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The Wild Boar That George Gunned Down

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*The Wild Boar That George Gunned Down*_____

Two days till payday. John and the others had long since run out of money, and George had no more to lend them. Hostesses at the bar no longer sat with and entertained them as they usually did. George noticed that the hostesses kept looking toward the entranceway, waiting for other customers to arrive. George wanted to leave but couldn't say this to his companions. They seemed now to be feeling awkward themselves, after the berserk frenzy of a few moments before. Their bottle of whiskey had been emptied long ago. Requests for more were met with demands for "cash, cash" from the hostesses, who no longer let them touch their breasts and thighs. John, Wilde, and Washington, smoldering just below the surface, seemed on the verge of something. The faces of all three were red and puffed up from the alcohol. Each face, in fact, was getting redder and redder, and each of their muscled bodies was getting more and more tensed. Soon something was bound to set them off. George remained calm and in control of himself, but he felt his heart pounding a bit harder as he observed the mood of his companions. Their vacillation, he thought, was making things worse. *If you're not going to drink, then don't take a drop of the stuff and don't say a word to the hostesses; but if you are going to drink, then you should drink yourself silly, feel up the hostesses, and go on and have sex with them. It has to be one or the other.*

Two of the hostesses casually got to their feet and turned toward the door. Three Caucasians with faces darkly tanned from long exposure to the sun had entered the bar. Each scanned the place with his large eyes. George could tell immediately that they were back from Vietnam on R&R leave. Military on R&R are very free with their money. Hostesses in the A-sign bars—the ones U.S. military personnel were authorized to frequent—called them *yama-otoko* ("men back from the wilds") and went out of their way to offer them every imaginable service. They were the best source of money. George and his group recognized their own less favorable status. George's group was still stationed in Okinawa, having just arrived from the States, while the *yama-otoko* were old-timers, hardened by combat in numerous battles. Even in their sleep, George imagined, these men were never free from thoughts of war. However much they

drank, however much they partied, however much they amused themselves with women and sex, still their minds were always in a state of battle readiness. They kept pistols and knives hidden in their pockets, and while this made no difference as long as they were on base, once they went off base they were capable of incalculable violence. In some ways, George looked down on these men.

The last of the hostesses finally got up from their table. With his thick, hairy hand, John grabbed hold of one of them by her arm. "You meaning to leave us?" he hollered. "You turning your nose up at us, you barbarian bitch?" As she struggled to free her arm, the woman pushed with her free hand at John's head, but he forced her to sit down on his lap. Wilde and Washington, on either side of her, pinned her arms and legs. She struggle, screaming hysterically. Wilde pulled down her sheer, black panties and howled with laughter as he tossed them into George's face. Wilde then wedged his knee between her legs, adroitly spread them as he lit a match and then, laughing loudly, shone the light on her crotch. John and Washington bent over to get a clearer view. They also laughed loudly and stared intently at her crotch. George watched the situation with increasing apprehension. The woman struggled frantically to free herself, yelling words that none of them understood. John jammed a handkerchief into her mouth as Wilde placed his match close to her pubic hairs, which frizzled, shriveled up, and in an instant burned out. George glanced at the *yama-otoko*. They were smiling scornfully. The other hostesses were frantically urging them to get George's group to stop, but the *yama-otoko* just stared and did nothing. The trapped woman wore a skin-tight, thick-fabric white dress. John and the other two struggled to pull it off, but were having no luck. Washington took out a jackknife, inserted the blade at the opening at the neck, and cut the front of the dress down to the belly. The woman struggled even harder. She seemed convinced they intended to kill her.

The knife had grazed her skin, and blood oozed out into her dress. George could see the woman was gnashing at the handkerchief in despair. Her eyes were wide with panic. George got up and moved off to the edge of the seat. Washington stroked the woman's neck and cheeks with his knife. There may have been a smile on George's face, but he knew this was no laughing matter. His heart was racing. It was different from when he was drunk. Washington might gouge out one of her eyes, slice off her nose, or poke open an artery in her neck.

The other hostesses were crowded in a circle around them, yelling incomprehensibly. They seemed to be pleading with the men. They also seemed enraged. And sad. George didn't know which it was. One of them grabbed John's jaw from behind with both hands and tugged at him with all her might. Clearly in pain from this, John raised his chin and glared into the woman's face. He clenched his right fist and hit her in the jaw. The blow

landed with a loud, cracking sound. She sank to the floor without a word. Screaming and hollering even louder now, the other women bent over the fallen woman. Still hollering and yelling, they carried her to the counter, laid her down, and applied ice wrapped in a towel to her chin. They then came back and again crowded around George's group, each of them gesturing toward the woman on the counter and shouting incomprehensively. The *yama-otoko* were standing now, casually taking in the scene. They were talking among themselves, with hands on hips or in their pockets, or with their arms folded across their chests. Washington's knife was moving slowly across the trapped woman's small, flattened breasts. The large, dark nipples were prominent in the room's slowly rotating blue light. George estimated she had had five or six children and was nearing her forties. Except for the heavy makeup, her face would have lacked any youthful color, he imagined, and her skin would be flabby and dried out. This was the sort of woman left for the American soldiers to find their pleasure in.

George felt sick. He hoped the others would rape her and get it over with. When they were done, Washington would shoot her dead with his pistol. Trying to grab the knife from Washington, two of the women got into a skirmish with him. Both received cuts on their arms and were bleeding. One of the women, bleeding profusely, retreated behind the counter and pressed moist hand cloths to her cuts. Washington was now incensed. He glanced at the two women who jumped him, released the shoulder of the woman he was holding down, and rose to his feet. The released woman wriggled herself free and stood up. Her feet became entangled in Wilde's legs, and as she furiously shook herself from John's grip she landed on the floor. She began to crawl away on all fours. Washington, shouting something, jumped on her from behind and slashed at her back and buttocks, splitting open her dress. Blood oozed out and soaked her white dress. She hadn't freed the handkerchief from her mouth, yet you could tell she was crying and screaming. Her false eyelashes had been knocked crooked, her eye makeup was running, the white facial cream was smeared, and her heavily painted lips were twisted. George thought her ugly.

Finally, she freed herself from Washington and ran into the women's restroom. He ran after her and inserted the handle of his jackknife between the door and its frame, preventing her from closing the door and locking it. Washington then began yanking on the door knob with both hands. The knife clattered to the floor as the door flew open and Washington fell back onto the seat of his pants. A somewhat heavysset hostess had retrieved the jackknife from the floor, and was pointing it at him. Washington scrambled to his feet and shouted threateningly at the women, who were gathered near the door. In the instant they recoiled from his shouts, he dashed into the restroom and closed the door. The lock clicked shut. In a rush, the women pounded on the door. They could hear wailing, screaming, and moaning from inside, along with high-pitched, ear-splitting laughter, angry shouts,

and what sounded like cursing. The handkerchief had come out, it seemed. The women on the outside took turns working the doorknob, tugging on it with all their might, and pounding on the door. They yelled back and forth at each other, terrified at what might be going on inside.

John and Wilde had calmed down quite a bit. Every so often, though, they broke out in loud laughter and angry shouts. George, on the other hand, was getting edgy. He felt like throwing liquor into the women's faces, or smashing glasses or bottles into the shelves behind the counter, or shattering them on the floor. If he didn't do something, he felt, he'd be called a weakling and incapable by the other guys. But he saw no way to involve himself. It was all too chaotic. *How come I held back and couldn't join in with the others? Must be letting myself think too much. And there's no way I'd get any thanks from them screaming women. They'd just accuse me of being a wimp. This is like the rampage John and the guys went on a month ago. Not surprising that they did that. But I did nothing then, either. Also not surprising. A few days later the women in the bar were hanging all over John and the others. I sat there remembering every detail of what had happened, but not those stupid women. They're hopeless. Even Washington, now holed up in that restroom, won't be turned away next time he shows up at this bar. Tomorrow night will roll around and they'll pour his drinks for him and let him fondle their breasts as if nothing ever happened. I'd like to take his jackknife to that moustache he's so proud of, hack the damned thing off, skin and all. And shoot every last one of the hostesses. They're all disgusting. Too bad I don't have my pistol with me. I should always carry it. Hearing the bullets shattering the whiskey bottles, the lights, the neon signs, the jukebox. Hearing everything getting busted, that'd be sweet. Firing slugs into the throats of all these repulsive people, laughing with their mouths wide open. That'd be good, huh?*

The front door swung open and the bar owner rushed in. His yellow shirt and black bow tie were a strangely appropriate match to his oily, round face and short, thick-set frame. The middle-aged man went right up to John and began saying something to him. He seemed to know what was going on. George moved over behind John. The owner's English was quite good. But he was speaking in a quiet voice and George couldn't catch all he was saying. The owner seemed to be making a great effort to appear calm. George picked up the general drift. The owner apparently was trying to settle the matter with money. John got to his feet and hollered at him: "I can get them to revoke your A-sign license. Is that what you want?"

A number of local establishments that had lost favor with the American authorities had had their A-sign licenses revoked; their business suffered bitterly as a result. George knew how intimidating this threat was. The owner abruptly turned all smiles, pleaded with John to calm down, and showed himself ready to make a deal. He tried to sound John out, and as he talked he kept lowering the settlement figure. The soldiers, actually,

could not care less what he said. “How about we stroke you with this here jackknife,” they threatened. To this the owner smiled broadly, looked at each of their faces, and announced his final price. “Twenty dollars,” he said. “Last offer. Can’t take anything less.” George could not believe what he was hearing. *Payment for assaulting the woman, her physical injuries, and the damage to the bar—all this for a measly twenty bucks? Hell, if he is willing to take that, George told himself, we should beat down his price even more. Why in the world is this pathetic guy so obsessed with getting so piddling a sum? I can’t even look at this guy any longer, he’s so disgusting.*

John and the others glared at the man and yelled, “It’s all her fault. We’re not giving you one damned cent.”

The women were now all abuzz over by the restroom. Washington had emerged from it, fastening his belt buckle as he did. The owner immediately approached him and began proposing a negotiated settlement with him. The bleary-eyed Washington barely glanced at the man, and with a hand that seemed as big as a boxing glove pushed him aside as if removing a repulsive eyesore. The owner staggered, tripped over the seats, and fell backwards onto the floor. Moving like a sleepwalker, Washington made his way to the front door, opened it, and went outside. “What’s all the fuss about anyway?” John said as he also went through the door. “We were just having a little fun, you inferior bunch of war-losers.” George shifted his gaze to the restroom, where the woman, apparently having been raped, was curled up on the floor, surrounded by the other women. Seeing her so still and quiet, George thought she might be dead. The *yama-otoko* repeatedly called out to the women: “What’re you all waiting for? Get over here and sit with us!”

George hurried after the others and left the bar. The air outside was suffocating. He could hear a loud voice, apparently the owner’s, behind him. George did not turn to look. It sounded like the owner was giving them a tongue-lashing. In Okinawan, most likely. In any case, from the tone, George could tell they were being cussed out. *I imagine he’s waving his fists and baring his teeth at us, and all the while inching backwards ready to run, George thought. And those hostesses, they must be fawning all over the yama-otoko by now.* For some time the abusive language lingered in George’s ear. *Why should they be mad at me? I did nothing to harm them.*

George walked two or three steps behind the others. They were talking loudly about wanting to kill Okinawans. Hard to tell if they were serious. They were trying to decide if it would be a cabbie or a clerk in some food store. George realized that their real desire was to rob someone. Whatever it was, they were determined to commit an even crazier act of violence than what they had just done. *But why take things that far? George thought. All they want is some money to buy their drinks and some money to buy their women.* The men walked along bantering back and forth. “Hey, they flip up their skirts at you.” “Yeah, and none of them are wearing any panties. At the

Green, that is. They squeal with delight when they do it, they love it.” “At the Oriental they let you stick your finger in their panties. You can touch anything you want. My fingers get worn out doing it. Do they let you, too?” “Yeah, but that Emiko there, she climbs right up on your lap and wraps her arms around your neck. Won’t let go for anything. She’s more than I can handle.” “Come on, man, what are you saying? That grin shows you don’t seem to mind.” “Yeah, it’s really wild there. People spraying beer around on each other, raising hell.” “Hey, George, what bar do you like to go to?” “Anywhere’s OK,” George replied without thinking. “Aren’t we heading back to the base soon?” George wasn’t in the mood for drinking. He felt sweaty under his arms and had a feeling something bad was about to happen. There was nothing unusual in the way Washington was behaving now, but seeing him pull out his jackknife was still vivid in George’s mind.

“I’ve had women drink beer through there, many’s the time,” Washington was saying proudly. “You force the bottle up in there. They get drunk, too, even when they drink it through there. It’s true. Most of ’em end up drop-dead drunk.”

As they walked down the street, women from the bars grabbed at their arms trying to get them to come in. John and the others walked by each group, responding only with obscenities and teasing. They were all familiar with this scene.

After a while the men came to a halt. “Hey, George,” Washington turned around to address him. “What about that watch of yours.”

“Watch?” But George knew immediately what Washington meant. They wanted to pawn it. “This watch won’t fetch much,” George said. “The pawn shops are all so tight-fisted.”

“What, then, are you proposing we do, George?” John was looking at him expectantly. “You can get money some other way?”

“George would be the one to have money,” Wilde chimed in. “You’ve got some stashed away, quite a pile, I bet.”

“Oh, that’s right,” John smiled thinly. “Just like George says, you can’t expect much from pawning a watch, or a cigarette lighter, a pendant—or a jackknife? Isn’t that right, Washington?”

“OK, I’ll go back and get some,” George said. George didn’t like the way they were looking at him, as if to say, “What in the world are you hoarding all your money for?”

“Yeah, you do that, George. We’ll chip in and pay you back on payday. Promise.” John patted George on the shoulder. *Of course, they never do pay me back,* George thought. *But, what the hell. It doesn’t matter.*

“Washington, you go back with him,” Wilde said.

“I’ll go by myself,” George responded, glancing at Washington, who wrapped a thick arm over George’s shoulder, as if about to escort him away.

“No, let me,” Washington said. “We can be back in half an hour if we take a cab.”

“Good. We’ll be at the Mississippi,” John replied, tapping George lightly on the cheek and then striding off down the street.

George and Washington found a cab right away. “Let’s do this up big and have some fun, George. We’ll be in Vietnam soon and won’t be able to do this for awhile.” Washington kept patting George on the shoulder.

George kept thinking he wanted to hand over the money to Washington, then stretch out on his barracks bed and write a letter to Emily. It was not yet ten o’clock. He knew that if he stayed behind, John would surely come and get him. *I’ll have to go in any case. John comes almost every night to get me. What does he think I am?*

They were young Caucasian women. Each of them had longish curly hair, some blond, some chestnut-brown. Their breasts were large and firm, and the pale orange nipples seemed small. They must be virgins and surely younger than he was, George thought. He couldn’t tell which tits belonged to which woman. They all looked alike, and the women were wrapped snake-like around each other. *These Okinawan bar hostesses are so cheap. The way they wriggle their bodies, sitting right up against me, rubbing their gnarled hands over my chest and down my pants trying to turn me on. And their collection of smells—sweat, semen, smoke, whiskey, cosmetics—that jumble of strong smells is always there.*

He spotted one woman who looked like Emily. He studied the screen intently. The woman shook her brown hair that hung down from her upside-down head, which George could see between the white fleshy thighs spread wide apart. She moved her tongue sensuously. The red of her lips and the size of her large eyes made her look childlike. *No, George corrected himself, it’s not Emily. Emily smiles all the time, showing her white teeth. And she ties her hair up in back.*

Over and over the private parts of the young women were shown in close-up, filling the screen. The women were on a yacht that bobbed on the ocean. The five white, wriggling nude bodies on deck in the midday sun were highlighted against the blue setting. Directly behind George, the 16-mm projector hummed, but he didn’t notice. The women fondled and caressed each other, moving in and out of one unusual position after another, and in and out of smaller and larger groupings—now three of them, now five, and so on. It seemed even stranger because there was no sound. The twisting of their bodies, with the intent of getting into position so they could spread their legs in front of the camera, was completely unnatural and obviously an act. But George didn’t notice this. *It’s a fake, he concluded, nevertheless. They aren’t American women. It’s not possible—those faces, those arms and legs. Not one wrinkle, not one blemish, no flab anywhere. Not one thing that could turn someone off. Shiny, soft, white. Not one of the five looks to be over twenty.*

A bar hostess pulled down George's zipper and thrusts her small, rough hand inside. George grabbed the hand instantly. Apparently his grip was stronger than he thought, causing the hostess to shriek hoarsely, jump up, and storm off. John, Washington, and Wilde were each silently making out with their own women, climbing all over them and moving ceaselessly in the dark. Elsewhere here and there in the bar, hostesses without customers sat smoking cigarettes. The smoke drifted up through the blue light from the movie projector. George again fixed his attention on the screen. *Still at it*, he thought. *They really throw themselves into it, like there's no life without it. But all of them*, George had the vague sense, *must feel so embarrassed they could just about die*. There was some consolation for him in that idea.

The film ended. The dark red lights in the bar came on. A fixture hanging from the ceiling revolved silently, shining red, blue, and yellow light on wall-posters of nude Western women. George decided to get smashed. He knew he wouldn't be getting any sleep that night. He had a feeling he'd be having bad dreams about Emily. He forced himself to drink the beer that had been poured in his glass, now warm and foamless. He filled his glass from the bottle again and drained it in one gulp. Two or three cupfuls and the small bottle was emptied. George snapped his fingers to get the attention of a hostess standing at the bar and gestured for her to bring him another. She quickly brought it over, sat down at George's side, and filled his glass. Her face was thin and the lipstick and white powder she wore seemed unsuited to her pale-brown complexion. The squeals of the hostesses, combined with the grating sound of the recorded jazz in the bar irritated George. The woman sat through it silently and without expression. She topped off his glass after each mouthful George drank. George didn't think beer ought to be topped off that way. She left and, without being asked, went to fetch a new bottle as soon as he emptied the old.

If she were to proposition me, I wouldn't mind going off with her to a hotel. But I'm the American, he told himself, *so I can't be asking her. Okinawans never deal straight with us. I always see that when I go off base*. George glanced at her out of the corner of his eye and noticed she was staring at him, full in the face. He felt confused. And then he felt he might throw up. Drinking any more was out of the question, but she kept putting the glass to his mouth. George sipped just enough to wet his lips, and recalled John telling him to distract a hostess by fondling their breasts or something. That way you don't have to drink too much. George hesitated to touch her body. Of course, there was no chance she would start screaming and run off just because he touched her.

George got to his feet, walked over to jukebox, shoved in a quarter and selected five of the loudest songs. *Screw it*, he told himself. *What do I care if everyone gets blasted out by the music*. And then, *How does John do it? How can he go out with a small, dark-skinned woman like that? Walking around*

with her in broad daylight, shopping and going to the movies and stuff. Anyone seeing that has to think it's weird. She doesn't even come up to his chest.

The woman was still at the table, smoking. George wanted to leave. He wanted to go back to the base and write a letter to Emily. He could never have told this to John and the others; they would have made fun of him. He sat down. The woman filled his glass, lifted it to his mouth, and whispered in his ear, "Let's go sleep together." George gulped down the beer. "Ten dollar, all night. Whatever you want," she said. She wrapped an arm around his neck and moistened his ear with her tongue. She entwined her dark, rough-skinned arms in his, inviting him again and again to go with her. Grinning, she mimicked the sex act with her fingers and made other sexual gestures. George looked over at John and the others sitting nearby. *They are watching me*, he thought. *And grinning, because they think I'm not up to it. It looks like they are all about to leave for a hotel.* George turned to the woman and nodded his head in assent. She lifted her glass and toasted him over and over. *I can't keep up, although I do want to get drunker. I'll end up puking if I drink any more.* The woman got her handbag from the counter and went to the restroom. *Maybe I'll feel better about these Okinawan people if I sleep with that woman.*

The woman emerged from the restroom, took George by the hand and said in English, "Let's go." John and the others were still fooling around with their hostesses. George wanted to stay with them, but the woman pushed him on. Aware that John, the other men, and the women they were with were all watching him, George made for the door with confident strides and went out.

Red, blue, green. Neon signs were flashing everywhere. The lettering scampered every which way. Some top to bottom, some right to left, others at every conceivable angle. The lights cast flickering colors on the sidewalk. Barely noticeable amidst the reflected light were the black, fan-shaped shadows of the Chusan palms planted at regular intervals along the street, lined with parked taxis and expensive American cars. Cabbies stood outside their cars in small groups, moodily awaiting fares. Women with a worn-out air about them gathered in the dimly lit alleys. They stood perfectly still and silent. They stared at George and the woman as the two passed by them. Empty beer cans, whiskey bottles, and other junk littered the sides of the alley. George wanted to send some of it flying with a good kick, but hesitated, knowing what a racket it would make as it clattered against the walls of the alley. The woman held George by the arm, but said nothing to him. Her face, too, was without expression. She seemed different now that they weren't in the bar. "Let's take a cab," George said, glancing at her. "We're almost there," she answered sharply, without looking at him.

It was a three-story hotel, furnished in American style. The woman did the talking at the front desk. A short, plump, middle-aged woman led

them to a room on the top floor. George looked down at the woman's head as she led the way. She wore her naturally straight, black, Okinawan hair permed into a mass of tangled curls. It annoyed him. *No doubt, he thought, it is this woman who cleans the toilets and throws out the soiled sex things people leave behind.* She turned on the light and they entered the room. She handed the key to George. As Mrs. Tangled Mop was about to leave, the bar hostess said something to her in Okinawan and flashed a quick grin. George noticed that the room seemed decorated to appeal to a woman's tastes. The curtains, bedspread, dressing table, and carpet were all garish reds and pinks. Still holding her handbag, the bar hostess went into the bathroom. George could hear the sound of water from the faucet. She eventually came out and told George it was his turn. George soaped himself down carefully. He wrapped a towel around his waist and returned to the room. He had once been laughed at by a woman for coming out in his shirt and underpants.

"Took you long enough," the woman said in English as she blew smoke from her cigarette. Now in her underthings, she went back into the bathroom, the cigarette held in her lips. George's head felt heavy, perhaps because he had showered after drinking so much. He stretched out on the double bed. He smelled a jumble of odors—skin lotion, sweat, semen. *Perhaps it is just my imagination, since the sheets are newly laundered. But, the sweat of sex must have penetrated hundreds of times to the bed mat under them.*

The woman was experienced and skilled at sex. Her nude body was that of a middle-aged woman. It was as if Emily's face had been superimposed on a pornographic film. Once they had finished, George was immediately overcome with disgust. *They're all drunk. None of 'em in their right minds. Me neither, I'm not in my right mind, either.* George felt trapped. *What in the world is going on? Who did this to me? Why am I here, in this town, on this island?* He sat down on the toilet. *Is it that woman out there, stretched out on the bed still naked and smoking her cigarette?* He felt fatigued, listless, his mind drifting in and out of focus. It occurred to him that Lt. James, the officer in charge of his unit, might be the culprit. George had asked him any number of times when they'd be shipping out to Vietnam, but each time, Lt. James avoided giving a definite answer, claiming the orders had not yet come in. "In that case," George would ask him, "when can we go back to the States?" Always the same answer, no orders. But George was convinced it was a lie. *Lt. James knows very well. He is just pretending that he doesn't know. It's a lie. Lt. James knows everything about it. He's just putting on that he doesn't know, keeping me in total suspense. All he does is force me to train to kill people. But we never actually do any real killing. The Okinawan midday sun beats down on me, makes me feel like my skull is going to crack open. I get dizzy. No enemy anywhere but there I am,*

shooting off live ammunition for no good reason. It's nuts. Whenever I lose focus out there, Lt. James yells and curses at me, like his hatred has been building up for a hundred years or something. No enemy is shooting at us, so he's the one acting nuts by taking it so seriously. I guess he just has it in for me. The training goes on and on and I'm about to pass out any moment. I gotta get out of this. Either I get into the real war in Vietnam, or I go back to Emily. One way or the other. I don't get what it is we're doing now. There's no way to train for "killing for real." I wonder if I could, actually. Kill a human being. What is that, anyway, killing another person?

Late almost every night, after the alcohol had worn off and George still could not fall asleep, he stared at the ceiling and followed his thoughts. Sometimes he thought he wanted to kill right away and see what it was like, but the orders never came. Just training, training, day after day. *I'm trained! I'm trained already! I know exactly what to do. Know it so well I'm about to explode with it... If I do something great in Vietnam and write Emily and tell her about it, she'll write back, I'm sure of it. She doesn't write me because we haven't shipped out yet. How else to explain it? It's been sixty-seven days already since I wrote her. Racked my brains two whole weeks over that letter ... I know why Lt. James hates me. I'm short and skinny. He says that about me all the time, just loud enough so I'm sure to hear him. Soldiers should be big and strong, he says. Why did they drag me into the military, if that's the case? I haven't the slightest desire to be here.*

George decided to go back to the barracks. He left the bathroom. The woman was still stretched out on the bed, smoking. She sat up, crushed out her cigarette in the ashtray, and turned to George. "Once more?" she asked in English as she extended an inviting hand toward him. "Please." George was suspicious. "Only ten dollars," she said. "But I already paid you," said George shaking his head. "No, that was for before. The ten dollars is for doing it again," she said, gesturing with her hand for him to come to her. *This isn't what we agreed on. I'm sure she said that it was ten dollars for all night. No doubt about it, in fact. John and the guys always said that's the rate—ten dollars for all night, five for a single trick.*

George levelled his eyes on her. "It's ten dollars for one time," she said again.

No, George thought, I can't let this woman make a fool of me. He began speaking to her with a slight stutter. "Look, at the beginning we agreed it'd be ten dollars for all night." The woman repeated herself in English that was smoother than his. George tensed up. "I'm sure you agreed it was ten dollars for all night."

"No, I said ten for short time. Regular price. Ask any of the women. You're the one who's wrong." She spoke quickly.

"John can prove it," George responded.

"Ok, tell John to come here," she said, moving over closer to him.

John and the guys will certainly back me up. But they'll also get to wondering how I can expect to enjoy a woman if I squabble so much over the money. I'll become a laughingstock, and it'll take forever to live it down. They're having fun with their own women right now, so asking them to come here would only piss 'em off.

George was at a loss how to get her to agree. His insistence was starting to look ridiculous. "Why make such a big deal over ten dollars?" she said. "All the girls say you're a cheapskate greenhorn. Why in the world are you worrying about your money so much, when you could die in Vietnam anytime?"

George started to feel sick. "I have my Emily back home," he now said. "What would any of you know about what I'm going through?"

"Oh, you're all the same," the woman replied, throwing up her hands. "It never changes. Okinawan women are just playthings for you. That's the way it is, and I can understand that. But, what about the guys who marry one of us, take the vows in a church before your priests and your God, but then when any of you go back to the States, you just abandon the woman like she's some filthy piece of trash. What's that? Ah...there's women like that who've returned to my village...my little sister is one of them. Left her own red-headed child in the States. You American soldiers are all the same. All of you have an Emily back home and all of us are fools to be taken in by you. Your Emily's are wrecking us Okinawan women."

George shouted back at her. "Don't you dare say anything about my Emily. She's not like any of you. She's not the shameless kind of woman who gets naked for any man that comes along." George eyed the woman's meager breasts.

She placed her hands on her hips and seemed to be thrusting her breasts toward George. "If that's what you think, then why pay for sex in the first place, someone like you so stingy over a lousy ten dollars. Don't you know that the new recruits are generous with their money, lots of them paying a hundred or two hundred for a night?"

George folded his arms across his chest and turned to face the woman directly. "What are you talking about? I can't stand being in a filthy hole like this!"

"Then why come?"

"What else is there to do on this island? No woods to walk in, no open spaces to ride a horse in. Nothing. Just this tiny little island with its disease-filled nights, its disease-filled bars. There's not one single thing, not a single person here for me. You being one example. Isn't that right?" The alcohol seemed to have lubricated his throat, and as his words flowed out he felt an inexplicable pleasure in saying them.

"You're a chicken. You're afraid of war," she said. "Emily, horses—that's the talk of a child. I've had men who cry out in their sleep, *yama-otoko* back

from the war, half asleep and suddenly they cry out: “Hold up! Stay back! There’re gooks out there!” Dripping wet in their sweat. Whenever I’m with these guys I never get any sleep, the crybabies cling to me all night, shaking, waiting for the morning light to come.” She began putting her clothes on. George was at a loss. Impulsively he grabbed her shoulders. The bath towel around his waist loosened. She quickly pushed his hands away. “I’ll get the manager to change it to a quick time,” she said as she stepped into her skirt. “Which means we can’t be wasting any more time here.”

George sensed he was being tricked. None of it added up. She opened the door and held out her hand to him. “Give me the money for the woman’s tip. It’s fifty cents.” She stood there, her hand held out, the door wide open. George handed her a dollar. “Come back right away,” he told her. “I mean it. Don’t forget.” She nodded ambiguously and closed the door.

Strange if she’s coming right back that she’d take her handbag with her, George thought. Actually, he didn’t know what to think. He got dressed. It occurred to him that maybe she wasn’t coming back. Maybe he should follow her. He wasn’t sure. He felt confused. After fifteen minutes of waiting, he decided to leave. He bounded down the stairs, the sound of his leather shoes reverberating through the stairwell. He had no idea what awaited him, but he rushed down the stairs nonetheless. The manager was standing at the desk. When he approached, she smiled and asked for the room fee. He knew from John that the room fee is always paid in advance. *Hadn’t the woman paid already? And tomorrow at the bar, she’ll be holding her hand out for me to pay again.* George paid the manager the amount she asked for. *I know what Jack was feeling. That guy unloaded every last round he had into the bathroom at that bar. Didn’t matter that he spent all the money he had just to please that bar hostess. When closing time came, she sneaked away from him anyway.*

George didn’t know what street he was on. It seemed to be an alley. He wanted to quickly find a cab. A scrawny dog rooted around in the trash can overflowing nearby. Empty cans and bottles were piled up in untidy heaps. The walls stunk of urine. George quickened his pace. His foot struck a bottle in his path and it skipped across the alley, setting off a shrill echo between the walls of concrete. Complete quiet returned. It was dark, with only the occasional street light or neon sign. *John brags lots about the sixteen times he’s pulled a razor on cabbies and beat them out of a fare and took all the money they had. If it ever comes to a tussle, a big guy like John isn’t about to lose to some cabbie. I wonder if I could beat them. There are Okinawans a whole lot bigger than me. Beating them out of a fare—it’s only twenty-five cents. And, really, how much money could they be carrying?*

George realized he would never find a cab until he got out on a main street. Neon signs were becoming more frequent. There were more hostesses and doormen on the street trying to entice passersby, too. It was long past two in the morning, but these people were still clapping their hands

and calling out loudly. "Hey, hey. Floorshow, floorshow!" "Hey, strip show!" "Hey, hey. Movies!" "Hey, special service!" George kept walking, avoiding them. He pretended that he didn't notice, but if one of them grabbed him by the arm, he was afraid he'd have no way to refuse. *If only that woman were still with me. Then I could just walk on by... Okinawan women and their like should be taken by force. What could there be to fear from them? Can't I even handle that, either? All the guys boast about doing it. Wilde raped some woman working at the PX, Washington took a housemaid, and John some high-school student... But I don't think I could rape a woman. For sure they'd resist like crazy. Even if I could overpower one, I wouldn't want to do it with a woman who fought back... Besides, isn't the child of a woman you rape your own child? I wonder what John would say about that? How about it, John, have you no feelings at all? But then, George, I hear a voice saying to me, you're still only twenty-one. What makes you think you know so much? Well, for sure I'm not completely helpless. How good a marksman I am is something the women just don't know about. The guys, though, they know. Why does she show no fear? Why does she feel nothing but contempt? Does she think I don't have the nerve to do it? Women with brown hair are better. I hate her black hair. Am I following her now? No, that's not it... or, maybe it's... I don't know... Lt. James's wife looks a little bit like Emily. I'd really like to get to talk with her, even just once. But Lt. James is ranked so high above me. Well, no, maybe he's not. At the least, I'd probably have to get promoted to sergeant. Emily won't be happy if I remain a private. I'll have to do something great... Lt. James has it made, what with an American wife and all.*

"Hey, hey." George turned in the direction of the voice. A plump, dark-skinned Okinawan man wearing a Hawaiian shirt was speaking to him in broken English, apparently offering him a Caucasian prostitute. George looked intently into the man's face. *How many nights, he wondered, have I wished I held an American woman in my arms? It's an impossible dream. No American woman would be a prostitute here, not in this filthy place.*

"They're different from you Okinawans," George yelled at the man as he began running from him. "You can't fool me, you sons of bitches." George heard the pimp yelling back at him as he increased the distance between them.

Red, blue, yellow, pink tight-fitting pants held up by suspenders. Sure are a lot of Blacks around here, George noticed. With their ferociously large, gleaming eyes. Their black faces sickly looking in the reflected neon colors. Thick lips spread wide in laughter. Big white teeth. Seems I might've wandered into the wrong place, George thought. His earlier tipsiness had worn off. The Blacks were gathered in groups of fours and fives, standing around American cars, leaning against walls, huddled at entrances to the bars, some in the shadows, some in the lights, some with arms on the shoulders of hostesses and girlfriends, some with arms around the women's waists, some

holding hands, and all following George with their eyes. Just as he neared the end of this row of eyes, George was hit with spit and someone's chewing gum. Obscenities come flying. George set his eyes directly ahead. And made no change in his gait. Were he to quicken his pace, he thought, they would jump him. And as he walked on, more and more of the eyes had the appearance of wild beasts about to pounce on prey. George began to understand that his primary concern was no longer with the women. I should be carrying my pistol, he thought. He not infrequently carried it when he went out, but luck was not with him this time. Even so, with these guys, he thought, I could plug them with a dozen rounds and they'd still be coming at me with teeth bared and eyes bulging. I'd have to shoot 'em right in both eyes and blind 'em. Wonder if I'm a good enough shot to do that? Unknowingly, he quickened his pace. Insults and challenges escalated. Then a clear, sharp sound. George looked down at his feet. A bottle smashed to pieces near him. Foaming beer streamed darkly over the pavement. Open-mouthed laughter erupted and grew louder and louder. More shouted insults came amid the laughter, greeted by even louder bursts of laughter. Caught between concrete walls on both sides of the street, the sounds refused to fade.

George instinctively came to an abrupt halt. A fist has been thrust toward his face. A short black man, muscles rippling all over, was imitating a boxer as he danced around George, poking jabs in the air with his fists. The arms protruding from his sleeveless green T-shirt were glossy black in the flickering neon lights and twice the thickness of George's. George started walking again, pretending not to notice. The boxer lightly tapped and poked at George's face, his jaw, his sides, his back, the back of his head. Some of the punches landed with a bit of a sting, perhaps intentionally. George continued to walk on as if he hadn't noticed. The boxer commenced butting his rock-hard head into George's back. When George glanced back to see what was happening, the boxer had circled to his front and flicked punches at George's face. He glared into George's eyes and laughed derisively at him, all the while continuing his pedaling footwork. The crowd of black men moved along with them, laughing and hollering. Some in the crowd raised clenched fists, others shook their arms at George. Some danced about like boxers. A short, youthful black man kicked an empty beer can toward George, as accurately as a soccer player. A thin, long-limbed black man broke from those clustered at the entrance to Club Niagara and began wrapping his arms around George. Instinctively, George stepped aside, but his head got caught in the man's long arms. He walked along beside George for a few paces with his arms curled around George's neck and then whispered softly in George's ear, "Let's have a drink, my good friend." George shuddered. The man had stopped walking, but George continued, so it looked as if the man's long arms had George firmly in a neck-hold. The man had enormous strength. George offered no resistance. Several other black men, apparently

companions of the long-armed man, surrounded George and amidst boisterous laughter and shouting, led him into the Niagara. To an onlooker, it might have seemed George was in the company of good friends.

George was set down—or, rather, pinned down—on a hard, black seat. People all around him began asking him, “Whiskey? Beer?” George responded barely audibly, “What?” When the Blacks shouted their questions again, George said, “Beer. Beer is fine.” One of the Okinawan hostesses brought over several bottles. Each of the black men filled a glass to overflowing, raised it to George, and urged him to drink up, too. George took up the challenge and chugged his glass dry. Someone immediately refilled his glass and urged him to do it again. Others followed, taking turns refilling George’s glass. More beer was brought. Shouts of praise went up after each drained glass, followed by urgings for him to have another. Eventually, George had an uncomfortably bloated feeling. His belly could take no more. The others kept urging him on, firing one question after another at him. George was now almost totally silent. They forced the glass to his mouth, claiming his silence must mean he hadn’t had enough to drink. “Go ahead, drink up!” George seemed to hear them saying above the jukebox. “After all, you’re the one paying for all this.”

George realized he had to get up. If he stayed where he was there could only be big trouble for him. *Is there any way I can get out of here*, he wondered, *without having my ass handed to me?* He continued not saying a word. He made no acknowledgement of anything said to him or of their laughter. The Black men kept pushing beer on him. George didn’t touch it. He knew his innards would erupt. One of the men jammed a bottle into George’s mouth. George reacted furiously, but his shoulders and arms were pinned down by others and his jaw pried open. The beer violently thrust down his throat overwhelmed his windpipe and threw his gut into turmoil. He couldn’t breathe. Tears filled his eyes. Another bottle was jammed into his mouth, this time whiskey was poured down his throat. George’s mouth, throat, chest, and gut were all on fire. His coughing further inflamed him. Even his swallowed saliva pained his throat. He felt he was about to vomit, but frantically tried to hold it back. If he threw up, he feared, his insides would likely burst. When he coughed, the Black men around him rubbed his back sympathetically, but then just as quickly thrust another bottle of beer down his throat. At one point in these repetitions, the hand holding George’s right arm let up and George, mustering his strength, broke the arm free and flung the bottle from his mouth. It shattered against the floor, making a crisp, clear sound. The men raised a great howl and started pouring beer all over George’s head and back. Pushing against the men closest to him, George struggled to his feet. His knee struck a table, lifting it by one end. Bottles, glasses, and an ice holder clattered to the floor. Then, marshalling all his energy in one great burst, George ripped himself away from

the hands that clung to him, headed for the door, but tripped over someone's foot and tumbled to the ground. Someone shouted something and grabbed George by the hair, yanking with both hands. George's face rose from the floor. All he saw was a forest of long, sinewy black legs. Two men took hold of George's arms and twisted them into a painful angle. George quickly sat up. The man who had earlier grabbed George's hair now pulled his head upright with one hand and slapped him hard across the face, one cheek and then the other, with the other. The stinging sound of the slaps lingered in the room. George felt deep inside that his ears had gone numb. The sound of the men screaming at him emerged only in fits and starts from somewhere deep down. He felt no pain from his hair being pulled.

Then the hold on his arms loosened. George collapsed into a ball. *Best to pretend I've passed out from the drink*, he thought. His hair was yanked again and his mouth pulled open, but George kept his eyes shut. He was kicked in the chest and gut. It seemed to be those gigantic pointy leather shoes he had noticed earlier. He grimaced despite himself, and squeezed his eyes shut more tightly. He was kicked again and again. The dull pain of each blow stayed with him. "You sons of bitches," George muttered to himself. "You'll pay for this." Bitter anger consumed him. But, his body was going numb, just as if he really had passed out from the drink. *I'll remember the faces of each one of you bastards*, he thought, *and I'll get back at every last one of you*. His eyes remained shut, however, so he had hardly any recollection of the faces. *How come all Blacks look alike, anyway?*

George had been clenching his teeth, but now he let his mouth fall open, relaxed his body, and pretended he had passed out. There was hardly any letup in the kicking and hair pulling and they didn't seem about to let him get up. Several of the men grabbed George's arms and legs, while one or two others removed his belt and began pulling off his trousers. George's eyes flew open, he yelled and cursed and struggled furiously, but he was pinned tight. His underpants were pulled off. He felt something strange going on in his pubic region. The Black men were hollering for someone to come over. George then saw three Black women peering down at him. He wondered where they could have come from. They were springing up and down like thin-legged antelopes caught in a trap. George's eyes were wide open now. And he was gritting his teeth. The women smiled broadly through mouthfuls of big, white teeth. *They all look alike*, he thought. *No individuality, just like animals*.

"Oh, so pretty, pretty," they said as they jiggled and rubbed at him with the tips of their shoes and poured beer over his groin. There seemed to be no end to the interest the women took in doing this. One, having fetched a small kitchen knife from the counter, smiled knowingly at him. She flicked the knife in front of his face. It shone dully in the light. As she wriggled and twisted, dancing around his prone and immobile body, the woman

brought the knife close to his privates and slowly moved it around in the air. George ground his teeth.

I'm going to have to kill these Black women, he thought. *One way or another.* He was about out of his mind from having that knife worming around his private parts. Suddenly all went dark. Another Black woman was standing over him. She squatted straight down, her tight buttocks planted squarely over his face.

"Go ahead, piss on him," George could hear the men saying. Instead, the woman raised and lowered her buttocks and made gyrating movements over and over, as if having sex with George, and then laughed loudly and dismounted.

The women eventually went off somewhere, apparently having lost interest in the fun. Another woman appeared, jabbering loudly about something or other. She spit twice in rapid succession onto George's privates. He felt a tingling pain down there, like you might get from shaving. He imagined that what cuts were there were no more than fine threads, but the Black men were back now, spraying him with whiskey and beer they had first swished around in their mouths. They stripped all the money they could find from his trousers. George kept his eyes shut. Two of the men, jeering and laughing loudly at George, lifted up his legs, dragged him to the entranceway, and flung him out onto the sidewalk. As a final insult, one of them, still laughing, urinated onto George's face. To George, it had alcohol, semen, and animal smells all mixed together. It was a steady, powerful stream of urine and felt slimy and disagreeably warm. George had a violent urge to throw up, but he suppressed it. And kept his eyes shut.

George thought about it every night. Jefferson had raped a young girl, Parker had broken into a household of females and raped a middle-school girl, Washington had raped a bar hostess. Every day, sleeplessness plagued him deep into the night. *I guess it's true that I really can't do it to some weak woman or girl who wouldn't have a chance in a million of stopping me. But, if I pull the trigger, then all of them will respect me: John, the officers, Black men, women... Pull the heavy cock back, then pull back on the tightly sprung trigger. The ear-splitting thunderclap, my right arm snapping back from the recoil, my body tensing up. That indescribable fraction of a second. If only I do pull the trigger...*

During one of those sleepless nights, a target began to take shape in George's mind. *For the old man, it really will be completely unforeseen. Just like what has happened to me. I never could have dreamed I would be dragged into the military and then brought over to a place like this. Completely out of the blue. The old man seems to be gathering scrap metal. Maybe he does that every night to earn a living. He carries some kind of coarse, fiber sack. He's not in a no-trespass zone. There are shell fragments and casings*

strewn about there from the no-trespass live-ammunition practice area nearby. I've seen Okinawans picking up stuff there any number of times. Usually just one person. Always the same guy? Makes no difference, really. Night after next the collector of those shell casings will die by my hand. His luck is up. But I'm not doing it because I have some reason to kill that particular person.

The ear-splitting sound that seemed to scream from the deepest part of his ears—the sound of jet fighters revving up—went on and on, night after night, endlessly. George's barracks was equipped with extra-strength sound-proofing, but the sound created an interminable ringing in the ears that made sleep impossible. The metallic roar of the engines maintained the same pitch, never rising, never falling, and seemed to go on for all eternity. Day after day the number of sleeping pills George took increased. The insomnia was agonizing. Until two or three months ago, he had been able to immerse himself in pleasant recollections of Emily, and so the long nights had caused him no trouble. Once he stepped outside the barracks, though, the sound assailed him from all sides. He knew the sleeping pills were harmful. He had earlier tried to find relief in alcohol, but he didn't have the constitution for drinking great amounts, could never drink enough to get good and drunk, and so drinking never had the desired effect. To gaze at the stars or listen to the insects sing were no more than fantasies now that he was here. The Rockies had been quiet and still. And the time George spent dreaming of such things increased. *There were so many stars there. We often looked at them from our window. The forests and the lakes were quiet and still. Sometimes we'd hear wild animals howling in the distance. The howls hung in the air for a long time...*

His dreams of the mountains were always fragmentary and incoherent.

George checked his watch. It was 7:40. Some daylight remained to him. Outside the chain-link fence on the base perimeter, mole crickets chirped in the swaying grasses. The breeze was cool. *Damned pleasant evening. This is about the time we usually go out to the bars. But this spot is about as unlike a bar as you can get. I envy the guys on sentry duty. They don't have to bother making up excuses for not going out with the guys. Not that I turned down any invitations from John tonight. I left the barracks before he could come around to see me.*

The old man was there. The smell of his body carried over to George on the soft breeze. No doubt he had heard George's leather shoes striking the asphalt walkway. He was hunched over in a dark ball. *We always see him beyond the fence just when we're heading out for the night. Bent over, fearful of who might be watching him. He uses the weeds and bushes in the rocky field to hide himself from us, just like that bug that hides in those cases patched together with dried-out pieces of leaf and twig. John and the others never*

notice him, they're so absorbed in the talk about the pleasures awaiting them at the Mississippi. The old guy remains still as a rock as we pass on by.

But he kept an unblinking, vigilant eye on George. *There he is*, George told himself. *Never fails.* The man had his straw, lampshade hat pulled down low on his brow, but George clearly saw his wrinkled, monkey face, saw his monkey eyes: those unmoving, dark, monkey eyes. For a long time George could not fathom the expression in those wide-open eyes. *Fear? Hatred?* Now it finally came to him. *Those are the eyes of the enemy. Those greedy eyes, open wide with terror and malevolence. They're the eyes of the Vietnamese. The color of his skin, his physique, they're the same. My enemy is just such a person.* George shuddered at the thought.

He's in the way. I can't see, a voice inside George shouted. *Get away from me. Any hunted animal when it hears me coming runs off. But the old guy doesn't. He just keeps his eyes fixed on me. Those eyes that are so aloof from me and show such contempt for me.*

George stopped, turned the side of his face toward the old man and lit a cigarette. "Go on, beat it," he said to himself as he realized something else. *I've seen those eyes before. John's eyes...and Washington's...and the lieutenant's. They all have eyes like that. But not Emily. Hers are different. Their eyes scorn me, make me feel depressed and small.*

George started walking again, leaving the old man behind. *Okinawans never do look you in the eye. When you pass by them they always look down. But just as you pass them, they're sneaking a look out of the corner of their eye. I can tell that's what they do. And after they've gone past you, they turn around and stare. I of course never turn and stare at them. They're the ones left over after their country lost the war. Who do they think they are anyway, looking at me that way? Acting so big. And what's that old guy thinking? That if he just stays absolutely still he won't get killed? You lost, old man, so put up your hands, raise your flag of surrender, admit you're defeated. The Blacks are not like you people. If I threatened them with death, they'd fight back against me. Eyes bulging, white teeth bared, yelling wildly. They'd be shameless about it. Wouldn't care a bit what others thought of them. They'd shriek and wail, try every which way to stay alive. Beg for their lives. But you Okinawans, what would you do? Nothing. No resistance, the look on your faces barely changing, saying not a word. Well, this once, I'll give you a stay of execution.*

George didn't look back at the old man, nor did he change his pace. *I'll come back in a little while. If you haven't run away by then, I'll gun you down. I'm not kidding. You'll be gunned down. For you, it will be totally unexpected. For me, it's not something I can't comprehend. It's the same for everybody. It's just what happens to you.*

George kept on walking. *It's not that I ever took any special interest in what's going on outside the fence. Then why, I wonder, did my eyes land on him? His old, drab clothes are all but lost in the colors of twilight. But, he*

was found by me, the one who will be his murderer. There's nothing you can call that but fate. Vietnam's the same. Squirring to set yourself free doesn't help. Even so, old man, why didn't you hide yourself? You must have heard me coming. Were you so involved in your work, were the sounds the insects make so loud you couldn't hear?

It occurred to George that he should just keep walking straight and not turn back. *No, not possible. I can't do it. The insomnia would just get worse. I'd be a wreck. I'm not incapable of taking matters into my own hands. None of you has the right to feel superior to me, not you Okinawans, not you, John, not Lt. James, not anybody. I won't let you, you or anybody who thinks I'm incapable. I have the power of life and death over another person. The fate of that other, and all the many others involved with that other, rests with this finger of mine. Nothing more certain. Some thoughtless decision by me and one of God's creatures gets sent off into the eternity of space. Beautiful, don't you think? Isn't that right, George?*

George made a complete turn and began retracing his steps. "It's his fault, for not running away from me," George muttered under his breath. *When was it, I wonder. I think it was on a day off, around midday sometime. I was walking along beside this fence when all of a sudden rocks come sailing over towards me from the other side. All of them hit the fence and fell to the ground without reaching me. A dark-skinned Okinawan kid in a dirty sleeveless T-shirt was over there, with his teeth clenched and a face filled with earnest determination. When I moved toward him, he began running. He held a straw hat to his head with one hand and continued to throw rocks at me with the other. He ran all around the rock-strewn field in his bare feet. He's afraid I'm going to shoot him, I thought. He did escape and so I didn't kill him. The old man's eyes are just like that child's. Why doesn't he escape, too? I remember another day. It was raining, not very late in the day but already dusky. I was sopping wet, walking along beside this fence looking at nothing in particular. I let myself get wet on purpose. What harm could it do? From the other side of the fence, large black eyes were staring at me, unmoving eyes. It was a she-dog. It had sopping-wet fur clinging to its emaciated body. Dried-out teats hung down from her. It seemed to me that the dog was struggling just to stay alive. There's nothing here for you to eat, I thought. The dog must have misread what I was thinking and limped away. I have no intention of taking life just for the hell of it.*

George set his foot down firmly and brought himself to a halt. His shoe made a sharp sound against the asphalt, breaking the silence enveloping him. *It's been fifteen minutes by now. He didn't bother looking at his watch. Won't I be spotted by someone standing guard or out on patrol? This idea popped into his mind. No, he shook his head. It makes no difference if they see me now or not. My mind's made up.*

He became aware of a buzzing in his ears. It was one of those rare times

when there was no noise from jet engines revving up. *So what is this constant ringing deep in my ears? Insects? How could that be? There are no rocks, no weeds, no dirt here, just this flat expanse of asphalt. Maybe it's insects on the other side of the fence. The sound seems too close to be from there, though. Where are they, the damned summer bugs making all this noise? That thing I saw back there a couple of minutes ago, that thing hidden in the shadows by the fence. That thing wasn't a person. It was wild game. A wild boar come looking for food. Those animals that look like pigs but have coarse hair on their bodies and sharp, pointy tusks. I've seen 'em before. That must've been what it was, I'm sure. That thing's a night animal, five feet long give or take, and it roots around with its snout in the dirt. I wonder if it'll put up a fight against me, squealing like crazy. Or beat it out of there so fast you'll wonder what you're looking at. But I'm not confident I can bring down a wild boar. It'll be hard at my level of marksmanship...I'll do the best I can.*

George noticed it had become much darker. Then it struck him: *Is that all I can kill, a decrepit old man incapable of either putting up a fight or making his escape? That's not the way it is in Vietnam...No, but that thing out there is a wild boar, not a person.*

The darkness was thickest near the ground. There was no identifying the black mass crouching in the grass. George stood still, planted his feet firmly, and calmed himself. Eight or ten yards separated him from the unmoving black mass, which seemed to keep its eyes fixed on George's every move. *I can't let this thing stare me down*, he thought. He strained to get a better look. His face grew rigid. *Looking at me like I'm some damned foreigner! I know that's what you're thinking. But there's no need to bother looking at me like that. I myself don't want to be here in this crummy place. What can I do? Nothing, there's nothing I can do about it.*

George suppressed an urge to break into a tirade. *What qualifies you to look at me like that anyway? You're probably the parent of a hostess at some filthy bar yourself. Women at those places talk freely enough and laugh. Not like you. You don't say anything, but your eyes are the same as theirs.*

George reached around behind and pulled out the Magnum pistol he had concealed under his loose-fitting Hawaiian shirt. He released the safety, which made a clear, satisfying sound. The dark shadow seemed to move slightly. George leveled the gun. *Put all my strength in the index finger of my right hand—that's all I have to do. Then everything'll be taken care of. The old man gets his peek at eternity. The sun sets, the sun rises, it sets again. The daily round of life's repetitions is coming to an end. The old man will be eternal. It's so easy. Life is so simple. The moment the black mass moves again, I'll pull the trigger.*

George had resolved the matter. But there was no movement. His finger's grip on the trigger tightened. His arm felt heavy. He began to lose feeling in

it. *Go ahead and move, make a break for it, try and stop me*, George was screaming inside. He lowered one knee to the ground, and firmly grasping his right wrist in his left hand, set himself at the ready. At that instant the black mass straightened itself up. George pulled hard on the trigger. As an ear-splitting roar reverberated through the air and the spent cartridge popped out, the shadowy figure slowly sank to the ground. For a moment, George's arms felt paralyzed from the recoil. He staggered over toward the black thing. The strength drained from his legs, they got tangled in each other, and he tripped forward onto the fence. Since the straw hat was still on, the neck on the body was bent unnaturally and the face was even more horribly contorted. The body was on its stomach, but the misshapen face was turned toward George. *Kept his eyes on me right up to the end*, George thought. In his right hand, the old man still held his cloth sack, nearly empty, it seemed, of any scavenged findings.

George returned the pistol to his back pocket with the safety still off and moved away from the fence on his unsteady legs. Without him noticing, the outdoor lamps high up on poles that were spaced at regular intervals had come on, illuminating the military base in a strong, white light. George began walking again, just walking, with no particular destination in mind. *Maybe he's still alive. I only plugged him once. Could very well not have been fatal. I bet he's just lying there, still as can be, and holding his breath until I clear out. I didn't see any blood. And no blood splashed back onto me... Am I a wanted man now? Did I leave fingerprints on the fence? Are they going to execute me for murder? But that's not possible. The Ryūkyūan police have no authority to arrest me. Proclamation No. 817 doesn't allow it. A court-martial? A court-martial would never sentence me to death. In fact, if I'm lucky, it could just mean I won't be sent to the front lines in Vietnam. Maybe they'll ship me back to the States. I'll be able to see Emily...*

George smiled broadly as he walked. But his heart was still thumping wildly. *I don't care if the guy is dead*, he assured himself. *Tomorrow morning I'll invite the lieutenant's wife out for a drive and show her the body. That means Lt. James, too, will probably change his opinion of me a little... Or, I could douse it with gasoline and burn it at the outdoor garbage incinerator. No, that guy doesn't deserve a proper cremation or a proper burial. Besides, I could never climb over this fence. It's too high and it has layers of barbed wire on top. The nearest gate's two miles away. I'll just leave it to the flies and maggots until it rots, sweats black sweat, and is absorbed back into the earth... Then again, they'd probably know from the bullet they get out of him that it was me that did it. There'll be an investigation. What story will I tell them? That I mistook him for a wild boar? Shall I tell them it was a little later when it got darker and the visibility was poor? Or, did I see him making a getaway back over the fence, shot two warning shots into the air and when he didn't stop I had no choice but to shoot him? That would work. Anytime*

an Okinawan makes unauthorized entry onto the base, for whatever reason, it's OK to shoot and kill the guy on the spot...But, could that old man even have climbed over the fence? Or...

George's mind was strangely clear now...or, maybe I should drag the body fifty or so yards from there and leave it in a no-trespass zone...Do I really even have to think about making up some story that'll work? The military court officers will never do a thorough investigation...But I would like to tell John and the lieutenant what actually happened...

No matter how far George walked, he felt not the least bit tired. He was now a considerable distance from the grasses, but something like the buzzing of those insects was rising to peculiar levels in his ears.

Translation by David Fahy