

Snowden's Death

Ch 4 Good questions

'Who is Spain?'

'Why is Hitler?'

'When is right?'

'Where was that stooped and mealy-colored old man I used to call Poppa when the merry-go-round broke down?'

'How was trump at Munich?'

'Ho-ho beriberi.'

and

'Balls!'

all rang out in rapid succession, and then there was Yossarian with the question that had no answer:

'Where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?'

The question upset them, because Snowden had been killed over Avignon when Dobbs went crazy in mid-air and seized the controls away from Huple.

The corporal played it dumb. 'What?' he asked.

'Where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?'

'I'm afraid I don't understand.'

'O— sont les Neigedens d'antan?' Yossarian said to make it easier for him.

'Parlez en anglais, for Christ's sake,' said the corporal. 'Je ne parle pas français.'

'Neither do I,' answered Yossarian, who was ready to pursue him through all the words in the world to wring the knowledge from him if he could, but Clevinger intervened, pale, thin, and laboring for breath, a humid coating of tears already glistening in his undernourished eyes.

Ch 5 Yossarian, fearing death, excels at ordering evasive action--except for the Avignon mission. Dobbs jerks control of the plane away from Huple and re-enters the flak.

Yossarian was the best man in the group at evasive action, but had no idea why. There was no established procedure for evasive action. All you needed was fear, and Yossarian had plenty of that, more fear than Orr or Hungry Joe, more fear than Dunbar, who had resigned himself submissively to the idea that he must die someday. Yossarian had not resigned himself to that idea, and he bolted for his life wildly on each mission the instant his bombs were away, hollering, 'Hard, hard, hard, hard, you bastard, hard!' at McWatt and hating McWatt viciously all the time as though McWatt were to blame for their being up there at all to be rubbed out by strangers, and everybody else in the plane kept off the intercom, except for the pitiful time of the mess on the mission to Avignon when Dobbs went crazy in mid-air and began weeping pathetically for help.

'Help him, help him,' Dobbs sobbed. 'Help him, help him.'

'Help who? Help who?' called back Yossarian, once he had plugged his headset back into the intercom system, after it had been jerked out when Dobbs wrested the controls away from Huple and hurled them all down suddenly into the deafening, paralyzing, horrifying dive which had plastered Yossarian helplessly to the ceiling of the plane by the top of his head and from which Huple had rescued them just in time by seizing the controls back from Dobbs and leveling the ship out almost as suddenly right back in the middle of the buffeting layer of cacophonous flak from which they had escaped successfully only a moment before. Oh, God! Oh, God, oh, God, Yossarian had been pleading wordlessly as he dangled from the ceiling of the nose of the ship by the top of his head, unable to move.

'The bombardier, the bombardier,' Dobbs answered in a cry when Yossarian spoke. 'He doesn't answer, he doesn't answer. Help the bombardier, help the bombardier.'

'I'm the bombardier,' Yossarian cried back at him. 'I'm the bombardier. I'm all right. I'm all right.'

'Then help him, help him,' Dobbs begged. 'Help him, help him.'

And Snowden lay dying in back.

Ch 17 Snowden reveals a secret to Yossarian who then goes on to list the many ways in which people die.

There was a much lower death rate inside the hospital than outside the hospital, and a much healthier death rate. Few people died unnecessarily. People knew a lot more about dying inside the hospital and made a much neater, more orderly job of it. They couldn't dominate Death inside the hospital, but they certainly made her behave. They had taught her manners. They couldn't keep Death out, but while she was in she had to act like a lady. People gave up the ghost with delicacy and taste inside the hospital. There was none of that crude, ugly ostentation about dying that was so common outside the hospital. They did not blow up in mid-air like Kraft or the dead man in Yossarian's tent, or freeze to death in the blazing summertime the way Snowden had frozen to death after spilling his secret to Yossarian in the back of the plane.

'I'm cold,' Snowden had whimpered. 'I'm cold.'

'There, there,' Yossarian had tried to comfort him. 'There, there.'

They didn't take it on the lam weirdly inside a cloud the way Clevinger had done. They didn't explode into blood and clotted matter. They didn't drown or get struck by lightning, mangled by machinery or crushed in landslides. They didn't get shot to death in hold-ups, strangled to death in rapes, stabbed to death in saloons, bludgeoned to death with axes by

parents or children or die summarily by some other act of God. Nobody choked to death. People bled to death like gentlemen in an operating room or expired without comment in an oxygen tent. There was none of that tricky now-you-see-me-now-you-don't business so much in vogue outside the hospital, none of that now-I-am-and-now-I-ain't. There were no famines or floods. Children didn't suffocate in cradles or iceboxes or fall under trucks. No one was beaten to death. People didn't stick their heads into ovens with the gas on, jump in front of subway trains or come plummeting like dead weights out of hotel windows with a whoosh!, accelerating at the rate of sixteen feet per second to land with a hideous plop! on the sidewalk and die disgustingly there in public like an alpaca sack full of hairy strawberry ice cream, bleeding, pink toes awry.

There were too many dangers for Yossarian to keep track of. There was Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo, for example, and they were all out to kill him. There was Lieutenant Scheisskopf with his fanaticism for parades and there was the bloated colonel with his big fat mustache and his fanaticism for retribution, and they wanted to kill him, too. There was Appleby, Havermeyer, Black and Korn. There was Nurse Cramer and Nurse Duckett, who he was almost certain wanted him dead, and there was the Texan and the C.I.D. man, about whom he had no doubt. There were bartenders, bricklayers and bus conductors all over the world who wanted him dead, landlords and tenants, traitors and patriots, lynchers, leeches and lackeys, and they were all out to bump him off.

That was the secret Snowden had spilled to him on the mission to Avignon - they were out to get him; and Snowden had spilled it all over the back of the plane.

There were lymph glands that might do him in. There were kidneys, nerve sheaths and corpuscles. There were tumors of the brain. There was Hodgkin's disease, leukemia, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. There were fertile red meadows of epithelial tissue to catch and coddle a cancer cell. There were diseases of the skin, diseases of the bone, diseases of the lung, diseases of the stomach, diseases of the heart, blood and arteries. There were diseases of the head, diseases of the neck, diseases of the chest, diseases of the intestines, diseases of the crotch. There even were diseases of the...

Ch 22 Yossarian loses his nerve and Snowden his guts.

That was the mission on which Yossarian lost his nerve. Yossarian lost his nerve on the mission to Avignon because Snowden lost his guts, and Snowden lost his guts because their pilot that day was Huple, who was only fifteen years old, and their co-pilot was Dobbs, who was even worse and who wanted Yossarian to join with him in a plot to murder Colonel Cathcart. Huple was a good pilot, Yossarian knew, but he was only a kid, and Dobbs had no confidence in him, either, and wrested the controls away without warning after they had dropped their bombs, going berserk in mid-air and tipping the plane over into that heart-stopping, ear-splitting, indescribably petrifying fatal dive that tore Yossarian's earphones free from their connection and hung him helplessly to the roof of the nose by the top of his head.

Oh, God! Yossarian had shrieked soundlessly as he felt them all falling. Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! he had shrieked beseechingly through lips that could not open as the plane fell and he dangled without weight by the top of his head until Huple managed to seize the controls back and leveled the plane out down inside the crazy, craggy, patchwork canyon of crashing anti-aircraft fire from which they had climbed away and from which they would now have to escape again. Almost at once there was a thud and a hole the size of a big fist in the plexiglass. Yossarian's cheeks were stinging with shimmering splinters. There was no blood.

'What happened? What happened?' he cried, and trembled violently when he could not hear his own voice in his ears. He was cowed by the empty silence on the intercom and almost too horrified to move as he crouched like a trapped mouse on his hands and knees and waited without daring to breathe until he finally spied the gleaming cylindrical jack plug of his headset swinging back and forth in front of his eyes and jammed it back into its receptacle with fingers that rattled. Oh, God! he kept shrieking with no abatement of terror as the flak thumped and mushroomed all about him. Oh, God!

Dobbs was weeping when Yossarian jammed his jack plug back into the intercom system and was able to hear again.

'Help him, help him,' Dobbs was sobbing. 'Help him, help him.'

'Help who? Help who?' Yossarian called back. 'Help who?'

'The bombardier, the bombardier,' Dobbs cried. 'He doesn't answer. Help the bombardier, help the bombardier.'

'I'm the bombardier,' Yossarian cried back at him. 'I'm the bombardier. I'm all right. I'm all right.'

'Then help him, help him,' Dobbs wept. 'Help him, help him.'

'Help who? Help who?'

'The radio-gunner,' Dobbs begged. 'Help the radio-gunner.'

'I'm cold,' Snowden whimpered feebly over the intercom system then in a bleat of plaintive agony. 'Please help me. I'm cold.'

And Yossarian crept out through the crawlway and climbed up over the bomb bay and down into the rear section of the plane where Snowden lay on the floor wounded and freezing to death in a yellow splash of sunlight near the new tail-gunner lying stretched out on the floor beside him in a dead faint.

Ch 24 Yossarian descends from his plane naked covered in Snowden's viscera and consequently refuses to wear his uniform. He receives his reward for Ferrara, naked and observes Snowden's funeral from a tree while naked (note the allusion to the Garden of Eden)

Doc Daneeka tended each moaning man that night with the same glum and profound and introverted grief he showed at the airfield the day of the Avignon mission when Yossarian climbed down the few steps of his plane naked, in a state of utter shock, with Snowden smeared abundantly all over his bare heels and toes, knees, arms and fingers, and pointed inside wordlessly toward where the young radio-gunner lay freezing to death on the floor beside the still younger tail-gunner who kept falling back into a dead faint each time he opened his eyes and saw Snowden dying. Doc Daneeka draped a blanket around Yossarian's shoulders almost tenderly after Snowden had been removed from the plane and carried into an ambulance on a stretcher. He led Yossarian toward his jeep. McWatt helped, and the three drove in silence to the squadron medical tent, where McWatt and Doc Daneeka guided Yossarian inside to a chair and washed Snowden off him with cold wet balls of absorbent cotton. Doc Daneeka gave him a pill and a shot that put him to sleep for twelve hours. When Yossarian woke up and went to see him, Doc Daneeka gave him another pill and a shot that put him to sleep for another

twelve hours. When Yossarian woke up again and went to see him, Doc Daneeka made ready to give him another pill and a shot.

'How long are you going to keep giving me those pills and shots?' Yossarian asked him.

'Until you feel better.'

'I feel all right now.'

Doc Daneeka's frail suntanned forehead furrowed with surprise. 'Then why don't you put some clothes on? Why are you walking around naked?'

'I don't want to wear a uniform any more.'

Doc Daneeka accepted the explanation and put away his hypodermic syringe. 'Are you sure you feel all right?'

'I feel fine. I'm just a little lopy from all those pills and shots you've been giving me.'

Yossarian went about his business with no clothes on all the rest of that day and was still naked late the next morning when Milo, after hunting everywhere else, finally found him sitting up a tree a small distance in back of the quaint little military cemetery at which Snowden was being buried.

Milo was dressed in his customary business attire - olive-drab trousers, a fresh olive-drab shirt and tie, with one silver first lieutenant's bar gleaming on the collar, and a regulation dress cap with a stiff leather bill.

'I've been looking all over for you,' Milo called up to Yossarian from the ground reproachfully.

'You should have looked for me in this tree,' Yossarian answered. 'I've been up here all morning.'

'Come on down and taste this and tell me if it's good. It's very important.'

Yossarian shook his head. He sat nude on the lowest limb of the tree and balanced himself with both hands grasping the bough directly above. He refused to budge, and Milo had no choice but to stretch both arms about the trunk in a distasteful hug and start climbing. He struggled upward clumsily with loud grunts and wheezes, and his clothes were squashed and crooked by the time he pulled himself up high enough to hook a leg over the limb and pause for breath. His dress cap was askew and in danger of falling. Milo caught it just in time when it began slipping. Globules of perspiration glistened like transparent pearls around his mustache and swelled like opaque blisters under his eyes. Yossarian watched him impassively. Cautiously Milo worked himself around in a half circle so that he could face Yossarian. He unwrapped tissue paper from something soft, round and brown and handed it to Yossarian.

'Please taste this and let me know what you think. I'd like to serve it to the men.'

'What is it?' asked Yossarian, and took a big bite.

'Chocolate-covered cotton.'

Yossarian gagged convulsively and sprayed his big mouthful of chocolate-covered cotton right into Milo's face. 'Here, take it back!' he spouted angrily. 'Jesus Christ! Have you gone crazy? You didn't even take the goddam seeds out.'

'Give it a chance, will you?' Milo begged. 'It can't be that bad. Is it really that bad?'

'It's even worse.'

'But I've got to make the mess halls feed it to the men.'

'They'll never be able to swallow it.'

'They've got to swallow it,' Milo ordained with dictatorial grandeur, and almost broke his neck when he let go with one arm to wave a righteous finger in the air.

'Come on out here,' Yossarian invited him. 'You'll be much safer, and you can see everything.'

Gripping the bough above with both hands, Milo began inching his way out on the limb sideways with utmost care and apprehension. His face was rigid with tension, and he sighed with relief when he found himself seated securely beside Yossarian. He stroked the tree affectionately. 'This is a pretty good tree,' he observed admiringly with proprietary gratitude.

'It's the tree of life,' Yossarian answered, wagging his toes, 'and of knowledge of good and evil, too.'

Milo squinted closely at the bark and branches. 'No it isn't,' he replied. 'It's a chestnut tree. I ought to know. I sell chestnuts.'

'Have it your way.'

They sat in the tree without talking for several seconds, their legs dangling and their hands almost straight up on the bough above, the one completely nude but for a pair of crepe-soled sandals, the other completely dressed in a coarse olive-drab woolen uniform with his tie knotted tight. Milo studied Yossarian diffidently through the corner of his eye, hesitating tactfully.

'I want to ask you something,' he said at last. 'You don't have any clothes on. I don't want to butt in or anything, but I just want to know. Why aren't you wearing your uniform?'

'I don't want to.'

Milo nodded rapidly like a sparrow pecking. 'I see, I see,' he stated quickly with a look of vivid confusion. 'I understand perfectly. I heard Appleby and Captain Black say you had gone crazy, and I just wanted to find out.' He hesitated politely again, weighing his next question. 'Aren't you ever going to put your uniform on again?'

'I don't think so.'

Milo nodded with spurious vim to indicate he still understood and then sat silent, ruminating gravely with troubled misgiving. A scarlet-crested bird shot by below, brushing sure dark wings against a quivering bush. Yossarian and Milo were covered in their bower by tissue-thin tiers of sloping green and largely surrounded by other gray chestnut trees and a silver spruce. The sun was high overhead in a vast sapphire-blue sky beaded with low, isolated, puffy clouds of dry and immaculate white. There was no breeze, and the leaves about them hung motionless. The shade was feathery. Everything was at peace but Milo, who straightened suddenly with a muffled cry and began pointing excitedly.

'Look at that!' he exclaimed in alarm. 'Look at that! That's a funeral going on down there. That looks like the cemetery. Isn't it?'

Yossarian answered him slowly in a level voice. 'They're burying that kid who got killed in my plane over Avignon the other day. Snowden.'

'What happened to him?' Milo asked in a voice deadened with awe.

'He got killed.'

'That's terrible,' Milo grieved, and his large brown eyes filled with tears. 'That poor kid. It really is terrible.' He bit his trembling lip hard, and his voice rose with emotion when he continued. 'And it will get even worse if the mess halls don't

agree to buy my cotton. Yossarian, what's the matter with them? Don't they realize it's their syndicate? Don't they know they've all got a share?'

Ch 30 Huple and Dobbs are insane

Actually, there was not much he could do with that powerful machine gun except load it and test-fire a few rounds. It was no more use to him than the bombsight. He could really cut loose with it against attacking German fighters, but there were no German fighters any more, and he could not even swing it all the way around into the helpless faces of pilots like Huple and Dobbs and order them back down carefully to the ground, as he had once ordered Kid Sampson back down, which is exactly what he did want to do to Dobbs and Huple on the hideous first mission to Avignon the moment he realized the fantastic pickle he was in, the moment he found himself aloft in a wing plane with Dobbs and Huple in a flight headed by Havermeyer and Appleby. Dobbs and Huple? Huple and Dobbs? Who were they? What preposterous madness to float in thin air two miles high on an inch or two of metal, sustained from death by the meager skill and intelligence of two vapid strangers, a beardless kid named Huple and a nervous nut like Dobbs, who really did go nuts right there in the plane, running amuck over the target without leaving his copilot's seat and grabbing the controls from Huple to plunge them all down into that chilling dive that tore Yossarian's headset loose and brought them right back inside the dense flak from which they had almost escaped. The next thing he knew, another stranger, a radio-gunner named Snowden, was dying in back. It was impossible to be positive that Dobbs had killed him, for when Yossarian plugged his headset back in, Dobbs was already on the intercom pleading for someone to go up front and help the bombardier.

And almost immediately Snowden broke in, whimpering, 'Help me. Please help me. I'm cold. I'm cold.' And Yossarian crawled slowly out of the nose and up on top of the bomb bay and wriggled back into the rear section of the plane-- passing the first-aid kit on the way that he had to return for --to treat Snowden for the wrong wound, the yawning, raw, melon-shaped hole as big as a football in the outside of his thigh, the unsevered, blood-soaked muscle fibers inside pulsating weirdly like blind things with lives of their own, the oval, naked wound that was almost a foot long and made Yossarian moan in shock and sympathy the instant he spied it and nearly made him vomit. And the small, slight tail-gunner was lying on the floor beside Snowden in a dead faint, his face as white as a handkerchief, so that Yossarian sprang forward with revulsion to help him first.