

## *Teufel Hunden*

"Dent, get out here!"

"Aye sir!"

I discard my book and scurry out my rack, nearly stumbling on my landing step at the sound of Lieutenant Aslan's voice. I hop to parade rest, the submissive posture expected of me, with my legs spread apart and hands clasped on my lower back. Staff Sgt. Midway is standing behind the lieutenant, smirking.

"Dent, you're not going to the sniper indoc because of what happened on Wednesday."

I feel my face struggling to contain the rage billowing out from inside. Must've not hid it very well because Midway rushes in to escalate the situation.

"Something you want to say, Dent?"

"No, Staff Sergeant."

"Good." He sticks a belligerent finger into my forehead while I impotently hold my position at parade rest. "You're lucky you had so many of your little shitbags willing to back you up and verify your story. Otherwise, we would've NJP'd your ass back to fucking recruit. You would've been lucky to get out as a fucking private."

"Aye Staff Sergeant." I steady my hateful gaze into his eyes. My only way to protest.

"Aye Staff Sergeant. That's all these dumbasses know how to say." Midway pushes forward.

"What're you reading, Dent?" The Lt. tries to shoulder Midway out of our standoff.

"East of Eden, sir."

"What's it about?"

"I'm not sure, sir. He's still developing the characters."

Midway rips out the book and turns to the bookmark. "You're on page 120 and you still don't know what it's about?!" He thrusts the book into my chest. "I'm telling you sir, they're a bunch of dumbass boots. You can't talk to them like they're capable of thought."

Lieutenant Aslan gives a half-hearted scoff to appease Staff Sergeant before redirecting the conversation. "You ready for the shellback ceremony, tomorrow?"

"Yes sir."

"We'll see about that." I hate Midway's knowing smile.

I climb back into my rack and try to salvage some privacy from the tattered curtains, but they aren't enough to shelter me from the night's wails that resume immediately following the duty's "Attention on deck!" to mark the Lieutenant's departure. I try to escape into my book. Try to unlock the mystery of Steinbeck's cryptic 'timshel'.

Three hundred and twenty souls packed into a 4000 sqft berthing area, clamoring loudly enough to disorient me from the ship's heavy sways. The senior Marines begin howling out tomorrow's marks,

"I'm coming for you, Stevens!"

A few begin slamming floor racks in a deafening din.

"Hey First Platoon! You're getting fucked up tomorrow!"

I hear curtains ripping as the usual prey are torn from their racks for the week's arbitrary infractions. The wall slams behind me as I hear Aang's familiar struggle to break free from his chokehold.

I impatiently wait to hear my name called out, but never hear it. The warning I imparted into senior Lance Corporal Michaels' face must have scared them off. Probably not. They'll probably wait until the morning's ceremony where they can get away with more. I feel the knots in my stomach turning, but can't quite place the feeling. I know it's not fear. Too familiar to be fear. It's more like an elevated sense of the chronic anxiety that fills the day. Anxiety from being penned up with these animals. It's all just so tedious.

*REVEILLE CHARLIE COMPANY! TIME TO EARN THAT SHELLBACK!*

I rub my tired eyes. Didn't sleep much. Even the anti-malarial pills refused their liberating dreams. Shellback Day. The day the ship crosses the equator and sailors turn from slimy polywogs (wogs) into trusty shellbacks. For the navy it's a fun day of camaraderie. For their Marine cargo, it's something else.

Our seniors have been looking forward to this. Their first deployment was on the 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit where they did nothing but get drunk in Okinawa bars and train in Philippine jungles. They never got their initiation into combat. Instead, they had to listen to their seniors tell stories from Ramadi and Fallujah. Stories about how to be a real Marine. Now they're on the 11<sup>th</sup> MEU, still trying to overcome their inferiority complex about not having that little red, blue, and yellow ribbon on their chests. Today was different, though. They had "earned" their shellback status and could justify their retributions against us. They're going to savor today as they take out their infantile frustrations on us.

I hop out my rack and wait with the rest of my aisle to file into the gangway. The uniform of the day for the wogs is green skivvy shorts and nothing else. For the senior shellbacks, it's boots and utes. Salazar whispers from behind me,

"Hey Sebastian, you think Michaels is gonna' come for you today?"

I turn to see the excited glimmer behind his Moorish eyes.

"I don't know. Probably. He's probably got a whole squad of seniors waiting to jump me."

"What're you gonna do?"

"I don't know."

"Don't fight back. We only got two months left on deployment."

I feel him tenderly finger the portrait of Jesus sporting his crown of thorns on my back as he reads it aloud.

“Why have You forsaken me?”

He ponders it for a moment.

“We’re with you today, Jesus.”

Chuckles at his simple musing. I hate the stupid fucking tattoo. A permanent reminder of another silly belief I desperately tried to cling to. Fuck that guy. He wasn’t anything to look up to. He only had to spend three days in Hell.

“WOGS DON’T WALK! WOGS CRAWL!” Sergeant Fehrmann is issuing our orders.

We slip to the ground but there isn’t enough space in the gangway for two rifle companies’ worth of boots to low crawl.

“OK YOU STUPID FUCKING WOGS! ON YOUR ASSES! NUT TO BUTT!”

Salazar gives his peculiar giggle that’s somehow heavily-accented in Spanish as he shifts the imprint of his monstrous cock away from my crack.

“Sorry about that, Sebastian.”

He playfully pats my sides to signal his readiness. How he always manages to smile has become a mystery to me.

“NO FUCKING TALKING!”

Michaels walks up from behind and takes a cheap shot into the back of my head. He doesn’t turn to give me a view of my handiwork, though. Two days for the bruises to fully color. I’ll bet that busted face is a masterpiece by now.

“Ok wogs, now row your boat!”

We obey the Fehrmann. In unison, we heave forward and plant our feet. We pull our asses forward and heave our upper bodies back to balance the movement.

“I know you’re not shellbacks. Tell me what you are!”

We answer the sergeant’s call as we row.

“WOG! WOG! WOG!”

Each of us moves forward as our snake circles throughout the berthing area. We round the corner and Corporal Esperanza is posted on guard duty at the berthing entrance leading to the rest of the ship. They told us the post was there to prevent gear theft from the sailors. I know that’s not the truth, though. If anyone has sticky fingers, it’s Marine infantry. I know the real reason the post exists, why it’s manned 24 hours a day, is to warn of any officers or battalion-level staff that happen to wander in. The guard’s only real duty is to make their presence known by screaming out *Attention on deck!* to alert and protect any seniors that may be engaged in any unsanctioned hazings.

I hate that fucking post. Other posts allow you to roam, but you're forbidden from abandoning that one. Because of that, Sergeant Narkissos always comes and finds me on it.

"Come on, Dent, just feel them."

"I can see them Sergeant. They're huge."

Sergeant Narkissos agitatedly takes my hands and thrusts them onto his shirtless chest.

"Not bad, huh? Probably bigger than any tits you've ever held."

"Aye, sergeant."

I try to remove my hands but he shoots his right arm across to arrest my hand and force it to linger on his oversized left breast.

"Feel this."

He forces my palm onto his undulating chest. His lustful eyes betray his thought – *Tell me I'm beautiful.*

"That's impressive sergeant."

I uncomfortably smile at him. Satiated with the compliment, he allows my hand to go free but not before gently directing my fingertips across his nipple. *Fuck.* I wish somebody would just tell him that it's ok to fuck dudes. I'm tired of participating in his schoolboy fantasies.

To his credit he does look good. We all do. With the gym being our only escape on this ship, we've done nothing but workout and cram protein down our gullets. A tangible manifestation of King Leonidas and his elite kings guard in the *300* movie that has played on the ship's TV's nonstop since it came out last year. Walking amongst us but never partaking must be unbearable for the sergeant.

I can't help but to revel in his self-inflicted hatred.

*WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row*

We round the corner and begin approaching the head. There's always a lingering smell coming from there. Multiple toilets are usually clogged at any one time, and they fester and ferment until the ship's gentle rocking spills them onto the floor, while the rusted valves constantly drip in new salt water to replenish what was lost. Today, they smell especially rank. Sergeant Boar is standing at the hatch picking out his usual prey.

"ELLIOT! RAMIREZ! FREEMAN! ROBERTS! WURMEN! SALAZAR! AANG! Report to the head for swabbing!"

"AYE, SERGEANT!"

Salazar pushes off my shoulders and runs to the head. PFC Akron pushes forward and envelopes me to close the chain. We take in a breath and prepare to renew our rowing, but before we can complete our first heave, Michaels pokes his wormy face from the head to find me.

"Where do you think you're going Dent? Get in the head!"

His face is a magnificent tapestry of blacks and blues and grotesque swells. My magnum opus.

I enter the head and quickly discover the source of the putrefaction. They must not potty-train shellbacks. Scattered across the floor are piles of shit, steeping in piss. We're the first cleaners. I can tell because Aang has already made it past the centermost shitter. In front of him, there are undisturbed cairns; behind, grotesque smears of sickly shit and piss.

"LOW CRAWL DENT!"

Despite the fetid stench, I can tell that Sergeant Boar is thoroughly enjoying his command post. I breath out my mouth to avoid the smells as I make my way to my stomach. One arm over the other, I follow along behind the others. I can feel the half-inch-wide, knobbed dimples of the anti-slip tiles pushing into my forearms and streaking their checkered patterns into my torso and thighs. I make it to the end of the shitter line and stand. There are mop buckets tucked away in the corner, filled with rancid piss to replace what we absorbed for the next cleaners. Lance Corporal Justin is posted in the doorway to the showers and smirks before looking past me. I can feel Michaels lingering behind me.

"Hit the showers you nasty fucks. Y'all better not bring that shit out where we sleep."

Our group ranger files into the showers and everyone begins to hose themselves off. Michaels grabs and twists my beltline from behind to direct me.

"You get that one."

He points to the shower at the end. The shower that's never worked. There's a fireteam of NCO's gathered around, waiting for me to lash out so that they can jump me and send me to the brig under Article 91.

I take my position in the shower and slide into parade rest. I already emptied my thoughts to control my face and withhold that satisfaction from them.

"Get to cleaning you nasty bitch."

"Aye Sergeant."

I turn the empty valves and begin pantomiming a cleaning ritual. I feel the control slipping away from me. Fuck these guys. I have to get this corrosive hatred out of me.

"Has no one ever taught you how to shower, bitch?!"

Sergeant Vuolsi splits the gathering. The canteen cup at the end of his careful, outstretched arms tells me he's holding a contagion.

"You gotta scrub with soap, you bag-nasty!"

I can surmise what's in the cup, but I'm not going to give them the satisfaction of resistance. I stick my hand in and pull out a heaping handful of cum and begin smearing it over my shit-covered torso. Deep down, I know that I brought this on myself. I shouldn't have given into my gluttonous rage on Wednesday. My lack of control lowered me to this state amongst the shitbags and dark green Marines.

"RUB-A-DUB-DUB, I'M IN A TUB!"

I have no idea what the next line to the nursery rhyme is but I can't stop now. The relief is overwhelming.

"RUB-A-DUB-DUB, I LOVE TO SCRUB!"

I see the thwarted anger in their faces. My passive belligerence is working. I hear my voice elevate to my firing range pitch; the howl that's loud enough to be heard across fields of machine-gun fire and rocket blasts.

"RUB-A-DUB-DUB, MARINE IN A TUB!"

"SHUT THE FUCK UP BITCH!"

I can see the exasperation in Sergeant Vuolsi's face as he frustratedly dumps the remainder of the cum onto my head. I smell its acerbic essence as it impotently droops down my brow. Someone should tell these cunts to lay off the Red Bulls and drink a glass of water.

"All right, get out. Back to the line wog."

I've broken them, but I'm still not satisfied with my results. I step out the shower and feign a slip to target Lance Corporal Michaels and contaminate him with my filth. He throws me off with a repulsive shove and brings his arm back to strike. I see his hand screaming towards my face and instinctually drop my chin to break it on my forehead. His accuracy is too wild and denies my tactic's efficacy. I feel his haymaker graze my sweated, shorn head and pull him away from me. I raise my head, ready to counter the blow, but find the others have already surrounded him and are pulling him away from me. Something about my leprous condition is protecting me.

"Get back to the line, Dent."

I shuffle my way out the bathroom and wait by the line. The others form a hole for me to slip in. Upon smelling my wretched state, the other shades give me a wide berth and allow me to row by myself with a bodies-worth of space between us.

*row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG!*

The line inches forward and I see that PFC Cato has been removed for a personalized treatment from Sergeant Goldman. Sergeant Goldman was already a massive man before the deployment, but when he found out we were going on another MEU, he decided to see how big he could get, so he drove down to Tijuana and bought a year's worth of anabolic steroids. In six months, he's already made it through three cycles and packed on at least an extra forty pounds. Watching him run across the flight deck in his combat gear is something novel, impressive, like watching a digi-clad silverback trying to imitate the humans.

Sgt. Goldman has Cato in front of him, propped against the wall and standing on two MRE boxes spread hip-width-distance. Cato's arms are curled around two more MRE boxes hoisted upon his shoulders and he's moving to the cadence set by Sergeant Goldman's fists.

THWAP! "What are you Cato?" THWAP!

Cato responds each time with a squat and response.

THWAP! Cato sinks to a 90-degree bend.

THWAP! He pushes up.

THWAP! “Wog! Wog! Wog!” He screams louder and louder as he rises.

As I approach, I can see the sweat pooling below the Sergeant’s face. Each movement of the massive arms is like the winding of an iron press before it falls to the anvil. Each thrust requires more labor from him.

THWAP! “What are you Cato?”

THWAP! “Wog! Wog! Wog” THWAP!

Cato’s lower ribs appear to be bruised and indented, but that doesn’t seem to impede his progress. The spark in Cato’s eyes as he attritions the sergeant in their unspoken battle fortifies me.

THWAP! “GIVE ME YOUR SPIRIT, CATO!”

THWAP! “IT’S MINE!”

THWAP! “GIVE IT TO ME!” THWAP!

THWAP! “COME AND TAKE IT, BITCH!”

THWAP! “WOG! WOG! WOG!”

THWAP! “TAKE IT, IF YOU CAN!”

I inch forward with the line and give Cato a nod acknowledging my respect before moving on. Keep it up, Cato. They can’t break us.

*WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row*

We round another corner and the sweat-soaked path darkens to the same crimson viscosity as the leaking hydraulic fluids on our helicopters as we approach the next aisleway.

Each aisle can hold sixteen Marines. Four racks stacked on either side, two racks deep. This aisleway belongs to my platoon. Sparrowhawk platoon. The racks on one side of the aisle are occupied by our staged combat gear that waits for us to be activated and respond to global emergencies – pirates, embassy evacuations, combat reinforcements, security for humanitarian missions – at a moment’s notice. The other half of the aisle is occupied by senior Marines that believe they rate the extra freedom afforded by the gear’s quiet compliance.

I’ve thought about Michaels’ animosity towards me for a while, and the only logical conclusion is that he’s jealous I was one of the ones that replaced him in the platoon when they replaced the mostly superfluous third team leaders with autonomous machine-gun teams. I was sent to third squad, after Michaels had triumphantly claimed his rack on the aisle. Now he has to wait in the gangway and watch as we file in and don our gear for every sparrowhawk drill and mission.

Each time we’re done with our gear, I’m careful to replace my loadout in the same spot – directly opposing Michaels’ rackhead with the name-tag on my plate-carrier staring out and mocking him. I always come back to find it turned around.

I breach the opening to sparrowhawk's gear aisle and begin to ford the delta of blood flowing out from it. I look in and see Corporal Amata taking a break from his toils, with each arm resting on the flanking bunks. The knuckles on his hands are bloodied and torn. The mouth of the bloody river takes shape at his feet and meanders past four others standing in front of him with matching knuckles and blood-spattered boots, braiding and twisting into lazy streams where it encounters their boot prints. Volkov moves forward to pluck me from the line, but Amata grabs his arm to restrain him.

"No. Not him. We can't."

Amata usually likes me, or at least tolerates me, but something's different in his eyes as he peers out at me from behind the flame of his cigarette's lighter cupped behind his wrathful fists. He wants to pull me in for judgement but can't. Maybe he realizes that I'll fight back and the wogs outnumber them. Maybe it's my armor of filth.

*row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG!*

The line wanders past the aisle and into Weapons Company berthing. Sergeant Frederic stands guard as we pass into the dissonant territory. The fiery crown of his messy no-reg haircut and smoldering contempt behind his berserker eyes tell us that we don't belong as he towers over us. Despite the immediate proximity and shared purpose, the Weapons Company area has remained mostly a mystery to us over the deployment. Their NCO's have diligently enforced the border between our areas, fearful of Charlie Company's toxicity spilling over into their ranks.

They believe that they're better than us, and I've even heard them quietly condemning the excessiveness of our NCO's' disciplinary actions. It's hard for me to believe that though, based on the stories I've heard from their boots.

It's dimmer on this side of the berthing area, but Charlie Company boots can expect safe passage through. The relief is palpable as we pass over into the darkness shrouding the mortarmen's section. I heard the reason the section has no NCO's is because of the consequences of their cross-guns ritual.

Cross-guns is a vestigial adornment from their artillery origins when Artillerymen uniforms were adorned with cross-cannon icons with the regiment's numerical designation sewn into their sleeve patches. Marine mortarmen often continue that tradition by tattooing crossing 81-mm mortar tubes on their outer biceps once they're fully initiated into their section. Tattooed or not, all mortarmen must undergo the cross-cannon hazing ritual to mark their passage into the platoon. During this ritual, the section seniors will line up on either side of the aisle and the new initiates must walk through while the seniors cross-pound their forearms into the initiates' arms.

According to the stories, the seniors became overzealous in their initiation rites. Four of the twelve initiates from my generation were sent home for broken humerus bones.

Of course, Charlie Company has its own versions of this story. Whenever a Marine ranks up, anyone that outranks them is allowed to participate in the hazing rituals. Most of us boots have already ranked up from private to PFC or PFC to Lance Corporal during our post in Charlie Company and already experienced our "snake bites", a supposedly friendly nod to the blood



and sweat spilt towards ranking up. During the 24 hours following your promotion ceremony, you're supposed to wear your fresh rank insignia on your collars without the protective brass clasps underneath and senior ranks passing by gently pound on them as a way of congratulating you. Most pounds don't even pierce the skin. A few do, but the most this ritual should result in is a few uncomfortable bites that go away after a few days of healing.

That's not our battalion's way, though. Whenever we rank up, our seniors will stop us, align their shots, and hammer the teeth in until they feel them penetrate muscle. That's if they like you. PFC Aang walked around for three months with his right arm in a sling because Lance Corporal Herbert maliciously lined up his teeth on his collar bone and drove the stakes home until they cracked the calcified substrate. Aang told me that it felt like inflamed lightning shooting down his arm when the bone snapped.

Then there's the story of Corporal Shaw. The boot that was already meritoriously promoted to Lance Corporal with the perfect PFT score, expert rifle score, and completed all of his additional schooling to qualify for the next round of meritorious corporal boards, where he beat out all of his senior competitors with his extensive knowledge of Marine Corps weapons, tactics, regulations, and history; infuriating the seniors who believed that they deserved to be rewarded based on the simple fact that they had more time in.

Whenever a Marine ranks up from Lance Corporal to Corporal, from non-rate to NCO, they're given a 1½" crimson blood stripe to be sewn onto the outer hems of their dress-blues trousers in memory of the Marine blood shed at the Halls of Montezuma during the Spanish American War. In addition to the snakebites, every company NCO and staff NCO are allowed to dead leg the newly non-commissioned officer along his IT band. Due to the injustice of having their mediocrity overlooked, every Charlie Company senior was allowed to participate in Shaw's blood-stripping on ship, even if they hadn't already ranked up to Corporal, and they made sure to use Shaw as a warning for any of us non-rates that dared to challenge the status-quo.

Now Shaw is stateside, undergoing physical therapy for multiple fractures on each femur. He probably won't recover to the point of being able to deploy with us again and will probably have to be medically discharged. A promising career cut short for a Marine that never even went to combat. He probably won't even get full access to his benefits if his contract is cut short. A permanent daily reminder of the brotherhood he had bought into.

Brotherhood. Espirit De Corps. Camaraderie. What silly notions. What silly notions I had. To think that I would be accepted into this family of dragon-slaying giants that would protect me as long as I proved myself. To think that I could have a family of my own. What silly notions we all had.

*WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row*

Around the next corner I find Corporal Eireann propped up against the wall, joking with Sergeants Alexo and Nixon sitting on MRE boxes in the corner. They're growing impatient as they wait for Charlie Company to filter through, but Sergeant Nixon gives me a silent nod. We were put on the same month-long detail guarding the battalion vehicles below deck.

Towards the end of my second week of guard duty I discovered a hidden hatch tucked away behind one of our Humvees, and in my boredom, I decided to open it and investigate what was behind it. It opened into a 10' by 10' boatswain's locker used by the sailors as an access point to the tangled maze of piping adorning the walls. In the center of the room was a small table and chairs scavenged from around the ship. Sergeant Nixon was there playing five-card stud with one of the admin privates that I had only known from the smoke deck.

They were too engrossed in their game to protest my intrusion and so I quietly stood watch over the proceedings. I had walked in on the third round of betting and Sergeant Nixon had an ace and a pair of tens showing. The private had three hearts showing, a king, queen, and jack. Corporal Eireann was the dealer and portrayed himself as a curious third party as he nudged each player to show him their hidden card. Upon seeing each player's full hand, I watched as Eireann looked at the next card, a numbered heart, remove it from the top of the deck and replace it with a card from the bottom. With a nod from the corporal, Sergeant Nixon pulled out his wallet and pulled out a set of twenties to raise the ante to \$100. The corporal's card-shifting had been done openly, as plainly as turning to the next page of the duty book. Surely the private must have noticed it, but he didn't say anything and continued the hand by matching the ante.

Corporal Eireann flipped over the card, an ace, and the private let out a frustrated chuckle at his flush being thwarted by the Sergeant's full house. Maybe the private didn't want to see anything and have to accuse a sergeant of cheating. He pushed away the last of his monthly paycheck and silently exited.

I don't know why I didn't say anything about the cheating. Maybe I understood the futility of it just as much as the private did. They were eventually going to steal his money with their bullyish posturing. It's not like it would have done me any favors to point it out. Charlie Company NCOs weren't going to reward me for my integrity. They live by the same code of ethics.

Charlie Company NCOs had already demonstrated their mastery of usury after our first port of call. In Singapore, the senior Marines had started no less than twenty reported fights with locals on our first night out. After that, the Battalion Commanding Officer implemented Cinderella libo – all personnel must return to the ship by midnight. Unable to fully release their pent-up frustrations, the senior Marines would all return to the ship at midnight in a shit-faced stupor and engage in their bloody orgies that would quickly overrun the ship's medical bay with boots that had busted their faces "falling out of their racks". In response, the Battalion Commander sent down a ruling that all Marines must go out on liberty in groups of no more than five escorted by an NCO.

After that, if you ever wanted to take advantage of one of the few benefits that the recruiter hadn't lied about and go out to explore foreign cities, you'd have to take an NCO with you. And the first stop required by all NCO's would be the ATM where you would pull out a \$200 cover charge for taking you out. The rest of the payment was covered in installments as the group's non-rates would take turns covering the NCO's insatiable appetites for alcohol, food, and girls throughout the evening. At least I got the small comfort of knowing that my purchases rewarded Sergeant Ubaldi's excesses with a little extra lagniappe. The burning of his inflamed

dick would warm my soul each time I heard his muted whimpers as he tried to pass his syphilitic piss from behind the shutter doors.

*row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG!*

The Weapons Company NCO's cravingly prod us forward as we near Charlie Company territory once again. They're eager to cycle us through so that they can return to tormenting their own boots. The transition has caused the line to stagnate as the sergeants on the Charlie company side take their time indulging themselves with their returning non-rates. I take advantage of the lull to investigate the aisle of racks that lay on the opposite side of the wall from my own. Half are Charlie Company outcasts; half are Weapons Company.

From the floor, I have an unimpeded view into PFC Pietry's rack. He still has pictures of his "girlfriend" plastered all over the bottom of the overlying rack so that he can stare into her plain face as he goes to sleep. Why has he chosen to ignore the truth that she plainly spelled out for him? It's been three months since she's talked to him, and two months since he degraded himself in front of all of us.

"I'm going to do it I swear! Unlock the armory so that I can pull my rifle out!" Pietry screams out his empty threats between sobs.

When we debarked for a month-long CAX field exercise in Kuwait, First Sergeant tried to warn us and explain that there would be extortionary service fees for cell phone use since American service plans didn't cover overseas minutes, but that didn't deter very many, especially Pietry. Every night on firewatch I could hear his muffled conversations to her through his tent.

"But baaa-aaabe"

Every other sentence was him pleading with her to not be mad at him.

"But baaa-aaabe"

Every other sentence was him pleading with her to stay on the phone a little bit longer.

"But baaa-aaabe"

Every other sentence was him pleading with her to stay away from her friend, Tom.

By the time we hit the culminating tank range, he was a nervous wreck. His cell phone service had been cut off a week prior due to an unpaid service fee of \$18,000, a sum greater than his annual salary. He was so preoccupied with what Tom was doing to his girl that he would have let that tank run over him if Staff Sergeant Gomez hadn't snatched him up.

When transpo finally dropped us off at the rear, he leapt off the seven-ton and sprinted to the internet café on the other end of the base, barely noticing the 140 pounds of combat gear still tightly secured to his body.

His pack looked much heavier on him as he trudged back to the huts that night. His girlfriend had used the week of no contact as an empty excuse to break up with him and find her way to Tom. He moped with his head down all the way to the ship and during the intervening week between our next port of call in Dubai.

The first and second nights in Dubai, I don't think Pietry even left his rack. Apparently, he went out tonight, though.

"Just let me do it! Someone call the armorer! Give me my rifle!"

"ARMORER UP! Favre!"

The others began to catch on and chime in,

"Favre! Open the armory and shut this pussy up!"

Their cheers are growing impatient.

"Fucking do it, faggot!"

Weapons Company begins to join the chanting.

"ARMORER! KILL! KILL! KILL! FAVRE!"

The cheers drown into a fevered pitch when I see a dazed Cato stumble into our aisle.

"Fucking Pietry!" Cato holds in the noxious burp, "Do it myself!"

"What happened?"

"gadam' dumbass rabbled wit us...got hisself shitfaced...kept runnin' away."

Cato's eyes are glazed over and he's struggling to keep his eyelids open.

"all way to ship... just kept running away...trying to jump off that sailboat building."

Cato lets out a sickly burp of bourbon and schawarma.

"I nearly lost my buzz...Tried tellin' him...I 'as jus' tryin' get my dick wet....ya' know Dent?"

"But how? I thought he was broke?"

A mischievous grin sneaks across Cato's face.

"Maxxed out 'is Naby Federal card. Couldn't even... get'a deep-throat ta look at 'im all night....jus kept goin' aroun' stealin' drinks when no one 'as lookin'."

The berthing's roar has subsided and Marines have made their way to the top racks to get a better view of the show. Like harpies cawing for more blood, they begin launching more creative taunts from their perches.

"Hey Pietry, why'd you go and let that man break your heart like that?"

"I'd kill myself too if I had to live with the memories of that bird beak gawkin' away at me!"

"Hey Pietry, fat Torres said he'd dress up for ya'! Said he doesn't mind the micropenis. Said the big ones hurt."

"Cheer up, Pietry! There's other cows in the pasture!"

"Just let me do it! I fucking hate this ship! I swear to God, I'll do it!"

Pietry's naked wails only excite the murderous flock as hands flutter up to begin banging on the ceiling pipes and they renew their call for blood.

“KILL!” “Fucking do it faggot!”

“KILL!” “Armorer!”

“KILL!” Favre!”

“KILL!” “Rifle up!” “KILL!”

“Oh god no!” Cato grabs my arm with sobering fear in his eyes and yells across the berthing area.

“DON’T LET ‘IM DO IT! WE’RE GONNA’ HAVE TO CLEAN ‘IM UP!”

Cato’s apathetic logic elicited enough laughter to quell the riotous crowd as Pietry quietly sobbed away. Cato was right. The others were right, too. Pietry was weak. Drunk or not, he should have known better than to expose himself like that to these savages. And of all the things to break you, why would you let it be a girl?

*WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row*

My mind is released from the hypnotically plain face of Pietry’s girlfriend as the bottleneck breaks. More wogs are plucked out of the idling herd and dragged back into obscured aisles with muffled gasps. The train moves forward and I peer in to discover who’s snatching the others – the golden children.

When my generation hit the fleet, we outnumbered the seniors three-to-one. The seniors quickly realized that they couldn’t sustain their overindulgences for very long without inciting a riot from the lower ranks, and so they handpicked the strongest among us, the most malevolent, to act as proxies. They pedestaled the impressionable junior Marines and offered them the same immunity that they enjoyed in exchange for the junior Marines’ complete compliance to their code. The undeveloped Marines reveled in their elevated positions, in their unchallenged strength, and quickly took to degrading their peers’ spirits through beatings, sowing discord, and accepting the rewards that came from reporting the most discontent.

Maybe I shouldn’t have resisted the opportunity to join the golden children when it was offered to me. All of this could have been different.

Now the budding Mengele’s are honing their crafts on either side of me. To my right, Malloy, Rubicon and Barber have Simon pinned to the floor with his face blindfolded in a wet skivvy shirt and his feet inverted into the air. Barber’s face is lit up by the glowing flame of a propane camp stove that has been erected in an emptied rack. His hand is gloved in the asbestos mitten used by machine-gunners for hot-barrel-changes and is holding coins over the fire. Once the coin is a glowing red, he removes it from the flame and presses it into the bottom of Simon’s feet while Malloy dumps out the remainder of his canteen onto Simon’s face. Unaware of his feet, Simon struggles to remove his face from the immediate danger of drowning. They’re getting smarter. By blistering the bottom of the feet, they can pass off the injuries as boot blisters and deny culpability.

The workings to my left are shrouded and I can only make out the backs of Adams and Robins as they giggle away at their labors. I can’t see what they’re doing but there’s a collection of skivvy shorts at their feet.

“Ok now go and entertain the sergeants.”

Adams gleefully commands their newest masterpiece as the pair open up to release Hanson to the main berthing area where the sergeants have congregated. Hanson steps forward. His skivvy shorts have been replaced by a contraption resembling a jock strap spun out of 550-cord. There are illuminated chem-lights dangling from the hip straps, with tassels dangling where his genitals have been tethered to his taint. At least they’re putting the knot-tying skills from the selective mountain-climbers course to good use.

Adams stares me down when he sees my unamused face. They despise me because they sense that I think I’m better than them. I despise them because I know that we’re better than them.

Hanson pirouettes into the common living area with his hands pointed to the sky. The chem-lights twirl about him like a hula-girl’s skirt.

“I’m a beautiful butterfly! I’m a beautiful butterfly!”

The sergeants cheer and whistle at the latest installment of exotic dancer as I row into the sepulcher.

*row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG! row WOG!*

I can feel the adrenaline flush my face as the space recalls Wednesday’s events to my mind and prepares my body for another encounter. Their ambush won’t catch me unprepared today. This time, I’m on the ground, so Lance Corporal Justin can’t crawl in behind me and wait for Lance Corporal Martin to walk in front and send me tumbling over.

I can’t help but to blame myself, blame my arrogance. To think that I could let my guard down for an instant. To think that I could walk amongst them, protected by my maiming rage.

“MICHAELS! OIL CHECK!”

Martin’s call was muffled as I furiously worked my head back and forth, catching my ears in his hold. Oil checks. That’s their name for the anal violations. The seniors are obsessed with tagging each of us to mark their status over us. The closest any of them ever came to claiming mine is an errant finger pressing over my asshole during our grappling matches, but my reactive anger would always buck them off and free me. That is, until they caught me unaware on Wednesday; before I had even hit the deck, Justin had my right arm wrapped up in an arm-bar and Martin was on top of my back with my left arm in a head & arm choke.

I could feel my shoulder sockets straining past their flexion point as I worked to free myself like a roped rodeo calf helplessly struggling against their entanglement. Michaels made quick work of my skivvy shorts and wasted no time in claiming his prize. I could feel the bony knobs of each of his knuckles as he worked his fingers in down to the base.

“I got it!”

At his declaration, Justin and Martin let out an exhausted exhale and loosened their grips enough for me to buck them off. When I spun around, I found Michaels triumphantly hoisting his shit-covered index and middle fingers high in the sky.

After that scene, my memory is only fragmented snapshots. I remember everything slowed down. I remember seeing the joy in his face transform into terror. There was a loud thud when his head slammed into the ground. I remember the kaleidoscope of reds from the blood trailing my infuriated fists.

Today's scene isn't much different from Wednesday. Controlled chaos. Non-rate wogs scurrying about trying to avoid catching the malignant attentions of their sergeant wardens. Corporals and senior lances, roving about and swooping in to snatch up the ones that slipped past the sergeants' watchful eyes. Michaels is in the corner, scavenging for his superiors' attention. He's spotted me and gestures wildly towards me, hopeful that my exhibit will endow him with the attention he craves.

"Hey Sergeant Biello, look at Dent!"

The other wogs push into each other, trying to distance themselves further from my marked state.

"Look at that shitty wog! He loves it! You should have seen him in the showers slurping up our cum!"

Michaels tugs on Sergeant Biello's arm like a toddler showing off his finger painting to a parent. Sergeant Biello responds with the same feigned enthusiasm of the exhausted parent forced to endure their child's thousandth presentation.

"Yeah, he fucking loved it. You should have heard him squeal when I oil-checked him."

"*You* pegged Dent?" Sergeant Biello's attention is piqued.

"Yeah, and he loved it!" Michaels' voice is carrying so that the others can hear him now. "Hey Dent, you want me to come over there and finger that tight little asshole again? You know you loved it, you fucking faggot."

I want to ignore his juvenile taunts and keep my head forward. Only two months left on deployment. I know this but I can't let it go without a rebuttal, so I mutter under my breath as I push forward. *Fucking try it*. Only the other wogs can hear what I said over the mayhem, but their contemptuous giggles alert the seniors to my lack of discipline.

"Something you want to say Dent?"

I can hear the posturing in Michaels' deepened baritone and can't let it go. I feel the magmatic chamber of pulsating rage deep within, pushing to relieve the pressure at the surface once again. Its allure is inevitable as I remember why I broke on Wednesday. I can take the shit, the cum, the degradation. It's all so routine for me now. What I can't take is the thought that someone so insecure, so much weaker, so much less than, deriving their value from me.

I swivel around on my ass and face him from the ground.

"Yeah, Why don't you come over here so that I can skull-fuck that pretty little face of yours again?"

I speak clearly and loudly enough for the congregation to hear and the ocean of wails pacifies to listen for his response. Reds flush into Michaels' masticated face, distorting it to deep maroons.

The other seniors are staring at him to see how he'll meet the challenge. He knows this can't go uncontested, but I can see the doubt arising from having to face me one-on-one. A moment of hesitation before he breaks into a gallop towards me.

I'm committed now. Violence of action. My only course of action.

He plants his front leg and winds his back in a pendulous arch like he's taking a penalty kick.

I open my arm as he launches his leg forward and my lungs let out a reflexive exhale to cushion the blow. I wrap my arm around his overextended limb and roll away. Something sinewy in his leg snaps as his face slams into the lockers behind us.

In a flashing glance I spot Martin and Justin push their way forward to help, but they restrain themselves at the room's shifting energy.

*KILL! WOG! ROW! KILL!*

They must inherently understand that they're next in the pecking order.

I can't lose the momentum. Violence of action. I entwine my legs around my injured prey and Michaels lets out a yelp. I can feel the muscles in his compromised leg convulsing and hardening as I straighten it out. I can feel the blood rushing to my groins as I wrap my arms around his torso and search for his olive-green MCMAP belt. I wonder if my body will be able to overcome my base nature to satisfy my rage.

Marine MCMAP belts are built for utility; Practical for martial maneuvers, impractical for undressing. They require two hands to push the ends together to release the friction while the left simultaneously slides the slack out. Michaels knows what I want and is struggling to rip my hands away while he wriggles to keep his belly on the ground.

*KILL! WOG! KILL! WOG! KILL!*

It's funny. I always thought my first time as an adult would be with a woman. Maybe I should've partaken at the Orchard Towers, Singapore's Four Floors of Whores. Maybe then I would have known a reasonable standard to compare to. I could never shake the feeling that those girls weren't wholly committed to their profession, though. Something about having to coerce my desires onto someone else never fully sat right with me.

I'll just have to pretend with Michaels' slender runner's body now. The high-pitched breaks in his resisting "NO's!" add to allusion, but not in the way that I need.

The energies in the room keep building, erecting my hardened cock. I can feel the room's anticipation pushing me forward. Am I an exhibitionist? Maybe hate-fucking is my kink. Can these really be enough for me to forego my base instincts? Can't afford to explore the intricacies of human sexuality now. Gotta concentrate. Violence of action.

*KILL! FUCK! KILL! FUCK! KILL!*

Michaels's belt has succumbed to my frantic coercions and I hook my hands in at the hips' sides. In two forceful jerks I have his trousers and skivvies down to his thighs.

*KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL!*



I've wrapped a hand back around his front and begin vigorously tossing his flaccid salad. He's going to share in the shame of enjoying this. He's going to enjoy his degradation down to our level. Only my skivvies remain between my enraged cock and his quivering asshole.

*KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL!*

"ZEEEEER-RO!"

The room stands still. A few of the unaware wogs down the gangway reflexively let out their conditioned responses from boot camp.

"Freeze, recruit, freeze!"

Battalion Sergeant Major Santana is standing over us. Behind him, there's three of the ship's senior Chiefs still costumed as Neptune's helpers with Charlie Company's enlisted staff behind them. One of the Chiefs turns to his sailor companions and mutters,

"I told you these Marines were fucking psychos."

The other two let out uneasy chuckles. I guess laughter is the only appropriate response to the absurdity of it all. I can feel my waning cock still pushing forward and leaving its impression in my shit-stained skivvies as I nakedly stand at parade rest. Michaels is still writhing on the ground and struggling to make it up to parade rest. Hanson and the others are trying to hide their scantily-clad cocks in their hands. The scene is kind of humorous, once you remove yourself from it.

Staff Sergeant Midway steps forward to claim the initiative.

"Sergeant Major, this is one of our shitbags, Me and Gunney already had to disci..."

"SHUT THE FUCK UP STAFF SERGEANT!"

Sergeant Major Santana launches a whetted knifehand into Staff Sergeant Midway's face.

"Look at this motherfucker!"

Sergeant Major jerks Midway forward like a drill instructor handling an undisciplined recruit.

"Tell me that's not human shit all over his body!"

Sergeant Major leans forward for a closer inspection.

"JESUS TITTY-FUCKING CHRIST! IS THAT CUM?!"

Sergeant Major is staring at me as though the question were directed at me, but I know he doesn't want an answer from me.

"It looks like sweat Sergeant Major."

Staff Sergeant Midway's military bearing holds under the weight of the overt lie.

"If that's sweat, then I want to see you wipe some off and eat it."

Staff Sergeant Midway maintains his silence and continues playing his part.

"That's what I fucking thought. If I sent him up to medical right now and had them use a rape kit on him, how many NCOs would I have to NJP?"

They have rape kits! That's what was protecting me! I could have razed this entire berthing to the ground! I can feel the simmering anger from my missed opportunity.

"What are you smirking at Sergeant Frederic?!"

The red-headed sergeant snaps to parade rest at his call out.

"You think Weapons Company is immune to this? You were in here the whole time. Do any of you NCO's think that you're safe right now? I'm done explaining the broken bones to the battalion commander. I'm done sending Marines home for no reason. I'm done with all of this butt-fuckery! You think I won't bust every last NCO in here down to private?"

Sergeant Major Santana's gaze refocuses on me.

"What's your name, Marine?"

"Lance Corporal Dent, Sergeant Major."

"Up til now, y'all have been lucky. Lucky that non-rates like Dent here haven't called you out and sent you to the brig. Now all of your fates rest on Dent, but even now, I'll bet Lance Corporal Dent's not going to rat on any of you, are you Dent?"

Sergeant Major's question signals the answer he expects from me. He just needs to make it out of this billet and salvage what's left of his career. Nobody wants to be the Sergeant Major that was in charge of a battalion of privates. Nobody can recover from that. I hold his career in my hands. But my own fate is enmeshed with that career. If I speak, we're both done. I'll be tried for attempted rape. Tried without a lawyer. Tried without a presumption of innocence. They'd probably even have me spend the rest of the deployment in general population before sending me to the brig when we got back. If I made it back.

Even in his eyes I can see it. They're reminding me of that first precious lesson we learned when we hit the fleet, even before we learned violence of action. The easiest way out of the Marine Corps is to just complete your contract. Just do your four and get out. The fastest way out is through.

"No Sergeant Major. It's sweat. Just enjoying a little PT before the ceremony."

Sergeant Major puts on an irritated display but I can still make out the relief in his voice,

"No integrity in this fucking battalion. All you motherfuckers are lucky. Y'all expect me to believe that this is the first instance of hazing? Well, this shit stops today. Charlie Company, Weapons Company, all NCO's and staff NCO's report to the flight deck in full battle rattle for PT. Non-rates, if you're covered in a bodily fluid that isn't yours, hit the showers and then report as platoons to the flight deck for your shellback ceremonies."

I can't quite place the emotion in Sergeant Major Santana's face as he returns to me. Exasperation? Bewilderment? Disgust at the would-be rapist?

"Hit the showers and clean yourself up devil pup."

*Devil Dogs.* That's what they call us. *Teufel Hunden. The Hounds from Hell.*