and bred. They were dead the moment they were captured, I couldn't save them, nothing I could do. Wasn't gonna risk myself, my men for that. But you?” he leered, suddenly wary, "You’ve got the practical experience, the guts, and more importantly, the smarts. You hesitating showed me you had survival instinct, weren’t some crazy sumbitch who’d risk everything for honor. Figured they might kill you anyways, Monty, but it was worth a shot.”

“You need me." The thought was hardly pleasant.

“I need you. We need you. Hell, the entire fucking planet needs you," Barnes said, an odd glint in his eyes. "The question, Monty, is are you game.

Well. Far be it from me that a Falsworth should shirk from his duty. "What is it you have in mind?”

"Pal,” Barnes grimaced. "Guaran-goddamn-tee you're gonna be sorry you ever asked."
loved you. Yet I love you. I love you. Your love means more to me, the Captain kissed him, than any and all of these.

Yet you would become a hero, the Boy replied. Very well. I cannot go home, I shall be a hero, too.

Your love, the Captain undressed the Boy to slow naked splendor, will be the death of me. And such, thought the Soldier, was the way of the world. That old Men linger, yet the young die needlessly. There was no death, the Poet said, quite so needless as to Love.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth
“If we are to die on the morrow, the Captain said, what then would you have me do? Eat, drink, and be merry, the Strongman boasted, for tomorrow we may die. Then the Captain paid, and they smoked and they sang and they danced and they drank as the evening wore away. And if the solemn Captain laughed, then, they were none of them the wiser.

You were right, the Captain said. What would you have of me.

Nothing, said the Boy, I would have nothing of you you have not already given, given a thousand times over and more.”

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

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CHAPTER FIVE

...*[Jacob (I Have Loved)]*’s publication generated a variety of responses, perhaps the most famous being Carter's blithe 1960 reply to UPI reporter Helen Thomas. "I'm afraid I have no comment on the matter. Absolutely no comment whatsoever. Now if you'll excuse me, I'd like to return to the task of defending this country from actual threats rather than perceived ones. Good day." At a White House press conference, no less!

Polyamorous lover, romantic rival, closet bisexual or beard, let’s all admit one thing: Peggy Carter kicks ass.


"You're an ambitious son of a bitch, Barnes," Monty said when the plan was at last laid bare.

"My ma was a God-fearing lady, pal," Barnes feigned a frown, then sobered. "I know it ain't fair, know it's a lot to ask a man..."

"You would do it, wouldn't you," Monty knew. "You would do it yourself if it weren't for them."

"I'm their CO," he said, voice strained. "I can't just leave 'em. You understand?"
He did. He truly did. "Certainly. But you're still a right bastard for asking." Thirty miles. Thirty
damned miles through fortified enemy territory, no maps, no supplies, just his God-given wits about
him. And that distance was just to the front line, that ever undulating wave carved in blood on a map
of the continent. But Barnes was right: one man alone could do what an army couldn't. He wouldn't
be a Soldier, he would be a Spy.

"You'll do it, then," Barnes smiled grimly. It wasn't a question.

"I shall make an attempt."

"Good. I didn't save your sorry ass for nothing," Barnes took his hand and clasped it. "You've got a
lot riding on you, pal."

"It's only the weight of the free world, man," Monty said in turn. "Must you Americans be so
damned dramatic?"

Barnes chuckled, white teeth flashing, red lips bitten down. "Says the man who's country shackled
us all with Shakespeare."

"My good fellow, you have gone too far," Monty said, aghast. "Such an attack on the Bard will not
be tolerated."

"You called my dear sweet ma a bitch, Monty. Seems only fair." And Lord, they were laughing like
school-boys, whistling in the dark during the darkest of hours, clutching their sides and rubbing sore
jaws, as if laughter alone could cripple the Reich.

"Your Jap," Monty spoke suddenly, the idea having stuck him.

"What of him?"

"Army Ranger. Seems to be the sort of chap one could send on a mission like this."

"Yeah, Monty," Barnes sighed, grey eyes downcast. "Considered it. Couldn't send him."

That brought Monty up short. Morita shared the cell. He had simply assumed—well. Friends close
and enemies closer, then. "You don't trust him?"

"Trust ain't the issue, pal. Nisei is from the 100th Infantry Battalion. Shit, that squint-eyed little
fucker could tear my guts out single-handed, not even sweat," Barnes shuddered. "Scares the piss
outta me. The rest of his unit went down fighting. Fought 'til the last man. Only reason Morita got
here alive’s cause he took a fucking bullet to the skull trying to evac the wounded. Went clear
through his helmet and damned near clear through his head. He was out until the end of it. So no.
Trust's got nothing to do with it. The issue is he’s Japanese."

Monty pinched the bridge of his nose. “Sergeant, that was precisely my point.”

“No, you asshole, it ain’t. He’s Japanese, Monty, and he’s the only one. These Aryan bastards can
overlook one big strapping blonde fella. So long as you leave the hat, they won’t miss ya. But Jim
Morita up and disappears? Well. Someone’s bound to notice.”

…he hadn’t considered that.

“Besides, Limey. I have to keep Morita locked in here with me or my own damned unit’ll kill him
for being a Jap spy, being in league with the Nazis. He shows up alone on the Western Front, walks
into an Allied camp...the fuck you think is gonna happen? He'd never get a word out ’fore they shoot
him dead. An' that's the world I'm livin' in, the damned world I've got to save. The one where we're too damn busy fightin' ourselves to even find our enemies. Used to be the good guys were on the same side. Now, hell if I know.”

"You do realize," Monty finally answered, "it is likely you send me to my death. And there is little hope otherwise."

"And you realize it's likely you're leavin' us to ours," Barnes shrugged. "No hard feelings, huh?"

"Quite."

Then they sat in companionable silence. The night wore on. More guards stalked by overhead.

"Pst! Sarge!" Monty nearly jumped out of his skin. Two white eyes and a wide, white smile had appeared from the gloam, the image of Carroll's Cheshire. I have, he thought irrationally, now seen a grin without a cat.

"The fuck you want now, Jonesey-boy?" Barnes growled to stifle his own grin. "Can'tcha see mom and dad are talking?"

“I've seen you, alright. What’s the plan?” Jones asked.

“Plan?” Barnes feigned innocence.

“I've seen the two of you, thick as thieves. You’re getting us out of here. What’s the plan?”

“Ain’t no plan, Jonesey. Can’t a man take a likin’ to a Limey without it bein’ everyone else’s business?”

The corner of that wide grin turned into a crooked smirk. “Sure, Sarge. That may have worked if I didn’t know you were saving yourself for Captain America.”

Barnes rolled his eyes. “I ain’t savin’ myself for no one.”

Jones only chuckled. “Letters to your sweetheart and that gun grip say differently.”

“Well now, that’s different,” Barnes sniffed. “Seems a fella can’t be savin’ himself if he’s already spent.”

"What, a Cat lick Patrick like you, Sarge? Doing the five-finger Mary?" Dugan called.

“Shaddup, Dugan. Unlike your ugly mug, not all of us've been forced celibate since shipping out.”

“Sarge, we’re at war. Ain't a one of us been celibate since shipping out.”

Barnes grunted.

“Oh, you’re kidding me,” Dugan protested. "Really? Not even once?"

"She must be a looker," Jones whistled.

"Or just pissier'n a cat in bathwater," Dugan chimed.

"Now fellas, ain't no reason she can't be both," Barnes said, affronted.

“—really?" Monty asked faintly. "Not even once—?"
"Ain't like I don't feel the urge," Barnes snarled. "Aw, shucks. It ain't broken. I just—take care of it. Myself."

"Sarge?"

"Yeah, Jonesey?"

"All this time I've been thinking you're randier than a tom-cat. Turns out, you're a priest."

Dugan guffawed. Monty himself had to bite back a chuckle.

"Jonesey-boy, I get that you're Baptist an' all—an' second-hand Baptist at that—but clearly you ain't met a priest. Least not a decent one," Barnes sighed. "What can I say, fellas? My gal’s Catholic. Very, very Catholic. More Catholic than the pope. Probably goes to confession, feels guilty 'bout touching herself, just thinkin’ about me. Sits there for an hour talking ‘bout what she wishes I’d do, what she’s done to herself, how goddamned guilty and wicked and good it makes her feel. Christ, I pity that poor priest," Barnes laughed.

“…And I envy him, the lucky bastard,” Monty quipped. “He gets to listen to that, and here we are hearing your fat yap.”

Barnes snorted.

But all around, eager eyes peered brightly out of the dark. “What?” Barnes asked.

“I could hear more,” Dugan shrugged.

There was a squawk and an undignified scuffle. “A gentleman don’t kiss an’ tell!” Barnes slugged him. “Specially not where his sweetheart’s concerned!”

“Sarge, I’ve seen some of the shit you’ve written that girl, and it’s pure filth,” Dugan argued. “That line about sucking her tits? You might be an officer, but you ain’t a gentleman.”

“And if a fella wants to send his sweetheart a little blue bible to read after God’s own every night to keep her company, I don’t see how it’s any of your fuckin' business.”

“You gonna tell us a sermon, preacher-man?” Jones drawled.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!” Barnes threw up his hands. “Fuck, fine!”

“My girl? She’s little, tiny thing, got bones like a bird, so small you’d think you’d break ‘em as soon as look at ‘em, but you wouldn’t know it. Thinks she’s a tough broad. And Christ Almighty, but she’s bossy in bed, takes those bony little wrists, holds my hands above my head, fucks me through the mattress ’til her knees are bleedin’ and the bedsprings are busted. And she’s got a mouth—what a mouth!—on her, cusses like a sailor, won’t be sweet for me until I’ve made her come. “Fuck me,” she’ll say, “Fuck me, fuck me good, you a man or not? This the best the Army’s got to offer?” And hell, she’ll ride me, ride me ’til I’ve come and screaming I’m so sensitive, won’t let me pull out, just keeps me there, keeps goin’ harder, harder until I’m hard again, until I’m gonna come then she’ll slap me, tell me I don’t dare, don’t get to come until she’s inside me, and she’ll reach one pretty little hand around, get it all nice and wet with herself, with me, and she’ll slip her little fingers up inside of me. She don’t tease or work me open or nothing, just fucks me, fucks me straight through and God it hurts it burns it stings then her fingers, her hand, her whole fuckin’ fist’s up inside me, hitting on that spot, And Christ, she’s beautiful, swearing and fucking and sweatin’ up a storm, neighbors banging on the walls and she’ll scream right back at ‘em.
And when she comes, when she finally comes, her pretty little face screws up, screws up so tight she’s got tears streamin’ down her cheeks, and she stops, she falls, she forgets to fuckin’ breathe and I get to hold her, cuddle her, she can’t talk, can’t think, can’t breathe and I’m half terrified I’ve killed her, but hell, I get to know I did that, I tore her apart, shut her damned sassy little mouth, made her blush from her goddamned cheeks down past her pert little tits, her perfect little belly…”

Monty felt his pulse twinge in his cock. From the pained looks around him, he wasn’t the only one hard just hearing.

“…and if a single one of you bastards even so much as thinks about touching himself to that, I’ll tan your fuckin’ hides,” Barnes sniffed. “Shame on all of you.”

“Sarge?”

“Yeah, Jonesey?”

“You’re the worst damned Catholic I’ve ever heard of.”

“Fuck you, Jonesey, my ma’s Jewish. You ever read Shir Hashirim?”

“Studied German, French, Italian, Greek, Latin and Hebrew,” Jones said smugly. "So yeah, I got you.”

But Barnes didn’t answer. When he finally spoke, his voice was soft. A song, a chant:

Al-mishkavi baleilot bikashti et sheahavah nafshi bikashtiv velo metzativ
Askumah na vaasovvah vair bashvakim uvarkhovot avakshah et sheahavah nafshi bikashtiv velo metzativ
Metsauni hashomrim hasovvim bair et sheahavah nafshi reitem
Kimat sheavarti mehem ad shematzati et sheahavah mafshi akhaztiv velo, arpenu ad-shehaveitiv el-beit imi veel-kheder horati
Yishakeni minishikot pihu ki-tovim dodeikha miyayin.

When Barnes was done, not a man among them spoke. Not even Jones.

“What was it he said?” Monty asked once Barnes was safely sleeping. What it took to use that tongue in their captivity was something Monty never wished to know.

“You got the gist,” Jones said. “I’m not repeating it.”

“It’s from the Bible—well, Torah? Talmud? Oh, I don't know. But surely it can’t be so bad as you suggest.”

“Shir Hashirim, Song of Songs,” Jones said strangely. “You look it up someday, Monty, and tell me if it bears repeating.”

Monty did. Years later, Monty did:
On my bed at night, I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but I did not find him.

I will arise now and go about the city, in the market places and in the city squares. I will seek him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but I did not find him.

The watchmen who patrol the city found me: "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"

I had just passed them by, when I found him whom my soul loves; I held him and would not let him go, until I brought him into my mother's house and into the chamber of her who had conceived me.

...Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine.

---

Mercy, said the Boy and fell before the altar. Mercy, please.

I will have mercy on those whom I will have mercy, she spoke at last. And I will have compassion on those whom I will have compassion.

Once I was beautiful, but now am I broken, he said. Have you no pity?

No, said the Woman. Only Love.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Shir Hashirim, "Song of Songs"

Chapter 3:1-4
Chapter 1:2
Who among you will follow me, said the Captain.

I will follow, said the Poet. You sing a song of freedom, and my heart is glad.
I will follow, said the Foreigner. My people were oppressed and downtrodden, yet you carry the flames of hope.
I will follow you, said the Physician. For my hands were weary with bloodshed and bitterness, yet you bring healing wherever you go.
I will follow, the Strongman said. Yes, I too will follow. But he spoke no more on the matter.

So the Soldier alone did not speak. You mean not to follow me, the Captain said.
No, said the Soldier, for I am ashamed. I alone am afraid to die.
Leave the dead to bury the dead, spoke the Captain. You follow me.

—**Jacob (I Have Loved)**, J. Montgomery Falsworth

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**CHAPTER SIX**

...most often The Captain. In this case, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” (Malachi 1:1e-2a, KJB). The original Hebrew transliterates to Ya’Kov; in Yiddish Yankel or Koppel; Irish Seamus; and in English, Jacob, Jamie, Jim, or James. Was this literary device merely tongue-in-cheek, no more than a pun? Of the seven original Howling Commandos, more than half were named a variant of Ya’Kov: Falsworth himself, Jacques Dernier, James “Jim” Morita, and, perhaps most notably, James Buchanan “Bucky” Barnes. Or is this title itself a harsher, sterner critique? James Buchanan Barnes was a US Army First Sergeant, SSR Agent, ruthlessly effective sniper, ethnically both Irish and Jewish, and a second-generation immigrant (Barnes-Proctor, 1996); in short, Sergeant James Barnes was a man who bore little or no resemblance to the “Bucky” of the USO comics. “Bucky”, Cap's teenaged, white "All-American" Anglo-Saxon Protestant sidekick, was aged down by government censors to explain away the obvious devotion between the two men, a device that was critiqued harshly by the surviving Howling Commandos (Schuyler, 1966). SHIELD Agent Gabriel Jones would later state that this de-masculinized and infantilized depiction of Barnes offended him just as much as the racial stereotyping or white-washing of his own fictional counterpart (Halbertstam, 1970). Much like the notion of in-panel dynamics of DC’s titular *Batman and Robin* portraying “homosexuality” in Wertham's moral-panic inducing *The Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), the attempt to remove the auspices of same-sex attraction by neutering the character instead created a fictional relationship not platonic, perhaps even more sexualized than originally portrayed, and—which given the in universe age discrepancy between Cap and Bucky—bordering on pedophilia (Hadju, 2008).

Although there have been speculations regarding Falsworth’s sexuality, The Soldier, the undeniable
protagonist of *Jacob (I Have Loved)*, does not express erotic interest in the physical bodies of The Captain or The Boy, but rather an intellectual and spiritual discourse—even fascination—with their audacity to love:

“How odd it was, the Soldier thought, that Man should have such notions. That there must only be Man or Woman, Lover or Beloved, that one must be active, aggressor, that the other be passive, servile. In Love, as in all things, one gave equally of each other to become one Heart, one Flesh, one Soul. The Captain and the Boy became One, and it was Good, and they were Glad (Falsworth, 1960).”

This is not the struggle of a man wrestling with internalized self-loathing or homophobia, but rather consistent with the despair of a man pondering his culture’s confusion of crime, moral failing, or mental illness for love (DSM, 1952).


“Hydra,” Monty grunted, waking to the harsh sounds of the factory floor.

“Why, hello to you to,” Barnes glanced up from his comic with an innocent face. Still reading, Monty mused, after all this time. It shouldn’t surprise him—it wasn’t as if Barnes had anything better to do. But still. The man’s expression was far from boredom. One of longing, a faint smile about his lips. *Americans,* Monty thought, and dismissed it. After all, they did love their cowboys.

“Sergeant…” Monty pinched the bridge of his nose, had neither the nor patience for the man’s gallows humor. Barnes ignored him, rolling the book carefully, then tucked it into a plastic sleeve that looked suspiciously familiar.

“Condom ration,” Barnes shrugged, as if he hadn’t just tucked and tied his reading material into a prophylactic. “Water tight. Damn handy. ‘Sides, ain’t like I got much else use for ‘em.”

“You possess...a rather peculiar devotion,” Monty admitted.

“Well, that’s one word for it,” Barnes rued. “Hydra. What about it?”

“Ah. Well, yes. Quite. Odd sort of name for a Nazi Science Division, don’t you think.”

“Pal, I before I shipped out I spoke three languages and two of ‘em were liable to get me killed,” Barnes said dryly. Yiddish and Irish. Either were enough to label him an outsider. “Spoke a bit of Lithuanian, Italian and Spanish—enough to cuss a man or greet him. And now I know some French and German and even some fucking Russian, but most of that’s just cussin’ or ‘don’t shoot’. The hell if I’d know. It's fuckin' Greek to me.”

Monty rather failed to suppress a chuckle.

"Fuck you, Monty," Barnes said. "What's so funny? Got a Limey like you laughing, can't be any good for anybody."

“You misunderstand. It really is Greek, I do believe.”
“Oh, you 'do believe', do you?” Jones yawned, stretching best he could in their cramped quarters. “It’s Greek, alright. Twelve labors of Heracles. What do they teach in schools these days?”

Barnes scowled. Tucked that strange bundle into his shirt, close to his heart. “Why does everyone know this shit but me?”

“Aw, shucks, Sarge,” Jones laughed. “Let it rest. You're not as bad as some. Dum-Dum here don’t know shit from chocolate.”

“To be fair, the US Army don’t know it, either,” Morita added with a hesitant smile. It was telling, wasn’t it, that he stole a glance to Barnes every time he spoke. Seeking permission? Protection—?

Dugan muttered something, and Morita’s and Jones’ faces froze. Monty's hackles rose.

“You going to repeat that?” Jones asked, deep frown lines creasing his forehead and lips.

“Aw, hell, Jonesy-boy. It’s just every Mick and poor hick knows he ain’t wanted, but he gets to tell himself ‘least I ain’t black’. Then you up and go to college—and Morita here’s gonna be a doc when it’s all said an’ done—what’s a fella ‘posed to think?” Barnes eased the tension with a wry grin and shake of his head. “Dugan here’s a circus performer. I’m a fuckin’ dock worker. We ain’t never gonna amount to much. The two of you got a chance, is all. Him picking on you just means he’s jealous…” then Barnes winked, the absolute bastard. "...either that, or he’s sweet on ya.”

Dugan let out an angry bellow, face gone redder than his mustache. And that got them laughing, thumping Barnes on the back, tension subsided, easing, gone. Monty had the nagging feeling that they had all been played, and played well. Sergeant James Barnes of the US 107th, he was certain, could play just about anybody...and in that moment, he resolved to never, ever face the man at cards.

“What, Sarge,” Dugan wrest his dignity back with no small difficulty. "You ain’t making a career out of it?"

“Well, that certainly took Monty by surprise. And judging by the men's reactions, he was far from the only one. “The draft—?” Dugan gaped. “How the hell, Sarge!”

“And more importantly, why—?” Jones asked, confused.

“…asks the college boy,” Barnes finished drily.

“Right thing to do,” Jones set his proud jaw, frowning. “My skills were needed.”

“Jonesy-boy, your skills were wasted,” Barnes snarled. “Mind like yours? You could’a been a goddamned officer, be a sight better than I am at it, but you ain’t, ’cause you’re black. Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses, fuck the US Army.”

But his regiment was still gawping, or glaring through narrowed eyes. Barnes sighed. Bit his lips, and ran a hand across his red-rimmed, bloodshot eyes. “You keep your face that way, Morita, and it’s gonna get stuck like that.”

“Ha fucking ha, Sarge. Figured you would have jumped at the chance,” the Ranger’s voice was low and harsh. “Kill some Nazis. After what they’ve done.”

“Knew full well what they’d done. My ma’s family was in Eisenach. Pogromnacht. Most of ‘em got
out. Some of 'em didn't. Hell, heard the stories 'bout the death camps before the news even broke. But it ain’t like that. Not for me. Never wanted to kill nobody… just happen to be goddamned good at it, is all. That an' the Nazis know how to aim for an officer's 'nough to get some damned Catlick Patrick Kike from fuckin' Red Hook promoted. Moment this is over? Moment we’re all free? I’m goin’ back to Brooklyn, back to my life, my job, my girl—don’t look at me like that, Dugan,” Barnes sighed. “We can’t all bleed red, white an’ blue like you. She’s sick, my girl. Always been. And I gotta make it home to her, you hear? Gonna make it home to her before the end."

His voice was suddenly tight. "Hell, boys. To be honest, thought about running north, crossing the border, running west, changing our names, dodging the fucking draft but she’d never let me hear the end of it, never let it go. Nag me 'til my dyin' day. That damn sassy broad'd rather enlist herself, fuckin' asthma and anemia an' diabetes an' all, than see me run, can you believe it?"

“So no, Morita, Dugan, Jonesey. I didn't sign up. I ain't a volunteer. Didn't come over to kill Nazis. I came out here 'cause someone put a gun in my hands and told me shoot or watch men get killed. I don't wanna be here, never wanted to be here. But I'm stuck here anyways, so I'm here to save lives, one in particular. Hundred and fifteen dollars and fifteen fucking cents a month pays the goddamned hospital bills, pays for coal in winter, pays for inhalers and liver extract and the damn pig juice PZI she's gotta shoot into her little legs. Hell, 'S a good thing I ain't kosher. So you’d damned better get your act together, 'cause if you get me killed, then I goddamned guarantee you're gonna wanna be dead right with me ‘cause Stephanie Grace Rogers'll hunt you down to the ends of the earth an’ claw your fuckin’ faces off.”

…Rogers. Monty’d swore he’d heard the name before. Heard it from Barnes's own mouth. But something wasn't right. You posh British boys are all the same. So damned polite.

“Aw, Sarge. After the stories you’ve told?” Dugan heckled, breaking Monty from his hazy, half-sure thoughts and easing the tight tension that threatened to strangle them all. “That poor girl'll thank us. Collect your pension money, besides!”

“Ain’t married,” Barnes grunted. "But that, boys, is a fuckin' promise. I'm here to save lives. I'm getting back to Brooklyn, makin' time with my girl. I got your backs, and you've got mine. We're all gettin' out of this, and we're doing it together, you hear? No one gets left behind. Not a man of you gets left behind."

*The Bard's left ball*, Monty thought. It wasn't grandiose, but it had grit. And hell if Barnes wasn't the most damn human man he'd ever met, Paddy be damned. “Not married? Why the bloody hell not?”

Barnes looked up, gaze shifting to Jones inexplicably, grey eyes heavy with the weight of the world: “Simple,” he said. "Can't."
But the Boy said, do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you. Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, as your Victory, and so your Defeat. Where you die, I will die, and there we will both be buried. There is nothing save death that parts you from me.

No, the Captain said. No. It is not so. Not even death may part you from me. You are bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. What has now been joined together, no man may tear apart.

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth
"We will work, the Boy defied him. We will work with our hands and our feet until they are bleeding. We will work with our bones and our hearts until they have broken. We will work to live, to breathe, to wreak revenge for our fallen. We will work to set ourselves free. We will work, yes. But do not forget: it is not for you. It is never for you."

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Morita: Yes, morphine poisoning was quite common in all theaters. You had untrained medical personnel, soldiers themselves, even, injecting on the field. And with shock, hemorrhage, or hypothermia...it was easy to dose a patient with compromised peripheral circulation and see no result. It led to more injections, accidental overdoses once circulation had returned. But no, I don't know if reports of purposeful euthanasia of injured US soldiers is true. I don't know if those accusations are true."

Interviewer: Are you referring to the events in Jacob (I Have Loved)?

Morita: My grandfather doesn't discuss that book, and I'll respect his wishes. If you have questions, I suggest you contact the Falsworth Estate. But as far as I know both the US and British governments still consider it an act of fiction.

Interviewer: You said Jim Morita doesn't discuss the book or events therein. Does that mean won't, or can't?

Morita: To be honest, the Commandos still can't discuss most of the war, due to SSR—SHIELD, now—classifications. Freedom of Information Act or not, some of that research is still ongoing. I know people think it's absurd, it's been over sixty years, and no one's ever managed to replicate the serum in all that time. But not for lack of trying. Diabetes? Asthma? Pernicious anemia—a whole host of autoimmune disease? Anatomical heart defects and murmurs? Skeletal abnormalities? Deafness? Color blindness? It still seems like a fantasy, a cure-all. But when you consider all the other medical advances that came out of World War II, antibiotics, anti-malarials, pain killers...perhaps the serum to cure all illnesses, to create a Super Soldier seemed less magical, not so far-fetched at the time. The war changed the face of medicine. Permanently altered the course of modern medicine, of health care delivery and treatments. It's remarkable, really. And he got to be there for the forefront of that.

Interviewer: Given the accusations Falsworth made, are you still proud to be a part of the Howling Commando Legacy?

Morita: Those men were goddamned heroes. So yes, I'm proud to be 'A Legacy'...I'm proud to be a Japanese-American patriot. But Patriotism doesn't always mean following the status quo—I'd argue it's never been about that. My Grandfather loves this country, I love this country, but the US still has a long, long way to go. I can't forget that atomic bombs were purposefully dropped on unarmed Japanese civilians. American citizens of Japanese ancestry—my family—were illegally detained, forcibly displaced. If you look at the way Asian characters are portrayed on television, in film, are so often stereotyped or entirely ignored, if you consider that the internment camps have all but been
erased from existence while places like Auschwitz still stand in memorium...

Interviewer: Did your grandfather ever address the issue of euthanasia directly?

Morita: It was the day of my White Coat Ceremony, and I'd asked Grampa Jim to hood me. "I've taken a lot of lives. Done a lot of things. It was war, and they were the Enemy, it seemed like the thing to do at the time. But do no harm doesn't mean 'do the least harm' or 'do what others order' or 'I was told this was right'. So if you're going to do this, if you take that Oath, you take it seriously. You do no harm, and don't give a damn what anyone else thinks." He never said, and I never really asked, but yes. I believe he was talking about doing what you thought was right when it came to respecting the wishes of a terminally ill patient.

Interviewer: And what is your specialty?

Morita: Palliative medicine. Not every patient is waiting on a Super Soldier serum or cure. Some simply wish to rest.


CHAPTER SEVEN

Above them, the noise suddenly ceased. A new day—shift, Monty thought bitterly, rubbing the cold from his stiff limbs.

"Alright, rise and shine, ladies!" Barnes stood, kicking Dugan's slumping form. "Don't make Jonesey here play reveille again!"

"Sarge, I don't even have a bugle," Jones groaned, stretching in turn.

"I know, and it's embarrassing for all of us. C'mon, ladies, up and at 'em!" There were two sides to Barnes, Monty had learned. The crass, coy, insulting Sergeant that motivated through humor and shame…and the kindly, comforting brother that welcomed one home from a hard day's work. He was, Monty thought, a damned good CO. Sight better than many of his own—even himself. He was a Falsworth. From a young age Monty had grown accustomed to giving orders, to others taking them. He had no idea—none at all—how to actually lead.

"Alright, fellas, good work. Take a load off, y'hear?" Barnes called to the shift straggling in. Clapped them on the back, the shoulder. Clasped hands. Greeted each and every one by name. "Get some sleep! Eight hours from now you're gonna be kicking A Team's ass again!" They were sweaty. Exhausted. Near to the verge of collapse. But every one of them—to the man—waited for Barnes' hearty approval and dismissal before turning in.

…he was also, Monty realized, a brilliant tactician. Routine. Repetition. Their guards, as imposing as they were, looked on with bored derision. They trusted him, trusted Barnes to keep his own men in line, to fall in step. Keep them working. Keep them safe.

Sometimes you've got to fight fuckin' dirty, Barnes had hissed. Sometimes you've gotta do somethin' you don't like to get the job done. Sometimes you've gotta get the goddamned Germans to drop their goddamned guard. Drunk on Christmas or just a little lax around you 'cause they know you ain't gonna pull something...and then you hit 'em fast, hit 'em hard.

These guards saw them as cowed, weak, defenseless, broken. Following the orders of a coward and
a traitor. They laughed at Barnes for his antics, called him *Herr Arschkriecher, der Betriebsleiter Amerikaner*, even *der Kleinführer*. And Barnes would dismiss them, the little bastard, with a cheeky “as you were!”

Two of the younger ones—Berger and Ackermann, Monty believed to be their names, the two who always brought them to the floor—had even taken the joke a step farther, taken to saluting Barnes, right arms raised high as he passed, goose-stepping behind him, and heckling their counterparts to do the same. “*Dem Kleinführer! Dem Kleinführer!*” they’d cry, “*Heil dem Kleinführer!*” This morning was no different.

“*Heil der Kleinführer!*” they called again.

“Why?” Jones muttered as they trickled from their cells. “Is he sick?”

“Pardon?” Monty asked. But the man never answered.

“Alright, ladies!” Barnes shouted, ignoring his entourage. “Get your asses moving! Don’t make me sing the fuckin’ song!”

“Aw, Sarge!” a collective cry of horror rose from the ranks. The the 107th, Monty had heard the legends, had on numerous occasions been forced to endure a marching rendition of ‘Hi, Ho’ from *Snow White*. A version, he had been assured, that had grown progressively crasser and off-key with each iteration of the verse.

 (“*Horrible,*” Dugan cringed. “For all Sarge can sing when he wants to, some days he wouldn’t carry a tune in a bucket if you paid him. I’d even been glad to hear about his girl if it’d get him to shut the hell up.”)

“Then don’t let B Team whoop your asses!” Barnes said sharply. “They made it to the floor in less than sixty seconds! Move your fuckin’ feet, girls!”

Up the stairs, out of the dark. They fell to their stations like a well-oiled machine. By the time the belts were working again, production hadn’t ceased even five minutes. It was, Monty had to admit, a rather impressive affair.

“Seen harder work at a riveting plant packed with dames! Bigger arms, too!” Barnes shouted. “Seen dolls half your size lift twice as much! Chop, chop, ladies!”

“I say, man. Don’t you think that may be too harsh?”

“Nah. Seen WAVES reassemble an engine faster these fools could find their damn bootlaces. No better way to get a man workin’ than tell him a woman could take his job,” Barnes grinned. “The only one it’s insulting is the dames themselves, comparin’ ‘em to this lot. Now hop to it, Monty. Can’t be seen favorin’ my best girl.”

“You absolute bastard.”

“Aw, you love me for it,” Barnes winked.

Monty did as he was told, joined Morita at their station, inspecting welding work. It took an attentive eye and alert mind, surveying every joint and seam for undercut, overlap, cracks. Running over every surface with jeweler’s goggles. It was a task suited perfectly to a medic or surgeon, the trained eye, steady hand, detail oriented. It was also, Monty had quickly realized, one of the least physically
challenging tasks at hand. A fact that had not gone unnoticed by Barnes’—or his own—men. Already this morning he’d received glares from both Brit and Yank alike.

…a contest, Monty thought, that he was more than happy to lose to a Frenchman.

“Pass the wrench,” Dugan held out a large hand.

“Laquelle?”

“No, that one.”

“Celle-ci ou celle-là?”

“That one.”

Dernier handed it over.

“That one,” Dugan insisted. “That one over there, man! The one I’m pointing to, dammit!”

“Là-bas,” Jones corrected, offering out the tool in question.


Jones snorted.

“Something funny, Jonesey-boy?” Barnes had snuck up, quiet as a cat.

“No, sir.”

“Then get your ass back to work.”

“How the hell,” Dugan griped once Barnes had walked out of earshot. “Did the damned French ever manage to build the Statue of Liberty?”

Jones’ handsome features showed no hint of a smile. “Well, Dugan. Funny story. I heard they shipped it in parts. Made the Irish New Yorkers figure out how to do it themselves.” Then he and Dernier broke into giggles.

Barnes appeared out of thin air, fingers twisting ears. “Alright, girls. Enough! I’ve got a better job for you two. Swear to Christ, if you don’t stop messin’ with him, I’m gonna let him beat both your asses some day.”

“Sorry, ma,” Jones chuckled.

“You ain’t sorry at all, Jonesey-boy. Oughta wash your mouth out with soap just for lyin’.”

“Je peux penser à une meilleure utilisation du votre savon,” Dernier nodded back to Dugan with a merry wink.

“Girls, I got a hundred an’ seventy men on the floor,” Barnes sighed as he towed them away. “I can’t waste my time savin’ your dumb asses from themselves.”
“They’re quite the merry lot,” Monty gestured. Morita only grunted, didn’t even look up from the task at hand. From what he’d seen of the man, he was small, silent, stoic. Single-mindedly focused with steady hands. “You don’t say much, do you?”

“Don’t want to be seen fraternizing with me, pal,” Morita returned. “Think you’re a Jap spy, too.”

Well. Monty didn’t have to wonder what it felt like to be the last of one’s unit. Grantham's regiment had not been his original deployment, after all. Most of the men he'd trained with had died over Casablanca, Algiers, and Anaheim. He’d been disliked, yes, by the cannon fodder conscripted through the War Service, those poor, non-commissioned devils from the rank and file alike…but never hated. Never so mistrusted. When pressed for it, Monty couldn't think of a thing to say. "Sergeant Barnes seems to think highly of you," he offered finally.

“Sergeant Barnes is too damned busy whistling in the dark to see a spy if one stood in front of him,” Morita said, pulling those thick goggles up and off his head, glaring up at Monty. “Not my first time in a labor camp. I know how this goes.”

He means internment. “You were on the West coast, then,” Monty's mouth dried with distaste. Who was to say Morita wasn’t a spy? They only had his word for it. None of the rest of his unit had survived.

“Fresno.”


“Serve with honor or live to die a slave,” Morita returned, chin held as high as he could muster, the very beginnings of a scraggly beard appearing. “You tell me which you’d pick, Boss, why I’ve got no right not to do the same, just for the color of my skin, even for a country that hates me. I may be yellow, but I’m no coward.”

Monty said nothing.

“That the best you got, Dugan?” Sarge called from under the aircraft’s belly, halting but not quite breaking their awkward tension. “Some Strongman you are!”

“Fuck you, Jimmy,” Dugan growled.

Barnes only laughed. “Thought Jonesey-boy was more your type. Heard you liked ‘em smart.”

“Hardy-har-har, Sarge. Give me a hand, will ya?”

“Well,” Monty began again. “We may as well investigate before they kill themselves.” He turned, and Morita followed not far behind. Dugan lay, pressed against welded metal, sweat glistening down arms and back, grappling with a stubborn bolt.

“What’s’matter, Dum Dum?”

“This nut,” he grunted through grit teeth. “It’s busted.”

“…really? You make it too easy.”

“Hardy-har-har-fucking-har, Sarge. You’re a bigger pain in my ass than Jones and Frenchie
combined. Help me with this, will ya.”

“Gonna need a longer wrench, pal,” Barnes said, adding his weight. “Not enough torque.”

“C’mon, Sarge, you Irish or Jewish?” Dugan strained.

“You damned well know I’m both.”

“Then c’mon, Sampson, pull it like you fuckin’ mean it!”

“…seriously, Dugan?” Barnes panted.

Americans…black, white, Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish, it hardly mattered, Monty thought. They were all a rather crass lot. “Oh, come on then,” Monty chided as the two continued to bicker. “Are the two of you Paddy bastards American or Americants?”

“Oh, that does it!” Dugan roared, ripping the wrench with every ounce of strength. The metal gave way with a groan and a lurch, sending Barnes flying.

“Woohoo!” Dugan flung his large hands in the air, laying kisses on the bulges of both arms. “Now that’s some good American craftsmanship right there!”

Monty leaned forward, inspecting the work, the large, gaping hole now missing a nut and bolt. Rapped smartly twice with his fist. “I say, that right there,” he sniffed. “It could stand to be tightened.”

Dugan swore, Barnes curled into a ball and nearly pissed himself. Even Morita cracked the faintest hint of a smile.

Then from the factory floor there was a loud crash, a cry of horror, and everything, Monty mused, had been going so well…

"The Traitor, the Traitor, the Enemy called.
I am that I am, the Boy replied. And am unashamed."

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Heil means ‘hail’…but it is also the imperative form of the verb heilen ‘to heal’, and thus
was a popular joke among those with anti-Nazi sentiment in Germany at the time. Instead of ‘hail Hitler!’, it would be heard or read as a command: ‘heal Hitler!’

…Gabe Jones can’t resist a pun.

German Translations:

*Herr Arschkriecher* Mr. Asskisser
*der Betriebsleiter Amerikaner* the American Foreman
*dem Kleinführer* the Little Führer (leader)

French Translations:

Dernier: Which? This one or that one?

Gabe: There.

Dernier: I know, I know. I’m joking.

Dernier: I can think of a better use for your soap!
"We should kill them, said the Strongman. For what they have done. Aye, said the Soldier. For the blood of my countrymen. Yes, spoke the Foreigner, for the rape of my homeland. I have seen suffering, enslavement, starvation, the Physician said. They should die. They are wolves, agreed the Poet. Safely you cannot take them with you, nor safely can you leave them behind. They should die. No, said the Captain. For it is written, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

You would defend them, asked the Poet. Let he among you who is without sin cast the first stone, the Captain answered.

I do not agree, the Strongman said. No. I do not agree. But I will obey. When we return, said the Soldier, they will be hanged, each and every one of them. Perhaps, said the Captain. And they spoke no more on the matter."

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

…often forget atrocities occurred on both sides. Hitler’s eugenics stemmed from an American movement, and the same so-called “Nazi” sentiments that would euthanize the disabled, the elderly, the ethnic minorities were also applied to a pre-serum Steve Rogers, who as an adult was offered sterilization countless times. For the outrage on behalf of the Jews, Romani, and Queers who died in concentration camps, where is that same horror for the natives who were killed in the making of America—how many more were still imprisoned on reservations, starved, had children stolen from them, broken and bereft of language and culture alike? For all the pogroms displaced the Jews of Europe, how many American citizens of Japanese descent were illegally detained and imprisoned in internment? For the few American soldiers butchered and eaten in the Pacific theater, how many GI’s returned with trophies of Japanese skulls, teeth, or ears?

And—more damningly—for the thousands who died that day in the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and in Pennsylvania with the crash of United Airlines Flight 93, how many thousands more have died in Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan? How many were incinerated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

It was easy for the USO, the British War Office and the French Resistance to cheer on a man who embodied the American ideal of defending freedom. Cap’s carefully crafted and controlled image projected strength and loyalty, the qualities of the perfect Soldier…an image that was suitable to use for the decades and wars to come. But the ideals of Captain America the man, Captain Steve Rogers,
were quite different. He believed in the oft-touted notion of liberty and justice for all. The Howling Commandos were hand-picked, a representation of the Allied Forces. It was no mistake of the five men chosen to represent an America still divided by race, religion and class, among them were a black Baptist, a Japanese-American atheist of Buddhist parents, a Catholic son of Irish immigrants and "confirmed bachelor" half-Jewish/half-Irish draftee, James Buchanan Barnes.

To this day, the United States government continues to use the image of Captain America to spur Americans to war. But with urban occupation, infrastructure collapse, Executive Orders calling for Human Rights violations, sexual abuse of prisoners, and sanctioned drone strikes on civilians we have to wonder: is this what Steve Rogers would have wanted?

“You forget. You have forgotten what sort of man he was. It is a shame. He was the best of your countrymen. And look what you have done. What you have let be done in his name. Did the Great War, did our War, the Cold War, did it all teach you nothing? I only met him once, and briefly. But no. This? This is not the man I knew, not even as his prisoner (Ackermann, 2003).”


CHAPTER EIGHT

“Sarge! SARGE!” Monty had never seen a man move so fast. Barnes shot off at at dead run, and Monty heard—rather than saw—the ensuing chaos.

"Jesus Henry Christ—"

"Shite!"

"—happened so fucking fast—"

"Mein Gott!"

"Feraldo!"

There was a crane, Monty saw. A crane and an empty, dangling chain...

“Dugan!” Barnes' voice barked.

“I’m on it!” And the Strongman lurched forward, faster than Monty could have expected, shouldering through, his momentum carrying him past the gathered throng.

“Where the fuck is Morita!” the smaller man shrugged and struggled his way to the front of the crowd, and Monty slipped behind in his wake. The man in question, Feraldo—

Monty had been to war. Seen death and destruction, both silent, eerie, and distant from descent and in the smoke-filled trenches, slick with men's blood, the wounded's cries, the dying's final breaths. It was one thing, he though, stopping short, to see bullet and shrapnel. Quite another to find a man who had been crushed. He'd seen a dog once, as a child, splattered by a Phantom's unfeeling wheels, its flesh torn, bones broken, pulled apart like meat.

The dog had died instantly, his nanny had consoled him. Feraldo wasn't so lucky.

"Oh mi Jesu!" the gasping man muttered in shock, "dimitte nobis debita nostra, libera nos ab igne
"Dugan!"

"On it!"

"One, two," Barnes panted, arms locked under the man's shoulders, wild eyes seeking Dugan's. "Three."

And Monty'd be damned but that Paddy bastard gripped the steel girder, and lifted it, face red, veins bulging, eyes frothing and pink with burst vessels as Barnes pulled the man—and what remained of a leg—from the wreckage. The bone was broken. Shattered through skin like shipwrecks, blood and flesh strewn about. Barnes had already tied a hasty tourniquet, but blood continued to leak and spurt, spreading thick like oil against the floor.

"Mein Gott!" Berger cried again.

"Libera nos ab igne inferni...libera...lib..."

"Morita!"

“I’ve got him, I’ve got him—“ Morita hissed, injecting a morphine syrette into the skin of the injured man’s stomach. “—this is going to hurt like shit, son.”

Barnes stripped the crouching medic of his belt. Placed it between Feraldo’s teeth. “Don’t make a sound.”

Don’t make a sound.

And the man didn’t. Stopped his praying, no sound but the sickening squelch and snick! of bones being extruded back through the snarled flesh. Morita looked sick. Monty wanted to run, to hide, to hurl. When it was over—finally, mercifully, blessedly over—Feraldo took a long, shuddering sigh, olive skin gone stark grey, clenched teeth nearly meeting through the ruined leather strap, and nestled back into Barnes’ chest, the fight, the life, draining out of him. His hollow face was slick with sweat-sheen, and his dark hair hung in clumped curls. The morphine, the blood loss, doing its work.

There were shouts. Distant. In German. And the frenzied panic turned to frozen tension.

"Sarge," Dugan grunted. "Incoming."

"Mop up the blood. All of you!" Barnes ordered. “Dugan, get him outta here.”

"Sarge," Morita protested, face and hands still greasy with blood. "Sarge, you can't. You move him, he dies.”

“He stays, he dies,” Barnes countered. “C’mon, move! Berger!” Dugan snatched the limp body in a fireman’s carry, hauled him from the floor. "Berger, Berger!" Barnes snapped his fingers under the young Nazi's nose, shook his shoulders, slapped him. "Get him back to the cells! Cells! Jonesey!"

"Gefängniszelle!" Jones translated. "Gefängniszelle!" he hissed as Dugan dragged their captor one-handedly behind him. "Sergeant, what the devil—" Ackermann and Berger had been there. The entire time. The bloody hell was going on?

Shirts, socks, scrap rags, any and everything was used to sop up the bloodstains, and what couldn't
be cleaned was covered by no less than eight men, Yank and Brit alike, shoving that steel girder over the mess. And, to top of the charade, Barnes himself sat brusquely in the rubble, mussed his hair, flung dust on his uniform. But the Nazi officers—the HYDRA officers—were upon them. "What is this? What is the meaning of this commotion?" Lohmer frowned. "Return to stations immediately!"

"Mein Gott, man," Kleiber gasped. "Sergeant Barnes? You are injured?"

"No reason to yell, Lohmer," Barnes drawled, picking himself up lazily from the floor. "As you can see the boys were just worried."

"We were told a man was injured," Lohmer growled.

Barnes smiled, a lightless, joyless thing. "As you can see, I'm fucking fine."

"My friend, you are lucky!" Kleiber said, clasping his shoulder. "Mein Gott! Another meter and—"

"We are under orders to see to the wounded," Lohmer continued. "We heard a man among you had injured his leg. Herr Zola—"

"Can kiss my Mick ass," Barnes returned. "You wanna see my leg? Fine!" He ripped the trousers from himself, standing in his filthy pants and socks only, jaw clenched and defiant. "I look injured to you, Lohmer?"

"Clearly the man is unharmed, Herr Colonel. Let him resume his work," Kleiber shrugged. "There is nothing for us here. We are fortunate, all of us," he put a fond arm around Ackermann. "Look, Lars, Dein Betriebsleiter Amerikaner is uninjured!"


But Lohmer, at least, was as humorless as a German ought to be. "One day, your Irish luck will run out, Sergeant. I wonder what will happen to you then?"

"You done yet, pal?" Barnes asked. "'Cause I gotta quota to fill."

"You filthy American mongrel," Lohmer said. "I would whip you."

"Aw, shucks, Lohmer," Barnes brushed the dust off his jacket. "You're just jealous 'cause I'm a better factory foreman...guess that makes me more a Nazi than you are."

"Herr Colonel, leave the man alone. Clearly he jests? Americans, such strange creatures. Such humor. Such wit! Let us see to this accident, it must not happen again. And you, my friend, you are unharmed? You are able to work? You do not require rest?"

"I'm fine, Kleiber."

"Gut, Gut," Kleiber waved him off. "And you, Lars, Dorflepp, what were you thinking?" he chastised the younger officer like an affectionate uncle might a wayward nephew. "The chain is rusted through! This equipment nearly got Sergeant Barnes killed. You must make more careful inspection. You know how important the work is for Herr Schmidt! How are we to create a glorious Third Reich if our workers cannot complete our machinery? And how would we work without our Kleinführer, eh?"

"Da, Herr Colonel," Ackermann said, eyes downcast, the perfect picture of contrition.

"What are you staring at?" Barnes growled, eying Monty in such a manner as to indicate 'not now'. 
"Back to work, ladies!"

Monty gawped, dumbfounded. Ackermann said nothing. As Lohmer and Kleiber left, still bickering, Barnes slipped him a pack of cigarettes. Now *that* was certainly interesting.

“What was that?” Monty tore Barnes aside at the first opportunity.

"Don't know what you call it in England, pal,” Barnes began, casual as ever. "But it's what we in America call a bribe."

"You seemed rather familiar with the Enemy," Monty frowned.

"Monty, best way to get treated like a human? You act like one. I make myself a likable pain-in-the-ass, and suddenly I'm everyone's favorite step-son. You wanna survive? You give 'em a reason to keep you that way."

"You're bribing Berger and Ackermann. You're kissing arse with Kleiber. That much I understand," Monty continued harshly. "What I don't, Sergeant, is the charade."

Barnes bit his lips. "Goddamn."

"Goddamn what?" Monty asked, perhaps more harshly than he meant to.

“You don't know. Your whole lot don't know."

"Don't know what, Sergeant?"

"There's an infirmary. Isolation ward," Barnes grunted, eyes darting nervously to his men like a dog guarding its flock. "Men go in...no one comes back again. Two hundred and forty three of us captured. Some dead on the way, froze on the walk or suffocated in the train cars. The rest?" And Barnes looked, for the first time, properly frightened.

Monty shuddered. “They're killing them.”

“That. Or worse.”

“Worse?”

“Yeah, pal,” Barnes grimaced. “Worse. Seen a body covered in burn scars. Seen a man turned inside out, just beggin' God t'let him die."

Disbelief. Incredulity. Horror. Humor. *I am hardly*, Monty wished to say, *naive enough to believe in ghost stories, Sergeant*. And yet...

"You're a liar,” he finally said.

"Look at me, Monty. You know me. I look like I'm lyin' to you?"

"You said—" Monty began, suddenly doubtful. "You said they needed us. They needed us to work."

"It's the wounded, ace. It's *always* the wounded. Zola, he...he picks 'em apart," Barnes blanched. "Like a kid taking apart a radio. Just to see what's inside. Just to see how it works."

"They need us," Barnes swallowed, voice grating as ash. "To work. So we're gonna be useful. We're gonna work, Monty. We're gonna work 'til our dyin' breaths. Ain't no more of our boys dyin' like
that. Ain't no one deserves to die like that."

"I'm gonna go back to my post," he said in parting. "You should do the same. Don't let any of 'em get the idea you're less than useful. I need you, Monty." It was a wonderful, terrible thing, to be so needed. But if Barnes' tale were true...well. The day of his great and possibly fruitless escape could not come soon enough.

"Is it true, then?" Monty asked on returning. "What Barnes says."

Morita eyed him warily. "Sarge talks a lot of shit."

Ah, Monty thought. "Is it true. What your Sergeant says," he tried again.

Morita only turned back to his work, jeweler's goggles pulled back over his dark eyes. "Told you. Talks a lot of shit."

"About the ward."

His head snapped up. "Don't," Morita warned. "Just...don't."

"Save your tears, the Woman said. The war is yet young. Save your tears like your strength for the days ahead, and your compassion for those that deserve them. Yet I am not willing that any should perish, the Captain answered, but that all would come to repentance. That is not the way of war, She said. Of that way am I already wearied, answered the Captain.

All your life you wished to be a Soldier, She spoke at last. Perhaps it was not what you truly wanted. No, the Captain said. I have only ever endeavored to be a good man. A good man has no place in war, She said. Then perhaps it is the war that must change, and not the man, said the Captain.

One man alone cannot change the world. Not even a good one, She said. And yet I needs must try, the Captain answered. Your ideals will be the death of you, the Woman warned. Said the Captain, I can think of none better.

So the Woman went to the Boy. This war, She said. This world. They will be the death of him. Yes, said the Boy. Yet I will follow him. I will do in the shadows those deeds that cannot be done in the light, those deeds that must never come to light. This can I do. For him whom I have loved. Then may he live long, and pass into legend as he once was and will ever be. See to it, She spoke at last, that they don't."

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Information on American Eugenics and Compulsory Sterilization from the University of Vermont:
https://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/
Lars Ackermann's interview occurred after November 2003, when the Abu Ghairb prisoner abuse leaked to the public: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Ghraib_torture_and_prisoner_abuse#Emergence_of_the_scandal

Warnings for depiction and description of torture and sexual assault.

Do yourself a favor and DON'T google image search crush injury. And I say this as a doctor.

Feraldo's prayer is the Fatima Prayer (in Latin, as it predates Vatican II): O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to Heaven, especially those most in need of Thy mercy. Amen.

Mein Gott (German): My God
Gefängniszelle (German): Prison cell
Dein Betriebsleiter Amerikaner (German): Your American foreman
Ja. Er hat Glück (German): Yes. He is lucky.
Gut (German): good
Dorfdepp (German): Village idiot
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for disturbing medical imagery, minor character death, mention of torture, discussion of sex work and a giant 'fuck you' to the writers of Civil War.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I wasn’t always so, the Captain said. Once was I weak, but now am I strong. No, said the Boy, and let him inside. You were always this way, yet only I could see it. Then I wished the world to know you as you were. Now I am selfish, for I no longer wish to share."

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

…I tracked her down in a nursing home in upstate New York. Her hair is coiffed and sprayed, her lipstick and nails done to a T. The room is an eclectic mix of retro spanning seven decades—to her, I suppose, reminders of her glory days. And here they are: 1943 playbills in mint condition, one for every stop on the Captain America War Bonds Tour, even the most rare and coveted by collectors: the Italian appearance. Cap’s last show. I find myself more than a little starstruck: Edna “Eddie” Bearce, USO showgirl, Hollywood legend, and one of the few living memories of Captain America.

“We had to sign non-disclosure agreements with the USO and everything. After Kreischburg, we had to sign the Official Secrets Act, too! Had to keep confidential with all the Allies. And we’re still not allowed to talk about that time! And there I was just some farm girl from Nebraska! But honestly, Falswhat’s-his-face wrote that tell-all back in the 60’s, for crying out loud! The pill, free love, Cap’s been dead for fifty years now! What harm could it possibly do?”

What harm, indeed. It’s a little mind boggling to think world governments consider the knowledge of this frail octogenarian a threat. But Cap’s heterosexual, All-American straight masculinity has become so indoctrinated into the collective public and our national consciousness, even first person accounts like Edna’s—an eye witness, but a woman—can and do continue to be wrongfully ignored.

Sherlock and Watson, Gimli and Legolas, Kirk and Spock, it’s one thing to queer-bait an audience and deny any homoeroticism, to lay accusations of “fangirling” and “hysteria” at the feet of the fans who dare to ship what is so painstakingly crafted by the entertainment industry to read as queer romance while maintaining the facade of plausible deniability. It’s quite another to apply that same censorship to real life…to erase the sexualities of human beings to further political agendas. Make no mistake, that’s what has happened here. The US government has repeatedly denied the LGBTQIA community the hero they’ve had all along. That’s right, ladies, gentlemen, and non-binary folks, Cap was—and will always be—solidly in our corner.
Afterword: Sadly, Edna Bearce-Smythe passed away shortly after the publication of this article. At the request of her wife, Mildred Smythe, the entirety of her Captain America memorabilia was donated to the Smithsonian Institute’s American History Museum.


CHAPTER NINE

The walk back to the cell block was one of the longest Monty had ever taken. Even inspection, the simple job he’d been given, the envy of all those less fortunate, took the life from him. And who among them knew, exactly, what awaited them on their return. They’d all seen Feraldo, seen the mangled leg. Would the man survive? And if so, how long?

…and even so, despite their protection from Berger and Ackermann, how long before Lohmer, Kleiber, or Zola noticed?

At the stairwell they stopped. The entire column of men balking at the smell. Usual sweat, piss, shit. And now, now a rotten odor of—

—Well, Monty thought. *It rather smells like Death.*

But Barnes barreled through, despite it all, taking the keys for change of shift from Berger’s shaking hands, the boy covering his face with a sleeve and coughing, unwilling to go farther into the stench.

“Sarge?” One of Barnes’ men called as he unlocked their cages. “Sarge!”

“I’m comin’,” Barnes said. “Just give me a moment. You get out there,” he told the worn, expectant faces of B Team. “You get out there and you work. Hard. And you be careful. Be fuckin’ careful, you hear?”

A hundred men nodded silently in unison.

“Now go. Get outta here! And you have each other’s fuckin’ backs!”

Barnes entered the far cell. Reluctantly, Monty followed. He regretted it. Regretted immediately the greying flesh spangled with angry purple, the scent of decay and foulness permeating the air. Regretted knowing that this was what a man’s body could look like and he be yet alive.

“Sarge—“ there was a man kneeling on the floor, clasping a fever-stricken hand. He had hair so blonde it was nearly white, red-rimmed, weeping eyes, a smattering of freckles across his cheeks and nose.

“It’s Brennan, right?”

The pale man nodded. Failed to hold back fresh tears. “He’s—he’s been asking for you.”

"S-sarge?” Feraldo cried wildly.

“Shh. Shhh. I’m right here.”

“Please. Please,” he begged as Barnes took his other hand. “Don’t wanna die. Not like this.”
“Won’t letcha,” Barnes promised. “Not like this. Morita?”

Morita stumbled forward, dark eyes averted, breathing pointedly through his mouth. “It’s…it’s bad, Sarge,” he said.

“Help him.”

The medic cringed. “He’s dying.”

“I know,” Barnes said. “Help him.”

Morita looked as lost, as useless as Monty felt.

“Morphine. How much we got?”

“It’s—he’s—his circulation, the sepsis—“

“Like I ain’t a college educated medic, Morita.”

“His circulation’s shut down,” Morita finally muttered, as if afraid to disturb the dying man. “Morphine won’t do any good.”

Barnes sighed. Ran a weary hand through his hair. “More’n one way to skin a cat.”

“Sarge?” Morita blinked.

“You an’ I both know a couple ways to kill a man. Some of ‘em ain’t half bad.”

“You can’t mean—“ Monty began. But Barnes’ look was both fierce and earnest, and he fell silent.

“Well, fuck,” Dugan said. Brennan made a retching sound and a choked off sob, and that about said it.

And Feraldo, well. Feraldo was lucid enough to know. “I—please,” he gasped, clutching at Barnes’ hand. “Please.”

“Feraldo. Italian. You Catholic?”

Nod.

Barnes looked up to him and Morita. “Either of you fellas wouldn’t happen to be a priest, would ya?”

Monty shook his head.

“Any of your lot?”

“No, I don’t believe so. And…well. Church of England and all that.”

“Oh, trust me,” Barnes said. “I know.” He turned his gaze back down to the dying man. "Feraldo, I ain’t no priest. But I’ll try. Ain’t no priest but I’ve heard the damned rite enough times may as well be. Hell, I’m Catholic and Jewish. Big Man upstairs owes me double favors, right?” Barnes laughed, face falling into a easy yet pained smile. “You got anything to confess? Sorry for all your sins?”

“All I got on me is gun oil,” Barnes said. “Think God understands. And if he don’t…fuck ‘im.” And that—surprisingly—brought a choked laugh from the dying man.

Whatever happened next, it was…it was private. Monty turned away, and the others, well. He assumed the others did the same. There were words. First in Latin, then Italian, some Irish, some English. Then finally, all too quickly, the men behind him grew silent.

“I can’t watch,” Morita whispered, when the rite was over. Monty agreed.

“No. You’re gonna do one better,” Barnes said. “Help him.”

“Sarge, you—you can’t mean—“ Morita choked. “You’re asking me to kill a man.”

“I’m askin’ you to put a dying man outta misery, Morita. Heck, I’ll order you if it makes you feel better ‘bout it. I’m askin’ you to do your damned job as a medic and help him. Let each and every damned one of us know when our time comes, if it comes down to it, well. You’d help us an’ do the same.”

“This—this isn’t even my unit, Sarge.”

“No. But you’re our medic now.”

“Please…” Feraldo’s words were a mere whispered whine.


“Billy?”

“I’m here, ‘Lando, I’m right here.”

“…scared.”

“Me too, A mhuirnín. Me too.”

Hands on either side of head. Deep, shuddering breath. Barnes looked up, once, and nodded.

Quick thrust. Neck broken. All over.

Monty let out a breath. Dugan swore. Morita turned and retched, and Brennan fell across the body, weeping. “Goddamnit,” he sobbed. “Goddamnit to hell!” Barnes released the hand, pressed it to Feraldo’s chest, brought his own steady hand up to shut those blank eyes. Reached out, grasped Morita, grasped Brennan by the shoulders.

“We’re through,” he said simply. “We’re through.”

It was an age. A lifetime. An eon before someone spoke. A man lay dead on the filthy floor, and another sobbed beside him. But finally, finally those sobs grew quieter, and Brennan raised his freckled, tear-stained face to say, “What now?”

Barnes sighed. “I’m workin’ on it. I promise ya, I’m workin’ on it. Dugan?” The man nodded tersely in response. "You’re in charge.”

…and that is how James Montgomery Falsworth came to spend the night locked in a cell with a Circus Strongman, a Jap Medic, an Irishman, and a corpse. Sergeant Barnes let himself out with
Berger's keys, and disappeared.

That night, Monty slept in fits and starts, dreams laden with the dead and dying. He woke, once, to find Barnes had returned. Standing outside the cell and peering in, accompanied by one of their captors. *The young one*, Monty thought, wearily. *Not Berger...* "The man is dead. I am sorry. But he cannot stay here. You will die. Of disease. The gig, they say, is over."

"The gig is up. The *game* is over," Barnes corrected him. "And it's 'as they say'." A man was dead. A man was dead, spread on the floor next to them, dead from this man's carelessness. That familiar tone, that open stance...even if Barnes were bluffing, playing the game. Well. It still stung. Hit too close to an already raw and wounded heart. But Monty was glad, at least, the others were sleeping, spared this. *Then again*, something bitter within him said, *had you worked as hard as they, perhaps you would be sleeping, too.*

"*Mein Englisch ist unter aller Sau.*"

"Now that's just insulting to pigs."

"Your language," Ackermann concluded. "It is confusing."

"Yeah, well, each spreck and see, kid. Can’t even pronounce half of yours. A real jaw cracker, German." Except Monty knew for a fact the man spoke—sang—perfect Yiddish. Or Hebrew, whichever it was.

But the German in question only yawned. "What do you want, *Kleinführer*?"

"Hide the body," Barnes stated plainly.

Ackermann blinked. "I cannot do this."

"I’m really regretting giving you those cigarettes, pal."

"The cigarettes are gone. And how do you say—no refunds."

Barnes leaned back against the bars. "Anything else I can interest you in?"

"Amerikans," Ackermann sniffed. "No alcohol, no cigarettes, you do not even have any decent...ah, porn."

"Yeah," Barnes snorted. "Only ‘cause you already stole it all."

Ackermann tisked. "They were, how you say, lack in imagination."

"Pal, I know this bunch, and if anything, *nothin’* was left to the imagination."

"This is...joke? Yes?"

"Yeah."

"Explain."

"Means they were plenty of illustrations," Barnes said. "So you don’t have to imagine, just use your
eyes. Play on words.”

“Ah. Even your jokes are not decent,” Ackermann complained.

“Yeah, well,” Barnes shrugged. "It’s an indecent subject.”

“Ha!” Ackermann said. “Joke!”

“I ain’t proud, pal,” Barnes said bluntly. "Think I’d suck a dick if it meant keepin’ this lot safe.”

*Good Lord, man.* Because that? That did not sound like a joke to Monty's ears. But Ackermann only laughed. “This is also not good joke! Not decent. But I am no queer. Lohmer—ha! This bastard, yes? So desperate, he would stick sausage in anything. So fat, ugly, no woman will have him. Even wife! Good joke, yes?”

“Yeah, well. I wasn’t offering Lohmer,” Barnes shrugged as Ackermann laughed yet again, and Monty let out a pent-up breath. “An' I already gave you my last pack of cigarettes.”

"These? These are also bad jokes. You said the same thing last week!"

Barnes continued, unperturbed. "So you won't hide the body. What can you do for me?"

“I say I find him,” he considered carefully. “I see him working last shift, then find him here tonight. This is true. I know no more.”

“Hey, thanks, pal. Don’t stick your neck out too far. You get in over your head...shit, you're just a fuckin' kid. They ask too many questions, you tell 'em I’m the one who made you. We clear?"

“Da, da, 'mein prisoner made me do it'. I will lose my balls, *Kleinführer*. This one. This dead man,” Ackermann scratched the stubble on his boyish chin. "His name?"


“Italian?” Ackermann frowned. “Not American? They are, I think, with us, da?”

“Yeah, well, it’s a big country, pal. Built by immigrants. My pop’s Irish. My ma—well,” Barnes paused. "My ma’s a Jew. Came over to the states during the Great War. Guess I got your anti-semitic asses to thank for that." *My God, man,* Monty thought, heart in his throat. Do you not know when to back down?

“Most...do not care?” Ackermann struggled to explain with his limited English. "Strange thing. But some, some are angry. Afraid, yes? There was war, much fighting, people are poor. Angry. Very bad. Angry ones see people are different, people have better, say 'I will have that', and take. Enough say, think, become hard to stop. To know different.”

“Yeah,” Barnes said, something like resignation in his voice. "But you do."

“Not everyone is ein hero, *Kleinführer*. Some want...live simple life.”

“What about you, Ackermann?” Barnes asked. "What do you want?"

"Cigarettes? Good fuck? Fat wife!" he laughed. "*die reichlichen titten!* That mime, at least, was universal.

"Well," Barnes said as he slipped back into the cell, Ackermann locking the door behind him. "Can't fault a man for that. How long you reckon it'll take to tell 'em?"
"Five minutes, I think, maybe more?"

"Make it sooner rather than later, yeah? Don't smell so good down here," Barnes pressed his face against the bars, gestured with his head. "Best if the boys workin' don't have to see it."

"Da, mein Kleinführer," and Ackermann saluted, right arm raised above his shoulder.

"Your ma ever tell you you're a little shit?" Barnes called after him with a bitter laugh.

"Every gott-damned day."

"Well, Stevie," Barnes muttered to himself with a sigh as he slumped to the ground. "Gonna be a goddamned shitshow. If you were ever gonna come save my sorry ass from somethin', now's the time."

Then—

"Rise and shine, ladies!"

"Goddamnit, Sarge," Dugan groaned from his left as Monty staggered to his feet. "Not even time yet."

"No, it ain't," Barnes bit his lip. "But I messed up. I fucked up bad. And it's comin' round to bite me in the ass. Need you all on your feet."

"Dunno, Sarge," he harrumphed. "Your ass looks fine to me."

Barnes retaliated with a kick. "Up. All of you, up!"

"What do you fear will happen?" Monty asked, dread knotting up his gut. If Barnes had been willing to offer—that—well. It must be grave indeed.

"Don't know. Only thing is, ain't good."

"Well, that's news," Morita wiped the crust from his eyes. And if their medic had had nightmares, cried out in his sleep, had the stains of tear tracks still present on his cheeks, well. Not a man of them would dare remember or comment.

"Who the hell," Dugan yawned, "is that? Looks like a pig fucked a potato." ...and that, the thought came unbidden, was a rather Irish thing to say.

"It's Zola," Monty glanced to Barnes. "What does he want."

"Well, shit." Dugan said.

Orders were barked in German, their meaning clear enough. They clung to the walls of the cell, hands raised as five HYDRA soldiers entered, masked, armored, armed with those strange guns and their faint blue light. They came for the body. Not a soul moved to stop them. "Herr Doctor!" one called.

"Ah, Sergeant Barnes, we meet again," the scientist said, stepping forward once the cell door had fallen shut and the corpse had been inspected. "I have come to inform you one of my men has told
me one of yours has died."

"Yeah."

"My sympathies, Sergeant Barnes. How did he die?"

"Neck broke."

"How tragic. And yet—forgive me, Sergeant Barnes, you are not a man of science—but there are signs of sepsis on the body. I wonder, then, how a man so sick happened to break it. Perhaps it was a fall?"

Barnes shrugged. "If you say so, Zola."

"Or perhaps something fell on him?" Zola continued, feigning ignorance. "From a great height? Crushed a limb. Caused his sickness. Such pain, Sergeant Barnes. That would be severe."

"Sounds like it."

"And I wonder, what a man might do, to ease that pain."

Beside Monty, Morita's skin went pale.

"If you're gonna wonder, could you 'wonder' away?" Barnes asked rather than answer. "'Cause I've got about an hour 'fore the next shift starts. Sure'd like to get some sleep."

"Let us dispense with pleasantries," Zola continued to smile, a hungry light in his eyes. "This idle talk, it does not suit you or I."

"What do you want, Zola?" Barnes set his jaw.


And somehow, somehow Monty knew what Barnes' next words would be. "Take me."

“Oh, I am afraid not, Sergeant Barnes," Zola tutted. "You are a most valuable asset, do you not agree?"

Barnes let out a bitter laugh.

"Choose your next words wisely, Sergeant." There was sweat, Monty saw, pouring down Morita's brow, slicking his hair down, disheveling his clothes. But he need not fear. Barnes would never hand over a man, Monty knew. But—

“You heard the man, fellas," Barnes turned to them, head high, eyes searching. "Gonna need a volunteer."

...Well. Monty thought. Fuck.

Zola clucked his tongue. "Fascinating. Absolutely fascinating."

“I already volunteered,” Brennan called, his voice shaking. “Why the fuck not?"

“You’re a good man, Brennan,” Barnes told him, laid a hand on his shoulders. "Thank you."
“Dead one, more like,” he tried to laugh. It was a terrified sob.

“You knew him well, didn’t you.” It wasn’t a question.

“Yeah. My—my cousin.”

"Thank you, Sergeant Barnes. That will be all. This concludes our business," Zola said, once Brennan was taken from the cell. The Irishman’s head was up, and shoulders back, but there was a line of tension in his back, and his pale hands were trembling at his sides. "Now if you would be so kind, bring the subject..." And they were gone, specters in the night, the predator that hunted only in darkness.

"You just gonna let him go?" Dugan wheeled the moment Brennan was out of sight. "Just like that! Why the fuck didn’t you do somethin’, Sarge!"

"You don’t think he tried that, you Paddy bastard?" I ain’t proud, pal. Think I’d suck a dick if it meant keepin’ this lot safe...

"You ain’t helpin’." Barnes said, and that was enough to shut Monty up. "Jesus H Christ, last thing I need’s you lot fightin’, too. It was someone go, Dugan, or someone get taken," Barnes bit into his lip until he drew blood. "He chose to go."

"Hell of a choice, Sarge," Dugan frowned, turning his back with a curse of disgust.

"Yeah," Barnes sighed. Sighed and sat to the floor, his head in his hands. "Yeah it was."

A shift came. A shift went. And the only indication two men had died—that a man had died, that another was alive, being tortured unspeakably—was a spreading stain on a factory floor.

"Cigarette?" Barnes asked him later that sleepless night when they were both bone-tired, and exhausted. Even Kleiber, it seemed, resented being taken for a fool.

"I thought you'd smoked your last pack last week."

Barnes offered a wry smile. Flicked a lone fag out the end of his sleeve as he had that battery a seeming lifetime ago. "Yeah, well, what that goy don't know won't hurt 'im."

Monty bit back a chuckle. "Only if you insist." Which was a lie, of course, but a harmless one. They sat huddled together. Shared a cigarette. Smoked in silence. "You're a brave man," Monty finally told him. Far braver than I.

Barnes shrugged. "Ain't nothin' special about me. Just do what I gotta."

"These men, they trust you," Monty insisted. "And you'd...well, you'd die for them, wouldn't you?"

"Dyin' don't solve nothing, pal," Barnes said. "I'm the best hope they've got. So no. I'll live for 'em, even if I can't live with myself."

"...thing is, Monty? I can tell you, can't I?" he licked his lips. "I can tell you. You're an officer. I can tell you," he repeated, like a litany. "You'd understand. You...you know he wouldn't've taken me,
right?” Barnes whispered. “And if I picked...if I picked I'd be no better than him. So no. I'm not a good person. A good officer. I'm a goddamned liar and a fraud. Someone had to volunteer. Only way it'd go down. Only way it could work. So yeah. Yeah, I volunteered. Knew one of these poor bastards would take my place. So no. I didn't send him to his death...but I'm the son of a bitch who tricked him into going. You know most of these boys sighed up for this shit? And here I am, the Mick bastard whose luck finally ran out, got the draft. Uncle Sam wants you. Fuck."

Monty was afraid. Afraid of many things. Of dying. Of failing. Of disappointing. That someday, when it mattered most, the scales would be weighed and he would be found wanting. And here this man, Barnes, uneducated, unwanted, out of his depth, well. He had taken the measure of a man and yet bemoaned he could not become a god. "I say," Monty finally offered his consolation as that butt burnt down to ash. "Sergeant, you're only human."

But Barnes only shrugged. "Thing is, I've known someone who was more."

Monty was silent for a long, long time. The night stretched on around them. “You don't read tonight?”

“I just killed a man. Hell, no, did one worse,” Barnes lay where the dead man had not hours before. "I convinced a man to kill 'im. Led another to his death. Don't exactly think Captain America would approve." 

"You are aware, of course, that the man is fiction," Monty asked, one brow raised.

"Nah, pal,” Barnes patted the comic where it lay hidden, over his heart. “He’s a hell of a lot more real than you 'n me."

"Brennan," Monty muttered as he drifted off into fitful sleep.

"What of him?” Barnes raised his head in the darkness.

“He was Irish,” Monty frowned.

“Yeah,” he laid his face down again.

“Feraldo was Italian.”

“Yeah,” there was a rustling as Barnes turned away.

“...yet they were cousins.”

“So he said,” that voice was far-off, muffled.

“Odd,” Monty finally said, a thought having occurred to him then. He wondered, distantly, if Barnes had thought the same. But Barnes’ back was turned to him, and he never pressed the issue more.

“Not so odd as you might think.”
"But share you must, the Woman said later. You can no more keep him than cage the wind. What you wish is a dream, and nothing more. You must awake. Yet the wind is not spurned for how it rages, nor when it ceases, said the Boy. And they have spurned him. Yes, they have spurned him. Loving the wild wind will kill you, She said. One may harness, but never embrace it. One cannot hold the wind, no matter how hard you may try.

If he is the death of me, so be it, the Boy said. I made my peace long ago.

Yet I know not whether he should survive such a thing, said She. Have care!"

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

By 1943, members of the mandatory Hitler Youth as young as sixteen were being pulled into the front lines, even fighting at Normandy. By 1945, boys as young as twelve were being recruited for active combat duty: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitler_Youth

Lars Ackermann is twenty years old in October, 1943. He has never known a Germany without the Nazi party.

A mhuirnín (Irish) My darling
Mein Englisch ist unter aller Sau (German, idiom): My English is under all pig/My English is really bad.
die reichlichen titten (German): big tits

...and that, friends, is how you pull a 'Bury Your Gays/Too Good For This Sinful Earth/Heroic Sacrifice' trope without being fucking insulting to the entire LGBTQ+ community.

1) Don’t make the queer couple in question the only fucking one.
2) Don’t make the queer couple in question split for a hetero-normative love interest who gets far less screen time and character development just to shoe-horn a queer character into a straight relationship.
3) Also, you know, canonically recognize your queer couples instead of just queerbaiting. [Or, conversely, if a character is canonically straight, DO NOT queerbait. It's simple, really.]

...I'm looking at you, Marvel. Right. Fucking. At You.
Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning for slurs.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They were hungry, and tired, and weary with much toil. They were afraid and so very far from home. And so the soldiers quarreled among themselves, and there was little even the Boy could do.

(But we mustn’t blame them too harshly, you and I—though it seems rather silly. They were afraid, and being afraid made them angry. And anger, well. Anger makes one rather careless.)

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

… an overarching theme of intersectionality, even if it was a term that Falsworth—at the time—would have never heard. Too often in fantasy there is Light and Dark, Good and Evil, with very little of a spectrum of shades of gray. *Jacob (I Have Loved)* faced and continues to face significant controversy and indeed is still banned in Austria for its sympathetic portrayal of Nazi perpetrators and POWs (VerbotsG, 1992). In the United States, *Jacob (I Have Loved)* is as despised as *A People's History of the United States* (Zinn, 1980) for its depiction of the Allied Forces not as the unfailing heroes our history books would praise, but as co-committers of the atrocities and acts of war. At the beginning of the decade that would launch the term "intersectional feminism", Falsworth addressed the injustices of race, class, gender, and even sexuality within the military as well as in the broader context of civilian life.

Falsworth both follows in and redefines the literary tradition set forth by his fellow soldier-scholars. Like Sam’s soliloquy over the dead Haradrim soldier (Tolkien, 1954), or Emeth’s inclusion among the followers of Aslan (Lewis, 1956), Falsworth’s novel shows us something rarely seen either in fiction or in our collective cultural memories of historical events: “[finding] Allies among those we might call Enemy, and our fiercest foe among those we ought name as fastest friends (Falsworth, 1960).”
CHAPTER TEN

The next shift offered little in the way of hope or consolation, but something in the matter of clarity. Monty had never been popular per se, but he had been moneyed, and from old money, that "Good English Stock", so his father and his father's father had known people—the right sorts of people—and subsequently had been in the right sorts of social circles so the right sorts of things seemed to happen to Monty regardless. Since birth he had wanted for nothing, not even human companionship. There had never been a moment in his life when he had been truly alone. Even in the privacy of his own bedchamber, he had a valet at his call. At Academy, he'd shared a dormitory, Barracks at training, and tents and campsites with Her Majesty's Third Parachute Brigade. He was the second son of a Lord, destined since before birth to serve King and Country, a soldier in His Majesty's Army after his father's generation had fought the War to End All Wars, and even with unrest in India, The Great British Empire had been at peace. Then came September 1st, 1939, and everything had gone to hell. By 1943, all but one of his childhood friends were dead. And after Anaheim, with the deaths of comrades, well. There were few left alive Monty might count as friends.

But Sergeant Barnes? The man may be the only officer...but he was far from alone. He bore the weight of them all, yes, but he was loved, and loved well. The man was even—absurdly—nearly universally well liked among their captors, Kleiber having gone out of his way to call him 'friend'. There was no shortage of cigarettes or beer offered to Barnes by their Nazi (or HYDRA?) overseers, who appreciated his leadership and diligence. The more Barnes worked, the less responsibilities they themselves shouldered. And Barnes? Well, Barnes shared any treats passed down from the hands that fed them as he could. Even Zola, the ever-present Bogey, had a strange admiration, even fascination for him.

No, there was only one person, really, who Barnes' considerable charm and work ethic had left untouched: Lohmer. Maybe the man knew of Barnes' ancestry. Perhaps he resented being second best to an uneducated Irishman. Or, and Monty thought this the more likely, perhaps he was simply cruel, and the Third Reich had given him free reign to foster his cruelty. Except, of course, with Barnes. Whatever deal Barnes had struck with the devil had taken, and the man was nigh untouchable. dem Kleinführer was, simply put, too valuable to the Third Reich or HYDRA to be subjected to the rigors of a senseless beating, and Lohmer resented it.

...and Sergeant Barnes? Well. Suffice it to say Barnes took that unfair advantage and ran with it. "My poor gran'd roll over in her grave if she'd knew she risked life an' limb to bring my ma to America, only for her to send me straight back to this shithole," Barnes said, when Monty'd put the question to him. "'Sides, it's never been said an Irishman—or a Jew—was anything less than an opportunist. I gotta reputation to maintain, here, pal." It kept spirits up, kept Lohmer's mustachios bristling, and in general was good for morale. The Colonel, it seemed, was just as disliked among his own peers as Barnes was adored. As Lohmer patrolled the corridor, lecturing, Barnes made of game of shadowing, pulling faces behind the man's back, daring Berger and Ackermann to laugh. Kleiber only looked on, bemused, with the face of a parent allowing 'if you must', and never gave the game away. Barnes' antics were natural, effortless, and the glee in their eyes showed how dearly they enjoyed it. Lohmer would wheel with suspicion, only to see a calm, complacent, rather bored looking Barnes standing beside him, staring disinterestedly somewhere to the left.

He must, Monty thought, have younger siblings.
...and two rather large brass balls.

But Colonel Lohmer was on top form today, spouting so vehemently he'd make Hitler proud. Well, Monty wondered once the man had left, and Barnes' antics ceased, what the devil was that all about?

Once this morning's inspection been completed to Lohmer's satisfaction, Berger and Ackermann were left behind to release them. As noise overhead ceased and B Team thundered down the stairs, Barnes sauntered across the dimly lit hall. Monty, for lack of ought else to do, tagged along. "Alright, Jonesey-boy, I brought you here to speak German, so speak some German."

"What, you want me to repeat it?" Jones asked. "Or you want some translating."

"Don't get cute with me, Jonesey-boy," Barnes sighed. "We both know I'm pretty as lipstick on a pig and I'd still win."

Jones snorted. "Sarge, you're prettier than half the girls I've dated."

"An' the other half only felt sorry for ya," Barnes said. "Now spill."

"You want the long or short of it?"

Barnes shrugged. "Both?"

Jones cleared his throat, huffed his chest out, lowered his chin and spoke in a deep, mock growl: "You know why the Reich is destined to win this war, Ubersoldat Ackermann?" and Barnes tried desperately not to grin. Jones snapped straight to attention, trading, of course, the Nazi salute for one more tasteful. "Surely the advanced weapons developed here by HYDRA will turn the tide in our favor, Colonel Lohmer. Heil HYDRA."

Barnes coughed. 

...Rather unconvincingly, it must be said.

That blustering posture again. "Hail HYDRA. No. The Reich shall win because we are unified. In blood as in purpose. While our enemies are the polyglot peasants of Europe and the mongrel masses of America."

By now, Barnes was sniggering. "He actually say that, Jonesey, or you just waxin' poetic?"

"Shut up, Sarge. This time, I'm telling the story." He cowered down, small and timid, peeping up out of the hands clenched over his face in terror. "What about Russia?" Jones squeaked, an imitation of Berger's breaking baritone. "I thought Russia was in Asia?" Now that brashness again. "And the rapscallions of Russia! The Aryan race is truly superior!"

Barnes was in increasing danger of developing a hernia. "Really, Jonesey?" he gasped.

"What about Jesse Owens?" Jones squeaked again.

That had Barnes staggering, wiping the tears from his streaming eyes. "Okay, now I know you're just making this shit up."

"This American propaganda is not good for you, Ubersoldat Berger! This was clearly a lie perpetuated by our enemies! The Aryan race is superior in all! Heil HYDRA."

"Da. Heil HYDRA," that smart salute was back. "The Aryan race is indeed superior."
“…and the rest,” Jones shrugged, himself once more, “is a soliloquy from Lohmer about the superiority of said Aryans and Berger’s questions about the 1936 Olympics fraud.”

“Oh, c’mon, Jonesey, boy,” Barnes groaned. “You can’t honestly expect me to believe all that.”

“No more than you expect us to think you’ve actually got a girl someplace and not just too many of those little blue bibles.”

And that, it must be said, sent Barnes into what Monty, having played uncle to no less than eight small nieces (a fact his brother resented him for to this day), could only describe as giggling.

“Just to be clear,” Dugan interrupted. “Is that a yes or a no?”

“I’d rather hazard it a yes,” Monty said.

“E tu, limae?” Barnes hiccoughed.

“Well, look at you, all edumacated an all, Sarge,” Jones grinned.

“Pal, my girl’s got bad eyes but she loves to learn, so I get stuck with all the reading. ‘Tween the two of us somebody had to make it through high school, and it sure as hell wasn’t gonna be me. ‘Sides, what else am I supposed to do in bed with her?” Barnes grinned. “Cuddle—?”

Dugan snorted appreciatively.

“Learn German, for a start,” Jones said. “Seriously, Sarge. I’m not pulling your leg.”

“The hell?” Sarge wondered, speaking for them all. “You sure you heard ‘em right? You don’t got a deaf ear or nothin’?”

Jones shrugged.

“Jesus Henry Christ, Mary, Moses and Joseph,” Barnes sighed. “Just when you think you’re startin’ to understand your enemies…”

“Fuckin’ Nazis,” Dugan grumped.

Barnes left them then to an awkward silence as he tucked the resting shift back into their cells, clasping hands, shoulders, laying hands on heads like a benediction. Watching him now, all easy smile and reassuring gaze, well, one would hardly guess not two days ago two of their own had died...or worse. And that, Monty thought, was rather the point. Barnes was their Sergeant, their leader, older brother, father, mother, even priest. As such, he was afforded neither the time nor space to mourn.

“Never again, Sarge,” Jones said once the rest of A Team had shifted upstairs. “Never again.”

“Needed the space, Jonesey-boy,” Barnes shrugged in apology. "Had to do some jugglin’.”

“Yeah, well. No offense, Limey, but your lot? Not so keen on sharing a cell with a black bunk mate. Oh, and our folks? Well, they ain’t so keen, either. You could’ve kicked him out, you know,” Jones scowled up at Monty.

...Well.

But Barnes, it seemed, could smell an argument before one ever started. “Aw, but who’d keep
“Frenchie company?” he drawled, cutting between them.

“Sarge, you and I both know Frenchie’d be just fine by himself.”

“In a cage full of Brits?” Barnes laughed. “That’s like askin’ a dog to spend the night in a chicken coop. Wouldn’t be a damn limey left alive come morning’! I put you in there to keep Frenchie in line, Jonesey-boy. Besides, Monty’s valuable,” Barnes slung an arm around Monty’s back. “Get yourself a workin’ radio and we’ll talk.”

“Aw, Sarge. And here I thought you liked me for my good looks and charm.”

“You’re anything but!” Barnes socked Jones in the shoulder. "I needed a night away from your ugly mug, givin’ me awful dreams!"

"You dreamin’ of me, Sarge, or Captain America?"

Barnes thwacked him with the rolled up comic, condom and all. "What I dream about's between me an’ my girl, so mind your damn business."

"Pretty sure you've gone and made it everyone's business," Dugan grunted.

"Dum Dum, I don't need to hear about you gettin' off to the thought of my girl's hand up inside me."

"They maybe you shouldn't've told me," Dugan sniffed. "I'm a red-blooded Irishman."

"Yeah. One who thinks way too much about my ass!" Barnes shoved him. "And it'd better be my scrawny Irish ass you're thinking of while you're tuggin' it, 'cause if it's my girl I will die defending her honor, pal."

"Pretty sure she ain't got none left, Sarge." And to that, Monty thought, I would quite agree.

But Barnes would hear none of it. "You got about three seconds to be real sorry, pal," he warned, eyes and smile as lifeless as a shark’s. "Then I'm gonna tear your fuckin' throat out."

"Shit, Sarge. Grow a sense of humor."

Barnes kicked his shin. "You stop jerkin' off to my girl where I can see it, Dugan, maybe I'll reconsider. Now get your fat ass up there and work, ya hear?"

Barnes watched him trundle up the steps, light for a man his size, a fond expression of bemusement on his face. But when the last of the men—when Dugan—had disappeared, the facade fell away. Barnes sobered, that smile turning into a firm line of pressed lips. “Seriously, Jonesey. I need to straighten anyone out?”

“Sarge, I’ve been called a nigger by white folks most of my life,” Jones replied. “It wasn’t until I met you someone started doing anything about it. Think I’ll live.”

Well, it would make sense, Monty thought. Dugan might not have understood the gist of Barnes’ bitter words: Simple. Can’t, but Monty believed he had well enough. Miscegenation was illegal for Americans, he once remembered reading. Not that he himself would ever have cause consider it—odd sort of thing, really, and after Edward VIII? Well! One ought to marry rich, marry well, and marry well within one’s class in order to maintain the balance of the world. But knowing it now,
well, of course Barnes would desegregate his unit. Would be intolerant to such speech. The woman he loved—strange though it seemed to Monty—was Coloured.

"Well. You’re welcome back," Barnes offered, the wry smile on his face more of grimace of pain. "Turns out I gotta recent vacancy. Two of ’em."

“It's a damn shame about Feraldo,” Jones said, expressed what Barnes could not. “About Brennan.”

Barnes said nothing.

“It was a tough call,” Jones continued.

“Didn’t decide nothin’,” Barnes grunted, a muscle jumping in his jaw. “Got work to do.” And with that, he left, pace smart, back and shoulders straight. Atlas, once again, Monty thought.

“Sure, Sarge,” Jones watched him go, concern written over his handsome features. Private Gabriel Jones, Monty became suddenly aware, was just as capable a player as Barnes himself. All that laughter had been for Barnes’ benefit alone. The burden of command could not be lifted, no; but it might be made lighter.

“The two of you,” Monty struggled for words, finding himself suddenly alone with Jones with absolutely nothing to say. “Well. You watch out for one another.”

Jones shoved him. Got up in his face, arm barred across his throat, stretched his lips into a wide, white smile, a sight both mirthless and chilling. “Well if it isn’t the nigger, at least it’s a shant,” Jones spat. “That’s what your pals had to say last night when one of our own was walking to his death. Well guess what, massa, Sarge might be a shant but he’s ten times the man you or yours will ever be.”

“He! He!” and someone pulled his attacker away. Barnes—?

“Autsch! Jesseowens! What you are thinking?” Monty heard as his knees hit the ground and his vision rushed back. "They kill you, you black bastard!"

...Berger. What the devil—?

“He! Jesse Owens! If Lohmer not kill you then der Kleinführer does!” Berger hissed, "then who talk sense into crazy fucking Franzose? Run off now!"

“I don’t know what sort of game you’re playing,” Jones said very, very carefully over the boy's shoulder as he began his retreat. “But you stay the hell away from Sarge, you stay the hell away from me.”

They were a couple of queers! Monty wanted to shout, but instead found himself coughing up his lungs, gasping and grateful for every breath of air.

“Ladies! Your powder’s over! Get your asses in gear!” Barnes called from the floor, oblivious. “Ain’t in the mood to sing the fucking song!”

"Run Jesseowens! You run now!” Berger heckled. “Quick, English, how you say ‘thank you’ in English?”
“I beg your pardon?” Monty choked.

“Is close enough,” he grinned. And yes, up close, Barnes had been right. Good Lord, Monty thought, he’s just a child. His academy mates had once had that same round-faced youthfulness. It would be, Monty mused, humorous—endearing, even—had they been on the same side. He’d known boys—young men barely out of boyhood like both Berger and Ackermann—back in the academy. In other circumstances, in another time, another life, perhaps, Monty might even think it a shame to kill them.

“This hat,” Berger frowned, snatching his beret from the ground and dusting it off. “Is ein stupid hat.”

Then—

“I am keeping this stupid hat.” And he placed it on his head jauntily, said “Heil!” and trotted away.

Oh, bloody hell. Monty sat, coughing, holding his aching throat.

“Swear to Christ, Monty! I may be Irish but I ain’t your butler! Get your ass up here!”

What was it Barnes said? “He’s Japanese, Monty, and he’s the only one. These Aryan bastards can overlook one big strapping blonde fella. So long as you leave the hat, they won’t miss ya.”

…well, fuck. Monty mused. So much for ‘leave the hat.’

“Rise an’ shine, your majesty. You sleepin’ or what?” Barnes drawled, but then those footsteps quickened, anxious, and the man himself was knelt suddenly by his side. “You alright, pal?” Barnes asked, ducking down to look Monty full in the face “You ain’t catchin’ pneumonia on me, are ya?”

“Hardly,” Monty choked, massaging his throat.

“Shit!” Barnes said, eyes wide. He pulled Monty’s fingers away, paled at the sight of the angry bruises no doubt already forming. “Who did that?”

Your Coloured friend! Monty wished to spit. “It’s of little importance,” he choked instead.

Barnes frowned. “Was it Lohmer?”

“Well,” Monty lied. “You know what the man is like.”

But Barnes bit his lip. “Kleiber and the others? They’re reasonable. The damnedest thing, knowing they sent all those, those…well,” Barnes choked, unable to continue.


"That they keep us here in cages, send us to our deaths, but they’ll offer me a drink like I’m their pal or somethin’. They’re monsters, but they ain’t impolite about it, and I—” he frowned. "I just don’t fuckin’ understand it, Monty. Ackermann and Berger? They’re just dumb fucking kids, Christ, they’re just fucking kids takin' orders and it shows,” Barnes offered him a hand up. “But that one?” his blue eyes darkened, like the swell of grey clouds before a storm. "He’s gonna be trouble."

And that brought a bitter, bilious laugh to Monty’s heart.
...Barnes, you've no bloody idea.

Perhaps Lohmer had a point, after all.

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Explain yourselves, the Captain cried. What is this you have done.
He was the Enemy, the soldiers said.
Never take your own revenge, said the Captain. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For in so doing you will reap burning coals on his head. Vengeance is not ours. It was never yours to repay.
Yet He was the Enemy, the soldiers said.
He was only a child, the Captain wept. Go! Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Ubersoldat Hans Berger is 17 in 1943...and is a trolling little shit. He was only 10 years old when Jesse Owens won the Gold Medals for 100 meter sprint, long jump, 200 meter sprint, and 4x100 sprint relay (setting a new world record) at the Berlin Olympics in 1936. And he would know, because he was there. His rank indicates military service of 6 months to 1 full year. It is likely he served in Stalingrad.

If you haven't already, do yourself the favor of reading The Book Thief by Markus Zusak.

Lohmer's lines (and mustache) were taken directly from Captain America: First Vengeance.

Interracial marriage or romantic relationships (miscegenation) were illegal in many states until the 1960's, but New York wasn't one of them. Monty, being British, wouldn't know the finer details.

Franzose (German): Frenchman

Shant and nigger are both racial slurs. So is Gypsy. Colo(u)red is a racist term. Monty is the protagonist, but he isn't perfect, and he's not yet the man who wrote Jacob (I Have Loved)
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings include slurs, medical imagery, reference to torture and war crimes, as well as discussion of religion, classism, and racism.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Do you think, asked the Boy, that God is on our side.
God supports the righteous, supplants the wicked, the Poet replied.
Then where, the Boy wondered, where does that leave us.
There is none righteous, no, not one, the Poet said. It is written.
It is written, the Soldier agreed.
It is written, but it is wrong. There is one, said the Boy. Yes, there is one. But this war would be the death of him, and I pray he is kept far from here.

(And well, as you know, all prayers are answered, yet not always as one wishes. Be careful then, little ones, what you pray for.)

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

"...[Jacob (I Have Loved)] is unique among fantasy novels not because the author invokes God or religion, but rather that both the Allies and the Enemy do so, and neither infallibly."

"How's that for a quote, huh? And that's just the fucking Spark Notes. But for the shit-ton of Biblical imagery, a "Christian" book ain't. It's not Narnia, not The Lord of the Rings, not even the pretty-damned-messianic-for-being-so-Satanic Harry Potter series. The Christian community and America have unilaterally rejected The Captain. Which is just weird, man. Cause if you think about it, this white, blue-eyed, chiseled blonde guy draped in abs and Old Glory looks more like a Jesus they'd recognize than any other...but despite the 'Murica of it, his message is much, much closer to canon. The Captain isn't racist or homophobic, and he won't put up with your bullshit. Hell, he's so socialist he makes The Communist Manifesto come in her pants. But by far my favorite is US Army Chaplain Col Chester Phillip Sousa's 1993 resignation speech: "When the war was here they laid the palm branches out for Captain America, but at the end of the week they crucified Steve Rogers. It’s been three days—it’s been sixty-some years—and he doesn’t show any sign of rising. If God is dead, we killed him. History tried to wash her hands of it, but Monty Falsworth made sure we remembered." Like Ho.Ly. Fuck, dude. Preach!"


CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Goddamnit, Monty,” Barnes groaned, head falling back in defeat. “Don’t lose the hat, I said. Don’t
lose the fucking hat. So what do you do? You go and lose the fucking hat.”

"In my defense," Monty hastened, "it was hardly intentional."

“What do you need that fucking hat for, anyways?” Barnes said. “Bright red felt, doesn’t even cover your ears, no tactical advantage. It's goddamn ridiculous.”

Well, to one who hadn't lived his life surrounded by Grenadiers in bearskins or the Royal Horse Artillery busby, perhaps even a beret might seem rather quaint. “It’s a uniform,” Monty insisted. There was no need to stand on ceremony, the Lady Falsworth always said, adding sugar to her tea despite the shortage, but it was the proper thing to do.

“It’s a fuckin' target,” Barnes snarled.

Monty stared.

“What, you think I got promoted due to my good looks and charm?” Barnes grinned that gnashing, ghastly grimace again. “Nah. I got good eyes, Monty. My girl, she’s colorblind. Fuck, a colorblind artist. An’ near as blind as a bat. Always squintin’ up at something. Can’t keep glasses on her face ‘cause she gets ‘em punched off. Well, somebody’s got to tell her what a sunset looks like over a city. Describe it to her. See the details. Then my letter comes. They ship my Kike ass off to Wisconsin, Fort McCoy, someone gives me a gun, tells me to shoot. Shit,” he sniffed, rubbing furiously at his eyes. His next words were choked. "My girl? She sees the world through my eyes and it becomes beautiful. The US Army? All they wanna paint is blood. All I am to them. Gun and a trigger. Far as they’re concerned, I got one good thing goin’ for me, and that’s I can kill people, and hell, I don’t even have to get my hands dirty doin’ it. Christ, if only I’d been colorblind or less a coward, maybe I wouldn’t be a murderer.”

Monty was a career soldier. Conscription was a foreign concept. But duty? Duty he understood. And for now he had his own. Barnes had been alone for far too long, and the burden of command was never born lightly. The man needed a confidante. Confessor. Monty was hardly a Royal Army Chaplain...but Barnes had been no priest, and still played the part for a dying man. He owed as much to do the same. “You’re a soldier,” he finally offered. “Following orders. It’s a war, man. Men are killed.”

“Coulda said no. Wasn’t brave enough to,” Barnes admitted, digging against his own fingernails, refusing to meet his eyes. “ Couldn’t face the consequences.” And for the life of him, Monty didn't know if the man meant prison, shame, or the illness or hospital bills for the Rogers girl. "Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes, fightin' for his country, expert in rifle, pistol, submachine gun and machine rifle," he sneered. "All for an extra five bucks a month. I'm a goddamned coward.”

"Your country called upon you," Monty reminded gently. "You had no choice.”

“There’s always a choice, Monty," Barnes shook his head, bit his lips, eyes red and raw. "You religious?"

Monty frowned, foundering. Oh, there had been mass at Christmas and Easter, his father tithing at the local parish, the voicing of the expected outcry at Edward VI's marriage but no righteous indignation. The Falsworth family and money had been steeped in Anglican tradition, certainly, but it had been rather ceremonial. “As much or as little as any other, I suppose.”

“You believe in Sheol—Hell?”

“I rather prefer to believe in Heaven.”
“Don’t know what they’ve been teachin’ you in the Church of England, pal. My daddy was an Irish drunk and my ma's a Jew, but Sarah Rogers dragged my sorry ass to mass every Sunday,” Barnes scratched his jaw, considering. "You're what? A Protestant, ain't ya?"

"Anglican, actually."

Barnes snorted. "Either way, pretty sure you can’t believe in one without the other."

“Well, quite.” Monty was silent for a while. “You believe this is hell? Or that you deserve to go there?”

But Barnes didn’t answer. “You believe in God, Monty?”

As an abstraction only, perhaps, never a person.“I rather like the idea of Him, yes.”

“Then you believe in the devil.”

“By your logic, I suppose I must.”

“Then if you believe in God, and you see this shithole, then it’s either hell, he don’t exist, or he ain't the kinda God I wanna fuckin’ serve,” Barnes bit his lips until they were raw and bloody. "If he's so damned good an’ just, well. Why the fuck is there so much suffering. Sickness. If there's a God and he's good, then he damn well lost to the devil long ago."

Monty had seen war, from the trenches and from the air. Hearing Barnes now? Well, it made it hard to argue.

“You were following orders.”

“So are they,” Barnes nodded to their captors. "You say you believe in Heaven, Monty? You want the Nazis to get there, too?”

“No.”

“And the scared ones, the ones just following orders, like Ackermann and Berger, shit, just kids, maybe don’t know any different—you really want them to go to Hell?”

Monty said nothing.

“Where’s that leave us, then?” Barnes laughed, but there was no humor to it. “Where’s that leave me? We like playin’ at God, sure, but we can’t take the same judgment. Either way, we’re fucked, an’ me most of all."

Monty wasn't particularly devout or religious. Religion intrigued him, if only the idea of it, the import placed on stories and words, myths and imagination. If one person wished, it was whim, it was fantasy. But that same vision shared by two, or ten, or tens of hundreds of thousands? Well, it become something Alive of its own. “Well,” Monty angled for a bit of Barnes' own humor. "If I remember right, David was a warrior King…and he was just an upstart shepherd like your countrymen, once.”

“Yeah. He was also a murderer. Killed a man for a woman an’ raped her. Gave away Saul’s kids to his enemies for sport. Lost his best friend. Fuck!” Barnes lips curled against his teeth. “Don’t talk to me ‘bout David, pal. That’s a man after God’s own heart, then God can go an’ fuck Himself.”

Well, Monty thought. Religious or not, there wasn't much to be said to that.
"Fuck," Barnes wiped a string of snot across his sleeve, red eyes dry but blinking rapidly. "Just don't tell my ma or Sarah Rogers. Or Becca! She'd whip my ass."

“What do we do?”

"Say a coupla Ave Maria's? Remember Shabbat and keep it holy? Fuck, I dunno. We get your damn hat back, and we get you outta here," Barnes shrugged, then grinned, a weak, watery thing at best. "Gotta save the world, worry 'bout our eternal souls later," he patted the comic where it lay hidden against his chest. "We do what it takes. That's what we do."

"Seems rather contradictory," Monty ventured. "To believe both."

"Pal, you shoulda seen my sister Becca at Bat Mitzvah," Barnes said, shaking his head and perhaps even smiling fondly at the memory. "Jesus, Mary, Abraham and Moses, you ever have an hour-long discussion with a twelve year-old about Peshat, Remez, Derash, an' Sod?" He sighed. "What's a twelve year-old girl doin' studying the Kabbalah, anyways? I kept tellin' Rabbi Mossel she knew more Hebrew than she was letting on, but I guess it's his business to tell her why the smartest damn kid I've ever met couldn't be a Rabbi. Hell, Monty, she was spittin' mad. Decided to become a doctor, just to spite him."

To be honest, Monty didn't even know what that meant. Hebrew, he assumed. Yiddish? "I can't say that I have."

"Well, you ain't missin' out on much. Fuck, but she was pissed at me. Couldn't understand why I'd never done it myself. Same with Stevie and confirmation," he sighed. Closed his eyes and grew quiet. "Gettin' told you're going to hell in two religions by your kid sister and best friend ain't exactly a walk in the park, pal."

"Why didn't you?"

"Christ, Monty, I was just a kid. Priests wanted to confirm me when I was seven years old. My ma's rabbi at thirteen. They wanted me to choose, and I wasn't gonna. Wasn't ready. Didn't see the need to. Didn't seem fair, makin' a kid choose between 'em when they both said he'd go to hell if he got it wrong. Heck, I dunno. Maybe it was me being a stubborn little shit at first. Then later it just didn't seem all that important," Barnes shrugged. "Seen people do good things without religion, seen people do plenty bad with."

Monty remembered his history well. Henry VIII. Edward VI. The Lady Jane Grey. Mary Queen of Scots. Elizabeth I. The Black and Tans. Men dying and killing senselessly in the name of a God they both claimed to serve. "Hear, hear."

"They're just stories, is all. Don't mean much except what we make 'em. A man who hears might make himself a better person. Or he might use it to, I dunno. Kill Jews. Catholics. Hell, even fuckin' Protestants. Call a black man the mark of Cain and say God supports stuff like slavery, segregation. Hell, Jonesey is black and baptist and he's a better man than most folks I ever met. Have a hard time believing in a God'd punish a man for somethin' stupid as the color of his skin," Barnes sighed.

For the life of him, Monty knew not whether to be impressed or appalled by this heresy. He said as much.

"Yeah, well, that's what happens when you memorize the Torah before you're ten, get your ass dragged to Sunday School by a well-meaning Irish woman. Spend five days a week in a Catholic orphanage learnin' catechisms 'cause you're the oldest and a boy and none of the relatives have the resources to take you in, either," Barnes shrugged. "Never did finish high school. Woulda liked to.
But I could work. Didn't see much sense in the girls goin' hungry just so I could get an education."

His own family had been wealthy, even with the stock exchange and economy crashing they had maintained more than a modest share of their holdings. The Falsworths were English, they carried on. "I can't say I know much of that."

"Aw, what, Monty?" Barnes sent an elbow into his side. "That champagne and caviar not treatin' you right? Shame on them."

"I recant," Monty said. "You are an absolutely uncultured fiend. Champagne is *French.*"

"Pal, you try eatin' so many years of potatoes and cabbage you're shittin' in German what with all the *sauerkraut* coming out your ass. Then we'll talk."

Needless to say, Monty sat aghast. Barnes burst into chuckles.

"That is singularly the most disgusting thing I have ever heard," he affirmed, as Barnes wiped tears of mirth from his eyes.

"Shit, Limey! The look on your fa-aa-ace—" Barnes gasped. "You went to a boy's school. You've had to've heard worse!"

"No, Sergeant Barnes, I do believe you are unreservedly the most uncouth creature I have ever had the displeasure of meeting," Monty sniffed.

"That how you insult people in England, pal?" Barnes mused, his worn face now flushed with laughter, relaxing into that familiar smile. "'Cause pa,l I gotta tell ya, we do it a bit different where I'm from. Least in Brooklyn."

Monty raised an eyebrow. He didn't deign to smile.


"So," Monty began.

"Yeah," Barnes agreed. "So. The hat."

"Taken."

"You know where, by who?"

Monty nodded. "Berger."

"Well, fuck me!" Barnes slapped his thigh. "Been worryin' about this for nothing! Berger'll give it up. Cigarettes. Or eight pagers," he licked his lips thoughtfully. "Gotta find somethin' to trade him for."

Monty raised an eyebrow. "I don't suppose he'll want your Captain America." Most troops he knew, Yank and Brit alike, couldn't stand the damn things.

"Pal, he ain't getting it!" Barnes objected as he stood, brushing dirt from his trousers. He offered Monty a hand up with a rueful smile. "Suppose we should get up there."

"I'd rather prefer not," Monty voiced.

"Yeah, well, I leave Frenchie alone too long and somethin'll explode again," Barnes shrugged as
they braved the stairs. "Got the bad feelin' Jonesey'd just encourage him. For being one small Frenchman he's a damned big pain in my ass. Speaking of which..." he glanced about quickly, ascertained there were none close enough to listen in. But the factory floor was humming with the sound of labor, and even Monty could barely make out the words.

"Think it's time we talked a little tactics."

"I agree," Monty said. "I assume you've already made plans for the package?"

"Yeah. And you ain't gonna like 'em."

Both improvisation and the ability to trust, remember, and follow orders were critical in the field. Before his own arrival, Barnes had considered undertaking the mission himself. His intelligence and reconnaissance would be indispensable. “I’m open to suggestions.”

“Yeah, pal. I’m workin’ on it. Thing about Hitler? This whole damn war? Hitler Doesn’t scare me. I’ve met bullies an’ their cronies an’ I’ve met cowards. I get that. But Zola? Zola’s reasonable, Monty. He’s intelligent. No idealist. He knows a regime built on hate can’t last. So what the fuck is he doing here? He’s using the Nazis, this Herr Schmidt to get what he wants...and that bastard’s cold and calculating enough to get it. An’ that scares me, Monty. That fuckin’ terrifies me. Hitler? This Schmidt? They wanna watch the world burn, an’ they’re inpatient enough to get burnt in the process. Land war in Russia? Attackin’ their own Panzers?" Barnes shook his head. "They've made their mistakes, and it'll gonna get 'em killed. But Zola? Zola’ll wait it out, the fire, the rain, the long winter after. So it don’t matter what happens to me. Don’t matter who wins this war. It’s the next one I’m worried about. You getting this battery to the front is all that fucking matters. This can’t—it can’t spread, you hear?" Barnes' voice grew tight.

"I grew up in Brooklyn. Depression. Immigrant country. Tore down walls in tenements to make room for more. Packed us in like cattle. I seen whole buildings condemned with TB, kids carted off to Sanatorium, all in just fuckin’ days. All it took was one of 'em to start coughin', and they were done for. Whatever the fuck Zola’s doin’? It’s like that. It can’t get out," he repeated. "It can't leave here. Even if the rest of us never do, it can’t leave here."

*It can’t leave here.* Monty remembered bodies turned to ash, men broken apart mid-scream. He shuddered. "Then let us do precisely that. As soon as possible."

"Yeah. Easier said than done, pal," Barnes frowned. "Thing is, that’ll put a dent in my plan."

Monty only shrugged in reply. “No plan is worth the name without contingencies.”

“Yeah, yeah, and a rose would smell as sweet," Barnes punched his shoulder. "Shaddup, Shakespeare, give me a bit. We’ve got to move the mission up. Can’t wait for the next supply shipment. Had the genius idea to hide you inside a shell crate, but it ain't happening."

Monty considered. “I rather agree.”

“So we’ve got to get another way to get you out of the factory unseen.”

“So it would seem," Monty barely remembered the grounds, was still wrapping his head around the logistics of the factory itself. They had been caged and quite deliberately. He hadn't seen the stars, seen sunlight in...well. Best not to think on it. They’d been purposefully denied any bearings. Without his compass, he would hardly know north.

“In the meantime..." Barnes continued. "About the battery.”
“What of it?”

“You can’t get caught with it. You get caught, the gig’s up. For all of us. Lohmer might be thick as shit but Zola’s got the brains to figure it out.”

*We won’t get a second chance.* Of that, Monty was well aware. “What do you suggest? If I am to be captured, dispose of it?”

“Monty, they catch you it’s gonna be somewhere within the factory grounds. After that it’s just a matter of not dying from the hypothermia.”

“And not starvation?” They were miles from the front lines…when they last knew where the front lay. Monty would be running their own Marathon, and once again it was the Message, not the Man, that mattered.

“Nah. We’ll stock you up with D rations and all the fuckin’ chocolate bars you can carry. But they catch you here, not gonna be time to or anyplace to toss it. They search you, they’ll find it,” Barnes assured him. "I’m thinking something a little more…intrusive.”

“Pardon?”

“You’re gonna keep it on your person,” Barnes fisted into his shoulder, pulling a stray thread from his shirt, not meeting Monty’s eyes. "And I don’t mean your pockets.”

“But where on earth?”

Barnes only winced. "Someplace the sun don’t shine.”

That stopped Monty short. “I beg your pardon?”

“Trust me, Monty. Every man’s got a place he can put something if he really wants it bad enough.”

Monty frowned.

“You finger yourself?” Barnes asked, taking pity. “Ever give it to a girl up the back way?”

Monty stared.

“Yeah,” Barnes patted his arm. Doled him the rest of his ration of condoms. "Put it on before you put it in," he winked.

“But—“ Monty began. Fingers were one thing (not that Monty had ever—well, ever frequently. since boarding school, since learning that such things weren’t done, were done only by fairies, different—of course—than helping a fellow out with one’s hand on another’s cock, it wasn’t as if one fucked, or kissed, felt attraction, or was in anyways queer), and certainly there had been a few pleasantly agreeable women he’d met on leave who’d indulged his curiosity, but—that? “But won’t that—be rather, well, uncomfortable?”

“Pal, I don’t even wanna think about it,” Barnes winced. "I’ve had a fist in my ass before, and if I were you, I’d shank my dear sweet baby sister for a tub of vaseline.”

“I. Well. That’s, rather—“ Monty babbled, felt his face flush crimson.

“And if I were you, I’d practice.”

“Practice?” As in—?
Barnes just clapped his shoulder and shook his head. "Can't be worse'n anything we've all seen Dugan do."

…as in.

Monty gaped after him. Well, where the bloody blazes would he find a place to do that—?

“Did...did Sarge just hand you a pro ration—?” Dugan asked, staring between them. “Shit, don’t answer that,” he muttered, knuckles pressed against his tired eyes. “I don’t even wanna know.”

Say some words, the Woman said. They are dead, said the Poet. Yes, said She. They are dead.

They are dead. What words would you then have me say, asked the Poet. Would you I say yes, as youth is wasted on the young, so is life on the undeserving. Would you I say there is no justice, no sense, no reason. Would you I say we are born, we live, we die. That the sun shines down, the rain falls on the innocent and unjust alike. Would you I say we are fools to think any differently.

I am no child, She said. If there truly be a God interested in our affairs, He is either unjust or impotent. Or perhaps He turned His back, the Poet replied, turned His back long ago, and has forsaken us.

Perhaps. Yet there are those who would still seek to find favor in His sight, said She. You are The Poet. If ever you loved him or owed him loyalty, say some words. I care not whether you believe them.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Bucky didn't enlist, he was drafted. But he could have easily dodged his draft—Steve wasn't the only one to lie on his enlistment form. In 1941, The US Army Surgeon General barred those with 'homosexual proclivities' from service. This recommendation was taken up by the Selective Service (draft board). The resulting blue discharge would have been dishonorable, a psychiatric diagnosis as well as character defamation, and would have prevented him from joining the civilian workplace and even denied him housing. It would have also outed Steve Rogers.
Don't Ask, Don't Tell barred openly queer service members, while prohibiting the US military from questioning the sexualities of closeted individuals unless they had ample reason/evidences to do so. Investigations proving active queer relationships during military service resulted in discharge. Don't Ask, Don't Tell was signed into law early 1994, and repealed by the Obama administration in 2011...coincidentally the same year Steve Rogers and his "Captain America Is Disappointed In You" face returned. Infer from that what you will.

Why does everyone hate Monty's hat?

Berets of any color were not officially included in United States military uniforms until 1961 when the green beret was adopted by Army Special Forces, and since that time Green Beret has become eponymous. Black berets are still Army Service Uniform standard (dress), but have been replaced in Army Combat Uniform due to offering no sun protection to the user. So Monty's dapper little red hat would've seemed quite ridiculous to US servicemen at the time.

Henry VIII, Edward VI, Jane Grey, Bloody Mary, and Elizabeth I make Game of Thrones look tame when it comes to sibling rivalry and religious war.

Black and Tans: nickname for the Royal Irish Constablery (RIC), guilty of war crimes and purposeful civilian violence.

“...Should the order (“Hands Up”) not be immediately obeyed, shoot and shoot with effect. If the persons approaching (a patrol) carry their hands in their pockets, or are in any way suspicious-looking, shoot them down. You may make mistakes occasionally and innocent persons may be shot, but that cannot be helped, and you are bound to get the right parties some time. The more you shoot, the better I will like you, and I assure you no policeman will get into trouble for shooting any man.”


This is the same 'shoot on sight' mentality that results in hundreds of civilian casualties, all too often minorities, at the hands of the Police in the US every year. The RIC was genuinely awful, comprised largely of English WW I vets desperate for jobs, and they were charged with war crimes and eventually disbanded. The attention brought to their deeds by the press made the people of Britain question the cost of maintaining Ireland. In 1922, the Anglo-Irish treaty was signed which brought about the Irish Free State as a separate entity, and gave Northern Ireland the right to remain under British rule.

For further reading:

Venereal disease (now known as sexually transmitted infections or STI) was a major issue in both WWI and WWII, and a massive public health outreach was launched among GIs to prevent the spread of disease as the antibiotics to treat syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia weren't developed until 1944 or later. For WACs, this was abstinence-only education. For servicemen, it was propaganda about the immorality of prostitution and sex outside of marriage in addition to TERRIBLE urethral cleanses. Pro Stations and Pro kits for prophylaxis of VD were stationed off-base and/or distributed on a weekly or monthly basis with rations. Unlike the US Forces, the Nazis legalized and even encouraged prostitution within specially designed off base brothels, with soldiers and a superior office recording the name of their sexual partner and location of their encounters to help track and treat disease should anyone become infected.


I get a kick out of imagining starving artist, sex-positive Steve Rogers refusing to draw this propaganda for the OWI due to its unfair depiction of women, and refusing to design pamphlets on sexual health for containing scientifically inaccurate information on wet dreams, masturbation, and VD...and then the thought of poor newly Cap!-ified Steve Rogers having to perform in one of these movies makes me cringe. Think of poor Morita tearing his hair out at Dugan's less-than-innocuous sexual exploits all over Europe and constant need for treatment.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning for slurs, violence, and gross medical imagery.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I dreamed, said the Singer, and behold in my dream there were seven runners who ran a race, yet the slowest and weakest outran them all. Thus the first shall be last and the last shall be first. And the Children said, Would you then race against us? And they hated him.

I dreamed, said the Singer, and behold in my dream there were seven stars who sang in the heavens above, yet the smallest and dimmest outshone them all. And the Children said, What is this dream you have had? And they hated him all the more.

So the Children were jealous of him, and plotted against him, yet his Mother heard and treasured these words in her heart.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

"...a propaganda piece created by the USO, whose legacy lives on both in captured footage, war-bond posters, and countless comics. Captain America is an icon, a symbol, the intellectual property of the United States Army, an embodiment of that "truth, justice, and the American Way" so prized by politicians and Armed Forces recruiters alike. It is an image that would be seized by the Republican party in the 1970s, one that lent itself well to the active recruitment of the religious right into the political sphere. And this is the Cap we are most familiar with: the frowning face, the stern gaze, the condemnation and judgment glaring in protest at abortion clinics and Pride parades alike.

But is Falsworth's Captain any more accurate? Or is he yet another biased interpretation, this time with a liberal, pro-LGBT slant? Are those toting WWBSRD (Who Would Bisexual Steve Rogers Do) bracelets, wearing matching Jacob (I Have Loved)/I am Jacob t-shirts, wielding circular shields painted with the colors of the bisexual flag or emblazoned with various LGBT symbols any better?

Steven Grant Rogers was born July 4th, 1920. He was an only child, the impoverished, orphaned son of Irish immigrants who was accepted into military service against all sound medical judgment. In the age of American eugenics less than a dozen years after the inception of the Tuskegee Experiment, one must wonder whether he was actively recruited solely for the purpose of illegal human experimentation. Project REBIRTH was intended for the United States Army, after all, never for any individual man. Steve Rogers was a 4F in an era of Ableism, a Catholic in a country of Protestants, a minority, an unknown, and more than that, unwanted. He was a man no one would miss, the ideal candidate should Erskine's first human trial fail. Within days of the now infamous NAZIS IN NEW YORK byline, the plates for The New York Examiner's June 25th, 1943 edition were misplaced and the original photograph purchased by an anonymous buyer at auction, never to be
seen again. On June 30th, 1943, a local Catholic Church flooded in a sewer backup destroying
hundreds of genealogies, and thousands of documents were misplaced when Brooklyn Borough Hall
underwent construction on July 1st, 1943, never to be seen again. Perhaps it is paranoia to wonder
whether this was more than mere coincidence, but it would be likewise naïve to dismiss evidence of
a white-washing campaign so fiercely effective there were no government records in the public
domain concerning Steve Rogers' pre-Identity existence until the release of the 1920 Census seventy-
two years later.

Rebecca Barnes-Proctor has repeatedly stated her family was forced to sign gag orders by the SSR
and to this day continues her annual Independence Day petition to have this order lifted and the
property of Steve Rogers and James Buchanan Barnes returned. If nothing changes, this year will
mark the 58th time the request has been denied by the United States Government under exemptions
to FOIA. Steve Rogers was effectively erased from history by a government that exploited him, the
same government that continues to propagate his image for the purpose of Human Rights abuses on a
global scale under the guise of "Enduring Freedom". So this Independence Day we must ask
ourselves: is the appropriation of Steve Rogers for LGBT or mutant rights—for any cause, however
well-intended—a true reclamation, or merely a re-branding?"


CHAPTER TWELVE

Even the best laid plans, well. And theirs had been haphazard and incomplete at best. But if the sun
never set on the British Empire, then the Third Reich stopped for no calamity, however great or
small. The Shift wore on. He joined Morita on the inspection line, goggles down, back sore, tracing
the minute seams of metal with both fingers and magnified sight. Yesterday they’d approved over a
hundred incendiaries, and it looked to be more so today. He'd been in London during the air raids,
saw the children at the train stations shipping out to the country, lost friends in the air and on the
ground alike during the Blitz, and now here he was, perfecting the very weapons he so hated. It left a
bitter, ashen taste in his unwashed mouth. So if Monty had noticed several defects yet passed them
on anyways, well. It was no one's business but his own. If even only one in every ten thousand that
fell failed to detonate, then by all accounts the effort would have been worth it.

Morita worked beside him, bent and focused on their task. The man remained as silent as ever. But
today, Monty noticed, today he was far from inscrutable. There were beads of sweat forming above
those goggles, trickling down his face, stuck in the hairs of his thin beard. Monty recognized that
disheveled expression, had worn it himself not hours ago when Jones had nearly throttled him...and
he wasn't the only to notice. Barnes stuck close.

"You're not going far, are you, Sarge?" Morita asked, every time Barnes did a round of the floor.

"Nah, Morita," Barnes shrugged. "Not too far. Monty'll keep a lookout."

A lookout for what, precisely? Monty wondered.

But his companion only shot him a look, dubious at best...and at worst, insulting. "What, you don't
trust Limey?" Barnes chuckled. "Now that's just racist, Morita. Shame on ya. Hell, I'm a fuckin'
Mick and Monty and I get along just fine. Cept when it comes to an Irish Free State, of course. That
an' baseball—the fuck is cricket, anyways?"

"He ain't exactly given me a reason to trust him, Sarge," Morita said.
"He ain't exactly ain't," Barnes countered unintelligibly, then winked. "If you're lookin' for the enemy, Morita, I'll give you a hint: they're the ones who walk with sticks up their asses and can't salute worth shit." Then he clapped them both roughly on the back of the head. "Play nice, girls!"

...Good Lord. Americans and Irishmen! If losing the Empire meant getting rid of Barnes, then heaven help him, but it was damn well worth it. Monty was about to voice as much when the inevitable happened. They were in a munitions factory, for God's sake, untrained, tired, and untested. Mistakes were not so much unavoidable as to be expected...and rather fatal at that. Monty had opened his mouth, a clever retort on the tip of his tongue when the explosion rang from the assembly line. The force of the blast sent him airborne, and Morita was flung away.

All was dark.

Monty opened his eyes to a world of silence. There had been a noise, an awful noise like the sound of the Luftwaffe shrieking from the heavens, then a horrible, pervading veil of nothing.

Monty blinked.

Several seconds. An eternity. Perhaps no time at all. Then a ringing whine, enough to split his head open. Monty gasped, clawed at his ears to stop the pain. Their world was a haze of smoke and dust, he couldn't see, couldn't hear, but he could taste the ash, could smell the tang of petrol pouring from the shattered machinery, feel the sparks and heat in the air. Barnes, years of training took over and his fears and hurt and instinct were shoved aside. Where was Barnes—?

But Monty's eyes and throat were choked, couldn't see, couldn't breathe. "Barnes?" He tried to call. "Barnes!"

The man wasn't to be found. Who knew whether or where the blast had thrown him. But Morita. Morita had been flung against the shells. Monty staggered up, eyes still watering, found himself bracing against the weight trapping the smaller man, back straining and muscles screaming. Time seemed frozen, mired in place like the Royce and her shrilly spinning tyres when his spitfire of a sister had stolen her (hell had no fury like Jacqueline Victoria Falsworth and he, oh he would never see Jackie again) that summer in '36 and burned rubber all over the paving stones at Falsworth Manor, the car shuddering and shaking in protest, held still as the tyres spun out by Jackie's clever hands. And the Royce, the Royce was spinning still and Jackie held it fast, and it wasn't enough, not nearly enough, he wasn't enough the man would suffocate under such a thing—

Movement. Muted voices as though underwater. More hands, sets of shoulders braced against his own. And slowly, slowly the those shells began to give, the weight tilting, lifting, rolling away, Jackie letting up on the emergency brake, the driveshaft screaming, tearing out of the Estate across the lawn, long turves thrown up and the Lady Falsworth's roses ruined. He collapsed in exhaustion with that sudden memory, sprawled beside Morita, felt rather than heard or saw the man's gasps for air, dimly aware of hands on his own shoulders, shaking him. Monty raised himself to his side, wiped soot and tears from his eyes to find the frightened faces of Berger and Ackermann staring back at him in shock.

Sound came booming back. Time ran forward like a rushing stream. Beside him, Jim Morita sat, reset his own shoulder, taut face unflinching, then staggered towards the fallen. Monty floundered like a drunkard, pulled both Ackermann and Berger to their feet and followed, cursing. He was a soldier—a Falsworth, dammit!—the last living member of His Majesty's 3rd Parachute Brigade, so he'd be damned if some Jap went where he dared not—

Strong hands grasped him from behind, dug deep in his shoulders. Wheeled him about, wild eyes searching. Blue. Barnes. Alive, Monty let out a bursting breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding.
The man shouted something, lips moving in soundless fury. Shoved him roughly.

*It can’t get out, Monty remembered. It can’t leave here. Even if the rest of us never do, it can’t leave here.*

*But—*, Monty thought desperately, *But*. But it wasn’t fair, dammit. He’d been prepared to do his duty for King and Country, to lay down life or limb…but no one ever spoke, in all that time, in all those years, not a man of them had spoke of the horrors of remaining behind, to swallow one’s pride, one’s honor, to simply stand and watch. War was a gentleman’s game, they’d said. If there was no greater honor than to serve, well, then. What shame to stand aside.

But he was far from alone. Barnes stood beside him, grim-faced and silent, and if the bravest man he’d ever known could force himself from the fray, well. There was no cowardice in it. For the good of them all, they would stand aside, choose to prioritize not their own safety, but the integrity of the mission and aught else be damned.

Monty watched Dugan race to keep the shells away from the fire, lifting two at a time, even. Saw Morita haul a gasping Jones from the flames. Watched the men dart back in, time and time again. Saw the anger in their eyes flash as Monty stood by, useless, cowardly, seemingly idle. But it mattered not what others might think. He and Barnes shared a secret, a mission, a purpose. And if only, if only he’d been more prepared, if only they’d made plans, had the final escape and provisions ready. The world had fallen into chaos and who would miss one man, who would miss James Montgomery Falsworth, red beret be damned—?

*It can’t get out. It can’t leave here. Even if the rest of us never do, it can’t leave here.*

They were enemy combatants, prisoners of war, foreigners on foreign soil and here was a factory full of fire and explosives, the very means to their own destruction…and Oh, bloody hell. The man can’t have meant——

Barnes was knelt next to Jones, hands over the man’s gushing head wound but his eyes—pale ice amid a sea of soot—flicked the Monty’s own, and the question died on Monty’s lips.

*For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,*  
*Th’ oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,*  
*The pangs of despis’d love, the law’s delay,*  
*The insolence of office, and the spurns*  
*That patient merit of th’ unworthy takes,*  
*When he himself might his quietus make*

Only as a last resort, that piercing gaze promised. Only in the direst need. If all other hopes had been exhausted, then. Only then. For all his talk of home, the Rogers girl, for all his seeming hope…such a thing had been Barnes’ plan all along, Monty understood. Everything else was simply whistling in the dark. *This* was what awaited them all, if all else should fail. There was no chance of rescue, no hope of escape, and the weapons of HYDRA would be loosed on the world. Barnes had sacrificed his own reputation, his people, his religion, became reviled and a traitor, had played Joseph to gain the opportunity of Sampson: he had been handed the keys to the kingdom, had his hands placed on the pillars, and would die with the Philistines, content.

…and would have done. Had it not been for Monty Falsworth. And that weight alone was enough to send him staggering. *Courage, courage, dear heart. Courage. Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.* Perhaps they would die in an inferno someday. Perhaps the man they trusted more than any would in the end betray them all. But not today. Today they had survived. They would live to work—they would live to *fight* (for that's what this was, not a surrender, never a defeat)—another day.
While there was yet work, while there was a member of his Majesty's 3rd Parachute Brigade, there was hope. *It's only the weight of the free world, man.* He'd said a lifetime ago. *Must you Americans be so damned dramatic?*

There were burns and bruises, cuts and coughing, but to a man they had survived. Miraculously, impossibly, they'd survived. The worst off was the Frenchman, closest to the explosion, hauled from the wreckage in a fireman's carry, the cloth of his sleeves and shirt burned away, shining red welts raised on his hands, arms, chest and face. His hairline was already peeling. "Frenchie? Frenchie!" Morita set the man down. "Jones! What's he saying?"

"He gonna make it, Morita?" Barnes said too loudly, blood trickling from both ears.

"Bit busy, Sarge!"

Barnes cupped a hand behind his ear. "He say something?"

"Maybe. Hell if I know, Sarge!" Morita shouted back. "It's jibberish to me!"

"We may have to—"

"Damnit, Sarge, I'm a field medic not a surgeon I'm not trepanning anyone!"

"Jonesey!" Barnes called. "Jonesey, I need you now!"

Jones scuttled closer, dark skin gone hoary with ash, laid his ear against the Frenchman's face.

"Jonesey! What's he sayin'?" Barnes insisted.

"Dunno, Sarge," Jones groaned as blood leaked out his left ear, tracked down the man's face. "Can't hear a damn thing!"

"Man was right in the middle of it. How the hell is he even alive?" Dugan wondered for everyone.  

*N'avez vous pas entendu dire que Dieu aide toûjours aux fous, aux amoureux, et aux ivrognes?*" the Frenchman muttered.

Jones let out a high, reedy whistling sound, eyes shut tightly. "Jonesey—?" Barnes exchanged a look with Morita, more concerned now than ever.

"Du-m-m-m-ma—" Jones managed to say.

"Jonesey!"

"Du-m-m-m-ma-a-a-as! He's quoting Dumas—!" Jones howled, slapping a hand to his knees, face contorting in laughter. "Les Trois Mousquetaires!" he pulled the Frenchman into a rough embrace as he wiped tears from his lashes, leaving dark streaks of skin visible through thick swaths of dust. "You crazy son of a bitch! He's fucking fine, Sarge."

"Yeah, yeah, Le Tros Whatever-the-fuck-that-means," Barnes gripped their shoulders tightly in relief. "Glad you're still with us, Frenchie, you bastard. You gonna share with the class, Jonesey-boy?"

"Means God's got a soft spot for drunks, fools, and lovers," Jones hiccoughed as they pulled apart. "Told him it's a damned good thing the French are all three."

...and to that Monty would quite heartily agree.
But the Frenchman continued to speak, desperate for Jones' attention. Monty's own understanding of the tongue was rudimentary at best, but one didn't need to speak like a Frog to catch the urgency in the man's voice.

"Jonesey, what's he sayin'?"

"He's saying they've got shit materials," Jones frowned at the deluge of animated French.

"What's he sayin'?

"Dunno, Sarge!" Jones bellowed back. "Studied French literature, not chemistry! Apparently their explosives's contaminated. The TNT? It's...turned?" Jones frowned in concentration as the man labored a point in increasing exasperation. "Changed? Soured? Rotten—?"

"Yeah, yeah, I get the gist." Barnes glowered. "Now ask him how the fuck he managed to survive a SC250 goin' off right in front of him...oh, wait, it didn't 'cause if it did we'd all be dead. Now spill." Jones blinked. Posed the question to the Frenchman, who shrugged. "Goddamnit, Frenchie! I've told you not to dick around with this stuff! You're off the floor," Barnes snarled. "NOW."

"Oui, oui, ma mère," Dernier dismissed him with a wave, hair still smoking. "Ce n'est pas ma faute!"

"Jonesey?" Barnes bit his lip, shut his eyes and shook his head. Ran fingers through his sweat-soaked, ash streaked hair.

"Yeah, Sarge?"

"Do me a favor and don't translate that. Morita, get him downstairs and get him cleaned up. Fuck's sakes cover those burns before he dies of infection."

"You heard him," Morita hauled the injured man up on shaking feet, "let's get you washed up. You're yellower than I am."

But an incident of this size, no matter how fortunate, no matter who was at fault, could hardly hope to go unnoticed. "Barnes! Barnes!" Kleiber's voice rang. "Where is Barnes?"

"Kleinführer?" Ackermann cried beside him. "Wo ist der Kleinführer!"

"I'm fuckin' fine, kid," Barnes stood with a grimace. Clapped the young man on the shoulder. "You alright? Everyone okay?" Slow nods. Hesitant grins. Shout of "son of a bitch!" from Dugan, even some scattered laughter. They'd survived. After everything, after Feraldo, after Brennan, they'd survived. There would be no losses today.

"I regret to report the casualty of my pride," Jones supplied for the Frenchman.

"Fuck you, Frenchie," Barnes growled, shoved a finger into his chest. "Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses I will turn you into shoes." I leave Frenchie alone too long an' something's bound to explode again. Well. If they were to tan Jacques Dernier for this frankly ridiculous and dangerous mess, Monty would wear them. That is, if Barnes didn't claim them first. But Dernier's tinkering was the least of their worries.

"Mein gott, man, what has happened?" Kleiber gaped at the wreckage, wiping soot from his spectacles. "We could all of us have been killed!"

Well, Monty pondered darkly, quite. The man had no idea how true it was.
"'m Fine. All of mine are fine. Little worse for wear but we'll manage," Barnes said. "Equipment's gonna be somethin' else. Whole batch ain't worth shit. Your boys okay?"

"Ubersoldat Berger and my nephew? Ach was! They are, as you say, anything but!" the man clutched his heart. "But they are unharmed, it would seem."

But Kleiber wasn't alone. Lohmer loomed above them, beyond patience. "Barnes! Wo est Barnes? Was ist das hier für eine Judenschule! Explain this interruption!"

"Explain? How about you explain, pal?" Barnes wheeled on Lohmer. "You're handing me shit materials, that's what! Demnier's a demolitions expert, says your stock's contaminated. Fuck! Could've killed us all! How'd you expect my men to work like this, huh?"

"Barnes," Kleiber began, a placating arm outstretched. Barnes waved him aside. "How'm I supposed to do my damn job with you Arshlöcher sabotaging my supply!"

"Barnes!" Kleiber pleaded.

"Judenscheisse," Lohmer bristled. "I would not say such things if I were you."

"Yeah, or what?" Barnes returned. "I'm the best fucking foreman in the Third Reich, pal! I run this place a damn sight better than you ever did so kiss my kike ass. You won't do shit."

Time shattered. Lohmer pulled back a hand. Struck Barnes in the face as a drunkard might an unruly child. There was a collective intake of breath, and something in the smokey air changed in a heartbeat, a stillness laced with menace. Even Ackermann and Berger, Germans, Nazis, mere boys in men's uniforms, grew suddenly alert and intent, all traces of fear, of injury gone. It wasn't right, Monty thought, it wasn't right at all. He was hardly a pugilist, preferred pistols to punching, had, at the Academy, developed a reputation as crack shot at twenty-five meters. But Monty was still English, had seen his fair share of prize fighting. Knew proper form and physique when he saw it. Lohmer had telegraphed the move, it was poorly done, and the man, Monty realized, the man had sufficient time to dodge, to pull away from the blow, to counter, to feint, fight back. But Barnes did not. The mad Irish bastard hadn't flinched. He'd chosen to take the blow full force, staggering under the pain...and when he rose to his feet rubbing that bruised cheekbone there was something akin to victory in his blazing eyes.

Without thought, without pause, without deliberation they all of them as one stepped forward.

...Ah, Monty thought.

"Go on, pal," Barnes said, chin held high, alone between the German giant and the men he'd sworn to protect. "I could do this all day." It was a moment larger than life itself, a sense of inevitability, predetermination, as if the outcome were already apparent to them all, written in rune stone, sung by bards, embroidered in ancient tapestry, illuminated in parchment, enacted on the cosmic stage for time eternal. It was David and Goliath, Beowulf and the Dragon, Monty thought. Live or die, it was a fight Barnes couldn't help but win whether he raised his own fists or not.

Lohmer drew his pistol. Barnes didn't so much as blink. "Do it," he shrugged. "I fuckin' dare you."

"Now you are a dead man, Barnes."

"So are you, pal."
"Herr Lohmer, lasse der Lagerältester en Ruhe!" Kleiber called. "Step away."

Lohmer blinked, astonished to find another Astra aimed not at Barnes, but himself. "I do not take orders from you, Herr Kleiber."

"Step away, or you will be blown away!"

"You would threaten me?" Lohmer challenged, incredulous.

"You would threaten HYDRA?" Kleiber's face was wrenched and red. "Sergeant Barnes is an irreplaceable asset! You would do well to remember this."

"Da," Ackermann agreed, drawing in turn, hands steady yet voice shaking. "Schluss damit!" Behind him, Berger's blue eyes grew wide in fear. The boy clutched for his own weapon clumsily, and Monty reached out, the only movement in a sea of stillness, to lower that arm and shaking barrel to the ground. The last thing needed now was a stray bullet from a boy's erring hand, for this standoff to escalate into an all-out war from which there could be no victory. Frightened grey eyes looked up into his, blinked once, twice, then the arm gave, and the boy stood there, ashamed.

"Judenschwein! Ich werde ihn umbringen!" Lohmer snarled, jerking his hand towards Barnes. The words were German, but the gesture was universal enough. But Barnes didn't flinch, and everywhere, all around, men surged forward with one mind, a pride intent on its prey. German, French, American, it made no difference. Weapons were drawn, guns and fists and factory implements, and that was the moment Monty knew, knew he and everyone here, prisoners of war, Nazi soldiers, these two boys—Lt. Kleiber, even—would die for this man.

...would kill for this man. And consequences be damned.

"Well, now," Barnes drawled, raising a hand to tap the barrel of the gun as Lohmer seemed to realize his untenable position. "Guess this is what you might call an impasse, pal."

Only the man said im-pass-EE, and Monty groaned inside. He had the terrible suspicion Barnes had done it on purpose, simply to lighten the mood. The man's levity, it seemed, knew no bounds.

Lohmer wrest the pistol away. Brandished it above his head. "Perhaps you cannot be killed. But you will be punished! Seize him!"

Not a man of them moved.

"Bring him to me! Seize him at once!"

"That is most unwise," an soft voice said.

...Zola. A nervous ripple went through the crowd, and the spell was broken.

"You were given instructions, Herr Lohmer. Specific instructions. Have you forgotten? Or are you perhaps incapable of following them?"

"I receive orders from Herr Schmidt. Not his Schoßhündchen!"

"And yet Herr Schmidt left me in charge. It would be unfortunate, would it not, upon his return to inform him of your untimely death." No malice, no ice, just plain, simple fact. A statement, not a question. Monty shuddered. For all of Lohmer's rage, for all of Hitler's bluster, Barnes had been right: this man's calm was far more dangerous.
"I am a soldier of HYDRA," Lohmer growled. "You are nothing!"

"I hardly think so. You, Herr Lohmer, are a petulant child incapable of controlling his anger," Zola continued, undeterred. "While I am a scientist. You will find HYDRA has no use for untrained children...and Herr Schmidt less so." Beside him, Berger made a choking noise. Monty squeezed his wrist, squeezed it hard, brought the boy's thoughts to the pain and pressure in that aching arm, silencing him even as Zola's beady eyes flicked in their direction. There, the thought struck him suddenly. Now we're even in the sight of gods and men.

Barnes merely sniffed, took that moment to raise a hand and wipe the trickling blood from his nose in a long stripe down his sleeve.

"Sergeant Barnes," Zola nodded as if he had come to the floor for a simple stroll.

"Zola," Barnes returned as though discussing the weather.

"We have spoken before, have we not? Keep your men in check, or I will be forced to take actions both you and I find distasteful."

"Same, pal."

"Enough! Return to your hole, Herr Doctor! And you, Dreckjude! Return to your work!" Lohmer blustered. The man did not take kindly to being ignored. But it was apparent, wasn't it, apparent to every man here who held the power. It was Barnes. Barnes and Zola, not Lohmer. These men? Captor and captives like? They might part before him like waves on shoals, but there was no loyalty, no devotion, no warmth or recognition in the action. The man was powerless with the illusion of power, and only that which they themselves had granted. The strings had been shown, now, and the puppet held no more fear for them. Machiavelli was wrong, Monty thought. It was a far, far better thing to be loved than feared...and to be needed, most of all.

"I presume your work will proceed as scheduled?" Zola asked.

Barnes only raised a singed eyebrow at the still smoking factory floor.

"Ah, yes," he said. "How unfortunate. How lucky not a man of you was killed. Carry on, Sergeant Barnes."

"Same," Barnes said with an curt nod. And only when the man had gone did Monty let out a breath, a prayer, perhaps, of thanks to whatever deity, Jewish or Irish, Christian or whover, either unlucky or humorous enough to be tasked with the reckless and foolhardy. But if Monty breathed easier with the monster gone, he wasn't the only one. The thinly-stretched silence was broken, the air filled first with sighs of relief, then chuckles, then cheers, congratulations, bellows of laughter.

"Run home, Fritz!" Dugan crowed. "That a tail between your legs or your limp dick? Tell ma it was the 107th that licked ya!" And all around there were hearty cries of approval.

Monty forced his way forward through the throng of men flocked around Barnes. "Good God, man, if you must insist on gambling with the devil, consider telling me you hold the winning hand."

Barnes only worked his jaw, eyes squeezed shut in silence.

"I say, man, are you quite alright?"

And hidden the midst of that celebration and distraction, Barnes allowed himself a fleeting moment of humanity. "Fuck," he muttered. "Oy gevalt, Rogers! Feisigh do thoin fein!"
The man was as infuriating and unreadable as ever. Which, Monty believed, meant Barnes was no
better, no worse for wear.

...How very wrong he was. "Brennan," Barnes choked then through gritted teeth. "Poor bastard's
still alive. Zola'd taken Frenchie if he ain't. Now smile like I said somethin' funny."

Well. Barnes wasn't the only one who could fight terror with humor. "I'm English, man," Monty
frowned. "It would only serve to raise suspicions." Barnes made a dark, throaty sound, one even an
Englishman might mistake for a laugh. But that seeming mirth didn't quite extend to his eyes. Barnes
looked worn. Exhausted. Drawn as Monty had never seen him before.

"You alright, Sarge?" Jones interrupted, frowning between them.

"Fuckin' peachy, Jonesey," Barnes pulled a wry grin, now smooth and cocksure, one hand laid
lightly against his swollen cheek. "Get your lazy asses back to work. You ladies have a hell of a lot
of cleaning up to do...now slap me with batter and call me a cobbler, 'cause I'm gonna make me
some shoes." And he stalked off, that strut in place, to give the Frenchman at fault a stern piece of his
mind and an ass-licking to boot.

"Is that—?" Monty wondered weakly, finding himself standing next to the man who'd tried to
strangle him mere hours before.

"Irish? Jewish? Brooklyn? Hell if I know," Jones eyed him up and down in disapproval. "But I'll be
dammed if it's American."

And it came to pass the Singer had a dream. Let not your heart be troubled, said the
Woman. Come. Tell me this dream you have had.

I dreamed, said the Singer, and behold in my dream there was ash and fire, and the Boy
I have loved was taken and slain upon the altar. I dreamed, said the Singer, yet behold
there is none now here to interpret.

Come, said the Woman. Come. For your dream is clear enough. And she brought him
before the Warrior.

Tell me, begged the Singer, tell me does the Boy yet live. Have you seen him whom I
have loved.

The outcry of the Enemy is great, spoke the Warrior, and their Sins exceedingly grave.
If the Boy lives I cannot say, yet still would I rain down fire and brimstone from the
Heavens.

Would you slay the righteous along with the wicked, asked the Singer. Far be it from
you to slay the innocent and unjust alike.

There is none righteous, the Warrior said. No, not One.

So the Singer was angered, and he left. Why are you angry, spoke the Woman, and why
has your countenance fallen. If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?

I dreamed, said the Singer, and behold in my dream there were seven runners who ran a
race, yet the slowest and weakest outran them all. I dreamed, and behold in my dream there were seven stars who sang in the heavens above, yet the smallest and dimmest outshone them all. I am the Victor, the Star and the Song. And so it came to pass.

So it came to pass, said She. All this you have dreamt and more.

On my bed at night I sought him whom I have loved, I sought him but I did not find him. I dreamed, the Singer wept, I dreamed of the Boy whom I have loved, and the dream was sweet as honey, yet now has turned to bitterness in my mouth. Behold in my dream there was ash and fire, and he whom I have loved was taken and slain upon the altar. And thus will it come to pass.

Perhaps, said the Woman. Perhaps not. Perhaps instead you were made for such a time as this.

What then would you have me do, the Singer wondered.

What you have always done, said She. What you believe to be right, for you are the Victor, the Star and the Song. The Tinker will aid you and I myself will fight alongside you. Come, said the Woman. Come.

I will be a Singer no longer, said the Captain. I will rise and go down to the city, I will seek him whom I have loved and I will find him. I will find him and I will not let him go until I have brought him safely home.

Perhaps, said She. But what you do, you must do quickly. Come!

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Regarding the use of slurs:

I try to make Bucky's use of slurs self-referential and humorous. Monty uses a slur for persons of Japanese descent and the leadership of the Third Reich continues to be a bunch of racist, anti-semitic dickbags, much like Nick Spencer and Tom Brevoort. Fuck you guys.

Emma Frost is a bad-ass Marvel mutant with a canonically gay older brother who is persecuted and disowned by his family for his sexual orientation (eh, don't you miss the good ol' days of 1990s-era LGBTQ+inclusion? You can be queer...but you still have to suffer for it!). As Emma grows up to become a headmaster at Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters and an advocate for Mutant rights, I really couldn't resist!

Irish Free State-provided for in 1921 at the end of the Irish War for Independence with the Anglo-Irish treaty (An Conradh Angla-Éireannach) and formed in 1922, it went on to become what we know today as Ireland in 1937. Many of the Irish immigrants in the United States at this time were second or third generation, like Bucky, and referred to the homeland by whatever terms they had heard their parents using. I imagine a five year-old Bucky Barnes heard the phrase "Irish Free State" more times in his life than he
had "Ireland" in the last six years, so this is the term I used. (Also, it would serve to further infuriate Monty, the son of an English noble.)

Spitfire/Jacqueline Falsworth is the daughter of Union Jack (James Montgomery Falsworth) and was a superhero during WWII, taking up her father's mantle as a protector. Since Monty is placed in WWII-era instead of WWI in the MCU, I thought it only fitting to make Jackie his sister instead.

Hamlet, Act III, Scene I, line 1763-1768.

Bleeding from the ear can be a sign of eardrum perforation, a common injury associated with sudden pressure changes, such as explosions. Associated symptoms include earache, hearing loss, and ringing in the ears.

Trepanation is the practice of drilling a hole in the skull to release pressure on the brain in case of severe acute head trauma. It is still practiced today in the form of craniotomy for treatment of epidural or subdural hematomas or for placement of intercranial pressure monitoring. It's performed by a neurosurgeon, not a field medic...and included here because I'm a ridiculous Trekkie and couldn't resist a "Damnit, Jim" joke.

N'avez vous pas entendu dire que Dieu aide toûjours aux fous, aux amoureux, et aux ivrognes? (French): "Haven't you heard that God always helps fools, lovers, and drunkards?" French proverb, a form of which is used in the narration of chapter 23 of The Three Musketeers, the most likely place Jones would have encountered the reference. As a mixed-race, famous French author whose father was born into slavery, rose through the French military to the rank of General, fought in the French Revolution, served as a POW and as the inspiration for much of The Count of Monte Cristo and still remains the highest ranking black officer in European history to this day, I figure Gabe Jones would have an academic crush on Dumas and his dad.

Shit it's been years since I've taken a chem class. Per Wikipedia: "TNT is prone to exudation of dinitrotoluenes and other isomers of trinitrotoluene. Even small quantities of such impurities can cause such effect. The effect shows especially in projectiles containing TNT and stored at higher temperatures, e.g. during summer. Exudation of impurities leads to formation of pores and cracks (which in turn cause increased shock sensitivity)." The minute amont of TNT Frenchie was siphoning off for his own personal explosive experimentation was defective, causing an increased sensitivity to pressure changes and an accidental explosion that shouldn't've happened had he had the proper materials.

The SC250 was the most common bomb manufactured by Nazi Germany, used in the London Blitz. It weighed 250kg, quite enough to crush a man.

Oui, oui, ma mère (French): "Yes, yes, my mother." A double insult, although in jest. Dernier purposefully misgenders Bucky as well as makes use of the stereotype of Jewish mothers as overbearing, guilt-tripping, and overprotective.

Ce n'est pas ma faute! (French): "It's not my fault!"

The Canary Girls were British women who worked in munitions factories during World War I whose constant exposure to TNT led to a bright yellow skin and hair pigmentation.

Oy gevalt, Rogers! (Yiddish): no exact translation, strong expression of woe, dismay,
speechlessness, or stand-in curse word, a generic "shit/fuck/damn"

Feisigh do thoin fein! (Gaelic): fuck yourself in your own ass. Bucky does his best Steve Rogers impression and realizes he's been wrong all these years: Steve's temper and smart mouth weren't a giant pain in his ass...no, they were much, much worse.
Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for slurs.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

So the Warrior saw the Brute and said, Surely our choice is before us. But the Philosopher answered, saying Do not look at his appearance nor the height of his stature, for I have rejected him.

Yet he is strong, and fast, and he is above all else obedient. Surely here is a soldier unlike any other, said the Warrior. Surely it is he.

I see not as a man sees, answered the Philosopher, for a man looks only at outward appearance. Yet I would look at the heart.

The Singer is a good man, the Woman said. Surely our choice is before us.

There are others, said the Warrior.

Yes, there are others, agreed the Philosopher. But them I have not chosen.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

"...one of the things I remember most about Captain Rogers was his unit—I suppose you all know them as the Howling Commandos, but to us they were always just Cap's Boys. Jim Morita was the communications officer, did public and media relations, and I don't think it was a coincidence at all, mind you. The man hated cameras, hated the spotlight, wasn't a good public speaker, but Cap said it was important the face people saw was his. Just another reminder that they shouldn't hate, shouldn't be afraid, that there were American citizens still imprisoned for being German, Italian, Japanese. People would always overlook or ignore or be rude to him, but Cap would never let them get away with it. The man once refused interviews with Saturday Evening Post and LIFE, even! He'd always ask us, always ask Morita how they treated him, treated us. Cap wasn't above letting anyone know what he thought of them, always asked us whether shaming a man for racism or being rude to us ladies or just refusing the interview would be best. Oh, and how they'd scream! Get themselves in real trouble with security, have to telegraph or phone home to say they'd been refused...and us girls, well. We worked the lines. Got a real kick out of it, let me tell you. If Cap didn't get cross with them, their own would!

"I remember, once, a war correspondent, I believe, from Time Magazine asked Cap how he felt to have the first Desegregated Unit—that's what they called it back then, you know. 'Desegregation'. Asked him if he thought it was an undo amount of pressure, having to save the world and be responsible for some Negro and a Jap. That's what they called them, then! Can you imagine! And you know what Cap said? He said—and I'll remember this to my dying day—"I don't think that at
It's an honor to serve with these men, Private Jones and Private Morita most of all. And I don't like that term, 'Desegregated'. It makes it sound like segregation is the normal, the natural state of affairs. It's not. It isn't. It's something we've made, and I hope what the Commandos can prove is that anyone can be an American soldier, a Japanese man from Fresno, a Colored Man from Manhattan, a farm boy from Tennessee, a Jew, a woman, even some unlucky Irish Catholic kid from Brooklyn.

"You always hear people touting Cap as some sort of stoic, and he was, to a degree. He'd eat last, rest last, rise first, always. He put those men—and women, you can't forget Carter or Baker or all those brave women in the French Resistance or any of us WAC or WAVES girls!—and his country and freedom above everything, ultimately his life. But he wasn't...

"He wasn't angry, do you understand? He wasn't emotionless.

"He was a good man. A kind man. A sad man, even. He was human, just like you and me. I think we forget that, sometimes. That Captain America was once just Steve Rogers...and being Steve Rogers was what made him a hero. Not some Shield or uniform."


CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The making of munitions was one thing, but cleaning up the wreckage of the Frenchman's folly was another matter entirely. Barnes didn't assign them roles or tasks beyond the restoration of their stations, let the lines fall where they may. It was no surprise to Monty his own countrymen kept their distance. He'd only recently joined them after Anaheim. And they? Well. He had known Captain Lewis and Major Grantham far better than any enlisted man here. And they blamed him—blamed Barnes, perhaps—for their officers' deaths. Blamed his own cowardice for their enslavement. If they hated him and his Received Pronunciation, so be it.

As for the Americans? Well. The Irish found one another, the Italians found one another, the corn-fed Southerners with their slow, rhythmic twang, the rich East Coasters with their Trans-Atlantic airs, the good old boys from the West with their near Scandinavian vowels all found one another and coalesced. He supposed it was how conscription—voluntary or otherwise—had found them across their wide country, and they fractured along the lines that felt most familiar. It was none of it surprising…with the exception of The Overly Educated Jones and That Idiot Dugan.

…Dugan and Jones, it must be said, shared a mutual animosity bordering on (yet never quite becoming) friendship, sniping at one another like an old married couple.

"Can someone explain to me," Dugan panted, heaving against a broad belt and righting it, "what the hell just happened. I mean, aside from Sarge handin' Herr Lohmer his sagging Nazi balls, that is."

"Aside from—?" Jones asked, appearing from under his perch in the machine's undercarriage, wrench in hand. Monty rather had to agree. "I'd take another explosion over that sort of suspense. Anyday."

"Oui," the Frenchman nodded, tinkering on God knows what with his heavily bandaged hands. "Je suis d'accord."

"Quelle?" Jones nearly shouted, one hand cupped behind his ear, feigning deafness. "Pardon?" The Frenchman gave a snort, and mimed a gesture universally understood.
"Et ta mère," Jones countered, and that, at least, Monty understood...and winced.

The Frenchman gasped his inaudible surprise and enacted a dramatic faint.

"I give up," Jones sighed. "From now on mime everything, Charlie Chapman. See if I don't just let you. It'd serve you damn right." And the Frenchman, true to character, said nothing, merely shrugged, pulled his lips into an exaggerated frown, traced a finger like a tear down his left cheek.

"You ever seen a man do somethin’ that foolhardy?" Dugan mopped the sweat from his brow with one meaty hand, continuing the conversation as if the scene had never happened. "Shit! Thought his luck’d give out for good with that one."

"The man’s something else, I’ll give you that," Jones said, bolting the belt's support to the floor. "Wouldn’t want to be him. Thank God for Kleiber."

"God’s got nothing to do with it," Morita's quiet voice made itself heard, the first Monty had really heard the man speak to anyone but Barnes since—well. Since events he would rather not dwell on. "And Kleiber’s the worst of the lot."

"You gonna go all athiest and socialist on us again, Morita? Your little Jap Utopia out in Fresno?" Dugan asked.

"Lohmer hates Jews. Hates blacks. Hates me, and the Japanese are part of the Axis. Guy’s just one more damn Nazi. But Kleiber? Kleiber sees Sarge as an asset, a piece of machinery. He’s useful, so he’ll keep him alive and keep him working, but if Sarge breaks, he’ll just replace him," Morita halted in his task of sweeping up scraps of metal and ash. "I’d rather a guy who hates me than one who won’t even see me as human."

"Well, you’re a Jap, Morita," Dugan said, and not pleasantly. "Ain’t nobody sees you as human."

"And you’re a great Irish hick," Jones countered from the floor as Barnes himself may have done. "Everybody says the same."

...and that, Monty thought aghast as the dark laugh within him turned to dread, couldn't possibly be true. He didn't hate the man, didn't hate the Irish, didn't see them as less than human, not like—

Not like Lohmer, he mused bitterly. And one hardly needed a University education to know if the best one could do was to comfort oneself in the knowledge that at least one wasn't a Nazi...well. Perhaps Morita had a point, about Kleiber. About humanity. More perilous, perhaps, the man who would let you and all yours die than the one who would openly kill you.

But if the lesson had pared Monty to his stung soul, Dugan seemed immune to any such epiphany: "Yeah, well you’re a, a, a—" and Monty had the terrible feeling things were about to turn ugly. With Dugan and Jones, one never quite knew. The line between jest and insult, well. Monty was neither Coloured nor an Irishman. He'd be hard pressed to say where the line was drawn, if indeed it even was.

"A—?" Jones stopped his work with a dead-eyed stare to envy even Barnes'.

"Fuck's sake! I'm gettin' there, Jonesey. For a negro you're awful bossy," he emphasized the word, just enough so, that no man couldn't sense the other in the offing. "Must be that college education of yours, givin’ you airs."

"Well, at least I'm the regular kind, not some damned green nigger," Jones leveled. "That's what you get when you let the damned Irish do a Colored man's job: they pick 'em before they're ripe."
And at that the Irishman gaped like a fish, and Monty himself didn't fare much better. "So much for the Great White Hope." And without another word, Jones went back to his work.

"Yeah, yeah," Dugan deflated like a tyre in the winter chill, combing his mustachios in distraction, not so much admitting defeat as avoiding it entirely. "Help me with this thing, will you?"

Jones stood, eyed him once over sternly before lending his own weight. "It's damn heavy, Dugan."

“C’mon, Jonesey-boy," Dugan heckled in turn. "You Ameri-can, or Ameri-can’t?"

Wait a moment, Monty thought. The joke sounded surprisingly familiar.

"Oh, a pun, is it?" Jones said as they shoved the next belt up together. “Family’s been here for at least five generations, got the freedom papers to prove it. My great-grand-daddy fought for the Union back before your grand-daddy's pasty Irish ass came over on a boat ‘cause he couldn’t figure out how to peel a potato."

And that, whatever it was, for whatever reason, did it. Dugan bristled, turned red as his mustachios, slammed a hand down on the belt loud enough to sting their still-sensitive ears.

“Gentlemen…” Monty began.

“Oh, listen to Queen Victoria, now!” Dugan snarled. “Sorry, your majesty, but we done whooped your ass ages ago, got a Declaration and everything says I don’t gotta listen to a word you say, in the States or Otherwise.”

"Yet clearly you have," Monty flushed, angered in turn. "That joke was mine."

“Et les François!” their resident Frenchman added.

“What’d he say?” Dugan wheeled, en garde for another attack.

“With the assistance of the French,” Jones supplied, albeit begrudgingly. He shot the Frenchman a placating look, and Monty could eat his own shoe. He was sore, sick at heart, poorly slept, a prisoner of war surrounded by his own allies and yet...and yet they treated each other as enemies. No. No, it was worse than that, James Montgomery Falsworth was treating some Paddy—Dugan, he thought, the man's name is Dugan—

“Oh. Okay then! That's alright. Looks like even Frenchie hates you, too," Dugan continued "And that's the problem with you Brits, isn't it? Mine. You say that about damned near everything, don'tcha?"

India. Ireland. Australia. New Zealand, even. But they were part of the Commonwealth, held in protection by the Crown, and the, the Irish, the Indians, the Aboriginals, the Maori, well, they'd all been savages before the Empire, hadn't they—? Living lives that were rather nasty, brutish, and short? What, Limey, something hidden within him said, with a voice that sounded quite like Barnes', if someone invaded your home and told you how to damn well run it, would you be grateful?

"All right! Show of hands!" Dugan called. "Who here cares what her Majesty has to say?"

Monty, it must be said, was no Sargent Barnes. He hadn't succeeded in halting the animosity, merely deflected it upon himself...then again, wasn't that precisely what Barnes would have done? Only with more humour and rather much better success? Whereas Barnes was met with laughter, Monty was met with jeers. Hissing. Boos. Well then, Monty thought. He supposed it was what one got as a British Officer in a troop of (mostly) Irish Americans, or what one got as any officer in a troop of
men entirely devoted to one Sargent James Barnes. And so for Barnes' sake he let the insult stick, felt the egg on his face, felt the irresistible, irrational urge to shout, to to fight, lash out, put a Paddy (damnit, man!)—to put Dugan in his place.

As if the man had a place, solely for being low-bred, uneducated Irish, the voice of Barnes intoned drily.

Oh, bugger it all, Monty thought. A week with an Irishman and I've become a bloody Socialist—!

...the thought was followed by several thousand damn you's addressed to one Sargent Barnes of the US Army, 107th Infantry.

KEEP CALM

and

CARRY ON

Was how the saying went. And James Montgomery Falsworth was, above all else, British. He bit back his retort, and returned to work. And if the inspection line happened to be hammered back into place with rather more force than necessary, well. He knew nothing about it.

There was one upside to this cock-up, however. His workmate hadn't joined in. Morita had been silent beside him through the whole disgraceful affair. The man was a Jap, after all. Wouldn't have the same distrust, years of bad blood as one would find between the English and the Irish, or even a white man and a Colored. “Are all your countrymen like this?” Monty ventured, an attempt at amends. Apology. What else was he meant to do? March up to the man and admit 'sorry, mate, I mistook you for a Jap spy’?

“…he asked the Jap, about the Mick and the Negro,” Morita muttered. And Monty blinked—wondered, really—whether the man knew he'd spoken aloud.

“I'd still rather Kleiber that Lohmer,” Jones said loudly, steering the conversation away from treacherous waters with a wary eye on both himself and Dugan. “Kleiber’s polite, for a Nazi. Lohmer’s trouble.”

"I still say we oughtta do something about that,” Dugan grunted.

“What?” Monty asked aloud, taken so far aback he forgot he wasn't speaking to the man. “I say, man, you can't mean—kill Lohmer?”

“I’m sayin’ thing’s’d be easier around here without that Krout bastard, ’s all.”

"Non!" The Frenchman smiled, and it was a savage, vicious thing. "Tue le tous."

“What’s he say?”

“Goddamnit, Dum Dum, you’re even dumber than you look!” Jones hissed. "Sarge’s done enough to keep us safe! I don't hold with that sort of talk.”

“Well, now. That’s rich. Comin’ from a ni—"
“Shut your mouth, Dugan, or Sarge’ll shut it for you,” Jones cut across him. “You remember what happened last time?”

“…ce fella like you,” Dugan harrumphed. Monty desperately did not wish to discover what had happened the last time. Knowing Barnes, there was a high likelihood it hadn’t been pleasant. “Still don’t explain what happened here.”

"I do believe our Frenchman made a bomb," Monty ventured. And rather badly, he needn't add.

"And if Sarge doesn't kill him, I will," Jones groaned. "You ever hear of a deaf musician? Or linguist?"

Ludwig van Beethoven, Monty didn't voice.

"There's enough explosives in here to take down the whole of Europe, let alone this factory," Jones continued. "He's lucky he didn't get us all killed." And that was the horrifying thought, wasn't it? Had Monty not arrived, had his uniform gone unrecognized, well. Barnes would have destroyed them all for the hope HYDRA's weapon would perish with them.

"Yeah, yeah. So the Frog made a bomb and it fucking did what bombs fucking do," Dugan snorted. "Still. I wanna know. The Hell was Sarge thinkin', going up against Lohmer like that?"

"Qui ne risque rien n'a rien," the Frenchman shrugged.

They turned to Jones as one. The man only sighed. “I gave up a career and university and a scholarship all for fifty-four damn dollars a month. You’re on your own. Uncle Sam does not pay me enough for this.”

“Think the gist is Sarge might be missing half his dick and half his brain but damn, does he have balls,” Dugan snickered.

Speak of the devil, and he shall appear. "This what you louts call workin'?" Barnes snuck up behind him, silent as a cat.

To a man, they startled. All but Morita. The Ranger had the near-preternatural ability to know where Barnes was at any given time.

"Uh..." Dugan began.

"We ain't in Kansas anymore, Toto, this ain't a holiday, so you'd better put your backs into it, girls, or so help me God I'll sing the fuckin' song," Barnes threatened them pleasantly. "I make myself clear?"

Dugan groaned.

“Yes, Massa,” Jones nodded, removing his hat and bowing his head in a show of contrition. “Lordy, Massa.”

Barnes gawped. “Jonesey!”

“Yes, Massa?”

“That ain’t even funny,” he frowned. "You’re Colored, you oughtta know better.”

“What," Jones said. "You’re born pink then turn white, when you get sun you go brown, when you
get mad you go red, when you choke you go purple, when you get sick you go green...and you have the gall to stand there and call me Colored—?” Jones shook his head.

Barnes remained unimpressed.

“Least I pick one and stay with it,” Jones continued, now grinning. “It's you 'white' folks just can’t make up your damned fool minds.”

“That’s it, pal,” Barnes relented, face finally crinkling up in turn. "I'll send you back the 92nd, see if I don’t.”

Jones danced a jig. Took a bow. Laid on the thickest brogue Monty’d ever heard. “Go back to Ireland, Jimmy, y’Paddy bastard and leave m' be.”
And with that, even Dugan barked a laugh.

“Fucking forget it, pal!” Barnes chortled. "I’m sending your ass straight to Liberia!”

“Hey, hey, Jew York! Take a boat back to Israel!”

“I’m from Brooklyn, you shit!” Barnes choked out between fits of laughter and breathless gasping.

“C'mon, Sarge, that the worst you got?” Jones challenged.

"I break a rib-" gasp "-an' get-" gasp "-pneumonia-" gasp "-you're gonna-" gasp "-be awful sorry, pal!”

"Aw, c'mon, Sarge," Dugan said. "Ain't no one ever died of laughin' before."

"Yeah, Sarge," Jones agreed. "Just ask Morita, here."

The medic in question shook his head. "Fellas, I want nothing to do with this." Jones and Barnes, at least, were fast friends, that much was plain. The black man and the Irish Jew, an odd sort of friendship, to be sure. Jones and the Frenchman got along well enough, a marriage of convenience, necessity, even. Dugan and Barnes got along like a house on fire, Dugan and Jones' animosity had reached a precarious peace and bemoaning respect while Morita was largely content to be ignored. And in a startling turn of events, the Americans, the Irish, and the French resented the British on instinct...how very bloody typical.

But that did leave one very important group rather overlooked. The Irish weren't the only Yanks to have lost a man. And as Jones and Barnes continued to bicker in jest while Monty returned to his station, he was sharply reminded.

"Lombardo, Lombardo—this ain't the way, man was sick, you hear?” a hissing whisper carried. "Adessi said the man was sick. Dyin'!”

...Feraldo.

The speaker came in sight, along with his companion. They weren't particularly tall men, no, but large and well muscled like wrestlers even after their month in captivity. The speaker stopped abruptly, stared at Monty with overlarge eyes like a deer caught fleeting in the glare of headlights. For a long moment, no one spoke.

Then, "You the Brit?” the second—Lombardo, he presumed— called, jaw jumping as he stepped forward, shiv in hand.
"You can very well see that I am," Monty said cautiously.

"Where is he?"

Well, if it was Barnes they would have heard him, as the man was cackling like the midnight hyenas of Algeria and Morocco. And if it wasn't, if they were waiting until the man was distracted for precisely this opportunity, well. "Whom, exactly, are you looking for?"

"You goddamned well know who," Lombardo bristled. "That fuckin' Jap."

Ah, so it was to be a bloody, fucking coup d'etat, then. As if Barnes didn't already have enough on his plate. "Haven't a bloody clue," Monty sniffed. "I'm afraid I can't help you, gentlemen."

"You heard the man," his friend begged, laid a hand on the man's shoulder. "Let's go." And Monty found himself hoping—praying, even—that the man would listen to reason.

"So you're on his side, huh?" Lombardo pressed.

Well, fuck. "I do believe it's called an Alliance," Monty said. "Correct me if I am mistaken, but we are all of us on the same side, are we not?"

Lombardo only sneered. "Yeah, yeah. You think you're funny?"

"Whatever quarrel you have with Private Morita, I suggest you solve it," Monty informed them with his crispest, most authoritative pronunciation and a terrible flutter in his chest. "Immediately. Else I will inform Sergeant Barnes." Which was a lie, of course, he'd go straight to Barnes either way about the dissension in the ranks. But if Monty was expecting the threat of Barnes to buy him time, he was sadly mistaken.

"Gonna go tattling to mommy, are you, Tommy Atkins?" the GI leered, stepping closer.

Monty’s lip curled, fists held tight. “You dumb twat, if you think Mum’s bad, clearly you’ve never crossed the governess.” Miss Jennifer Middleton, a handsome and usually genteel woman, it must be said, gave Monty quite a chasing around Falsworth Manor for taking a young Jackie out into the village wearing—of all things—his own trousers, clumsily tailored. She administered an almighty beating to him, too, before Jackie called her an old witch, kicked her shins, bit her arm, and the Governess resigned in a fury. Needless to say, it was the last time Jackie'd ever picked up a thread and needle of her own accord. The Lady Falsworth had only relented to the attire after an eight year-old Jackie's insistence that without them, she'd just go naked. With Jackie, one soon learned, it didn't do well to press these things.

"C’mon, Lombardo," the man’s friend begged. “I’m tellin’ ya, It ain’t worth it—man’s just like us, you hear?”

"He’s a Jap. Attacked Pearl Harbor. Belongs in a camp, in the goddamned ground, Gianni! Man killed Feraldo, an' you wanna just let it go?"

"Of course not!" Gianni cried. "But there'll be time for that. Justice. Court-martial. But after. Let's just get out alive, you hear?"

"You think those WASPs are gonna give a rat's ass about some dead Dago?" Lombardo said. "Only justice’s what we get ourselves."

"You're right," Morita stepped out of the shadows, startling them all. "You're friend is right," he told Gianni. "You want revenge? Justice? You'd best get it now. Army thinks the only good Jap or
Dago's a dead or interned. Army's not going to give a damn about one more dead Dago, one more dead Jap...but Barnes will," he concluded. "So you better get to it then. You don't got much time. Hate for you to miss your window."

...Good Lord, were all Americans such bloody cowboys—?

And he may have done it, certainly had the intent, but Morita's sudden appearance and calm had unsettled him. The man had nerves of steel. "You're a dead man, Morita!" Lombardo called, taking a slow retreat, dark eyes staring back out of the gloam unblinking.

"Take a look around, fellas," Morita answered. "You're not saying anything I don't already know."
The man had had an answer ready, Monty realized. And Barnes...well. Only yesterday he'd assured Morita that Monty would look after him.

Well, then. It was a bloody good thing the man was such a judge of character. "How long have you known?" Monty asked faintly.

Morita shrugged. Went back to sweeping, head bowed low over the broom. "Since Sarge asked me to do it."

He'd known. He and Barnes, they'd both known. All this time. "Yet you did it anyways."

"Since Sarge and asked me to do it. Yes."

Monty found himself at a loss for words. "I say. That was...well. That was brave."

"You're not my friend."

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother

So much for Shakespeare. "Well. As Barnes says," Monty began. "I'm hardly your enemy." Morita only glanced up, said nothing, and resumed scrubbing the soot from the inspection line. Oh, bloody hell. As if the previous day's demonstration hadn't proven them all—Yank or French or English—viciously loyal to the man. "Your Sergeant," Monty corrected.

"I look white to you?" Morita asked, fixing him with a look he hadn't seen the likes of since Jackie'd last had a governess (they never had lasted long, the little sprite went through them like a knife through butter).

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said: I look white to you? All my COs are dead. He's not my anything."

Monty faltered. The military was segregated. Morita would hardly have been in the 107th. Would've woken, like Monty, to find these strange men and their Sergeant all he had left in the world...a world where he was like as not to be considered the Enemy, even by the country and countrymen he served. "I thought—"
"I call him Sarge 'cause he deserves it. You weren't at Azzano. The long march. The cattle cars. You don't have a fucking clue the shit Hermann put us through. Sarge's saved my life—saved all our lives a thousand times over."

"Mine as well," Monty reminded him.

"Yeah. Yeah he did. So don't go pretending you'd be his friend, that you'd be talking to him, talking to me if it were different," Morita said. His face was placid, that expression unreadable, but there was a glimmer of anger in his sharp eyes.

Monty had known plenty of Irishmen. His father's chauffeur. His own valet. Nearly half the kitchen staff at Falsworth Estate. He'd not had much contact with any Orientals, no, aside from a few Ambassadors, their wives, children, and entourages at various dinners and social affairs. One wasn't born a Falsworth without rubbing shoulders with the up-and-coming, of whatever country or color. "Have I done something to offer offense—?"

"You're passing shit materials, that's what," Morita returned. "Sarge gave you the easiest job on the floor and you still can't get it right."

That brought Monty up short. So someone had noticed, then. But after that initial shock came anger and bitterness at everything Monty had lost. "Perhaps it was deliberate."

"Sarge is working his ass off to keep us alive. Risked his neck—risked all our necks—for you. And you're telling me you can't be bothered?"

"Perhaps I dislike working for the enemy." The 'unlike some' went rather implied.

"Say it again, Baijo," Morita said, and for the first time his mellow voice contained the hint of a snarl. 
"'Cause I'll break your fucking fingers and name every ligament in them."

Monty stiffened. Tried to explain. "No one has dropped a bomb on your country." As half-assed apologies went, it was rather half-assed (which Monty supposed was rather the point.)

"Pearl Harbor," Morita stood straight and proud. "That's America. That is my country."

"Well, ain't you patriotic as Teddy Roosevelt ridin' backwards on a bullmoose shootin' a bear," Barnes drawled, sauntering over with one eyebrow quirked. "An' that's from a guy named after a President. You got problems, Morita?"

"No, Sarge," Morita said. "Everything's just peachy."

"That mean something different out on the West Coast, Morita? Cause the closest you're coming is choking on a can of cling peaches. Well, either that, or up the other way." Good God, man. Must he be reminded—?


"Your Britisher's been passing defective materials."

"Well, now," Barnes frowned. "Can't have that. You ain't workin' for Hitler, or Lohmer, or Zola, Monty. You're workin' for me. An' you're gonna work hard, pull your own weight, same as everyone else here blueblood be damned. Keep him in line for me, will ya, Morita?" And Barnes, that absolute bastard, winked.
“Sure, Sarge,” Morita said, shoulders straightening with this newfound trust. It was all so bloody unfair and so bloody typical of Barnes that Monty did his best to suppress a groan. The man was damned determined to desegregate his unit, whether they would or not.

... 

"Damnit!" Monty was woken abruptly from sleep after their shift, Barnes slamming that damned comic down on his knees in duress. Beside him, Dugan stopped his snoring, let out a grunt, scratched his thick belly and went back to sleep.

"Wha'samatte-eh-eh-errr?" Monty managed to yawn.

"White light's composed of all the colors!" Barnes hissed. "Damnit, damnit, damnit," he let his head fall back against the bars morosely. "And I let Jonesey just waltz away with that one."

There were, Monty was certain, far more pressing matters the man might concern himself with. Escape. Survival. Not one or two but three separate assassination plots. "I say, man, do you ever rest —?"

He was met with a wicked grin and a wink. "Saturdays." Then—

"Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses! Shucks, pal! It was a joke. Feel free to laugh!"

Do you regret, said the Woman. Do you ever regret.

I regret, said the Warrior. Yes, I regret. Yet I do not repent. What I have done, I would do so and more again without shame.

The Singer is dead, the Woman said. And the Captain as well.

The Singer is dead, the Warrior said. Yet the Song lives on. You may sing it, one day, if you so choose.

And you, said the Woman. What would you do?

I would beat my sword into a ploughshare, and my spear into a pruning hook, spoke the Planter. For I will be a good man, a simple man, and be a Warrior no more. Perhaps someday Nation will no longer rise up against Nation, and they will no longer train for War.

Perhaps, said the Woman. Yet perhaps it is an idle dream, and nothing more.

There is no greater thing, said the Planter, than to dream idly, and of peace.

Then I will take up the Captain's mantle. I will be the Shield, the Sword and the Song, said She. Go. Dream idly. Be at peace. And with that the Singer left, and wherever She went, she sang. And the people heard her, and they were glad.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes
Regarding the use of slurs:

I try to make Bucky, Gabe, and Morita's use of slurs self-referential and humorous, or a reflection of the internalized hate their culture pushes on them. In this chapter, Gabe and Dugan get in a good natured argument and toss respective insults at one another in jest...until it goes too far. Monty and many characters use slurs for Japanese and Japanese-Americans, Italians, and Germans. Monty is still very much coming to terms with his prejudice and privileges, and isn't yet the man who wrote *Jacob (I Have Loved)*.

The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later Women's Army Corps) was brought into being in 1942 by the work of Edith Nourse Rogers, a bad-ass boss bitch who succeeded her deceased husband to become Massachusetts' first female Representative, the sixth woman ever elected to Congress, and held her office from June 1925 to the day of her death in 19-fucking-60. That's holding a federal office five years after women got the vote, and doing such a damn good job of it she got re-elected 17 times...fought for women's rights and gender equality, veteran's rights, co-sponsored a bill to allow 20,000 Jewish refugee children to enter the United States in 1939 (that didn't pass, damn you FDR!), and was described by the British Foreign Office as "A pleasant and kindly old battle-axe—but a battle-axe." This woman needs her own goddamned movie, stat! ...Also, Season 3 cameo on Agent Carter, anyone?

For more reading on Ye Old Battle Axe and the WAC:

http://www.armywomen.org/wacHistory.shtml
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_Army_Corps
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edith_Nourse_Rogers

In 1940 Charlie Chaplin wrote, starred in, scored, and produced *The Great Dictator*, a satire of fascism where he plays a buffoonish Hitler called Adenoid Hynkel as well as a Jewish barber who uses his appearance to impersonate the dictator and deliver an impassioned speech against fear and hate. It was his first 'talkie', and was released 6 days after Britain had declared war on Germany. It would be another year before Pearl Harbor. In the ending scene Chaplin drops character and makes a direct plea to the audience himself regarding the situation in Europe and the evils of fascism and war. The attitude of Americans was mixed at the time, both in regards to implementing their own stronger, nationalist state and to joining the war effort, so Chaplin was persecuted by the government and media for his political involvement. Watch it here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Qmb-Bf2TGc

It's important to note that at the time the film was written and released, neither the public nor Chaplin knew the full extent of the horrors of the Holocaust, and Chaplin has stated he would have never created a comedic version of Hitler had he known.

Tue les tous (French): "Kill them all."

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was published in 1900, and the film adaptation famous for using both color and black and white for storytelling purposes was released in 1939.

Between 1821 and 1847, the American Colonization Society "re-patriated" over 13,000
blacks to the newly-established colony of Liberia. Some of the ACS members were abolitionists, and others (including the four founding members) were slave owners who saw free blacks in America as a threat to the institution of slavery. Liberia declared its independence in 1847 and remains a state to this day.

Israel became an independent state on May 14th, 1948, but the Zionist movement was active long before that due to a desire for a Jewish home state and the increasing unrest and antisemitism in Europe. The British Mandate for a Divided Palestine and the State of Israel remains controversial to this day.

Brooklyn was an independent city until January 1st, 1898.

Tommy Atkins was the generic name given to any British Army Soldier during World War I, and stuck. It's much like saying "G.I. Joe" in American English.

_Bucky's joke is a reference to Shabbat._
Place me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm, said the Singer. And do not forget me, wherever you go. For I know not where the wild War may take you, and who knows how long have I to live.

Your name is as a coal seared against my lips, said the Boy and embraced him. As an ember set within my heart. Our love is as strong as death, stronger still than even the grave. Where you go, there quickly would I follow.

Say not so, said the Singer. For it is likely you go to your death, and leave me to my own. Say not so!

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"...an anonymous collection of poems and fragments of poetry, all erotic in nature. In contrast to common themes of violence or despair, the War Poet elicits only images of beauty, love, and even explicit sexuality, making his some of the best-loved poetry of the First and Second Indochina Wars. The similarities of both theme and time of publication in relation to the controversial classic Jacob (I Have Loved) have not gone unnoticed:

What is more beautiful
Than this peace after war
The sweet sheen of your skin
On a long night of love

Indeed, many contemporary scholars speculated and textual analysis too supports the theory that the War Poet is none other than Howling Commando Gabriel Jones. Fifty years after its first publication, the War Poet's work has seen a revival due largely to this legacy, as technological advances in deep sea exploration have renewed public interest in the recovery of Captain America. Most recently, his work featured in Liberté, the French language drama/biopic of the late Jacques Dernier, adapted to the soundtrack as Yeux blues, and referred to by its writers and fans alike facetiously—or perhaps, in this instance respectfully—as le Ballade de Bucky Barnes."


“Look alive, ladies!” Monty was awoke by the dulcet Irish/Brooklyn tones and a rather (he thought) unnecessary kick in the ribs. “B Shift’ll be back any minute! Up and at ‘em!”

“You heard the man,” Jones offered a hand to Dugan, groaning on the cold floor and refusing to rise.
“Rise and shine, Dugan!”

“I just got to sleep!” Dugan glowered. “Your Jap’s tossed and turned and your Frenchman’s been snoring all night!”

*Shift*, Monty thought. Day, night, it didn’t matter here. He hadn’t felt the sun on his face, seen the sky in…well. Days were irrelevant now. The only thing that mattered—the only thing that kept them all alive, all sane—was Sergeant Barnes. Monty hadn’t paid all that much attention to the classics, preferring automotive racing, pistols, whiskey and women during his youth to the dull lessons, but if offered the choice between being Barnes or being Atlas…well. He’d rather the actual physical weight of the world, thank you. The metaphors were rather all too much.

But if his erstwhile companions shared this sympathy, they pretended otherwise. Another shift started as it always did, Barnes rousing them rudely and cursing up a storm, and within seconds of waking, Jones and Dugan were at it again. “Why’s he my Jap?” Jones griped good-naturedly, hauling Dugan up. “Sarge here’s the one who dug him out of the mud. Don’t blame me.”

“Oh, what, and you’re not taking responsibility for Frenchie?” Dugan demanded.

“No,” Jones sighed. “That is *entirely* my fault, and I’ve regretted it ever since.”

The Frenchman in question only yawned. “*Tu sais que m’aimes.*”

“Not now, Francois (and the man pronounced it fran-COISE, the absolute Irish philistine). It’s too early for that shit! Giving me a headache and Good God Almighty I wish the two of you’d stop bringing in strays,” Dugan muttered.

“…speaking of said strays, I’m one of them, you know,” Jones said. “So’s Limey here.”

“Oh, no thank you, gentlemen. I want no part,” Monty said, turning down the lit olive branch as quickly and politely as he could.

“And I’d rather not belong to any one,” Morita cut in. “I’m already the property of the War Relocation Authority and the US Army, thanks.”

“Like I said,” Dugan grinned even wider, staring down at the Jap. And as Monty thought it, the voice of Sergeant Barnes frowned in his head. The Oriental? Monty tried again. *C’mon, Monty, you’re British. That the politest you got—?* Oh, bloody hell. Staring down at *Private Jim Morita.* A Socialist, Monty mused. One week amidst these bloody Irishmen and their bloody Sergeant James Barnes and he’d become a bloody, fucking Socialist!

“—I wish Sarge’d stop bringing in strays,” Dugan finished.

“Why?” the man himself asked. “‘Cause you’re the biggest, mangiest mutt of the lot, Dum Dum.”

"You're just jealous," Dugan preened, combing out his rather flagging ginger mustachios.

"Of what, pal? That bristle-brush you call an upper lip?" Barnes said. "My girl'd squeal an' kick me if I came at her soft little ass wearin' that!"

...Silence.

"What?"

"Well don't stop on account of me," Dugan urged, as the collective 107th nodded their agreement.
"You were sayin’—?" And Barnes opened his mouth, to continue or berate the man, Monty never knew, as Colonel Lohmer chose that most unwelcome moment to appear.

"Guten Morgan, Herr Barnes."

"Sorry, pal," Barnes changed course smoothly. "Ain’t nobody here named Morgan. And I’m pretty sure you meant Sergeant Barnes. Or Unteroffizier Barnes. Or just Barnes? derr Arschkriecher, der Betriebsleiter Amerikaner, derr Kleinführer—but if you’re gonna use that one I expect a proper salute. It’s only fair seein’ how I outrank you," Barnes winked. "Oh, and then there’s my personal favorite, Judenscheisse. You could’ve gone for derr Irländer. I’m half’n half, you know. No reason to be so rude about it."

"Dreckjude!" Lohmer swore, and his face went red as the stolen beret Berger still sported.

Jones sent him a warning glance, but Barnes shrugged it off. "C’mon, pal. Least I got the blue eyes—makes me more Aryan than you, I reckon. Just don’t go tellin’ your Führer. Aw, hell, I heard he was Jewish, too!"

There was a loud clang!, the Colonel's billy clug struck against their cage. "Du Hurensohn!"

"C’mon, Lohmer. Whatcha gonna do?" Barnes pressed his face through the bars hungrily. "Beat me or my boys? Cut our rations?" And something dark gleamed in those eyes, a glimpse of Puck, perhaps, the malevolence within the Merrymaker and Trickster. And slowly, gratingly, Lohmer lowered his arm. "Oh, wait, that’s right...you can’t."

"You will die here, Herr Barnes," Lohmer promised.

But Barnes only smiled wider, like Carroll's Cheshire."An' so will you, pal."

Only then, once the man had gone, did Monty let out a bated breath. "Wow-wee! You're certainly setting yourself up for an ass-kicking, Sarge," Dugan chimed.

"Yeah," Barnes shrugged, their captor's threats rolling off him like so much rain on sealskin.

"Believe me. I've had lessons. And speaking of ass-kickings—"

A collective groan went up among the A Shift, and the incident was all but forgotten.

"How's he doin'?" Barnes popped by on the factory floor later. "Our Limey. Not giving you any more trouble, is he?"

Oh, Goddamnit, man. Monty thought. So they were to continue this ruse, then. But Jim Morita grunted in response, not looking up from his inspection of a piece designed for an aircraft wing. He'd been a parachuteman, dammit! If Monty had to hear one more minute on the thermal properties of metal alloys and engine exhaust piping against condensation and wing icing and the importance of a uniform surface texture, well. Barnes wouldn't be the only American today in danger of being punched.

"Say, you wouldn't mind if I borrowed him for a minute, would you?" That at least elicited a vague nod and wave of the hand.

"So," Barnes began once they were well out of earshot. "Hate to ask. But—"

"As uncomfortable as could be expected," Monty rushed before the man could continue. He'd done a few things for King and Country he'd taken no pride in since his time while in His Majesty's Service,
but this mission had certainly scraped the bottom of the barrel. He'd experimented enough under the (woefully inadequate) cover of darkness and sleeping cell mates now to know the parameters were possible, at least.

"Lighten up, Limey. It ain't all bad."

"Not of of us enjoy a fist up the arse, old sport," Monty laughed nervously.

Barnes shrugged. "Just gotta hold it in long enough to get out past the perimeters and patrol. From then on out I'm guessing the going'll be faster if you...well," here he winced. "Use more conventional means of transport, if you take my meaning."

"Duly noted," Monty said. "About the perimeter..."

"Yeah," Barnes grimaced. "You thought about the tracks, didn't you? That was my first thought, too. Smugglin' Morita outta here in a supply car with it. Won't work."

"Too much uncertainty," Monty agreed. "And those tracks will be patrolled." Not to mention lead most likely to more Nazis, rather than less.

"Yeah," Barnes sighed. "By theirs and ours alike, pal. How long you reckon it'll take 'em to find us, huh? Big old factory like this."

If he'd been a lesser man, Monty would've lied. But this was Barnes. The question could only be rhetorical. "My guess is they already have."

"Yeah." The rest went unsaid. The rails were hardly the only strategic targets on the charts. "Couple hundred of us. Don't think that's gonna stop 'em."

"Well, there is a war on, man."

"You think?" Barnes snorted.

"Well. We've established the package can be escorted unseen past the perimeter," Monty finally broke that dark humour. "The rest of the transport I've trained for, God help me. It's the perimeter itself that worries me."

"You get a good look at it?"

"We approached from the Northwest. And you?"

"Pal, it was so damned dark out, I don't got a damned clue."

"I say, there are stars," Monty frowned.

Barnes rolled his eyes. "Brooklyn, you shit. I'm a city boy, remember? That an' we were packed in like cattle. Damn near suffocated, and if we weren't, we'd've frozen to death. Lost some good men to frostbite. 'S a nasty way to go," he sighed. "Fuck, pal, I could tell you all about Pluto an' space an' Brave New World an' War of the Worlds and shit, don't know a damned thing about my own sky."

"Have you tried Out of the Silent Planet?" Monty wondered.

"Oh, yeah. Sure, pal," Barnes drawled. "Weren't we discussing strategy?"

"Reading decent literature is a good strategy," Monty sniffed.
"Amazing Stories and Astounding Science Fiction are decent literature. An' Aasimov's a Jew, too!" Barnes grinned. "An' hell, we're essentially discussing Nightfall, aren't we?"

"My good fellow, I haven't a clue."

"Answer's yes, genius," Barnes said. "So now's the part where we do a bit of reconnaissance."

Monty feigned a bemused look to the walls and ceiling surrounding them. "And what do you propose?" Barnes kicked him in the shin.

"You're the Parachute man, you tell me."

"I'm a soldier, not a spy."

"Yeah, well," Barnes shrugged. "Near as I can figure it, we don't got a sky, or stars, or anything, and we can't get a look at 'em, no how. Only thing we've got is each other."

"Rank sentimentality?" Monty raised a brow. Barnes kicked his other shin.

"You schmuck! I meant intelligence!"

"Sergeant, I've lived among your men for some time now. If their intelligence is all we have, then I'm afraid the free world is doomed."

"Aw, pal, the 107th ain't nothin' but the best an' brightest," he laughed. Then— " Scratch that, Jonesey-boy I got on loan from the 92nd and Morita just sorta happened," he frowned.

"If the world is indeed ending," Monty added in turn, "I'll be needing a stiff drink."

Barnes snorted. "Yeah, pal. That an' a sti—oh, shit never mind," he rushed, face both paling and flushing, if such a thing were possible.

"What?"

"Nothin', Limey. Least nothin' appropriate for an officer."

Monty cast a dubious look. Such a thing had hardly stopped the man before. "You're hardly an officer. NCO, at best."

"Well, man. You are both Irish and American." And there it was again, that uneasy pause, neither certain whether words said in jesting were jesting only.

"More 'long the lines of you both outrank and outclass me," Barnes broached that awkward silence. "They don't much like me buttin' in where they don't feel I belong. Don't have much nice to say about you, either."

"It can't be helped," Monty said. He hadn't known them, nor they him, and they had watched him succumb to seeming cowardice after the death of both their Captain and their Major. He supposed, given this perspective, he would hardly regard such a man in a worth light either.

"So it's settled, then," Barnes decided. "We pick their brains, all of 'em, and hope they're ripe for the picking. Winter's coming, if it ain't on our heels already. Don't much like the idea of you out there alone in all that." Truth be told, Monty didn't fancy it himself. "Your lot," Barnes continued. "How
"Long you been with 'em?"

"Not long." Monty conceded. "I lost most of my Regiment at Anaheim."

Barnes whistled, low and long. "Heard about that. Nasty stuff."

"And you?"

"Lost more'n half of mine at Azzano," he bit his lip. "And them we left behind were mostly dead or dyin'. Tell you the truth, Monty, I dunno if any made it out. Odds are, nobody knows we're alive." A small comfort, that. That the bombs sent to kill them may do so unintentionally, rather than in malevolence. "I know there's some of mine come from out West, farm boys an' such. An' Morita, of course. You're gonna want to broach it slow, subtle like, though. Nice and casual. Can't let word gettin' round we're planning a run. And Dugan. Tennessee born and bred. Told us all a thing or two about smugglin' moonshine and whiskey back during Prohibition days. Spent the last ten years or so before the war as a circus strongman. Done his fair share of travelin' and navigating at night. You'll wanna talk to him, if anyone. My advice, you go through Jonesey."

And James Montgomery Falsworth, His Majesty's Soldier, Staunch Englishman, laughed until he clutched his sides. Of all the people, of all the odds, what were the chances it would be Privates Timothy Aloysius Cadwaller Dugan, Jim Morita, and Gabriel Jones—?

"Something the matter, Limey?"

"Nothing, Sergeant," Monty said, and stifled his hiccoughs. "I'll just, gather intelligence, then."

"You do that," Barnes said, still skeptic. "The route's up to you. The gettin' you outta here? Well. Two ways to go about it. We either sneak it, or we cover it up."

"What, with this lot?" Monty gestured to the floor, where Dernier and Jones were arguing heatedly in French next to what looked like an absurdly dangerous amount of explosives. "I say they’ve more than proven themselves already."

"A diversionary tactic? With this pack of fools?" Barnes grinned as Jones threw his hands in the air with a final unintelligible shout. "Hell, I can hardly keep 'em from fighting as it is. Catholics and Protestants, Irish and Brits, Brits and Frenchie, Irish and Italians, not to mention just havin' Jonesey and Morita? I’m startin’ to think desegregation’s illegal ‘cause no one wanted to deal with the headache. It’s a right pain in my ass, Monty. I think this lot’ll give it a go. Hell, might not even have to fake it."

"They are rather…opinionated," Monty offered.

Barnes frowned. "Here’s the thing, Monty. You’re a good fella, but you’re British, and you’re blue-blooded as they come. Your men don’t like you, my men don’t like you, startin' to think I'm the only one who does," he rued, then grew serious. "You’re an Officer, and you’re not exactly popular. We want this to work, you’re gonna have to stop scraping your nose against the ceiling."

“What do you propose?"

“Ain’t proposing to no one, pal,” Barnes winked. “An’ sure as hell not to you! What I’m sayin’ is, you could talk to ‘em once in a while. Couldn’t hurt."

“I shan’t be here long."

“No,” Barnes said. “But where you’re going? Not knowin’ ‘em won’t make it any easier. I’ve been
in the trenches, pal. An’ knowing who you’re fighting for’ll carry you through more than some damn flag, you hear? Hell, you, Jonesey and Morita are the only college boys here, and you ain’t hardly said a word to ‘em. But you’ll talk to my uneducated Mick ass—now why’s that?”

Well. Morita was a—that is to say—Japanese, and Monty hadn’t been entirely sure he could trust the man. That and the man had a chip on his shoulder more visible than the ones Jackie had left on the the Lady Falsworth's Wedgewood teacups he’d once caught her juggling when she'd had a flight of fancy to go off and join the circus. And Jones? Well. Jones was Coloured, and there was the small matter of the man had quite clearly threatened to kill him. “You’re the CO.”

“Yeah. But I ain’t yours.”

Monty frowned. “What exactly are you saying, Sergeant?”

“What I’m sayin’, pal, is that I ain’t telling this to discipline you or to make sure your mission succeeds, I’m sayin’ it ‘cause I’m your fucking friend.”

…oh.

“Thought never crossed your mind, did it? Fuck, but growin’ up high an’ mighty got to be the damn loneliest thing I ever heard of. An’ that’s from a man who ain’t gotten laid since leaving the states in ’42.”

The hours wore on. The shift wore down. Monty's eyes, open and earnest in intent, were worn and wearied. He blinked the fatigue away, rubbing furiously as B Shift began to emerge from their cells, Ackermann and Berger overseeing their transition. Supervised, of course, by none other than Lohmer.

"Where's Kleiber gotten to, anyhow?" Dugan groaned as they shuffled by. "Stuck in a cell with a madman, Jonesey-boy, a Jap, an' Her Royal Highness, the Queen of England."

It's Her Majesty the Queen, Monty thought. What did they teach in schools these days?

"Herr Barnes," Lohmer leered.

"Colonel Lohmer," Barnes gave a jaunty, two-fingered salute that would have him court-martialed in any country. "The boys an' I were just thinking, what with morale so low an' all, maybe you could wear some garters and stockings tonight an' sing us Ich bin die fesche Lola."

"One day, Herr Barnes. One day Herr Schmidt's lapdog won't be here to save you."

"Well, then," Barnes shrugged. "Guess I'll just have to talk to this Herr Schmidt, then."


“‘You trying to get yourself killed, Sarge?’” Dugan gaped.

“Pshaw, Jonesey-boy. Ain’t doing nothing but gettin’ him hot under the collar. ‘Sides, I got two Luckies says he throws another punch.”

“And why would you go and do that?” Jones heaved a long-suffering sigh. But it was obvious, wasn’t it? If there were to be a choice between Lohmer and Barnes…well. Zola had made it quite clear which of the two he found more useful. And Barnes, the ingenious little Irish shit, wasn’t above forcing the Swissman’s hand. There would still be a war on. Still be a labor camp. Still be a hail
storm of friendly fire coming down to burn them alive. Lohmer’s removal couldn’t change the fact that they were prisoners of war…but there were Germans, and then there were Nazis, Monty reasoned.

“Yeah, Sarge. Don’t wanna mess up that pretty face of yours,” Dugan snickered. “What will your lady think?”

“My Lady’ would whoop your ass and anybody else’s who insinuated she or any other gal belonged to anyone, pal. Sarah Rogers was a suffragette. Stevie don’t put up with shit like that,” Barnes admonished, then broke into a slow grin. “‘Sides, pal, she don’t exactly like me for my face.”

“Thought you said a gentleman don’t kiss and tell,” Dugan chuckled.

“And I ain’t. Tellin’, that is.”

“You just said she ain’t a lady,” Dugan heckled. “Don't see much a reason you got to be a gentleman.”

“Yeah, Sarge,” Jones goaded. “Near as I can figure today is Sunday. About time for another sermon.”

“Jonesey-boy, you’ve been sayin’ that every day since Sicily. Jesus fuckin’ wept I ain’t never met a man so damned church-minded.”

"That’s me," Jones shrugged with a wide, white grin. "Catholic, Protestant. We're all Christians here."

"You're all heathen, you mean!" Barnes laughed. "Then again, I am Jewish, I would say that, huh? Say, I ever tell you 'bout the time she damned well near kicked my teeth in? It was last winter an' with the weather I was lookin' as handsome as Dugan here, growing out a nice beard an' all against the cold and that bossy little broad—"

Good God, man, not again! Monty groaned as they were treated to yet another of the infamous (and improbable) erotic adventures of one Sergeant James Barnes. As far as bedtime stories went, they weren't particular terrible…but the cramped quarters and lack of privacy left much to be desired.

“You told our friend Mr. Ackermann you were out of cigarettes,” Monty reminded Barnes as the randy men around them finally drifted into an uncomfortable and irritated sleep. Well, most. Dugan was as shameless as ever. Nothing Monty hadn’t seen or heard in dormitories or barracks, but still.


…and Dugan, that Irish bastard, laughed until he choked, cock going limp in his hand.

“Why?” Monty asked much later, tired eyes already closed.

“Why what, pal?” Barnes said, rustling the pages of that comic gently.

“Why do it?”

“…gonna have to be more specific, pal. An’ fair warning if you’re giving me shit about the comic, I’ll wallop you over the head with it while you’re sleeping. Condom and all, see if I don’t.”

“Give ‘em hope, pal. We don’t got that, we don’t got nothing.”

“…’sides,” Barnes mumbled as he too fell asleep. “Stevie Rogers never did back down from a bully. You’d never believe the shit that came outta that pretty little mouth,” he laughed lightly to himself. “Fuck, I miss that stubborn sumbitch somethin’ awful.” And Monty had one last absurd thought before he slept and knew no more.

You are fair, said the Boy. And my Beloved.

Yet once I was sickly, spoke the Captain. Now no more.

No, my Beloved. You are all fair. There is no blemish in you, there never was. In this you are unchanged.

Yet I am changed, spoke the Captain.

Once loved I a Singer, said the Boy. I love him still. And they spoke no more on the matter.

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Trigger warning for slurs, the Holocaust, Bucky's bad sex stories, an' good ol' fashioned Yiddish cussin'.

Tu sais que m’aimes (French): You know that you love me

Unteroffizier Barnes (German): Sargeant/Staff Sargeant/NCO Barnes
derr Arschkriecher (German): the asskisser
der Betriebsleiter Amerikaner (German): the American foreman
derr Kleinführer (German) the little Führer
derr Irländer (German): the Irishman
Du Hurensohn (German): son of a whore/bitch

For more on the the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) and flight advances of World War II, see NASA's page: http://www.nasa.gov/centers/langley/news/factsheets/WWII.html

Pluto, a former planet, is our galaxy's 9th rock from the sun and first discovered in 1930.

Isaac Asimov was a prolific and beloved science fiction writer, publishing his first science fiction short story "Marooned Off Vesta" in Amazing Stories in March 1939. Nightfall (1941) became a science fiction classic, and was later adapted into an author-approved full length novel with Robert Silverberg during Asimov's lifetime. It features a
world with six suns where the inhabitants have never known darkness, and belief in
stars outside this stellar system is considered occult.

Out of the Silent Planet is rather obscure science fiction, but written by a Cambridge
AND Oxford University professor, Clive Staples Lewis. You might know him as the
author of The Chronicles of Narnia (1950-1956), or just as "Jack".

Schmuck is a bad word. Think the C-word level of bad word in its original Yiddish. It's
essentially cunt, but for dicks. in American colloquial context it's seemingly harmless,
used to describe the accused party as a dolt, idiot, or buffoon...but was and is still highly
negative and highly controversial among the Jewish community. Naturally, Bucky
Barnes finds this "harmless slang" attitude of most Americans hilarious.

Your Royal Highness; Her Royal Highness/His Royal Highness-introducing and
addressing a prince or princess
Your Majesty; Her Majesty the Queen/His Majesty the King-introducing and addressing
the king or queen

Ich bin die fesche Lola (1930), as sung by Marlene Dietrich:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMbglXvNQGE
Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings for mentions of the Holocaust/HaShoah, homophobia, war time violence, racism, discussions of genocide, internment, and segregation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Safely have you returned, said the Woman. I see the Strongman, the Soldier, the Physician and the Foreigner. Yet where is the Boy?

He has fallen, said the Poet.

And the Captain, She wondered. What of the Captain.

If ever were you needed, you are needed now most of all, spoke the Poet. Fly now to him ere he falls.

—Jacob (I Have Loved). Falsworth, J. Montgomery.

Kelly: And joining us live today in the studio, some names and faces right out of the history books! Howling Commandos Gabriel Jones and Jim Morita!

Jones: Thank you, thank you. Oh, I'm a civilian, now. No need to salute! And that's Dr. Jim Morita!

Morita: Every time...

Kelly: So. JOSEPHINE.

Jones: Yeah. Josephine. What a woman!

Kelly: Oh, I’m sure she was! I was talking about the show?

Jones: Oh, JOSEPHINE! Sorry, didn’t hear the all caps! Granted, at my age, I don't hear much these days.

Kelly: Tell us what it’s all about.

Jones: True life story of a black American entertainer, active in la Resistáncé. Released right before Black History Month. Can’t get any better than that!

Morita: He means the French Resistance.

Jones: Po-tay-to, po-tah-to.

Morita: You’ll take that one with you to the grave, won’t you.

Jones: Pal, it’s gonna be my epitaph.
Both: (laughter)

Kelly: Well. It seems there’s a private joke being shared. Can you tell us more about it?

Jones: What do you think, Morita?

Morita: Classified.

Kelly: That’s unfortunate.

Jones: Between that and all these “spoilers”, I’m afraid there might not be much we can say!

Morita: Never stopped you from talking before.

Kelly: So JOSEPHINE. It’s airing on HBO, yes?

Jones: Sure thing, ma’am. Only network we could find that’d let us produce that rating. No offense! I’m sure yours is a fine channel, too. We wanted it real-to-life. And that meant, well. No spoilers!

Kelly: But if it’s an accurate portrayal, shouldn’t there already be some? Spoilers?

Morita: Not necessarily.

Jones: What Jim means to say is we’ve gotten permission from the French, British, and American governments—as well as the family, you can’t forget them—to make public details of her involvement that were previously classified.

Morita: It’s the true story. But it’s different from the history books.

Jones: Official secrets act, and all that. But it’s been long enough, and enough of us felt like this was a story that deserved to be told that we got together and got it passed.

Kelly: It sounds like congratulations are in order!

Jones: Thank you. It's been a long da...a long darn time coming!

Kelly: We're not HBO, Mr. Jones!

Jones: I'm sorry, ma'am. I apologize.

Morita: ...you're also senile.

(Audience laughter)

Kelly: Now if I’m correct, Kerry Washington was cast as the lead? As Josephine Baker?

Jones: She’s one talented actor. Did her own singing and dancing, too.

Kelly: And here’s a picture! Oh! She’s quite beautiful.

Morita: She’s hard-working, and she’s good at what she does.

Jones: Oh, yes! Costume, make-up and hair worked hard to get the look just right, took hours every day, and she never complained. Not a word. I think they all did a fine job. We’ve both met Baker and even I was impressed!

Kelly: I—okay, then. Tell us more about the project. Your involvement.
Jones: Screenplay, mostly. (waves to camera) And promotion!

Morita: Production.

Jones: He did some consulting work, as well. This man here knows a thing or two about medicine in the 1930s and 40s. The whole team did their best to get every detail right. And you what, Jim? Even lent us some equipment for the props department, didn’t you?


Jones: Now what’re you going to do with all that old junk?

Morita: I’m donating it to the Japanese American Internment Museum.

Jones: No, no, no! You wait and let the series get popular, *then* you sell it at auction and give them the money!

Morita: You offering to buy it, Jonesey-boy?

Jones: Some—oh, I *am* senile! What do you call them—fanboys! Some fanboys like Stark’ll buy it. In fact, let me call Pepper—

Morita: (laughter) Peggy know you got Ms. Potts on speed dial?

Jones: Considering how we spent most of the sixties, I’d say she be pretty pleased!

Kelly: So tell me, you two! JOSEPHINE. How and why did you both become involved.

Jones: Well. It was personal to us. Even in our own stories, own histories, we’re too often marginalized.

Kelly: Marginalized?


Kelly: Give us an example.

Morita: Wind Talkers.

Jones: The Last Samurai.

Morita: (snorts)

Kelly: You found those movies offensive?

Jones: I have nothing against—well. I’ll rephrase that. It’s not any individual actor’s or actress’ fault for accepting a role. Not even the screen writers. So, no, I don’t find Nicolas Cage or Tom Cruise personally to blame. Finger-pointing will get us nowhere. It’s an industry-wide—a society-wide—problem. The erasure of people of color from our own narratives. That’s the discussion I’m trying to have.

Kelly: So what you’re saying is, you want to see the war from the perspective of the Japanese?

Morita: From the perspective of Americans who are also Japanese. Yes.

Jones: Or Navajo.
Kelly: Isn’t there already something like that? A musical?

Jones: Just because you’ve got Uhura, doesn’t mean you should stop there! There are plenty of shows written by and featuring white people. We’re simply asking for the same.

Morita: Allegiance.

Kelly: What was that, Mr. Morita?

Morita: Allegiance. It’s a broadway show in pre-production by George Takei.

Jones: Just because you’ve got Sulu, doesn’t mean you should stop there!

Kelly: I see he was on the red carpet with you last night.

Morita: With his husband.

Jones: How are they, anyways? I’m having dinner with them tonight. I was too tied up at the press junkets for anything more than just a quick hello—

Kelly: Let’s get back to the issue at hand. So you both support the idea of another story about Navajo involvement in the Pacific Theater?

Jones: I would love to see that.

Kelly: A movie?

Morita: Why not?

Jones. (laughter) Oh, no! Television. Television’s where it’s at. And your network doesn’t even have to pay me for that!

Kelly: Can we expect to see the two of you writing it soon?

Morita: No.

Jones: Not me. I’d produce it, maybe.

Kelly: Why not?

Morita: Just because I’m a person of color doesn’t mean those stories are mine to tell.

Jones: I agree. And there are so, so many. Not just the Navajo. There’s the queers forced to out themselves or lie in order to serve. Jewish soldiers who made the choice to have their religion listed on their dog tags. WACs, WAVES, the stigma against them. All of the women forced from jobs when the men returned. The people who lost their country—their culture, even—when the Kingdom of Hawaii was overthrown and later became a state. Pacific Islanders and Nuclear Testing. The war and its aftermath turned this century upside down for everyone. It’s a story worth hearing, and we owe it to all those who’ve lived or died to listen. Let them tell it.

Morita: It’s not our place to tell it. It’s our job to make sure they’re heard.

Kelly: Couldn’t this be seen as “diversity” for diversity’s sake?

Jones: Look at us. We lived it. We were there.
Morita: Diversity just is.

Kelly: But stories like those could be criticized for historical inaccuracy, for not representing all the facts.

Jones: I was a black Howling Commando, part of the very first desegregated military unit. There's a few things I could share about historical inaccuracy.

Morita: They interned me. My family. Then they erased the camps. The men left on the Oklahoma drowned or suffocated, and it took sixty-six years for us to recognize them. Men like Jones came home, weren’t allowed to vote. Navajo fought and died for freedom, were still forced off their land. Their religion and languages were still outlawed. Their kids still stolen and sent for re-education. The queers “liberated” from the Death Camps? They went right into German prisons. The version you tell? That's the historical inaccuracy.

Jones: It happened. We were there.

Kelly: Can we talk about the book?

Morita: No.

Jones: We don’t discuss the book. We're here to promote JOSEPHINE. I'd be happy to talk about that.

Kelly: Jacob (I Have Loved). It’s quite controversial—

Jones: We don’t discuss the book.

Morita: We don’t discuss the book.

Kelly: In keeping with what you said earlier, do you think the your characters—the characters of the Soldier and the Physician—were short-changed? Did Monty Falsworth even have the right to tell this story?

Jones and Morita: We don’t discuss the book.

Kelly: Did Falsworth as a straight man have the right to out Cap, if what he purports is true? If not, was it responsible to libel an American hero during the Cold War when—

Morita: No comment.

Jones: This interview is officially over, ma'am. Enjoy your dead air.


CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Monty woke with an almighty crick in his neck.

There was something, his mind supplied. Something odd. Some revelation. Something he’d thought just before slipping off to a deep, dreamless sleep. But it was gone, whatever it was, the thought slipping from his mind, like grasping at straw.
No. There was something. Something the matter right now. The silence. Barnes was asleep, all around him everywhere the men were asleep and above them only silence.

Monty jolted awake and upright, the sudden motion drawing no few groans of complaint from his snoring cell-mates, the grunt of a sleeping dog whose slumber has been disturbed, but remains unbroken. Morita, at least, startled to. Barnes lay there like a dead man.

Wordlessly, their eyes met. Morita raised a finger to his lips. Nodded once.

Monty crept over. Shook the man awake.

“Fuckin’ Christ,” Barnes groaned, laid an arm over his face, and rolled away. “Again already—?”

…Well. Monty could hardly blame him. What rest they did get was precious and hard to come by. He shook the man again. Barnes swatted his hand with an unintelligible curse, and a “I swear, doll, I ain’t in the mood. Touch your own damn tits if you’re that fuckin’ randy. Lemme sleep.”

…Sergeant James Barnes of the 107th Infantry US Army, was perhaps the single crassest man Monty had ever had the misfortune to meet. Also the only man he’d ever met more lucid sleeping than awake. There was nothing for it. Monty shook him harder. “Fuck! Fine!” One blue eye winked out from Barnes’ arm, a slow, wry smile spreading, then—

“Oy! Everliving fuck!” Barnes yelped, jerking nearly out of his boots.”You ain’t Stevie!”

Monty clamped a hand over the man's mouth. “…indeed not,” he said, urgency stamping down the humor of the moment. He in no way considered himself ugly, was a rather handsome specimen (as he had been told) and no mirror could deny, but with current sanitation? And expecting one’s lover, a Coloured girl at that—? Well. He supposed it to be a bit of a nasty shock.

“Jesus, Mary, Joseph an’ Moses, pal!” Barnes rasped, shoving the hand away from his face and clutching his chest. “You scared the piss outta me! Imagine ‘spectin’ your sweetheart an’ wakin’ to your ugly mug. And here I was havin’ a perfectly good dream, thank you very—“ Barnes stopped. The silence hung heavy in the air.

He jumped up, wincing and adjusting himself through his pants. “Fuck. How long—“

“I only awoke,” Monty said, trying not to notice the strain against the fabric, nor the fresh stains. But the truth was they all slept and sat in sweat and blood, smelt like piss and shit, and laying in the long dark were no stranger to the smell of sex—crass exhibitionists like Dugan, or inadvertent emissions alike. In that regard, perhaps, it was rather like Winchester School all over again.

“Morita?”

“Same, Sarge,” Morita nodded.

“Shit,” Barnes hissed. “An’ I actually feel well-rested, which means we’ve slept a damn sight longer than they’ve ever let us before.”

“German holiday?” Monty wondered. Or perhaps someone reasonable—Kleiber, perhaps, or even Zola?—had recognized their flagging output, agreed to let them rest? But B Shift would be crowded back in among them, not remain on the silent floor above.

“Don’t like it, Sarge,” Morita said.

“Yeah. You an’ me both, pal.”
“Do we wake them?” Morita wondered.

Indeed, Monty thought. Bard be damned, that was the question. To wake them in uncertainty, or to wait.


“You going somewhere, Sarge?” Morita frowned. Barnes only produced the key to their cell out of Lord knows where, yet another sleight of hand.

“Bloody hell,” Monty said. How had he managed—?

“Ackermann and Berger,” Barnes shrugged, opening the door slowly, as not to wake his charges. Oil, oil, Monty remembered the man teasing, only days—weeks? shifts—before. If there were two things Barnes had in spades, it was that sense of unfettered optimism, and the ability to quote The Wizard of Oz at inopportune times. “Little shits. Don’t much like gettin’ up so early. After...after Feraldo. Figured they could just trust the Kleinfuhrer with the schlisl—Schlüssel, damnit—“ he swore. “Just gonna sneak around a bit. See what I can find.”

“And if—“ Monty began, unsure himself of what he meant. If they woke, if you do not return, if the worst should have happened—?

“Blimey, Limey. Fine. You’re in charge,” Barnes turned to go, thought better of it, and leaned back to peer at him through the bars. “Do me a favor pal. Don’t fuck it up. Morita, keep him in line.” Then the man was gone. And Monty felt his courage—his hope—go with him.

Here in the dark, in the silence, time passed slowly or not at all. He counted heartbeats, one hundred, two, several thousands until he lost count, began anew. Still the floor above rang only its ominous silence, a stillness not the lack of noise or movement, but something more, something sinister. Lurking. Waiting in the dark. And he was—absurdly—he was, glad for the bars beneath his grasp. Like a child sitting stock-still in bed, blankets keeping out the dark and the imagined monsters, so too did the surety of the cage give him comfort.

He wiped sweat from his brow, from his lip. Look at you, man, he cursed himself. Afraid of the bloody dark. But it wasn’t the dark. Not really. It was the Silence, and everything one might imply from it. As if reality weren’t horrific enough, his imagination ran wild like a frightened child’s.

Kagome kagome
Kago no naka no tori wa
Itsu itsu deyaru
Yoake no ban in
Tsuru to kame ga subetta
Ushiro no shoumen daare

…Morita’s eerie chant, it must be said, was hardly helping.

“I say, man, can you not—?” Monty whispered. He pronounced it thay, not say. After all, it would hardly do to wake the others with a misplaced sibilant. Not to mention stir up suspicions of the man’s loyalty all over again.
Morita said nothing. The Silence returned. Well, that wouldn’t do at all.

“What does it mean?” Monty broached the subject, hungry for anything but the oppressive stillness.

“Kid’s game,” Morita shrugged, th-ing in kind. “Like Ring a Round the Rosie. That’s all. You don’t have that in England?” Ring-a-Ring o’ Roses, Monty thought. Mother Goose. With eight young nieces, he was more than familiar.

Ashes, ashes
We all fall down

…he didn’t much like the sound of that.

“Don’t,” Monty blurted, more clipped than he’d meant.

“Sure, boss,” and the man went back into the stubborn, silent shell who worked beside him day in, day out. Goddamnit, man, Monty berated himself, now alone again in the silence, and who knows how long he waited for Barnes’ return. But if the silence and darkness caged them in, Barnes crept back through it, footfalls as quiet as a cat’s. For as loud and brash as the man could be, he could control that power, that movement when he wanted to.

“Anything?” Monty asked as Barnes slunk back inside.

“Nothin’. Ain’t seen hide nor hair. Place’s as quiet as the—“ Barnes thought better of it. “Fuck it,” he snarled.


“Ain’t much we can do,” Barnes said.


Barnes licked his lips. Turned to him, of all people. “What’d you think, Monty?”

He’d seen HYDRA’s weapons. Knew they were deep into enemy territory. One man, perhaps, or a few men, seasoned, experienced, traveling alone…well. Those men might have a chance of slipping away unseen, flitting like shadows across the countryside. But the whole shift—? They had the numbers, certainly, the desperation, the brute strength. But the Nazis—HYDRA—had those damned batteries, those guns that could vaporise a man where he stood. No. Such an onslaught, however impassioned, would stand no chance. “We wait.” Monty said.

“That’s what they all said, Sarge: we wait.”

“You think we oughtta make a run for it?” Barnes asked him.

Morita shook his head. “I’m saying by the time we know it’s too late, it’s too late.” They held their gazes, then, and something crumbled in Barnes’ eyes.

“He’s right,” Barnes said. “Damnit, Monty, he’s right. I had family in Eisenach. Heard the stories.”

“Everyone I know knew someone who never came home,” Morita replied. “Everyone said it would get better. Things would change. Wouldn’t go that far. Then they took everything, packed us in like
cattle, sent us away. And we don’t know if we’re ever going back.”

He hadn’t thought. Never considered. How very strange, how sad, how uncertain a thing to lose one’s home. “I say, man, what are you saying—?”

“He’s a Jew,” Morita shrugged. “And I’m a Jap. That’s what I’m saying.”

“You think we should run,” Barnes said, biting his lips. And there was defeat in those eyes, calculating the odds, the risks, and coming up—as Monty had—short despite all his hopes and assurances.

“No, I think whatever it is you and your Britisher are planning, you’d best do it, Sarge. Do it soon.” Monty started. The man just shrugged.

“He’s right,” Barnes sighed. “Damnit, Monty. He’s right,” he looked away shyly. “It ain’t because I don't trust you, pal. You know that, right?”

But the man was as unreadable as ever. ”You going to stand around apologizing, Sarge? Or are you going to get shit done?”

“I won’t—“ Monty began in protest, anger and pride making him far braver than he felt.

“What? Follow orders? Save the fuckin’ world? Damn you British and damn your pride. I say you run, Monty, you run, and you don’t look fuckin’ back, you hear?”

Monty gestured, helplessly, to the sleeping men around them, to the man himself, Morita, even. “Shouldn’t we try—“

“It ain’t about savin’ our lives, Monty. It’s about gettin’ that thing outta here while we still have the chance.”

He blinked, looked to Morita for aid. They’d just agreed to stay was a death sentence, damnit. “Surely—“

“Sarge says we stay, we stay,” the man replied. “He says you go, you’d best fucking go.”

Barnes turned to him, and air of finality on his set shoulders. “You need to be ready to run.” Ready? No reconnaissance, no rendezvous, no back-up, no extraction. He’d spent over thirty weeks in training, jumped in Morocco, Algiers, Anaheim and Italy. Could—if he had to—hoof fifty miles in a day, thirty-two in regiment, in all his gear. No. It wasn’t the directionless distance or lack of supplies Barnes was referring to. Well, bugger.

...Quite.


Monty winced. Felt his face flush. Both from mortification and discomfort alike. “Would you give a man a moment?”

“Brings a whole new meaning to ‘sanction and extract’, huh?” he heard Barnes hiss in sympathy.

“…gad it’s not me.” Morita’s brows raised, eyes nearly round. Monty felt sweat trickling down his brow.

“Jesus fuckin’ wept, Morita, turn ‘round!” Barnes hauled the man around by his shoulders. “Monty’s
a classy dame, he’s shy. Can’t get anythin’ done down there with you standing there starin’.”

“Sure don’t look like any dame I’ve seen.”

“What, they don’t got queers out in Fresno?” Barnes snorted.

There was an uncomfortable moment of silence. “Plenty of queers out in Fresno, Sarge.”

All this talk of bints and bum bandits! Go on then, man, add insult to injury, Monty thought. “If it’s between being a dame or a queer, I’d rather the former,” Monty hissed, still stretching himself. “If I have any choice in the matter.”

“Yeah, well, Dum Dum’s gonna have the final say in that,” Barnes shrugged, keeping his voice and their conversation casual, as though there weren’t a man behind him loosening up his own arse. “Always does. He’s the godawful king of godawful nicknames. Must be the circus.”

“Dum Dum?” Monty wondered.

“Dugan,” Morita supplied, with perhaps a trace of glee, even in these desperate times. Quite right, too, thought Monty. At least the jesting and laughter had relaxed him, loosened him somewhat. And yes, he agreed with Barnes: he’d gladly shank Jackie for a fingerful (fistful!) of vaseline at the moment. Lord knows she could take it, and she’d stab him right back, as the scars from the late Lady Falsworth’s letter opener over her right hand and his own left thigh could attest.

Morita stole a backwards glance. “Shit, Sarge. How—“

“Pal, you don’t even wanna know,” Barnes assured him.

“Well whatever it is, just tell me you don’t plan to leave it in long.”

“—What?” Morita asked, interrupting Barnes’ disbelieving stare. “Cause ulcerations and ruptures and hemorrhaging and all sorts of nasty shit.”

“Literally,” Barnes let out and undignified ghost of a giggle. Whistling in the dark, Monty thought. The more perilous, the more cheer, that was the beloved Sergeant Barnes the men all knew. Yet it was soothing, however forced he now knew it to be. And anything, anything to keep his mind off the task at hand. Well. He was both grateful and appalled in equal measure. “And you’d know this because—?”

“Because I’ve been a medic on an army base and you wouldn’t believe how many men “trip and fall” on things that have no business being up there.”

“C’mon, spill,” Monty could hear Barnes’ grin. “What’s the worst you’ve seen?”

“Plenty of lacerations from gun barrels. I keep saying Army issues condoms for a reason.”


“That too,” Morita said. “But the worst…”

“Yeah?” Barnes was still sniggering. You’d think with the things the man had outright admitted—bragged, even—being up his own arse he’d find the whole thing less humourous, Monty rued. Yet sex and bums—those taboo topics—still elicited peals of laughter. In that regard, it was very much like Winchester all over again.
“You wouldn’t believe me.”

“C’mon. Stevie’s ma was a nurse, practically a midwife an’ doc in our neighborhood. Ain’t nothing you can say’s gonna shock me.”

Morita scratched the back of his head. “Hand grenade.”

…Well. That certainly put things into perspective, didn’t it?


“Oh, I didn’t get it out,” Morita said. “Nothing to grab onto but the pin.”

“W-wha—what happened?” Barnes clutched his sides, scrubbed tears of mirth from his face.

Morita shrugged. "Last I saw of him he’d been loaded onto an ambulance." The man's face remained entirely placid, and for the life of him, Monty couldn't tell if the man was pulling his leg or not. Barnes' shoulders shook with silent mirth, and the man himself seemed too entirely engrossed in the humor to care.

“If the two of you are quite done,” Monty said, package in place, buckling his trousers and smoothing down his shirts.


“Quite.”

“The things one does for King and Country, huh?” Barnes grimaced. And Monty had the terrible feeling he knew where this is going.

“Sergeant, if you’re asking if I lay back and thought of England—“

Morita made a noise non-committal movement with both face and shoulders. One that may have passed for a chuckle. “I got a compass, knife, a couple of D rations. Wool socks.” Morita offered. “Take ‘em.”

“Don’t exactly think they’ll fit,” Barnes said, looking between them.

“His hands,” Morita continued with a straight face, not falling for either of Barnes' obvious set-ups. “It’s damn cold out there.”

“I—thank you,” Monty said as Morita sat and unlaced his boots. Truth be told, he'd neither been kind nor courteous to the man.


“Sarge?” Morita said.

“Yeah?”

“You’re terrible at this,” he handed over two thick woolen socks. "Now give him yours, too." Barnes bent, and did. The smell—well, after laying in this cell caked in shit and piss for so long—the smell was hardly describable.

Morita pulled a tattered page from his pocket. “Near as I can figure, this is us,” he pointed to the
crude, hand-sketch map. “This town to the North? It’s called Kreishberg. Where most of our German friends go on leave. We're in a valley between two mountain ranges. Alps. They've got snows, skiing already. Allied territory's South by Southwest or East until Moscow but you’d be an idiot to head towards Russia in the winter time. If it were me, I’d stick near the tracks or road. Heavily guarded, but they skirt the mountains, hug the river. Should bring you towards supplies. Shelter. You try going up and over on your own, you’ll freeze first.”

Barnes looked impressed. “How’d you know all this?”

“Frenchie, Jones, and I figured we’d bust out back at Azzano when we heard some crazy son of a bitch Irishman got left in charge,” he answered with what might have been a smug smile.

Barnes threw an arm around the man's shoulders, pulled him in firmly for a quick embrace. "Stupid fucker. You ever meet my ma, Morita, an' you're apologizin'."

“We've been doing all the recon we can. Jones caught some of our young friends discussing leave. Skiing. Thing is, no one suspects him of anything. All think he's just some dumb, well," Morita frowned. "Everyone but Berger and Ackermann, and to them he's just some big, friendly, German-speaking negro. More of a parlor trick, than any threat."

It struck him, then, that Jones had kept those abilities rather well hidden. Jesse Owens, Monty thought. Private Gabriel Jones was perhaps one of the few Coloureds they'd ever met. Made it easy enough for the man to play to their expectations.


“It was always going to be,” Morita frowned. "I'm a Ranger and I'm telling you it's not about the risk, not about the shortest distance or safest route, Sarge. It’s what a man can do, and what can kill him. We've got one chance. We stack our deck. Make it count."

Well, Monty thought. Well-reasoned and well-argued. He found no complaint with the logic. Wondered why they hadn't thought to include the man in the first place, then remembered himself...and James Montgomery Falsworth needn't look farther.

_I have been, Monty thought, a colossal arse._


"Well shit," Barnes said, staring between the two of them and their sudden understanding. "A flying pig. Starting to think I should send the both of you, maybe. Two heads bein' better than one, an' all."

Morita shook his head. Denied that offer of salvation. “They notice I’m gone, and they’ll go looking. Even if they’re about to march us someplace else, march us to death again, they’ll go looking. They go looking, they'll find us.” _Nisei is from the 100th Infantry Battalion. Shit, that squint-eyed little fucker could tear my guts out single-handed, not even sweat. Scares the piss outta me._ Barnes had spoken, seemingly so long ago. Well, quite, Monty agreed. Jim Morita may be small in stature, but the man was as courageous as any he'd ever met.

"It's why you didn't send me in the first place. Safest without me. Jones and I, we stick out. Memorable. Your Britisher? Just another white man. Could even pass for a German easy enough."

Blonde hair. Blue eyes. Tall. White. Strong set shoulders and jaw. He was, now he thought on it, uncomfortably Aryan. _That would be the House of Hanover,_ he was certain. Monty may be an
Englishman, but could just as easily have been born German. Fighting for King—well, Führer—and Country as a Fallschirmjäger instead of a Para. Coloureds, socialists, queers...well. Was the way the Home Office or War Office or he himself thought of them really so different—?

“Shame you don’t know German,” Morita continued, as though discussing the weather and not his own impending demise. “Still, it’s as good a as disguise as any.”

When the moment came, when it came down to it, Monty found himself at a lost for words. The apology, the farewells, well. They all just stuck in his throat. "Well," he swallowed. Morita nodded.

“Alright, pal,” Barnes said. Gripped his shoulders tightly. “Let’s get you goin’.”

The Enemy is defeated, said She. The War is won!

Yet the Captain was quiet, and the Woman called out to him.

All rivers flow to the sea, said the Captain. Yet the sea is not full. Where the rivers flow from, there again must they go.

Come, said the Warrior. Come. And the Physician went with him.

Do not leave me, begged She the Physician. Do not leave me alone for this!

If this is to be your final farewell, said the Physician, I would not intrude. Not even now. For there are words that will be spoken, and I would not see you weep.

What can I do, said She. Surely still there is something I can do.

There will be time enough for such deeds in the World to Come, spoke the Captain. There will be peace, and hope, and life anew. Blessed are those who endure to see it.

No, She said, for I will save you, surely will I save you. Only tell me the way!

The Way will be long and dark before you, spoke the Captain. Long may courage carry you before your feet falter.

Do not leave me alone, said She.

You will not be alone, said the Captain. You will never be alone.

—Jacob (I Have Loved). Falsworth, J. Montgomery.

Chapter End Notes
Bucky and Morita relate stories of internment of the Jewish peoples of Europe and Japanese-Americans. Morita and Gabe discuss treatment of Japanese-Americans, indigenous groups, and blacks during WW2 era America and today.

America Live with Megyn Kelly ran from 2/1/2010-9/27/2013. This interview is fictional, but the show and host are not.

OKLAHOMA
Morita mentions the sinking of the USS Oklahoma, where many of the crew were trapped and suffocated in the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Of nine ships damaged on December 7th, 1941, the Oklahoma was the last to receive a memorial.

HAWAII
"Now to avoid any collision of armed forces, and perhaps the loss of life, I do this under protest and impelled by said force yield my authority until such time as the Government of the United States shall, upon facts being presented to it, undo the action of its representatives and reinstate me in the authority which I claim as the Constitutional Sovereign of the Hawaiian Islands. Done at Honolulu this 17th day of January, A.D. 1893." —Queen Liliuokalani

Hawaii overthrow apology:PUBLIC LAW 103-150—NOV. 23, 1993

PACIFIC ISLANDS
US nuclear testing is often referred to as the Pacific Proving Grounds. The residents of Bikini Atoll were forcibly relocated by the US and given inadequate supplies. Some islands' populations were purposefully not evacuated in order the learn the long and short-term health consequences of nuclear radiation. The Nuclear Claims Tribunal was founded by the Compact of Free Association between the Marshall Islanders and the US, and ruled against the US on March 5th, 2001. The awarded amount of over 500,000,000 USD has never been paid. In 2010, the United States Supreme Court turned down an appeal to force the US government to fund the settlement.

Further reading:
The US State Department:http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26551.htm
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_testing_at_Bikini_Atoll
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bikini_Atoll

QUEER HISTORY/PERSECUTION OF HOMOSEXUALS IN POSTWAR GERMANY
Under the Allied Military Government of Germany, homosexuals arrested under paragraph 175 of German criminal code were still considered criminals, even if sentenced to concentration camps. Many were forced to fulfill their full sentencing. Convicted homosexuals were ineligible to receive compensation as victims of the Holocaust. Paragraph 175 was repealed March 10th, 1994.

The US Holocaust Memorial Museum on homosexual persecution:
https://www.USHMM.org/learn/students/learning-materials-and-resources/homosexuals-victims-of-the-nazi-era

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS
Indigenous religions were illegal until the passing of the Native Americans Religious Freedom Act, 8/11/1978.
The Indian Relocation Act of 1958 called for relocation into US urban areas to force assimilation.
Indigenous parents gained the right to refuse boarding school in 1978 with the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Further reading:
http://www.nrcprograms.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Indian_Religious_Freedom_Act

JOSEPHINE

JOSEPHINE the television series is fictional. But the Josephine Baker Story is a real docu-drama released by HBO in 1991, starring Lynn Whitfield. It won 5 Emmy Awards as well as a Golden Globe.

Whitfield on her experience: "You know, being a black woman in this country and knowing about people through the folklore, through the word of mouth, through the family, you understand the tragedy of anonymity in America that occurs to so many black people who have accomplished so much. Because the history books simply weren't geared to telling our stories."


Full movie: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0g4j00_7ZG4
World War 2 era Medic's Kit:
http://www.mtaoffnj.org/content/WWII%20Combat%20Medic%20-%20Dave%20Steinert/acloser.htm

shlisl (Yiddish): key
Schlüssel (German): key

Kagome kagome: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kagome_Kagome
Ring a Round the Rosie: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring_a_Ring_o%27_Roses

Utrinque Paratus (Latin): Ready for Anything, British Paratrooper Regiment motto

Fallschirmjäger (German): Paratrooper

"All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place where the rivers flow, there they repeatedly go."—Koholet 1:7
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings for the Holocaust/HaShoah, portrayal of panic attacks, slurs, discussions of genocide and racism.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You would fight then for King and Country, said the Boy. And yet the Enemy claims glory in the very same.

And you, the Soldier asked. What then would you fight and die for, if not for King and Country and the renown of Empire?

Love, spoke the Boy simply. I live for love. I would die for love, if die indeed I must.

And it is enough, the Soldier wondered. To live, to die for love.

May you yet live to know someday, the Boy blessed him, the Boy laid hands upon his head. May love carry you far from here, may love yet bring you to a place of peace.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“...Jacob (I Have Loved) gives the reader a glimpse into the lives of POWs and concentratonslager victims. Falsworth unflatteringly depicts the complicated relationships between those forced into slavery, and those forced to become slavers. While parallel passages in Tolkien’s and Lewis’ work have been praised for their complex and at times compassionate characterization of evil, Falsworth’s own has been damned. Sauron has among his army slaves pledged to fight for him by their masters, the unwilling, unwitting workers of evil, worthy of mourning (Tolkien, 1954). A soldier of Tash is revealed to have always been a son of Aslan (Lewis, 1956). A Death Eater fighting not for evil, but for love merits if not forgiveness or redemption, at least remembrance (Rowling, 2007). Yet the allegory of Falsworth’s Enemy is still too close for comfort. Perhaps it is not due to the horrendous nature of Nazi war crimes, then, but the harsh reminder of our own.

Even in an era of Comstock laws, censorship, and criminalization of homosexuality, nowhere does the author receive so much criticism as this sympathetic portrayal of Nazi perpetrators and unflattering depiction of Allied POWs (§ 18 Paragraph 1-2 JuSchG; § 15 Paragraph 2 JSchG). Yet a closer textual analysis will reveal no such imbalance: Falsworth addresses each equally with both
They possessed Berger’s keys, perhaps, but escape from the factory would not come so easily. Every footstep echoed. Every shadow cast. Yet Barnes slunk through with the surety of a cat along a well-worn path through the dark. He moved not like a soldier but a dancer, at times both swift and still through the shadows. And Monty wondered then—not for the first time, not for the last—what was it the man had done. In Brooklyn. Before.

But in all the silence they were not alone. Two of HYDRA’s monsters prowled the halls, alien and aware, ever-searching. And for a long while they sat, they two, backs against the machinations of the enemy, barely daring to breathe.

Time stood still. Sweat formed on Barnes’ brow. Monty became aware of the pounding of his own heart, beating against his breast, and surely—surely—the Nazis could hear, and they would be discovered. Every puff of air past his lips felt a shout. Every small, furtive shiver the rustling in the grass that dooms the fox to chase by the hounds.

Yet they weren’t monsters. Merely men. Only and always men—the helmets were removed, the gun sights lowered, and cigarettes were lit. Conversation was had. Laughter, at least, was unmistakable, whether a man be English, Irish, German or Jewish. And in that moment Monty wondered whether he was better or worse for the knowledge, that their captors were not faceless creatures, the many, mindless spawn of the Enemy, but Men. Living, breathing Men as human, as fallible—as fearful—as he and Barnes.

“Nazis,” Monty shuddered once that patrol was safely past. “Do you know, I bloody hate the Jerry fuckers.”

“Damnit, pal,” Barnes closed his eyes and leaned back against the baseplate of the bomb that hid them. “Should be home having Rosh Hashanah with Becca but some asshole decides to invade Poland and the League of Nations doesn’t do jackshit. And America? We’ve got our heads up our asses twiddlin’ our thumbs. Then Hirohito goes and bombs Hawaii and that’s how my sorry kike ass ended up over here,” he sighed. “I don’t hate anybody, Monty—’cept the New York Yankees, of course, but that’s just principle. I don’t hate ‘em, I just wanna get home. Want the war over an’ done. Guessin’ most of the Germans feel the same.”

Krouts, Monty thought suddenly. The man called himself a kike, a mick, mocked his own Irish and Jewish heritage, but never once in their long captivity had he called them Krouts. Fritz. Hermann. Jerry. Huns. Heinies. Why not? “If it feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge,” Monty muttered to himself.

“Yeah, yeah, hath not a Jew eyes or some shit,” Barnes said. Rolled his own. “Swear to God, Monty—both the Christian and the Jew kind—you quote Shakespeare at me again and I’ll hand you and your ass both over the Germans just to get rid of you.”

“You have reason to hate them, man. More than most. Yet you call them Germans,” Monty frowned.
“Hell, it’s what they are, ain’t they?” Barnes said, dragged a hand through his matted hair. “Kick a dog often enough he’ll start to bite back. People who hurt and help him alike. Can’t say who’s at fault, can you. Dog, or the men who’ve kicked him. I’m Irish. And Jewish. Can’t blame a people for wanting something better, for turning a blind eye to hurt when the rest of the world’s done the same to them.”

The villainy you teach me I will execute—and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

“Shit, Monty, I never wanted to be here. I should be home breaking challah with my kid sister and her husband and hell, bet she’s had her second damn baby by now,” Barnes let out a sad little laugh. “Probably thinks I’m dead—better’ve named the little fucker after me!” A baby. A child. The thought seemed so odd—and yet the war had never touched American soil. Pearl Harbor, yes, but that had been a military installment, not civilian. A colony, even. For Barnes and his sister there had been no bombs fallen on homes, no Battle of Britain, no mass evacuation of children to the countryside. A country at war, yes—but where one might contemplate a meal with one’s family, having children of one’s own.

“You—?” Barnes asked.

They were in this war together, the British and the Yanks. But how different their experiences. England had been at war since 1939. Monty’d been a Para three years now, been a Soldier since he was old enough for Academy, dreamed of patriotism and glory since he could remember, gazing up at the Zulu spears and shields, the Arab sabres hung on the walls of Falsworth Manor as an inescapable destiny. He’d spent years in Egypt, Algeria and Morocco—even Palestine—before the bloody Reich had given Africa up as lost. And they’d won, damnit. The Brits and the Kiwis and the Aussies had fucking won. They’d wrest the North African Theatre back from Rommel only a few short months before, and it’d all seemed a victory, then.

And that was worth fighting for—that was what he fought for, was it not? King and Country, the glory of the Great British Empire? And yet. And yet perhaps it had all been a ruse. If only not as Hitler’s propagandists had promised. Perhaps the whole bloody thing—this whole bloody war—had been a victory for this HYDRA, a distraction, and not a defeat. All those lives lost, blood spilt, the sheer enormity of the scale. They may have the Mediterranean, may have taken back the Dark Continent, but Europe was still beleaguered behind and before. England and her Allies embroiled in war. And they’d done so, the Enemy had done so, because the Great British Empire, America—these so-called Allied Nations—were too busy fighting their school yard squabbles to notice HYDRA’s noose wrung tight around their necks.

Morocco. Algeria. Tunisia. Egypt. This whole damn war. And in the face of that, it all felt rather hopeless, really. All those men. His mates from Academy, Winchester, and Oxford…there was hardly a man left alive he’d grown up with. And all for nought. Vanity, Monty remembered the words to a sermon he’d forgotten so long ago. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit. “To be honest, man?” Monty floundered for the words. “Truth be told I hadn’t given it much thought.”

“No shit?” Barnes said. “Hell, Limey. Thought you were a lifer.”

“King and Country,” Monty argued. “And God, I suppose. It seemed the thing to do at the time—don’t give me that look man, it was all rather more inspiring as a child. I come from a long line of soldiers. Seemed a shame to be the one to break the chain.”

“Yeah, well, ain’t exactly a reason to keep fightin’, is it?”
Monty tried to shrug. Shake that weight from his shoulders, breathe past the sudden lump in his throat. “I say, man. It beats being shot for cowardice.” And there it was: his own unspoken fear. It’d since been outlawed, of course. But he’d an uncle, once. His father’s brother. The man who’d borne his name. Died. In the Great War, some months after Monty was born. Killed. Shot for cowardice. The family refused to speak of it to this day for shame.

“You don’t gotta do this,” Barnes said plainly. “If you don’t wanna. You’re welcome to stay. To—“To whatever end Zola and this Herr Schmidt, that HYDRA had in store for them, Barnes didn’t voice. He didn’t have to die alone—and he would die, more than likely. Lost forever to the Alps. Frozen. Forgotten.

It was that or—

Or everything he’d ever fought for, all those he’d ever lost. Well, it’d all have been for nought, then, wouldn’t it? “I say, man. There’s not much of a choice.”

“Hey, hey, pal,” Barnes insisted, finding Monty’s wavering eyes. “There’s always a choice. Jesus, Mary, Joseph an’ Moses I ain’t gonna shoot you if you change your damn mind.”

Silence.

“You got anyone? Back home?” Barnes’ voice was strained. “Someone—someone like Stevie?”

There’s been girls, of course. Countless, numerous girls. One conquest after the next. But no. No one in particular. There was no Stephanie Grace Rogers waiting for him. “I have a sister,” Monty finally said, voice thick.

“Fuck, Limey. I tell all sorts of stories ‘bout Stevie but that’s just wrong,” Barnes broke the levity with a grin.

“You absolute arse,” Monty chuckled, yet sobered quickly. “It’s just—Jackie. Well. I suppose I would dearly like to see her again.” A proper, final farewell. That was all he asked.

“You even know how to fire that thing?” she’d asked him around a cigarette last he saw her on some air ambulance run in Tunisia. "Shoot your damn foot off, more likely.”

“I’m a Para in his Majesty’s Army and a marksman, Jacqueline. I’d damn well say I know how to fire it.”

“Well then. I’d shoot your damn foot off myself if I thought it’d save you.”

“I’m not a coward,” he’d replied. And those, he now regretted, were the last words he’d ever spoken to her.

“No, but you are a fool,” she’d quashed that cigarette out under her heel as her patients were loaded. "A coward might live. Fool’s going to get himself bloody shot. This damn army, promoting you for courage—stupidity, I call it. Making you a Para. You always did care too much what people thought of you, Monty. An’ you’ve got a stain on your uniform shirt, bloody slob. Made you look,” she’d flicked his nose. Straightened his beret. “Now sod off. We’ve got a war to win, and you won’t bloody well win it strutting around like some peacock.” And that had been their farewell. Both of them children, arrogant, anguished children, whistling in the dark. Hiding concern behind a facade of carelessness.
Monty took a deep breath. What the hell. He’d been a gambling man all his life, horses and race cars and whorring about. Tempting fate. And if he’d laughed in the devil’s face it was because James Montgomery Falsworth was too terrified to face death screaming, for all the bloody good it’d do him. But yes. Yes. For the chance to see Jackie again, to tell her how proud—how bloody terrified he was—of her in that blue skirt and black tie and double-breasted coat? Well. For that he’d bet his life. His death, even, however horrible and lonely it might prove.

“I got three,” Barnes offered, sensing that resolve. “An’ when shit gets tough, hell, when there’s shells goin’ off, guy next to you bleedin’ out his gut, I think—I think don’t know if there’s a God, Monty—don’t know if I believe in Him but I thank Him anyways it’s me, not them. You know? So you think about her, you hear? You gotta get home to drink tea and crumpets and shit with your shvester. Don’tcha worry about us.”

Monty was a career soldier. An officer. Had been for most of his adult life. And Barnes—? Well. The bloody Irish-Jewish socialist bastard was nothing other than an equal. Superior, perhaps, despite him being some poor Yank conscript, some unlucky sod who couldn’t dodge the draft even with his peoples’ combined fortune. An NCO, but a young one at that, only a Sergeant, but the best damn officer—perhaps best damn man—Monty had ever met.

“Now c’mon,” Barnes slapped his shoulder. “Let’s get you and your dumb ass outta here.”

For Jackie, then, Monty thought. For Jackie, both the wide-eyed slip of a girl he’d once known and the wild woman she’d become. For her, Monty knew, he could do anything.

And you, yes, you, Little One. Would you go to war as well, wondered the Philosopher, and regarded him then with wisdom. Would you fight and die for King and Country, would you kill for the very same?

No, said the Singer. I wish neither to kill nor be killed, not for King or Country, nor any Glory. But I would fight—I would die, I think—for love. I do not wish that any should perish, not even those we name as Foe. They fight for King and Country, perhaps. Or Fear. For the love of those they hold most dear. Yet many we might call Ally would indeed do the very same.

Yet not you, said the Philosopher. You would not kill, but save them all.

I had a dream, the Singer said. And in that dream the forces of darkness struggled against one another, the very earth trembled and was rent, and her peoples were afraid.
But I sang to them then of peace and beauty, and lo the war was ended, the reign of darkness over, and the world was healed and made anew. I have no wish to be a soldier, merely a Singer. I would sing to them not of victory, but of love, if only they would listen.

Perhaps, the Philosopher spoke, yet who can say whether any will.

Who are you, sir, the Singer said, are you yet the Gods to know that they will not?

This one, the Philosopher said, and pulled the Warrior aside, for he is anointed already with Truth and Love. He is the Victor, the Star and the Song, whether we would wish it or no.

Yet he is only a singer, the Warrior spoke. He will not do.

Your armies are filled already with soldiers, is the war yet won, asked the Philosopher. I do not chose him, nor any other, this choice has he made of his own. For he would go whether we aid him or no, and he would yet win for he is afraid neither to live nor love.

Yet to kill, the Warrior scorned. To die. For a soldier must do all these things and still more.

I said not a soldier, the Philosopher answered. But a Victor. For you cannot fight hate with hatred. Ware! I fear lest your war be won then with bloodshed and bullets and countless lives, yet never truly ended. And then will you know weariness, and come bitterly to regret.

I care not for your philosophies, said the Warrior. I would a thousand soldiers craving blood and battle to one such simple singer.

So it is victory alone you crave, the Philosopher spoke, and remembered then the imaginations of the Enemy. And never peace.

Victory, the Warrior said. Victory at whatever costs. Victory by whatever ends.

Yet I fear this Victory you speak of will prove only your defeat, warned he.

If our Enemy dies as well, spoke the Warrior, then I too shall die content.

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

**TRIGGER WARNINGS:**
Holocaust/HaShoah: Monty and Bucky discuss Germany's atrocities. Panic attacks: Monty experiences a mild panic attack. Regarding the use of slurs: Monty uses slurs for German soldiers popularized by the British and Americans during WW I and WW II. Bucky explains his reasons for using or refusing them. Genocide/ racism: Monty ponders on colonialism and the military history of the British
Empire, and Germany’s WW1 reparations. Bucky likens it to the violence surrounding Zionism and the Irish Free State.

REFERENCED QUOTES:

“It was Sam’s first view of a battle of Men against Men, and he did not like it much. He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the man’s name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil at heart, or what lies or threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather have stayed there in peace."

“But the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. Then by reasons of my great desire for wisdom and understanding, I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One and said, Lord, is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one? The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said, It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath’s sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. Dost thou understand, Child? I said, Lord, though knowest how much I understand. But I said also (for the truth constrained me), Yet I have been seeking Tash all my days. Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless they desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.”

“...If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies—and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute—and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.”
—Shakespeare, William. The Merchant of Venice. 3.2 1287-307.

SHOT FOR COWARDICE:

During WWI, 306 British men and boys lost their lives to firing squads. Despite our modern knowledge of PTSD and the many who lied about their age to enlist, the British government refused to pardon them until 2006. The Shot At Dawn Memorial was erected in 2000, and bears the face of Private Herbert Burden, a 17 year-old executed for cowardice and desertion.
AIR TRANSPORT AUXILLARY

M-616's "Spitfire" calls herself after the plane. The ATA was a civilian, paramilitary piloting group responsible for transport of planes from factories to the front. Since they were not in official military service, age restrictions, gender, and disability status did not apply—Joan Hughes was 17 when she joined, and only 22 at the war’s end. 168 women were pilots and these female Fliers were known as 'Attagirls' by their male counterparts. They received equal pay. Over 1/10 were killed in combat.

Further Reading:
http://www.airtransportaux.com/firsteight.html


shvester (Yiddish): sister
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings for the Holocaust/HaShoah, portrayal of panic attacks, ableism, slurs, discussion of genocide.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Would you yet live, even now, the Soldiers said. For the yoke of the Enemy is heavy upon us, and the Gods have turned their face away. Come, they urged the Boy, Curse God, and die. Then may we prisoners rest together, and hear not the voice of our Oppressor. Come, let us seek peace where the servant is free from his master.

Keep your peace and leave me alone, spoke the Boy. Only let me live to love, and let come upon me what may.

Would you do then even the works of the Enemy, others scorned the Boy. Now cry to your Gods, will any answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn? You are a traitor, a son of darkness, may you be cast out to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Would you sell even your soul? May the punishment of your iniquity rest upon your bones.

All this would I bear, spoke the Boy, and more, for the hope of He Whom I Have Loved. If love be a sin, I lost my own soul long ago.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“…the Kapos saved the Reich the cost of supervising soldiers, as well as increased paranoia and suspicion among the inmates to prevent insurrection or escape. Many appointed to the position were criminals with records of violence, unflinching in the face of the required brutality. Per Heinrich Himmler, it became an efficient, self-policing system: “The moment we become dissatisfied with him, he is no longer Kapo, he's back to sleeping with his men. And he knows that he will be beaten to death by them the first night (qtd. in Orth 110).” While survivors indeed attest there were those who used this privilege and power to comfort or assist fellow prisoners (Bloom 35) or were known among their fellow prisoners for treating illness, injury, or aborting the pregnancies of rape victims (Perl 71), the vast majority of the Kapos were as hated as their SS overseers. Many surviving Kapos were charged as complicit with their Nazi counterparts and were either imprisoned or executed after the war.

In addition to saving labor costs, the establishment of Kapos, like the replacement of Einsatzgruppen with mobile or constructed gas chambers, spared German soldiers the psychological effects of observing the systemic dehumanization and mass killings of the imprisoned:
There was one, a Lagerältester, I remember. He was both respected and mocked among his men and ours. Everyone knew dem Kleinführer. The things they made him do—the things were done to him—he treated us with kindness when we were Unmensch—monsters. He called us children when Hitler saw only soldiers. That was when I questioned were they animals, die Judentum, die Homosexuelle, when the best man I knew was among them. We deserved to die, for what we did. But he saved us. He and the Kapitän both. (Fastingbauer-Ackermann 13)


They slunk through the abandoned floor, neither a sound nor a footfall between them. Waited with baited breath for the proverbial shoe to drop, for the sword hanging above their heads to fall. Yet despite the perils of the road ahead, the nagging fear at any moment they may be discovered, may yet be killed, even the ever-present chafing discomfort up his arse, Monty had a singular, peculiar thought: Damn these Yanks and their confounding hand signals!

That which we call a rose, indeed. Barnes had crossed the gap between aisles. Crouched hidden among the munitions The man motioned once, hand above his head, swept down to shoulder height, a gross reversal of the Reich.

….And that was the moment James Montgomery Falsworth knew they were utterly and royally fucked. Bloody hell he was a Lieutenant in His Majesty’s Army, a Para, for fuck’s sakes, and here he was bumbling along after Barnes, green as a cadet on his first day of Academy. Damn Americans and their thrice-damned independence! What is the point, Monty cursed as the cock-up became apparent, in being Allies if we can’t damned well communicate—?

Barnes checked his 3 and 9. Repeated the gesture.

Damnit, man, Monty tried to convey with his face.

Barnes beckoned then, eyes wide, waved his hands to himself furiously. Monty caught the gist: Get your ass over here!

Monty checked his 9 and his 3. Ducked his head, half-bolted, half-scrambled across that great divide, Barnes’ reaching hands pulling him to the safety of cover—if one could count the long shadows explosives as safety.


Monty frowned. Shook his head. Hand at his side, swept slowly fore. Advance, man.

…and, Barnes being Barnes, bit his lip, no doubt suppressing a story of spanking—or being spanked on the arse by—one said Stephanie Grace Rogers, the most sultry, insatiable little bird in all of Brooklyn (if one could indeed believe the stories).

Bloody hell, man, Monty rolled his eyes. Is now the time—?
Barnes winked. Shrugged. *Always,* that look seemed to suggest. And Monty determined then, that should it all be over, should the escape go as intended, the war be won, he was no Catholic but he was nominating the poor woman for sainthood, as Barnes was the randiest, most confusticating half-Irish Jew Socialist bastard he’d had the misfortune to meet.

Their whole operation may have gone tits up from there, but Barnes steered him true, the strong, sure steps of a man following a route by heart, and the patience of a mother hen clucking after her chicks. Where hand signals failed, he gestured with his head, and even—bloody hell, was that signing—? Percival and the Lt. Colonel had a cousin born both deaf and dumb. Truth be told Monty’d rarely seen the lad, sent away to Asylum. It was rather a shame, the Lady Falsworth used to say, to send such a bright boy away to be wasted with the infirm instead of teaching him to speak and lip-read as he ought. Monty was by no means knowledgable enough to know a sign, or even to spell, but the intricacy of the gestures seemed oddly familiar. Even so, it was nothing like Monty had ever witnessed, the man appeared to be spelling *one-handedly,* of all the bloody things. It couldn’t be military, that much was certain. The movements too small, too complex for any practical use in the field. It’s signing, Monty decided. It must be bloody signing—must the damn Yanks insist on doing everything so bloody differently? And if it was signing, why on earth, Monty wondered, would the man be so practiced—?

…why indeed. The girl was already Coloured, diabetic, anemic, asthmatic, colour blind…could she really be deaf as well—? Bloody fucking hell. She’d best be beautiful, in her own Coloured way. Yet even then Monty couldn’t imagine one woman alone being worth the effort.

But when even that attempt failed, Barnes took his hand. Spelt his instructions out with the sharp scratch of nails, one pain-staking letter (or number) at a time.

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3-c-o-v-e-r-c-r-a-t-e-s
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Monty looked to his right. That group of crates holding God knows what of HYDRA and Hitler’s filth. Barnes meant to cross the divide after the guards next passed them by. It was easily understood enough, but far from ideal for either stealth or combat. Their communications could continue in silence, but not across any real distance.

And yet they flitted. From shadow to shadow, obstruction to obstruction, taking every advantage of breaks in the line of sight. The factory floor was laid out on a grid, efficient, economical, perhaps, but also easily taken. Every indent, every alcove, every small shadow became a hiding place, and Barnes moved like one born to a life in the darkness.

And finally—mercifully—the floor gave away, that great expanse larger even than King’s Cross Station. The architecture grew closer, claustrophobic, the walls kiln brick rather than concrete and reinforced steel. It felt safer, more enclosed, but years of training told Monty this was a trick. A trap. A long, narrow hall. Open sight lines. Sparse cover. It was—tactically speaking—a bloody nightmare. The area was older than the factory floor itself, felt familiar, more clinical. A repurposed hospital, Monty wondered, an infirmary. Although there was a word more suited: asylum. The lamps overhead were dim, the walls dingy. It was—had been, then—no place of rest. Healing. Nurture. Whatever this was, the evil had sank into the very stone. And yet it was quiet. Monty shuddered. Where are we. They’d headed near North, or so Morita’s compass had told him.

*Loading docks,* Barnes spelt into his palm.

A sharp cry ran down the hall, sent gooseflesh up his spine.

Brennan, Monty stopped, felt a twinge of guilt. They were so close, dammit. Perhaps—

Barnes shook his head. The man would be weak. Injured. Monty had little hope of making his own escape, surviving the elements. They couldn't afford to be burdened with the wounded. _Hell of a choice, Sarge_, Dugan's sharp words returned. And Monty agreed: it rather was. Which was worse, he wondered, to be the tormentor, or the one who turned a willful eye away?

Footsteps echoed down the hall. Shadows approached from around the corner behind them, growing ever-longer. Barnes grabbed him by the arm, shoved him into the adjacent room. It was dark. Dry. Empty but for a long row of kilns.

Barnes slipped through the small door. Hastened him inside. The fit was tight, packed in like sardines, more crowded even than the enlisted’s bunks below decks on the way to Morocco, and once again were they were forced to be silent, lest the Germans overhear. Monty felt his heart pound in his ears. He’d been trapped, once, in a chimney. As a child. Playing some mad game, and John left him, the bloody bastard. Left him stuck and scrabbling for what felt like hours. When Carson had rescued him he’d long since sobbed himself bloody hoarse. Had it not been for Jackie’s toddling insistence the scullery maids never would have found him. And not for the first time since the war began Monty felt he was back in that horrid chimney, suffocating anew.

The footsteps grew louder. The phalanx passed. The firm, goose-stepping footfalls of HYDRA’s troops, Lohmer barking commands in German, the slow, sickly pad, pad, pad of wearied feet and murmuring American voices. Wherever Barnes’ missing men had gone, well. It’d seemed they’d found them. And without them here the man himself was trembling, clutching at the comic that lay next to his heart. All that cheer, hope, constant chatter, well, it was whistling in the dark, nothing more. The man kept it together before—for—his men, gave them hope when he himself had none.

There was no Stephanie Grace Rogers, not for Monty. And now was neither the time nor place to speak of one of his own amorous encounters or Jackie’s many indiscretions. Yet here, within the very wake of their captors, he cast desperately for a distraction.

_Kitchens?_ Monty spelled as the sound of that parade continued past.

_b-o-d-i-e-s_

Came the slow reply. Monty went still. This was no oven—it was a crematorium. He willed himself weightless. Wished not to brush the ash beneath him. Bloody fucking God they were laying in—

Barnes lay beside him like a dead thing, one hand clapping that comic. “Either me or one of them,” he whispered under the din of passing feet, voice muffled in Monty’s shoulder. “An’ they didn’t need to see that shit. Tell you the worst part, pal, the worst damn part of this whole fuckin’ war, it ain’t the killing, ain’t even the dyin’…it’s the time, the whole damn time I was doin’ it, I was so fuckin’ hungry from the goddamn smell. I knew ‘em. My men, my unit. My goddamned brothers and it’s all my fault. And all I could think’s not how awful it was they’re dead or how they died but how hungry I was. Fuck.”

He thought to answer, offer hope, comfort— some pithy word of consolation—but for all the words in all the books in all the world, there were none.

Who knows how long they lay there, cloistered together in the dark. But the sound of HYDRA’s minions and the weary feet of the 107th had long since passed when Barnes tried the door. And Monty was met with a moment of blind panic and rushing thoughts—what if it weren’t to open, if they’d locked themselves inside, would it be better to starve or suffocate than be discovered—as the door swung slowly forward on silent hinges, and Barnes climbed out. In the half-light of the hallway,
the left side of his face was grey with ash, and if his eyes were bright with the long swaths of tears, well. They only mirrored his own.

The room. It was, well. In his hurry he’d mistaken it for a kitchen. Industrial ovens for the German war machine. Yet the kiln they’d sought refuge in was one of dozens and dear God how many bodies had burnt here and why—? It couldn’t be—it wasn’t—a mortuary. Not even in London would one find a crematorium so large. You used to get Jews here, didn’t you? Barnes’ words haunted him. Jews and Gypsies and Queers and God knows who else, poor bastards. It felt so long ago, and he’d heard of such brutality in the Great War, of course, captives forced to work, the enslavement of political prisoners—but incineration? On such a scale? Even accounting for illness and those who’d died from injury?

\[
\text{the numbers cannot try the cause,} \\
\text{Which is not tomb enough and continent} \\
\text{To hide the slain?}
\]

Surely not, Monty’s mind refused the thought. Surely not. It was an isolation ward. In an old hospital. An asylum, not an abattoir. Death and disease ran rampant among the imprisoned and the ill. It was the only safe, only sure way to dispose of the bodies. Yes. The bodies. The bodies of the those who’d died of illness. Typhus. Pneumonia. Trench foot. Tuberculosis. All hastened to their deaths by forced labour and starvation. Not even Hitler, not even HYDRA would, could ever even consider—

No. The ovens. They were for those who’d died of disease. They had to be.

…the alternative was unthinkable.

Barnes gestured towards the hall. That same sweeping motion as before, again the Sergeant, ever the soldier. Monty shuddered once, cast such dark thoughts from his mind, steeled himself, and followed.

The passageway was empty yet again. For a long while they waited there, in the doorway, half-hidden in the shadows. Barnes’ fear was now his own: HYDRA’s men, wherever they had gone, well. They were now both behind and before. Monty had no desire to become flanked by the enemy, not in Thermopylae, and in this narrow hallway even less so. And suddenly he was struck with a thought. A rather horrible thought. Were bodies burned here, for whatever cause—well. Where smoke might escape, why not a man as well? Perhaps there were more than one way a soul might exit that abominable chamber. He pulled Barnes aside, back towards that gaping crypt.

The fuck, you putz? Barnes’s frightened frown accused. And Monty understood the sentiment. A man, having once escaped the furnace, would hardly wish to return.

Chimneys, Monty spelt into his hand. There was some advantage to being an airman, after all: he’d long since learned to dream in three dimensions. Barnes raised an eyebrow. Nodded. The man hadn’t thought of that—and yet Monty hadn’t thought it through himself, he realized. Not entirely. One might climb up and out, were one so lucky, maybe even in and down using only one’s strength and one’s wit…but how the hell would one climb then down and off without a bloody rope? And rappelling gear. It would certainly solve the problem of the hallway…if only they had the supplies.

\text{How high, Monty asked.}

Barnes bit his lip. Don’t know, was clear enough.

Monty shuddered. Pulled the entrance of that maw open again. Grimaced once, and wormed his way
in. Barnes stood in the entryway as his look out, shivering and sweaty, a horse spoiling for a heat.

It was dark within the belly of the beast. Narrow. Breathless. Monty braced his back, brought up hands and feet. A woman would fit better, he thought. Someone of Jackie’s frame. Small, and slight. She might be a woman but she had the strength. Morita, the thought pained him, a man of Morita’s abilities and size would be perfect for such a mission. He hoisted himself up several feet, squinting into the blackness above. It was almost certainly all for nought—the chimney would be high. But he held out a last, desperate prayer of hope, but above him was only emptiness and the haunting echoes of his breath.

Well, for want of a bloody nail, then.

The battery may have helped, blue light illuminating what the eyes could not, but even that tool was denied to them. Monty sighed. Cursed to himself. Shimmied slowly back down, one careful placement of hand and foot after another. He had no desire—he had no rescue—should he become stuck.

Anything? Barnes’ nervous gaze questioned, darting between him and the door.

Monty shook his head.

Fuck, Barnes mouthed.

Quite, Monty agreed. Q-U-I-T-E.

In the end, they had no choice. Or rather, Monty supposed, the choice had been made for them: retreat, or forge yet ahead. Endure whatever cruelty and torment their enemy had in store with promises neither of rescue or escape, or press onwards to the hopes of home, however distant and dim that be. And if Monty was afraid—and he was deathly afraid—in Barnes’ presence he need not be ashamed. It wasn’t pity, but understanding. The man had never asked for this, never desired this, shirked from the duty until the tendrils of the war reached and took him at last, yet he wore the cloak of command better than those born beneath it. In another life, perhaps, Monty’d been envious, resentful, even, some uppity Irishman—a Jew and a Socialist at that—usurping his birthright. And yet it was a comfort, was it not, to relinquish command, release that unspoken fear of inadequacy, to rest.

Barnes bit his lip. Met Monty’s eyes. Nodded once, then waved them forward.

*Once more into the breach, then, lads, once more.*

Together they braved that empty hall. It was night outside, those barred windows lining the left wall soot-stained and black, and here so close to the edge of the compound the wind whistled fiercely and the cold clung to their bones. Stars, Monty consoled himself as he shivered. *At least they’ll be bloody stars.*

Would you then be a Singer? the children mocked him. Will the deaf now sing? The dumb now speak? Would you give sight even to the blind?

I would sing, spoke the Singer. To the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the crippled. I would sing to those yet ill and whole, the hopeful and the hopeless, both Enemy and Ally, I
would sing to them all alike.

Do the Gods speak to you, Singer? the Children struck him. Do they speak to you even now?

And if he wish to Sing, spoke one of their number, what is it to you? Is this why you Sing, asked then the Boy, and helped him to his feet. When all others would be silent? Do the Gods then speak to you and you alone?

I Sing because I will not be Silenced, the Singer said, as to where the Song comes from, the Gods themselves or the good deeds of Men, who may say.

You terrify me with dreams and you frighten me with visions, but Sing, the Boy took his hand and did not let go. Sing, and I will listen.

He is mad, the Children said. Surely he is mad. Sing in silence, others begged, so all may go well with you and you may yet live long on the earth. We wish no quarrel, only Sing you not. Yet others still took great offense, and hated the Singer, crying he profanes the very name of God! So they sought to lay hands on him, and drag him outside the city, and so to stone him, yet the Boy would not permit it.

Does a Song do you such harm, then, wondered the Boy, that you would kill the one who Sings? And if he wish to Sing, what is it to you? You may kill a Singer, yet the Song lives on.

Yet would we kill him, the Children said. Yet even so would we see him Silenced.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Regarding the Holocaust/HaShoah: Monty and Bucky take refuge in what Monty learns to be a cremation unit. Barnes relates he has chosen to be responsible for the disposal of bodies instead of his men.

Ableism: Monty’s grandmother makes snide remarks regarding BSL referencing the deaf son of a friend of the family. Monty reflects on “Stephanie Grace Rogers”’ and questions whether she is worth the effort Bucky puts into caring for her.

Regarding the use of slurs: I try to make Bucky's use of slurs self-referential and humorous. However, in this chapter he uses a pejorative term for the Romani people (this is a flashback to a line in chapter 2, and not a new instance).

Kapos: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kapo_(concentration_camp)
Gisella Perl: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gisella_Perl
Einsatzgruppen: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?(ModuleId=10005130)
Bibliography:

Sign Language vs. Oralism: Oralism stressed the idea that a deaf or hard of hearing person must learn to lip read and speak fluently in English in order to be “educated”, it was implemented internationally in deaf education causing sign language to be stigmatized for the next 80 years.
International Congress on the Education of the Deaf 1880:
//store.stir.ac.uk/bitstream/1893/775/1/Oralism%20-%20sign%20of%20the%20times%20-%20ERoH%20-%20Jun%202007.pdf
ASL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Sign_Language

Percival “Pinky” Pinkerton: Monty’s MCU adaptation has been said to take inspiration from Pinkerton’s 616 portrayal.
Marvel 616: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinky_Pinkerton
“But the book I mentioned years ago that I did, "Sergeant Fury," ... had a gay character. One member of the platoon was called, I think, Percy Pinkerton. He was gay. We didn't make a big issue of it. In this comic book that I read, the word gay wasn't even used. He’s just a colorful character who follows his own different drummer. He follows a different beat. But we're not proselytizing for gayness. “

Brian Falsworth and Roger Aubrey:
Robbins, Frank & Thomas, Roy. The Invaders #18-26 1977-78

Arnie Roth and Micheal:
Captain America #278 April 1982

Many people headcanon MCU’s Bucky Barnes as both Jewish and queer as his role in Steve’s life bears more resemblance to Marvel 616’s childhood best friend Arnie Roth, rather than kid sidekick “Bucky”.

The Third Geneva Conventions: created in 1929 as a response to the many POW
casualties of WW1. It was never adopted by Russia, and used as an excuse in Nazi Germany for the starvation and harsh treatment of Russian POWs, many of whom chose to fight for the Third Reich in Hitler’s “Russian Liberation Army” instead of starve or die of sickness.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Liberation_Army
US Army history of military medicine:
http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwii/EPWs/EPWs.htm#PREVENTIVE

Shakespeare, William. Hamlet, 4.4.66-68.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/For_Want_of_a_Nail (Or, as Samwise Gamgee says: Rope!).

Shakespeare, William. Henry V. 3.1.1-5
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings for the Holocaust/HaShoah, homophobia, war time violence, panic attacks, brief descriptions of child death and violence against animals.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Come, they said, for you are a Soldier of the King Across the Sea. Surely will you save us! Yet the Soldier had a Secret still, once which he would not share. For he was no Soldier, not in truth, for a Soldier of the King would have no fear and would give his life gladly for King and Country. But the Soldier was Afraid, and did not wish to Die, and so was he Ashamed.

(Or so he had been told, long ago and long enough that he would yet remember. Guard your tongues, little children, for you know not who may be listening. And be ware of words, for they are wont to slip away, and once out in the world who knows to whom the wild wind my carry them. There is no shame in Fear, dear ones, just as it is no sin to Love.)

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

"...perhaps the most poignant is a simple letter from an American soldier at Azzano to his lover stateside:

and this is the truth sweetheart I’m scared out of my goddamned mind Jesus fucking Christ sweetheart don’t you follow me don’t you fucking follow me out here to die I love you I love you they can pull this from my cold queer hands don’t care who knows I ain’t ashamed I love you I love you god help me I love you (Lettre 1)

Yet The Letter of an Unknown Soldier is not unique in this dissection and subversion of traditional binary gender roles and their complicity in the shame and emotional suppression of fear. Toxic masculinity is a major thematic element of Penguin’s 1960 fantasy novel Jacob (I Have Loved). While Falsworth’s Soldier is the predominant voice of a generation of veterans, his is far from the only to describe the hollows of then contemporary gender roles, suppressed sexual identities and their harmful effects. In his 1979 Goodbye Darkness, Manchester recalls the breakdown of fellow marine and commanding officer: “I priggishly disapproved...a Marine is supposed to cry inside; he can be afraid, but he can’t bring shame upon himself for showing fear." Well aware of his own hypocrisy he continues,"yet the fact is that I wanted to weep myself.” “We were all of us afraid,” a decorated veteran of the United States Air Force wrote, “only liars and fools would not admit it.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

That long hall was nearly behind them now. Eyes, ears, scanning, searching for the first glimpse of a shadow, the faintest sound. And finally they were here, the wall off to the right giving way to another corridor. They stopped mere feet from it, backs pressed into the brick, holding their breath, willing their very hearts to beat softly, softly, lest they be overheard.

l-o-o-k

Barnes spelled. Monty nodded. Barnes crouched catlike, pulled himself forward to peer into that unknown.

c-l-e-a-r

The message came.

m-e-f-i-r-s-t

The man continued. Then, if am seen, hide.

Discretion the better part of valour and all that, Monty thought to himself. Barnes had the keys, after all. And a golden tongue. If any man could talk his way out of such a situation, it would be Sergeant James Barnes, the Jewish-Irish socialist bastard who never shut up. And, simply put, “der Kleinfuhrer” had made himself and his purpose quite clear: his influence was far too valuable an asset for HYDRA to give up. Any interrogators may hurt him, yes, but they couldn’t truly harm him.

…and that, Monty shivered as he stood alone in the silence, was the story how His Majesty’s Soldier Lieutenant James Montgomery Falsworth found himself standing idly in a Nazi factory with a battery buried up his arse. When—if—he ever made it home (and it was bloody unlikely, wasn’t it?), Medal of Valour be damned he vowed to never, ever speak of this with anyone.

…and especially Jackie.

Monty remained vigilant, weight strung on his toes lest he need to run. And how long he stood there in the silence, God only knew. Time. Fear. They played tricks on a man. The lonelier, the better. He thought of names. Faces. Academy mates who’d died in the war. His own Paras who’d dropped like flies around him. Thought of his eight little nieces, thought of the charred and twisted bodies of children dead in the war and no. No, stop that. Monty wasn’t a religious man, didn’t know whether he believed in God—a god, really—but something came to mind, then. Let the dead bury the dead. He was alive. Monty was alive. And those little girls, his own sister a grown woman now, well. They were all alive. And they were counting on him. He forced himself to picture them as he last remembered, a gaggle of girls giggling in the glow of Falsworth Manor’s many windows, or Jackie smoking on that dimly lit runway. And that hurt. Hurt too much. A sharp cut to the quick of his soul. He shook his head. Thought instead of Barnes’ men, filthy and ragged, his own escape their only chance of rescue. The asinine Jones. That lout, Dugan. The Frenchman and his strange affinity for explosives. Morita’s long-suffering silences and final assistance. Brennan. Feraldo, he felt a twinge in
his gut. Both brave, in their own strange ways. Despite being—

Well. They’d been rather queer, hadn’t they?

There was something then, in the back of his mind. A nagging whisper, a tinge of doubt. That peculiar, recurring, ridiculous thought—

No. He stuffed it away.

“Fuckin’ nothing,” Barnes swore in a whisper, reappearing around the corner. “The hell’s going on?”

Monty startled. “I don’t know,” he said. How the bloody hell did the man move so damn silently—?

“And I’d rather hate to guess.”

“C’mon. This way,” Barnes jerked his head. “’S all empty. Place is like a tomb.”


Barnes grinned. Whistling in the dark, Monty knew. And he was desperately, pathetically grateful for it. What was the wording? Ah, yes. Drier than a nun’s cunt, Monty frowned. And he wondered, then, how much of their initial greeting was for his own benefit, as Barnes had only just made a deal with the devil. He himself was an older brother, both to Jackie and—well, it didn’t bear thinking about. If one Falsworth were a soldier in His Majesty’s Army, another a civilian pilot aiding the war effort, and the other gone to Germany in 1937 in support of their Führer and fascism never looking back, well. Brian could go and bloody sod himself, for all Monty cared. He and Aubrey both.

He followed Barnes down that narrow hall on the balls of his feet, half-standing, half-crouching, ready to duck, to run, seek cover at any turn. A searchlight swept through the soot-stained windows overhead, and they pressed themselves against the wall, huddled in the pockets of shadow beneath the beam. Outside, the wind whistled. Dogs barked. They were close. Near to the end of the factory, perhaps as close to the edge of the compound as they were like to get.

Barnes risked a look.

“Two towers,” he whispered, voice gone hoarse. “Got a gate between ‘em. Rest’s all fenced, and they’ve got patrols,” he frowned. There was silence. “Looks like ninety seconds, maybe. One man each, but they’re carrying radios.”

“And the gate?” Monty pressed, picturing the scene in his mind’s eye.

“Trucks goin’ in and out easy enough,” Barnes breathed. “An’ they ain’t searching ‘em.”

No. And they wouldn’t need to, either. A dog didn’t need to see you, Monty knew. Or even hear you. A dog only had to smell, and Monty was rank with shit and sweat. And oh—oh, that was a terrible thought, wasn’t it—?

Falsworth Manor had all sorts of hounds and spaniels. Even some shepherds for the flocks on the common. Relics of a by-gone era, kept for appearance’s sake. Had, at least. Until the outbreak of war. Jackie had written him, and there were tears staining that hasty ink. They had said—often, had said—that John had no heart, that he was cruel, that he cared not for people only for what they might
think of him, and they’d been right. They’d been bloody right. The Home Office said pets were a
nuisance, that a patriot would put them down for the good of King and Country. They were
Falsworth’s, damnit. Had weathered the recession like none of the other great houses could. It wasn’t
as if the Estate couldn’t bloody afford it, even with a war on and rationing. But the Home Office had
spoken, and no amount of pleading from his sister, his wife, or his own children could persuade him,
the wanker. So John’d done in the lot of them. They’d been slaughtered or surrendered to the army,
all save a few herding dogs “needed to raise mutton for the war effort.” Even Brutus, the aloof old
Mastiff who’d patrolled the halls and kept even a grown Monty abed when he’d otherwise be
frequenting a guest’s quarters had not been spared.

There was a hand on his shoulder, then. Monty startled from that dark reverie to find Barnes looking
down at him, a strange light in his eyes. Seeing him—that small, shame-faced boy playing at soldier,
seconds from pissing himself, crying out for his sister—clearly, and for the first time. The picture,
Monty thought bitterly, of Conspicuous Gallantry.

“You ever kill a dog?” Barnes asked.

“No,” Monty choked. Stared down at his shaking hands. “I should rather think not.”

“Think you could?”

No, Monty thought. I daresay I don’t bloody think I could.

“Yes,” Barnes knelt beside him. Placed that strong hand on his shoulder once more. “One thing to
kill a man. ‘Nother thing to kill his dog. Dog’s not evil, just loyal. Dog don’t know wrong from right,
just does what somebody tells him. Dog’s just doin’ what he’s taught to, what he knows. Can’t kill a
dog for that.”

“Are they leashed, at least?” Monty asked, pinching the bridge of his nose. He would not weep. He
bloody would not.

Barnes sighed. Squeezed Monty’s shoulder, then stood above him. “Yeah. From what I can tell.
Wind’s blowin’ our way, too, if it’s any help,” he offered.

“How far to the fence?”

“I reckon hundred yards. Maybe more. But you’ve got tanks and trucks an’ shit blockin’ sight lines,
on the ground at least,” Barnes assessed. “Should get you near enough there.”

“And after?” Monty pressed.

“‘Nother hundred or so ‘til cover.”

“How tall?”

“Say a a good twenty feet.” Wired. Both barbed and electrified, Monty wouldn’t doubt. Two
sprints, then. Each 100 meters. He was no Liddell, no Abrahams, no Tommy Hampton or—Jesse
Owens came absurdly to mind—but he’d and a few mates at Academy had come close to Abrahams’
1924 time. But that was years ago, Monty’d been younger, fitter, not half-starved and battle-weary.
And he would have to mind, he reminded himself, both barbs and electricity alike. Our doubts are
traitors, Monty steeled himself.
...hell. Jackie’ve done it on a dare.

And that thought, well. Thinking of her didn’t bring him courage so much as as a sense of resolve. He’d not let her chide him, call him coward, even if he had feared in the attempt. “So,” Monty sighed, letting his head fall back against the cold brick. “Not the gate, then.”

“No,” Barnes agreed, sliding down into a squat beside him. “Think the fence might be our best bet.”

“Your Frenchman,” Monty grimaced. An explosion would have provided an opportune distraction. And not for the first time—not for the last—Monty wished they’d only been prepared.

“Yeah,” Barnes sighed, face gone wry and twisted. “Would’ve been perfect, wouldn’t it?”

“Should they notice I’m gone—“ Monty began.


He certainly didn’t feel it. *I’m not, Monty wanted to say. I’m really not. I’m bloody terrified.*

Outside the ground was a swollen, frozen tundra of mud and ice, tank tracks etched starkly into the gutted earth. The stench of industry and ash lay thick and cloying, clung choking to the nose, the mouth, the throat. Here the wind’s whistling had become a barren howl, freezing flesh down to the bone.

“Ain’t this the bee’s knees,” Barnes grimaced.

> At once as far as angels ken he views
> The dismal situation waste and wild

“Better to reign in Hell,” Monty shuddered. Pulled his coat closer about his neck, Morita’s filthy socks already over his hands.

“…than serve in Heaven, or some shit,” Barnes’ teeth chattered. “But someone’s gotta do it. Better you than me, pal. ‘Sides. I’da gone with ninth circle, myself.”

Monty—almost—let out a laugh at that. Milton and Dante. The man never ceased to surprise him.

“This is it, pal,” Barnes clapped his shoulder. “Far as I go. End of the fuckin’—“

Time stopped. The man stood still. The world went silent.

“Sergeant—?” Monty began after a moment’s pause. “Sergeant?”

But Barnes was unmoving. Unblinking. Not even shivering. Staring off the to right as though caught in the Gorgon’s gaze.

*Shell shock,* Monty thought absurdly. *He rather acts as though—*
Monty swallowed. Stalked forward. Peered through that awful doorway into darkness, bracing himself for what horrors may come.

It was the laundry. Draped and heaped carelessly. Uniforms. British. American. French partisans. Hung on the walls. Crumpled on the floor. Monty recoiled. Thought of lice, thought of filth, sitting and laying in piss and shit for God knows how many days. Knew these discarded clothes carried death and disease as certain as their own. Yet Barnes. The bloody hell—?


Barnes’ jaw jumped. A bit of blood ran down his chin. Instinct overtook him then, and Monty threw them both to the ground, rolled to cover through that open doorway shielding Barnes as best he could. Thought the man’d been shot. Monty scrambled for the wound, searched for its exit, counted the seconds, waited for the rifle’s retort—

But no. No. There had been no rifle. No bullet. The man had merely bitten his lip through to bleed even before the fall. Now it was a nasty, gaping thing. But the pain of it seemed to have broken the spell. Awoke something within him. One last ounce, perhaps, of Irish grit and rage. Barnes curled away from him, cursing.

“The fuck you still doing here,” he staggered to his feet, wiping at that wound. “Get the fuck outta here.”

Monty pulled himself up, struggling in that sea of cast off clothes. “Barnes—?”


Monty stumbled back outside on the uneven ground, pocked and twisted with tank tread. But instinct held him upright and fast. He caught Barnes about the wrist. “I say, man, what is happening.”

“Nothing to concern you, Limey. Now go,” Barnes snarled. “That’s an order, soldier.” It was a bluster and a rather poor one at that, the last resort of braggarts and bullies, not the capable, confident soldier he knew. He’d known superiors when they were angered, yes. But he’d also seen them afraid. And Barnes was bloody terrified.

“I outrank you,” Monty countered. “And oddly enough, I serve His Majesty.”

Barnes swore to himself, rolled bloodshot eyes to the sky, hands running down the gooseflesh raised on his soot-stained arms. “Yeah, you wanna keep callin’ him that then you best do what I fuckin’ say.”

And it was there behind him now. The fence. Not a hundred yards away. The way—perhaps—home. But it wasn’t cowardice that stopped him, it was fear. Barnes stank of it.

…And that was the danger, wasn’t it? Becoming confidantes? The peril of losing one’s perspective. The reason for rank and file, the chain of command. It was much easier to take the order of an officer than ignore the needs of a friend. And yet, and yet at the moment King and Country—even the comforts of family and Falsworth Estate—seemed so very far away. “You know something,” Monty said, finding some pittance of courage not for his own sake, but for Barnes’. “Tell me.”

“I know you gotta go, so just go, okay?” Barnes pleaded with him, wiping sweat and filthy fringe from his face. His breath came in fog, and steam rose from every drop down Barnes’ cleft chin onto

The ovens. The laundry. That sudden fear. Surely—

But the sound of raucous singing cut him off. Barnes seized his arm, forced him to cover behind the treads of one of HYDRA’s metal machinations. The ground beneath them was so cold it hurt, skin burning and bones aching. Monty’s knees and wrapped palms screamed in protest. Beside him, Barnes’ bare skin had turned an angry red.

Three enemy soldiers—boys, really, no older than Berger or Ackermann—appeared, arms around one another’s shoulders, laughing and swigging from a shared flask, their long grey coats, woolen gloves, hats and hoods shielding them from the unforgiving cold. Monty held his breath lest the steam of it betray them. Pass us by, he prayed to no god in particular. Jesus bloody God just pass us by.

If luck be a lady, she was a fickle one. The Germans stopped, only feet from them, then came the familiar, slow jangling sound of a man opening both belt and trousers, followed by the stream and splash of piss. A low moan. Monty’s lungs seized and screamed with the effort of holding back his breath. The man was so near Monty could feel warmth of the urine’s steam as it trickled beneath the treads. Barnes was soaked in it.

His vision swam black. Monty turned his head, breathed as best he could through the wool of his coat, willing the fog away. Beside him, Barnes did the same, stained shirt wet and clinging.

That stream stopped, the last drops shaken off, and the boy fumbled with his clothes and belt. This close Monty could smell the alcohol on him. Cheap, nasty stuff, he thought. But if he’d hoped this relief would be the end of it, he was mistaken. The enemy did not move on. The three of them lingered, still singing, just some lads out for a lark, then, their clumsy fingers fumbling matches as they went for a light.

They were off duty. Inebriated. Slow. Reflexes dampened by both drink and cold. They could, Monty considered, be overpowered if necessary.

…but bodies. Either their bodies or their absence would soon be noted, off duty or no. And were an alarm to be raised—well. Search-lights would follow. The dogs would be loosed. He’d be sighted. Scented. Shot. The whole thing would have been for naught.

(And, some deep, desperate part of him wondered with a voice that sounded so much like Barnes’, he was a soldier, not a killer, couldn’t—wouldn’t—kill a dog, did he have it in him, really, to kill a boy in cold blood—?)

There was a wager, then, of some sort. Flip of a coin. The chap to the left lost, let out what could only be a curse before ducking through that doorway, rifling through the discarded clothing with HYDRA’s familiar baton, lip raised in disgust. The others watched. Backs turned. Laughed and egged the poor sod on, stepped forward to fight over stray cigarettes, watches, coins, even crude eight-pagers. And they were children, certainly, not the men who’d done the killing, but content enough to pillage the only remembrance of the dead.

Beside him, Barnes shivered. But from the cold or callused cruelty, Monty couldn’t say.

They couldn’t stay here. Not much longer. Even under the tank’s small shelter they’d soon freeze to death. Already Barnes had a hand shoved in his mouth to keep his teeth from chattering. Beneath the
soot and blood his face was blistered, bare hands a raw, bitter red. Come with me man, Monty wished to scream. Fence, he spelled instead. If they moved, perhaps the pumping blood would keep them warm—warm enough, at least, to seek better shelter in the shadows of the surrounding forest.

Barnes answered.

both, Monty insisted.

Barnes shook his head. Squeezed his hand. And those eyes. His eyes. He knew as well as Monty the exposure would surely kill him, would only serve to slow the mission down.

Damnit, man! Monty cursed. Clenched his eyes shut. He’d lost so many to this war, and so much. In the scheme of battles and kingdoms—HYDRA’s domination—what was one life, one man more? And yet—and yet even with the weight of the world bloody fucking nails and horseshoes be damned he’d not leave the man behind to die. Not like this.

…and yet. And yet. That’s an order, soldier. He could not in good conscience go, nor could he remain behind. But if Barnes could die—could choose to die—horribly, cringing alone on the frozen ground, doused in his own blood and the piss of their enemy and still consider it a sacrifice worth making—then perhaps, Monty took some small measure of solace, perhaps it had been no shame to be afraid.

It was the fence, then, for him. Now or never. He was a man perhaps of little courage, but Barnes’ death could not—would not—be in vain.

How, the Soldier said, how is it you have no fear.
I am afraid, said the Boy. This War frightens me.
No but you are unafraid, said the Soldier. And we shall surely die here.
Yes, the Boy answered him, surely we shall die here. And yet still I love. They may take my hope, my blood, break my very body but this alone they cannot take from me, that I have lived, and while yet living, loved.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Holocaust/HaShoah trigger warning: The chapter contains the discovery of the discarded uniforms of the missing 107th.
Homophobia: Monty struggles to reconcile Feraldo and Brennan’s bravery with their queerness, and rejects the notion of Bucky being queer entirely.

War time violence: Monty remembers the Third Parachute Brigade being gunned down around him.

Child death: Monty has flashbacks to bodies of children killed by bombings. He panics and imagines they were his nieces instead of strangers.

Violence against animals: Monty remembers receiving word from his sister that the dogs at Falsworth Manor have been exterminated or surrendered to service in compliance with Home Office recommendations at the time. He confides he is too emotionally compromised to kill an attack dog if the need arises.

Fear:
“I think I have never been so cold, so wretched, so frightened. It is the slow piling up of fear that is so intolerable. Fear moves swiftly in battle, strikes hard with each shell, each new danger, and as long as there’s action, you don’t have time to be frightened. But this is a slow fear, heavy and stomach filling. Slow, slow...all your movements are careful and slow, and pain is slow and fear is slow and the beat of your heart is the only rapid rhythm of the night...a muttering drum easily punctured and stilled.” --Gantter, Raymond. Roll Me Over: An Infantryman's World War II.

Manchester's story of the Marine doesn't end there. USMC Sergeant Major Mike Powers was removed from the field for a panic attack and was mocked by his men and medical officers alike. Only after a medic comforted him did Manchester feel remorse for his participation. Powers was later sentenced to 85 years at Portsmouth Naval Prison for "indecently, lewdly, and lasciviously" participating in oral sodomy with Bobby Winkler, the medic who had been kind to him.


Further reading
http://www.americainwwii.com/articles/haunted/

The Letter of an Unknown Soldier:
After Bucky's and Steve's deaths, Monty is forbidden by the Home Office to publish their letters as their queerness remained a highly guarded state secret by both the US and the UK. That l'Université d'Aix-Marseille received a collection of two anonymous American GI's wartime correspondence as a gift from the Dernier family the following year is entirely coincidental.

Many Americans and British supported the the Third Reich’s fascism until war was declared on Britain, even celebrities such as Edward Prince of Wales/Keith Edward VIII, poet Ezra Pound, and American aviator Charles Lindburg. Many visited Germany, or met with Hitler and/or his associates, witnessed their “success” and encouraged their compatriots to do the same. In the comics, Brian Falsworth and lover Roger Audrey leave England to support the Third Reich in 1937. Upon discovering the truth of the Solution to the Jewish Problem they attempt to flee, and are kept as POWs.

Pet Culling:
"If at all possible, send or take your household animals into the country in advance of an emergency…if you cannot place them in the care of neighbours, it really is kindest to have them destroyed (British Home Office, 1939).” An estimated 750,000 pets were euthanized within a week of its publication in September 1939.

Further reading:


"Our doubts are traitors
And make us lose the good we oft might win/By fearing to attempt."
Measure for Measure I:IV.

Alighieri, Dante. Divine Comedy, Inferno.

//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/For_Want_of_a_Nail
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Please mind the tags and trigger warnings, and take care of yourselves!

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings for the Holocaust/HaShoah, slurs, portrayal of panic attacks, homophobia, discussions of genocide, racism, slurs, slavery, segregation and sexual assault.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Where now is your god, the Enemy mocked him, where is your god when most you need him. Will your gods not save you, not even now.

I will forsake neither the gods of my fathers nor the faith of my brothers in arms, spoke the Boy, nor yet the hope of He Whom I Have Loved.

You are nothing, the Enemy said, your god is nothing, your people are nothing. They will be scattered like ashes. Look, already they burn.

Ware, said the Boy. Ware. A flame knows not who sets it. Ware lest Death meet you here by your own devices.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“…the Boy’s faith is not unaltering or without fear, but full of questions, anger and sadness. And rightly so. He has survived capture, enslavement, torture and unspeakable evil at the hands of The Enemy. His is the righteous suffering of Iyov, both the steadfastness of Rut and the bitterness of Naomi, the embodiment of the ever-errant yet faithful Children of Israel. And the metaphor continues. He is the Yosef to the Captain’s David, not living to see the end of his people’s enslavement nor their glory restored. He is Yehonatan, abdicating his kingship for the coming of the Captain, loving him as his own soul. He is Moshe to the Captain’s Yehoshua, paving the way for his people but never entering the Promised Land. If the Captain represents the Covenant, the peace that was promised, then the Boy represents the reality of the Jewish experience: “But now, I no longer pleaded for anything. I was no longer able to lament. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the
accuser, God the accused. My eyes had opened and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man. Without love or mercy (Wiesel, 64).”


CHAPTER NINETEEN

“Halt!” a harsh voice split the night. “Was ist das hier für eine Judenschule?” Another guard. Approaching fast. Arm raised, rifle at the ready. It was break now or die, and it wouldn’t need be a kill shot. The alarm would be raised, the dogs loosed, barracks emptied. They would both of them be caught. Be killed. There was one choice, then, and one choice only.

He wrenched Barnes up with him, and sprinted the distance at a dead run.

\[
\text{Theirs was not to reason why} \\
\text{Theirs was but to do or die} \\
\text{And so the lot} \\
\text{Had died for nought}
\]

“I’m sorry,” Monty gasped as Barnes flung off his arm. “I—“

“I know,” Barnes said. “I know.” But the man wouldn’t meet his eyes.

Retreat. Regroup. Retry. Death awaited them as assuredly within the factory as without…but while there was life, there was hope. No time to check they were being followed. If their escape had been cautious, then the return was bloody reckless. They were racing their captors back to their cages, and should their pursuers arrive first, to discover them gone—?

They were both breathless, winded, skin burning like the devil with the sudden warmth of shelter and the exertion of their run. Barnes’ lip had opened again, bleeding down his front. But they had made it. Battered and bloodied covered in ash and soot they’d made it.

Two more cells were now abandoned. HYDRA’s masked men were emptying a third. The 107th and sundry were awake, standing and stirring, stretching and cursing. Barnes held out his hand, stilling him, and crept the rest of the way to the cellblock alone. “Sarge?” Dugan asked as Barnes leaned against the bars, unlocking that door behind himself one-handedly. He hastened Monty inside. “What’s goin’ on?”

“Dunno yet,” Barnes lied, quick as you please. “‘M workin’ on it.”

“Where’ve you been,” Jones asked, assessing them both. “You look like hell.” Bloody right, Monty thought. They were the both of them caked in soot and sweat, bare skin chapped, bedraggled even beyond their unkept imprisonment. Barnes’ lip bled freely.

“Merde,” the Frenchman hissed, dark eyes narrowing at the sight of it.
“Sarge—?” Morita elbowed forward for a closer look. And if he gave Monty the briefest look of
surprise, it passed solely between themselves. “What happened? Goddamn. Let me see it.”

“Wait, did he hit you?” Jones frowned at their matching soot-stained clothes, Barnes’ split lip and
cracked and bleeding knuckles. And yes, it rather looked as though they had struggled, didn’t it.
Bloody hell, Monty cursed. He may be a Para, and in top form had been one of Oxford’s finest
athletes, but had they come to blows, well. A man with any understanding of just what Sergeant
Barnes were capable of would know Monty would be the one to walk away wounded—were he to
walk away at all. It was a sentiment Dugan shared.

“As if,” the man sniffed. “No way Queen Victoria here got the drop on our Sarge.” There was a
murmur of assent from the 107th.

“I’m serious, Sarge,” Morita insisted. “Let me see. Shit, that might need stitches.”

“Fell. ’S nothin’,” Barnes waved him off.

“Bite wounds are the nastiest kind there is. Stop being such a stubborn Irishman and let me see.”

“You ain’t my ma,” Barnes countered. “Hey, HEY!” he called as that sickly file of men shuffled
past. “Where’re you goin’?” And there was something off. Wrong. In the timbre of his voice.

_We made it_, Monty thought. _But we’ve made it_. They were safe, for the moment. Weren’t they—?

“Dunno, Sarge,” someone from that weary lot answered. “Boss man said something about us
stinkin’. About us gettin’ showers. Least I think. Dunno, don’t got your darkie!”

“About time,” Barnes laughed. “You lot smell like a shithouse in summertime!” But it was a
testament to how anxious the man was, wasn’t it, Monty wondered. Never before had Barnes let
such language go unchallenged, and he was far from the only one to notice.

“Sarge?” Dugan asked, more bemused than anything. “Ain’t you gonna—“

“Sorry, Dugan,” Barnes said, going still, split smile plastered on his face. “Thought you were gonna
do the honors. You bein’ sweet on him, an’ all.”

There was an eruption of raucous jeering. Jones joined in, his deep laugh loud and long, and Dugan
boiled, but burst into a grin. Even Jim Morita shook his head, and the Frenchman…perhaps
challenged Dugan to a duel for Jones’ hand? Monty wasn’t sure. But Jones himself went suddenly
silent once the chorus became self-sustaining.

“Sarge—?” he began.

“Not enough of us,” Barnes answered, voice clipped. “Can’t rush ‘em. Won’t work.”

Jones raised his brows, forehead knit in a frown. “I say, man—“ Monty seconded.

But at that moment a familiar, boyish face and red beret appeared. Barnes pressed against the bars.
“Hey, Berger, pal, tell me what’s going on?”

Before Berger could reply, Lohmer loomed over them. “Ubersoldat Berger! Komm her!” The boy
shrugged, gave an apologetic ‘what-can-one-do?’ face, and trotted off obediently.
“Berger, Berger—Hans!” Barnes called, then Monty heard him mutter *Jesus fuckin’ Christ*. His own heart turned over like an engine in his chest.

Lohmer slapped that baton against the bars, and Barnes withdrew his hands, cursing. “Who do you think approved it, *Judebrut*?” he leered. Then he snatched Barnes’ soot and piss streaked shirt through their cage. Pulled him close, not a measure of intimacy, but intimidation. Barnes, for his part, held his head high. Refused to look away.

Lohmer pinned a six-sided star to his chest. It gleamed gold in the dull light. “Nothing to say, Herr Barnes? You are not so arrogant now, I think.”

“Nothing to say?” Barnes drawled impossibly, picking at the fabric. “What, partner, you makin’ me the sheriff of this here town? Or you just want my best singin’ cowboy?”

“Dreckjude,” Lohmer spat, and shoved him.

Jones caught the man before he could stumble, Morita helping to keep him upright. “Yeah. It’s right there on my fucking dog tags, pal,” Barnes snorted, smearing blood and soot across his sleeve. “But thanks anyways. ’S like Ringo Kid says, some things a man just can’t run away from.”

“We shall see, Herr Barnes. We shall see.”

“Well now you’ve done it,” Dugan groaned loudly, spoiling the levity of the moment. “You’ve gone and got Sarge quoting *Stagecoach* again. Last time he didn’t shut his Yid yap for a goddamned week.”

Lohmer’s hackles raised.

“I say, man,” Monty berated him almost unwittingly. “Can you not.” Even in the hour of their utmost need, Timothy Alonysius Cadawaller “Dum Dum” Dugan got under his skin like a splinter-wound, struck every one of Monty’s last nerves—and Colonel Lohmer’s as well, it would appear. Although Monty would bet good money that, at least, had been deliberate. The man turned on him, puffed his chest out, and crowded against him.

Things may have gotten ugly, then, had Dugan’s poor choice of words not intervened: “You English are all alike, ain’tcha. Walkin’ around like you own everything, got a stick up your ass—“

Morita snorted. Even Barnes shook his head, mouth pulled into a tight smile…but his eyes. There was a brightness there that had nothing to do with jesting. The man was terrified. “What’s so funny?” Dugan wheeled on Morita, who had now doubled over hiccupping. “Hey, Hirohito, what’s so damn funny?”
“I say, Sergeant—?” Monty began.

“Just our German hosts bein’ friendly, Limey,” Barnes smirked, himself again. He patted the star on his chest proudly. “What in case I forget I’m a Jew or something. Oughtta get you a teacup, get Frenchie here a wine cork.” That got a laugh out of all of them.

Barnes muttered something, then, in the span of their distraction. Monty didn’t overhear, but Jones did—and the man startled. “Sarge, what’s a matter—“ Hebrew, then, Monty guessed. And nothing good.

“Nothin’,” Barnes lied, sucking his bruised and bloodied knuckles. “It’s nothin’, Jonesey-boy. I’m fine.”

It was a lie. And Private Gabriel Jones was, for all of Monty’s distaste and disagreements, a fiercely loyal friend. “The hell you are that was the goddamned Shema—“ Barnes kicked him, then. Hard, and in the shins. Sent the man a meaningful look.


“Only thing we can, pal,” Barnes offered in apology. “Told you when I brought you into this mess you’d regret it.”

“No such thing, Sarge,” the man insisted, shoulders squaring and standing straighter. “No such thing.”

Barnes gave him a rather wry grin then. “Then you ain’t as smart as you think you are, college boy.”

“Shut your damn fool mouth, Jew York.”

“We get back home,” Barnes’ voice was tight. “You’re introducin’ me to Louis Armstrong, right?”

Jones nodded. “As long as I’m invited to the wedding.”

“What, best man? As if,” Barnes snorted. “You’re the worst, pal. What’re you gonna bring, a covered dish?”

“Why, you’d prefer some challah and the Eucharist?”

“Jesus fuckin’ Henry Christ, Jonesey!” Barnes let out a small laugh. It was almost a sob. “Your mama know you talk like that?”

“It’s INRI, you absolute philistine. Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum. It’s from the Latin.”

“I’m a goddamned Hebrew, asshole. I’m the exact opposite of philistine,” Barnes retorted, world narrowing, ignoring them all. “You ever even read the Old Testament?”

Jones clucked in disapproval. “Then keep it kosher, will you?”

Outside the wind was howling. Dogs barking. The 107th trudging down that dim-lit hall. But here, right here, there was a bubble of light, of warmth, that the reach of winter and the shadow of the
Reich couldn’t touch. The doors of their cell were the last opened, and finally Lohmer came for them. But Barnes and Jones? They ignored the man, HYDRA be damned. Continued their bickering, jesting and light, grinning and groaning at puns perhaps only a Coloured Baptist and an Irish Catholic Jew from Brooklyn could understand. Whistling in the dark, Monty suspected. But why? he worried as they were led back the way they’d came. What the bloody blazes was Barnes keeping from them? What had the man seen, what had he guessed that Monty couldn’t—?

There was a dark door in his mind, and Monty refused to open it.

They were led past the cells, then. Factory floor. That long, narrow hall, past the shadowed entrance that led to the crematoria, sharp right turn. And finally, finally they were there, outside again in the whipping wind at the laundry, where Barnes had had that moment of utter stillness and something of a shadow of horror had come upon him. This time another door was open, and in the dimly lit room beyond the rest of A shift shivered, naked and miserable. There was something wrong, Monty knew, could feel it, deep down in his gut. Intuition. Sixth sense. Something was horribly, desperately wrong. But whatever it was, Barnes wasn’t sharing.

“Zieht aus!” Lohmer barked.

In the corner of his eye, Jones nodded tersely.

“Best do as he says,” Barnes shrugged, and shucked off his shirt, careless in the cold. “C’mon, fellas. You heard the man: strip.” And so slowly, awkwardly, they did. That cramped chamber became even more uncomfortable, every eye averted, no one daring to look lest what his fellows might think of him. And they were all of them haggard, wearied, no more than bones under loosened, shivering flesh. Monty knew he must look alike to all of them, but it was startling to see the skeletons surrounding him.

Beside him, Barnes folded his clothes, pressed the creases of those unsent love letters and laid them down. Then that damned Captain America comic. Last he lay down a wrinkled postcard, a gorgeous water colour of a sunset over the sea labelled only “Los Angeles” in perfect, painstaking penmanship. “Your Rogers girl,” Monty heard himself ask faintly. “She drew that?” He was no artist himself, but he’d grown up among enough collections and museums to recognize talent, recognize a masterpiece when he saw one. He’d thought the man had been exaggerating—of course Barnes had been bloody exaggerating—but not in this. The girl was an artist, and an exceptional one at that.

“Yeah,” Barnes grunted, He unwound the dog tags from around his neck and placed them atop that faded missive. “Stevie.”

“The hell is that,” Dugan interrupted.

Monty turned.

“It’s a belt,” Morita gritted out, and indeed it was. White silk stained with sweat and blood. And—well. There was no mistaking that lettering. The words, the language of the Enemy.


“Buddhist,” Morita scowled, folding the damn thing. “You’re wearing St. Julian,” he gestured to the patron saint hung around the Irishman’s neck. “I don’t see the difference.”

“My ma’s Catholic,” Dugan argued.
“And my ma’s Buddhist,” Morita sniffed. “Same thing.”

“No it ain’t.”

“You’re right—you’re actually Catholic, and I’m an atheist,” Morita growled, drawing himself up to full height like a cat bristling before a dog. “I’m only wearing the damn thing to remind me of home—which is Fresno, in case you’re wondering, ace. Whereas you actually think that necklace is going to protect you, which is ridiculous.”

“Morita—“ Barnes began.

“Oh don’t you start,” Morita said. “You’re more Jew-ish than Jewish, and we all know it. Don’t know how you got the Germans so damnedfooled.”

Jones snorted at the pun.

Barnes only sighed. Rubbed a hand across his eyes, blinking furiously. “He’s Irish, you’re Japanese, I’m Jewish, Jonesey here’s black and Baptist, half this lot are Irish and the other half Italian and we’re all Americans—well, almost all of us, anyways,” Barnes said, with a nod to Monty.

“Je suis Français,” the Frenchman grumbled. “Et apparemment invisible.”

“And Frenchie, here,” Barnes affirmed. “My point is, not a one of you’ve read the Bill of Rights?”

“Huh?” Dugan asked, as Monty said “I beg your pardon?”

“Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses, fellas,” he said, uncomfortable under their collective attention. “‘Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free expression thereof?’ ‘M not sayin’ anyone’s wrong or right here, just some goddamned respect would be nice, that’s all.”

“Still a Jap vest,” Dugan muttered, intent on the last word.

“Still Irish superstition,” Morita returned, but his gaze and hands had fallen now to his uniform belt, and it would appear the quarrel had all but been forgotten.

“…he says, as he takes the Lord’s name in vain.” Jones rolled his eyes.

“What can I say, pal, left my rosary at home with the rest of my dick. You see my rabbi, tell him to give ‘em back.”

Oh, dear bloody God. Monty was no true believer himself, had, on more than one occasion as a boy been silenced in liturgy for sniggering at spectacles, testicles, wallet and watch, but he had the urge to step back nonetheless.

…Just in case there truly were a deity—Jewish or Christian or bloody Buddhist, even—and he chose to smite the man where he stood.

Whistling in the dark. As a diversionary tactic, it was Barnes’ best. There was a wave of nervous laughter. Jones only sighed. “Sarge?”
“Yeah, Jonesey-boy?”

“You’re going to hell. In two religions.”


“Protest-\textit{ain’t},” Jones groaned at the pun, folding his own trousers with shaking hands. “May have to borrow that one.”

“’S all yours, pal.”

But even shivering under the eyes of their captors, forced at gunpoint to strip and shower for sanitation, they were all of them different. And they were afraid. And fear cracked the tensions of color and creed long-simmering that now threatened to boil. The anger had been there, all along. Lohmer had been right. And it was—it would be—an Irishman to start it, Monty rued. “The fuck,“ Dugan burst. “Something wrong with your dick?”

“No.” Morita scowled.

Monty had been trying to avert his eyes, give the man the semblance, at least, of privacy. But damnit. He hazarded a look. There was a sparse patch of dark hair at the juncture of his legs. The man himself was uncut, on the slender side, but nothing so small or misshapen as Dugan’s tone would suggest.

“What’s that?” Dugan grabbed at him.

“It’s a piercing. What’s it look like?” All eyes were on him, now.

“What,” Dugan scoffed, speaking for them all. “You a queer or something?”

“I’m not the one with his hands on another guy’s Johnson,” Morita insisted. “Get your mitts off or I’ll rip ’em off.” And the air had gone—if possible—even more chilled.

“Dugan?” Barnes asked. But the timbre, it was a touch too high.

“Yeah, Sarge?”

“Give the man his dick back.”

“Great,” Dugan said, and twisted cruelly. Morita gave out a yelp. “Stuck naked in Nazi-land with a Jap and a queer.”

“You either let the man go or jerk him off,” Barnes said. “Either way, mind your manners.”

Dugan swore.

But the damage had been done. In that small space, they had all of them given him a wide berth. Even Monty. And that—that was untrue. It was unkind. it was poorly done.
Hirohito, Dugan had called him. And it had triggered something in Monty's fear-filled mind. Shakespeare, of course. Much Ado. He felt a twinge of sympathy under that wave of self-loathing and disgust. It was a lie, a falsehood, an ugly wound (and even if it were not, Feraldo and Brennan had been queer, hadn't then?) His sister would have hardly stood for it. O God that I were a man, she’d scorned Beatrice. What bloody fucking rubbish. But Monty was. And he had no excuse. But—

…But Barnes.

Monty waited. Morita cast a fleeting glance, but the man was strangely silent.

“Oh for fuck’s sakes, my girl liked it,” Morita insisted, perhaps pleaded. “At least until February of ’42.”

That I had any friend would be a man for my sake!

But Jackie wasn’t here, and they were in the very lion’s den. Monty Falsworth would have to play the part of Benedict, then. And his own sister had had her young heart broken many a time—if wasn’t vain young men being reckless fools, then it was the war. He cleared his throat. Forced the question. “I say, man. What happened to her—?”

“Executive Order 9066,” Morita said, grabbing onto his sudden interest like a lifeline. “That’s what happened. To me. Got shipped out and she stopped writing. Last I heard she was cleaning houses, screwing some white guy with a wife and kids.”

“Her loss, pal,” Barnes offered clumsily, mind back among them. “Girl like that’s no good for you.”

Better to have loved and lost, Monty supposed. Although such a thing did rather wound. But a piercing—? his mind supplied squeamingsly. The man was Japanese. Oriental. American. You bloody well know what I mean, he berated himself. Just because it was something Monty had never done—never would—didn't necessarily make it queer, did it (And if it did, if it did would it really matter)?

“Hell, had my whole life figured out. Was going to be a doctor, going to marry her, shit," Morita said. "You know I already thought of names for kids? Pedro Morita. Now there’s a name that’ll turn heads. Wouldn’t let him go by Pete, either.”

“You were pretty far gone on her, huh?” Barnes asked wistfully.

“Sarge, I was over the goddamned moon for that dame.”

“Yeah, well. When this is over, we get back home from the war, they’ll be linin' up for you, pal.” And Barnes almost, almost had them convinced he believed his own words: When this is over. When we get back home.

“What, you got Captain America coming to save us, Sarge?” Jones heckled him.

“Save us?” Barnes sputtered, casting about as if he couldn’t believe it. “An’ here I thought you all liked workin’ for me! I’m the best damn factory foreman this side of the Atlantic!”
“Only ‘cause it’s the Ratzis,” someone snorted.

“Sarge, you’re the worst factory foreman anywhere,” said Jones.

“Well, now,” Barnes said. “If you lot don’t like the hours, you can take it up with management. But if you’re gonna unionize, I’ll just replace you lot with B Shift, see if I don’t.”

“And here I thought you were socialist, Sarge,” Jones crossed his arms over his bare chest.

“What?” Barnes quipped. “In this economy? I can’t afford any principles, pal!”

Speaking of Irishmen who couldn’t afford principles, “Didn’t know you were Jewish, too,” Dugan eyed him.

“Anglican,” Monty snapped, covering himself with one hand. It was a rather odd thing, wasn’t it. For many he supposed it to be a matter of religion. But at Winchester, and in the Army, it’d all rather been a matter of class. Cleanliness is next to godliness, or some such nonsense. Jackie’d cackled about unendingly when she’d first found out at the tender age of thirteen. "You’re missing half your di-ick, you’re missing half your di-ick," she’d sang for weeks on end over the summer hols. “At least I’m not bleeding out of it,” Monty’d snapped back, and that had shut her up, hadn’t it? Adolescent Monty had been horrified, but oday he’d given anything to have her here to tease him.

“What, you got a fur coat on under there, Sarge?”

“What can I say, Dum-Dum. I got the draft. If the war don’t put hair on your chest, the godawful coffee will,” Barnes said, voice strained. You say one word about my dick, Dugan, and I’ll kick your balls so hard it’ll take Morita here a week to find ‘em.”

“Same,” Jones grunted, hiding behind him.

“What, you worried we’ll all want a look to see if it’s true what they say?” Dugan leered. “’Cause judging by Hirohito here I’d say those rumors are true.”

“Oh for crying out loud,” Morita insisted. “I’m average size!”

…they were POWs in Nazi Germany and having a dick-measuring contest. Yes, this was exactly like Winchester School all over again.

“Girls, girls, you’re both pretty,” Barnes tried.

“Ugh, you’re not a queer too, are you, Sarge?”

“I ain’t the one ogling another man’s dick, Dugan. Ain’t the one who had my hands on one, neither,” Barnes managed to murmur, but the bite was gone as he fussed with that bloodied lip. He was, Monty thought, unable to find humor in that, a man now in rapid danger of drowning. But Barnes pushed through, if only for a moment longer, sought out one final diversion. “Sing us a song, Jonesey-boy.”

“What, I’m the only black man so I have to make the music?” Jones groaned. “Left my bugle back at camp, Sarge.”
“Just sing, Jonesey.” There was a certain sharpness, not a sting but a plea.

“Yeah, Jonesey. Sing.” Dugan chimed, not one to be left out of a joke, however horrible.

“Dum Dum, I do not take orders from you.”

“Aw, c’mon, Jim Crow. I’m askin’ nicely!”

“Dugan,” Barnes said, voice sharp.

But Jones only sighed, sang some jazz number, brought Monty back to 1937, tracking Jackie down on a London New Years, finding her in a Coloured club, of all places. Where she’d gotten the idea in her wild young head, he’d never know. She’d thrown her drink in his face, called him the most vile epithet in the English language, hissed and cussed and thrown such a scene as only Jacqueline Falsworth could, the education and intellect of a highbred woman of a Great House of England mixed with all the rancor and fire she’d picked up from God knows where—the girl had attended and been expelled from nearly every Girls’ School in England. But he’d paid off her beau, a handsome young mulatto man (from bloody Manchester, of all places!), and she’d hated him for it, but the heartfelt word was enough to bring her home, and that was that.

“Can’t you sing some shit we all know?” Dugan griped. “C’mon, Sarge. Make him sing somethin’ else. Damn race records, givin’ me the willies. Or you could give us another sermon. If I gotta listen to Jonesey here singing hynms, and all.”

“Hymns—?” Jones sputtered. “It’s Billie Holiday, not Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel—!”

“Po-tay-to, pa-tah-to,” Dugan glowered.

“You’re Irish,” Jones countered. “You say po-tay-to. Don’t give me any TransAtlantic airs. Our Britisher here’s the only one with that excuse.”

“I say, man,” Monty stepped up to bat, much braver than he felt. “I’m English. And I do know an insult when I hear it.” An insult and an invitation, he might add.

“Say potato,” Dugan grinned, but it was a vicious, hungry thing. “Go on, say it.”

Say Uncle, the cousins had said. Say Uncle. And stubborn little Monty wouldn’t, even if the grip on his hair had him screaming with tears in his eyes. But Jackie—well, she’d kicked the them in their shins and busted their balls and chased them half-way across the county in her hemmed hand-me-down trousers, all shrieks and teeth and skinny little legs even if she was all alone and only half their size. “I’m a girl,” she’d cried, shaking her braids out from under her cap, pulling the most awful faces and leering, “You can’t hit me back!” But Jackie wasn’t here. And Barnes—? Well. The man was bloody terrified. Barely holding it together. Damn you British and damn your pride, he’d said. Well, quite. Monty’d already buried a battery up his own arse today. He hardly had any left to speak of.

“Potato,” Monty sighed.

“See?” Jones continued. “Received Pronunciation.”

“English,” Monty insisted.

“I’ve been to England. Heard plenty of people say it different,” Jones said. “RP’s an affected dialect,
“Po-tay-to, pa-tah-to.” The penny was in the air now, and who could say which way it would fall?

Dugan guffawed, slapped Jones on the back. Morita snorted. Barnes—the man did his best—even managed a weak grin. Jones, to his credit, did nod twice, in appreciation or apology, Monty could only guess.

“C’mon, Sarge,” Dugan goaded. “Ain’t like you to miss a chance to preach! I could use a bit of preachin’ from the good ol’ gospel of Stephanie Rogers.”

…a book, Monty had no doubt, second in profanity to none. Including Lady Chatterly.

Dugan sent his elbow into Jones’ ribs. “This is the part where you give us a ‘hallelujah’.”

“Dum Dum, you can’t even spell it,” Jones accused him.


“I thought yesterday was Sunday,” Barnes managed to quip with a shaky smile. “You’ve already had your sermon for the week!”

“Well, now, you’re just confused about the Sabbath,” Jones said. “You being Jewish and all. I, for one, agree with Dum Dum here. Think we could all stand to here a little more Shir HaShirim.”

“What, you want it in the original Hebrew again, pal?” Barnes answered with a panged little smile.

“Sheer Ha-what—?” Dugan asked, living up to his name.

“Alright,” Barnes took a shaky breath. “Alright—“

And later, much later, when Barnes had fallen and before the Captain was no more, Monty would hear those words again, this time in English. There was no body. Nothing to bury. The Captain could barely breathe, let alone speak. But it wouldn’t be right, it would hardly be fitting for a spirit as fierce and full of life as Barnes to go so gentle into that good night. They had a service, alone, and cold, and in the snow. Carter held him, and Jones repeated those words: “My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”

“Hey, no fair,” Dugan broke in. “Just ‘cause he’s Jewish and you’re all edumacated don’t meant you get to tell all your dirty stories in secret!”

“I say man, must you?” Monty winced with a glance at Barnes. Above them, the plumbing made a groaning sound, and the air was rent with sulphur. Barnes’ jaw jumped, his voice trailed off, and he was silent.

“Great,” Jones shuddered as the stench grew stronger. “Only Hitler could make a shower smell worse than our own shit.”

screeched. Undeterred, Dugan prodded Barnes in the ribs. “Shitler. Shitler! It’s funny, right, Sarge? C’mon, Shitler! it’s funny!”

Jones shook his head. Gave the man a sad, sad smile. “Dum Dum, it wasn’t even funny the first four times.”

Then the spray came down. Barnes closed his eyes, and cowered.

I have lost hope, spoke the Boy. And in losing hope have I damned us all.

Yet were we not damned, the Soldier wondered, from even the beginning?

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Holocaust/HaShoah trigger warning: Given the choice between an unsuccessful escape attempt or retreat, Monty forces Bucky’s hand. Aware of the apparent danger, Bucky returns to the cells in order to be with his men and to calm them during their execution.

Racism/slurs: Lohmer. Dugan and an unnamed member of the 107th refer to Morita and Gabe by racial slurs. Morita reveals his girlfriend left him because he was Japanese. Monty paid off Jackie’s then-boyfriend because he was mixed race, describing him with a slur.

Homophobia: When Lohmer uses his presence to intimidate Bucky, Bucky purposefully misinterprets his intentions. Bucky makes a joke about Dugan and Jones when Dugan comes to Jones’ defense after a soldier uses a slur. In the showers, Bucky freezes and deflects when accused of being queer.

Sexual assault: Dugan intimidates Morita for having a genital piercing, going so far as to grab him.

Page, Ellen, actor. X-Men: The Last Stand. 20th Century Fox, 2006
Page, Ellen, actor. X-Men: Days of Future Past. 20th Century Fox, 2014

Blume, Judy. Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret. USA: Yearling, 1970
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Are_You_There_God%3F_It's_Me,_Margaret.
Judy Blume: Jewish YA Author https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judy_Blume


Was ist das hier für eine Judenschule (German idiom): What, is this for a Jewish school? translation: What is this mess/ruckus?

Alfred, Lord Tennyson. The Charge of the Light Brigade. The Examiner. 1854.

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad (Hebrew): Listen oh Israel, Adonai, Our God, Adonai is One.


Zieht aus (German): undress

Morita is wrong, senninbari is a Shinto tradition, but had been adopted as a state symbol in Japan in the late 19th century. Japanese and Japanese-American soldiers alike wore them during WWII. As a second-generation immigrant, it is a nuance Morita might not have known or understood. http://eyelevel.si.edu/2010/05/gaman-and-the-story-of-the-vest-with-a-thousand-knots.html

Merde (French): Shit

Je suis Français. Et apparemment invisible (French): I’m French, and apparently invisible.

Jacques “Frenchie” Dernier never gets enough love: first appearance in “To Free a Hostage!” Sergeant Fury and his Howling Commandos vol. 1, 21. Only six comics appearances since his debut in 1965, only 2 and 1/2 minutes of screen time and two speaking lines in Captain America: The First Avenger (2011); from Marseille, the most ethnically diverse city in all of Europe; is a member of la Resistance in occupied France who got himself in enough trouble to be sent to a work camp in Austria…and it’s not a coincidence a demolitions expert from the French Resistance *somehow* managed to infiltrate the precise location HYDRA’s weapons factory. When re-entering Allied territory, Steve Rogers has himself flanked by Bucky, Gabe Jones, Jim Morita, Jacques Dernier to give the Resistance and Dernier their due credit. When planning their final assault, an empty chair is left to Steve’s right for Bucky...on his other side is Jacques Dernier.

Jim "Lady Killer” Morita is so not down with your desexualized Asian male stereotypes.

Much Ado About Nothing. Act IV, Scene I.

Gabriel Jones was one of the first black comic characters, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1963 in response to the growing civil rights movement and lack of black representation in comics. He was depicted as the first black man to serve in a non-segregated unit in the United States military, and portrayed as trumpet player who was tutored by Louis Armstrong. While musicality itself isn’t problematic and the intention was to pay homage to his Harlem roots, by writing only one black character and infusing him with tropes it reads like racial stereotyping.
JAZZ

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmIkSGtkaJI
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billie_Holiday


Anticipated update: February 3
Status: written, currently editing
Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings for the Holocaust/HaShoah, portrayal of panic attacks, torture, homophobia, alcoholism, and slurs. Heads up for Bucky's bad sex stories with mild BDSM content.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Come, they said, Come. For you have scouted out the citadel of the Enemy. Tell us, what is it that you have discovered.

The walls are high, and the gate is strong, the Boy answered them. Yet it may be we have found the means to Escape.

You would lie to them, the Soldier wondered. Even now.

They have lost everything, said the Boy. Would you have them lose their hope as well?

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

"...whose sudden “spasms of high, hysterical laughter” foiled the razzia’s attempts to steal her brothers into slavery (Ten Boom, 106). The horrors of the war and feelings of powerlessness in the face of fascism were fought with humor, even in the darkest of hours. Whether it was the storytelling and imaginations of the women of Auschwitz (Perl, 1948) or the recounting of crass sexual exploits by a commanding officer in the Pacific theater (Manchester, 1979), laughter was the ultimate act of defiance, even if it was one’s last. This gallows humor and the need for narrative are seen time and time again in the memoirs of survivors of the camps and soldiers in the war, whether as works of fiction or autobiography. It is evident in the Strongman’s “Eat, Drink and Be Merry” (Falsworth, 1960) as much as Yossarian’s depiction of the painful ridiculousness that is wartime bureaucracy (Heller, 1961). As second Lieutenant Daniel Inouye of the 442nd confessed, "Even knowing that every agonizing second may be their last on earth, a man has to vent the terrible pressures inside, and of course laughing is better than crying. So we laughed, sometimes heartlessly, sometimes hysterically, sometimes in the final instant of life". (Ellis, 2005, para. 11)"


CHAPTER TWENTY
The spray stung, water so cold it cut like knives. Smelt bitterly of sulphur. Monty sprang back reflexively. Around him, the 107th began to curse.

“What, you afraid of a little water, Sarge?” Dugan heckled. The man had dropped to the floor like an air raid, hands over his head, shivering uncontrollably. “Only two things melt in the rain, and Jimmy-boy, you ain’t exactly sugar—“

Barnes made a low, hitching sound. It took Monty several seconds to realize the man was laughing, not sobbing.

“It’s water!” he choked, naked shoulders heaving in swells of hysteria. “It’s just fuckin’ water that fuckin’ Nazi sumbitch—“

“What,” Dugan said. “You expecting something else?”

...and yes, Monty realized. Dear bloody God, yes. The man rather had. And that had been the reason, hadn’t it. Behind the jesting. The terror. His own heart clenched up at the thought, that dark door opening at last to the horrors beyond. Those ovens, this chamber, they hadn’t been for the diseased or the dead. Those mounds of clothes—and oh, oh God. This factory, this camp—

_You used to get Jews here, didn’t you?_ Barnes’ words haunted him. _Jews and Gypsies and Queers and God knows who else, poor bastards._

It’d been a place of death. For who knows how many hundreds or thousands. That’s what Barnes had realized, stricken speechless, breathless with the horror of it all. And Monty had—

_Damnit, pal. You get outta here. You got a chance. You gotta take it._

Monty had dragged him back. And he’d gone, Monty swore to himself. The man had gone back for them without a word of complaint, gone to his own bloody death wearing nothing but forced cheer all to hide the truth from them. He couldn’t have saved them, couldn’t have even saved himself. But Barnes could spare his men—could spare Monty, even—the agony of knowing, so he’d born that burden all alone.

...not alone. Jones had seen through that rictus of humour, the short moments of silence, the tearful brightness in those terrified eyes that could, if one wanted to, mistake for laughter. And they all had wanted to. Had so badly wanted to. And now, knowing, Monty felt his knees give way, felt the terror flood through him, bones chilled, guts gone cold deeper even then this torrent could reach. But he held himself together—_damnit man hold yourself together!_ They can’t know, Monty knew. It’s what Barnes had wanted. He’d spared them all—gone to his bloody death with laughter on his lips—to spare them all that terror.

"I’ll kill ‘im.” Barnes sobered, wiping at tears with vehemence once that relief had faded. "I’ll fuckin’ kill him.”

“C’mon, Sarge,” Jones said kindly, offering a strong hand up. “View can’t be good down there.”

He’d known, too. Stayed silent—stayed jesting—so that Barnes might continue the facade. And if Barnes—if Jones, this unappreciated, underestimated Coloured man—could put on a show of courage and hope where he felt none, well. Monty was a Para. A soldier in His Majesty’s Army. He could force himself to do the same.
"I say, man," he came again to Jones’ assistance, his own voice a touch too high. "It’s hardly better up here."

Barnes made a panged grimace in appreciation, staggering to his feet. The shock of it had left him rather breathless. "Pal, if it’s b-b-between lookin’ up your asses or at your ugly mugs…” he trailed off, teeth chattering. "Dunno if I can tell the difference."

"Well, Sarge, in an Irishman’s case, it’s quite easy to tell which end is up,” Jones explained. "See that long, ugly, protuberant thing? That’s his nose.” Around them, the 107th let out a nervous trill of laughter.

"Hey, now,” Barnes frowned. “That’s just fuckin’ antisemitic."

"He’s not callin’ your nose Jewish, Sarge. He’s callin’ our dicks small.” Dugan scowled.

"Well, half-right’s better than dead wrong, at least,” Barnes drawled. At that they laughed—all, of course, but Dugan, who was still trying to work out whether or not it was an insult.

"Just fucking water my ass,” Morita interrupted them, rubbing his arms where gooseflesh prickled amidst his sparse hair. "It’s like ice. We’ll catch hypothermia if this keeps up."

And it made Monty wonder, could that indeed have been the plan all along? It would be slow. Excruciating. The quick, suffocating death of poison certainly didn’t seem the man’s style. Lohmer seemed the type who would prefer to play with prey before he killed them. Monty had known a chap or two, upperclassmen, a few professors at Winchester, officers—John, even—who had used power only to wield cruelty.

"He’s right, you know,” Monty voiced. "If this keeps up, we’ll catch our death of cold.” There was a remedy, of course. Stay active, or stick together fiercely to conserve heat. But their confines were so crowded that movement would not be feasible. And the other—? Well. The thought was hardly pleasant, to say the least. It would have to be Barnes, Monty knew with bitter clarity. And only Barnes. If any other man were to suggest such a thing. They’d already proven themselves to be intolerant—afraid, dangerously so, even—of queers. Even Monty himself.

“Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses,” Barnes shivered. “C’mon, ladies. Bunch up. Keep away from the walls and water. Huddle together. We stay as warm as we can.”

“Sarge, you’ve got to be kidding me,” someone said.

Barnes only cringed in the cold. “Pal, I wish I was!”And so slowly, reluctantly, certainly rather awkwardly they did, all being quite careful to cross one’s hands over genitals, or legs around, so as not to make it unseemly. But—and there was no way around it, was there?—it couldn’t be helped. They were a naked mass of shivering limbs, stuck skin to skin. And it wasn’t, Monty grimaced, sexual, not arousing or erotic at all but rather mortifying to feel the cheek of one’s arse or scrape of one’s cock against another’s thigh, the back of another’s hand.From the corner, Dugan eyed them warily. Morita rolled his eyes.

“Oh for fuck’s sake, you too, Dugan,” Barnes insisted, his arms about both Morita and Dernier.

“Yeah, come on, Dugan,” Morita called. “You can stand next to me.”

“You ain’t helping,” Barnes whispered fiercely. Morita snorted. “Wasn’t trying to.”

“Dugan, that’s an order.”
“Inutile de discuter,” the Frenchman shrugged.

“Man does have a point,” Jones said.

“Fine,” Dugan swore, joining in that pressing mass of limbs. “But tell your pervert Jap here not to get any ideas.”

“Keep your butt against the wall, then, if it makes you feel safer,” Morita scowled, burrowing deeper against Barnes’ side. “Me, I’m staying warm.”

“Hey! Mind your hands.”

“…your pubic hair tickles.”

“That’s what she said.”

“Ugh, could you not?”

“Ow! That’s my goddamned foot, genius.”

“Was that your dick—?”

“Gross.”

“That had better not’ve been your dick!”

“Great. Another queer.”

“It’s a physiologic reaction, shit for brains.”

“It’s fucking freezing, Sarge.”

“—kinda wishing the Nazis would’ve just killed us all back at Azzano, now.”

“So…now what do we do?” Dugan wondered aloud for all of them as they huddled together, shivering. “Because if this is your brilliant rescue plan, Sarge, we’re fucked.”

“Now that would be pretty queer,” Morita supplied unhelpfully. Jones stomped the man’s foot. “See the difference?”

“C’mon, fellas,” Barnes groaned, stuttering around the cold. “Jonesey here’s a college boy, Monty, you went to Oxford. Morita, weren’t you gonna be a doc when all this was done? Three of your thick heads together oughtta be good for something.”

They all three stared at one another. The silence—and Monty could hardly believe such a thing possible—grew ever-more awkward.

“Well, I dare say we might try the door,” Monty suggested after a moment.

“Limey here’s a tactical genius,” Barnes shook his head. “Glad we got a Brit along for the ride.”

“I say, I’m English, man.”
“Not going to work,” Morita sighed, sidling out of their pocket of warmth to test the door. There was no bloody handle on the inside. The man leaned close, placed an ear flush with the steel. Rapped his knuckles with a frown. “Thing’s solid steel. Few inches thick. And look. Here—“ he pointed to the seal between the door and the walls with a frown. “Thing’s airtight.”

There was a look, then. Between he and Barnes. Two men can keep a secret if one of them is dead, the saying went. And, well. It would appear there were now four of them.

“Why the fuck would they do that?” Dugan asked in an unusual display of intelligence.

“Submarine,” Monty lied, as Morita blurted “airplane?”

“What?”

“Or an aeroplane,” Monty amended quickly. “Clearly. It’s an airtight or watertight seal. The components were originally intended for an submarine or aeroplane.” He glared. Really, man? An aeroplane? They were designed to be lightweight! So much for the thermal properties of metal alloys, concerns of corrosion and their effects on lift!

“That’s why it’s so small,” Morita continued that lie, sending Monty a flushing shrug of chagrin. “Probably for a U-boat or something. You remember the ride over? Couple of weeks, crammed into bunks, smelling like sweat mold and the spunk of bored sailors with nothing better to do. Showers were pretty much the same, only they smelt like piss, too. I remember thinking it was the only consolation: at least the Nazis trying to sink us had it worse.”

…Monty, it must be said, on his first voyage to Morocco all those long years ago had had an officer’s quarters. And a man-servant.

“Well, ain’t you a regular Pollyanna,” Dugan groaned. “Only our Jap here could take a Nazi shower and remind us of something even worse.”

“Oh, ‘our Jap’, is it now?” Morita bristled. “Five minutes ago I was Hirohito.”

“Well, we’re all red-blooded men, even if we’re black or white or yellow on the outside,” Jones cut in, before things could take a turn for the worst. “Say, Sarge, a little preaching might keep us warm.”

“You want me to tell stories about my sweetheart to a shower full of naked men? For shame!” Barnes choked through his chattering teeth. And that, more than anything, proved the man had been shaken to his core. Sergeant James Barnes of the 107th infantry, US Army, was notorious for not passing up an opportunity to regale his men regarding the many virtues—or rather vices—of a certain Stephanie Grace Rogers. “Bad enough I catch you j-j-jerkin’ off as is! You want dirty stories, fellas, you tell ‘em yourselves.”

That pulled a laugh from all of them. And that’s how they passed the time, all those seeming hours alone in the dark, shivering together, singing themselves hoarse with bawdy bar songs and coarse jests. And if there happened to a be chorus or several dozen dedicated to one Stephanie Grace Rogers of Brooklyn, New York, sweetheart of the aforementioned Sergeant James Barnes, well. They all of them knew nothing about it.

But even Barnes’ over-bright, contagious humour couldn’t last forever. Singing and laughing turned slowly into whispers and murmuring as the minutes wore on. Whispers and murmurs gave way to silence.

In the silence, the sound of falling water echoed off the walls of the chamber. Their breath rose in
steam around them, left a sheen of frost in beards and hair.

“I’s so cold.”

“I’m so cold.”

“I don’t want to die here.”

And, over and over and over again out of the dark the question came: “How long they gonna keep us here?” Bloody Shakespeare be damned, that was the question, wasn’t it. But here there was no heat, no help, no answer. “I don’t know, fellas,” Barnes couldn’t comfort them. “I just don’t know.”

Who knew how long they stood there, water rising slowly about their ankles. By now Barnes’ lips were blue. Even Jones’ dark face seemed pale, his lips purple and swollen as though bruised. Monty’s own skin was ashen, felt flayed to the bone. He’d long since lost all sensation in his feet. It was too much. It was all too much. Monty closed his eyes. Burrowed against the fleeting warmth of the body next to his.

“Freezin’ to death. How’s it work.”

“You get cold. Then you die.”

“Ha, Ha, Hirohito. I mean, our toes ain’t gonna fall off first or something? Or, uh, other stuff? Swear, my balls are blue as Sarge’s.” The words were muffled, their meaning lost.

“Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses, pal,” a third voice joined them. Barnes, Monty came aware enough to recognize, struggling to fight his way out of that deathly shroud of cold. “I got a girl back home in Brooklyn.”

“You’re the one who ain’t got his wick wet since he shipped out.”

"Cold ain’t that bad, Dugan,” Barnes's voice continued, coming as if from so very far away. And he took them out, if not away from the cold, then to a distant time and place and the thought of one’s waiting sweetheart where even this bitter cold was welcome. “Cold’s nice. Sometimes. Least what happens after. Imagine walkin’ home from the docks, wind gnawing at your face, sludge an’ snow and shit up to your knees, soakin’ your socks, going right through your coat, got frost on your fuckin’ face, fingers shakin’ so bad you can’t get the goddamned key in the lock but you get home, and there’s coal in the fireplace, blankets on the bed, dinner in the oven, cup of hot coffee ready and your sweetheart there waitin’ for you in nothing but your night shirt. It's warm an' flannel, slipped down over her shoulders, falling down around her skinny little legs, keepin’ her warm all day while you've been gone. And she gets you outta your drippin’ clothes, once piece at a time, takes her fuckin’ time, unwrappin’ you like a present, then she rubs your fingers between her little hands, warms 'em up, kisses all over your split knuckles and sucks 'em all greedy like she would your cock, licks that warm little tongue of hers over your cold nipples and up your neck. She takes her hand, swings it back, sting of it when she slaps your freezin’ ass and thighs, skin goin’ red and burnin’ like fuckin’ crazy gonna bruise in the morning but it hurts so damn good. Feel of her lips, tight little throat closing all warm around you—“

There was a loud, unwelcome banging. Monty blinked stupidly, wondering at the interruption, had forgotten—if only for a moment, a bloody blessed moment—just when and where he’d last left the miserable husk of his failing body.
More clanging. Shriek of metal on metal. That brutal spray dribbled into a trickle, then cut off, the only sound the steady drip, drip, dripping as water slid from their skin and made its way down the drains. And they waited, then, with baited breath. What now—?

Light blinded them. They cowered back, stricken with this sudden brightness. Monty’s eyes stung, and the world about them spun on its axis around the sun, they were all of them fragile passengers huddled close to the skin of a swiftly tilting planet flung through the night and the void and the cold and the dark and in that moment they were so small, so unessential, so unnecessary and afraid.

Oh, thank bloody God, Monty thought.

It was Kleiber.

You again! the Tinkerer startled. Yet the Philosopher is dead. What now would you have of me?

Yes, he is dead, spoke the Captain. Is this then how you would mourn him.

Once I believed as you, the Tinkerer scoffed and filled again his cup. Then the Philosopher died, and his Wisdom with him. I turned to admire all my deeds and the works of my hands that I had wrought, and I thought on all I had achieved, and behold all is vanity and striving after wind. There is nothing new, and there is no profit under the sun, and death awaits us all in the end, the wicked and just alike. Why then should I work? And what would my toil bring?

You would drink away your worries, the Captain wondered, when others die at War.

All that my eyes desired I did not deprive them, said the Tinkerer. I did not deprive my heart of any joy, but I rejoiced and made merry, and my heart was made glad. I have served others enough, and this now is my portion from all my toil. Come, drown your worries with wine and experience pleasure. For life is short, and it is a time of violence. Who knows how long have you to live?

No, said the Captain, not for the sake of the Song I have sung, nor yet the hope of He Whom I have Loved.

Vanity! cried the Tinkerer. All is vanity! What use is a Singer against swords? What can one man do against a hundred? Will your love save you even from death?

He is a Singer no more, spoke the Woman. He is the Victor, the Star and the Song. Well would you do to succor us.

You are mad, the Tinkerer said. Surely you are mad. In that way lies nothing but destruction and death. Come! Go you not early to your grave! There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time for searching, and a time to give up as lost, time to keep and a time to cast away.

There is also a time to be silent and a time to speak, spoke the Captain.
Surely this Boy is dead, the Tinkerer dismissed him. Mourn him if you must! But as for myself I shall eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.

Come, said the Captain then bitterly. Come. We will find another way.

It is wise to refuse us, said the Woman when the Tinkerer could yet hear. For such a task would prove a fool’s errand in the end. And yet who can say? Long may such a deed be remembered in song.

Take me not for a fool! the Tinkerer laughed. Indeed all is vanity and striving after wind. Very well! Wherever there is the will to go, he said, there quickly will I take you.

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Holocaust/HaShoah: Bucky inadvertently gives away the purpose of the showers to Monty and Morita.

Panic attacks: Monty is able to control the symptoms of a panic attack to continue Bucky’s ruse.

Torture: the 107th are subjected to brutally cold conditions in order to kill or weaken them.

Homophobia: Both overt and internalized. Monty considers his own attitude towards queers. Morita goads Dugan using Dugan’s previously stated homophobia.

Alcoholism: The Tinkerer chooses to drink rather than fight despite the danger

Slurs: Dugan refers to Morita using a slur.

Razzia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roundup_(history)]


Further reading:

http://www.americainwwii.com/articles/haunted/
Daniel Inouye (September 7, 1924 – December 17, 2012): Medical student and Red Cross volunteer who responded to the attack on Pearl Harbor, then went on to volunteer for the segregated 442nd Infantry Regiment. He lost his right arm during his service in 1945, then went on to sit 9 consecutive terms as a Senator for Hawaii.

Further reading:

hypothermia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypothermia

In First Vengeance, Lohmer brutally beats Bucky who is already ill with pneumonia, ultimately leading him to be chosen for Zola's project. I found the idea of Bucky gradually succumbing to systemic cruelty at the hands of his captors to be a more compelling story. I used this account of the murder of a Holocaust victim by a survivor:

“He was a young and healthy man. The first evening roll call after he was added to our penal company was his last. When he arrived, he was seized and ridiculed, then beaten and kicked, and finally spat upon. He suffered alone and in silence. Then they put him under a cold shower. It was a frosty winter evening, and he stood outside the barracks all through that long, bitterly cold night. When morning came, his breathing had become an audible rattle. Bronchial pneumonia was later given as the cause of his death. But before things had come to that, he was again beaten and kicked. Then he was tied to a post and placed under an arc lamp until he began to sweat, again put under a cold shower, and so on. He died toward evening.” (Steakley, 21, 1974)


Few homosexuals sent to the camps survived. Those that did remained imprisoned for the duration of their sentencing under Paragraph 175. Even fewer spoke about their experiences, and those who did did so under pseudonyms for fear of persecution. Dr L.D. Claassen von Neudegg (pseudonym of Dr. Leo Clasen), was one of the first who came forward. Neudegg’s accounts of brutality against homosexual victims are verified by Rudolph Höss' testimony.

Further reading:


Before his execution in 1947, Höss wrote a memoir. As the Germans sought to destroy all evidence of the camps before the Allies advanced, his testimony corroborated the accounts of Holocaust survivors where official Third Reich records had already been destroyed. In a final letter to his children Höss told his eldest son: "Keep your good heart. Become a person who lets himself be guided primarily by warmth and humanity. Learn to think and judge for yourself, responsibly. Don't accept everything without criticism and as absolutely true... The biggest mistake of my life was that I believed everything faithfully which came from the top, and I didn't dare to have the least bit of
doubt about the truth of that which was presented to me. ... In all your undertakings, don't just let your mind speak, but listen above all to the voice in your heart.” (Paskuly, 144, 1992)

The Tinkerer's speech is taken from Kohelet 1-3.
Not all of the Enemy were entirely wicked, for some brought them bread when they were hungry, others water when they were thirsty, clothed them and sheltered them when they were naked and weary. For they saw the Boy and they said to themselves surely the Gods are with this one. And so the Boy found favour in their sight, and served them, and so was he raised up among them, and in everything he did he prospered.

But there were yet those among them who hated the Boy, both for his gift and for his Gods, and they were jealous that he had found favour in the eyes of their masters. They could not touch him, for the Boy was appointed even above them and so was he saved for a time. But in their hearts they hated him, and sought to put him cruelly to Death.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“… not the facelessness of war, but its intimacy. Jacob (I Have Loved) offers a glimpse of life inside a Camp, lets us observe the atrocities and willful ignorance committed by the SS and so-called “desk perpetrators” alike. Whether the Examiner, dutifully pursuing inquiries of scientific advancement and human experimentation or the Bystander and the Onlooker, who watch, wring their hands, and yet do nothing, Falsworth’s Enemy remain undeniably human in a way that Tolkien’s Orcs do not. For the majority of the novel, it is this indifference and inaction rather than overt violence that so appalls the reader. Perhaps most compelling is the case of the Overseer, whose seeming sympathy for the Boy stems from his usefulness, rather than a shared humanity. And indeed, once the Boy’s capacity for work is extinguished, it is with regret at the loss of productivity—not life—that he is released to his final fate.”


CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

“Mein Gott!” the man hissed. “Steigt aus! Out! All of you out at once!”
Monty fumbled forward into that blinding light, the 107th a massive press of limbs about him. Together they stumbled toward salvation, clutching at one another, blinking stupidly in the sunlight. His skin prickled in the sudden warmth, and Monty felt—if anything—even colder. The pockmarked ground squelched and gave way beneath them. More than once he would have fallen were it not for Morita and the Frenchman holding him upright, their slight stature affording a firmer foothold. About them their once-folded clothes were now scattered, victims of German scavenging. Some still stood, hovering awkwardly, interrupted it would seem by Kleiber’s arrival.

_Bloody heartless bastards_, Monty thought. They’d known. All these soldiers. These guards. Some of them bloody children, for fuck’s sakes. They’d known. And—like Barnes—they’d believed the walk into that small cell to have been their last.

…Worse still, what what might they have found? The knife, that compass, Morita’s crude map—?

_You’re going to keep it on your person_, Barnes had the foresight to smuggle the package. _Sore arse be damned thank bloody God for that._

“‘S about damn time,” the man himself slurried somewhere to Monty’s left, voice gone distant and drunk. Monty squinted against the sun, searching. “I get any ‘cleaner’, pal, and my goddamned skin’s gonna fall off.”

_“Ubersoldat Berger, erkläre!”_

Monty had a but a moment to for his sluggish mind to think _that goddamned hat_ before Kleiber slapped Berger, all traces of his characteristic kindliness gone. And Monty would feel, if he could, pity for the boy, outrage at such an act of violence, but in the moment he felt nothing at all. Not gratitude. Not horror. Not even sick satisfaction from this accomplice’s sudden pain. “Hey, pal,” Barnes began, a better man than any Monty had ever met, could have hoped to be. “Don’tcha blame Berger, here. Just doin’ his job. Like a soldier should. I was you I’d take it up with his superior.”

“You! Get dressed at once!” Kleiber shouted. “And you! _Bring mir Herr Lohmer!”_

But the boy needn’t go far. Lohmer had been waiting.

_“Herr Lohmer! Was ist das?”_

“Why, it is hygiene, Herr Kleiber,” their tormentor protested, eying their pale and purpled flesh with unmasked interest. English, Monty’s mind provided as he fumbled with his pants, pulled filthy fabric over pallid flesh. He’s switched to English. The Jerry bastard wanted them all to overhear.

“Explain yourself!”

“You said you were concerned about our prisoner’s hygiene and safety, Herr Kleiber,” Lohmer leered. ”Herr Zola agreed they were in danger of typhus. I was only doing as you had both suggested. I thought our guests might appreciate the hospitality.”

Kleiber reddened, furious. “These are _not die Mädchen, not Invalidentransport! Herr Barnes is a tool of HYDRA, not your plaything!”_

“Herr Barnes is now behind on his quota,” Lohmer continued, crisp in his smart uniform, ignoring that outburst. And here, in this moment, they were all of them small, vile, twisted things, naked and helpless, mere refuse to be disposed of as he would. And would have been, they were rather cruelly
reminded, were it not for Barnes’ accord with Zola and the scientist’s strange fascination. “He will have to work hard indeed to keep up.” Morita’s dark eyes dulled. Even Dugan was far too exhausted to mount a protest, steam bellowing from his flared nostrils like a bull’s, loose slabs of freckled flesh heaving at his sides. Jones blinked, uncomprehending in the cold. Only the Frenchman remained defiant, a small dark David before this German giant. And Barnes—

Barnes' streaming red eyes took them all in, the defeat etched on wearied faces, the fall of shoulders, frozen fingers, the skin gone bone-white or angry blood-red. He sighed, the slow warmth of it wavering in the sunlight like trails of a dying cigarette.

“Nothing to say, Herr Barnes?” Lohmer hectored.

Barnes looked away and down. Swallowed once. Worked his mouth. Lipped those cracked and bleeding lips once. Twice. Three times. “Aw, shucks, sweetheart,” he winked and shimmied his hips, shriveled genitals bouncing for all to see. “You wanted to see me naked, all you had to do was ask.”

And

And it—

The sheer audacity, the improbability, the utter ridiculousness of such a suggestion—

For a moment, the world stood still. Monty wondered fleetingly whether he’d imagined it, the hypothermia having taken hold at last, hallucinating this hero as he lay burrowed, dying in that cramped and cold hell. Then—

“Dreckjude!” Lohmer spat. He turned on his heel, humiliated.

"That's sheriff shitjew to you, pal,” Barnes called after him. And they weren't laughing, didn’t have the strength—the humour—to laugh, couldn’t catch the breath for it in the permeating cold but backs stood straighter. Shoulders less stooped. And yes, Monty thought, that bitter cold remained but a weight was lifted. Dugan shook his weary head. Even Morita’s eyes shone brighter. They were yet prisoners, still the tenuous guests of this Schmidt and HYDRA, captured by the Reich, like as not to never see home again, and yet—

And yet. It wasn’t hope, nothing so trifle. Just the sick, solid pleasure of knowing this shit-talking Irishman, this Jewish Sergeant from Brooklyn had their backs. Until the last. Even in the end. It wasn’t much, perhaps, in this war of Kings and Gods, but it was real, and for these war-worn soldiers it was enough.

That moment of appreciative silence couldn’t last long. Even in the sunlight they were bloody freezing. Monty stumbled forward with Morita and the Frenchmen, began the search through those rifled clothes.

“I would not say such things if I were you,” Kleiber warned as Barnes himself began to dress, but his blue eyes belied a twinkle of humour. “If you goad him, Herr Barnes, he will kill you.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Barnes snorted, ducking rather clumsily into his piss-soaked shirt. “An’ you and I both know you ain’t gonna let that happen.”
“I was gone for but a day, and he has nearly succeeded,” Kleiber reminded him.

“The hell were you, anyway,” Barnes asked for all of them.

“A wedding, in Kreischburg. My youngest niece.”

“Masal tov,” Barnes said, shucking on his pants and trousers in an awkward shuffle. Kleiber raised an eyebrow. “‘S Yiddish,” Barnes fumbled with both belt and flies. “Means congratufuckin’lations.”

“I would also not say such things if I were you,” Kleiber countered, but there was a look of amusement, rather than admonishment in his eyes. *I make myself a likable pain in the ass and suddenly I’m everybody’s favorite step-son.* Barnes had gambled, played the long game, and so far his luck had held.

“Why, you wanna trade? You try being *der Lagerältester* for a day, pal, see how you like it.” Barnes snorted, plonking down on his arse in that damned doorway to pull on his boots. “Me, I’m gonna be in your office with a nice fire going, feet on the desk, smokin’ cigars and sippin’ bourbon.”

“No dirty pictures?” Kleiber wondered.

Barnes only grimaced. “Pal, now that’s just a given.”

“—Where are your socks?” There was a beat, then, and Monty’s breath caught. And they had almost, almost gotten away with it—

“Hell if I know,” Barnes lied, nodding to the mess of uniforms around them. Then he slipped his dog tags about his neck with unsteady hands. “Ask Lohmer. I ain’t on laundry detail.”

The man regarded him with a sharp gaze, but that look soon softened. “I will provide you with new ones, Kleinfuhrer,” he decided. “It will not do for you to catch *Grabenfuß.*”

“You sure?” Barnes asked as Morita steered them to the cellblock, feet numb and clumsy against the factory floor.

“She, we don’t get some rest we’ll drop,” Morita insisted.

“Oughta keep movin’;” Barnes mumbled. Monty agreed. He’d done time in the African theater, the deserts of Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Algiers. The days blistering hot, the nights so sudden and cold they could kill a man where he stood. Horrid way to go. You kept your head down, hands covered, kept your body moving, you didn’t dare stop. Hypothermia, he’d learned, could catch up, kill a man even hours later. And that, indeed, had been Lohmer’s purpose. To lower their defenses, to work them all to death. Above them, B shift was working. Had been, it would seem, ever since they went into that horrid cold all those long hours before. It’d been a nasty trick; simple, really, to stage, and all of it to frighten, to weaken Barnes. They worked hard, one and all, but Barnes the bloody hardest. There was only so much stress a wearied body could take before it was broken.

…and Barnes was nearing that. Quicker than any of them.

“Yeah, thanks, I’m the medic,” Monty heard the man counter. “And no. We’ll huddle, okay? Keep warm. But you take these boys up to that floor, you make them work and they’re gonna go one by one. We stick together we might just have enough heat.”
“Hygiene,” Barnes’ voice came from so far away. “We oughtta—“

“We’ll worry about it later, Sarge.”

But there was no need. True to his ruse Lohmer had cleaned the cells. No longer did they smell solely of piss and shit and sweat, the rotten scent of Feraldo’s dying leg, now there was the acrid scent of bleach above it. But it was clean. And mostly dry. A sight as welcome now as a freshly-made bed, feather pillow and all. They fell to it, piled like hogs together for the heat, cold hands grasping under clothes, into armpits for extra warmth.

Beside him, Barnes let out a wet, rasping cough.

“I say, man,” Monty managed to slur. “Dry your hair. You’ll catch your bloody death of cold.”

“You ain’t my ma,” Barnes sniffled, but only put up a nominal protest as Monty attacked those dripping curls with his Dennison. Morita and Jones both visibly relaxed.

“Oh, about damn time, Sarge,” Morita sighed. “You’re too fucking tall or I’d’ve done it myself.” Beside them, Dugan offered up his own bowler hat in silence, their own worry reflected in his drawn face. Monty bundled the man into it, and Barnes fell still and silent beside him.

Monty dozed only fretfully. That brush with death had left him exhausted but sleepless. Around him, men were wracked with violent shivers threatening to rend muscle from bone. They cursed as the cold left them and the warmth of blood returned, skin burning and chafing underneath their clothes.

He slept again. Woke with a start as Barnes flailed beside him, began stripping clumsily.

“I say, man—“ Monty protested, but Morita had already crawled over.

"Hey, Sarge—"


Well, Monty thought, fuck. And how had he not noticed? The man had stopped shivering hours before. Barnes hadn’t been getting better, he’d gotten worse. And the stubborn Irish bastard had hidden it from them. Or perhaps, Monty thought with no small twinge of guilt, they had been frightened and tired themselves, and all too willing to be taken for fools. Barnes, whoever he was, was merely a man. Even having seen the mask of the Sergeant slip, Monty had been willing, desperately grateful, even, to pretend he had been blind.

"No, Sarge, that's the cold talking, Morita insisted. "I know it's a bitch, but you've got to keep your goddamn clothes on."

“Yeah, Sarge. What would your girl think?” Jones asked lightly, coming to Morita’s aid.

"F*ck you, Stevie. Know how to treat a goddamned fever," Barnes grumbled as they bundled him back in his clothes. The man lolled, eyes half-closed, muttering to himself and signing clumsily. He kept pressing his hands—fists, really—to his chest. Monty thought absurdly of King Tut, of mummies and their curses, of corpses.

“I don’t speak sign, Sarge,” Jones wrestled Barnes’ left arm back up its sleeve. “One of the few
things they didn’t teach me at Howard. There you go, Sarge.”

“Hey, hey, you!” Morita called to Berger. “Bring us some coffee.”

The boy shook his head, glanced down at Barnes, worry evident on his young face. “This is not allowed.”

“Do you want him to die?” Morita countered. “You need Jones here to translate for you? Die? Dead? No? Then bring him some damn coffee. This cold’s killing him.”

“That was risky,” Jones frowned as the boy scurried away. “What if—“

“He won’t bring Zola,” Monty assured them. “The boy’s bloody terrified of him.” Weren’t they all?

Jones frowned, but nodded slowly. “Should we, I don’t know, warm him up?” He’d picked up one of Barnes’ pale hands, began squeezing the blood back into it.

“Don’t,” Morita said sharply, snatching Jones’ arm away. “Just—look, don’t, okay? You do that, you’ll make it worse. We’ve got to conserve what heat he has, can’t stress him anymore than those bastards have already.” He fumbled under his own clothes, brought out that silk belt with all its strange lettering. Wrapped the warmed cloth about Barnes’ neck and ears. Against the stained fabric, the man’s face was ashen.

“He may have been onto something,” Monty suggested, leveling a look at Morita.

“Shit,” Morita ran a hand through his hair. “He’s right. Skin-to-skin contact. Dugan, keep him warm.”

“Whaddya mean, ‘keep him warm’?” Dugan asked, aghast.

“You’re the biggest so you’re going to keep him fucking warm,” Morita scowled.

“I ain’t—“ the great lout grimaced. Crossed his arms across his powerful chest. “—cuddlin’.”

“Oh, fuck you, Dugan,” Morita snarled. “No one here’s going to think you’re a queer!”

“Oh, Lordy,” Jones rolled his eyes, began unbuttoning his uniform jacket. “If it’ll keep Sarge warm, I’ll do it.”


“Moi aussi,” Dernier sighed. In the end they layered those jackets and shirts down like a blanket and laid Barnes between them, shirt skirted up to reveal bare skin with Jones’ broad shoulders and chest behind his naked back, the Frenchmen nestled before him. Dernier pulled that second pair of socks about Barnes’ blistered hands, then tucked them loosely into the warmth of his own groin.

“I dunno,” Dugan muttered with a disapproving eye. “Looks awful damn queer to me.”

“Dum Dum, a couple of hours ago you had your hands on my dick,” Morita sighed. “Groin’s got the femoral artery and vein, the most circulation for heat convection, and we need his extremities warm before the blood flows back, or the cold’s going to kill him.”
“Yeah. Sure,” Dugan harrumphed, “‘heat convection.’ Keep your hands warm. Bet you say that to all the girls.”

The Frenchman snorted, muttered something then. Over Barnes’ back, Jones raised his head to gape his disbelief. They turned to him for the translation.


“What? Can’t be anything worse than Sarge’s already said,” Dugan shrugged.

“That’s different.”

Monty frowned. “And how so?”

“One’s classical literature,” the man stated loftily. “This was just a dick joke.”

Morita scowled. “Yeah, well, tell him I have a nine inch tongue and can breathe out my ears. That should shut him up.”

“Bloody God, man,” Monty protested, as he had before with Jackie ten thousand times. “I say, must you?”

“It wasn’t about the si—why am I even having this conversation?” Jones sputtered, laying his head back down, pulling Barnes closer into his dark chest. “Uncle Sam needs you, they said. Serve your country, they said. Thought I’d be interpreting for MIS but here I am, listening to the two of you flap your filthy mouths.”

“C’était un calembour excellent!” Dernier lamented.

“…wait,” Morita’s muffled voice came a few moments later, pulling Monty back from the edge of sleep. “Does ‘cinquième colonne’ mean what I think it means?”

Fifth Column. And—oh. That was rather rude, wasn’t it? “I’m afraid so, old chap,” Monty said.

“I’ll be damned,” Morita chuckled. “That stupid frog is actually funny.” Jones sighed, and with that, Monty fell again asleep.

Sometime later, Berger had returned with a thick woolen blanket, a thermos of coffee, and a flask. The sound of keys jangling against the lock woke Monty from a fitful slumber.

“No,” Morita shook his head at the proffered Schnapps, tucking Jones, Barnes, and the Frenchman in. “I’m confiscating this. Alcohol’ll only make the cold worse.”

“How is he?” Berger asked. “Will he—”

“Live?” Morita let out a derisive snort. “Maybe you should’ve thought of that before you let Lohmer leave him in a freezer overnight. He’s got it bad.”

“I—we, could take him to—”
“The hell you will,” Morita growled. Berger looked to Jones to translate. And yes, Monty rather agreed. The boy may have the best of intentions, but he was low ranking and alone. They couldn’t trust the damned Germans for help, not even—especially—Barnes. Berger’s barracks may have held better heat and shelter from the cold, but it felt safer, they all felt safer, keeping Barnes here with them.

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I would follow you, the Philosopher said. But you must permit me first to find my family.
You will go to them, said She. But they will not come to you.
You speak in omens and riddles, the Philosopher said, and my bowels are wracked with terror.
They were taken for safekeeping by the Enemy, spoke the Woman, for a time they lived, and not well. But plague came at last to their encampment and the Angel of Death carried them away.
The Philosopher wept and rent he his clothes. I rejoice, then, that they are beyond suffering. I too will go to rest.

Will you not fight for us, asked She, will you not fight for the sake of them who you have loved?

He who saves one life is as if he has saved all Mankind, and he who takes one life is as if he had slain all Mankind. What difference does it make then whether I take my life or another’s? Yet in this way do I not spread suffering, and it may be I put an end to my own.

Does your God not say vengeance is mine, cried She. Will not the sins of the fathers be reaped upon the third and fourth generations? Come now, stay your hand, and fight for us!

Corrupt not the words of the Song, answered her the Philosopher. But you have delivered me from the hands of my Enemy, and the Gods have taken those whom I have loved where I am forbidden now to follow. So instead will I bless you, and anoint your head with oil. And he placed his hands upon her head, and opened his mouth and he spake, You are not taken out of man, nor does his rib form you. It is man born of woman, and not the reverse. I would curse God and die, I would fall upon the sword, but for your wisdom and your compassion. I will take the life of no man, not even mine own. Not even in vengeance or anger will I do this. But for the sake of your courage and hope, for my Deliverance, for these I will build my People their Protector. I will fashion him up out of clay as Adam of old, and he will be the Victor, the Star, and the Song. And thus may we be delivered again out the land of Egypt, and my People be set free.

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—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth
"Nacht und Nebel" ("Night and Fog") was the codename given to a decree given December 7, 1941, issued by Adolf Hitler and signed by Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the German Armed Forces High Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, or OKW) condoning the murder of sick prisoners and those deemed too weak to work. https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007465

Concentration Camp Inspectorate (CCI): the administrators behind the camps whose office work enabled prisoner transport, transport of Zyklon B gas, and the transport of stolen belongings back to Germany for redistribution to the German people. http://www.orte-der-erinnerung.de/en/exhibitions/permanent_exhibitions/dassystemdesterrors/


Hypothermia: http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hypothermia/basics/definition/con-20020453

Steigt aus (German): Get out!

Erkläre (German): explain

Bring mir Herr Lohmer (German): Bring me Herr Lohmer

Was ist das (German): What is this?

Mädchen (German): ‘little girls’ (slang term for homosexual men during the Holocaust)

Invalidentransport (German) transport of the disabled or ill sent to death camps for extermination

Lagerältester(German): Camp leader, highest rank of prisoner, responsible for day to day operating of a camp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kapo_(concentration_camp)

Grabenfuß (German): Trench foot/Immersion foot

Moi aussi (French): me too

C’était un calembour excellent (French): It was an excellent pun

Cinquième colonne (French): Fifth column, a term that originated in Spain during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930’s to describe a group of saboteurs or enemy resistance from within. It originally appeared in Spanish as quinta columna. Morita grew up in the San Joaquin Valley during the 1930s-1940s so he and would have had exposure to Spanish. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_column

The Philosopher’s benediction is inspired by multiple sources:

1) Kamala Khan quotes the Qur’an in Miss Marvel issue #2 when she first dons the identity of Miss Marvel to rescue Zoey Zimmer from drowning: “Whoever kills one person, it is as if he has killed all of mankind, and whoever saves one person, it is as he
has saved all of mankind.”

An identical sentiment is expressed in the Talmud Mishnah Sanhedrin 5:3, “Therefore but a single person was created in the world, to teach that if any man has caused a single life to perish from Israel, he is deemed by Scripture as if he had caused a whole world to perish; and anyone who saves a single soul from Israel, he is deemed by Scripture as if he had saved a whole world.”

2. "I have no power to change you
or explain your ways
Never believe a man can change a woman
Those men are pretenders
who think
that they created woman
from one of their ribs
Woman does not emerge from a man's rib's, not ever,
It's he who emerges from her womb
like a fish rising from depths of water
and like streams that branch away from a river
It's he who circles the sun of her eyes
and imagines he is fixed in place.”

—Nizar Qabanni (21 March 1923 – 30 April 1998), extract from I Have No Power

…It’s the perfect poem for Peggy Carter.

3. A conversation between "Eva", revealed to Abraham Erskine as Agent 13 from the SSR the night of his escape from Germany. It is only then Erskine learns his family died three years previous in the camps, and Schmidt never informed him in order to continue the blackmail (Captain America: First Vengeance, 6, 2011).

Jack Kirby was a pen-name for Jacob Kurtzberg, and both he and Joe Simon were from Jewish families. Never forget that 1940 while millions of Jewish people were being murdered and the United States stood by and refused them asylum, these two comics creators made a story about a superhero created by a Jewish scientist...and in the last twenty years Marvel has done their damnedest to erase their Jewish identity both from the Captain America comics and the MCU storyline.

MCU-Bucky is an amalgamation of 616-Bucky—Cap’s plucky kid sidekick—and Arnie Roth, Steve Rogers’ childhood best friend who was canonically both queer and Jewish. Arnie Roth and his boyfriend Michael were introduced into the comics storyline in the 1980s during the height of the AIDS crisis (Captain America #268 April 1982), two decades before Brubaker retconned the death of Bucky to create the character of the Winter Soldier.


For a sporadically updated research blog, check out https://www.tumblr.com/blog/j-ihl
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The Big Damn Morita Moment.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: Racism, internment, holocaust.

This chapter contains brief real-person fiction in the form of an interview with the actor who portrays Jim Morita in HBO’s JOSEPHINE. Jacob (I Have Loved) takes place in our world, and this fic explores how Steve Rogers and the Howling Commandos effected the 20th and 21st centuries. If you prefer not to read RPF, you can skip to the story at CHAPTER 22.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He has fallen ill from the Enemy’s abuses, the Soldier said. He is stricken and will never recover.

It must not be so, said the Physician. Yet here I have not the means to heal him. Come, he cried to their captors, does he not serve your King? Has he not served you well? Has not he found favour in the eyes of your masters! Will you not save him?

But the Enemy turned their face away and said, it is no business of ours whether this Boy lives or dies. We serve only at the bidding of our masters and behold, on this matter are they silent. But there were those among them who murmured amongst themselves, and said surely the Gods are with this one, and so has he been raised up, and in everything he does he prospers. Has he not increased our harvest sevenfold? Is not our yoke been made lighter by his servitude? And so they took interest in the plight of the Boy if they had not pity, and clothed him and sheltered him when he was naked and weary.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Park: So you’re playing Howling Commando Jim Morita?

Cho: That’s right!

Park: Tell us about that experience! How did the role happen?
Cho: You know, honestly, it was a bit of a mistake. I’m…well. I’m Korean, obviously. I’d never have auditioned for the part if I’d known. But my agent, she, well. She found this kickass script calling for a East Asian male co-lead, really super-sexy, action hero sort of stuff. And we’re so, so underrepresented in mainstream television. I jumped at the chance! It was all hush-hush, they wouldn’t even let us see the full script, referred to it as a codename—wouldn’t tell me the name of the character or series or anything until after I’d signed. I did an audition, a couple of call backs, probably the most anxious to hear from my agent I’ve ever been.

Park: Why do you think that was?

Cho: I really, really, I mean really wanted it!

Park: Yet you say it was a mistake?

Cho: Yeah. I was so excited, signed my name on the dotted line, already said no to so many contracts and commitments just to have then time free…and then they tell me all big smiles that I’ve been cast as one of the Howling Commandos.

Park: That was your initial reaction?

Cho: Yeah. I was devastated. I mean, I was thrilled, don’t get me wrong. It was about time we got a tv series, about time we saw Jim Morita onscreen kicking ass…but at the same time the guy went through internment, you know? He’s, he’s the icon for all East Asian kids, but Japanese-American kids so much more so. And I…I just felt, weird? Wrong? You know? One Asian American identity doesn’t equal another, and here I am, a Korean-American actor—A Korean immigrant—getting ready to play this iconic role of the quintessential Japanese-American soldier and I just felt wrong. I felt dirty. I didn’t think it should be me. I went into a bit of a depression.

Park: It sounds like you’ve come such a long way—and we’ve all seen you in the promos! How did you cope with accepting the part?

Cho: I called Jim Morita, really the only thing I could do. Got a hold of him, explained who I was, what I was doing…fumbled through the whole thing and the only thing he said was, “Cho? Isn’t that a Korean name?”

Park: That’s all he said?

Cho: That’s all he said!

Park: That’s awful!

Cho: I know!

Park: So what did you do?

Cho: I didn’t do anything! I didn’t have time! The guy shows up at my house the very next day, we’re talking six am! He’s is old as hell but apparently never sleeps, brought me a biography and some surgical equipment that once belonged to Fred Ohr, brought all these mementos of the Tiger Brigade, wanted to tell me all about his time at Fort McCoy with Young Oak Kim!

Park: Sounds like he took your casting extremely well!

Cho: I’ll say! I don’t know which of us was the bigger fanboy, to be honest! I’m from LA, so I’d heard of Kim, of course, and I’ve spent so much time at the Korean American center, but here I am, half-hung over and exhausted and there’s this like, nonagenarian on my doorstep with coffee all
excited to tell me about Korean-American soldiers who fought in World War II and how excited and
proud he was I was playing him! Kim, he was Jim’s—that’s right, we’re totally on first name basis
and that is without a doubt the coolest thing that has ever happened to me ever—okay, I lied. I have a
kid, and I’m married to the most incredible woman, and that is undoubtedly the coolest thing ever but
if you asked thirteen year-old me, he’d definitely be more excited about this—and I even got to be
Sulu!—but Kim was Jim’s Lieutenant in the 442nd!

Park: So, not nearly as bad as you were thinking, huh?

Cho: No, no, God no! Probably one of the best, most surreal days of my life, walking the board walk
with Jim Morita and my son at the crack of dawn, just…talking. I asked him if, I just had to know, if
he was upset that I was cast when I was Korean, not Japanese like him—there was pretty bad blood
between Japan and Korea at the time—if it was weird, or awkward, or anything, I kept
apologizing…and the guy just flat out tells me his Lieutenant was Korean-American, fought
alongside Japanese-Americans the whole war, refused a re-assignment when his superiors suggested,
said there weren’t any Koreans or Japanese in the US Army, just Americans.

Park: Sounds like an amazing day. Like an amazing guy—guys!

Cho: It was. It really, really was. He’s an amazing man, a really good person. He’s a smart-ass, too,
that really never comes across enough in interviews. I made him—essentially—promise me he
wasn’t mad, and he just put his hands on my shoulders, looks right up at me, and goes, “Well, John, I
guess if it’s good enough for George Takei, it’s gotta be good enough for me.”

Park: He does have a point!

Cho: (laughter) He really, really does! Men like him, men like George, they’ve inspired so many kids
who don’t always see themselves in stories because they’re Asian. They inspired me—they still
inspire me. So now Jim’s got my Star Trek script—signed, of course, and I’ve got an original edition
of Jacob (I Have Loved).

Park: Signed?

Cho: He uh, he asked me not to discuss the book, so…

Park: Alright, then! Anything you can tell us about JOSEPHINE?

Cho: It’s been an amazing experience. I can’t believe how lucky I’ve been. One of the screenwriters
is Gabe Jones, and we’ve had unprecedented access and ability to tell this story. And it deserves to
be told.

Park: How do you feel about framing the narrative around the character—the person, really!—of
Josephine Baker, rather than say Captain America? Or the Howling Commandos?

Cho: That’s been one of the most exciting parts for me, actually. We get to portray a side of history
that’s often overlooked, ignored, or untold. “Captain American and HIs Howling Commandos” as a
testosterone-laden action movie with one female love interest is something we’ve all seen before. It’s
essentially Saving Private Ryan—only Saving Sergeant Barnes! Setting it as a period drama
centering around one woman of color and her experience with the French Resistance and this elite
Allied force just opens up so much, to so, so many. Asians, blacks—all people of color—we’ve been
always been here, we’ve been a part of history, too. It’s just so damn good to finally see it.

Barnes was in no position to drink.

Morita passed that thermos of coffee around, had each of them take a short draught. The container scalded their hands, the warm liquid coating their bellies, felt like fire, like some shared, bastardized communion. And there were men—cells full of men—Monty knew, that went without. There was barely enough for their ragged crew, Jones and Dernier, Morita, Dugan and himself, a handful of others. It was no miracle, no sword from the stone, no sharing of loaves and fishes. But it was warm, and passed unbegrudgingly from hand to hand, then nestled finally under that thick blanket, a protective furnace around Barnes’ prone form.

“How is he?” Monty asked for all of them.

“We’ll give it a bit,” Morita shook his head, voice strained. “See if we can’t get some color back into him.”

Dernier grinned impishly, reached over Barnes and shook Jones’s arm. Made, they were all now well aware, a rather lewd comment.

“Non,” Jones slapped the offending hand, glaring at the Frenchman.


“Oui, oui,” Dernier said.

“…all the way home,” Dugan mumbled.

“You all settled?” the man sighed, rubbing the heel of his hand into the corners of his eyes. Dugan gave a loud snore in answer.

“Sounds like it,” Jones said. “We’ve got this. Medic be damned, Morita, you get some rest.”

“I’m getting there. Just got to take care of something first.” Then he wheeled to Berger, hovering anxiously outside the bars, and stuck his chin in the air. “Hygiene? Typhus? So we get bathroom privileges now, or what?”

The boy stared. “But you—how to say—“

“die Toilette,” Jones insisted instead from the floor, “nicht das Badezimmer.”

“Ja,” Berger shrugged. “Herr Kleiber und Doktor Zola, Sie machten sich Sorgen um Flecktyphus.”

“Well, that’s sweet of them,” Jones muttered darkly.

“Come on, you grimy Limey bastard,” Morita hoisted Monty to his feet, pins and needles prickling his palms and soles. Monty hissed. “You and I are going to take a powder.”

Berger accompanied them, weapon drawn—although there was little need. They could not have made a run for it now if they had wanted to, limbs deadened and senses dulled. Morita held him steady, firm arm about his waist. And the man was—it should come as no surprise, he had been a Ranger, after all—deceptively strong for his small size.
They were brought briefly outside, squinting against the sudden sun. The privy was a decrepit building, hastily constructed and even more poorly shaped. There were gaps between boards, the muddy hellscape of the camp visible along slats of uneven timber. Even the toilets themselves were rough: long wooden ledges with crude cut holes. And the cold—well. The cold at least did something to mute the smell.

Morita sat him down along the left side wall. “You good? Think you can sit up on your own?”

“There is a reason for this venture, I presume.”


“Oh, bloody God,” Monty flushed. He’d had quite enough of that joining His Majesty’s Army, thank you. Amidst all their talk of gloria et decorum est, not a one of his forebearers or school books had warned him the price of the uniform would be another man fondling his balls disinterestedly, one in a long line of unclad men awaiting inspection. “I assure you I can proceed unaccompanied.”

The man leveled him with a look that defined condescension. “Yeah, and if you lose consciousness, fall asleep in here and die from the cold, we’re fucked. I’m not saying I’ll do a rectal exam, just, well. Supervise.”

“Well, bugger.” Monty said bitterly.

“Can’t say I’m thrilled about it, either,” Morita grimaced. Walked a few awkward paces up the line to give him some semblance of privacy. He sat gingerly, narrow frame nearly slipped through the privy hole.

“I dare say, they’re meant for—well. A man rather more my size,” Monty began, and fumbled with his belt. Good bloody God, what had his life come to, consoling an American for falling ill of a toilet whilst digging up his own arse for a Nazi battery? Were he live to see London again, Jackie would never let him hear the end of it. Then, thinking better of it in his current situation of undress, lest the man take it as a double entendre—“I hadn’t meant—”

“No,” Morita cut him off coldly. “Take a closer look. This place is just as industrialized as the rest of it—goddamn gas showers, all those chimneys—“ and the man had put it together, then. The whole bleak and bloody picture. “Shit, assembly line toilets. I’m guessing two, maybe three at a time?” He scratched the back of his neck, pacing the length of the building to inspect the whole sorry set up. “No paper. No sink. No soap. They didn’t give a rat’s ass about anyone getting typhus.”

“No,” Monty swallowed. “I rather think not.”

“POW camp my scrawny Asian ass,” Morita continued. “This place is a death trap. They meant for people to die here. Hundreds of them. Thousands. Don’t know why it took me so long to see it. Fucking Kraut bastards.”

“I say, man. No civilized person could expect to think it,” Monty said. “Or sane.”

Morita let out a dark laugh. Held his arms tightly crossed against his chest, hands rubbing forearms for warmth. “Yeah, well, next time Sarge’s about to lead us to our death, tell a guy. Fuck, you think you know somebody—”

And yes. Monty supposed it to be a rather brutal shock. It had been for him. And yet—and yet he couldn’t help but defend Barnes’ actions, speaking up in the man’s absence. “I dare say the Sergeant knew he couldn’t intervene.”
“I’d still rather go down swinging,” Morita grunted. “‘S why I joined up. If they were going to imprison me, deport me, exe—well. I wanted everyone to know that I was an American.”

“Deport you?” Monty frowned.

“You all really don’t know, do you? My parents aren’t citizens, not eligible on account of being Japanese. But I am. Born and bred in the USA. And they—they wanted them to renounce their citizenship, make them stateless, sign some damned…” he trailed off. Looked down at his hands, nails picking absently. “And they did. Not mine but a lot of them did. Scared them shitless, so they did.”

“So they’re refugees, then,” Monty wondered. “Without a country.”

“They’re still prisoners. Them and the no-no boys. The good ones got leave to go East and work. So long as they had a sponsor family.”

“I say, man. Why not leave? ‘Go east and work??’

“Because Sarge isn’t the only stubborn son of a bitch with a hill to die on. That Irish bastard may’ve got the draft, but he still put down he was Jewish on his damned dog tags. He knew what would happen if the Nazis caught him, and he did it anyways,” Morita said. “They weren’t going to renounce loyalty to an emperor they’d never sworn loyalty too, and I wasn’t going to sit around in internment just waiting to get shot. Fuck, my folks were mad as hell when I signed up.”

“I say, man. Shot?” Monty asked, disbelieving. Surely not.

“James Ito. Seventeen,” Morita said. “The US Army killed him during a peaceful protest. Jim Kanagawa. Shot in the back. He went a few days later. Relocation Authority wouldn’t send him to a real hospital, so he died. Last thing he said to me, ‘I don’t want to die’. But he did, and I couldn’t do a damned thing about it. I knew the doc who did the autopsy. Wouldn’t lie on the paperwork. Got himself relieved of duties and shipped off God knows where.”

There had been no gun to his head, no fence about him, no obligation to fight for King and Country, but Monty had. He was born a soldier in a family of soldiers, playing at war since he was a child, the Zulu spears, Boer rifles and Napoleonic swords decorating the library at Falsworth Manor as trophies, no more than heads from a hunt, the uniforms and medals of his forefathers displayed on their likenesses in the halls. He’d become a cadet when he’d entered schooling, trained to clean, load, and fire a rifle. March in formation. He had never been offered a choice, didn’t remember choosing, had found himself grown and a man, out of Oxford with his officer’s commission and the world his oyster. Traveled to the African theater, Palestine, all on a lark. His own family—Brian aside, bloody sod—was safe in the comfort and familiarity of his childhood home.

“I guess I hadn’t thought,” Monty admitted finally. Had someone held them prisoner, suspected them, placed them behind a stone wall and set a gun upon them then asked him to serve King and Country, well. He couldn’t say he’d make the same choice. He’d tell them to go to bloody hell.

“What, all this barbed wire, machine guns, armed guards? I spent a good six months in Manzanar, ace. Horse stables before that. This might be Germany, but it isn’t my first rodeo.” Americanisms. But Monty thought he understood the gist.


“BSA.” Morita said. “Eagle Scout.”

“BSA—” Monty gaped. “The bloody Boy Scout Association—?”
“Boy Scouts of America,” Morita shrugged. “Same thing.”

“Good Lord.”

“What can I say,” the man winked. “I was maybe six years old when I first figured out the ladies love a man in uniform.”

“And they—“ Monty began, then cut off awkwardly. But it would seem the man had sensed his intent.

“Sure. Up to the local chapter. My ma’s temple got one started. You’re looking’ at the first damn Eagle Scout from the Sequoia Council.”

Monty wiped his face with his clean hand. Bloody Buddhist Boy Scouts. What would these damn Americans think of next?

“Need your smelling salts there, ace? We’re just like normal people, even if we’re yellow. Being Nisei, It’s not all eating rice and drinking sake. Still a Scoutmaster. Let me tell you it was a wrench leaving them. Still write—wrote to them,” Morita sombered. “I wonder if the Army’s broke it yet. That we’re—well. Dead.”

…and there was a rather disheartening thought. What of Jackie? John? Had someone from the Home Office pulled into the Estate to give the news of his own demise or capture? Did they yet know? He had—they all had—lost one Falsworth to this bloody war already, Brian and his bloody ideologies be damned, he was still their brother. Their blood. And Monty’s gut gave a twinge.

“I say, sake?” Monty asked, gingerly inspecting the painfully procured package. He peeled off the shit-stained condom with a wince. Morita whistled.

“Rice alcohol. Tastes like piss, but it gets the job done,” Morita said, then waved Berger’s flask. “Speaking of, Joseph Lister says wash the hell up.” Monty wiped his fingers on the wooden ledge best he could, picked under the nails to rid them of his own filth. Whinged at the cold brush of the alcohol over his hands, and rubbed until they were bloody dry. Buckled himself back into pants and trousers. He pocketed the battery.

Morita eyed the flask's remaining contents with interest. Sniffed once, then took a tentative sip.

“I say, man, won’t that “only make the cold worse”? he fixed the man with a disapproving eye.

Morita scoffed. “Yeah, well, I ain’t Sarge, am I. I’m expendable.” He took a long draught.

“I say, man,” Monty protested. “Give me a bloody drink.”

“Oh, no,” Morita said, hastily wiping his mouth, cheeks already flushed red. “Sarge’s gone stupid with cold so as the medic and the only other person briefed on the mission I’m practically the ranking officer. Can’t risk you getting hypothermia.”

“Damnit, man.”

“Great white man’s burden,” Morita shrugged, swigging the rest down. Then he belched. And Monty—rather despite himself—let out a laugh.

“How is Barnes?” Monty asked upon their return. About them, the 107th and sundry lay, still and silent as stone.
“Still out like a light,” Morita answered, fingers on the man’s pulse. “Heart’s picking up, and he’s got a little pink in his cheeks now, at least. We’ll let him sleep.”

Monty looked to the floor above. “How long—“

“We’re not leaving this cell until Sarge’s on his feet,” Morita insisted. “We’ll deal with A shift later.”

“Assuming they haven’t collapsed in exhaustion by then, poor sods.”

“Yeah, well, don’t put all your chickens in one basket before they hatch.”

“I say, man, don’t count your chickens before they hatch?” Monty asked, bemused.

“We’ll burn that bridge when we get to it,” Morita yawned. “What can I say, champ? You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him think. Now you and me? We’re getting some sleep.”

“I don’t rather fancy—“Monty began.

“Suck it, Tommy Atkins.” Morita grimaced. “Either I spoon you or you spoon me, and you spoon me, you’re gonna spoon me like you fuckin’ mean it.” Monty felt his lip twitch. And so that was the whole sad, sordid tale of how His Majesty’s Soldier James Montgomery Falsworth came to be rather aggressively coddled by a Pvt. James Morita, US Army Ranger, to stave off hypothermia.

…and if it went against all decorum, well, there wasn’t a damn thing he or the bloody Home Office could do about it.

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So the Physician placed his hands upon the Boy’s head, stretched out his body and breathed, and behold the breath of life returned then to the Boy.

Speak a blessing, the Poet said. For surely this is the work of the Gods and not man.

I will not profane the name of the Gods in disbelief, answered he the Poet. Whether the Gods of my fathers or your own strange one. Would they hear then the plea of the unbeliever? If you would have him blessed, bless him yourself! For the Physician had taken no gods and would pray to none, and so it was with his own wisdom alone the Boy was saved.

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

We can’t ignore the desexualization of Asian men on screen. I could have gone with Steven Yuen, because both he and John Cho have been the first Asian-American male actors to play love interests on television (The Walking Dead, 2010-16 and Selfie, 2014). Yuen definitely fits the physicality better, but the idea of Hikaru Sulu in the Star Trek reboot and Morita both getting portrayed by John Cho was too much fun. Also I’m a sap for #STARRINGJOHNCCHO—it’s the Hawkeye Initiative for race.
John Cho on Star Trek, Gay Sulu, and Yellow-face in Film (NSFW): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVYyQ4tJbg
John Cho on Star Trek, Immigration, Asian and LGBTQ+ Representation in Film, and respect for Star Trek Fandom and Fan Culture: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fd-M3u1_roU

Actual badass human and humanitarian Young Oak Kim:
http://www.100thbattalion.org/history/veterans/officers/young-oak-kim/


Amazing artist and intellectual Willa Kim, his sister, with a career in costume design spanning six decades and still active in 2016. She created Kerry Washington’s costumes for JOSEPHINE.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Mbh73wZUXg

“Up until that point I had no idea what it was like for these men who had come from the camps. High barbed wire fences and machine gun outposts and bayoneted rifles. Would I have volunteered if I were from that camp? ... I don’t know if I would have volunteered, but when we got back, they became our brothers. You know, these guys were special, that even under these extreme circumstances they would volunteer. They were better than us. ... After that, the islanders and mainlanders were brothers, ready to fight and die for each other.” -Daniel Inouye


Jim Morita headcanons:
M-616 Morita is known as “The San Fransisco Kid.” In J(IHL) he studied medicine at UCSF, and was temporarily sent to Tanforan Detention Center in holding as the camps were built. He was interred at Manzanar separated from his family.

https://medschool.ucsf.edu/about-school-medicine
https://www.nps.gov/manz/learn/historyculture/japanese-americans-at-manzanar.htm
http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tanforan_%28detention_facility%29/

Morita’s story is true: http://newamericamedia.org/2013/07/unsolved-murder-in-manzanar.php. Orderly Paul Tagaki sat with Jim Kanagawa for five days as he died. Dr. James Goto refused to change his testimony on the autopsy under pressure from the army to say bullet entries came from the front.

https://scoutingmagazine.org/issues/9911/d-wwas.html

“Well, it’s this way…” And then the Japanese-American whose folks were still Japanese-Japanese, or else they would not be in a camp with barbed wire and
watchtowers with soldiers holding rifles, told the blond giant from Nebraska about the removal of the Japanese from the Coast, which was called evacuation, and about the concentration camps, which were called relocation centers.

The lieutenant listened and he didn’t believe it. He said: “That’s funny. Now, tell me again.”

The Japanese-American soldier of the American army told it again and didn’t change a word.

The lieutenant believed him this time. “Hell’s bells,” he exclaimed, “if they’d done that to me, I wouldn’t be sitting in the belly of a broken-down B-24 going back to Guam from a reconnaissance mission to Japan.”


John went through internment and volunteered for the 442nd, and was recruited to military intelligence. He served as an interpreter in the Pacific Theater. His book was poorly received by the American public and Japanese-Americans alike in 1957, and he died in obscurity in 1971 at the age of 47. No No Boy is his only surviving work.


The average Japanese-American GI was 5’3” and weighed 125 pounds (Cooper, 46). Morita and most of the 100th/442nd were literally the size of pre-serum Steve Rogers—or rather 1 inch shorter and 30 pounds heavier.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for mentions of sex work, racism, holocaust and internment, and minor character death.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

And behold from the plain the Citadel of the Enemy rose high above them, and the sky was rent with darkness and ash and the bitter smell of bloodshed. So the Soldier wondered then at the Hearts of Men and the wickedness therein that they should build such things, and he was again Afraid.
— Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“...few and far between, and fiction even less so. Jacob (I Have Loved) is a timely piece of the ongoing Indochina Wars, detailing the atrocities of war committed on all sides and the bitter aftermath of trauma. Like No No Boy before it, Jacob (I Have Loved) in no ways detracts from the truth or historicity of later memoirs but rather enriches them, and more importantly, did so in an era when both the Second World War and Executive Order 9066 and their wrongs were still raw in the minds of the public. These works were, in the intervening post-war years, a constant, unflinching reminder of a time “which has never been told in fiction and only in fiction can the hopes and fears and joys and sorrows of people be adequately recorded (Ozeki, xvii).”


CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Monty woke sometime later to his cellmate’s stirrings. The needle-sharp pains in his limbs had ceased during his sleep, and he breathed a prayer to whatever gods may be above—Christian or bloody Buddhist even—that he had woken at all. Alive, for the time being, though he had not escaped unscathed; his chest felt heavy, his throat tight.

“Hey, Sarge? Sarge—?” Morita’s voice came from somewhere to his right. Barnes, Monty’s mind
supplied worriedly, and he opened his eyes, sat hastily up with a cough. But the man’s tone was wrong, a cry of exasperation rather than worry.

There was some rustling, a groggy moan. “Oh, goddamn it, Sarge!” Morita sighed as the man burrowed his head back under the blanket, clinging to Jones and the Frenchman. Morita shook him again, but Barnes only batted the offending hand away.

“He’s awake, then?” Monty asked with no small relief.

“Awake? Hell, no,” Morita said. “But the crazy son of a bitch is alive, at least. Come on, Sarge, goddamnit, get up!”

“—unngghghhh…” Barnes returned.

“I mean it, Sarge, get up!”

[…]…fuck you,” came the garbled reply, Barnes’ face—it would seem—plastered firmly into the warmth of Jones’ armpit. Jones, it must be said, was far too amused by the turn of events to be of any assistance.


“Ding dong ding, motherfucker,” Morita took up the cue. “Dugan, grab the other end of this blanket. Help me wake Snow White.”

“I ain’t kissing him!” the man protested.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Morita sighed. “It’s a joke. Besides, Dum Dum, if you’re Prince Charming, I’d rather kiss a frog.”

“les français baisent parfaitement,” Dernier protested.

Jones made a face. “Jacques Dernier, hypothermia be damned I am never sharing a blanket with you again.”

But between the four of them they managed to wrest that thin blanket away. Barnes glared up at all of them, eyes bleary, hair disheveled. “Mirror, mirror, on the wall,” Morita said. Then— “Shit, Sarge. You look terrible.” The man truly did, skin grey and haggard, eyes red-rimmed. Blotches of purple bloomed like bruises underneath them. Looking at Barnes Monty felt a lurch deep in his gut, not the protective urge he got where Jackie was concerned but rather the blind, uncomprehending terror of a child. The man had been willing to freeze to death to ensure their chance of escape, and he nearly bloody well had.

“I feel terrible,” Barnes croaked, voice brittle as broken glass. “Fuck.”

“But alive, at least,” Jones said, the quaver in his voice echoing Monty’s own relief. “Hell, Sarge, look at us. We’re the modern Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”

“It’s Hanania, Mishael, and Azaria, you heathen,” Barnes grimaced.

“Sure, Sarge. Next thing you’ll be telling me Jesus was Jewish.”

Barnes rolled his eyes.

“Let’s get you drinking something,” Morita insisted. “Coffee?”
“Jesus, Morita, pal, c’mere. You’re the most beautiful thing I ever saw,” Barnes crooned, then broke into a fit of coughing.

Morita shook his head. “Shut it, Sarge. You know miscegenation’s illegal. Besides, I hear you got a girl back home in Brooklyn.”

“Psh,” Barnes continued once that fit had passed. “Pretty face like yours? I’m King Goddamned Solomon. I’m startin’ up a harem.”

“Isn’t that the Arabic term?” Jones heckled.

“Psh,” the man scoffed. “I’m King Goddamned Solomon. I’m startin’ up whatever the hell a harem is in Hebrew because Jonesy-boy here’s a smartass. Whaddya say, Tokyo Rose? You wanna be my new best girl?”

“If it weren’t against the Hippocratic Oath, Sarge, I’d slug the shit out of you.”


“Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses,” Barnes cried in protest, voice dropping off into another fit of coughing. Monty didn’t much like the sound of it. “You tell one story ’bout how your girl likes to boss you in bed—”

“Just the one?” Morita spoke on their behalf. “Now I got a chocolate bar—” he waved the man off before he could protest. “And you’re going to eat it if I have to cram it down your throat. You do that, I might even consider letting you get up.”

“Hey, pal,” Barnes took a shaky sip from that thermos cap. “You wanna give me chocolate, ’s no skin off my nose.”

“Oh, is that what you Jews are calling it now?” Jones wondered. Barnes began coughing in earnest.

“Hey, whoa. Easy there, slugger,” Morita cautioned.

“I say,” Monty said as Morita pounded at Barnes’ back. “Is he quite alright?”

Morita snorted. “We’ve all had significant exposure. And we’re malnourished to begin with. Wouldn’t be surprised if half of us came down with pneumonia.”

“Be just my fuckin’ luck,” Barnes groused, wiping the dribbling coffee from his chin.

“Non,” Dernier argued, jabbering away in rapid-fire French. “… hypochlorique et viola la pneumonie chimique. Les Enfoirés!” he finished. They turned to Jones.

“Don’t look at me, boys. All I got was motherfuckers. I studied conversational and literary French, not a chemistry textbook.”


Monty frowned. Mourir empoisonné. That sounded rather a great bloody lot like—

“Poison death, uh huh.” Jones voiced drily. “And you—I don’t know, I never studied medicine so this is purely conjecture here—couldn’t’ve warned us earlier?”
“I say, man,” Monty agree. “Why ever didn’t you say something?”

“He mean the bleach and piss?” Morita asked. The Frenchman nodded.

“Yeah, well, I figured. But between the cold or the gas, the cold was going to kill us a hell of a lot quicker. Fuck, fellas, it’s not mustard gas. We should be fine in a couple of days. Just need some fresh air, that’s all.”

“Yeah,” Barnes croaked. “Fresh air. Thank fuckin’ God we ain’t stuck here in some industrial shithole.”

Their captors began their rounds as if taking cue from Barnes’ recovery, clanging on the bars with those leather-bound clubs to rouse them. Yet there were those among them who would never now be woken. It was disturbing to know how close his own brush with death had been; disturbing too to wake to departed bedfellows, men who only seeming moments ago had been breathing reduced now to still, wax-like figures discolored by the cold.

Morita did not take it well.

“Hey, pal,” Barnes said, and knelt beside him as the man closed their eyes. “You did everything you could. It ain’t your fault Lohmer’s a cunt.” He offered what crude comfort—if any—could be had. “They went sleepin’. Not even Zola can hurt ‘em now.”

But for all their care, the dead were disposed of callously, piled atop one another and carted away to the waiting furnace. Barnes at least had the foresight to remove their metal identification tags, mingling now with his own as a weight pressed against his heart.

“You okay, pal?”

“Yeah,” the man grunted, rubbing furiously at his eyes. And if there were tears there, well. Monty would never say. “I’m just so fucking sick of these goddamned fucking camps.”

For his part, Monty felt nothing. He found himself well beyond all horror, and nothing Man would do to one another could now startle him.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth
Sex work: Bucky jokingly propositions Morita
Racism: Jones teases Bucky about being Jewish
Internment: GI deaths from hypothermia remind Morita of the murders and medical negligence at Manzanar.


Japanese American National Museum

http://www.janm.org/

After the Arpaio pardon, the history of concentration camps in the US is now more relevant than ever.

“First they take them to county jail, then they stayed there a couple of nights, then they took them to Tuna Canyon, and from Tuna Canyon they would send them to Billings, Montana, Bismark, North Dakota, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Crystal City, Texas. These were all US justice camps. These were not EO 9066 camps, these were before EO 9066. But when I think of, when they talk of putting away immigrant parents away from their children today it just—it just like a knife that goes right into my heart. Because you just can’t separate children from their parents. I mean, it’s just so inhuman to do that.” — JANM volunteer June Berk, March 23rd 2017

Executive Order 9066 Survivors testimony:
http://blog.janm.org/index.php/2017/08/03/last-chance-see-instructions-persons-moving-day/

Tuna Canyon:
http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tuna%20Canyon%20(detention%20facility)/

If you do nothing else on social media today, at least follow George Takei, camp survivor and Japanese-American actor/activist on Twitter:
https://twitter.com/GeorgeTakei.

les français baisent parfaitement (French): the literal translation is ‘the french kiss perfectly/absolutely/thoroughly/excellently/nicely/fluently’. However, despite sharing a root with Spanish besar (to kiss) and un beso (a kiss), baiser and its derivatives such as la bise (a kiss) in modern French have come to have the connotation of ‘fuck’.

Hanania, Mishael, and Azaria were Jewish captives serving in the court of King Nebuchadnezer. They were miraculously saved from death by furnace after refusing to worship the King’s golden image. They are better known by their Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. See Daniel 3:

Tokyo Rose

Name used to refer to female English language radio propaganda personas whose broadcasts were meant to decrease morale in Allied troops in the Pacific. After the war it referred specifically to a single Japanese-American woman: Iva Toguri D’Aquino. Toguri was an American disc jockey caring for her ill grandmother in Tokyo when Pearl Harbor happened. The US embassy refused to issue her a passport to return. She
refused to renounce her US citizenship at the behest of the Japanese government and so was declared ineligible for a Japanese ration card. Desperate for income, she participated in English-language broadcasting in a segment called The Zero Hour, calling herself Orphan Annie. In the years she was on the air Toguri refused to broadcast any anti-US propaganda, and used her income and minor celebrity status to aid Allied POWs. She was held by the US Army for a year after the surrender of Japan, then tried in 1949 upon her return to the US with treason, and subsequently convicted. She served 6 years of a 10 year sentence before evidence revealed witnesses had perjured themselves and chain of evidence was haphazard at best. She received a presidential pardon from Jimmy Carter in 1977.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokyo_Rose

Bleach and ammonia form chlorine gas, a chemical irritant. In high enough doses it can prove fatal through inflaming the lungs, causing chemical pneumonitis.

British "dog tags" during World War II consisted of pressed fiber tokens, one a green hexagon and the other a red circle, on a cotton string. Chapter 23 is the first of an 8 part Howling Commando-centric arc. Chapters 24-29 are written and in the editing stage. I plan to update every two weeks.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

It is written, a cord of three is not easily broken said the Poet.

It is written, said the Soldier, the Strongman, the Physician, and even the Foreigner in his own strange tongue. And a strand of six even less so.
—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“…whose hysterical cry of “Roosevelt made me!” saved him from a vigilante mob and lynching, to the Bet at Bratford where American POWs and their German overseers bonded over a display of absurdist humor, laughter crossed both language and cultural barriers and saved lives. Even among the Allied forces themselves wartime humor brought opposing cultural mores together with the widespread re-introduction of traditionally queer performances such as drag. At a time where homosexuality was illegal, grounds for dishonorable discharge, and diagnosed as a mental illness, the officer who cross-dressed as a USO chorus girl or Hollywood starlet and performed for his men was both a well-known and welcome sight:

“Thanksgiving, 1944. It got bad. We got word the USO and Red Cross wouldn’t be coming and we’d be eating K rations for dinner, and that wouldn’t do. So Sarge goes to the WACs and Newshens and gets all dolled up, blackmarket stockings and lipstick and everything, comes out and sings and plays the piano, Yes, Sir, That’s My Baby, Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue…does a little dance number like he’s Ginger Rogers. A real Vaudeville production. Must’ve had him up there half the night in those damn heels. Back home it would’ve made us mad as hell but there on the wrong side of the world it was just damned good fun, a laugh just for the sake of living. Even Phillips didn’t stop him. Barnes did get KP, though. That old curmudgeon [Phillips] accused him of possession of prohibited items, can you believe it?"


CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

They were offered sustenance, or what meager meal passed for it, at least, for prisoners of HYDRA behind on their quota: a thin cold broth and stacks of stale bread. There was no little grumbling among their ranks.

“The Hell’s that?” Dugan muttered as the men across from them were served. Their own cell was set last, it would seem. Lohmer’s doing, no doubt.

But it was their turn at last, and the familiar faces—and that bloody goddamn hat—of Ackermann and Berger approached. The latter looked relieved at seeing Barnes on his feet. So relieved, in fact, he gave the man an awkward embrace through the bars. “Oh, hey, pal,” Barnes said, as though the turn were utterly normal. “’M fine.”

Monty didn’t much like the mutinous looks on the men’s faces. Morale was low enough already. He took Barnes aside. “You seem rather friendly with our hosts.”

“Yeah, well, I got my mama’s good looks and charm,” Barnes forced a grin. But his face was too tight still, too pinched around the eyes. “The more human they see us, the harder it is to hurt us. Lohmer doesn’t care, Kleiber’ll wring his hands over lost productivity, sure, but it’s boys like that’ll smuggle us in some food if you pal around with ’em enough.”

“I don’t disagree. Yet I worry not all your men will see it that way.”

“Hey, pal. Let me deal with that,” Barnes insisted. “You worry about getting your ass to the front.”

_Literally,_ Monty sighed, and readjusted his posture gingerly. It was a duty he would perform, yes; but an experience he would much rather not repeat.

What little food was brought looked bloody unappetizing, globs of grease floating on rotten vegetable broth, and on closer inspection the bread had mold. Yet Monty’s stomach rumbled despite himself. Gods, when had he last eaten—?

“Don’t eat that,” Barnes cautioned them. “Smells like someone pissed in it.”

“Someone maybe did piss in it,” Ackermann puffed on his cigarette. Then with an apologetic shrug, “Herr Lohmer is rations.”

“And you were just gonna let my boys here eat it, huh,” Barnes frowned.

The boy waved him off. “I am not in charge, Kleinführer.”

“No, but you could schlepp your ass to the kitchens and bring us some decent food.”

“Ach, I do this, Kleinführer, you all want it. One man, one cell I can do. But a hundred? Nein.”

“What,” Barnes wheedled, posture shifting into something—well, had Jackie done it, he might have called it _coquettish._ “You don’t got some girl in the kitchens? No sweet thing you’re tryin’ to impress? Or owes you a favor?”

“You are trying to flatter me, Kleinführer, but you have no cigarettes.”

“Yeah, ‘cause someone stole ‘em all,” Barnes said pointedly. “Say, when did the Führer start issuin’ Lucky Strikes?”

The boy flushed.

“What about you, Berger?” Barnes changed tack so fast it made Monty’s head spin. “You got some pretty little frauline you could sweet talk for me, huh?”

“Mit ihm ist es nur schwatzen,” Ackermann said. Monty hardly spoke German, but that barbed tone he recognized well enough.

“Du wirst eine Jungfrau sterben.”

“Und du wirst an der Geschlechtskrankheit sterben!”

“Hey, hey, Berger. You ‘n me, pal? We’ll talk about your Lili Marleen later,” Barnes interrupted them with a wink. “Teach you how to run ‘round the bases, make that dame head over heels for you. You? Food,” he turned to Ackermann, all that slick charm gone. “Actual, decent food that no one’s taken a shit in. And I’ll be having my letters back, too.”

“Ugh. Stale bread for breakfast,” Dugan huffed as they hunkered together like pigs in a sty. “Never thought I’d miss K rations.” There was a chorus of agreement.

“’S better ‘an no bread,” Barnes took a tentative bite, then grimaced. “I take it back. Reminds me of Stevie’s cooking.”

“Don’t you even start, Jew York,” Jones said. “No one here needs to know about the two of you eating breakfast in bed back in Brooklyn.”

Barnes choked. But whether it was the crumbs or the sickness or startled laughter, Monty could not say. “Goddamnit,” Barnes swore when he had regained his breath. “How the hell they expect you to work like this?”

“I say, man,” Monty harkened back to that first conversation with Zola. “I suppose we ought to be grateful they’ve offered us anything at all.”

“’S against the goddamn Geneva conventions, that’s what,” Barnes grumbled.

“Got a feeling they don’t much care about those, Sarge,” Morita said.

“You ’n me both, pal.”

“Quit your moping, Sarge,” Jones stuck an elbow into his ribs. “Don’t you Jews have a prayer for this or something? Manna from heaven?”

“That was the desert, smartass. Think the weather’s different all the way up here. Say, you’re a Protestant. You happen to have any loaves ‘n fishes?”

Jones made a show of patting down his pockets then shook his head. “What do you know, Sarge, I’m all out.”

“’S worth a shot,” Barnes replied ruefully. But the moment the man had turned away, Barnes set his face again, that same stubborn, mulish look Monty had come to both respect and dread.

This could hardly bode well. “What are you thinking?”

“Rations. Guess I’ll have to take it up with Zola.”

Monty shuddered. Thought of the man’s frail condition. “I say, Sergeant. Is that…wise?”

“Hell, no,” Barnes ground his teeth. “But I ain’t letting these boys starve.”

Above them the sounds of the factory floor were distant and slow. B Shift, working still. Their own
respite could hardly continue. “Chop, chop, ladies,” Barnes rose, brushing crumbs from his stubble and shirt. “B shift’s been pullin’ their weight, high time you lot pulled yours.”

“B shift doesn’t have this lump,” Jones kicked Dugan’s drowsing form.

“Huh?” The man startled awake, gave a lazy salute. “Sure, Sarge. Whatever he said.” Then he lay his head back down. Jones kicked him again.

Barnes scowled. "Dugan, so help me I will sing the fucking song."

“I’m up!” Dugan jumped to his feet so fast Monty thought absurdly of a Leprechaun. “I’m up, c’mon, girls, hi ho let’s go.”

“How long have we slept?” Monty asked for the lot of them as they climbed to the factory floor.

“Dunno. Morita?”

“Given the light I’d say at least eighteen hours, Sarge. Maybe more.”

“Shit,” Barnes ran a nervous hand through his hair.

“We needed the rest,” Morita continued. “We had exposure. If we didn’t rest the hypothermia would’ve killed all of us instead of some of us.”

Barnes bit his lip. “Yeah. So did they.”

“Not as long,” Morita insisted. “And not overnight.”

“They’ve been workin’ this whole time,” Barnes said, still musing his hair. “Shit. Stick close, you hear? You too, Jonesey-boy. Got a feelin’ this ain’t gonna be pretty.” They’d been subject to cruelty and torture, certainly; but they’d also gotten rest. And it was a bitter testament, wasn’t it, that all their enemy needed to stir up strife was allow one to sleep, and not the other. Had it been the other way around, well. Monty was an Englishman and an officer, but still human. He too would begrudge the man who slept or ate when he himself went without.

“Operation Ophelia?” Jones suggested after a long moment of silence.

Barnes sighed. Wrinkled his nose in distaste. “Yeah, Jonesey-boy. Think we’re gonna have to.” Dugan pumped his fist in celebration.

“Operation Ophelia?” Monty wondered, turning to Morita for assistance.

“Don’t look at me, pal,” the man shrugged. “I’m just a Jap spy. They don’t tell me the playbook.”

“Extremis malis extrema remedia,” Jones assured him.

Well, quite, Monty agreed. But which?

Their reception was less than hospitable. “There he is, the fucking Nazi,” Lombardo, Monty recognized the man with unease. Beside him, Morita not so much stiffened as shifted his weight to the balls of his feet, one foot slightly in front of the other, shoulders braced, arms held at the ready by his sides.

Barnes only tipped an imaginary hat. “As you were, soldier.”
“You get enough beauty sleep?”

“I’m Snow fuckin’ White, pal. Which one of you goyim bastards kissed me?”

“ Heard you all got sleep. And coffee. And dry socks.” It was a lie, of course. Only Barnes had gotten them. Three pairs, thick and woolen—but the rumor was sure to incite jealousy.

Barnes cocked his head. “An’ who told you that? Was it Lohmer?”

“You ain’t in charge here anymore, Sarge. The boys and I decided.”

“We took a vote,” Gianni added.

“Sure, pal,” Barnes shrugged, nonchalant. “’S a free country.”

Dugan sniggered. Whatever this Operation Ophelia was, Monty had the terrible notion he was about to find out.

“Dugan?”

“Nothin’, Sarge.”

Barnes turned back to his accusers. “Like I was sayin’, pal, it’s a free countr—“

Dugan snickered again.

Barnes frowned. “Dum Dum?”

“Nothing, nothing, Sarge. You go ahead.”

Barnes turned back to Lombardo, whose frozen, intimidating posture was beginning to seem rather ridiculous instead of menacing. “You all voted on it, ’s fine,” Barnes shrugged. “If you wanna be responsible for B shift, Lombardo, you go right ahead. No skin off my teeth. Democracy at work. Like I said, it’s a free count—“

Dugan giggled. And Monty had eight young nieces, he would know. They all of them turned to stare, A and B shift alike in the absurdity of such a sound coming from so large a man. Lombardo was all but forgotten. Barnes raised a brow. “You got somethin’ you wanna share with the class, Dum Dum?”

“Sorry, uh, only got about a fourth grade education,” Dugan removed his hat and scuffed his feet under their collective attention. “But Jonesey here told me this story ‘bout Shakespeare—“

“It’s a pun,” Jones’ smooth voice took over seamlessly. “A play on words. Shakespeare’s rife with them. They’re all quite crass, academia agrees this one is the worst. Especially if you take the line in context.”


Dugan dissolved into giggles again. Jones continued. “It’s Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 2—” and the man droned on regarding original pronunciation, intonation, the linguistic differences between Old, Middle, and Modern English. Their gathered audience grew restless and distracted. Monty himself frowned, tried to remember a summer at the Old Vic. 1937, it’d been. The last time he, Jackie, Brian and John had been out in London together, the four Falsworths. If memory served, the play within the play…
Barnes raised a brow. “An’ for those of us who ain’t gone to college?”

“Oh, bloody hell,” Monty cried aghast, getting the joke all these long years later. “Cunt—!”

...Silence.

Monty slapped a hand to his mouth.

Then the 107th and sundry—Irish, Italian, Puerto Rican, all those mongrel Americans, his own British brothers, A shift and B alike—burst into startled laughter. The Frenchman clapped his hands in delight. “Et tu, Limae?” Barnes sighed as Dugan whooped and hollered. Wahoo, Monty wondered, hot under his collar. Was that an American or an Irish abomination?

“Goddamn it, Barnes, this is serious!” Lombardo shouted, but he’d lost the attention of the crowd. Hearing a dour English soldier suddenly shout the single most vile epithet in the language would rather have that effect, yes. Monty, for his part, was mortified. He thought to die on the spot.

Dugan and Jones only glanced sidelong at one another then cackled even louder. “I can’t believe you got him to say it!” Dugan had fat tears streaming into his drooping mustachios.

“It’s—his—did you—“ Jones gasped.

“Yeah, yeah,” Barnes rolled his eyes, twisting the men’s ears and knocking their heads together. “You dumb cunts. We get it.”

“The look on his f-f-f-a-ace!” Dugan howled, then wahoo-ed again, for good measure.

“Don’t think this is finished, Barnes!” Lombardo promised over the din.

“What?” Barnes whipped around as though he’d forgotten the man entirely. “Right. Sure. Whatever you say, Lombardo,” he dismissed them with a wave. “It’s a free country.” More snickering. “Why don’t you take your boys and get some sleep?” And that was the whole sordid story how a certain Sergeant James Barnes, Privates Gabriel Jones and Timonthy Dugan of the 107th Infantry US Army averted a civil war with a four hundred year-old pun involving the female pudenda, and how Lieutenant James Montgomery Falsworth of His Majesty’s Third Parachute Regiment became a rather unwitting participant.

Monty said as much.

“C’mon, Your Highness, it was fuckin’ funny!” Dugan elbowed him as they made their way to their respective stations.

“That,” Monty relented, “was one hell of an act.”

“Act?” Barnes feigned innocence, then winked. “The play’s the thing. And you dumb fucks are just the actors therein, or some shit.”

Monty groaned. Dernier patted his arm in sympathy.

“No?” Barnes asked. “How’s it go again, Jonesey?”

Jones just shook his head. “Something like that, Sarge.”

“Aside from your mangling, it was rather impressive,” Monty had to admit. He wondered how long the three of them had sat on it…and frankly, whether to be offended or flattered they’d brought him into the joke—or rather, made him the unwitting butt of it. It was, he must admit, a sight better than
their previous near-constant tension. Perhaps some good had come from that cold, miserable night spent shivering together.

“Your improvisation ain’t half bad either, Limey,” Barnes continued. Monty sighed. He had, as the saying went, been both set up and quite put upon. “An’ Dugan? You’re a natural. A real Gary Cooper.”

"Vous l’insultez, Sergent," The Frenchman insisted. "Il est Raimu, évidemment."

Dugan scowled. Turned to Jones. "That an insult?"

"Vous m'as blessez. C'etait un compliment," he said, hand over his heart. "Sincèrement."

"Yeah, well, I was a circus performer," Dugan's posture relaxed, mollified. "Showmanship's my middle name. Besides, Queen Victoria's got a stick up her ass. Damn near perfect for it."

“Not anymore,” Morita added. Monty dearly wished to punch the man.

“Nick Bottom or Dogberry?” Jones asked him then. And that earnest look, well. That was an apology—or as near to one as Monty would get. “Take your pick.”

“I say, man,” Monty sniffed, put on his best English manners. “That’s all rather unnecessary.”

“Huh?” Dugan asked.

“If you jokers are done, we’ve got work to do,” Barnes rolled his eyes. “We’re behind on quota, so you’d better get your asses moving if you want to eat tonight. Three of you can talk your traveling circus act later.”

“Traveling Circus?” Monty protested. “It’s bloody Shakespeare!”

So the Emissary of the King and the Emissaries of the King Across the Sea came to the Captain and knelt low and said Surely you are the Victor, the Star and the Song! Come, and fight for us! For we will anoint your head with oil and clothe you in garments of purple and gird you with the armour and sword and seal of our Kings! Then will you have gold and much glory, and we shall give you swords and soldiers and thus may we destroy utterly those we call Enemies and carve up the skin of the world and profit share and share alike.
I am the Shield and the Song, spoke them the Captain, I wish not for Swords nor Soldiers nor bloodshed nor gold nor any glory. For I am Adam made anew, formed of clay and the promise of truth. I will walk beside my brothers and with Shield and Strength will I protect the helpless and restore hope to the broken hearted.

But the Emissaries were angered, and they grumbled among themselves and sought to subdue him, saying That is not the way of War.

Spoke them then the Captain Yet it is the path to Peace.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

“If we were determined and full of cocky humor, we were also starving and somewhat scared. If we knew, as did our captors, that the Allies now might well win the war, we did not know what victory could mean to our fate. Many feared the Nazis would kill us long before any liberation, a final act of vengeance for their failed war. The simple truth was that every day we had to fight for mastery over our fears, our bodies, our hearts. We dug into tunnels, survived our pistol-whippings and listened long into the night to one another’s memories of home (Handy & Battle, 9).”


“Internment brought suffering beyond belief; the unending frigid weather, the unpredictable behavior of the guards. Inadequate food, lice, sickness, boredom, death by starvation or by exposure, was their unchanging agenda. Yet there were times when the spirits of the Prisoners of War were lifted. It was always through their own methods of creativity and ingenious that this happened.”


"During the entire procedure there was a nicely dressed elderly man, seemingly of local importance, who endeavored to quiet the mob. About a quarter of a mile from the forest -after a cycling episode - he was able to ask a direct question of me. 'Why you bomb Germany?' By that time, I was desperate, tired and ready for anything, so I replied, "Roosevelt made me!" That quieted things down a bit, but again we marched off-headed for the trees. I could occasionally hear, "Roosevelt! Ya! Ya!" I began to hope. The mob had lost some of its violence by then, the cyclists had stopped, and it was possible for the elderly man to induce them to stop and discuss the situation...The relief I felt is impossible to describe. Even the sight of German uniforms worn by the local military authorities didn't bother me. Lynching wouldn't be a pleasant way to die."

Reeder, C "Whitey":http://www.merkki.com/reedercaleb.htm

Arnie Roth was M-616 Steve's best childhood friend, queer, Jewish, and was shown reigniting his friendship with Steve as Cap during the AIDS crisis in 1982: https://geeksout.org/blogs/aaron-tabak/forgotten-gay-characters-captain-americas-gay-pal-armie-roth

Nazi Germany was profoundly anti-smoking, but the sales tax on tobacco products
contributed up to 1/12 of the Reich's income. Cigarettes were given in rations, but were very low quality and sometimes even nicotine free.


Lili Marleen/Lili Marlene

“Das Mädchen unter der Laterne” was a 1915 poem and subsequent 1939 German language song sung by Lale Anderson, popular among both Allied and Axis troops with various English language versions. A sadder, slower ballad version was released by German immigrant Marlene Dietrich in 1944 in direct collaboration with the Office of Strategic Services (CIA precursor and real world equivalent of Marvel’s SSR) to undermine German troop morale on their blacklisted German-language station SoldatenSender. The OSS estimated Operation Muzak as effective as air raids at dampening Axis morale. After Dietrich’s version, all renditions of Lili Marleen were outlawed on German radio, but high volumes of soldiers sent letters requesting the song. By the end of the war, Lili Marleen had become the broadcast closing song on official German radio. Dietrich was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1945.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lili_Marleen

(OSS version):https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZAV4hsP5WU

Baseball metaphors as a euphemism for sex first became widespread among American adolescents after World War II. I blame Bucky's bad sex stories.

Extremis malis extrema remedia (Latin): Desperate times call for desperate measures.

Shakespeare and Original Pronunciation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPlpT7n9s &
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hi-rejaoP7U.

By the 20th century, Shakespeare had been deemed classical literature and the height of English culture. During Shakespeare’s time it was considered crass humor for the masses, filled with filthy jokes and innuendo.

Gabe’s Apology

A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Nick Bottom is given the head of an ass by Puck. Much Ado About Nothing: Dogberry repeats an personal insult to other characters without context: “Forget not that I am an ass!”
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

The Howling Commandos begin to take form. Morita takes a risk. Bucky's gamble with their young guards begins to pay off as he explains the birds and the bees and searches for his letters.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for brief mention of sexual assault. Chapter includes discussions of graphic sexual content directed at a minor.

See end notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will you not help us, cried the Boy. Not even now?
It is not I who gives the orders, but my Masters, spoke him then the Overseer. You and I are soldiers. Such is the way of war.
And what of them? Would you yet do so while children look on asked the Boy. Would you have even them do your Master’s bidding? Far be it from you to send sons to do what even their fathers would not!
What would you have of me asked him the Overseer. That were the order to come I should slay you myself? Or would you walk then willingly to the flames, would you lay yourself down like a lamb to be slaughtered?
I would their hands were free of bloodshed and their hearts from burden, spoke him then the Boy. Of my own free will would I go if indeed go I must.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“...I close my diary here, because I don’t see any point in recording the cruel things that sometimes happen (Uwe, 113).” This depersonalization and distance from atrocities were ultimately rejected by Uwe, who criticizes the brother who grew up under the influence of Hitler Youth not for his participation in the horrors of fascism, but rather for failing to document them for posterity: “like the idea of recording angels who keep the books, writing down all the shameful deeds and suffering of mankind. That at least one should do—bear witness.” Such reflection and recording of both personal and institutional wrongs in the name of warfare remain a key thematic element in Falsworth’s 1960 classic Jacob (I Have Loved), wherein the author documents—however fictitiously—in painstaking detail both the atrocities of war and the crimes committed in the name of the peace that followed.”

Morita had been right. About them resting. About needing to keep up their strength. Monty hadn’t realized the full extent of his own exhaustion until he climbed the scaffolding to inspect the monoplane’s final welding. His heart beat was heavy in his chest, leaden and sluggish. He nearly fainted.

“You alright up there, champ?” Morita asked from the scaffold’s foot as Monty wrapped an arm through the rungs. “You forget your smelling salts?”

Monty shook his head. Willed himself awake. “Bloody fantastic, man.” Yet their position as inspectors was one of the least physically taxing. By the time they’d arrived to the floor B Shift had easily been working for twenty hours or more. Monty could only imagine—he didn’t wish to imagine—the fatigue they felt. It was a wonder their ruse had bloody worked at all.

But Barnes? Well. Barnes was pale perhaps, the skin under his eyes grey and pinched, but he still kept up that constant chatter and cheer. Enthused energy wherever he went. But Monty had seen the cracks in that mask, and now knowing, could not help but notice that smile, like that forced cheer, went only skin deep.

Morita too surveilled Barnes every time he passed by. “You should get some rest, Sarge.”

“Nah, pal,” Barnes brushed him off. “What’ll you ladies think if I’m puttin’ my feet up and eatin’ babka while you’re out here working? ‘Sides, we’re behind schedule.”

Morita went unimpressed. “I’m serious, Sarge.”

“Yeah? Well, so’m I,” he gave a cheeky salute. “As you were.”

Morita rolled his eyes and returned it, albeit one-fingeredly.

“What the bloody blazes is babka?” Monty wondered once Barnes passed out of sight.

“That’s a Jap, not Jewish,” Morita grunted, hefting open the fuselage. “How the hell should I know?”

“Wasn’t me, it was one of the boys. Whichever one of those B shift idiots who assembled it,” he whistled. “We’re in the Reich over our heads, here working our asses off just to get fed, and they’re still out here pulling this shit.”

“Barnes,” Monty said. Perhaps not the man himself, no; but the spirit. It would take more than cold showers, sleepless nights, and empty bellies to rattle these bloody Americans, and Monty found himself suddenly grateful. They were prisoners held against their will, lives hanging on the whims of a madman and whatever accord Barnes had struck. Their task was hardly pleasant by any means, but
it was rather more agreeable to converse or work in amiable silence with his American compatriots instead of their previous near-constant tension. Monty said as much.

“Not my fault,” Morita shrugged. “You were the one with a stick up his ass.”


“You better hope the Krouts kill me, pal. I’ll stop telling that joke the day I die,” Morita continued, nodding to the cartoon. “You want to add something?”

Monty arched an eyebrow. “Not seven days ago you gave me hell for sabotaging equipment, and yet here you are encouraging it.”

“—then you’d better pray there isn’t an afterlife,” Morita’s voice echoed tinnily as he resealed the panel. “Because I’ll tell it there, too.”

Monty pinched the bridge of his nose. “Well if that’s the case I indeed hope not.”

“Heaven, hell, reincarnation,” Morita whistled, brushing the sweat from his eyes. “Fuck ‘em. I die, throw me in the ground and toss some dirt on me. With all this shit Sarge has got us through I’ve earned myself a rest.”

“Hear, hear.”

The hours wore on. Barnes’ cough worsened. The two of them watched him worriedly with every pass.

“Your Governess is back,” Morita would heckle as the man approached. Or, “Oh, look, it’s your nanny.”

Monty, for one, refused to rise to the bait, but Barnes intervened, broke his coughing fit long enough to say, “Yeah, well, if you’re wantin’ me to wear a little maid costume an’ bend over something you’re gonna be disappointed, pal.” That at least shut the man up, even if Monty’s own ears flushed in chagrin.

“I say, man, must you?”

Barnes shrugged, positively refused to look ashamed. “Nothin’ I ain’t done before.”

Morita shook his head. “Lingerie, Sarge. You’re doing it wrong.”

Barnes struck quite an indecent pose. “What, a fella can’t like dressin’ up somethin’ special?”

"Good bloody God, man!"

Morita’s face went as scarlet as it had after downing that flask. “It’s an absolute wonder any woman puts up with you.”

“What can I say, pal, I’m a lucky guy,” Barnes winked. “An’ here’s the goods,” he said, hastily lowering his leg as Ackermann joined them. “Whatcha bringin’ me?” Wrapped rations of chocolate, tins of sweetened milk, pudding powder, canned meats, paper packs of thick rye bread, and pates of butter. Or lard, rather. All small and discrete enough to be hidden on the person.

“I was not there, Kleinführer,” the boy mumbled to his feet as means of apology. “The cigarettes. I traded for them.”
“Yeah, I know, pal. Your aunt’s wedding,” Barnes reassured with an easy smile and an affectionate clap on the shoulder. “You got my letters?”

Ackermann shook his head.

“Keep an eye out for ‘em, will ya?”

“Ja,” he nodded, not meeting Barnes’ eyes.

“Hey, Lars?” Barnes called after him.

Ackermann turned back with clear reluctance. “Ja?”

“You’re a good kid. When you wanna be. I ever hear you rough up a girl and I’ll punch your fuckin’ teeth in.”

The lad blinked. Frowned. Finally looked Barnes full in the face. “They’re whores,” he argued.

“Don’t think they chose to be.”

The boy went silent, scuffling his feet. “…is better than—“

“Dying?” Barnes asked. The word hung in the silence for a long moment. “Yeah. You’d be surprised what someone’ll do with a gun to their head.”

Monty may be English, but he’d never once been so gracious. When he’d first learned of Jackie and Pinkerton—

But no. His sister be damed he had more pressing matters now than that cad.

“There’s women here?” Morita interrupted his dark musings. “You seen any?”

“Can’t say I have.”

“Shit. Just when you think the bastards can’t get any worse…”

Barnes was upon them before Monty could agree. “There you go,” he foisted the lot of contraband off on him. “Just what the doctor ordered.”

Monty blinked, but his stomach rumbled in betrayal. “I beg your pardon?”

Barnes rolled his eyes. Punched his arm. “Eat up, asshole, before I change my mind. I need you in shipshape. Peak fighting condition. I’m gonna get you rested up, fatted up, get you some supplies stored up then get your pasty English ass outta here. The sooner the better. You know what they say, Monty, third time’s the charm—though if it were me I’d’ve gone for beginner’s luck.”

Morita winced in sympathy.

“You absolute bastards, I hope you both bloody die.” Monty uttered in all earnestness, that worry over whether there were women imprisoned here with them, too, laid momentarily aside.

But the humor vanished with the man himself. “That self-sacrificing idiot,” Morita grumbled at Barnes’ retreating back. “He keeps going at this pace he’s going to get himself killed.”

“He’ll be fine,” Monty said if only to assure himself. “He always is.”
“Yeah,” Morita snorted. “And if he isn’t? Anything happens to Sarge, and you’ll be fine. Me? I’m a Jap. I’ve got a vested interest in keeping that crazy son of a bitch alive.” He nodded to himself as though deciding. “I’m going to talk to Kleiber. Try to get Sarge some decent rations.”

“I say, man,” Monty asked around a guilty, melting mouthful of chocolate. “Is that wise? Won’t that only make them hate him the more?”

“Probably,” Morita shrugged, and swung out onto the scaffolding. “But as long as that reckless Irish bastard’s still kicking, I don’t give a damn what Lombardo thinks of him. Here goes nothing. I die, do me a favor: tell my Troop it was doing something heroic.”

…Then, as if an afterthought he popped his head back up and added, “I’d say my ma, too, but she knows better than to believe it.”

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“Herr Kleiber?”

The guards stopped their circuit, those damn rifles at the ready. But Kleiber merely pulled a gloved hand up, and they stood again at ease. The man looked amused more than anything, as though a professor’s favoured pupil had acted up in class.

“I’d like to discuss rations,” Morita’s voice was quiet, but firm. “Sir.”

“Is this so?”

“You and I both know pneumonia and typhus can kill a man quick. Trench foot, too. The rest of us don’t matter, but Barnes does. Quota be damned.”

“And what would you suggest?”

“Protein,” Morita insisted. “He needs protein. And clean water. As much as you can give him.” Kleiber studied him. Sweat began to bead at the man’s hairline, and he averted his eyes to the ground. Stood stock still, the fawn frozen before the hunter.

“Verpflegungssatz I,” Kleiber finally indulged him. “It is what we feed our own troops. In cold weather combat. Will this suffice?”


“You are on the wrong side of this conflict. Germany—in your case, is not your enemy. I wonder why you fight us.”

“Yeah, well. I got the choice to rot in a work camp or use a machine gun. Guess in retrospect maybe I make shitty decisions.”

…oh, good bloody God. Between Morita and Barnes they would all of them be bloody killed.

“Die Amerikaner,” Kleiber chuckled. “You astound me. Do you know, I can not say if you are all this brave, or simply this foolish. Or perhaps you have seen too many of your movies, ya?”

“Always wanted to be a cowboy,” Morita shrugged. “But I’m a bit too short. Plus I’ve been told I’ve got the wrong complexion.”

Kleiber shook his head in bemusement. “As you were, Herr Morita.”
“Sure thing, boss.”

“I say, man, are you quite alright?” Monty asked as the man wrest his way up the ladder, knuckles white.

“Aside from shitting myself?” the man sprawled out on the scaffold platform. “Fucking fine. Tell you what, I ever get an idea that stupid again, do me a favor and slug me.”

Barnes made yet another round of the factory floor, kicked at the scaffolding he Morita were still clambering on, inspecting riveting and seams. ‘The hell you two workin’ on, anyways?’ Morita sent Monty a sharp look. He’d seen that look before, on Jackie’s face: don’t tell Nan or you’ll be sorry.

“It’s an aeroplane, man,” Monty called, just to give Barnes a taste of his own medicine, the cheeky bastard.

“I know that, asshole,” Barnes rolled his eyes. “Either of you see an airstrip here?”

“No,” Morita poked his head out of the cramped cabin where he’d been inspecting the seals with a frown. “Haven’t heard any planes, either.”

“I say, that is rather odd.” He’d previously given it no thought, but it was a rather glaring omission, wasn’t it? “They’re transporting everything in and out by rail—including the aircraft.” Jackie had flown any and everything she could get her hands on, from rickety old biplanes on a lark to the blundering Vickers Warwick bomber he’d last seen her on with the Air Transport Auxillary in Tunisia. Truth be told, these Hydra planes more resembled the former in size, smaller even than a Spitfire. “Which makes no bloody sense whatsoever.”

“This wasn’t exactly a POW camp, champ,” Morita said in distaste. “My guess? This whole factory bit came later. You don’t exactly roll out the red carpet for a bunch of people you’re planning to murder.”

“An oversight,” Monty relented. “Yet why not adapt it?”

Morita shrugged. “Keeps it low profile on our reconnaissance?”

“Also makes it a helluva hike to reach it.” Barnes frowned. “If you were workin’ on something top secret, say plannin’ something behind the Fuhrer’s back, you’d put it out in the middle of Fuckoffistan where no one—not even the Nazis— wants to go inspect it.”

“Wait. Behind the Führer’s back? Sarge, you know that sounds crazy, right?”

Monty looked to Barnes. He gave the nod. “We’ve received intelligence that would suggest the operations of this base may not be fully sanctioned.”

“Yeah. Intelligence,” Morita snorted. “This from a guy who volunteers to jump out of aircraft while people are shooting at him.”

Monty did not rise to the bait, though he badly wished to. Morita sighed. “Alright, alright— I’ll bite. How do you figure?”

“I’m from Brooklyn,” Barnes said. “Been working the docks and shipyards since I was a kid. Know a thing or two about manifest and invoices, loadin’ and unloadin’, and I’m telling you our output gets shipped out of here on two different trains with two very different schedules.”
“Okay. Sure, Agatha Christie. But that’s not exactly hard evidence.”

“Most of the personnel are local,” Monty added. “Kleiber and Ackermann, they have family in Krieschburg.”

“An’ the guns,” Barnes dropped their pièce de résistance. “The batteries. If Hitler had ‘em, he’d be using ‘em. We make bombs, tanks, some conventional weapons, sure. They get all shipped straight off to Berlin or the Eastern Front, enough to keep the Führer happy. But everyday we’re making more ‘n more of this here War of the Worlds shit with those goddamn batteries, and the war? It ain’t over yet.”

Morita blinked. “Now that’s just damn disturbing, Sarge.”

“And we’re making ‘em in all different sizes. Big ones,” Barnes continued, biting his lips. “You see anything here large enough to need those?”

“Biggest thing I’ve worked on yet’s a tank.” Morita frowned. Monty agreed. All the aeroplanes had been single-seat monoplanes, half the size of a Spitfire. And-perhaps the most puzzling thing-they all of them had lacked wheel wells and landing gear. It would seem an alarming oversight were it not so strange.

“Sergeant, what are you suggesting?”

“HYDRA. Whatever it is they’re making, it’s massive.”

“A submarine,” Monty voiced with dread. Now that was a disturbing thought. Could all these vehicles instead be submersibles?

“Or an airplane. What?” Morita insisted as they stared at him incredulously. “It could be an airplane.”

"I'm a Para, man," Monty retorted. "I think I would recognize the designs for an aeroplane when I bloody see them."

"If this thing was a submarine it'd be squished," Morita insisted. "And how to you explain the wings, genius?"

"Lateral stabilization, man. Physics doesn't simply disappear underwater. And I never said deep sea craft. Merely submersible."

“Whatever it is…fellas, we're makin’ parts, not the whole. This factory,” Barnes scratched at the stubble on the underside of his chin, leaving long pink welts in his distress. “I got the feelin’ it ain’t the only one.

…Well, bugger.

“You haven’t told the boys,” Morita noted after a heavy moment of silence.

“No.”

“Well you might want to bring Frenchie in on it,” Morita continued. “Because that crazy son of a bitch would blow this whole place out of spite.”

Monty shuddered. “From what I have gathered, our French compatriot may just as well incinerate us all on accident.”

“Nah,” Barnes nodded sagely to where Dernier and Jones were arguing out on the floor. “Something
tells me our Frenchie already knows.”

There came a sudden clatter as the Frenchman’s gesticulations upended an explosive. Barnes winced.

“Yeah,” Morita voiced for all of them. “We’re definitely going to die here.”

“Hey, Morita, you wouldn’t happen to have a pro kit, would you?” Monty’s head jerked so hard he would swear he’d pulled his chute.

“What?”

“A Pro Kit. C’mon, you’re our medic. Practically makes you the VD Officer. Pro Kit. You got one?”

“Why, you need one?”

“Ain’t for me,” Barnes said, leaning against the assembly line, picking at his nails.

“Who the hell—?”

“Ain’t for me,” Barnes said, leaning against the assembly line, picking at his nails.

“Shit, Sarge. You got to be kidding me.”

Monty quite agreed.

“Nope. Shit you not. Just ‘cause the kid’s a Nazi don’t mean he oughta be pissin’ fire for the next few weeks.”

“Sarge, I’ve heard your stories, and any advice you give is guaranteed to result in VD and at least three pregnancies.”

“Well, you wanna do the honors, be my guest,” Barnes teased. “Bein’ our VD Officer an all.”

“Yeah, if I’m the VD Officer, I want a goddamn raise.”

“Sure thing, pal,” Barnes called, walking backwards and laughing. “Hey, tell me, college boy, what’s a fifty percent increase on nothin’?”

…and that was the story of how His Majesty’s soldier James Montgomery Falsworth had the grave misfortune of overhearing the United States Army Venereal Disease Prophylaxis talk in its terrifying entirety and how a certain Private Gabriel Jones was tasked with translating it. From the look of terror on Berger’s young face, well. Monty wasn’t the only one now considering a life of chastity.

“You made it horrifying,” Barnes cringed, and Monty had to agree. “Lovecraftian, even. Christ Almighty even my pa’s priest and my ma’s rabbi couldn’t’ve put the fear of God into me like that.”

“I must say I rather agree.”

“You seen syphilis, Sarge?” Morita raised a brow. “‘Cause that rash’ll rot your dick off. Face, too.”

“Yeah, yeah. Worst of three,” Barnes rolled his eyes. “If I wanted the kid to become a monk, I’da
read him catechisms. Jesus fuckin’ Henry Christ, Morita, you could make a religion outta that.”

Morita glowered. “It’s biology, not theology.”

Barnes ignored him. Leaned in conspiratorially, patted the scaffolding next to him and urged the boy to sit. “Tell ya what, Berger, after that, you could use a pick-me-up. Don’t got any cigarettes left—blame your pal Ackermann for that. But do yourself a favor, pal, an’ forget all that. Let Sarge tell you a story.”

“Oh, this should be good,” Jones grumbled.

“First things first: forget fucking. You’re gonna wanna go down on her.”

“Go…down?” Berger blinked in obvious obliviousness. “Down where?”

Barnes just raised his eyebrows. “Lady’s got two sets of lips, champ. Try givin’ em a kiss sometime, see how she likes it.”

The boy frowned.

Barnes rolled his eyes. “I need to draw you a diagram?”

Dawning realization occurred with equal parts confusion and disgust. “They…they like that?”

“Nothing they like more, forget your cock, kid. Use your tongue. Dames ain’t like us—got less space to work with. Can’t just jerk her off all sloppy like you would yourself. You gotta convince her, you gotta get her to let you down there. You pick a collarbone or an ankle and you put your mouth on her and you work your way from there. You worship her. That thing you do with your wrist when you’re strokin’ yourself off, makes you see white behind your eyes, makes your legs shake like crazy, makes you come? You wanna do that to her. You gotta get in there real close to see, to smell. To taste. You use the blade and tip of your tongue. Open her up. You do it right, you get her all spread out and relaxed and she’ll be so wet she’s drippin’, and you can taste her, lick her open, eat her ass, find that spot buried beneath her hair that drives her fuckin’ wild. You just listen to her, she’ll show ya, you move where she takes you, let her put her hands in your hair, scratch you, you suck her clit, you please her right she’ll scream like a cat in heat.

…and after that? You make her come with your mouth, won’t matter if you get in there half hard an’ finish in two seconds flat. She’ll still tell everyone you’re the best fuck she’s ever had.”

Silence. Monty swallowed with no little difficulty.

Berger blinked. Struggled for words. “That is…this is, this is not how you fuck. In Germany.”

Barnes shook his head. “Here’s the thing, kid. You doin’ this to impress the ladies, or impress your pals? ‘Cause all your pals are gonna wanna hear is how long your dick is, how long you can ride her, an’ we all know that’s gonna be a fuckin’ lie. All the ladies care about’s havin’ a good time… and havin’ it again,” he finished with flourish. “You read me?”

Berger nodded furiously, and with that absconded, no doubt to tend to the very uncomfortable tenting in his pants.

“So there is a God,” Morita whistled after an award moment's arousal and awe. “Sarge, you could make a religion out of that.”

“Says you,” Jones grumbled. “I have to go wash my mouth out with soap.”
Monty merely gaped, dumbfounded. “You, Sergeant, are a scoundrel.” And bloody hell, why wasn’t he given that advice back at Academy—?

“That’s me, pal,” Barnes sat up straighter and winked. “James B. Barnes: hellion and heartbreaker of Red Hook.”

“And father of how many bastard children?” Monty wondered.

“Aw, Monty, that’s the swellest part,” Barnes grinned. “You do it like that, ain’t no one gets pregnant. ‘Sides, I got three kid sisters. I’d want someone to treat ‘em right.”

“I say, man,” Monty flushed. He knew for a fact Jackie was hardly a blushing virgin but it was a door in his mind he still refused to cross.

“What, they’re supposed to be old maids forever?” Barnes snorted. “Nah. Rather have someone show ‘em a good time and take care of ‘em than make ‘em think they’re goin’ to hell just for getting dirty thoughts or touchin’ themselves. Dame’s got needs, too.”

Jones pinched the bridge of his nose. “Sarge, you’d sweet talk a girl on her way to Sunday School.”

“What can I say, Jonesey-boy, I got a silver tongue.”

“You could’ve just said a way with words.”

Barnes grinned. “That’s just the half of it.”

Jones put his knuckles in his eyes. “Oh, Good God Almighty.”

Monty, for his part, felt his face flame like the time he was fifteen and had caught John rather-more-than-snogging with the under housemaid. Good bloody God indeed. “You are without a doubt the worst Catholic I’ve ever heard of.” Monty voiced for himself and Jones alike.

“Aw, shucks, pal,” Barnes lowered his gaze in a display of bashfulness, traced a line on on the floor with his foot. “You know I’m Jewish.”

Morita whistled. "And here we were all wondering how a foul-mouthed cuss like you managed to get yourself a girl, Sarge. Guess that answers the question."

"Pal, I don't got nothin'. That crazy broad just puts up with me! 'Sides, Stevie's a person. Last I checked, can't own one of those."

"Maybe not this century," Jones said under his breath.

"I say, all that, and she still won’t marry you?"

Barnes looked over his shoulder. Ostensibly at Jones, but his mind was miles upon weary miles away. His gaze dropped, lips pressed together into a rift no smile could hope to heal. "Nah, pal, some laws ain't never gonna get changed."

“Well it's a damn shame, man,” Monty insisted. “When it's all done, when the war is over…well. You ought to fly her to Paris. They'll marry anyone, miscegenation be damned.”

"Yeah, Monty," Barnes said oddly. “You know what? When this is all over, maybe I just will.”

But now the cry of the oppressed and downtrodden has afflicted me, said the Captain. I
hear the voice of their suffering day and night, a great cry as though in the lands of Egypt, such as there never has before been, nor will be again. Even at night in the Boy’s embrace find I now no rest.

Then stand you forth, spoke the Woman, and lead you now the peoples through War to Victory.

I wish not for Victory, nor Mastery, nor mine Enemy’s Defeat answered Her the Captain. I desire for them only Justice and Peace, every good thing from every tree that is pleasant.

Yet they have eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, said She. And thus knowing have they chosen Evil.

—Jacob(I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Racism: Klieber questions Morita’s service
Discussions of sexual assault: forced prostitution is mentioned
Discussions of sexual content directed at a minor: US Army STI talk/ Bucky’s Bad Sex Stories as Sex-ed

“This is his last dated entry. Still moving on. After that comes one more entry, undated, a note made some time between 7 August and the day he was wounded, 19 September 1943, written carefully in a rounder hand-writing and with more distinct pressure of the pencil: I close my diary here, because I don’t see any point in recording the cruel things that sometimes happen. Writing about suffering, about the victims, should also mean asking questions about the killers, about guilt, about the reasons for cruelty and death—like the idea of recording angels who keep the books, writing down all the shameful deeds and suffering of mankind. That at least one should do—bear witness.”


“To us, it was the most exciting time of our lives. As a Hitler Youth, you liked action, you liked to show what a tough guy you are. You know, like fighting fires and dragging people out from under the rubble; wearing your steel helmet and having a cigarette in the corner of your mouth. We didn’t know any better. You see, when the Nazis came to power, I was five years old. I grew up in this, so it was a normal way of life to me. So it just seemed normal to you. Yes…but, to us kids, working with real military transmitters and using Morse code and being up there right with the big shots in the military made us feel good. It made us feel important. What about the gasings and the shootings? We tried not to believe it. We simply said, “No, that’s too brutal, too gruesome, too organized.”…So I started reading a lot and I started, well, may reading with biased mind, hoping that I would find reason to believe that it was not true. But the evidence piled up. This became more convincing by the day. So I also asked myself, “Could we have done anything
different? Where did the responsibility lie?” My conclusion was the responsibility lies in the fact that people didn’t do anything about it. They just stood by and closed their eyes and ears. And I think that is true. People just didn’t want to believe it. They didn’t.”


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kilroy_was_here

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Typhus

Typhus was combined with starvation and blockade of medical supplies to exterminate European Jews by the thousands within ghettos. An epidemic would be sealed off from the outside world, exacerbating starvation and unsanitary conditions. Outbreaks spreading to surrounding gentile neighborhoods were used as Nazi propaganda reinforcing Jewish ethnic inferiority. https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007822#


Morita lived during an exciting and terrifying time in medicine
1920-Whipple found ingesting several pounds of raw liver daily cured pernicious anemia
1926-Minot and Murphy isolated vitamin B12 from liver extract
1928-Fleming discovers Penicillin. An injectable, concentrated liver extract is made available
1934-Whipple, Minot, and Murphy shared the Nobel Peace Prize for Medicine
1935-Rose discovered threonine, the final essential amino acid that forms proteins in the human body; lobotomy introduced in Portugal as a means to cure mental illness, including homosexuality
1936-lobotomy popularized in the US
1949-the physicians who invented and popularized lobotomy are awarded the Nobel prize
1953-Rosamund Franklin’s research published, revealed the structure of DNA
1954-first antipsychotic discovered
1967-last outpatient “ice pick” lobotomy performed in the US
1973-homosexuality no longer classified as a mental illness in Diagnostics and Statistics Manual II
1977-National Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research formed to investigate allegations lobotomy was used to persecute women and minorities

WW2 sex ed:

HYDRA parasit-fictional plane in cattfa based off three real WW2 era German designs: Fieseler Fi 103R, Messerschmitt Me328 & Me334, all developed for suicide missions launched from larger aircraft.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Morita's plan backfires. Bucky makes enemies but gains an unlikely ally.

Chapter Notes

Warning for racism, slurs, homophobia, and mentions of suicide.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Why then do you hate your brother in your heart, spoke them the Boy. Are we all of us not servants of the same King Across the Sea? Or would you become instead even as the servants of the Enemy? Far be it from you to punish him! For it is written, you shall bear no evil will against any people, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Such is the Song.”

Yet still they hated him in their hearts, and sought now to put the Physician and the Boy both cruelly to death.

(Is it so surprising, Little Ones? Finding friends among those we name our Enemies, and fiercest foe among those we ought name as fastest friends? For there are those among even us who would refuse to heed the Song, no matter which kings or gods they suppose to serve.)

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“…But Jacob (I Have Loved) contrasts sharply with the USO comics in more than just the treatment
of queer-coded content. The artists of the 1940’s operated under the strict supervision of both the Comics Code Authority and USO censors, and for that reason the tales of “Captain America” and later “Captain America and His Howling Commandos” were simple, moralistic, and bore little resemblance to the reality or complexity of war. In an America where segregation, miscegenation laws, and lynchings were still widespread and Americans of Japanese, German, and Italian ancestry were forced into mass relocation or held in captivity as enemy aliens, civil rights issues could not be incorporated into the comic’s narrative without openly criticizing the Roosevelt administration during a time of war. Falsworth, writing in peacetime under the guise of thinly veiled fiction, had no such reservations.

After a failed 50’s revival, “Captain America and His Howling Commandos” would paradoxically become comic staples for both the Civil Rights movement and military propaganda during the Vietnam War. Yet despite their inclusion in the narrative, the fictional character of Jim “The San Fransisco Kid” Morita is presented without comment on EO 9066, and Gabriel “Gabe” Jones’ presence among the Commandos is accepted without ever asking or answering the question of “BOTH HITLER—AND JIM CROW” (Beaumont to Detroit, 1943). But this depiction of an Asian-American and an African-American character and their unchallenged acceptance by the Commandos’ fictional counterparts were considered progressive in their time despite minimal storylines, poor print coloring, and heavy reliance on racial stereotypes.”


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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

“Morita?”

Monty startled. Slammed his head against the paneling with a curse. He glared up at the man, Barnes having appeared out of bloody nowhere.

Barnes grinned. Touched his tongue to his incisors. “You keep glarin’ like that, Monty, you’re gonna end up lookin’ like Morita here.”

“They have miscegenation laws in England?” Morita called from the submersible’s interior.

“No,” Monty frowned, rubbing his head and rising stiffly to his feet.

“Then don’t worry about it. You go slant-eyed you’ll still have all the girls you want—assuming they want to deal with the caterpillar growing out of your face.”

“I say, man,” Monty bristled in jest. “I daresay it makes me look rather dashing.”

“You’re goin’ on what, a couple weeks now?” Barnes scratched at his own unkempt scruff, shaking with silent laughter. “Any second that thing’s gonna become a butterfly. I dunno, Morita. Man may have a point. Do your neckin’ upside down?” Barnes winked at Monty. “Might find yourself a girl or two who likes it rough.”

Morita appeared at the window with a groan. “I have the terrible feeling we’re about to hear another story about your sweetheart, Sarge.”
“Oh, like hell I’m letting Monty overhear it,” Barnes scoffed. “Handsome fella like that? I don’t need the competition.” He put a hand beneath his nose, wagging the fingers in imitation of Monty’s—admittedly—unwashed, unwaxed, and untrimmed mustache.

“You’re both bloody hilarious.” Barnes could keep his juvenile humour and his coloured woman, although he couldn’t quite hide his own interest in hearing the man’s story of beard burn. He wondered, fleetingly, what it would look like against the Rogers woman’s thighs…

“Pal, I am single-handedly fighting off the Nazis with my good looks an’ charm,” Barnes drawled, and dropped the act. “How’s your airsusbplanemarine comin’?”

“Well, we’ve discovered yet another work of artistry by one of your countrymen,” Monty gestured to the de-icing lines to reveal the crude cartoon.

Barnes shook his head. “We oughta ask Jonesey-boy what ‘Killroy was here’ is in German. Just to fuck with ‘em.”

Morita snorted. “I’m sure you climbed all the way up here to talk cartoons with us, Sarge.”

“It was either that, or regale us with tales of his sexual exploits,” Monty offered.

“Pal, my girl’s an artist! Still won’t shut the fuck up about Snow White or Pinocchio. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and Moses, I gotta hear another spiel on how she’s gonna make pictures just like Disney some day, I might just die.”

“Well, as your physician I oan’t recommend it,” Morita said drily.

“Sure thing, doc,” Barnes winked, then sobered. “Need to pick your brain a minute.” Morita wiped the grease and oil from his blackened hands against his trousers. “Yeah, Sarge?”

“Need a little help.”

“What, you got another Nazi needs the VD talk?”

“Not like that, pal! I make Jones translate that again and you can forget Lombardo, Jonesey-boy’ll kill us both.”

“You, maybe,” Morita countered. "Jones and I have an understanding."

Barnes whistled.

“Fuck you,” Morita snorted.

Barnes leaned against the scaffolding. “The both of us, huh?”

Morita shrugged. “If you think you could keep up.”

“Jesus fucking Christ, Morita!” Barnes choked, then broke into a fit of coughing.

Monty and Morita shared an anxious look. “You’re only this chipper when things are going to shit, Sarge. What gives?” Monty thought back to that long walk to the showers, those moments of panic as Barnes’ fear threatened to betray him. And yes, Monty knew intimately, the man indeed whistled loudest in the dark.

Barnes lowered his eyes and bit his lips, looked for all the world like a guilty child, like Jackie, caught in the act, wheedling her way out of the worst of the punishment. ”We’re laggin’. We’re still
behind. Dunno if you boys have it in you to keep goin’ today. And B shift…” his face fell, the cracks in the mask growing deeper. “Ain’t fair, not to them. But I can’t risk you lot—‘here he glanced meaningfully at Monty. “—either. Whatcha think?”

Barnes was the glue that kept this precarious coalition together, the great bloody idiot. “I say, man,” Monty voiced. “We can’t very bloody well risk you, either. It all depends on you.”

“Pal, I’m just a kid from Brooklyn,” Barnes insisted. “In over his head and shittin’ his pants, same as you.”

“And you’re asking me to make the decision?” But it was more than that, and they each of them knew it. When the exhausted and angry B shift fell out—and fall out they would—it would be Morita’s name put to it. It was a lie, of course. To deflect the anger. Let Barnes remain their beloved leader. It was a hell of a thing to ask a man, let alone a man as already suspect—in their minds, as he had been in Monty’s own—as Pvt. James Morita.

“You’re the medic,” Barnes insisted. “I’m just askin’ for a consult.” It was an out. Not to make the man feel a coward or a fool, no. Monty remembered all too well the distant barking of dogs, Barnes’ hand on his shoulder. It was Barnes, and it was kindness.

“Shit, Sarge.” They were all three of them silent for a long, long time.

“Yeah, I know,” Barnes sighed, scratching behind his head in unease. “Out of the frying pan and into the fire, here, pal. Could use all the help I can get. Got the feelin’s this is gonna get ugly.”

“Can’t be any worse than your ugly mug.”

Barnes straightened his shoulders, put on that charming smirk as if it were as simple as donning a dinner jacket. “Now that’s just antisemitic.”

“Your nose is fine, Sarge. It’s the rest of that mess you call a face I’m talking about. Alright. I’ll call it. Just—just be careful, Sarge. Take it easy. Okay?”

“You know me,” Barnes snorted with a smart salute, and turned on his heel.

“Yeah, fucker,” Monty heard the man mutter. “That’s what worries me.”

A few minutes later, they were interrupted with the crassest, crudest song Monty had ever heard, and that included many a drunken sea shanty on many a Bullingdon blind. And yes, to his own surprise Monty found himself agreeing with Dugan for once: for having such a lovely baritone when he sang in Hebrew, Barnes not so much wouldn’t carry a tune in a bucket as upended the bloody thing over their heads.

On the last stair Morita stopped cold. Monty bloody well near stumbled over the man before he caught sight of the spectacle before them. Someone had set up a table and chairs, complete with a pressed white tablecloth, fully set with silver dishware and two flickering candles. The whole scene was lifted as though from the street cafes of London before the Blitz. Monty blinked, willed his weakened, work-addled brain to reveal the truth, but the absurd scene remained.

“Well, shit.”


“Bet you a million fucks that’s not their cold combat rations.”
But it wasn’t just the supper, Lohmer himself lay in wait for them. The smell of seared steak, sausage, and warm bread sent them salivating, and despite his own earlier supper and the contraband in his pockets, Monty felt his own stomach pang in protest. Dozens of hungry eyes peered between cell bars, intent as a dog by his master’s table. Even for Barnes’ silver tongue, there would be no talking their way out of this one. But Barnes merely took the scene in stride, swaggering towards Lohmer as confident as a tomcat. He tipped an imaginary hat. “Well howdy there, partner.”

“You dinner, Herr Barnes.”

“That’s Sheriff Barnes to you,” Barnes pulled the crude star pinned to his chest. “You bring enough for this whole two-horse town, or—“

“You dinner, Herr Barnes.”

Barnes tilted his head. Nodded towards the sumptuous spread. “That’s got pork in it, right?”

“You dinner, Herr Barnes.”

“Well, jokes on you, pal.” Barnes bounced easily from his heels to the balls of his feet and back again, arms swinging carelessly. “I ain’t kept kosher a goddamn day in my life. Well, Yom Kippur,” he winked. “’S easier when you’re fasting.”

He was baiting the man. But Lohmer it seemed had gained a modicum of patience since their last encounter. “Your dinner, Herr Barnes.”

Barnes’s posture changed in an instant. “Aw, shucks, pal,” he fanned his lashes, ducked his chin and bit his uncurling lower lip. “You wanna step out with me, you gotta ask my pa.”

There was a second of silence. Uneasy, unbelieving laughter. Lohmer went rigid, hand on his sidearm. Monty recoiled at the horror of it.

“Candles are a nice touch,” Barnes sprawled easily into his seat, the very picture of comfort. “We goin’ dancing after?”

On the table, Lohmer’s hand twitched with the restraint it took not to strike him. “You do not understand, Herr Barnes. These men will not enter the cells, and these men will not leave until you have eaten. There will be no rest. No work. No quota,” he poured Barnes a glass of wine that splashed ominously in the silence. “Every time you speak, Herr Barnes, I will add more.” Damned if you do, damned if you don’t. It was an elegant, elaborate trap. Monty thought bitterly of all-but-forgotten childhood tales of the fae, of Persephone and those six pomegranate seeds politeness bid her accept. But Barnes’ choice was a rather different sort of Hell. The food was heavy, hot, and savory. The wine a deep, rich red. If he ate, he would be sick, perhaps even violently so. And in his already weakened state? If he ate, he would do so in front of the eyes of hundreds of his men forced to go without. If he ate, they all of them would hate him. Yet if he didn’t—? Well. Lohmer had devised a way to punish them all without lifting a finger to Barnes or his men.

Monty saw the moment Barnes made his choice.
He ignored his glass and reached across the table for the bottle, raising it in silent salute. He took a slow, sensuous sip, head thrown back, the long line of his exposed throat pulsing rhythmically with every swallow. Then, deliberately, never breaking eye contact, Barnes began to eat the proffered food, sucking obscenely at his tableware, moaning in pleasure, and licking his lips with every bite. It made for a rather rude spectacle, quite queer, but it brought a crass laugh from them all at Lohmer’s expense. Sergeant James Barnes of the 107th Infantry, US Army, it would seem, needn’t speak to find the last word of any argument.

(Yet later, much later, when the truth had been made known at the last, Monty would wonder which it was that made the man more reckless: taunting a man with the power to torment him, or exposing his soul to ridicule for the sake of his men’s morale.)

B Shift did not go lightly. The poor buggers had been on the floor for nearly a day, and now were made to return with only hours of sleep. Despite Barnes’ display, there was no little grumbling. But Barnes only said, “Doctor’s orders,” and left it at that. Their hatred shifted—predictably—from Barnes to Morita, but the man stood firm, refused to lower his eyes or look away. Monty, for his part, bristled at those foolish enough to show their intent.

But A Shift or B Shift, American, British, or French, they were now all of them Barnes’ men. His word would be obeyed. With soft utterances of encouragement and in some cases even Barnes’ hands pulling them up, he got them slowly to their feet. Every man. Every cell. Save one.

Barnes bit his lip. Strode forward with confidence. “C’mon, Manelli,” Barnes said, offering a hand up. “On your feet.”

“No,” this Manelli insisted. “I’m done.”

Barnes sat in a squat in front of him. “You don’t work, you’ll get yourself killed.”

Manelli let out a bitter laugh. “So I die.”

“This ain’t some picture, you asshole, it’s your fuckin’ life.”

“Yeah if this is the rest of my life, I’d rather have it done with,” someone said.

“We were dead the moment we walked into this camp!” another accused. “The moment you surrendered!”

Barnes held up his hands. “Fellas…”

“We should’ve kept fighting,” another agreed. “We could’ve gone quickly. Now we’re all gonna freeze or starve or get taken by Zola.”

“Or worse.” Manelli grunted.

Worse? Monty shuddered at the memory of Brennan’s screams. What the bloody hell could be worse?

“Not gonna let that happen, pal.” Barnes promised, a hand on their shoulders. “Not today.”

“I’m not working for them, do you hear?” Manelli brushed his hand away. “Not another minute.”

Barnes bit his lips. “C’mon, Manelli. Get your boys together. Get up.”

But Manelli held his chin high with a fierce, bitter pride. “No.”
Something in Barnes’ voice and face changed, a darkness Monty had not hoped to see before, not even directed at their enemies. “Get off your ass, you stupid fucking lazy wop.” And then it all happened at once: Manelli let out a cry. Rushed him, head into his belly, sent them sprawling across the cell. There were shouts. Jeers. An ugly rift opened along the lines of race. Monty struggled forward but the throng held him fast. Manelli fought like a wildcat, and their spectators sent out vicious kicks, but Barnes absorbed the blows, let blind anger run its course. It was horrible and bloody but over in seconds: Barnes got the man in an armlock, cursing and crying.

“There you go,” Barnes soothed. “There you go. Now you’re angry. Angry’s good. Angry’ll keep you alive. I let you go, you gonna take a swing at me again?”

“No,” Manelli sobbed.

“Now call ‘em off.” Manelli did.

“Alright,” Barnes picked them both up. “Alright. Next time you get that tired, you get fuckin’ angry and you stay that way.”

It had been a ruse, of course, Monty now knew. But a cruel one. B shift still bristled about them, not as willing as Manelli neither to forgive nor forget.

“I was okay with getting shot at,” Manelli said, wiping blood and tears from his face vehemently. “Getting killed, even. It’s what I signed up for. But they never said it would be like this.”

“I’m just so tired, Sarge,” the first dissenter said helplessly. “I’m so hungry. And I’m so scared.”

“So’m I, pal. So’m I. But I’m not letting Zola get you,” Barnes promised. “Not a one of you. Not today.”

“Hollow words, for a hollow man,” someone accused.

...Lombardo.

“You think we haven’t lost already?”

Barnes swallowed. Didn’t meet Lombardo’s eyes. Barnes knew his men by face and name. Would know better than any here when a man among them had gone missing. For his part Monty clenched his fists. Dropped his weight onto the balls of his feet, ready and willing to fight should it come to that. Morita stood beside him like a hound on alert, ready to spring. There would be no next move against Barnes.

“You were gone,” someone said, and that hopelessness was worse than any anger. “You said you’d protect us and you were sleeping when they took Cristoforetti.”

“Poor bastard,” Manelli mumbled.

Barnes bit his lips.

“That’s sixteen of ours, now,” Lombardo stepped into his space, standing chest to chest. “Seventeen, counting your Jap.”

Barnes held out his hands in appeasement. “Fellas, we’re all on the same side, here.”

“Which side is that, then?” Lombardo challenged. “The Nazis? You seem happy enough to work for them.”
“It’s work for ‘em, or get killed. Whatcha wanna do, Joe Dimaggio? It’s the ninth inning, bases are empty, we’re down an’ out an’ we’re losing bad but we’re still in the goddamned game. We give up, we start fightin’ among ourselves, an’ it’s strike out. I’m just tryin’ to do what’s got to be done. For everybody.”

“You don’t care a lick about us,” Lombardo spat. "Just your precious Irishmen.”

Barnes turned to Gianni with a placating look. “Help me out, here, pal.”

“I wish I could, Sarge,” Gianni said. “I really do. But it seems to me Lombardo’s right: you’re more interested in saving your own skin than helping any of us.”

With that they left, an uneasy, muttering mass in the shadows. Barnes watched them, spine straight, face inscrutable.

“He’s right. Gianni.” Manelli said, comb in his hair and a cracked pocket mirror in his hand. “You do whatever they want.”

“Don’t think I shoulda eaten the food, huh,” Barnes said, one hand on his belly. “Yeah, me neither.”

“I didn’t.”

Sudden understanding creased Barnes’ face. ‘Lohmer pickin’ on you?’

Manelli nodded.

“He recognize you?”

Another nod.

Who the bloody hell? Monty wondered with no little bewilderment.

“He want somethin?” Barnes asked darkly. “Money? Your mouth—?”

“What? God, no, Sarge!” Manelli went scarlet. “Nothing like that!”

“Then what’s go you so bothered, soldier? Because the Dino Manelli I know walked fifteen miles in the snow at gun point and froze his ass off on a cattle car for three days, and he was singing and jokeing the whole damn time.”

“I was bluffing, Sarge. Same as you.”

“I beg your pardon,” Monty’s mind caught up with the conversation. “Dino Manelli? As in the Dino Manelli?”

Barnes nodded to the man with a jocular grin. “You’re lookin’ at him, pal.”

“Oh, good bloody God.” And yes, underneath the gaunt cheekbones and weeks of filth on his uniform, even without that smooth, practiced Trans-Atlantic accent there was still the ghost of the sauv picture star. Monty flushed. Lt. James Montgomery Falsworth was of the Brighton Falsworths. He was no stranger to celebrity, nor royalty—his own sister called Her Royal Highess the Princess Elizabeth by her bloody christian name—no, it had more to do with Jackie’s rather vocal appreciation, something along the lines of “I’d drink him like a tall glass of grappa.”

“Look at you, Limey. All star-struck,” Barnes shook him affectionately. ”You wanna autograph or somethin’?”
Monty sputtered. Managed an undignified, “Sergeant, do shut up.”

“C’mon, Manelli,” Barnes insisted. “Spill it.”

“At first he was just Lohmer, yanno? Now he’s trying to give me cigarettes,” Manelli explained. “Chocolate. Blankets. Girls, even. Warm place to sleep.”

“Hell, that don’t sound so bad.”

“He wants me to go on film,” Manelli continued bitterly. “Say I support Mussolini, the repubblica sociale italiana.”

Barnes crossed his arms, leaned back against the cells with a whistle and an appraising eye Monty knew could bode nothing well. “And you wouldn’t even take the cigarettes, huh.”

“I’m not going down that road. I know how it ends. I might’ve been born in Italy, but America’s my home. I’m not a traitor.”

“No, but you’re not a coward, either.”

“Yeah,” Manelli snorted. “Because I wasn’t just sitting on my ass blubbering like a coward. They're not putting that on the enlistment posters.”

“Nah, pal. You look to me like a man who’s willing to make the hard choice to serve his country.”

“What are you saying, Sarge?”

And there it was. The trap was sprung. Barnes would talk the poor sod into his death as surely as he had done Monty, all charm and understanding, and the worst part was Monty couldn't bring himself to hate the man, not even an inkling. “I’m saying Lohmer’s making you an offer you can’t refuse. My advice? Don’t.”

Manelli’s brow furrowed in surprise. “What? You think I should do it? You, you want me to be a spy?”

“Fuck yes.” Barnes growled. “Hell, I’ll order you. You fall in line, you goose-step like the rest of ‘em, you’ll find yourself hearing and seeing things that none of the rest of us could, ‘cause red-blooded American patriots as we all are, we ain’t Hollywood’s darling Dino Manelli.”

“That’s what you’ve been doing this whole time, isn’t it.” Manelli laughed. “Goddamn, you’re Jewish! I knew you weren’t in Kleiber’s pocket.”

“Don’t got a clue what you mean, pal,” Barnes said. “Any favors I get’s down to my good looks and charm.” As had been so aptly demonstrated, no doubt.

Manelli frowned. “Some of the boys don’t see it that way.”

“Yeah, well, between you ’n me, some of the boys got shit for brains.”

“He’ll kill you, you know? Lombardo. And if I turn, he’ll kill me, too.”

“I got eyes on Lombardo,” Barnes brushed him off. “That sumbitch ain’t nothing I can’t handle.”

“Oh, good,” Morita said drily. “For a while there I was worried.”

“You gotta have some clout, though. Being a big Hollywood star an’ all?”
“Sure, some. But I’m an actor. You give me a speech and I’ll act the hell out of it, give me a character and I can ab lib. But ask me to write one? I’m sunk. I mean, obviously I’m playing the part of the undercover hero, but what’s my “real” motivation? How do I, you know, explain my sudden change of heart to the boys? This audience isn’t just going to boo me if they don’t appreciate the performance. Got more on the line than a couple of tomato stains, here.”

Barnes shook his head. “Ain’t you in stand-up?”

“Yeah,” Manelli countered. “Comedy.”

“Then lemme introduce you to the most dour bastard you’ve ever met.” Barnes grinned and shoved him forward. “Manelli, Monty. Monty? Manelli.” Neither Barnes’ introductions nor manners had improved in their eloquence. Monty voiced as much. “You should meet Jonesey-boy an’ Morita here, too.”

“Everybody here knows your moulie and your Jap,” Manelli affirmed.

“On account of how we’re colored?” Morita asked. Jones’ face had gone stony.

“Well there’s that, and on account of every other college boy we’ve ever met went to officer’s school.”

Morita shrugged. Jones’ jaw softened. He nodded appreciatively.

“You girls done fighting, yet?” Barnes asked. “It’ll be dangerous—Dino Manelli vs. Il Duce. Whaddya say, pal? You up for it?”

“You’re-a offering-a me a leading-a role-a and it’s-a not-a even-a Tony Camote?” Manelli forced a grin, spoke with a swagger and self-deprecating caricature that reminded Monty so very painfully of Barnes. “Danger be damned. I’ll fucking take it. You’d do it, wouldn’t you?” He turned to Morita in earnestness.

“Hell, no,” Morita said seriously. “You think I know any fucking Italian?” Manelli threw his head back and laughed. “Well, that and I’m a yellow-bellied bastard.”

“Between the two of us?” Manelli held out his arm next to Morita’s, comparing their ochre undertones. “I don’t know.”

“Sure, Casanova. I’ve dated a dozen girls all darker than you.”

“The two of you are seriously going to argue over second place?” Jones wondered. Dugan grunted. Monty, for his part, stood in uncomfortable silence.

“Tell you what, you give Hitler and Mussolini the old razzle dazzle for me, you hear? But you’ve gotta make it convincing. Let Lohmer work you over for a few days, make him think he’s gotcha right where he wants ya. But you’re a nice girl,” Barnes gave a lecherous grin and a wink. “You don’t put out on the first date. He’s gotta work for it.”

“Don’t be disgusting, Sarge.” Manelli grimaced. Monty whinged in sympathy: Barnes’ most recent performance fellating the tableware didn’t much help the matter.

Barnes shrugged. “Too late.”

“…so the American takes a puff,” Manelli continued, “then throws the rest of the cigar out the
window. The passengers ask him why, he says, ‘we have so many cigars in America.’ So the Scotsman opens his whiskey, takes a swig, and he throws the rest of the bottle out the window. The passengers ask him why, he says, ‘we have so much whiskey in Scotland.’ Then the Italian throws the terrone out the window, and the passengers ask him why, and the Italian says, “we have so very, very many terroni in Italy.”

Monty nodded in attentive silence. It was only polite.

“Terroni—tyranny?” Barnes grimaced, curled over around his belly. “That a joke about Hitler an’ Mussolini?”

“Oh, thank bloody God,” Monty breathed in relief. He wasn’t the only one.


“Terra. It’s from the Latin.” Jones explained. He’d taken Latin, of course, both in grammar school and University, but there had been distractions: fast cars and even faster women, Bullingdon dinners and athletics of Oxford.


“Thought you were a Jap, not a Spic.” Dugan grunted.

Morita pulled the chain on his dog tags sardonically. “I’m from Fresno, ace.”

“Ain’t heard that one,” Barnes said, one hand on Dugan’s glowering face, pushing the man back from Morita. The other arm was pressed tight against his own stomach. “Just heard guinea.”

“That’s the white word for us, yeah. But another Italian wants to insult me? He’ll call me terrone. Get the feeling Lohmer didn't think that one through.”

“Yeah, well, to no one’s great surprise,” Barnes grimaced. “An’ who’s Tyrone?”


“Italian has different declensions, Sarge. Like Latin,” Jones explained.

"Ah," Monty said.

"It's not that easy, fellas!" Manelli warned. "-a becomes -e, -o becomes -i, -a becomes -i, too, -e becomes -o, some words don't change, and don't even get me started on -co, -go, -ga, and -ca."

“That’s nuts,” Dugan argued. "Can't you just slap an 's' at the end?"

"Pal that ain't nothin'," Barnes said. "Try Yiddish."

Jones snorted. "Try Irish, Dum Dum."

“I’ll say,” Manelli continued, ignoring the two of them. “No one in my village even pronounced them. It’s a regional thing. Think I had more shock getting to Ellis Island hearing people speak ‘proper’ Italian and not having a damn clue what they were saying than I did having to start all over again learning English.”

“Ma spoke English and Yiddish at home growing up. My pa some Galege—you know, just lullabies and superstitions and shit. Guess I don’t remember ever really ‘learning’ either of ‘em,” Barnes
frowned. "They just were."

"Well, English has its own share of doozies, Sarge," Manelli whistled. "Mouse, mice, house, houses, goose, geese, moose, moose, ox, oxen, box, boxes…"

"Then take the collective nouns in English, Sarge," Jones said sagely. "Completely unique. For instance, what do you call a group of Jews?"

"An argument." Barnes finished, unimpressed. "You think I ain’t heard that one before? Nah, pal. I’ll do you one better. So this Jewish kid writes home to his ma: ‘here in America I met an Orthodox rabbi, an atheist, a communist, and a factory owner.’ His ma writes back, ‘Well, kiddo, we're a diverse people.’ He says, ‘no, ma: they’re all the same Jew!’"

Jones and Manelli got a hearty laugh out of that one. “Got a feeling if I got up and did that act in the Big Apple, Sarge, I’d never work in that town again.”

"Yeah, well, it’s the one advantage of being Jewish," Barnes shrugged. "When I’m antisemitic, it’s actually funny—I’m guessing you’ve got a coupla Italian jokes up your sleeve you save for that particular audience.”

Manelli grinned. “So this guy comes into the garage, tells the mechanic he needs a new set of tires, because his are Italian. So this meathead looks at the tires and says ‘they’re flat—why do you think they’re Italian?’ ‘Easy,’ he says. ‘Dego wop, wop, wop…”"

The bloody Americans all had a startled laugh. “I beg your pardon?” Monty voiced in polite bewilderment.

"Slurs, Monty," Barnes provided.

“What could they possibly mean?”

“Means you’re Eye-talian,” Manelli yawned, stressing the unusual pronunciation.

“How?” Monty persisted.

“Without papers,” Manelli said.

“Come again?”

“Wop. Stands for without papers. Or so they say,” he shrugged. “Which makes no damn sense. My famiglia’s got plenty of papers. We got-a the passaportes, gli biglietti, le contraffazioni, all-a for-a a good-a price-a.” His gesticulations like his accent grew wilder and wilder.

"Yeah, ok, Scarface," Morita snorted. "We get it."

"And Dego?” Monty pressed.

“Means you’re Eye-talian,” Manelli shrugged. “And not in a good way.”

“It makes no bloody sense.”

“’S like kike, Limey,” Barnes interrupted before His Majesty’s soldier Lt. James Montgomery Falsworth could make an even greater arse of himself. “No one knows what the fuck it really means or where it comes from, but it damn well means you’re Jewish. And not in the ‘HaShem’s chosen people’ sort of way,”
“Kikulah,” Jones voiced.

“Gezunheit.” Barnes said with his usual cheek.

“Or so it goes,” Jones offered.

“You think I don’t fuckin’ know that?” Barnes groused, but his eyes were bright and playful. “My ma’s family’s been running West so goddamn long we ended up on the East Coast.” Monty nodded politely, rather tired of having the humor—or rather possibly lack thereof—explained to him. And perhaps it was that discomfiture Barnes picked up on. “C’mon, Monty,” Barnes nudged his shin with one booted foot. “Your turn.”

“I say, man,” Monty frowned. “If you knew the first thing about the English you’d know we never joke about anything whatsoever.” But the truth of the thing? Monty came from old English breeding. A titled family. This humor, this derogatory, self-deprecating humor, well. They were all of them rather whistling in the dark. Monty had quips and barbs about his own countrymen, dating back to his academy days and even earlier, certainly; but they were for Scotsmen and Irishmen. The Welsh. Not a one of applied to himself. It was a strange, invisible line he dared not now cross for fear of breaking their tentative truce. And if it meant treading lightly with a scout’s measured steps and gathering intelligence, so be it.

Barnes snorted.

“Well, how’d you like that,” Manelli piped. “Look at us, the American dream, that’s what this is. Colored kid, Japanese kid, Jewish kid, Irish kid, Sicilian kid? All giving ’em hell.”

“Well, Manelli, you’re a real picture star. Jonesey’s great-great grandpa was a slave now he’s a college boy. Morita’s parents are both doctors, and he’s well on his way. An’ Me? My pa’s first generation and an accountant, and I’m just a fuckin’ dock-worker,” Barnes winced. “Besides, look at me now, behind bars. Think I’m more the American nightmare.”

“If it weren’t for her—your Rogers girl,” Monty clarified. “What would you do, man?” Education or not, Sergeant Barnes was a veritable polymath of persuasion.

Barnes scratched his head. “Tell you the truth? Can’t imagine life without her. I dunno—if Stevie were healthy? Shit, I’d’ve finished school. Gone on to be a scientist? Like Stark. Or science fiction writer. Love to be in Asimov someday.” He grinned. “Hell, boxing maybe. I’d be the Jewish Joe Louis.”

Monty's lip twitched. “A professional pugilist?”

“You’re looking at the three time YMCA welter-weight champion of Kings County, pal,” Barnes said with a jaunty tilt to his chin. “Got my bell rung a coupla times, but I still walked away with that belt.”

“You’ll get there, Sarge,” Manelli affirmed. “We all went through a rough bit with the depression.” Monty had been young and naive on October 29th, 1929, convinced the Falsworth name and money and way of life which stood for centuries would survive the crash. They'd lost some properties, certainly; but at the end of the Depression his father and then his brother still sat in the House of Lords.

Barnes grinned. “Lemme guess, Manelli: the sun’ll come out tomorrow? Or tomorrow is another day?”
“Got the funny feeling they wouldn’t let me audition for Orphan Annie or Scarlett O’Hara, Sarge.”

“Hair like that?” Barnes hectored him. “You’re a corset and a fuckin’ ball gown from being Vivian Leigh.”

“Yeah? Next time I see her, I’ll let her know.” Manelli returned. “Besides. I prefer to think of myself as Charles Atlas.”

“Well, when it comes down to it, man, don’t we all?” Monty wondered.

“I got one,” Dugan said. “How many Frenchmen does it take to defend Paris?”

“Dugan—“ Barnes cut across him harshly.

“Dunno. No of ‘em’s ever tried!”

“Combien d'Américains faut-il pour gagner l'indépendance? Au moins un français.” Dernier sniffed. “Pas de quoi.”

“Dum Dum, that man could blow this whole place to kingdom come,” Barnes sighed. “You sure you want to go pissing him off?”

“I wanna see what the little frog can do,” Dugan argued. “Everyone else here’s in uniform. Why not him?”

“Hydrogène, oxygène, dioxyde de carbone ...”

“What’s he saying?”

“He’s naming all the chemicals he could use to kill you,” Morita snorted. “And those are just the ones in the air.”

"...sulfure d'hydrogène--"

“Where the hell are you going to get hydrogen sulfide from?” Morita interrupted.

“I’ll push him into he ditch under the latrines. He either drowns or he suffocates,” Jones translated.

Barnes jerked away from where he had been nodding against the Frenchman. “Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and Moses, Dernier! No one go to the shitter with Frenchie. Sergeant’s orders.”

“Our luck he’s bottling the piss and he’ll poison us all in our sleep.” Dugan grumped.

“Non,” Dernier said through Jones again with a feral smile. “When I kill you, you will be awake.”

Dugan gave the man a wide berth after that.

Barnes slept like a dead thing.

Monty had been left with the distinct impression they had been meant to devise a strategy of sorts, but Manelli and Jones instead talked Joltin’ Joe, Jumpin’ Joe Louis (as any self-respecting pugilist of any creed or colour would know) and Louis Armstrong, all while debating the merits of every nightclub in Manhattan by means of its music, ambiance, menu, and clientele. Morita looked on indulgently, at least understanding some of the references. For his part, Monty sat in baffled—if unruffled—silence. He watched over Barnes dutifully, and did not much care for the rattling in his
breath.

“I wouldn’t say I know Ella Fitzgerald,” Jones offered humbly. “But I’ve certainly played a set with her.”

“You’re shitting me, Jones. The Queen of Jazz? Really?” Morita whistled.


“Not likely. I’ve spent the last few years down at Howard.”

“I’ve spent the last few years in LA. But I’m certain I’ve seen you in Harlem.”

“I’m certain I saw you in the Dodgers Story,” Jones frowned.

“Oh, no—well, yes. I was. But I was billed different back then. Your parents give you a name like ‘Benito’, then some fascist goes and declares war on your country…” Manelli grimaced. “It’s bad enough being Italian-American, let alone having the same name as Il Duce.”

“How do you get ‘Dino’ out of Benito?”


Monty frowned. “Yet the ‘D’?”

Manelli flapped his hands like an orchestra conductor. “It’s-a pronounced-a a-differently in-a Italiano*.”

Jones shook his head. “You might be an award-winning actor, Manelli, but you couldn’t play an Italian to save your life.”

“Yeah, well, I know a couple of fascists who’d probably agree.”

“I say, man,” Monty remonstrated. “You’re meant to encourage him, not bloody scare him off.” But Italian, Irish, Coloured man, and Jap be damned, the four of them were Yanks, at least. They had a laugh at his expense. Monty, for one, would never understand their humour.

“I don’t understand it, Jones,” Manelli insisted. “You play as good as all that, shared a stage with Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong—why they hell’d you want to throw it all away?”

“I would hardly refer to a university education as ‘throwing it away’,;“ Monty protested.

“People like Louis Armstrong. Billie Holliday,” Jones explained, voice low and measured. “Hattie McDaniel. But they don’t respect them. End of the day, they’re still black. They’ll always be black. Any white folk ever call me just some dumb, swanky negro, try to put me in my place on account of my color, my education… I can pull out my diploma, prove him otherwise. My great-great grandfather lived nearly his whole life as a slave. My great grandfather was born one. My gramps and my pops both grew up under Jim Crow down in Georgia. I’ve been given the opportunity, so I owe it to them to take it.”

“Well, when this is all over, Jones, you ought to come to Hollywood. Forget the stage—the screen’s where it’s at.”

“Plus you’d be on the right coast,” Morita agreed.
“I doubt they’d ask me to play any of the Dodgers,” Jones told them drily.

“Wish it had been the Yankees,” Manelli sighed. “I’d love to play DiMaggio on screen someday, yanno?”

“Don’t let Sarge hear you saying that,” Jones warned him seriously. “Yankees or Giants over the Dodgers? He’d courts-marshal you for sure.”

“That man loves the Dodgers,” Manelli groaned. “Only thing he talks about more is that Rogers girl. You’d think she was Marlene Dietrich! And pal—I’ve met Marlene Dietrich!”

“Rogers, Dodgers. Maybe it’s guilt by association,” Jones opined. “Could be our Sarge has a rhyming fetish.”

“I hear any more of those and I might just die.” Morita groaned.

“I dare say our sergeant doesn’t know the difference between cunnilingus and linguistics.” Monty supplied.

“Same root word,” Jones shrugged.

“…and you’ve no idea how many dames he’s got with that line,” Morita heckled. “A real panty-dropper, that one.”

“It’s better than your VD talk,” Jones said, stretching. “No, Morita, if I’m looking to impress a lady, I usually lead with saying I’ve got an embouchure to die for, what with all the trumpet playing. Ask her If I can get her drink, play her a song, and nine times out of ten she’ll ask for a private performance.”

“Oh, good God, man.”

“Can’t argue with that. I’m all for going down on a girl,” Morita nodded. “One, no chance of pregnancy, and two? She might just reciprocate.”

“Sure you are, Hirohito,” Dugan leered. “When it’s your mouth, she can’t tell the difference if you’re Yellow or Black.”

If there had been any doubt as to where the line lay, it had been rather unfortunately discovered. “You do a lot of thinking about dicks for a guy who claims not to be queer,” Morita retorted.

“Methinks the lady doth protest too much,” Monty agreed, relishing the man’s discomfiture. It was poorly done. And even more poorly taken.

“Yeah, Queen Victoria?” Dugan snapped. “If I’m a queer, the fuck does that make Sarge?” A cold, uneasy silence fell. And that was a rather uncomfortable—a rather impossible—an entirely preposterous—accusation. Barnes’ role here was sacred. They could none of them afford the scrutiny of such a scandal, however malicious and unsubstantiated. Sergeant James Barnes could play queerness for laughs because the thought was so absurd it could not be true. He was, despite his many protests and even tears, simply the bravest man Monty had ever known. Coloured woman and foul mouth be damned he deserved more than to have his courage and moral fortitude questioned by his men, and especially by the likes of an illiterate twat like Dugan. “The court jester, one presumes,” Monty snarled.

“Jester?” Morita asked in a failed attempt to rekindle that dying humor. “I thought that was Dugan.”
“Oh, no,” Monty sniffed. “He’s the chamberpot.”

“I’m Irish. I’m not on any of your fucking courts,” Dugan scowled.

“Well, we certainly wouldn’t ask you to be.”

“Je suis français. Techniquement, vous êtes sur notre terre. Depuis 1066.”

Monty understood enough. “I do rather think the Hapsburgs changed all that, old sport.”

“And we’re back at each other’s throats,” Jones sighed, checking an imaginary watch. “Sarge has been asleep for what? Five minutes?”

“Could be Lohmer had a point.” Morita shrugged.

“Knew you were on the side of the Nazis,” Dugan bristled.

“Dugan, so help me I will wake Sarge and he will hand you your pale Irish ass on a platter,” Jones threatened. “Again.”

“You’ll do no such thing, man,” Monty insisted. “The sergeant needs his rest.” If anyone was going to put the man in his place, it would be Monty, and he would do so gladly.


“I’ve got six cigarettes on the moulie,” Manelli said, pulling out filthy paper and a pencil numb like a bookie. “Anyone else want in?”

Jones never did raise his voice. His simple, eloquent enunciation was intimidation enough: “English, Italian, doesn’t matter what language or how famous that face is, Manelli, you keep calling me a nigger and I’ll break your Roman nose.”

“Old habits, huh?” Manelli cringed and held out a hand. “Whaddya say we shake on it?”

Jones shook his head. “It’s not forty acres and a mule, but I’ll be having those cigarettes.” Manelli relinquished them reluctantly. To their surprise, Jones passed them each a fag—even Dugan and Manelli. “Now everyone light up and shut up before we all kill each other.”

Barnes awoke to the sound of the cell door softly closing. Manelli. Leaving for his shift on the floor above. “Well, fuck,” Barnes muttered under his breath, still clutching at his belly. He watched the man with open worry.

“Surely a pair of eyes inside the Reich is a good thing, Sergeant,” Monty prompted. He was far more concerned with Barnes’ health to be bothered with Manelli’s, however personable the man had been.

“Yeah. For the US Army, maybe. Not so much for us. For him. Might’ve saved his skin from Zola but I sure as hell put a target on his back with the boys up there. And it ain’t doin’ us any favors, either. That poor schmuck there’s one of two reasons they ain’t bombed us yet.”

Monty frowned. “And the other?”

“Well, it’s not me or Jonesey-boy, here.” Morita intoned drily.

…Ah.
“Could be our folks don’t know this ain’t the only HYDRA factory. Army gets word their picture star is out, safe and sound in Berlin somewhere, they might just blow the place, the rest of us be damned,” Barnes broke off breathlessly, left hand pressed beneath his ribs. “We’ve got intelligence they don’t. We gotta get it to the front.” Yet if James Montgomery Falsworth were to appear at the front, battery in hand, would it not simply serve to strengthen their resolve? Would Downing Street not bomb the factory, those left inside be damned, considered acceptable collateral, the necessary casualties of war?

“Intelligence? You keep saying that, Jew York,” Jones shook his head. “I’ve yet to see any proof.”

“Have to say, Sarge,” Morita agreed. “Not your best plan.”

“I said it was a plan, smartass,” Barnes grimaced. “Never said it was a good one.”

“Jonesey-boy’s right, Sarge. I’m pretty sure by ‘intelligence’ and ‘plan’ you mean making shit up as you go along.”

“Shh, pal!” Barnes’ strained smile didn’t quite mask his pain. “There’s a war on! Don’t you go givin’ away all my secrets.”

“Nah, Sarge,” Morita said in the strange silence that followed. “Your secret’s safe with me.”

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Have you not heard, spoke him the Mother, In a plain Man settled, and He erected there a tower to stretch even to the heavens. And the gods said, come, let us confuse their language lest they supplant us, that they waste their strength instead to raise weapons brother against brother and father against son. And so their language was confused, and they judged one another not on the character of one’s heart but by the colour of one’s skin, and lo they fell upon one another, and were slaughtered. Yet why would the gods do thus, asked her the Singer. For if they are indeed holy and just, why would they ordain that brother rise up against brother and a father against his sons?
Oh my child, the Mother answered, the gods did not declare it thus. It is Man who tells this story the he may not answer for the violence of his hands and the hatred in his heart. Could a god who is holy and just permit that Man should kill one another? And would you then worship him?

And so the Singer spoke No, I would cast their graven image down, and I would Sing the truth, that Men would listen. Then perhaps we shall live to see the end of such violence and all bloodshed, and witness instead all that is good from every tree that is pleasant.

You must not Sing so loudly, said him the Mother, lest the People overhear, and take offense.

They are false priests who worship false gods, and incite Men to wickedness, said the Singer. You have taught me to Sing, so Sing I must.

And his Mother wondered again what he would become.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

A WORD ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND INTERNMENT

So America has conveniently forgotten about our long-standing history of internment, starting with indigenous peoples and their children, chattel slavery, and the mass internment of Japanese-Americans during WW II. But Executive Order 9066 and 9102 also affected persons of Italian and German ancestry, including exclusion zones, curfews, mandatory carrying of identification, and even internment at Ellis Island for East Coast Italians and German citizens such as diplomats and merchants in US ports at the outbreak of war.

...As a person with Italian-American ancestry on her mother's side and a human being with a fucking soul, the current US practice of mass internment of immigrant families and forced separation of children really pisses me off.

Benito “Dino” Manelli

Italian immigrant, one of the M-616 founding Howling Commandos, changed his name for his acting career. He left a successful movie, stage, and stand-up comedy career after Pearl Harbor to enlist in the army. His character is a fictionalized version of Dean Martin. One of his more notable plot lines is “switching sides”, using his fame and supposed conversion to fascism to insinuate his way into obtaining vital intelligence from the Axis powers in northern Italy. Angela “Angie” Martinelli of Agent Carter is likely a homage both to the character's Italian-American heritage and comedic/acting roots.


In a running gag, Dino is rarely depicted not fussing with his hair or without his comb:

One day, Panunzio recalled, a male teacher asked him to stay after class. The teacher told him solemnly, “In this country, it is not customary to carry knives.” Panunzio remembered: “He used the word “stiletto” synonymously with the word “knife”. There appeared to be some uncertainty in his mind as to just what it was but one thing was certain: I had a weapon and I was Italian. That was enough. All Italians carry weapons and are dangerous creatures, according to the common American
belief. He assured me that he harbored no ill feelings toward me, but he made it plain that it was not a good thing to carry a weapon and the since going to the school i had caused great disturbance by openly carrying a “stiletto”…”Unless you give it up,” he continued, “you will be obliged to leave school.”

Finally…to clinch the matter, [he] said that he himself had seen it a few moments before, and for that reason he asked me to remain. If I did not mind, he would at lest like to look at it. The point of it was even then to be seen sticking out of my vest pocket, shining brightly against a blue silk handkerchief. I could deny it no longer. Taking hold of the lapel of my coat, he pulled it open, reached for the dreaded weapon and pulled it out…

It was an aluminum comb, convenient point at one end to be used for manicuring, and not for carving out human hearts!

—Constantine Panunzio, scholarship recipient to private school where he was the only Italian student. (Hoobler, 86-8)


Tony Camote

In reality, Dino and his parents as Italian immigrants or “Enemy Aliens” in NYC or LA would have likely been sent to the lesser-known prison camps for German and Italian immigrants/citizens.

“One of the persistently troublesome issues had to do with the evacuation of Italian and German alien enemies…The mayors of two of the nation’s largest cities—San Fransisco and New York—were Italian Americans. What of their parents? And, most troubling of all, what about Joe DiMaggio’s father, a resident of Oakland, California, and thus subject to removal in any mass evacuation of the West Coast. The average American not of Italian ancestry might be indifferent to the fate of Mayor Angelo Rossi’s parents or Mayor Fiorello La Guardia’s, but if anything rude or uncivil were done to Joe DiMaggio’s father, the popular reaction was bound to be highly unfavourable. To offend America’s greatest hero since Babe Ruth would be impolitic [unwise] to say the least.”

—Smith, Page, Democracy on Trial (qtd. in Yancey, 31)


The Godfather Effect
https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/what-is-the-godfather-effect-83473971/

Benito Mussolini “Il Duce”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benito_Mussolini

Italian Socialist Republic-Nazi puppet state formed in September 1943
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Social_Republic

The more there are rivalries, the more battles between the prisoners, the easier it is to control the camp. Divide and rule—that is the principle not only of high politics but also in the concentration camp.” (Helm, 51)

*In the early 20th century, Italian consisted of hundreds of local dialects, many which weren’t mutually intelligible. Mussolini contributed to the standardization of modern Italian when he took power, because fascism. In some Southern dialects, the pronunciation of final vowels was often dropped, ‘p’ often became ‘chi’, and ‘t’ became ‘d’. Sicilian contained many dialectal words that would not be understood on the mainland even by Southern Italians, and Sardinian was another romance language entirely. When Dino uses this accent, he is mocking the stereotype of a monolithic Italian/Italian American culture, rather than himself.

In the M-616 comics, Dino and Gabe's relationship has no racist undertones. But despite shared experiences with racial prejudice, income disparities, history of lynching in the US, and even the slur 'guinea' for Italian-Americans referring to dark skin, the Italian-American community hasn’t historically sought solidarity with the black community. Italian-American acceptance was built on assimilation and white supremacy. Consider the shooting death of Yusuf Hawkins, a 16 year-old black teen in Brooklyn, on August 23rd, 1989:


Chapter End Notes

Homophobia: Bucky plays queerness for laughs.
Racism/ Slurs: Bucky goads a GI to save him. The Howlies tell jokes not necessarily in good humor.
Suicide mention: a GI attempts suicide by Zola.

You must not hate your brother in your heart.
You must surely reprove your fellow citizen
so that you do not incur sin on account of him.
You must not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the children of your people,
but you must love your neighbor as yourself.
I am the LORD.
—Vayikra 19: 17-18

The phrase “Judeo-Christian values” was birthed during the 1930’s when Jewish leaders allied themselves with liberal Catholics, seeking support in response to America’s growing Antisemitism. After WW2, it was appropriated by the religious right to distance Christians from the genocide and violence of the Reich despite their complicity and to lend Evangelical support to the State of Israel.
Guiseppina: Italian form of the name Josephine, named for Josephine Baker, the original Beyoncé and French Resistance Fighter.

Jack Kirby created a hero based on Jewish folklore in 1940 in an America deeply divided over white nationalism and anti-semitism. In the 60’s, as a response to the Civil Rights movement in America and the fall out of colonialism in Africa, he created T’Challa/Black Panther and Samuel Thomas Wilson/the Falcon, and Gabriel Jones, depicting an integrated WWII unit. Sergeant Fury and his Howling Commandos featured a Jewish commando, Isadore “Izzy” Cohen; a Kentucky Redneck, Robert “Rebel” Ralston; an Italian-American actor and immigrant, “Dino” Manelli; an Ivy League student, Jonathan ‘Junior’ Juniper; an openly gay Englishman, Percival “Pinky” Pinkerton; and Gabriel “Gabe” Jones, a black musician who lived through the Harlem Renaissance. These men were depicted as a fully integrated unit, and when the series referenced racism and antisemitism (which it often did) it was always from the perspective of an outsider or an Axis enemy. While Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos’ focus on WWII events and weaponry was thinly veiled military propaganda, it did so with a diverse cast of characters who insisted on respect and inclusivity.

In the original M-616 comics, Gabe Jones’ skin tone is ashy and grey. On the cover to the first Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos, the colorists assumed his character description to be a typo depicted him as white.

‘Ha! ‘Against my will I am sent to bid you come into dinner’, there’s a double meaning in that!” Much Ado About Nothing.

LGBTQ+ Activism in WWII

“When they were humiliated in public, gay GIs began to direct their “camping” not only to their guards but to the crowds of taunting onlookers, trying to defuse the hostility directed toward them by making the crowd into their audience. Performing as “queers” on these degrading stages, they danced a fine line between self-contempt and outrage, between acting the victim and surviving. A gay man’s ability to “camp it up” in such desperate situations could be his last defense against hopelessness and even suicide.”
Bérubé, 224

“…Every day, when he and his fellows in the ship’s makeshift queer brig were taken out for “airings” under armed guard, the other men would “all come to the front of the deck to look down at the faggots.” For someone in a deep depression, such humiliation could have put him over the edge. But Thayer’s friend Arnie would not let him give in. Arnie “would usually put on his Mae West and he would do dance numbers and sing for them all. He said, “They know were a bunch a faggots. They want to look at us, so let’s show them something! We can’t just walk here and look like anybody else.’ He was cheering me up and cheering everybody else up.” Bérubé, 224-225

“When Jim Kuzell’s ship landed at Nouea on the way to Espiritu Santo, he saw in the middle of the receiving station a “queer compound” surrounded by barbed wire with twenty or thirty men inside. He was distressed by their campy behavior. “They’d come out around their fence and they would prance and be prissy. It hurt me to see it, because they were making fun of themselves. They swished up a storm and pretended to have big chandeliers and were just doing it like wild.” So long as they could still “camp it up,” the men in the stockades were able to show everyone—and themselves—that the military was not yet powerful enough to make them give up being gay.” Bérubé, 225
Charles Atlas/Angelo Siciliano, 1895-1972, famous body-builder, Italian immigrant who grew up in Brooklyn, got his start as a Strongman at Coney Island

Dugan’s joke: Captain America First Vengeance
Dernier's: How many Americans does it take to gain independence? At least one Frenchman. Think nothing of it.

Jackie Robinson was the first black player in major league baseball: Brooklyn Dodgers, 1947.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Barnes’ stunt has consequences. Manelli faces the fallout. Zola returns.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for mentions of suicide, minor character death, graphic medical imagery, violence, and vomiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

But as is the way in all Wars, little children, illness had left them weak and wearied.

And if there were those among them who despaired of life and longed for death, well. Who are you or I to judge them?

—Jacob (I Have Loved). J. Montgomery Falsworth

Hey, America,

We need to talk.

We need to talk about PTSD and suicides. We need to talk about lack of funding, access barriers, budget cuts, the sh*tty state of veteran healthcare in this country.

So let’s talk.

Last time we were attacked, we went to war. Turns out our intelligence was faulty. Turns out we were wrong. Still a war I was proud to fight in. Still a country I was proud to protect. I lost brothers out there on the field, and it was the price we were willing to pay for freedom. Then I came home. And I kept on losing them.

Thing is, this issue isn’t new. Our soldiers have been fighting against the stigma of mental illness and the effects of toxic masculinity for years. I’ll tell you what, America, it’s killed more of our veterans than Al Queda ever did. So we need to talk. And we need to talk now or people are gonna die. Our soldiers are gonna die. And I don’t mean on the front lines. I mean here, at home, whether that’s in their living rooms or homeless out on the streets. We’re sending our soldiers off to war, and we’re bringing them home to die. And that ain’t right. We’re the richest country in the world, America. We have the money. If we put our minds to it we could stop each and every one of our boys from overdosing or eating a bullet.
But we don’t. We can’t. ‘Cause our culture still can’t rectify the image of a soldier with that of the mentally ill or afraid.

So I’ll say it, America. I’ll come out and say it. I’ll say what Monty Falsworth could only say in subtext back in 1960: Steve Rogers’ death was a suicide. Cap died for this country in more ways than one, and every single soldier’s life we’ve lost—before and since—to self harm has been a goddamn tragedy. And that’s on us, America. That’s on all of us.

Hope. Change. I’m a veteran, and I voted for Barack Obama. I stand by my choice, and I’m hella proud to see a brother in the White House. But dude needs to deliver. All I’ve seen is More and Same.

—Sam Wilson, LCSW

If you or a loved one is considering suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255, Suicidepreventionlifeline.org


CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Monty dreamt that night of London, of Whitehall, of watching where he himself was safe while the factory floor above was burning. Barnes’ young face was among the dead.

Perhaps it was the man’s own recklessness that brought on the nightmares, perhaps instead Lohmer’s increased cruelty.

…yet perhaps, perhaps, another voice said (and it sounded—oh it sounded so very much like Jackie’s), it was Monty’s own cowardice that damned him.

Monty woke to the harsh sound of unintelligible speech.

“Hey, easy, pal,” a familiar voice replied. “I gotta take a shit, ’s all.”

Barnes. Monty sat up, heart racing. Lohmer. Lombardo—

“Nein.” But it was only children, captors surely, yet not their cruel taskmaster nor the American dissenters. It did little to ease his worry.

“Look, you’re obviously new here,” Barnes grunted in response. “I don’t got cigarettes to bribe you and I don’t got time to sweet talk you. I’m about to shit my damn brains out, so you can stand around smellin’ it for the next four hours or get me to the fucking latrines. Dealer’s choice.”

Their hosts exchanged uncertain looks. Barnes was allowed to pass.

In that moment, Monty made up his mind. He jumped to his feet. Kicked Morita and Dugan as he clamored out the cell spouting some nonsense—“I have the sudden compunction to urinate”—in excuse. It would have been bloody mortifying were it not their startled young guards and their raised guns.

Monty stood stock still. He blinked in the harsh blue light.
“Easy,” Barnes assured them, hand outstretched through the beam, sending long shadows scattering. His voice was low and calm, as though soothing a startled racehorse. “Easy, fellas. ’S just Limey.”

“Huh?” Dugan’s confusion bled through the tension.

“He has to piss. You have to piss? I have to piss.” Morita said, all levity vanishing, and stepped through the gap before the door could be swung shut.

“Yeah. What Her Royal Highness said,” Dugan shouldered his way out despite their captors efforts and protests.

“Nein!”

The two boys were clumsy, flustered, HYDRA’s rifles now pointed to the floor as they tried to shepherd them all inside, but Monty still held his breath. These two he did not recognize, it was unknown whether they were affable, indifferent, or cruel, even so they were unlikely to hurt a man so important as Barnes—that is to say, to seriously harm him. Yet they had little motivation and scant reason to keep him from his own. And Lombardo? The man had made it onto the factory floor before in his quest for vengeance. Who knew what influence he may have on their hosts.

“Pal, you don’t let us go I’m gonna drop trou and shit right here,” Barnes’ gut let out a high pitched whine in emphasis.

“Scheisse,” their captors shared a look of silent resignation.

“That about sums it up, yeah.” Barnes grimaced.

“You heard the man, fellas,” Morita shrugged, unbothered. “Let’s get this road on the show.”

Barnes didn’t make it. Half way across the frozen yard he let out a strangled retching sound and was violently sick. He doubled over, hands on his knees, vomit dribbling all down his front.

Their captors cried out in protest. Monty gagged back his own bile.

“Fuck you, Fritz,” Dugan growled. For being a brute and a bully, the man was surprisingly gentle. Put an arm under Barnes’ shoulders as he choked. “C’mon, Sarge. Let’s get you situated.” He led Barnes to the crude line of latrines, but Barnes staggered almost to his knees—would have, if the man hadn’t caught him—and was sick again.

“OhgodohfuckohJesusfuckin’Christ,” Barnes groaned.

“Yeah, yeah,” Dugan said, plunking Barnes into position on his knees and tussling his hair. “You’re only Catholic when something goes wrong, Sarge.”

“Oh Moses fucking Christ then,” Barnes returned, face in that rough-hewn hole.

Morita snorted.

“You ruffle my hair one more goddamn time Dum Dum, I’ll puke on your shoes,” Barnes threatened pitifully, voice echoing up from the depths. “See if I fuckin’ don’t.”

“Yeah. Sure, Sarge,” Dugan thumped him, then mussed his hair again for good measure. “For a marksman you’ve got terrible aim.”

“Schnautz!”
Monty’s own limited German brought him absurdly short at *proboscis*. “Do you have any idea what they’re bloody saying?” For all their disagreements, he found himself rather missing Jones’ presence.

“Oh, like hell I’m leaving him here like this with the two of you.” Behind him, Barnes spat out a long string of spittle.

Monty was cold. Tired. Cross. “I say, man, whatever are you insinuating?”

“Who the what?” Dugan clenched his fists.

“Fellas, don’t start,” Morita interjected.

“This is between Her Royal Highness and me,” Dugan insisted. “Stay outta it.”

Something in Monty snapped. “For the love King and Country it’s *Her Majesty* when you reference the bloody Queen!”

“Because etiquette is really what matters here,” Morita said. “Make sure you use the right peerage when you insult someone, Dum Dum. You wouldn’t want to be fucking rude.” Things may have gone to hell with that, were it not for Barnes and his ever-present—albeit rather crass—humor.

“Aw, what’s wrong, sweetheart?” he crooned, groping blindly behind himself to take and caress Dugan’s hand. “You been feelin’ left out? ‘Cause you’re still my first, you know that, right?”

And with that, their rather ungracious spat was over. Monty watched with mixed relief and shame as Dugan visibly deflated. Shook the man off. “Shaddup, Sarge.”

“Sarge?”

“Yeah, Morita?”

“If he slugs you, you deserve it.”

“Morita?” Barnes croaked into the toilet, and retched again.

“Yeah, Sarge?”

“You’re the worst goddamn doctor I ever heard of.”

“My bedside manner is just fine, Sarge. Got plenty of people who’ll say so.”

“Yeah,” Barnes snorted, wiping his mouth of spit. “I bet you do.”

“Patients, Sarge.” Morita said, in his customary long-suffering way.

“That’s what you’re calling ‘em these days, huh?”

“Gentlemen…” Monty pinched the bridge of his nose.
“Pshaw, Monty. It’s not like you’re the Virgin Mary,” Barnes snorted.

“Sarge, that’s blasphemy,” Dugan reproached him. “…and if Her Majesty here was, it’s not like she’d admit it.”

Monty’s mouth flapped like a fish—remembering that first fleeting encounter at fifteen which had been somewhat squeamish and rather unsatisfactory for both parties involved and the ceaseless teasing thereafter—which was rather undignified and rather against his will. He closed it. Pvt. Timothy Aloysius Cadwallader Dugan, 107th Infantry, US Army, looked more smug than he had any right to be, the cad.

Morita turned to Barnes, rolling his eyes. “Feeling any better, Sarge?”

“Nah, pal. ‘M gonna be here a while.”

“Alright, Sarge,” Dugan clapped Barnes’ head again. “You take care of business, then.” He proceeded to the farthest hole, fished around, and retrieved a shell casing capped absurdly by a prophylactic.

Monty blinked, dumbfounded. “I say man, whatever are you doing?”

Dugan shrugged and broke the seal. There came a bitter, rotten smell. “Had some uncles who were bootleggers. Taught me a thing or two about making moonshine,” he stretched the prophylactic again, resealing it. “If these fucking Krouts want to give us mushy rotten apples and moldy bread, I say we let ‘em.”

Oh, good bloody God. Irishmen! And Americans!

“You’re shitting me.” Barnes rasped.

“Nope, Sarge. You’re doing fine all by yourself.”

“Ha fucking ha,” Barnes grunted. “Do me a favor? Don’t tell Frenchie.” Monty agreed: the last thing they needed was a certain Mssr. Jacques Dernier getting his hands on even more improvised explosives. But Dugan only grinned, a slow and terrible thing, and Monty felt a horrible sinking feeling in his gut that had nothing to do with the stench of shit or the sound of Barnes’ vomiting.

“Are we really making toilet hooch right now?” Morita asked, equal parts exasperation and awe. “If jerking it hasn’t made you blind yet, Dum Dum, that moonshine will.”

Monty grimaced as Dugan restored the improvised still. “I say, man. Isn’t that rather unsanitary? And how do you plan on stilling it?”

Dugan shrugged. “It ain’t exactly for drinking, if you get my drift.”

So he and Barnes weren’t the only ones with plans to escape. …or sabotage.

Barnes groaned behind them. There again came the unpleasant sound of something splattering that smelt distinctively not of vomit. “I didn’t know you spoke German,” Monty said, somehow managing a stiff upper lip.

Barnes let out a snort of laughter. “You remember that, huh, pal.”

“You want to share with the class, fellas?” Morita asked.
“Said somethin’ ‘bout eating so much cabbage during the Depression I was shittin’ sauerkraut.”

“Huh,” Dugan nodded in sympathy. “We’ve all been there.”

“Fellas, none of you ate your weight in nato or tofu,” Morita informed them grimly as Barnes’ sphincter made a horrible sound. “I don’t speak much Japanese but I sure can fart in it.”

“Good bloody God, man,” Monty protested. “ Didn’t you know they outlawed the manufacture of chemical munitions at the Geneva Conventions?”

“Cheaper than mustard gas,” Morita offered.

“Hate to say it, but Hirohito and Her Majesty’re right. We could bottle your farts and throw ‘em at the Krauts. Win the war in no time.”

“Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses,” Barnes returned. “Where are we, back in basic? Disrespecting your CO? I oughta put all three of you on KP duty. Make you peel your weight in fuckin’ potatoes.”

“We get to eat them?” Dugan wondered. “Then sure.”

“Yeah, well, given the circumstances I wouldn’t exactly advise it, pal.”

Beside him, Morita mulled it over a moment. “If we had potatoes Dum Dum here could make vodka.”

“Look at you, a regular old Pollyanna.”

Morita shrugged. “Life gives you lemons, but liquor is quicker.”

“Yeah. Morita,” Barnes grunted. “Somethin’ like that.”

“Well, I for one won’t be peeling any,” Monty sniffed, and rather regretted it. “Technically, I do outrank you.”

“Well, thank fuckin’ God. You can be in charge of this here shitshow, Limey. I want decent hours and a goddamn raise.”

“Oh, no, Sergeant,” Monty assured him. “I am quite content to follow the established chain of command.”

“Ugh,” Barnes said, after a particularly nasty bout. “Is this karma, Limey? Your lot colonized half the known world and India, you should know. ‘Cause it kinda feels like karma.”

Morita caught the corner of his eye, and the two of them burst into hysterics. There was a certain disgusting, surreal hilarity to it all, wasn’t there? “Schnautz!” Their escort shouted again, but the bloody godawful stench kept them at bay.

Dugan, however, was flummoxed—although perhaps flummoxed was too kind a word. “What’s so goddamn funny?” he asked, as Monty hiccuped and wiped tears from his eyes. It felt so bloody damn good to laugh.

“I’ll tell you when you’re older,” Morita promised.

“God, that’s disgusting,” Barnes hissed. “And this from a guy who likes havin’ a hand up his ass. Think I’d sell my left nut for some toilet paper.”
The man didn’t have his comic or his letters, though Monty doubted he’d have put either to the purpose, however desperate. He rummaged his pockets, but aside from Ackermann’s contraband they had been thoroughly emptied. Unless—Well, why not? What the late Lady Falsworth would say of her silken hand-embroidered handkerchief bearing the Falsworth family crest being used on the arse of an uncouth Irishman neither mattered nor bore rumination. “I have a handkerchief,” he offered.

“Oh thank fuckin’ God. If I weren’t pukin’ my guts out, I could kiss you.”

“If it’s all the same to you, Sergeant,” Monty felt his mustache twitch. “I’d rather prefer it that you didn’t.”

Barnes vomited throughout the night. Took several more staggering trips to the latrines. Between the coughing and the retching and other unpleasantries it was a wonder if the man got a wink of sleep. It was a wonder any man among them did.

“Lohmer’s bloody poisoned him,” Monty voiced his own worst fear, holding back the man’s sweat-rank hair as he heaved.

“He didn’t have to.” Morita said. “We haven’t eaten like that in weeks.”

But finally, finally Barnes was asleep, swaddled up in Berger’s blanket, Dugan’s bowler hat snug over his ears, Monty’s own duster tucked again around his shoulders. He’d grumbled the whole bloody while, but they had all of them easily overpowered him. He’d broken into a spell of horrible coughing until Dugan had sat him up, head resting against the meat of his shoulder.

“Dugan?” Barnes croaked.

“Yeah, Sarge.”

“You stink.”

“Yeah, yeah. Takes one to know one, Jimmy-Boy. Shut up and sleep.”

“N’body calls me that.”

“Oh, yeah? What do they call you?” Dugan prodded, before Monty could intervene. He glared at the man, cringing at the thought of another erotic installment in the increasingly obscene saga of Stephanie Grace Rogers, and really, what the man was called in bed by his sweetheart was hardly their business. And Barnes needed rest.

“Fuck off.” he mumbled.

“Fuck Off, huh?” Dugan asked. “That’s what they call you?”

“’S Sergeant Fuck Off to you.”

“Sure, Sarge.”
Monty himself slept in fits and starts. He ate his own rations both furtively and sparingly lest he be discovered. Morita and Barnes were both in know, of course, but he didn’t trust Dugan. Of Jones he remained uncertain.

But the end of their collective rest came both inevitably and swift. They were all too soon woken by the pattering of boots, the weary footsteps of B Shift come home to roost. Seeing their gaunt faces, Monty again wondered at their exhaustion, his own pockets full of food, his shrunken stomach full. He searched for a familiar face, but neither the handsome Hollywood star nor the ragged man he’d become in captivity were to be seen. Monty was struck then with two contradictory thoughts: that Barnes must be made aware at once, and that Barnes must never know.

Even sick and exhausted, Barnes remained as sharp as ever. “Where’s Manelli?”

To a man they refused to answer him, some glaring, others avoiding, shuffling past into the cells. All of them, that is, save Lombardo. “That disgraziato? Licking his wounds,” he leered.

“The fuck did you do to him, Lombardo?” Barnes clamored to his feet.

“The same I’ll do you you and your traitor Jap.”

“You’re welcome to try,” Monty bristled, stepping between them. “Lohmer couldn’t do it with a bloody pistol.”

“You’re on the wrong side, Brit. This has nothing to do with you.”

“I suppose it all rather depends on where you’re standing,” Monty answered curtly, a knot in his knickers and the sound of his heart pounding in his ears. He was no stranger to pugilism himself, and had half a foot on the man, but Lombardo outweighed him by at least five stone.


There was a moment of terse silence. “Krauts have him,” Gianni grunted.

“Shit,” Barnes swore, and took off with unsteady steps towards to floor. Entrenched now in their roles as beleaguered body guards—or perhaps put-upon older siblings—he and Morita followed, Jones and Dugan not far behind. And where Jones went, the Frenchman followed.

A gathering of their young guards were smoking their sickly, German cigarettes. Barnes strode through them with purpose, ignoring a chorus of caterwauling:

“Ätsch, ist der Arschkriecher Amerikaner.”

“…Herr Barnes.”

“…Lagerältester.”

“…dem Kleinführer.”
“Ackermann? Ackermann?” Barnes called over the din, breaking into a fit of coughing.
“Lars!” There was no small amount of giggling, and no less than a dozen stiff-armed salutes. Barnes faced down their young guard, who refused to express either embarrassment or contrition his farce had spread rampant through the ranks.

“Ja?” the lad asked.

“Spill, pal.” Barnes insisted.

“Ja, Lars,” someone teased. “Gehorche deinem Kleinführer.”

There was then a gesture that needed no familiarity of sign—whether German, British, or American, civilian or military—for interpretation.

“Where’s Manelli?” Barnes pressed.

“Ja, Lars, wo ist Herr Hollywood?”

“Wo ist—?” the boy blinked in confusion.


“Herr Hollywood, ja,” Ackermann scuffed out his cigarette, looking rather sheepish. “I will take you.”

Any fears of death or Zola’s experimentation were unfounded. Ackermann did not lead them down that dim corridor, but outside. They left the din of the factory behind and trudged across the frozen ground to what could only be the officer’s barracks or hospital. The building was white-washed, well finished, windowed and warm. Yet again there was a brief argument with the guard on duty, smoothed over by Barnes’ presence (and, it would seem, their young charge’s, as nepotism would have it) and they were allowed to pass.

They need not have feared the worse. The spectacle that greeted them was Dadaist absurdity: a crowd of young nurses in their crisp, starched whites, flapping about and cooing:

“Are you comfortable, Mr. Manelli?”

“Is there anything else we can do for you, Dino?”

“How can you be sure it’s really him?”

“I just know it’s him! I’ve seen every movie he’s made a dozen times!”

“He’s so handsome I could die!”

“If he so much smiles at me we’ll be needing that mop again!”

...And many other such sentiments which Jones refused to translate.

“Oh, good bloody God, man,” Monty caught a glimpse between the surgical caps and shrieking. Manelli’s famous latin visage had been replaced with a purpled, bloodied pulp.
“I’m with Limey on this one. Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Moses, Manelli,” Barnes winced, elbowing his way to the forefront. “So much for that Roman nose. They got you good.”

“Nah, Sarge,” the man himself boasted from his sick bed. “It makes me rakish. When this all heals up, my agent’ll love it.”

“Well, shit, Manelli,” Barnes drawled and sat on his bedside while the girls fluttered about. “I hear you’re in the hospital, figured you’d have your ass kicked, not kissed.”

“You’re a real bundle of laughs, Sarge. When all this is over, you should take that act on tour.”

“What, me? Doing Vaudeville? You’re behind on the scoop, Dino. You get me a needle and some curtains and I’m Scarlet O’Hara. I’ll break a leg. Got me a whole dance number and everything.”

Manelli grinned—then winced. One of the hovering nurses slapped a raw steak on his face, and the man groaned at the cold. “Now which of us is Vivien Leigh?”

Barnes crossed his arms. “Pal, I’m Betty goddamn Grable and don’t you forget it.”

“The hell you are, Sarge,” Manelli laughed. “If you’re anybody, you’re Judy Garland.”

Barnes’ smile froze, the edges of that mask apparent yet again. But they were surrounded only by a dozen tittering girls in white, not a one of whom could be more than twenty, none armed. Where was the danger—?

“You got me all figured out, huh, pal.”

Manelli waved him off. “Plenty of friends of Dorothy out in Hollywood, Sarge. Forget Vaudeville or Broadway—the two of us make it out of this alive, come west and meet the gal. I’ll introduce ya.”

“Kid’s quite the lady-killer.” Dugan agreed. “Hell, I gotta get me beat up by some Nazis.”

Monty rolled his eyes, beseeching King, Country, and God above to spare him from the man’s idiocy. “I do somewhat doubt you’d receive the same treatment, old sport.”

“We so sure he’s on our side?” Jones wondered faintly.

“Absofuckingpositutely he’s on our side, Jonesey-boy. You think anybody but a God-fearin’ patriot would risk his life and lovely face to syphilis?”

“No one’s going to be sitting on that face for a while,” Morita said, and Monty grimaced in both distaste and sympathy. They were all of them sex-starved, so much so that even the slightest brush of a comrade’s warmth may lead to a rather mortifying consequence—if one’s weary body still had the nourishment for that sort to thing. Yet the thought of being intimate with a woman? In his current filthy, underfed state? Monty shuddered. It did not much help they had been so youthful and Aryan, their straw-colored hair and light eyes reminding him of Jackie.

“I dunno, Sarge,” Morita interrupted those dark thoughts. “Between VD and celibacy, most people choose the VD.”

“Ain’t like that, pal!” Barnes laughed with a hoarse, little cough. “I chose Stevie. ‘Sides, it’s one thing to mess around when your girl knows all about it—hope some fella back home’s takin’ good care of her, too. Another thing when you’ve been shipped out to the front. I gotta go, I want that
dame to know she’s the last goddamn girl I ever touched.”

A rather saccharine sentiment, yet to those who had the (mis)fortune of hearing the man’s tales of Stephanie Grace Rogers, the revelation was hardly a surprise.

“Aw, Sarge. You’re a sap.” Dugan shoved him with one large hand. “That girl’s got you by the dick. And the balls.”

“You forgot the heart, pal!” Barnes brokered no argument, hands upraised.

“…and anywhere else she can get her hands on—or in,” Morita quipped for all of them, swatting Barnes’ arse. Barnes yelped and sent an elbow into his ribs. Morita went staggering.

“Say Sarge, you sure you’re not a Marine?” Jones heckled.

“Yeah, Jonesey-boy. I’m Army, just like you. You studied Latin an’ all, but you ever met a Marine?”

“So much VD,” Morita lamented, rubbing his side. “You get me started, I might never stop.”

“We’ve all heard enough about that,” Jones cut him off.

Barnes gave a sly wink over his shoulder. “All I’m sayin’ is, Jonesey-boy, I don’t think semper fi means what you think it means.”

“No, indeed.” Monty rather agreed. “No indeed.”

“How’re you feelin’?” Barnes crawled inside the fuselage later that shift, the stench of sick overwhelming. “You eating good?”

“Better,” Monty allowed, tightening a gasket with his wrench, fighting down the urge to gag.

“I’m not letting him pull the same shit you did, if that’s what you’re asking,” Morita peeked in. “He’s got a diet and a strict schedule.”

“Aw, Morita,” Barnes wheedled. “Can’t a fella catch a moment or two alone up here? Just tryin’ to make time with my best girl, ’s all,”

Monty sputtered.

“Sure, Sarge.” Morita shrugged. “Just put it on before you put it in.”

“Oh good bloody God,” Monty thought in horror of years of lectures on ladies’ fever and Cupid’s measles and the sheer mortification of prophylaxis films. For his part, Barnes laughed so hard he choked, tears gathering in the corners of his eyes.

“You seem in better spirits.”

“Yeah, well, it’s been an hour since I shat my guts out. Not havin’ your ass glued to the toilet’ll do that to you.”

“Hear, hear.”

“Manelli—” Barnes began in earnest.
“I dare say the Reich won’t put him on film in his current state.” For the time being the lad had lost his his picture star looks, not to mention the appearance of coercion and torture.

“Yeah.” Barnes breathed. In the close space Monty was reminded then of that night in the ovens, seeking refuge from the Enemy in the very maw of the beast. For a long while they lay silent in the dark.

“Should we wait for him?” Barnes wondered.

Monty felt his own pulse churn between his ears, a plane tossed in the storm.

“Yet we know not when with certainty that might be.”

“Yeah.”

“And is he aware of our plans?”

“No.”

“Then he has deniability. Should my absence be noted.”

“God I hate this,” Barnes whispered, eyes closed and hands clenched in their cramped confessional. “Bein’ in command. Keepin’ everything together, jugglin’ all the secrets. Gotta make ‘em trust me while I’m up here stabbin’ them in the back the whole goddamn time.”

Priest. Bother. Father. Solider. Friend. Both the stoic and the raucous youth full of bawdy humor. The many roles Barnes played boggled the mind, yet he juggled them expertly. It was a task Monty did not envy him. “You’re no Iscariot, Sergeant.”

“Don’t give me that New Testament shit,” Barnes let out a bitter laugh.

“You are their commanding officer and you are responsible for them,” Monty allowed, reminded sharply of the hundreds of lives balanced in the man’s hands. “Yet our mission rather takes precedence, I should think.”

“Yeah,” Barnes agreed, laying his head down against the fuselage floor with an exhausted finality. “Yeah.” And if he fell asleep where he lay and wasn’t woken until the change of shift, well. Neither he nor Morita knew anything about it.

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It had been easy, had it not, to forget. Their true enemy was not their own sickness or starvation, not their childish, tribal bickerings nor even the unrest within the ranks. Not even Lohmer and his ever-increasing cruelty, but Hydra.

…Zola.

“Fuck you,” Barnes snarled at the sight of the unassuming man in the cellblocks.

“Sergeant Barnes, there is no need for rudeness,” Zola chided. “Your assistance is required.”

“Again? Already?” He’d taken Cristaforetti not twelve hours before.

“It is an isolation ward, for the sick,” Zola explained dispassionately. “It is not my fault that some are beyond my help. I am without a patient, and a doctor without a patient cannot work. Hydra must
have order. I require a selection.”

“Take me,” Barnes insisted. “You leave them the hell alone.”

“Oh, I think not, Sergeant Barnes. The procedure is not yet ready.”

And later, much later, when Barnes had fallen and Rogers went to his death, Monty would wonder. But if—even if—there were an inkling of truth behind it, that the mission had instead been a ruse, a trap, that Zola had not fallen into their hands but rather orchestrated the recapture of his most intriguing subject—even if Barnes had not come off that table unscathed, well. If he indeed had survived the fall, the cold surely would have killed him.

There wasn’t time, Carter would repeat all those long decades later. There wasn’t time. And with the world hanging in the balance, well, what was the life of one man? Even such a man as Sergeant James Barnes—?

“You choose,” Zola continued pleasantly. “Or I will be forced to.”

Barnes bit his lip. Remained silent.

“Very well. Herr Kleiber, proceed as we have discussed.”


Yet Kleiber merely squeezed Barnes’ shoulder in sympathy. “I am a solder, Herr Barnes, like you. I follow orders, I do not give them.” And in the months that followed, the liberated camps, the Brenner Pass, the trials at Nuremberg, the long years afterwards as Dugan, Sawyer, and Pinkerton hunted down Nazis across Europe and South America with SHIELD, Monty would grow well and truly sick of the excuses: it was not my fault, I was ordered by others to do thus, as if the simple act of obedience itself held no complicity. Kleiber was no bogey, no monster, no Grendel hunting in the night, just a man—polite, refined, educated, even. They had all of them come face to face with their enemy, only to discover the bland banality of evil. And so they were lined, tired and haggard and sleepless they were lined, forced to remove their shoes and stand shivering barefoot on the cellblock’s cold floor.

Zola strolled before them asking names, ages, seemingly ridiculous trivialities. How was their mother? Their father. Where were they from? Yet the answer remained the same: Name. Rank. Serial number. All those who refused further intelligence were punished severely. What harm could there be, Monty wondered at the senseless beatings, in revealing such information? Would the Empire and Allies fall so easily? What were these secrets worth? More than the life of a man? They were to beleaguer and confusticate the enemy as prisoners of war, surely, their sworn duty to hassle and inconvenience, be the broken cog in the wheel of the German military machine—but they were under no obligation to risk their lives, not even for King and Country.

Yet he wasn’t brave enough to share as much. In the doctor’s presence Monty was as silent as ever, as silent as that first day of selection, steeling himself for a noble death knowing all the while he was, in fact, a coward.

In the end it was Barnes—it would always be Barnes—who saved them.

“Answer him, damnit!” Barnes had gone pale in the face of such brutality. “It’s okay, just answer him.”

“Your cooperation, Sergeant Barnes, is appreciated as always.”
“Didn’t do it for you,” Barnes bit back.

“No,” Zola smiled, removing his glasses to polish them on his shirtsleeves. “And yet, I find that is what makes it all so interesting.” Barnes worked his jaw under that strange attention. “You are a man of fascinating qualities.”

“I’m just a kid from Brooklyn,” Barnes insisted.

“Oh, I know,” Zola returned. “I know.”

This man was Italian, this man Irish. This man from good old English or Scandinavian stock. They had lived where? In America? In New York? Really. Born in Brooklyn? Fascinating! Had they known their father? Was their mother yet living?

It was slow. Methodical. Psychological torture.

There was one poor chap—Monty didn’t know his name, he realized with a pang of guilt, only recognized him faintly—that Zola took a keen interest in. O’Connell, sir. Private. Number. Nineteen, sir. Irish, sir. Brooklyn, sir. His father had fought in the great war. Got gassed, sir. Died of pneumonia, sir. The Depression, sir. No, sir. She was alive, sir. Did laundry, worked as a seamstress, sir. His young face was slack with terror, and he began to cry.

In that moment, a volunteer stepped forward. “No need for that,” their saviour said. “Take me.”

Zola regarded him hungrily, dismissing the O’Connell boy back in line. “And you are—?”

“Finnegan. Private, sir, first class. Irish. Brooklyn born and bred. My feckin’ feet ain’t any good anyhow and I’ve near shat myself to death. Figure I’m next anyways.”

“I thought it may come to this,” Zola nodded to their guards. “You may proceed.”

“You don’t gotta,” Barnes choked. “You don’t gotta.”

“Someone’s gotta. Might as well be me,” PFC Finnegan told him, head held high as he was taken away. “You can’t save us, Sarge. No sense killin’ yourself trying.”

“I’ll be back,” Barnes promised them all. “I’ll be back. Just gotta take care of some things, that’s all.” He means the body—bodies, Monty corrected himself. Little wonder, then, that Barnes chose the cells rather than trusting that hiding space. And he mulled, then, perversely, whether the scream he’d heard seeming countless years ago, those thoughts of Brennan, well. Had the man already been dead. Had it already been another in his place.

…and, if their mission should fail, how many more would escape HYDRA’s hands only as smoke through those bloody chimneys.

But where is the ram, the Innocent asked. Where is the ram for the sacrifice?
Here is the wood and here is the alter, the Boy promised him. The Gods will provide the ram.

—Jacob (I Have Loved). J. Montgomery Falsworth

A word on veteran suicides:

Sam’s issues with veteran treatment aren’t new.


Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US.

Suicide rates among veterans are twice that of the civilian population.

Male veterans over age 50 comprise 65% of all veteran suicide deaths.

An average of 20 veterans die daily from suicide in the US.

67% of veteran suicide deaths occur by firearm.

US government comprehensive report on veteran suicides, updated 8/2017:
https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/2016suicidedatareport.pdf


National Center for Veteran’s Studies: https://veterans.utah.edu

PTSD

“The Treaty of the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany may have brought final closure to World War II as far as Germany and the Allied countries were concerned, but the war isn’t over for me, or men like me. The war continues to go on in the minds and hearts of those who fought in it. We each have our own nightmares that still haunt us. I know I have mine. Despite the fact that over sixty five years have passed since the war ended, I prefer to keep to myself particular memories of combat, and things I had to do in order to stay alive.

“Worse yet, a lot of combat veterans of World Wr II and other wars suffer from what used to be called “shell-shock” or “battle fatigue”, but is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder. This is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to or being involved with military combat. People with battle fatigue are often haunted by frightening thoughts and memories of their combat experiences and feel emotionally numb. They may experience sleep problems, have frequent nightmares, feel detached, or be easily excited or frightened, and become irrational and violent.

“…I know of World War II veterans that have suffered from battle fatigue. It can disrupt a person’s life, make it hard for them to hold job, or just get along with other people. I’ve seen it lead to alcoholism, cause marriages to break-up, and even lead to suicide…
“What is sad is that it is only relative recently that battle fatigue is considered to be a serious illness. Veterans from World War II, the Korean War and even the Viet Nam War who suffered from it were largely ignored. The condition was kept quiet for a long time. Why it was kept quiet for so long, I don’t know, but I suspect it was because soldiers are supposed to be strong, and having battle fatigue may be viewed by some as a weakness. Guys had to keep quiet about it. Another reason could be politics and money. Since it’s an illness caused by combat, veterans are entitled to compensation from U.S. Department of Defense. The cost of treating all of the veterans who suffered from the illness would be tremendous.”


9/11

The official death toll of 9/11 is 2996, including the 19 perpetrators. There have been multiple hundreds of deaths and thousands of cancer diagnoses as a result of toxic exposure among first responders and survivors close to Ground Zero.


The 9/11 Victim’s Compensation Fund is not permanently funded, and will close in 2020. Those with cancer and other illnesses caused by 9/11 who receive their diagnosis after the deadline are not eligible for compensation.


The most unrealistic thing about the politics of the MCU isn’t the Sokovia Accords—it’s that 9/11 isn’t mentioned even once. The Tobey McGuire Spider-Man films at least obliquely addressed it with “You mess with one of us you mess with all of us” added in reshoots and the NYC skyline updated so the WTC Towers weren’t present. But in the MCU? Nada. The Chitauri Invasion is called “The Incident”, but even Tony Stark’s presence in Afghanistan in Iron Man never directly addresses the issue. Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (aka great propaganda names) would have been the tours Sam Wilson served and lost Riley in, and he would live to learn that there were indeed no “weapons of mass destruction”. It was a war built on a lie, and the consequences globally were catastrophic and are still ongoing.

Chapter End Notes
Mentions of suicide: Sam Wilson writes an Op Ed about veteran suicide
Minor character death: a GI “volunteers” to be taken by Zola
Graphic medical imagery: detailed descriptions of wounds and gastrointestinal distress
Violence: GIs are beaten into compliance by HYDRA
Vomiting: Bucky vomits multiple times as a result of Lohmer’s force-feeding

Starvation


The Minnesota Starvation Experiment began in November 1944 when the Allies realized that millions in Europe and Asia were a risk of famine due to WWII. The experiment documented both the physiological and psychological effects of starvation over 24 weeks as well as time to recovery. The experiment is infamous for a participant self-amputating three fingers with an axe.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minnesota_Starvation_Experiment#cite_note-6
http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/wwii/a1.html

Prohibition and methanol poisoning
https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/2013/03/14/can-homemade-booze-kill-you/


Without proper equipment, Dugan would be unable to separate the ethanol from many other by-products of fermentation such as methanol, which can and does to this day lead to blindness, organ failure, and death. Home distilling is illegal in the US. This mash is suitable for combustion only.

Morita wouldn’t be the first POW to suggest making vodka:

“Joe arrived at 10:20 on May 1st. Also, news has been received that the "Great Bad Man (Hitler)" has done kicked the bucket. We woke up this morning to gaze upon our own boys in the guard towers. The jerries took off for parts unknown. The camp is going crazy and we have the jerries radio and have picked up New York and now we are listening to the Hit Parade. It seems the number one song is "Don't Fence Me In". My God, but I am happy. Six stinking months in this hell hole and here I am free. The lights are all on, the fellows are all running around like mad men. But the greatest thing is that those mad Russians are at the gate. "Kill the b*stards us my slogan.: The boys are singing "Roll Out The Barrel". They now have a Congo line, Lord what a madhouse. I have chills running up and down my spine, we have food, and freedom to come and go
as we please. And now we are trying to figure out a means to turn the potatoes into Vodka and all get drunk.

The Burgomeister at Barth committed suicide today by poison. But the whole town should take a suck at the gas pipe for all I care. Tomorrow we can go outside of the fence and take over the d*mn countryside. Some of the boys who have been down for eighteen months are shaking with happiness. Can't say as I blame them. I will not be able to sleep tonight.

This is just a rough idea of how we feel: but I assure who ever reads this, this is the happiest day of my life. For me the war is over. You aren't kidding brother. The Star Spangled Banner was just played. Oh happy, happy day.”


Friends of Dorothy

Friends of Dorothy: early to mid-1900's American slang for queer, taken from the Wizard of Oz books by Frank L. Baum

Mrs. King: British slang for ‘queen’, ie, a queer man

“The girl was getting used to queer adventures, which interested her very much.” pg 34

“You have some queer friends, Dorothy,” she [Polychrome] said.

“The queerness doesn’t matter, so long as they’re friends,” was the answer. pg 184


Judy Garland was a gay icon and outspoken about queer rights. Her funeral was held in NYC the night the Stonewall Riots began and may have acted as an additional catalyst. According to Sylvia Rivera, “I guess Judy Garland’s death helped us really hit the fan.”


Semper Fidelis

Marine Corp motto since 1883

VD

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings for sexual assault, violence, homophobia, racism, and medical imagery.

Please heed the tags and trigger warnings. Explanations available in End Notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Come with me, said She, to Canaan’s land. For you are the Victor, the Star, and the Song. You will set your people free.

Yet what use, the Warrior scoffed, is a Song or a Shield against the walls of the Enemy? Will a woman be also among the Prophets?

But the Woman ignored him, and implored the Captain still, saying seven times will you Sing, and the walls of the Enemy will crumble to dust. Awake, Awake! Utter a Song! Arise, Singer, lead away your captives!

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

“In contrast to Falsworth’s inclusion and even insistence of women in the narrative: Lucy ‘the Valiant’ is given healing cordial (Lewis 1950), Susan ‘the Gentle’ forsakes her role as Queen of Narnia for “nylons and lipstick and invitations (Lewis 1956)”; even Æowyn Æomund’s daughter recants her life as a warrior for that of a healer and wedded bliss (Tolkien 1956). Yet In the liberation from the Enemy’s walls, it is the Woman’s prophecy and disobedience that bring the Captain to the Boy. It is the consent of the Courtesan that allows the escape, not the cunning or strength of the Soldier. It is the Navigator who pulls them from the sea. The Healer is not only skilled with her hands but a trusted confidante, as respected by the Captain and his followers as the Physician himself. The Mother dies, yes, but only after she has taught her son to Sing.”


CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

A shift passed in silence. Barnes’ coughing grew worse.
Again, Lohmer fed him in front of the men, and again his skin went pallid and clammy with the effort. It would be another long night in and out of the latrines for him.

Monty woke to the sound the cell door opening.

Barnes made it all of three steps. Fell to his knees. For a fleeting, panicked moment Monty thought the man had been struck—but no. Barnes made a miserable, croaking sound. Then came a harsh splatter, the smell of sick. Monty fought back the urge to gag, refused to disgorge the food and energy their mission rather desperately depended on.

“You are wasting food, Herr Barnes.” Lohmer. Of course the bloody arsemonger had been waiting in the shadows, eager to see his handiwork. “I should make you eat that.”

“Fuck you, Fritz.” Dugan growled, wrenching at the metal bars of their cage. “You leave him the hell alone.” Lohmer raked them with his baton. Dugan cursed again and withdrew his hands, muttering continued—if unrepeatable—insults under his breath.

“Stay outta this,” Barnes ordered through a fit of coughing. “This ain’t nothin’ I can’t handle.” But Barnes was separated from them by the steel bars. Alone on the floor with Lohmer. For as much admiration Monty held for the man, he equally possessed the urge to shake him by the shoulders and scold him like an errant child. Barnes didn’t know when to bloody shut up—or rather worse, he did, and he kicked that hornet’s nest out of sheer bloody-minded stubbornness.

As though reading his thoughts, Lohmer clucked his tongue. “Your men they are so loyal. If I open this door, I wonder what they might do.”

“They’d kick my ass,” Barnes returned evenly. ‘Then they’d fuckin’ kill you.”

Quite right. And damn the consequences. And Monty found he was far from the only one: Jones and Dernier were livid beside him. Morita’s hands had drifted towards a hidden shiv. And Dugan? The man looked ready to pry the bars open to rip Lohmer’s spine through his throat.

“For how long, I wonder,” Lohmer prodded Barnes’ chest with that baton, then raised his sick-spattered chin. “When you eat, and they do not.”

“That what this is about?” Barnes leered. “Hell, Lohmer, you wanted me on my knees you could’ve just asked.”

It happened in the space of a breath: Lohmer bludgeoned him in the flank, and Barnes collapsed on his side with a cry. He slammed his heavy boot onto Barnes’ head, forced his face into the stone and sick. “Non! Putain, fils de pute!” Dernier protested. “Connais! Connard!” Barnes’ whole body twitched. He made a high, hitching sound, and the whole world erupted. Everything that is and was and had been and would be shrunk into one moment and one man. Dugan and Morita were shouting, Monty’s own shoulder sprained against the hinges in his efforts. For a horrible, horrible moment he truly believed Barnes’ skull had been crushed, that the man had been killed, that they were all of them left alone.

But no. Barnes was laughing. Like a madman.

“You have gone mad, Herr Barnes.”

Barnes began to crawl towards their cage, favoring his left side. “Nah, pal. I’m just thinkin’ what Zola’s gonna do to you when he finds out. ‘S why you went for the side instead of my pretty face, right?”
...Zola. Even their hosts trembled at his name.

“You are ill, Herr Barnes,” Lohmer cautioned him. “You would be wise not to draw undue attention.”

“My ma always said I got more charm than sense. Besides, pal, didn’tcha hear?” Barnes sat back against the bars and smiled, a dead, humorless thing on his gaunt face. “The procedure ain’t ready yet. Zola won’t do shit. So I want decent rations for my boys today, and I won’t tell Arnim you beat me, force-fed me ’til I puked, then held my face in it like a fucking dog.”

“This request is not unreasonable,” Lohmer allowed.

Barnes pulled himself up. Stood on two shaky feet. “Yeah. Yeah. Pleasure doin’ business with ya.”

“The pleasure, I assure you, Herr Barnes, is mine.”

“I know you, you bastard,” Barnes called after him as he struggled with the keys. “You’re a bully and I’m gonna win every goddamn round of this thing ‘cause you don’t have the fuckin’ sense or self-control not to kick a man when he’s good an’ down.”

“Jesus, Jimmy!” Dugan pulled Barnes in for a hearty embrace without a ounce of disgust.

“Mon Dieu, t’es rien qu’un petit conndard!” Dernier admonished him.

“You just don’t know when to quit, do you?” Morita sighed. “Let me look at those ribs.”

Barnes swatted them all away. “M fine, ma,” he insisted, but they were none of them so easily fooled. His breathing sounded—if anything—worse.

“I say, man, are you quite alright?” It was only then Monty realized he himself had been—was still—trembling. In anger. In fear.

“Fuckin’ peachy.”

“You look terrible, Jimmy.”

“Still look a lot better ‘an you, Dum Dum,” Barnes sniffed.

“You stupid son of a bitch,” Morita said. “I’d kill the man who did that to me.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Barnes groused. “He keeps up at this pace Kleiber and Zola’ll do it for me.”

Good bloody God, man. “So that’s your brilliant plan, then.” Jones voiced their collective disapproval. “Just let him beat you half to death?”

“S a plan, Jonesey-boy,” Barnes grimaced, wiping sick from his stubble with his sleeves and wincing with the movement. “Never said it was a good one. Say, any of you fellas got a clean shirt?” he looked from face to frowning face with that same stubborn cheer. “Didn’t think so.”

Now was not the time for this brash American humour. Monty said as much. “You are beyond bloody infuriating, man. Your whole line of reasoning—if this foolishness can indeed be called reasoning—is one logical fallacy after the next.”

“Don’t think that’s the kind our Sarge here is interested in,” Morita said, offering Barnes of sip of stale water from an improvised metal cup.
Barnes choked. Continued choking.

But Lohmer wasn’t the only one so emboldened. Barnes grew more brazen with each passing hour. “Should’ve saved that goddamn Schnapps,” Morita muttered as the Barnes led a gaggle of their young guards in a heckling chorus at Herr Colonel’s expense. It was, frankly, the worst rendition of *Ich bin de fesche Lola* Monty had been plagued with since Jacqueline had first imitated the Dietrich woman a lifetime ago back in 1930.

“For sanitation?” Monty wiped the sweat from his eyes, thought of Barnes’ injuries with a frown.

“Yeah. That and my nerves.”

The escalation could only continue. During their next stay in the cells, Barnes roused him from a swift, dreamless sleep. “I say, man, can it not bloody wait?” Monty blinked, bleary-eyed, protesting like a schoolboy.

“Well, yeah,” Barnes allowed, as an adult might to an exceptionally dull child. “But today we’ve got Lohmer by the balls. Don’t know when that’s gonna happen again, and you’ve got a helluva hike ahead of you— fill out a TS slip and send it to the chaplain if you don’t like it. C’mon. Chop-chop, you lazy Limey bastard,” Barnes poked him in the shoulder. “Let’s get you stocked up.”

Monty grumbled and got begrudgingly to his feet.

Such was the power and rapport of ‘dem Kleinfuhrer’ that they were not halted. Their guards, seeing Barnes ambling, were either content to ignore him, or—in the case of many—offer their now customary sardonic salute. Even with Monty’s accompaniment, they were allowed to pass onto the factory floor freely. “I say, man,” Monty mused aloud. “You’re bloody invisible.”

“Nah, pal, I’m entirely fucking visible, and that’s the goddamn point. No one suspects you of doin’ anything when you’re absofuckin’luteley above board.” Barnes put his hands in his trouser pockets, humming. There was that cheery, playful undertone, the invitation to humour, to release one’s troubles, to forget a man had been taken from among them only hours before. As they left the factory floor for that low brick hallway and the memories of that place Monty dearly wished to be whistling in the dark. He grabbed hold like a lifeline.

“You, Sergeant, are an absolute scoundrel, and I pity the woman who raised you.”

Barnes shook his head. “Nah, pal, my kid sisters are the real hellions.”

“Mine as well,” Monty admitted, “yet I am confident in my assessment you gave as good as you got.”

“Yours?” Barnes wondered, then worried his lip, remembering, perhaps, not every country had been as bloody lucky as his own. “They safe back home?”

Monty thought of the Battle of Britain, of losing the late Lady Falsworth, of fog, of darkness, of navigational errors, of the ruthless Luftwaffe pilots that would shoot down the supply chain, women and girls, even, who flew unarmed. “‘Safe’ is not a word one can apply to Jacqueline, I’m afraid,” Monty decided. “Neither before the war nor during—a pilot in the Air Transport Auxiliary, and a rather a great bloody pain in my arse.”

“A real fuckin’ spitfire,” Barnes whistled. “Kid sisters, huh?”
“Quite,” Monty agreed, voice clipped as they passed that dreadful room and its row of kilns. “And yours?”

“Becca’s gettin’ serious about Proctor,” he looked down, scuffing the toes of his boots against the tile. “Least her last letter said. Might even marry him.”

“I suppose congratulations are in order.”

“Don’t exactly think I’ll be there to see it,” Barnes countered wistfully. “Didn’t get to know him as well as I’d’ve liked.”

“He doesn’t serve?”

“Nah, pal, he’s at university, teaches, even—if you can believe it. Trigonometry. Calculus, that sort of thing. Shit, I thought I had a thing for numbers before I met him. There’s that, and the polio,” Barnes shrugged, and winced at the motion, clutching his ribs. “He’s a regular old FDR, yanno? Uncle Sam’d just as soon draft Stevie.”

Monty took the bait. “And how does your sister marry a man from university?”

“Oy!” Barnes objected, shoving him with one sharp elbow. “Stevie introduced ‘em. Gone all day and hours of the night on campus, hangin’ round a bunch of swell, smart Jewish guys…” Barnes heaved an exaggerated sigh. “’s enough to drive a fella something crazy jealous, that’s what.”

Monty opened his mouth about to protest, “What, your Rogers girl, at university—?” when they rounded the corner to the larder and were halted by none other than their young guard, Ackermann.

“Scheisse!” the boy startled, then recognized Barnes with a groan. “What are you doing?”

Barnes batted his eyes in feigned innocence, put his right hand to his heart quick-as-you-please. “Getting supplies.”

Ackermann held up an arm to bar the way, which Barnes unceremoniously ignored. “’S a real shit salute there, pal.”

“You can’t be here.” Ackermann argued.

“C’mon,” Barnes chortled, walking backwards away from him, now between his post and the door. “You say that like my men didn’t have sausage and strudel for breakfast this morning.”

Ackermann lifted his eyes heavenward, and turned to Monty in quiet supplication.

“I say, chap, don’t look at me,” Monty offered in apology. “I can’t bloody well control him either.”

“You won’t even know I was there,” Barnes promised. “I’ll be in and out. Two minutes, tops. Like when you fuck a girl.”

Ackerman let out a disbeliefing laugh.

>>You let him speak to you like this?<< A woman’s low voice came from the doorway, and Monty startled at the sound. She was young and coltish like Ackermann, blonde and blue-eyed, the very picture of Bund Deutscher Mädel. She wore a drab grey uniform, a pressed skirt, a jacket with a wide collar, and a cape. Not a nurse, then, but there were no insignias. A soldier? A guard? He held no prejudice towards the fairer sex—his own sister was in the ATA, he’d known his fair share of pilots and nurses, ambulance drivers and code-breakers at Bletchley, after all. It wasn’t that a woman
couldn’t serve, but there was something so unsettling they should be in the employ the enemy.

“Ja, ist dem gottverdammten Kleinführer,” Ackermann hiccoughed. >>He sasses Herr Lohmer. What I am supposed to do?<<

“Halt!” She demanded, baton in hand.

But Barnes would not be cowed. “You gonna hit me with that stick, doll?”

“No?” Barnes asked. “Didn’t think so.” And he pushed past.

“I say,” Monty ran to catch up, a watchful eye over his shoulder on the girl—Ilse—still arguing. “That was bloody reckless, man.”

“Nah, pal. I just count on people being good. She wasn’t gonna hit me—’sides, that kid wouldn’t let her, anyhow.”

After so many years at war, Monty held no such illusions. “I don’t know whether it’s indeed refreshing or foolish, your faith in humanity.”

“Oh, no, humanity’s fuckin’ fucked,” Barnes agreed. “But a person? A person you can trust to be themselves. We’re all as much a mensch as we wanna be, yanno?”

You’re a good kid. When you wanna be. And yet their captor, in the service of the Reich, no less. They entered the larder as Monty pondered this contradiction, and it occurred to him suddenly and rather altogether too late why it was their young guard had been posted look out. “Bloody hell!” Monty spun on his heel, colliding with the wall. Barnes—the cheeky bastard—merely whistled. Leaned his hips against the corner and bit into a stolen apple with a crunch.

“es ist nur der Arschkreicker,” someone called as young men fumbled with belts and pants and trousers. A Rottenführer, unfamiliar to them. Barnes, however, was known both by face and reputation. “Hey, Kleinführer,” the boy called again, this time in His Majesty’s perfect English. “How many cigarettes to suck my dick?”

“I’d have to find it first,” Barnes shot back with a nod to the girl hastily rising from between his feet. “She knows what I’m talking about.”

She scuttled away to join a handful of others, clustering together like frightened hens in a coop. And something, Monty thought, something about the situation wasn’t quite right–

“Dreckjude!”

“Of course I’m a jew,” Barnes sniffed. “I know a bad investment when I see one.”

>>What are you doing here?<< another young woman interrupted, this one dark haired, with deep brown eyes. >>Herr Friedrichs gave you orders. Übersoldat, explain yourself!<<

“Herr Barnes is the Lagerältester, Fraulein Schmidt,” Ackermann reasoned from the doorframe. “And Klaus is just a rotten führer.” He glanced to Barnes for approval, and the man snorted appreciatively. But Monty caught Barnes’ eye, looked sidelong at this Frauline Schmidt.

You do not wish to meet Herr Schmidt. Zola’s warning, a lifetime ago. Was this mere coincidence? A daughter--?
“What do you look at?” Schmidt insisted, as though reading their thoughts.

“Nothin’,” Barnes shrugged, reading the room with an uncanny ease. “…for the right price. Be a shame of Herr Kleiber found out about dereliction of duty, ’s all.”

The squad went silent. Ilse and Schmidt exchanged worried looks, something unspoken passing between them. “Scheisse,” Schmidt scowled. >>Just let him fuck them<< “What do you want?” She asked again in English, dragging one of the girls forward from the peep by her hair. “You want her?”

Understanding struck. A wave of horror washed over Monty: this wasn’t a lovers tryst, some lads being boisterous. These girls—and they were just girls, young, fresh-faced, fragile things like Jackie had been in those last fraught years of adolescence, girls who ought be concerned with boys and bicycling, stolen kisses, sitting examinations—were prisoners, just like him.

>>You can’t—<< Ackermann began.

>>It’s not your ass on the line if your Uncle finds out! << Schmidt returned.

>>You don’t give orders here,<< Friedrichs snarled. >>Not to us!<<

>>It’s your ass, too!<< She snapped, clutching the girl’s hair tighter. That brokered no argument. Schmidt thrust her again towards Barnes. “You want her?”

“Hey, no, doll,” Barnes said, voice and posture forcefully neutral, but Monty saw the line of his throat as he swallowed, the cracks at the edge of the mask. “Cigarettes. Soap. That sort of thing.” It might have ended there.

…and for sixty some years Monty prayed to a God he didn’t believe in that it indeed had ended there.

Schmidt released her, but the girl didn’t dare move, head ducked down, whinging at the floor. >>Thank God. If I had to watch a Pole and a Jew fucking like livestock--<<

Friedrichs ordered her silent. Leaned forward and blew a thick cloud of smoke into Barnes’ face. “How long since you seen a girl, Kleinführer?”


“You are not interested?”

“Maybe she ain’t my type.” Quite right, indeed. Monty himself was no stranger to sex, but there was a difference between a bird sitting on a man’s lap of her own free will for a snog or a shag—even if money happened to change hands—and this.

“This Schwuchtel, this Judenschwein here, could have his own room, his own bed, could fuck girls in the brothel but he does not and now he says he does not even want pussy,” Friedrichs proclaimed to their gathered audience.

“What can I say, pal. You and I both know I go back to the floor smelling like cunt I’d be eaten alive. ‘Sides, unlike you, shitstain, I got myself a girl back home in Brooklyn.”

“I think you are lying,” Friedrichs leered. “I think you are a queer.”
Barnes went still. When he spoke, his voice had gone low and dangerous. “Got quite an imagination, don’tcha.”

“You’re going to fuck her.”

*Oh good bloody God.*

“I don’t think so.”

Friedrichs drew his sidearm. The room went silent.

“Do it, or I shoot you.”

*Bloody bugger fuck.*

Schmidt paled. >>Klaus, you can’t!<<

>>You don’t give me orders!<<

“Klaus—‘ Ackermann warned him.

>>And you! Übersoldat! You don’t give me orders, either! You think because your uncle is a Colonel that you are protected? I’ll tell Herr Lohmer he has betrayed his party, aided prisoners, this judenschwein. Perhaps he is one himself! What do you think will happen then?>><

Monty need not know German to understand the threat. The boy swallowed. Said nothing.

Friedrichs turned back to Barnes. “You’re going to fuck her.”

“You think I scare that easy, pal?” Barnes bristled, and for a moment—a fleeting, desperate moment—Monty thought that surely, surely he would talk his way out of this as he had done so very many times before. “Lohmer couldn’t do it, and neither can you.”

Friedrichs considered, and Monty found himself staring down the narrow barrel of a Luger P08. He felt his throat tense, heard his heart pounding like the storm-tossed ocean in his ears. “I shoot him.”

“Yeah?” Barnes—the bloody, reckless fool—put his body between them, stalking forward until his chest pushed against the barrel of the gun. “And what’s your Colonel gonna say when you shoot a strapping Aryan fella like Monty here? One of his best workers? You think he’s gonna be happy?”

“You’re right, Herr Barnes, you’re right,” Friedrichs soothed cruelly, smoothing his hands down the chevrons on Barnes’ shoulders. “I can’t shoot him.” And for a moment Monty thought—hoped, prayed, even—that it was over.

Then—

“Herr Ackermann, Bring the bimbo. The nigger. No one, I think, will complain then.”

>>You can’t—!<<

>>Übersoldat, obey your superiors!<<

“Ackermann,” Barnes began. “Lars.”

>>Do you take orders from me? Or from this dreckjude here?”
>>Herr Barnes is the Lagerältester. He outranks you.<< Ackermann argued in a panicked voice.

>>Like Uncle, like nephew. Perhaps I should say you both fight for Alljuda. What do you think would happen then?<<

“Lars,” Barnes called, more insistent. But the boy wouldn’t meet his eyes. “The fuck you say to him?”

And surely, Monty thought, surely the lad would go for help. Would alert his uncle, a comrade, a friend, someone--anyone--of the farce being played before them. There was no help here. Their young guards shared bright looks of mocking amusement, at once horrified and emboldened. Ilse and Schmidt stood silent and tense. And the girl--the girls--kept still, their eyes to the floor, frozen like fawns.

But help was not forthcoming. Ackermann appeared all too soon, escorting Jones, who read the tension in the room. “Sarge--?”

Friedrichs turned the pistol on him without warning. Struck him once, twice, three times across the face, and the shredded flesh underneath was a startling, startling pink. Jones raised a reflexive arm, but Friedrichs slammed the butt against the base of the skull. Jones sprawled to his knees, hands upraised, mouth moving soundlessly.

The man was praying.

“Stop,” Barnes cried out. “I said stop!”

“I will stop,” Friedrichs sneered, “when you fuck her.”

“Alright, alright. Easy, pal,” Barnes held his hands out in shaking surrender. “Shit, sweetheart, how old are you?”

“What does it matter?”

“It matters ‘cause some of us care more about not bein’ pederasts than people thinkin’ we’re queer.” But the girl reached out and took his hand. Slipped her fingers into his trousers. “No,” Barnes insisted, and knelt before her. “You speak English, doll? You understand me?” he asked gently, hand on her knee. “Her feet,” he whispered, and Monty’s startled eye was drawn to blood-soaked shoes and stockings. “What happened to ’em.”

“Little cunt wanted to die. Tried to make it to the fence. I make sure it does not happen,” Friedrichs shrugged. “She had friend who was uglier. Her I pushed. The bitch took days to die.”

“Jesus, sweetheart,” Barnes breathed. “Anyone look at those?”

“I said you’re going to fuck her.”

“Sarge, don’t—” Jones defied him. Friedrichs dug the muzzle into Jones’ nape, chambering a round with an ominous click, “It’s not worth it.”

“Can it, Jonesey-boy,” Barnes took a shuddering breath, searching her face for permission. Forgiveness. Resignation. “I ain’t gonna let him fucking shoot you.”

Monty turned away. Nearly retched. Once again the world—Barnes, his friend, this poor Polish girl—needed him to be a man, a soldier, a Lieutenant in His Majesty’s Third Parachute Brigade, but for all of that in this moment he was a young boy again, trapped in a chimney, heart in this throat,
struggling for air. A person you can trust to be themselves, Barnes had said; and Monty Falsworth was a coward.

“Watch.” Their tormentor ordered, and it was only the thought of Jones on his hands and knees, pistol to his head, defiant to the last, that Monty mustered the strength. He knew violence intimately: the sound of the Luftwaffe above London, the rush of air as he plummeted to the earth below; the scrambling of a man as he suffocated in the trenches; what it was to watch men be mown down by shrapnel into gore and shit with surprising, untouched fragments of flesh—an eye, a hand, half a face of a man he recognized, had shared a beer with not the night before—strewn over the survivors. He remembered Lewis and Grantham pooling to ash, the look of starvation and sickness on the prisoners’ faces, not trusting himself to choose. Even Barnes’ words with Zola of rape seemed so long ago, distant and forgotten. For five long years Monty had witnessed the horrors of war and even then, not even then, had he imagined the depravity of being both forced perpetrator and unwilling victim.

The sight. The sound. The smell of it. The slick rhythm of Barnes’ tongue and working fingers, her heaving breaths. Monty was frightened. Repulsed. Aroused. Ashamed.

On one long, slow stroke no different than the others she came, thighs clenching around his head with a little cry. He continued to mouth where their two bodies were joined, and she went on and on until those moans turned to a hiss of pain. Barnes sat back on his heels, kissed the inside of her knee once, then offered her a hand. “Still think I’m queer?” Barnes demanded as he sat her up. “Now let him go.”

“You didn’t fuck her.”

Barnes stood, pulled his spit-soaked lips back from his teeth. “I don’t know, pal. She seems pretty damn well fucked to me. Any of you make her come like that?”

“Everyone has a weakness, Kleinführer. I think I found yours,” Friedrichs said, putting his cigarette out on the back of Jones’ head. Barnes didn’t so much as flinch. “The next one I put out on her. Right on her Kitzler.” He moved the Luger from Jones' nape in an obscene gesture.

“Fuckin’ finally,” Barnes growled, and slammed his forehead into the lad’s leering face.

There came a sickening crunch. A collective intake of air. The pistol fell to the floor with a clatter. Friedrichs raised his hand to his broken nose, astonished at the sight of his own blood.

Ackermann burst into frightened laughter.

Barnes punched him in the gut, sent a knee through his groin. Friedrichs staggered back and fell. Barnes swept that gun away and under the shelving with purpose and bore down on him like a predator. Kicked the man in the ribs and balls with short, brutal blows. Rolled him onto his back. Put his foot to the man’s throat and leaned his weight into it.

In that moment Monty had no doubts Barnes would kill him. And Monty—no man, no brother, no father—would blame him.

“Now you’ve done it. You’ve gone and made me angry. See, Klaus—I can call you Klaus? Here’s the thing: you might be a fuckin’ Nazi, but I’m the Lagerältester. I’m in charge of this base, its output, and the well-being of all the workers in it. So you don’t come between me and my men, and you don’t come between me and my work—or anyone else’s. How’s Jonesey-boy supposed to work with a hole in his head, huh? And how’s a girl supposed to work if you put a third hole where her clit goes? So here’s the deal, pal: Jones is coloured, and even if you’ve got a bucket of
bleach back there there ain’t damn thing I can do about that. And her? She’s a whore, and god
fuckin’ help me there’s not a goddamn thing I can do about that, either. So you go ahead and fuck
her, pal, you an’ every other piece of shit like you. But you hurt her? You beat her? You incapacitate
her in any way? I’ll bust your fuckin’ teeth in then castrate you with mine. So you’d better hope
next time I see her she’s got good things to say about you, pal.”

Barnes filched through the man’s pockets, found and lit a cigarette of his own. No one moved. The
only sound was Friedrichs' ugly, gasping breaths, fingers scrabbling at Barnes’ unrelenting heel. His
face had turned a deathly shade of purple.

“This cigarette right here? I could put it out in your eye. Right here. Right now.” Barnes yanked a
fistful of his hair, forced Friedrichs' head still as he clenched his eyes shut in a soundless scream.
There came the sudden acrid scent of burning hair as his lashes melted. “An’ no one—not a one of
your pals here, is gonna stop me. That’s how much a piece of shit you are. I know it. They know it.
An’ way deep down inside I’m guessin’ you know it, too. But I ain’t gonna—not ‘cause you don’t
fuckin’ deserve it an’ not ‘cause I ain’t that guy but ‘cause I got a girl back home who wouldn’t like
it. So you thank Stephanie Grace Rogers I gotta give you a second chance. There by the grace of her
you go, pal.” Barnes flicked the butt away, quashed it with that same heel. “Do me a favor? Don’t
make me regret it.”

Friedrichs clutched his throat, floundered like a fish. “Herr Kleiber’s not here to protect you!” he
croaked, retreating shakily on his arse and free hand.

“You think I need Kleiber?” Barnes laughed humorlessly. “Hell, pal, Zola’s just down the hall. Let’s
go ask him. Hey, Arnim!” The shout echoed off the hallway walls. Underneath the blood and
bruises, Friedrichs paled. Their gathered audience stirred uneasily.

“Yeah, pal. You just fucked with the teacher’s pet. Don’t make me tattle on you. ‘Cause if it’s
between me and your stupid, sorry ass, who’d you think Zola’s gonna choose? I ain’t the one
breakin’ the goddamn rules bringin’ girls in here on duty. Anyone else got somethin’ to say?” Barnes
held himself to his full height, stared defiantly from face to face. No one spoke. No one dared even
breathe. And that, Monty decided, was the true power of the man. These boys who had mocked him
only moments ago now stood before him, trembling and ashamed.

“You alright, Jonesey-boy?” Barnes helped the man to stand.

Jones wiped the blood from his lip with trembling hands. “S-sure, Sarge.”

“Good man,” Barnes told him, and squeezed his shoulder.

“Now c’mon, sweetheart,” he offered the girl his arm as she dressed, got her onto her wounded feet.
“Where they got you stationed, huh? Least I can do’s walk you home.”

He caught sight of Barnes in the latrines later, fist in his teeth, sobbing silently where not a soul could
see. Monty was struck. Frightened. Complicit. Ashamed. Did his damnedest to wipe it forever from
his memory.

...but that sight of Barnes clutching that comic and screaming would stay with him a long, long time.
And later, much later, he would wonder if that image of Barnes weeping last behind his eyes that
night was the last behind the Captain’s when he too went where the wicked cease from raging, and
the weary are at rest.
Come, said the Boy to the Soldier, and let us arise and escape this City.

Yet the walls are high, the Soldier said, and who can say what awaits us on the stones below.

Come, said the Courtesan, Come. For you have shown me kindness. I will show you the secret ways through the city. On safe paths will I guide you, from harm will I hide you, only come.

—Jacob (I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

On Baiting German Officers

“Bloody stupid, adolescent behavior.”

He was not only hurt but very angry.

“Not stupid,” I answered. ‘We had the right idea, we just went to far. It’s a matter of judgement.”

“You can’t tell me that it was not stupid and irresponsible to start sensing about the Siegfried line.”

“There I agree with you, it was a very bad choice. But the principle of the thing is right—don’t you agree? Infuriate the goons, make them flap and panic, harass them, disturb them—that’s what we have to do.”

“Not at the expense of my kidneys,” he answered, rubbing his back.

“I’m sorry about that,” I said, “and I do agree that this last effort was below standard. On the other hand, you have to admit that these Germans now respect our little RAF contingent. They know they are going to have to watch us very carefully and that, in itself, is a victory. Quite apart from the fact that we destroyed the fat captain in that shambles at the station when we first arrived and again just down the hill when everybody sat down on the roadside.”

“That’s all very true. But suppose these bastards had started shooting instead of just slogging us. What then? Would that have been clever?”

It was a critical question and I thought carefully before replying.
“No. The game as it should be played must at all costs avoid violence and injury. Violence is their weapon and we have no defense against it. If we provoke it we are the losers, as in this case. I think that there are two vital lessons to learn from our experience this morning.”

“And what are they?”

“I suppose it really boils down to one principle. Attack the system but not the individual. Which means, never bait or try to infuriate a German soldier with a gun because he, as an individual, has a very human limit of self-control and, if pushed too far, may well press the trigger. On the other hand, with a German officer you can go almost to any limits, because he represents the system with all its rigid discipline and blind obedience. No German officer, however much you provoke him, would ever shoot you out of hand or even hit you. He will have you thrown in the cooler but he will not lose his self-control and get violent. So we should bait the officers but lay off the soldiers.”

“Maybe,” he was doubtful, ‘you have something there. But it does mean that we have to being control of ourselves. We can’t let just anybody start a riot. Somebody has to give the orders and take the responsibility.”


**Allied POW ambivalence to torture**

“To our comfortable British consciences, they [Russian POWs] were a nasty embarrassment. It was easier to pretend they were not there, much as one crosses the street to avoid passing a beggar. Their offence was that they did not fit into the rightful scheme of things, but provoked uncomfortable thoughts. Towards us the Germans behaved themselves with a disciplined formality and correctness. They liked us to think they were gentlemen and we were often stupid enough to think this way. The starving Russians, moving their emaciated bodies with painful slowness, did not fit the pattern and it was easier to ignore their existence than to re-adjust our ideas to grim reality.”

In those days we were innocent and ignorant, sheltered and protected by our bared wire fences. We had never heard of Belsen, Buchenwald or Cahua and knew nothing of the desperate plight of the Jews and the other declared enemies of Hitler's Third Reich.”


**Pink Triangles**

In 1942 Himmler mandated that Pink Triangle prisoners should be forced to participate in sex acts with camp prostitutes on a weekly basis as a form of gay conversion therapy. This sexual abuse by proxy of gay men was first attested to in die Männer mit dem rosa Winkel (The Men With the Pink Triangle), a memoir of Josef Kohout, and published by Hans Neumann under the pseudonym of Heinz Heger in 1972. It was the first testimony of a homosexual survivor to be translated into English, and the catalyst for international queer movements to reclaim the symbol of the pink triangle.

"I was taken the same day to the police prison on Rossauerlande street, which we Viennese know as the “liesl”, as the street used to be called the Elisabethpromenade.

My pressing request to telephone my mother to tell her where I’d been taken was met with the words: “She’ll soon know you’re not coming home again.”
I was then examined bodily, which was very distressing, as I had to undress completely so that the policeman could make sure I was not hiding any forbidden object, even having to bend over. Then I could get dressed again, though my blet and shoelaces were taken away. I was locked in a cell designed for one person, though it already had two other occupants. My fellow prisoners were criminals, one under investigation for housebreaking, the other for swindling widows on the lookout for a new husband. They immediately wanted to know what I was in for, which I refused to tell them. I simply said that I didn’t know myself. From what they told me, they were both married, and between thirty and thirty-five years old.

When they found out that I was “queer,” as one of the policemen gleefully told them, they immediately made open advances to me, which I angrily rejected. I was in no mood for amorous adventures, and in any case, as I told them in no uncertain terms, I wasn’t the kind of person who gave himself to anyone.

Then they started to insult me and “the whole brood of queers,” who ought to be exterminated. It was an unheard-of insult that the authorities should have put a subhuman such as this in the same cell as two relatively decent people. Even if they had come into conflict with the law, they were at least normal men and not moral degenerates. They were on a quite different level from homos, who should be classed as animals. They went on with such insults for quite a while, stressing all the time how they were decent men in comparison with the filthy queers. You’d have thought from their language that it was me who had propositioned them, not the other way round.

As it happened, I found out of the very first night that they had sex together, not even caring whether I saw or heard. But in their view—the view of “normal” people—this was only an emergency outlet, with nothing queer about it.

As if you could divide homosexuality into normal and abnormal. I later had the misfortune to discover that it wasn’t only these two gangsters who had that opinion, but almost all “normal” men. I still wonder today how this division between normal and abnormal is made. Is there a normal hunger and an abnormal one? A normal thirst and an abnormal one? Isn’t hunger always hunger, and thirst thirst? What a hypocritical and illogical way of thinking!

22-23

"On the express orders of SS Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler—Reichsheini” as he was known to both friend and foe—a prison brothel was established in Flossenburg in summer 1942, known by the euphemism of the “special block.” In what had formerly been the cinema, the hall was divided up into several apartments where the prostitutes were to live and “work”. The special block was placed under the sick bay, so that a check could be kept on the health of the “ladies” and their clients. Naturally all this was the subject of great discussion among the prisoners, who had already heard about it well in advance. The “greens” and the Gypsies were most keen on the idea of a brothel, whereas the politicals were against it and held that it was simply a diversion on the part of the Nazis to concern the bad state of the war. The Jehovah's Witnesses refused to visit the brothel on grounds of conscience.

Himmler’s idea, however, was that those of us in the pink-triangle category should be “cured” of our homosexual disposition by compulsory regular visits to the brothel. We were obliged to show up there once a week, in order to “learn” the joys of the other sex. Of course, this instruction only showed how little the SS leadership and their scientific advisers understood homosexuality, seeing a human emotional orientation as simply a disability and prescribing brothel visits as “treatment”.

The same narrow-mindedness, of course, is still with us today, more than twenty-five years later, as far as most “authorities” are concerned.

One day the truck with the “girls” arrived at the camp gate and rolled up at the special block, impatiently anticipated by many people. Ten young women go out, and were taken into their quarters. They came from the women’s camp at Ravensbruck, and were almost all Jews and Gypsies. The SS had brought them to Flossenburg on the pretext that after six months of “service to
clients” they would be released from concentration camp. The tortures and sufferings in the women’s camps must have been just as bad as those inflicted on the male prisoners at Flossenbury, otherwise it would be incomprehensible that girls such as these would have volunteered for brothel service. The promise of freedom was a gleaming one, an end to torture and brutality, as well as the pangs of hunger.

Believing in the promises of their concentration-camp jailers, they offered themselves up as victims for six months, whereupon they would allegedly be relieved by a further batch of “volunteers” from Ravensbruck. But rather than freedom, they were taken to the extermination camp at Auschwitz, completely exhausted by the almost two thousand “acts of love” that they had to submit to in these six months.

ON the very first day, when the brothel was “opened,” a hundred prisoners arrived at the special block at 5 pm, four hours ahead of opening time. A similar number Came day after day, with not the slightest letup. These prisoners, laughing and joking as they queued up outside the brothel, were by no means all men still in their prime—those were mostly Capos or foremen—but also included a good number of half-starved and exhausted human wrecks, floating between life and death, and looking as if they might collapse any minute. Yet still they wanted to have their “pleasure”—a clear sign of how sexuality is the most powerful of human drives.

“Dustbag” had holes drilled in the brothel rooms for himself and his underlings, so that they could get a good look at the “love life” of their prisoners and tell other prisoners the next day what position this man or that had taken. I often asked myself whether this inhibited sexuality of secret voyeurism through the keyhole was not more “degenerate” than my own homosexuality was said to be.

*Amazingly enough, this behavior was not just mere voyeurism, but an express part of Himmler’s plan for “curing” homosexuals. Any pink triangle prisoners deemed “cured” by virtue of their consistent good conduct in the brothel were then sent to the Dirlewanger penal division." 98-100

"On three occasions I myself had to visit the brothel on “Dustbag’s” express orders, which was already torment enough. What pleasure was I expected to get, when the poor girl lifted her legs and called, “Hurry up, then, hurry up!” so that she could be finished as soon as possible with a situation that was certainly just as painful for her? On top of which, I knew that some SS man would be spying on me through the hole. Certainly no “cure” was to be expected from this “enjoyment of the opposite sex.” Quite the contrary: I was so shattered by this form of sexual intercourse that I never again tried to have sex with a woman, and my homosexual orientation was only reinforced. Since the pressure on the brothel was so great, however, I was not ordered there again, though to keep up appearances I had to put my name down once a week and pay my two marks, sending another prisoner there to “enjoy himself” instead of me.

The camp “dignitaries” patronized the brothel very regularly, often bringing the “girls” presents, which might range from a sausage through to a pair of silk stockings, Naturally enough, the prostitutes looked forward to their arrival. Many of them always visited the same girls, and started talkin gin terms of a regular relationship. But this was optimistic, for very often ten of fifteen prisoners would view the same girl as their future bride, and bring her presents. It was almost a miracle that it didn’t come to murder between the prisoners involved. Despite their regular visits, however, the block seniors and Capos still maintained their dolly-boys, whom they were evidently attached to. I didn’t blame them, for even though I never got intimate with any of them, these young Russians and Poles were both cleaner and more human than the worn-out brothel girls. But I suppose I obviously would see it like that.” 100

"Toward the end of 1943, a new instruction on the “eradication of sexual degenerates”—that is, homosexuals—came down from Himmler. He now stipulated that any homosexual who consented to castration, and whose conduct was good, would shortly be released from concentration camp. Many of the pink-triangle prisoners actually believed Himmler’s promises, and consented to castration with a view to escaping their murderous persecutions. But in spite of good conduct—and this was
assessed by their SS block leader and camp commander—when they were released from concentration camp this was only to be sent to the SS Dirlewanger penal division on the Russian front, to be butchered in the partisan war and die a hero’s death for Hitler and Himmler. On one occasion “Dustbag” asked me: “Tell me, you queer Capo, have you been castrated yet?”

“No, Herr Lagenfuhrer.”

“Are you going to be, then?”

“Herr Lagenfuhrer, I want to go home in the same state that I came in.”

“You and the whole pack of you queers, you’re never going to go home again,” he poisonously remarked.

What he meant by this was that we homosexuals, despite the promises of the commandant and the whole SS leadership, were not going to be released, even after good work in the munitions factories. The intention was to exterminate us, as had already been decided in 1938.”

In any case, I steadfastly refused to be castrated, which gave “Dustbag” a new pretext to try and get rid of me, the only pink-triangled Capo. “Dustbag” started a campaign for enrollment of German prisoners for the Russian front. The order had come from Himmler to fill up the ranks of the Dirlewanger penal division. SS Standartenfuhrer Dirlewanger was a former Sturmbannfuhrer who had been court-martialed on several occasions, and initially imprisoned, but who had been pardoned and given command of an SS penal regiment, just as the partisan resistance behind the German lines began to flare up at the start of the Russian campaign. His SS regiment, which rapidly expanded into a division, was made up exclusively of prisoners from the military and civilian jails, and deployed only against the Russian partisans.

…”Dustbag” thus drew up a list of “volunteers” for the Dirlewanger division, with my name on it among the others, spitefully saying that by serving at the front I might blot out the shame of my homosexuality. In this way he hoped to get the pink-triangled Capo out of “his” camp. I immediately told the civilian staff in the aircraft factory of this “voluntary” enrollment for the Dirlewanger division, and asked them for their help. Since they were very unwilling for me to be moved, they telephoned their head office straightaway and told them I was quite indispensable at my job in the Flossenburger aircraft components stores, so that my removal would virtually amount to sabotage of aircraft production. The head office was therefore to make sure that I was kept on as Capo. They also reported that I had displayed particular vigor ever since the start of my work in the stores, and had taken great pains to see the supply and delivery of aircraft components went smoothly ahead. I kept a firm hand on the prisoners working under me, without any brutality, and would keep them sticking to their work.

The head office got on Minister Albert Speer—so I later learned from the civilian staff—who in turn spoke with the SS department in charge of the concentration camps. The very next day the Flossenburger commandant was informed by telephone from Himmler’s office that prisoner X.Y.—that is, myself—was to be kept on as Capo in the stores of the Flossenburger aircraft factory.

That evening I was called into “Dustbag’s” office, where the commandant personally informed me, in “Dustbag’s” presence, that I was to remain in the camp and continue at my post in charge of the station detachment. The commandant praised my careful and even “important” work in the factory, and took his leave in an almost kindly way, patting me on the shoulder.”


Pierre Seel shared his story in a memoir Moi, Pierre Seel, déporté homosexuel in 1994. He was 17
in May 1941, when he was interrogated and imprisoned.

"After violently shutting my file, the SS man facing me instantly called me a Schweinehund (dirty bastard), filthy faggot. The interrogation was only just starting. Did I know other homosexuals? What were their names and addresses? Had I heard about so-and-so? Wasn’t it true that a certain churchman liked young men? Where were our meeting places? He knew a lot more than I did. I remained silent.

The Germans, who obviously knew that I was homosexual, were trying to use me to trap a portion of the city’s populace. But what proof did they have of my sexuality? They showed me the statement I had signed at the age of seventeen, when I had told a French police officer about the theft of my watch in a dubious place. There was my signature. I couldn’t deny my homosexuality. Others, who could deny theirs, were lucky enough to be expelled from the territory instead of being interned. The blows came raining down. Behind the desk, each SS man followed the last in an even rhythm. Each time, the grilling started from scratch: last name, first name, date of birth, names and addresses of homosexual acquaintances. One after another the interrogators yelled, threatened, brutalized. They tried to corner us, exhaust us, quell any resistance. After reiterating the same words, the same denials twenty times over, for ten hours in a row, we saw lists emerging from files. We had to sign. Kneeling on a ruler, we had to confirm that all these names made up the roster of homosexual in Mulhouse. The walls echoed with our screams. Sometimes they took us to a different office, where we were asked to identify other victims who had been rounded up that day. Our eyes met, terrified.

At first we managed to endure the suffering. But ultimately it became impossible. The machine of violence accelerated. Outraged by our resistance, the SS began pulling out the fingernails of some of the prisoners. In their fury, they broke the rulers we were kneeling on and used them to rape us. Our bowels were punctured. Blood spurted everything. My ears still ring with our shrieks of atrocious pain.

When my eyes reopened, I thought I was in the back room of a butcher’s shop. I don’t know what went through my mind. The torture had overwhelmed even the slightest thought. It was pure violence, the kind that destroys forever. But it was a wretched victory for our torturers. For though I signed the document as others did, to stop the agony, the bloodstains had made it illegible.

..."One of my brothers came to see me in the visitor's room. He and my father, nervous about my disappearance, had gone to the Gestapo the morning after I was summoned. There they found out that I was in the city prison. The SS man had added that in any case I was nothing but a Schweinehund--the disgusting German word was perfectly understood. And that was how, in the most humiliating manner, my family learned about my homosexuality. A horrible wound, both for them and for me. Moreover, my brother told that that since the Gestapo was a law unto itself, the attorneys they consulted had their hands tied. I was absolutely alone."

I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual. Basic Books, 2011. You can search and read portions of it on google books, here:

https://books.google.com/books/about/I_Pierre_Seel_Deported_Homosexual.html?id=S6sdDOjK05YC

Chapter End Notes
Sexual assault by proxy: A captor accuses Bucky of being queer, then threatens Jones at gunpoint unless Bucky performs a sex act on a female prisoner of unknown age. Bucky actively seeks her consent but neither of them is in a position to refuse. If you would prefer to skip this section, stop reading at: “…and for sixty-some years Monty would pray to a God he didn’t believe it that it would indeed have ended there.”

Violence: Bucky provokes Lohmer into attacking him (THAT scene TM from First Vengeance). Gabe is threatened with a firearm. Bucky beats the ever-living shit out of a Nazi.

The Woman's prophecy is based on the Song of Deborah (Shoftim 5:2-31). It's some of the oldest surviving Hebrew poetry, and one of two passages in the Tanakh to credit women with a military victory

Bernadette “Bernie” Rosenthal

Jewish artist turned human rights attorney from M-616. She left glass blowing to pursue a career in law after befriending and falling in love with Steve Rogers. She argues for a bench trial and successfully represents a post-Winter Soldier Bucky in court, and even after he changes his plea to guilty because it's “the only honorable thing, the only thing Captain America should do”, the judge sentences him to 20 years, commuted to ‘time served’, effectively setting him free.

Brubaker, Ed. The Trial of Captain America, Part 5 (Captain America 615). Marvel Comics.


Air Transport Auxiliary
https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/doing-their-bit-the-female-fighter-pilots-of-world-war-ii/

Peggy Carter punching out Gilmore Hodge has historical basis-most American GIs had to be specifically trained to respect British women, who had been fighting the war for 4 years before the US even entered: 'A British woman officer or non-commissioned officer can – and often does – give orders to a man private. The men obey smartly and know it is no shame. For British women have proven themselves in this way…There is not a single record in this war of any British woman in uniformed service quitting her post or failing in her duty under fire. Now you understand why British soldiers respect the women in uniform. They have won the right to the utmost respect. When you see a girl in khaki or air-force blue with a bit of ribbon on her tunic – remember she didn't get it for knitting more socks than anyone else in Ipswich'.

Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain. United States War Department, 1942.

Music and Jazz under the Reich

Bund Deutscher Mädel in der Hitler-Jugend/League of German Girls in Hitler Youth

“The so-called agricultural school had only a few pigs and lambs. It was actually a Nazi training center for boys and girls from ten to eighteen years of age. The youngsters were
dangerously fanatic and had the right to sentence to death anyone criticizing Hitler or the party. They could even denounce their parents and have them sent to concentration camps or shot, if they judged it good for the party. I was so wary of them I never walked to work alone.”

Anti-black Racism in Nazi Germany
Bimbo (German)-ethnic slur

On December 17, 1944, 11 black GI's surrender to the SS to save the lives of the family that hid them, including Hermann Langer, then only 12 years old.
1945 February massacre site discovered
1947 Massacre investigation closed and sealed as Top Secret
1949 Senate Armed Services Committee documents 12 incidents of American troop and Belgium citizen massacres. The Wereth massacre is excluded.
1994 Hermann Langer returns on the 50th anniversary of the Wereth massacre and erects a temporary memorial
2004 Permanent memorial erected
2013 HR Concurrent Resolution 68 called on the Senate to amend the 1949 report with the Wereth 11’s names. The Wereth 11 are posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and World War II Victory Medal.
http://www.wereth.org/en/history (Warning: contains graphic images of war crimes investigation)
(low budget/ a bit cringey, but contains interviews with Staff Sergeant George Shomo, a black WW2 POW)

Suicide by electric fence

‘Choiceless Choice’
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings for discussions of sexual assault, violence, racism, and homophobia.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

What then would you do, asked him the Soldier. The War is over, the Boy is dead, the Captain as well.

Proclaim freedom, everyone to his brother and every one to his neighbor, spoke the Poet. I would bind up the broken-hearted, declare freedom for the captives, hear the cry of the prisoner, and loose the sons of a dying nation. Then perhaps we shall know justice, and peace, and every good thing from every tree that is pleasant. For it is written the needy shall not be forgotten forever, nor shall the hope of the poor be lost. I have heard the Song, and so would I Sing.

You would then be a Singer, the Soldier wondered. Such a path would be lonely and thankless, and come bitterly to its end.

Yet it is the right path, spoke him the Singer, and I have chosen freely.

--Jacob(I Have Loved), J. Montgomery Falsworth

Let me tell you a story.

Last weekend a stop of frisk was filmed by an elderly bystander. This man—like the youths stopped—was black. This man was arrested. This man was thrown to the ground, humiliated and handcuffed, then left six hours in a holding tank without treatment for his injuries, including a fractured wrist and a subdural hematoma. This man remained in custody for the next 36 hours as our justice system continues to take weekends off.

This man’s name was Gabriel Jones.

I tried my d*mnedest to protect and serve this city. Tried to prove it’s not just “the white man’s uniform”. But I can’t justify being the face of the NYPD if I stay silent. I can’t hold my head up, hang my badge and holster at the end of the day and say it’s an organization I’m proud to represent, even here in Harlem. Because the truth is I’m no longer trying to keep my community safe from crime, but from the men and women who’ve sworn to protect and serve. When you unjustly injure and imprison a civil rights leader who lived through the Harlem Renaissance, fought in the first desegregated military unit in US history, marched with MLK Jr. and Bayard Rustin to Montgomery and Washington, when you spit in the face of a century of progress, a century of black activism and equality, you apologize, not cover your a**. We can’t ignore this. We can’t keep calling these
There was an unspoken pact between them that the men could never know. Unspoken, perhaps, because there was nothing to say; unspoken, perhaps, because there were not yet words, if indeed there ever would be. It was hours before they saw Barnes again, and in a manner so incongruous with what they had witnessed it was a rather jarring shock.

“What’s got you so happy?” Jones broached the subject warily.

“Women.” Barnes tossed a brassier in their startled faces.

“Women?” Jones wondered, as flummoxed as Monty felt.


“Nazis,” Dugan raised a lip in disgust, pulling the item away from his nose where he’d been sniffing reverently.

“Yep,” Barnes sang, then slung a chummy arm around the two of them. “But where there are women, fellas, there are bound to be men makin’ stupid-ass decisions, even ones of the Nazi persuasion. And what sort of Jew-boy would I be if I didn’t exploit that?”

“Just don’t be one of ‘em,” Morita said unwittingly, and bristled under Monty’s glare of reproach. “Six hundred servicemen a day get treated for VD. Never seen so damn many dicks in my life.”

“Who, our Sarge?” Dugan snickered, pocketing the brassiere, no doubt for an intimate moment in the latrines later. “Gettin’ lucky with a lady? That’ll be the day.”

The cracks in the mask were slipping now, but Barnes stayed true to form. “Says the man who single-handedly emptied the Pro station at Salerno.”

Dugan only shrugged, mimed massaging the air like a woman’s tits, looking to Barnes for approval. “Wasn’t much single-handedly about it.”

“Leave the story-telling to Sarge, would you?” Jones took up that mantle when the man himself could not. “Good God Almighty if I have to listen to one more rendition of Dum-Dum Dugan’s greatest hits with the ladies I may just die.”

“You don’t mind so much when Sarge does it.”

“Yeah, well, Sarge has a way with words,” Jones deflected. “To what poor woman do we owe the pleasure?”

“If I remember right, Ilse. Don’t look at me like that, Morita. I didn’t do nothin’. Just gave our boy Berger a few tips, that’s all. An’ whatever he did, she gave him this an’ some pretty nice panties, black market an’ everything, and the kid was so grateful he let me have this. Just thought I’d share, ’s all.”
“You couldn’t’ve asked for my hat back, I wonder,” Monty tried. If Barnes was determined to put the incident from his mind forever, well. Monty would attempt do the same.

“Nah. Kid loves your stupid hat…and what’s worse, so do the ladies,” Barnes winked, the absolute bastard. He beckoned Monty closer. “But I think I found you a way outta here, if we can swing it.”

“Indeed?”

“Simple, Monty. Where there’s women, there’s bound to be men sneakin’ away at night…and not a damned thing anybody’d say about it if he’s wearing the right uniform.”

“I say, man you can’t possibly mean—“

But Barnes only made a pointed stare to their captors, Kleiber and Ackermann, enjoying cigarettes together. Monty felt a stab of hatred for the boy, for his cowardice. It was far too stark a reminder of his own. ‘Hugo Boss makes ‘em. Ain’t they just stylish?’

…and where the bloody hell were they meant to steal one of those?

“An’ you know who you look like, don’tcha?” Barnes continued, and pinched Monty’s cheek. “Tall, broad, an’ handsome with a mustachio like that?”

_Oh, good bloody God._ “Don’t say it, man.”

“Colonel Asshole Lohmer himself. Right uniform, shave, little wax for that mustache…” Barnes shrugged. ”You can walk clean out of here an’ no one’s gonna say a fuckin’ word.”

“And just where the bloody blazes are we meant to procure said uniform?”


It was the closest they came to speaking of it. They would not speak of it again.

“You okay, Sarge?” Jones’ measured voice woke Monty from a fitful sleep.

“Anything but, pal.” Barnes grimaced.

“You wanna talk about it?”

“Sorry, sweetheart. The kids are awake. Maybe another night.” Jones said something then. Latin, Monty thought.

“’S no good, Jonesey-boy. My Latin ain’t exactly what you call conversational, that an’ half of these boys here are Irish Catholic and hell, I’m guessin’ our Limey’d know for sure.”

“How are you with Hebrew?”

“Same as Latin. The classical shit I can read, a bit,” Barnes shrugged. “Memorized a whole heckuva lot of it. But I ain’t exactly whatcha call conversational, pal. You want my kid sister Becca for that—she’s the one who wanted to be a Rabbi, not me.”

“My Hebrew is strictly academic,” Jones offered in apology. “What about German?”
“...you think I’m speakin’ a goddamn word of it, you got another thing comin’.”

“But you know Yiddish, right?” Jones pressed.

“Shh! Look around you. Don’t you go tellin' people I’m a Jew!” Barnes remonstrated, but the laughter didn’t reach his eyes. They glistened in the dark with the memory of tears.

“How much German can you understand?”

“Bits. Pieces. Shit,” Barnes said hoarsely. “It ain’t enough, just the gist. ‘S like tryin’ to see underwater. Everything’s blurry, and it hurts my fuckin’ head just tryin’ to keep up. Speakin’ of German, Jonesey-boy. Got a favor to ask.”

“Anything, Sarge.” Quite right, Monty thought.

“You ain’t gonna like it,”

“Alright, give it to me,” Jones sighed.

“Limey—“

“Aw, hell no.” Jones dropped to a different cadence and register. Barnes snorted.

“What’s so damn funny?”

“You just sounded real black there for a second, that’s all.”

There was a moment of awkward silence. “I am black.”

“I—shit, Jonesey,” Barnes stammered.

“Hey, man, I get it. You’re Jewish. You’re Irish. You’re—well. But you can hide. All of it, if you want to—if you keep your damned pants on. Me? I can’t. I’m colored. I don’t have a choice. Only way I can blend in is by talking proper, or by playing a trumpet, singing and smiling and just being that big, dumb, swanky negro. But it wears. And I’m sick of pretending, of people looking down on me, putting on airs about pronunciation and grammar. Guess I just figured you of all people might understand a thing or two about it.”

“First thing I learned,” Barnes agreed bitterly. “As a kid. Not to talk too much Yiddish outside the house. Sounded too German. Great War an’ all. Got the shit beaten outta me, couldn’t’ve been more than five. Hell, it’s even how I met Stevie. I see some dumb punk standin’ up for that schlump Arnie Roth, gettin’ called a filthy krout lovin’ mick, gettin’ the shit beaten outta ‘em, well. Had to step in. Nearly ripped little Eddie Allen’s ear clean off! Got myself a black eye, and an ass whippin’ from my pa when I got home, but goddamn was it worth it just to see that goy bastard howl.”


But no, that couldn’t be right, Monty frowned. Barnes’ girl was Coloured.

“—First thing I learned,” Jones interrupted those troubling thoughts. “You be polite. You take the shit they give you and you say yes sir, thank you sir, more please, sir, you swallow it down and they call you one of the good ones. ‘Credit to your race’ and all. Even the goddamned Army, Just once, I’d like to be a man. Not a nigger, not a Negro. Not some Colored man, just a person.”

“All men are created equal, huh?” Barnes sneered. “‘Cept you coloreds, kikes, an’ queers, that is.
Aw, fuck it, Jonesey-boy. They told us. They warned us. And we didn’t listen. And this country? Our country? It left them to die. It left all of them to die. Just like it segregates you an’ puts Morita in internment. All for what? Why? Don’t know what I’m fighting for. Not anymore. Not when them that’s meant to do good do as bad as all the rest. ‘Cause that’s the one thing a good man can’t do. Hell, Stevie taught me that when I was just a fuckin’ kid. Can’t walk away from a fight. Not when there’s them that’s hurtin’. And we did. We saw it happenin’ and we walked the hell away, both here and at home, even. What’s it make us?”

“You know when Jedidiah Jones got his freedom?” Jones offered in answer after a long moment of strained silence. "I know it to the hour, minute, and second: Midnight. January first. 1863. Emancipation Proclamation. A whole two years into the war. And Lincoln? He didn’t do it because it was the right thing to do, he did it to weaken the Confederacy. And I know it, because Old Honest Abe left it legal in the four states of the Union where it wouldn’t matter.”

“Yeah? They didn’t teach that bit in school.”

“Sure, Jew York. You never finished school.”

“No, but Stevie did. I made damn sure of it. You know how many deaf kids make it outta high school? It ain’t many. I read every single one of those damn books.”

Jones sobered. “They didn’t. Found that out from the history department at Howard.”

“Don’t paint the prettiest picture, huh.” Barnes agreed.

“No one ever wants to be the villain,” Jones returned. “Everyone wants to say here, kids, here’s the war that freed them slaves. No one wants to say, we white folk? It was our fault, this is what we did. You can sweep the garbage under the rug all you want, but it’ll still rot. Especially now your slaves sure as hell aren’t cleaning up after you anymore.”

Barnes snorted. “What’re you sayin’?”

“I’m saying if that son of a bitch could up and fight for a country that didn’t give two shits about him to stop others from going through the same, if my uncle could go off to the Great War to earn some respect, come home to see seventy servicemen lynched in their uniforms and still scrape every penny together to get us out of Georgia and send my black ass to college, well. Then you can keep fighting. For us. Sure as hell have a lot more at home to look forward to than he did.”

“Sounds like a swell guy, your zeyde,” Barnes swallowed. “You ever—”

“Never got to meet him.”

“S’a damn shame,” he decided. ”Think he would've liked that. I dunno though...his great-great grandson turned out to be a regular old pain in the ass.”

Jones chuckled. Shook his head. “Would’ve liked to. Meet him. Talked with him. Would love to learn more about him, about history—hell, he was alive for the start of the blues, ragtime and jazz! I could listen to him talk all day! Wish I could. Wish I could tell him his great-great-grandson went to an all black University. Played in all the fancy swing joints in New York City. Saw a sister win an Academy Award. Two brothers elected to congress. Hell, one of us will be president, someday.”

“You really think?”

“Times are changing,” Jones affirmed. “Look at us, Sarge. Desegregated unit. First of it’s kind. It’ll happen. It’s slow, but it’ll happen.”
“I dunno, Jonesy. I just…dunno. It’s still WASPs and Catholics, Christians and Jews, English and Irish—hell, us Irish and you Coloreds. We only climb higher if we push you down. Too damn busy fightin’ each other to notice no one else hurtin’.”

“They’ll notice, alright. We just gotta make ‘em. Miscegenation, too.”

“What,” Barnes drawled. “You really gonna marry Dugan one day?”

That wrung a startled laugh from him. “Sarge, I pity the woman that does!”

“Shit, you really believe that, don’tcha, Jonesey,” Barnes asked in awe. “That one day it ain’t gonna matter, black man’s gonna be president, people won’t care if you’re colored, if you’re Protestant, Catholic, Jewish. If you’re—“ Barnes choked. Continued, “We’re gonna all get to marry who we want. Whoever we choose.”

“Sure, Sarge,” Jones affirmed. “You don’t?”

“I dunno, pal. It’s just—“ Barnes trailed off to someplace far away, then blinking his way back to reality. “‘S a nice dream, is all. But it ain’t real.”

“You and I were knee-high to nothing when women got the vote,” Jones reminded him. “Look at ‘em now. We’re gonna make it happen, you and me both.”

“Dames’d been after the vote for years, Jonesey. My and Stevie’s ma were both suffragettes. Fought like hell for it.”

“Then we fight, too,” Jones insisted. “We get home, and we give ‘em hell.”

“Whoa, there, Slugger. We gotta beat the fuckin’ Nazis before we can go home and get our asses thrown in jail.”

“If that’s what it takes, that’s what it takes. Black men’ve taken beatings for hundreds of years. About time we earned ourselves a few lashes…high time we gave a few, too,” Jones decided.

“Hey, none of that New Testament shit,” Barnes protested. “I’m Jewish!”

Jones shook his head indulgently. “Sarge, you’re as Jewish as an Easter ham.”

“Yeah, well, you know what they say, Jonesey-boy. No Atheists in fox-holes.”

“Oh, what, so you’re actually Jewish now? Or did you go decide on Catholic?”

“Nah. I dunno. Got the shit scared outta me. I ain’t prayed in a long damn time. Not sure I even know who or what I’m prayin’ to. Not sure after all the shit I done if anybody’d listen.”

“All I wanted was to get you boys home,” Barnes would say outside the Paramount Dance Hall all those many long weeks later. “The things I did, kinda planned on dyin’. And now I gotta live with ‘em. And it gets harder—“ They never spoke of it. Even then, staring out at London with their stolen cigarettes, they would not speak of it. “Look at us,” Barnes would say instead. “Bunch of old hens out here flappin’ our gums, too goddamn tired to go in and dance.”

“Well, you figure it out, Sarge, you let me know,” Jones told him gently. “Either way, I’ll pray for your heathen soul: I’m a Baptist.”
“Aw, ain’t you just sweet as shit on sugar.”

“Jewish, Catholic, agnostic, atheist...Sarge, any way you slice it God knows you’re a pain in my ass. Speaking of which, I’ve got something that might just cheer you up,” he parsed through his pockets and pulled out that battered comic. “Here.”

“The hell’d you get this?” Barnes whispered, stricken.

“Our friend Mr. Ackermann. By way of apology. Said the Kleinführer shouldn’t be without his favorite eight pager.”

That got him a startled laugh. “Ain’t like that, pal!”

“I dunno, Sarge. You and Captain America spend an awful lot of time together.”


“Sure, Sarge.”

“You wouldn’t happen to have my letters, pal? To Stevie?”

“I’m guessing our hosts the Germans kept them for a little light reading. But you get some sleep, Sarge. I’ll keep this great lunk in line for you,” Jones nudged Dugan’s snoring form with one foot. “Now come on, Sarge,” he patted his lap. “Come here.”

”Jonesey—“ Barnes protested.

“You thought I meant country matters?” Jones snorted. “Lay your thick head down and get yourself some goddamn sleep.”

Barnes curled between his legs, nestling against Jones’ chest like a pillow. Smoothed the wrinkled sheets of that battered comic between his hands. “We’re gonna make it, ain’t we, doll,” he whispered, “to the Future?”

I dreamed, said the Captain. And I saw, and behold, a hand stretched out to me, and in it was the scroll of a book. And it spread out before me, and it was inscribed before and behind, and there was written upon it lamentations and murmuring and woe.

Yet scrolls like swords have two sides, spoke him the Woman. On one, death and destruction. And the other?

The peace that was promised, said the Captain. The wonders of the World to Come.

—*Jacob (I Have Loved)*, J. Montgomery Falsworth

Chapter End Notes

Stop and Frisk
The case Misty references is a fictionalized version of a real case opened against NYC in 2012:


Terry vs. Ohio 1968 https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/392/1


Misty Knight
Created by Tony Isabella and Arvell Jones, Knight was first mentioned (by name) in Marvel Premiere #20 (January 1975) and appeared in the next issue.

Bayard Rustin https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayard_Rustin
Rustin died in 1987, but lost audio of a 1980’s interview was recently released by his partner. You can listen to it here: https://makinggayhistory.com/podcast/bayard-rustin/
https://www.npr.org/2019/01/06/682598649/in-newly-found-audio-a-forgotten-civil-rights-leader-says-coming-out-was-an-abso
Before marriage equality was made federally legal in the USA, many same-sex couples had no recognized legal rights and could be barred from seeing each other while hospitalized, or even excluded from death and burial rites by their partner's homophobic families. As the AIDS crisis grew, Bayard Rustin legally adopted Walter Naegle, his 30 year-old partner, to obtain what limited legal rights they could. It was not an uncommon practice.
https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline

Lynching
Black veterans of the 92nd and 93rd returning home after WWI were targets for white terrorists:
https://eji.org/reports/online/lynching-in-america-targeting-black-veterans

Red Summer of 1919
http://time.com/5450336/african-american-veterans-wwi/
https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum

"This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. This is the fatherland for which we fought! But it is our fatherland. It was right for us to fight. The faults of our country are our faults. Under similar circumstances, we would fight again. But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.
We return.
We return from fighting."
We return fighting.  
Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why."  

https://glc.yale.edu/returning-soldiers

The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration opened to the public on April 26, 2018, in Montgomery, Alabama: https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum

Burning of Black Wall Street 1921

Black achievements during WWII

“ You say Stark showed you the ‘ I have a dream ’ speech? ”
“ It was incredible. ”
“ It truly was. It moved a nation. Did he tell you what happened to the man who gave it? ”
“… no. ”

--Gen. Jacob Simon

The Times, They Are a-Changin’

As of 1943, the total number of ever-elected black officials:

black representatives: 23
black senators: 2
black governors: 0 (2 acting governors elevated from Lt. Gov position, but none elected)
Black supreme court justices: 0
Black presidents: 0

As of 2019:

black representatives: 147
Black senators: 10
Black governors: 2 (1 additional acting governor elevated from Lt. Gov position)
Black supreme court justices: 2

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_minority_governors_and_lieutenant_governors_in_the_United_
Works inspired by this one: [Jacob (I Have Loved) Podfic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States#African_)


Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States#African_) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!