Unbroken

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LAURA HILLENBRAND

The youngest of four children, Laura Hillenbrand grew up in a suburb north of Washington D.C.. As a child, she loved writing stories and riding horses on her father's farm. While studying at Kenyon College, she developed an incurable illness called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome that forced her to drop out of school and move back in with her family. In the late 1980s, Hillenbrand felt well enough to move to Chicago with her future husband. Still confined to her home, she began a writing career in sports journalism and, drawing from her love of horses, she wrote the 2001 best-selling nonfiction book *Seabiscuit* about the unlikely achievements of an undersized race horse. Almost a decade later still battling the illness, and largely house-bound, she finished work on *Unbroken*. Hillenbrand says that since her illness prevents her from leaving her house, she writes books about incredible physical feats so that she can live vicariously through the stories she tells. Hillenbrand currently lives in Washington D.C.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Unbroken lives and breathes the Pacific theater of World War II. From the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor that began the war to the dropping of the atomic bombs that concluded it, *Unbroken* not only tells Louie's tale of survival but also gives a broad perspective on the toll the war took on American soldiers. Louie's exceptional story is a lens through which we see the triumphs as well as the tragedies that marked the lives of the millions of enlisted men. The 1936 Berlin Olympics also plays a significant role in the novel. At the Games, the African-American runner Jesse Owens won four gold medals, defying the Nazis' racist belief in the inferiority of people of African descent.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While nonfiction books on the European theater of World War II have consistently garnered widespread popularity, historical nonfiction about the Pacific front has only in last two decades emerged as a popular genre. An early forerunner of the genre includes James Bradley and Ron Powers's 2000 *Flags of Our Fathers*, which explores the heroism and tragic postwar lives of the six soldiers who famously raised the American flag at Iwo Jima. Hillenbrand also draws on a recent tradition of narrative journalism that builds stories around characters, scenes, and dialogue rather than on the stylistic abilities of the author. Some well-known examples of this trend include Susan Orlean's 1998 *The Orchid Thief* and Erik Larson's 2003 *The Devil in the White City*, but Hillenbrand's own 2001 *Seabiscuit* set a high standard for this kind of storytelling.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*
- **When Written:** 2003-2010
- **Where Written:** Washington D.C.
- **When Published:** 2010
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Narrative Journalism
- **Genre:** Historical nonfiction
- **Setting:** The United States and Japan; before, during, and after World War II
- **Climax:** When Louie Zamperini finds redemption at a Christian revival meeting
- **Antagonist:** Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe
- **Point of View:** Limited third-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Success on the Silver Screen: Angelina Jolie produced and directed the 2014 film adaptation of *Unbroken*. Grossing over 160 million dollars, *Unbroken* had the fourth highest box-office debut among WWII themed movie.

eBay and Adversity: Unable to leave her house because of her medical condition, Laura Hillenbrand conducted all the reporting and research for the novel from her home. This made even the simplest tasks a challenge. For example, instead of going to library to look at microfilms of old newspapers, Hillenbrand had to find and procure vintage newspapers on eBay.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Torrance, California in the early 1930s, a young boy named Louis "Louie" Zamperini spends his childhood stealing, pulling pranks, and getting into fights. Seeing Louie heading down the wrong path, his older brother Pete helps focus Louie's unrestrained energies into running track. Soon, Louie cleans up his act and becomes the fastest high school runner in recorded American history. After graduating high school, Louie wins an invitation to compete in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. At the Games, Louie doesn't win a medal but he does set a world record for the fastest last lap of an Olympic race.

As Louie trains for the next Olympic Games, the world

descends into war. With the Olympic Games cancelled due to the outbreak of World War II, Louie enlists in the Air Force. After military training, Louie becomes a bombardier and receives orders to report to a military base in the Pacific. In 1941, Louie and the crew of the bomber, *Super Man*, engage in successful bombing runs of Japanese military targets. But after Japanese planes nearly destroy *Super Man* during an air battle, Louie and his best friend Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips get reassigned to a new plane and crew.

On a routine mission, their new plane crashes into the Pacific Ocean and only Louie, Phil, and their new crewmate Francis "Mac" McNamara survive. On board an inflatable life-raft, the men have few rations, little water, and no protection from the hot sun or the **sharks** that constantly encircle them. The men collect rainwater, catch birds to use the meat for fishing, and even kill and eat a couple of sharks. But it's not enough and Mac dies from malnourishment. After forty-seven days adrift on the raft, Louie and Phil fall into the hands of a passing Japanese military ship.

The Japanese bring Louie and Phil to a military base called "Execution Island" where they put them in small cages, give them almost no food, and inject them with experimental chemicals. Instead of executing them, the Japanese send Louie and Phil to separate labor camps in Japan. At the Omori camp, one of the head guards, Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe, singles out Louie for emotional and physical torture. **The Bird** feels powerful abusing the prisoners and thinks that if he can break the spirit of a famous Olympian like Louie, then he can feel even more power.

At one point, Japanese propagandists give Louie the opportunity to send his family a message over the radio. The U.S. army had mistakenly announced Louie's death, but his family never lost hope that Louie was still alive. The Japanese broadcast Louie's message throughout the U.S. and his family gets their first real indication that he's alive. The propagandists tell Louie that he can leave the camp and live in a nice hotel if he agrees to read propaganda for them on the radio. Louie refuses and they send him back to the prison camp.

Soon after, the Bird transfers to another camp, but he brings Louie along with him so that he can continue the abuse. At this camp, Louie hauls tons of coal on his back all day. When a guard pushes him, Louie slips and breaks his leg. Since he can no longer work, the Bird makes him clean out the pig sty with his hands. This humiliation almost breaks Louie's spirit for good, but he is just able to hold on.

After over two years of humiliating and torturing the prisoners, the Japanese suddenly announce that the war is over. As U.S. bombers deliver food and clothing to the prisoners, Louie, emaciated and exhausted, finally feels free. Days before the war had ended, the Bird learned about the impending Japanese surrender and fled the camp, fearing that the Allies would try him as a war criminal. After regaining some of his strength at a U.S. military hospital, Louie flies back home where he meets his overjoyed family.

Recuperating from the war in Miami, Louie falls in love with a beautiful and fiercely independent woman named Cynthia Applewhite. After only two weeks, Cynthia accepts Louie's marriage proposal and, a few months later, they marry in a church outside Torrance. The military sends Louie around the country to give speeches about his experiences in the war but, plagued by his memories of torture, Louie begins to drink heavily. His marriage starts to fall apart and Louie develops a severe mental illness called PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) that is common with military veterans.

After years of spiraling mental illness and alcoholism, as well as Louie's abusive behavior toward his wife and children, Cynthia brings Louie to a Christian revival meeting where he comes to believe that a benevolent and compassionate God had been watching over him during the war. Louie finds redemption in the Christian faith, quits drinking, and overcomes the PTSD. His marriage rebounds and he lives out the rest of his life in peace by helping others in the service of God.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Louis "Louie" Zamperini – The novel's protagonist, Louie transforms from a rebellious boy who gets in trouble with the law into a record-breaking Olympian and resilient war hero. Stranded on a raft in the Pacific Ocean with his friend Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Louie demonstrates his most exceptional qualities: resourcefulness, stubborn optimism, and a tenacious will to survive. He spends the rest of the war as a prisoner of the Japanese, enduring physical and emotional abuse from the guards with a fierce bravery. Louie's unwavering self-respect prevents even the most abusive guard, Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe, from breaking his defiant spirit. After the war, Louie suffers from flashbacks and alcoholism, but rebounds when he finds redemption and inner peace in Christianity, living out the rest of his life helping others.

Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe – The novel's antagonist and the epitome of evil, Watanabe is the cruel and psychopathic prison guard who singles out Louie for emotional and physical torture. Driven by a desire to feel powerful, Watanabe derives sexual pleasure and self-worth by using torture to dehumanize the prisoners. Watanabe is also vain and delusional, believing that that prisoners love and respect him. At the end of the war, Watanabe lacks total self-awareness and compassion, casting himself as a victim, rather than a perpetrator, of the horrors of war.

Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips – Louie's pilot and dependable best friend during the war. One of the survivors of the plane crash,

he remains confident and good-spirited on the raft. Despite not bearing any responsibility for the crash, Phil's strong moral conscience makes him feel guilt for the dead crewmen. A quiet man, Phil's deep religious convictions and his love for his fiancé Cecy Perry help him bear and survive the experiences of war with graceful fortitude.

Francis "Mac" McNamara –The only other survivor of the plane crash, Mac is a new army recruit and almost immediately loses all hope for survival on the raft. Mac's hopelessness and selfishness endanger Louie and Phil's lives when Mac eats all the rations. But Mac's sense of responsibility drives him to redemption, risking his own life to protect Louie and Phil from the **sharks**. In the end, Mac lacks the resilience to survive, dying on the raft from malnourishment.

Cynthia Applewhite – Louie's kind, beautiful, and fiercely independent wife whom he meets and marries after the war, Cynthia comes from a wealthy, respectable family. Their marriage disintegrates when Louie, affected by PTSD, begins to drink heavily and becomes abusive. She is about to divorce him when she attends a Billy Graham Christian revival meeting that fosters in her a renewed faith and determination to preserve her marriage. She then brings Louie to another meeting, resulting in his own "rebirth" in Christianity. Her patience, faith, and affection help Louie out of his downward spiral of depression and alcoholism.

Pete Zamperini – Louie's older brother, Pete is always responsible and mature. As a boy, Pete was wise beyond his years, guiding Louie out of his youthful rebellion, focusing Louie towards the running careers that would ultimately bring Louie to the 1936 Olympics. During the war, Pete's unshakable optimism makes him believe that his younger brother is still alive.

Kunichi "Jimmie" Sasaki – A Japanese immigrant, Jimmie befriends Louie at college over their shared love of track. Mysterious and always shifting his allegiances, Jimmie might have spied for the Japanese but he also provided Japanese military secrets to the U.S. government. Jimmie is also extraordinarily conceited, telling Louie during the war that he was the head interrogator in the Japanese prison camps despite only being a low-level translator.

Louise Zamperini – Louie's mother, Louise is the novel's embodiment of belief, giving the rest of her family the conviction that Louie was alive even after the army announced his death. Like Louie, she has a love of mischief and a defiant streak. A great cook, she is a supportive and loving mother who worries tremendously for her son.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sylvia Zamperini – Louie's loving and devoted sister, Sylvia never gives up the belief that her brother is still alive. She takes a job as a dental assistant in a military hospital to learn information about the war and about Louie.

Anthony Zamperini – Louie's caring father, Anthony has a quiet self-assurance about him. Like the rest of the family, he believes that Louie is alive.

Billy Graham – A handsome and prominent Christian evangelical preacher whose frank and emphatic sermons renew Louie's faith in religion.

Kawamura – A Christian Japanese guard on Execution Island who offers kindness and compassion to Louie and Phil.

Frank Tinker – Louie's friend and a fellow prisoner at the Ofuna labor camp. He, Louie, and William Harris make an escape plan.

William Harris – Another prisoner at the Ofuna camp. He helps form the escape plan with Louie and Frank Tinker. The Quack almost beats Harris to death when he finds a map in his possession.

Glenn Cunningham – A famous Olympic track star who taught himself to walk again after receiving severe burns in a house fire as a kid. Louie admires him for his resilience and determination.

Don Lash – An Olympic runner who most sports commentators thought was American's best chance for the gold at the 1936 Olympics. Louie beats him in the race.

Payton Jordan – Another Olympic runner and Louie's best friend at college.

Yukichi Kano – A kind Japanese prison guard at the Omori prison camp who tries to protect the POWs from the abusive guards.

John Fitzgerald – A confident and capable U.S. commander who is a POW. After the war, he takes it into his own hands to arrange for a train to pick up the POWs at the Naoetsu prison camp.

Charleton Hugh Cuppernell – Louie and Phil's friend and co-pilot. A jovial ex-football player, he dies in Green Hornet plane crash.

Stanley Pillsbury – The top turret gunner of the *Super Man*, Stanley Pillsbury shoots down a Zero but receives a serious leg wound in the process.

Adolf Hitler – The leader of the Nazi Party in Germany who congratulates Louie on his "fast finish" at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games.

The Quack – The abusive doctor at the Ofuna prison camp, he nearly beats William Harris to death. He is sentenced to death for his crimes.

Clarence Douglas – The waist gunner of the *Super Man* who shoots a Zero down.

Prince Yoshitomo Tokugawa – An influential Japanese dignitary who, after hearing of Watanabe's abuse of prisoners, removes him from the Omori prison camp.

Harry Brooks – A crewman on the *Super Man* who dies during the fight against the Zeros.

Shizuka Watanabe – Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe's loving mother.

Cecile "Cecy" Perry – Phil's devoted fiancé. They marry after the war.

Fred Garret – A friend of Louie's from the war who suffers from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

Cissy Zamperini – Louie and Cynthia's first child.

Draggan Mihailovich – A TV producer who makes a movie about Louie.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SURVIVAL AND RESILIENCE

Hillenbrand identifies a thread of adversity and resilience in Louie's pre-war life. As a child, Louie grew up poor but his defiance pushed him to rebel against the limitations he saw around him. At the time he expressed this defiance in inappropriate and destructive ways, acting delinquently and stealing from neighbors and local businesses. His beloved older brother, Pete, eventually helped straighten Louie out by giving him a new challenge: running. Louie poured his determination into training—which by definition is the continued act of giving one's all and overcoming adversity through physical and mental resilience—eventually emerging as an Olympian who competed at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Hillenbrand speculates that this experience with adversity and the resilience such experiences helped to build up allowed Louie to survive the war. Getting stranded in a life-raft for forty-seven days was just another limitation or obstacle to overcome. Similarly, after being captured by the Japanese and subjected to the daily cruelties and humiliations of the Japanese labor camp, Louie never gave in to despair or hopelessness.

Louie's resilience made him able to withstand the war but, perhaps, made him less able to handle reintegration into normal civilian life after the war. Before and during the war, Louie's resilience had always been defined against the very concrete obstacles he faced, whether that was training for the Olympics or surviving on the raft or in the Japanese camps. After the war, Louie was faced instead with the threat of his own mind: psychological wounds like night terrors and flashbacks. He fought against these obstacles much as he did against external obstacles, in this case repressing them with the use of alcohol. But that combative resilience had destructive effects in peacetime, both to himself and his family. It was only when Louie found a new kind of resilience, a belief in God founded on acceptance rather than defiance, that he could heal and remake his civilian life.

DIGNITY

One of the central conflicts of the novel centers on Louie's struggle to preserve his dignity, which Hillenbrand argues is as important to survival as food and shelter, in the face of the dehumanizing conditions of the Japanese prison camps. Even before Louie arrives at the camps, Hillenbrand establishes the importance of dignity when Francis "Mac" McNamara succumbs to selfish desire and eats all the rations on the raft, a betrayal that made him lose his self-respect. Without his dignity intact, despair consumed Mac, weakening his will to live and making survival impossible.

The issue of dignity took on greater weight after Louie and Phil were captured and brought to the Japanese prison camps. The Japanese considered being captured by the enemy as being without dignity. Since they saw the POWs as having no dignity, the Japanese guards treated the POWs as subhuman. In this context, preserving one's dignity was akin to insisting on one's humanity. Louie and the other prisoners preserved their dignity with small acts of resistance against their captors: they stole, mocked the guards behind their backs, and planned escape attempts. By rebelling against the guards, the men asserted their independence and individuality, reclaiming the self-respect that the guards tried to take from them.

While Louie preserved his dignity during the war, after the war his inability to cope with the psychological wounds left by the war threatened his self-respect, which led to a cycle of drinking heavily, abusing his wife, and squandering his family's money, that in turn led to even more loss of dignity. Louie's postwar loss of dignity causes him to lose his sense of morality, becoming almost as violent as the guards who tried to deny him his dignity in the first place, and leads him to the false idea that the only hope for restoring his self-respect was to kill Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe.

In the end, Louie countered the dehumanizing effects of war with a faith in God. Since the Japanese guards tried to deprive him of his dignity by making him feel insignificant, Louie's faith that a higher power singled him out for protection restored his dignity and self-worth.

REDEMPTION AND FORGIVENESS

The cycles of wrongdoing and redemption that lie at the heart of the book illustrate how one can always atone for the crimes and sins of the past. At

the beginning of the book, Louie is a juvenile delinquent, committing petty crimes, terrorizing the neighbors with pranks, and beating up other boys. Louie redeemed himself in the eyes of his community when he turns his energy to running and ends up competing in the Olympics, becoming the pride of his hometown. Likewise, Francis "Mac" McNamara selfishly endangered his crewmates by eating all of the rations, but redeemed himself by tirelessly fending off **sharks** from attacking Louie and Phil.

Though the book portrays everyone as having the *potential* for redemption, some characters miss out on the spiritual rewards of finding redemption. For example, Mutsuhiro "the Bird" Watanabe committed the much graver crime of torturing POWs but never sought redemption for his wrongdoing. If this story were fictional, we might expect the author to conclude the book with the **Bird** getting what's coming to him. But, in reality, the Bird didn't suffer any physical consequences for his actions. The Bird, however, does miss out on the inner fulfillment and serenity of finding redemption and making amends for past wrongs.

The book ends with Hillenbrand identifying forgiveness as the most powerful resource for achieving redemption. For Louie to recover from the traumas of war and rebuild his familial and marital relationships, he had to let go of the anger he had for Watanabe. Once he forgave his former captor, Louie found the inner peace that had eluded him in the years after the war.

WAR AND IDENTITY

War is hell. But *Unbroken* shows that in the darkest moments of that hell, people discover their true natures. Louie, for example, made it through the war with greater self-knowledge. Stranded on the raft, Louie comes to know the full strength of his resolve and resourcefulness, surviving for over forty days. Likewise, in the prison camps, Louie discovers just how unbreakable his sense of self is. Though the Japanese prison guards try to erase his identity by making him feel less than human, Louie never loses his goodhearted and optimistic nature.

But the war also reveals the depths of human cruelty. Hillenbrand compares Watanabe's cruelty to that of the other Japanese guards in order to show the different ways war brings out the darkest aspects of humanity. Hillenbrand claims that many Japanese prison guards were unable to cope with the horrific barbarity of dehumanizing the POWs. So, in response, these Japanese guards refused to see the POWs as human so that they could carry out the cruelties that their superiors demanded of them. If they saw the POWs as beasts rather than men, then it would easier for them to beat and starve them. In this way, the war turned good men into monsters. In contrast to these solders, Hillenbrand speculates that the war did not make Watanabe evil. Instead, she argues that he always had sadistic impulses, but that the war gave him the power to enact his violent fantasies on the helpless POWs. His case shows how war gives evil men the freedom to express the full extent of their wickedness.

War also has the potential of destroying the core traits of one's character. The psychological toll of the war changes Louie in tragic ways. When Louie arrives home from the war, he was no longer the lighthearted, resilient, and optimistic Olympic runner but instead a withdrawn, abusive, and unstable war veteran. Yet Louie's religious salvation—which comes as the result of a kind of last gasp effort by his wife—gave him the feeling of being reborn as a "new creation." Religion helped Louie put the horrors of war behind him by providing him with a kind of blank slate on which to remake his identity anew.

BELIEF AND FAITH

Unbroken argues that belief is a powerful, even essential, component for overcoming adversity. The suffering Louie witnessed first hand during the war nearly swallowed his soul, making him lose faith in himself and the essential goodness of humankind. But in the years after the war, Louie found salvation in the religious conviction that a compassionate and benevolent God cares and guides the world even during periods of global suffering and turmoil. Belief in God gave Louie a reason to live, allowing him to recover from the psychological traumas of the war.

But traditional religious belief isn't the only kind of belief in the book. Louie's family had faith that he was alive despite the U.S. Army's announcement that he was killed in action. This faith kept the family from falling apart and succumbing to unbearable grief. Similarly, before Louie found religion, his faith in himself and in his abilities gave him the confidence he needed to survive the trails of POW camp.

The book also shows that people who lack faith in themselves become cruel and violent. For example, the Japanese army's rejection of Watanabe's application to be an officer caused him to lose faith in himself, which Hillenbrand argues prompted him to torture others in order to derive a sense of power and significance. In this context, *Unbroken* illustrates that a deep-rooted faith in one's own value is a necessity for moral decency.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GRAF ZEPPELIN

The Graf Zeppelin was a giant German airship that flew around the world in 1929. When the Zeppelin passed over Louie's home in California one night, it created a

black absence in the sky by blotting out the light from the stars. Like a black hole that destroys everything around it, the Zeppelin represents the approaching war that will blot out many lives and bring so much suffering to the world's citizens. The Zeppelin also represents the metaphoric black hole that the war will open inside Louie. Causing him to develop a drinking problem and a serious mental illness called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the war obliterates everything good in his life, including his optimism, his ability to express love for his friends and family, and the joy of running. Only religion and a renewed sense of self-worth save Louie from being consumed by the black hole inside of him.

SHARKS

Throughout the novel, sharks symbolize the ever-present violence of the natural world. The U.S. airmen fear the sharks more than starvation or drowning. On the raft, the sharks encircle Louie, reminding him that the natural world's dangers are all around him. At first, Louie and his crew kill sharks in revenge for eating downed Allied airmen, but Louie quickly realizes that it's wrong to kill the sharks because it's in their nature to attack anything in the water. But unlike sharks and other sources of danger in the natural world, people have the ability to control their violent inclinations. Though the sharks appear like cruel monsters, the real monsters are abusive guards like Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe who choose to torture prisoners for pleasure. In this way, the sharks represent a natural violence that contrasts with the much more cruel human violence.

THE BIRD

One of the worst Japanese war criminals, Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe is the novel's epitome of evil, representing humankind's utmost capacity for violence. In the wild, birds often are seen to represent freedom, so the Bird's nickname emphasizes the freedom he has in comparison to the POWs, specifically with regards to his unrestricted freedom to torture the prisoners without consequence.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *Unbroken* published in 2010.

Preface Quotes

❝ A month earlier, twenty-six-year-old Zamperini had been one of the greatest runners in the world, expected by many to be the first to break the four-minute mile, one of the most celebrated barriers in sport. Now his Olympian's body had wasted to less than one hundred pounds and his famous legs could no longer lift him. Almost everyone outside of his family had given him up for dead.

Related Characters: Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes: 

Page Number: xvii-xviii

Explanation and Analysis

In the prologue to the book, we see Louis, the protagonist of the story, in a life raft in the middle of the ocean, a victim of the brutality of World War II. Hillenbrand builds suspense by describing how a great Olympian ended up in a life raft, barely able to survive. We're forced to wonder what could have driven Louis to such a state--and we want to continue reading to figure out the answer. the passage is typical, then, of Hillenbrand's book: although we're reading a work of nonfiction, it's plotted with a suspenseful, almost novelistic style more characteristic of nonfiction. The implicit message is that the truth is at least as strange, exciting, and interesting as fiction.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ He could feel the rumble of the craft's engines tilling the air but couldn't make out the silver skin, the sweeping ribs, the finned tail. He could see only the blackness of the space it inhabited. It was not a great presence but a great absence, a geometric ocean of darkness that seemed to swallow heaven itself.

Related Characters: Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4-5

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Louis looks up at the Graf Zeppelin, a German airship that flew around the world in the years leading up to World War II. The zeppelin is presented as a

symbol of foreboding and even evil: although it's on a peaceful mission, it's going to visit two countries--Germany, as led by Hitler, and Japan--that will soon fight against the United States in World War II. Louis is only a young kid, looking up at the zeppelin as it flies over California. And yet he gets a sense of foreboding as he watches it; it's as if he can feel the specter of World War Two approaching. (The passage is also a good example of how the author uses a highly fictional, imaginative approach to nonfiction: we can't know for sure what Louis was thinking when he was a kid, after all.)

He could have ended the beatings by running away or succumbing to tears, but he refused to do either. "You could beat him to death," said Sylvia, "and he wouldn't say 'ouch' or cry." He just put his hands in front of his face and took it.

Related Characters: Sylvia Zamperini (speaker), Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

As a child, Louis endured a lot of bullying from his peers for being Italian. Italians were a persecuted minority in parts of America at the time: they were seen as dangerous, unclean, and criminal people--not real Americans at all. Louis grew up being beaten and punched for his ethnicity--and whenever he was attacked, he accepted his punishment, preferring to be hit than to cry or beg for mercy.

Clearly, Louis is a tough, self-controlled person--and when he's an adult, his toughness will help him survive in a lifeboat and in Japanese POW camps. As we'll see, Louis's fortitude also helps him as an athlete: he's capable of turning off the pain signals in his body through sheer willpower.

Chapter 2 Quotes

By 1932, the modest, mild-tempered Cunningham, whose legs and back were covered in a twisting mesh of scars, was becoming a national sensation, soon to be acclaimed as the greatest miler in American history. Louie had his hero.

Related Characters: Louis "Louie" Zamperini, Glenn Cunningham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to one of Louis's heroes, Glenn Cunningham. Glenn is a fast runner, just like Louis. But he's also a symbol of willpower and drive: Glenn was disabled for much of his childhood (he was badly burned in an accident), and couldn't even walk for a while. Yet he used his willpower and determination to re-teach himself to walk, and later to run, eventually becoming one of the fastest runners in the country.

It's very telling that Louis chooses to worship a runner who's not just fast but also highly motivated--a sign, perhaps, that Louis recognizes the psychological side of athleticism, not just the physical achievements themselves. Louis learns how to train his mind to ignore pain and push for success at all times--and he seems to learn it from people like Glenn.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Once his hometown's resident archvillain, Louie was now a superstar, and Torrance forgave him everything. When he trained, people lined the track fence, calling out, "Come on, Iron Man!" The sports pages of the Los Angeles Times and Examiner were striped with stories on the prodigy, whom the Times called the "Torrance Tempest" and practically everyone else called the "Torrance Tornado."

Related Characters: Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

As Louie becomes a more impressive athlete, he also becomes a more popular figure in his own hometown. Previously, Louie was demonized for being an Italian. As he grows up, though, the townspeople are forced to acknowledge his greatness--they give him their respect because he earns it.

The passage is a good example of how many immigrants in the Untied States won respect for themselves through hard work and model behavior. At the same time that Louie was becoming a sensation, Frank Sinatra was paving a way for Italians in show business, another good example of the same process. It's unfair, of course, that immigrants should have to prove themselves to be "real" Americans through their excellence, but such is life in America in the middle of the

20th century.

Chapter 4 Quotes

He found himself thinking of Pete, and of something that he had said as they had sat on their bed years earlier: A lifetime of glory is worth a moment of pain. Louie thought: *Let go*.

Related Characters: Pete Zamperini, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Louie gets a surge of confidence just before he competes in the Olympic Games. Louie is worried that he'll do poorly in the games because he's gained weight and because he has little experience with international athletics. Still, he remembers the advice his brother gave him: in essence, it's worthwhile to sacrifice one's happiness in the short term if the payoff is big enough. Louie is talented at "playing through pain" in order to ensure a victory.

The passage is a good example of the way that Louie finds encouragement in the most unlikely of places. Like so many successful people, Louie is an optimist at heart, someone who finds the courage to be great even when others don't think he'll succeed. The passage also foreshadows the way Louie will sacrifice his own happiness for a greater good during World War II.

Hitler said something in German. An interpreter translated. "Ah, you're the boy with the fast finish."

Related Characters: Adolf Hitler (speaker), Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage Louie, having just run the fastest final lap of a race in history, meets Adolf Hitler. Hitler praises Louie for his excellent performance. The scene is so strange that a fiction writer wouldn't dare to dream it up: but it really happened. Hillenbrand notes the irony here: Louis is shaking hands with Hitler, the man who started the war in which Louie would one day fight, on the other side.

Thus, the passage foreshadows some of the tragedies of the second part of the book. Louie is basically just an innocent kid for now, but we the readers recognize that he'll become involved in a horrible war in the near future. Similarly, at this point Hitler was seemingly just another world leader (albeit a racist and power-hungry one), not yet recognized as the architect of one the world's greatest atrocities.

Chapter 6 Quotes

From this day forward, until victory or defeat, transfer, discharge, capture, or death took them from it, the vast Pacific would be beneath and around them. Its bottom was already littered with downed warplanes and the ghosts of lost airmen. Every day of this long and ferocious war, more would join them.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Here Louie and his new friend, Phil, prepare for a career in the military. They're being sent to Japan, where some of the most brutal fighting of World War Two took place. Hillebrand depicts their journey across the Pacific Ocean as a dangerous trek, in which they're surrounded by death in one form or another ("the ghosts of lost airmen"). As the war goes on, we're told, more and more soldiers will be killed. The passage is important because it conveys the extent of the danger Louie is about to face. He's dealt with adversity before, but it's not until now that he'll truly risk his life.

Chapter 8 Quotes

In World War II, 35,933 AAF planes were lost in combat and accidents. The surprise of the attrition rate is that only a fraction of the ill-fated planes were lost in combat. In 1943 in the Pacific Ocean Areas theater in which Phil's crew served, for every plane lost in combat, some six planes were lost in accidents. Over time, combat took a greater toll, but combat losses never overtook noncombat losses.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we learn a surprising fact: during World War Two, the vast majority of airplanes in the Pacific were lost because of accidents--in other words, the planes went down because they malfunctioned, the pilot erred, the weather was bad, or other reasons--not because a Japanese enemy shot them down. Hillebrand has no illusions about the virtues of war: although Louie enters the war in part because he thinks of combat as an inherently heroic, admirable profession, the reality is that war is often undignified and full of meaningless death. The passage also foreshadows some of the accidents that will get Louie in trouble later in the book: he's as much a victim of his own faulty machinery as he is of the Japanese army.

❝ And like everyone else, Louie and Phil drank. After a few beers, Louie said, it was possible to briefly forget dead friends.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Louie begins to develop a love for drinking. Alcohol isn't very good for a professional athlete, but when Louie is in the midst of World War Two--i.e., when he's surrounded by death and destruction--alcohol is a convenient way to forget about the horrors of his reality. Louie's alcohol consumption will later get him in big trouble, but for now it seems completely defensible: it would take a superhuman to survive World War II while acknowledging, head-on, the brutality of the conflict, and not seeking some kind of relief or escape. Louie is strong enough to run the fastest lap in Olympic history, but he's not strong enough to face the realities of World War Two.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ When they arrived at the crash site, the men were astonished by what they saw. Two life rafts, holding the entire five-man B-25 crew, floated amid plane debris. Around them, the ocean was churning with hundreds of sharks, some of which looked twenty feet long. Knifing agitated circles in the water, the creatures seemed on the verge of overturning the rafts.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Louie's crew rescues a group of men from shark-infested waters. The men are swimming in the ocean, trying to escape the sharks, which threaten to eat them alive. Louie and his friends are shocked and terrified by the sight of so many bloodthirsty animals. The passage reiterates the presence of death and danger in Louie's life now: as a soldier, he has to contend with the dangers of the natural world, not just of the Japanese army. Next to the sharks, the sailors and their life rafts seem incredibly fragile, barely capable of withstanding the sharks' attacks. At the same time, the sharks are just following their nature--they aren't any more bloodthirsty or vicious than any other animal trying to eat. It's only humans who are capable of real cruelty--it's a human war that has brought the sailors to this conflict with nature. The passage also foreshadows some of the dangers that Louie will experience personally when he's sent adrift in the ocean.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ The realization that Mac had eaten all of the chocolate rolled hard over Louie. In the brief time that Louie had known Mac, the tail gunner had struck him as a decent, friendly guy, although a bit of a reveler, confident to the point of flippancy. The crash had undone him. Louie knew that they couldn't survive for long without food, but he quelled the thought. A rescue search was surely under way.

Related Characters: Francis "Mac" McNamara, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the story, Louie is trapped on a life raft with his fellow soldiers Phil and Mac. Mac is a good man, but he panics in the face of such sudden danger--here, for instance, he sneaks into the rations and eats all the chocolate. Louie is understandably angry with Mac for stealing the food that will keep them alive, and yet Louie remains calm and collected. He looks ahead to the future, optimistically. The same qualities that made Louie such a talented runner--his drive, his optimism, etc.--make him good in a crisis, too. He doesn't wallow in his own anger and frustration; instead, he remains singularly focused on the goal, rescue--the rest is details.

That night, before he tried to sleep, Louie prayed. He had prayed only once before in his life, in childhood, when his mother was sick and he had been filled with a rushing fear that he would lose her. That night on the raft, in words composed in his head, never passing his lips, he pleaded for help.

Related Characters: Louise Zamperini, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage Hillenbrand introduces the theme of religion to the novel. Louie isn't a particularly religious person, we've already been told--but there's a side of his personality that seems willing to have faith, against all the evidence. Here, Louie is trapped on a lifeboat, desperate for food and rescue. He prays to God for help, just as he did when he was a child and feared that he might lose his mother. His motivations aren't hard to diagnose: he's frightened and, for once, helpless.

In a way, Louie's behavior here reiterates everything we already knew about his athletic prowess. Louie is an optimist through and through--when the outlook doesn't look good, he finds a way to see the bright side, believing against all reasonable evidence that everything will work out well. Thus, he chooses to have faith that he'll be rescued, praying to God for help.

Louise cried and prayed. From the stress, open sores broke out all over her hands. Sylvia thought her hands looked like raw hamburger. Somewhere in those jagged days, a fierce conviction came over Louise. She was absolutely certain that her son was alive.

Related Characters: Sylvia Zamperini, Louise Zamperini, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're told what's going on with Louie's relatives back in the United States. News that their son has gone missing reaches California, and Louie's mother, Louise, becomes horribly frightened. Louise is a religious person, and she prays to God for help with her son. Louise also finds the courage to *believe* that her son is still alive, even after the authorities tell her that he's likely dead. Much like her son, Louise is an eternal optimist, someone who believes in the best of all possible worlds and the ability to improve things through the force of one's will, endurance, and faith. Here, she chooses to believe that Louie is still alive--she becomes singularly focused on such an outcome, much like Louie focusing his attention on winning a race.

Chapter 14 Quotes

For Louie and Phil, the conversations were healing, pulling them out of their suffering and setting the future before them as a concrete thing. As they imagined themselves back in the world again, they willed a happy ending onto their ordeal and made it their expectation. With these talks, they created something to live for.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

Back in the lifeboat, Louie, Phil, and Mac try their best to survive in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Mac is currently slipping into despair, but Louie and Phil try to keep their hopes up. The two were already friends before the accident, so they have an easy time bonding with each other, and here they try to keep up their optimism and mental acuity by

quizzing each other, recalling memories, and telling stories.

What's the point of having chats like these on a life raft--what purpose could they possibly serve? One of Louie's key insights, both here and later in the book, is that adversity is mental as much as it is physical. In other words, Louie doesn't just have to deal with the challenges of having no food--he has to keep his sanity during the ordeal (by the same token, he had to focus his mind in winning the race, not just focus his body in running). Louie is a great athlete and a great human being because he understands the psychological component of danger--he has incredible willpower, which helps him survive.

Mac had never seen combat, didn't know these officers, and was largely an unknown quantity to himself. All he knew about his ability to cope with this crisis was that on the first night, he had panicked and eaten the only food they had. As time passed and starvation loomed, this act took on greater and greater importance, and it may have fed Mac's sense of futility.

Related Characters: Francis "Mac" McNamara

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hillenbrand contrasts the experience of Mac, a new recruit to the military, with that of Phil and Louie on the life raft. Mac is young and unused to crises, and he feels devastatingly guilty about having stolen all the chocolate on the first night in the raft. As a result, Mac becomes depressed and anxious during his time at sea--he can't force himself to envision a future in which he survives the danger and goes back home.

The passage reminds us how extraordinary Louie's willpower is. Not just anybody can focus so single-mindedly on a bright future--many of us are more like Mac, focusing on the worst possible outcome and allowing our guilt and self-doubt to consume us.

They bowed their heads together as Louie prayed. If God would quench their thirst, he vowed, he'd dedicate his life to him. The next day, by divine intervention or the fickle humors of the tropics, the sky broke open and rain poured down. Twice more the water ran out, twice more they prayed, and twice more the rain came.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Louie prays to God, and his prayers are seemingly answered. Louie is getting desperate--he's going to die of thirst if he's not rescued soon. In his desperation, Louie takes solace in prayer and faith--he even promises God to devote his life to religion if there's rain. Almost miraculously, it rains shortly afterwards, saving Louie's life.

Hillenbrand isn't saying outright that God saved Louie's life--she leaves it up to readers to decide if the event was a coincidence or fate. And yet the broader point seems to be that Louie finds the courage to take a "leap of faith" in his time of need. In other words, Louie turns to God out of desperation, once again hanging onto his sense of optimism in the midst of a crisis.

Chapter 18 Quotes

This self-respect and sense of self-worth, the innermost armament of the soul, lies at the heart of humanness; to be deprived of it is to be dehumanized, to be cleaved from, and cast below, mankind. Men subjected to dehumanizing treatment experience profound wretchedness and loneliness and find that hope is almost impossible to retain.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

In his next ordeal, Louie's faith and optimism are tested even more rigorously. During his time as a prisoner of war, Louie isn't just tortured and deprived of food and water--he's humiliated and dehumanized by his Japanese captors. The Japanese soldiers force Louie to perform humiliating actions, and they laugh at him, treating him like an animal. Hillenbrand notes that Louie's dehumanization at the hands of the enemy soldiers is more damaging than his physical torture. Louie is an optimist--he can always look ahead to the future because he sees the bright side of everything. But because his captors treat him like an animal, Louie finds

his optimism fading away--he begins to despise himself, falling in line with the way his guards treat him. The passage reconfirms one of the book's key ideas: psychological strength is just as or more important than physical strength for attaining success.

Dignity is as essential to human life as water, food, and oxygen. The stubborn retention of it, even in the face of extreme physical hardship, can hold a man's soul in his body long past the point at which the body should have surrendered it. The loss of it can carry a man off as surely as thirst, hunger, exposure, and asphyxiation, and with greater cruelty. In places like Kwajalein, degradation could be as lethal as a bullet.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Louie is finally treated with kindness and respect by one of his prison guards, a man named Kawamura. Kawamura doesn't go along with his fellow soldiers in humiliating Louie; instead, he regards Louie as a human being, and therefore worthy of kindness. Hillenbrand notes that Kawamura's kindness might have saved Louie's life, because optimism and basic dignity is a key force for survival. When people learn to respect themselves, they find new courage, which helps them succeed. Optimism can be an almost physical feeling, just as despair can cause concrete problems with a person's breathing, circulation, and general health. We've already seen evidence for such an idea, but here Hillenbrand makes her point especially clearly: psychological strength is more important than physical strength, at least for survival.

Chapter 26 Quotes

Finally, Louie was introduced to a group of men, Australians and Americans. These men, the producers said, were helping them make broadcasts. As Louie held out his hand, the propaganda prisoners dropped their eyes to the floor. Their faces said it all; if Louie agreed to make this broadcast, he would be forced into a life as his enemy's propagandist.

Related Characters: Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Louie, still in captivity, is sent to be a propagandist for the Japanese nation. Louie is a well-known figure (at least relative to the other POWS), and therefore his presence on the propaganda team would be of great use to Japan. If Louie were to read pro-Japanese statements, the Japanese think, then he could influence American soldiers to turn against their commanders, or at least deal a general blow to American morale.

In short, Louie is being offered an easy way out: he can work with the Japanese and get better conditions during his time in a Japanese prison, or he can refuse and go back to being tortured. The passage, then, poses a moral challenge to Louie—he'd be sacrificing his psychological dignity by working with the Japanese, yet gaining a better physical life.

Chapter 28 Quotes

Now he was condemned to crawl through the filth of a pig's sty, picking up feces with his bare hands and cramming handfuls of the animal's feed into his mouth to save himself from starving to death. Of all of the violent and vile abuses that the Bird had inflicted upon Louie, none had horrified and demoralized him as did this. *If anything is going to shatter me*, Louie thought, *this is it.*

Related Characters: Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Louie is forced to endure an especially awful punishment at the hands of the sadistic "Bird": he's forced to crawl on the floor of a pig sty, picking up pig feces with his bare hands. Furthermore, Louie has to eat the feces just to survive. This torture is not only disgusting and horrific, it's also entirely dehumanizing--Louie is made to act like an animal, or something even lower than an animal. The Bird is trying to break Louie's spirit, and this kind of torture tries to get him to think of himself as a mere beast.

The passage shows Louie coming close to giving up entirely.

And yet even here, at the nadir of his time in captivity, Louie maintains his sanity and his confidence (barely). The one Japanese soldier who treated him with kindness and support has inspired him to be strong. Thus, even while Louie is thinking about being "shattered," he continues to maintain some distance from his own punishment—it's as if he's just closing his eyes and waiting for it to be over.

❝ A flask became his constant companion, making furtive appearances in parking lots and corridors outside speaking halls. When the harsh push of memory ran through Louie, reaching for his flask became as easy as slapping a swatter on a fly.

Related Characters: Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 347

Explanation and Analysis

After Louie returns from the war, he becomes an alcoholic. He finds it impossible to cope with the traumatic memories of his time on the lifeboat and in the POW camp—it's easier to blur things over with the help of liquor. Louie's descent into alcoholism is especially hard to watch because he's always been an incredibly self-controlled person—his self-control helped him survive the lifeboat and the POW camp, after all. And yet in the end, Louie's trauma becomes too much for him (or any other man, for that matter) to bear: he can't face the memories of being starved, beaten, and humiliated, and so he tries to escape them altogether.

Chapter 35 Quotes

❝ For these men, the central struggle of postwar life was to restore their dignity and find a way to see the world as something other than menacing blackness. There was no one right way to peace; every man had to find his own path, according to his own history. Some succeeded. For others, the war would never really end.

Related Characters: Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, Fred Garret, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 357

Explanation and Analysis

In the final third of the book, Hillenbrand changes her focus from war and athleticism to psychology. The book has been psychological all along, of course—we've seen what's going on in Louie's mind while he's running or surviving the lifeboat—but now, Louie's mind becomes the true "battleground." As Hillenbrand says here, many soldiers returned from World War Two without ever really recovering their old lives: the experience of so much bloodshed and trauma was too much for them to bear. Each soldier had suffered in a different way—as a result, there was no easy fix for the trauma of warfare.

In effect, the final third of the book is about whether or not Louie can regain control of his own mind, or if he'll plummet into guilt, despair, and resentment.

❝ Louie had no idea what had become of the Bird, but he felt sure that if he could get back to Japan, he could hunt him down. This would be his emphatic reply to the Bird's unremitting effort to extinguish his humanity: *I am still a man.* He could conceive of no other way to save himself. Louie had found a quest to replace his lost Olympics. He was going to kill the Bird.

Related Characters: Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 361

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hillenbrand shows us how low Louie has sunk after coming home from World War Two. Louie endured incredibly harsh conditions in his POW camp—most of it at the hands of a Japanese soldier nicknamed "The Bird." The result is that Louie, despite having survived the war, feels a continued hatred for the Bird. He's been so traumatized by his violent torture that he thinks the only solution is more violence. Thus, Louie plans to return to Japan and kill his old tormenter. He feels helpless and lost in America, and feels that he can only take meaningful action and reclaim his human dignity by taking the life of his enemy.

Louie's attempts to find justice and peace after World War Two are especially poignant because they suggest that the remainder of his life will be dominated by his memories of the past. Louie has always been an optimistic person who

focuses on the future; now, he can think of no future other than one in which he settles his past scores.

Chapter 37 Quotes

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 373

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Hillenbrand sums up Louie's state of being after World War Two and before his religious conversion. He's always been optimistic, and yet he's now singularly fixated on the past rather than the future. Furthermore, Louie feels the need to struggle for his humanity and assert himself through violence. He spent so long being treated like an animal that he internalized some of the feelings of inferiority that the Bird was trying to make him feel. Louie rationally knows that he's a human being, but he can't help but hate himself as a result of the humiliating exercises he was forced to endure in Japan.

What Hillenbrand is describing, of course, is post-traumatic stress disorder, though the term hadn't yet been popularized at the time. Louie doesn't know that he's suffering from a serious psychological affliction—as far as he's concerned, his problem is his and his alone. Thus, instead of seeking help from doctors or counselors, Louie tries to solve his problems with violence—i.e., by killing the Bird.

Chapter 39 Quotes

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe, Louis "Louie" Zamperini

Related Themes:    

Page Number:

Explanation and Analysis

Louie was unbroken during the war because he faced the terrible traumas of the war, of the Japanese camps, and of the Bird with a refusal to give in or give up. He faced all these obstacles as enemies to be beaten, and he beat them. And yet after the war he found that the skills that allowed him to beat those obstacles -- rage, refusal to give in -- were essentially eating him alive. He survived the war; it did not break him physically. But it broke him emotionally.

As this quote shows, though, through religion Louie finds a way to mend himself, to un-break himself. Religion gives him a way to escape the mindset of war -- victory or death, defeat or be defeated -- and find instead compassion and forgiveness. Here he finds compassion, even, for the most hateful, vengeful enemy he faced: the Bird. And it is only when he feels that compassion for the Bird, when his faith allows him to be able to recognize a kind of fundamental dignity in the Bird despite all that the bird did, that Louieis able to feel that dignity in himself as well and to leave the war behind, that he is able to truly be unbroken.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

In June 1943, Army Air Force bombardier and former Olympic runner Louie Zamperini lies across a small raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. With him on the raft are the two other surviving crewmen of his crashed plane. The men have no rations or drinking water and hungry **sharks** constantly encircle them. The U.S. military has already given them up for dead.

Hillenbrand starts the book by throwing the reader into the middle of the action, immediately laying the foundation for the theme of Survival and Resilience as her characters face dire circumstances. Her description heightens the hopelessness of their situation, giving the reader a sense of how much strength, fortitude, and resourcefulness it took these men to survive.

On the morning of their twenty-seventh day at sea, a Japanese bomber spots the raft and opens machinegun fire on them. To escape the bullets, the men jump into the ocean. The bullets nearly hit them, but the men survive and climb back aboard the raft. As the bomber makes a second attempt, Louie dives into the water. Too weak to follow, the other crewmen take their chances on the raft. As the bomber flies overhead, the **sharks** swim toward Louie.

This preface introduces one of Louie's core personality traits: resilience. Resilience is the ability to recover from and respond effectively to adversity. In this scene, Louie embodies the trait. Not letting the plane crash, the starvation, or the sharks break his spirit, Louie distinguishes himself from his crewmates, diving into the ocean to save himself rather than giving up and leaving his fate to chance or the accuracy of the bomber. This preface is an introductory snapshot of the adversity that Louie will face, and resiliently overcome, his entire life.

CHAPTER 1: THE ONE-BOY INSURGENCY

In the small town of Torrance, California, during the early hour darkness of an August 1929 morning, Louis "Louie" Zamperini, then twelve-years-old, and his older brother Pete watch the German airship, the **Graf Zeppelin**, pass over their house. The size of two and a half football fields, the flying machine was three days from completing its trip around the globe. The Zeppelin had passed over Nuremberg, Germany, where Adolf Hitler gave a speech on selective infanticide. It also flew over Tokyo, Japan, where four million Japanese people shouted "Banzai!" as it passed. Unable to make out the details of the Zeppelin, Louie sees it as an "ocean of darkness" that blots out the stars in the sky.

The Graf Zeppelin shows up only once in the book, but its appearance in the first chapter reveals its importance as a symbol for war. Though the Zeppelin is on a mission of peace, Hillenbrand describes how it passed over the two nations, Germany and Japan, whose militarism would spark WWII. The Zeppelin, which Louie describes as if it were a black hole blotting out the stars, is a symbol of the coming war because, like a metaphoric black hole, the war will also blot out the lives of so many people.

The son of Italian immigrants Anthony and Louise Zamperini, Louie was a boyhood scoundrel. Smoking cigarettes by age five and drinking by eight, he steals from the locals and pulls pranks on the whole town. Other boys would beat him up for being Italian-American, but he never ran away or broke into tears. Later, his sister Sylvia would say that Louie would rather die in a fight than cry.

Louie's refusal to cry is a sign of his defiant will to maintain his pride and dignity no matter what. This defiant spirit will prove useful in the POW camps where the Japanese will physically and emotionally try to strip him of his dignity, though at this point in his life he channels his defiance to less than constructive ends.

Pete Zamperini, Louie's older brother by two years, was everything Louie was not. Pete treated adults with respect, was kind to younger kids, and woke up every morning at two-thirty to run a three-hour paper route. Louie took after his mother Louise, who also loved making mischief. One Halloween, she dressed up as a boy and went trick-or-treating with her sons, even getting into a scrap with local toughs who tried to steal her pants.

The comparison between Louie and his brother highlights Louie's rebellious and defiant nature. But, like Louie, Louise also defies traditional norms, rebelling against the expectations of her as a woman and mother in the 1930s. Her defiance will also prove useful when, refusing the U.S. Army's suggestion that she give up Louie for dead, she holds onto the belief that he is alive.

As Louie enters high school, his crimes become more serious. He punches a girl, throws rotten fruit at police officers, and leaves a boy he nearly beat to death in a ditch. During this period in America, people were fascinated with eugenics – the pseudoscience that promised to enhance the human race by sterilizing or putting to death people deemed "unfit." After the California state government tried to sterilize a local boy deemed "feebleminded," Louie realizes that his Italian ethnicity, criminal record, and poor grades could get him sterilized or worse. Deciding to clean up his act to avoid such a fate, Louie tries harder at school, helps around the house, and curbs his violent impulses.

Hillenbrand's portrayal of Louie's youth sets up the theme of Redemption. As he grows from a boy into a teenager, he moves from being a child menace to what might better be described as a lowlife villain, and is certainly far from the admirable war hero that the preface portrays. Louie's fear motivates him to alter his behavior just enough to avoid external repercussions, but at this point he lacks the internal motivation to redeem himself in the eyes of his family and community for its own sake.

CHAPTER 2: RUN LIKE MAD

Hoping sports will channel Louie's energies into a more socially acceptable activity, Pete convinces him to join the track team. Louie only agrees so that he can impress the girls who watch the boys practice. After coming in last during his first track meet, an embarrassed Louie trains until he is good enough to attend the All City Finals where he comes in fifth. But running feels like a chore and Louie begins to resent the hard work.

Louie's embarrassment reveals that a fear of losing his pride and self-respect motivates him to run. But fear is not sufficient for actually making him enjoy running – Louie's resentment foreshadows his slip back into his delinquent ways. Fear alone won't keep him on the path to redemption.

After an argument with his parents, Louie and a friend board a train and ride north. Soon, a railroad detective forces them to jump from the moving train at gunpoint. After several days of walking and stealing food, a desperate and hungry Louie decides to return home, realizing he must reform his ways or else live in absolute poverty. His parents welcome him home and he begins training with Pete in earnest.

With only fear motivating his desire to reform, Louie returns to his delinquent ways. Though fear of poverty drives him back to his family, he'll need something more substantial to keep his sights on redemption.

Louie finds a hero and role model in the runner Glenn Cunningham. As a child, Cunningham lost the ability to walk after being burned in a house fire. Not giving up, Cunningham trained himself to walk and even run. By 1932, sports casters were heralding him as America's greatest mile runner. Admiring the man's resilience, Louie trains everyday and soon becomes one of the fastest runners in Southern California.

Finally, instead of fear, Louie finds something positive to motivate him: overcoming limitations and the promise of resilience. No longer simply running away from fear of sterilization or poverty, Louie is now running towards *a goal – to imitate his idol, overcome any obstacle or limitation, and become the best runner he can be.*

CHAPTER 3: THE TORRANCE TORNADO

Louie's running abilities improve. He breaks the national high school record for fastest mile and gains a nickname: "The Torrance Tornado." Realizing he may have a shot at running for the Americans at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Louie trains even harder. His successes earn him multiple college sports scholarships. In 1935, Louie accepts the University of Southern California's offer but delays entry until the following semester so that he can train full time.

As Louie succeeds as a runner, it both opens doors for him and gives him a sense of dignity that feeds on itself: his "fight", which used to get him in trouble, now pushes him to try to be the best he can be. Once the terror of the town, now through his nickname he proudly carries the town's name during his competitions.

Louie trains for the 1,500 yard race until he comes to the realization that he's too young and inexperienced to beat the older and more professional American runners competing for the chance to go to Berlin. Refocusing his energies, he trains his sights on the less competitive 5,000 yard race. Louie wins the preliminary Olympics trials and travels to New York City to compete in the final trial. The residents of Torrance see Louie off, presenting him with travelling money and gifts.

Louie encounters his first obstacle and overcomes it with grace. Instead of giving up at the first sign of adversity, Louie shows his resilience by competing in a race that he's unprepared for and still winning. The town has also forgiven Louie of his past crimes, showing that he's redeemed himself in their eyes. In a reversal that mirrors Louie's own 180 degree transformation, the town now lavishes a boy who used to steal from them with gifts.

During one of the hottest summers in recorded New York City history, Louie trains for the final trial. His biggest competition is Don Lash, who most sports commentators think will come in first during the trial. As long as Louie comes in second place, he will advance to the Olympics, but he plans to give Lash a run for his money. On the night before the race, Louie lays in bed thinking of all the people he will disappoint if he loses.

Louie's determination to beat out the more experienced runner shows just how much he believes in himself. But this self-confidence doesn't make Louie self-centered or conceited – Louie knows that he not only runs for himself, but also for his town. He's truly transformed from a young punk into an admirable athlete.

During the race, Lash stays in the lead while Louie conserves his energy by staying behind the other runners. On the last lap, Lash begins to slow down and Louie seizes the opportunity. Running at full speed, Louie and Lash cross the finish line at the same time. It's a tie and both men take their place on the Olympic team.

This race can be understood as a metaphor for Louie's life. Early on, Louie trailed behind his peers, so far in fact that he feared the government would sterilize him for being "unfit." But, in his final years of high school, Louie literally raced ahead of everyone else, even winning a spot at the Olympics.

Hearing the good news on the radio, the residents of Torrance explode in celebration, honking their car horns, gushing into the Zamperini's home, and drinking to Louie's success late into the night. Louie is the youngest distance runner to ever make the American team.

The chapter culminates with Louie's complete redemption. Now a local hero and the pride of their town, the townspeople forgive and forget Louie's boyhood transgressions.

CHAPTER 4: PLUNDERING GERMANY

On board a luxury cruise ship to Germany, Louie along with other U.S. Olympic team members steal mementos and gorge themselves on the free food. When they arrive in Berlin, their Nazi hosts give them a tour of the city. Nazi banners and the German military are everywhere. Unknown to the Olympians, the Nazi government had isolated the Jews and Gypsies away from the city, leaving only smiling German "Aryans" in the streets.

Two years before the Olympics, the Nazi party took control of Germany and elected Adolf Hitler as the leader of the country. Hitler and other Nazi leaders promoted the idea of a "pure" and "master" race of Northern European "Aryans." This racist belief motivated the Holocaust: the Nazi extermination of six million Jews and five million non-Jewish victims deemed "inferior" by the Nazis.

Worried that he gained too much weight on the cruise ship, Louie loses confidence in his ability to win the race. On the race day, Louie lies facedown in the infield of the stadium, readying himself for the challenge ahead. During the race, his teammate Don Lash takes the lead while Louie stays behind, once again conserving his energy. Runners from the Finnish team stay right behind Lash and, near the end of the race, one of the Finns elbows Lash in the chest, causing him to stumble and fall hopelessly behind the pack.

It's looking bad for the American team. Louie is the Americans' only hope for victory but his lack of confidence, a psychological obstacle, is preventing him from giving the race his all. Will his resilience return, helping him find the self-confidence to push ahead?

Also falling behind, Louie remembers advice that Pete gave to him as a boy: a moment of pain is worth a lifetime of glory. The memory motivates Louie, giving him the will to run as hard as he can for the last lap. Louie finishes in seventh place, but clocks the fastest last lap in Olympic history. After the race, a Nazi official says that Adolf Hitler would like to meet him. In a private section of the stadium stands, Louie and Hitler shake hands. Hitler says, "Ah, you're the boy with the fast finish."

Pete's advice is like a mantra or tagline for the book and for the theme of Survival and Resilience: pain, whether in a race or stranded and starving on a raft, is only temporary and does not compare to the glory of prevailing over limitations. Hitler's line also reinforces the idea of the race as a metaphor for Louie's life so far. Despite his bad start as a delinquent, he had a fantastic finish in the Olympics.


In the days after the race, Louie and some of the other U.S. Olympians drink, party, and steal souvenirs from all over Berlin. But after the Olympics end and Louie returns home, the city of Berlin changes. Anti-Semitic signs and newspapers reappear and the Nazis transport the first prisoners to concentration camps.

During the Olympics, the Nazis hid any signs of conflict or violence in order to project a sense of national unity and power. With the world no longer watching, the violence returns and intensifies, a sign that foreshadows the coming war.

Back in Torrance, Louie plans for the 1940 Olympics. With more experience, he hopes to earn a gold metal. Eager for victory, Louie's hopes shape around the city announced as the host of the next Olympic Games: Tokyo, Japan.

Foreshadowing continues, but this time with a dark irony. Louie will get his wish – he will make it to Japan but, rather than as a proud Olympian, he will arrive as a prisoner of war fighting to preserve his pride and dignity.


CHAPTER 5: INTO WAR

At the University of Southern California, Louie along with his best friend and fellow Olympic runner Payton Jordan train for the next Games. Louie befriends a Japanese immigrant named Kunichi "Jimmie" Sasaki, a fellow student who also loves track. But Jimmie is not what he seems. Actually nearly forty-years-old and with a family, Jimmie only pretends to be a student.

For a minor character, Jimmie is at the center of the War and Identity theme. A man of mystery, Jimmie hides his true identity. As the story unfolds, his identity will remain an unknown, revealing the limitations of what can and cannot be known about the motivations and intentions of others.

Louie continues to train, trying to be the first person to run a mile in under four minutes. During the 1938 NCAA Championship race, Louie brags to the other runners about his fast running times. Louie's boastfulness prompts the runners to sharpen their cleats and slash his shins and feet during the race. Despite their malicious attempts, he wins the race and sets a new speed record at the NCAA.

The racers' aggression towards Louie foreshadows how Louie's pride and self-confidence will, later and more devastatingly, spur the anger of his prison guards. Once again, Louie shows his resilience, winning the race despite the others' attempt to incapacitate him.

As Louie trains, Germany invades Poland and Japan invades China. As a result of these aggressions, the Olympics Commission suspends the Games. Without the prospect of the Games to look forward to, Louie becomes depressed, loses race after race, and drops out of college despite only having a few credits left to earn. Aware that war was coming and that those who enlisted prior to being drafted could choose their service branch, Louie, feeling a pull to the sky, joins the Army Air Corps in 1941.

Louie's resilience falters. Hillenbrand isn't clear why Louie relies on running to keep him from slipping back into delinquency, but it is possible that what Pete calls the "glory" of victory gives Louie the self-worth necessary to reach new heights. Putting it more broadly, Louie thrives when he has a challenge to face, and loses motivation when that challenge disappears. Louie's urge towards the sky metaphorically illustrates this desire for the glory of overcoming obstacles and limitations.

While Louie trains to be a bombardier, the FBI investigates Jimmie Sasaki for espionage. The U.S. government suspected him of relaying information about the U.S. military to Japanese officials and raising money for Japan's war effort. But Jimmie also gave Japanese military secrets to a U.S. congressmen.

Jimmie's true allegiances remain unknown, providing a contrast to the other characters – whereas war will bring out their true natures, Jimmie manages to keep his concealed.

In December 1941, 180 Japanese fighter planes attack the U.S. military base at Pearl Harbor. At a training base in Texas, Louie finds out that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor while watching a movie. Louie would long remember sitting in the theater with eyes wide and his mind struggling to comprehend the news: America was at war.

Louie's inability to comprehend the enormity of war shows just how inconceivable WWII really was. A global conflict that will involve almost every nation on the planet, the war will alter the world and its citizens.

CHAPTER 6: THE FLYING COFFIN

At a U.S. military base far out in the Pacific, a Japanese bomber raid catches the marines at Wake Atoll unaware. Although it should have been an easy victory for the Japanese, it took three days of bombing and a large invasion force to conquer the island. Instead of registering the ninety-eight captured American soldiers with the Red Cross as POWs, the Japanese enslave them all.

This is the first indication of Japan's wartime atrocities. During WWII, Japan defied the terms of the 1929 Geneva Convention on the Prisoners of War, which established the basic humans rights of the POWs. Louie will learn firsthand of how the Japanese violate these basic rights.

While in military training, Louie becomes a superbly accurate bombardier. After graduating from training, he drives to Torrance to say goodbye to his family. Pete, a navy chief petty officer in San Diego, comes home to see his brother off. In a picture the family takes, Louie and Louise, on the verge of tears, squint and look slightly away from camera, as if blinded by the glare of what lay before them.

With the Olympics no longer a feasible goal, Louie finds a new challenge in military training: becoming the best bombardier possible. Focusing on overcoming this obstacle helps Louie pulls himself out of depression, possibly providing him that sense of "glory" or self-worth that he had derived from running. Hillenbrand's description of the photo also foreshadows the trials and challenges that both Louie and Louise will face in the coming years.

At an airbase in Ephrata, Washington, Louie, now an officer, meets his pilot Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips. A quiet man, Phil is always cool under pressure and deeply in love with his hometown sweet heart and fiancé, Cecy Perry. Another eight men make up the crew of their B-24 Liberator. Ugly, accident-prone, and hard to fly, the B-24 feels like a death sentence to the crew. One of crewmen calls it "The Flying Coffin."

A deathtrap, his plane is another external obstacle Louie must overcome. The plane also contrasts with the popular image of the WWII airplane. Today, we might imagine the brave flyboy's plane as a majestic thing of beauty. But, in reality, their plane is a hunk of junk, a source of fear and embarrassment.

In time, the hundreds of hours of intense training make the crewmen love their plane as their home. They choose the name "*Super Man*" for the plane and soon receive orders to fly to Oahu's Hickam Field in the Pacific Ocean to continue their training and prepare for their first combat mission.

The plane's name change from the "The Flying Coffin" to the invincible superhero "Super Man" reflects Louie's own transformation. Louie's unpromising beginnings could have led him to an early grave, but he'll ultimately prove be a resilient, seemingly indestructible hero.

CHAPTER 7: "THIS IS IT, BOYS"

By the time the crew of the *Super Man* arrives at the Allied-controlled island of Oahu, Japanese bombing runs have already scarred the Hickam military base. Louie's crew also gains a new co-pilot, Charleton Hugh Cuppernell, a jovial ex-football player. The men continue training on the island and patrolling the ocean for enemy planes.

The men get their first glimpse of war and what they see isn't pretty. Instead of a secure military base, they find Hickam bombed out and in disrepair – a sign that war will be a challenge for the men to survive.

Soon, the crew gets their first orders. The men will head to Wake Atoll where the Japanese have built an airbase. It will take sixteen hours to reach Wake Atoll, bomb it, and then return. As *Super Man* flies over Wake Atoll, antiaircraft guns shoot into the sky. Louie's bombs hit the airstrip, blowing up bunkers and nearly destroying a grounded Japanese fighter plane called a Zero.

In the first of a few extended battle scenes, Hillenbrand illustrates warfare as thrilling and terrifying at the same time.

When they head back to a U.S. airbase at Midway, *Super Man's* bomb doors refuse to close, causing the the plane to eat up more gasoline than expected. All the crewmen can do is hope that *Super Man* will stay in the air long enough to get them home. With the airbase in sight, one of the engines runs out of gas. As Phil touches the plane down on the airstrip, the engines sputter and die. If they had been in the air only a little bit longer, they would have crashed from a lack of fuel.

Hillenbrand primes the reader for the religious themes that will become more pronounced later in the book. While Hillenbrand doesn't explicitly suggest that a higher being saved the men from crashing, the sheer unlikeliness of their survival might lead some people to conclude (including an older Louie looking back on his life) that only God could have saved them.

A few days after the raid, Louie finds a cartoon in one of the military newspapers depicting him as an Olympic runner and describing the successful bombing of Wake Atoll. With the success of the bombing behind them, a lot of the men think the war will be won in a matter of months. Doubtful, Phil writes a letter to his mother, saying that all the talk of victory is too premature.

Louie has become a national symbol of victory. As an Olympic runner, he brought pride to his town by breaking a world record. Now, the newspaper portrays him as a war hero, bringing pride and glory to his country. No longer a small-town lowlife, Louie has transformed into a hero, a "Super Man."

CHAPTER 8: "ONLY THE LAUNDRY KNEW HOW SCARED I WAS"

At the beginning of the war, most downed American Air Force planes were lost due to accidents rather than combat. Most of the time, mechanical failures in the planes themselves were the reason for accidents. But bad weather, human error, and the challenges of navigation also accounted for some of the losses.

After describing the heroic victory at Wake Atoll, Hillenbrand undermines the idea that war is inherently heroic by describing all the futile, unglorified ways to die in war.

If crewmen survived a crash into the Pacific, the U.S. Air Force would search for them for thirteen months before giving them up for dead. Although the military was dedicated to finding survivors, the chances of actually seeing anyone on a tiny life-raft in the middle of the Pacific was highly unlikely. **Sharks**, starvation, and crash wounds all contributed to the unlikelihood of staying alive on a raft long enough to be rescued.

Because of the events related in the preface of the book, we know that Louie will soon find himself on one of those very same life-rafts. The description of the unlikeliness of survival gives the reader an understanding of how challenging survival will be on the raft.

Above all else, the airmen fear capture by the Japanese after a crash. Word of the Japanese atrocities had swept through the U.S. military barracks, including reports about the six-week killing frenzy known as the "Rape of Nanking" where Japanese soldiers murdered between 200,000 and 430,000 Chinese civilians in the city of Nanking. The men also heard stories of Japanese soldiers torturing and executing American prisoners of war.

Once again, Hillenbrand provides a sense of the extent of Japan's wartime atrocities. These descriptions serve to show that while sharks and starvation seem like terrible ways to die, nothing compares to the cruelty that human beings are capable of inflicting upon each other.

To cope with the possibility of death, Louie learns survival techniques in case he finds himself stranded on a desert island. But, like most airmen, Louie turns to drinking to repress his fear of dying.

During wartime, drinking is a socially acceptable and perhaps necessary coping mechanism. It's hard to find fault with men who drink to forget, if only for a moment, that death is all around them.

CHAPTER 9: FIVE-HUNDRED AND NINETY-FOUR HOLES

On a search-and-rescue mission, the crew of *Super Man* see hundreds of **sharks** surrounding five downed airmen sitting in two life-rafts. The rescue planes get to the men before the sharks can, but seeing the bloodthirsty sharks terrifies the *Super Man* crew. On a later flight, the crew shoots at several sharks attacking a group of whales. Feeling guilty later, the men decide not to harass the sharks in the future.

The sight of the sharks establishes their symbolism as the pervasive and remorseless reality of death. By taking revenge on the sharks, the men symbolically take revenge on death itself. But, as the crewmember's guilt reveals, the sharks only symbolize the death of the natural *world. Since it's in a shark's nature to attack anything in the water, the men seem to realize the cruelty of killing them in revenge for something they cannot control.*

On another combat mission, *Super Man* joins a fleet of planes on its way to bomb a Japanese-controlled island. As the fleet approaches the island, the Japanese antiaircraft guns fire into the sky. After Louie drops the bombs on the island's fuel depot, three Japanese Zeros attack their plane and open fire. One of *Super Man's* gunners shoots down a Zero, but the other two maintain their pursuit.

Another extended war scene where Hillenbrand's direct but vivid writing style heightens the tension that the men experience.

In the ensuing fight, machine gun bullets tear through *Super Man* and wound half of the crew. The top turret gunner, Stanley Pillsbury, receives a large gunshot wound in his leg but still manages to take down another of the Zeros. Clarence Douglas, the waist gunner, shoots down the third and final fighter plane.

Remember Phil's advice about a moment of pain being worth a lifetime of glory in Chapter 4? Pillsbury embodies that advice– he fights through the pain in order to protect his crewman and bring down the enemy plane.

Super Man sustained heavy damages during the fight, losing the ability to brake. The crewmen know that their chances of getting back to the base are slim. Hoping to offset the lack of brakes, Louie ties two parachutes to the plane and plans to throw them out of the window to slow the plane on landing, but Phil safely lands the plane without the need of the parachutes.

Louie won't go down without a fight. Instead of giving in to hopelessness or leaving his fate up to chance like the other crewmen, Louie takes a proactive role in saving his own skin by using his ingenuity and resourcefulness to tie the parachute to the plane.

At the base, the ground crew counts the bullet holes and announces that there are 594 holes in the plane, making *Super Man* the most damaged plane from the bombing run. Medics rush the wounded airmen to the infirmly but it's too late for one of the crewman, Harry Brooks, who dies from a gunshot wound received during the fight.

Once again, Hillenbrand leaves this scene open to interpretation, letting the reader's personal beliefs dictate the meaning. Was it fate, God, or sheer luck that kept a plane with 594 bullet holes from falling out of the sky?

CHAPTER 10: THE STINKING SIX

As Louie tries to fall asleep in his barracks on the night after the raid, he hears the sounds of bombs crashing down all over military base. The Japanese air force is staging a counterattack. As the bombs fall, everyone on the base tries to find cover. After three passes over the island, the bombers end their raid. The base is in shambles and men lie dead all over the base. Thinking there were two sets of three bombers, someone on the island dubs them "The Stinking Six."

For the first time, we see the true horrors of war. Up to this point, Louie has only seen the devastation of war from his plane, miles above the ground. He never had to see the blood, guts, and sheer magnitude of suffering.

Before leaving the island to regroup at a base in Hawaii, Louie says goodbye to *Super Man*. The bomber will never fly again due to the damages it sustained during the raid on the Japanese. Scared of dying and missing home, Louie becomes irritable and sullen in Hawaii. He picks fights, holes up in his room, and tries to forget about the death of his friend Harry Brooks.

His resilience fails him again. Seeing the devastation of war brings out Louie's darker side, making him slip back into his old delinquent ways. We begin to see that Louie has less resilience dealing with internal, emotional problems, like coping with a friend's death, than with the external, physical ones like becoming an expert bomber.


Eventually, the army assigns Louie, Phil, and Cuppernell to another crew. The only person of note is Francis "Mac" McNamara, who has a reputation for having a sweet tooth. They are also given another plane – *Green Hornet*. Barely in working condition, this new plane can only carry out errand missions, but that will soon change.

Hillenbrand's gives extra weight to this single, seemingly insignificant detail about Mac, signaling its as-of-yet unknown importance. The Green Hornet was also a popular comic book hero, but unlike Super Man, he was hardly invincible, which foreshadows the plane's quick demise.

CHAPTER 11: "NOBODY'S GOING TO LIVE THROUGH THIS"

Before dawn on May 27th, 1943, Louie runs a mile in 4:12, an incredibly fast time given that he was running in sand. That same day, his crew receives orders to search for a downed plane. Worried that *Green Hornet* won't make it back to the base, Louie writes in his diary that if doesn't come back in a week's time, then his bunkmates can help themselves to the booze in his footlocker.

One of the most tragic ironies of this book is that Louie – the model of physical fitness – will soon waste away as he starves on the raft. More broadly, this tragic irony encompasses all the solders who die in war despite their youth and good health. Louie's note emphasizes the importance of alcohol to the soldiers; and foreshadows how alcohol will affect Louie's life when he does eventually return.

While flying over the Pacific, one of their engines suddenly blows out. One of the engineers onboard makes a mistake when trying to fix the engine, causing a second engine to blow out. With nothing else he can do, Phil tells the crew to prepare for the crash.

The crash shows how there's less glory in war than movies or propaganda normally depict. While it's true that some soldiers will die heroically in battle, these men die a meaningless, unglorified death because of the engineer's simple mistake.

As they crash into the water, Louie thinks, "Nobody's going to live through this." The plane hits the ocean, blowing apart all around them. A tangle of wires ties Louie down, preventing him from escaping the sinking plane. Louie takes one last breath before the water covers him. He thinks a single word, "Hopeless," and then blacks out.

Louie's negative, defeatist thinking combined with the violent shock of experiencing a plane crash weaken his resilience, causing him to stop fighting and give into black unconsciousness. As will soon become more clear, survival is in part psychological – Louie must believe he'll survive in order to survive.

Louie wakes up in total darkness and thinks that he must have died. Coming to his senses, he realizes, to his astonishment, that the wires are no longer tying him down. Louie escapes the debris and swims to the surface and into the dazzling daylight. He takes in a deep breath and then vomits all the salt water and fuel he had swallowed.

Later, Louie will remember the inexplicable disappearance of the wires as evidence of God's benevolent intervention into his life. Hillenbrand's description of the moment heightens the religious quality of his experience – many religious narratives depict conversion as the movement between darkness into light, a metaphor apparent here as Louie emerges from the dark depths of the ocean and into the light.

CHAPTER 12: DOWNED

On the surface, Phil and Mac stay afloat by holding on to some of the plane's debris. Phil has a bleeding head injury. Louie swims to the two inflated life-rafts and brings them over to Phil and Mac. Louie wraps his t-shirt around Phil's head wound. Recognizing that his injury will hinder his ability to lead, Phil asks Louie to take command, and Louie agrees. Suddenly, they hear a horrible scream and then total silence. Louie searches for the drowning man, but he finds no trace of him.

The ocean is brutal and uncaring, literally swallowing up the man's horrific scream. This scream even becomes a metaphor for life in a violent, unforgiving universe: in the endless expanse of time and space, man exists for a moment only to scream before returning to oblivion. This sense of futility sets the mood for the following chapters, threatening Louie's will to survive.

The rafts contain several thick, highly caloric chocolate bars, a flare gun, a patch kit in case of leaks, a few half pints of water, and some fishing hooks. A few years later, the army would provide more rations and survival materials, including a water desalination device for making the ocean water drinkable.

This short list of inadequate survival materials attests to the direness of their situation. Hillenbrand is making it absolutely clear that the men have little to no chance at surviving long enough to be rescued.

As Louie takes stock of the rations, Mac starts to scream and shout that they're all going to die. Louie tries to calm him, but Mac continues to panic so Louie slaps him. Mac falls silent. Louie tells them that they'll survive by rationing the food. Each man will get one square of chocolate in the morning and at night as well as two sips of water a day.

If resilience is defined by one's ability to adapt effectively to adversity, then Louie's and Mac's responses to the plane crash show the great divide between their respective resilience. The crash causes Mac to lose all hope while Louie, seemingly unfazed by the crash, stays positive and asserts control over the situation by rationing out the food. Resilience, or lack thereof, will be the determining factor for surviving the ordeal.

As the day passes, the **sharks** start to surround the raft. They are so close that Louie can touch them. At night, the temperature drops and the sharks rub their backs along the bottom of the raft. While Phil and Louie sleep, Mac stays wide awake, terrified at what may come.

The sharks are a symbol for the violent, ever-present natural world. Like the uncaring ocean, the sharks have no mercy or sympathy for the men. Only hunger. The sharks, and the violent death they represent, undermine Mac's psychological fortitude, his ability to survive.

CHAPTER 13: MISSING AT SEA

At four-thirty a.m. the following day, the U.S. Air Force declares *Green Hornet* missing. Since the Air Force doesn't know where the plane went down, the chances of finding the crew are slim. Nonetheless, they send out search planes to look for survivors.

Hillenbrand gives more evidence for the unlikeliness of their rescue and survival, making sure the reader knows that, with no help coming, it will take everything the men have to stay alive.

When Louie wakes in the morning, he goes to divvy up the morning's rations only to find that Mac had eaten all the chocolate during the night. Realizing Mac acted out of panic, Louie doesn't blame him. Instead he simply tells him that he is disappointed in him but that they will be rescued soon.

Now we know why Hillenbrand noted the detail about Mac's sweet tooth – if Mac believes they're all going to die, then he can't fight off the urge to satisfy his selfish desire for sweets. His lack of belief in the possibility of survival—and his loss of dignity resulting from that loss of hope—has made survival even more unlikely.

With nothing to do or eat, the day passes slowly. The following day, they see an American bomber pass over them. Louie shoots a flare, but the bomber doesn't seem them. Louie infers from the bomber's direction that their raft must be drifting west towards Japanese territory.

More than sharks or starvation, the men fear capture by the Japanese. Sharks represent the violence of the natural world, but it's humans and their potential for a more terrifying violence that really scares the men.

On the fifth day at sea, they finish all the water. After saying almost nothing the entire time, Mac snaps and begins screaming again that they're going to die. Louie slaps him again and Mac quiets down, feeling comforted by Louie's assertion of control. That night, Louie prays for help. Louie has prayed only once before in his life – when Louise was sick and he feared he'd lose her.

This is the first overt indication of the Belief and Faith theme. Louie was never a religious man before the war, always relying on himself, rather than God, for getting out of bad situations. Only when circumstances are totally out of his control – he couldn't cure his mom then and can't bring the rain now – does Louie turn to God for help.

A week after their disappearance, the U.S. military sends Louie's footlocker to his home in Torrance along with a telegram that tells his family that he is lost at sea. Anthony is stoic but, out of stress, Louise develops a rash all over her hands. Over the next few days, Louise develops the fierce conviction that her son is alive. The news of Louie's disappearance headlines newspapers all over California.

A continuation of the Belief theme but instead of religious belief, Louise has a sort of motherly intuition, an internal conviction that her son is alive. This steadfast belief will help her survive the war years without succumbing to an overwhelming grief.

CHAPTER 14: THIRST

The hot sun burns the men's skin and their lips balloon in size. On the third day without water, rain falls and the men collect some of the water in a makeshift hat. Louie starts to resent Mac for eating the chocolates but says nothing, believing that Mac's guilt about eating the rations is already causing him to slip deeper into despair.

Mac's depression provides evidence of the shame he feels for failing his crewmen. This guilt may have caused him to lose any pride or respect he had in himself. The extreme conditions of life on the raft gave him a glimpse of his selfishness and lack of resolve– a glimpse that only further weakens his resilience.

On around the tenth day, an albatross lands on the raft. Louie catches the bird and uses the meat as bait to catch a small fish. Eating the fish revives Louie's and Phil's spirit, but Mac remains unchanged. Phil worries that killing a friendly albatross will bring them bad luck. This superstition comes from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" where a sailor kills an albatross, causing his whole crew to die as punishment for the cruelty. Louie shrugs off his superstition.

At this point, Louie reveals himself to be a skeptical, rational person. He does not read symbolic meaning in the albatross, instead taking the practical approach: he must kill the bird to survive. It's worth noting that Louie's practicality explains his lack of religious belief – he only turns to God as a last resort when he can do nothing else to save himself.

Fearing that the lack of mental stimulation will cause them to lose their minds, Louie and Phil spend their days quizzing each other on trivia, telling stories, and recounting all the good food they have eaten in their lives. Mac doesn't join in.

As a survival mechanism, Louie and Phil concentrate on the past, reminding themselves of all the good things that are waiting for them if they survive. Mac, on the other hand, is stuck in the terrifying present, unable to pull himself out of despair.

Having overcome challenges in the past, Phil and Louie remain confident in their ability to survive the ordeal. But Mac, a new recruit who never saw action, becomes more depressed. His guilt over eating the rations on the first night may have also contributed to his lack of faith in his ability to survive. Phil was also a quietly religious man, and his faith may have given him the inner strength to endure life on the raft.

Hillenbrand speculates that Louie's and Phil's encounters with adversity and the resilience they built up as a result helped give them the self-confidence to overcome this new challenge. In addition to having little built up resilience, Mac's panicked betrayal makes him lose his self-respect and his faith in himself. Consumed by self-doubt, Mac does not believe he has the strength to survive – a belief that will only further hinder his chances.

As the men starve, they decide that no matter what they won't resort to cannibalism. At the two week mark, Louie begins to pray out loud. They catch a second albatross and feed Mac its blood, hoping the nourishment will revive his spirits. On the sixth day without water, Louie promises to dedicate his life to God if he sends rain. The next day, it rains. Twice more they ran out of water and twice more they prayed and rain came.

Even starvation doesn't make the men lose sight of their identities and abandon their convictions against cannibalism. Louie not only holds on to his beliefs, but also begins to form new ones. Though it could be coincidence, Hillenbrand frames this scene as if God answered Louie's prayer by sending rain – an event that will plant in him the seeds of faith that will later bloom into full-fledged religious conviction.

CHAPTER 15: SHARKS AND BULLETS

On their twenty-seventh day at sea, a Japanese plane spots the raft and opens fire at them. To escape the bullets, the men jump into the ocean. When the plane is out of range, they climb back on the raft but the plane turns around and prepares to shoot again. Phil and Mac are too weak to jump into the ocean so they take their chances on the raft while Louie jumps back in.

The book circles back to the opening scene in the preface. We now fully understand what resilience it took Louie to dive back into the water despite the days of starvation. He really is "unbreakable."

As the bomber shoots from overhead, Louie jabs an oncoming shark in the snout. After the plane passes, Louie climbs back onto the raft and finds Mac and Phil unharmed. Four more times the plane tries to kill them and each time Louie jumps back into the water, fends off **sharks**, and then climbs back into the raft. Machine gun holes pepper the raft, but Mac and Phil are uninjured. Finally, the bomber flies away.

Louie is beset on all sides by violence: below him, sharks, the symbol of the violent natural world, try to tear him apart and above him, people, being cruel for cruelty's sake, shoot at unarmed and helpless men. The men's survival in the face of such overwhelming violence could, once again, be read as evidence of God's intervention into their lives.

The bomber completely destroyed one of the rafts and the puncture holes in the other one is making it sink fast. As Louie patches up the raft, Phil pumps in air. With a renewed sense of life, Mac uses an oar to hit the **sharks** when they come close to the raft. They keep this up for hours until Louie patches all the holes.

Mac begins his journey towards redemption by protecting his crewmates from the shark attacks. For at least a moment, he makes up for the betrayal by tirelessly providing a necessary service to his friends, possibly returning to him some of his lost dignity.

The men realize that the presence of the Japanese plane must mean that they are close to Japanese territory. Louie and Phil predict that they'll arrive at land in three weeks. Not saying anything, Mac's burst of life vanishes and he slips even deeper into despair.

Mac cannot muster strength from the victory over the sharks and Japanese plane, losing his resilience as soon as the men realize they have three more weeks on the raft.

CHAPTER 16: SINGING IN THE CLOUDS

One day while Louie stares into the ocean, a **shark** lunges at him. Luckily Mac beats the sharks away before it can injure Louie. Smiling, Mac proves himself a necessary asset and, for a moment, reclaims the sense of self that he was losing.

Mac's redemption continues as he regains some of his lost dignity by helping his crewmates.

Louie feels that he has an implicit understanding with the **sharks**: if he's in the water, they can attack him, but they have no right to lunge at him on the raft. Feeling like they violated an agreement, Louie takes revenge by grabbing a shark by its tail and lifting it out of the water. The men eat the shark's liver and are full for the first time since being on the raft. They catch and kill one more shark this way, but soon all the small sharks stay away from the raft.

Louie's imagined treaty with the sharks reinforces their symbolic meaning as a specifically natural violence. Louie feels that it is natural for the sharks to attack him in the water because that is their domain, but unnatural for them to come on the raft, his territory. This view of the sharks also draws a connection between sharks and the Japanese military, who crossed into American territory to bomb Pearl Harbor. Louie, therefore, seems to provide a justification for the war: if you cross our borders with violent intentions, then you can expect we'll be coming to your territory, seeking revenge. At the same time, this eye-for-an-eye mentality and the anger it brews in him is something that Louie will struggle with after the war.

As the days pass, Mac grows thinner, eventually dying from malnutrition. Although he began his journey on the raft as a panicked and unreliable man, in his last days he redeemed himself by fending off the **sharks**. They wrap his body in part of the ruined raft and lower him into the ocean. The sharks leave his body alone.

Hillenbrand makes explicit the theme of Redemption, outlining how Mac redefined himself. At first he selfishly risked the lives of the men, but, at the end, he risked his own life to fend off the sharks. Even the sharks seem to respect their former adversary's bravery, allowing him a dignified burial at sea.

One morning, Louie and Phil awake to a total stillness. They have arrived in a calm, windless part of the ocean called the doldrums. Amazed by the beauty and stillness of the ocean, Louie feels as if only some greater being could have created such perfection.

As we saw earlier, Louie's fear of sterilization made him clean up his act, but his love of exceeding limitations made him an Olympian. On the raft, fear made Louie turn to religion as a last resort, but now he sees God's hand in the beauty of the world. This more positive, joyful reason to believe will eventually provide Louie with a deeper, more resilient faith in the years after the war.

On the raft, the quiet and lack of stimulation provides Louie with an intellectual refuge. Without the noise and chaos of everyday life, he has time to think about himself and his world. In his mind, he recalls with great precision memories from his childhood, including one where his dog saved him from falling down a flight of stairs.

Louie's realization about his memory underscores war's capacity for bringing out people's true qualities. (Speaking more skeptically, one might speculate that because Louie was an old man when he told Hillenbrand these stories, she might focus on his memory skills in order to anticipate any criticisms of the book that cast doubt on Louie's ability to recall the events of his life.)

On the fortieth day, Louie hears a chorus of voice singing in the sky. When he looks up, he sees twenty-one human figures in the clouds. Asleep, Phil hears and sees nothing. Louie feels confident that this is no hallucination or vision, but instead something real. A few days later, they see land in the distance.

Louie's encounter with the angels is a divine revelation, reinforcing the presence of God in his life and in the narrative. The angels are a good omen, heralding the coming of land and his deliverance from the jaws of a natural death at sea.

CHAPTER 17: TYPHOON

As they drift towards land, a terrible storm picks up and nearly sinks their raft. After the storm, a Japanese military ship intercepts their raft. The Japanese sailors bring the men aboard at gunpoint and tie them to the mast. The sailors threaten Louie and Phil, but the ship's captain tells them to treat the Americans more humanely. As per the captain's orders, the sailors untie them and give them food and lodging.

The typhoon that the chapter takes its title from is both literal and metaphoric. The literal typhoon is another example of the violent natural world, but the men only glimpse the metaphoric typhoon: the tumultuous storm of violence and cruelty that the Japanese will unleash on them.

The ship drops them off at an island where a Japanese doctor provides them with food and medical care. Both men have lost half their body weight during their time on the raft. They feel safe until a Japanese commanding officer tells them that the Japanese military is sending them to an island known to the Americans as "Execution Island." The officer says that he has sought to treat them well here, but that he can offer no protection on the island.

The commanding officer's actions provide an important contrast to the coming violence of internment. From here on, the book will depict countless Japanese atrocities, so Hillenbrand first establishes the obvious truth that there are good Japanese people, that not every Japanese person is inherently evil – a belief some of the POWs will sadly harbor postwar.

On the boat to Execution Island, the ship's captain provides Phil and Louie with bountiful portions of food. But their fortunes change at the island where Japanese prison guards drag them to small separate wooden cages. Louie sees the names of nine marines carved into the roof of his cage and wonders what happened to them. When he looks down at his body and sees his shrunken form, he thinks to himself that he is a dead body breathing. He then begins to cry.

Louie's assessment of his emaciated body directly contrasts with the scene where he ran a mile in the sand on the day of the crash. At that moment, he was in the best shape of his life, but now his body has withered away. The shock of the transformation risks withering his spirit, his will to live, and assaults his dignity, which was so tied up in his ability to overcome physical challenges.

CHAPTER 18: A DEAD BODY BREATHING

Louie learns from a guard that the Japanese executed the nine marines whose names were carved into his cage. Given tiny amounts of food and water, Louie gets sick with dysentery. He is beaten daily, usually for not understanding what the Japanese guards want of him.

According to the Geneva Convention, it is a war crime to beat, starve, or execute POWs, but Japan breaks these laws and more. While the sharks seemed like violent monsters, the Japanese prison guards appear to be the true monsters because they, unlike the sharks, are not simply acting out of hunger but are choosing *to harm, even kill, their captives.*

Louie feels that his will to survive beginning to fray. Although the conditions on the raft were harsh, at least there he was able to maintain his dignity. Putting him in the cage, the Japanese guards treat him like an animal. They throw rice balls at him and taunt him when he picks up the bits of rice. They prod him with sticks and laugh at his pain. These ceaseless humiliations chip away at Louie, threatening his will to live by making him feel like a lesser human being.

These humiliations foreground the theme of Dignity. The Japanese considered being captured by the enemy as being without dignity. Since they saw the POWs as having no dignity, the Japanese guards treated them as subhuman. Hillenbrand makes clear that in this context, preserving one's dignity is akin to insisting on one's humanity and that, without their humanity, people lose their capacity for survival.

One day, a Christian Japanese guard named Kawamura offers kindness and compassion to Louie, which restores some of his self-respect. They talk as equals and the guard protects Louie from some of the most abusive guards. Hillenbrand writes that dignity is as important to survival as food or shelter, speculating Kawamura's kindness may have restored Louie's self-respect and his will to live.

The theme of Dignity continues. Kawamura's compassion restores Louie's dignity, providing him the psychological fortitude to survive the ordeal. As Hillenbrand details, fortifying his mental resilience by treating him with dignity was as important for survival as shielding his physical body from the beatings.

Three weeks after arriving on the island, Japanese doctors experiment on Louie and Phil. They inject them with a murky solution that gives them a rash and made them nauseous. In many Japanese POW camps, prisoners became test subjects for Japanese experiments in biological and chemical warfare. Louie and Phil were lucky not to be among the thousands who died as a result of the experiments.

From slavery in the American South to genocide in the Holocaust, perpetrators of such violence dehumanize their victims so that they can better carry out the atrocities. By experimenting on the men as if they were lab rats, the guards deprive them of their dignity. Put another way, dehumanizing one's victims is a kind of psychological defense-mechanism; but of course refusing *to treat anyone that way would be a true show of dignity.*

After spending forty-two days on Execution Island, Louie and Phil board a Japanese ship on its way to what they hope will be an official POW camp at Yokohama in mainland Japan. Louie won't learn for a long time why he and Phil were spared from execution.

Hillenbrand ends this chapter on a cliffhanger, leaving it a mystery why Louie and Phil were spared. For religious readers, this ambiguity may reinforce the idea that God was looking out for Louie, guiding him to survival.

CHAPTER 19: TWO HUNDRED SILENT MEN

After a three-week journey full of beatings, Louie and Phil arrive in Yokohama, Japan. The Japanese blindfold Louie, separate him from Phil, and bring him to a room where he meets his old college friend Jimmie Sasaki. Although Louie remains quiet, Jimmie reminisces about their college days and boasts that he is the lead interrogator in the Japanese POW system.

Reenter the book's man of mystery: Jimmie Sasaki. Though Jimmie's presumed high position in the Japanese army might suggest that he was, in fact, a spy, he also speaks about his life in America with great fondness. We shouldn't be too quick to judge his true, hidden allegiances – his inner motivations and feelings – because they'll soon appear to shift again.

A guard leads Louie outside to a large compound with several one-story buildings surrounded by a high fence topped with barbed wire. Two hundred skinny Allied soldiers stand quietly in the compound. Louie sees Phil far away sitting alone. A captive approaches Louie and explains that this place is an interrogation center called Ofuna, which is not a POW camp registered with the Red Cross. He tells Louie that he cannot speak or communicate with the other two hundred captured soldiers and must obey all the rules exactly or else the guards will beat him.

The guards continue their relentless dehumanization of the prisoners. The forced silence of the prisoners deprives them of the fundamental human need to communicate. It seems especially cruel to herd the men together like animals and prevent them from asserting their humanity in the most human of all activities: talking, telling stories, sharing their experiences as a way of coping with the trauma.

At the camp, everyday is the same. At 6 a.m., Louie rises, falls into line outside with the other men, counts off, bows in the direction of Emperor Hirohito's palace, and then returns to the barracks for a meal consisting of a watery slop. For the rest of the day the guards force the men to clean the camp and exercise. The only change in the routine occurs when they hear screams coming from the interrogation room.

A tedious and soul-sucking routine like the prisoners' can slowly chip away at their resilience and identities. If, every day, the guards force the men to carry out the same set of actions, the men have no way to distinguish themselves from each other or one day from the next. This daily routine threatens to alienate the men from themselves, zapping their individuality and breaking their spirit.

The guards mercilessly beat Louie and the other prisoners for the smallest infractions like folding one's arms. Japanese society at the time valued beatings as a way of molding soldiers, so many of the guards at the camp did not see any problem with disciplining the prisoners. The Japanese people also believed they were the most superior race, which contributed to the ease with which they dehumanized the Allied soldiers. Other guards may have tried to cope with the unsettling experience of depriving the POWs of basic human rights by dehumanizing the men even further, reassuring themselves that they were hurting beasts and not humans.

The theme of dignity continues with Hillenbrand's investigation into the motivations for the guards' cruelty. In the last reason she gives, she argues that the war transformed essentially good Japanese men, who did not want to hurt their fellow human beings, into cruel guards. This transformation illustrates how war, a violent and cruel affair, alters the identities of peopled forced to carry out that violence and cruelty, turning them into heartless monsters.

The POWs fear most the announcement of a "kill-all" rule. If the Japanese thought the Allied forces would be able to rescue the POWs, then they would issue the order to kill all of the prisoners. Louie thinks that most of the guards would carry out this order with pleasure.

....Thus, the guards, who must also be aware of the possibility of a kill-all order, might have been depriving the prisoners of their human dignity in order to mentally prepare themselves for the ultimate inhumanity: taking another's life. What looks like pleasure to Louie might be the guards' coping mechanism for anticipating such terrible violence. Yet all this also shows how people give up themselves and their dignity as a way to protect themselves.

CHAPTER 20: FARTING FOR HIROHITO

At the camp, Louie realizes that the prisoners have developed various ways of communicating with each other secretly. Men write notes on toilet paper and hide them in the latrines. They also communicate by tapping out Morse code on the walls. In an act of rebellion, most men fart when the guards force them to bow towards Emperor Hirohito. In another defiant act, Louie finds and keeps a journal of his experiences in the camp.

The POWs find ways to fulfill their human need to communicate, asserting their autonomy and humanity in the process. With his journal, Louie affirms his distinct individuality in the face of the dehumanizing conditions that threaten to eat away at his identity. These acts of defiance restore the men's dignity, making life in the camp more tolerable.

When the guards learn that Louie was an Olympic runner they find a Japanese amateur runner to race him. Due to his ill health, Louie loses the race and becomes increasingly concerned about his failing strength. Louie goes to Jimmie Sasaki for help, who ensures that he will assist him, but ends up only providing him an egg and some fruit. The other prisoners are more of a help, giving him extra food and a better coat.

Louie's conception of self is so wrapped up in his identity as an Olympic runner that losing the race means that he is beginning to lose his core essence. But even this loss doesn't crush Louie – instead, he fights to regain to his strength and physical health, the bedrock of his identity as a runner.

When the guards arrange for another race, Louie feels well enough to win the race. With the cheers of the prisoners motivating him, he wins and the guards beat him for it. Louie feels that the victory was worth the beating.

Louie's victory restores his identity as a champion runner. Defying the guards' expectations, Louie's achievement reminds him of the proud, unbeatable man he was before the war. But the victory is not only his own because it also gives the other POWs a moment of triumph over the guards, an experience that will help them preserve their human dignity.

In March 1944, the Japanese transfer Phil to a forced labor camp north of Tokyo. At the camp, Phil works in the terrible conditions of a copper mine. But the guards allow him to write home. A few days after giving a letter written for his fiancé Cecy to the guards, he finds the letter in a garbage heap, burned. The edges are charred, but his letter is still readable. Phil retrieves the letter and vows to deliver it to her in person after the war.

While Louie's will to survive comes from the defiant assertion of his identity, Phil gains strength from his love for his fiancé. The letter could be understood as a metaphor for Phil's own resilience – a little burned around the edge, he's still alive and optimistic. Like the love letter itself, his love for Cecy cannot be so easily destroyed.

CHAPTER 21: BELIEF

Back in Louie's hometown of Torrance, Louise's fierce belief that Louie is alive inspires the other family members to believe. Hillenbrand describes their feeling as not being hope, but rather a belief that they could feel Louie's presence in the world.

Louise is the book's epitome of belief. Hope is the feeling of desire and expectation for things in the future. But Louise's belief is not desire – it is confidence in the truth of something without hard evidence. Louise does not want Louie to be alive, she knows he already is.

Training naval recruits in San Diego, Pete feels the stress of not knowing about Louie's situation wearing on him and he travels home often to be with his family. Louie's sister Sylvia takes a job as a dental assistant at an army hospital, hoping to learn information about the war and about Louie. Anthony bravely smiles through the pain and tears.

Louie's family endures an emotional ordeal that parallels Louie's physical one. Each family member must find ways to cope with the uncertainty about Louie's condition or else succumb to a crippling doubt and grief. Pete finds it in family, Sylvia in actively getting info, and Anthony by staying optimistic for others.

After a military bombing destroys Execution Island, the U.S. army finds Japanese documents that list how a Japanese ship captured two unnamed American soldiers stranded on a raft. The report says that they were beaten and then transported to a camp in Japan. Although this information gives the army reason to believe Phil and Louie are still alive, the army never informs their families because of a lack of a hard evidence.

Since conviction in the absence of hard evidence is the definition of belief, the U.S. military is seriously lacking in it. If the military had more faith, then they could have given Phil's and Louie's families this info, sparing them the pain of not knowing about their sons' conditions. Their lack of belief, usually a bad sign in this book, causes only more suffering for the families.

The army officially declares Phil and Louie dead in May 1944, but their families don't stop believing that they are alive. When a newspaper plans to run an obituary for Phil, his mother contacts the paper to ask them not to print the notice. In the Zamperini household, Anthony and Pete make plans during family meals to search the islands of the Pacific after the war, looking for Louie.

The family's response to the announcement cements the importance of belief. Like Phil and Louie, their families are resilient, believing the boys are alive despite all odds. This belief will give them the strength to emotionally survive the war.

CHAPTER 22: PLOTS AFOOT

In the summer of 1944, Louie and two other prisoners, Frank Tinker and William Harris, plan to steal a Japanese plane and escape. Conditions in the camp have been getting worse. There is less food and more beatings. In order to demoralize the prisoner, one guard even sodomizes a duck named Gaga that the POWs had come to love as a pet.

Performing such cruelties may demoralize the men, but it also has an unintended effect on the guards. The cruel rape of the animal points to the idea that the guards, though trying to dehumanize the men, are also lowering themselves, sexually and ethically, to an animal's level. Violence effects both victim and aggressor: it may make its victims feel weak and inferior, but it also brings the aggressor closer to a savage, animalistic state.

After stealing a war map, the men realize that Allied forces are closing in on Japan's mainland, which means that there is a strong possibility that the Japanese would initiate the kill-all order. Enduring so much suffering and believing that the Japanese may kill them anyway, Louie, Tinker, and Harris, conclude that their best chance at survival is to steal a plane and escape.

The men's escape plan is an overt attempt to survive, but the planning of the escape itself provides the men a way to reclaim their dignity. Stealing maps and secretly making their plans, the men defy the guards and assert, once again, their autonomy as human beings. As the men reason: though their plan might get them killed, at least they would die with dignity, fighting for survival on their own terms.

After realizing that stealing a plane from a Japanese airbase was an unfeasible plan, they decide to hike across the island of Japan, steal a boat, and pilot it to China where they hope to find safe haven. Just before the date they set to make their escape, the guards announce that anyone attempting to escape will be executed and, for every escapee, several additional POWs will also be killed. In fear of endangering the other prisoners, Louie and his friends suspend their plans.

The men's new plan reveals their resilience: undeterred by failure, they engineer a new plan, one that will require an arduous journey through enemy territory. But, ultimately, what does deter them is their sense of morality. The men would rather suffer the humiliations of prison life than risk the lives of their fellow prisoners – a sacrifice that shows that they are truly men of dignity, worthy of honor and respect.

Unable to escape, Louie and his friends channel their energies into finding out more information about the war. But a guard called The Quack finds a map in Harris' possession and beats him extremely severely, causing Harris possible brain damage. A few weeks later, the Japanese transport Louie and Tinker to a camp called Omori near Tokyo. After a year of suffering, Louie hopes the next camp will be better.

In the camp, knowledge is defiance. The guards cut the men off from the outside world so that they can't revive their spirits from knowledge of the Allies' victories. By staying informed about the war, the men can also stay connected to who they once were: strong, proud soldiers.

CHAPTER 23: MONSTER

At the Omori camp, Louie encounters a handsome prison guard with large, brutish hands named Mutsuhiro Watanabe. Watanabe inspects the new arrivals at the camp, shouting that they should each state their name. When he comes to Louie, Watanabe stares at him until Louie drops his eyes. Watanabe punches him in the head and tells Louie to look at him in the eyes. When Louie raises his eyes to the man's face, Watanabe strikes him again and says not to look at him. Tinker thinks to himself that this man is a psychopath.

The embodiment of evil and cruelty, Watanabe is the book's sole antagonist. The monster the chapter takes its name from, he will be responsible for making Louie's life a living hell, nearly crushing his spirit and will to survive.

Mutsuhiro Watanabe was born to a wealthy Tokyo family. He had lofty expectations for himself as a soldier, but the Japanese military rejected his application to be an officer. The humiliation of rejection left Watanabe feeling disgraced and derailed and those who knew him said that every subsequent action was informed by this humiliating dishonor. This defining event would have tragic consequences for the POWs.

In Japanese society, humiliations like Watanabe's were identical to a complete loss of dignity that would severely undermine one's self-worth. Without dignity or faith in himself, Watanabe will dehumanize the POWs in order to put himself above them, thereby reclaiming for himself a perverse kind of his self-worth.

At Omori, Watanabe gains a reputation as an especially cruel guard who uses psychological and emotional torture on the inmates. Kind one minute, he would suddenly become enraged, beating a prisoner for no reason. One time, he made a prisoner salute a flagpole all night. By morning, the prisoner was weeping uncontrollably. According to one Japanese guard's wartime journal, Watanabe derived sexual pleasure from hurting the prisoners.

Here, and elsewhere, Hillenbrand asks the question, "Does war make good men evil?" Elsewhere she has answered yes. In the case of Watanabe, she answers no. Instead of dehumanizing the POWs to cope with the horrors of imprisoning them like some guards, Watanabe tortures them for torture's sake. Hillenbrand believes that war did not give him these sadistic sexual appetites, it only gave him the power to satisfy them.

Watanabe also seeks the friendship and affection of the inmates in order to boost his vain self-confidence. When not trying to befriend the prisoners, he would try to break any of them who defied him. This desire for power made him single out Louie, a naturally defiant famous Olympian, for torture. Louie would become Watanabe's favorite victim.

Watanabe is delusional just as much as he is cruel. As a result of his humiliation, Watanabe tries to regain his self-worth by dehumanizing and disempowering the POWs so that he can feel superior. But he also seeks that feeling of self-worth from the approval and friendship of the prisoners. Rather than finding his self-worth from a deep, inner source or from God (as Louie will later), he seeks to reclaim his lost dignity from other people – either through cruel violence or empty affection.

CHAPTER 24: HUNTED

When Louie meets the other prisoners, they tell him not to call Watanabe by his real name. If he hears the prisoners using his name, he will beat them for fear that they are plotting against him. Instead, the prisoners call him the **Bird** because it carries no negative connotations in case he finds out about the nickname. At Omori, the Japanese register the POWs with the Red Cross, but they don't register Louie. The Japanese military has bigger plans for him.

The Bird is Watanabe's wartime nickname – it is the name that represents his identity during this period of cruelty and violence. With this nickname, Watanabe is no longer just a real-life person, but also a symbol for humankind's utmost capacity for violence. It is fitting that his name is of a kind of animal, as Watanabe is himself like a kind of animal in the savagery he displays.

In defiance of the Geneva Convention's law that protects POW officers from having to work, the **Bird** makes the officers, including Louie, into slave laborers, forcing them to clean the toilets in the barracks. To get back at the guards, the prisoners stage a secret war against their captors. They sabotage machines used in the war effort, pee in the Japanese food, and steal tremendous amounts of food.

In the wild, birds represent freedom, so the Bird's nickname emphasizes the freedom he has in comparison to the POWs, who Hillenbrand describes as slaves. Specifically, the Bird has the freedom to torture the POWs without consequence. The men, however, are not completely powerless: their "secret war" of resistance makes them feel like soldiers again, helping them preserve their pride and dignity.

One guard in the camp, Yukichi Kano, tries to help the prisoners by giving them food and blankets and by protecting them from the sadistic Japanese doctors. But Kano could do nothing to protect Louie from the **Bird's** violent attacks.

Kano is a foil, or contrast, to the Bird. Though the Bird is "free" to torture the men, he is also liked a bird that is caged in a personal prison of dishonor, unable to escape the humiliations of the past and experience the deeper joys of mercy, friendship, and benevolence that Kano can.

Watanabe's attacks intensify. When the **Bird** demands that Louie look him in the eyes, Louie refuses, prompting more vicious attacks. To Watanabe, Louie's defiance is a personal offense. The other prisoners tell Louie that he must show deference and respect to Watanabe in order to stop the attacks, but Louie refuses. Like when he was a boy who never cried in front of a bully, Louie refuses to give Watanabe the satisfaction of seeing him cower or submit.

Louie's defiance spurs Watanabe's anger, but it also gives Louie the strength to demand that the guards respect his humanity and independence. If Louie were to give in, he'd save himself the beatings but would also acquiesce to the idea that he is somehow lower, less human, than the Bird. Louie would rather die, than give up his human dignity. It is interesting to contrast Louie's behavior here with those of the guards, who in order to protect their positions as guards and to save themselves from being punished, give in to orders and clearly mistreat the POWs.

CHAPTER 25: B-29

While following an order to pick up rations from Tokyo, Louie sees Japanese graffiti on the wall of a building: *B Niju Ku*, which he translates as B-29. Louie doesn't realize that *Ku* means nine as well as "fear, calamity, affliction." At the time Louie saw the graffiti, the new B-29 American bomber was becoming the terror of the Japanese skies, raining bombs down all over the country.

Perhaps one limitation of the book is that we only see the war through the eyes of the Allied POWs, but this graffiti provides a glimpse into the Japanese's perception of the war. Hillenbrand does not give the full scope of the Allied destruction of Japan: from 1944-1945, the B-29 firebombing raids resulted in the deaths of an estimated 500,000 people, most of whom were civilians.

In the days after Louie saw the graffiti, a B-29 bomber flies over the camp on its way to Tokyo. The Japanese look up at the plane in fear. One of the POWs says that the plane is our Messiah.

The B-29 is an ambiguous symbol. For the Americans, it's an angel of salvation but, for the Japanese, it's a demon of destruction. The meanings of symbols are relative in wartime – what means salvation for one nation is destruction for another.

The appearance of the bomber makes the **Bird** even more vicious. On one occasion, the Bird runs into the barracks, calling for everyone to come to attention. He claims Louie came to attention last and then hits him across the head with his his belt. Louie falls to the floor bleeding. In a soothing voice, the Bird offers Louie a cloth to wipe the blood. Right after Louie dabs his ear with the cloth, the Bird hits him again, causing him to go deaf in that ear for several weeks.

For a man like the Bird so concerned with maintaining and exerting power, the bombers are a real fear that threaten to disempower his nation and, by extension, himself. To reclaim this power, he ramps up the torture and dehumanization of the prisoners.

One day in mid-November, Japanese producers from Radio Tokyo offer Louie the opportunity to broadcast a message on the radio so that his family would know that he was alive. Fearing they would make him read propaganda, Louie agrees after they let him compose the message himself. They bring him to the Radio Tokyo studio where he broadcasts the message.

For the first time, Louie gets the chance to announce his survival to the world. With this message, Louie affirms his identity and his connection to the outside world – aspects of himself that the prison guards tried to take from him.

In the U.S., a woman from a California suburb calls the Zamperini family with the news that she heard Louie's message on her radio. Later, the U.S. military sends the family a telegram saying they've intercepted his message, confirming that he is most likely alive. Hearing this news, Louise and Sylvia dissolve into tears and shouts of joy. Pete calls Louie's friend Payton Jordon and shouts into the phone: "Payt! He's alive!"

The family finally reaps the fruits of their belief. They now have hard evidence to confirm what they always knew to be true: Louie is alive. Their belief has served them well, giving them the strength to bear their lack of info about Louie's condition until the info, at long last, arrives.

CHAPTER 26: MADNESS

The radio producers soon return to the prison with a new transcript they want Louie to read over the radio. The transcript describes how Louie felt disappointed with the U.S. government for incorrectly declaring him dead and making his family feel unnecessary pain. Louie realizes that the Japanese spared him from execution and refused to register him with the Red Cross so that they could use him as a propaganda tool for embarrassing the U.S. government and sewing dissent in the American public.

The revelation that the Japanese spared his life conflicts with the religious interpretation of Louie's survival. An older, religious Louie will come to believe that a benevolent God ensured his survival, but right now, it appears that the Japanese, and not God, kept him alive. This revelation casts doubts on God's intervention into his life, but it ultimately won't deter his future religious belief.

When Louie refuses to read the message, the producers give him a tour of a comfortable hotel where Australian and American POWs who read Japanese propaganda live. When Louie holds out his hand to the "propaganda prisoners," they all drop their eyes to the floor. Louie realizes that if he agrees to make the broadcast, then he would be betraying his country. Louie refuses once again. The producers tell him that if he continues to refuse, then they will have him moved to a "punishment camp." Louie refuses and they bring him back to Omori.

The propaganda prisoners' inability to meet Louie's gaze reveals their shame and loss of dignity. Like Mac on the raft, the men betrayed their brothers-in-arms by reading propaganda for the enemy. In this book, betrayals like these deprive one of one's dignity faster and more completely than living in the dehumanizing conditions of a Japanese POW camp. By refusing the offer, Louie preserves his status as a man of dignity, picking physical "punishment" over shame and dishonor.

Soon, the Allied forces send wave after wave of B-29 bombers over Tokyo, destroying the city. Whenever a B-29 flies over the camp, the **Bird** cracks down on the prisoners, beating them and prohibiting them from small enjoyments like singing and attending religious services. But he would especially seek out Louie, beating him severely three or four times a week. Some nights, Louie dreams of the Bird beating him. Other nights, he dreams of strangling the Bird to death.

The Bird's prohibition on religious service casts him as an anti-Christian figure, a representation the book will develop further in the postwar chapters. The Bird's evilness begins to infect Louie, bringing out his darker side. Since boyhood, Louie has had a violent temperament, but the Bird's torments make him lose sight of his moral compass, inspiring in him a desire for violence and eye-for-an-eye revenge.

Near Christmas time, an influential dignitary named Prince Yoshitomo Tokugawa tours Omori for the Japanese Red Cross. He meets one of the POWs who tells him of the **Bird's** cruelty. By New Years, the Bird receives order to transfer to a distant isolated camp. While the men reveled in the good news, the Bird seemed heartbroken, lamenting that the prisoners would miss him. In revenge for the Bird's cruelty, the prisoners prepared his last meal at the camp with feces from the latrine.

The Bird's mad belief that the men love him emphasizes how delusion forms the basis of his self-worth. Unable to come to terms with his past humiliation, he compensates with the delusion that he is the most loved man at camp. But this harmless delusion underscores the tragic consequence of his other major delusion: the perverted belief that he can regain his dignity by stripping the POWs of theirs. But the men won't give in without a fight. In another (disgusting) act of defiance, they assert their autonomy, which in turn helps them preserve their dignity as soldiers and not broken, timid animals.


CHAPTER 27: FALLING DOWN

After Watanabe leaves, the kind guard Yukichi Kano takes his place and the **Bird's** reign of terror ends. William Harris arrives in the camp with a group of new prisoners. The Quack's beating had taken its toll and Louie notes that Harris looks like a wreck. Fearing for his friend's life, Louie gives him his one and only Red Cross care box, which Louie would later say was "the hardest and easiest thing" he ever did. Harris's condition improves.

Louie's gift to Harris once again proves him to be a man of dignity who is willing to risk his own life to help his friends. Starvation and humiliation do not make Louie lose his humanity or compassion. In this way, he is more "free" than the Bird – who's lack of self-worth makes him cruel and delusional.


One day, a massive air battle breaks out between Japanese and Allied forces over Tokyo. The Omori prison guards try to keep the prisoners inside the barracks, but the men sneak out and watch the battle from outside. Fifteen hundred American planes and several hundred Japanese planes flew over the camp in battle that day. By that night, Tokyo was in flames.

Again, Hillenbrand provides only the American side of the battle. It is understandable that the POWs would revel in the destruction of Tokyo after experiencing so much suffering at the hands of their guards, but Hillenbrand's narration glorifies the raid, overlooking its dubious ethics: the raids would kill over 100,000 civilians and injure many more.

On the first day of March, the camp officials transport Louie and Frank Tinker and a few other POWs to another camp called Naoetsu in the western part of Japan. As they take a train west, the snow begins to fall harder and harder. When the arrive at the Naoetsu, snow almost entirely obscures the camp.

Every time Louie transfers camps, his situation deteriorates. The blizzard, a foreboding sign, reinforces the expectation that his new camp will only be worse.


The guards order them to stand at attention in front of a shack in the compound. Suddenly, the door flies open and the **Bird** runs at the prisoners. Louie collapses from shock and fear.

Louie's resilience is beginning to fray. For the first time, fear completely overwhelms him.

CHAPTER 28: ENSLAVED

Louie would remember that moment when he saw the **Bird** as the darkest of his life. But the Bird is overjoyed to see him, thinking that Louie is his friend. The guards march Louie and the other prisoners to the barracks on the edge of a cliff that dropped straight down to the Hokura river. The other prisoners are emaciated and poorly clothed for the weather. They are even worse off than the ones at Omori. Of all the terrible places Louie had known in the war, Naoetsu is the worst.

With less food and worse weather, internment in Naoetsu will push Louie's ability to survive to the limit. Here Hillenbrand's description of the camp ratchets up the question of whether his defiant spirit and resilient nature be enough to overcome this new obstacle or will the Bird finally break him? (Though the book's title may give away the answer to that one…)

Watanabe had specifically requested that the Omori camp officials transfer Louie to Naoetsu so that he could continue the abuse. Watanabe forces Louie and the rest of the officers to work on a nearby farm while the other prisoners work in much worse conditions at a factory. When the the Japanese guard charged with overseeing the officers complains to the **Bird** that the officers are lazy, he punishes the men, making them carry tons of coal onto boats.

For Watanabe, breaking Louie holds the key for reclaiming his dignity. The Bird hopes that by dehumanizing the proud and famous Olympian, he will feel superior to Louie, and thus regain the dignity he lost as a result of his humiliation. But this is simply a delusion. By needlessly hurting others, the Bird furthers himself from reclaiming his human dignity, becoming more like a monster or savage animal than a man of honor. Bird seems to have confused "dignity" or "self-worth" with "feeling powerful," which is a bit like taking drugs and believing that temporary high to be happiness.

The slave labor at Naoetsu nearly swallows the prisoner's souls, but the prisoners find ways to score small victories like stealing from the guards and teaching them the wrong English words for things.

Like in the previous camps, the POWs keep their spirits up by defying the guards. Defiance makes the prisoners feel like soldiers again, not cattle waiting for slaughter.

Disaster strikes one day in spring when a guard pushes Louie while he's carrying a heavy load, causing him to injure his leg. The guards take him off work detail and cut his rations in half. Without full rations and suffering from dysentery, Louie fears he will starve. Desperate, he asks the **Bird** for work. Savoring the request, the Bird makes him clean out the pig sty with his bare hands. Of all the vile and demoralizing things the Bird inflicted on him, cleaning out the pig sty is the worst. Only the faint hope that the war would soon end gives him the strength to keep going.

This is the lowest point to which Louie will sink in the war. Though we as readers may not judge Louie for losing his defiant spirit, he might experience this moment as evidence of his faltering self-respect. Once so proud and defiant, Louie loses his self-respect by having to go to the Bird, his nemesis, for help, thereby acknowledging the man's power over him, and then doing the pointless and demeaning work that Bird tells him to do. Nonetheless, his struggle to maintain his dignity is remarkable in the face of such daily, demeaning tasks.

CHAPTER 29: TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY PUNCHES

In May 1945, a B-29 bomber targets a steel mill near Naoetsu. Realizing that a bomber would only attack such insignificant targets if the Americans were close to winning the war, the men become hopeful that the war will soon end. Their hopes increase further when new arrivals to the camp inform the men that Germany has surrendered.

News of victory revives the men's spirits, giving them the strength to keep fighting the slow, ever-present erosion of their resilience and dignity.


By June, Louie's leg heals enough to bear his weight, allowing him to go back to shoveling coal and salt. One day on duty, the Japanese foreman accuses the prisoners of stealing a fish from the galley. Louie and the others convince the thief to confess in order to spare the others punishment.

The men's attitude towards the theft shows how war alters conventional morality. Most men (though perhaps not Louie when he was a teenager) would have probably found fault with stealing back home, but they see stealing from the Japanese is only wrong if you get caught and let your fellow prisoners suffer the consequences. But this is not the only change in morals that occurs during war. Murder, the number one prohibition in a society during peacetime, becomes a heroic duty in war.

When the men return to camp, the **Bird** claims that the officers must have been involved in the theft. As punishment, he makes the two hundred other prisoners strike the thief, Louie, and the other officers one time in the face. The guards beat anyone who refuses or punches too lightly. For two hours, prisoners punch Louie and the others while the Bird watches with erotic pleasure.

This punishment reinforces the idea that violence is reciprocal, that it may be more damaging to those who inflict pain than those who take it. Having to hurt their friends, each man performs a betrayal and, as we have seen with Mac and the propaganda prisoners, betraying one's brothers-in-arms is an action that quickly exhausts one's self-respect. The officers' bruises will heal, but betrayal will leave psychological scars that only some kind of redemption can erase.


As more bombers pass overhead, the situation in the camp worsens. There is less food and the prisoners doubt they'll survive the coming winter. They also believe that an Allied invasion of Japan's mainland is inevitable. Japan would rather arm its civilians – children, women, and the elderly alike – rather than surrender to the Allies. The men worry that an invasion would mean the announcement of a kill-all order.

Hillenbrand's claim that Japan would rather sacrifice its own citizens than surrender is a common view in the U.S.. Some historians use this same claim to justify the dropping of the atomic bombs as a necessary evil that averted the U.S. having to invade Japan, thereby saving countless American and Japanese lives. But this isn't the only opinion. Other historians have argued that dropping the bomb was cruel and unnecessary because Japan, already weakened, was on the verge of surrender.

At Phil's camp, officials announce that they are transferring the American POWs to a more pleasant camp. The men travel to a remote region and hike for hours up a mountain to an isolated clearing that encloses only a few rickety huts. One prisoner considers their situation and concludes, "This is the place of our extermination." In Naoetsu, the men learn from a friendly Japanese civilian that a date has been set for *their* execution: August 22nd, 1945.

In the context of WWII, the word "extermination" carries the weight of human suffering. This is the same word that people use in reference to the Nazi genocide of six million Jews during the Holocaust. The word evokes how the perpetrators of these atrocities saw their victims as vermin without human dignity and in need of destruction.



CHAPTER 30: THE BOILING CITY

Allied planes had sunk so many Japanese ships that shoveling the coal used to power those ships became unnecessary. Without a work detail, the officials send Louie back to half rations. After Louie begs the **Bird** for work, the Bird commands him to watch over the camp's goat. The Bird says that if the goat dies, then Louie dies. Already sick, the goat dies almost immediately.

Hillenbrand's choice of the word "beg" emphasizes how far Louie has sunk. For fear of losing his dignity, a younger, healthier Louie would never beg for anything, let alone from a man who spent years torturing him. Memories of moments like these will eat away at Louie in the postwar years, making him feel worthless and without dignity, and driving his anger and desire for revenge against the Bird.

As punishment, the **Bird** makes Louie carry a thick, six-foot beam over his head. The Bird says that if Louie drops it, then another guard will beat him with his gun. Louie picks up the beam, locking eyes with the Bird and radiating hatred. At first, the Bird laughs at him, but after ten minutes the Bird stops laughing. Louie thinks to himself "He cannot break me."

Louie's defiance ensures that, at least in the reader's eyes, he he has nothing to feel shame or humiliation about. But, for Louie, this moment may redeem his momentary loss of dignity when begging the Bird, as if he is telling his nemesis that he is a man of dignity who deserves respect and not a animal that must beg for its life.

Louie calls upon all the strength he has to hold up the beam. In a flurry of motion, the **Bird** charges towards him and rams his fist into Louie's stomach. The beam falls Louie's head, knocking him unconscious. After rousing him, the other prisoners say that he held the beam aloft for thirty-seven minutes.

Louie breaks the Bird, not the other way around. Forcing the Bird to fly into a rage, Louie proves himself to be even more formidable, and more honorable, than the Bird.

Each day, Louie grows thinner and weaker. One day, the **Bird** approaches Louie and tells him that tomorrow he will drown him. After spending the day in fear, the Bird finds him the next day and says, "I have changed my mind. I will drown you tomorrow. Unable to take the abuse any more, Louie joins a group of prisoners plotting to kill the Bird by tying a rock to his legs then throwing him out the barracks window and into the Hokura river below.

Revenge in this context is morally ambiguous. Would the murder be evidence of Louie asserting his dignity by defending himself or is it evidence of the Bird's influence penetrating him, making him lose sight of his moral compass? Hillenbrand doesn't provide any answers or moral judgments yet.

As the men plan the assassination, a U.S. plane drops an atomic bomb over Hiroshima. A huge, bluish grey rise over the city as Hiroshima boils in fire.

Hillenbrand has stayed fairly neutral about the United States' participation in the war, not weighing in on the questionable aspects of their involvement. Similarly, she doesn't address any of the controversies surrounding the use of the atomic bomb.

CHAPTER 31: THE NAKED STAMPEDE

The Naoetsu POWs could tell by the guards' scared faces that something big had happened. They hear rumors of a single bomb blowing up an entire city. A few days later, the city of Nagasaki also disappears, but the guards don't give the men any information.

Again, Hillenbrand's narration shies away from giving many details about the atomic bomb and the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, instead presenting the cataclysmic event through the men's limited perspective.

The men fear the Japanese will kill them even if the war is over, either out of vengeance for their dead countrymen or to prevent them from testifying about the guards' war crimes. A week before the kill-all date, the **Bird** disappears from the camp and the guards tell the prisoners they will soon march into the mountains.

In the context of WWII, a "march into the mountains" sounds eerily similar to the death marches where Nazis exterminated countless Jewish victims. The POWs fear that the Japanese will march them to an isolated spot, kill them, and then bury their bodies so that the world would never learn of the horrors that they endured. The Japanese would effectively erase the men's experiences from history – a fate perhaps crueler than death itself.

As Louie gets more and more sick, the Japanese cancel all work in the camp. One of the guards tells a prisoner that the war is over. A few men celebrate the rumor, but Louie worries that the guards will still kill them. Five days before the execution date, the **Bird** returns. Louie thinks that he looks changed, but cannot pinpoint the difference.

The Bird's return and his changed appearance is an omen, but of what we don't yet know. Does the Bird, after learning of Japan's surrender, feel defeated and disempowered? Or, has the Bird received the kill-all order and is coming to grips with the mass murder of the POWs?

Two days before the day set for their execution, the guards gather the men outside the barracks. A Japanese commander tells them that the war has ended. Speaking to them as if they were old friends, he says he hopes that the men will help Japan in the coming fight against the Soviet Union. As a sign of goodwill, the commander invites them to bathe in the Hokura river.

The commander's tone of voice illustrates the absurd fickleness of war. One moment, two nations seek each other's destruction and the next, they are allies, even friends.

As the men bathe silently and in confusion, an American plane flies overhead, flashing Morse code that the war is over. Finally realizing that the war has truly ended, the naked men stampede into the camp, burn down the fences, and celebrate. The guards do nothing to stop them. In his tired mind, Louie thinks to himself, "I'm free!"

Bathing in a river is usually associated with renewal and, in the context of this religious-themed book, baptism. It is apt that the men run from river naked, as if born anew, ready to live their lives as free men.

Watanabe escapes the prison before the men have a chance to take revenge on him. On the day of the announcement, the **Bird**, knowing that the Allies would charge him with war crimes, stole a bag of rice and slipped out of the camp for good.

Watanabe' escape deprives him of the possibility for redemption. Without standing trial for his crimes, Watanabe will never free himself from his wartime identity as the "Bird" – the epitome of evil and cruelty.

CHAPTER 32: CASCADES OF PINK PEACHES

At Phil's prison camp on August 22nd, a Japanese commander tells them the war is over. The men throw a giant party, demolishing the camp and drinking barrels of *sake* (a Japanese alcoholic drink). After the night of celebration, the men wait in the camp for help to come.

The men's destruction of the camp is a declaration of their freedom and dignity. No longer penned in like animals, the men reclaim their humanity in celebration.

At Naoetsu, the Japanese guards stay in the camp, treating the prisoners with kindness for fear they will testify about their crimes. Over the next few days, American planes deliver food, medicine, clothing, and crates full of news and magazines to the POWs. A celebration of eating and smoking commences. With the **Bird** gone, Louie gives up his desire for revenge. Throughout the camp, forgiveness reigns and the men don't attack or harm any of the guards.

The men's goodwill towards the guards introduces a key theme for book's last chapters: forgiveness. As Louie will learn, escaping the camp does not mean that he's psychologically free. Haunting memories of the camp will construct around him "a prison of the mind" from which he'll only find escape by forgiving his former captors.

Tired of waiting around the camp for rescue, one of the prisoners, Commander John Fitzgerald, goes to the train station to arrange a transport to bring the men to the U.S. military base in Yokohama. The Japanese station master refuses. Beaten and humiliated for years, Fitzgerald snaps and punches the station master in the face. The next day the train arrives. As the train departs from the station with the POWs onboard, a few of the Japanese soldiers who were kind to the men in camp stand outside and salute them.

Fitzgerald's response to the station master epitomizes the theme of Dignity. Treated as inferior for so long, he demands that the station master recognize him as a human being who deserves respect. In contrast, the kind Japanese soldiers' salute the men in an attempt to affirm their dignities before they head back to civilian life. What these guards seem to realize that neither the cruel guards nor the tormented men do is that the POWs' ability to survive the camp was an act of true courage and dignity, worthy of a salute.

CHAPTER 33: MOTHER'S DAY

When the train stops at each station, the men pile off, steal what souvenirs they can, and then come back aboard. As they pass bombed out cities, they cheer in celebration.

The forgiveness these men had for the guards evaporates. War has made them hard-hearted – instead of seeing the loss of human life as tragic, they cheer the destruction out of a callous desire for revenge on all of Japan.

At the U.S. military base in Yokohama, Frank Tinker introduces a journalist to Louie, who most Americans still think is dead. Louie tells the journalist that he would rather die than go through experiences of the camp again. Louie boards a plane to Okinawa with the other POWs.

Louie's matter-of-fact response to the journalist reveals how close he was to losing his will to survive, even suggesting that his life isn't worth the pain and suffering he endured at the camp…

In Okinawa, Louie checks into a hospital so that he can recover from the abuse he experienced in the camp. The doctors tells him that the years of malnutrition mean that Louie will never run again. When a reporter soon after asks him about his running career, he says, "It's finished."

…Louie's negative attitude continues. It's hard to imagine that Louie, whose optimism and resilience got him through the war, would give up so easily on his running career. Perhaps being a POW has gotten to him, worn down his most admirable trait: resilient optimism.

On the morning of September 9th, Louie's family finds out about his survival from an article in the Los Angles times with the headline: "Zamperini Comes Back From Dead." The family erupts with relief and excitement for his return. Louise says that September 9 will be Mother's Day from now on because that was day she learned for sure her son was coming home. Anthony remarks that "those Japs couldn't break him."

The Zamperini family's enthusiastic response to the news of Louie's survival contrasts with Louie's more morbid, depressed attitude, heightening how much Louie has changed. Anthony is correct that the guards couldn't break his body, but they might have seriously damaged his spirit.

In Okinawa, Louie enjoys himself eating and partying until a typhoon hits that wreaks havoc all over the base. Seeing the destruction, Louie feels ready to leave.

The destruction, not unlike what he witnessed during bombing runs, seems to reminds Louie of his experiences in the war. Louie's desire to go home illustrates his naive belief that if he leaves Japan, then he'll also be leaving behind the devastation experienced there. But, as we'll learn, memories of the war will follow him home.


Louie travels to a military hospital in San Diego where he meets Pete, who looks gaunt and haggard from the stress of worrying about Louie for all these years. Due to the all weight he gained in recovery, Louie actually looks chubby in comparison to his brother. Once, when reporters came to interview Louie, they huddled around Pete, thinking he was the famous POW.

Pete's appearance reveals that even psychological ordeals like the mental strain of worrying about one's brother can have a devastating effect on one's self. Just because Louie is out of physical danger does not mean that he is safe: he must still face the psychological perils, like the ones that have so affected Pete, of coming to terms with his experiences.

On a wet October day, Louie arrives in California and meets his family on the airstrip. Louie rushes to his mother and whispers, "*Cara mamma mia*." He and his sobbing mother embrace for a long while.

Sustained by her belief that this day would come, Louise finally gets to hold her son again and hear him say in their shared ancestral language of Italian, "My dear mother." By speaking in his mother tongue, Louie connects to his heritage and identity – a connection that the dehumanizing conditions of the camp threatened to erase.


CHAPTER 34: THE SHIMMERING GIRL

At the Zamperini home, the family showers Louie with gifts and love. Louie acts normally until his sister Sylvia puts on their prized recording of Louie's broadcast. When the broadcast begins to play, Louie suddenly screams, shouting incoherently about propaganda prisoners. To his family's horror, he demands that Sylvia destroy the record. Louie goes up to his boyhood room and falls asleep. That night, he dreams of the **Bird**.

Louie isn't out of the woods yet. Though his body is healthy, the war has left unseen, psychological wounds that make him violent and unpredictable. Louie thought that he was "free" when the war ended, but he only found himself in a psychological prison where the war, the many threats to his dignity such as the offer to read propaganda, and most of all the Bird still haunt him.


In the Japanese metropolis of Kofu, the **Bird** hears on the radio his name on a list of war criminals. He decides to spend his life in hiding, vowing never to let himself get captured. In the wake of the WWII peace treaty, Japan forms a special detective unit for apprehending war criminals. The hunt for the Bird is on.

The Bird's desire to keep his freedom points to the ambiguity in his nickname. The Bird does not want to live out his days imprisoned in a cage, but he doesn't realize that by fleeing punishment, he has already made for himself a personal prison. Without redemption, he will never free himself of his sins, never know the true freedom of inner peace and atonement.

In the States, the War Department books Louie for a speaking tour to talk about his wartime experiences. His days are full of interviews, fancy dinners, and speeches, but at night he dreams only of the **Bird**. At one speaking engagement, Louie begins to drink more than normally in order to calm his nerves. The next day at breakfast, he drinks even more. Soon, Louie carries a flask with him wherever he goes, taking a swig whenever he starts remembering the war.

Louie fights against the memories of war much as he did against his fear of dying, repressing them with the use of alcohol. Speaking more broadly, Louie approaches the terror of his memories as he has every other challenge: as something to overcome. This attitude bolstered his resilience in wartime, but it will prove to have destructive effects in peacetime when the thing he has to overcome is internal.

In Miami, while spending the two weeks of paid vacation awarded to returning servicemen, Louie meets Cynthia Applewhite on the beach. Cynthia comes from a wealthy family, but has an impulsive, passionate, and independent personality. After two weeks of flirting, partying, and pulling pranks, Louie asks her to marry him. Despite knowing so little about him, she accepts.

Louie's proposal might be an attempt to flee the memories of the past. Carefree and untroubled by emotional baggage, Cynthia seems like the perfect person for forgetting his own troubles. Seizing the first chance he has for marriage, Louie tries to jumpstart a normal civilian life, but without first coming to terms with his past and healing his psychological wounds, Louie won't be able to reintegrate fully into society.

In the following May of 1946, Louie and Cynthia marry in a small church near Louie's home. In a hotel room they rented for their wedding night, Cynthia informs her parents about the marriage for the first time. They keep her on the phone all night yelling at her. Louie opens the champagne, drinks the whole bottle, and falls asleep.

The first fissures appear in the external appearance of stability and normalcy that Louie has tried to cultivate with marriage. Drinking himself into a stupor on his wedding night is not a good sign for his mental health or for their marriage.

CHAPTER 35: COMING UNDONE

In the later half of 1946, Louie and Cynthia have dinner with Phil and his wife, Cecy, as well as another war buddy Fred Garret. Everything is going well until a waiter sets down a plate of white rice. Fred looses all control and starts incoherently berating the waiter. Louie and Phil calm Fred down, but at that moment the men realize that nothing will ever be like it was before the war.

Garret's reaction and the men's realization illustrate how war changes those who go through it. Louie and the others hoped they could simply reintegrate into civilian life, but the war has left psychological wounds that changes them. Even if they heal these wounds, they won't be the same naïve young men who went off to war.

After the war, many Pacific POWs suffered from extreme emotional and psychological problems, including flashbacks, anxiety, depression, and uncontrollable rage. One of the most common illness was Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD for short), which involved vivid flashbacks and dulled responses to others and the outside world.

Before and during the war, Louie's resilience had always been defined against the external obstacles he faced, whether that was training for the Olympics or surviving on the raft or in the Japanese camps. Now, he must overcome a different kind of obstacle: the inner struggle to heal his psychological war wounds.

In Louie's life, the **Bird** continues to haunt his dreams. Louie withdraws from his wife and friends and into training for the next Olympics, aiming to run the 1,500 meter though he no longer finds pleasure in running. Trying to see how fast he could go, Louie pushes himself to the limit during one race. He finishes with a great time but irreversibly worsens his leg injury from the war. He will not make it to the Olympics.

In high school, Louie only got pleasure from running when he stopped running from his fear of sterilization and started running towards a goal of surpassing his limitations. Now, Louie loses that pleasure as he metaphorically runs from the past, unwilling to deal with the traumas and indignities of living through torture.

Without the prospect of the Olympics, Louie's depression deepens. During the day, he obsessively thinks about the **Bird** and his nightmares only get worse. Drinking heavily, Louie becomes enraged easily, beating up strangers with little to no cause. One day, Louie feels the war enveloping him from all sides. He can smell and feel it. This is the first of many flashback he will have.

Louie transfers from a literal prison in Japan to the metaphoric prison of his mind. While Louie's resilience preserved his compassion in the physical prison, this psychological prison brings out the dark, violent side of his identity. Unable to drink his problems away or rely on his defiant nature to combat mental illness, Louie must develop new methods for surviving this private prison.

After reading about a story of a former Pacific POW who helped arrest one of his wartime captors, Louie starts fantasizing about finding and killing the **Bird**. Louie feels as if vengeance is the only way to save himself from his spiraling depression. This desire for revenge replaces his lost quest for an Olympic medal.

Louie's murderous rage is a perversion of the noble quest to represent his country at the Olympics. This rage shows how Louie absorbed some of the Bird into himself. The Bird used violence against Louie in order to make himself feel powerful, to forget about his past humiliations. Now Louie, too, believes that killing the Bird will restore the dignity that the Bird tried to take from him. Of course, just as the Bird's effort to dehumanize Louie ended up dehumanizing the Bird, Louie's desire for physical revenge is making Louie savage even with those he loves.

CHAPTER 36: THE BODY ON THE MOUNTAIN

In the winter of 1946, the Japanese police expand their search for Watanabe. An aged police officer travels to the largest home in a small mountain village and shows a picture of Watanabe to the farmer, his wife, and their live-in servant. The officer leaves, not realizing that the servant was the **Bird**.

Though the Bird has changed his appearance enough to fool the police officer, he is still, deep-down, the same evil man. Unless he finds redemption, the Bird won't be free of either the police or his past.

Watanabe had come to this out-of-the-way village and taken the job as a servant to evade capture. He wrote in his journal that he felt guilt that he was free while other Japanese soldiers were being tried and executed as war criminals. He did not express remorse for the POWs he tortured, writing instead that his role in the prison made him feel powerful.

One definition of "redemption" is the act of buying one's freedom. The Bird is technically "free" because he's not in prison but his refusal to stand trial limits what actual freedom he has. He must live out his life in hiding, both from the outside world and from himself. His journal entry shows that he cannot face the reality of his horrific crimes, that he is repressing the knowledge of his wrongdoing.

All over Japan war criminals are being brought to justice. The Quack is sentenced to death for contributing to the deaths of four prisoners. It also emerges that Jimmie Sasaki had not been the chief interrogator but instead a low-ranking interpreter. Always willing to shift allegiances, Jimmie asks for a job in the U.S. Army, but instead the Army tries him for the abuse of several captives despite having little evidence that he committed those crimes. Jimmie is sentenced to six years of hard labor. Jimmie's true allegiances – artful Japanese spy or something more innocent – remains a mystery.

Since this book is nonfiction, we can never truly know the hidden thoughts and feelings of the characters. Because we don't have access to Jimmie's inner life, his true identity remains unknown. In the same way, Hillenbrand can only speculate about Watanabe's true identity. His journal entry makes it sound like he had no remorse for the POWs, but perhaps he was so racked by guilt that he couldn't even admit to himself the horrible things he had done. The mystery surrounding Jimmie reminds us that, ultimately, we don't ever truly know the inner lives of others.

In the mountain village, the farmer requests that Watanabe accompany his son on a trip through major cities. In the cities, no one recognizes the **Bird**, which gives him the hope that he can visit his family, who he hasn't seen in years, in Tokyo. Deciding to risk capture, the Bird boards a train to Tokyo. At home, his family greets him with celebration. After two hours of catching up, police detectives arrive at their home. The Bird hides in a closest as the detectives ask the family questions and then leave.

The Bird's journey home humanizes his character. Despite being the antagonist and the book's epitome of evil, he is still a man with a family whom he loves and is loved by. The Bird's capacity for love suggests that perhaps there is still some good in him, that he is not a total monster beyond redemption.

Watanabe returns to the farmer's village. The **Bird** works as a waiter in the farmer's son's coffee shop. After a young woman falls in love with the Bird for his good looks, he considers marriage but decides he cannot burden her with his past. He leaves the village and becomes a cowherd in the grasslands nearby.

His decision not to burden the woman with his past again shows an empathetic, human side to the Bird. This decision also shows how little freedom he actually has – unable to marry or see his family, the Bird lives a life of isolation devoid of love and support.

In the fall of 1946, the police find the body of a man in the mountains. The man killed himself with a pistol. Though the gunshot wound obscures his face, the police think that the man matches the description of Watanabe. They bring in his mother, Shizuka, to identify the dead body. She says it's her son and the Japanese government announces that the **Bird** is dead.

Hillenbrand makes it seem like the Bird has died, has killed himself. That he committed suicide implies that the Bird was devastated either by his actions during the war or by his isolation after the war. The connection of Watanabe to his mother also creates a parallel or mirroring between the Bird and Louie, as both of them were devoted to their own mothers.

CHAPTER 37: TWISTED ROPES

Living in Hollywood, Louie does not know about the announcement of the **Bird's** death. Drinking heavily and consumed by a desire to kill the Bird, Louie is unable to financially support himself or his wife. One night at a bar, Louie gropes a woman and gets beaten up by her boyfriend. Cynthia pleads with him to stop drinking, but it does no good.

Remember how, Chapter 1, the Graf Zeppelin blotted out all the lights in the night sky like a black hole? At the beginning of the novel that symbol foreshadowed the coming war, but now it takes on a new meaning, symbolizing how the war opened in Louie a metaphoric black hole that threatens to swallow his self-respect and identity.

In 1948, Cynthia tells him that she's pregnant. Louie is excited but cannot bring himself out of his rage and alcoholism. One night, while dreaming of killing the **Bird**, Louie wakes to find himself strangling his pregnant wife. He stops himself and lies back, the blankets twisted like ropes around him.

The ropes symbolize the memories and the hatred that tie Louie down, imprisoning him in the past. Louie's desire for a revenge that he imagines will give him back his dignity and free him from what the Bird did to him controls him even in sleep, and endangers his family.

Even Louie's love for his newborn daughter, Cissy, has no effect on pacifying his murderous fantasies and alcoholism. After Cynthia comes home to find Louie violently shaking their child, she takes the child and goes to her parents, threatening to file for divorce.

Louie hits rock bottom. Hurting his only child and forcing his wife to leave him, Louie has lost his self-respect and alienated everyone who loves him. His isolation here mirrors the isolation of Watanabe.

In Japan, early one evening at the end of 1948, Shizuka Watanabe sat on the lower floor of a two-story restaurant in Tokyo, scanning the crowd. Then she sees him: her dead son standing just outside the restaurant.

After making it seem that the Bird had killed himself, Hillenbrand reveals here that in fact the Bird did no such thing. And through this tactic she has shown how both Louie and the Bird are on a similar path, of isolation and despair.

CHAPTER 38: A BECKONING WHISTLE

Two years after the Japanese government announced that he was dead, Watanabe sees his mother again. The last time they spoke was two years ago when he said that he'd meet her at this spot in another two years. Like Louise Zamperini, Shizuka believed that her son was still alive despite what she saw that day when she identified the dead body as her son.

Despite the fact that their sons are mortal enemies, both mothers share one key trait: an unbreakable connection to their sons that strengthens their convictions. By comparing their mother's faith in this way, Hillenbrand continues to built the parallels between Louie and the Bird.

In Los Angles in 1949, a tall blonde man named Billy Graham gets off a train. He has been travelling the U.S., preaching evangelical Christianity. His blunt, emphatic preaching bring large crowds to his tent revival meetings. After hearing about his sermons from a neighbor, Cynthia decides to go, but Louie refuses. When she returns, she says she has a gone through a religious awakening and won't divorce Louie. After some convincing, Louie decides he will attend the next meeting with her.

After building up those parallels, Hillenbrand now begins the arc in Louie's story that separates him from the Bird. It begins with Cynthia, who has clearly had a hard time of it and is struggling with the difficulty of divorcing a man she loves, searching for strength through religion and finds redemption in the Christian faith. Louie, intent on overcoming this obstacle by himself as he has so many others, refuses her request to go with him. Even when he does agree to go, his agreement seems grudging.

At the revival meeting, Graham preaches about how people are drowning in sin and unhappiness. Louie says to himself that he is a good man, but Graham's words make him uneasy. When Graham invites people to declare their faith and find absolution, Louie stands and bolts out of the tent. That night he dreams of Satan hunched over his bed, holding the same belt that **Bird** used to beat him.

Louie, like Watanabe, is lying to himself – he's incapable of realizing that he is in need of redemption. But Graham's words penetrate Louie's psyche/soul, starting to make him realize that he has lost his way and his moral conscience. Louie's dream doesn't just connect the Bird to Satan, it connects the idea *of Bird, which because of his desire for revenge Louie can't escape, as connected to Satan.*

Cynthia convinces Louie to go to another meeting. At the meeting, Graham preaches about how God watches over and cares for everyone despite his apparent absence in this world of war and suffering. Louie remembers the day in the doldrums on the raft when he found peace and stillness, feeling as if some greater presence was offering him compassion.

The suffering Louie witnessed first hand during the war nearly swallowed his soul, making him see humankind's horrifying capacity for evil. But Graham's sermon reflects Louie's own epiphany on the raft: a belief that, despite so much suffering, his own and other people's, there is a God.

Confused and frustrated by his feelings, Louie is about to leave the tent when he has the last flashback of his life. He feels himself back on the raft on the day he made his promise to God: "If you will save me, I will serve you forever." Louie heads back into the tent, suddenly feeling more alive than he has in years.

Louie is in the midst of a battle for his soul. His dark side compels him to violence and revenge while his good side yearns to be closer to the goodness and compassion that God represents. He has been fighting *to try to overcome the effects of what has happened to him, but suddenly here he finds redemption in giving up on fighting and instead redirecting his energy towards* serving.

At home, Louie dumps out all his stashed alcohol into the sink. For the first time since arriving in the U.S., he doesn't dream of the **Bird** that night. The next morning he finds an old Bible and goes to sit under a tree. He realizes that a divine love had saved him from the war and that the Bird had not broken him. Letting go of his anger and his humiliation, Louie feels like a "new creation" and begins to weep softly to himself.

Before and during the war, defiance gave Louie the resilience to overcome limitations, but now he finds a new kind of resilience not in defiance but in love: a belief in God that allows him to give up the need to get revenge on Bird (or anyone else) for the terrible things he experienced. By dumping out his alcohol, Louie gives up the self-destructive and dignity-robbing "tools" of his defiance and fight against of his memories, and in the process. As Louie escapes his mental prison, he experiences a symbolic rebirth like the one he had in the Hokura river. Religion makes him feel like a "new creation" – it is as if faith provides him with a blank slate on which to remake his identity anew.

CHAPTER 39: DAYBREAK

In the fall of 1950, Louie arrives at the Sugamo Prison in Japan to meet his former captors. In the time after Billy Graham's sermon, Louie begins a career as a Christian speaker, telling his wartime stories in order to inspire others to find God.

In the context of these Christian-influenced chapters, Louie takes another step towards redemption,. It's not just that he spreads the word of God through his personal story in order to inspire others to renew their faiths. It's that in meeting with (and implicitly forgiving) the men who oversaw his hellish experiences in the Japanese POW camps that he fully practices what he preaches.

With his bitterness and rage gone, Louie rekindles his marriage with a renewed sense of love. Louie decides to travel to Japan and meet his prison guards in order to test if he can preserve his newfound sense of peace.

Louie's decision to explore the limits of his faith shows that the old Louie, who was always pushing his limits, is finally back in action. Louie's redemption also returns to him other qualities like his compassion and capacity for love.

At the camp, Louie learns that the **Bird** had killed himself. All Louie feels is compassion and forgiveness for the man whose life is now beyond redemption. Finally, for Louie, it feels like the war has ended.

To find redemption and free himself of the Bird, Louie had to forgive him. Louie pities the Bird, realizing that he never had a chance to free himself of the burden of sin and the lust for violence.

The head of the prison camp asks Louie's former captors to come forward. Seized by a childlike sense of enthusiasm, Louie rushes to each man with a radiant smile and outstretched hands.

Louie is eager to forgive his captors because he has learned that forgiveness, rather than violence or revenge, is the path to redemption and inner peace.

EPILOGUE

In the summer of 1954, Louie opens the California Victory Boys Camp. It is a summer camp for "lost boys" who have a history of delinquency, not unlike Louie's own. When not with his campers, Louie travels the country, talking about his experiences in the war. Ever since that day in the Graham's tent, he remains cheerful, pleasant, and hopeful.

Louie's redemption is a continuous journey filled with compassion, faith, and a desire to help others. When he was a boy, Phil helped guide him to redemption in the eyes of his town. Now, Louie lives up to his promise to God and gives back to his community by doing for others what Phil did for him.

In 1996, Louie, in his late seventies, accepts an offer to run in the 1998 Winter Olympics in Japan. A television producer, Draggan Mihailovich, who is making a film on his life tells Louie that the **Bird** is still alive.

Finally, after 62 years, Louie gets his chance to run in the Olympics in Japan. Louie found it easy to forgive the Bird when he thought the Bird was dead. His final challenge is whether he can forgive the Bird when it turns out the Bird is still alive.

After the Japanese announced his death, Watanabe spent several years working as a farm hand. In 1952, he read a newspaper article about how the Japanese government had issued a pardon for him and the other war criminals. With the rise of Communism in the Far East, the United States wanted to strengthen its relationship with Japan so they dropped the charges against the war criminals. When the **Bird** returned to his family in Tokyo, they received him with open arms. The Bird told his family that he felt like a victim of war, that he had committed no crime.

While Louie comes to terms with his past, the Bird still lives trapped by immorality and delusion – he is either evil to the core and cannot even comprehend the magnitude of his crimes or he has so repressed his guilt that he actually sees himself as victim. Louie couldn't see that he needed redemption until he found God, so perhaps the Bird also needs a sort of epiphany or religious awakening to make him see the truth and confront the crimes of his past.

In the following years, Watanabe marries, has two children, and makes a small fortune by starting an insurance agency. In 1995, in his mid-seventies, the **Bird** feels ready to publically discuss his role as a prison guard. Perhaps motivated by guilt or the narcissistic hope that he would be admired for having the "courage" to talk about the war, he gives an interview to a British newspaper. The Bird apologizes for being "strict" with the prisoners and says that the war made him cruel. He also invites his former captives to punch him in the face if they still feel angry.

If this story were fictional, we might expect the author to conclude the story with the Bird getting what's coming to him. But, in reality, instead of suffering any consequences for his actions, he actually seems to live a pretty good life. This may seem unjust, but there is a suggestion in the book that the Bird does miss out on the inner fulfillment and serenity of finding redemption that Louie experiences. Though we don't know the Bird's true motives for giving the interview, his offer to the former POWs shows that he is still a violent man at heart – he still believes that violence, rather than compassion and forgiveness, is the answer to letting go of one's anger and humiliation.

At Louie's request, Mihailovich tries setting up a meeting between him and the Watanabe during the Olympic Games, but the **Bird** refuses. Unable to offer his captor forgiveness, Louie writes him a letter where he details how the Bird's actions made his postwar life a nightmare, but that the Christianity gave him the strength to forgive him. He also urges the Bird to convert. Louie gives the letter to someone to give to the Bird. If Watanabe received it, he never replied.

Louie's faith withstands the injustice that the Bird never suffered any punishment for his crimes. Rather than dwelling on this injustice, Louie offers the Bird forgiveness, knowing that it's the only way he can move past the war. Louie's suggestion that the Bird convert also reveals Louie's strong conviction that religion—and specifically Christianity—is the only way for people, no matter their crimes, to find redemption for their past sins.

In January 1998, Louie runs with the Olympic torch past the former Naoetsu prison camp. All around him, Japanese civilians smile and cheer him on. As he runs past his former prison, he has no bad memories of the war or of the **Bird**. He feels only joy.

Louie not only made it out of the camp alive, but also survived the psychological toll of war through a resilience founded in a belief in God. The book concludes not just with Louie's survival but with his achievement of his initial goal: to run in the Olympics in Japan. No longer dwelling on the past, he is finally, utterly, free.

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