

Thirty-six
The Body on the Mountain

IT WAS THE FIRST WINTER AFTER THE WAR. AN AGED POLICE officer trudged through a village high in the mountains of Japan's Nagano Prefecture, knocking on doors, asking questions, and moving on. The Ministry of Home Affairs, frustrated at the failure to track down Mitsuhiro Watanabe, was renewing its effort, sending out photographs of and reports on the fugitive to every police chief in Japan. Chiefs were under orders to report twice a month on their progress. Police officers conducted searches and interrogations nearly every day. In one prefecture alone, 9,100 officers were involved in the search for him. The officer in Nagano was part of this effort.

It was around noon when he reached the largest house in the village, home to a farmer and his family. Someone answered the door, and the family, thinking that he was a census taker, invited him in. Inside, the policeman found an old, portly farmer, the farmer's wife, and their live-in laborer. As the laborer prepared a plate of pickles and a cup of tea, a traditional offering to visitors, the officer pulled out a photograph of Watanabe, dressed in his sergeant's uniform. Did they recognize the man? None of them did.

The officer left, moving on to a neighbor. He had no idea that the fugitive he was seeking had just been standing right in front of him, holding a plate of pickles. —

The Bird had come to Nagano Prefecture the previous September, after having fled his brother's home, then Kofu. Reaching the hot springs resort community of Manza Spa, he'd checked into an inn. He chose an alias, Saburo Ohta, a common name unlikely to attract notice or dwell in anyone's memory. He had a mustache, which he'd begun growing in the last days of the war. He told people that he was a refugee from Tokyo whose relatives were all dead, a story that, in postwar Japan, was as common as white rice. He vowed to live by two imperatives: silence and patience.

Manza was a good choice, trafficked by crowds in which Watanabe could lose himself. But he soon began to think that he'd be better hidden in the prefecture's remote mountain regions. He met the old farmer and offered himself as a laborer in exchange for room and board. The farmer took him to his home in the rural village, and Watanabe settled in as a farmhand.

Each night, lying on a straw mat on the farmer's floor, Watanabe couldn't sleep. All over Japan, war-crimes suspects had been captured, and were now imprisoned, awaiting trials. He'd known some of these men. They'd be tried, sentenced, some executed. He was free. On the pages on which he poured out his emotions about his plight, Watanabe wrote of feeling guilty when he thought of those soldiers. He also mulled over his behavior toward the POWs, describing himself as "powerful" and "strict when requesting [POWs] to obey the rules." "Am I guilty?" he wrote. He didn't answer his question, but he also expressed no remorse. Even as he

wrote of his gratitude for the humanity of the farmer who had taken him in, he couldn't see the parallel with himself and the helpless men who had fallen into his hands.

The radio in the farmer's house was often on, and each day, Watanabe listened to reports on fugitive war-crimes suspects. He scanned the faces of his hosts as the stories aired, worried that they'd suspect him. The newspapers, too, were full of articles on these fugitives, described as "enemies of human beings." The pronouncements wounded Watanabe's feelings. It seemed to him outrageous that the Allies, who "would not forgive," would oversee trials of Japanese. God alone, he felt, was qualified to judge him. "I wanted to cry out," he wrote, " 'That's not fair!' "

The tension of living incognito wore on him. He was especially wary of the farmer's wife, whose gaze seemed to convey suspicion. Sleep came so reluctantly that he had to work himself to exhaustion to bring it on. He brooded on the question of whether or not he should surrender.

One night, as the evening's fire died in the hearth, Watanabe came to the farmer and told him who he was. The farmer listened, his eyes fixed on the fire, his tongue clicking against his false teeth.

"People say to control your mouth, or it brings evil," the farmer said. "You should be careful of your speech."

He said nothing else and turned away. —

As the Bird hid, other men who had abused POWs were arrested, taken to Sugamo Prison, in Tokyo, and tried for war crimes. Roughly 5,400 Japanese were tried by the United States and other nations; some 4,400 were convicted, including 984 given death sentences and 475 given life in prison.* More than 30 Ofuna personnel were convicted and sentenced to a total of roughly 350 years in prison. The thieving cook, Tatsumi "Curley" Hata, was sentenced to twenty years. Masajiro "Shithead" Hirayabashi, who'd beaten countless prisoners and killed Gaga the duck, was given four years. Commander Kakuzo Iida, "the Mummy," was sentenced to death for contributing to the deaths of five captives. Also convicted was Sueharu Kitamura—"the Quack"—who had mutilated his patients, bludgeoned Harris, and contributed to the deaths of four captives, including one who was carried from Ofuna at the war's end, hours from death, crying out "Quack" over and over again. Kitamura was sentenced to hang.

Kaname Sakaba, the Omori commander, was given a life sentence. Of the men from Naoetsu, six civilian guards were tried, convicted, and hanged. Seven Japanese soldiers were also convicted: two were hanged, four given life imprisonment with hard labor, and one given twenty years.

The police found Jimmie Sasaki working as a liaison between the Japanese navy and the occupying forces. Ever a fabulist, he told investigators that Ofuna interrogators were "always kind to prisoners," that he'd never seen a prisoner abused, and that prisoners rarely complained. In questioning, the truth about his position at Ofuna finally emerged. He had not been the chief interrogator, bearing a rank equal to admiral, that he had claimed to be; he'd been only a low-ranking interpreter. This man of ever-shifting allegiances tried to shift them again, speaking of his debt to America and asking if someone could get him a job with the U.S. Army. Instead of a job, he received an indictment, charged with ordering the abuse of several captives, including one who'd been starved and tortured to death. Though the trial testimony

seemed to raise enormous doubt as to his guilt, Sasaki was convicted and ultimately sentenced to six years of hard labor.

And so the strange and twisting war journey of Louie's onetime friend ended in Sugamo Prison, where he was a model prisoner, tending a vegetable garden and a grove of trees. Who Jimmie Sasaki really was—whether artful spy and willing instrument in Japan's machine of violence or something more innocent—remains a mystery.

Of the postwar stories of the men who ran the camps in which Louie had lived, the saddest was that of Yukichi Kano, the Omori private who'd risked everything to protect the POWs and had probably saved several prisoners' lives. Just after the war's end was announced, Kano came upon a group of drunken guards stumbling toward the barracks, swords drawn, determined to hack some captured B29 men to death. Kano and another man planted themselves in the guards' path and, after a brief scuffle, stopped them. Kano was a hero, but when the Americans came to liberate the camp, two of them tried to rip the insignia off his uniform. Bob Martindale stepped in and gave the Americans a furious dressing-down. Fearing that Kano might be mistakenly accused of war crimes, Martindale and several other POW officers wrote a letter of commendation for him before they went home.

It did no good. Kano was arrested and jailed as a suspected war criminal. Why he was fingered remains unclear. He was mentioned in many POW affidavits and, in every one, was lauded for his kindness. Perhaps the explanation was that his last name was similar to those of two vicious men, Tetsutaro Kato, an Omori official said to have kicked a POW nearly to death, and Hiroaki Kono, the Bird's acolyte at Naoetsu. Months passed, and Kano languished in prison, frightened and humiliated. He was neither charged nor questioned. He wrote a plaintive letter asking authorities to investigate him so his name could be cleared. "Cross my heart," he wrote, "I have not done anything wrong." In the winter of 1946, Kano was finally cleared, and MacArthur ordered his release. Kano moved to Yokohama and worked for an import-export business. He missed his POW friends, but for years, he didn't try to contact them. "I thought I should refrain from writing them," he wrote to Martindale in 1955, "as my letter might make them to remind up the hard days in Omori, which, I am sure, they would like to forget." Sometime later, he died of cancer. —

In the mountain village where he was known as Saburo Ohta, Watanabe waited out a bitter winter. The visit from the policeman shook him. After the policeman left, the farmer's wife eyed Watanabe with what seemed to be recognition. When night fell, Watanabe lay awake, mulling capture and execution.

When summer came, Watanabe was asked to attend the farmer's son as he toured the country, selling leather straps. The tour would take them through major cities where Watanabe was surely being sought, but he was living on the good graces of the farmer and had to accept. Watanabe donned glasses to obscure his features and headed off, filled with trepidation.

They went to the busy port cities of Akita and Niigata. No one gave Watanabe a second look. As his fear of being discovered eased, he began enjoying himself. The conversation in the cities was dominated by the war, and everyone had an opinion about the conduct of Japanese

soldiers, especially those accused of war crimes. People talked of how the hunt for suspected war criminals was being conducted. Watanabe listened intently.

Being out in society made him long to see his family. He thought of how his mother would now be in Tokyo, on her regular summer visit to his sister Michiko's home. The yearning was overpowering. Watanabe took out the fortune-telling cards that his little sister had given him and dealt himself a hand. The cards told him that if he went to his family, he'd be safe. On a sweltering day at the height of the summer of 1946, he boarded a train for Tokyo.

His timing couldn't have been worse. The winter's push to find Watanabe had yielded no clues,

and the police were again doubling their efforts. A newly discovered photograph of Watanabe had been copied and distributed, along with a report that described him as a man "known to have perversions" who might be found "wherever there are loose women." Since Japanese citizens were required to register changes of address, police were ordered to pore over registries in search of men traveling alone. They were instructed to monitor transactions at ration boards and prowl post offices, train and bus stations, taxi stands, ferry landings, mines, black market outlets, dive hotels and lodging houses, and any businesses that might attract a man fluent in French. Probably inspired by the clue that Watanabe might have committed suicide, police moved to investigate all unnatural and unusual deaths since November 1945, especially those in which the deceased person was unidentified. As a homesick Watanabe journeyed out of hiding and into Tokyo, he was walking into the manhunt.

Shizuka Watanabe was sitting in Michiko's house with two of her other children when the front door swung open and in walked Mutsuhiro. The room fell silent as the startled family members looked at Mutsuhiro and then at one another. Mutsuhiro, emotionally overwhelmed and dizzy from the midday heat, wavered, afraid he would faint. Michiko came in and saw her brother. The family broke into celebration.

For two hours, Mutsuhiro sat with his family, sipping drinks and listening to them tell of being arrested, questioned, followed, and searched. He said nothing of where he'd been, believing that his family would fare better if they didn't know. As time passed, the family members grew anxious, afraid that the detectives would catch them. They'd been there just two days previously. At two o'clock, Shizuka warned Mutsuhiro that it was the time of day when the detectives usually came to search. Mutsuhiro reassured them that the playing cards had told him that all would be well.

There was shuffling outside. The detectives had arrived. The Watanabes sprang up. Someone tossed Mutsuhiro's belongings into a closet. Someone else snatched up the cups and dumped them in the sink. Mutsuhiro raced into a tearoom and shut the door. Behind him, he heard footfalls as a group of detectives entered the room that he had just left. He heard them questioning his mother and sister, telling them that if they caught Mutsuhiro, he'd be treated well.

The detectives were just feet away, on the other side of the door. His heart racing, Mutsuhiro tried to decide whether to run or to conceal himself here. The room was tiny, scattered with pillows, but there was a closet. Ever so slowly, he inched open the closet's sliding door and squeezed inside. He decided not to close the door, fearing that it would make noise. He stood there, a hand clasped over his mouth to smother the sound of his breathing.

The door opened. A detective looked in. "You have plenty of room," he said to the family. There was a pause as he looked about. If the detective turned his eyes toward the closet, he'd see Mutsuhiro. "It is tidy," the detective said. The door closed. The detectives left.

Mutsuhiro had wished to stay overnight, but the close call changed his mind. He told his mother that he'd try to see her again in two years. Then he left, walking back, he wrote, "into the lonesome world." —

Watanabe returned to the village. The farmer's son, unable to make a go of his leather strap sales, opened a coffee shop in the village. Watanabe became his waiter.

The farmer approached Watanabe with a proposition. Arranged marriage was still common in Japan, and the farmer had found a match for him. Watanabe was tempted; he was lonely and unhappy, and liked the idea of marrying. But marriage while in his predicament seemed impossible. He said no.

The young woman eventually came to him. When the farmer's son fell ill, she paid him a visit, and Watanabe, curious, went into the sickroom to see her. He raised the subject of the novel that the farmer's son was reading, thinking that, he wrote, "if she liked books, she must understand the mind and hardship of human life." In his notes about the meeting, he didn't say if she possessed that understanding, but he did seem to like her and thought she would be "a good house-keeper." Part of him seemed to want to fall for her, and he believed that love "could save my daily life."

The woman was taken with the attractive waiter, and began lingering in the coffee shop to be near him. He kept his identity secret from her. She began telling her parents about him in hopes of winning their blessing for a wedding. After brooding on her, Watanabe decided that he had to end the relationship. All he told her was that he had "a burden which would make her unhappy."

With that, he broke with the tenuous existence that he had created in the village. He quit his job and left. He wandered onto a stretch of the Nagano grassland along the Chikuma River and took a job as a cowherd. His inability to control the willful animals exasperated him. He was despondent. At sunset, he lifted his eyes to the majestic Asama volcano, watching a ribbon of smoke unspooling from her upper reaches, the cattle grazing below. —

In Japan's Okuchichibu Mountains stands the holy peak of Mitsumine, its sides fleeced in forest, its summit ornamented with an ancient shrine. In the fall of 1946, two bodies were found amid the hollows and spines of the mountain, a pistol lying with them. One was a man, the other a woman. No one knew who they were.

The police went to Shizuka Watanabe and asked her and her family to accompany them to the mountain. The Watanabes were driven up to Mitsumine and, with the help of guides, taken to the bodies. Shizuka looked down at the lifeless form of the young man.

Japanese newspapers ran the sensational story: Mutsuhiro Watanabe, one of Japan's most wanted men, was dead. He and a woman, probably a lover, had killed themselves.

Twisted Ropes

LOUIE KNEW NOTHING OF THE DEATH OF THE BIRD. WHEN the bodies were found on Mount Mitsumine, he was in Hollywood, falling to pieces. He was drinking heavily, slipping in and out of flashbacks, screaming and clawing through nightmares, lashing out in fury at random moments. Murdering the Bird had become his secret, fevered obsession, and he had given his life over to it. In a gym near his apartment, he spent hours slamming his hatred into a punching bag, preparing his body for the confrontation that he believed would save him. He walked around every day with murder in his head.

Throughout 1947 and 1948, Louie jumped headlong into scheme after scheme to raise the money to get back to Japan. When Cynthia's brother Ric visited, he found Louie encircled by fawners and hangers-on, all trying to exploit him. One of them talked Louie into investing \$7,000 in a plan to purchase and resell earthmoving equipment in the Philippines, promising to double his money. Louie signed the check, and that was the last he saw of either the investor or his money. He formed a Tahitian passenger-boat company in partnership, but creditors took the boat. A deal to found a movie production company in Egypt met a similar end. He even considered working as a mercenary bombardier in an attempted coup in a small Caribbean country, and was still thinking it over when the coup was called off. He and a partner made a verbal agreement with Mexican officials, giving them sole authority to issue fishing licenses to Americans. As his partner drove down to ink the deal, a truck hit him head-on, and the deal died with him. Each time Louie got some money together, it was lost in another failed venture, and his return to Japan had to be put off still longer.

Drinking granted him a space of time in which to let it all go. Slowly, inexorably, he'd gone from drinking because he wanted it to drinking because he needed it. In the daytime, he kept sober, but in the evenings, as the prospect of sleep and nightmares loomed, he was overcome by the need. His addiction was soon so consuming that when he and Cynthia went to Florida to visit her family, he insisted on bringing home so much liquor that he had to take out his Chevy's back seat to fit it all in.

He had become someone he didn't recognize. One night at a bar on Sunset Boulevard, he parked himself on a stool, drank all evening, and wound up stinking drunk. A man passed behind him, ushering his date past. Louie swung around, reached out, and groped the woman's bottom. The next thing Louie knew, he was on his feet, outside, being half-carried by a friend. His jaw was thumping with pain, and his friend was chewing him out. He slowly came to understand that the woman's boyfriend had knocked him unconscious.

On another night, he left Cynthia at home and went to a restaurant in Hollywood with two friends from his running days. Sometime in the early evening, after drinking what he would remember as only a single beer, he felt oddly light and excused himself to step outside. Then time broke into disconnected segments. He was in his car, driving, with no idea where he was or how he'd gotten there. He wove through the streets, disoriented, and came into a hilly

neighborhood of mansions and broad lawns. His head spun round and round. He stopped the car and rolled out. There was a tree in front of him, and he relieved himself against it.

When he turned back for his car, he couldn't find it. He stumbled along in a soupy darkness and mental fog, searching in vain for something familiar. He walked all night long, scared, lost, and vainly grasping at lucidity.

As sunrise lit up his surroundings, he realized that he was standing in front of his apartment building. Opening the door, he saw Cynthia, frantic with worry. He toppled into bed. When he woke up and dressed, he had no memory of the night before, and couldn't understand why the heels of his new shoes were worn down. He went outside and looked around, but he couldn't find his car, so he called the police and reported it stolen. Two days later, the police called to tell him that they'd found the car in a wealthy neighborhood in the Hollywood Hills. He went up to where they had found it, and memories of his night came back to him, carrying the ethereal quality of a nightmare.

Cynthia pleaded with Louie to stop drinking. It did no good. —

The further Louie fell, the less he could hide it. Ric Applewhite noticed that he was manically germophobic, washing his hands over and over again, and each time, scouring the faucet and handles on the sink. Some of Louie's friends spoke to him about his drinking, but their words had no impact. When Payton Jordan saw Louie, he recognized that he was in trouble, but couldn't get him to talk about it. Pete, too, was worried about Louie, but knew only of his financial woes. He had no idea that Louie had slid into alcoholism, or that he had hatched a wild scheme to kill a man.

Cynthia was distraught over what her husband had become. In public, his behavior was frightening and embarrassing. In private, he was often prickly and harsh with her. She did her best to soothe him, to no avail. Once, while Louie was out, she painted their dreary kitchen with elaborate illustrations of vines and animals, hoping to surprise him. He didn't notice.

Wounded and worried, Cynthia couldn't bring Louie back. Her pain became anger, and she and Louie had bitter fights. She slapped him and threw dishes at him; he grabbed her so forcefully that he left her bruised. Once he came home to find that she had run through a room, hurling everything breakable onto the floor. While Cynthia cooked dinner during a party on a friend's docked yacht, Louie was so snide to her, right in front of their friends, that she walked off the boat. He chased her down and grabbed her by the neck. She slapped his face, and he let her go. She fled to his parents' house, and he went home alone.

Cynthia eventually came back, and the two struggled on together. His money gone, Louie had to tap a friend for a \$1,000 loan, staking his Chevy convertible as collateral. The money ran out, another investment foundered, the loan came due, and Louie had to turn over his keys.

When Louie was a small child, he had tripped and fallen on a flight of stairs while hurrying to school. He had gotten up, only to stumble and fall a second time, then a third. He had risen convinced that God himself was tripping him. Now the same thought dwelt in him. God, he believed, was toying with him. When he heard preaching on the radio, he angrily turned it off. He forbade Cynthia from going to church.

In the spring of 1948, Cynthia told Louie that she was pregnant. Louie was excited, but the prospect of more responsibility filled him with guilt and despair. In London that summer,

Sweden's Henry Eriksson won the Olympic gold medal in the 1,500 meters. In Hollywood, Louie drank ever harder.

No one could reach Louie, because he had never really come home. In prison camp, he'd been beaten into dehumanized obedience to a world order in which the Bird was absolute sovereign, and it was under this world order that he still lived. The Bird had taken his dignity and left him feeling humiliated, ashamed, and powerless, and Louie believed that only the Bird could restore him, by suffering and dying in the grip of his hands. A once singularly hopeful man now believed that his only hope lay in murder.

The paradox of vengefulness is that it makes men dependent upon those who have harmed them, believing that their release from pain will come only when they make their tormentors suffer. In seeking the Bird's death to free himself, Louie had chained himself, once again, to his tyrant. During the war, the Bird had been unwilling to let go of Louie; after the war, Louie was unable to let go of the Bird. —

One night in late 1948, Louie lay in bed with Cynthia beside him. He descended into a dream, and the Bird rose up over him. The belt unfurled, and Louie felt the buckle cracking into his head, pain like lightning over his temple. Around and around the belt whirled, lashing Louie's skull. Louie raised his hands to the Bird's throat, his hands clenching around it. Now Louie was on top of the Bird, and the two thrashed.

There was a scream, perhaps Louie's, perhaps the Bird's. Louie fought on, trying to crush the life out of the Bird. Then everything began to alter. Louie, on his knees with the Bird under him, looked down. The Bird's shape shifted.

Louie was straddling Cynthia's chest, his hands locked around her neck. Through her closing throat, she was screaming. Louie was strangling his pregnant wife.

He let go and leapt off Cynthia. She recoiled, gasping, crying out. He sat in the dark beside her, horrified, his nightclothes heavy with sweat. The sheets were twisted into ropes around him. —

Little Cynthia Zamperini, nicknamed Cissy, was born two weeks after Christmas. Louie was so enraptured that he wouldn't let anyone else hold her, and did all the diapering himself. But she couldn't cleave him from alcoholism or his murderous obsession. In the sleepless stress of caring for a newborn, Louie and Cynthia fought constantly and furiously. When Cynthia's mother came to help, she wept at the sight of the apartment. Louie drank without restraint.

One day Cynthia came home to find Louie gripping a squalling Cissy in his hands, shaking her. With a shriek, she pulled the baby away. Appalled at himself, Louie went on bender after bender. Cynthia had had enough. She called her father, and he sent her the money to go back to Miami Beach. She decided to file for divorce.

Cynthia packed her things, took the baby, and walked out. Louie was alone. All he had left was his alcohol and his resentment, the emotion that, Jean Améry would write, "nails every one of us onto the cross of his ruined past." —

On the other side of the world, early one evening in the fading days of 1948, Shizuka Watanabe sat on the lower floor of a two-story restaurant in Tokyo's Shinjuku district. Outside,

the street was lively with shoppers and diners. Shizuka faced the door, watching the blur of faces drifting past.

It was there that she saw him. Just outside the door, gazing in at her amid the passersby, was her dead son.

Thirty-eight A Beckoning Whistle

FOR SHIZUKA WATANABE, THE MOMENT WHEN SHE SAW HER son must have answered a desperate hope. Two years earlier, she'd been driven up a mountain to see a dead man who looked just like Mutsuhiro. Everyone, even her relatives, had believed it was he, and the newspapers had announced Mutsuhiro's suicide. But Shizuka had felt a trace of doubt. Perhaps she'd registered the same sensation that Louise Zamperini had felt when Louie was missing, a maternal murmur that told her that her son was still alive. She apparently said nothing of her doubts in public, but in secret, she clung to a promise that Mutsuhiro had made when he had last seen her, in Tokyo in the summer of '46: On October 1, 1948, at seven P.M., he'd try to meet her at a restaurant in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo.

While she waited for that day, others began to question whether Mutsuhiro was really dead. Someone looked up the serial number on his army sidearm and found that it was different from that of the gun found beside the body. Mutsuhiro could easily have used another weapon, but an examination of the body had also found some features that seemed different from those of the fugitive. The detectives couldn't rule out Watanabe as the dead man, but they couldn't confirm definitively that it was he. The search for him resumed, and the police descended again on the Watanabes.

Tailed almost everywhere she went, her mail searched, her friends and family interrogated, Shizuka endured intense scrutiny for two years. When October 1, 1948, came, she went to the restaurant, apparently eluding her pursuers. There was her son, a living ghost.

The sight of him brought as much fear as joy. She knew that in appearing in public, standing in full view of crowds of people who had surely all heard of the manhunt for him, he was taking a huge risk. She spoke to him for only a few minutes, standing very close to him, trying to restrain the excitement in her voice. Mutsuhiro, his face grave, questioned her about the police's tactics. He told her nothing about where he was living or what he was doing. Concerned that they would attract attention, mother and son decided to part. Mutsuhiro said that he'd see her again in two years, then slipped out the door.

The police didn't know of the meeting, and continued to stalk Shizuka and her children. Everyone who visited them was tailed and investigated. Each time Shizuka ran errands, detectives trailed behind her. After she left each business, they went in to question those who

had dealt with her. Shizuka was frequently interrogated, but she answered questions about her son's whereabouts by referring to the suicides on Mount Mitsumine.

More than a year passed. Shizuka heard nothing from her son, and the detectives found nothing. Everywhere there were rumors about his fate. In one, he had fled across the China Sea and disappeared in Manchuria. One had him shot by American GIs; another had him being struck and killed by a train after an American soldier tied him to the track. But the most persistent stories ended in his suicide, by gunshot, by hara-kiri in front of the emperor's palace, by a leap into a volcano. For nearly everyone who had known him, there was only one plausible conclusion to draw from the failure of the massive search.

Whether Shizuka believed these rumors is unknown. But in his last meeting with her, Mutsuhiro had given her one very troubling clue: I will meet you in two years, he had said, if I am alive.

In the second week of September 1949, an angular young man climbed down from a transcontinental train and stepped into Los Angeles. His remarkably tall blond hair fluttered on the summit of a remarkably tall head, which in turn topped a remarkably tall body. He had a direct gaze, a stern jawline, and a southern sway in his voice, the product of a childhood spent on a North Carolina dairy farm. His name was Billy Graham.

At thirty-one, Graham was the youngest college president in America, manning the helm at Northwestern Schools, a small Christian Bible school, liberal arts college, and seminary in Minneapolis. He was also the vice president of Youth for Christ International, an evangelical organization. He'd been crisscrossing the world for years, plugging his faith. The results had been mixed. His last campaign, in the Pennsylvania coal town of Altoona, had met with heckling, meager attendance, and a hollering, deranged choir member who had had to be thrown out of his services, only to return repeatedly, like a fly to spilled jelly. So much coal dust had billowed through the town that Graham had left it with his eyes burning and bloodshot.

That September, in a vacant parking lot on the corner of Washington Boulevard and Hill Street in Los Angeles, Graham and his small team threw up a 480-foot-long circus tent, set out sixty-five hundred folding chairs, poured down acres of sawdust, hammered together a stage the size of a fairly spacious backyard, and stood an enormous replica of an open Bible in front of it. They held a press conference to announce a three-week campaign to bring Los Angelenos to Christ. Not a single newspaper story followed.

At first, Graham preached to a half-empty tent. But his blunt, emphatic sermons got people talking. By October 16, the day on which he had intended to close the campaign, attendance was high and growing. Graham and his team decided to keep it going. Then newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst reportedly issued a two-word order to his editors: "Puff Graham." Overnight, Graham had adoring press coverage and ten thousand people packing into his tent every night. Organizers expanded the tent and piled in several thousand more chairs, but it was still so overcrowded that hundreds of people had to stand in the street, straining to hear Graham over the traffic. Film moguls, seeing leading-man material, offered Graham a movie contract. Graham burst out laughing and told them he wouldn't do it for a million bucks a month. In a city that wasn't bashful about sinning, Graham had kicked off a religious revival.

Louie knew nothing of Graham. Four years after returning from the war, he was still in the Hollywood apartment, lost in alcohol and plans to murder the Bird. Cynthia had returned from Florida, but was staying only until she could arrange a divorce. The two lived on in grim coexistence, each one out of answers. One day that October, Cynthia and Louie were walking down a hallway in their building when a new tenant and his girlfriend came out of an apartment. The two couples began chatting, and it was at first a pleasant conversation. Then the man mentioned that an evangelist named Billy Graham was preaching downtown. Louie turned abruptly and walked away.

Cynthia stayed in the hall, listening to the neighbor. When she returned to the apartment, she told Louie that she wanted him to take her to hear Graham speak. Louie refused.

Cynthia went alone. She came home alight. She found Louie and told him that she wasn't going to divorce him. The news filled Louie with relief, but when Cynthia said that she'd experienced a religious awakening, he was appalled.

Louie and Cynthia went to a dinner at Sylvia and Harvey's house. In the kitchen after the meal, Cynthia spoke of her experience in Graham's tent, and said that she wanted Louie to go listen to him. Louie soured and said he absolutely wouldn't go. The argument continued through the evening and into the next day. Cynthia recruited the new neighbor, and together they badgered Louie. For several days, Louie kept refusing, and began trying to dodge his wife and the neighbor, until Graham left town. Then Graham's run was extended, and Cynthia leavened her entreaties with a lie. Louie was fascinated with science, so she told him that Graham's sermons discussed science at length. It was just enough incentive to tip the balance. Louie gave in. —

Billy Graham was wearing out. For many hours a day, seven days a week, he preached to vast throngs, and each sermon was a workout, delivered in a booming voice, punctuated with broad gestures of the hands, arms, and body. He got up as early as five, and he stayed in the tent late into the night, counseling troubled souls.

Graham's weight was dropping, and dark semicircles shadowed his eyes. At times he felt that if he stopped moving, his legs would buckle, so he took to pacing his pulpit to keep himself from keeling over. Once, someone brought a baby to him, and he asked whose child she was. He'd been away from home for so long that he didn't recognize his own daughter. He longed to end the campaign, but the success of it made him sure that Providence had other wishes. When Louie and Cynthia entered the tent, Louie refused to go farther forward than the back rows. He sat down, sullen. He would wait out this sermon, go home, and be done with it.

The tent was hushed. From someplace outside came a high, beckoning sound. Louie had known that sound since his boyhood, when he'd lain awake beside Pete, yearning to escape. It was the whistle of a train. —

When Graham appeared, Louie was surprised. He'd expected the sort of frothy, holy-rolling charlatan that he'd seen preaching near Torrance when he was a boy. What he saw instead was a brisk, neatly groomed man two years younger than himself. Though he was nursing a sore throat and asked that his amplifier be turned up to save his voice, Graham showed no other sign of his fatigue. He asked his listeners to open their Bibles to the eighth chapter of John.

Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw no one but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

Louie was suddenly wide awake. Describing Jesus rising from his knees after a night of prayer, Graham asked his listeners how long it had been since they'd prayed in earnest. Then he focused on Jesus bending down, his finger tracing words in the sand at the Pharisees' feet, sending the men scattering in fear.

"What did they see Jesus write?" Graham asked. Inside himself, Louie felt something twisting.

"Darkness doesn't hide the eyes of God," Graham said. "God takes down your life from the time you were born to the time you die. And when you stand before God on the great judgment day, you're going to say, 'Lord I wasn't such a bad fellow,' and they are going to pull down the screen and they are going to shoot the moving picture of your life from the cradle to the grave, and you are going to hear every thought that was going through your mind every minute of the day, every second of the minute, and you're going to hear the words that you said. And your own words, and your own thoughts, and your own deeds, are going to condemn you as you stand before God on that day. And God is going to say, 'Depart from me.' " *

Louie felt indignant rage flaring in him, a struck match. I am a good man, he thought. I am a good man.

Even as he had this thought, he felt the lie in it. He knew what he had become. Somewhere under his anger, there was a lurking, nameless uneasiness, the shudder of sharks rasping their backs along the bottom of the raft. There was a thought he must not think, a memory he must not see. With the urgency of a bolting animal, he wanted to run.

Graham looked out over his audience. "Here tonight, there's a drowning man, a drowning woman, a drowning man, a drowning boy, a drowning girl that is out lost in the sea of life." He told of hell and salvation, men saved and men lost, always coming back to the stooped figure drawing letters in the sand. Louie grew more and more angry and more and more spooked.

"Every head bowed and every eye closed," said Graham, offering a traditional invitation to repentance, a declaration of faith, and absolution. Louie grabbed Cynthia's arm, stood up, and bulled his way from the tent.

Somewhere in the city, a siren began a low wail. The sound, rising and falling slowly, carried through the tent, picked up by the microphone that was recording the sermon.

That night, Louie lay helpless as the belt whipped his head. The body that hunched over him was that of the Bird. The face was that of the devil. —

Louie rose from his nightmares to find Cynthia there. All morning Sunday, she tried to coax him into seeing Graham again. Louie, angry and threatened, refused. For several hours, Cynthia and Louie argued. Exhausted by her persistence, Louie finally agreed to go, with one caveat: When Graham said, "Every head bowed, every eye closed," they were leaving.

Under the tent that night, Graham spoke of how the world was in an age of war, an age defined by persecution and suffering. Why, Graham asked, is God silent while good men suffer? He began his answer by asking his audience to consider the evening sky. "If you look into the heavens tonight, on this beautiful California night, I see the stars and can see the footprints of God," he said. "... I think to myself, my father, my heavenly father, hung them there with a flaming fingertip and holds them there with the power of his omnipotent hand, and he runs the whole universe, and he's not too busy running the whole universe to count the hairs on my head and see a sparrow when it falls, because God is interested in me ... God spoke in creation."*

Louie was winding tight. He remembered the day when he and Phil, slowly dying on the raft, had slid into the doldrums. Above, the sky had been a swirl of light; below, the stilled ocean had mirrored the sky, its clarity broken only by a leaping fish. Awed to silence, forgetting his thirst and his hunger, forgetting that he was dying, Louie had known only gratitude. That day, he had believed that what lay around them was the work of infinitely broad, benevolent hands, a gift of compassion. In the years since, that thought had been lost.

Graham went on. He spoke of God reaching into the world through miracles and the intangible blessings that give men the strength to out-last their sorrows. "God works miracles one after another," he said. "... God says, 'If you suffer, I'll give you the grace to go forward.' "

Louie found himself thinking of the moment at which he had woken in the sinking hull of Green Hornet, the wires that had trapped him a moment earlier now, inexplicably, gone. And he remembered the Japanese bomber swooping over the rafts, riddling them with bullets, and yet not a single bullet had struck him, Phil, or Mac. He had fallen into unbearably cruel worlds, and yet he had borne them. When he turned these memories in his mind, the only explanation he could find was one in which the impossible was possible. What God asks of men, said Graham, is faith. His invisibility is the truest test of that faith. To know who sees him, God makes himself unseen.

Louie shone with sweat. He felt accused, cornered, pressed by a frantic urge to flee. As Graham asked for heads to bow and eyes to close, Louie stood abruptly and rushed for the street, towing Cynthia behind him. "Nobody leaving," said Graham. "You can leave while I'm preaching but not now. Everybody is still and quiet. Every head bowed, every eye closed." He asked the faithful to come forward.

Louie pushed past the congregants in his row, charging for the exit. His mind was tumbling. He felt enraged, violent, on the edge of explosion. He wanted to hit someone.

As he reached the aisle, he stopped. Cynthia, the rows of bowed heads, the sawdust underfoot, the tent around him, all disappeared. A memory long beaten back, the memory from which he had run the evening before, was upon him.

Louie was on the raft. There was gentle Phil crumpled up before him, Mac's breathing skeleton, endless ocean stretching away in every direction, the sun lying over them, the cunning bodies of the sharks, waiting, circling. He was a body on a raft, dying of thirst. He felt words whisper from his swollen lips. It was a promise thrown at heaven, a promise he had not kept, a promise he had allowed himself to forget until just this instant: If you will save me, I will serve you forever. And then, standing under a circus tent on a clear night in downtown Los Angeles, Louie felt rain falling.

It was the last flashback he would ever have. Louie let go of Cynthia and turned toward Graham. He felt supremely alive. He began walking. "This is it," said Graham. "God has spoken to you. You come on." —

Cynthia kept her eyes on Louie all the way home. When they entered the apartment, Louie went straight to his cache of liquor. It was the time of night when the need usually took hold of him, but for the first time in years, Louie had no desire to drink. He carried the bottles to the kitchen sink, opened them, and poured their contents into the drain. Then he hurried through the apartment, gathering packs of cigarettes, a secret stash of girlie magazines, everything that was part of his ruined years. He heaved it all down the trash chute.

In the morning, he woke feeling cleansed. For the first time in five years, the Bird hadn't come into his dreams. The Bird would never come again. Louie dug out the Bible that had been issued to him by the air corps and mailed home to his mother when he was believed dead. He walked to Barnsdall Park, where he and Cynthia had gone in better days, and where Cynthia had gone, alone, when he'd been on his benders. He found a spot under a tree, sat down, and began reading.

Resting in the shade and the stillness, Louie felt profound peace. When he thought of his history, what resonated with him now was not all that he had suffered but the divine love that he believed had intervened to save him. He was not the worthless, broken, forsaken man that the Bird had striven to make of him. In a single, silent moment, his rage, his fear, his humiliation and helplessness, had fallen away. That morning, he believed, he was a new creation.

Softly, he wept.

Thirty-nine Daybreak

ON A CHILLY FALL MORNING IN 1950, LOUIE WALKED UP a long, level road toward a complex of unadorned buildings. As he approached the archway that marked the entrance to the complex, his whole body tingled. On the arch were painted the words SUGAMO PRISON, and beyond it waited Louie's POW camp guards. At long last, Louie had returned to Japan.

In the year that had passed since he had walked into Billy Graham's tent, Louie had worked to keep a promise. He had begun a new life as a Christian speaker, telling his story all over America. The work brought him modest honoraria and offerings, enough to allow him to pay his bills and buy a \$150 used DeSoto, finally replacing the car that he'd lost as loan collateral. He had scraped together just enough money for a down payment on a house, but was still so poor that Cissy's crib was the house's only furniture. Louie did the cooking on a

single-coil hot plate, and he and Cynthia slept in sleeping bags next to the crib. They were barely getting by, but their connection to each other had been renewed and deepened. They were blissful together.

In the first years after the war, a journey back to Japan had been Louie's obsession, the path to murdering the man who had ruined him. But thoughts of murder no longer had a home in him. He had come here not to avenge himself but to answer a question.

Louie had been told that all of the men who had tormented him had been arrested, convicted, and imprisoned here in Sugamo. He could speak about and think of his captors, even the Bird, without bitterness, but a question tapped at the back of his mind. If he should ever see them again, would the peace that he had found prove resilient? With trepidation, he had resolved to go to Sugamo to stand before these men. On the evening before, Louie had written to Cynthia to tell her what he was about to do. He had asked her to pray for him.

The former guards, 850 of them, sat cross-legged on the floor of a large, bare common room. Standing at the front of the room, Louie looked out over the faces.

At first he recognized none of them. Then, far in the rear, he saw a face he knew, then another and another: Curley, the Weasel, Kono, Jimmie Sasaki. And there was the Quack, who was petitioning to have his death penalty commuted. As Louie looked at this last man, he thought of Bill Harris.

There was one face missing: Louie couldn't find the Bird. When he asked his escort where Watanabe was, he was told that he wasn't in Sugamo. Over five years, thousands of policemen had scoured Japan in search of him, but they had never found him.

As Louie had been packing to come to Japan, the long-awaited day had arrived in the life of Shizuka Watanabe: October 1, 1950, the day her son had promised to come to her, if he was still alive. He had told her to go to the Shinjuku district in Tokyo, where he would meet her at the same restaurant where they had last seen each other, two years before. At 10:05 that morning, police saw Shizuka climb aboard a train bound for the Shinjuku district. At the restaurant, Mutsuhiro apparently never showed up.

Shizuka went to Kofu and checked into a hotel, staying alone, taking no visitors. For four days, she wandered the city. Then she left Kofu abruptly, without paying her hotel bill. The police went in to question the hotel matron. Asked if Shizuka had spoken of her son, the matron said yes.

"Mutsuhiro," Shizuka had said, "has already died." In the corner of a sitting room in her house, Shizuka would keep a small shrine to Mutsuhiro, a tradition among bereaved Japanese families. Each morning, she would leave an offering in memory of her son. —

In Sugamo, Louie asked his escort what had happened to the Bird. He was told that it was believed that the former sergeant, hunted, exiled and in despair, had stabbed himself to death.

The words washed over Louie. In prison camp, Watanabe had forced him to live in incomprehensible degradation and violence. Bereft of his dignity, Louie had come home to a life lost in darkness, and had dashed himself against the memory of the Bird. But on an October night in Los Angeles, Louie had found, in Payton Jordan's word, "daybreak." That night, the

sense of shame and powerlessness that had driven his need to hate the Bird had vanished. The Bird was no longer his monster. He was only a man.

In Sugamo Prison, as he was told of Watanabe's fate, all Louie saw was a lost person, a life now beyond redemption. He felt something that he had never felt for his captor before. With a shiver of amazement, he realized that it was compassion.

At that moment, something shifted sweetly inside him. It was forgiveness, beautiful and effortless and complete. For Louie Zamperini, the war was over. —

Before Louie left Sugamo, the colonel who was attending him asked Louie's former guards to come forward. In the back of the room, the prisoners stood up and shuffled into the aisle. They moved hesitantly, looking up at Louie with small faces.

Louie was seized by childlike, giddy exuberance. Before he realized what he was doing, he was bounding down the aisle. In bewilderment, the men who had abused him watched him come to them, his hands extended, a radiant smile on his face.