

## CHAPTER 39

# Daybreak

On a chilly fall morning in 1950, Louie walked up a long road, toward a complex of buildings. His whole body tingled. On the entrance archway were painted the words SUGAMO PRISON, and beyond it waited Louie's POW camp guards. Louie had returned to Japan.

In the year since he'd entered Billy Graham's tent, Louie had worked to keep a promise. He'd become a Christian speaker, telling his story all over America. He'd scraped together just enough money for a down payment on a house but was still so poor that Cissy's crib was the house's only furniture, and Louie and Cynthia slept in sleeping bags. They were barely getting by, but their connection had been renewed and deepened. They were blissful together.

For more than four years after the war, a return to Japan had been Louie's obsession, the path to killing the man who'd ruined him. But thoughts of murder no longer had a home in him. He'd come here not to avenge himself, but to answer a question.

Louie had been told that all the men who'd tormented him had been arrested, convicted, and imprisoned in Sugamo. He could speak and think of his captors, even the Bird, without bitterness now, but a question tapped in

his mind: If he saw them again, would the peace he'd found prove resilient? He'd resolved to go to Sugamo and find out.

On the evening before, Louie had written to Cynthia to tell her what he was about to do. He asked her to pray for him.

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The former guards sat on the floor of a common room. Louie looked out over the faces.

At first he recognized no one. Then he saw a face he knew, then another and another. One was missing: Louie couldn't find the Bird. When he asked where Watanabe was, he was told he wasn't there. Over five years, tens of thousands of policemen had hunted for him, but they'd never found him.

As Louie was packing to come to Japan, the long-awaited day had arrived in the life of Shizuka Watanabe: October 1, 1950, the day her son had promised to come to her, if he was still alive. He'd told her he'd meet her in Tokyo, at the restaurant where they'd met two years earlier. That morning, Shizuka boarded a train for Tokyo. At the restaurant, Mutsuhiro apparently never showed up.

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

"Mutsuhiro," Shizuka had said, "has already died."

In her house, Shizuka kept a shrine to Mutsuhiro, a tradition among bereaved Japanese families. Each morning, she left an offering in his memory.

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

The words washed over Louie. In prison camp, Watanabe had forced him to live in incomprehensible degradation, humiliation, and violence, leaving Louie lost in darkness and hate. But on an October night in Los Angeles, Louie had found, said a friend, "daybreak." That night, the sense of shame and

powerlessness that had driven his hatred of the Bird had vanished. The Bird was no longer his monster. He was only a man.

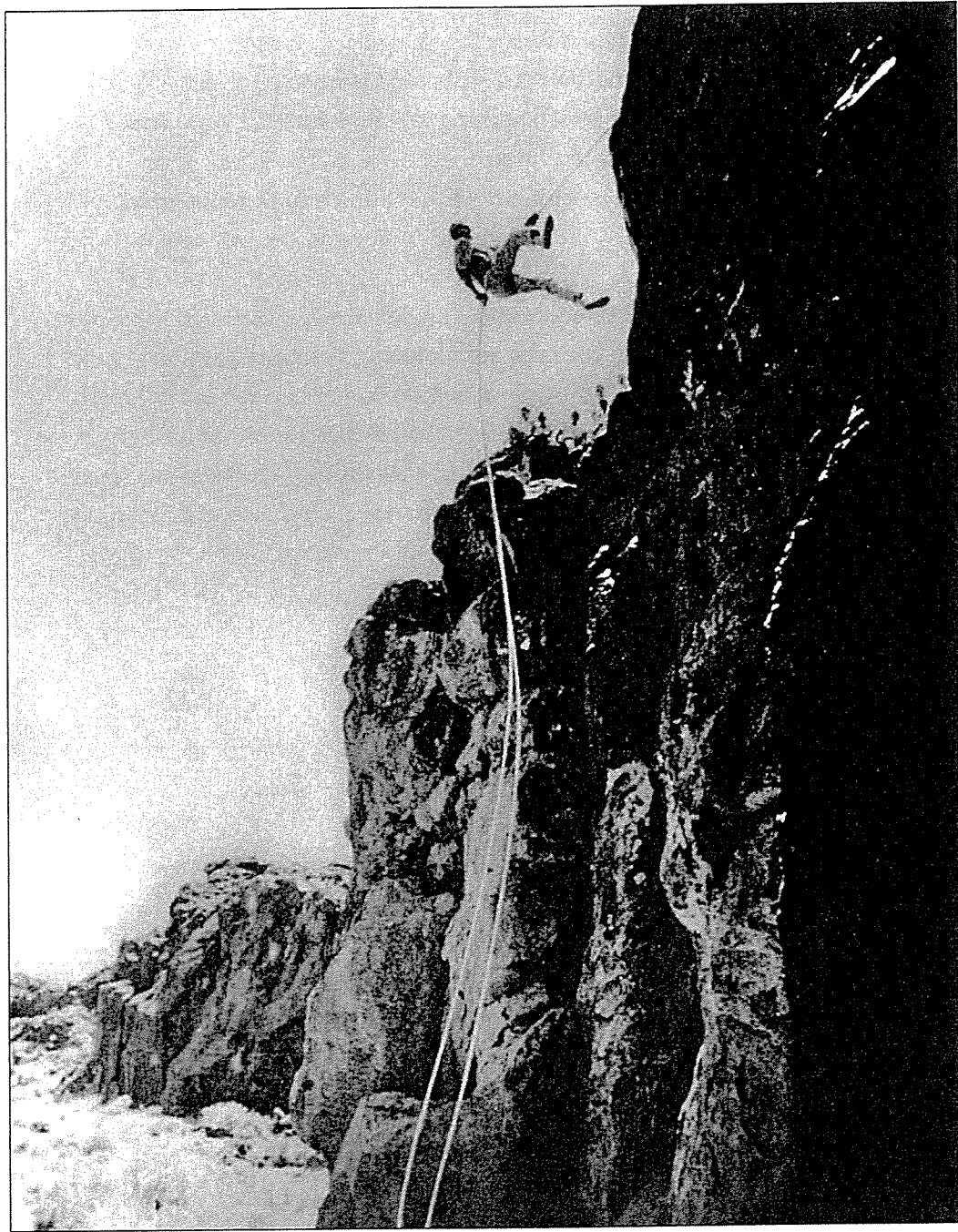
As he was told of Watanabe's fate, all Louie saw was a lost person, a life now beyond redemption. He felt something he'd never felt for his captor before. With a shiver of amazement, he realized it was compassion.

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

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Before Louie left Sugamo, his escort asked Louie's former guards to come forward. The prisoners shuffled into the aisle, moving hesitantly, looking up at Louie with small faces.

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



*Louie rappels down a cliffside. COURTESY OF LOUIS ZAMPERINI*