

Out and Far Tonight

Jane Carnall

for Shoshanna, with love and respect

Of all the things BJ hadn't expected about the 4077th, the still in the Swamp was still the least expected. Pierce and O'Reilly managed it with offhand ease, and the liquor that resulted was... potable, at least.

O'Reilly's share in the still consisted of finding the raw materials and assisting in the regular production of the mash: he drank grape Nehis by preference. Pierce drank in Rosie's Bar or the "officer's club" for pleasure: but when Pierce simply, violently, did not want to be sober, he'd be found sprawled on his bed, drinking "Swamp martinis" as if each one represented a planned and longed-for achievement. He was not an angry or a sloppy drunk, and he could operate with astonishing skill exhausted or hungover. He just had two modes of drinking: either considerably or voraciously. BJ's alcohol consumption was going up to a level that he didn't, himself, quite like to think about: but he was always at least three drinks behind Pierce.

The hospital was almost empty: all but two patients had been trucked out this morning, and the last two were waiting a deluxe ride where there was room for them to travel flat on their backs with an IV beside them. They'd live, though they might not walk again. Three corpses, representing the 4077th's current failure rate, were boxed and awaiting passage out. None of them had been on BJ's table, which was something to be grateful for.

Burns was off somewhere with the head nurse. BJ was trying to keep an open mind about the head nurse: Pierce had a rough mouth and a brutal sense of humour, but it was generally directed at people who deserved it. Still, aside from her... association with Burns, for whom BJ could find no excuses whatsoever, BJ couldn't see that Pierce had any good reason to dislike her.

One sniff inside the Swamp and you knew why it had acquired that name. So far BJ was still philosophically assuring his nose that it would get used to it, while his nose was protesting that it never ever would.

"It gets better," Pierce said, from his bed.

BJ glanced over. Burns had one half of the tent to himself: Pierce and the previous surgeon had split the other half between them. All of McIntyre's belongings had been cleared out, of course. BJ supposed he should, at some point, move his bed or his belongings, lay claim to a full third of the tent: so far he had not wanted to spend the necessary time inside the Swamp when wide awake.

"What gets better?"

"The smell." Pierce took a long, thoughtful swallow of clear liquid from a martini glass. "Of course, this helps."

"I wondered why you drank it," BJ said, pointlessly amused.

"Glass over there. Have some nosepaint. Finest vintage. From yesterday."

BJ thought about it. It was early evening: in an hour or so the mess tent would start serving something that passed for dinner. At home, he'd be coming home about now. Peg would have made dinner, or they'd go out. Take in a movie. Stay home and settle down like bookends on the sofa they'd inherited from Peg's parents, that fitted them both as neatly as if it were a shared sleeping bag. They'd read or listen to the radio.

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Talk about what had happened that day. A long evening was a pleasure, time stretching out before them.

He could go over to the mess tent early and get a cup of coffee. He could read whatever newspapers had been delivered to the camp in the past couple of days that he hadn't read already. He could catch up on medical journals. He could go for a walk, though the 4077th had been here long enough that the surroundings were a mess, and further away was too dangerous. He could write a letter to Peg, though his last letter had been sealed and deposited with the mail and wouldn't even be picked up till tomorrow morning.

"Thanks," BJ said after a moment. He picked up the glass and bottle, and lifted the bottle to the light, pretending to examine it, though he had no idea what he would be looking for. "Ah yes: three pm yesterday. An excellent vintage."

"No, this is from ten am," Pierce said cheerfully. "It's been at least thirty hours in the bottle by now."

"More than enough," BJ agreed, still wondering at himself. He poured a cautious ounce or so in the glass. Pierce reached up and tilted the bottle to provide a more generous measure.

"You don't appreciate it until you've drunk enough to numb the tastebuds," he said.

The spirit was all but raw: it felt almost oily in his mouth, and then burned. BJ swallowed hastily, finding the burn went all the way down his throat. He sat down on his bed and remembered to breathe.

"Good stuff," Pierce said.

"You could say that," BJ said, and coughed. "Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

Pierce rolled up on his elbow and stared at BJ through narrowed eyes. "You mind if I give you a personal answer?"

"How come you call the head nurse 'Hotlips'?"

"Well, that wasn't the personal question I was expecting you to ask," Pierce said, and lay down again. "Ancient history."

"How long have you been here?"

"About seven hundred years." Pierce squinted. "So has she."

"Neither of you look it."

"She's a good nurse," Pierce acknowledged. "In fact, she's a terrific nurse. She's a tight-assed, metal-mouthed, military-minded..." He took another drink.

"What?"

"Don't interrupt me in my search for the perfect noun."

"Is that what you're doing?" BJ lay down. Everything looked a little hazier.

"Trying to forget statistics."

"What?"

"We have a ninety-seven point eight percent survival rate here," Pierce said. "Like Hotlips says. Which is pretty good, right? Military people like statistics." He eyed the bottle. "I calculate that I should be able to get twenty-four point five percent more drunk before supper."

"All three of them were on your table," BJ said. He hadn't put it together before. He rolled over on to his side. Pierce reached out the bottle. BJ shook his head. "Look, there is no way you should blame yourself –"

"Who else is there to blame?"

"Well, the people who shot at them would be a start."

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Pierce shrugged. He waved the bottle again at BJ. “We’re in hell. They’re all shooting at each other. When I operate on them and they live, it feels like there’s some point to me being here. When they die under my hands, it’s just hell.” He paused. “Of course, when I operate on them and they live and they go back into combat and they get shot again and they come back here again and I operate on them again, I feel like they could just replace me with a revolving door.”

“Providing it could operate.”

“There’s always a snag.” Pierce poured himself another Swamp martini. “Come on. I hate to drink alone.”

BJ watched himself holding out the glass. Pierce poured him another measure.

“Am I really going to drink that?” BJ wondered out loud.

“Trust me,” Pierce said, “it’ll make this place look a lot better.” He drank. “Or make you go blind.”

BJ took a drink. It still tasted like a kick in the mouth. He wiped his lips. “Why did you and O’Reilly set this up?”

“Trap and I had the idea,” Pierce said. He twisted his mouth into a teeth-showing grin. “Hey, it seemed like a good idea at the time. Radar helped us get the bits and pieces. It still seems like a good idea now.”

“Captain McIntyre?”

“Trapper John. Yeah.”

“How long was he here?”

“Over a year. Almost as long as me and Hotlips.”

“And Burns?”

“Same time as Hotlips.”

BJ swallowed another load. He was finding it impossible to decide whether or not he disliked the stuff. This was probably a bad sign. “Frank Burns and....” He trailed off, trying to decide if he should say Houlihan, Margaret, or Hotlips.

“Yeah. They are,” Pierce said, apparently understanding.

“An item.”

“Of some kind. Yeah.”

“He’s married.”

“Yeah.” Pierce didn’t appear to be shocked. “He is.” He took another drink.

“There’s a lot of that about.”

“What?”

“Marriage.”

“I’m married,” BJ said.

“I won’t hold it against you. Some of my best friends are married.”

“I heard someone saying you were married,” BJ said, though he hadn’t meant to. It hadn’t sounded like the kind of joke you repeat to the person it’s being made about.

“Really? Did they say who to?”

BJ stared at the remaining alcohol in his glass. “No one in particular,” he said, deciding that he didn’t have the courage of his convictions.

More alcohol splashed into the glass. BJ looked up. Pierce was grinning like a maniac. “It was Trapper, wasn’t it? Was I supposed to be the wife or the husband?”

“What?” BJ half-laughed. He took a quick swallow. “I didn’t – ”

“Who was the bridesmaid, Klinger or Radar?”

“What?”

“From the first time we took a four-day leave in Seoul together,” Pierce said. “It started with a crack about honeymoons and went on from there.”

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It didn't sound like the kind of joke that two soldiers should have tolerated. It didn't sound like the kind of joke that anyone should have tolerated. BJ finished the liquid in his glass. Pierce was right – he couldn't tell what the Swamp smelled like any more. "And you put up with it...?"

"Hell, we encouraged it." Pierce was laughing. "You wouldn't believe how much Ferret-face hated it. On the one hand, he'd have loved to get something that would have got both of us kicked out of the 4077th. Especially me. On other hand, if he believed it, it would have meant he was sharing a tent with a pair of queers. He couldn't stand to think about it. But he kept hoping it was true."

"Didn't you ever worry about getting court-martialled for real?"

"Even the army requires a little thing like evidence," Pierce said reasonably. "More?"

BJ blinked. Pierce was holding out the bottle.

"I think I'm already twenty-four point five percent drunk," BJ said.

"So am I. But I'm an over-achiever," Pierce said, and poured another glass.

Mail call at the 4077th was an occasion that no one that missed. Father Mulcahy, however, was not subject to this rule: he'd borrowed a jeep and Captain Pierce and gone to the orphanage. When O'Reilly came by the Swamp, BJ accepted both sets of letters: he put Pierce's down on his cot, and took his own off to the mess tent to read with a coffee.

Pierce and Mulcahy weren't back till early evening: BJ was back on his own cot, tracing Erin's brightly coloured scrawls across the page. "Mail on your bed," he said, without looking up. "You got a letter from McIntyre."

"Trap?" Pierce sounded mildly surprised. He sat down on the cot and picked up his letters. "Dad. Nudist's Weekly. Mmmm, perfume." He sniffed it. "Natalie. I knew it. She misses me!"

"You had four letters," BJ said. "One of them had McIntyre's name on the back. I noticed it because Peggy's best friend's name is June Macintyre and I thought it was for me at first."

"It isn't here."

BJ looked up. "Oh. Actually, I think I opened it before I realised it wasn't for me. I was afraid she was writing to me because of something to do with Peggy. Don't worry, I didn't read past 'Dear Hawkeye'. At least, not once I was sure June wasn't writing to you."

Pierce had grabbed up BJ's bundle of letters, and was sorting through it. "Not here either."

"Well, I took my letters through to the mess tent," BJ said. "I might have left it there. Don't worry, someone's sure to give it back to you."

Pierce was gone before BJ finished the sentence. BJ looked after him with a small, private smile, and picked up his bundle of letters again.

It was over half an hour before Pierce came back. "It isn't there," he said. "They were setting up the tables for supper and it isn't there."

"What?" BJ looked up from his letters.

"The letter. From Trap. McIntyre. Igor said he saw you sitting at the table by the stove and you had a stack of mail with you, but he swears you didn't leave anything behind you."

"Oh." BJ shrugged thoughtfully. "Well, if he says so. I got called over to post-op for a while – I know I had my mail with me then. I was sure I picked it all up again, but I might have missed one."

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“Where did you put it down?”

BJ shrugged again. “Probably where we hang the coats. I don’t remember. That patient with the chest wound and the Type O Positive blood – ”

“Russell,” Pierce said. “Is he okay?”

“He gave us five minutes worry this afternoon,” BJ said. “But he’ll be fine.”

“Good,” Pierce said. “You put your mail down by the entrance?”

“Somewhere around there.”

Pierce left again. He was gone nearly an hour this time: with Burns on duty he would have trouble getting out of post-op. When he came back, BJ was picking himself up to head over to the mess tent for something approaching food.

“It isn’t there,” Pierce said.

“What?” BJ looked puzzled. “Look, it has to be. I didn’t go anywhere else. Mail delivered here, I went to the mess tent, I went to post-op, I came back here. If someone’s picked it up, they’ll give it back to you, surely?”

“I searched everywhere.” Pierce had his hands thrust deep in his pockets. He hadn’t moved from the tent entrance. “It isn’t in the mess tent and it isn’t in post-op, so it has to be here.”

“Well, I did step into Colonel Potter’s office,” BJ said.

“Did you have your letters with you then?”

“I think so, but I don’t think I put them down.”

“Okay. Russell’s looking healthy,” Pierce added. “Good pulse.”

“And very handsome blood pressure, considering.”

“You’re O Positive, aren’t you?”

“I plead guilty.”

“We may need a pint of you later.”

“I gave at the office.”

“Is that where you left the letter?”

“What?” BJ shrugged. “Look, it’ll be somewhere about. If you let me get through to the mess tent, I’ll try and remember where else I went.”

“Where *else*?” Pierce stepped aside. “I thought you said you just went there, there, and here.” He jerked in three directions with his thumb. He was grinning, showing all his teeth.

“Well,” BJ said thoughtfully, “I stepped into the Colonel’s office...” he was walking casually towards the mess tent, and Pierce was perforce walking with him. “I had a word with the Colonel, and showed off Erin’s handwriting. Then I came back here...” He trailed off his voice. “Wait a minute. I went for a beer at Rosie’s.”

“Rosie’s!” Pierce veered off as suddenly as if the wind had changed. BJ grinned to himself.

The food was no better than usual, but BJ enjoyed it more. He was heading back towards the Swamp when Pierce appeared beside him. “It isn’t there,” he said abruptly.

“Well,” BJ shrugged widely. “I don’t know. Maybe I dropped it in the compound.”

“No, no,” Pierce said. “I’ve seen the way you hang on to your mail.”

“Well, maybe it’s in the Swamp,” BJ offered.

“Where?”

BJ shrugged even more widely. “How would I know? I thought I left it on your bed.”

They had reached the Swamp. BJ cast himself down on his bed. Pierce’s quarter of the tent was a mess: but he set about searching it like a wolf. After he had turned over,

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lifted, and shaken, every object that could possibly have concealed a letter, he turned and looked at BJ's quarter of the tent.

"No, wait, you're not doing that to my stuff –" BJ protested. He was trying to keep a tight rein on his grin. "Look, I remember now, I decided I needed to see what the view was like from up the flagpole –" He was choking back a laugh with difficulty. "Maybe I left it up there –"

Pierce took a step towards BJ. He was showing all his teeth in a wide grin. "There never was a letter," he said quietly.

BJ dropped his head back and laughed out loud. It was the perfect moment. "Gotcha!"

Silence.

BJ lifted his head. Pierce was standing with his hands in his pockets and his head thrust forward: he was still grinning, but it didn't look like humour any more. It was so near to Pierce's habitual wide-mouthed smile that it was a long moment before BJ recognised it for what it was.

"There never was a letter." Pierce's voice was hardly recognisable: rough and grating.

Looking up at him, BJ was genuinely afraid, for a long moment, that Pierce was going to hit him. But Pierce never took his hands out of his pockets. He swung round and went out. BJ sat up and stared after him.

There had been so much anger in Pierce's voice, so much pain in that grimace. A simple joke couldn't have caused that.

A simple joke had. Or something. BJ got to his feet and went after him.

Pierce was halfway across the compound. Father Mulcahy was moving to intercept. BJ stopped. Mulcahy could probably deal with it better than he could.

You broke it, you fix it.

BJ swallowed. Pierce and Mulcahy were standing close together. Mulcahy was saying something. Pierce was shaking his head. He glanced round and saw BJ: something happened to his face. "Look, Father, I'm fine. I'm just going for a walk."

"Hawkeye," BJ said rapidly, "I'm sorry."

Mulcahy gave BJ an odd look. He didn't say anything to BJ, but to Pierce he said "If you need to talk –"

Pierce's gaze flicked from BJ to Mulcahy. There was an oddly trapped look in his eyes. "I'm fine."

"Why don't I go for a walk with you?" BJ offered.

"That sounds like a good idea," Mulcahy said, to Pierce, and faded.

"I didn't know there was anywhere to go for a walk around here," BJ said.

"There's the minefield," Pierce said.

BJ grinned. "You're on your own if you want to go for a stroll there."

Pierce nodded, as if accepting a brush-off, and turned away. BJ grabbed at his arm. "No, wait. Hawkeye, I don't get it, but I'm sorry."

Pierce turned back. He was still nodding. "Okay, you're sorry, fine. It was just a joke, right?" He grinned, widely, and it still looked like a grimace. "Look, I just want to go for a walk."

"It's getting dark," BJ said. He glanced round. "Hell, it *is* dark." Night came swiftly in Korea: dusk was as quickly over with as dawn. "Come back to the Swamp and we'll – have a drink."

"I don't want a drink," Pierce said. But he was following BJ back to the Swamp. BJ nearly cracked "That's a first," but was afraid that the sentence, untruncated, would be "I don't want a drink with you."

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Pierce retrieved a bottle of the still's end-product from the bashed-together cupboard where he kept the stuff. BJ picked up two glasses, and held them out to Pierce as if he expected the other man to fill them. He wasn't sure that he did, but after a moment Pierce unscrewed the cap and sloshed a couple of ounces into one glass, then the other. He took the second glass from BJ's hand, looked at it, and drank.

BJ drank from his own glass. He was surprised but not relieved when Pierce laughed, and, laughing, poured them each another drink, then sat down on his cot. "You really got me going. Chasing all over the camp for a letter that didn't even exist. I've got to hand it to you." He lifted his glass as if in a toast. "Underneath that apple pie and hot dog look beats the heart of a practical joker." He looked up at BJ and laughed again. "It was – good going. Trapper would have been proud of you."

It was fairly convincing. Or would have been if Pierce had managed it ten minutes earlier.

"I'm sorry," BJ said again, sitting down on the cot opposite Pierce.

The door of the tent swung open and Burns walked in. Pierce looked up. "Good morning, Frank," he said blithely.

"That's easy for you to say," Burns snarled, sitting down. "I've been slaving away in post-op and you've been sitting here doing nothing all day."

"Frank, the only patient in post-op right now who needs the attention of a doctor is Russell, and, lucky for him, he got one, even though *you* were on duty."

"I'm tired of your insinuations," Burns snapped. He could put a kind of pompous self-pity into his snap that BJ had found irritating almost on first hearing.

"BJ, did I ever tell you about the time Trapper and I put minced meat into Frank's ears when he was asleep?" Pierce was grinning.

"No, I don't believe you did." BJ glanced at Burns.

"There was a dog in camp at the time. Belonged to one of the transport sergeants."

"I'm beginning to see the end of this story."

"The best bit was what Ferret-face was muttering when the dog was licking his ear."

"In his sleep?"

"Well, waking up. Haven't you ever been woken up by a wet tongue in your ear?"

BJ shook his head. "I never kiss and tell."

"I don't want to tell tales out of school, but we never knew Frank and General McArthur were on such good terms." Pierce's voice was a miracle of understated humour: BJ eyed him. The tone was perfect.

"Should have been court-martialled for that, assaulting an officer!"

"They couldn't have court-martialled the dog for licking your ear, Frank." Pierce was laughing.

"You weisenheimer," Burns snarled. "I haven't forgotten the time you put fresh cheese in my slippers."

"Fresh cheese?" BJ raised his eyebrows. "Where did you get fresh cheese around here?"

"Brought some back from Seoul," Pierce said, sotto voice.

"I haven't seen fresh cheese in weeks," BJ said.

"Next time we go to Seoul we'll pick some up. There's a great little cheese shop off the street one down from the flower market."

BJ nodded. Burns was glowering across the tent at Pierce, and Pierce was grinning insouciantly back. It was a perfectly familiar picture: but it didn't fit with what BJ had heard in Pierce's voice not even half an hour ago.

"You glued my head to the pillow!"

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“It wasn’t as if you were *using* it.”

Burns spluttered. “Why, you – ”

Pierce stood up, grinning. “I think I’ll head on over to the mess tent and see if there’s any food left.”

“I didn’t know there was any food there in the first place,” BJ said.

“Sometimes I close my eyes and pretend what I’m eating is edible. Sometimes I have to hold my nose, too.” He was retreating out the door. “And my tongue.”

“As if you’d ever held your tongue in your life,” Burns spat after him, and then looked absurdly pleased with himself.

Burns was not BJ’s idea of good company. He got up and went out.

Pierce wasn’t in the mess tent. Nor in the officer’s club. Nor in Rosie’s, when BJ went across the road to look.

Nor in post-op. Colonel Potter was on duty, and catching up with his paperwork. Russell was quiet: his blood-pressure was up and his pulse was normal.

There was no one at all in the Colonel’s office. O’Reilly glanced up as BJ went by, twice, but said nothing. BJ went out into the night, and stood still, looking around the compound. The light from the tents made the surrounding countryside look darker.

“Brilliant, BJ,” he muttered to himself. “Absolutely brilliant. I think I’d feel better if I knew exactly what I should be apologising for when I find him.” He paused. “I think I’d feel better if I could find him.” He glanced round again. “Or maybe if I could just quit talking to myself.”

O’Reilly coughed behind him. “Sir?”

“What?” BJ turned. “Radar?” He was trying to get used to being an officer. “Can I do anything for you, soldier?”

“Hawkeye’s up where the choppers land. That’s where he always goes when he wants to be alone.”

“How did you know I was looking for him?”

O’Reilly twitched. “Just did. But please don’t tell him I told you.”

“Okay.” BJ nodded.

The chopper field was beaten red earth. There was a scrub of bushes and grass around it. The road to it was rutted dirt, packed hard by jeep wheels. Apart from the possibility of being interrupted by casualty loads, it was probably about as private a place as you’d get inside the camp perimeter.

BJ usually took the road at a run. At a walking pace, in the dark, it still wasn’t much of a road.

Assuming that Pierce wouldn’t sit down in the middle of the field, BJ walked round it. It wasn’t very big. He didn’t see anyone.

Of course, there was the possibility that O’Reilly had been playing his own practical joke on BJ. If he went back up and asked O’Reilly, he’d probably get directed back to somewhere else. “Or maybe I should just go back and get some sleep,” he added out loud. “Worry about apologising tomorrow.”

A bush about five feet off stirred. Pierce stood up from it. “Oh, for crying out loud,” he said. His teeth showed as a brief flash of white. “You already said you were sorry once, BJ. You don’t need to keep following me round the camp saying it again every time you see me.” He came a bit closer. “What *are* you doing here?”

“Radar told me where to go.”

“The little fink.”

“He told me not to tell you he had.”

“You big fink.”

“I’m sorry.”

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“Yeah, you already said. It was just a joke, BJ. It was a pretty funny joke. Got me going. I’ll get you back sometime.” Pierce’s voice was light and cheerful. His face was invisible.

“I think the only thing you could do that would hurt me as much as I hurt you is fake a letter from Peg telling me she’s divorcing me,” BJ said. “What I can’t figure out is...” And then he stopped. Light came on. “Those jokes about you and Captain McIntyre...” He stopped again. This wasn’t something he’d ever imagined thinking about anyone he liked.

“For the love of God,” Pierce said abruptly, “just leave it alone. Do you hear me? Just *leave it alone*.” He turned away and went down the road towards camp.

BJ followed him. Pierce was heading towards the Swamp. He was walking with his head down, hands stuck in his pockets, looking very tired.

BJ enjoyed practical jokes. He’d heard enough stories from the other staff that made it clear Pierce enjoyed them too: tying Frank Burns’ big toe to his bed and then yelling “Fire!” was one that he was still trying to think of a method of repeating without duplication. Sometimes a joke backfired, got more serious than ever intended, and BJ had found that the only thing to do under those circumstances was to acknowledge, apologise, and make amends. Any delay made matters worse.

When his victim wouldn’t let him apologise for it and didn’t want him to acknowledge it, it was tough to figure out what he could do to make amends for it.

And he really didn’t want to know what he was afraid he did know about Pierce. They had to shower together, scrub together, hell, they were sharing a *tent*, cots within arm’s reach of each other...

He was sleeping in McIntyre’s cot. Positioned where Pierce could reach out and touch it, or rather, the sleeper in it.

Well, he’d been thinking about moving the cot. Rearranging the Swamp. Laying claim to a full third of it. Maybe not tonight.

Dear Peg, I just found out that the man I like best in the camp has deviant tendencies...

BJ stopped. “And you’ll tell me that if I liked him before, I can still like him now,” he muttered, to Peggy several thousand miles away. “I do like him, Peg. But what if he – ”

Well, he hasn’t. And just because he formed a relationship with a man he was sharing a tent with for a year in the middle of a war, it doesn’t mean he’s really deviant.

Pierce stopped by the door of the Swamp and held it open, glancing over his shoulder at BJ. “Come on in. Frank’s gone over to visit with Hotlips for the rest of the night.”

“How do you know?”

“His bed’s empty. And Hotlips got a new package of nail varnish today.”

“Nail varnish?”

“Hotlips likes to have Frank do her nails.”

“I wish I didn’t know that,” BJ said.

Pierce sat down on his cot. “From the look on your face, that’s not the only thing you wish you didn’t know.”

BJ shrugged. He remained standing.

“Why don’t you get your questions over with?” Pierce asked.

“I don’t know that I want to,” BJ said.

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"I'd just as soon you didn't spin it out." Pierce grinned at him. "What's your first one – am I really a homosexual, or am I just faking it to get more dates on Saturday night?"

"Well, something along those lines," BJ admitted. "You don't... you don't act like a homosexual."

"Listen," Pierce said abruptly, and then stopped. He shrugged. "There was a report came out three years ago, about how people have sex."

"Do you really need a report on that?"

"I read it cover to cover."

"Somehow that doesn't surprise me."

"The doctor who did the research reports that thirty-seven percent of men have orgasms with other men at some time in their lives."

"That seems pretty high."

"Judging by my experience, it's pretty low. But then he wasn't doing his survey in a war zone." Pierce grinned widely and abruptly. "You know what they say about men going into combat."

"I do," BJ acknowledged, "but don't they usually assume that men want women?"

"Mere prejudice." Pierce got up to retrieve the bottle from the makeshift cupboard. "And at least fifty percent wrong." He picked up the glasses they had abandoned an hour ago, and filled them both. "Which one was yours?"

"Does it matter? They've been disinfected."

Pierce smiled. "Thoroughly." He handed him one and sat down on the bed.

BJ sat down on the bed opposite. "So you're not a homosexual...?"

"I love women," Pierce said. "I love men. I'm just naturally loveable." He drank.

BJ matched him. "So you found out here you...?"

Pierce shrugged. He took another quick drink, and BJ lifted the glass to his mouth again. The Swamp gin was beginning to taste good to him.

"No," Pierce said. "I found out *that* the first time I got a successful blow-job."

"A *successful* blow-job?" BJ was distracted.

"Crabapple Cove kids start young and try harder," Pierce said. He sounded drunk: BJ wondered how much he'd had. On an empty stomach? "But no amount of trying teaches you to keep your teeth inside your lips."

Involuntarily, BJ winced. "Ouch."

"Boys take more care with their equipment," Pierce said. He lifted his glass to his mouth again and swallowed. His words were definitely slurring.

BJ took another sip. "That's not my experience," he said. The glass was almost empty.

"Oh?" Pierce was grinning, showing most of his teeth. He reached out and sloshed more into BJ's glass. His own didn't seem to be any emptier.

"How much have you had to drink? I mean eat?"

"Not hungry," Pierce said. "Not for anything they serve in the mess tent."

"I've still got some of Peg's cake left," BJ offered. The tin box with the cake Peg had sent, arriving mostly as fruited crumbs, was sitting on top of the battered box. Getting up to reach it was beginning to look like something of an effort, but Pierce ought to eat something. BJ was conscious that he was becoming more drunk than he should, even by his current standards, and he'd had supper.

Pierce shook his head. He was lying flat and somehow managing to drink out of the Martini glass. BJ eyed this achievement and decided not to emulate it. He lay down, propped up on his elbow. "Fifty percent?" he said. "Where?"

"Where, what?"

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“You can get thrown out of the army for deviant behaviour.”

“Many’s the time I’ve thought of that,” Pierce said reflectively. “The downside would be explaining to my dad why I got thrown out of the army. The upside would be, well, getting thrown out of the army. Still, I’m told the paperwork is a pain in the ass.” He laughed.

“So how can you have – where can you have – you know – ” BJ waved his hand wordlessly, not sure how to say it.

“If you needed to know, you would,” Pierce said. He waved his hand in what BJ recognised after a moment as a mimicry of his own gesture. “I bet every army base has a place where you can go if you... you know.”

“I don’t get it.”

“How many people are there in this unit? Not counting patients.”

“Seventy-five, eighty,” BJ said. “Something like that.”

“How many women?”

“Eleven,” BJ said. This was a figure that every man in the unit knew by heart.

“So you’ve got at least fifty men whose choices are their own right hand, or left hand, depending on personal preference, or nothing at all, or wandering down to the place where you go if you want to get a blow-job. Or have someone else’s hand do the job for you, which is at least a damn sight friendlier than your own. And by my reckoning, at least two dozen are going to pick the blow-job.” He laughed. “One side or the other.” He wasn’t slurring his words any more.

“Why?” BJ realised, hearing his own voice, that he was close to complete befuddlement. He stared at the last few drops in his glass and finished them before he spilled them. “I don’t get it.”

Pierce sat up. He had definitely sobered. “I could show you.”

BJ lay back and dropped his glass and laughed. “Come on.”

Pierce seemed to be coming closer. He settled down on the cot beside BJ. His face was very close to BJ’s, and he was smiling. He looked predatory. “I was hoping you’d say that.”

“Now, wait – ” BJ protested.

Pierce kissed him. “No time to wait.” His voice brushed across the skin of BJ’s face like his lips: it was distortingly pleasant. His hands were busy. BJ was finding it hard to focus. Hawkeye’s mouth on his; Hawkeye’s hand at his groin, stroking him, skilled even through two layers of cloth; other hand sliding under his jacket, finding a sensitive point on his chest through his t-shirt. It all felt good, it felt wrong but terribly good, coming from too many directions to stop it or to protest.

“Hawk – ” he started breathlessly, but Hawkeye’s mouth interrupted him again.

Dear Peg, last night I found out my bunkie is one hell of a kisser -

Pierce was an inch or so shorter than him and more lightly built: he couldn’t possibly be pinning BJ down. He was resting half on top of BJ, providing a tantalising pressure on BJ’s groin: growing arousal made it hard to think, but he ought to be stopping Hawkeye before it went too far and neither of them *could* stop –

Pierce shifted his weight a little and BJ felt a hard shape pressing against his thigh. He went on kissing BJ, and it was some measurable time before BJ could work out what it was: an erection, not his. He was in bed with another man, and the man was turned on. So was he.

The strangeness of this held him between protest and enthusiasm: he hadn’t felt like this in so long, so many weeks since anyone had held him like this. A physical memory of Peg lying over him, her breasts soft and lush against his chest, her eyes intent on his, her weight comfortable and comforting: a physical memory jarring with

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the immediacy of Hawkeye's weight on him, a different weight but just as comfortable, oddly comforting.

Dear Peg, I don't know how to apologise to you for this, but I was unfaithful to you last night with Hawkeye –

BJ jerked back, physically separating himself from Pierce as far as he could, pressing his hands against Hawkeye's shoulders. "Hawk – stop it."

"Stop what?" Hawkeye was grinning. His voice was smooth as silk. He bent his head again and kissed BJ's mouth, running his tongue along his lips. Somehow he had shifted his weight so that he was resting on BJ again, and now his hands were moving at the waistband of BJ's trousers, pulling them down. BJ tried to move back again and found he couldn't. Hawkeye's hands were doing something magical to his cock, though it was trapped inside his shorts and weeping to get out. "Tell me what you don't want me to do," he said, his voice tickling inside BJ's ear, "and I'll stop doing it."

"Stop –" BJ managed to get out, but it was not much more than a breathy huff of air before Hawkeye's tongue was inside his mouth. BJ closed his eyes. He wasn't surprised that Hawkeye wasn't paying attention – he wasn't sure he wanted Hawkeye to stop doing what he was doing. He was hard as rock and he'd got there somehow without ever having to do anything but lie back and let it happen, and Hawkeye was –
Not doing anything.

BJ blinked his eyes open and stared up. Hawkeye's face was looming very close over his own, eyes half-shut and his mouth twisted. He looked tired and unhappy.

Moving with an effort, Hawkeye pushed himself up and off BJ: it was almost a relief, and almost a disappointment, when Hawkeye's erection stopped touching him. He could still see it tenting the front of Hawkeye's pants.

Hawkeye sat down on his cot: sat rather as a puppet falls, and lay back as if his strings had been cut. He put an arm over his face, and said nothing.

After a moment, BJ propped himself up on his elbows. "What was that about –?"

"Nothing," Hawkeye said. His voice was grating. "Nothing happened, just go to sleep."

"You can't just say 'nothing happened'."

"Just did. You were drunk, I was drunk, nothing happened, okay, go to sleep."

"Hawk –"

"Go to sleep." Hawkeye's voice shook. He rolled over, curling up on himself. If he felt anything like BJ felt, he wasn't going to sleep. "Good night."

BJ levered himself up to a sitting position, and eyed the distance separating the two cots. Not far. He got up on to his feet, jerked his trousers up again before they fell, and navigated himself across the space between, sitting down on the cot beside Hawkeye. "Hawk?"

"I'm not here. Go away," Hawkeye said into the pillow.

BJ sat there a minute longer. Hawkeye's shoulders gave him no help. He got up and went out. To the latrine, where he relieved himself: he almost never jerked off in there, but his balls were aching. The chill of the night air made him feel less drunk. Following a succession of small thefts that would have bothered him more if he'd been in any way sober, he came back to the Swamp. Hawkeye had put the light out, but wasn't asleep: he groaned a protest when BJ put the light back on.

Hawkeye sat up, looking rumped. "What the hell?"

BJ put the stolen items down on the bed, one by one. "Half a loaf of bread, Army issue, soldiers, midnight snacks, for the use of. Jar of French mustard. Can of Virginia ham. Pack of cheese slices. Breadknife. Plate."

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“What?”

“You missed supper. Ham and cheese sandwich okay with you?”

Hawkeye stared at him. He seemed to have been stricken speechless. It was the first time BJ had ever seen him look genuinely surprised, and BJ found he quite liked the look. He picked up the can of ham – it was the sort that came with a key – and began to open it. Hawkeye said nothing until BJ started spreading the mustard on the hacked-off slices of bread.

“Let me do it.” Hawkeye held out his hand for the knife, and BJ passed it to him. He layered ham with cheese, mortaring it with more mustard, and topped it with the other slice of bread. “Thanks,” he added, with an odd look at BJ from under his brows.

“It’s the least I can do.”

“Finding a Virginia ham?”

“I think it used to belong to Frank,” BJ admitted. “I got it from the stash someone keeps in the supply hut.”

“They have Mafia connections,” Hawkeye said, chewing. “You’d better offer to pay for it in the morning.”

“I’ll post a notice on the camp bulletin board. The mustard’s from Sergeant Kimball’s private stores and the cheese is from the stash Burns had in the colonel’s office. I wondered why he didn’t like fresh cheese.”

Hawkeye finished one half of his sandwich and started on the other. “Not that I don’t appreciate this, but why?”

BJ sat down on his own bed. The amount he’d drunk was catching up on him again. It was warm in the tent. “I played that damn joke on you. I didn’t know about you and Trapper. I wouldn’t have done it if I’d known. I’m sorry.” His bed actually felt comfortable. He kicked off his shoes and started to wriggle under the blanket.

Hawkeye shifted the food from his bed to the floor. He put the can of ham down respectfully: everything else went down with a succession of thumps.

“There wasn’t anything to know about me and Trapper,” he said. He sounded impossibly tired. “That’s the way it works. Once it’s over it’s over. Trapper knew that.” He got up and put the light out. BJ heard him move back to his cot and lie down with a thump.

“How long were you two together?”

“We never really were,” Hawkeye said. He was slurring the words. “After the night’s over, it’s over, and it never happened. It was just a longer night than usual. About a year.”

BJ stared across the darkness at the shadow in the other bed. *Mail on your bed. You got a letter from McIntyre.* He felt horrified and small. “You must have been miserable,” he said.

Hawkeye didn’t answer.

The other thing that bothered BJ, waking up to reveille, was that he suspected he would get used to feeling half-hungover in the morning. Hawkeye was already up, brushing his teeth: Frank Burns was a muffled lump under the far tent wall, emitting small puppy-like snores.

It was beginning to be cold enough in the mornings that it didn’t make sense to get undressed until you got to the shower. BJ got up and pushed his feet into his shoes. Towel. Soap. Clean fatigues. Well, fairly clean. Shaving gear.

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Hawkeye was doing the same thing, about half a minute behind. They usually went over to the showers together. Hawkeye stood still a moment, looking at BJ, a question visible in his eyes.

BJ shrugged. "Coming?" he asked, moving towards the door.

"If only," Hawkeye muttered, and followed him.

It didn't feel odd to be undressing in the shower tent with Hawkeye until BJ thought about it. Even then, he had to force himself to feel it was odd: Hawkeye wasn't even looking at him. It was a classic bad situation to be in – a good reason, BJ realised he would have said if anyone had asked him, why queers couldn't be allowed in the army. But then Hawkeye had already... had already tried something, and he'd stopped. Drunk as he was, tired as he was, angry and miserable and horny as he was, he'd stopped.

"Hawk, about last night –"

Hawkeye glanced at the door and stepped under the shower. He spoke so quietly BJ could hardly hear him over the sound of the water. "Can't we just pretend it never happened?"

"No," BJ said after a moment's thought, "I don't think I can."

Hawkeye made a face. "Figures." He was silent for a minute, soaping himself. His face, directly under the flow of water from the shower, looked closed-off. "You want a transfer?"

"No," BJ said, emphatically, without any need for thought. "But – what do we do now?"

"Shower, shave, get dressed, have what passes for breakfast, check on Russell, wait for today's wounded." Hawkeye grinned, briefly. "You might want to brush your teeth, too."

BJ thought about it, rubbing soap on his face. He reached out and Hawkeye passed him his razor, no fumbling. He went on thinking about it, passing the blade across his skin, seeing Hawkeye's face out of the corner of his eye as he focussed on his own in the mirror. He didn't cut himself once.

"How do you think I'd look with a moustache?"

There was a pause. Hawkeye went on shaving. He had a heavier beard than BJ, and it took him longer. He looked at BJ, and ducked his head on one side, grinning crookedly. "Cute as the devil."

August 2004

7660 words

Afterword

All Catholic theology and belief described in this novel is based on my own research: I am grateful to Daegaer for her advice, but any errors are mine and not hers.

Shoshanna, editrix supreme, provided incalculable help with the first and following drafts of "An Officer and a Gentleman". Thank you.

Susan Elizabeth Leinbach

Born: 28th November 1966

Died: 15th June 2006

Susan wrote as Iolanthe: you'll find her *M*A*S*H* slash stories on her website, iolanthe.netfirms.com/Slashfic.htm. She wrote the first Hawkeye/Mulcahy stories I read: "Spin the Bottle", "Compassion", the unfinished story "Playing the Game", and a trilogy: "Caught", "Possibilities", "Escape". (She also wrote as Scarlatti on livejournal, where we first met.)

Thank you, Susan. I wish we could have met in person: I'm glad we touched via fandom.

Doug Spencer, Susan's partner, wrote in response to a query about donations in Susan's memory:

"I might suggest that any charity local to you which is involved in cancer research, cancer treatment or palliative care would be pleased to receive donations in her memory. Cancer Research UK (formerly The Imperial Cancer Research Campaign and The Cancer Research Campaign), Marie Curie Cancer Care and the Macmillan Nurses are all organisation worth googling for in the UK. Similar organisations exist in the USA and Canada. Any one of a number of local hospices, and a couple of hospice umbrella organisations, would be pleased to have your money.

"If you're a taxpayer, there may be techniques provided by your government to ensure that your donation reaches its target accompanied by any tax which you might otherwise have had to pay: in the UK, google for "gift aid", or fill out the appropriate sections of the screen if you're donating online. Similar techniques will exist in other jurisdictions.

"If these issues don't enthuse you, there will be others which do. Contribute time, energy and money to causes which you feel are going to help you to honour Susan's memory. Wherever you choose to give it, whatever you choose to give will be gratefully received and faithfully applied."

"Sins and Virtues" is distributed free of charge. You can copy it and pass on copies to anyone you think might like it. Please include this page whenever you copy "Sins and Virtues", in whole or in part. Remember Susan. I will.

Love,

Jane Carnall

To get in touch with me:
14 Hawthornbank Place
Edinburgh, EH6 4HG

Website: hjc.akicif.net
Journal: janecarnall.greatestjournal.com