

HOME THE HUNTER

Snarled in a web of documentation, I roamed Saigon's mecca of despair while a passport was manufactured. My employer and MSTs tried to convince the Vietnamese that my presence proved I was truly there and in need of an exit visa to leave. No record of my arrival at that remote beach lifetimes ago existed, so I needed a back-dated entry permit, as well, which ground things to a complete halt. It was beyond my power to inveigle any necessities from bureaucrats, so I left the task with our crude quasi-military politburo.

Sampling the tortured state of a society born and dying in war, I found none of it even phased me, my learned weapon of morbid acceptance now fully operational in any setting. Humanity flowed by like a river around a rock as I wandered this derelict metropolis of refugees. Speeding Army convoys rumbled through choking diesel haze, as a jangled sea of rickshaws and bicycles buzzed ant-like in frenetic comunicado, bumper cars in a carnival without equal on earth.

Shocking extremes were the norm, as Sherman tanks waited at stoplights with buffalo-drawn carts, and cripples of countless tragedies crawled on bloody stumps to their appointed destinies. It was far worse than being in the bush! Anything and everything was available for a price in Cholon's blackmarket; even grenades and a full complement of ammo for all sides was arrayed. What was it Jack was always yellin'? One Helluva war! Slipping into an opium den for some privacy, I watched as a skeletal sorceress prepared a pipe for me. Seeing to my dream-state every few hours, she catered to my brief reprieve from the chaos outside for a day and a night.

I emerged rested but burdened by what greeted me, and blinking at the same ravaged drama I'd hidden from, headed for the zoo. Where else? There I got into a sort of menage a trois with two pretty school girls about thirteen. I'm not sure of their ages, and did give them some money, but the way it happened was so coy, it struck me more like playing doctor. We giggled, exploring each other's private parts on a grassy plot surrounded in bamboo behind the monkey cage.

Sitting on some cardboard, I got them to raise their Catholic smocks an inch at a time, piaster by piaster, 'till finally their virgin vaginas were shining pinkly before me. It was exquisite! Then I sat between them and let my finger slide slowly up and down their slippery cracks as they daintily held my rigid prick in good, clean fun. Refreshing, to say the least, this little fantasy lifted me slightly from a place where simple joy was unknown.

That evening, an old money changer brought me close to

mayhem, pulling a sleight of hand trick with six-hundred MPC, my last Military Payment Currency! It took me very near murder, but prepared me for reentry into civilization as I caught myself halfway down the alley with my Colt aimed at his back about to go off. Jeez! This was not the jungle, and piece by piece I gathered my wits enough to play it cool. I got jostled around in the local U.S.O. club like an unwelcome hippie and, totally grossed out by G.I.'s and gooks, I eased into the Hotel Continental.

Joining the international reporters at their seance on the "Shelf" where gossip had always been best, I sipped Cognac and shared expansive views on the conflict, watching the stream of humanity flow by below. The last hours before I slept were spent in silent review on our company's villa roof, smoking dope and watching flares float in lazy arcs as gunships waved their magic wands in the flickering shroud that wrapped the city. The familiar whumpf, whumpf, whumpf of fire strikes kept a distant beat to an age-old rhythm I could hardly imagine these folks doing without.

Morning renewed its surcease and continuum, so with satchel in hand, I drifted robot-like to our Embassy and my promised papers of deliverance. The crowd was thicker there, and seeing a Buddhist monk on fire enthroned in heat waves I felt sudden, real danger! As the second monk doused himself with gasoline, I hauled ass up the steps, grabbed my passport, and zipped out the side into a taxi for Ton Son Nhut, Colt in hand.

Luckily, a mortar barrage had just hit and everyone was scurrying around in confusion. With no line at the counter, I checked in, swallowed five pink balls at the water cooler, and darted through customs to the plane, by now never forgetting my first rule...always take your pain pills before you get hurt!

There was a loud cheer at lift-off from those departing the war forever, pimply faced youngsters eager to escape this festering savagery broken out like leprosy among their ranks, but it seemed just another sequence to me, and I closed my eyes. The usual rat screams echoed, as groping, fiery figures melted, and a helicopter fell with men scratching at the sky...a dream within a dream. As the smell of burning flesh passed, muffled by monkey chatter, two hairless pussies wriggled before me in some minature dance from Fantasia. Then a thump and screech of tires announced I was home...in time to change the station.

Still unaffected, I stood in my flip-flops on the runway with the Colt under my aloha shirt, groping with the concept of taking myself off auto-pilot. I'd never been able to locate its dials anyway. I was chuckling about holding the rank of Chief Petty Officer at an age it normally took "years in service" to get. They'd finally made me an I.D. It will haunt V.A. halls forever.

Kela appeared from nowhere and held me in silence.

Tears and flowers wreathed in long hidden feelings must've jump-started my being because I felt like I used to for a moment...and for at least six or seven of the nine days there. A great relief did come over me with her in my arms, even if vast worlds separated us and great pain lay submerged like unmarked shoals in treacherous waters ahead...

Our wedding the next night was a magic affair, attended by the cream of Island society. Kela's family home on the beach was sculpted in exotic flowers, and a Hawaiian troupe serenaded guests through a blazing sunset and pounding surf. I noticed the waves were getting bigger, and wondered how our catamaran was doing in the nearby lagoon. Nobody'd tie tin cans on that getaway vehicle!

Coconut trees swayed in spellbound rhythm to the Hawaiian Wedding Song, as prince and princess were united in one of the first LSD weddings in Hawaii, with over a hundred believers tripping with us. The adults were all so boozed up that everyone flowed together pretty well. Not a lot was said in the reception line, as we were glowing so much words weren't necessary. I freaked out momentarily when a retired General shook my hand, asking how the war was going, while his arm with its tattooed eagle clawed at me. Duke hid in the hedge, grinning with a tank of nitrous oxide under his arm. Paul called down God's blessing, his white robes flowing like Moses, and our camera man stood on the reef in a tuxedo with waves breaking over him. It was all fine with us...we could see and do no wrong!

The catamaran sliced through the third wave in the set, almost washing us off the stern. Catching the wind, we slipped majestically through spotlights and cheers as palms waved at us from shore. I speculated momentarily on the time warp that delivered me from the gun turret of a black jet boat in a place of utter horror to this white spirit craft lunging over silver swells so full of light. The thought passed in a fluid rush like sparkling scud in our wake. A dance of phosphorescent gypsies there brought an audible swoon, as we set a course past tremendous breakers resounding off Diamond Head. We held each other, aware of our place in the dream, moaning as one in acquiescence of its potential coming true...

She was coming with me, the money from Asia seed of our farm to come, we only needed to believe in the magic before us and ourselves. Tears filled my eyes, LSD oozed from my tongue, and I tried to say something but could only sigh. We surfed waves through widening patterns, hissing like a prehistoric bird across oily rainbows of myriad colors. The reflections of Waikiki crystallized as we settled into its lee and anchored off Queen's Surf, where Kui's voice spread an ageless Hawaiian grace once more. I felt OK, my girl by my side, a part of life, and it seemed so easy...too easy, something mutely warned.

The next morning, we flew to the Big Island and were

treated like royalty. We honeymooned on a private ranch for five days at Kiholo Bay in a true Shangri La. The green furrowed hill, Puuwaawaa, was studded with fanning peacocks, and the cowboys had trussed a white goose in the back of our Jeep. Masters of all we surveyed, on safari across a veldt stretching from the ranch house to the emerald sea far below, we waved to "paniolos" on horseback and their contented herds.

After miles of remote lava, we neared the austere blue-green oasis and seemed to be slipping back to some state of original grace known to Adam and Eve in a once-promised Eden. By its lapping waters, we freed the goose in a brackish lake, making camp as the sun slipped off our horizon to rise upon another, one where choppers and gunships renewed their dance in a never-ending dirge...the song of death I knew too well.

It wouldn't leave me, I knew this much, no matter what drugs we took or where we hid. While we dove naked for lobsters, bathed in tidepools, and made love on the warm sand with liquid sunshine pouring over us, a faraway malevolence began to beckon, quietly at first, until its roar and frenzy enveloped all things, sweeping this circumspect enchantment aside and filling it with an astounding pathos!

Between flashes of probable paradise and the philosophy of Huxley's "Island," where the mynah bird calls "Remember," I felt compelled to relate small portions...grisly aspects of a world so completely diametric to hers that my attempts stunned our very being there, threatening to cordon off the sun or turn the warm sands cold! How could I ever explain?

At night under the moon's glow, I'd promote haltingly what we were bound for...plotting our destinies on some imaginary chart, implying the course ordained, our work that of missionaries, and that we had a sacred duty to brave the evils inherent in life's progression. Kela nodded naively with each new illumination. Seeing the evolving tapestry I wove with compounded threads of violence or necessity, she agreed it was a righteous crusade into darkness, the land of Kerry, a testing of our ability to absorb realities beyond our magic, and a fair price to pay for that state of bliss on our farm to come in valhalla.

Shadows lengthened and the flickering fire's tongue slowed. She talked of ceaseless challenge, as velvet waves caressed the fragile shore of our enshrined camp. Convinced so fully she even accepted that I'd worn a weapon home, Kela spoke of going on the noble mission to help in tones of confidence, responsibility, and call of country! I gazed away, the traces of my smirk turning to a snarl as imaginary voices rose up and hers drifted out of range. It wasn't duty or honor driving me. The sirens were calling from the edge!

I grappled with the truth but could not ever let her know. It was best she buy the sanctified version than once

glimpse the beast within. I longed to return! The thought of telling her arose in my gorge. How could I relate an urge to be consumed in the thrall of death so far beyond her that words couldn't penetrate even its outer layer? I was barely able to face it myself!

Embers glowed, spirits ill-focused and sinister slipped through our halo of light, and my senses preened to the jungle night. The animal lurked in me, almost growing out of my skin. Veins rippled, some of my fingers clutched cold steel, while others caressed her nipples, now swollen by my touch. Her mouth slipped over my manhood, as beads of sweat formed over my acid-enhanced eyes, darting now like lances bent on images she'd never see. I was there!

Part of me saw her fingers spread that wet and mysterious slice in dewy gold hair between her legs, and slide slowly down onto the hard shaft that arose from me to pierce her very soul. Moments of my life swirled and vaporized, as the sweet lips of her cunt engulfed me. I arched to join her form in coupling, as the animal within, clutched the Colt in waiting. The spiraling whampf of napalm splayed its palette of gore as tracers, orange and green, criss-crossed just over us.

I shuddered! Would it always be like this...nothing sacred with that creature burrowed in my soul? I tried to focus so hard I cried! There she was, rising in splendored ecstasy, my naked madonna stuck by an umbilical shaft of bliss to her madman, who was consumed in thoughts beyond her capacity to imagine. I couldn't follow it myself! The choice lay before me...this paradise with her or that hell alone? In a dark corner of my mind, I was drawn inexorably to the latter!

Its fearsome truth tore at my heart. Love trickled like blood onto the sand...payment for reversion to that debauched yet magnificent atavism of the primal beast within! Its call was louder than hers. She slept now on my still form, or so it seemed, as the creature uncoiled of its own free will.

Totally insane, engulfed in visions, I felt every pore wrench to scream in some primordial birthing. Hideously on it came! Her heart was beating as I followed the contours of her body poured over mine, a wondrous living blanket I did not deserve!

I slipped from her and padded like an animal through the night, weapon glinting dull throbs of power, driven by a predatory link. Scanning the night for movement, I slithered like a wraith through its pulsing elements. Claws curled just beneath the thin membrane of my being. I knew man had come to this place in fear, revenge, or rage...some more than others. It lives within us all...at least recognize it's there.

Those who shared this bane waited within a ring of glaring skulls. Crouched by my sibling sea, the very artery I'd traversed as a free-spirited lad dodging a dumb drug law,

I gazed across its filmy bond to that far and challenging shore. Kela found me there and held my shoulders, her breasts grazing my back, and in shuddering surrender sensed the forebodings of her future with me. At least, I remember it that way.