

Beneath a Scarlet Sky



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARK SULLIVAN

Mark Sullivan was raised near Boston, Massachusetts before going to Hamilton College to study English. After graduating with his BA in 1980, Mark worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer. After two years, Mark returned to the United States to study journalism at Northwestern University. For the next several years, he worked numerous jobs related to journalism and politics. In 1990, he decided to put his job on hold on try his hand at writing. A few years later, in 1994, Mark published his first novel, *The Fall Line*, and in 1995, he followed it up with another, *Hard News*. However, it was not until his third novel, *The Purification Ceremony*, that Mark became a well-known writer. Since publishing *The Purification Ceremony*, Mark has become a household name. He's co-authored five books with James Patterson, and his novel *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* is currently being adapted as a film. Most recently, Mark published a novel titled *The Last Green Valley*, which explores World War II from the perspective of a German family living in Ukraine.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Beneath a Scarlet Sky takes place in Milan, Italy during World War II. At this time, Italy was under the rule of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, who allied himself with Hitler during the war. As the war dragged on, Mussolini gradually lost control of his country to the Nazi party. He became what is known as a puppet ruler; that is, a ruler who is considered a leader in title only. In reality, Hitler and other high-ranking members of the SS were in control of Italy during much of the war. As is depicted in the novel, this left many Italians in a difficult place. Many of them were opposed to Mussolini and even more were opposed to Hitler, yet they feared for their lives and the lives of their children. However, the longer the war dragged on, the less tolerant the Italian people became of Nazi policies. Many fought back as part of resistance efforts, especially near the end of the war. Additionally, this novel makes numerous references to the Holocaust. Most Italians, like Pino, knew the Germans were oppressing Jewish people, but the magnitude of barbarism we now associate with the Holocaust was not widely known until Allied soldiers began liberating concentration camps at the end of the war.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Beneath a Scarlet Sky fits neatly into the genre of historical fiction, a genre that emerged in the early 1800s with the works of Sir Walter Scott. Scott's most famous books include *Rob Roy*

(1817) and *Ivanhoe* (1819), both of which are classics within the genre. From the time of Sir Walter Scott, all the way up until the present, debates have existed about how much liberty authors should be allowed to take when writing historical fiction. Many critics of historical fiction raise an eyebrow when authors alter historical fact to better suit their narrative. Meanwhile, defenders of historical fiction argue that such a line of criticism forgets about the "fiction" half of the genre. Such conversations were had about Scott's fiction, and they are being had again today in critical discussions of *Beneath a Scarlet Sky*. Of course, *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* is not the only piece of contemporary World War II historical fiction. Other recent releases include Anthony Doerr's Pulitzer Prize winning novel [All the Light We Cannot See](#) and Kristin Hannah's *The Nightingale*, which sold millions of copies. Historical fiction remains one of the most beloved genres in American fiction, both by reviewers and popular audiences. At least half of recent Pulitzer Prize winners belong to the genre, including Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*, Colson Whitehead's [The Nickel Boys](#), and Doerr's aforementioned [All the Light We Cannot See](#).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Beneath a Scarlet Sky
- **Where Written:** Bozeman, Montana
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Milan, Italy during World War II
- **Climax:** Pino watches helplessly as Anna is shot to death by a firing squad after falsely being labeled a Nazi collaborator.
- **Antagonist:** General Leyers
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Collaboration. Mark Sullivan has co-authored five novels with best-selling author James Patterson.

Adaptation. *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* is currently being adapted as a film, with Tom Holland slated to play Pino Lella.



PLOT SUMMARY

Beneath a Scarlet Sky takes place in Milan, Italy during World War II. At the start of the novel, it is June of 1943, and the Nazis are beginning to occupy more and more of Italy, including Milan. However, despite these dramatic circumstances, Pino

Lella, the novel's protagonist, starts the story focused on normal teenage concerns. In particular, he wants to find himself a girlfriend. Together with his brother Mimo and his friend Carletto, he wanders Milan, looking for the love of his life. Eventually, he spots a beautiful young woman named Anna, whom he asks out on a date. Anna accepts the offer but does not show up to the date when the time comes. The same night, Allied forces begin bombing Milan. This scares Pino's parents, and they send Mimo away from the city to Casa Alpina, a religious camp in the Alps. Pino's father, Michele, wants to send Pino too, but Pino insists on staying in Italy. For a while, Pino's father respects his son's wishes—however, after the Lella home is bombed, he sends Pino to live at Casa Alpina.

At Casa Alpina, Pino and Mimo live with Father Re, who is an old family friend. Father Re is a supporter of Italian resistance efforts, and he coordinates with other high-ranking religious members to help Jewish people escape to Switzerland where they cannot be persecuted by the Nazis. Father Re trains Pino and Mimo physically and mentally to undertake escort missions, which involve leading groups of Jewish people to Switzerland, often in treacherous conditions. The most perilous of these missions involves a pregnant woman named Mrs. Napolitano, who is understandably afraid of the many dangerous paths Pino and Mimo lead her on. However, like the rest of their missions, Pino and Mimo ultimately lead Mrs. Napolitano to safety. When not undertaking escort missions, Pino spends much of his time with Alberto Ascari, an aspiring young racecar driver who teaches Pino to drive. Additionally, Pino has the misfortune of meeting Tito and his band of outlaws. Tito and his men regularly harass the towns surrounding Casa Alpina under the guise that they are partisan soldiers. Pino makes Tito his enemy one day at Casa Alpina after he steals a gun that Tito was pointing at Father Re.

A few days before Pino turns 18, Michele tells Pino he must return to Milan. Once there, Michele tells Pino that he will be drafted on his 18th birthday. Pino has two choices: he either must join the Italian Army or the SS. If he joins the Italians, he will be sent to the Russian front where he will likely die. Alternatively, if he joins the SS, he will become a pariah in his own community, but he will be safe. Pino doesn't want to do either, but eventually he decides to join the SS as part of Organization Todt. Shortly after becoming an SS member, Pino is recruited by General Leyers to be his personal driver. Pino's Aunt Greta and Uncle Albert are thrilled. The two of them have connections with the Allies and they want to use Pino as a spy. Pino accepts the role, but is told that he cannot tell anyone, even his own parents, what he is doing.

Shortly after being employed by Leyers, Pino reunites with Anna, who works as a maid for Leyers's mistress, Dolly. Leyers spends a lot of time with Dolly, meaning that Pino gets to see Anna regularly. However, the rest of his time is spent driving Leyers, often to places he would rather not go. Quickly, he

learns that the Germans are enslaving vast numbers of people from a variety of regions. They use these people to complete arduous work and rarely feed them. Additionally, Pino takes trips with Leyers to see Benito Mussolini, Italy's puppet dictator, who is concerned with his lack of power. All of this information he reports back to his aunt and uncle who find it incredibly useful.

However, Pino's new position comes at a cost. Because he cannot tell anyone the truth, he loses Carletto's friendship and the love of his brother. Both of them think he is a traitorous Nazi. This is especially difficult for Mimo, who eventually leaves Father Re's camp to join the partisans. However, there is one person who Pino does tell the truth: Anna. After Anna catches him snooping around Leyers's apartment, Pino fills her in on his role as a spy. Gradually, the two of them fall in love with one another and Anna begins helping Pino however she can. Additionally, Anna tells Pino that she came into her current position after her father died, her mother disowned her, and her former husband was killed in the war. None of this information bothers Pino; it only makes him love her more. Pino asks Anna to marry him when the war is over, and she accepts. This gives Pino hope and allows him to continue his physically and psychologically draining job as Leyers's driver.

Toward the end of the war, when it is clear that the Germans are losing, Pino is finally able to tell Carletto and Mimo the truth. Both of them forgive him immediately and apologize for their behavior. Additionally, Mimo gives Pino a job: he must arrest Leyers and turn him over to the partisans. Pino accepts. A few days later, when it is clear the Germans have lost the war, Pino points a gun at Leyers, arrests him, and takes him to the partisans, who thank Pino for his service. For a few days, Milan is chaos as the Italian fascists, the Nazis, and the partisans fight for control of the city. In the chaos, Dolly and Anna are captured by the partisans and labeled Nazi collaborators. While looking for Anna, Pino comes across a mob and decides to follow them. The mob leads him to a public execution where several so-called Nazi collaborators are being put to death by a firing squad, including Dolly and Anna. Pino tries to stop them, but he is too late. Both Anna and Dolly die. The crowd sees that Pino is upset and assumes that he is a Nazi collaborator as well. He is chased throughout the city, though the mob never manages to catch him. After Anna's death, Pino contemplates suicide, though he never goes through with it. He also attempts to recover Anna's body so he can give her a proper burial, but he fails.

Shortly after Anna's death, Benito Mussolini's body is brought to a city square in Milan and Pino watches along with an American soldier, Major Knebel, as the Milanese people desecrate it. Additionally, Major Knebel gives Pino a mission. He wants Pino to transport General Leyers, who is now being labeled an American hero, to the Austrian border. Pino accepts the mission, but only because he plans to kill Leyers on his way

to the border. Carletto also joins in on the mission. On the way to the Austrian border, Leyers reveals to Pino that he specifically asked for him to be his driver because he admires his skills. However, such flattery does not work on Pino, who eventually pulls a gun on Leyers with the intention of killing him. Along with the other atrocities he is responsible for, Pino largely blames Leyers for Anna's death. However, Leyers points out to Pino that he was going back to check on Anna and Dolly the day Pino arrested him. As such, Leyers says, Pino is at least equally responsible for what happened to Anna. Pino thinks Leyers is right and decides against killing him.

Eventually, Pino, Carletto, and Leyers approach the Austrian border. However, in the final stretch, they encounter Tito and a number of his goons. Tito tries to exact revenge on Pino, but before he can, Leyers shoots him and Carletto guns down the rest of his men. Shortly afterward, the three men reach the border, where American troops are waiting for them. Before Leyers leaves to go with the Americans, he shakes Pino's hand and whispers "*Now you understand, Observer.*" Pino is dumbstruck. "Observer" is the codename given to him by his aunt and uncle. The fact that Leyers knows it suggests that he may have known Pino was a spy from the beginning. This leaves Pino questioning all of his interactions with Leyers from throughout the entire novel. Together, Pino and Carletto depart for Milan, and Pino expresses to Carletto that the events of the war will be with him forever.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Pino Lella – The novel's protagonist, Pino Lella starts out as a carefree Italian youth whose main concern is finding love. One day, while walking around Milan, he meets a woman named Anna and asks her out on a date. Anna accepts but doesn't show up. That night, the Allied forces begin bombing Milan. Not long after, Pino is sent away from the city to Casa Alpina. At Casa Alpina, Pino is trained by Father Re to carry out escort missions to help Jewish people escape to Switzerland. Just before his 18th birthday, Pino's father, Michele, asks him to return to Milan. Michele tells Pino that once he turns 18, he will be drafted. Michele's connections give Pino a choice: he can join the Italian army and be sent to the Russian front, or he can join the SS. Although he resists both options, Pino eventually chooses the latter. Shortly after joining the SS, Pino is recruited by General Leyers to be his personal driver. While serving Leyers, Pino is reunited with Anna, who works for Leyers's mistress. Additionally, Pino's aunt and uncle ask him to spy on Leyers and help the resistance. Under Leyers's command, Pino witnesses many atrocities and learns important information, all of which he reports to his aunt and uncle. In the meantime, Pino and Anna fall in love and, toward the end of the war, Pino asks Anna to marry him. She accepts. As the war comes to a close,

Pino is asked by the partisans to arrest Leyers, which he does. Around the same time, Anna is captured and executed by the partisans because they think she is a Nazi collaborator. After Anna's death, Pino becomes despondent. The only thing that pulls him out of his sadness is a mission given to him by Major Knevel. He is tasked with escorting Leyers, who is now being hailed as a hero, to the Austrian border. Pino accepts, but only because he plans to kill Leyers on the way there. After stopping for a break, Pino pulls a gun on Leyers, but Leyers convinces Pino to spare him. The novel ends as Pino drops Leyers off at the Austrian border and Leyers implies that he knew Pino was a spy all along.

General Leyers – General Leyers is a high-ranking member of Organization Todt, the civil and military engineering branch of Nazi Germany. He is in direct contact with Hitler, as well as many other high-ranking members of the SS. After Pino joins Organization Todt, Leyers recruits Pino as his personal driver. Together, the two of them drive around Milan and its surrounding areas to perform various duties. These include meeting with Mussolini, checking up on defenses, and overseeing the various laborers whom the Nazi have enslaved. Although at times Pino cannot help but like General Leyers, he also despises him for his callousness and cannot understand why he would allow such atrocities to take place. Unlike some of his colleagues, such as Walter Rauff, Leyers does not endorse barbaric violence. He explicitly opposes deploying the firing squad that kills Tullio, as well as the Nazis' scorched earth policy. At one point, he even rescues a few Jewish children from a cattle car. However, after he does so, he makes the children memorize his name, likely for his own self-interest. Toward the end of the novel, Mimo tells Pino that he must arrest Leyers and give him over to the partisans. Pino complies and does as he is told. Later, Major Knebel orders Pino and Carletto to drive Leyers to the Austrian border. He tells them that Leyers is a hero and that they need to keep him safe. Pino agrees to take on the mission, but only because he plans to assassinate Leyers on the way to Austria. Indeed, Pino does pull a gun on Leyers, largely because he blames him for Anna's death, but he ultimately decides against pulling the trigger. In the final moments of the novel, Leyers shakes Pino's hand and whispers "*Now you understand, Observer.*" "Observer" is Pino's codename, and the fact that Leyers knows it suggests that he may have known Pino was spying on him all along.

Anna Marta – Anna Marta is the love of Pino Lella's life. Pino first meets Anna by happenstance while roaming the streets of Milan. Pino asks Anna out on a date, and she accepts but fails to show up. Pino doesn't see Anna again until he becomes a driver for General Leyers. On his first trip to Leyers's home, Pino is greeted by Anna at the door. He learns that Anna works as a maid to Leyers's mistress, Dolly Stottlemeyer—and this, of course, means that Pino will see Anna quite frequently. One day, while Leyers is away, Pino looks around his apartment for

his valise key and is caught by Anna. Pino tells Anna what he is doing, and Anna decides to help him. From this moment forward, Anna and Pino begin falling in love with one another. At first, they treat their relationship as an escape from the war, but eventually Anna becomes fully invested in helping Pino. Additionally, Anna reveals her tragic background to Pino; her father and former husband are dead, and her mother has disowned her. Despite their tragic circumstances, Anna and Pino still manage to fall deeply in love, and near the end of the war, Pino asks Anna to marry him. Unfortunately, their marriage never happens. Toward the end of the novel, Anna is treated as a Nazi collaborator because she works for Dolly and is executed by a partisan firing squad.

Mimo Lella – Mimo Lella is Pino's outgoing and competitive younger brother. Shortly after the Allies begin bombing Milan, Mimo is sent to live with Father Re at Casa Alpina. After the Lellas' home is destroyed, Pino is sent to live with his brother, and before long, both of them lead escort missions to help Jewish people escape to Switzerland. Although Pino eventually leaves Casa Alpina, Mimo stays and continues undertaking escort missions. Later, after Pino becomes Leyers's driver, Mimo returns to Milan and tells his brother that he's joining the partisans. Immediately afterwards, Mimo notices that Pino is carrying a swastika armband, so he screams at him and calls him a traitor. For much of the second half of the novel, Mimo and Pino don't talk to one another because Pino cannot tell his younger brother that he is working as a spy. Eventually, however, Mimo learns the truth and apologizes to his brother for the way he acted. By this time, Mimo has made a name for himself in the partisan army; his lack of fear and dedication to the cause end up serving him well.

Tito – Tito leads a small band of men who occupy the territories surrounding Casa Alpina. Tito and his men claim to be partisan soldiers who fight on behalf of the people of Italy, though in reality there are brutes and thieves. Pino first encounters Tito at the inn in Madesimo and then again at Casa Alpina. Both times, Tito tries to get Pino to submit to his will through violence. The first time, Tito succeeds. The second time, though, Pino triumphs by getting Tito's gun away from him. Tito appears one last time at the end of the novel when Carletto and Pino are transporting Leyers to the Austrian border. Just before Pino, Carletto, and Leyers reach their destination, Tito and his men show up and attempt to take revenge on Pino. However, Leyers shoots Tito, and Carletto guns down his men.

Carletto Beltramini – Carletto Beltramini is Pino's best friend. Over the course of the war, he watches his mother and father die. During the latter's death, Carletto spots a swastika armband sticking out of Pino's pocket and thinks his friend is a traitor. The two of them don't talk again until the war is almost over, at which point Pino can finally reveal that he was actually acting as a spy. Carletto joins Pino on his final mission to take Leyers to the Austrian border.

Father Re – Father Re is a priest who resides at Casa Alpina. Along with the other prominent religious figures such as Cardinal Schuster, Father Re organizes missions to help Jewish people escape to Switzerland. When Pino comes to live with Father Re, the priest trains him physically and mentally to help with these missions. He also helps restore Pino's faith in God and humanity after Pino witnesses some fascist soldiers putting the heads of their enemies on spikes.

Benito Mussolini – Benito Mussolini was the real-life dictator of Italy during World War II. Several times throughout the novel, Leyers and Pino visit Mussolini's villa, and Leyers uses Pino to translate. Over the course of their several meetings, Mussolini becomes increasingly desperate and delusional about the state of the war and his own power. At the end of the novel, Mussolini is executed, and his body is brought to Milan, where it is desecrated by an angry Milanese mob.

Cardinal Schuster – Cardinal Schuster is the highest-ranking religious figure in Milan. He is a kind, intelligent man who seeks peace and an end to bloodshed. He regularly communicates with Father Re and plays a role in helping Jewish people flee from Italy. Near the end of the novel, he comforts Pino after Anna's death and talks him out of taking his own life.

Tullio Galimberti – Tullio Galimberti is a family friend of the Lellas and is beloved by Pino. He is also a member of the Italian resistance and gets caught, sent to prison, and tortured. After a rebel bombing occurs in Milan, Tullio is executed by the Nazis to send a message, along with 14 other prisoners.

Mrs. Napolitano – Mrs. Napolitano is a Jewish woman Pino escorts to Switzerland. She is pregnant while making the trek to Switzerland and has a difficult time. Getting her to the Val di Lei is the biggest challenge Pino faces while living at Casa Alpina. Additionally, Mrs. Napolitano is a talented violin player, and she plays for Pino as he and Mimo return to Casa Alpina.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dolly Stottlemeyer – Dolly Stottlemeyer is General Leyers's mistress, as well as Anna's employer. She is kind to Anna and Pino and encourages their budding relationship. Toward the end of the novel, she is captured by partisans and executed because of her connection to Leyers.

Greta – Greta is Pino's aunt, who owns a leather-making shop. Greta and her husband Albert are members of the Italian resistance who have connections all over Milan. Pino reports back to them with information about Leyers.

Albert – Albert is Pino's uncle, who owns a leather-making shop. Albert and his wife Greta are members of the Italian resistance who have connections all over Milan. Pino reports back to them with information about Leyers.

Alberto Ascari – Alberto Ascari is a young man who lives in Madesimo and wants to be the world's greatest racecar driver.

While Pino is staying at Casa Alpina, Alberto teaches him to drive and, in return, Pino teaches Alberto to ski.

Michele Lella – Michele Lella is Pino's father. He cares for his son and does everything he can to keep him out of harm's way.

Porzia Lella – Porzia Lella is Pino's mother. She loves Pino deeply and forces him to enlist in the Nazi army.

Walter Rauff – Walter Rauff is a high-ranking Nazi official who holds a lot of power in Milan. Unlike Leyers, Rauff is openly bloodthirsty and never expresses a conscience for his horrific actions. Leyers regularly argues with Rauff about the savagery of his policies.

Mr. Beltramini – Mr. Beltramini is Carletto's father and a close family friend of the Lellas. He dies suddenly after being in close proximity to a rebel bomb that is thrown into a Nazi vehicle.

Brother Bormio – Brother Bormio lives with Father Re at Casa Alpina. His primary duty is to act as a chef for the boys staying there.

Mr. Bergstrom – Mr. Bergstrom is the man Pino meets near the Val di Lei. He helps the Jewish people Pino escorts on the last leg of their journey.

Nicco Conte – Nicco Conte is a young boy who lives in Madesimo. He dies suddenly and violently after picking up a grenade left by Tito and his men.

Luigi – Luigi is a Jewish man Pino escorts to Switzerland. He has difficulty completing the hike to Switzerland, but Pino pushes him through it. Before parting ways, Luigi thanks Pino by giving him an expensive cigar.

Maria – Maria is a Jewish woman Pino escorts to Switzerland. She is married to Ricardo.

Ricardo – Ricardo is a Jewish man Pino escorts to Switzerland. He is a teacher, and he is married to Maria.

Giovanni Barbareschi – Giovanni Barbareschi is a seminarian who is a key figure in the Italian resistance. He works closely with Father Re and forges papers to help Jewish people escape the Nazis.

Mario – Mario is Pino's second cousin. He dies after being shot in the head by a man who mistakes him for a fascist soldier.

Eugen Dollmann – Eugen Dollmann is Hitler's personal translator. Dollmann is present at a meeting between Cardinal Schuster and Leyers, so the two men use him to translate.

Max Corvo – Max Corvo is a high-ranking member of the Office of Strategic Services, an intelligence agency established by the United States during the war. Pino and Leyers meet Corvo to negotiate the terms of the German surrender in Milan.

Major Knebel – Major Knebel is an American soldier Pino meets at the Hotel Diana near the end of the war. Major Knebel asks Pino to throw him a party and escort Leyers to the Austrian border.

Baka – Baka is a radio operator for the partisans.

Christian – Christian is Anna's dead husband, who was killed early in the war.

Calabrese – Calabrese is the owner of the Fiat factory.

Mr. D'Angelo – Mr. D'Angelo is a man Pino escorts along with Mrs. Napolitano.

Mr. Conte – Mr. Conte is the owner of an inn in Madesimo. He is Nicco's father.

Adolf Hitler – Adolf Hitler was the real-life leader of Nazi Germany. He is discussed often in the novel but only appears briefly, over the phone, when Leyers calls him in Calabrese's factory.



THEMES

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



WAR AND MORALITY

Beneath a Scarlet Sky takes place in Nazi-occupied Italy during World War II, showing a side of the conflict that is rarely seen in literature. During the war, Italy allied itself with the Axis powers (Germany and Japan) while under the rule of Benito Mussolini, a fascist dictator. However, *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* largely ignores the overarching scope of the conflict to instead focus on individuals. This shift in focus alters the moral landscape of the story to paint a more complex portrait of the war. It does not create a sympathetic portrait of fascist countries, but it does demonstrate the moral complexities faced by individuals living under fascist regimes.

The moral chaos caused by war is most clearly seen in Pino Lella, who becomes a spy for the Allies. His job is to act as the driver for Nazi General Hans Leyers, while feeding information back to the Allies. Although Pino feels he is doing the right thing by helping the Allies, he also quickly realizes that his situation is not so black and white. Because he pretends to be allied with Leyers, Pino is forced to stand by and watch as Leyers commits atrocities or allows them to happen. Among other horrors, Leyers oversees thousands of starving slaves, signs off on executions, and watches as Jews are sent to labor camps. Meanwhile, Pino can only sit and watch while trying to maintain his cover.

Despite Leyers's actions, even he is portrayed with shades of gray. Pino often finds himself liking Leyers more than he would wish, and twice he has to stop himself from smiling after gaining Leyers's approval. Additionally, Leyers occasionally performs a

morally virtuous act, such as freeing several Jews before they can be sent to labor camps. Furthermore, at the end of the novel, Leyers reveals to Pino that he knows Pino's code name, suggesting that he may have known Pino was a spy all along. The novel does not exonerate Leyers, but it does make him a more morally ambiguous character than one might expect. Ultimately, then, the novel advocates for a morally complex understanding of individuals living under fascism, rather than categorizing people as purely good or evil.



COMING OF AGE

Despite its focus on World War II, *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* is also a coming-of-age story that explores the maturation of a young man living in Nazi-occupied Italy. Pino Lella, the young man in question, starts the novel as an unremarkable youth, more focused on typical teenage concerns such as music and women than he is with war. However, soon his hometown of Milan is bombed by the Allied Powers and taken over by Nazis. In response, Pino's father, Michele, sends his son to live with Father Re in the mountains. There, he is forced to grow up quicker than would normally be expected of most young men. Father Re teaches Pino the physical and emotional discipline he needs to survive and to help others. At the tender age of 17, Pino is sent by Father Re on missions to help Jewish people escape Italy. These missions force Pino to mature quickly; he is the one in charge, even though he is much younger than most of the people he escorts. When Pino returns to Milan on his 18th birthday, his parents remark that he left them as a boy and came back as a man.

However, Pino also learns that growing up during wartime comes with a price, as turning 18 means he must enlist in the Italian or German army. Both options are appalling to Pino, but he is left with little choice. Typically, coming of age novels focus on characters who achieve new levels of freedom because of their maturation. Indeed, in this novel, Pino's transition into adulthood comes with choices, but Pino quickly learns that these choices are extremely complicated. Should he join the Italian Army? The Nazis? The partisans? Something else entirely? None of these options are wholly appealing, and all of them come with their own set of consequences. Later, in the novel's finale, Pino is faced with another difficult, adult choice: should he or shouldn't he assassinate Leyers? On the one hand, he has witnessed Leyers oversee atrocities. On the other hand, as Leyers points out to him, Pino is not entirely innocent himself. In both cases, Pino eventually comes to a decision on his own and has to live with the consequences of his actions. Whether he's made the correct choice—especially regarding Leyers—is never made clear. In fact, the novel posits that entering adulthood, especially in this time and place, is synonymous with not always knowing whether one has made the right decision. In many cases, there may not even be a right decision to be made.



THE POWER OF MUSIC

Music shows up throughout *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* and proves to be a powerful force for Pino and his friends. At the start of the novel, Pino expresses his love for jazz music and classical music. He also listens to his father and friends play "*Nessun Dorma*" ("None Shall Sleep"), a famous aria from Giacomo Puccini's opera *Turandot*. This scene takes place after the Lella and Beltramini families have fled Milan because the city is being bombed. Additionally, Carletto is especially upset because his mother is terminally ill. However, when Pino and Carletto hear "*Nessun Dorma*," they momentarily connect with a deeper reality that touches them on a spiritual level. For the duration of the song, wars and terminal illnesses are forgotten and replaced by the beauty of the music. Later, after helping a violinist escape to Switzerland, Pino asks her if she will play "*Nessun Dorma*" as he returns to Italy. She does so, and the song lifts his spirits; it gives him the power to continue his long and difficult journey. Then, toward the end of the novel, the Allied forces begin retaking Milan. To celebrate, they ask Pino to round up some musicians and throw a party. Pino does so, and once again, the music results in great happiness, both for the musicians and their audience. Despite all of the hardships the American soldiers and Milanese citizens have faced, they are able to lose themselves in song and dance without being crushed by the weight of the war. In fact, to get to the Hotel Diana—where the party is held—the attendants have to walk through streets filled with bodies. Even after witnessing such horrors, the music prevails and the partygoers enjoy themselves. Here and elsewhere in the novel, then, music is depicted as a transcendent medium that is larger and more powerful than even a conflict as great as World War II. It is not merely an escape from hardship, it is a life-giving and unifying force that brings people together after so much death, destruction, and division.



LOVE AND DEATH

Pino Lella starts *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* as an immature youth who does not know what romantic love means. He claims to fall in love with every girl he meets, though really, he is simply struck by their beauty. However, all that changes when he meets Anna Marta, a beautiful young Italian woman whom Pino truly falls in love with. At first, Pino's love for Anna begins like all the others—she is beautiful, and he takes note of that fact. However, eventually, their love deepens into something more substantial. At first, both Pino and Anna treat their relationship as an escape from the war. Both are embittered by the chaos that surrounds them, but they do not let it filter into their relationship. However, the all-encompassing nature of the war, as well as Anna's tragic past, do not allow Pino and Anna to ignore the outside world forever. Anna eventually learns about the horrors of Pino's double life, and Pino learns that Anna was

previously married to a man who was killed in the war. Nevertheless, Pino realizes that these tragedies do not destroy his relationship to Anna; instead, their love for one another grows stronger. At one point, Anna risks her life to help Pino smuggle a radio that the partisans want to use to confuse the Germans. After working together to achieve this goal, the two of them spend a romantic evening together, which Pino describes as one of the greatest nights of his life. By this point, Pino and Anna's relationship does not function as an escape from the war. Instead, they act together—as a couple in love—to actively thwart the Nazism.

Unfortunately, although Pino learns what it means to truly and deeply love someone, he also learns what it means to have that person taken away. In the climax of the novel, Pino is forced to watch an Italian firing squad execute Anna because she is mistaken for a Nazi collaborator. This experience nearly ruins Pino; his love for Anna pushed him through the most brutal parts of the war and now Anna is gone. Notably, though, Pino's love for Anna does not dissipate. His love for her survives the war and her death. This can be seen in the scene in which Pino returns to Cimitero Monumentale in search of Anna's body, hoping to provide her with the burial she deserves, even if it means risking his own life. Although it would be hard to call the ending of the novel hopeful or romantic, it is nonetheless a testament to the endurance of both human kindness and love even in the face of tragedy and death.



SYMBOLS

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



THE SCARLET SKY

The scarlet sky symbolizes the oppressive nature of living under Nazism. Despite appearing in the title of the book, the phrase “the scarlet, threatening sky” only appears once in the novel itself. In the first chapter, Pino, Mimo, and Carletto, stroll around Milan. Meanwhile, a storm rolls in, and in the distance, the sky looks scarlet. Notably, scarlet (along with black) is the color most associated with Nazi imagery, including most iterations of the swastika. In other words, the storm in Chapter 1 is being compared to the Nazi occupation of Italy. Throughout the first half of the novel, the Nazis steadily take over Milan and assert their rule over its citizens. Like the storm, they come on gradually and make everyone and everything around them bend to their will. The sky half of the symbol is also important. It illustrates the all-encompassing nature of the Nazi's rule; like the sky, the Nazis in the novel are everywhere and impossible to escape.



GRAY MEN

Gray men are a symbol of the dehumanization many people suffered under the Nazi war machine. Pino first spots the gray men while leaving Milan for Casa Alpina. He describes them as “hordes of vacant-eyed men, many in shabby gray uniforms.” The empty stares and the drab coloring of their clothes demonstrates the degree to which these men have been abused. It is as though the life has been sucked right out of them. Throughout the novel, Pino continues to run into the gray men, and each time it seems as though they are being treated worse and worse by the Nazis. The only person in a Nazi uniform who shows the gray men any kindness is Pino, who offers them water. While doing so, Pino talks to one of the gray men named Antonio. Antonio tells Pino that he, along with the rest of the gray men, are slaves who must bend to the will of the Nazis or suffer the consequences. Later in the book, Pino sees a gray man he thinks may be Antonio get knocked off a cliff by a Nazi soldier simply for taking a break. Pino's inability to recognize whether the man is Antonio, along with the Nazi's treatment of the man in the first place, demonstrates the degree to which the Nazis have sucked every bit of individuality out of these men.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Lake Union Publishing edition of *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* published in 2017.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝ Like all the pharaohs, emperors, and tyrants before him, Il Duce had seen his empire rise only to crumble. Indeed, by that late-spring afternoon, power was bleeding from Benito Mussolini's grasp like joy from a young widowed heart.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Anna Marta, Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis


This quote is the opening of the novel, and it provides the historical backdrop for what is to come. Il Duce (“The Leader”) is the name given to Benito Mussolini, the puppet dictator of Italy during World War II. Mussolini allied himself with Hitler in 1940, several months after the war began. Shortly after Germany made Italy its ally, the Nazis

began occupying Italy and quickly drained Mussolini of any power. This novel begins as Mussolini loses control of his country to the SS. Historically, these events led to much civil unrest in Italy, much of which is depicted in the novel. Additionally, this quote uses a simile that echoes later events in the novel—“power was bleeding from Benito Mussolini’s grasp like joy from a young widowed heart.” Although the war will make many widows by the end of the novel, the one the reader becomes most familiar with is Anna Marta, the love of Pino Lella’s life.

“I am going to meet a beautiful girl today,” Pino said, wagging his finger at the scarlet, threatening sky. “And we are going to fall in mad, tragic love and go on grand adventures with music and food and wine and intrigue every day, all day long.”

Related Characters: Pino Lella (speaker), Anna Marta, Mimo Lella, Carletto Beltrami

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis



This quote is the reader’s first introduction to Pino as he walks around Milan with his friend Carletto and brother Mimo. In the distance, a storm is forming, creating a “scarlet, threatening sky.” This is the only time in the book where the title is mentioned, and it ties together a number of the novel’s primary concerns. The storm on the horizon is a symbol of the oncoming Nazi occupation of Milan. The sky is described as “scarlet,” the color most associated with Nazi imagery. In other words, *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* is another way of saying “living under Nazi rule.” Notably, Pino wags his finger at the sky as a sign of resistance. He refuses to let it interrupt his quest to find love. Indeed, later in the novel, Pino manages to find the love of his life—Anna Marta—despite the horrors of the war. Even when Anna dies, Pino still carries on and continues to love her, and ultimately the resistance triumphs over the Nazis.

Chapter 2 Quotes

“The screen froze in close-up on Astaire and Hayworth dancing cheek to cheek, their lips and smiles to the panicking crowd.”

As the film melted up on the screen, antiaircraft guns cracked outside the theater, and the first unseen Allied bombers cleared their bays, releasing an overture of fire and destruction that played down on Milan.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Anna Marta, Mimo Lella

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 24


Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the end of the chapter when Pino and Mimo are at the movie theater watching *You Were Never Lovelier*. *You Were Never Lovelier* is a romantic musical comedy starring Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth; it is largely an upbeat film that provided its viewers an escape from the horrors of the war. However, in this scene, war cannot be escaped, as the Allied forces begin bombing the theater, which is ironically showing an American film. The destruction of the theater suggests that the type of romance found in *You Were Never Lovelier*—the same type of romance that Pino yearns for—is impossible during wartime. Indeed, Pino’s romance with Anna ultimately ends much differently than the one depicted by Astaire and Hayworth in the film. At the end of *You Were Never Lovelier*, Astaire and Hayworth end up happily married to one another. Meanwhile, at the end of *Beneath a Scarlet Sky*, Anna dies before Pino can marry her.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Pino had never seen dead people before, and began to cry himself. *Nothing will ever be the same.* The teenager could feel that as plain as the hornets still buzzing and the explosions still ringing in his ears. *Nothing will ever be the same.*

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Mimo Lella

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis


This quotation comes while Pino and Mimo are fleeing the theater in favor of the Duomo, where they hope to find safety. On their way to the Duomo, they witness the


carnage wrought by the Allied bombers, which includes sights of dead children. This deeply bothers Pino, who instantly realizes that his life—and the lives of his fellow Milanese people—can never be the same. Here, the emotional toll of the event is paired with a physical sensation (the ringing in the ears), suggesting that Pino's entire being is altered by what he witnesses. Although this quote comes from the beginning of the novel, Pino still feels the same way in the final chapter. In fact, the final lines of the book are Pino telling Carletto, "And the war's not over. I don't think it ever will be over for me. Not really." In other words, even once peace treaties are signed, the effects of the war will still be with Pino and anyone else who was a part of it—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☛☛ As the train rolled back into Milan shortly after dawn the next day, black scrolls of smoke unraveled, twisted, and curled above the city. When they left the train and went out into the streets, Pino saw the physical differences between those who had fled the city and those who had endured the onslaught. Explosive terror had bowed the survivors' shoulders, emptied their eyes, and broken the set of their jaws. Men, women, and children shuffled timidly about, as if at any second the very ground they trod might rupture and give way into some unfathomable and fiery sinkhole. There was a smoky haze almost everywhere. Soot, some of it fine white and some a volcanic gray, coated almost everything. Torn and twisted cars. Ripped and crushed buildings. Trees stripped bare by the blasts.

Related Characters: Pino Lella

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the start of Chapter 4 as the Lellas and the Beltraminis return from their overnight trip to the countryside. The two families previously left the city because they felt they needed a night away from the bombings to restore their sanity. As he returns to Milan, Pino immediately realizes the difference a single night can make. Notably, there is a physical difference between those who left the city and those who remained. Those left in the city are described using language reminiscent of Pino's later descriptions of the Gray Men. The Gray Men are slaves

used by the Nazis as part of Organization Todt. Because of their enslavement, they've been dehumanized and stripped of their vitality. Although the residents of Milan are not as defeated as the gray men, their empty eyes and shuffling feet signify a concerning level of despondency. In addition to the affected people, the city itself is also in shambles. Previously known as one of the most beautiful cities in Italy, Milan is now a shell of itself, which only makes the despair of its inhabitants even worse.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛☛ Pino left the chapel believing that he'd entered it as a boy and now exited it having made the decision to become a man. He was frightened by the penalty for helping the Jews, but he was going to help them anyway.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Father Re

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis



This quote appears after Father Re reveals to Pino the purpose of his long and grueling hikes. Part of Pino's initial resistance to coming to Casa Alpina was that he would be sitting out the war. Such a position made him feel useless and cowardly. However, Father Re's plan gives him a new sense of purpose and a chance to do something good for the world. Not only does this revelation lift Pino's spirits, it also instantly matures him. Sitting out the war is the role of a boy, but fighting as a part of the resistance is the job of a man. Of course, Pino's new role at Casa Alpina is difficult, not to mention dangerous. The "penalty" mentioned in this quote could include many unpleasant outcomes, most notably torture and death. However, the consequences do not matter for Pino, as long as he feels he is doing the right thing.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☛☛ As Pino hiked south through Val di Lei, he felt good and satisfied. They'd done it. Father Re and everyone else who'd helped get the refugees to Casa Alpina. As a team, they'd all saved three people from death. They'd fought back against the Nazis in secret, and they'd won!

To his surprise, the emotions that flooded through him made him feel stronger, refreshed.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Father Re

Related Themes:  


Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

This quote elaborates on the emotions Pino feels after completing his first escort mission for Father Re. Unsurprisingly, the job was not easy, and Pino arrived at the Val di Lei mentally and physically exhausted. However, the success of the mission refreshes Pino and he is hungry for more. Pino feels as though he's made a tangible impact on the outcome of the war and certainly on the outcome of three people's lives. However, he does not let his success go to his head. He is humble and notably only speaks in the plural when discussing his accomplishments at Casa Alpina. It is not his success; it is everyone's success. Considering the bravery and strength required to complete such a mission, Pino's humility is especially noble. After arriving at Casa Alpina, Pino matures into a cunning young man as well as a team player. However, because he's felt what it is like to make a tangible difference, it is especially difficult for Pino when he returns to Milan and is told he must enlist with the Italians or the Germans.

☛ Pino sat on a bench at an empty table in the dining room. He closed his eyes and hung his head, seeing Nicco's missing face and arm, and the boy who'd been blinded, and then the dead girl with the missing arm from the night of the first bombardment. He couldn't get rid of those images no matter how hard he tried. They just kept repeating until he felt as if he were going crazy.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Nicco Conte

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis


This quote comes after Pino witnesses Nicco's death. Nicco dies after some fake partisans carelessly leave a grenade in his town. Not knowing what the object is, Nicco picks it up, pulls the pin, and accidentally kills himself. The sight of Nicco's death shocks Pino and it reminds him of the carnage he witnessed when the bombs first fell on Milan. Nicco's death, along with other grotesque moments in the novel, are images that never leave Pino's mind. At the end of the novel, Pino tells Carletto that the war will never be over for

him, and moments like this get at what he is talking about. Some moments are so horrid and traumatic that they are impossible to get out of one's mind. Of course, the fact that Pino could never forget something like this is part of what makes him a good person. However, in this moment, it is also what is driving him mad.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☛ They lost sight of Mrs. Napolitano and the others almost immediately, but they could hear her playing beautifully, with passion, each note carrying through the thin, crisp, alpine air. They reached the tree line and put on their skis as she took the tempo up again, casting forth the melody of the triumphant aria like some radio wave that hit Pino in his heart and vibrated in his soul.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Anna Marta, Mimo Lella, Mrs. Napolitano

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 140-141

Explanation and Analysis


This quote comes from the scene where Pino and Mimo leave the Val di Lei and head back to Casa Alpina after escorting Mrs. Napolitano to Switzerland. Of all the escort missions Pino undertakes, his journey with Mrs. Napolitano is the most difficult and the most dramatic. To repay him, Mrs. Napolitano plays "Nessun Dorma," the same aria played by Pino's father earlier in the novel, on her violin. This passage, along with several others in the novel, is a testament to the power of music, which is one of the forces that gives Pino the strength to carry on, even when he is exhausted. Several times throughout the novel, Pino will compare music to love, and imply that the two are inseparable. Therefore, it makes sense that if Anna's love propels Pino through the events of the second half of the novel, then it is music that leads him through the first half, especially "Nessun Dorma."

Chapter 12 Quotes

☛ "Pino was quiet for a long time before saying, "Father, is it a sin if I'm asking myself if I did the right thing in not killing that man?"

The priest said, "No, it is not a sin, and you did the right thing not killing him."

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Father Re (speaker), Tito

Related Themes: 


Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

This is a conversation between Pino and Father Re after Tito and his men rob Casa Alpina at gunpoint. During the robbery, Pino gets Tito's gun from him, but decides not to shoot him. Now, Pino wonders if he did the right thing. On the one hand, murder is never justified, especially for a Christian. On the other hand, Pino knows that Tito and his men are likely on their way to steal from and potentially murder more innocent people. Father Re understands Pino's struggle and does what he can to comfort him. As a Catholic priest, Father Re would never openly endorse murder, but he understands the conflict raging inside of Pino. This moment touches on a larger question of the novel; that is, is there such a thing as "the right thing" during wartime? Or are there just better and worse choices, none of which are wholly right or wholly wrong? In this case, Father Re gives Pino a straightforward answer. However, as the novel progresses and Pino's situation grows more complex, it is difficult to say whether the advice Father Re gives him is always correct.

☝ But he felt good about it, elated actually. Fooling the Nazis like that made him feel empowered. In his own way, he was fighting back. They were all fighting back, part of the growing resistance. Italy was not German. Italy could never be German.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Anna Marta, Mimo Lella, Walter Rauff

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes after Pino, Mimo, and the other members of Casa Alpina fool Walter Rauff and his men, successfully saving the lives of their Jewish guests. As he does throughout much of his time at Casa Alpina, Pino feels like he is doing important work for the good of humanity. However, what is interesting about this quote is Pino's nationalistic pride. Here, he is proud to be Italian and not German. And yet, later in the novel, he will be just as disgusted by some of his fellow Italians as he is with the Nazis. As the Allies begin to take Milan, a lot of violence is

carried out by the Italian partisans and the Italian fascists, much of which is unjust. Most notably, Anna Marta is murdered by Italian partisans because she is falsely accused of being a Nazi collaborator. As such, even though Pino expresses pride in his nation in this quote, the novel will ultimately go on to challenge such a simplistic reading of Italy's place in the war.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ Vorarbeiter Lella had little faith in God's plan for him by that point. Indeed, as he entered the station, he was still fuming mad at his predicament. His mother had railroaded him into this. At Casa Alpina, he'd been doing something that mattered, something good and right, guiding as an act of courage, no matter the personal risk. Since then, his life had been boot camp, an endless parade of marches, calisthenics, lessons in German, and other useless skills. Every time he looked at the swastika he wanted to tear it off and head for the hills to join the partisans.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Porzia Lella

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 179-180


Explanation and Analysis


This quote comes from the beginning of the chapter, as Pino has just officially been made a member of the Nazi party. *Vorarbeiter* is the German word denoting Pino's rank: he is a private first class. Likely because of his uncle's influence, Pino is given a decent rank. Typically, one would start as a private third class and work their way up. Nonetheless, Pino is deeply unhappy with his position, which is a significant change from the work he was doing at Casa Alpina. However, placing the blame on his mother is not entirely fair. Although Porzia does insist that Pino join the SS, he is still the one with the final say in the matter. After all, by this point Pino is legally an adult. Even so, he is only 18. Though he began his coming-of-age journey at Casa Alpina, his continued deference to his mother suggests that he still isn't fully his own person and has more maturing to do.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ They were all emaciated, filthy, with scraggly beards and long tangled hair. Many of them had vacant, dead eyes and wore ragged gray trousers and tops. There were letters on their chests he couldn't make out. Manacled, they moved at no better than a shuffle until the guards tore into them, hitting a few with the butts of their rifles. As lorry after lorry emptied, there were soon three hundred of the men, maybe more, moving en masse to the stadium's north end.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, General Leyers

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the scene where Pino is watching General Leyers sort the gray men into groups. Presumably, Leyers is determining which of the men can keep working and which ones cannot. As Pino looks at the gray men, he sees that their humanity has been drained out of them. Not only do their eyes look “vacant” and “dead,” but they are completely subservient to Leyers and his men. In other words, they are slaves. Whenever Pino sees the gray men throughout the novel, they are always assembled “en masse,” as though they can no longer be thought of as distinct individuals. The sight of the gray men and Leyers's treatment of them is what makes Pino hate Leyers more than anything else. Regardless of the excuses he makes to Pino, Pino knows Leyers is responsible for the deadening of the gray men's spirits, and he cannot forgive him for that.


Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ He glanced in the mirror at the general and realized he hated Leyers. He was a Nazi slave driver. He wants Italy destroyed, and then rebuilt in Hitler's image. He works for Hitler's architect, for God's sake.

Part of Pino wanted to find a secluded spot, get out, pull his gun, and kill the man. He would head for the hills, join one of the Garibaldi partisan units. The powerful General Leyers dead and gone. That would be something, wouldn't it? That would change the war, wouldn't it? At some level?

Related Characters: Pino Lella, General Leyers

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

This quote details Pino's thoughts as he and Leyers drive away from a Nazi construction site. While at the site, Pino witnesses a Nazi soldier push a gray man who looks like Antonio over a cliff, simply for taking a break. After seeing such casual barbarism, Pino is inflamed and mentally takes his anger out on Leyers. After all, Leyers is one of the higher-ups in Organization Todt, making him a slave master for the gray men. However, the questions Pino asks himself about killing Leyers are obviously not thought through. Regardless of whether killing Leyers is morally justifiable, it almost certainly will not affect the overall course of the war. Instead, the Nazis will simply replace Leyers, possibly with someone more bloodthirsty. Additionally, Pino would be killed, and he could no longer collect information for the Allies. Ultimately, Pino does not go through with killing Leyers, so it appears these are thoughts that are spurred on by his anger. However, they do raise existential questions about Pino's role in the war that he cannot simply ignore.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☝☝ “I'm not ready to reveal my scars to you. I don't want you to see me human and flawed and whole. I want this . . . us . . . to be a fantasy we can share, a diversion from the war.”

Related Characters: Anna Marta (speaker), Pino Lella

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 250

Explanation and Analysis


This quote is found after Anna and Pino decide to start a romantic relationship with one another. Evidently, Anna has a troubled past, which she doesn't want to share with Pino. Instead, she wants Pino to be part of “a fantasy,” and, at first, Pino is all too happy to accept her offer. However, as Anna and Pino fall in love, both of them realize that their initial decision is foolish and immature. To be truly in love with someone, you need to know the difficult parts of their past, and they need to know yours. This is a lesson that Pino and Anna quickly learn, and eventually Anna reveals her tragic background to Pino. Rather than push Pino away, the story of Anna's past only brings them closer together. Of course, their relationship is no longer a fantasy; instead, it turns into

something deeper and more real. Additionally, rather than acting as “a diversion from the war,” their relationship becomes actively entangled in the war, as Anna helps Pino sneak a radio into his home on behalf of the Allies. Ultimately, although this quote represents a moment in Pino and Anna’s relationship where they are youthful and ignorant, their love eventually grows into something much stronger.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☞ “Doing favors,” Leyers said. “They help wondrously over the course of a lifetime. When you have done men favors, when you look out for others so they can prosper, they owe you. With each favor, you become stronger, more supported. It is a law of nature.”

Related Characters: General Leyers (speaker), Pino Lella

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is a bit of advice that General Leyers gives to Pino after Pino saves his life. In general, the advice seems to be Leyers’s life philosophy—it is how he’s managed to get as far as he has in the war. On the one hand, it is not a wholly evil philosophy; doing favors for others is generally a good thing. However, Leyers seems less interested in what he does for other people and more interested in what other people can do for him. Toward the end of the novel, it is revealed that Leyers may have been working for the Allies all along. However, even if this is the case, is he only doing so because he knows it will save his life after the war? This question is never clearly answered, but reconciling Leyers’s philosophy regarding favors with his actions throughout the book is necessary for a thorough reading of his character.

☞ “It would be surprising if you didn’t hate me for what I’ve had to do today. A part of me hates myself. But I have orders. Winter is coming. My country is under siege. Without this food, my people will starve. So here in Italy, and in your eyes, I’m a criminal. Back home, I’ll be an unsung hero. Good. Evil. It’s all a question of perspective, is it not?”

Related Characters: General Leyers (speaker), Pino Lella, Anna Marta, Walter Rauff

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is spoken by General Leyers to Pino after a day of Leyers pillaging the Italian countryside. While moving from residence to residence, Leyers and his men treat the Italians callously and steal from them without blinking an eye. As such, Leyers assumes that Pino thinks that he is evil because of how he’s treated the Italians. In response, Leyers gives another piece of his life philosophy, which could be described as moral relativism. Moral relativism can be summed up by what Leyers says at the end of this quote: “Good. Evil. It’s all a question of perspective, is it not?” Though Leyers certainly oversimplifies the case here, his question is one that the novel grapples with. Although there are clearly evil forces in the world like Rauff and Hitler, almost all of the other characters in the novel are made up of shades of gray. Many of them think they are doing the right thing from their perspective, but from a different perspective, this is not the case. For instance, toward the end of the novel, the partisans feel entirely justified in killing Anna, even though she was not actually a Nazi collaborator. As such, though the novel does not wholly endorse moral relativism, it takes its claims about morality seriously and ponders them.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☞ Three little fingers stuck out of a crack on the rear wall of the last cattle car. The fingers seemed to wave at Pino as the train gathered speed. He stared after the train, seeing the fingers in his mind long after he couldn’t see them anymore. His urge was to go after the train and set those people free, get them to safety. Instead, he stood there, defeated, helpless, and fighting the urge to cry at the image of those fingers, which would not fade.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, General Leyers

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 286-287

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation comes from the first time that Pino and General Leyers see cattle cars transporting Jewish people to a labor camp. At the time, Pino does not know where the trains are headed, though he understands that it isn’t anywhere good. The “little fingers” Pino sees clearly belong

to a small child. Previously, Pino made it his life mission to escort Jewish people to safety. In doing so, he felt like a hero who was doing good for the world. Now, he is forced to stand by as Jewish people are rounded up and treated like animals, while still convincing himself that his mission is morally justified. This moment stays with Pino for the rest of the novel, and he returns to it, horrified, when he learns the truth about what's happened at Auschwitz. Although Pino does more than most people to help the right side win the war, he cannot help but think he did so via dubious methods.

Chapter 24 Quotes


☛☛ The general opened the rear door and looked in at them, smiling. "Vorarbeiter, tell them my name is Major General Hans Leyers of the Organization Todt. Ask them to repeat that, please."

"Repeat it, mon général?"

"Yes," Leyers shot back, irritated. "My name. My rank. The Organization Todt."

Pino did as he was told, and they each repeated his name, rank, and the Organization Todt, even the little sick girl.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, General Leyers (speaker), Cardinal Schuster, Walter Rauff

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is from the second time Pino and General Leyers see train cars headed for a Nazi labor camp. Before the train departs, Leyers saves several of the children on board and tells Pino to take them to Cardinal Schuster. However, before they leave, Leyers asks them to memorize his name. As such, it is unclear whether Leyers performs this act out of the kindness of his heart or because he is performing a favor he hopes to be repaid for. Alternatively, it could be some mixture of both. Regardless, it is clear that Leyers wants the children to know his name. One explanation is that he wants to receive credit from the Allies for saving the children, thus making him seem like a good man. Alternatively, he may tell the children his name because Walter Rauff forces him to. After all, Rauff was clearly opposed to General Leyers's decision to free the children and he may want Leyers to shoulder the blame should the act raise any eyebrows among their fellow Nazis. Ultimately, though, like many of Leyers's acts throughout the novel, this one is an enigma that is left to be interpreted by the reader.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☛☛ Pino felt chills go through him as Leyers drove them out of San Babila and toward the address Mimo had passed along from the partisan commanders. He had no idea why he was supposed to bring Leyers to that specific address, and he didn't care. He was no longer in the shadows. He was no longer a spy. He was part of the rebellion now, and it made him feel righteous as he barked directions and turns at the general, who drove stoop shouldered.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, General Leyers

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 400

Explanation and Analysis

This description comes from the scene where Leyers drives Pino to an address in San Babila after Pino arrests him. This is an important moment for Pino because he is no longer forced to live "in the shadows." The specifics of this phrase are important because Leyers describes himself as a man of the shadows earlier in the novel. Pino does not want to be associated with Leyers and is happy to no longer be a part of the work that Leyers does. Additionally, this scene reverses the roles previously established for Pino and Leyers in the novel. Whereas previously Pino drove around Leyers, now Leyers drives around him. Just as Leyers "barked" orders at Pino, now Pino can bark them back at his former boss. Although Pino feels relieved in this moment, it is yet another part of the novel where he acts more like Leyers than he would prefer to admit.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☛☛ The crowd around him bellowed and jeered its approval while he just stood there, hunch shouldered, whimpering at the agony that possessed him, so powerful it almost made him think it couldn't be real, that his beloved was not lying there in a pool of blood, that he'd not watched her take the bullet, that he'd not watched life flee her in a blink, that he'd not heard her begging him to save her.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Anna Marta

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 427

Explanation and Analysis



This quote comes at the start of Chapter 30, just after Pino

witnesses Anna's murder by the partisan firing squad. Following Anna's death, Pino is devastated and can barely function properly. Meanwhile, the crowd around him roars its approval for the death of the love of his life. This is the moment where the novel turns its focus away from the Germans and towards the citizens of Milan. Previously, Pino described himself as a proud Italian and he thinks of himself as fighting for the nation of Italy. Yet, just as he's achieved victory, his nation stabs him in the back by murdering the most precious person to him in the world. In this moment, Pino realizes that many of his fellow Italians are not so different from the bloodthirsty Germans he met throughout the novel. In fact, Anna's death has a lot in common with Tullio's. Both are killed via firing squads, while Pino looks on, helpless to do anything about it. Although the novel does not fully equate the actions of the Germans with those of the partisans, it does deconstruct Pino's previous, naïve notion regarding the moral character of Italy.

Chapter 31 Quotes

☛ Pino would remember little of the journey. Milan, Italy, the world itself had become unhinged for him, disjointed and savage. He watched the scarred city as if from afar, not at all a part of the teeming life that was beginning to return after the Nazis' retreat.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, Anna Marta, Albert, Michele Lella

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 444

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the scene where Pino, Albert, and Michele are walking to the cemetery in search of Mario's body. This scene takes place the day after Anna's death and Pino is still reeling from what he's witnessed. The language in this quote describes the alienation Pino feels from his fellow Italians. Throughout the entire novel, Pino fought for Italy's future, only to return to a city that is "disjointed and savage." The city is both physically and psychologically "scarred," and its scarring has resulted in a bloodlust that Pino did not see coming. Although there are still people he loves in Milan and people he knows are good, they seem far away from him. Even his father and uncle, who are walking by his side, seem distant. Instead, he is overcome by thoughts of Anna and what the city of Milan did to her. Like the child's fingers he sees in the cattle car, Anna's death is a moment Pino can never forget, nor can he reconcile it with

his previous understanding of Milan.

Chapter 32 Quotes

☛ Someone put a toy scepter in Mussolini's hand. Then a woman old enough to have been the crone in Dolly's apartment building waddled out. She squatted over Il Duce's mistress and pissed on her face.

Pino was repulsed, but the crowd went feral, sinister, and depraved. People were laughing hysterically, cheering, and feeding on the anarchy. Others began shouting for more desecrations while ropes and chains were being rigged. A woman darted forward with a pistol and put five rounds in Mussolini's skull, which provoked another round of jeers and catcalls to beat the bodies, to tear the flesh from their bones.

Related Characters: Pino Lella, General Leyers, Benito Mussolini, Major Knebel

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 456-457



Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from a scene where Pino and Major Knebel watch as Benito Mussolini's body is brought to a town square. When the corpse arrives, the Milanese people brutalize it in order to take revenge on the fascist dictator for allying himself with Hitler. This scene is based on what really happened when Mussolini's body was brought to Milan. Although much of the treatment of Mussolini's corpse is brutal and straightforward, there is some subtlety involved as well. For instance, the placement of the toy scepter in Mussolini's hand suggests that he is a pretend dictator. Indeed, throughout the novel (and actual history) it is clear that Mussolini does not actually have any control over Italy. Instead, he gave all his power to Hitler. Additionally, when Pino and Leyers meet with him, Mussolini acts like a child who often complains but does very little to fix anything. As such, he is presented with a children's toy. Nonetheless, despite Mussolini's heinous actions and childish demeanor, this scene is difficult to read, and it is meant to be. The brutality disgusts Pino and Major Knebel, both of whom saw terrible atrocities throughout their time in the war. It is yet another example of bloodlust that Pino did not think the citizens of Milan were capable of.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☞☞ The general looked at him without remorse and added, “If there’s anyone directly responsible for Dolly and Anna’s death, Pino, it’s you.”

Related Characters: General Leyers (speaker), Pino Lella, Anna Marta, Dolly Stottlemeyer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 479

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the scene where Pino confronts General Leyers with the plan of assassinating him. Pino comes up behind Leyers, threatens him with a gun and explains that Anna is dead. Leyers appears to be genuinely surprised by this information and then tells Pino that he would’ve checked on Anna had Pino not arrested him. For this reason, Pino is responsible for Anna’s death, according to Leyers. Whether or not the reader believes Leyers is a different question. Certainly, Leyers is not above lying to save his own skin. However, what he says is at least partially true—he was headed home before Pino arrested him. If Leyers is telling the truth, then he likely blames Pino for Dolly’s death, too, which explains why he speaks “without remorse.” Ultimately, the novel never gives a clear answer to this problem, and instead leaves it to the reader to untangle.

Chapter 34 Quotes

☞☞ *Now you understand, Observer.*

Related Characters: General Leyers (speaker), Pino Lella, Albert

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 490

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final words that General Leyers says to Pino before departing with the American soldiers at the Austrian border. Importantly, “Observer” is Pino’s undercover spy name, given to him by his uncle. The fact that Leyers knows the codename renders many of the events in the second half of the novel ambiguous. There are many important questions that the novel refuses to answer. For instance, why didn’t Leyers turn Pino in if he knew the truth? How long did he know the truth? Was Leyers working for the Allies all along? If so, was he only doing so to save his own skin? Additionally, what are the moral repercussions of Leyers’s actions, given this new information? Are Pino and Leyers equally culpable for the atrocities committed in the novel? Each of these questions is something the reader must work out for themselves, though the novel purposely makes it hard to find clear answers. By leaving Leyers’s character ambiguous, the novel drives home that war necessitates making morally debatable decisions.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

It is June 9th, 1943, in Milan, Italy. Benito Mussolini is losing power as Allied forces begin to close in on Italy. Adolf Hitler sends men and supplies to secure the southern half of Italy. Meanwhile, Pino Lella, an unassuming Italian youth, spends his time thinking about women, food, and music. Pino is 17 years old and awkward, but he doesn't let that deter him from trying to attract the opposite sex. However, his flirtations never prove successful, so his younger brother, Mimo, and his friend, Carletto, like to tease him.

While walking around Milan, Pino, Mimo, and Carletto spot a large number of men working outside of the Duomo. Curious about what's happening, Pino taps a nearby cleric on the shoulder and asks him what the men are doing. Before the cleric can answer, Cardinal Schuster, who is standing nearby, makes his presence known to Pino. Realizing who is in front of him, Pino bows and addresses him respectfully. Cardinal Schuster tells Pino that the men working nearby are getting ready to light up the Duomo; a blackout will begin in the evening and the Cardinal hopes that showing off the beauty of the Duomo will dissuade Allied bomber pilots from destroying it. This is the first time Pino realizes that Milan could be hit by an aerial attack.

Pino returns to Mimo and Carletto, and reports what he heard from the Cardinal. Together, the three of them walk around the Galleria as a storm begins to roll in. While they're walking, a flower vender tries to sell to Pino. Pino tells the vender he will return when he has a girlfriend, which results in more teasing from Mimo. Shortly afterwards, Pino sees a beautiful blond woman walk by and he decides to flirt with her. Although the woman brushes him off at first, Pino gets her to agree to go to a movie with him. She also tells Pino her name: Anna. When Pino returns to Mimo and Carletto, Mimo teases him and tells him that Anna won't show up for their date.

Beneath a Scarlet Sky is a work of historical fiction, with World War II as its backdrop. World War II began on September 1st, 1939, meaning that the novel begins more than halfway through the war. Italy swore its allegiance to the Axis Powers in June of 1940, but fighting on Italian soil didn't begin until 1943 after the German occupation of Italy. As such, it is no surprise that, for a young man like Pino, the war seems far away. He is not yet old enough to serve in the Italian army and very little seems different in his hometown of Milan than it was before the war. This novel is also a coming-of-age story, and Pino's desire to find love is a central quality of his character. Here, he is too young to know what true love is, though that will change as he grows older and more experienced.



The Duomo refers to the Duomo di Milano, the largest church in Italy. It is considered one of the great works of Western architecture. Meanwhile, Cardinal Schuster is a real historical figure who did, indeed, serve as the Archbishop of Milan. This is an important moment for Pino's character because it is the first time the war seems real to him. He knows that if someone like Cardinal Schuster is afraid, then he should be too.



The storm approaching Milan doubles as a metaphor for the German occupation of the city. However, despite the oncoming darkness, Pino and his friends remain jolly, likely because they don't yet understand the full extent of what is to come.



CHAPTER 2

Heavy rain starts coming down, so Pino and Mimo seek shelter in a nearby shop belonging to their Aunt Greta and Uncle Albert. When they enter, Pino spots a Nazi officer and watches as Albert makes a sale. When Pino moves closer, he notices the Nazi is a member of the Gestapo and Pino is unsettled by his presence. Pino goes into the back of the store to get some boxes for his uncle while still thinking about his upcoming date with Anna. When Pino returns to the front of the store, the Nazi has left. His aunt and uncle inform him that the Nazi is Walter Rauff, a Gestapo chief who is about to take charge of the Hotel Regina. Greta and Albert are annoyed by the increasing power the Nazis hold over Italy. Pino thinks the war will be over soon, but they aren't so sure.

Pino and Mimo return home. They worry their mother, Porzia, will be mad at them for staying out longer than they should have. Indeed, when Pino and Mimo enter their flat, Porzia is not happy with her sons. However, Pino manages to avoid his mother's wrath by making an excuse about not feeling well. Porzia buys Pino's explanation, and he is allowed to go to his room where he listens to jazz and thinks about Anna. At 6:15 p.m., Pino climbs out his window to go meet Anna. Mimo catches him doing so. Mimo laughs at his older brother and tells him Anna won't show up to their date.

Pino arrives at the theater, buys two tickets, and waits for Anna but she doesn't show up. Instead, Pino gives the other ticket to Mimo, who followed him to the theater, and the two of them go inside together. Before the film begins, fascist propaganda plays, which Pino mocks. Then, the real film begins; it is a comedy starring Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth titled *You Were Never Lovelier*. Pino immediately falls in love with the film, but it is soon interrupted by the sound of an air raid siren.

Here, another real historical figure is introduced: Walter Rauff. He is now known as one of the most barbaric members of the Nazi party who was responsible for the deaths of around 100,000 people. In this scene, Pino's intuition is both good and bad. He is right to be unsettled by Rauff but is incorrect about when the war will end. Pino's feelings about the war demonstrate a sort of youthful optimism, something that is lacking in his older relatives.



Here, Pino's life looks nearly identical to that of a stereotypical teenager. He is chided by his mother for a minor transgression and then he sneaks out his window to go on a date. Additionally, although it is only lightly touched upon here, this is the introduction of music into the novel, which will become increasingly important as the story continues.



*Anna standing Pino up hurts him, although he tries not to let it show to Mimo. As is described in this scene, it was standard under Mussolini's regime for propaganda to play before a film. The film, *You Were Never Lovelier*, is a romantic comedy with a happily-ever-after style ending. Of course, Pino never gets to see the ending of the film, perhaps implying that this novel will not end as happily as the film.*



CHAPTER 3

Bombs begin to fall around Milan. Pino and Mimo flee the theater and head to the Duomo to seek shelter. On the way to the Duomo, Pino and Mimo see the horrific results of the bombing, including dead children. Pino is shocked by what he sees and begins to cry. Eventually, Pino and Mimo make it to the Duomo, which is entirely intact, suggesting that the Cardinal's plan worked. Although bombs are still falling throughout the city, Pino and Mimo see that it looks safe in the direction of their home, so they carefully make their way back to the flat. When they enter their flat, they hear music emanating from upstairs. The music makes Pino angry. He yells at his parents for playing it during such a horrific time. Porzia explains that music is necessary to get through trying times. This calms Pino, who is still coming to terms with what he's witnessed.

Angry but relived, Porzia takes Pino into the dining room to get him some food. In the dining room, Pino finds Tullio, a family friend, with a beautiful girl named Cristina. Pino asks Tullio how he gets so many women to like him. Tullio tells him the key is to always listen. Pino then changes the subject to Colonel Rauff, who Tullio is spying on. Tullio chastises Pino for bringing up Rauff in their current setting. Soon after, Tullio and his date leave. Pino eats and listens to the adults discuss the increasing Nazi presence in Milan, which has them all on edge. In particular, Pino's attention is piqued when he hears that the Jewish people attending the party are planning on fleeing the country.

Pino goes to bed and thinks about why the Nazis hate the Jews. Pino has many Jewish friends and cannot imagine taking such a stance. Because of the day's events, Pino has trouble sleeping. He turns on the radio and listens to classical music, which calms him and allows him to sleep. The following afternoon, Pino goes looking for Carletto. Outside Carletto's home, Pino sees Mr. Beltramini, Carletto's father. The two of them discuss the previous day's events and Mr. Beltramini tells Pino that he and Carletto must look after one another. After, Pino enters the Beltraminis' shop and tells Carletto about his failed date and the air raid. After their brief talk, Pino and Carletto head to the theater, only to find it destroyed.

This novel is concerned with the messy moral problems that accompany war. Even in the most justified of wars, which World War II certainly was for the Allied forces, innocent people die, including children. Though his talk with Cardinal Schuster began to make the war seem real for Pino, this incident brings the gravity of the situation into full focus for him. When Pino and Mimo return to their home, the power of music is expounded upon by Porzia. Here, it is described as a necessity for survival, a lesson Pino takes to heart.



Tullio is Pino's role model, and he takes his advice seriously. He is also intrigued by the subject of Rauff but doesn't have enough tact to know when to ask about him. Tullio chastises Pino, likely because he doesn't know Cristina very well and worries that his secret about being a spy could get out. Additionally, this section is the first in the novel that references the Holocaust. Although most Italians at this time didn't know the extent to which the Nazis brutalized Jewish people, it was well known that Jews were a persecuted group under Hitler's regime.



Again, music proves itself to be a useful distraction from the troubles of the world, as it lulls Pino to sleep. Additionally, Pino and Carletto's trip to the theater demonstrates the immediacy of war; a beloved building that stood tall and housed people just a day before is now in shambles.



CHAPTER 4

Throughout June and July of 1943, the air raids continue, causing widespread damage and chaos throughout Milan. Pino is deeply disturbed by the carnage he sees, though he distracts himself with thoughts of Anna. He purposely spends time where the two of them first met, but to no avail. In the middle of June, Michele, Pino's father, sends Mimo to Casa Alpina, a camp in the mountains run by a priest named Father Re. Michele tries to make Pino go as well, but Pino refuses, even though he likes Casa Alpina. However, as time moves forward, the Nazi presence only grows, and the bombings only get worse.

In early August, Pino learns that the Allies are bombing Milan to destroy resources that Hitler could use to prolong the war. Soon after, bombs strike close enough to the Lellas' home to make it shake. This scares Porzia, who insists that the family should move. Michele refuses to move, but he does once again suggest that Pino join Mimo in the mountains. That evening, the Lellas and the Beltraminis take a train trip away from Milan before the bombing starts again.

The train stops near some farmland, and everyone gets out for the night. Pino and Carletto notice some girls their age and briefly consider talking to them, though they decide against it. Carletto teases Pino as usual, but Pino sees that something is bothering Carletto. Carletto reveals to Pino that his mother is ill with an unspecified disease. Carletto is sure that she will die soon. Pino commiserates with his friend and tries to cheer him up. On a nearby hill, Pino spots his father and Mr. Beltraminis playing music. Based on their previous experience, Carletto and Pino expect the performance to be a trainwreck and are surprised when they find it moving. The piece the adults play is called "Nessun Dorma" ("None Shall Sleep") from the Italian opera *Turandot*.

After the musical performance, Pino compliments his father and then goes to bed. The next day, everyone returns to Milan. Stepping off the train, Pino immediately notices that the devastation has grown significantly worse over the course of a single night. Over the next month, the Nazis seize complete control of Milan, as bombs continue to fall all over the city. The final straw for Michele is the bombing of the Lellas' home, which doubles as their purse shop, the source of their livelihood. Albert promises Michele that he will help him rebuild. However, in the meantime, Michele insists that Pino move to the mountains to be with his brother. Pino agrees to the plan.

War is now an everyday reality for Pino, as he is forced to watch the city he grew up in get destroyed by Allied bombers and Nazis. He is distraught, but at this point, he is not scared. He apparently feels it is his duty to remain in Milan, even if it is dangerous.



Throughout the novel, Pino and his family are never angry at the Allied forces, even though they are bombing Milan. Rather, the Lellas remain sympathetic to the Allies and instead blame the Nazis who have turned their focus to Italy as a way of dragging out the war. Additionally, although money is never discussed at length in the novel, it is worth noting that the Lellas appear to be relatively well-off. They have the money to move, send their children to the mountains, and take a train ride outside of the city.



"Nessun Dorma" is the most famous aria from Turandot, which initially premiered in 1926. The circumstances surrounding Michele and Mr. Beltraminis's performance lend the piece a new level of profundity, which deeply moves Carletto and Pino. It is unclear whether it is the performance itself that is elevated; perhaps Pino and Carletto have become more receptive listeners. Ultimately, it does not matter; the piece resonates with Pino, and he will think of it several times throughout the novel.



Although Pino's parents largely allow him to make his own choices, he is still a minor, and ultimately, they have the final say. Additionally, his parents likely have a sense of what Milan will look like under the Nazi regime—that is, Italians, even relatively well-off Italians, will have little to no power in the city.



CHAPTER 5

One week later, Pino is at the train station, preparing to depart for Casa Alpina. Michele gives Pino money and tells him that someone will be waiting for him when he reaches his destination. After saying goodbye to Michele, Albert, and Tullio, Pino finds a seat on the train and watches the landscape pass by. The train makes a brief stop at Lake Como where Pino spots hundreds of **“filthy men” in “dull gray outfits.”** Pino is confused by their presence and wonders who they are. He contemplates the strange sight for the rest of his trip. Soon, he arrives at Chiavenna, where he is greeted by Alberto Ascari. Alberto takes Pino to his car, a Fiat with a loud and powerful-sounding engine. Pino comments on the sound of the engine and Alberto tells him that he wants to be a race car driver.

Alberto drives Pino up a mountain road full of turns and other cars. Alberto drives quickly and effortlessly, passing other cars and diving the car into turns. Pino is terrified and excited at the same time. When they come to a stop, Pino tells Alberto that he believes he will be a race car driver. Pino asks Alberto if he skis and Alberto responds that he doesn't. Pino then makes Alberto a deal: if Alberto teaches him to drive, Pino will teach Alberto to ski. Alberto agrees to the deal and the two make plans to meet up whenever Pino gets a chance.

From where Alberto drops him off, Pino hikes several hundred meters to his new home. There, he is greeted by Father Re, who is happy to see him. Father Re sends Pino inside to eat dinner and reunite with Mimo. Mimo is happy to see his brother, though he is sad to hear about what's happened to their home. Pino assures him that everything will be okay. At dinner, Pino talks to Father Re, who asks him if he remembers the way to Val di Lei. Pino assures Father Re that he remembers and even knows multiple ways to get there. This pleases the priest, although he doesn't say why. Father Re tells Pino that while at Casa Alpina, his job is to go on daily hikes and to study three hours a day.

There will be more to say about the men in gray outfits later in the novel as their identity becomes apparent. For now, it is worth noting their number, which is substantial, and their lack of basic hygiene, which doesn't appear to be a choice on their part. Meanwhile, in Alberto Ascari, the novel presents another real and significant historical figure. Although he is just a child here, the real Alberto went on to win back-to-back Formula One World Championships. He is one of only two people to ever do so in the history of the sport. Tragically, he died while test driving a car in 1955.



Here, the novel uses dramatic irony to wink at its audience. After all, anyone familiar with Formula One already knows that Alberto will go on to be a world-famous driver. Additionally, the deal Alberto makes with Pino, though seemingly trivial, becomes important later in the novel.



The Alps lie north of Milan, which is itself in the northern part of Italy. Notably, the Alps create a border between Italy and its neighboring countries, including Switzerland, a neutral force during World War II. Meanwhile, the Val di Lei sits right against the Swiss border. Although it's not yet clear what Father Re wants Pino to do, it seems to have something to do with Switzerland.



CHAPTER 6

Father Re shakes Pino awake at four-thirty the following morning. When Pino enters the dining hall, he finds only Father Re and Brother Bormio, a chef who has made Pino breakfast. Father Re gives Pino supplies and sends him on an 18-kilometer hike. He also tells Pino to avoid being spotted by others if possible. Pino is confused by his instructions, but he sets out on his hike. The hike goes smoothly for the first few hours, but then it begins to rain and hail. Pino gets soaked, but he pushes onward anyway. At one point, Pino is spotted by some villagers who shout at him. Frightened, Pino moves along the trail as fast as he can, scared of what might happen. He pushes himself to his physical limits. Finally, he makes it back to Casa Alpina, exhausted.

Pino tells Father Re about his hike and the priest tells him to strip down to his underwear and sit in front of the fire to warm up. The next day, Father Re wakes Pino up at the same time and sends him on another hike. He tells Pino to make sure he isn't seen. This time, Pino asks the priest why he mustn't be spotted, but he doesn't get an answer. Pino departs on his hike and this time weather isn't a factor. However, the hike is still brutal, and it exhausts Pino. At one point, he decides to climb down to the nearby village of Madesimo. He stops and eats at an inn where he meets a young boy named Nicco. The two briefly discuss their shared love of skiing.

After his meal, Pino looks for Alberto, who lives in Madesimo, but cannot find him. Instead, he returns to Casa Alpina and reports to Father Re. The next day is Saturday and Pino spends it learning to drive with Alberto. At one point, they come across a Nazi patrol that stops them. Alberto and Pino explain themselves and the Nazis allow them to continue, though they don't seem to approve. The next day, while Pino is driving, he almost accidentally runs a Nazi vehicle off the road. He wonders if he should turn around, but Alberto tells him to drive faster and the two of them escape before further trouble can ensue. When Pino tells Father Re about his driving experience, the priest warns him not to provoke the Nazis. The next day, Father Re sends Pino on another hike, this one even harder than the two that preceded it.

Eighteen kilometers is roughly equivalent to 11 miles, a significant length at any elevation, but especially when hiking through the mountains. Additionally, Father Re's warning to Pino about being spotted suggests that the task may be more dangerous than he is letting on. This hike—along with the many other hikes Pino will soon undertake—are crucial to his character development. Not only do they teach him to be mentally and physically tough, but they also transform his body from that of a boy to that of a man.



Clearly, Father Re's hikes serve a purpose of which Pino is not yet aware. It is a testament to Pino's fortitude that he is able to withstand these grueling trials.



Although Pino and Alberto know to be afraid of the Nazis, they lack the maturity and experience to know what the German soldiers are capable of. Meanwhile, Father Re seems as though he's dealt with the Nazis before and knows exactly how bad matters can get if they are provoked.



CHAPTER 7

Pino departs on his new mission. Although the weather is nice, the hike is treacherous, and Pino has never done it before without a guide. The hike involves rock climbing, and it takes Pino a long time to find the courage—and the proper footing—to complete the task. Eventually, Pino reaches the top of the mountain that he set out to conquer. Satisfied, Pino lays down and falls asleep. He wakes up at 2 p.m. and begins his descent. It is almost nightfall when he returns to Casa Alpina. He tells Father Re that the hike was difficult, but that he could do it again if necessary. Pino asks the priest why he is being sent on these hikes. Father Re tells him that their purpose is to make him strong, but he refuses to elaborate.

Over the next few weeks, Pino continues to spend his time hiking and learning to drive with Alberto. One day, in October, after a long hike, Pino returns to Casa Alpina to find Father Re hosting three guests. Pino asks about their presence but does not get a clear answer. However, Father Re does promise him the following day to rest. The following evening, Father Re asks Pino to come see him after dinner. Pino does so, and he learns the identities of his guests, as well as the purpose of his hikes. The guests are Jewish people who have escaped Meina because of Nazi persecution. Father Re explains to Pino that the routes he's been traveling lead to Switzerland, a neutral country. Father Re asks Pino to guide their Jewish guests to Switzerland so they can evade the Nazis. Pino wholeheartedly agrees to do so and is filled with a newfound sense of purpose.

CHAPTER 8

The morning of the hike, Father Re introduces Pino to the people he will be guiding. Pino asks them for their names and Father Re instructs them to give the names found on their fabricated papers, which turn out to be Maria, Ricardo, and Luigi. After breakfast, Pino suggests taking the group via Angel's Step to the Val di Lei, but Father Re shoots down his idea. Apparently, Giovanni Barbareschi, a seminarian, as well as Father Re's collaborator, recently took another group of Jewish people via that route and Father Re doesn't want to attract undue attention to it. After this conversation, Pino, Maria, Ricardo, and Luigi depart.

In addition to being difficult, Pino's hikes are an isolating experience. While the other boys at Casa Alpina spend their days together, Pino is alone. This means he has to be completely self-reliant; no one is around to tell him what to do or what not to do. Indeed, these hikes make Pino stronger, though Father Re's continued silence suggests that they serve a greater purpose as well—one that Pino isn't yet ready to hear.



Finally, the true purpose of Pino's hikes is revealed. In many countries during World War II, there were resistance efforts to help Jewish people flee Nazi persecution. Switzerland was one of the most common countries for Jewish people to flee to as a safe haven because it stayed neutral during the war. As is portrayed in the novel, religious groups often spearheaded these efforts, saving thousands of lives in the process.



It was common for Jewish people escaping persecution to take on different identities in order to conceal their religious and ethnic background. In this case, their fabricated papers use common Italian names. Evidently, Father Re has been involved in many similar situations and he knows they must be careful. This explains why he repeatedly told Pino to make sure he wasn't spotted during his previous hikes.



Not long into the hike, Pino realizes he must take control of the situation. He urges the others to only speak quietly and forces Luigi to put out his cigarette. The group is slightly annoyed, but they ultimately respect Pino's demands and listen to him. Before long, one of the steepest and most dangerous parts of their hike is over with. However, Luigi begins to slow down, and he is seized by coughing fits. When the group reaches a difficult part of the trail, Luigi refuses to go any further. However, after some convincing by Pino, Luigi decides to continue onward.

The part of the trail Luigi fears is a set of steep steps. Pino coaxes Luigi up the steps by telling him to pretend he is climbing the Colosseum. This works and Luigi eventually reaches the top. Up next is the worst part of the climb, though Pino doesn't reveal this fact to the rest of the group. However, the challenge is purely psychological; the group must pass over a cleft where falling means death. Pino makes short work of the cleft by keeping the group's eyes on him instead of the cliff that is at their feet. Shortly afterward, the group reaches the Val di Lei, and Pino feels a great sense of satisfaction at his accomplishment. All that is left to do is to walk to Switzerland. Pino has never gone to Switzerland before, but he follows Father Re's instructions. He enters a grove mentioned to him by Father Re, and just as Pino feels that he's accomplished his task, a gun is pointed in his face.

CHAPTER 9

The man with the gun asks Pino who sent him. Pino responds truthfully and the man lowers the gun. He introduces himself as Bergstrom, the man Pino is looking for. Bergstrom tells Pino he can take Luigi, Maria, and Ricardo the rest of the way. Before going their separate ways, everyone says goodbye and Luigi gifts Pino a fancy cigar. After, Pino makes his way back to Madesimo to rest at the inn. He is exhausted, but proud of himself for helping people and fighting back against the Nazis. Before reaching Madesimo, Pino stops to rest. From his position he can see four men with guns walking in the Val di Lei. He wonders whether they saw him.

Despite the fact that he is still a minor, Pino is now charged with leading three adults to safety, creating a strange power dynamic. Pino knows he has to act as the group's leader because if he doesn't, they are likely to die. Notably, Luigi's coughing suggests that he is not in good shape. If such a climb is difficult for the young Pino, then it is significantly worse for Luigi, who smokes and is much older.



After experiencing the hike himself, Pino understands how much the group's success depends on psychological fortitude. It is a testament to Pino's mental toughness that he is able to will, not just himself, but three other people through the trip as well. Additionally, the end of this chapter makes use of a narrative device that is common throughout the novel: the cliffhanger.



Pino feels as though he has a renewed sense of purpose after successfully completing his escort mission. Rather than sitting out the war, Pino is now a part of it, and he is fighting on the morally just side. However, the men walking with guns through the Val di Lei are a bad omen, which foreshadow trouble on the horizon.



Pino makes his way into Madesimo where he finds Alberto. Alberto tells him that partisans stopped in the village the previous evening. Although the partisans claimed to be fighting the Nazis, they asked a lot of questions about Jews. At the same time, Nicco is standing nearby showing an egg-shaped object to a few other kids. Suddenly, the egg-shaped object explodes, taking off part of Nicco's face and injuring the other children as well. Pino picks up Nicco and rushes him back to his parents at the inn. Before anything can be done to help Nicco, he convulses and dies. Mr. Conte, the innkeeper, as well as Nicco's father, asks Pino to fetch Father Re to bless Nicco's body. Exhausted and upset, Pino makes his way back to Casa Alpina to find Father Re.

Pino returns to Casa Alpina and reports to Father Re. After, Father Re departs for Madesimo and Pino goes inside. Seeing the state of his brother, Mimo helps Pino to the shower to clean Nicco's blood off of him. Later, Father Re returns and tells Pino he needs to rest because he'll have two more Jewish people to escort the following day. Over the next few months, Pino helps escort Jewish people to safety almost daily. He also teaches some of the other boys, including Mimo, how to undertake the escort missions so they can help as well. Father Re is happy with their success but worries that the Nazis are becoming suspicious because they've been unsuccessful in their hunt for Jewish people. Pino hopes the war will be over soon, but he knows from listening to the radio that the Allies are not making much progress against the German front.

Winter arrives and after a brief trip home for Christmas, Pino and Mimo spend it at Casa Alpina. One night, Alberto invites Pino to a party at the inn in Madesimo. Pino accepts the invitation. The party is great, and Pino is happy. However, the party is interrupted by a group of men with guns claiming to be partisans. They force everyone to "donate" to their cause, essentially robbing them at gunpoint. The leader of the group spots Pino and tells him that he's seen him walking along many of the nearby trails. He tells Pino to stay off the trails and then steals his boots and money. Later, Pino learns the man's name is Tito and that the group only pretends to be partisans when they are really just criminals. On top of everything else, it is a member of Tito's group who left the grenade that killed Nicco.

The partisans are the Italian resistance, fighting against both the Italian fascists and the Nazis. However, the men who stopped in Madesimo don't appear to be real partisans. The egg-shaped object Nicco picks up is a grenade, carelessly left behind by one of the fake partisans. Although death was already a significant part of the novel, this is the first time a person dies who Pino knows and it affects him more than anything else up to this point in the story.



Pino is in shock after Nicco's sudden and violent death. Mimo demonstrates his maturity by helping his older brother. However, the novel doesn't linger on this tragic event for long and instead switches its focus to Pino's many escort missions. Pino acts as a leader for the other boys at Casa Alpina, making him a critical part in the operation. However, he is also beginning to understand his previous ignorance about the state of the war, as it doesn't seem as though it will end soon.



Tito's group are opportunists who barely bother to disguise the fact that they aren't partisans. They are also reminiscent of the men who Pino recalls seeing in the Val di Lei after his first escort mission. Also, they pose a problem for Pino's missions going forward, as it's apparent that their threats are serious, and they are not afraid to use violence to get what they want.



CHAPTER 10

Snow begins to pile up on the trails around Casa Alpina, causing difficulty for Pino's escort missions. Because of the snow, he must go less frequently and take larger groups. After one mission, he returns to Bergstrom's hut (his usual resting place before returning to Casa Alpina) to find a note that reads "Last warning." Pino takes the note, starts the fire, and then steps outside. Suddenly, he hears an explosion from inside and realizes Tito or one of his men placed an explosive in the fireplace. Later, Father Re and Pino realize that their current route is no longer an option because Tito's threats seem serious. Instead, Father Re proposes a different route and instructs Pino to teach it to Mimo.

Pino's next escort mission is undertaken with Mimo. Their job is to escort a small family and an old violinist whom they know from Milan. Before departing, the boys reintroduce themselves to the violinist, who recognizes them. The violinist, whose fake name is Mrs. Napolitano, tells Pino that her husband was recently caught by the Nazis and sent away on a cattle car. Pino offers sympathy to Mrs. Napolitano and promises to get her to Switzerland. However, because Mrs. Napolitano is not in good shape, he can tell the hike will be difficult for her.

Indeed, the trip quickly proves troublesome for Mrs. Napolitano. Before long, she suggests that she return to Casa Alpina with Mimo. Pino tells her that doing so isn't possible and that it would put everyone in danger. Immediately afterwards, Mrs. Napolitano throws up and reveals to the group that she is pregnant. To make things easier on Mrs. Napolitano, Pino carries her violin for her; it is a Stradivarius, her prized possession. The group continues to make progress, but they move slowly because of the increased amount of snow.

Eventually, the group makes it to one of the more precarious sections of the hike. The rocks they must climb have turned into a wall of ice and so now they require ice picks to climb. Pino goes first, creating a path for the others. He also sends them down a rope to secure themselves with. He gets everyone up with relative ease, except Mrs. Napolitano, who is petrified. Eventually, Mimo talks Mrs. Napolitano into attempting the climb. She tries but falls. After a brief pep talk, Mrs. Napolitano attempts the climb again and eventually succeeds.

Taking larger groups on missions means there is a higher risk of getting caught, but one Pino and Father Re feel is necessary to take. Indeed, they do get spotted by Tito, which means taking a different route, presumably one that is more dangerous if they decided against using it previously. In the face of all this danger Pino stands tall and continues to do the right thing.



Previously, when Pino escorted Luigi, he had a difficult time, and that was during summer on an easier trail. Now, he and Mimo must guide Mrs. Napolitano during the winter on a significantly more difficult trail. This hike is shaping up to be the most difficult yet, but Pino still remains confident. Additionally, this section of the story refers to the cattle cars that were often used to transport Jewish people to concentration camps. The destination of the cars can be surmised by most modern readers but would not be known by most Italians at the time.



On top of her already apparent physical disadvantages, Mrs. Napolitano's pregnancy is a serious drawback for the trip. It is dangerous for a pregnant woman to push her body to its limits because she could harm herself and the baby she is carrying. Also, the Stradivarius Mrs. Napolitano carries is an extremely precious item. A Stradivarius is a violin made by the Stradivari family in the 17th or 18th century; they are considered to be some of the finest instruments ever made and are incredibly rare. This would've been true even in the 1940s and explains why Mrs. Napolitano takes the trouble to carry her violin on the dangerous journey.



The hike requires significant bravery both from its leaders, Pino and Mimo, and from Mrs. Napolitano, who is understandably petrified at every turn. For Pino and Mimo, the test is one of leadership; they know the only way Mrs. Napolitano can make it is if they help her. Meanwhile, Mrs. Napolitano is fighting both physical and psychological conflicts inside herself.



The group continues to make progress, but not before a storm starts to roll in. Pino knows he must get everyone to safety and out of the elements. Soon, they come to a part of the trail that looks like a catwalk. Here, a wrong step means falling and potentially dying, although Pino secures everyone with rope. Almost everyone gets across without too much difficulty, including Mrs. Napolitano. However, Mimo crosses last and does so carelessly. Pino warns him to be more careful and just as Mimo tells him not to worry, he falls over the side of the catwalk.

Mrs. Napolitano's fears are not irrational, as Mimo's fall demonstrates. The danger on the trail is real and it shows how desperate many people were to escape Italy during the war. Also, this is another example of a chapter ending on a cliffhanger. Mimo's fall is ironic because he's a leader, not an inexperienced refugee, and it shows that in such a risky situation, nobody can be too careful.



CHAPTER 11

Pino yells his brother's name and Mimo eventually answers. With the help of Mr. D'Angelo, the father of the family he is escorting, Pino manages to pull Mimo back up to safety. Shortly afterwards, the group is through the worst of their trip, but the weather continues to worsen. Pino takes the group to a nearby shepherd's hut, and they all huddle inside to rest and get warm. Everyone sleeps for a few hours before waking up to the sound of an avalanche. Once the sound stops, Pino opens the door to the hut to find that they have been snowed in.

An already extreme test of will is made even worse by the bad weather that accompanies it. Although Pino is smart to take his group to shelter, he's inadvertently put them in even more danger, as is evidenced by the avalanche.



The group begins to panic, including Mimo. However, Pino takes charge and asks the men to help him clear the snow. The process is long and arduous, but eventually they feel a draft and know they are getting close. They spend the rest of the day digging and finally make their way out. However, Pino decides it is best for them to spend the night in the hut so that they can properly rest before completing their journey.

Again, Pino shows poise and leadership through an intense situation where acting differently could likely result in his death. Although Pino's decision to rest is the only viable option, it also puts the group a day behind schedule.



Upon emerging from the hut, Pino points out the Val di Lei and tells the others that they have roughly five kilometers to go. Mrs. Napolitano insists that she cannot go any further without potentially losing her baby. However, Pino comes up with an idea. He tells Mrs. Napolitano to get on his back and he skis her the rest of the way. At first, Mrs. Napolitano is terrified by the idea, but quickly realizes that she loves it. She laughs most of the time and when the skiing is done, she thanks Pino for the experience.

The physical (and perhaps mental) stress has finally caught up to Mrs. Napolitano who cannot in good conscience go any further. However, Pino once again demonstrates his ingenuity and his vastly improved physical strength by carrying Mrs. Napolitano to the destination on skis. He turns one of the worst moments of Mrs. Napolitano's life into one of the best.



Pino comes to a stop near Mr. Bergstrom who is concerned that the group is a day late. Pino explains the situation to Mr. Bergstrom and Mr. Bergstrom assures Mrs. Napolitano that she doesn't have much further to go. Additionally, Mrs. Napolitano has begun to feel better after the skiing. Mr. Bergstrom, Pino, and Mrs. Napolitano wait and watch as the D'Angelos make their way to them. Once the group arrives, Pino and Mimo say their goodbyes. As they depart, Pino asks Mrs. Napolitano if she would play "Nessun Dorma" for them on her violin. She does so as Pino and Mimo make their way back to Casa Alpina.

Although it was not easy, Pino and Mimo's mission is ultimately a success, largely thanks to Pino's leadership. However, even though Mrs. Napolitano and the D'Angelos are safe, Pino and Mimo are only halfway done with their mission. Now, they must return home. They are given the strength to do so from "Nessun Dorma," the same song Michele sang during the Lellas' overnight trip to the countryside several months before.



CHAPTER 12

Several months later, in April of 1944, Pino wakes up and hears loud voices outside. He leaves his room to find Tito pointing a gun at Father Re and demanding money and resources. Father Re agrees to give Tito what he asks for, but not before he chastises Tito for his conduct. While Brother Bormio fetches the resources for Father Re, Tito turns his gaze to Pino, whom he recognizes from the party at the inn. Tito turns his gun to Pino and makes him step forward. Tito tries to make Pino show him respect, but Pino refuses. Tito responds by hitting Pino in the testicles with his gun, which drops Pino to the ground. Father Re tries to break up the violence, but Tito turns his gun back on him. In response, Pino kicks Tito in the knee, causing him to fire and drop the rifle.

Tito and his men have no shame. Not only did they rob innocent people in Madesimo, now they are robbing a priest who houses young men and who they know helps Jewish people escape the country. They are selfish and their selfishness angers Pino, who refuses to bow down to Tito, even if it means he is physically harmed. Here, Pino puts his life in danger to protect Father Re, whom Tito has no respect for.



Pino picks up Tito's rifle and points it at him. Tito orders his men to kill Pino and Father Re, but they refuse. Still, Father Re promises to give them the supplies they asked for. Tito begrudgingly leaves, but tells Pino, "This isn't over." After Tito and his men depart, Pino asks Father Re if he should have killed him. Father Re tells Pino that he is glad he didn't. Then, Father Re asks Pino to stand guard for the rest of the day. Hours later, Pino sees a signal in morse code coming from Campodolcino. He doesn't know what it means, but he copies it down. He then takes the message to Father Re and Brother Bormio. Brother Bormio translates it and tells the others that Nazis are on their way.

Evidently, Tito is even more despicable than the men who follow him, as he genuinely wants them to shoot Father Re. In sharp opposition to Tito, Father Re shows compassion on Tito and his men by giving them the rations anyway. He is genuine in his desire to help others and wants to avoid bloodshed at all costs. However, Tito and his men are nothing compared to the Nazi regime that is on its way to Casa Alpina.



Father Re is currently sheltering Jewish refugees. He knows if the Nazis find them, they will kill everyone at the camp. Pino tells Father Re that he has an idea of how to hide them. An hour later, Colonel Rauff arrives at Casa Alpina with a group of Nazi soldiers. Rauff questions Father Re about his involvement in smuggling Jewish people out of the country. Father Re pretends not to know what Rauff is talking about and tells him that he is welcome to search the premises. Rauff does so but does not find anything.

This scene is one of the most suspenseful in the novel because of the repercussions that could come of it. The historical Colonel Rauff was known for his barbaric behavior, such that he wouldn't blink twice before executing everyone at the camp if he knew Father Re was lying. For this reason, it is crucial that Pino's plan—so far hidden from readers—works.



Along with Pino and Father Re, Rauff goes back outside and finds Mimo chasing after an ox. Mimo tells Pino, Father Re, and Rauff that he's having trouble rounding up the rest of the oxen. Much to the chagrin of Pino and Father Re, Rauff offers to help. Rauff grew up on a farm and finds the idea fun. Along with Pino and Mimo, Rauff walks to the oxen and helps wrangle them. The entire time, Pino believes his plan has been ruined, although the nature of the plan has yet to be revealed. Ultimately, though, the wrangling of the oxen is uneventful and soon after Rauff and his fellow Nazis leave.

Afterwards, the members of Casa Alpina let out a cheer. It turns out they had hidden the Jewish refugees in the trees and covered their tracks with the oxen. However, they weren't expecting Rauff to want to help. Rauff walked right underneath where the refugees were hiding, but luckily, he never spotted them. Pino is relieved that his plan worked. Later the same day, Alberto comes to Casa Alpina and tells Pino that he has an urgent message from Michele saying that Pino must return to Milan.

CHAPTER 13

Pino wants to stay at Casa Alpina where he feels he is doing valuable work, but Father Re tells him he must return to his father. Alberto drives Pino to the train station and tells him to come back when he can to finish his driving lessons. Several hours later, Pino's train arrives in Milan. Albert and Michele are at the station, waiting to meet him. The first thing Pino notices about his father and uncle is how much older they look. Meanwhile, Michele and Albert say the same thing about Pino. While driving through Milan, Pino spots more people he labels as **gray men** laboring throughout the city. He asks Albert about them, but Albert says they'll talk about it later, while motioning to their suspicious-looking driver.

While driving through the city, Pino quickly realizes that the Nazis have seized complete control of Milan. When entering their new apartment building, Pino is forced to show his papers to Nazi guards who now permanently stand watch. As Pino enters his new apartment, his father informs him that the lower part of the building functions as Nazi headquarters in Milan. He also informs Pino of the reason he brought him home; Pino is about to turn 18, meaning he will soon be drafted into the Italian Army. Michele does not want this for his son because the Italian army is currently being sent to the Russian front, a certified death trap.

Evidently, Mimo and the ox have something to do with Pino's plan, although it is not yet clear what that is. Also, it is apparent that Pino did not expect Rauff to help them with the oxen and that him doing so could ruin the plan. Though it's not clear to the reader what's going on here, these details build further suspense.



Pino's plan is rather ingenious. Because there is so much snow at Casa Alpina, there is no obvious way the Jewish people could escape or hide without leaving tracks. However, Pino finds a way to make it happen that even Father Re hadn't thought of. It is a substantial moment for his character that demonstrates his cleverness, a trait that's grown since he arrived at Casa Alpina.



Pino knows that returning to Milan means putting the important work he's doing at Casa Alpina on pause, which could result in fewer lives being saved. Nonetheless, he returns to his father and uncle, who immediately notice how much he's matured. Pino sees differences in Michele and Albert as well, but their aging is clearly a regression, unlike Pino's. The men Pino spots while driving through the city are similar to those he saw earlier at the train station. From this moment forward, he dubs them the gray men, a title which emphasizes their lack of liveliness.



In only a few months, life has completely changed in Milan. Even at home, Pino has Nazis right below his feet; he cannot escape them while in the city. Additionally, Pino's coming of age is not without its difficulties. During wartime, all 18-year-olds were expected to join the army, and Pino is no exception. Over 300,000 young Italian men died in the line of duty during World War II, many of whom were sent to the Russian front.



Instead, Michele wants Pino to enroll himself in the Nazi army where he can sit out the war comfortably, likely performing construction jobs. He would work as a part of Organization Todt, and Albert has connections that would ensure him the job. Pino protests, before ultimately agreeing to think on it. After, Pino accompanies Albert to his shop where he finds his Aunt Greta and Tullio. Tullio tells him that Barbareschi recently escaped San Vittore prison, but now Rauff wants Tullio brought in for questioning. This makes it impossible for Tullio to spy on Rauff, as he had been doing previously.

Because Tullio cannot freely move around the city, Albert asks Pino to complete one of his normal tasks. Pino must deliver papers to a man on the other side of the city, although he is not told what the papers contain. Pino agrees to do so, knowing that being caught means being killed. Pino goes to the apartment where he is meant to deliver the papers and finds a man named Baka. Pino discovers that Baka is a radio operator who switches apartments every day so the Nazis cannot find him. After meeting with Baka, Pino decides he will join the resistance rather than become a Nazi.

On his way back from Baka's apartment, Pino goes to see the Beltraminis. Pino spots Mr. Beltramini first who tells him that Carletto is upstairs helping his mother. Unfortunately, Mrs. Beltramini has only a few months left to live. Pino goes and sees Carletto and the two of them spend time catching up, though Carletto is clearly depressed by his mother's condition. Afterwards, Pino heads home. On his way, he sees a Nazi patrol take a gun from a civilian and shoot him in the head. Pino arrives home and reunites with his mother. Soon after, Greta arrives and tells them that Tullio has been taken by the Gestapo. Everyone is shocked and Porzia tells Pino that he will join the SS, whether he wants to or not.

CHAPTER 14

Eleven weeks later, Pino is walking around Milan, now in a Nazi uniform, as part of Organization Todt. His commanding officer orders him to stand watch with another boy near the train station. While they are there, air raid sirens start to sound, and shortly afterwards, a bomb drops on the train station, killing Pino's fellow watchman and injuring Pino in the process. Pino sees that two fingers on his right hand are barely attached, and this causes him to pass out. Pino is taken to a hospital where his fingers are reattached. He is discharged in early August, and heads to his aunt and uncle's store.

If Pino agrees to his father's request, he will be doing the exact opposite of the work he was doing at Casa Alpina. Pino wants to feel like he is doing the right thing and joining Organization Todt is far from it in his mind. However, resisting the Nazis is a dangerous game, as he learns from Tullio, who is now attempting to avoid Nazis in a city swarming with them.



Pino is eager to perform a task for Albert and feel as though he's contributing to the Italian resistance. Again, he shows bravery and risks his life for the cause. In doing so, he realizes that he cannot in good conscience join the SS—not when there are so many people fighting for the future of Italy on the side of justice.



The Beltraminis's situation is especially heart-wrenching because they are dealing with the gradual death of a loved one on top of everything else. While returning from his friend's house, Pino witnesses a casual and brutal act of violence, which he soon learns is standard procedure for the Nazis. This makes him feel even more disgusted at the idea of joining the SS, but his mother tells him he has no choice. Even though Pino is now an adult, his mother ultimately makes his decision for him, suggesting that he still hasn't fully matured into his own person.



Although Porzia thought Pino's work for Organization Todt would keep him safe, this immediately turns out not to be the case.



Outside the store, he spots a Nazi attempting to fix a vehicle. Pino offers to help and quickly gets the vehicle up and running. Immediately afterward, Greta and Albert exit the store with a man who looks like a high-ranking Nazi officer. They tell Pino that the man—General Leyers—would like to speak to him. After seeing his skill with the broken-down vehicle, Leyers wants Pino to be his new driver. Pino accepts the position. Leyers departs and then Greta and Albert inform Pino of Leyers’s importance. Apparently, Leyers is one of the most high-ranking members of the German army. As such, Greta and Albert want to use Pino to spy on him.

Here, the novel introduces another key player as well as another real historical figure: General Leyers. Though Leyers was a high-ranking member of the Nazi party, he has not traditionally been seen as a major player in the Nazi regime. This novel likely emphasizes his importance for dramatic purposes. Notably, Pino can serve as a driver for Leyers because of his experience with Alberto. Additionally, even in Organization Todt, Pino finds a way to be useful for the Allies.



CHAPTER 15

Albert and Greta tell Pino that he cannot tell anyone he is a spy, even his own parents. Doing so would put everyone in danger. They also tell him that Tullio is alive, but he’s been beaten by the Nazis and is being held in prison. The next day, Pino makes his way to Leyers’s flat and knocks on the door. The door opens and Pino is shocked to see Anna on the other side. At first, Anna doesn’t recognize Pino, so he reminds her of his identity. Anna takes Pino into the flat and introduces him to Dolly Stottlemeyer, Leyers’s mistress. A moment later, Leyers arrives and tells Pino to take his things to the car.

Tullio’s situation reflects what could happen to Pino if he lets anyone know that he is a spy. Once again, Pino is risking his life, but he is doing so for a just cause. This section also reintroduces Anna, whom Pino hasn’t seen since his foiled date at the beginning of the novel, and who will be a key character moving forward.



Pino does as he is told, but his mind is still reeling from reuniting with Anna. While waiting for Leyers, Pino considers going through the general’s suitcase, but decides against it. Leyers asks Pino to drive him to a soccer stadium, which he does. When they arrive, Leyers tells Pino to stay near the car and then leaves. However, Pino does not do what he is told. He moves to a vantage point where he can see what Leyers is doing. From afar, Pino watches as Leyers sorts a group of **gray men**. After he is finished, Leyers heads back to the car, and Pino rushes to meet him there so he is not caught.

Immediately, Pino puts himself in danger and acts without much caution. Although he immediately gets results, he also nearly gets caught. Once again, the gray men appear and it is clear that they serve the Nazis, though they don’t appear to do so willingly. Furthermore, Leyers has power over what happens to the gray men, as is evidenced by the scene Pino witnesses.



The next stop of the day is a tunnel, also occupied by laboring **gray men**. Leyers brings Pino into the tunnel with him, and Pino sees that it is full of ammunition. Leyers looks through the supplies and asks Pino to take notes. Then, he sends Pino away while he talks to a colonel. Pino looks around at the gray men and is shocked by what he sees. They are completely emaciated, and no one is giving them water. Pino decides to give water to them himself. When he asks one of the men who they are, the man responds, “We’re slaves. Every last one of us.”

Here, Pino gets his first close-up look at the gray men and learns the reality of their situation. They have been enslaved, taken by the Nazis and harnessed by Organization Todt to perform grueling manual labor. Indeed, although the name is Pino’s invention, the gray men are more or less historically accurate figures. On top of the now well-documented enslavement of Jewish people in labor camps, the Nazis also enslaved other non-Germans to carry out manual labor on various fronts of the war.



CHAPTER 16

Pino asks the gray man, Antonio, if he is Jewish. Antonio says he is not. Although some of the gray men are Jewish, many of them are prisoners of war. Before the discussion can move further, Leyers returns and yells at Pino for giving the men water. Pino fires back at Leyers and tells him that the men will die without proper food and water. Leyers tells Pino that there is a food shortage, but he will try to make sure the men get more water.

The next stop of the day is Salò. Once again, Leyers asks Pino to come with him. They enter a sprawling villa where Benito Mussolini lives. Leyers uses Pino as his interpreter to converse with Mussolini. Mussolini is angry because he has no control over his own country. Meanwhile, conditions continue to worsen. The conversation is not fruitful, though Leyers makes promises to Mussolini that he will try to make sure things improve. Afterwards, Leyers and Pino leave and Leyers compliments Pino on a job well done. Pino gets angry with himself because the compliment makes him happy.

Pino drives General Leyers back to Milan and Leyers gives him a few hours of free time. Pino uses it to see Carletto. He starts to tell Carletto about his day, though he leaves out the fact that he is a Nazi spy. Outside Carletto's home, Pino and Carletto watch as a biker tosses a bag into a Nazi vehicle. Immediately, it explodes, injuring Mr. Beltramini who is standing nearby. Pino and Carletto rush to Mr. Beltramini's side. On the way, Pino puts his Nazi armband back on so that he can get through the German troops who have rushed the scene. Mr. Beltramini sees the armband, causing him, along with Carletto, to think Pino is a traitor. Before Pino can explain himself, Mr. Beltramini dies and Carletto refuses to talk to him anymore.

Pino returns to General Leyers's apartment and describes what he's seen. Soon after, Leyers dismisses him, and he returns to Albert and Greta's shop. He explains to them what happened. Albert and Greta are sad about Mr. Beltramini but tell Pino that he cannot reveal to Carletto that he is a spy. Additionally, they are excited that he's collected so much information over the course of a single day. Albert promises Pino that the information he's collecting is invaluable.

Pino can only take his role as an undercover operative so far. Unlike Leyers, he refuses to deny the gray men basic human decency. Surprisingly, Leyers partially comes around to Pino's side, suggesting that he is not entirely without a conscience.



Salò is the German puppet state set up during the German occupation of Italy during World War II. As is shown in the novel, it is where Mussolini lived for the majority of the war. In this scene, Mussolini is frustrated at his lack of control and though Leyers promises to fix it, his promise is empty. Both historically and in the novel, Mussolini retains little to no control over the state of Italy. Here, he is treated like a child by Leyers, who simply wants to pacify him and nothing more. Additionally, Pino's satisfaction at Leyers's compliment demonstrates the moral complexity of his situation. Although Pino knows Leyers is evil, he cannot help but like him and want his approval on some level.



Even though Pino and Carletto would likely sympathize with the biker, who is presumably a partisan, his actions lead to the death of Mr. Beltramini, an innocent man. To make matters worse, Carletto cannot know that Pino is working as a spy, meaning he now sees his friend as evil, even if that is not the case. It is implied that Carletto partially blames Pino for his father's death and Pino can do nothing to convince him otherwise, at least for the time being.



Despite the horrors he witnesses, Pino manages to gather a lot of intel in a single day, all of which is vital information. However, this means that Pino must continue to act like he is a part of the Nazi regime, a role which many Milanese people find disgusting.



CHAPTER 17

The morning of August 8th, 1944, Pino wakes up early and makes his way to General Leyers's place. While there, he sees Anna, which cheers him up, and hears warnings on the radio about what will happen to the Italian resistance if they continue to bomb Germans. After breakfast, Leyers asks Pino to take him to the chancellery. Leyers brings Pino inside to translate. Pino tries to hide himself from Cardinal Schuster but is unsuccessful. Leyers tells the cardinal that, in light of the bombing, Colonel Rauff plans to execute Italian men until the bomber is brought to justice. Schuster tells Leyers that such a policy will only make matters worse, and Leyers agrees, but cannot do anything about it. Before Leyers and Pino leave, Pino tells the cardinal that the situation is not what it looks like and he asks him to conceal his identity to Leyers.

Leyers and Pino return to Leyers's home and the general asks Pino to wait in the car because he might need him later. Pino does as he is told but is not happy about it. He had hoped to see Anna, and he is starving. A few hours later, the vehicle's door opens and Anna hops in with a basket of food sent by Dolly. Pino eats ravenously and thanks Anna for the kindness. He asks her to stay longer, but she tells him she has to get back to Dolly.

Early the next morning, Pino is woken up by Leyers tapping on the window. Leyers tells Pino to drive him to San Vittore Prison and Pino does as he is told. At the prison, Pino watches as Leyers makes 150 prisoners count off by tens. Then, he asks every tenth person to step forward, one of whom is Tullio. Pino knows he shouldn't let Leyers figure out that he knows Tullio, but he worries about what will happen to him. After returning to the car, Leyers asks Pino to follow a lorry containing the fifteen prisoners.

After driving for a while, Leyers asks Pino to stop at a piazza where they can get gas. After the gas tank fills up, Leyers and Pino watch from afar as the prisoners exit the lorry. A large crowd forms around them and a Nazi officer informs the crowd that this is what will happen anytime a Nazi soldier is killed by a partisan. Tullio begins yelling at the Nazi commander, only to be mowed down by machine gun fire along with the rest of the prisoners.

Anna is Pino's light in the darkness as he tries to navigate his new role as Leyers's driver. Although he knows his work is valuable, he is ashamed of his role, as is evidenced by how he behaves around Cardinal Schuster. Additionally, in this section Rauff lives up to his barbarous reputation by threatening public executions. Meanwhile, Leyers appears more measured and does not wish for any bloodshed. That said, Leyers seems more concerned that the executions are a strategic misstep than he is with the fact that they are morally abhorrent.



Again, Anna proves to be a bright spot in Pino's day. Dolly, too, is a kind figure of sorts, even though she is associated with Leyers. Because Pino and Anna are both the servants of others, their time is not their own and, for now, their relationship cannot progress.



Here, Pino's status as a spy is put to the test. Although he's yet to deduce what is going to happen to Tullio, he suspects it won't be good. However, if he says anything, he could be forfeiting his own life and his valuable position as a spy.



Here, it is apparent that Leyers lost the battle with Rauff regarding the execution of prisoners. Even though he was opposed to Rauff, Leyers helped carry out the order, leaving him in a morally dubious position. Evidently, these executions are carried out as a warning, but their brutality is sure to come with unintended consequences for the Nazis.



CHAPTER 18

Pino screams as the machine guns open fire. When Leyers sees his reaction, he pulls him away from the crowd and takes him back to the car. Leyers asks Pino if he knew one of the men who was shot. Pino lies and says he didn't, and he was just shocked by the barbarity of the act. Leyers agrees that the act was barbarous and thinks it will only make matters worse. Leyers then asks Pino to drive him back to Gestapo headquarters and gives him three hours off.

Pino immediately goes to his aunt and uncle and tells them about Tullio's death. They, too, are shocked by the cruelty displayed by the Nazis, and say it will only make things worse. Then, Pino returns to Gestapo headquarters where Leyers eventually comes out to meet him. Leyers asks Pino to take him home and Pino does so. He invites Pino inside and tells him that he's going out on a date with Dolly. In the meantime, Pino is left alone with Anna who fixes him up some delectable food, including veal. Pino tells Anna about what he witnessed and mentions that he knew one of the men. Anna takes pity on him and the two of them strike up a conversation.

After dinner, Pino asks to be excused to the bathroom. However, instead, he makes his way to Dolly's room in search of the key to Leyers's briefcase. Eventually, he finds it in Dolly's jewelry box. However, Anna catches him in the act. In response, Pino tells Anna the whole truth about his situation, and Anna agrees to help him and keep his true identity a secret. Afterwards, Pino takes the key and creates a mold of it so he can open Leyers's briefcase whenever he wants. Then, Pino and Anna share their first kiss. Next, Pino returns the key to its rightful place and returns to the kitchen to continue kissing Anna. After a while, Pino tries to get Anna to talk about her past, but she refuses. She wants their relationship to be a fantastical escape from the past and from the war. Pino happily agrees to her conditions.

CHAPTER 19

Leyers and Dolly return from their date and Leyers dismisses Pino for the day. Pino returns home and finds Mimo, who's come home to visit. Mimo tells Pino that he plans to join the partisans, though he doesn't say this to his parents. It is a jolly reunion until Mimo spots a swastika armband sticking out of Pino's pocket. Mimo yells at Pino and calls him a traitor. In response, Pino punches his brother in the face. Michele comes in to break up the fight and Pino storms off to his room.

Although Leyers agrees with Pino, he does not act as though the massacre weighs on his conscience. Perhaps he hides his feelings better, or perhaps he's become desensitized to such violence. Alternatively, he may only care about what the executions mean for the Nazis and does not care about the men who were executed.



Seemingly, everyone agrees that the Nazis made a grave mistake by carrying out the executions. Despite the horrors of his day, Pino finally gets to spend some time alone with Anna at night and they are able to talk to one another without the fear of being overheard. Again, Anna acts in a caring and compassionate manner toward Pino who's just had one of the worst days of his life.



Pino's decision to tell Anna the truth is important for the development of their relationship, but it also puts her in danger. After all, if anyone finds out she's helping Pino, she could be killed. Additionally, Anna's refusal to talk about her past lends her character an air of mystery. Also, this is an important moment for Pino's coming of age story because it is the first time he enters into a romantic relationship with someone, although the fantasy element of their relationship—of trying to hide from reality—casts doubt on how much this relationship can really grow.



After losing Carletto, Mimo's anger is a devastating blow to Pino and he reacts physically. Not even Michele knows the truth and Pino believes he must keep it that way. This is a mature decision for Pino to make. It would be easy to tell his family the truth, to vindicate himself, but he doesn't because he knows that doing so would put them in harm's way. Instead, he lets them continue to believe that he's an active member of the Nazi party.



A few weeks later, Pino drives with Leyers to the Apennine Mountains. Pino watches as Leyers meets with high-ranking officers. Additionally, he sees enslaved people laboring all around him. When Pino follows Leyers to leave, he watches as a Nazi soldier hits a laborer that looks like Antonio with the butt of his gun. This sends the man tumbling over a cliff to his death. This sight disgusts Pino and his hatred for Leyers exponentially increases.

Later, Pino returns to Albert and tells him what he's seen. Luckily, the time Pino spends with Leyers allows him to see the weaknesses in the German defenses and he relates this information to his uncle. Additionally, Albert tells Pino that he has a code name: Observer. The name is deliberately vague, so as to obscure Pino's identity. After this meeting, Pino finds himself missing Anna, so he heads to Dolly's apartment to find her. He goes around the back way and tosses pebbles at her window until she answers. Anna lets him into the apartment briefly and the two of them eat and talk in Anna's room. After dinner, Pino wants to stay longer, but Anna tells him he must go.

In September of 1944, the British begin to break through many of the German defenses surrounding Italy. This makes General Leyers a busy man. One day, early in September, Pino and Leyers go to the Fiat factory where they speak to a man named Calabrese. Leyers tells Calabrese that he needs more lorries, and he promises the Germans will pay for them. Calabrese is skeptical of Leyers's promises and asks to speak to one of his higher-ups for confirmation. This enrages Leyers, who calls Hitler, and Pino listens as the Führer barks orders at Calabrese.

From the Fiat factory, Leyers asks Pino to drive him back to Dolly's. On their way home, they are attacked by a fighter pilot. Pino takes control of the situation and drives into a cluster of trees to avoid being seen. He plays a game of cat-and-mouse with the pilot, which pleases Leyers. Eventually, Pino thinks they are safe, and he gets out of the car. However, almost immediately, he hears the aircraft again and sprints toward a nearby ditch. He urges Leyers to do the same.

Although Leyers doesn't spend his days actively watching over the men the Nazis enslaved, he does have power over what happens to them. The fact that he chooses to do nothing sickens Pino, as the horrors he witnesses grow increasingly more repulsive.



Pino manages to calm his conscience because of the valuable information he gains by spending time with Leyers. The name Albert gives to Pino not only keeps Pino safe, but also anyone who gets questioned about Pino. If the only name a prisoner can provide the Nazis is "Observer," then there is little the Nazis can do. Also, this section shows that Anna is both a strength and a weakness for Pino. On the one hand, she gives him the courage to continue on. On the other, he engages in risky behavior in order to see her, which could end up hurting both of them.



Here, General Leyers demonstrates the full extent of his power to Pino and Calabrese. He truly does have the ability to contact the Führer himself, a fact that makes him simultaneously more impressive and more repugnant.



This is the first time Pino's lessons from Alberto, along with his ingenuity, really come in handy when driving Leyers. Despite the attempt on his life, Leyers cannot help but be excited by Pino's abilities. However, just as Pino and Leyers think they are safe, the plane returns, and the chapter ends on another cliffhanger.



CHAPTER 20

Once the plane is far away, Pino calls out to Leyers and eventually receives a weak reply. Seeing that Leyers is okay, Pino moves to their vehicle and makes the necessary repairs. Leyers tells him that they will need to switch to a vehicle that is more conspicuous, and Pino agrees. On the drive home, Leyers gives Pino some whisky and compliments him again for his performance. Leyers also tells Pino that he reminds him of his son and his nephew, the latter of whom died in the war. For the first time, Leyers allows Pino to ask him about his personal life and Leyers opens up to him.

Additionally, Pino asks Leyers about his relationship to Hitler. Leyers tells Pino that he works for Hitler but prefers to stay far away from him because he knows Hitler is a ticking time bomb. Leyers also gives Pino a piece of advice: the best way to get by in life is to perform favors for others. Leyers sees this as the key to continued success and survival. He also tells Pino that you never want to be the leader; it is better to be “a man of the shadows.”

By the time Pino makes it back to Dolly’s place, Leyers is passed out in the back of the car. Pino goes upstairs and asks Dolly if she can come down and help him get the general upstairs. However, just as he is doing so, the general appears behind him, apparently able to take care of himself. Still in a jovial mood, Leyers tells Dolly, Anna, and Pino that they will spend the night celebrating Pino’s great deeds. Eventually, Leyers and Dolly go to Dolly’s bedroom, and Pino is left alone with Anna.

Pino and Anna begin talking and soon the topic of conversation switches to Anna’s father. Anna tells Pino that she used to love boating with her father. However, tragically, one day they got caught up in a storm and their boat capsized. Anna was found and rescued, but her father was lost to the sea forever. Pino comforts Anna, who responds by saying that the story of her mother is even worse.

The following morning, Pino reports to Albert and Greta. By this time, things are starting to look bad for the Nazis. Unfortunately, what is bad for the Nazis is also bad for the people of Italy. In the following weeks, Pino is forced to watch as Leyers goes around to small farms and loots resources. Pino hates Leyers more than he ever has before, and Leyers can see it in his face. Leyers tells Pino that he understands why Pino would hate him, but he has no choice because he answers to a higher authority.

Here, the novel starts to humanize Leyers in a way that it hasn’t previously. Like everyone else, Leyers has a family who was tragically affected during the war. The distance between Leyers and Pino is not as great as Pino would like to believe; in fact, Leyers tells Pino that the two of them could almost be related. This moment doesn’t diminish Leyers’s actions throughout the rest of the novel, but it does complicate Pino’s notion that he is wholly evil.



Unlike someone such as Rauff, Leyers is not an unthinking cog in the Nazi war machine. He differs from his colleagues and superiors in numerous ways. He also knows that the war will not last forever and seems to be implying that Germany might lose. Additionally, if Leyers believes that the key to success and survival means performing favors, then that raises the question: who is he performing favors for during the war? Also, although Leyers refers to himself as “a man of the shadows,” such a description could also be used to describe Pino.



This version of Leyers is considerably different than the man that appeared up to this point in the novel. Perhaps this is a glimpse of who Leyers would be if there were not a war. Regardless, the celebration is doubly great for Pino; not only has he won Leyers’s favor, but he also gets to spend time with Anna.



Although previously Anna and Pino’s relationship was predicated on escaping war and tragedy, now Anna decides to be open and honest with Pino about her background. This marks a shift in their relationship from something that is fantastical and innocent to something that is more mature and real.



Leyers’s actions continue to horrify Pino, but in this passage the novel raises an important question: are Leyers’s actions so much worse than Pino’s? Both of them must answer to higher authorities. If they don’t, they put their own lives at risk, as well as the lives of their countrymen. Although Pino has yet to make this connection, it is certainly one that the novel invites the reader to ponder.



CHAPTER 21

After raiding the farms, Leyers walks over to a line of boxcars and Pino follows close behind. In the cars, Pino hears a woman screaming; she wants to know where she is going. Leyers tells Pino to inform the woman that she is being sent to a labor camp in Poland. As the boxcars pull away, Pino sees three small fingers sticking out of a crack in one of the cars. This image stays with Pino for the rest of his life. On the way back to Dolly's, Pino questions Leyers about the labor camp. Leyers tells Pino it is called Auschwitz. When Pino tries to get more details, Leyers yells at Pino for asking too many questions.

In late October, Pino once again drives Leyers to Mussolini's villa. Again, Leyers uses Pino to translate. Mussolini asks Leyers whether there is any truth to the rumor that Hitler has a secret bunker hidden in the mountains for use after the war. Leyers says he is not sure. Mussolini tells him that if such a place exists, he would like to reserve two spots. After this conversation, Pino and Leyers depart for the city of Monza.

Once near the train station at Monza, Leyers gets out of the car and orders Pino to stay put. He also leaves his briefcase in the car. Pino thinks about searching the briefcase while Leyers is gone, but instead decides it would be more useful to follow him. Pino sees Leyers with four enslaved people, whom he is using to load gold that he is shipping out of Italy. When the enslaved people leave Pino's sightline, he hears four gunshots and assumes Leyers has killed them. Leyers tells Pino that he shot in the direction of the enslaved people but did not hit them. Pino doesn't know if he believes Leyers. When they return to Milan, Leyers tells Pino that he has tomorrow off. Additionally, he gives Pino permission to use the car to take Anna somewhere.

The next day, Pino and Anna drive to a number of beauty spots on the outskirts of Milan. They have a wonderful time enjoying one another's company. However, the mood darkens when Pino asks Anna to tell him about her mother. Apparently, Anna's mother blamed her for her father's death and believed she was cursed. She even had priests perform exorcisms on Anna. She kicked Anna out of her home, which is how Anna eventually came into Dolly's service. Pino also shares a bit of his soul and tells Anna that he feels lonely not being able to tell his friends the truth about his position as a spy.

Pino doesn't know the truth about the Polish labor camps, though Leyers likely does. His reaction to Pino's questioning suggests that seeing the boxcars bothered Leyers. This is the first time where Leyers's conscience is openly displayed, probably because he's aware of the atrocities being committed at Auschwitz. Notably, Auschwitz is the most infamous of all the Nazi labor camps. Roughly 1.1 million people were killed at Auschwitz and 90% of the victims were Jewish.



Mussolini may be referring to the Berghof bunker, Hitler's headquarters for much of the war. The Berghof was located in the Bavarian Alps but was by no means a secret (at least not one that was effectively kept). Regardless, Mussolini's attitude here reflects his delusional state of mind about the war. The Germans do not respect him at all, and even if they did, they are losing the war.



Whether Leyers actually shoots the enslaved people is an unanswered question in the novel. On the one hand, he may have killed them so they wouldn't spill his secrets. On the other hand, he may have only shot in their direction so that he could have plausible deniability when explaining to his fellow Nazis what happened to them. There is also an open question about where the gold is going. If it is being secretly shipped out of Italy, then it is presumably not for use by the Nazis.



Again, Pino and Anna's relationship deepens as they learn more about one another's respective backgrounds. Although they initially wanted to act as an escape for one another, now they are bonded together by tragedy. This only makes their relationship grow stronger and their love grow deeper.



CHAPTER 22

After Pino's latest report to Albert, Albert asks Pino for a favor. Because the Nazis are getting good at finding radio signals, he wants to sneak a radio into Pino's home and splice it into the cable the Germans use to broadcast. He believes this will confuse the Germans while still allowing the rebellion to get its messages out. Pino agrees to the plan. However, before they can carry it out, Albert decides it's time to tell Michele the truth about everything. Pino tells Michele what he's been up to for the past several months and his father is surprised, but proud of him.

The next night, Pino eats dinner with Anna and asks her if she will help him smuggle in the radio. She agrees to help. They carry out the plan on Christmas Eve. They hide the radio in a briefcase with a false bottom that they then fill with bottles of wine. Pino and Anna start drinking to get themselves appropriately drunk for what they plan to do. Next, they go to Pino's home arm-in-arm and act visibly drunk. The Nazis notice them, but Pino gets on their good side by telling them he works under Leyers and by giving them bottles of wine. Their plan works, and they successfully get the radio upstairs.

Once upstairs, Anna reveals to Pino that she is a widow. Previously, she married an army officer named Christian who served in the war and immediately got himself killed. Anna barely knew Christian and tells Pino that she was not in love with him. In response, Pino tells Anna that he loves her and doesn't care if she is a widow. The two spend the night together and sleep with each other for the first time.

CHAPTER 23

After the best night of his life, Pino wakes up to the sound of boots outside his door. He gets up and finds Mimo pointing a gun at him. Still under the impression that Pino is a traitor, Mimo threatens his older brother and calls Anna a whore. Pino knocks Mimo's rifle away and almost punches him before Anna makes him stop. Pino tells Mimo to leave before he changes his mind. Afterwards, Pino and Anna cuddle up to one another and go back to sleep.

Finally, Pino gets to reveal the truth to his father, which is liberating for him. Meanwhile, Albert's idea for the radio is rather ingenious. Not only will they be able to continue to broadcast, but they can also potentially turn the Germans against one another in the process.



Pino relies on the holiday to provide him with appropriate cover. His plan is smart, and it works, but it is not without its risks. The fact that both Anna and Pino are willing to put their lives on the line speaks to the love and trust they have in one another. It also demonstrates their allegiance to the Allied cause.



This moment completes Anna's tragic backstory, and now Pino feels as though they thoroughly know one another. Here, their relationship turns physical, as Pino continues his evolution from a boy to a man.



Although Pino understands his brother's frustration, he seethes with anger at how Mimo treats Anna, and seems to genuinely want to hurt him. Neither Mimo nor Pino is fully right or fully wrong, once again underscoring the moral complexity of war.

In the following days, the weather gets worse and the Germans—and, in turn, the Italians—get more and more desperate. Leyers tells Pino that he thinks the war is nearing its end. He also makes a passing reference to “the ungodly things done for Hitler,” though he does not go into detail. Pino takes Leyers back to Dolly’s place and lets him out of the car. Pino quickly realizes Leyers left his briefcase in the back of the car, so he grabs it and takes it to his aunt and uncle’s shop. Together, they go through its contents, which include a letter written by Leyers expressing his view that the war is over. Pino also tells his aunt and uncle that he thinks Leyers’s most recent trip to the Swiss border was another instance of gold smuggling.

On his way to return the briefcase to Leyers, Pino is stopped by Rauff who questions him. Pino tells Rauff that he brought the briefcase to his aunt and uncle’s shop to get it repaired. Rauff buys the story and leaves Pino be. That evening, Pino gets a call from his mother asking for a favor. A friend’s daughter was accidentally killed in a skirmish, and Porzia wants Pino to go and recover the body. Pino makes his way to the body’s location to find that the fight still hasn’t died down. Eventually, he finds the body, but gets caught by fascist soldiers. Pino tells the soldiers that he works under Leyers and shows them his papers. Ultimately, the soldiers decide to let Pino go. While leaving with the girl’s body, Pino sees other fascist soldiers putting heads on stakes. The sight revolts him.

CHAPTER 24

After delivering the young girl’s body to the house of her parents, Pino decides to take a trip to Casa Alpina to speak with Father Re. When he arrives at Casa Alpina, he sees that it’s been turned into a partisan camp. At first, the partisans don’t recognize Pino and they are suspicious of him. However, before long, Father Re comes out and assures them that Pino is welcome. After briefly catching up, Pino tells Father Re that his faith in humanity has never been lower because of the things he’s seen. In response, Father Re reminds Pino of all the good he has done. Even though Pino doesn’t see it on a daily basis, his actions have saved countless lives. Talking to Father Re makes Pino feel better and, after a while, he returns to Milan.

Leyers knows the end of the war is near and that the Nazis will suffer because of what they’ve done for Hitler. In particular, he is likely thinking about what’s happened in the labor camps. Perhaps because he’s distracted, Leyers leaves his briefcase for Pino to finally get his hands on. Ultimately, the opening of the suitcase proves to be anticlimactic. The novel does not address its contents in detail, nor does it suggest the contents are particularly useful or insightful.



Rauff’s presence is always unsettling because of his capabilities, but each time his interactions with Pino amount to nothing. After his meeting with Rauff, Pino goes on a horrifying mission to recover the body of a child and it affects him more deeply than anything he’s seen up to this point. Although he’s used to seeing Nazi atrocities, this is the first time he’s seen the handiwork of the Italian fascists up close. When he sees what the Italian fascists have done, he can no longer excuse himself—or his country—from the horrible acts that were committed in the name of Italy.



Pino is understandably distraught by the carnage he’s witnessed, much of which he’s been powerless to do anything about. There are no clear moral guideposts for him to follow, so he visits Father Re for assurance that he’s doing the right thing—or, at least, the closest one can get to the right thing under such circumstances.



When Pino returns to Milan, Leyers asks Pino to take him to a train station. There, Pino spots Colonel Rauff and more Jewish people in boxcars. Many of the prisoners are crying out in fear, and one woman, in particular, repeatedly cries out that her daughter is sick. Leyers begins arguing with Rauff in German, so Pino doesn't know what they are saying. At the end of the argument, Rauff opens up one of the boxcars and Leyers rescues four Jewish children, including the sick little girl. He takes them back to his car and asks them to repeat his name, so they know who rescued them. Then, he tells Pino to take them to Cardinal Schuster. Shocked by this turn of events, Pino does as he is told. Neither Pino nor the cardinal know what to think of Leyers.

For once, it seems Leyers took a principled stance against Rauff and won. He manages to rescue several Jewish children and gets Pino to take them to safety. However, it is unclear whether his actions are wholly unselfish. After all, he gets the children to repeat his name. He wants them to remember his name, probably so they can repeat it to Cardinal Schuster and the Allied forces. Previously, Leyers told Pino that he survives by trading favors, and this scene could be interpreted as an example of a favor that he expects something for in return.



CHAPTER 25

Leyers's behavior continues to get stranger. He works sporadically and starts drinking more than normal. However, he does tell Pino that he plans to move Dolly and Anna to Innsbruck where they will be safe. One day, Leyers asks Pino to drive him to see Cardinal Schuster. Inside the chancellery, Pino and Leyers find Schuster, who introduces them to Eugen Dollmann. Dollmann is the Führer's translator and Schuster uses him to speak with Leyers. Schuster is concerned because he's heard the Nazis want to utilize a scorched earth policy. Apparently, Leyers has heard the same thing, although he finds the policy abhorrent. Schuster asks Leyers if he can use his influence to make sure the Nazis don't use such brutal tactics. Leyers promises to try. Leyers also warns Schuster that higher-ups in the Nazi regime may try to arrest him.

A scorched earth policy is where a retreating military force destroys everything in its path. It is largely a nihilistic act, but also a tactical one because it hinders the advance of enemy forces by destroying anything they might find useful. Once again, Leyers demonstrates that he is on the right side of the issue, but it is unclear whether he will find any success in convincing his fellow Nazis. He knows the level the Nazis are willing to sink to, which is why he wouldn't be surprised if they attempted to arrest the Cardinal.



Next, Pino drives Leyers to the Fiat factory where they speak once again with Calabrese. Despite their previous interaction, Leyers acts kindly toward Calabrese. Leyers tells him that he appreciates the work he's done for him and that he will personally make sure nothing happens to the factory in the days to come. This calms Calabrese, who was worried because of how often his factory has been sabotaged by partisans. After this interaction, Pino returns to his aunt and uncle's shop. Albert and Greta tell him about the recent news out of Germany: the Russians arrived at Auschwitz and discovered what the Nazis have been doing in their labor camps.

Once again, it is unclear whether Leyers's attitude toward Calabrese is genuine or if he is trying to make himself look good for when the war is over. He knows that he needs to find ways to save face now that the Allies uncovered the horrors of Auschwitz.



In February of 1945, Leyers and Pino drive near Monte Castello and watch the end of a siege that has lasted months. Leyers knows he's lost and asks Pino to take him to Milan. Back in Milan, Pino learns that Albert was arrested. Pino's father tries to get him to flee the country before something similar happens to him, but Pino rejects the idea. Soon afterwards, Pino and Leyers make one last trip to Mussolini's villa. Mussolini talks to Leyers about Hitler's secret bomb, which he plans to use to destroy the Allied forces. Leyers listens to Mussolini talk but doesn't confirm or deny the bomb's existence.

CHAPTER 26

On the 15th of March, Leyers orders Pino to drive him to Brenner Pass so he can see what progress has been made in clearing the road. The Germans are using their slave army to slowly remove the ice blocking their path, but they don't seem to be making much progress. Pino seizes the opportunity and gets Baka to send a message to the Allies, encouraging them to bomb nearby so the Germans cannot escape. A few days later, the Allies do exactly that and cause avalanches, which trap the Germans. The day after the avalanche bombings, Pino and Leyers look at Lake Comacchio and see smoke from Allied bombs in the distance. That afternoon, the Allies manage to conquer the nearby German ground forces.

CHAPTER 27

While waiting for Brenner Pass to be cleared, Leyers spends time burning Nazi documents. This annoys Pino who wants the world to know the full extent of what the Nazis have done. Several days later, Leyers checks up on Brenner Pass to find that it is almost cleared. After spending the day with Leyers, Pino returns home to find his second cousin, Mario. Mario is a fighter pilot who was recently shot down and is hiding out with the Lellas.

After briefly speaking to Mario, Pino goes to see Anna. As he enters his vehicle, a gun is placed on the back of his head. Almost immediately, Pino realizes that the gunman is Mimo. Mimo tells Pino that he's learned the truth about his resistance efforts and apologizes for the way he's treated him. Pino accepts the apology but asks why Mimo is pointing a gun at his head. Mimo tells him that he was worried Pino might try to kill him if he saw him. Pino tells Mimo that he would never hurt him. Additionally, Mimo tells Pino that partisan leaders want Pino to arrest Leyers on the 25th. Pino is excited by the opportunity.

A lot of information is compressed into a short time as the war nears its end. Notably, this section contains the sole reference to the nuclear bomb found in the novel. Like the United States, Germany spent much of the war attempting to develop the atomic bomb, and they came dangerously close to succeeding. Mussolini, still in denial about the state of the war, thinks Hitler still can win using the nuclear bomb. It is unclear whether Leyers knows of the bomb's existence, though it seems likely that he does.



Progressing through Brenner Pass would allow the Germans to escape to Austria, but Pino refuses to let that happen. No matter where Pino and Leyers go, the Germans are losing, while the Allies are triumphant. Finally, it seems that the Italian front of the war is almost over.



Document burning was a common practice among Nazis near the end of the war. Although there is plenty of evidence still in existence to catalog the list of atrocities committed by the Nazis, much evidence was burned. The higher-ups in the Nazi party knew they would be punished and wanted to get rid of as much evidence of wrongdoing as possible.



Finally, Pino can tell Mimo the truth. Obviously, Mimo is ashamed of his actions, and he worries that what he's done is unforgivable. However, demonstrating the maturity that is now a key trait of his character, Pino immediately forgives his brother. Not only can Pino now tell the truth to his brother, but he will also soon do the same with Leyers, an opportunity that is equally exciting for him.



Pino drives to Dolly's place to find Dolly upset because Leyers hasn't been around lately. Pino tells Dolly about the plan to move her to Innsbruck and that calms her down. That night, Pino stays with Anna and the two of them sleep together. The following day, Pino asks Anna to marry him after the war is over. Anna says she will.

Later in the day, Pino is tasked with driving Leyers to the soccer stadium. Leyers uses Pino as a translator to speak with Max Corvo, who is there to negotiate the terms of the Nazi surrender. Corvo tells Leyers that everything will go smoothly as long as the Nazis offer no resistance. Leyers agrees to his terms. Without Leyers's permission, Pino adds that Leyers has spent the last few weeks burning as many Nazi documents as he can get his hands on.

Leyers and Pino return to Milan where they meet with a number of important figures including Cardinal Schuster, Mussolini, higher-ups in the SS, and resistance leaders. Cardinal Schuster calls the meeting to strategize the most peaceful transition of power. Everyone is on board with the plan except Mussolini, who is in denial about the state of the war and his country. After listening to his complaints and childish rhetoric, Cardinal Schuster dismisses Mussolini from the meeting. The cardinal also tells Wolff, a high-ranking member of the SS, to make sure all Nazi soldiers stand down to prevent further bloodshed.

CHAPTER 28

On his way to the Hotel Regina with Leyers, Pino spots Mimo pointing a gun at a Nazi vehicle and ordering the Germans to put down their weapons. Caught up in the moment, Pino decides to take the opportunity to arrest Leyers. Pino puts his gun to Leyers's head and orders him to drive to the address given to Pino by the partisans. Leyers tries to convince Pino that he's making a mistake, but Pino doesn't listen to him. When they arrive at the appropriate spot, partisan soldiers take Leyers and thank Pino for his work.

When Pino returns to Milan, all of the lights around the city come back on for the first time in many months. Throughout the city, Pino hears skirmishes taking place between the Germans, the Italian Fascists, and resistance groups. Pino returns home and finds his parents celebrating along with his Uncle Albert. Albert tells Pino that he was part of a prison riot; Albert and other resistance members broke out of their cells and freed everyone around them.

Leyers isn't around because he's trying to get all his plans in order before the end of the war. Although he plans to move Dolly, it is unclear whether he plans to continue seeing her after the war. Meanwhile, Pino and Anna's love reaches new heights, as they are now engaged.



Max Corvo is another real historical figure who became the leader of the Italian Secret Intelligence during the war. Unsurprisingly, Leyers immediately agrees to Corvo's conditions. Despite his shortcomings, Leyers is never in favor of more violence, so Corvo's demands are not a hard pill for him to swallow.



Apparently, neither the Nazis or the Italian fascists came for Cardinal Schuster, who is still alive, well, and very much in control. Like Leyers, the Cardinal wishes for a peaceful transition of power and though everyone (except Mussolini) agrees, such a transition is much easier said than done.



This is the first of several climactic moments that occur over the course of the next few chapters. Finally, Pino no longer needs to pretend to be a Nazi, and he finds this freedom liberating. However, as important a moment as this is for Pino's character, the actual showdown between Pino and Leyers is rather anticlimactic. Largely, Leyers does as he is told and complies with Pino's demands.



The lights initially went off in the city so that it would be more difficult for the Allies to bomb it effectively. Now that the bombing is over, the lights are back on. However, Milan is in a state of civil unrest as various groups vie for control of the city.



The next day, Pino goes to the Hotel Diana where he meets Major Knebel, an American. Knebel asks Pino for two favors. First, he needs Pino to take him to a place where he can make a phone call and second, he wants Pino to throw the American soldiers a party. Pino agrees to do both. After providing Knebel with his phone call, Pino goes off in search of Carletto. Pino finds his old friend and tells him the truth about what he was doing in a Nazi uniform. The two friends make up and Carletto agrees to help Pino throw a party for the Americans.

This section of the novel contains an odd mixture of celebration and violence. On the one hand, the war is nearly over, but on the other, Milan is in a state of utter chaos. However, Pino's mind is starting to settle down as he is able to reveal the truth to his friends and family.



CHAPTER 29

Pino and Carletto throw a party for the Americans complete with wine, women, and music. The next day, Pino wakes up hungover and heads home. On his way, he spots bodies littered across the streets. He also runs into Mario and has a brief, friendly exchange with him. After their conversation, a man walks up to Mario and points a gun at him. He accuses Mario of being a Fascist and then shoots him in the head. The man then turns his gun to Pino, who runs away.

It is unclear whether the man who shoots Mario does so because he truly believes he is a fascist or because, like Tito, he is an opportunist. Either way, it is clear that Milan is far from safe, especially for someone like Pino who spent months in a Nazi uniform.



Before heading home, Pino goes to Dolly's apartment, hoping to find some of Leyers's papers. Upon arriving, he finds that the apartment has been destroyed. He becomes especially concerned when he discovers a handbag that Albert gave to Anna lying in Anna's room. Pino knows Anna treasures the bag and would never leave it behind, leading him to think that Anna is in danger. Pino ends up back outside where he sees a mob forming and heading toward Castello Sforzesco. Pino gets a sick feeling in his stomach about what will happen next.

Despite Leyers's plans, it seems Anna and Dolly never left Milan. Furthermore, the state of their apartment suggest they are in real trouble. The partisans are not kind to Nazi collaborators, and it would not be difficult for them to place Anna and Dolly into that category.



Pino follows the mob and finds some partisans bringing out a group of accused Fascists for execution. Among the group are Dolly and Anna, who have been stripped down to their underwear and have had their heads shaved. Pino finds a partisan guard and tries to convince him that there has been a mistake. However, the guard does not believe him and before Pino can do anything else, the firing squad unloads on the accused Fascists, killing them all.

The partisans dehumanize Anna and Dolly before executing them by stripping them of their femininity and their clothes. It is a brutal scene that calls to mind the executions ordered by Rauff earlier in the novel. In both situations, Pino can only watch, helplessly, as one of his loved ones is killed.



CHAPTER 30

Pino is driven nearly insane after Anna's death. He blames himself for not doing more to save her. In front of the partisan crowd, he starts to cry, and the partisans begin to suspect that he, too, is a Fascist. Realizing that the crowd is about to turn on him, Pino flees. He spends the next several minutes playing a game of cat-and-mouse with the partisans, who seem to want his head. Eventually, Pino makes it to the Duomo where he finds safety. He climbs up to a balcony, miserable, and considers throwing himself off of it.

Although Pino is understandably devastated by Anna's death, he puts himself in serious danger by expressing that fact. The partisans and the mobs forming around Milan are bloodthirsty and want to destroy anyone who made them live in such horrid conditions for the past year. Of course, Pino is not responsible for their suffering, but, like Anna and Dolly, it wouldn't be hard to implicate him as a Nazi collaborator.



CHAPTER 31

Before Pino can do anything drastic, Cardinal Schuster stops him. The cardinal knows the partisans are looking for a so-called traitor and he asks Pino if that refers to him. Pino tells the cardinal the details of the mix-up, including Anna's tragic death. He also tells the cardinal that he thinks he is a coward for doing nothing to save Anna's life. The cardinal tells Pino that Anna's death was not his fault, but this does little to comfort him.

Under the cover of dark, Pino returns home. There, he tells his parents about Mario's death. Pino's parents try to talk with him, but he is almost completely despondent. He goes to bed and falls asleep listening to the radio. The next morning, Michele and Albert force Pino to get out of bed to go looking for Mario's body. All of the bodies littering the streets have been taken to Cimitero Monumentale. When Michele, Albert, and Pino arrive the cemetery, they see piles of bodies being brought in. Together, they look through the corpses, hoping to find Mario. Eventually Pino finds him. Shortly afterward, Albert comes up to Pino and apologizes for what happened to Anna. He's found Anna's body in the cemetery and understands now why Pino is so upset. Albert does not want to take Pino to her body, but Pino forces him to.

CHAPTER 32

Pino breaks down when he sees Anna's body. He cleans her up the best he can and tells his father and uncle that he wants to take her with him. They tell Pino that he will do no such thing; the partisans are checking to see who claims the bodies. If they find Pino with Anna's body, they will likely kill him. Pino eventually sees that his father and uncle are right and decides to abandon Anna's body. That night, Pino is wracked with even more guilt. By leaving Anna in the cemetery alone, he feels as though he's failed her twice. Angry with himself, he gets up out of bed in the middle of the night and marches back to the cemetery. He goes to the spot where he last saw Anna's body, only to find that it is no longer there.

After departing from the cemetery, Pino goes to the Hotel Diana where he sees Major Knebel. Pino asks Knebel if he can talk to him about something. The major is happy to lend an ear, but before their conversation can progress any further, a young man enters the hotel and tells everyone that Mussolini's body is being put on display at Piazzale Loreto. Pino and Knebel follow the young man to Piazzale Loreto and witness a gruesome sight. Along with Mussolini's body, 15 others are spread across the Piazzale. Many have gathered around to mutilate and defecate on the bodies, particularly those of Mussolini and his mistress.

Religious figures play a crucial role in the darkest moments of Pino's life. Like Father Re before him, Cardinal Schuster helps Pino walk back from the ledge, literally this time, and exonerates him. Although Pino still feels guilty, he respects the cardinal, and it is enough to keep him from ending his life.



The scene at Cimitero Monumentale brings home the needless devastation of war. The two people the Lellas are looking for had nothing to do with the war, and yet they are dead. More than likely, there are many people in Cimitero Monumentale who are similarly blameless.



Anna was Pino's one light in the darkness of the war and now she is dead. All that he fought and sacrificed for is gone and now he doesn't know what to do with himself. His return to the cemetery represents his need for closure, but closure is something that he never gets. The war will always be with him, as will the memory of Anna's death. As much as Pino has matured throughout the novel, nothing could prepare him for this unfortunate outcome.



Pino never gets a chance to talk to Major Knebel about whatever it is he came for, though it's fair to assume that it relates to Anna. Instead, Pino and Knebel witness a horrific scene that draws on real-life accounts of what was done to Mussolini's body after his death. Once again, the novel shows the moral messiness of war. Though Mussolini was a fascist and a tyrant, the actions of the Milanese people are also difficult to stomach and hard to morally justify.



Both Pino and Knebel are horrified by what they see and quickly leave. The two men walk away and end up outside the Beltramini shop where they find Carletto. Knebel asks Pino and Carletto if they will perform a dangerous task to help America. Both agree to help. Knebel tells them to come to the Hotel Diana early in the morning two days later and he will give them the details of their mission.

Although the war is almost over, there is still one more mysterious task for Pino and Carletto to complete. Both men feel like they need the job. Pino needs something to distract himself and Carletto wants to serve his country after feeling as though he sat out the war.



CHAPTER 33

Two days later, Pino and Carletto go to the Hotel Diana, ready to embark on their mission. Major Knebel gives Pino and Carletto submachine guns and teaches them how they work. He tells them that they are going on an escort mission to Brenner Pass. Their goal is to deliver “a friend of America” to safety. Shockingly, the friend of America turns out to be Leyers. At first, Pino refuses to help Leyers, but Knebel insists that he is a hero. Eventually, Pino agrees to drive Leyers, but only because he secretly plans to execute him when he gets the chance.

Leyers’s reappearance makes sense given his sudden and anticlimactic departure from the novel. The question, now, is whether Leyers is what he appears to be. Pino still hates Leyers, largely because he blames him for Anna’s death, but could it be that he is missing something? If so, then his decision to try and execute Leyers is problematic.



Pino and Carletto begin their escort mission. Along the way, they are shot at by a group of men blocking the road. Carletto fires back as Pino drives, but accidentally drops his gun. Leyers laughs once they are past the men and tells Pino that he handpicked him for the mission because of his driving skills. Toward the end of the drive, their car is fired upon by an American tank. Once again, Pino manages to avoid the tank and gets them to safety. Shortly afterwards, Leyers tells Pino to stop the car so he can pee. Pino does so and then decides to seize the moment.

Leyers’s laughter is frustrating for Pino, who deeply wants his former boss punished. Once again, the driving skills Alberto taught Pino come in handy as he gets them through various obstacles. When Pino stops the car so Leyers can urinate, the novel approaches its climax, as Pino moves to assassinate him.



While Leyers’s back is turned, he takes the remaining gun and points it at him. Leyers is confused by Pino’s anger until Pino tells him about what happened to Dolly and Anna. Leyers seems genuinely surprised and saddened by the news. However, he also places some of the blame on Pino. Leyers was on his way home to check on Dolly and Anna before Pino arrested him. Pino takes Leyers’s point to heart and decides he is just as much to blame for Anna’s death as Leyers.

Once again, Leyers is an ambiguous character. Whether he actually wanted to check on Dolly and Anna is unclear. He may only be saying so to manipulate Pino. On the other hand, he may be telling the truth, in which case Pino is partially to blame for Anna’s death. Ultimately, Pino decides to spare Leyers’s life, but it is unclear whether he is doing the right thing—or if there is a right thing to do in the first place.



CHAPTER 34

Pino decides not to shoot Leyers and the two of them return to the car. Before long, they get fired upon once again, this time by Germans. However, before Pino needs to do anything drastic, an American fighter pilot clears the way for him. After this exchange, Pino nears the rendezvous point. However, there is still one last hurdle left: Tito. On the road to their destination, Pino comes across Tito and six other men, all aiming weapons directly at their car.

Tito recognizes Pino and tells him that he plans to kill him. Tito comes up to the side of the car and Pino slams his door into him. In response, Carletto and Leyers open fire on the rest of Tito's men. Leyers kills Tito and Carletto handles the rest of Tito's men. After, Carletto is shocked by what he has done and starts to come apart at the seams. However, Pino comforts him by telling him he only did what was necessary. Additionally, Leyers tells Pino that now they are even.

Finally, Leyers, Pino, and Carletto arrive at their destination: the Austrian border. There, they find American soldiers who are waiting to take Leyers. Pino asks the Americans why they would want to help someone like Leyers, but no one can give him a straight answer. Before Leyers departs, he shakes hands with Pino and whispers, "Now you understand, Observer." Pino is stunned that Leyers knows his code name and wonders how much he has known all along. After Leyers departs, Carletto tells Pino that the war has ended. In response, Pino says to Carletto that, for him, the war will never end.

Still, Pino's dramatic journey is not over, as the last leg of his journey reads like an action movie. However, the story also contains dramatic weight as it ties up one of its last loose ends: Tito.



Of all the major characters in Beneath a Scarlet Sky, Tito is one of the most repulsive. Yet even his death is not celebrated. Instead, the focus shifts to Carletto, who is traumatized by the act he's just committed in order to save his own life. Additionally, Leyers sees this moment as him paying back the favor he owes Pino. This is important to Leyers, who likes to be the man who is owed something rather than the other way around.



The final moments of the novel throw everything from the moment Pino met Leyers into question. How long did Leyers know the truth? Did Leyers take Pino to certain locations intentionally? Did Leyers act as he did to help the Allies or to save his own skin? Even if Leyers was helping the Allies all along, were his actions morally justified? None of these questions have easy answers, but they speak to the concerns at the heart of the novel regarding difficult moral decisions during wartime. Additionally, Pino's final words speak to how much he's suffered and how much he will continue to suffer because of what he's been through.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Sawyer, Ian. "Beneath a Scarlet Sky." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 15 Dec 2022. Web. 15 Dec 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Sawyer, Ian. "Beneath a Scarlet Sky." LitCharts LLC, December 15, 2022. Retrieved December 15, 2022. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/beneath-a-scarlet-sky>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Sullivan, Mark. *Beneath a Scarlet Sky*. Lake Union Publishing. 2017.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Sullivan, Mark. *Beneath a Scarlet Sky*. Seattle, WA: Lake Union Publishing. 2017.